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III. LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES AND THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE NOVEL IN FRANCE

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III

1. INTRODUCTION

It is not our aim, in the third and final section of this work, to attempt to give a panoramic view of the whole, complicated history of the French novel in the eighteenth century. Rather, we shall try to suggest certain factors discernible in this history and then go on to examine certain of Laclos's predecessors, contemporaries and successors in the domain of prose fiction in the light of Les Liaisons dangereuses. For this purpose we shall in fact not confine ourselves solely to the eighteenth century, but shall also look at the nineteenth and, very briefly, the twentieth. It is hoped that, as a result of this examination, Laclos's novel will be seen for what it is, a work which, for all its fine qualities, is not an isolated phenomenon but a very good example - perhaps the best example - of a type of novel which is by no means rare in the eighteenth century, and a type of novel the influence of which continues to be felt long after the end of that century. It seems all the more important to attempt this insofar as the tendency has been for critics, almost without exception, to treat Les Liaisons in more or less complete isolation.

The eighteenth century is a period in which the novel is, as it were, trying to find its feet. If, as Daniel Mornet has shown(1), the most striking feature of the French novel during this period is its

1. D. Mornet, in his introduction to his edition of La Nouvelle Héloïse, 4 vols., Paris, 1925.

diversity, and if, for that matter, in the early years of the century, novelists such as Mlle de Scudéry, Gomberville and La Calprenède of the previous century still retained a considerable degree of popularity(2) it is nevertheless true that certain clear trends can be discerned. One of the chief of these developments, in fact dating back no doubt to the 1670s in certain of its aspects, was a trend towards what can only be called realism, realism in the sense of an attempt to situate the events of the plot in a recognisable historical or contemporary setting, and also psychological realism. Many facets of this tendency are dealt with by Georges May in his book Le Dilemme du Roman au XVIIIe Siècle, and in particular he makes out a good case for the view that realism in the eighteenth-century novel stems much more from literary than from sociological causes(2).

If, in 1734, Lenglet-Dufresnoy could argue that the novel was essentially "un poème héroïque en prose"(3), such an argument was, as May puts it, "vieux d'au moins soixante-dix ans"(4). Lenglet-Dufresnoy's attitude was a reaction against what had been, in the seventeenth century, one of the main lines of attack against the novel on aesthetic grounds, an attack based on the hierarchical view of literary genres and on the fact that ~~that~~ the novel had not been

1. *ibid.*, I, 10-11.

2. G. May, Le Dilemme du Roman au XVIIIe Siècle. Étude sur les Rapports du Roman et de la Critique (1715-1761), New Haven (Conn.) and Paris, 1963, pp. 162-181.

3. N. Lenglet-Dufresnoy, De l'Usage des Romans..., 2 vols., Amsterdam, 1734, I, 188.

4. G. May, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

consecrated as a genre by Aristotle or Horace. In consequence of this attitude, the best that could be hoped for by the novel was a reception taking the form of condescending tolerance, exemplified by Boileau's remark in canto III of the Art poétique (line 119):

"Dans un roman frivole aisément tout s'excuse."

But if it was still possible, even as late as the 1730s, for critics like Bruzen de La Martinière in his Introduction générale à l'étude des sciences et des belles lettres (1731) and Porée in his De libris qui vulgo dicuntur Romances (1736) to attack the novel as an ignoble genre which was likely to corrupt the taste of its readers⁽¹⁾, the fact of the matter is that the novelists themselves were by this time abandoning attempts such as that of Lenglet-Dufresnoy to win acceptance for the novel by associating it with the epic and, in reply to other common criticisms of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, were more and more tending to put forward realism as the aesthetic criterion by which they were to be judged.

This is not, of course, to suggest that there is a sudden change of tack to which a precise date can be put. There is still evidence, in the 1730s, of novelists seeking to find a place for their productions within the accepted hierarchy of literary genres, but even in terms of ~~this~~ effort there is a tendency for the tactics to change. Not infrequently it is with comedy that novelists seek to associate their work, rather than with the epic. This can be seen, for example, in the following

1. cf. G. May, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

quotation from the remarks with which Crébillon files prefaces Les Égaréments du Coeur et de l'Esprit (first published 1736-8), to the effect that

"... le roman, si méprisé des personnes sensées, et souvent avec justice, seroit peut-être celui de tous les genres qu'on pourroit rendre le plus utile, s'il étoit bien manié, si, au lieu de le remplir de situations ténébreuses et forcées, de héros dont les caractères et les aventures sont toujours hors du vraisemblable, on le rendoit comme la comédie, le tableau de la vie humaine, et qu'on y censurât les vices et les ridicules."

Here, in fact, Crébillon is not only seeking to associate the novel with comedy(1). He is also, especially when he goes on to urge that the novelist should strive to show "l'homme tel qu'il est"(2), professing a realist aim and ~~in~~ addition, in the relatively lengthy passage quoted above and in his earlier assertion that he seeks to combine "l'utile et l'amusant"(3), making a moral claim for his work, which is another aspect of the development of the eighteenth-century novel about which we propose to say something shortly.

The movement in the direction of realism takes various forms. One of these is the conflict already taking place in the seventeenth century between the courtly and the sentimental on the one hand, represented by writers such as Mlle de Scudéry and Honoré d'Urfé, and the anti-courtly and the picaresque on the other, represented by writers such as Scarron and Furetière and continued in some measure in the

1. As we have already seen, Laclos, almost half a century later, defending his portrayal of characters in his letters to Mme Riccoboni, makes great play with a comparison between his approach and that of Molière.

2. In Oeuvres complètes de M. de Crébillon fils, Maestricht, 1779, 11 vols., I, vi.

3. ibid., I, v.

eighteenth by Lesage and Marivaux. In addition, nouvelles historiques such as Mme de La Fayette's La Princesse de Clèves (1678) had dealt with historical characters in historical settings, and in 1713 Hamilton brought out his Mémoires du Chevalier de Gramont, which purports to outline the love life of the court of Charles II of England(1). This work is an excellent illustration of the way in which the dividing line between history and fiction in the early eighteenth century was a hazy line indeed. It may well be, in this case, rather more than a novelist's device when, at the end of his opening chapter, Hamilton, writing of Gramont himself, professes,

"C'est lui-même... qu'il faut écouter dans cet écrit; puisque je ne fais que tenir la plume, à mesure qu'il me dicte les particularités les plus singulières et les moins connues de sa vie"(2),

since it is quite possible that Hamilton did have access to his friend's personal papers and perhaps too, even, did have the actual verbal assistance which he claims.⁽³⁾ It must be stressed that the fluidity

1. Hamilton's authorship of this work has been questioned, but a good case can be made out for it: cf. Mlle Claire-Éliane Engle's edition, Monaco, 1958.

2. A. Hamilton, Mémoires du Chevalier de Gramont, Monaco, 1958, p. 64.

3. Whatever the answer to the question of this work's historical accuracy and value, it may be worth noting that characters like Gramont and Jermyn derive an intellectual enjoyment from overcoming the obstacle which lie between them and the women of their choice by no means dissimilar to the pleasure which Valmont derives from a similar activity. The following observation about Jermyn, who has just heard of the charms of Frances Jennings, may serve to illustrate the similarity. The roué, be his name Jermyn or Valmont, derives his satisfaction from his tactics his purity of method (to borrow Valmont's phrase) in overcoming the obstacles. He is less interested in the woman, the ~~prey~~ quarry, as such than in the "View Halloo" and the hunt itself. Thus, it is said of Jermyn, "Il ne fit pas grand cas de ce qu'on lui mandoit de ses charmes; persuadé qu'il en avoit bien vu d'autres. Il fut plus touché de ce qu'o publicoit de sa résistance et de sa fierté qui lui parut digne de sa cōlère, et (il quitta) son exil, pour la subjuguer"(ibid., p. 279, my italics). Cf. Valmont's "Voilà l'ennemi digne de moi.?"

of the boundaries which separate history from pseudo-history and out-and-out fiction was considerable at this time. It is, after all, only in the eighteenth century, with writers like Montesquieu and Voltaire in France and Gibbon in England, that a scientific approach to the study of history really begins to make itself felt, that real documentation comes to be attempted, and that imaginary dialogues between great historical personages begin to be discredited.

Not only do writers such as Bussy-Rabutin and Couÿtilz de Sandras produce works like the Histoire amoureuse des Gaules or the Annales de la Cour et ^{de} Paris pour les années 1697 et 1698, not only does Hamilton produce the Mémoires du Chevalier de Gramont or Prévost a novel which purports to be the story of a natural son of Cromwell told by himself, but many of the memoirs of the eighteenth century cannot safely be taken at face value. We have already suggested, for example, that the feats of sexual prowess attributed to themselves by such people as Richelieu and Tilly may well be less a statement of fact than an expression of wish-fulfilment or of a desire for self-aggrandisement(1). The same is clearly true of Casanova, of whom Octave Uzanne, whilst claiming that the memoirs should be placed "au tout premier rang des recueils de souvenirs les plus indiscutablement véridiques", hastens to say that "on est volontiers le tapissier décorateur de sa propre jeunesse alors qu'on devient quinquagénaire ou septuagénaire"(2).

1. cf. supra, section II, chapter 5.

2. O. Uzanne, in Casanova di Seingalt, Mémoires, Paris, 1924-35, 12 vols., I, xxxiv-xxxv.

It is surely no accident, in terms of the claims of realism so often put forward by eighteenth-century novelists, that so many of the novels of the period are either in the form of memoirs or possess titles beginning with the word Histoire and that, as S.P. Jones points out, of the 946 novels the publication of which he lists in the first half of the century, a mere handful, some four or five, actually have titles which clearly brand them as novels(1). The Histoires and the fictional memoirs, together with the other large group of novels which are written in the epistolary form in the eighteenth century, all make some sort of claim to be considered as documents rather than as works of fiction, although it is fair to assume that by no means all of the reading public would unquestioningly accept them as such.

Such devices as these are remarkably common throughout the eighteenth century, together with the frequently ingenious if not always terribly convincing prefatory claims of the novelists that the letters or memoirs which make up their novels are in fact genuine and have fallen into their hands by some lucky chance or other. They amount to a reaction against the attacks of the critics who, by the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, were tending to attack the novel less because it did not possess a place in the Classical hierarchy of literary genres, and more on the grounds of its lack of verisimilitude - critics like Sorel, Boileau, Duval and

1. S.P. Jones, A List of French Prose Fiction from 1700 to 1750, New York, 1939, p. xv. Jones lists 156 out of the 946 novels as beginning with the word Histoire and almost 100 in memoir form. A comparable list for the period after 1750 has yet to be compiled. Histoire, of course, can have more than one meaning, but the point about realist implications stands.

Bougeant(1). Laclos, as we have said, was one of the authors to indulge in this type of device - his novel, after all, bears the sub-title of Lettres recueillies dans une Société et publiées pour l'Instruction de quelques autres - and amongst the authors to be examined in this section we shall find others who, like him, profess to be mere editors.

Another aspect of this movement towards realism in eighteenth-century French prose fiction is the increasing popularity in France of English novelists. Prévost's rôle is far from negligible here: his translations did much to make Richardson's works popular(2), and one of the reasons for the popularity of Richardson and other English novelists in France was undoubtedly their realism. Nevertheless, it must be stated that often, in translation, their works were adulterated to suit French taste and that even so they did not by any means meet with universal or unqualified approval. La Porte wrote of them, "On y remarque du génie, si l'on veut, mais presque jamais du goût"(3), and in general, although French novelists did tend to turn more to the study of contemporary manners, they were rather unwilling to follow Richardson, Fielding or Smollett in the depiction of the lower strata of society and were inclined to confine

1. C. Sorel, De la Connaissance des bons livres (1671); Boileau, preface to Les Héros de Roman (c. 1710); François Duval, Lettres curieuses sur divers sujets (1725); Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant, Voyage merveilleux du prince Fan-Férédin dans la Romancie (1735) - quoted by G. May, op. cit., pp. 19 et seq.
2. Translations of Pamela (1740), Clarissa (1751) and Grandison (1755-6). Prévost's responsibility for the translation of Pamela has been challenged by H. Roddier (L'Abbé Prévost, l'Homme et l'Oeuvre, Paris, 1955, pp. 166-9).
3. La Porte, Observations sur la Littérature moderne, I, 115; quoted by Mornet, op. cit., I, 24. Cf. also May, op. cit., pp. 163 et seq.

themselves to the upper classes(1).

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the rôle of England, and particularly that of Richardson, was important in the development of the French novel, although one must avoid exaggerating it and remember that there were writers in France, amongst the chief of them being Prévost, who were moving in a very similar direction to that of Richardson. This influence, moreover, was far from being confined to the field of realism, and in certain quarters a sort of Richardsonian mania developed. If Grimm could say of Clarissa, after it had appeared in Prévost's translation,

"J'ai éprouvé dans la lecture de ce livre une chose qui n'est pas ordinaire, le plaisir le plus vif et l'ennui le plus assommant"(2),

the reaction of Diderot towards Richardson was far less ambivalent. In 1761, the year in which Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse appeared, Diderot published his encomium of the English writer:

"Par un roman," he writes, "on a entendu jusqu'à ce jour un tissu d'événements chimériques et frivoles, dont la lecture était dangereuse pour le goût et pour les mœurs. Je voudrais bien qu'on trouvât un autre nom pour les ouvrages de Richardson, qui élèvent l'esprit, qui touchent l'âme, qui respirent par-tout l'amour du bien, et qu'on appelle aussi des romans."(3)

1. It should not, of course, be thought that the lower orders, and on occasion the seedy lower orders at that, were absent from the French novel, even before the appearance on the scene of Richardson. Manifestly they are not - cf. Scarron, Chasles, Lasage, Prévost, Marivaux, etc. But in general the social norm for the characters of the novel is and remains fairly elevated. This, after all, is true even of La Nouvelle Héloïse (1761). It is certainly true of Les Liaisons.

2. Grimm et al., Corr. litt., Tourneux edition, Paris, 1877-82, mai 1753 - mars 1755, II, 24-5.

3. Diderot, Eloge de Richardson, in Oeuvres esthétiques, Paris, Garnier n.d., p. 29.

In this remark of Diderot's, of course, considerations other than the purely aesthetic are paramount, and this brings us to another facet of the development of the novel in the eighteenth century, namely its relationship with questions of morality. There were indeed attacks on the novel quite apart from those based on aesthetic criteria, and of these the chief was the moral objection.⁽¹⁾ This type of objection goes back into the seventeenth century, and here it is worthwhile to remember that the celebrated remark by the Jansenist Nicole in his first Lettre sur l'Hérésie imaginaire (1665), which Racine saw as an attack upon him, linked the "faiseur de romans" with the playwright:

"Un ~~f~~aiseur de romans et un poète de théâtre est un empoisonneur public, non des corps, mais des âmes des fidèles, qui se doit regarder comme coupable d'une infinité d'homicides spirituels, ou qu'il a causés en effet ou qu'il a pu causer par ses écrits pernicieux."⁽²⁾

Attitudes not dissimilar to this can be found throughout the eighteenth century, and there can be little doubt about it that the ~~emphasis on~~ of the theme of love in the novel was an important factor in arousing this kind of reaction⁽³⁾. The counter to this kind of charge was to claim a moral value for the novel: the novel must be educative as well as amusing.

Aubert de la Chesnaye des Bois, for example, recognised Crébillon's

1. If one accepts May's thesis, this was a principal factor, expressed in particular by Porée, leading up to a virtually total and official interdict on the publication of novels within the frontiers of France somewhere between February 1737 and April 1738 (May, op. cit., pp. 75-105)
2. Quoted by May, op. cit., p. 24.
3. cf. *ibid.*, pp. 24-28.

talents as a writer, but considered that it was dangerous for young people to read him. "Les Romans," he said, "quand ils sont bien faits, et conformes aux règles, que le bon sens a dû prescrire, loin d'être l'école du libertinage, font voir la vertu couronnée, et le vice puni... Les Romans sont... des Précepteurs muets."(1) A similar refrain is to be found in La Dixmerie, who said that "on sait qu'un Roman ne doit pas être un sermon... mais le vase entouré de miel doit offrir au tempérament le plus délicat un breuvage salutaire..."(2); and it echoes through the writings of many of the novelists and theorists of the century up to the Marquis de Sade and Mme de Staël(3). Novelists began overtly to moralise. Prévost is a good case in point. In Cleveland he laid much of the groundwork for Rousseau, presenting a code of natural morality. Richardson again played an immense part. His whole aim was to cultivate the principles of religion and virtue. That his grasp of Christian ethics was perhaps not as profound as it might have been, and that he not infrequently confused virtue and convention, is another point. Rousseau himself, of course, indulged in endless moralising digressions, but we may name as two of the least digestible works of this nature which the

1. A. de la Chesnaye des Bois, Lettres amusantes et critiques sur les romans..., Paris, 1743, p. 20.

2. B. de la Dixmerie, Discours sur l'origine, les progrès & le genre des romans, in Toni et Clairette, 2 vols, Paris, 1773, I, xxv.

3. Sade's is of course a special case. Nevertheless, he goes through the motions: cf the preface to Justine and infra. In his Idée sur les romans (1800), he says that "ce n'est jamais l'auteur qui doit moraliser, c'est le personnage, et encore ne le permet-on, que quand il y est forcé par les circonstances" (Paris, n.d. (1947), pp. 48-9). It is superfluous to say that Sade frequently intervenes in his own person with his own particular brand of moralising. Mme de Staël writes: "Cependant le seul avantage des fictions n'est pas le plaisir qu'elles procurent. Quand elles ne parlent qu'aux yeux, elles ne peuvent qu'amuser: mais elles ont une grande influence sur toutes les idées morales, ~~donc~~ lorsqu'elles émeuvent le coeur;

eighteenth century produced, the Abbé Gérard's Le Comte de Valmont, ou les Égaréments de la Raison(1), and another epistolary work, Mme de Genlis's Adèle et Théodore(2).

The reply made by the novelists to the type of accusation exemplified in Nicole's remark was often based on the movement towards realism to which we have already referred(3). As we have already pointed out, in his sub-title and in the Préface du Rédacteur, Laclos (however unconvincingly, especially in view of the opening sentence of the Avertissement de l'Éditeur), makes a defence for his work on the grounds of the authenticity of the letters of which he claims to be merely the editor - this, he says, is a "Recueil" rather than an "Ouvrage". In addition, in the sub-title and, by implication, in the epigraph, he claims an instructional value for these "real" letters, and in the Préface du Rédacteur he becomes more precise, suggesting examples of the way in which this instructional value can be demonstrated, examples which are based on the principle that to depict the methods employed by the immoral to corrupt the innocent is to perform a public service. This type of defence is to be found in more than one of Laclos's predecessors and contemporaries, as we shall see. The novelist professes to depict the world as it is, including the machinations of the wicked, and expresses the belief that the reader will be warned by his picture of reality and conduct his life

1. Nouvelle édition, revue et augmentée, Paris, 5 vols., 1775.

2. Paris, 3 vols., 1782.

3. It was also sometimes based on an attempt to associate the novel with the "received" genre of comedy, which had as its device Santeul's castigat ridendo mores (cf. supra, p. 525 & n. 1). G. May suggests a parallel with the theory of seventeenth-century tragedy (op. cit., pp. 122-4).

accordingly.

When, however, one goes beyond this in itself by no means entirely convincing argument, as many novelists of the eighteenth century did, and, as an additional insurance against being condemned as "un empoisonneur public", metes out punishment to the wicked and rewards to the virtuous at the end of one's novel (sometimes within the space of a mere page or two, or even less), then one runs the risk of destroying one's claim to realism. We have already seen an attempt at something like this in Les Liaisons dangereuses, the ending of which we have suggested to be aesthetically unsatisfactory, the introduction of an element of poetic justice jarring in tone with the rest of the work(1). At least equally striking examples of this are to be found in some of the works which we shall shortly be examining.

Closely associated with the profession of moralising aims by so many eighteenth-century novelists, but not synonymous with it, is the growth of sensibility in the literature of the period. Sensibility in literature was not, it must be stated, an innovation of the eighteenth century. It is visible, for example, in the seventeenth-century Lettres d'une religieuse portugaise, which went through numerous editions in the eighteenth century, and which Rousseau had certainly read. Still less is it true that it was Rousseau who introduced sensibility into eighteenth-century French literature. Mme de Graigny's Lettres d'une

1. We have also, in the particular case of Laclos's novel, expressed doubts as to how far this attempt at poetic justice can, in practice, from the conventional stand-point, be considered morally satisfying.

Péruvienne (1747)(1) (for the authenticity of which, incidentally, the author vouched) owed their success not only to their exotic appeal or to their satirical element, but to sensibility. The Correspondance littéraire said of them, "C'est la nature embellie par le sentiment, c'est le sentiment qui s'exprime lui-même"(2). There is scarcely need to mention to what extent the writings of Prévost are full of sentiment. Tears in abundance were shed over the novels of Mme Riccoboni, the first ^{fr. 1742} ~~two~~ of which appeared before La Nouvelle Héloïse(3). The inevitable happened, as it happened in Richardson. Virtue and sensibility came to be confused.

We have already suggested, however, that the two phenomena of the indulgence of sensibility and the profession of moralising aims are not synonymous, and this becomes clear when one considers some of the highly cerebral pieces of prose fiction which profess moralising aims. Amongst these are some the manner and content of which are, the reader suspects, deliberately intended to titillate. Examples of these we shall consider later.. In addition, it can be said of many of Marmontel's Contes moraux that the only thing about them which is moral is the title. Equally, some of the novels of sensibility of the period, continually preaching virtue, and not infrequently confusing virtue and sensibility, are, one may think, at least as suspect from the moral point of view as many of the straightforward erotic0-psychological novels of the time. One is

1. A Peine, n.d.

2. Grimm et al., Corr. litt., Tourneux edn., I, 132.

3. Lettres de mistress Fanni Butlerd (1757); Histoire de M. le Marquis de Cressy (1758); Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby (1759).

tempted to argue thus about much of La Nouvelle Héloïse itself, that novel which supremely attempts to reconcile realism with a moral purpose, but the confusion of virtue and sensibility is clearer still, very often, in the works of Rousseau's disciples.

"Presque tous ceux qui se sont enivrés au XVIIIe siècle du roman de Rousseau," says Mornet, "tous ceux qui en ont exalté la noblesse et la dignité, les plus chastes et les plus dignes, ont accepté à peu près sans réserves ces pages où brûle la volupté. Il semble bien que la pudeur de Jean-Jacques ait été la leur. Ils restent, comme lui, du temps où l'on n'a renié le libertinage qu'en avouant les droits de la nature, entendons ceux des sens."(1)

That many writers traded on the success of La Nouvelle Héloïse is beyond all doubt. Some of them sought to increase sales by making use of references to the very title of Rousseau's novel(2). Dorat, in his Idées sur les Romans, praised Rousseau for daring to "apporter parmi nous le scandale de la vertu"(3), but gives equal praise to Richardson. L.-S. Mercier too has a dual allegiance, and owes as much to *Clarissa* as to *Julie*(4). The same may be said of Baculard d'Arnaud, many of whose short stories in Les Épreuves du Sentiment are given English settings(5). Clary, histoire anglaise is clearly inspired by Richardson's Clarissa, as the title itself indicates. It is written

1. Mornet, op. cit., I, 51. Something similar might be said of Richardson, of whose Pamela F.C. Green observes that "it had the same piquant blend of eroticism and sentimentality (as Crébillon's Égaréments and Duclos's Histoire de Mme de Luz), which never fails to attract the extremely blasé or the very uneducated" (Minuet, London, 1935, p. 367). This is equally true of Clarissa.

2. e.g. Restif wrote a Nouvel Abailard.

3. in Les Sacrifices de l'Amour, Amsterdam, 1771, I, 15.

4. in preface to Contes moraux, Paris, 1768.

5. Neufchâtel, 4 vols., 1773; Clary: I, 132-192. In many writers the English setting is of no real significance.

in the form of two letters, and its characters read Richardson's novel. Mévil's activities strikingly correspond to those of Lovelace. It is not without interest to note the parallel between the name of the hero, "le baronet Borston", and that of Rousseau's "Mylord Edouard Bomston". Loaisel de Tréogate openly acknowledges his debt to Rousseau, of whom Ermance, the heroine of Dolbreuse, says, "La nature avoit mis la tendresse dans nos coeurs; mais Rousseau nous apprend à en multiplier les jouissances, à y joindre le sentiment et l'attrait de la vertu"(1). Ermance and Dolbreuse even make a pilgrimage to Rousseau's grave. This novel perfectly illustrates Mornet's remark that "c'est la passion... qui bouillonne à travers ces romans. Non plus seulement le 'sentiment' et ses 'délices', mais les tempêtes du coeur et leurs frénésies. On ne veut plus seulement s'attendrir, mais se griser et délirer"(2).

It would, of course, be a gross oversimplification to argue that there are only two types of novel in the eighteenth century, the cerebral (erotico-psychological) and the sentimental. We have already

1. Loaisel de Tréogate, Dolbreuse, II, 119.

2. Mornet, op. cit., I, 271.

stressed the diversity of the novel in this period(1). Nevertheless, there is considerable force in Georges May's observation, written specifically of the novel between 1715 and 1761, to the effect that

"Lorsqu'il n'est pas compassé, comme chez Crébillon et quelquefois aussi chez Marivaux et Duclos, le style des romans de l'époque tend au contraire vers une certaine grandiloquence qui, à grand renfort d'adjectifs emphatiques, de phrases exclamatives et d'images démesurées et banales, s'efforce d'exprimer une sentimentalité exagérée ou des passions dont l'excès n'est pas toujours immédiatement compréhensible. Parmi les romanciers les plus connus de cette période, Prévost est sans doute le principal représentant de ce style dont l'influence se fit sentir sur celui de J.-J. Rousseau, de Diderot et de leurs émules."(2)

We shall find, amongst the novelists we examine in the following pages, examples of styles which fall into each of the two categories broadly delineated by May, for, whether the style be cerebral and disciplined or sentimentally grandiloquent, whether the claim of moral intention seem more or less genuine, there is by no means always a hard distinguishing

1. We have stated that it is not our aim here to seek to give a panoramic view of the entire history of the novel in eighteenth-century France. Nevertheless, it may be worthwhile to stress at this point that not only did the novels of writers such as Mlle de Scudéry and La Calprenède retain much of their popularity into the eighteenth century, but also that the taste for the romanesque was preserved well into that century in a variety of other forms, amongst them the fairy tale, numerous editions of which appear between 1740 and 1780 (cf. Mornet, op. cit., I, 343-4 & 370-1), the exotic stories inspired by the success of Galland's Mille et une nuits (1704-1717) and the romans à tiroirs of writers like Lesage and Prévost (cf. May, op. cit., p. 47). In addition to which, the esprit gaulois continued to make itself felt, and the more obviously pornographic novels of the latter half of the century were as far removed from reality in one direction as the bergeries of D'Urfé had been in another. Moreover, we have already suggested that, in one sense at least, the term "realist" may not be entirely applicable to the erotic type of novel of which Les Liaisons dangereuses is one example, insofar as it is often doubtful whether their authors were in a position to give an accurate picture of that section of society which they purported to portray (cf. supra, section II, ch. 5).

2. G. May, op. cit., p. 67.

line between the matter dealt with by the writers we propose to consider, or between the final impressions left by them, whatever their original intention may have been. There is frequently, as we suggested of Les Liaisons in section II, and as we suggested a short while ago of La Nouvelle Héloïse, Pamela and Clarissa, an intriguing ambivalence. Disciples of Rousseau such as Loaisel de Tréogate, who wrote of his Dolbreuse,

"Le but de l'Ouvrage que nous mettons au jour, est de remettre en honneur parmi nous l'amour conjugal, dont le nom seul est presque devenu un ridicule, de ramener les mères aux sentimens de la nature, de faire sentir les plaisirs faciles et trop négligés de la vie libre et innocente des campagnes"(1),

are often nearer to Crébillon and the erotic novelists than may at first appear to be the case. Although they initially turn away from sensual licence in horror, they often find their way back to it by confusing sentiment, and the pleasure to be gained from its indulgence, with virtue, thus covering with sickly hypocrisy the cynicism to be found in La Morlière and Crébillon. This tendency was already present in La Nouvelle Héloïse(2), and is extremely clear in Dorat's and Loaisel's writings, particularly in Dolbreuse. Their heroes, in their moments of virtue as in their rakish moments, along with the heroes of

1. Dolbreuse, I, ix-x. It may not be inapposite at this moment to remind oneself of what Laclos said of his projected second novel, namely that its purpose would be to "rendre populaire cette vérité qu'il n'existe de bonheur que dans la famille" and that it would call for "le stile des premiers vol. des Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau" (L.I., pp. 238-9).

2. cf. supra. Burke said of La Nouvelle Héloïse that Rousseau doles out "... an unfashioned, indelicate, sour, gloomy, ferocious medley of pedantry and lewdness; of metaphysical speculations blended with the coarsest sensuality" (Letter... in answer to some objections to his Book on French affairs? in Works, Oxford, 1950, IV, 362).

Crébillon, would not have quarrelled with Locke's notion that "what is apt to produce any degree of pleasure (is) in itself good"(1), and both schools of writing owe a great deal to the sensualist philosophy purveyed by him and Condillac, however vulgarised their view of it.

After the appearance of the works of Richardson, then, and perhaps more still after the appearance of La Nouvelle Héloïse, an increasing number of novelists, from Mme de Genlis to Dorat and Loaisel, and to Laclos, Rétif and Sade, deliberately claim moral utility for their novels. It must be stressed in this connection that the morals preached by their models were frequently questionable. Julie's virtue was quite as suspect as that of Pamela, and although Clarissa is a far more subtle creation than Pamela she too is by no means as virtuous as Richardson would have us believe. The result is that many of the "moral" writers are by no means as moral as they might have been, which, incidentally, is by no means always a bad thing. They are often at their best when they are not moralising or indulging in sentiment. We have already mentioned one or two examples of such writers. Another case which may briefly be mentioned in passing is that of Louvet de Couvray, whose Les Amours du Chevalier de Faublas (1787-1789) is a curious mixture of the devices of the erotic novel (with a stress on transvestism) and of those of the novel of sentiment.

1. Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, London, 1947, p. 124.

Les Liaisons dangereuses, in fact, shows signs in one way or another of each of the trends to which we have referred in these opening remarks. Although we have already cast doubt on this novel's validity as an accurate portrayal of social manners, and although the form of realism which May describes as the tendency, in writers like Lesage, Marivaux and de Mouhy, to "limiter de moins en moins le recrutement de personnages de roman aux privilégiés du monde social" is not apparent in it, it is nevertheless true that there is certainly no attempt in Laclos's work to idealise the characters after the manner of D'Urfé or Mlle de Scudéry(1). And so in this sense there is certainly to be seen in Les Liaisons another manifestation of realism referred to by May: if the "privilégiés du monde social" e/ still dominate, they are certainly not, in the conventional sense, the "privilégiés du monde... moral."(2) That the works of Richardson and

1. Paradoxically enough, it might be argued that by allowing Valmont and Mme de Merteuil to develop into the consummate monsters of vice they become, this amounts to a sort of inverted idealisation.

2. G. May, op. cit., p. 58. May cites, as examples of the introduction of "personnages de moralité douteuse ou même franchement corrompue", writers such as Lesage, Marivaux, Prévost, Crébillon and Duclos. This is true, but the world of Lesage or that of ~~Marivaux~~ Prévost is very different from that of Laclos in many respects, and whilst it is true of Marivaux that it is possible to find, in both his plays and his novels, that element of cruelty and vanity, and the desire for domination in matters of the relationship between the sexes which we have stated to be characteristic of the erotic mind, it is equally true that there are no really firm parallels to be drawn between his characters and Valmont and Mme de Merteuil. One is inclined to agree with Le Breton when he writes, "Au lendemain de la Régence au commencement du règne de Louis XV, le roman de moeurs courait grand risque, en se rapprochant de la réalité de quelques degrés de plus qu'avec Lesage, de tourner au roman licencieux. Il n'en est, certes, pas là dans la Vie de Marianne ni même dans le Paysan parvenu; on sent seulement qu'il s'y achemine"(A. Le Breton, Le Roman français au XVIIIe siècle, p. 82). There may be more to be said, in terms of Laclos, about the other writers mentioned by May, Crébillon and Duclos, and we shall look at them in some detail later.

Rousseau, both of them so important not only in terms of realism but also in terms of the making of moral claims for the novel, were known to Laclos is perfectly clear, and that this tendency to seek, in however ambivalent a manner, a moral justification for one's novel is present in Laclos, has already been shown. The twin cerebral and sentimental attitudes to which we have referred are both evident - in conflict - in Les Liaisons in the characters of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil on the one hand and Mme de Tourvel on the other, and these attitudes are brilliantly reflected in the contrasting epistolary styles with which Laclos endows these characters.

As all that has been said above implies, if Laclos shows tendencies towards, to some degree, a form of realism and towards moral self-justification, he is in this respect very much a man of his times, and shares these characteristics with many novelists whose works in other respects are very dissimilar from his. Nevertheless, there may be certain writers whose work may have rather more in common with Les Liaisons, and in particular it may be possible to find interesting parallels between Laclos's novel and the production of what one might call the novelists of high life and sexual adventure, whether their basic approach be sentimental or cerebral (one might almost say neo-classical) - as that of Laclos

himself seems to be in his novel(1).

The aim of the next chapter will, then, be to seek to establish to what extent the theme of Les Liaisons dangereuses (which, as we have seen, cannot adequately be accounted for by the attribution to Laclos of political or such-like motives) can be said to be the result of the influence of established literary traditions. Here we are primarily concerned with content rather than with literary form.

1. As Armand Hoog puts it, "Cet officier (i.e. Laclos) représente la pointe extrême et comme le dernier feu - éblouissant, glacé - de l'art et de l'analyse classiques" (Les Liaisons dangereuses, Paris, Bateau Ivre, n.d. (1946), 2 vols., I, xii); G. May says, "L'on aurait plutôt tendance à voir aujourd'hui en Laclos un écrivain d'un classicisme rigoureux, soucieux d'un art ~~plus~~ concerté mais très impersonnel, très concentré mais très détaché..." (op. cit., pp. 253-254). One manifestation of the cerebral approach to the relationship between the sexes - and one having a not inconsiderable history by the time Laclos comes to write - is the phenomenon of Don Juanism. Valmont can be attached to this tradition, which has various forms, some more intellectual than others, some Don Juans, for example, having a greater concern with metaphysical questions than others. This aspect is not entirely absent from Valmont - cf. such declarations as "J'oserai la ravir au Dieu même qu'elle adore" and "Je serai vraiment le Dieu qu'elle aura préféré" (Letter VI) - even if it is not his principal consideration. Valmont, it must be stressed, is a highly intellectual being, and certainly no mere coureur de jupes interested in nothing more than the mere lengthening of his list of conquests for its own sake. The Don Juan phenomenon will be discernible in several of the works discussed in the following chapters. It is equally apparent in certain of the more or less fictionalised memoirs of eighteenth-century roués such as those to whom we have already referred, for example Richelieu, Tilly and Casanova, and can be traced back in some measure to Courtilz de Sandras (Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan) or to Bussy-Rabutin. (Cf. R. Grimsley, Don Juanism in Les Liaisons dangereuses, in French Studies, January 1960, pp. 1.-15.)

2. LITERARY TRADITION AND LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES. PRECURSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES OF LACLOS.

The dangers of looking for literary "influences" are manifold. One has to be in possession of very strong evidence indeed before one can speak with any authority about author "A" having exerted an "influence" on author "B". Sometimes, for example when an author openly acknowledges a debt to another, one can of course speak in these terms with assurance. Often, however, such cast-iron evidence is not available. It may be that an author who never once refers to a given predecessor nevertheless manifests in his writings similarities with him. This is by no means always sufficient to enable us to conclude that a direct influence was felt, still less that the author in question is guilty of plagiarism. Given enough authors showing similarities, however, we may be able to speak, if not of influence, then at least of parallel development. We may find evidence, if not of a school, then at least of some kind of common climate or tradition. A masterpiece, even when it is an author's only work, is in any case very rarely a spontaneous eruption of genius. More often than not it has its roots in the past. It is just conceivable that too much has been made of Laclos's originality.

I

The first novelist we propose to examine in terms of Laclos is Duclos (1704-1772). Duclos's novels are an illustration of the point made in the previous chapter, that there is no distinct line of demarcation

separating the novel of sensibility from the domain of eroticism. One of the reasons for this is, no doubt, a phenomenon of the eighteenth century to which we have already had occasion to refer, a certain confusion between virtue and sensibility (the pleasures to be derived from performing good works), ~~and~~ which occurs time and time again and which Laclos's Valmont lays bare in his remarks about "do-gooders" like Mme de T~~h~~urvel(1). Duclos is not exempt from this confusion, one of the most striking indications of which is the following passage taken from his Considérations sur les Moeurs de ce Siècle:

"Le vrai bienfaiteur ^{cède} ~~se~~ à son penchant naturel qui le porte à obliger, et il trouve dans le bien qu'il fait une satisfaction qui est à-la-fois et le premier mérite et la première récompense de son action."(2)

There is danger in this view that the ensuing satisfaction is "le premier mérite" of one's good deed. It can easily degenerate. Indeed it does degenerate in many of the novels of the eighteenth century. For instance, in Marivaux's Le Paysan parvenu Mme de Ferval (whose morality is, admittedly, doubtful) asks Jacob,

"À propos de coeur, êtes-vous né un peu tendre? C'est la marque d'un bon caractère."(3)

It is not very far from this to the position we find in Les Liaisons, in

1. "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." (XXI, 72)
2. Considérations sur les Moeurs..., C. U. P., 1939, p. 83.
3. Marivaux, Le Paysan parvenu, Garnier edn., Paris, 1959, p. 138.

which Valmont argues that all forms of pleasure are very similar and therefore, by implication, that none is better than another.

What similarities with the work of Laclos can be found in Duclos's novels? Émile Henriot has no hesitation in placing Duclos in the same tradition as Mme de La Fayette, Laclos, Benjamin Constant, and Stendhal, that is to say,

"la meilleure tradition du roman dit psychologique..... Ce ne sont pas les événements qui l'intéressent, en eux-mêmes, mais, dans telles situations données, les réactions et les caractères de ses personnages."(1)

Henriot describes Mme de Selve, in the Confessions du Comte de ***, as "la digne soeur des princesses de Clèves, des présidentes de Tourvel."(2) He is not alone in seeing such parallels. Édouard Maynial sees an affinity between Valmont and certain characters in the novels of Duclos(3). André Monglond agrees, and further suggests that Mme d'Orval in the Confessions is a Mme de Merteuil "sans génie" and that there is a parallel to be drawn between the Mme de Merteuil-Prévan relationship and the Mme de Grancour-Comte de *** relationship(4). For his part, Paul Meister, although acknowledging that there is no evidence of direct borrowing, suggests that

"Laclos a pu cependant s'inspirer de la sécheresse nette, abstraite et distinguée du style de Duclos, de la morale et de la stratégie amoureuse que développent ses séducteurs, de la physiologie de l'amour-vanité qui s'étale en particulier dans les Mémoires sur les Mœurs, d'un romanesque, enfin, qui ne s'attache qu'à l'analyse psychologique et fait, avec plus ou moins de sincérité, profession de ne dépeindre le mal que pour le réprimer."(5)

These elements, of course, need not have come to Laclos direct from Duclos - they are commonplaces of the literature of the period. Meister, moreover,

1. E. Henriot, Les Livres du second Rayon. Irréguliers et Libertins, Paris, 1925, pp. 154-5.
2. ibid., p. 159.
3. E. Maynial, introduction to L.D., Soc. des Belles Lettres, Paris, 1943, p. lxxi.
4. A. Monglond, Histoire intérieure du Preromantisme..., Grenoble, 1929, I, 13.
5. P. Meister, Charles Duclos, Genève, 1956, p. 136.

recognises that Les Liaisons dangereuses is much better written than any of Duclos's novels.

We are not, however, seeking to prove a direct influence of Duclos upon the author of Les Liaisons. We are merely seeking to show a common atmosphere, and to suggest that the inspiration behind Laclos's novel is probably more literary than social, that the provincial Laclos is following an established pattern in the erotic novel. He may well create something greater than his predecessors. This does not alter the fact that he is in their lineage, and perhaps it will show the dangers of the argument that Les Liaisons is primarily a weapon wielded by an ambitious revolutionary(1). Let us therefore turn to Duclos's novels.

When one picks up the Confessions du Comte de***, one immediately notices, by comparison with Les Liaisons dangereuses, a difference of tone. The physical details of the seduction by the Comte of the young widow, the Marquise de Valcour, are far less discreet than those given by Laclos in the "harem scene" of Mme de Merteuil or the seduction of Cécile, for example(2). Immediately, too, we begin to see similarities with Laclos's novel. The Comte's vanity is aroused and when the news of his liaison with the Marquise is noised abroad he expresses pleasure in terms which are in harmony with Valmont's acknowledgement that his enterprise in connection with Mme de Tourvel assures him of "autant de gloire que de plaisir"(3). Duclos's Comte puts it

1. Dorothy R. Thelander makes a pertinent remark concerning Dard's theory of Laclos the man of ambition when she remarks of both the Eloge de Vauban and Les Liaisons that neither can be said to be the work of "a cleverly ambitious man. One does not usually further a military career by writing a novel, no matter how popular it may become, nor by disagreeing with accepted military doctrine." (Laclos and the Epistolary Novel, Geneva, 1963, p. 39)

2. Duclos, Les Confessions du Comte de***, écrites par lui-même à un ami? Amsterdam, 1741, 2 vols., I, 7-15.

3. L.D., IV, 41. My italics

as follows:

"Un aveu si public fut fort de mon goût, parcequ'il flattoit ma vanité." (1)

This element of vanity, this concern for la gloire is further expressed when the Comte returns from a stay in England. He has been absent for a year and so is faced with the necessity of making "une espèce de début". His choice has to be made with care. He rejects the idea of Mme de Limcuil:

"Elle étoit jeune, elle passoit pour sage, et il falloit qu'elle le fût, car on n'avoit point encore parlé d'elle, L'attaquer, et ne pas réussir, c'étoit me perdre..." (2)

On the other hand,

"Mme de Tonins étoit à la mode, et dès lors elle me paroissoit charmante." (3)

For his vanity's sake, he must have her; and in this he quickly succeeds. This is in accord with one side of Valmont's code of "principles", and the vanity here is not so very different from that which leads Valmont to seduce the Vicomtesse de M (4). There are, however, important differences between Valmont and the Comte. Firstly, although Valmont may well be prepared to indulge in this type of fancy, and welcome the notoriety it will bring him, he is far more ambitious than the Comte, as he shows in his choice of Mme de Tourvel. Furthermore, unlike the Comte, Valmont could never bring himself to envisage the possibility of attacking a woman without success. Then again, Valmont is ^{primarily} interested in the intellectual domination of women, in the chase rather than the kill. The Comte is much closer to the traditional Don Juan:

"C'est l'usage parmi les Amans de profession d'éviter de rompre totalement avec celles qu'on cesse d'aimer. On en prend de nouvelles, et on

1. Confessions, I, 18.
2. ibid., I, 148-9.
3. ibid., I, 156.
4. I.D., LXXI, 169 et seq.

tâche de conserver les anciennes, mais on doit surtout songer à augmenter la liste."(1)

If one may put it in such a way, although Valmont is glad of the gloire brought by his numerous conquests, he is more interested in quality than quantity. Hence his initial unwillingness to tackle Cécile: "Vingt autres peuvent y réussir comme moi."(2) Mme de Tourvel is the enemy worthy of him.

Valmont is a far more complex character than is the Comte, and the differences considerably outnumber the similarities between them. For example, although Valmont may well declare, somewhat ironically,

"Le parti le plus difficile, ou le plus gai, est toujours celui que je prends, et je ne me reproche pas une bonne action, pourvu qu'elle m'exerce ou m'amuse"(3),

he shows none of the sensibility of the Comte who, having decided to lead "une vie tranquille", finds an impoverished widow offering him her daughter, Julie by name, and instead of taking advantage of her, decides to unite her with her honest young lover, "en assurant leur fortune et leur vie." As he remarks, echoing the Duclos of the Considerations,

"Je n'ai jamais senti dans ma vie de plaisir plus pur que celui d'avoir fait leur bonheur. L'auteur d'un bienfait est celui qui en recueille le fruit le plus doux... Tous les plaisirs des sens n'approchent pas de celui que j'éprouvois."(4)

Valmont, after his "good work", adopts a much less sentimental approach. The form taken by the Comte's good deed is strikingly similar to that of Lovelace in Richardson's Clarissa a few years later(5), the Lovelace was

1. Confessions, I, 125.

2. L.D., IV, 41.

3. ibid., LXXI, 169.

4. Confessions, II, 37-56.

5. Samuel Richardson, Clarissa, Everyman edn., vol. I, letter XXXIV, pp. 170-3. The first 2 vols. of the novel appeared in November, 1747.

not only spares the sweet young girl he calls "my Rosebud" but marries her to the young carpenter Johnny Varton and gives them a hundred pounds. It is interesting to compare the motives of the three rakes in the performance of their acts of charity. Both Duclos and Richardson use the episodes for primarily didactic purposes, Richardson to show that even the deepest-died villain has a conscience to assuage -

"... I make it my rule, whenever I have committed a very capital enormity, to do some good by way of atonement"(1) -

and Duclos to show the good deed as the beginning of the rake's redemption. The Comte says of Julie and her husband,

"Je leur dois en partie le changement qui arriva dès-lors dans mon coeur. Leur état m'en fit désirer un pareil."(2)

Laclos will have none of this. Valmont's act of charity is a calculated part of his strategy in the seduction of the Présidente, and the pleasurable sensation he derives from it, far from revealing a conscience to be assuaged or beginning a period of atonement, simply confirms him in his cynical view of humanity and convinces him that, after all, the allegedly virtuous people like the Présidente are not very different from himself.

The parallel between the Comte and Valmont, then, exists, but it is far from being a close one. The Comte has none of Valmont's subtlety as a character, and neither is he so firmly attached to the "principles" of vice. What about the women in the Confessions?

Monglond's description of Mme d'Orval as a Mme de Merteuil "sans génie"

1. ibid., p. 173.
2. Confessions, II, 56.

need not detain us very long(1). There is no Mme d'Orval in the novel. Monglond may be referring either to Mme Dornal(2) or to Mme Derval(3). A friend of the Comte's, Senecé by name, lets Mme Dornal deprive him of all his friends. Senecé is sure that she is in love with him. The Comte determines to show Senecé that this is not so by supplanting him in her favours, although he loathes and despises her. She makes a rendez-vous with the Comte, who deliberately drops her letter so that Senecé shall find it. Senecé surprises the two of them in a compromising position, but Mme Dornal's dominion over him is so great that she stops him from going for the Comte with his sword. Despite everything, Senecé continues his liaison with her. M. Dornal dies, and the Comte informs us that "J'ai su depuis que... Senecé avait eu la lâcheté d'épouser cette vile créature." (4)

Of Mme Derval, on the other hand, we are told that "il lui falloit un Amant quel qu'il fût". "D'ailleurs le bon air étoit de l'avoir eue, et je voulus en passer ma fantaisie." (5) The Comte takes her "par caprice" and keeps her for two months, so much is he impressed by her, and then he receives an anonymous letter saying,

1. No more need his comparison between the Mme de Merteuil-Prévan and Comte-Mme de Grancour relationships: the Mme de Grancour episode is a minor one, and the similarity with the relationship in Les Liaisons, if similarity it be, is confined to the fact that in his plan to seduce the "dame de garnison" Mme de Grancour the Comte is caught on a rope ladder by a military patrol and consequently becomes a laughing-stock. The results are far different: the Comte seeks vengeance by possessing an Intendante who has found his predicament particularly amusing - and succeeds (Confessions, I, 50 et seq.)

2. Confessions, II, 2-28.

3. *ibid.*, II, 31-3.

4. *ibid.*, II, 28.

5. *ibid.*, II, 31-2.

"... J'attendois mon tour (with Mme Derval), et dans cette confiance j'ai rompu avec une Maîtresse que j'au^rois gardée. Vous êtes trop galant homme pour troubler l'ordre de la société: rendés-lui donc une femme qui lui appartient, vous devés sentir la justice de ma demande."(1)

The Comte does so.

The tone of this letter is in harmony with several passages in Crébillon or Chamfort, but it could never have been written about a Mme de Merteuil, whose front of respectability is much too good for us to liken her to Mme Derval, who, as this letter shows, is essentially a "machine à plaisir", the one thing above all others which Mme de Merteuil is determined not to become. As for Mme Dornal, she does have complete dominion over Senecé, but there is no real comparison between this and Mme de Merteuil's infinite talent for domination and manipulation. A Mme de Merteuil "sans génie"? Take away Mme de Merteuil's genius and her originality is destroyed.

If these ladies do not present anything like a close parallel with the characters of Laclos, this is not to say that such parallels are not to be found. For instance, Mme de Rumigny reminds one of Mme de Merteuil when she names her conditions for establishing a liaison with the Comte:

"Je veux le sacrifice de la Marquise (de Valcour), j'exige le plus éclatant et tel que je le prescrirai."(2)

Mme de Rumigny dictates to the Comte a "billet fort impertinent" which presages Valmont's "ce n'est pas ma faute" letter to Mme de Tourvel as a device. Like Valmont, the Comte sends the letter, but he is still capable of feeling remorse, and it is left to him to remark that

"Les femmes n'ont point de plus grands ennemis que les femmes"(3),

1. *ibid.*, II, 33.
2. *ibid.*, I, 20.
3. *ibid.*, I, 21.

which parallels Mme de Merteuil's observation to Valmont:

"... Vicomte, quand une femme frappe dans le coeur d'une autre, elle manque rarement de trouver l'endroit sensible, et la blessure est incurable."(1)

Similarly, like Mme de Merteuil, Mme de Gremonville has the external appearance of a "dévôte", but she also possesses a "petite maison". As the Comte points out,

"c'est ainsi que la réputation étant une fois établie, la vertu, ou ce qui lui ressemble, devient la sauvegarde du plaisir."(2)

Perhaps the most interesting of all the women in the Confessions, however, is the Comtesse de Selve, a widow of twenty-three years of age, whom the reformed Comte ultimately marries. There are parallels to be found between her and Mme de Tourvel. The Comte goes to stay with a friend in the country, and meets her there. He remarks that

"Les femmes avec lesquelles je vivois communément n'avoient guère de rapport avec M^e de Selve qui m'avoient toujours paru trop respectable pour moi."(3) 8/

Unlike Valmont, however, the Comte openly confesses to falling in love with her. After a month of tongue-tied devotion he ultimately makes a declaration of his love. Mme de Selve is wary because of his reputation but, like Mme de Tourvel, offers friendship. Old habits of calculation die hard, and the Comte reflects:

"Une femme qui parle souvent des dangers de l'amour, s'aguerit sur les risques, et s'y familiarise avec la passion; c'est toujours parler de l'amour, et l'on n'en parle guère impunément."(4)

Taking advantage of her offer of friendship, the Comte relates:

1. L.D., CXLV, 368.
2. Confessions, I, 85-98.
3. ibid., II, 57-8.
4. ibid., II, 70-1.

"... je me hasardois alors à lui baiser la main. Les caresses de l'amitié peuvent échauffer le coeur, et faire naître l'amour. Séduite par le prétexte d'un attachement pur, M^e de Selve y résistait foiblement. Je l'accoutumai insensiblement à m'entendre parler de ma passion, et j'attendois que le tems et ma constance lui fissent naître les sentimens que je désirois, ou plutôt que je pusse en obtenir l'aveu; car je m'apercevois que je faisais chaque jour de nouveaux progrès dans son coeur."(1)

The Comte's approach here is strikingly similar to that of Valmont - his emphasis on the avowal of unconfessed feelings - and Mme de Selve's reaction to his advances contains more than a trace of the auto-séduction apparent in the Présidente. As we have seen, the Comte is fully aware of this element in her. After much hesitation, and after a proposal of marriage which she neither accepts nor rejects, wishing to test the Comte's fidelity and sincerity, Mme de Selve finally gives in and the Comte possesses her. Afterwards, like Mme de Tourvel, she weeps from remorse. The Comte repeats his promise of marriage and possesses her again. This time there are no regrets. Like Mme de Tourvel to Valmont, Mme de Selve is now completely devoted to the Comte. A year passes "dans une yvresse de plaisirs"(2) and then, says the Comte, "l'ennui me gagnoit involontairement"(3). He is unfaithful to her. His new mistress, Mme Dorsigny, "plus vaine que jalouse", forbids the Comte to see Mme de Selve, "et j'avois la lâcheté de le lui promettre"(4). Shortly afterwards, Mme de Selve discovers the Comte and Mme Dorsigny "dans une situation qui n'étoit pas équivoque" in the woods(5). The Comte is smitten with remorse and asks Mme de Selve's pardon, once again offering marriage and swearing eternal fidelity. And so, as in the case of Mme de Tourvel, we have the

1. *ibid.*, II, 71-2.
2. *ibid.*, II, 91.
3. *ibid.*, II, 97.
4. *ibid.*, II, 106.
5. *ibid.*, II, 113.

seduction (or rather auto-seduction), the complete surrender of the victim, a period of bliss (here longer than in *Les Liaisons*), and the compromising situation -- Mme Dorsigny in essence is little different from *Émilie*.

From this point onward, however, Mme de Selve loses all resemblance to Mme de Tourvel and, if anything, becomes more like Mme de Merteuil in her relationship with the Comte:

"Suivés vos goûts, ayés des Maîtresses; je serai trop flattée de rester votre amie... Que d'autres partagent vos plaisirs; je jouirai de toute votre confiance." (1)

The Comte does as she says:

"Elle me parloit de mes Maîtresses; elle m'en faisoit le portrait, et me donnoit des leçons pour ma conduite." (2)

Finally he becomes bored with this life too, and once again proposes marriage to Mme de Selve. This time she accepts him, and so this curious relationship is over. Her motives in acting as the Comte's confidante are, of course, different from those of Mme de Merteuil in her liaison with Laclos's Vicomte. As Mme de Selve puts it to the Comte:

"J'aime encore mieux conserver votre cœur par mon indulgence que de vous éloigner par une sévérité, dont l'effet tomberoit particulièrement sur moi." (3)

Self-interest may be at the root of it, but it is a different self-interest from that of Mme de Merteuil. There is none of the Marquise's raillery: when Mme de Selve gives him tactical advice ("des leçons pour sa conduite"), it is straightforward, honest advice to enable him to vanquish his latest female fancy -- and all this is based on the conviction that the women possessed by the Comte will cloy the appetite they feed and cause him to

1. *ibid.*, II, 125-6.
2. *ibid.*, II, 128.
3. *ibid.*, II, 130.

return to her.

Duclos the moralist now finds himself in a pretty pass. The Comte and his new wife retire to the country where, he tells us,

"Nous jouissons de cette union des coeurs qui est le fruit et le principe de la vertu. Ce qui m'attache le plus à ma femme, c'est que je lui dois cette vertu précieuse, et sans doute elle me chérit comme son ouvrage."(1)

So Mme de Selve succeeds where Mme de Tourvel fails. But this moral ending, in which virtue seems to consist in the exhaustion of all sensual pleasure by promiscuity, is no more satisfying than the end of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.

Despite what Paul Meister has to say concerning the *Mémoires pour servir de Suite aux Considérations sur les Moeurs de ce Siècle* (first published in 1751 as *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire des Moeurs du XVIIIe Siècle*), this is a tedious novel, vastly inferior to the *Confessions*. Nevertheless, as Meister says(2), *amour-vanité* similar to that of *Les Liaisons* does play an important part here. In particular, the Marquise de Rétel can in this respect be seen as a pale fore-runner of the Marquise de Merteuil. Speaking of *liaisons*, she says,

"J'ai réfléchi de bonne heure sur ce sujet; je me suis fait un plan de vie en conséquence de mes réflexions."

She wastes no time in divulging the nature of this "plan de vie". She has decided

"... à défendre (son) coeur de toute passion tyrannique, & à goûter les plaisirs que les moeurs régnantes (lui) permettent."(3)

She shows a similar awareness to that displayed by Mme de Merteuil of the fact

1. *ibid.*, II, 136.
2. P. Meister, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
3. *Mémoires pour servir de Suite...*, 3rd edn., n.p., 1777, p. 66. My italics.

that two standards of moral behaviour exist, one for men and one for women(1). If one compares this attitude of Mme de Rétel with that of Mme de Merteuil in the brilliant autobiographical Letter LXXXI of Les Liaisons, the parallel becomes clear, although, as has already been said, the Marquise of the Mémoires is a pale character by comparison with Laclos's creation. Nevertheless, her "plan de vie" is paralleled by what Mme de Merteuil describes as "les règles que je me suis prescrites, ... mes principes", and her awareness of the dual standard of moral behaviour is comparable with Mme de Merteuil's observation to the effect that

"Combattant sans risque, vous devez agir sans précaution. Pour vous autres hommes, les défaites ne sont que des succès de moins. Dans cette partie si inégale, notre fortune est de ne pas perdre, et votre malheur de ne pas gagner."(2)

One other passage which finds an echo in Les Liaisons is the remark made by the narrator in which he points out the ultimate desperate emptiness of the roué's life:

"Quoique ma vie parût être un enchaînement de plaisirs, j'en goûttais peu, parce qu'ils s'étoient pour ainsi dire tournés en métier. Aucune aventure n'étoit plus en état de me piquer mon goût, si elle n'avait quelque singularité, & celles de cette espèce sont fort rares."(3)

The same position is arrived at by Valmont in his revealing remark,

"... je ne sais pourquoi, il n'y a plus que les choses bizarres qui me plaisent."(4)

The Mémoires, however, cannot compare with Les Liaisons as a work of literature.

There is the conventional happy ending, in which Duclos's roué is straightened

1. cf. ibid., pp. 50 & 66-7.
2. L.D., LXXXI, 200 & 198.
3. Mémoires, pp. 163-4.
4. L.D., CX, 288.

out, married to a virtuous woman, and given a fortune into the bargain.

The Histoire de Mme de Luz, anecdote du Règne d'Henri IV (first published in 1741) is a period piece written in the third person. It has little or nothing in common with Laclos's work, except that it helps to show how the erotic novel can develop into sheer horror for the sake of horror. This work is pointing in the direction of the clumsy excesses of horror of the Marquis de Sade. The opening sentence reads:

"Il semble que la vertu d'une Femme soit dans ce monde un être étranger, contre lequel tout conspire."(1)

And then, without the irony of Voltaire's Cosi Sancta, Duclos sets about illustrating the point: the virtuous Mme de Luz has to give herself to her husband's judge to save him, is raped by a suitor whilst taking a bath, and is drugged and raped by her confessor (Laclos confines his horror, for the most part, to the non-physical plane). Finally, like Sade's Justine, Mme de Luz cries out:

"À quel comble d'horreur étois-je donc destinée, Ciel cruel! par où puis-je avoir mérité ta haine? est-ce la vertu qui t'est odieuse?"(2)

She dies of a broken heart, "la plus belle, la plus malheureuse, et j'ose dire encore, la plus vertueuse et la plus respectable des Femmes."(3) The sad thing is that, unlike Sade at the end of Justine, when he assures us that happiness no doubt awaits that young lady in heaven, Duclos gives every impression here of being perfectly serious.

One may sometimes have reservations about applying Meister's epithet "distingué" to the style of Duclos. Nevertheless, there is a community of

1. Histoire de Mme de Luz, in Bibliothèque choisie et amusante, Amsterdam, 1748, III, 159.
2. ibid., III, 261.
3. ibid., III, 267.

atmosphere between him and Laclos here and there, although the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses displays much more elegance, much greater/subtlety and vigour of characterisation, and overcomes the dangers of a basically banal plot far more successfully than Duclos. There are hints in Duclos of what is to come later in Les Liaisons, but these hints are scattered widely amongst characters who never achieve any real stature.

II

We have already quoted André Le Breton's observation to the effect that the novel of manners was moving towards licentiousness in the hands of Marivaux(1). He goes on to say that "il a franchi le pas avec Crébillon/fils." Émile Henriot has pointed out the existence of two Crébillon files: firstly, the Crébillon to whom it is certainly impossible not to apply the term "licentious", the often long-winded, tedious author of spicy fairy-tales such as Le Sopha and Tanzen et Néa, d'arné, and, secondly, the far better psychological writer of Les Lettres de la Marquise de M***, Les Egarements du Coeur et de l'Esprit and, above all, such excellent dialogues as Le Hasard du Coin du Feu and La Nuit et le Moment. It is with this second Crébillon that we are here concerned, and it is Henriot who most clearly puts Crébillon's relevance to the study of Laclos when he says of him;

"Il n'a pas inventé le genre où on l'a vu briller: Hamilton écrivait avant lui... Mais il a... porté à la perfection... cette dialectique du coeur."(2)

In this side of Crébillon's production we find the interest in psychology, *et* and perhaps especially feminine psychology, characteristic of Hamilton

1. Cf. supra, p. 541, n. 2.

2. Henriot, op. cit., p. 169. My italics.

and Marivaux, taken to an extreme of subtlety which sometimes surpasses even that of Marivaux. This is the "game of chess" at its best.

But is it possible to draw any real parallels between the work of Crébillon (1704-1777) and that of Laclos? Francis Carco vigorously opposes any such idea:

"Rien ne serait plus injuste que de transformer Laclos en une sorte de Crébillon fils ou de Nerciat, et les Liaisons dangereuses - ce chef-d'oeuvre - n'ont rien de commun heureusement avec Félicia ou mes Frédaines."(1)

The question of Nerciat's Félicia is a quite separate one from that of Crébillon's novels. Crébillon and Nerciat are so different that it seems unreasonable to couple their names in this way. For the moment we are concerned only with Crébillon, however, and whilst we do not seek to "transform" Laclos into a Crébillon, it remains a fact that certain similarities do exist between the two writers.

The most obvious point is that the cold, tactical approach of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil is very similar to the chess-like manoeuvres of Crébillon's characters. As Robert Kemp puts it,

"... le romantisme de Rousseau, la mélancolie de Goethe ou d'Ossian (traduits en 1776) n'ont pas troublé ce clair esprit (Valmont) légèrement attardé, et qui semble contemporain de Crébillon le fils."(2)

(This is not to say that we consider Valmont to be exactly comparable with the heroes of Crébillon). Hippolyte Taine remarked on a similar discretion on the part of both novelists in their use of language: in the works of both of them,

1. F. Carco, Introduction to Les Liaisons dangereuses, Paris, La Cité des Livres, 1931. I, ii.
2. R. Kemp, La Vie des Livres, Paris, 1955, p. 31.

"... l'indécence qui est dans les choses n'est jamais dans les mots."(1)

More than this, the general moral climate in the works of both writers is very similar.

Two of the dominant characteristics of this climate are boredom and vanity. It is from this that springs the immorality - or amorality - of the characters. Says Clitandre, in the dialogue La Nuit et le Moment,

"On est dans le monde, on s'y ennuye, on voit des femmes qui, de leur côté, ne s'y amusent guère, on est jeune, la vanité se joint au dés-oeuvrement. Si avoir une femme n'est pas toujours un plaisir, du moins c'est toujours une sorte d'occupation."(2)

Clitandre has earlier remarked that

"Jamais les femmes n'ont mis moins de grimaces dans la société; jamais on n'a moins affecté la vertu(3). On se plaît, on se prend. S'ennuie-t-on l'un avec l'autre? on se quitte avec tout aussi peu de cérémonie que l'on s'est pris. Revient-on à se plaire? on se reprend avec autant de vivacité qui si c'était la première fois qu'on s'engageait ensemble."(4)

All this, reminiscent as it is of Chamfort's definition of love in the eighteenth century as merely "l'échange de deux fantaisies et le contact de deux épidermes", amounts to a description of a moral state scarcely differing from that of the world of Prévan, Valmont, Mme de Merteuil, Vressac and the Vicomtesse de M. of letter LXXI, and even - by implication - old Mme de Rosemonde, the world to which Danceny and especially Cécile seem so eager to gain admittance. "Revient-on à se plaire? on se reprend avec.. vivacité", says Crébillon's Clitandre. The catastrophe of Les Liaisons is caused in part by Laclos's

1. H. Taine, Les Origines de la France contemporaine, I, L'Ancien Régime, Paris 1876, p. 173.

2. Oeuvres complètes de M. de Crébillon fils, Maestricht, 1779, V, 252-3.

3. Mme de Merteuil finds it useful to affect virtue. So, in point of fact, do most of Crébillon's women, if only for form's sake. The "dialectique du coeur" cannot take place if the woman is a brazen hussy.

4. *ibid.*, p. 169.

asking what happens in this world of debased values if only one person of the couple wishes to renew a liaison (Valmont-Mme de Merteuil and Valmont-Mme de Tourvel). This in some measure accounts for the greater ferocity of Laclos's novel by comparison with those of Crébillon.

Vanity and boredom often go hand in hand, and the two characterise the work of both Laclos and Crébillon. When one is prevented by force of circumstances from indulging in worthwhile activities, one is likely to attribute exaggerated importance to one's performance in the bagatelles open to one. And it is Valmont's basic fear of boredom, the idea that he must always seek something new, which leads to his exhausting all normal human relationships, to his feeling that he can now derive satisfaction only from "les choses bizarres", or to such statements as,

"Je ne me reproche pas une bonne action, pourvu qu'elle m'exerce ou m'amuse." (1)

It is, however, Mme de Merteuil who gives us the clearest proof of the corrosive influence of ennui in this closed society, when she is describing her apprenticeship in the ways of vice. Writing of her marriage, she tells us that her experiments in sex and human behaviour generally were, for a short while, abandoned. Then her husband took her to "sa triste campagne" and

"... la crainte de l'ennui fit revenir le goût de l'étude; et ne m'y trouvant entourée que de gens dont la distance avec moi me mettait à l'abri de tout soupçon, j'en profitai pour donner un champ plus vaste à mes expériences. Ce fut là, surtout, que je m'assurai que l'amour que l'on nous vante comme la cause de nos plaisirs, n'en est au plus que le prétexte." (2)

The last sentence of this passage presents a direct parallel with a remark made

1. L.D., LXXI, 169.

2. ibid., LXXI, 202.

by Clitandre in La Nuit et le Moment. Continuing his remarks on the relationship between the sexes, Clitandre observes:

"Il est vrai que l'amour n'est entré pour rien dans tout cela; mais l'amour, qu'étoit-il, qu'un désir que l'on se plaisait à s'exagérer, un mouvement des sens, dont il avoit plu à la vanité des hommes de faire une vertu? On sait aujourd'hui que le goût seul existe; & si l'on se dit encore qu'on s'aime, c'est bien moins parce qu'on le croit, que parce que c'est une façon plus polie de se demander réciproquement ce dont on sent qu'on a besoin."(1)

This is a very similar conclusion to that at which Mme de Merteuil arrives almost fifty years later(2), and which gives her the icy strength of will to bring Valmont to a position in which she might well have said with the Marquise of Crébillon's Le Hasard du Coin du Feu:

"Les hommes, en voulant satisfaire leur vanité, nous donnent quelquefois de bien risibles spectacles."(3)

If we examine the Lettres de la Marquise de M*** au Comte de R*** and, possibly more especially, Les Égaréments du Cœur et de l'Esprit, ou Mémoires de M. de Meilcour, it is possible to find even more striking parallels with Les Liaisons dangereuses, similarities not only of general atmosphere, but also of characterisation. Crébillon's first novel, the Lettres de la Marquise, was published in 1732, exactly half a century before Les Liaisons. Like Laclos's novel the work, as of course its title implies, is epistolary in character, but it is an epistolary novel in which all the letters are from the Marquise to the Comte. This is perhaps an easier form of the genre than that undertaken by Laclos. Like Laclos, Crébillon gives us little in the way of physical description. This is

1. Oeuvres complètes de M. de Crébillon fils, V, 169-70.
2. Crébillon wrote La Nuit et le Moment before he was 30 (i.e. before 1734), although it was not published until much later (cf. E. Henriot, op. cit., p. 174).
3. Oeuvres complètes de M. de Crébillon fils, V, 4.

essentially a work of the intellect. The action takes place within the intellect - and, perhaps, later on, within the heart too - of the Marquise.

Just as Laclos claims that the letters which form Les Liaisons are "recueillies dans une Société", so Crébillon makes the pretence that the Lettres de la Marquise are genuine. Furthermore, in his Préface du Rédacteur, Laclos writes,

"Cet Ouvrage, ou plutôt ce Recueil, que le Public trouvera peut-être encore trop volumineux, ne contient pourtant que le plus petit nombre des Lettres qui composaient la totalité de la correspondance dont il est extrait...."(1)

Similarly, in the prefatory Extrait d'une Lettre de Madame de ... à M. de...

Crébillon seeks to make us believe that the Marquise's letters have been found amongst the papers of the Comte de R***.(2) Mme de ... tells us that

"... dans plus de cinq cents (lettres) qui me sont tombées entre les mains, je n'en ai réservé que soixante-dix; ce n'est pas que les autres fussent plus mauvaises; mais les amants s'écrivent souvent des choses qui ne peuvent intéresser qu'eux-mêmes."(3)

Then, however, with an insouciance akin to that of Laclos, Crébillon makes Madame de ... write:

"Enfin, pour vous dire mieux, je l'ai voulu ainsi, & je ne crois pas mieux me justifier auprès de vous."(4)

Another parallel is to be found in the fact that both authors appeal, in their pretence of authenticity, to the spontaneous naturalness of the style of these "genuine" letters. Crébillon's lady editor remarks of the

1. O.C., 30. In his Avertissement de l'Éditeur, however, Laclos remarks that, "malgré le titre de cet Ouvrage et ce qu'en dit le Rédacteur dans sa Préface, nous ne garantissons pas l'authenticité de ce Recueil, et... nous avons même de fortes raisons de penser que ce n'est qu'un Roman."(ibid., p. 29)

2. At the end of the novel the absence of the Comte's letters is explained to us: the Marquise burned them (Oeuvres complètes de M. de Crébillon fils, Vol. VIII, letter LXX, pp. 279-80).

3. ibid., VIII, p. 3.

4. ibid., VIII, p. 4: cf. supra, ~~p. 285~~, n. 1.

Lettres de la Marquise:

"Vous n'y trouverez pas cette correction de style dont se parent nos Écrivains; mais les négligences d'une femme spirituelle sont des graces que tout votre esprit ne sauroit attraper."(1)

Likewise, we read in Laclos's Préface du Rédacteur of

"... une qualité qui tient... à la nature de l'Ouvrage: c'est la variété des styles; mérite qu'un Auteur atteint difficilement, mais qui se présentait ici de lui-même..."(2)

At first sight, one difference between Crébillon's Extrait d'une Lettre and Laclos's Préface du Rédacteur is that in the former Crébillon makes no moral claims for his work. This is not to say, however, that Crébillon's novel is devoid of the moralising tendency so widespread in the eighteenth century. To the contrary, moral aphorisms and the like are scattered throughout the work. One of them in particular, the remark of the Marquise that

"Ce que l'on appelle fleurettes, & qui séduit tant de femmes, seroit sur moi sans effet; mais après tout, il vaut mieux ne s'y point exposer; & toute femme qui se repose trop sur sa vertu, court toujours risque de la perdre..."(3),

might well have been read with profit by the Présidente de Tourvel, and indeed forcibly recalls one of the moral claims made fifty years later by Laclos in his Préface, namely that his novel was to serve as an illustration of the fact that

"... toute femme qui consent à recevoir dans sa société un homme sans mœurs, finit par en devenir la victime."(4)

However, if the Marquise de M*** is a forerunner of one of Laclos's

1. ibid., VIII, p. 2.

2. O.C., 32.

3. Lettres de la Marquise, Letter XI, p. 40 (Future references to the text of this work will give simply the number of the letter in Roman figures and the page reference in Arabic figures, the entire work being contained in vol. VIII, of the Maestricht edition of the Oeuvres complètes)

4. O.C., 32.

characters, she is less an embryonic Mme de Tourvel than a precursor of that other Marquise de M***, Mme de Merteuil. Laclos's Présidente and Crébillon's Marquise both submit to the seducer. The difference is that in the case of the Marquise it would be incorrect to say that she becomes his victim. She is far more alive to the ruses of the game than the Présidente and is fully aware of the dangers of auto-séduction which, as we have seen, is the principal element in the downfall of Mme de Tourvel. This is illustrated by her remark that

"... nos réflexions contribuent plus à nous perdre qu'elles ne nous aident à nous retenir."(1)

She is aware of the implications of the steps she takes, and she takes them, deliberately, for her own satisfaction.

Crébillon's Marquise has the vanity which in different ways characterises both Mme de Tourvel and Mme de Merteuil. For instance, to dispel odious rumours that in the person of Mme de G... she has a rival for the Comte de R***'s love, the Marquise de M*** tells the Comte to put an end to his visits(2). Like both Mme de Merteuil and Mme de Tourvel she has a full sense of her own worth and is determined to be differentiated from other women. In her attempt to ensure that she will be differentiated in this way the Présidente de Tourvel offers Valmont friendship. In her case this is the first step on the way to her downfall. The Marquise de *** makes a similar offer to the Comte(3) but, as we have said, Crébillon's

1. Lettres de la Marquise, XI, 40.
2. ibid., VII, 27.
3. ibid., III, 13.

Marquise has a knowledge of the world closer to that of Mme de Merteuil than to that of the Présidente and, unlike Mme de Tourvel, she makes the offer in full awareness of its implications:

"Si je vous le donnois (mon coeur), ce ne seroit pour vous qu'une félicité passagère, que vous ne souhaitez à présent que parce que vous n'en jouissez pas, & ce seroit pour moi une source cruelle de larmes et de tourments... Votre passion s'éteindroit bientôt, & il ne me resteroit que la honte d'avoir été séduite, & peut-être celle de vous aimer encore."(1)

True, this may sound, with its element of pride mingled with a suggestion of true feeling, like the language of Mme de Tourvel(2). Crébillon's Marquise's forecast does in fact come true in the case of the Présidente who, after Valmont's desertion of her, declares to Mme de Volanges,

"Je me croyais bien sûre d'en mourir, et j'en avais le courage; mais de survivre à mon malheur et à ma honte, c'est ce qui m'est impossible."(3)

This is the measure of the difference between Laclos's Présidente and Crébillon's Marquise.

1. *ibid.*, V, 19.

2. It may be compared with several passages to be found in the Présidente's letters to Valmont, for example, "De retour à Paris, vous y trouverez assez d'occasions d'oublier un sentiment qui peut-être n'a dû sa naissance qu'à l'habitude où vous êtes de vous occuper de semblables objets, et sa force qu'au désœuvrement de la campagne..." (L, 130), or "... s'il existe des plaisirs plus vifs, je ne les désire pas, je ne veux pas les connaître. 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 et de s'éveiller sans remords?" (LVI, 141), or "N'aimez-vous pas mieux être l'objet de l'amitié d'une femme honnête, que celui des remords d'une femme coupable?" (LXVII, 163)

3. *L.D.*, XCLIX, 377. Cf. also in this context her delirious letter CLXI, 396-8.

The similarities with Mme de Merteuil are several. The Marquise de M*** has the same irony: on one occasion the Comte tells her that he is dying of love, to which she replies that she does not think highly of this particular strategem, asking him what advantage he will gain in his suit by dying(1). In her first letter to the Comte she writes:

"On peut se dispenser d'aimer un mari; mais un amant, cela devient grave."

But the crux of the matter is, as she says, that

"Je ne veux point aimer."(2)

She has Mme de Merteuil's cynicism concerning love:

"Cet amour n'est qu'une idée, & je ne crois qu'il ait jamais existé. Ce n'est aujourd'hui qu'un lien formé par le caprice, entretenu par un sentiment encore plus méprisable, & détruit par tous deux."(3)

Once again the tone of Chamfort. The basic antagonism in her relationship with the Comte is the same fear of domination by the other which characterises the conflict between Valmont and Mme de Merteuil - she says that if she gave way to the Comte she would see "le maître succéder à l'amant."(4) Those writers who have sought to see Les Liaisons as a feminist novel on the strength of similar remarks by Mme de Merteuil must at least recognise that these are nothing new in eighteenth-century French prose fiction.

The Marquise's "Je suis fière, on ne m'outrage point impunément"(5)

1. Lettres de la Marquise, IX, 30-1.
2. *ibid.*, I, 7.
3. *ibid.*, V, 20.
4. *ibid.*, XVII, 60.
5. *ibid.*, XL, 140-1.

might well have come from the pen of Mme de Merteuil. And this pride - or perhaps one should say vanity - is in its details very similar to that of Laclos's character. The Marquise's sudden declaration of interest in the Prince de ... has very similar motives to Mme de Merteuil's attack on Prévan. As the Marquise puts it,

"C'est une conquête trop illustre pour ne pas mériter toutes sortes d'attentions; & j'ai peine à deviner pourquoi vous avez cru qu'il me trouveroit inflexible..... Il me dit les mêmes choses que vous m'avez dites."(1)

On the other hand, in the case of both the Marquise and of Mme de Merteuil there is a desire for the glory of conquest, and on the other hand, there is a desire to humiliate, in the case of the Marquise to show the Comte that he is no unique being and in the case of Mme de Merteuil to show Valmont that he does not "own" her and that she is capable of greater triumphs than he. When the Comte attempts an infidelity and is unsuccessful the Marquise, by contrast, humiliates him still further by refusing to take him back(2). This is on a par with Mme de Merteuil's denigration of Valmont's attempts vis-à-vis the Présidente. Laclos's Marquise, however, shows greater subtlety and ferocity in her ultimate refusal to take Valmont back after his success with Mme de Tourvel and the sending of the letter of rupture.

The Marquise de M***'s attitude to infidelity by the Comte de R*** depends, however, on the circumstances. Like Mme de Merteuil, her vanity is offended only when she thinks that her lover is placing another woman above her in his estimation, as in the case of Mme de G ---- mentioned above(3).

1. *ibid.*, LXII, 243-4.
2. *ibid.*, LX, 235.
3. *supra*, p. 587.

Thus, when she learns that the Comte has taken an Opera girl on a jaunt into the country, the Marquise simply remarks, "Je ne vois là-dedans rien d'extraordinaire." It is beneath her to be jealous of such a creature. She contents herself with remarking that the Comte has no right to begrudge her similar minor infidelities(1). This again differentiates the Marquise from Mme de Tourvel, who is outraged when she sees Valmont with an Opera girl(2). Mme de Merteuil's attitude would have been similar to that of Crébillon's Marquise,

It is, of course, only indirectly - through the letters of the Marquise - that we see the Comte de R***, but even so the similarity of his character and principles with those of Valmont is quite striking. For them both, difficulties add spice to a conquest. The Marquise is fully aware of this so far as the Comte is concerned, as she demonstrates when she writes to him,

"Vous vous êtes opiniâtre à me poursuivre, parce que c'est un affront à votre vanité de ne pouvoir me rendre sensible."(3)

It is for precisely this reason that Valmont lays greater store by the pursuit of Mme de Tourvel than by the pursuit of such easy game as Cécile. He cannot bear the thought of the affront to his vanity if he fails to win the Présidente, and this no doubt is in large measure what he means when he says that he must have her to prevent himself from falling into the ridiculous position of being in love with her: there is an old tradition that the place for love is outside marriage. This is a variant on it. Love, in this sterile world of Les Liaisons, is a mixture of desire and of respect for a superior tactician. This accounts for part of Valmont's attitude to

1. Lettres de la Marquise, XXXII, 113-4.
2. L.D., CXXXV, 348-50.
3. Lettres de la Marquise, VIII, 28-9.

Mme de Merteuil, as well as for her attitude towards him(1) (as soon as she is convinced of his inferior technique, as soon as she can manipulate him, she has nothing but contempt for him.) Had Mme de Tourvel withstood Valmont, it is reasonable to suppose that he would have felt this respect for her. She does not, of course and, whatever the precise nature of his final attitude towards her, the episode with Emilie and the fact that he can send the letter of rupture spring from the contempt which arises from possession and her admission of the superiority of his tactics.

Vanity and boredom are at the root of the Comte's desperate search for pleasure. The Marquise tells him:

"Vous n'étiez pas fait pour aimer. Toujours maître de vous, vous n'êtes jamais que spectateur des transports que vous faites naître..... Vous vous passionnez pour des plaisirs que vous ne ressentez pas; & si quelquefois vous feignez des désirs, ce n'est que par vanité ou par ennui.... Vous ne connaissez ni l'amour, ni l'amante. Vous faites l'un parce que c'est le bel air, & vous ne voyez l'autre que pour jouir de la vue d'un objet dont vous êtes le maître, & que vous avez le plaisir de rendre la victime de vos caprices & de vos froideurs. Vous vous plaisez à faire des épreuves..."(2)

The Comte, partly because we see him only through the eyes of the Marquise, is a considerably less developed character than Valmont. Nevertheless, as the above description of him shows, he has a strong basic family resemblance to Laclos's Vicomte, his icy emptiness, his preoccupation with the technique of conquest rather than with its object, his sadistic desires for domination, e and his declaration that "il n'y a plus que les choses bizarres qui me plaisent."

If there are similarities to be found between Laclos's novel and the

1. She says of this liaison, "C'est le seul de mes goûts qui ait jamais pris un moment d'empire sur moi" (LXXXI, 205).
2. Lettres de la Marquise, XLV, 159-60.

Lettres de la Marquise, the same applies to Les Égaréments du Coeur et de l'Esprit (first published 1736-8). In this novel we find a relationship, that between Mme de Lursay and Meilcour, the supposed author of the "memoirs" which comprise this novel, which merits comparison with the liaisons of Les Liaisons dangereuses. There are, too, similarities of general theme.

This time the author is non-committal as to whether or not these memoirs are to be thought genuine. In his preface Crébillon attacks the extravagances of the adventure novel and declares that his aim is to do away with these "puérilités fastueuses". He seeks to depict "l'utile et l'amusant" and professes a realist aim, to show "l'homme tel qu'il est"(1), in much the same way as Laclos borrowing from Rousseau the epigraph, "J'ai vu les moeurs de mon temps et j'ai publié ces Lettres."

The twin themes of vanity and ennui are there again, quite as apparent as in the Lettres de la Marquise. Meilcour, for instance, remarks that

"... il est bien plus important pour les femmes de flatter notre vanité, que de toucher notre coeur."(2)

Meilcour, in fact, is governed by his vanity. Towards the end, although he wishes to break with Mme de Lursay, he is hurt when he thinks that she no longer loves him. The result is that she easily manages to persuade him to stay(3). The theme of ennui is established early on when Meilcour observes:

1. Oeuvres complètes de M. de Crébillon fils, Maestricht, 1779, I, v-vii.
2. Les Égaréments, *ibid.*, p. 76.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 300-8.

"Ce qu'alors les deux sexes nommoient Amour, étoit une sorte de commerce ou l'on s'engageoit, souvent même sans goût, où la commodité étoit toujours préférée à la sympathie, l'intérêt au plaisir, et le vice au sentiment." (1)

In this bored world, galanterie is the principal pastime:

"On disoit trois fois à une femme qu'elle étoit jolie, car il n'en falloit plus: dès la première, assurément elle vous croyoit, vous remercioit à la seconde, et assez communément vous en récompensoit à la troisième.... Il ne faut cependant pas inférer de ce que je viens de dire qu'elles offrissent toutes la même facilité. J'en ai vu qui, après, quinze jours de soins rendus, étoient encore indécises, et dont le mois tout entier n'achevoit pas la défaite. Je conviens que ce sont des exemples rares..." (2)

When we turn to the characters of Les Égaréments the first to attract our attention must be Mme de Lursay. Pierre Lièvre has said of her:

"La Marquise de Merteuil des Liaisons n'est pas plus habile ni plus rouée..."

It is true that Lièvre adds,

"... mais elle est pénétrée de méchanceté tandis que madame de Lursay, un peu plus âgée, est toute bonté, et bonté voluptueuse..." (3)

-- thus seeming to nullify much of the opening comparison. Nevertheless, it is true that Mme de Lursay has much of the cunning of Mme de Merteuil. She holds all the strings, and completely controls the actions of the timid ingénu Mailcour (a much more docile puppet than Valmont, rather nearer to Danceny), leading him on through each stage of the ritual of intrigue, so that for all his timidity and ingenuousness he acts exactly as an experienced roué would act. In the final scene (4), she is absolute-

1. ibid., p. 5.
2. ibid., pp. 5-7. Cf. the penultimate paragraph of L.D., XCIX, 255.
3. P. Lièvre, preface to Les Égaréments, Paris, Divan, 1929, p. xxxiii.
4. Les Égaréments, Maastricht, pp. 322 et seq.

ly brilliant, outdoing the C  lim  ne of Moli  re's Le Misanthrope in snatching victory from defeat after Meilcour has set about telling her that he now knows that she is not the respectable woman she had led him to believe. She leads Meilcour to the goal which has been hers throughout the novel -- he sleeps with her and abandons his love for the innocent Hortense de Th  ville. Mme de Lursay has him dancing to her tune throughout. She may not be as truly the motive power behind events as is Mme de Merteuil, but she is a remarkably powerful female character. It is true that she is much less vicious than Mme de Merteuil. The viciousness in this novel comes not from her but from the men.

Meilcour is a neophyte in the ways of galanterie, and in this he resembles Danceny more than any other character in Les Liaisons. If at first Meilcour seems to deserve the remark made by Valmont about Danceny ("Voil   bien les hommes! tous   galement sc  l  rats dans leurs projets, ce qu'ils mettent de faiblesse dans l'ex  cution, ils l'appellent probit  "(1)), he learns fast, and by the time he comes to write his memoirs he is sufficiently worldly-wise to have some sound advice to impart to the Mme de Tourvels of this world:

"... j'ai remarqu   que les femmes les plus ais  es    vaincre, sont celles qui s'engagent avec la folle esp  rance de n'  tre jamais s  duites, soit parce qu'en effet elles sont aussi foibles que les autres, soit parce que, n'ayant pas assez pr  vu le danger, elles se trouvent sans secours contre lui quand il arrive."(2)

This is an idea near and dear to Valmont, and, although no one could say that Mme de Tourvel was exactly "une des femmes les plus ais  es    vaincre", something along the lines of this view is the basis of Valmont's campaign from very early on. As he writes to Mme de Merteuil:

1. L.D., LXVI, 161.
2. Les   garments, p. 52.

"... vous savez assez que femme qui consent à parler d'amour, finit bientôt par en prendre, ou au moins par se conduire comme si elle en avait."(1)

Valmont exploits the raw materials he finds in the psychological make-up of his intended victim. If the young Meilcour makes such progress in the field of worldly wisdom it is because, like Danceny, he has his Valmont, ever ready to encourage his penchant towards rouerie. In this instance it is a rake whom Meilcour has been forbidden by his mother to frequent, a gentleman by the name of Versac(2).

It is Versac who enlightens Meilcour as to Mme de Lursay's true character, in the words "Il y a cinquante ans au moins qu'elle est fort tendre".(3) His motive is revenge. Mme de Lursay, we are told, has just played "le tour le plus sanglant" on him, having deprived him of a victory over a woman who was on the point of yielding, a woman who was "le plus joli sujet à former." Mme de Lursay

"n'est-elle pas venue mettre des scrupules, des craintes dans l'esprit de cette jeune personne, lui dire qu'elle se perdoit de me voir; que j'étois inconstant, indiscret? Enfin, elle lui a fait une si étrange peur de moi... Pensez-vous de bonne foi que cela se pardonne?"(4)

The motive of vengeance is no stranger to readers of Les Liaisons. Mme de Lursay's reasons for depriving Versac of his anonymous prey, and her method of doing so, may well be different from those of Mme de Merteuil in depriving Valmont of Mme de Tourvel, but the reaction aroused is very similar to that present in Valmont when he suggests to Danceny that surely the innocence and love of Cécile are preferable to the "agrément

1. L.D., LXXVI, 179.
2. NB the similarity of this name with that of Vressac in L.D., LXXI.
3. Les Égaréments, p. 123.
4. ibid., p. 126.

d'une femme parfaitement usagée", Mme de Merteuil(1). As a result of Versac's revelations, Meilcour comes to taste "le plaisir de la vengeance"(2) by making Mme de Lursay think that he is in love with Mme de Sénanges.

Later on in the novel, Versac exposes his principles and tactics, in a veritable manual of libertinage(3). For example, the necessity of noising abroad one's talents and successes in amatory endeavour so as to acquire a "reputation" is fully recognised:

"De toutes les vertus, celle qui, dans le monde, m'a toujours paru réussir le moins à celui qui le pratique, c'est la modestie."(4)

Versac acts as Meilcour's tutor in the ways of the world: c/

"C'est une erreur de croire que l'on puisse conserver dans le monde cette innocence de mœurs que l'on a communément quand on y entre, & que l'on y puisse être toujours vertueux, & toujours naturel, sans risquer sa réputation ou sa fortune. Les vertus, les agréments & les talents y sont purement arbitraires... Voilà des principes que vous ne devez jamais perdre de vue."(5)

Versac, then, is a rake through and through. He has the cynicism of Valmont or of Mme de Merteuil but nevertheless, by comparison with them, he is a light-weight fop. The passage quoted immediately above continues:

"... mais ce n'est pas assez de savoir que pour réussir, il faut être ridicule."

And later on, Versac tells us that

"... il vaut mieux... prendre les erreurs de son siècle, ou du moins s'y plier, que d'y montrer des vertus qui y paroîtroient étrangères (sic), ou ne seroient pas du bon ton."(5)

1. L.D., CLV, 389. Laclos's italics.
2. Les Égaréments, p. 253.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 268-97.
4. *ibid.*, p. 277.
5. *ibid.*, p. 271.
5. *ibid.*, p. 287.

In other words, Versac's principles lack the vigour of those of the two villains of Les Liaisons. They spring from conformity to a group rather than from the strong individualism which characterises Mme de Merteuil and (to a lesser extent) Valmont and makes them something approaching demi-gods.

It would, then, be wrong to seek a really close parallel between Crébillon and Laclos. There is a gaiety, a frothiness in Crébillon which has disappeared in the novel of Laclos. There is a good deal of truth in the remark made about Laclos by Arsène Houssaye:

"Au lieu de ces jolies enluminures (de Crébillon, le gai, qui voyait tout en riant) voilà tout à coup un peintre sans fard qui efface les roses pour reproduire la vérité toute nue. Au premier abord, n'est-ce pas encore les héros et les héroïnes de Crébillon? C'est le même sourire et la même grâce, le même corsage ouvert et la même jupe à queue de paon; mais regardez de plus près. Ne voyez-vous pas le coeur qui s'agite et se débat dans le mal?"(1)

There is, undeniably, a greater incisiveness about Laclos, and the nature of this greater incisiveness we have tried to show in an earlier chapter, just as we have tried to show the nature of the "vérité" produced in Les Liaisons dangereuses. One never penetrates far beneath the surface with Crébillon, to whom one may well sometimes feel inclined to apply the description given by Laclos of Marivaux,

"... un grand disséqueur de mots, (qui) 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..."(2)

With Crébillon, everything is a game. With Laclos, on the other hand, there is a new kind of high seriousness.

1. A. Houssaye, Galerie du XVIIIe Siècle, 13e série, Poètes et Philosophes, Paris, 1858, p. 230. Laclos, of course, knew Crébillon's work: Mme de Merteuil reads Le Sopha (cf. L.D., X, 54)

2. L.I., p. 46.

III

It is proposed next, before going on to examine a writer who seems to have considerably more to offer in terms of parallels with Laclos than any of the authors at whom we have so far looked, to say something very briefly about three minor - and very different - erotic novelists of the middle of the eighteenth century, Godard d'Aucour, La Morlière and Chévrier.

Godard d'Aucour (1716-1795) makes claims of authenticity for his work such as those to which we have already referred in the introductory chapter to this section. In his first novel, Histoire et Aventures de *** par Lettres(1), which is interesting in that basically it is an epistolary novel (albeit a clumsy one) about the writing of an epistolary novel (the characters exchange letters with the intention of composing an epistolary novel for the Duchesse de V***), he says of the letters,

"Je n'ai pas cru devoir y rien changer, persuadé que l'art ne corrige que très-mal des sentimens dictés par la nature"(2),

and, moreover, in the prefatory letter À Mme la Duchesse de V*** we are encouraged to think of the work as a roman à clef. The Duchesse is informed that

"Quoique les noms soient déguisés, vous n'aurez pas de peine à connoître les Acteurs."(3)

A similar device is used in the case of Godard's Thémidore (4), which is

1. n.p., 1744.
2. Histoires et Aventures..., p. viii.
3. *ibid.*, p. v. The use of nothing more than an initial letter for the duchess's name is, of course, another example of a common device used to lend an air of authenticity to the work.
4. La Haye, 1745.

written in memoir-form. We find here the common pretence that the memoirs are genuine, that the

"portraits sont d'après nature, & méritent une place dans le Recueil des Migniations galantes (sic)",

and we are informed that

"Nous avons jugé à propos de déguiser le nom de ceux dont on fait mention."(1)

These two works are very different in character. The Histoires et Avantures, although it has as its basic quality psychological analysis, also possesses strong elements of the novel of intrigue and of eighteenth-century sensibility, and there is nothing remotely scabrous about it. The same can certainly not be said of Thémidore. If we turn for a moment to Angola(2), by La Morlière (1719-1785), this is very different from, and considerably better than, either of the above works. It is an erotic fairy-tale of the same type as Crébillon's Le Sopha, Duclos's conte Acajou et Zirphile, and Diderot's Les Bijoux indiscrets. Chévrier's Le Colporteur, histoire morale et critique(3), on the other hand, though equally different from the work of Godard d'Aucour, is different in another way. Although Chévrier in his Avertissement calls it a novel, it is not such in any real sense of the term. Rather it is a succession of scabrous stories and portraits peddled by M. Brochure, the colporteur of the title. It is formless and tedious, it would appear to have none of the qualities of Les Liaisons and, in its shapelessness and its stress on

1. Thémidore, p. v.

2. Agra, 1746.

3. In Oeuvres complètes de M. de Chévrier, Londres, 1774; 1st edn. n.d., Chévrier's dates: pre-1700-1762.

such themes as venereal disease, it is a good deal nearer to the work of Nerciat.

What, then, is the purpose of invoking three such dissimilar writers in terms of Laclos? We have already mentioned that, in the Histoires et Aventures and in Thémidore, Gôdard d'Aucour makes claims of authenticity for his letters and memoirs such as Laclos makes in common with more than one other writer of the period. There is, however, no question of either La Morlière or Chévrier making such claims(1). Furthermore, with perhaps the exception of the Histoires et Aventures, no moral claims for any of these works could be substantiated. Nor are any made. Indeed, Godard warns us, in the Avertissement to Thémidore, that

"Nous ne conseillons point aux âmes scrupuleuses de jeter les yeux sur ces aventures, elles sont quelquefois chatouilleuses & capables d'exciter des idées extrêmement éveillées; elles ne sont faites que pour être lûes par les esprits revenus de la bagatelle, ou qui vivent avec elle... Au reste ces Mémoires sont écrits avec retenue, il n'y a aucun mot qui puisse blesser la modestie, mais on ne répond pas des idées qu'ils peuvent faire naître. Ils sont semés de Sentences très-sages et aisées à retenir, ils sont dans le goût actuel du Public, puisqu'ils ne contiennent que d'aimables bagatelles bien dictées & plus propres à amuser l'esprit qu'à nourrir le coeur."(sic)(2)

The first part of this warning presents a striking contrast with the moral claims of Laclos, although possibly the general tone is not so far removed from that of Laclos's Avertissement de l'Éditeur, which opens with the warning that

"Nous croyons devoir prévenir le Public, que, malgré le titre de cet Ouvrage et ce qu'en dit le Rédacteur dans sa Préface... nous avons...

1. Cf. the full title of La Morlière's work: Angola, histoire indienne, ouvrage sans vraisemblance.
2. Thémidore, pp. vi-vii.

de fortes raisons de penser què ce n'est qu'un Roman."

As to Godard's comments about his language, it is true that he does not go to the extremes of a Nerciat or a Sade in his use of the mot cru, but he allows himself considerably more licence than either Crébillon (in his analytical novels) or Laclos in the presentation of scabrous details. As for the closing remark, it is a clear promise of a bagatelle, a piece of spicy amusement. Laclos promises, and provides, more than this. And yet, despite the obvious differences, it is possible, in Thémidore, Angola and Le Colporteur(1), to find points of detail which are suggestive of elements in Les Liaisons dangereuses. In these pages it is proposed to draw attention to these points of detail for what they are worth, and without any attempt to exaggerate their significance.

For this purpose it is probably simplest to take Chévrier's Le Colporteur first. Possibly the only real justification (but an interesting one) for citing this work in the present context is the fact that it presents us with quotations from a so-called Dictionnaire du Monde, nécessaire à tous les gens aimables qui veulent ruiner les femmes which, in fact, amounts to a real manual of corruption. In particular we are given an article on the use of letters in the art of seduction:

"Lettres. Aussitôt que l'on est parvenu à mériter ou à surprendre les faveurs d'une femme, il faut s'assurer d'elle, & des moyens de la déshonorer en cas qu'elle ne paie point le tribut. Pour remplir ce plan avec succès, il suffira de lui écrire des lettres tendres & pleines de confiance; son esprit flatté échauffera son coeur, & elle répondra de façon à avouer sa honte & sa défaite."(2)

1. Other than the fact of its being epistolary, the Histoires et Aventures has no real point of contact with L.D.
2. Le Colporteur, in Oeuvres complètes de M^e de Chévrier, I, 149-150.

Valmont might well have read this passage. It is interesting that in the only letter we have from Mme de Tourvel to Valmont after the seduction she asks him for the return of

"... des Lettres qui n'auraient jamais dû exister; et qui, si elles ont pu vous intéresser un moment, comme des preuves de l'aveuglement que vous avez fait naître, ne peuvent que vous être indifférentes à présent qu'il est dissipé..."(1)

The Présidente, of course, completely misunderstands the mechanism of Valmont's mind. The letters are far from being a matter of indifference to a roué, one of whose prime ambitions is notoriety. They are a means by which he can add to his reputation. It is therefore significant that in his reply Valmont makes excuses for his fault - having been seen in the company of Emilia, the fille d'opéra - but makes no reference whatsoever to the Présidente's letters. (Had he returned them, of course, there would have been no novel....)

Another point about Le Colporteur may be mentioned in passing. In it Chévrier presents a precedent for Prévan's escapade with the Three Inseparables, and it is a precedent which makes that adventure almost pale into insignificance. Chévrier's Mme d'Erbigny makes rendez-vous with no fewer than eight brothers at intervals of one hour(2).

Of the other two works it is proposed to examine here, Godard d'Aucour's Thémidore and La Morlière's Angola, it can be said that both of them demonstrate the dehumanising of the sex relationship characteristic of the

1. L.D., CXXXVI, 351.

2. Le Colporteur, loc. cit., pp. 157-160. Chévrier manages to mingle with this series of scabrous stories praise of La Nouvelle Héloïse, "qu'on a très stupidement critiqué." (p. 166) Perhaps he too thought that he had seen the "mœurs de (son) temps". Like Laclos, and unlike Rousseau, whilst he paints corruption Chévrier offers no alternative to it.

erotic mind, in which the participant coldly observes the actions he is performing. That the characters in Thémidore behave to some degree like puppets is not entirely the result of bad characterisation by Godard. Certainly one cannot pretend that Godard's skill in the art of characterisation comes anywhere near that of either Crébillon or Laclos, but part of this impression of watching a puppet-show arises from the basic attitude towards people within the characters themselves. They regard other people as puppets, just as Valmont and Mme de Merteuil do. Thus, we find Thémidore making a claim to omniscience concerning the workings of the brain and the heart of the opposite sex similar to that which we find in Laclos's characters. On one occasion, when he has raped a certain Mme Dorville, Thémidore remarks,

"Une femme... sait bien qu'on n'est malhonnête homme qu'avec une jolie personne; & elle ne peut vouloir du mal à qui lui a donné du plaisir.... Elle se servit des termes les plus forts & les plus énergiques pour me reprocher ma hardiesse; elle pleura même. Façons, cher Marquis(1), je connoissois trop la marche du coeur du sexe pour être allarmé: une femme souvent n'est jamais plus près de sa chute, que lorsqu'elle fait plus d'efforts pour s'en défendre (sic)."(2)

This last point we see admirably illustrated in Mme de Tourvel. Again, like Valmont, Thémidore is not averse to comparing himself with Hannibal(3), but this is only one example of the indulgence in military references and jargon common in erotic literature.

We find too in Thémidore(4) the erotic use of mirrors for motives

1. Thémidore's memoirs are supposed to have been sent by him to the Marquis de Doncourt, from whom the "editor" has them (cf. Avertissement, pp. iii-iv).
2. Thémidore, pp. 116-8.
3. Cf. ibid., p. 118; L.D., CXXV, 326.
4. ibid., p. 49.

similar to those which lead Mme de Merteuil to think of herself as the various women of a harem(1). This erotic use of mirrors is also to be found in Angola(2). A further example of this device of artificially stimulating the sexual appetite occurs in the scene in which Angola reads an erotic book and, as he reads, puts into practice with the fairy Lumineuse what he gleans from its pages. We have already compared the mirror scene in Thémidore with the harem scene in Les Liaisons dangereuses. There is an even more striking parallel between the scene in Angola which we have just described and Mme de Merteuil's preparation for the harem scene with Belleruche, when she reads

"un chapitre du Sopha, une lettre d'Héloïse et deux Contes de La Fontaine, pour recorder les différents tons (qu'elle voulait) prendre."(3)

This continual presence of an artificial ingredient in the sexual encounters is important. It is there in Valmont's depraving of Cécile, it is there - in much more recent literature - in Alberto Moravia's Woman of Rome, when Giacinti asks Adriana, when he is about to possess her, whether her mother is aware that she is a prostitute, and whether she approves or not. Adriana observes:

"These details were obviously nothing more to him than an additional thrill in his adventure. This trait is common to all men. Few can resist the temptation of mingling physical pleasure with some other kind of interest or even pity.... He laboured over my body like someone over an instrument that requires much preparation before being played and urged me all the time to do the same with his. But although I obeyed him I soon began to be bored and to watch him

1. It is true that no use is made in Les Liaisons of mirrors as a means of erotic excitement. It might be argued that the very letters fulfil the same function here as mirrors in other erotic novels.

2. Angola, I, pp. 96, 121 & 135-6.

3. L.D., X, 54. It is interesting to find Laclos placing Rousseau's novel in such company.

coldly, as if his obvious calculations had set a distance between us, and I were seeing not only him but also myself from a great way off, through a mirror of dislike and disgust."(1)

It is true of all these characters, Thémidore, Angola, Mme de Merteuil, Valmont and Giacinti that, to use Valmont's phrase, "il n'y a que les choses bizarres qui (leur) plaisent." In all this the partner in the sexual union counts for nothing. He, or she, is a mere thing; another side of this is shown in Alma's remark to Angola when he suggests that they should exchange mistresses:

"Je regarde les jolies femmes comme des effets qui sont dans le commerce..."(2)

Another theme to be found in Les Liaisons dangereuses is that of eroticism at the service of revenge. There is something of this too in Thémidore, the hero of which work "attacks" a dévôte, Mme de Dorigny, who previously has scorned him. His vanity has been hurt and he is seeking vengeance. The result is comic and, one likes to think, deliberately so:

"La belle ouvrit mollement les yeux, la foiblesse les lui referma, & poussant un soupir, elle me dit d'une voix tendre: Ah! cher Conseiller, je me damne; & moi je me sauve, ~~et~~ m'écriai-je, & aussitôt je cours à la porte pour sortir."(3)

Beneath the comedy the intention is cruel, but happily for Mme de Dorigny Thémidore cannot escape, since there is a secret spring to the door. He therefore laughs off his intended flight as a joke. Valmont is capable of taking revenge in far more cruel ways than this. He is also capable of refusing to take a woman when it suits him. But there is no such clowning as this in Les Liaisons dangereuses.

1. A. Moravia, The Woman of Rome, trans. by Lydia Holland, Penguin Books, 1952, pp. 130-1.

2. Angola, II, pp. 5-6.

3. Thémidore, pp. 90-1.

In its quest for erotic oddities - such as the scene in which Thémidore and Rozette have sexual intercourse through the bars of a ⁿco~~v~~ent parloir, each standing on a chair, Thémidore dressed as a priest(1) - Godard's novel is nearer in tone to the memoirs of Casanova than to anything else, and becomes quite as boring. Thémidore's reflections on the scene summarised above illustrate this community of atmosphere:

"J'ai beaucoup d'estampes très-gaillardes, mais aucune des miennes ne copie une situation dans ce goût: c'est bien là un sujet à burin; si je voulois plaisanter, je vous dirois que je ne comprends pas comment toute la grille n'a pas fondu se trouvant ainsi entre deux feux."(2)

There is nothing of quite this nature in Laclos's novel, the nearest being the desk scene.

And after all this, in the last three pages, a "moral ending" is tacked on. Rozette, the woman of easy virtue, gives up her evil ways, marries a merchant and lives happily ever after. Thémidore remarks:

"Je l'estime même assés pour ne lui plus parler de galanterie."(3)

Thémidore himself is about to be married.

Both Angola and Thémidore, then, can be said, in terms of certain points of detail, to have one or two elements in common with Les Liaisons dangereuses. Nevertheless, as we have said, Angola basically belongs to a different tradition, that of the erotic fairy-tale, and Thémidore,

1. Thémidore, pp. 110-111.

2. ibid., p. 112.

3. ibid., p. 134.

although it can be counted as belonging to the erotico-psychological type of novel, has none of the discipline of Les Liaisons dangereuses, and little of the elegance of style, little of the subtlety, of either Laclos's novel or the best works of Crébillon films.

IV

Despite certain similarities with the work of Laclos which we have mentioned in the writers whom we have so far examined, it is only when we reach Dorat (1734-1780) that we find characters who can be said to have a psychological stature really comparable with that of the creations of Laclos. Not all critics agree with this assessment. Maynial, for example, maintains that Laclos is more closely comparable with Crébillon films and Duclos, and that the analogy with Dorat is superficial(1). We have already discussed both Crébillon and Duclos in this connection, and it is our contention that in fact the parallel that can be drawn between Laclos and Dorat is at least as striking - if indeed not more so - than that between

1. E. Maynial, op. cit., p. lxxi.

him and either of these other two novelists. Before going on to examine the work of Dorat it is, however, worth noting that it is impossible to show that Laclos had read either Les Sacrifices de l'Amour or Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance for, whereas there is a mention of Crébillon's Le Sopha in Les Liaisons, nowhere in the writings of Laclos is there any mention made of Dorat. Laclos is not usually shy of making allusions to works which have influenced him (cf. his references to Clarissa and La Nouvelle Héloïse, for example). This does not mean, however, that we should create a mystery for ourselves, as René Peter does(1), and suggest that this omission in the case of Dorat is deliberate, an attempt to hide a debt. We cannot prove a direct influence, but we can show several elements in common.

In his Idées sur les Romans, which precede Les Sacrifices de l'Amour(2), we find Dorat attacking, as Crébillon had done in his prefatory remarks to Les Égaréments, the epic novels of intrigue in which

"... le héros, plus imbécile encore que valeureux, se croit obligé de conquérir quelques Provinces avant de baiser la main de sa maîtresse."(3)

He then goes on to survey the scene of the eighteenth-century French novel, and to give his view of what the novel should be. French literature, he says, has moved away from these extravagant novels in

"ces tems où les hommes & les femmes se voient de plus près, se respectent moins, & s'abandonnent davantage, mais toujours sous le voile de la décence, dernier vestige de l'ancien culte."

1. R. Peter, op. cit., p. 51.

2. C.-J. Dorat, Les Sacrifices de l'Amour, ou Lettres de la Vicomtesse de Senanges et du Chevalier de Versenay, 2 vols., Amsterdam, 1771.

3. *ibid.*, I, p. 4.

Nowadays,

"le roman (acquiert) de la vie, de l'intérêt & de la vérité."

We have, in fact, moved on to a situation where we are living in

"ces jours d'aisance dans les mœurs, & de bouleversement dans les principes, où les hommes, élégamment vicieux, trompent et sont trompés, n'attaquent les femmes, que pour obtenir, s'ils le peuvent, le droit de les mépriser, & sont en cela même plus méprisables qu'elles; où, je ne sais quelle philosophie, en se jouant de tout, tarit les sources du bonheur, & met un persiflage triste à la place des vrais plaisirs." (sic) (1)

This recalls the remark of La Harpe, in attacking Crébillon and Laclos, to the effect that

"... un des plus grands défauts de ces sortes de romans c'est de donner pour les mœurs du siècle.... 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." (2)

Dorat, however, is less condemnatory than La Harpe, and hails Crébillon as

"ce juste appréciateur du siècle... ce Peintre profond de la frivolité." (3)

Dorat comments on the abundance of satirical, galant and licentious novels, but adds that

"... il en est peu où les mœurs soient peintes, & les passions en mouvement, où l'homme se retrouve tel qu'il est dans la nature." (4)

The result of this was that France had recourse to the imitation of English novelists, amongst whom Richardson is singled out for praise:

"Il y a dans le caractère des Anglois, je ne sais quelle seve énergique, qui se communique à leurs écrits. Les compositions sont larges et

1. *ibid.*, I, pp. 4-5.

2. La Harpe, *Corr. litt.*, in *Oeuvres*, Paris, 1820, XI, 473, Lettre CLIII; in *O.C.*, p. 727.

3. Dorat, *op. cit.*, I, p. 6.

4. *ibid.*, I, p. 7.

grands.... Nos ouvrages sont pour la plupart des especes de miniatures (1), ou le pointillé domine. Qu'attendre de cet enfantillage élégant? Il éteint l'imagination & glace la sensibilité."(2) (sic)

Rousseau is praised for his attempt to alter all this in La Nouvelle Héloïse, a work in which he dared to be

"la satire vivante des mœurs, & d'apporter parmi nous le scandale de la vertu" (sic),

a work which represents

"les derniers soupirs de la véritable éloquence." (3)

It is Rousseau, then, whom Dorat professes to take as his model but, self-effacingly, he doubts whether he is worthy of his master:

"Précédé dans la carrière par un tel concurrent, comment osé-je y paroître? Je n'ai de commun avec lui que le sentiment de l'honnêteté."

This remark is paralleled by one of Laclos's, when his wife compared him with Rousseau:

"Tu me fais assurément beaucoup d'honneur et toi beaucoup d'illusions et tu prends la ressemblance du sentiment pour celui de l'expression..." (4)

In view of what follows within the actual pages of Dorat's novel, despite the moral claims made for it by its author, we see, as we may see in Les Liaisons if we take retrospectively, and in conjunction with the works epigraph, the enthusiasm for Rousseau manifest in this remark of Laclos's to his wife, that profession of belief in the new morality of Jean-Jacques need not be far removed from literary eroticism. Indeed, one is reminded of the fact that within La Nouvelle Héloïse itself there are passages which fit

1. cf. Godard d'Aucour, supra, p. 580, n. 2.
2. Dorat, op. cit., I, pp. 7-8. Dorat's italics.
3. ibid., I, p. 15.
4. L.I., p. 60.

none too comfortably together with the moral preaching to be found there in abundance. Food for thought is given to those who hold that Les Liaisons dangereuses is intended by Laclos as a deliberate riposte to Rousseau's theories of natural goodness. Rousseau's concept of virtue is frequently a shaky one. Moreover, there are dangers inherent in the view that if one depicts vice the reader will love virtue. It may well be that Mme de Tourval was intended purely and simply to be the representative of virtue unalloyed.

What, then, is Dorat's precise view of the function of the novel? He gives it quite succinctly:

"Le roman, tel qu'il doit être conçu, est une des plus belles productions de l'esprit humain, parce qu'il en est des plus utiles: il l'emporte même sur l'histoire..... L'histoire n'est le plus souvent qu'un amas incohérent de vices sans grandeur, de foiblesses sans intérêt; qu'une collection de faits, piquants pour la curiosité seulement, & en pure perte pour la morale. Le roman, quand il est bien fait, est pris dans le système actuel de la société où l'on vit; il est, osons le dire, l'histoire usuelle, l'histoire utile, celle du moment."(1)

In other words, we have the claim of realism which lies behind the subtitle and the epigraph of Les Liaisons, behind the claims that the memoirs and letters which compose many of the novels of the period are authentic, and we have the moralising aim which is common to many eighteenth-century novelists in theory if not in fact, Laclos amongst them. Once again we are faced with the notion that "realism", which in this context seems to mean depiction of vice, is enough to show off the value of virtue and morality. Dorat, like Rousseau and Laclos, could say, "J'ai vu les mœurs

1. Dorat, op. cit., I, pp. 12-13.

de mon temps, et j'ai publié ces lettres."

The moral which Dorat is here seeking to illustrate is the following:

"... de prouver, d'un côté, qu'une femme qui aime, peut remplir tous les devoirs qui contrarient sa passion, & n'en être que plus intéressante; de l'autre, qu'il n'y a point de sacrifice que cette femme ne puisse obtenir de l'homme le plus amoureux, s'il est vraiment digne d'être aimé." (1)

The moral is put over by the use of a dual theme implying contrast. The Baron de ~~***~~, who is the confidant of the Hero Versenay, has withdrawn from the life of galanterie to lead a Rousseauesque life on his estates.

As he puts it,

"Je me compare à un voyageur, qui, après avoir erré longtemps dans le creux d'une vallée aride & brûlante, respireroit enfin l'air frais & libre des montagnes." (2)

Versenay, on the other hand, is still in the valley, leading the life of a rake, having just tired of Mme d'Ercy and begun to turn his attention towards Mme de Senanges. Dorat's mouthpiece, the Baron, sums up Versenay as follows:

"À votre âge, on est plus vain que sensible; on se livre à ce qui flatte; on est amusé, le premier mois; languissant, le second; ennuié, le troisième, & l'on finit par briser avec scandale l'idole qu'on s'étoit faite par vanité." (3)

Since Dorat is a pupil of Rousseau, it is not surprising that by the end of the novel Versenay has been led from the valley to the pure air of the mountains. The Julie who leads him to this land of sensibility is Mme de Senanges. Since we are to consider parallels between this novel and Les Liaisons dangereuses, one must point out that this redemption is the great point of difference between the two. Mme de Senanges is a victorious

1. ibid., I, p. 16. This is remarkably reminiscent of Mme de La Fayette's La Princesse de Clèves - cf. ~~infra 618-9~~. cf infra, pp 598-9
2. ibid., I, 30, Letter VIII
3. ibid., I, 31, Letter VIII.

Mme de Tourvel.

In so far, then, as Dorat here shows virtue triumphant, the dénouement of his novel is different from that of Les Liaisons, and whilst both Dorat and Laclos profess moralising aims it is true that by his introduction at an early stage of the Baron, Dorat prepares the way for a moral ending much more carefully than does Laclos, who contents himself with killing off Valmont and suddenly ~~inflicting~~ Mme de Merteuil with small-pox and the loss of ^{at} most of her financial assets. Nevertheless, although it cannot be said that there is a close parallel between the plots of the two novels, there are certain quite striking similarities in detail.

The heroine of Les Sacrifices de l'Amour is unhappily married to a man many years her senior. In this she is not directly comparable with Mme de Tourvel for, so far as we know, the Président has none of the depravity of the Vicomte de Senanges, ~~not~~ do we have any details about his age. One does get the feeling, however, from her isolated, conventional reference to her marriage, to those "noeuds que j'ai formés, que je respecte et que je chéris"(1), that she has no great feeling for her husband. Mme de Senanges is similarly conventional in her remarks about her marriage:

"Je dois respecter le noeud qui m'accable," she writes to Versenay; "tu me l'appesantis; mais rien ne peut le rompre: pour être haï, en est-il moins sacré?"(2)

This lack of warmth is logical enough, in view of the singularly unpleasant nature of her estranged husband, but it is a pity that Dorat should be so much weaker than Laclos in his grasp of psychological probabilities as to

1. R.D., LXXVIII, 188.

2. Dorat, op. cit., II, 74, Letter XIX

make Mme de Senanges exclaim after her husband's death:

"L'infortuné! Je voudrais pouvoir le rappeler à la vie! Ses fureurs ne me rendoient que malheureuse; son repentir me rend coupable." (sic) (1)

This is the type of sensiblerie one expects from a disciple of Rousseau, although of course it was to be found in the French novel before Rousseau appeared on the scene - in the reaction of Marivaux's Marianne to the death of her tormentor Climal, for example.

The position of Mme de Senanges at the beginning of Les Sacrifices is not, however, so very dissimilar from that of the Présidente at the beginning of Les Liaisons. Mme de Senanges, like Mme de Tourvel, does considerable charitable work and, at the opening of the novel, she is staying in the country. Versenay is about to open his campaign in earnest, despite the plea of his friend the Baron not to seduce her

"pour la perdre, l'exposer à toutes les horreurs d'un abandon qui seroit suivi de sa mort, & ne pourroit être expié que par la vôtre." (2)

The Baron in fact foresees as the possible fate of Mme de Senanges precisely the events which stem from the seduction of Mme de Tourvel, and in the same letter he adds another dimension to the situation - a dimension familiar to readers of Les Liaisons - when he suggests to Versenay that Mme d'Ercy, his current mistress, is far too proud to brook the rivalry of "une femme respectable" such as Mme de Senanges. The Chevalier de Versenay replies that his friend is too late: he has made his declaration and, he tells the Baron,

1. *ibid.*, II, 213, Letter XLVII.
2. *ibid.*, I, 43, Letter VIII.

"Quoi que vous disiez, Mme de Senanges peut devenir sensible."(1)

This attitude of Versenay's is insufficiently developed for us to be able to make a firm comparison of it with Valmont's "Voilà l'ennemi digne de moi", but there is an element of this approach in it, at the opening stage of the relationship. Both Valmont and Versenay, then, at the beginning of their respective liaisons, wilfully ignore the advice - given, admittedly, for very different reasons - of their confidants.

If we briefly follow the outline of Versenay's campaign against Mme de Senanges, we can see how he exploits her weakness in a way very similar to Valmont's technique with Mme de Tourvel. There is an element of auto-séduction in the way in which Mme de Senanges's interest in him grows.

In Letter XVII of Part I she is refusing to have anything to do with him; in Letter XXVII we find her urging him to return to his last mistress, Mme d'Ercy, who is powerful at Court, and declaring:

"Mon coeur n'est pas fait pour l'amour."(2)

In Letter XXVIII, a letter to the Baron, she is tacitly admitting that she is not so calm and easy in her mind as the preceding letter implies;

"Que je vous envie la paix de votre solitude."(3)

In Letter XXXI, Versenay is making it clear to Mme de Senanges that he will not be content with friendship: "elle est si froide, si paisible."(4)

Shortly afterwards, we find Mme de Senanges writing to her confidante, Mme *** , admitting that Versenay has made further inroads into her affections:

1. *ibid.*, I, 46, Letter IX.
2. *ibid.*, I, 128, Letter XXVII.
3. *ibid.*, I, 132, Letter XXVIII.
4. *ibid.*, I, 148, Letter XXXI.

"Je vous ai dit que je ne l'aimois pas, je l'ai écrit au Baron; je me le suis persuadé. Vous aurois-je trompé tous deux?"(1)

In Letter XLV, Versenay really begins to make progress. Significantly, however, his means of doing this is by following Mme d'Ercy's advice, in this respect acknowledging, as Valmont frequently does in respect of Mme de Merteuil, that her estimation of character is greater than his. Mme d'Ercy has assured him that he can go ahead with impunity, having poured scorn on his timidity:

"Je vous croïois mieux stilé" (sic)(2)

Thus goaded, Versenay asks for a lock of Mme de Senanges's hair which, after much hesitation ("Non, ... je n'ai rien promis; ne comptez sur rien, je vous le défends"(3)), she gives him. As might be expected, however, he is not satisfied. He writes to her:

"Que faut-il à l'amant vrai? Tout, sans doute, oui, tout; mais que de riens consolent & charment pour lui les rigueurs de l'attente."(4)

By this stage, Mme de Senanges is virtually lost. She has moved a long way from her initial declaration that her heart was not made for love.

As she writes to her confidante:

"Mon amie, il n'y eut jamais d'exemple d'un amour comme le mien.... Je suis toute à l'amour, & je lui parle d'amitié."(5)

She commits the same mistake as that made by Mme de Tourvel - and, no doubt, by all lovers - the mistake of believing that her situation is unique.

1. *ibid.*, I, 181, Letter XXXIX.
2. *ibid.*, I, 196, Letter XLIV. (cf. Mme de Merteuil's "C'est que réellement vous n'avez pas le génie de votre état"(CVI, 274)
3. *ibid.*, I, 202, Letter XLVI.
4. *ibid.*, I, 203-4, Letter XLVII.
5. *ibid.*, I, 229-30, Letter LI.

Soon another barrier goes down: she confesses her love to Versenay himself but, like Mme de Tourvel in a similar situation, she is still desperately fighting a rearguard action. She follows her admission with a warning:

"Cependant, n'espérez pas de moi d'autres foiblesses; je vous fuirais au bout du monde: je vous fuirais, n'en doutez pas, si vous exigiez la moindre preuve de ce que j'ai eu tant de peine à vous cacher." (1)

The first proof he asks of her, however, is a trivial one, her portrait, and this she grants him. Versenay promises her that he will ask no more (Letter LXIV), but immediately regrets his promise:

"Qu'ai-je promis, ô Dieu! quel horrible serment! aurai-je la force de le tenir? Quel complot avons-nous fait à l'envi contre les droits de la nature & de l'amour!.... Vous n'allumez le désir, que pour exiger le sacrifice." (2) (sic)

This note of lamentation is more genuine than anything we find coming from the pen of Valmont, but it has the effect of causing Mme de Senanges to repeat her threat to take the same evading action, by fleeing her lover, that the Présidente takes in Les Liaisons. Versenay, however, promises to behave himself and she agrees to stay, re-affirming her love in terms which stamp her as a Rousseauesque character:

"Depuis que vous m'aimez, la nature est plus riante." (3)

At the end of Part I Versenay uses a tactic nearer to the methods of Lovelace than to those of Valmont, and attempts to possess her whilst she is asleep. She wakes up in a fury and banishes him. She goes away, but is still in love with him, and expresses this love in sensual terms, as she confides to Mme ****:

"J'ai surpris en moi.... le voeu coupable de me retrouver dans ses

1. *ibid.*, I, 246, Letter LVI.
2. *ibid.*, I, 271-3, Letter LXV.
3. *ibid.*, I, 290, Letter LXIX.

bras,"(1)

Nevertheless, from the end of Part I all ambiguity is removed from Versenay's character. Henceforth he is repentant, the sincere lover personified. She eventually agrees to see him again, but not in tête-à-tête, and, in terms as conventional as those used by Mme de Tourvel, she insists that he respect

"Mes devoirs, mes principes, le noeud fatal qui me lie."(2)

There are more twists and turns to the plot before M. de Senanges dies, repenting of his past cruelty, leaving the way open for his widow to marry Versenay. Even then, however, there is a final twist, which takes us back to the beginning of the analytical tradition of the French novel and recalls La Princesse de Clèves, illustrating Servais Étienne's point concerning the "amoindrissement du héros de roman." As has already been mentioned, when Mme de Senanges hears of her husband's death, she shows great sorrow. Whereas his bestiality had merely rendered her "malheureuse", his repentance makes her "coupable". Thus, she writes to Versenay from the convent in which she has been incarcerated:

"Je suis libre; je n'en abuserai pas. Je sors de ce couvent, pour rentrer dans un autre: je t'écirai a tous les instants du jour; je te permettrai de me répondre: mais il faut, pour quelque tems, me priver de ta vue.... La bienséance, l'honneur me le commande, & c'est à toi de m'y encourager."(sic)(3)

The motives for this retirement from the world are different in each of the two heroines. It might be argued that in the case of the Princesse de Clèves it was caused by remorse, or perhaps by an awareness that she

1. *ibid.*, II, 37, Letter XI.
2. *ibid.*, II, 61, Letter XVI.
3. *ibid.*, II, 214-5, Letter XLVII.

could not hope indefinitely to hang on to Nemours in the married state. 9/ In the case of Mme de Senanges it is partly a peculiar brand of remorse for her behaviour (not that she has been unfaithful in deed, and not that she believes she is actually the cause of her husband's death) and partly regard for "la bienséance". The most striking mark of amoindrissement is, however, that in the case of Dorat's heroine the renunciation is not permanent. Two years elapse before the next and final letter, and then Versenay writes to his friend the Baron:

"Les deux siècles sont écoulés... c'en est fait, cher Baron! nous sommes unis, elle est à moi." (1)

And so they live happily ever after. This ending is trite by comparison with that of Mme de La Fayette's novel.

Mme de Senanges, then, escapes the ultimate humiliation of Mme de Tourvel, and ends up as a respectable married woman. Nevertheless, there are parallels between the stories of these women, especially if we confine our comparison with Les Liaisons to the first part of Dorat's novel. Ultimately, Mme de Senanges is more sensible than Mme de Tourvel and possibly more genuinely virtuous, although like the Présidente she has a fund of sensuality, which is brought out by Versenay. She has, too, Mme de Tourvel's idolatrous attitude towards her lover, which causes her brother-in-law, the Commandeur de Senanges, to urge her to cease

"... de vous faire un Dieu d'un être qui après tout n'est qu'un homme, c'est-à-dire toujours à la veille d'être infidèle." (2)

She does in fact reach the stage reached by Mme de Tourvel, in which she places her lover above her God. She feels that her liaison with Versenay

1. *ibid.*, II, 218, Letter XLVIII.
2. *ibid.*, II, hors-série Letter I, p. vii.

is sinful, but, as she writes to him,

"... (J'en demande pardon à l'Être souverain qui m'entend sûre de sa colère, je n'en serois moins à toi."(1)

There are manifest traits of Rousseau's Julie in her. Like Julie,

"Madame de Senanges purifie le feu qu'elle allume", causing Versenay to

remark, "Je m'élève à sa hauteur, mon âme à tant à jouir"(2). The

difference here between her and Mme de Tourvel is that this is what the

Présidente wrongly thinks of herself. She does not succeed in purifying

Valmont's love. It may be thought that Laclos's psychology is more

probable than either Dorat's or Rousseau's on this particular point. It

should be noted, however, that this desire to convert the lover is fraught

with danger: Mme de Senanges succeeds with Versenay, but she fails with

the Marquis ~~***~~, who laughs as cynically about it as does Valmont about

Mme de Tourvel's similar ambition:

"Je crois, Dieu me pardonne, qu'elle auroit quelqu'envie de me convertir..."(3)

The difference is that Mme de Senanges's Marquis is a good deal less prac-

ticed in the art of seduction than Valmont, as he himself would have been

the first to admit(4). Mme de Senanges had a narrow escape here. The

Marquis acknowledges defeat. What Laclos gives us is, in a sense, the

story of what might well have happened to Mme de Senanges if he had met

the Marquise d'Ercy earlier and had more experience.

1. *ibid.*, II, 86, Letter XXII.

2. *ibid.*, II, 88, Letter XXIII.

3. *ibid.*, I, 123, Letter XXVI, cf. *L.D.*, VI, 47, Valmont's "Elle veut, dit-elle, me convertir", and the whole of this letter, & *ibid.*, XXIII, 75, where, after his deliberate "good work", Valmont remarks of the Présidente: "On eût dit qu'elle prêchait le panégyrique d'un Saint".

4. Dorat, *op. cit.*, I, 123-4, Letter XXVI. Cf. *infra*, p. 608, n. 1.

A final comparison between the stories of Mme de Senanges and Mme de Tourvel should be made. Mme de Senanges's choice of confidante is no happier than that of the Présidente, Mme ****'s advice is as indulgent as that of Mme de Rosemonde and of little more use in the preservation of Mme de Senanges from her would-be seducer. Compare Mme ***'s

"Ma charmante amie, c'est de l'amour que vous avez; consolez-vous... un malheur n'est pas un crime'.... Vous voilà sensible; il est question maintenant d'être prudente"(1)

with Mme de Rosemonde's

"Je vois qu'il en est encore comme au temps passé..... Cependant ne vous découragez pas..., et quand vous devriez un jour avoir le malheur de succomber, (ce qu'à Dieu ne plaise!) croyez-moi, ma chère Belle, réservez-vous au moins la consolation d'avoir combattu avec toute votre puissance"(2);

or Mme de Rosemonde's

"Je ne soulagerai pas vos peines, mais je les partagerai"(3),

with Mme de Senanges's friends

"Je vous répète non pas d'étouffer votre amour, mais de le renfermer"(4).

As it is possible to see from some of the passages quoted above, Versenay is not entirely a Valmont, although, initially above all, he does show some similarities with Laclos's Vicomte. He has a past record as a rake sufficiently imposing for the Marquis *** to ask him for advice(5), and in particular this past includes a liaison with Mme d'Ercy who, as it is hoped to show, and as has already to some extent been implied, has traits in

1. *ibid.*, I, 183-4, Letter XL.
2. *L.D.*, CIII, 264.
3. *ibid.*, CIII, 265.
4. Dorat, *op. cit.*, I, 234, Letter LII.
5. *ibid.*, I, 124, Letter XXVI.

common with Mme de Merteuil. On the other hand, unlike Valmont, Versenay, is not so experienced in the ways of vice as to be beyond redemption. He does, in fact, fall head over heels in love with Mme de Senanges(1), whereas in Les Liaisons, despite Mme de Merteuil's taunts and despite some remarks of Valmont himself early on(2), an element of doubt envelopes to the end the exact nature of Valmont's feelings towards Mme de Tourvel. Frequently, especially later on, in his timidity Versenay is nearer to Danceny, but even then has a sensibility unknown to any of the male characters of Laclos's novel.

Mention has already been made of both Mme d'Ercy and the Marquis ***. These two characters are both worthy of consideration in terms of Les Liaisons dangereuses.

It is early on that the Marquise d'Ercy makes her appearance. In a letter full of scathing comments about Mme de Senanges, having just heard of Versenay's interest in her, she urges him:

"Jetez, un moment, les yeux sur le tableau de la société: vous verrez que l'intérêt personnel est tout.... Devant (la philosophie), les préjugés disparaissent, ainsi que toutes ces petites vertus de convention auxquelles on ne croit plus. Vous ne savez donc pas, que, dans ce siècle de lumières, on a renouvelé la morale? Soiez de votre tems: dans le naufrage public, saisissez votre débris, comme un autre..."(sic)(3)

This marks the beginnings of the portrait of a character who, in many ways, foreshadows Laclos's Marquise. It also illustrates the conflict between the

1. Quite early on, too: cf. his reply to Mme d'Ercy's scathing attack on Mme de Senanges: "Je vous plains d'une erreur, je ne vous accuse pas d'une infamie."(ibid., I, 115, Letter XXIV)
2. "J'ai bien besoin d'avoir cette femme, pour me sauver du ridicule d'en être amoureux: car où ne mène pas un désir contrarié?" (L.D., IV, 42): "Madame de Tourvel m'a rendu les charmantes illusions de la jeunesse" (ibid., VI, 46).
3. Dorat, op. cit., I, 53-4, Letter X.

lumières of the philosophes and the new morality of sensibility of Rousseau (represented primarily here by Mme de Senanges). Mme d'Ercy talks, somewhat cynically, of "la philosophie" and "ce siècle de lumières"; Mme de Merteuil, in her autobiographical letter, talks in the language of the experimental scientist (of which the essentials are "observer et réfléchir"(1)) and attacks "ces femmes à délire, et qui se disent à sentiment...."(2).

Immediately, Mme d'Ercy shows us that the Baron was right when he suggested that she would not gladly suffer the indignity of being placed on a lower plane than Mme de Senanges in Versenay's eyes:

"Informez-vous-en, je vous prie; &, si vous trouvez quelqu'occasion de l'humilier, pour l'amour de moi, ne la laissez pas échapper."(3)

Later on, her character develops. There is a note of menace when she writes in a highly sarcastic letter to Versenay,

"J'avois pensé, que de nous deux, c'étoit moi qui aurois l'esprit de tromper la première; vous m'avez prévenue, & cela me donne un grand respect pour vous."(4)

The meaning of this implicit threat becomes clear in a letter from Mme d'Ercy to the Marquis *** in which she discusses Mme de Senanges:

"Elle a osé être ma rivale; je ne serai pas fâchée de la tourmenter un peu, le tout pourtant, sans trop d'humeur. Je veux bien que ma haine puisse lui nuire; mais je ne prétends pas qu'elle m'attriste."(5)

This letter is dictated by a feeling of resentment similar to that which dictates Mme de Merteuil's behaviour towards Mme de Tourvel (for example

1. L.D., LXXXI, 200. Cf. also p. 202.
2. *ibid.*, LXXXI, 199. Laclos's italics.
3. Dorat, *op. cit.*, I, 56, Letter X.
4. *ibid.*, I, 109, Letter XXIII.
5. *ibid.*, I, 174, Letter XXXVII.

the idea of the ce n'est pas ma faute letter), and similar to that which causes Mme de Merteuil to make such remarks to Valmont as

"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.... Adieu, comme autrefois, dites-vous? Mais autrefois, ce me semble, vous faisiez un peu plus de cas de moi; vous ne m'aviez pas destinée tout à fait aux troisièmes Rôles..."(1)

It is true that in Les Sacrifices de l'Amour we have nothing approaching the fiendish relationship between Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, and that Versenay at no time seeks to renew his liaisons with Mme d'Ercy, despite the fact that at one time Mme de Senanges urges him to do so. But Mme d'Ercy has a similar cruelty to Mme de Merteuil in her desire to avenge her hurt vanity.

The form taken by Mme d'Ercy's vengeance is, however, considerably less extreme, less diabolical, than what we find in Les Liaisons. She tricks Versenay into a tête-à-tête at the theatre, deliberately to upset Mme de Senanges who, naturally enough, suffers an attack of jealousy. Versenay, however, is easily able to explain the situation. Mme d'Ercy's stratagem may well be less effective and less cruel than the kind of thing indulged in by Mme de Merteuil, but her attitude is very similar, as we see from the letter she writes to Versenay after this incident:

"Ne suis-je pas bien haïssable? Je vous ai joué un tour sanglant, n'est-il pas vrai? J'en ai ri de bon coeur.... Quoi! vous n'êtes pas plus avancé que cela, dans l'usage du monde & des femmes! Ce pauvre Chevalier, il étoit d'un embarras, d'une gaucherie!..... Convenez donc que vous étiez parfaitement ridicule.... Je vous croïois mieux stilié... Dans tout ceci, j'ai trouvé le moyen de vous faire jouer le petit rôle."(2)

This is the same irony as Mme de Merteuil's, and the same desire for domin-

1. L.D., CXXVII, 331-2.
2. Dorat, op. cit., I, 195-6, Letter XLIV.

ation.(1)

This minor trick is not, however, the end of the affair as far as Mme d'Ercy is concerned. After an affair with the Marquis ~~4244~~ she endeavours to win back Versenay (this is a reversal of the Valmont--Mme de Merteuil situation), and she uses threats to this end(2). Such is the situation at the end of Part I.

In Part II the Marquise shows further signs of similarity with Mme de Merteuil, pouring scorn on Versenay and comparing him to the heroes of the romances and to Don Quixote (Letter XIII). Mme de Merteuil scornfully refers to Valmont's "retenue, digne des plus beaux temps de notre Chevalerie"(3) and references to novels are not infrequent in her letters(4). The Marquise is still determined to break up Versenay's relationship with Mme de Senanges, and we soon learn that she has informed the insanely jealous M. de Senanges of it(5). He, unable to bear the idea that another man should be happier than he, seeks a reconciliation with his wife. She cannot bear the idea, is arrested by lettre de cachet and placed in a convent. Versenay learns that Mme d'Ercy is behind this:

"La cruelle! c'est, sous l'éclat des charmes les plus séduisants, qu'elle cache l'ame la plus atroce."(6)

Mme d'Ercy denies responsibility: it is not her fault if Mme de Senanges has a jealous husband. The Marquise then goes on to expound a theory

1. cf. supra, p. 596, n. 2.
2. Dorat, op. cit., Billet (Versenay to Mme de Senanges), I, 287.
3. L.D., CVI, 274.
4. On one occasion she bewails the fact that Danceny is "si Céladon".(II, 132)
5. Dorat, op. cit., II, 69, Letter XVII.
6. ibid., II, 121, Letter XXIX.

familiar to both Mme de Merteuil and Valmont, namely that difficulties add spice to the chase:

"Savez-vous bien que votre situation a même un côté très-avantageux? Si Madame de Senanges fut restée dans le monde, vous vous seriez à coup sûr familiarisé avec ses charmes (on se fait à tout); elle seroit devenue moins piquante, à vos yeux: cette catastrophe renouvellement & ses attrait & vos sentimens."(1)

There is deliberate irony in this, of course, and Versenay does not take it at face value, nor does Mme d'Ercy expect him to. He is no Valmont. But this does not mean that Mme d'Ercy is not at least half-serious. Valmont would certainly have seen this situation as a further challenge, just as he sees Mme de Tourvel's retirement into pious seclusion as a challenge: and it is at this point, of course, that he triumphs over her.

Mme d'Ercy's next move is to spread a rumour that Versenay - who in reality has not replied to Mme de Senanges's recent letters solely because of illness - is about to marry an influential young widow. This piece of information she includes in a letter to her cousin, who happens to be the abbess of the convent in which Mme de Senanges is incarcerated, and with a sadistic pleasure in other people's suffering, she asks how Mme de Senanges receives the news:

"Les moindres détails me semblent intéressants."(2)

Mme de Senanges's reaction is in fact that of Mme de Tourvel when she discovers Valmont's infidelity - death is the only course (letter XL). She soon learns the truth, however, and is thus spared the Présidente's fate.

1. *ibid.*, II, 127, Letter XXX.
2. *ibid.*, II, 182, Letter XXXIX.

Mme d'Ercy's attempt at vengeance is foiled.

One final point of comparison between Mme d'Ercy and Mme de Merteuil is given us in Mme de Senanges's last letter to Versenay. It will be remembered that Mme de Merteuil, in addition to contracting small-pox, is virtually ruined by the loss of a law-suit. Mme de Senanges's letter shows a similarity between the fate of Laclos's Marquise and that of Mme d'Ercy, and also reveals a note of sentimentality foreign to Les Liaisons dangereuses:

"(M. de Valois) me mande que Mad. d'Ercy vient de perdre un procès qui lui enlève plus des trois quarts de sa fortune; il ajoute, que les changemens arrivés dans le Ministère lui ont oté tout son crédit. Ah! mon ami, la belle occasion de nous venger. Tâche de lui être utile,.... Après tant de noirceurs Mad. d'Ercy mérite bien que nous la fassions rougir par nos bienfaits."(1)

So, clumsily, vice is punished and "virtue" is triumphant (and, moreover, provided with a wonderful opportunity to indulge in "good works").

The Marquis ~~***~~, although by comparison with the other characters we have examined a minor figure, also deserves consideration. He and his type are described by the Baron as "les chenilles du dix-huitième siècle"(2). It has already been suggested that he is far less practised in the art of seduction than Laclos's Valmont, to the extent of asking a friend, the Chevalier de ~~***~~, for help in seducing Mme de Senanges. But he is already showing in embryo the principles followed by the Vicomte in Les Liaisons. As he himself puts it:

"Ma réputation est plus brillante que solide; il est temps de la

1. ibid., II, 216-7, Letter XLVII.
2. ibid., I, 141, Letter XXIX.

conduire à sa maturité.... Madame de Senanges a justement ce qu'il faut, pour cette opération... c'est une femme qui mérite qu'on la distingue; &, en lui sacrifiant un mois plein, il est possible de se faire avec elle un très-grand nom... Chevalier,... tu m'aideras de tes conseils."(1)

One of the factors which leads us to draw a parallel between the Marquis and Valmont is the former's amused reference to the fact that Mme de Senanges apparently wishes to convert him(2).

In some respects the Marquis is perhaps more of a "scalp-hunter" than Valmont, and thus nearer to a Don Juan or a Casanova. There is a greater gaiety of approach than one associated with Valmont in such remarks as

"La vie est une éclair, il faut que nos goûts lui ressemblent, qu'ils soient brillans & rapides comme elle",

or

"Je voudrais qu'il y eût peine de bannissement, pour tous ceux qui s'aimeroient plus de vingt jours de suite".(3)

Nevertheless, there is something nearer to the spirit of Les Liaisons in the Marquis's idea that a certain degree of painful uncertainty is good for a woman. There is more than a hint of cruelty about this particular expression of vanity:

"Ayez une maîtresse, que rien n'inquiète, que rien n'allarme, sûre de vos hommages, convaincue de votre sentiment; elle en accepte les preuves avec tranquillité, c'est-à-dire, sans reconnaissance. Une femme tranquille ne tarde pas à être froide."(4)

He has the same systematic approach to the business of the relationship between the sexes as Laclos's roué, and he is proud of the letter which lays down these rules:

1. *ibid.*, I, 123-4, Letter XXVI.

2. Cf. *supra*, p. 600, n. 3.

3. Dorat, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 96 & 97. Copie de la Lettre du Marquis *** au Chevalier de **

4. *ibid.*, I, pp. 97-8.

"Cette lettre est une espèce de code que je compte publier, un jour, pour l'encouragement des dames, & l'instruction des hommes,"(1)

The Marquis, however, fails in his attempt to seduce Mme de Senanges, and turns his attention to Mme d'Ercy, where he soon meets with greater success and strikes up a liaison which bears all the hall-marks of those who, to use La Harpe's terms about the characters of Les Liaisons, have "érigé le libertinage en principe, et fait une science de la dépravation." Here we are in a world of unbridled eroticism. His description of Mme d'Ercy's bedroom, in which

"les glaces... sont placées avec tout l'intelligence d'une femme qui aime à savoir ce qu'elle fait"(2)

immediately stamps this relationship as the type existing between Mme de Merteuil and Belleruche. His reply to Mme d'Ercy, when the latter threatens vengeance over Mme de Senanges and reproaches him for not having at least said he has succeeded in possessing that lady, brings the relationship closer to that between Mme de Merteuil and Valmont, and the prize offered to Valmont, like a carrot to a donkey, of a renewal of Mme de Merteuil's favours. Says the Marquis:

"Je ne demanderois pas mieux que d'avoir Madame de Senanges, pour vous en offrir le sacrifice..."(3)

He recognises, however, that this is impossible, and suggests that they both forget Mme de Senanges and concentrate on their own affair. This, of course, is the last thing that Mme d'Ercy's wounded vanity will allow her to do. From this point on, the Marquis fades out of the plot.

1. *ibid.*, I, p. 107.
2. *ibid.*, I, 160, Letter XXXVI.
3. *ibid.*, I, 177, Letter XXXVIII.

Before going on to draw a conclusion from the parallels we have attempted to draw between Les Liaisons dangereuses and Les Sacrifices de l'Amour, we must first consider Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance, Dorat's other epistolary novel. By comparison with Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance, Les Sacrifices de l'Amour is an anodine work. In his Avant-propos to the later novel, Dorat writes:

"En écrivant les lettres de Mme de Senanges, j'ai voulu prouver que l'amour & le devoir ne sont pas toujours incompatibles. Le but de celles-ci est tout-à-fait opposé & peut-être n'est-il pas moins intéressant... La femme qui cède est souvent plus courageuse que celle qui résiste; elle s'immole, se condamne aux craintes, aux allarmes, cache des pleurs, dévoile des soupçons, risque tout, & ne jouit que du bonheur de son amant." (1)

Remembering Laclos's project for a second novel, one is tempted as one reads this opening declaration by Dorat, to begin to feel that he is about to attempt to "do a Laclos" in reverse. But once again sensibility is very much to the fore here: we are told that "la honte ne peut être, où vit la flamme du sentiment" (2), that "le bonheur est dans l'excès du sentiment... les amans raisonnables ne sont que des amis" (3), that "la sensibilité est la première vertu" (4). The influence of Rousseau is everywhere: we are told that "les leçons d'une mère sont persuasives; c'est le coeur qui les donne" (5), there is the by this time commonplace attack on arranged marriages in Mirbelle's question to Mme de Syrcé (this is the spelling throughout the text, despite the *Circé* of the full title):

1. Dorat, Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance, ou Lettres de la Marquise de Circé et du Comte de Mirbelle, 2 vols., Amsterdam, 1772, I, pp. i-ii.
2. *ibid.*, II, 91, Letter XIV.
3. *ibid.*, II, 127, Letter XX.
4. *ibid.*, II, 248, Letter XLVI.
5. *ibid.*, II, 87, Letter XIII. Mme de Sancerre to her daughter, Mme de Syrcé.

"Les femmes n'ont-elles que la triste vertu d'être fidelles à de perfides époux, & le Ciel qui les forma ordonne-t-il que dans leurs plus belles années elles se traînent aux pieds des autels pour y sceller leur esclavage, & jurer elles-mêmes leur infortune?"(1)

Mme de Syrcé is in this respect in a similar position to Mme de Senanges in the earlier novel. This resentment is similar to that taken to its extreme by (in a purely personal context) Mme de Merteuil. We get too, in Les Malheurs, the concert of the noble savage, in Mirbelle's suggestion to Mme de Syrcé that they flee

"... les hommes cruels, tyranniques, qui ont des conventions au lieu de sentimens, des bienséances au lieu de vertus... C'est (la nature) seule qu'il faut suivre, ou'il faut écouter".

Among the "sauvages" who live

"... aux extrémités de la terre, sous quelque climat que nous habitons, nous trouverons une bonté naturelle qui nous fera grace, qui soulagera nos maux. Nous trouverons, non des loix établies par des hommes aveugles & barbares, mais la sensibilité vraie, mobile universel de tout être que nos politiques institutions n'ont point dégradé"(2)

The aim of this work is moral, its aim being - as Mirbelle tells us in the closing lines - that the example of his unfortunate life shall

"effrayer tous ceux qui se font un jeu de l'inconstance & de la perfidie. (La Harpe's "vingtaine de fats et de catins" again), Qu'ils me contemplant, ils frémiront, & peut-être ils seront corrigés."(3)

In other words, perhaps the sinners will be brought back to the life of Nature. This aim is ^{based} ~~anchored~~ principally upon the ideas of Rousseau, but the influence of Richardson is also felt. Lady Sidley, at the beginning of the novel, tells us, "Je relis Clarice, pour la troisième fois" - and she weeps over it(4) - and later on the Duc *** is likened to Lovelace.

1. *ibid.*, II, 14, Letter III.
2. *ibid.*, II, 229-30, Letter XL.
3. *ibid.*, II, 283-4, Letter LIII.
4. *ibid.*, I, 7, Letter I.

In this novel there are two figures to be compared with Valmont and two with Mme de Tourvel. There is no Mme de Merteuil at all. The two men in question are the Duc *** and the Comte de Mirbelle: the two women, Lady Sidley, whose taste for Clarissa we have already mentioned, and the Marquise de Syrcé.

The novel opens with the Duc attempting to seduce Mme de Syrcé, the unhappy victim of an arranged marriage with a lascivious husband. Since she refuses the Duc her love he -- a familiar gambit -- offers her friendship, saying,

"Je ne suis pas si dangereux que bien des femmes voudroient le faire accroire." (1)

What he is attempting to do is to lull Mme de Syrcé into a false sense of security, despite the (correct) gossip of the Mme de Volanges' of her world, much as Valmont succeeded in making the Présidente question the accuracy of public gossip about him. One remembers Mme de Tourvel's first letter to Mme de Volanges:

"Notre retraite est égayée par... le Vicomte de Valmont... Je ne le connaissais que de réputation... mais il me semble qu'il vaut mieux qu'elle" (2).

Mme de Syrcé, however, is considerably more perceptive than Mme de Tourvel in this matter, or perhaps it is simply that the Duc is less subtle in his approach than Valmont, whom it is very difficult to imagine coming out with such a bald statement as that quoted above. She remarks:

"Le faste des mots ne supplée pas à la sécheresse du coeur; &, tant que l'émotion ne nous gagne pas, nous sommes toujours armées contre le projet.... Apprenez de moi, Monsieur le Duc, & retenez, si vous

1. *ibid.*, I, 10, Letter II.

2. *L.D.*, VIII, 49.

pouvez, qu'il est encore des femmes estimables, dont les charmes méritent vos hommages, & les moeurs, vos respects."(1)

She laughs at the idea of a man of his type being merely a friend of an attractive twenty-year-old such as herself.

The Duc ~~***~~, considerably offended by this rebuff, turns his attentions towards Lady Sidley. He also has plans for the future of Mme de Syrcé. In the letter to his friend, the Vicomte de ~~***~~, in which he reveals these plans, he also strikes a note similar to Valmont's

"J'ai bien besoin d'avoir cette femme pour me sauver du ridicule d'en être amoureux"(2)

The relevant passage of the Duc's letter reads as follows:

"Croyriez-vous bien qu'à l'instant où j'écris, j'échappe à peine au ridicule d'une passion sérieuse. J'en ai eu les symptômes les plus effrayans....., je redevenois un homme ordinaire..."(3)

This is the last thing a roué, in his vanity, can permit. The Duc's pique at failing is considerable, and the reason he gives again shows his similarity with Valmont, who swore of Mme de Tourvel that:

"J'oserai la ravir au Dieu même qu'elle adore..... Qu'elle croie à la vertu, mais qu'elle me la sacrifie..."(4)

The Duc writes of Mme de Syrcé:

"Qu'elle ait résisté par caprice, très bien; mais que la vertu en soit, je ne le souffrirai point."(5)

In the form he plans for his revenge, the Duc demonstrates the ambition

1. Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance, I, 18-22, Letter III.
2. L.D., IV, 42.
3. Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance, I, 42-3, Letter VI.
4. L.D., VI, 46.
5. Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance, I, 51-2, Letter VI.

of grooming a disciple found also in Mme de Merteuil(1) and Valmont(2). His ambition is to train the young Mirbelle to seduce Mme de Syrcé. In so doing he seeks notoriety:

"Le succès n'est rien; c'est la publicité que je veux, c'est l'éclat qui me venge.... La chère Marquise raffolera d'un homme à-peu-près indifférent, & elle sera puni du ridicule de m'avoir combattu par l'obligation de me regretter."(3)

The Duc's plan is double-edged, for he is also seeking to persuade Mirbelle to break off his attachment for Lady Sidley, who is his own next target. This plan is hailed by the Vicomte de *** as

"... d'un genre neuf & saillant. C'est un trait qui manque au caractère de Lovelace."(4)

Just as in Les Sacrifices de l'Amour Versenay has a virtuous confidant in the person of the Baron, so here does Mirbelle, in the Chevalier de Gêrac, whose comments on the Duc and his kind are instructive. The description he gives of them, in its terminology, forcibly recalls Valmont:

"Sous l'aménité des dehors ces êtres-là cachent une ame féroce. Ils ressemblent aux conquérants; comme eux ils se repaissent de pleurs,

1. Mme de Merteuil says of Cécile: "Quant à la petite, je suis tentée d'en faire mon élève; c'est un service que j'ai envie de rendre à Gercourt..." (L.D., XX, 70) (cf. also LIV, 138; LXIII, 155; this plan to train Cécile to "jouer les seconds" is abandoned in CVI, 275.)

2. Valmont and Mme de Merteuil both work, of course, on Danceny. Valmont's intentions here are somewhat different from those of the Marquise with Cécile. He plays on Danceny's sensibility for, as he recognises, "ce beau héros de Roman" (LVII, 142) "a un fonds de générosité qui nous gênera" (XLIV, 120); but the net result is the same: "... un libertin amoureux, si un libertin peut l'être, devient de ce moment même moins pressé de jouir; et... enfin, entre la conduite de Danceny avec la petite Volanges, et la mienne avec la prude Madame de Tourvel, il n'y a que la différence du plus au moins" (LVII, 143): "Voilà bien les hommes! tous également scélérats dans leurs projets, ce qu'ils mettent de faiblesse dans l'exécution, ils l'appellent probité" (LXVI, 161).

3. Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance, I, 55-6, Letter VI.

4. *ibid.*, I, 144, Letter XII.

& verseroient le sang comme eux, s'ils n'étoient pour l'ordinaire plus lâches encore que vains. Leur ame est glacée, leur esprit aride; &, sans le mouvement de leurs petites intrigues, ils ne seroient plus que des automates accablés de honte, de ridicule & d'ennui".(1)

Yet even Gêrac has a low opinion of women and love:

"Arracher une femme à l'enchantement d'une passion tranquille, c'est plonger le poignard dans le sein d'un enfant qu'amuse un songe agréable."(2)

The weapon used by the Duc to bring his plot to fruition is the same as is so frequently employed in Les Liaisons: he plays on Mirbelle's vanity, suggesting that Mme de Syrcé has been pouring scorn on his charms. Mirbelle seizes the bait and asks Gêrac,

"Seroit-ce être infidèle à Sidley que de punir sa rivale, & de lui prouver qu'on peut être heureux avec elle, sans cesser d'être amoureux d'une autre? Cette combinaison me plaît; ja la crois innocente"(3)

Once again we see vengeance being sought to soothe wounded vanity, and all the time Mirbelle thinks that he is behaving as a free agent he is in fact a tool of the Duc. By the end of Part I Mirbelle has succeeded in possessing Mme de Syrcé.

Part II opens with Mme de Syrcé feeling remorse for what she has done, but like Mme de Tourvel dedicating herself to her lover come what may, and at the same time feeling uneasiness about the degree of Mirbelle's love:

"Vous pouvez me rendre bien malheureuse, mais rien, rien à présent ne pourroit me détacher de vous... pas même votre ingratitude.... Hélas! votre ivresse est-elle vraiment de l'amour?(4)

1. *ibid.*, I, 125-6, Letter XI.
2. *ibid.*, I, 134, Letter XI.
3. *ibid.*, I, 155-6, Letter XIV.
4. *ibid.*, II, 12, Letter II.

Mirbelle has in fact fallen genuinely in love with Mme de Syrcé and so, when the Duc seeks to carry his scheme for vengeance one step further by, in the best tradition of the roué, urging Mirbelle to drop Mme de Syrcé, Mirbelle will have nothing to do with the plot(1).

The Duc meanwhile is following up the other side of his scheme. In a familiar pattern he professes first of all respectful love for Lady Sidley, and then says that if his love is unacceptable he will content himself with friendship. Lady Sidley rejects him. At this the Duc sends her an anonymous letter telling her of Mirbelle's affair with Mme de Syrcé. Mirbelle now realises the full extent of the Duc's machinations (Letter XVI). Mme de Syrcé is all this time in the seventh heaven, and in a revealing letter to Mirbelle shows the dangers inherent in the stress of sentiment which Dorat, as a pupil of Rousseau, applauds:

"J'aime qu'on juge, qu'on agisse, qu'on pardonne, & qu'on oblige par sentiment, non par principes"(2).

Like the so-called virtuous character of Richardson, Rousseau and Laclos, she is basically no more moral than the roués.

Mirbelle makes a clean breast of everything to Mme de Syrcé, and swears that all his love is now for her. Lady Sidley is now convinced of his duplicity and her reaction is one of scorn. Like Mme de Tourvel she has a reputation for religious faith and, morally stronger than the Présidente, who goes insane, it is to this faith that she now turns:

"Ne me plains pas, barbare! Je me jette dans le sein d'un Dieu... Je ne suis pas ta victime"(3).

1. *ibid.*, II, 26-7, Billet, Mirbelle to the Duc.
2. *ibid.*, II, 109, Letter XVII.
3. *ibid.*, II, 205, Letter XXXV.

The word "victime" is significant, summing up the erotic world in which these characters live.

Mme de Syrcé meanwhile finds herself pregnant by Mirbelle, but falls ill, and Mirbelle, in a scene which recalls the bedroom scene between the sick Julie and Saint-Preux in La Nouvelle Héloïse, manages to be present at her death((1)). Subsequently he goes after the Duc and kills him in a duel, just as Danceny kills Valmont when he realises the extent of the latter's duplicity. Danceny goes off to Malta; Mirbelle, after contemplating suicide, goes off to one of his father's estates, where in terms more lyrical than anything in Les Liaisons he seeks

"... l'ombre des bois les plus épaïs," where he can "(s)'attacher à toutes les images du tombeau..."(2)

His one wish he expresses as follows:

"Je mourrai jeune, je vis dans cet espoir."

He hopes that his example will serve as a warning to his readers.

The end of this novel approaches the sombre bitterness at the end of Les Liaisons, although it is to some degree marred by excessive sentimentality. Mme de Syrcé is dead, the Duc is killed in a duel, Mirbelle is waiting for death, and Lady Sidley is in a convent.

What, then, does all this amount to? Do these parallels with Laclos's novel justify our saying, in the words of René de Flanhol, that these

"... deux petits romans de Dorat... contiennent vraiment une ébauche des Liaisons dangereuses"?

1. *ibid.*, II, 273-4, Letter LI.
2. *ibid.*, II, 282, Letter LIII.

De Planhol goes on to say,

"Combinez, non les événements qui sont sans intérêt, mais les caractères et les situations de ces deux romans, et vous avez comme une esquisse des Liaisons dangereuses"(1)

Can we accept this in full, can we agree with René Peter, who takes a similar view(2), or with Marcel Ruff, who describes Dorat's novels as "un assez digne prélude aux Liaisons dangereuses"(3)? We have already said enough about both Les Sacrifices de l'Amour and Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance to show that, broadly speaking, de Planhol is right in one respect at least, in that only very rarely can one find anything like a parallel between the details of the actual plots of Dorat and Laclos. Such similarities as there are lie chiefly in character and situation.

It has already been suggested that there is no reason to suppose that Laclos's silence on the subject of Dorat was deliberate. The parallels to be found are at no time sufficiently close as to warrant a charge of plagiarism against Laclos. "Le ton (of Les Liaisons) y est déjà," says Ruff of Dorat's novels(4). The tone of Les Liaisons is present in only part of Les Sacrifices. There is a sensiblerie in Dorat which is totally absent from Laclos, and it is this sentimentality which is the essence of the happy ending of the novel. The sensiblerie, is, if anything, even more marked in Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance, although here the dénouement, with its emptying of the stage, is in some respects nearer to that of Laclos's novel.

When Ruff remarks that in Les Sacrifices de l'Amour Mme d'Ercy and the Marquis ***

1. R. de Planhol, Préface to L.D., 2 vols., Bossard, Paris, 1925, pp. xvi-xvii.
2. R. Peter, La Dame aux Repentirs, L'Inspiratrice des Liaisons dangereuses, Paris, 1939, p. 51.
3. M. Ruff, L'Esprit du Mal & l'Esthétique baudelairienne, Paris, 1955, p. 42.
4. ibid., loc. cit.

"ne préfigurent pas mal Mme de Merteuil et Valmont"(1),

he is being as precise as it is really fair to be about either of Dorat's novels. The Marquise d'Ercy may well, as we have tried to show, have elements of Mme de Merteuil in her, the Marquis ~~***~~, the Duc ~~***~~ and, part of the time, Versenay and Mirbelle, may well possess elements of Valmont, but none of Dorat's characters has anything approaching the stature of those of Laclos. Embryoes they may be, but they are no more. The world in which these characters move is much akin to the world of Les Liaisons, a world more cruel than that of Crébillon, whom Dorat himself describes as a painter of frivolity(2). However, the roués of Dorat's world have not worked out their principles with the precision of Mme de Merteuil and Valmont, and they are noticeably less successful in their intrigues. The ultimate and greatest intrigue in Les Liaisons fails too, of course, and the ending of that novel raises the interesting but insoluble problem of whether Laclos did intend us to wax as sentimental over the fate of Mme de Tourvel as Dorat undoubtedly wished us to do over the end of Mme de Syrcé and Lady Sidley. Laclos, after all, could be as fulsome as Dorat in praise of Rousseau. If we accept that this may have been Laclos's intention, then all one can say once again is that he failed, that somehow Valmont and Mme de Merteuil increased in stature so as to become more than mere seducers. They came to overshadow Mme de Tourvel and, at the same time, that representative of virtue had rotted internally.

It is, then, impossible to trace a direct link between Dorat and

1. *ibid.*, loc. cit.

2. Cf. *supra*, p. 589, n. 3.

Laclos, but the novels of the former do, on the other hand, serve to illustrate more clearly than the works of any other novelist of the time that Laclos has his origins well and truly in a discernible literary tradition which perhaps, as some contemporary critics suggested, had really very little to do with a realistic representation of eighteenth-century manners. Dorat serves to demonstrate, too, the surprisingly close link between the Rousseau tradition and eroticism, and perhaps makes it a little easier for us to reconcile the Laclos of the correspondence with the Laclos of Les Liaisons. It might well be argued, on the basis of this comparison with Dorat, that Laclos's novel is a roman sensible manqué, that Mme de Tourvel was intended to be a Mme de Syrcé, the Rousseauesque representative of, to use once more Dorat's terms,

"la sensibilité vraie, mobile universel de tout être que nos politiques institutions n'ont point dégradé"(1),

the degraded being Valmont, Mme de Merteuil and their like. If this was indeed Laclos's intention, then once again we must rejoice that he failed, for, in the process, he not only underlined the dangers and hypocrisies of sensibilité but also created, in Mme de Tourvel, a far more complex and convincing character than either Dorat or Jean-Jacques has to offer.

V

Of the Chevalier de Nerciat (1739-1800), Henriot remarks that he has

"peut-être trouvé le moyen de pousser à son plus haut point de perfection l'art malhonnête de tout dire."(2)

Henriot is here referring in particular to Le Diable au Corps (published

1. Les Malheurs de l'Inconstance, II, 230, Letter XL.
2. F. Henriot, Les Livres du second Rayon, p. 259.

posthumously in 1803). It is true that this is the work of Nerciat which comes nearest to having genuine literary value, but the aim implicit in Henriot's description can be said to be that of all Nerciat's works. This presents a striking contrast with Laclos, in whose writings - to quote Taine again - "l'indécence qui est dans les choses n'est jamais dans les mots".

One cannot deny Nerciat a certain wit and, on occasions (especially in Le Diable au Corps and from time to time in Félicia (1775)) he shows a genuine talent in the use of dialogue. This, however, is a long way from saying with Henriot that if Félicia were not too long and if it could have some of its more scabrous descriptions cut out it might have been

"... un roman charmant, léger sans doute, mais guère plus que les Liaisons dangereuses ou les Aventures de Faublas que d'ailleurs il a devancées..."

This kind of supposition is of very little value - the risqué element and the long-windedness are part of Nerciat's talent or lack of talent - and certainly, so far as a Nerciat-Laclos rapprochement is concerned, we see the emptiness of this particular remark when Henriot goes on to describe this "novel-which-might-have-been" as

"... un roman d'aventures vives..... plein d'une caricature excellente... un Diable boiteux fin de siècle." (1)

This comparison places Andréa de Nerciat, rightly, nearer to Louvet de Couvray than to Laclos, and when Henriot goes on to search for comparisons with Les Liaisons he soon finds himself in deep water. To suggest, as he does, that Thérèse, the servant in Félicia, who deliberately spreads venereal

disease is

"... comparable par la noirceur de ses vengeances à la marquise des Liaisons"(1),

is really going rather too far. She is a good deal closer to the characters of Chevrier.

Félicia is an episodic novel, and the links between the different episodes are often, to say the least, very tenuous. Nerciat makes no moral claims for his work, and in the intimacy of detail of the descriptions of sexual behaviour, it is in the same stream as that of the Marquis de Sade, although the cruelty of Sade is not there. If we were to permit ourselves something along the lines of the conjectures for which we have just been taking Émile Henriot to task we might say something along the following lines: transfer the cruelty of Les Liaisons on to the physical plane, add to it the descriptive side and the general shapelessness of Nerciat's writing, and you would have something very much akin to the productions of the notorious Marquis.

Carco cautions us, as we have seen, that

"Rien ne serait plus injuste que détransformer Laclos en une sorte de Crébillon fils ou de Nerciat"(2).

We have already agreed that it would be wrong to seek to transform Laclos into a Crébillon. The same applies to Nerciat. One must, however, emphasise the differences between Nerciat and Crébillon. Whilst there may be something in common between Nerciat's work and Le Sopha - Félicia is

1. *ibid.*, p. 273.

2. Carco, *op. cit.*, p. ii.

divided into chapters with headings which often recall Crébillon's exercise in exotic eroticism (Plus vrai que semblable; Dont on saura le contenu, si l'on prend la peine de le lire; Court, mais intéressant; Indéfinissable; etc.) - there is very little common ground between Nerciat and those works of Crébillon which we have seen to be in the same tradition as Les Liaisons dangereuses.

There are, nevertheless, some minor points of contact with this tradition. Henriot remarks that Félicia herself systematises pleasure;

"Quelle fille du siècle, philosophe jusqu'en ses déduits"(1)

To some degree Henriot is right, and this tempts one to look for parallels between Félicia and Mme de Merteuil.

Félicia follows, not her own principles, like Mme de Merteuil, but those of the painter Sylvino who, with his wife, adopts her. In a chapter entitled Singuliers discours de Sylvino, dont je conseille à bien des femmes de faire leur profit, the painter indoctrinates his charge:

"Le parfait amour est une chimère. Il n'y a de réel que l'amitié, qui est de tous les temps, et le désir, qui est du moment. L'amour est l'un et l'autre réunis dans un cœur pour le même objet, mais ils ne veulent jamais être liés.... Fais de bons choix, ne t'engage jamais au point d'avoir plus de peines que de plaisirs."(2)

We follow her sexual education in considerable detail, and then she undertakes the sexual education of the fourteen-year-old Monroe, this being described in equal detail. Félicia's attitude towards life is summed up in her rhetorical question,

"Mais en amour tout n'est-il pas caprice?"(3)

1. Henriot, op. cit., p. 272.

2. Andrea de Nerciat, Félicia, ou Mes Fredaines, in Oeuvres (ed. Guillaume Apollinaire), Paris, 1910, vol. II, p. 42.

3. ibid., II, 199.

She refuses to have anything to do with "un amour exclusif" -

"... mais le système de la pluralité des goûts n'est-il pas autant à l'avantage des hommes qu'au nôtre?" (1)

All this, together with the confession of D'Aiglement, after indulging in a little voyeurisme, observing various sexual postures through a peep-hole -

"Je n'aurai ni la mauvaise foi de nier que ces irrégularités m'ont ravi, ni l'entêtement de soutenir qu'elles soient par elles-mêmes de véritables moyens de jouir. Tout cela git dans l'imagination. C'est elle qui nous entraîne, qui vient aisément à bout de nous faire faire les choses qui répugnent le plus à la raison et même à la nature; le caprice bouleverse tout; mais ce désordre tourne au profit du plaisir..." (2)

- all this takes us into a world not far removed from that of Mme de Merteuil and Valmont, no longer interested except by "les choses bizarres", although in Félicia the situation is rather more exaggerated than in Les Liaisons. At the same time, although the degeneration is in a way more advanced here, the acceptance of this life is, for the characters of Merciat's novel, more frivolous, more facile than for either Valmont or Mme de Merteuil. Contrasting with the gaiety of Félicia and her kind, there is, after all, in the frustration of Mme de Merteuil and Valmont an element which implies dissatisfaction and therefore, by means of the practice of their "principles", the hope of attaining some other order of things. They are moulders of destinies. By comparison, the demi-mondaine Félicia is a feather-brain, despite the ideas inculcated into her by Sylvino. There is, in fact, no profundity in these ideas, no real intellectual effort behind them. Félicia underlines this fact by the banality of her summing-up of her principles when discussing her "educat-

1. *ibid.*, II, 207.

2. *ibid.*, II, 203.

ion" of the young Monrose:

"... je me souciais fort peu d'être adorée. Cela ne m'a jamais flattée; j'ai toujours souhaité court amour et longue amitié." (1)

We are in a world of proverbs.

There are two other minor points to be considered in Nerciat's work.

If the Marquise's masturbation in Le Diable au Corps whilst she reads "quelques livres libertins" (2) implies a similar kind of psychology to that illustrated in Mme de Merteuil's cerebral self-excitement by means of reading Le Sopha, La Fontaine's Contes and La Nouvelle Héloïse, it remains true that Nerciat here allows himself to "say all", whereas Laclos is far more circumspect and far less clumsy.

Guillaume Apollinaire, in his notes to the Oeuvres of Nerciat, draws the reader's attention to Baudelaire's notes on Les Liaisons dangereuses. Apollinaire suggests that

"C'est sans aucun doute à propos du Diable au Corps et des Anphrodites que Baudelaire écrivit cette note qu'il avait l'intention de développer, '... La Révolution a été faite par des voluptueux. NERCIAT (utilité de ses livres)...'" (3)

Both Le Diable au Corps and Les Anphrodites (1793) are concerned with the members of a secret, erotic society, the Anphrodites, which is based on fact (4). Both are written in dialogue form and both, on occasion, show considerable wit. The first of these works is set before, the second after the Revolution. Both deal with sexual activities in various forms, from masturbation to a projected orgy in which "chaque dame sera toute à

1. ibid., II, 180.
2. Le Diable au Corps. Oeuvre posthume du très recommandable Docteur Cazzone, Membre extraordinaire de la joyeuse Faculté phallo-collo-pygo-glottonique, ibid., I, 232.
3. ibid., I, 209. (cf. O.C., 738)
4. cf. Guillaume Apollinaire, ibid., I, pp. 257 et. seq.

tous, chaque homme tout à toutes"(1).

In Les Aphrodites, Nerciat misses no opportunity of attacking the revolutionaries. For example, in his Préambule nécessaire, he says of the Aphrodites that they are

"... gens fort répréhensibles peut-être, mais qui du moins ne sont pas dangereux, et qui, fort contents de leur Constitution, ne songent nullement à constituer l'univers."

They are

"des citoyens infiniment actifs qui, d'accord avec la nation, reconnaissent la liberté, l'égalité, pour bases de leur bonheur."(2)

What is the relevance of Baudelaire's remark on Nerciat, and what, if any, is its connection with Laclos? Despite the way in which he plays with certain terms, it cannot seriously be suggested that in the passages quoted above Nerciat is really trying to make any real political point. Terms such as "Constitution", "citoyen actif", "liberté" and perhaps especially "égalité" with its scarcely veiled homosexual implications, are obviously in this context used as puns. Nerciat's career is not known in detail(3), although Apollinaire suggests that under both the Ancien Régime and the Consulate he played some kind of a rôle as a secret agent. This might suggest some kind of parallel with the political fortunes of Laclos who, as we have already shown in some detail, was a constitutional monarchist and later a servant of Bonaparte. The remarks of Nerciat in Les Aphrodites, however, are by no means sufficient to enable us to draw

1. Le Diable au Corps, *ibid.*, I, 239, Nerciat's italics.

2. Les Aphrodites, ou Fragments thaliaprianiques pour servir à l'histoire du plaisir, *ibid.*, I, 259-60.

3. Cf. Apollinaire, *ibid.*, I, 1-35, & Henriot, *op. cit.*, pp. 257-74.

a close parallel between the two. One striking contrast, indeed, is immediately apparent. Whereas Nerciat defends the Aphrodites, however ironically, Laclos was continually at pains to defend the moral worth of Les Liaisons as a novel and to disown the principles of Valmont and Merteuil. The "utilité" of Nerciat's works might be taken to be a revelation of the corruption and depravity of the nobility and the clergy, but the corruption is in fact common to all the characters he portrays, no matter what their social station. Moreover, they revel in it, in a form of determinism. Félicia has never thought of trying to reform herself,

"et... d'ailleurs j'aurais peut-être fait des efforts inutiles. Car un homme de génie, qui connaît le cœur humain a dit pour ma consolation et pour celle de beaucoup d'autres: "N'est pas toujours femme de bien qui veut." (1)

This may be determinism, but it is a singularly facile form of determinism. Once again we find ourselves in a world in which people talk in the tone of proverbs. The "utilité" of Les Liaisons is, if we accept Laclos's professed aims, almost equally banal. On the other hand, at no time, either explicitly or implicitly, does Laclos claim any political significance for his novel, which was, after all, written well before the Revolution, unlike Les Aphrodites, which was published in 1793, two years after the Champ de Mars petition.

As we have already said, one does not feel justified, in any case, in taking too seriously the political import of the passages quoted above from Les Aphrodites. Félicia, Monroe and the rest are above all interested in le plaisir. This is implied in the titles of the works:

1. Félicia, in Oeuvres, II, 311.

Félicia is subtitled Mes Fredaines; Les Aphrodites is intended to servir à l'histoire du plaisir; the imaginary author of Le Diable au Corps is a member of la joyeuse Faculté phallo-coïro-pygo-glottonique. The abundance of physical details of the sexual behaviour and depravities of these characters is enough to show that they have indeed, all of them, "le diable au corps". Perhaps it would be truer to say of Laclos's characters that they have "le diable à l'esprit".

VI

Mme de Saint-Aubin deserves mention in this survey, if only as the author of Le Danger des Liaisons (1763), which, as Laclos's manuscript shows, was the original title of Les Liaisons dangereuses. This circumstance in itself is sufficient justification for an inquiry as to whether she can in any sense be seen as one of Laclos's precursors.

Le Danger des Liaisons, ou Mémoires de la Baronne de Blémond(1) is a lengthy, sentimental novel, episodic in form, and one which, rightly, is accorded no high place in the history of French literature. The influence of Rousseau and, at the same time, of the novel of intrigue which Rousseau did so much to destroy, are clearly to be seen. There is an unfortunate tendency for the work to become bathetic, and one can find little justification for La Dixmerie's suggestion that Mme de Saint-Aubin and Mme Élie de Beaumont "prouvent que notre siècle a ses La Fayette"(2). There are erotic episodes in the work: for example, the Marquis de

1. 3 vols., Genève, 1763.

2. La Dixmerie, Discours sur l'Origine, les Progrès et le Genre des Romans, published with his novel Toni et Clairette, 2 vols., Paris, 1773, I, lx.

Clarcy sees through a mirror his mistress Mme de Sanval in the act of infidelity(1). There are, however, no real parallels with Les Liaisons dangereuses in either characterisation or plot. Mlle de Fargenne is stricken by small-pox as retribution for her sins(2), but although she is something of a schemer she is no Mme de Merteuil in either character or force. Moreover she enters a convent and repents for her successful intrigue, by which she persuaded her brother to marry not his lady-love Mlle de Chansai but her widowed mother. There is a certain superficial similarity in names between certain characters of this novel and Les Liaisons. There is, for instance, a seducer by the name of Valnel who seduces Mme de Blémon with the aid of a woman of ill repute, Mlle de la Fond, much as Lovelace uses Mrs. Sinclair to weaken Clarissa's resistance(3). Valnel, however, is no Valmont. He is a rich fermier-général with an elderly, ailing wife, and defends Mme de Blémon when she is suspected of involvement in an armed attack on him shortly afterwards. In this section of the novel there is also a Mme de Montval (Valmont in reverse), but there is no similarity whatsoever between her and either Valmont or Mme de Merteuil.

Similarities of names exist between Les Liaisons and another novel by Mme de Saint-Aubin, this time an epistolary work with the rather curious title of Mémoires, en forme de Lettres, de deux jeunes Personnes de Qualité(4) in which the influence of Richardson (especially Clarissa) is

1. Le Danger des Liaisons, III, pt. ii, pp. 22-3.
2. ibid., III, pt. i, pp. 191-2.
3. ibid., III, pt. ii, pp. 122 et seq.
4. Mme de Saint-Aubin, Mémoires, en forme de Lettres, de deux jeunes Personnes de Qualité, La Haye & Paris, 2 vols., 1765.

overwhelming. The similarity of names arises in the case of the Vicomte de Valmire and his friend the Chevalier de Valmon. It is certainly possible that Laclos knew the writings of Mme de Saint-Aubin - his alteration of the title of his novel may well be seen as implying, at any rate, an awareness of the existence of *Le Danger des Liaisons*. It is therefore conceivable that he also knew the *Memoires*, and in consequence may be worthwhile to examine Valmire and Valmon a little more closely.

Of Valmon, little need be said. He is a very minor character, and bears no trace of a relationship with his near name-sake in *Les Liaisons*. Valmire, on the other hand, a friend of the brother of one of the letter-writers, Sophie, is a young rake. Sophie says of him:

"Rien n'est comparable à sa légèreté, & lui-même en convient de bonne foi.... il exige moins d'être aimé, qu'il n'exige qu'on l'amuse: l'amour, selon lui, doit être un plaisir, & point une affaire: le ton de la tristesse l'ennuie, il ne cherche que celui de la gaieté.

Cependant on l'a vu quelquefois s'attacher à des conquêtes difficiles: l'extrême facilité, ou la très-grande résistance produit à peu près sur lui le même effet: la gloire de vaincre vaut alors pour lui le plaisir de jouir, mais dans l'une ou l'autre circonstance le commencement de son bonheur est presque toujours le terme de son amour...(sic)"(1)

If the first part of this description seems to label Valmire as a mere lascivious fop, in the second he appears to be acquiring greater stature, and approaching the "principles" of Valmont. Unfortunately, however, this is not developed. Moreover, there are ways in which Valmire manifestly differs from Valmont. Sophie adds that

"... sans penser très-bien des femmes, il ne lui arrive jamais d'en parler mal.... il est amant très-volage, mais il est très-solide ami."(2)

1. *ibid.*, vol. I, pt. i, pp. 133-4. Letter XI.
2. *ibid.*, vol. I, pt. i, p. 134, Letter XI.

Nor is this merely the fond illusion of a woman in love. Soon afterwards, Sophie and Valmire are married, and while it is true that he is soon unfaithful to her - indeed a separation takes place - the rest of his story is the account of his redemption. He falls deeper and deeper into debt, but we see, as the sentimentality mounts, that his heart is in the right place, when he arranges to see his baby son in the Luxembourg gardens(1). Valmire is arrested - we later learn that this was done at the orders of Sophie's parents as a means of bringing Sophie and Valmire together again through the noble deeds they know their daughter will perform to release him. They are not mistaken. Sophie has herself thrown into gaol, swearing she will not come out alone. Valmire, repentant, finds her - "Il m'aime, il m'a toujours aimée..." - and her father not only has them both released but also pays the debts of twenty other prisoners!(2)

In other words, not only does Valmire fail to develop as a character, but the novel itself has neither the formal qualities nor the depth of Les Liaisons. It presents us with two extremely complicated stories, that of Sophie and that of Henriette, which have no connection other than that Henriette and Sophie were educated together. Henriette is now in England, and the twin stories are told in great length and detail in the letters between the two friends. The epistolary form as such serves no real purpose at all.

1. *ibid.*, vol. II, pt. iv, pp. 46-9, Letter V.
2. *ibid.*, vol. II, pt. iv, pp. 124-44, Letter XV.

One is forced to the conclusion that any similarity between the names of the characters of the Mémoires and those of the characters of Les liaisons is probably purely fortuitous. It points to a singular lack of imagination among eighteenth-century novelists in the invention of names for their characters(1), a trait characteristic not only of France but also of England, but not necessarily to any closer link between works which have names of characters in common.

VII

The novelist whom La Dixmerie named together with Mme de Saint-Aubin as proving that the eighteenth century was not lacking its Mme de La Fayette was Mme Élie de Beaumont. La Dixmerie's remark is nearer to acquiring real meaning in her case than in that of Mme de Saint-Aubin. Although the influence of eighteenth-century sensibility appears in Mme de Beaumont's work as it does in the two novels we have just examined, there is a genuinely analytical side to the Lettres du Marquis de Roselle(2) which does look back in some measure to the seventeenth century. At the same time, this side of the novel should not be exaggerated. Joachim Merlant is quite right in saying of the Marquis de Roselle that "ce bon jeune homme a lu la Nouvelle Héloïse, qui lui a un peu tourné la tête."(3)

In the second volume in particular, preaching comes well to the fore, and we are treated to digression after digression. The most interesting of these are those which give Mme de Ferval's views on education. The

1. This manifestation is further examined infra. Cf. Appendix A.
2. Mme Élie de Beaumont, Lettres du Marquis de Roselle, Londres, Paris, L. Cellot, 2 vols., 1764.
3. J. Merlant, Le Roman personnel de Rousseau à Fromentin, Paris, 1905, p. 20.

ideas here often parallel Rousseau's Emile, although there is one striking difference in that Mme de Ferval expresses a feminism quite contrary to Rousseau, putting forward the view that the secondary position normally accorded to women in this sphere is at the root of the ills of society.(1)

It is not surprising in a work containing so much didactic sensiblerie to find an appreciative reference to the novels of Richardson, and it is again Mme de Ferval who makes it, in terms strongly reminiscent of Diderot's Eloge de Richardson, which had appeared in 1762, two years before Mme de Beaumont's novel:

"Richardson! est-il possible qu'on donne le nom de romans à ces belles histoires du monde et de l'humanité? C'est la vertu elle-même qui vous y instruit par l'organe du génie... Je viens de donner Clarisse à lire à ma fille aînée; elle est à l'école des bonnes, des grandes mœurs."(2)

The similarities between the Lettres du Marquis de Roselle and the work of Prévost are also worthy of mention. The basic plot of the first volume, in which the Marquis falls in love with the fille d'Opéra Léonor recalls in some measure the basic plot of Manon Lescaut, although Mme de Beaumont takes the redemption of her hero further, and points the moral with a heavy-handedness which is not found in Prévost's celebrated work.

It is, however, the analytical side of this novel which primarily concerns us here. This is most striking in the first volume, before the moralising tendency becomes too overt. This first volume has much more pace than

1. Lettres du Marquis de Roselle, II, pp. 28-56, Letter XCVII, & pp. 72-94, Letter CIII.

2. *ibid.*, II, 44, Letter XCVII.

the second, and the characterisation is reasonably acceptable. The same is true of the epistolary technique, which is not here weighed down by the lengthy digressions which are found in volume two.

Here, one male character in particular is of interest, a friend of Roselle's by the name of Valville. Apart from a slight similarity in name, this gentleman possesses certain of the characteristics of Laclos's Valmont. He is a convincing character, an interesting picture of the elegant rake, content to live a life of pleasure with a cynical disregard for conventional morality, even if he has not the power of Valmont.

He has Valmont's contempt for sincere love, a point which is made in his remark to Roselle,

"Je t'avois mis entre les mains de Léonor pour y prendre le ton du monde, & te mettre en réputation, & voilà que tu te prends de belle passion pour elle; c'est un enfantillage."(1)

His cynicism is of a variety common in eighteenth-century erotic literature, and the like of it is easily found in the works of Chamfort, Duclos or Crébillon:

"La femme qu'il est le moins nécessaire de trouver aimable, c'est la sienne. Quand on se marie, on épouse le bien d'une fille, & l'on met en liberté sa personne; voilà ce que j'appelle se tirer honnêtement du sacrement."(2)

Valville offers to become Roselle's directeur, a rôle not dissimilar from that Valmont plays in respect of Danceny, and promises to draw up a plan de conduite, or manual of libertinage, for his pupil's edification.

This is developed at intervals throughout this first volume. Thus, in

1. *ibid.*, I, 43, Letter XI.
2. *ibid.*, I, 50, Letter XI.

Letter XV, we find Valville writing to Roselle,

"C'est chez toi une frénésie que l'amour; l'amour! saches qu'il ne doit être qu'un amusement, qu'un préservatif contre l'ennui. Il faut en intrigues amoureuses, comme en toutes autres affaires, former un plan d'abord, & ne s'en point écarter, à moins que les circonstances varient..."(1)

This is exactly Valmont's method of procedure. Moreover here we see the appearance of the theme of ennui, which lies at the heart of both Valmont and Mme de Merteuil.

Further details of Valville's system are given in Letter XXXI, where Roselle is told that

"Il y auroit de la sottise à se refuser les plaisirs, mais il faut conserver les dehors."(2)

La décence must be observed:

"Livre-toi aux plaisirs, aie des maîtresses, évite les leçons de ta sœur, & le verbiage de ton beau-frère, tu feras fort bien, mais observe les bienséances d'usage, le monde l'exige..."(3)

Letter LXXXII is a veritable roué's manual. Valville tells Roselle:

"Vis avec les vivans, sois heureux, sois tranquille, amuse-toi; voilà tout ce qu'on te demande... Tu ne sais pas, je le vois, ce que c'est que l'honneur des honnêtes gens.... Une femme doit exiger la décence, les égards pour son mari, la constance autant qu'il est possible... mais en cas qu'on s'ennuye l'un de l'autre, point de rupture, on fait une retraite honnête."(4)

There are, of course, important differences between Valville and Valmont, the most obvious of which is contained in the remark about "point de rupture". Valville is more frivolous, more of a coureur de junes, more of a mere Don Juan than Valmont. He has little of the latter's serious-

1. *ibid.*, I, 64, Letter XV.
2. *ibid.*, I, 103, Letter XXXI.
3. *ibid.*, I, 105, Letter XXXI.
4. *ibid.*, I, 282-4, Letter LXXXII.

ness, his determination to dominate, ruin and degrade women. His rather empty-headed approach, and his facile snobbery, are well brought out in the same letter:

"Ne sais-tu pas qu'aujourd'hui tout roule sur le plaisir, qu'il est le pivot des plus grandes affaires, & qu'il faut le sentir ou le feindre? Mais je rougis pour toi, Marcuis, d'ignorer les premiers élémens de la société du grand monde. Où diable as-tu donc vécu? En Province apparemment, car je ne te soupçonne pas de t'être retréci à Paris dans quelque coterie bourgeoise"(1)

This illustrates a class-barrier which is not brought out in Les Liaisons dangereuses. It is emphasised in Roselle's sister's arguments against his relationship with Léonor, whom he has announced that he intends to marry (Letter LVIII). One can understand Roselle's relations being against such a match, but the terms in which this opposition is expressed are instructive. Mme de Saint-Sever tells her brother Roselle that if Léonor were really honorable, "elle auroit honte de vous avilir pour s'élever", and goes on to ask,

"De quel droit, vous citoyen, vous décoré de prérogatives & d'honneurs, de quel droit intervertiriez-vous l'ordre de la société, qui, en distinguant les conditions pour le bien de l'état, s'est promis à juste titre que ceux qu'elle plaçoit dans un rang honorable, ne seroient ni assez lâches, ni assez ingrats pour en troubler l'harmonie par leur propre avilissement?"(2)

Although the class element is, despite Vailland's argument, absent from Les Liaisons (and even if it were present the gulf between Valmont and Mme de Tourvel would be considerably less than that between Roselle and Léonor), these remarks of Mme de Saint-Sever do point to another parallel between the two works. Mme de Beaumont's world is quite as corrupt, at this stage in the novel, before we sink into the morass of sentimental moralising which

1. *ibid.*, I, 285-6, Letter LXXXII.
2. *ibid.*, I, 208-9, Letter LVIII.

characterises its later stages, as the world of Laclos in Les Liaisons. And the chief cause for this rottenness is the same in either case: vanity. It is vanity which is behind Mme de Saint-Sever's attitude. Moreover, this attitude is not very far removed from that of her enemy Valville, expressed in his remark that one must observe "les bienséances d'usage", since "le monde l'exige". The basic moral emptiness of these characters, even the allegedly virtuous ones, is as great as that of Mme de Tourvel and Mme de Volanges (Mme de Saint-Sever's concern for social acceptability brings her quite close to the latter), and it is well illustrated by another remark to her brother which is not far from the attitude of Valville:

"La passion est une illusion, un état violent de l'âme, elle ne sauroit ni durer, ni nous tromper toujours."(1)

Valville, then, possesses the same desire to find and instruct a pupil as do Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, especially the latter. Like them, he is doomed to failure. The reason that he fails with Roselle is that, to quote Merlant again, "ce bon jeune homme a lu la Nouvelle Héloïse qui lui a un peu tourné la tête". Thus we find Valville writing to Roselle (Letter LXXXVII):

"Oh! ma foi, Mercuis, voilà qui est fini; des que tu donnes dans la haute morale, je n'ai plus rien à te dire, ni rien à faire pour toi, tu es un homme noyé. C'est dommage, pourtant, tu aurois réussi dans le monde."(2)

Valmont and Mme de Merteuil fail, of course, because of Danceny's timid, romanesque limitations and Cécile's empty-headed stupidity. It is a pity about Mme de Beaumont's inability to resist the temptation to dive

1. *ibid.*, I, 214, Letter LVIII.

2. *ibid.*, I, 305, Letter LXXXVII.

head-first into a series of moralising digressions. Whatever one may say about the authenticity of Laclos's professed moral aims, there can certainly be no doubt in the case of Mme de Beaumont, who ends her novel with "virtue" triumphant and vice converted, with a repentant Léonor invoking Heaven's blessing on Roselle and his bride from her convent cell, Roselle having as early as the end of volume one expressed his contempt for Valville's notion of la bonne compagnie. The tedious second volume represents Redemption, after the Fall of volume one.

One other character deserves some consideration, and that is the source of all the trouble, Léonor. It would be ludicrous to seek to draw a close parallel between her and Mme de Merteuil - her humble status as an opera-girl and her ultimate repentance both militate against this. Nevertheless, although in her fallen state she has none of the convergence of either Valmont or Mme de Merteuil, she does share their cynicism and can thus be said to belong to the same tradition.

In her determination to seduce Roselle she employs a trick similar to that later used by Valmont in his pursuit of Mme de Tourvel: she arranges for some people to play the part of "une famille honnête et pauvre" whom she pretends to have helped by selling the diamonds given her by Roselle. The scene in which these impostors express their thanks to her is, of course, intended to convince Roselle of her virtue.(1)

Léonor shows considerable skill in managing Roselle, twisting him round her finger with consummate ease and manoeuvring him by various devices

1. *ibid.*, I, 81-3, Letter XXIII.

such as the invention of a non-existent rival for her favours. All in all, however, it must be confessed that the machinations of Léonor, and her great concern for the material things of this world, do not so much look forward to Laclos as back to Prévost, whose influence on this character seems to have been quite considerable.

VIII

Loaisel de Tréogate is a curious writer. His novel Dolbreuse, ou l'Homme du Siècle ramené à la Vérité par le Sentiment et par la Raison appeared the year after Les Liaisons dangereuses(1), and in many ways is more representative of current trends and future developments than is Laclos's novel. The influence of both Prévost and Rousseau is marked. In the words of Servais Étienne,

"Le héros de Loaisel est avant tout l'homme prédestiné à l'amour et par conséquent au malheur."(2)

The title is symptomatic of the intention, which is moral: "Dans quelque genre que l'on écrive, on doit se proposer d'être utile"(3). Just as Prévost describes Manon Lescaut as "... un traité de morale, réduit agréablement en exercice", so Dolbreuse is described as "... un abrégé de morale, d'autant plus utile que tout y sera mis en action"(4). A Rousseauesque note is struck early on:

"Le but de l'Ouvrage que nous mettons au jour, est de remettre en honneur parmi nous l'amour conjugal(5), dont le nom seul est presque devenu un ridicule; de ramener les mères aux sentimens de la nature; de faire sentir le prix des plaisirs faciles & trop négligés de la vie libre et innocente des campagnes..."(6)

1. L. de Tréogate, Dolbreuse..., 2 vols., Amsterdam & Paris, 1783.
2. S. Étienne, Le Genre romanesque en France..., p. 363.
3. Dolbreuse, I, p. v.
4. Ibid., I, pp. 2-3.
5. Cf. Laclos's plan for a second novel.
6. Dolbreuse, I, p. ix-x.

The favourite reading of the hero and heroine, Dolbreuse and Ermance, is La Nouvelle Héloïse, and their reaction to it binds the joint influences of Rousseau and Prévost closely together: what they learn above all from "Les épreuves de Julie & de Saint-Preux" is

"que le besoin d'aimer, inséparable de la condition d'homme, n'est souvent que le besoin de souffrir."(1)

The name of Rousseau and his ideas are constantly appearing in the pages of this novel. For example, Dolbreuse gives at one point what is no more than a résumé of the argument of Rousseau's Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts:

"On ne peut disconvenir, que les sciences et les arts, à force de polir la société, n'établissent le premier degré de la corruption dans un empire, & ne lui fassent faire un pas vers sa décadence."(2)

To crown this homage to Rousseau, the hero and heroine make a pilgrimage to his tomb(3), where Ermance undergoes a form of apotheosis. In the words of Dolbreuse himself,

"Ce n'étoit plus Ermance que je voyois, c'étoit l'épouse de Wolmar, c'étoit la femme d'Émile, c'étoit l'objet céleste dont ce peintre brillant nous a laissé le modèle."(4)

Loaisel is a decidedly inferior pupil of Prévost and Rousseau. From what we have already said about Dolbreuse, it would appear that nothing could be further from the tone of Laclos. And this in general is true. Loaisel is prepared to outdo both his masters in sensiblerie, which sometimes from his pen becomes positively repulsive. The death of Ermance, for instance, is even more nauseating than that of Manon. Dolbreuse

1. *ibid.*, I, p. 17. Cf. also II, p. 119.
2. *ibid.*, I, p. 132.
3. *ibid.*, II, pp. 131 et seq.
4. *ibid.*, II, p. 136.

burns her body in the middle of the night and collects the ashes, which he places in a crystal urn. Henceforth he daily prays before it to "l'Éternel"(1). This work epitomises the confusion of pleasure with virtue, the association of the erotic with sentimental moralising, which so often appears in sentimental literature of the period and which Laclos castigates through the pen of Valmont:

"C'est dans le délire que se trouve quelquefois la sagesse..... Au milieu même de l'effervescence des sens, alors qu'on se livre à tout le délire de l'amour, la convulsion du plaisir n'est-elle pas un effort de l'âme, impatiente de sortir de sa prison, & de voler au lieu de son origine céleste?"(2)

Whatever the faults of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, they certainly do not share this "effervescence des sens." Thus it is not unreasonable to say that the spirit of Loaisel is diametrically opposed to that of Laclos. Loaisel, in fact, with his stress on sentiment, his introduction of a genuine admiration for the medieval(3), his use of the "tour d'architecture gothique" on the site of the downfall of the Comtesse de ...(4), his introduction of a ruined castle(5), and such notions as that of Dolbreuse when he remarks,

"Je marche, entouré de ces ombres palissantes que répand autour de nous la tristesse, au milieu même du jour le plus serein"(5),

looks forward to Romanticism and the roman noir. Add to all this the shapelessness of Dolbreuse, and there seems to be no point of contact whatsoever between Loaisel and Laclos.

1. *ibid.*, I, pp. 84-5.
2. *ibid.*, I, pp. 8 et seq., II, pp. 98 & 110.
3. *ibid.*, I, p. 178.
4. *ibid.*, II, pp. 68 & 72.
5. *ibid.*, II, p. 35.

Such, however, is not quite the case. First of all, there is frequently a goodly proportion of eroticism in the works of the eighteenth-century moralising novelists. This is true of Rousseau himself, and it is equally -- and frequently more -- true of Rousseau's disciples. There are, indeed in *Loaisel*, manifestly erotic descriptions such as the more classically disciplined Laclos scorns to use. Why, one may well ask, does *Loaisel* insist so much on the physical details of sexual relations? This is the case whether he is dealing with conjugal or illicit sex. Thus, we are treated to a sensual description of the first act of love between Dolbreuse and Ermançe -- in a field on their way back from church after the marriage!(1) Again, we have an erotic description of Dolbreuse undressing his bride(2). That the religion of sentiment cloaks this scene makes it none the less erotic:

"Je ne voyois plus le siège où elle étoit assise; je voyois un autel où la Divinité descendue des cieux, sous les traits les plus adorables, daignoit s'offrir aux regards d'un faible mortel, se rendre sensible, palpable, pour lui seul; & par une faveur inouïe l'associer d'avance à toutes les délices de la béatitude."(3)

This, at any rate, demonstrates that eroticism in the eighteenth-century novel is not the private preserve of practitioners of the clinical approach, such as Crébillon or Laclos.

More striking, however, from our point of view, are two passages which show the magnetism of the literary tradition of the roué, even for a sensible writer such as *Loaisel*. These are to do with the married Dolbreuse's lapses into adultery. The first concerns the hero's meeting

1. *ibid.*, I, pp. 80-3.
2. *ibid.*, I, p. 90.
3. *ibid.*, I, p. 89.

with an old roué, through whose circle he strikes up a liaison with the immoral Marquise de ***. Admittedly, Dolbreuse feels remorse for this lapse, but nevertheless at this point in the narrative he uses the language of Chamfort and Crébillon to describe his own situation:

"Nous nous étions pris sans beaucoup d'amour, nous nous quittons sans beaucoup de regret" (1);

-- and again:

"Machinalement nous renouons une liaison de vingt-quatre heures, & la rompimes machinalement." (2)

At this time Dolbreuse has fallen in with, if not the Valmonts and Mmes de Merteuil (for these surely are unique), then at least the Prévans of fashionable society, and he describes them in terms which recall La Harpe's description of Les Liaisons as "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." Dolbreuse's terms are as follows:

"J'étois tombé entre les mains de ces agréables de la capitale, qui érigent la scélératesse en système, & la font passer en amusement; qui se disent les dispensateurs des réputations, les maîtres de la renommée, s'emparent de tous ceux qui débutent dans le monde, les endoctrinent, les forment, & se dépêchent de les associer à tous leurs vices & à tous leurs travers." (3)

Here we find ourselves in a world very closely akin to that of Les Liaisons dangereuses. Moreover, Loaisel characterises it in much the same way as the society of Les Liaisons is characterised. Its chief quality is:

"...cet esprit universel de vanité, qui fait l'esprit dominant du siècle; car nous ne sommes plus dans ces jours de l'âge d'or."

1. *ibid.*, I, p. 117.
2. *ibid.*, I, p. 118.
3. *ibid.*, I, pp. 124-5.

où les sens se passaient du secours de l'imagination."(1)

At least the shadow of Mme de Merteuil passes across the stage when Dolbreuse asks,

"Où trouver autre part que chez les femmes accoutumées à figurer sur le grand théâtre de la société ce talent d'annoblir un commerce de galanteries, de lui donner toute l'importance, d'y mettre tout le génie d'une négociation d'état, d'engager, de conduire une intrigue comme il plaît, & de la rompre quand il plaît, sans laisser à celui qu'on quitte d'autre alternative que celle du silence ou du ridicule?"(2)

This is not the second intriguing passage to which we referred a moment or two ago, however. A far closer parallel with Les Liaisons than is to be found either in these general reflections on the state of society, or in the affair with the Marquise de *** appears in Dolbreuse's liaison with the Comtesse de

It could be argued, perhaps, that the story of this liaison with the Comtesse is a cautionary tale. If this be so, then one can only reply that the moral is a dubious one - it appears to be summed up in Dolbreuse's description of his wife's reaction after he has sown his wild oats and returned to her:

"Elle avoit assez de connoissance du coeur humain, pour juger que je l'adorois toujours, que la saison des folies étoit passée, & ne reviendrait jamais pour moi.... Femmes, qui vous répandez en plaintes amères, en noms injurieux contre vos maris infidèles, que vous connoissez peu le coeur humain!"(3)

One cannot escape the impression that the author revels in the account of this liaison, and the excuses he presents are, to say the least, no stronger than those of Laclos:

1. *ibid.*, I, p. 138.
2. *ibid.*, I, p. 151.
3. *ibid.*, II, pp. 60-2.

"Si je m'arrête un peu sur le tableau qui va suivre, ce n'est point pour fixer l'imagination du lecteur sur des images voluptueuses, mais pour dévoiler l'art dangereux d'un séducteur, & prémunir l'innocence contre les attentats du vice..."(1)

The reader of the prefaces to Les Liaisons will feel he has heard all this before, an impression which will be strengthened when he comes across this definition of the Comtesse's mistake:

"Elle ne voyoit pas que le méchant qu'on plaint, est le tigre qu'on flatte, & que le bien accueillir, c'est se nommer sa victime."(2)

This could not be much closer to Laclos's claim that one of the purposes of his novel is to illustrate the notion that

"... toute femme qui consent à recevoir dans sa société un homme sans mœurs, finit par en devenir la victime."(3)

The fate of the Comtesse is indeed similar in several respects to that of the Présidente de Tourvel. Valmont's aim to acquire complete dominance over the Présidente, to force her to confess her desire and give herself to him in full awareness of what she is doing is remarkably close to Dolbrouse's attitude towards the Comtesse:

"... la petite vanité de plaire un instant, l'insipide vœu d'avoir une femme de plus, ne m'avoit point engagé dans cette pénible intrigue. Les triomphes du moment, les plaisirs faciles, ne faisoient que glisser sur une âme comme la mienne. J'aspirois à la volupté plus recherchée d'émouvoir par degrés un jeune cœur, d'en bannir tous les scrupules, tous les obstacles à l'assouvissement du désir, & d'y porter tout l'embrasement d'une passion violente."(sic)(4)

1. ibid., I, pp. 155-6. In fact, it should be noted, innocence (in the person of the Comtesse) does here succumb to the wiles of vice (Dolbrouse). Moreover, the Comtesse is not even punished for yielding, as it might be argued the Présidente is, for although she appears to die of remorse, in fact Dolbrouse discovers that she has not died at all, but is alive and well! Both she and her husband forgive the seducer (II, pp. 28-44).

2. ibid., I, p. 168.

3. O.C., p. 32, Préface du Rédacteur.

4. Dolbrouse, I, pp. 164-5.

Secondly, the fact that despite all this the Comtesse sometimes inspires in Dolbreuse "un sentiment de justice & de respect qui glaçoit (ses) sens"(1) recalls the question of whether Valmont does have something of a genuine affection for the Présidente, as Mme de Merteuil alleges. Thirdly, the Comtesse's attitude towards Dolbreuse is remarkably similar in some ways to that of Mme de Tourvel towards Valmont. Mme de Tourvel considers that

"M. de Valmont n'est peut-être qu'un exemple de plus du danger des liaisons"(2),

and that

"ce serait une belle conversion à faire."(3)

Of the Comtesse, Dolbreuse tells us that

"...elle vouloit me faire abjurer ce qu'elle appeloit mes erreurs, & pour cela il fallut nous voir plus souvent... Elle me croyoit séduit & non pas corrompu; elle vouloit me corriger."(4)

In other words, both are to some degree victims of auto-séduction.

It is not suggested that there was necessarily any influence, direct or even indifect, of Les Liaisons dangereuses upon Dolbreuse. The very proximity in time of the two works might well be seen as an argument against that. What we have said about Dolbreuse should, however, serve as evidence of two things: firstly, that Les Liaisons is by no means an isolated phenomenon, but that its basic plot is a literary commonplace of the eighteenth century, and secondly, that it is impossible to draw a rigid

1. Dolbreuse, I, p. 165.

2. L.D., XXII, 74.

3. L.D., VIII, 49.

4. Dolbreuse, I, p. 167.

line of demarcation between the rational, analytical eroticists and the sentimental eroticists stemming from Prévost and Rousseau. It is not our function to pass any kind of judgement on the respective moral worth of the two schools. Artistically, however, there can at least be little doubt concerning the superiority of Les Liaisons dangereuses over the formless, weakly characterised Dolbreuse, with its cliché-ridden exclamatory style.

Loaisel de Tréogat is a contemporary of Laclos's. So are the two writers whom we propose to examine in the remainder of this chapter, two writers who, together with the author of Les Liaisons, form the "trio honteux" of which V. L. Saulnier speaks(1), namely Rétif de la Bretonne and the Marquis de Sade. It will not always be possible, in considering these writers in terms of Laclos, to speak with complete confidence of direct influence, but we consider that at the very least it should be possible to point to a certain community of spirit in certain respects, despite the manifest differences which separate these three writers.

IX

To suggest that there are any similarities from the point of view of form between the works of the hyper-prolific Rétif de la Bretonne,

1. V. L. Saulnier, La Littérature du Siècle philosophique, Paris, 1948, p. 93.

writing and re-writing a romanticised autobiography, and the one novel of Laclos, and that one of the most clinical novels ever written in the French language, would quite plainly be utterly ludicrous. Rétif has been called, with some justice,

"... un des plus robustes cyclopes de la forge de Jean-Jacques." (1)

We know of the esteem accorded to Rousseau by Laclos. There is at least a superficial resemblance between Laclos and the "Rousseau du ruisseau" (2) in the sense that the distortion undergone by the ideas of Jean-Jacques in the mind of Rétif led Grimm to say of him,

"On ne se fait point l'idée d'une tête plus singulièrement organisée, d'un mélange plus étonnant de platitude et de génie, d'ignorance et d'instruction, de sagesse et de folie." (3)

It would be unfair to use such extreme language about Laclos, and it is true that the influence of Rousseau is by no means as all-pervading in his case as it is in that of Rétif. Not all the works of Laclos outside Les Liaisons bear the imprint of Rousseau, by any means, but it is certainly true that there is a marked contrast between the genius shown in that novel and the platitudes of some of his other works, especially his fragments on the education of women.

Yet it is not primarily their common debt to Rousseau which concerns us in these remarks on Laclos and Rétif. Armand Bégue brings us nearer to the point when he suggests that Rétif was influenced by Marivaux. Bégue's reference to "ces galanteries pesantes et fausses, ces compliments contournés et ces discours pompeux" which, he says, "sont bien du Marivaux

1. Grimm et al., Corr. litt., June 1776, XI, 276.
2. ibid., XIII, 107.
3. ibid., XI, 277.

déformé", his view that Le Paysan pervers owes its inspiration as well as, no doubt, its title, to Le Paysan parvenu(1), brings Rétif closer to the analytical tradition of erotic or near-erotic literature which we have been examining. It is impossible to put it more strongly than this: no one, even with the greatest effort in the world, could positively integrate the shapeless, sentimental works of Rétif with this tradition. Servais Étienne remarks,

"Laclos et Rétif sont, si l'on veut, deux élèves de Richardson; tous deux, en outre, lecteurs assidus de Crébillon et Rousseau, desquels ils ont profité ou pâti fort inégalement."(2)

This coupling of the name of Rétif with those of Laclos and Crébillon makes the point even more clear. Paul Meister adds another name with which we are familiar when he observes that Rétif, Laclos and Duclos all thought of the novel in terms which are summed up in the phrase from Sade's Idée sur les Romans, "un tableau des mœurs séculaires"(3), although Sade would not have welcomed the juxtaposition of Rétif's name with his(4). Rétif knew Laclos's novel(5), and although it is impossible to prove a direct influence, there are rapprochements of some interest to be made between certain passages of the two writers.

1. A. Bégue, État présent des Études sur Rétif de la Bretonne, Paris, 1948, p. 100.

2. S. Étienne, op. cit., p. 385.

3. P. Meister, op. cit., p. 178. Cf. Sade, Idée sur les Romans, édition Palimugre, n.d., n.p. (Paris, 1947), p. 42.

4. The two of them were bitter enemies: cf. Rétif on Sade in Monsieur Nicolas..., Paris, 1924, IV, 261 (9me Époque) (The work was first published in 1796-7): "... n'ayant pas le coeur corrompu, comme l'auteur d'Aline, je peins l'amour, et jamais la débauche, encore moins la cruauté," or a footnote in the same work, (III, 172, 5me Époque) referring to Justine as "du scélérat de Sade." Cf. too Sade on Rétif (Idée sur les Romans, p. 39): "... un style bas et rampant, des aventures dégoûtantes, toujours puisées dans la plus mauvaise compagnie; nul autre mérite enfin, que celui d'une prolixité... dont les seuls marchands de poivres le remercieront."

Although Rétif was prepared to defend Laclos's personal reputation against identification with Mme de Merteuil or Valmont(1), he expresses his view of Les Liaisons dangereuses in an anecdote related in Monsieur Nicolas:

"Sous mes yeux, une mère imprudente, après avoir laissé traîner les Liaisons dangereuses, trouvant sa fille à les lire, lui arracha ce roman détestable au milieu du IIIe volume. La fille, âgée de quinze ans (l'oserai-je dire!), le désirait avec tant d'ardeur, qu'un homme de quarante-cinq ans obtint d'elle la dernière faveur, à condition qu'il le lui apporterait... O mères! soyez prudentes."(2)

Is this the end of the anecdote? We are told no more. For instance, what was the reaction of the fifteen-year-old girl in this story, which so directly contrasts with that concerning the "bonne mère" in Laclos's own Préface du Rédacteur, when she read the dénouement? We might well ask wherein lay the imprudence of this particular mother: in leaving the book lying around in the first place, or in taking it away before her daughter had finished it. We must conclude that since Rétif describes the work as a "roman détestable", it is the former alternative he wishes us to accept! We have no desire to reopen the question of the morality of Les Liaisons, and indeed we have already said enough on the moral question for the reader not to expect us to raise the problem of the relative moral worth of the works of Rétif and Laclos. We shall merely point out what is the nature of the moral claims made by Rétif for his writings.

The first point to be made is that Rétif gives what is perhaps the most extreme expression of the confusion between pleasure and virtue to

1. Cf. *supra*, p. 649, n. 5.
2. Monsieur Nicolas, vol. I, p. 179, 3me Époque.

which we have already referred more than once:

"J'ai un principe qu'il faut avouer: c'est que je pense que le bonheur est tout... Le plaisir est la vertu, sous un nom plus gai"(1),

or again,

"Un des plus grands torts de la Religion Chrétienne, c'est d'avoir anéanti le plaisir et créé le libertinage, en détruisant toutes les institutions qui donnaient la science du premier."(2)

If Rétif is here principally expressing his devotion of Rousseau(3), it remains true that this was a problem which exercised many thinkers of the eighteenth century(4).

What is constant in Rétif, just as much as in Laclos, is a desire to justify his writings from the moral standpoint, a desire which is bound up with considerations of "le naturel", or realism. Let us once again examine Monsieur Nicolas. In the 8me Époque, Rétif writes,

"Indigné de voir les livres consacrés au mensonge, j'ai voulu faire un livre vrai, entièrement vrai d'un bout à l'autre"(5),

and

"C'est un livre utile qu'on lit ici, et s'il est amusant, ce n'est que son second mérite."(6)

Elsewhere in the same work the intimate connection between morality and realism in Rétif's eyes is laid down:

"Je préfère la vérité à la belle morale d'imagination, parce que la vérité seule est la morale."(7)

1. ibid., vol. IV, p. 122, 8me Époque.
2. ibid., vol. IV, p. 148, 8 me Époque.
3. Cf. ibid., vol. IV, p. 166, 8me Époque.
4. Cf., for example, the Diderot of the Pensées philosophiques, nos. I-V, etc.
5. Monsieur Nicolas, vol. IV, p. 106, 8me Époque.
6. ibid., vol. IV, p. 175, 8me Époque.
7. ibid., vol. III, p. 72, 5me Époque.

In the last resort, the main plank of Rétif's defence on the moral question must be the same as with Laclos - that to be shown vice is to love virtue:

"Je rends l'homme tel qu'il est, et non tel qu'il devrait être."(1)

Rétif also demonstrates, as we have suggested that Laclos does by implication in the case of Mme de Tourvel, that virtue is not always where it seems to be:

"Oui, oui, Zéphire prostituée était vertueuse, et tant d'honnêtes gens ne le sont pas."(2)

Rétif, then, does not set out to show us paragons of virtue. To the accusation, "Vous montrez le vice trop à découvert", his reply is simple:

"Moi! je brave les Puristes, pour démasquer le vice, et en instruire les Parents."(3)

He makes a similar claim for his collection of nouvelles entitled Les Contemporaines, which began to appear in 1780, where he writes,

"Les Contemporaines, comme les lois, ont deux parties: par l'une j'encourage à la vertu que je peins aimable; par l'autre, je donne horreur du vice que je représente hideux; ces deux manières sont inséparables et sont également utiles: que dis-je! elles sont également nécessaires."(4)

As an example of the first type we may mention Les vingt Épouses des vingt Associés, in which we are treated to a Utopian community possessing all the virtues set up in the heart of Paris(5), and as an example of the second type there is La jolie Agréministe, in which a country girl from Normandy comes to Paris, is seduced, and falls into prostitution, when she is rescued and made to see

"... combien le bonheur que la vertu procure est au-dessus de toutes les jouissances amères et trompeuses du vice."(6)

1. ibid., vol. III, p. 42, 5me Époque.
2. ibid., vol. III, p. 129, 5me Époque.
3. ibid., vol. IV, p. 86, 8me Époque.
4. Les Contemporaines, in l'Oeuvre de Restif de la Bretonne, 9 vols., Paris, 1930-32, II, 324.
5. ibid., II, p-32.
6. ibid., II, 98-115.

It is, of course, quite true that nowhere in Les Liaisons is Laclos as openly moralising as this, but then one remembers the plan of a second novel in the style of the Confessions of Rousseau... Rétif was continually defending himself against the charge of corrupting the reader, and Maurice Heine draws upon a particularly vivid footnote to the 7^{me} Époque of Monsieur Nicolas in order to defend Rétif's old enemy Sade against similar charges(1). This footnote, addressed to the puriste is worthy of note in connection not only with Rétif himself, but with Laclos and all the other writers who have been the object of similar attentions. It is a remark which seems relevant to the entire question of pornography and pornographers:

"Citoyen censeur, je vous dénonce des coupables encore plus dangereux: ce sont les couteliers, ils font de grands coutelas, selon eux, pour découper des tranches d'aloyau; de gigot. Eh! les scélérats qu'ils sont! ils ne suivent pas le couteau qu'ils ont vendu: un méchant en poignarde; un voleur en assassine! Vite une loi, qui supprime la coutellerie, et condamne à mort tous ceux qui feront des couteaux!"

It may be argued that this is an irresponsible remark. It is certainly an overstatement if an amusing one. The degree to which any book can be said to corrupt its reader remains, however, to be demonstrated.

It is to Le Paysan et la Paysanne pervertis(2) that we must turn in search of definite parallels of theme. Before doing so, it is worthwhile to mention that one point which separates Rétif from Laclos, apart from the former's prolixity and his excessive Rousseauism, is the fact he draws his characters from a far wider social range than does Laclos.

1. M. Heine, Le Marquis de Sade, Paris, 1950, p. 298. Text of a lecture at the Club du Faubourg, 14 May, 1923.
2. Le Paysan perverti dates from 1775, La Paysanne pervertie from 1784. The definitive version, the Paysan-Paysanne was published in 1787. Our references are to Maurice Talmeyr's abbreviated modern edition, Paris, 1932.

The atmosphere in Rétif's writings is, and in more than one way, less rarefied than the atmosphere of Les Liaisons dangereuses.

Armand Bégué makes a comparison between Rétif's renegade monk, Gaudet d'Arras, and Valmont, and associates with these two names that of Stendhal's Julien Sorel(1). F. C. Green, in Mimuet, although he emphasises above all Balzacian elements in Rétif's writings, observes:

"In the Paysan-Paysanne one can detect echoes of (the) struggle between the Casanova and the Saint-Preux who wrestled for mastery in the soul of this amazing creature."(2)

This struggle is that between Gaudet d'Arras and Edmond. Whilst one would agree with the general sentiment of Green's observation, one is inclined to feel that so far as this semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical conflict is concerned, the choice of Casanova's name as foil to that of Saint-Preux is too weak. Gaudet d'Arras is a considerably more intellectually vigorous character than Casanova shows himself to be in his memoirs, and perhaps Valmont's name is more appropriate in this context than that of the Italian - or perhaps Gaudet d'Arras can rather be seen as a male Mme de Merteuil. Green himself acknowledges the strength of Gaudet's character. Gaudet's life is governed quite as much as Mme de Merteuil's by rigid principles.

Green implicitly suggests a possible comparison between Gaudet's relationship with Edmond and the project toyed with by Mme de Merteuil of making Océile de Volanges her pupil. As Green points out, the Franciscan Gaudet, essentially an "intellectual"(3), renounces his vows

1. A. Bégué, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
2. F. C. Green, Mimuet, London, 1935, p. 434.
3. *ibid.*, p. 441.

"in order to carry into practice a certain atheistic philosophy of life in which he has long dreamed in the silence of his convent. In Edmond he sees the predestined instrument of his schemes, so Gaudet resolves to mould the boy's destiny, to refashion and dominate his mind and, incidentally, to assure his material fortune. But first of all he must be cured of his 'prejudiced' and, with this in view, the monk subjects Edmond to an insidious course of training in libertinism.... Seen from the peak of his immense intellectual pride, the world consists of two kinds of men: the plantes mouvantes or those who are content merely to vegetate, and the fleurs who, like himself, flourish in a special climate of their own, a climate charged with lust for action and conquest."(1)

Green is certainly right when he says that for Gaudet "the besetting sin of his age is its fly-blown sensibility."(2) In Gaudet we see the ideas of thinkers such as Diderot, D'Holback and La Mettrie being applied to sexual libertinism. His principles recall the dislike for Christian asceticism to which we have already referred in works like Diderot's Pensées philosophiques(3):

"J'ai souvent cherché pourquoi il se trouvait des hommes qui attaquaient les plaisirs, et tout ce qui peut flatter les sens.... La Vérité est que nous sommes faits pour être heureux, que nous y tendons sans cesse, et que le plaisir est la route du bonheur. Tout ce qui est vrai plaisir est permis."(4)

Compare this remark, and certain others of Gaudet, such as the following -

"De ce qu'on nomme amour, je n'estime que le physique, dans la modération convenable"(5) -

with certain of the observations of La Mettrie, for example

"Les divers états de l'âme sont donc toujours corrélatifs à ceux du corps (sic)"(6),

or

"Soyez seulement habile économe de vos plaisirs..."(7)

1. ibid., pp. 437-41.

2. ibid., p. 442.

3. cf. supra, p. 675, n. 4.

4. Le Paysan et La Paysanne pervertis, pp. 71-2.

5. ibid., p. 74.

5. La Mettrie, L'Homme machine, Loyde, 1748, p. 43. Cf. infra for his definition of "l'âme".

6. La Mettrie, L'Art de Jouir, in L'Homme machine, suivi de l'art de Jouir, Paris, 1921, p. 171.

The community of spirit is apparent and, moreover, the association of Gaudet and La Mettrie leads us back to the atmosphere in which exist the characters of Laclos's novel.

If La Mettrie concludes that

"... le corps n'est qu'une horloge, dont le nouveau chyle est l'Horloger" (1)

and that "l'homme est une machine" (2), Valmont and Mme de Merteuil think that they can become the operators of these machines so far as the other people with whom they come into contact are concerned. Their pleasure is intellectual. La Mettrie writes, in L'Art de Jouir,

"Si les plaisirs du corps sont si vifs, quels sont ceux de l'âme" (3)

-- but to appreciate this properly one must bear in mind La Mettrie's definition of "l'âme":

"L'âme n'est donc qu'un vain terme dont on n'a point d'idée, & dont un bon esprit ne doit se servir que pour nommer la partie qui pense en nous" (4).

More specifically on the subject of sexual relationships, La Mettrie gives expression to an idea with which a roué such as Valmont or a rouée such as Mme de Merteuil would be in accord:

"J'aime qu'on me résiste et non qu'on me prévienne, mais avec art, ni trop, ni trop peu; j'aime une certaine violence, mais douce, qui excite le plaisir sans le déconcerter." (5)

Resistance, difficulties, these are part of the spice of seduction, as we have shown in connection with Les Liaisons dangereuses but at the same time

1. La Mettrie, L'Homme machine, p. 119.
2. ibid., p. 147.
3. La Mettrie, L'Art de Jouir, p. 176.
4. La Mettrie, L'Homme machine, p. 103.
5. La Mettrie, L'Art de Jouir, p. 194.

the aim of the seducer is to treat the seduced as a thing. Gaudet d'Arras puts it succinctly:

"... les femmes sont toujours des enfants, et, en cela même, elles sont encore ce qu'elles doivent être"(1);

or again,

".... les femmes sont une monnaie qui doit passer de main en main"(2).

Such remarks as these, taken in conjunction with certain observations of Mme de Merteuil, clearly illustrate the truth of F. C. Green's view that

"Gaudet is more than a character of fiction; he incarnates an extreme mood of French civilisation, combining, as he does, the dual force of eighteenth-century rationalism and sensibility. A super-philosopher, he blends the epicureanism of the earlier libertines with the fanatical humanitarianism of materialists like Diderot and D'Holbach. For the Rousseauistic and chivalrous sentimentality of Edmond he has nothing but contempt. Sexual love, as conceived by Jean-Jacques, he despises, because it implies the sacrifice of man's individualism and, in some sort, the degradation of the intellect..."(3)

A similar motivation lies behind Mme de Merteuil's love of a well thought-out plan when someone tries to seduce her, for woman's favourite passions,

"la gloire de la défense et le plaisir de la défaite" must be respected:

"Pour moi, je l'avoue, une des choses qui me flattent le plus, est une attaque vive et bien faite, ou tout se succède avec ordre quoique avec rapidité;... qui sait garder la violence jusque dans les choses que nous accordons..."(4)

Whereas, of course, Mme de Merteuil would certainly not accept Gaudet's view of women as applying to herself, she has some very scathing things to say about what she calls "ces femmes à délire, it qui se disent à sentiment"(5), and on occasion expresses herself about her sex in terms which

1. Le Paysan et la Paysanne pervertis, p. 122.
2. ibid., p. 143.
3. F. C. Green, Minuet, pp. 445-6.
4. L.D., X, 52.
5. L.D., LXXXI, 100.

recall Gaudet's division of the human race into two types, the plantes mouvantes and the fleurs, and which also recall the terminology of La Mettrie. She abandons all hope of adopting Cécile as her pupil, and writes to Valmont as follows:

"Je me désintéresse entièrement sur son compte.... Elle dénote, surtout, une faiblesse de caractère presque toujours incurable et qui s'oppose à tout; de sorte que, tandis que nous nous occuperions à former cette petite fille pour l'intrigue, nous n'en ferions qu'une femme facile. Or, je ne connais rien de si plat que cette facilité de bêtise, qui se rend sans savoir ni comment ni pourquoi, uniquement parce qu'on l'attaque et qu'elle ne sait pas résister. Ces sortes de femmes ne sont absolument que des machines à plaisir."(1)

There are certain other similarities, perhaps more superficial, between some details of the plots of the Paysan Paysanne and Les Liaisons dangereuses. Edmond is convinced by the arguments of Gaudet, and his first conquest is that of his young cousin, Laure. Valmont possesses Cécile by means of a ruse; similarly Edmond possesses Laure, by saying that the only candle available to light him to his bed is the one he has lent her. She retires to bed, and then calls Edmond back to take the candle:

"je suis rentré sur-le-champ, j'ai laissé tomber le chandelier, j'ai mis le pied sur la mèche, comme par mégarde, et j'ai paru très fâché de cet incident. Ensuite, je me suis approché du lit de l'aimable fille, pour lui souhaiter le bonsoir et l'embrasser. Un baiser, deux baisers! La petite cousine souriait...

"Après avoir calmé ses premières craintes, comme je n'étais pas venu là pour causer, j'ai risqué quelques libertés. Sans doute on ne lui a pas bien appris dans son Couvent, à combien de périls divers est exposé la timide innocence, et tout ce qu'elle a à garder pour n'être pas surprise: car, portant toute son attention, toutes ses forces, à se défendre d'un baiser, qui n'était qu'une fausse attaque, tout le reste était laissé sans défense; le moyen de n'en pas profiter! J'ai donc changé ma marche et

Une liberté! La petite cousine se défendait, mais si maladroitement!... Pour dérober son sein, elle livrait tout le reste..."

(Le Paysan et la Paysanne pervertis, p. 78. Edmond to Gaudet d'Arras)

sur-le champ j'ai pris poste..."

(Les Liaisons dangereuses, XCVI, 242. The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil)

and, the following morning:

"Aujourd'hui, la petite personne est distraite, rêveuse. La leçon qu'elle a reçu hier l'occupe, et tout à l'heure elle est venue timidement auprès de moi; elle n'osait lever les yeux."

(Le paysan et la Paysanne pervertis, loc. cit.)

"... j'aime, de passion, les mines de lendemain. Vous n'avez pas l'idée de celle-ci. C'était un embarras dans le maintien! une difficulté dans la marche! des yeux toujours baissés, et si gros et si battus! Cette figure si ronde s'était tant allongée! rien n'était si plaisant."

(Les Liaisons dangereuses, XCVI, 244)

These passages serve to indicate both the basic similarity of situation in the two works, and the greater incisiveness of tone and analysis of the writing of Laclos. Laclos says more than Rétif, and gives us here an excellent illustration of his ability to be precise without using the mot cru.

Rétif and Laclos both represent an enigma of the eighteenth century.

Both of them in a curious way straddle the two main streams of intellectual development of the period, the increasingly scientific, humanistic approach of the philosophes, and the desire for a new morality based on the heart, the clearest expression of which is to be found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau(1).

Neither of them, any more than Diderot or La Mettrie, succeeded in expressing

1. As A. Hoog puts it in his very interesting preface to L.D. (Bateau ivre, Paris, 2 vols., n.d. (1946). in this novel "Laclos compromet d'un coup ce difficile équilibre que le siècle finissant essaie de maintenir entre la tradition de l'intelligence et les frénésies nouvelles du sentiment." (p. xiii)

in their writings a really coherent, integrated approach to the problems of human psychology. Both of them display a fascination for characters who represent a rationalistic esprit de système, and yet both of them feel that ultimately this attitude is inadequate. In many ways they are poles apart, but in this respect at least they sometimes come close together and place themselves in a tradition which has long roots leading back into the past, to Mme de La Fayette and even to Corneille.

X

Our first task in tackling the problem of the Marquis de Sade is to make it clear what it is that we understand by sadism. Immediately we have to make one very important qualification. Dr. Benjamin Karpman points out that

"Pioneer investigators in the field of abnormal psychology, e.g. Krafft-Ebing, talked about sadism and masochism, regarding these as two separate and distinct perversions of the sexual instinct. We know now, however, that they are simply bipolar manifestations of the same paraphilia. We speak of sadists or of masochists only in terms of the preponderant trend exhibited by particular individuals, just as in homosexuality we speak of active and passive types; but every sadist possesses certain elements of masochism and every masochist possesses certain elements of sadism..."(1)

Thus, sado-masochism, or algolagnia, is a better term than sadism. Marcel Ruff has another useful definition. He describes algolagnia as

"... le désir d'associer à la volupté (sexuelle en particulier) une souffrance infligée ou subie, ou tout au moins sa représentation fictive ou symbolique."(2)

It is in this wider sense that we understand and use the term sadism, a term which has the advantage of being less bulky and awkward than either

1. B. Karpman, The Sexual Offender and his Offenses: Etiology, Pathology, Psychodynamics and Treatment, New York, 1960, p. 355.
2. M. Ruff, op. cit., p. 47.

of the alternatives, algolagnia or sado-masochism.

One further general point deserves mention before we move on to rather more particular considerations. Karpman observes of sado-masochism:

"It is closely related to homosexuality, usually latent homosexuality, but sometimes overt homosexuality, and to fetishism(1)..., and the root of it, as of practically all the paraphilias, is the reaction to the fear of incest."(2)

How does all this tie up with Laclos, and with the eighteenth-century novel? Suffice it to say for the moment that in the case of Mme de Merteuil and Valmont we are given no indication of incestuous elements in their respective psychological make-ups. On the other hand, the theme of incest is quite an important one in Sade (for example, in Aline et Valcour) and in Rétif (for example, in Monsieur Nicolas). The importance of the theme of homosexuality in Sade's work is quite obvious(3) and, although less obvious, it is to be found in Les Liaisons dangereuses in the relationship between Mme de Merteuil and Cécile de Volanges.

Algolagnia, of course, was not an invention of the Marquis de Sade. Ruff finds its literary expression, before Sade, in, amongst other works, the first part of Richardson's Pamela, in Marivaux's La Voiture embourbée, in Diderot's La Religieuse, in Dorât's Les Sacrifices de l'Amour, and in Rétif's Le Paysan perverti. And, quite rightly, he includes in this list Laclos's Les Liaisons dangereuses.(4) That algolagnia, according to Ruff's definition which we have just quoted, finds expression in Les Liaisons is clear. As an

1. Cf. Rétif de la Bretonne in this light.

2. B. Karpman, op. cit., p. 355.

3. Geoffrey Gorer (The Life and Ideas of the Marquis de Sade, revised edn., London, 1953, pp. 216-8) points to evidence of homosexuality in Sade himself.

4. M. Ruff, op. cit., pp. 47-8.

initial justification for comparing Laclos with the man who gave his name to sadism, we need do no more than draw the reader's attention to Valmont's reaction to the picture presented by Cécile after her first night with him, in the passage quoted in connection with Retif: "... Cette figure si ronde s'était tant allongée, rien n'était si plaisant." And this is by no means the only example in the novel of suffering, or at least "sa représentation fictive ou symbolique", being associated with pleasure.

It is proposed here to make a dual approach to the question of any possible relationship between Sade and Laclos. The first line of enquiry will be largely biographical; the second will consist of an examination of certain of Sade's works of fiction in terms of Laclos.

The first argument centres around the possibility of a meeting having taken place between the two writers, and in this connection we shall examine an unrealised plan for a novel by the Marquis. For the basic points of this argument we have to turn to Gilbert Lély(1). Lély points out that although in his Idee sur les Romans Sade passes in review the most famous - and some less famous - works of imagination from antiquity up to the end of the eighteenth century, he does not even mention Les Liaisons dangereuses, "pourtant si proches de son système et dont il ne pouvait méconnaître le caractère de chef-d'oeuvre."(2) Before going on to give Lély's two suggested explanations of this fact, it should be pointed out that the omission of Laclos is not the only gap in the panorama presented by Sade. Another, equally glaring, omission is that of Duclos. This fact, however, in view of what

1. G. Lély, Sade a-t-il été jaloux de Laclos? in Nouvelle Revue française, 1er juin 1953, pp. 1124-29.

2. ibid., p. 1124.

we have already had to say about Laclos and Duclos, need not necessarily weaken Lély's first hypothesis concerning the absence of any mention of Laclos's name, namely literary jealousy. Indeed, it could strengthen it.

The second of Lély's hypotheses seems to us extremely tenuous. On the 27th March, 1794, Sade was transferred from prison at Saint-Lazare to Picpus, where Laclos had been incarcerated since the 5th November of the previous year. Sade was released on the 15th October, Laclos on the 3rd December. In other words, the two of them shared the same prison for almost seven months. Lély argues that it is scarcely possible to believe that during this period they did not come into contact, a view which is not unreasonable. But he goes on to argue that, especially in view of the "caractère emporté" of Sade, it is quite possible that they quarrelled, and that this quarrel was still in the Marquis's mind some years later when he wrote his Idee sur les Romans. The implication, they would be that Sade's resentment took the form of a deliberate exclusion of all mention of Laclos's novel.

It must be said at once that, apart from the fact that they were both in Picpus for some time together, there is no evidence whatsoever for this somewhat fanciful theory. As we have just said, Laclos is not the only omission, and moreover there are no grounds to believe that Sade's usual technique towards his literary enemies was to pass them over in silence. The passage on Rétif de la Bretonne which we have already quoted

from the Idée sur les Romans(1) is in itself sufficient proof of this.

Lély then produces the text of a Plan d'un roman en lettres drawn up by Sade in 1803-4 in which he detects parallels with Les Liaisons, and although he admits that we cannot, in all objectivity, say that these parallels indicate jealousy on Sade's part, he does go on to argue that

"... toutefois, nous croyons pouvoir en inférer que le dessein du marquis de Sade a été un instant de refaire le roman des Liaisons dangereuses",

and possibly to show that he could outdo Laclos in a field which Sade considered to be his own(2).

It seems at this stage appropriate to examine Sade's plan, and the more easily to make our points we reproduce it here in full(3):

"PLAN D'UN ROMAN EN LETTRES

Clémence, jeune innocente, victime des pièges qu'on lui tend.

Théodrine, femme corrompue et qui coopère à la perte de Clémence.

Delville, homme immoral qui s'entend avec Théodrine pour la séduction de Clémence.

M. de Gocour, homme honnête et sage qui combat les systèmes de Delville et s'oppose tant qu'il peut aux scélératesses de ce jeune homme.

Mme de Roseville, femme raisonnable, vertueuse, s'entend avec M. de Gocour pour le même objet.

IDÉE DE LA CORRESPONDANCE DE CE ROMAN EN LETTRES

Clémence se confie à Théodrine qui la trompe, qui affecte de la vertu avec elle et qui, se montrant telle qu'elle est à Delville, son ancien amant, trahit à chaque instant cette jeune personne. M. de

1. Cf. supra, p. 649, n. 4.

2. Lély, op. cit., p. 1128.

3. We have taken the text from another, and very useful, publication of Lély, in which he repeats the arguments we have summarised above: Sade, Cahiers personnels (1803-4), publiés pour la première fois sur les manuscrits autographes inédits avec une préface et des notes par Gilbert Lély, Paris, 1953, pp. 67-70.

Gocour a dévoilé cette funeste intrigue et fait tout ce qu'il peut pour l'entraver. Il s'entend avec Mme de Roseville pour cela. Les événements immoraux s'écriront entre Delville et Théodrine, les conseils et les confidences, tantôt de Clémence à Théodrine, tantôt de Clémence à Mme de Roseville, car elle est la dupe de Théodrine. Le dénouement sera retracé par M. de Gocour à Mme de Roseville, qui se sont connus chez les parents de Clémence, mais qui ont eu peu de relations entre eux pendant l'action. M. de Gocour apprend à Mme de Roseville, à la fin, tous les malheurs dont Clémence, sera devenue la victime par les instigations de Delville et de Théodrine. Mais il faut une intrigue à tout cela, et je n'en vois d'autre que de donner un amant à Clémence, que lui ravira Théodrine par méchanceté, pendant que, dans le même principe, Delville cherchera à avoir Clémence, et qu'il l'aura pour la perdre. Maintenant il faut un objet à ces atrocités, et je n'en vois d'autre que de rendre Théodrine parente de Clémence, dont la perte ou la mort l'enrichirait et lui ferait épouser Delville, qui n'aurait joué l'amant de Clémence que pour la perdre et la faire mourir de chagrin.

COSTUMES DES PERSONNAGES ET LEUR AGE

Clémence, 16 ans, jolie, crédule, naïve, franche, et de l'esprit naturel.

Son amant, 20 ans, etc. (il faut le créer)

Théodrine, 32 ans, beaucoup d'esprit, de méchanceté, style paradoxal, jouant avec toutes les vertus et sachant se parer de toutes au besoin.

Delville, roué, scélérat, 35 ans, un esprit du même genre que celui de Théodrine, qu'il sert par seul esprit de ruserie.

M. de Gocour, philosophe, sensible, éloquent, plein de sagesse, d'excellents principes, 45 ans.

Mme de Roseville, 40 ans, encore belle, d'une grande sévérité de mœurs et de principes.

Clémence doit être orpheline et, pour ainsi dire, confiée aux soins de Théodrine, sa tante, et qui hériterait d'elle si cette jeune personne venait à mourir; elle est sa tante, sa tutrice, son chaperon, etc., et elle abuse de tout cela pour perdre ce malheureux enfant."

How far is it possible to see this plan as indicative of a desire to "refaire les roman des Liaisons dangereuses"? Lély sees Theodrine as a reincarnation of Mme de Merteuil, and draws parallels between Delville and

Valmont on the one hand and between Clémence and Cécile on the other. He recognises the absence of a Mme de Tourvel, arguing that it is here, and in the banality of the motives he attributes to Théodrine, that Sade departs from Laclos.

Dealing with the last point first, it is, of course, true that the motivation of Mme de Merteuil is immeasurably more subtle than that of Théodrine, in so far as we can base^a valid judgement on this brief plan. The absence of a Mme de Tourvel is a more serious, but not a disastrous, blow to Lély's theory - as we have been at some pains to suggest, it is the Valmont - Mme de Merteuil relationship and not the seduction of the Presidente which is at the heart of Les Liaisons dangereuses.

It is true that in the Delville-Théodrine relationship we have something which seems to bear a resemblance to that between the Vicomte and the Marquise of Laclos's novel. Their alliance for the seduction of Clémence, Théodrine's show of virtue towards Clémence, and her frankness towards Delville (who is her ex-lover), all these elements have counterparts in Les Liaisons. Cécile, too, is extremely young, like the sixteen-year-old Clémence, and no doubt if one is not too precise in one's terms she could technically be described as a "jeune innocente". Although one could apply most of Sade's epithets concerning Clémence to Cécile, the term "franche" seems, however, singularly inappropriate. Cécile, moreover, is no orphan, nor is Mme de Merteuil related to her, and the way in which Mme de Merteuil wins her confidence is incomparably more subtle than the device offered by Sade, who places Clémence in Théodrine's power from the outset.

Whole dimensions of Laclos's novel seem to be lacking in Sade's plan. Of these, the absence of a Mme de Volanges is but one. The descriptions of M. de Gocour, "homme honnête et sage", "philosophe, sensible, plein de sagesse, d'excellents principes", and of Mme de Roseville, "femme raisonnable, vertueuse", "d'une grande sévérité de mœurs et de principes", seem to offer us a clear division of the world into black and white, which contrasts most unfavourably, from the point of view of acuity of psychological insight, with the world of various shades of grey in which are to be found a Mme de Volanges, a Mme de Rosemonde or a Mme de Tourvel. Sade was apt to think in these somewhat facile terms, as his Justine and Juliette demonstrate (There is, incidentally, no precedent for M. de Gocour in Les Liaisons - there might, however, be a parallel to be drawn between him and the virtuous Baron de ~~***~~, in Dorat's Les Sacrifices de l'Amour).

One other character deserves mention. Sade feels the need to give Clémence a lover. We know nothing whatsoever about his psychological make-up ("il faut le créer"). Although this could be seen as an argument against believing that Sade had Laclos's novel in mind, what we are told about his projected fate presents what is possibly the closest parallel of all with Les Liaisons. Théodrine is to steal him "par méchanceté", much as Mme de Merteuil steals Danceny.

Nevertheless, when we have said all this, this Plan d'un Roman en Lettres presents us with insufficient evidence on which to base a suggestion that Sade was in any way setting out to rewrite Les Liaisons dangereuses. There do appear to be similarities - at a pinch one could even adduce the similarity

of the names of Mme de Roseville and Mme de Rosemonde -- but there are also manifest differences. Sade's statement that "les événements immoraux s'écriront entre Delville et Théodorine", and that the latter will be endowed with a "style paradoxal", seems perhaps to promise us something along the lines of the Valmont-Mme de Merteuil liaison, whilst the remark that "le dénouement sera retracé par M. de Gécour à Mme de Roseville, qui se sont connus chez les parents de Clémence, mais qui ont eu peu de relations entre eux pendant l'action", seems to point to some disaster or series of disasters emptying the stage of the principal actors, much in the way that, at the end of Les Liaisons, relatively minor characters are left to try and plumb the depths of the iniquities which have been enacted before them. However, the differences remain, and one of them (the banal financial motive attributed to Théodorine) is sufficient to change the whole tenor of the comparison. This is indescribably crude by comparison with Laclos's work. In short, one cannot draw any firm conclusions as to whether Les Liaisons was an important causal element in the creation of this plan, or indeed as to whether it played any part at all. The most one can say is that it presents a source of interesting speculation.

It has already been mentioned that Lély suggests that one possible motive behind the drafting of this plan was a desire on Sade's part to demonstrate that he could outdo Laclos in a field which Sade considered to be his own. Even if we cannot go along with Lély as far as to arrive at a definite conclusion on this point on the basis of the Plan, there still remains the possibility of considering how far the field exploited by Sade does in fact coincide with that exploited by Laclos. Are they,

in fact, in any sense members of the same literary tradition?

We have already suggested that the Marquis would undoubtedly have taken exception to any attempt to link the name of Rétif de la Bretonne with his(1). It is true, of course, that there are manifest differences of method and of aim which separate them. Nevertheless, they do both show an interest in sexual psychology which possibly links them with Laclos, and they do both demonstrate, more often than not, an inability to arrive at anything which could be graced with the appellation of artistic form. It is, of course, this very formlessness which most clearly distinguishes Sade and Rétif from Laclos. However, as we have tried to show in the case of Rétif, and as we are about to try to show in the case of Rétif, and as we are about to try to show in the case of the Marquis in the field of psychological analysis, it does seem to us that there are interesting parallels to be drawn with the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses. This does not mean that we are hoping to prove identity of interest between Sade and Laclos, but it may well be interesting to consider Sade as a continuer of Laclos's analysis (consciously or unconsciously) and to examine the differences between sexual relationships as they appear in the fictional works of the two writers.

Sade, even more so than Laclos, has been over the years the victim of his personal reputation, or rather of legends which have sprung up about him. There is more real evidence, perhaps, to justify some of these legends in his case than in that of Laclos, but even so the matter must not

1. Cf. supra, p. 649, n. 4.

be exaggerated. The work of writers such as Maurice Heine and Gilbert Lély has gone a long way towards showing, in the words of Marcel Ruff, that

"Sade n'est personnellement guère plus sadique que Rabelais ne fut rabelaisien..."(1)

Ruff constantly emphasises that the work of Sade

"... est issue du même courant que celle de Laclos, et le sens profond en est moins différent qu'on pourrait le croire."(2)

André Monglond, recognising Laclos's grace of style, sees a similar relationship, although he adopts a more condemnatory approach:

"La méthode de Laclos paralyse ou corrompt toute saine activité de l'âme. Non seulement le sentiment de l'amour, mais tout le mécanisme de la vie est faussé... (Valmont et Mme de Merteuil) sont à ce point clairvoyants que, chose affreuse, pas un seul de leurs mouvements intérieurs ne leur échappe... La curiosité cherche dans la souffrance, dont elle nie le sérieux, une volupté raffinée. Il y a moins loin qu'on ne pense de Laclos au marquis de Sade."(3)

There are, on the other hand, those writers who refuse to have anything to do with the idea of similarities between Laclos and Sade.

Roger Vailland is one of these. He makes the point that Sade was a grand seigneur(4) who was describing himself when he described libertines whereas Laclos "peignait ses ennemis de classe, les cousins de Sade."(5)

It is true that Sade was a grand seigneur, and it is true that Laclos did not know at first hand the society he depicted, if indeed he can be seen

1. M. Ruff, op. cit., p. 52.

2. *ibid.*, p. 47.

3. A. Monglond, Histoire intérieure du Préromantisme français, de l'abbé Prévost à Joubert, 2 vols., Grenoble, 1929, I, pp. 8-10.

4. Sade's family was connected with the great Condé, and their title of nobility dated from the early twelfth century. One of his direct ancestors, ironically enough, was the husband of Petrarch's Laura, Hugues de Sade (cf. G. Corer, op. cit., p. 21)

5. R. Vailland, Laclos par lui-même, pp. 165-6. Cf. also R. Vailland in L.D. (Club français du livre, 1957), p. vii.

as the painter of a specific, real circle. But it is our contention that we are not really dealing with the problems seen by Vailland. Laclos and Sade are not making the eighteenth-century version of documentary films, not is there any real sign that Laclos is preaching class war. There is, to the contrary, something to be said for the view that they both belong to the same literary and philosophical tradition. Seen at one level they are both merely writers of "spicy" novels. But there is more to the matter than this.

Maurice Heine saw this clearly:

"... en France, la grande figure de Sade domine, auprès de Laclos, les vingt dernières années de son siècle. Et les raisons de cette éclatante supériorité, il faut les chercher d'abord dans une conception philosophique, systématiquement pessimiste, que ces deux écrivains ont fondée sur une sérieuse connaissance du monde et de l'homme." (1)

Armand Hoog expands this theory of Sade and Laclos's common philosophical ground in his introduction to Les Liaisons dangereuses (2). He writes:

"Les Liaisons ont été le roman des lumières en un siècle qui commençait à ne l'être plus. Au bout du chemin qu'a parcouru l'homme post-cartésien, voici, avec le héros de Laclos, la parfaite, algébrique fiction de l'homme de verre.

L'homme de verre, l'homme machine." (3)

This ties up closely with the passage from Monglond which we have just quoted.

Hoog goes on to say that it seems to him impossible that Laclos should not have read with profit La Mettrie's L'Homme machine, which

1. M. Heine, Le Marquis de Sade et le Roman noir, Paris, N.R.F., 1933, hors commerce. Reprinted in Le Marquis de Sade, Paris, 1950, from which this quotation is taken, p. 229. Richard Aldington saw this point too when, writing of L.D., he observed, "This was the epoch of the Marquis de Sade, so that the theme of sex and malice cannot be held to be illusory.." (Great French Romances, London 1946, p. xxviii)

2. A. Hoog, L.D., Editions du Bateau ivre, 2 vols., 1946, I, ix-xxvi.

3. *ibid.*, p. xiii.

appeared in 1747, and also the same writer's L'Art de Jouir:

"La Mettrie est derrière Laclos comme Heidegger derrière le roman existentialiste.... Quelle plus mécanique définition de la sexualité de la Marquise de Merteuil que cette ligne de La Mettrie; 'La vie des plaisirs d'autrui nous en donne!'"(1)

We have already said something about La Mettrie in connection with Laclos and Rétif, and we do not propose to spend much additional time on him here, except to emphasise that although there is no concrete evidence that Laclos knew either of the works mentioned by Armand Hoog this of course by no means necessarily means that he had not read them.

Several critics emphasise the link between La Mettrie and the Marquis de Sade. Ruff writes,

"La philosophie de Sade n'est pas nouvelle. C'est celle de La Mettrie et d'Holbach. La seule différence est que l'athéisme présente chez lui un caractère plus agressif."(2)

Geoffrey Gorer remarks that there is one author more quoted than any other by Sade, and that this author, La Mettrie, "obviously had a preponderating influence on the formation of many of his ideas."(3) Gorer possibly overstates his case when he writes of La Mettrie,

"In short he posited the basis on which nearly all modern psychology rests. For all science today is materialist in its assumptions, whatever it may be in its popularisations; it is a pity that it has forgotten this precursor and well-nigh martyr in the cause of objectivity."(4)

La Mettrie, after all, was neither the first nor the only eighteenth-century thinker to argue in this direction. Nevertheless, his pragmatic approach to philosophical problems does clearly find parallels in Sade, as does, more particularly, the idea put forward in L'Homme machine that

1. *ibid.*, P. xiv.
2. M. Ruff, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
3. G. Gorer, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
4. *ibid.*, p. 91.

Nature and not God is the prime mover, and that Nature is amoral. In La Mettrie's view, as Corer points out,

"Man is not responsible for his qualities or his defects, and therefore remorse is useless, nor is he criminal for following his instincts." (1)

What is the relevance of all this to Laclos? Maurice Heine and Armand Hoog have put it as well as anyone in the passages we have just quoted.

Both Sade and Laclos place considerable emphasis on the association of imagination and will. The essence of what is commonly referred to as sadism is the master-slave relationship and, as Hoog argues, writing of Les Liaisons

"Jamais peut-être l'idée de sujétion, le rapport de dépendance qui unit le maître et l'esclave ne furent poussés à de si extrêmes conséquences." (2)

Before turning to some examples of Sade's prose fiction and seeking to discover what similarities they may have with Laclos's novels, and what

distinguishes them from Les Liaisons, it is worth pointing out that what Maurice Heine said about their common "conception philosophique, systématiquement pessimiste" applies in the case of Laclos only to his novel.

In his work on the education of women, after his initial, and deliberately provocative "Il n'est aucun moyen de perfectionner l'éducation des femmes", Laclos can show quite considerable optimism, and although God is absent in any real sense from Les Liaisons dangereuses (despite Mme de Tourvel's protestations), and although, too, Valmont shows signs of a positive declaration of war upon the deity, this is not to say that it is our contention that Laclos was an atheist. Valmont, after all, as we have emphasised, is not Laclos. There is evidence, in Laclos's letters and elsewhere, that his

1. *ibid.*, p. 95.

2. A. Hoog, *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

basic position was one of sensible deism. Once again we find ourselves face to face with aspects of the Laclos enigma. Perhaps the final word here can be given to Hoog, who writes, in a slightly different context,

"Quel inconvénient à maintenir au sein de la conscience de Laclos des éléments contradictoires..."(1)

We are singularly fortunate in having a work in which Sade sets forth his conception of the novel. This work, the Idée sur les Romans, was written and published in 1800, as a preface to his collection of short stories, Les Crimes de l'Amour. For Sade, the best of all novels is Don Quixote(2). He lambasts the "fatras inintelligible" of Honoré d'Urfé and his kind, but amongst seventeenth-century novelists expresses approval of, on the one hand, Scarron, and on the other hand Mme de La Fayette(3).

It is not our intention to go into an analysis of Sade's comments on all the eighteenth-century novelists he mentions. There are certain amongst them which may seem relevant to our purpose. He praises Mmes de Gomez, de Lussan, de Tencin, de Graffigny, Elie de Beaumont and Riccoboni -- "leurs écrits pleins de délicatesse honorent assurément leur sexe."(4) More important, however, in terms of the erotic novel, are Sade's comments on Crébillon fils, Marivaux and Dorat (As we have already mentioned, there is no reference in this work to either Duclos or Laclos).

On Crébillon and his kind, Sade expresses himself in no uncertain manner:

"... ils envelopperent du cynisme, des immoralités, sous un style

1. *ibid.*, p. xvi.
2. Sade, Idée sur les Romans, Paris, Palimugre, n.d. (1947), p. 26.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 27-8.
4. *ibid.*, p. 29.

agréable et badin, quelquefois même philosophique, et plurent au moins s'ils n'instruisirent pas."(1)

He appears to be in no doubt about the basic immorality of Crébillon's work, referring to

"... tous ces romans qui flattaient le vice et s'éloignaient de la vertu; mais qui lorsqu'on les donna, devaient prétendre aux plus grands succès."(2)

Marivaux is praised, but no less grudgingly than Crébillon. He is described in the following terms:

"Marivaux, plus original dans sa manière de peindre, plus nerveux, offrit au moins des caractères, captiva l'âme, et fit pleurer; mais comment avec une telle énergie, pouvait-on avoir un style aussi précieux, aussi maniéré?"(3)

Dorat too is somewhat grudgingly praised:

"... aussi maniéré que Marivaux, aussi froid, aussi peu moral que Crébillon; mais écrivain plus agréable que les deux à qui nous le comparons; la frivolité de son siècle excuse la sienne, et il eut l'art de la bien saisir."(4)

Finally, it is interesting to note an apologetic passage which appears towards the end of the Idée:

"Je dois enfin répondre au reproche que l'on me fit, quand parut Aline et Valcour. Mes pinceaux, dit-on, sont trop forts, je prête au vice des traits trop odieux; en veut-on savoir la raison? je ne veux pas 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.... et pour y réussir, j'ai rendu ceux des mes héros qui suivent la carrière du vice, tellement effroyables, qu'ils n'inspireront bien sûrement ni pitié ni amour; en cela, j'ose le dire, je deviens plus moral que ceux qui se croient permis de les embellir.... Jamais enfin, je le répète, jamais je ne peindrai le crime que sous les couleurs de l'enfer, je veux qu'on le voye à nud, qu'on le craigne, qu'on le déteste, et je ne connais point d'autre façon pour arriver là, que de le montrer avec toute l'horreur qui le caractérise. Malheur à ceux qui l'entourent de roses! leurs vues ne sont pas aussi pures, et je ne les copierai jamais. Qu'on ne m'attribue donc plus... le roman de J...; jamais je n'ai fait de tels ouvrages, et je n'en ferai sûrement jamais."(5)

1., 2., 3., *ibid.*, p. 31.

4. *ibid.*, p. 38.

5. *ibid.*, pp. 56-7.

Sade, then, clearly dissociates himself from the writers whom we have suggested as being of the same lineage as Laclos. This does not, however, justify our abandoning the project of seeking parallels between Laclos and Sade. The manner of Sade's rejection of these writers is instructive. He condemns them as too frivolous. We have already stated that in our view it is precisely the high seriousness of Laclos which most distinguishes him from writers such as Crébillon. It is also interesting that Sade's argument in the past passage quoted above, whatever we may think of his disclaimer of Justine, is very similar to what must be the main plank of Laclos's moral defence of Les Liaisons - that to be shown vice in its true colours is to be led to love virtue. This might, then, amount to a further fragmentary piece of circumstantial evidence to shore up Lély's theory of rivalry and jealousy as the motive behind Sade's omission of Laclos from his gallery of novelists in the Idée, the more so when, having dissociated himself from the light erotics, Sade turns to praise of the English novelists, particularly Richardson, who exercised such an enormous influence on eighteenth-century French writers, among them Laclos.

It is here that we really begin to see what Sade's conception of the novel amounts to:

"C'est Richardson, c'est Fielding, qui nous ont appris que l'étude profonde du coeur de l'homme, véritable dédale de la nature, peut seul inspirer le romancier, dont l'ouvrage doit nous faire voir l'homme, non pas seulement ce qu'il est, ou ce qu'il se montre, c'est le devoir de l'historien, mais tel qu'il peut être, tel que doivent le rendre les modifications du vice, et toutes les secousses des passions."(1)

1. *ibid.*, p. 34.

For Sade, then, the basic rule is verisimilitude. Virtue need not always triumph in the novel,

"... car lorsque la vertu triomphe, les choses étant ce qu'elles doivent être, nos larmes sont taries avant de couler: mais si après les plus rudes épreuves, nous voyons enfin la vertu terrassée par le vice, indispensablement nos âmes se déchirent, et l'ouvrage nous ayant excessivement émus, ayant, comme disait Diderot, ensanglanté nos coeurs au revers, doit indubitablement produire l'intérêt, qui seul assure les lauriers." (1)

What, then, is for Sade the basic function of the novel? In one who admires Richardson, and along with him Prévost, "Le Richardson français" (2), the answer is not far to seek. The novel is "le tableau des mœurs séculaires", and is "aussi essentiel que l'histoire, au philosophe qui veut connaître l'homme (3)." The task of the novelist is clear:

"C'est donc la nature qu'il faut saisir quand on travaille ce genre, c'est le coeur de l'homme, ... et nullement la vertu, parce que la vertu, quelque belle, quelque nécessaire qu'elle soit, n'est pourtant qu'un des modes de ce coeur étonnant, dont la profonde étude est si nécessaire au romancier, et que le roman, miroir fidèle de ce coeur, doit nécessairement en tracer tous les plis." (4)

Three further points ought to be mentioned. The first is a plea for an objectivity, a withdrawal of the author from his work such as we have suggested to be one of the principal characteristics of Les Liaisons:

"Évite l'afféterie de la morale; ce n'est pas dans un roman qu'on la cherche... ce n'est jamais l'auteur qui doit moraliser, c'est le personnage, et encore ne le lui permet-on, que quand il y est forcé par les circonstances." (5)

The second, again an argument in favour of verisimilitude, is a maxim which Sade did not follow in Justine, the novel he disowns here, and also one which Laclos failed to adhere to in Les Liaisons:

1. *ibid.*, p. 35.
2. *ibid.*, p. 36.
3. *ibid.*, p. 42.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 35-6.
5. *ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

"Une fois au dénouement, qu'il soit naturel, jamais contraint, jamais machiné, mais toujours né des circonstances."(1)

The third, which is to do once again with Sade's modus operandi as a novelist, serves as a possible explanation of the formlessness - particularly in comparison with Laclos's novel - of his writings:

"Dépasse tes plans, varie-les, augmente-les; ce n'est qu'en travaillant que les idées viennent."(2)

Hence a prolixity not far removed from that for which Sade takes Rétif to task. This notion that ideas come when one starts writing is illustrated in the Plan d'un Roman en Lettres, where it will be remembered that of Clémence's lover Sade merely notes down, "Son amant, 20 ans, etc. (il faut le créer)". Moreover, the exhortation to the would-be novelist, "Dépasse tes plans, varie-les, augmente-les", goes a long way, if any faith is to be placed in Sade's sincerity in the Idée, towards destroying any idea that Sade was planning to refaire Les Liaisons. It would seem, at any rate, that this kind of precise intention before setting down to write was not part of Sade's usual method.

It may seem surprising, in view of Sade's professed admiration for Richardson, that we have not so far mentioned Rousseau amongst his models. The reason for this is simple. As Sade writes in his Avertissement to the Contes et Fabliaux du XVIIIe Siècle, par un Troubadour provençal(3):

"À l'égard de la Nouvelle Heloise, il falloit cesser de l'avoir en vue, c'est une sorte de chef d'oeuvre unique qu'on n'atteindra point et dont toutes les copies seront détestables...(sic)"

We propose next to turn to three of the Marquis's works of fiction,

1. ibid., p. 49.
2. ibid., p. 47.
3. This Avertissement is reproduced in its hitherto unpublished first form in M. Heine's Avant-propos to Oeuvres choisies et Pages magistrales du Marquis de Sade, Paris, 1933, and again in Heine's Le Marquis de Sade, pp. 263-8. The passage quoted here appears on p. 265 in the latter work.

and to examine them in turn in terms of Les Liaisons dangereuses. The first of these works is Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertue, which was written in 1788 and published for the first time in 1791. We propose to examine this novel despite Sade's disclaimer, for fairly obvious reasons, of any suggestion that it should be considered typical of his work, or indeed that it should be considered his work at all, for although the parallels with Laclos are not, perhaps, as striking here as in, say, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, they do exist.

Of Justine, Georges Bataille writes, "Sade a moins voulu convaincre que défier"(1), and there may well be a good deal of truth in this. This, indeed, often seems to be the case in Sade's writings, although frequently these do contain a perverse kind of logic, not by any means always to be ignored. The basic message of Justine, is simple enough, and it is conveyed with a kind of irony which, if initially it is amusing enough, soon begins to seem heavy-handed. Sade puts forward moral claims for his work in the unpaginated dedication À ma bonne amie, including incidentally an argument similar to that used by Laclos in his correspondence with Mme Riccoboni:

"C'EST LE VICE QUI, GÉMISSANT D'ÊTRE DÉVOILÉ, CRIE AU SCANDALE AUSSITÔT QU'ON L'ATTAQUE. LE PROCÈS DE TARTUFE FUT FAIT PAR DES BIGOTS. CELUI DE JUSTINE SERA L'OUVRAGE DES LIBERTINS..."(2)

1. Sade, Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu, Paris, Pauvert, 1957, p. ix.
2. Cf. Laclos to Mme Riccoboni: "... j'ai répandu l'alarme et dévoilé leurs coupables artifices, qu'ai-je fait en cela, que servir les femmes honnêtes, et pourquoi me reprocheraient-elles d'avoir combattu l'ennemi qui faisait leur honte, et pouvait faire leur malheur?/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?" (O.C., 714) It is no doubt pure coincidence that, like Sade, Laclos goes on to make a comparison with Tartuffe.

three general themes which appear in both works. One of the basic premises of the attitude of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil is that the imagination is of paramount importance to the erotic mind. Allied to this is the everlasting need for variety in sexual encounters, which accounts for such devices as the use of mirrors in many erotic novels, for the seraglio scene or the scene of the human desk in Les Liaisons, and for the dwelling on vicarious erotic sensations which is conveyed in the correspondence of which that novel is composed. As the monk says to Justine (under her pseudonym of Thérèse):

"Or, si nous avouons que la jouissance des sens soit toujours dépendante de l'imagination, toujours réglée par l'imagination, il ne faudra plus s'étonner des variations nombreuses que l'imagination suggérera dans ces jouissances, de la multitude infinie de goûts et de passions différentes qu'enfanteront les différents écarts de cette imagination. Ces goûts quoique luxurieux, ne devront pas frapper davantage que ceux d'un genre simple; il n'y a aucune raison pour trouver une fantaisie de table moins extraordinaire qu'une fantaisie de lit..."(1)

This, once again, as in Les Liaisons, is essentially an intellectual, a philosophe approach.

The second theme of Justine with which we wish to deal is again one which is basic to the attitude of a Valmont or a Mme de Merteuil, the extra spice added to a conquest by the difficulties which stand in the way of the seducer. This theme takes on an extreme form in Sade's novel. As the brigand and forger explains it to the heroine:

"Il ne faut pas s'imaginer que ce soit la beauté d'une femme qui irrite le mieux l'esprit d'un libertin, c'est bien plutôt l'espèce de crime qu'ont attaché les lois à sa possession: la preuve en est que plus cette possession est criminelle et plus on en est enflammé; l'homme qui jouit d'une femme qu'il dérobe à son mari, d'une fille qu'il enlève à ses parents, est bien plus délecté sans

1. Justine, pp. 214-5.

doute, que le mari qui ne jouit que de sa femme, et plus les liens qu'on brise paraissent respectables, plus la volonté s'agrandit. Si c'est sa mère, si c'est sa soeur, si c'est sa fille, nouveaux attrait aux plaisirs éprouvés: a-t-on goûté tout cela, on voudrait que les dignes s'accrussent encore pour donner plus de peines et plus de charmes à les franchir; or, si le crime assaisonne une jouissance, détaché de cette jouissance, il peut donc en être une lui-même.... Car il est impossible que ce qui prête du sel, n'en soit pas très pourvu soi-même. Ainsi, je le suppose, le rapt d'une fille pour son propre compte donnera un plaisir très vif, mais le rapt pour le compte d'un autre donnera tout le plaisir dont la jouissance de cette fille se trouvait améliorée par le rapt.."(1)

This may seem a long way from Laclos. And, of course, Sade is in some ways quite far removed from the author of Les Liaisons, not only in the liking for graphic physical details which he manifests, but also in the overt praise of crime for its own sake such as we see here. Nevertheless, in considering the above, rather lengthy, quotation, we should remember that Valmont deliberately sets out to snatch Mme de Tourvel not only from her husband but also from her God, and that he derives considerable pleasure from "les choses bizarres", among which is the wilful debauching of Cécile, whom he has seduced not on his own behalf but on that of Mme de Merteuil. The contempt of the libertine for the conventional moral ties, the banal expression of which we have already seen in Mme de Tourvel's phrase about her marriage ("des noeuds... que je respecte et que je chéris"(2)), is powerfully put over by Sade's Roland, who replies to Justine's plea to be spared in the following terms:

"... il semblerait par les obligations que je t'ai, que je dusse t'accorder ce que tu exiges: cependant je ne me rends à rien, je brise tous les noeuds qui captivent les sots, je te soumets à mes désirs, et de la plus simple, de la plus monotone jouissance, j'en fais une vraiment délicieuse; soumets-toi donc, Thérèse, soumets-toi; et si jamais tu reviens au monde sous le caractère du plus fort, abuse de même de tes droits, et tu connaîtras de tous les plaisirs, le plus vif et le plus piquant."(3)

1. ibid., pp. 327-8.
2. L.D., LXXVIII, 188.
3. Justine, pp. 328-9.

This, together with the previous quotation, brings us to the principal difference between Laclos and Sade. Sade's seducers, whether homosexual or heterosexual, are more often than not not seducers at all, but rapists. They live according to the law of the jungle. One of Sade's basic tenets is that nature is indeed red in tooth and claw, a destroyer as well as a creator, and that in this world might is right(1). In Laclos's world lip-service is still paid to the social conventions. His seducers, although convinced of their own superiority, have to resort to more devious, more subtle, more intellectual means of domination. This is not to say that Sade's world is a world of mere animal lust. That would be a gross oversimplification. There are at least as many ideas behind Sade's novels as behind Les Liaisons, and possibly more. The essential is that the will to dominate, to treat other people as things, is there in the characters of both these writers.

The third and final theme which we wish to examine in terms of Justine is again one which is clearly apparent in Les Liaisons dangereuses. It is to do with what Mme de Tourvel calls "le plaisir sacré de la bienfaisance"(2). We have already dwelled upon Valmont's evaluation of this pleasure. Valmont is echoed in Justine by the tax-farmer Dubourg, but Dubourg's attitude is a blunter, more extreme exposition of the implications of Valmont's position:

"On est revenu de cette manie d'obliger gratuitement les autres; on a reconnu que les plaisirs de la charité n'étaient que les jouissances de l'orgueil, et comme rien n'est aussitôt dissipé, on a voulu des sensations plus réelles; on a vu ou avec un enfant comme vous (Justine),

1. Marcel Ruff says of Sade, "Il ne veut suivre que la nature, comme Jean-Jacques, mais cette nature est maudite." (op. cit., p. 57)
2. L.D., XXII, 74.

par exemple, il valait infiniment mieux retirer pour fruit de ses avances, tout les plaisirs que peut offrir la luxure, que ceux très froids et très futiles de la soulager gratuitement; la réputation d'un homme libéral, aumônier, généreux, ne vaut pas même à l'instant où il en jouit le mieux, le plus léger plaisir des sens."(1)

The second of Sade's novels which we wish to consider is Aline et Valcour, ou le Roman philosophique, which was written in 1788 and first published in 1792. We are led to make a comparison of this work with Les Liaisons dangereuses by Maurice Heine, who says of it that it "ne le cède en intérêt, dans le genre épistolaire, qu'au chef-d'oeuvre de Laclos"(2), and by Geoffrey Gorer, who expresses the view that it was "undoubtedly influenced by Richardson and Choderlos de Laclos"(3). We have no intention of seeking to arrive at a relative qualitative assessment of the two novels, but we must express grave doubts as to whether any possible influence of Laclos on Aline et Valcour is quite as obvious as Gorer implies. It is, of course, true that both works are epistolary in form, but there almost all resemblance seems to end. There is no similarity of plot between Sade's work, which is part roman philosophique and part roman d'aventures, and the analytical Liaisons. Even allowing for the fact that both works are epistolary, the most glaring difference between them is in form. Nothing could be further removed from the disciplined novel of Laclos than Aline. This is obvious enough, and we have no desire to labour a point which will adequately be made by pointing out for instance that letters XXXV and XXXVIII of Sade's work comprise over

1. Justine, p. 26.

2. M. Heine, Notice sur Sade, in Tableau de la Littérature française (XVIIe-XVIIIe Siècles), Paris, 1939, reproduced in Le Marquis de Sade, p. 279.

3. G. Gorer, op. cit., p. 71.

five hundred pages each(1). In short, the nominally epistolary form of this novel serves little or no purpose. The essence of it is narrative, together with Sade's philosophising. The letters themselves, except very rarely (in the case of Blamont and D'Olbourg, who are in any case far larger than life), do not illumine character or play a part in the action to any appreciable extent.

In Aline et Valcour, Sade once again makes moral claims, and moral claims which are very similar to those to be found in Justine. Once again the basic principle behind these claims is akin to that governing Laclos's protestations of moral intent. In his Avis de l'Éditeur, Sade tells us,

"... si la vertu s'y fait adorer (i.e. in the letters) par la manière intéressante et vraie dont elle est présentée, assurément les couleurs effroyables dont on s'est servi pour peindre le vice ne manqueront pas de le faire détester: il est difficile de le mettre en scène sous une plus effroyable physionomie(sic)."(2)

Here, however, his professed aim is to

"... faire voir avec quel ascendant, et en même-tems avec quelle facilité le langage de la vertu pulvérise toujours les sophismes du libertinage et de l'impiété (sic)."(3)

This in fact, although this would certainly be considered one of the most anodine of Sade's works, he fails to do(4). The plot of the main story, that of Aline and Valcour, sets the virtuous and poor young lover, Valcour,

1. The edition to which we shall refer is Sade, Aline et Valcour, ou le Roman philosophique, écrit à la Bastille un an avant la Révolution de France, Paris, 7 vols., 1795.

2. Aline et Valcour, I, v-vi.

3. ibid., I, viii-ix.

4. In justice, however, it should be pointed out that in this Avis Sade also points out that it is only "dans le pays des chimères que se trouve le juste et le bon" (ibid., I, viii) - and in Tamoe Sade gives us his Utopia, just as in Butua he depicts the vices of contemporary civilisation.

his beloved, Aline, and her mother, M^{me} de Blamont, all people ruled by the heart, against M. de Blamont, who has picked the rich financier D'Olbourg, his companion in debauchery, as Aline's future husband. As Geoffrey Gorer puts it,

"On one side there is sentiment, honour, religion - the heart; on the other the intellect which acknowledges no laws but those of reason, no prejudices, no tacit agreements. The heart is bound to lose, for it considers itself bound by conventions and decencies at which the intellect laughs." (1)

The result is that, in his attempt to force his daughter to marry D'Olbourg, Blamont drives her to suicide, having had her mother poisoned so that Aline shall be alone, held prisoner by himself and D'Olbourg.

Perhaps one can take a little more seriously another of the Marquis's observations in connection with his claims of moral purpose. Of vice, he writes,

"... rien n'est dangereux comme d'en adoucir les teintes; c'est le faire aimer que de le peindre à la manière de Crébillon, et manquer par conséquent le but moral que tout honnête homme doit se proposer en écrivant." (2)

This sounds almost like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre! The allusion to Crébillon presages what Sade was to have to say in his Idée sur les Romans, but his moral pretensions here run counter to what he has to say in the Idée, where he makes a plea for realism and argues that moral instruction is not what readers look for in a novel, and no doubt they represent nothing more than adherence to a literary convention.

One theme of Les Liaisons which we have already found in Justine reappears in Aline et Valcour, that of the true motivation behind the

1. G. Gorer, op. cit., pp. 71-2.
2. Aline et Valcour, I, ix.

practice of performing good works. The sensible Mme de Blamont puts one side of the argument to Valcour, placing a fair amount of emphasis on the pleasure to be derived from such deeds:

"Il est si doux, mon ami, de faire un peu de bien, et à quoi servirait-il que le sort nous eût favorablement traité, si ce n'était pour satisfaire tous les besoins de l'infortuné? nos richesses sont le patrimoine du pauvre..."(1)

Mme de Tourvel would have put it no differently, although her jealousy of Valmont in this field of endeavour leads one to feel that she places more emphasis on the "il est si doux", that it is above all her own needs that she is satisfying, rather than the needs of the poor.

In the more or less distinct story of Sainville, the other side of the argument is put to Sainville himself by the Portuguese Sarmiento, who has "gone native" and become the homosexual chooser of wives for the cannibal king of the African land of Butua, where normal moral codes are turned upside down. Sainville rescues a negress who is being beaten by her husband. His chief justification for this is that "il est si doux de se livrer à de telles actions." Replies Sarmiento,

"D'accord... dis que tu as fait cette action parcequ'elle te flattait, que tu t'es livré, en la faisant, à un genre de plaisir analogue à ton organisation: que tu as cédé à une sorte de faiblesse flatteuse pour ton âme sensible; mais ne dis pas que tu as fait une bonne action, et si tu m'en vois faire une contraire, ne dis pas que j'en fais une mauvaise, dis que j'ai voulu jouir comme toi, et que nous avons cherché chacun ce qui convenait à notre manière de voir et de sentir."(2)

This is philosophe relativism taken to its logical conclusion, a variation

1. *ibid.*, II, 281-2.
2. *ibid.*, II, 191-2. In the Dialogue entre un Prêtre et un Moribond, Sade's first published work (1782), he uses a similar argument about belief in God. Says the dying man, "Ton dieu est une machine que tu as fabriqué pour servir tes passions, et tu l'as fait mouvoir à leur gré, mais dès qu'elle gêne les miennes, trouve bon que je l'ai culbutée..." (Paris, 1949, p. 14)

on Diderot's "je ne hais pas les grands crimes." The analogy of Sarmiento's argument with Valmont's remark about Mme de Tourvel, when he says,

"... 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(1)",

is perfect.

The close relationship between the attitude of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil towards others, and what is known as sadism, is illustrated by another remark of Sarmiento to Sainville:

"Toutes les sensations se prêtent mutuellement des forces: l'orgueil, qui est celle de l'esprit, ajoute à celle des sens; or, le despotisme, fils de l'orgueil, peut donc, comme lui, rendre une jouissance plus vive."(2)

Thus we move on from intellectual domination, such as that which is the essential aim of a Valmont or a Mme de Merteuil, to physical domination, such as is more usually - or perhaps rather superficially - associated with the term "sadism". In Sarmiento's view, multiplication of experiences is just as valid in "evil" as in "good" (3), and once again we are given the law of the jungle - the weak should suffer, the strong have all the rights(4). And this brings us back to Sainville's "good word" in rescuing the negress from a beating. Paradoxically, he is not by this action asserting the rights of the weak, but indulging his own taste for domination. Thus we see that it is foolish and unfair to see Sade merely as a source of cheap thrills for the smutty-minded and the twisted. The sadistic, physical details can be seen both as resting upon a philosophical foundation (whatever one may think of their monotonous frequency in his writings - and they are not overdone in Aline) and as a logical extension of the attitude of Laclos's characters.

1. L.D., XII, 72.
2. Aline et Valcour, III, 126-7.
3. ibid., III, 129.
4. ibid., III, 190.

That in Sade the characters' physical activities have an intellectual basis is emphasised by a remark of Valcour's friend Détérville:

"... l'âme d'un libertin n'a pas une seule faculté qui ne soit aux ordres de sa tête, et... tous les mouvemens de la nature cèdent dans de tels coeurs, à la perfide corruption de l'esprit."(1)

One might argue that this is a stage which Laclos's characters have not quite reached in Les Liaisons. That they are not quite as perfectly in intellectual control of themselves as they like to think is the cause of their downfall, when their vanity and their jealousy take over. Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, it is true, are larger than life, and yet, within the confines of the world of Les Liaisons dangereuses, one believes in them. This is all too often not the case with Sade's villains, who are considerably more grotesque than those of Laclos, and are too "perfect", too abstract, to have the necessary power of fascination to enable Sade's fictions to live as works of art.

It would be impossible to leave Aline et Valcour without examining Blamont, the evil genius, "the prototype of the "sadistic" villain", as Gorer calls him(2). Set against the Rousseauism of his wife, who sees the countryside as "l'asyle du repos et de l'innocence", and Paris as "ce gouffre de perversité.... On y chansonnerait un époux qui au bout d'un mois serait encore amoureux"(3), Blamont's ideas are all the more striking. He remarks to Valcour:

"L'amour n'est que l'épine de la jouissance, le physique seul en est la rose... Je vous étonnerais bien, si je vous disais qu'il est peut-être possible de goûter des plaisirs plus vifs

1. ibid., II, pp. 208-9.
2. G. Gorer, op. cit., p. 72.
3. Aline et Valcour, I, 73-4.

avec une femme qui nous haï (sic), qu'avec celle qui nous aime."(1)

The attitude here is not identical with that of Valmont. Both eschew love, but one feels that Valmont is not even particularly interested in the physical enjoyment of his quarry. The last sentence is interesting, however. Neither Valmont nor Blamont is interested in the tranquil and permanent possession of a consenting woman. Each enjoys the difficulties inseparable from possessing a woman who distrusts or hates him -- hence, for example, Valmont's initial choice of Mme de Tourvel, who although at the outset she does not necessarily hate him, is well aware of his reputation, should, if she is to be true to the principles she professes, hate what he represents, and is, therefore, likely to be difficult to win ("Voilà l'ennemi digne de moi."); hence Valmont's delight in sending her the letter written using a whore as a writing-desk, an act which, had Mme de Tourvel been aware of the circumstances, would necessarily have made her hate him, and so on. But, as this episode in itself shows, Valmont progresses by more devious methods than a Sade seducer. There is something onastastic about this attitude of Valmont. A Sade seducer would willingly use rape, and enjoy it. Valmont refuses to use force, even to the extent of administering drugs and becoming a second Lovelace. His position is clear: "Il faut qu'elle se donne". In Laclos the intellectual delight in outwitting is supreme, almost all the pleasure is cerebral; the delights of purely physical despotism have not yet been added as they are in Sade.

Blamont, like Mme de Merteuil, has systematised evil; he is "fait de principes":

1. *ibid.*, VII, 93.

"J'ai étayé mes écarts par des raisonnemens... j'ai vaincu, j'ai déraciné dans mon coeur tout ce qui pouvait gêner mes plaisirs"(1);

and again:

"... il faut savoir conduire plus d'une intrigue de front, et le projet des plaisirs qu'on ne goûte pas encore, ne doit se former qu'au sein de ceux dont on jouit."(2)

Blamont, who describes himself as a "scélérat de profession"(3), refers to the most celebrated authority on intrigue of all time, misquoting Machiavelli, who said that as soon as their usefulness is passed one should do away with one's accomplices. Blamont says this of women(4). But there is one pronouncement above all which shows that Blamont is no mere rapist, and which links him with the intellectual processes of a Valmont or a Mme de Merteuil. He remarks to his friend and accomplice D'Olbourg,

"La drôle de chose que l'analyse du coeur humain: je suis parfaitement sûr à présent, qu'on en fait tout ce qu'on veut; facile à recevoir les impressions de la tête, il n'adopte bientôt plus que ses mouvemens, et l'on se gangrenne ainsi voluptueusement d'un bout à l'autre sans que rien s'oppose à la circulation du venin."(5)

Even here, however, there is a new note, one which belongs to the roman noir rather than to the tradition of Laclos. To this is added a theme which becomes almost obsessive at the turn of the century, the theme of incest(6). Blamont intends to possess his daughter once she is married to D'Olbourg:

"une des clauses du contrat est, que je prête sans céder."(7)

1. ibid., VII, 131-2.
2. ibid., I, 63.
3. ibid., VII, 203.
4. ibid., VII, 201.
5. ibid., VII, 202.
6. Cf. Chateaubriand. It is also a fairly common theme in the late 18th century - cf. Retif de la Bretonne, Louvet de Couvray, etc.
7. Aline et Valcour, VII, 203.

This planned incest can, of course, be seen as a variant on the theme of obstacles (here a legal one) adding spice to possession.

In form, then, Aline et Valcour has nothing in common with Les Liaisons. It has many of the horrifying ingredients of the roman noir, similarities with Gulliver's Travels and with the novels of Prévost and Louvet de Couvray. Nevertheless, although these differences are of sufficient magnitude to prevent our agreeing with Gorer's declaration that the influence of Laclos is obvious in this work, it is true that there exist, scattered here and there in Sade's confused, over-long novel, certain points of similarity with Laclos's, even if we cannot with any confidence speak of influence. There do appear to be some real grounds for arguing that in some respects at least, Sade starts from a similar position to Laclos in his approach to psychological analysis. The two approaches are not identical, Sade's emphasis on the physical being perhaps the chief difference. The physical element is very strong in the next, and last, work of Sade which we wish to examine, but, paradoxically, it seems to us that the similarities with Les Liaisons are stronger here than in either Justine or Aline et Valcour.

The work in question is La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, first published in 1795. The subject matter of this work is extremely scabrous and yet the fact that it is written in dialogue form, and that Sade here and there shows signs of a sense of humour, makes it quite readable. The form forces a certain discipline on to Sade (although from a formal point of view, the introduction of the lengthy treatise Français, encore un effort rather spoils the work), and the work is neither over-involved nor unbearably long. Sade

manages to use the dialogue form reasonably well, giving his work a dramatic quality such as that possessed by the dialogues of Crébillon fils. Neither Crébillon nor Sade, no doubt, would be flattered by the comparison. The setting, Mme de Saint-Ange's house, and the names of the characters. Mme de Saint-Ange herself, her brother the Chevalier de Mirvel, Eugénie and Dolmancé, might well belong to Crébillon's world. But there the similarities end. None of the subtle innuendo of Crébillon here, but the mot cru, none of the suggestion and implication either, but the detailed description of complex sexual positions.

This side of the work is as foreign to Laclos, with his delicacy of expression, as it is to the Crébillon of the dialogues and the analytical novels. Nevertheless, we have said that it seems to us that it is in La Philosophie dans le Boudoir that Sade comes closest to Laclos. It will now be our task to try to justify that remark. o/ ix

There is one element which immediately strikes the reader by contrast with the other two Sade novels about which we have had something to say: no moral claims are put forward. Far from it. The dedication, Aux Libertins, calls upon the reader to take the libertines of the dialogue as models.

The work contains a good deal of philosophical theorising, and in it Sade puts the materialist, determinist argument as powerfully as anywhere else in his writings. We do not, however, intend to try to evaluate Sade's debt here to writers such as Diderot, La Mettrie or Buffon, but merely to

concentrate on those elements of the dialogue which recall Les Liaisons dangereuses.

First of all, there are certain themes which we have noted not only in Les Liaisons but also in Justine and Aline et Valcour. The "good works" theme reappears here. A remark by Dolmancé strikingly closes the gap between the "do-gooders" such as Mme de Tourvel and the roués like Valmont, one of whose prime demands, as we have seen, is that full publicity and recognition be accorded to their activities. Dolmancé points out to the young Eugénie that

"... la bienfaisance est bien plutôt un vice de l'orgueil qu'une véritable vertu de l'âme: c'est par ostentation qu'on soulage ses semblables, jamais dans la seule vue de faire une bonne action; on serait bien fâché que l'aumône qu'on vient de faire n'eût pas toute la publicité possible..."(1)

This is a theme to which he returns later in the work:

"Est-ce donc pour nous que les hommes nous obligent? N'en croyons rien, ma chère; c'est par ostentation, par orgueil..."(2)

It is the Chevalier de Mirvel, who has a crise de conscience and is not as clear-sighted in his viciousness as Dolmancé, who puts the other aspect of the problem, and emphasises the pleasure to be obtained from charitable activities:

"Eugénie, Eugénie, n'éteignez jamais dans votre âme la voix sacrée de la nature: c'est à la bienfaisance qu'elle vous conduira malgré vous.... Laissons là les principes religieux, j'y consens; mais n'abandonnons pas les vertus que la sensibilité nous inspire; ce ne sera jamais qu'en les pratiquant que nous goûterons les jouissances de l'âme les plus douces et les plus délicieuses. Tous les égarements de votre esprit seront rachetés par une bonne oeuvre..."(3)

1. Sade, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, Paris, 1954, p. 56.
2. ibid., p. 175.
3. ibid., pp. 266-7.

It is, of course, the intellectualism of Dolmancé ("N'écoutez jamais votre coeur, mon enfant; c'est le guide le plus faux que nous avons reçu de la nature"(1)) which convinces Thérèse, and not the sensibility of the Chevalier.

Another familiar theme is that of the importance of the imagination. Dolmancé puts it in a nut-shell:

"L'imagination est l'aiguillon des plaisirs... n'est-ce pas d'elle que viennent les voluptés les plus piquantes?"(2)

Here we are once again in the world of Les Liaisons (the seraglio scene, etc.). As Mme de Saint-Ange, a female libertine comparable in stature with Laclos's Marquise, points out, this idea implies the stifling of all conventional prejudices, and she gives a graphic example to illustrate her point:

"... voilà d'où vient la singulière réponse d'une femme à imagination, qui foudroyait froidement avec son mari: Pourquoi tant de glace? lui disait celui-ci. - Eh! vraiment, lui répondit cette singulière créature, c'est que ce que vous me faites est tout simple."(3)

This places Mme de Saint-Ange firmly in the lineage of Mme de Merteuil, as a rapid comparison with the latter's autobiographical letter LXXXI will make clear. Mme de Merteuil is essentially "une femme à imagination", by contrast with "ces femmes à délire, et qui se disent à sentiment" whom she castigates in that letter."(4) One or two further quotations from this important letter will emphasise the point:

"... j'ai porté le zèle jusqu'à me causer des douleurs volontaires, pour chercher pendant ce temps l'expression du plaisir"(5)

1. *ibid.*, p. 265.

2. *ibid.*, p. 84.

3. *ibid.*, p. 85. Sade's italics.

4. *L.D.*, LXXXI, 199. Laclos's italics.

5. *L.D.*, LXXXI, 200.

(a remark which underlines the dual nature of "sadism", upon which we commented early in this chapter):

"... Ma tête seule fermentait; je ne désirais pas de jouir, je voulais savoir..."(1);

"... Cette première nuit, dont on se fait pour l'ordinaire une idée si cruelle ou si douce, ne me présentait qu'une occasion d'expérience: douleur et plaisir, j'observai tout exactement, et ne voyais dans ces diverses sensations, que des faits à recueillir et à méditer"(2);

"... M. de Merteuil m'ayant menée à sa triste campagne, et ne m'y trouvant entourée que de gens dont la distance avec moi me mettait à l'abri de tout soupçon, j'en profitai pour donner un champ plus vaste à mes expériences. Ce fut là, surtout, que je m'assurai que l'amour que l'on nous vante comme la cause de nos plaisirs, n'en est au plus que le prétexte."(3)

Mme de Merteuil, no doubt, would have been in basic agreement with Dolmancé's view that

"... tous les hommes, toutes les femmes se ressemblent: il n'y a point d'amour qui résiste aux effets d'une réflexion saine."(4)

The basic plot of La Philosophie dans le Boudoir has certain similarities with one of the plots of Les Liaisons dangereuses, the seduction and the debauching of Cécile de Volanges. Mme de Saint-Ange has devised the plan of "educating" the young Eugénie, and to this end she calls on the assistance of her brother the Chevalier and of Dolmancé. Although inevitably there are differences, there are certain striking similarities between Eugénie and Cécile. Eugénie is straight from the convent; there are lesbian ties between Eugénie and Mme de Saint-Ange, just as there are lesbian overtones to the relationship between Cécile and Mme de Merteuil; and Eugénie, like Cécile, from the outset has an inclination towards libertinage ("Cela ne sera sûrement pas long avec les dispositions que je lui

1. L.D., LXXXI, 201.

2. L.D., LXXXI, 202.

3. L.D., LXXXI, 202.

4. La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 172.

connais."(1)) It is true, however, that there is no revenge element in this plan to corrupt Eugénie. Nevertheless, in outlining her project to her brother, Mme de Saint-Ange manifests the enjoyment of vicarious eroticism so characteristic of Mme de Merteuil:

"J'aurai deux plaisirs à la fois, celui de jouir moi-même de ces voluptés criminelles et celui d'en donner des leçons, d'en inspirer les goûts à l'aimable innocente que j'attire dans nos filets."(2)

This attitude finds further expression in the introduction of a common erotic device which is, perhaps surprisingly, absent from Les Liaisons dangereuses, but which, as we have already pointed out, has its equivalents in that novel in episodes such as the seraglio scene. The device in question is the use of mirrors. The observation of the reflections in a mirror acts as a stimulant to the imagination, and in a sense adds the pleasures of voyeurism to the pleasures of the bed themselves. Mme de Saint-Ange explains the functions of the mirrors in her boudoir to Eugénie:

"C'est pour que, répétant les attitudes en mille sens divers, elles multiplient à l'infini les mêmes jouissances aux yeux de ceux que les goûtent sur cette ottomane. Aucune des parties de l'un ou l'autre corps ne peut être caché par ce moyen: il faut que tout soit en vue; ce sont autant de groupes rassemblés autour de ceux que l'amour enchaîne, autant d'imitateurs de leurs plaisirs, autant de tableaux délicieux, dont leur lubricité s'enivre et que servent bientôt à la compléter elle-même."(3)

This pleasure is not essentially different from that which Mme de Merteuil experiences by means of observing herself as the various mistresses of the sultan, Belleruche.

The aim is not simply to seduce Eugénie, but to debauch her. Indeed, the whole of La Philosophie dans le Boudoir can be seen as a working-out in

1. *ibid.*, pp. 18-20.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

detail of the project which Valmont mentions more or less in passing in a letter to Mme de Merteuil:

"J'occupe mon loisir... à composer 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;... Rien n'est plus plaisant que l'ingénuité avec laquelle elle se sert déjà du peu qu'elle sait de cette langue! elle n'imagine pas qu'on puisse parler autrement..."(1)

Certainly we are given plenty of "mots techniques" in La Philosophie, and the term itself is used there(2). Whilst one may perhaps like to think that Valmont stopped short at some of the sexual variations which are described in such detail in Sade's work, one cannot even be sure of this, for he tells us later that he has succeeded in obtaining from Cécile "ce qu'on n'ose pas même exiger de toutes les filles dont c'est le métier."(2) That Laclos leaves so much unsaid is, of course, one of the factors which most clearly differentiate his work from that of Sade.

It is not our purpose here to go into details of the "catéchisme de débauche" offered by Sade. There remain, however, one or two further similarities between the themes of this book and Les Liaisons.

Themes allied to that of the true motives behind acts of charity appear. One remark of Dolmancé irresistibly recalls Valmont's remarks about Mme de Tourvel, but takes them one step further:

"Ne sois pas la dupe, Eugénie, de ces femmes que tu entends nommer vertueuses. Ce ne sont pas, si tu veux, les mêmes passions que nous qu'elles servent, mais elles en ont d'autres, et souvent bien plus méprisables... C'est l'ambition, c'est l'orgueil, ce sont des intérêts particuliers, souvent encore la froideur seule d'un tempérament qui ne leur conseille rien. Devons-nous quelque chose à de pareils êtres, je le demande? N'ont-elles pas suivi les uniques impressions de l'amour de soi? Est-il donc meilleur, plus

1. L.D., CX, 288.
2. La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 33.
3. L.D., CXV, 299.

sage, plus à propos de sacrifier à l'égoïsme qu'aux passions? Pour moi, je crois que l'un vaut bien l'autre; et qui n'écoute que cette dernière voix a bien plus de raison sans doute, puisqu'elle est seule l'organe de la nature, tandis que l'autre n'est que celle de la sottise et du préjugé..."(1)

In this sense, Pierre Charpentrat is perfectly right when he observes that

"Si Laclos discerne avec effroi derrière la Marquise (de Merteuil) le spectre d'Antiphysis, Sade cherirait en elle une encourageante ébauche de la Femme Naturelle"(2),

provided that we conceive of "La Femme Naturelle" in terms of Sade's own brand of twisted Rousseauism which is constantly appearing in his writings(3).

For Sade, Nature is the ultimate force, a destroyer as well as a creator.

Perhaps the clearest expression of this attitude to nature is that which comes from the lips of Dolmancé:

"Ne nous brûlez pas, ne nous écorchez pas! La nature dit qu'il ne faut pas faire aux autres ce que nous ne voudrions pas qu'il nous fût fait!" Imbeciles! Comment la nature, qui nous conseille toujours de nous délecter, qui n'imprime jamais en nous d'autres mouvements, d'autres inspirations, pourrait-elle, le moment d'après, par une inconséquence sans exemple, nous assurer qu'il ne faut pourtant pas nous aviser de nous délecter si cela peut faire de la peine aux autres? Ah! croyons-le, croyons-le, Eugénie, la nature, notre mère à tous, ne nous parle jamais que de nous; rien n'est égoïste comme sa voix, et ce que nous y reconnaissons de plus clair est l'immuable et saint conseil de nous délecter, n'importe aux dépens de qui."(4)

That this approach is not unrelated to the position of more "respectable"

thinkers of the Enlightenment, in particular determinist thinkers, is perhaps

best illustrated by the remark of the dying man in the Dialogue entre un Prêtre

1. La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, pp. 45-6.

2. P. Charpentrat, op. cit., p. v.

3. As good an example as any of this twisted Rousseauism is the following remark of Dolmancé: "La cruauté n'est autre chose que l'énergie de l'homme que la civilisation n'a point encore corrompue: elle est donc une vertu et non pas un vice." (p. 120) (cf. also supra, p. 706-7)

4. La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, pp. 118-9. Sade's italics.

et un Moribond, who considers himself

"créé par la nature avec des goûts très vifs, avec des passions très fortes; uniquement placé dans ce monde pour (s)'y livrer et pour les satisfaire,... ces effets de (sa) création n'étant que des nécessités relatives aux premières vues de la nature ou... que des dérivations essentielles à ses projets sur (lui), tous en raison de ses lois."(1)

Nature, he adds, "a un égal besoin de vices et de vertus."(2) This is not far from what Diderot says on more than one occasion. And it is not dissimilar from the approach of Hobbes. Mme de Merteuil and Valmont would agree with Dolmancé when he says that "le plus fort seul aura raison": this is the basic premise on which their lives are based ("Conquérir est notre destin"), although they do not appear to think this out in quite the Hobbesian terms of Dolmancé, who adds,

"... voilà l'état primitif de guerre et de destruction perpétuelles pour lequel (la main de la nature) nous créa..."(3)

Sade's atheism, too, is, perhaps rather weakly, provided with a precedent in the attitude of Valmont who, it will be remembered, in his pursuit of the Présidente, vows,

"J'oserai la ravir au Dieu même qu'elle adore."(4)

Such, too, is the fate of the more complaisant victim, Eugénie, who after Dolmancé has given his version of the life of Christ, observes:

"Mon choix n'est pas embarrassant; je méprise toutes ces rêveries dégoûtantes, et ce Dieu même, auquel je tenais encore par faiblesse ou par ignorance, n'est plus pour moi qu'un objet d'horreur."(5)

1. Dialogue entre un Prêtre et un Moribond, Paris, 1949, p. 8.
2. ibid., p. 15.
3. La Philosophie dans le Boudoir. p. 119.
4. L.D., VI, 46.
5. La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 54.

A further piece of advice which Dolmancé, who is the roué-in-chief of Sade's work, gives to his pupil Eugénie, exposes the world of social hypocrisy, represented in Les Liaisons by Mme de Volanges who, despite her show of virtue and decorum, has a "past" and admits Valmont to her circle because of his social position. It also defines the wisdom of Mme de Merteuil in setting out to "acquérir le renom d'invincible." (1) Dolmancé puts it as follows:

"Et, dans le fait, est-ce bien sûrement la vertu, ou son apparence, qui devient réellement nécessaire à l'homme social? Ne doutons pas que l'apparence seule lui suffise; il a tout ce qu'il faut en la possédant. Dès qu'on ne fait qu'effleurer les hommes dans le monde, ne leur suffit-il pas de nous montrer l'écorce?... La fausseté, d'ailleurs, est presque toujours un moyen assuré de réussir..." (2)

An even closer definition of Mme de Merteuil's position is given by Dolmancé. As we have seen, one of the essential characteristics of the male roué is a desire for notoriety. He can enjoy this, because society in its hypocrisy operates a double standard. Mme de Volanges accepts Valmont into her society despite his reputation. She would not accept Mme de Merteuil were she not protected by her cloak of virtue. Laclos's Marquise feels this distinction bitterly (3) She, too, desires her triumphs to be admired and commented upon, but she is able to satisfy this desire only because there exist a few people (particularly Valmont) over whom she has a secret hold which obviates the risk of exposure, and to whom she can recount such masterpieces as the Prévan episode. Dolmancé not only outlines the position of women like Mme de Merteuil, but, so to speak,

1. I.D., LXXXI, 204.
2. La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 107.
3. Cf. I.D., LXXXI, 198-9.

defines the Marquise herself, that woman who can come out with such "sadistic" observations as

"Vous ne sauriez croire combien la douleur... embellit"(1),
or, with such evident relish,

"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)

Dolmancé, in his education of Eugénie, is analysing cruelty, and he remarks that there is one type "dont les femmes sont le plus souvent affectées". He goes on:

"... Vous verrez ai ce n'est pas l'extrême activité de leur imagination, la force de leur esprit qui les rend scélérates et féroces: aussi celles-là sont-elles toutes charmantes; aussi n'en est-il pas une seule de cette espèce qui ne fasse tourner les têtes quand elle l'entreprend; malheureusement, la rigidité ou plutôt l'absurdité de nos mœurs laisse peu d'aliment à leur cruauté: elles sont obligées de se cacher, de dissimuler, de couvrir leur inclination par des actes de bienfaisance ostensibles qu'elles détestent du fond de leur coeur; ce ne peut plus être que sous le voile le plus obscur, avec les précautions les plus grandes, aidées de quelques amies sûres, qu'elles peuvent se livrer à leurs inclinations.."(3)

It is impossible not to recognise that here we are indeed moving in a world very closely similar to that of Mme de Merteuil.

There is even, although admittedly it is considerably less pronounced than in Les Liaisons dangereuses, the theme of rivalry between male and female libertine. Compare the following remark of Mme de Merteuil,

"... Ah! mon pauvre Valmont, quelle distance il y a encore de vous à moi.... Et qu'avez-vous donc fait, que je n'aie surpassé mille fois?"(4),

1. L.D., LXIII, 153.
2. L.D., CXLV, 368.
3. La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 122.
4. L.D., LXXXI, 197.

with Mme de Saint-Ange's

"... Ah! Dolmanco, quelque libertin que vous soyez, ie vous défie de m'avoir égalée dans ces délicieux combats de la luxure... J'ai fait tout ce qu'il est possible en ce genre."(1)

The two attitudes are interchangeable.

None of this proves, despite what Gorer has to say, a definite, precisely demonstrable influence of Laclos upon Sade. It does, however, serve to illustrate that there is a good deal of ground which they cover in common. It is, in short, quite easy to see Valmont and Mme de Mertenil - and especially the latter - as "sadistic" avant la lettre. In terms of aesthetic quality there is no comparison between the two writers. Here Laclos, despite his faults, is immeasurably Sade's superior. But in terms of their interest in the psychology of sex as it relates to desire for domination, they undoubtedly have much in common. Despite Sade's use of mots techniques, despite his indulgence in detailed description, his world is not so very far removed from that of the Laclos of Les Liaisons. It may be less palatable (on the superficial plane) because it is considerably more direct and obvious. It cannot be conveniently dismissed as mere indulgence in pornography, although one may feel here and there that pornographic intention does occur. Sade is at least as much concerned as Laclos with psychological realities, and despite superficial appearances his basic approach is no more animal, and is at least as intellectual, as anything to be found in Les Liaisons dangereuses. It is no use closing one's eyes when faced with Sade, in the hope that he will go away. Sade completes the amoindrissement du héros de roman which is one of the important characteristics of eighteenth-century prose fiction, and in a sense he goes

1. La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, p. 134.

further, for in a very real sense his characters are not in pursuit of trivia, but of a new philosophy of life. Thus it is that Laclos, who has about him what we have called a "high seriousness" which differentiates him from a Crébillon or a Dorat, is a precursor of Sade.

One of the great endeavours of the Age of the Enlightenment was to find a replacement for conventional Christian morality. The chief characteristic of this endeavour was, in the words of Peter Gay, "a favourable estimate of human nature and of the human enterprise"(1). Rousseau possessed a theoretical optimism about the basic goodness of human nature, but somehow or other this basic goodness had been distorted by the erection of the superstructure of civilisation. Laclos's view of civilised society, as it is revealed in Les Liaisons dangereuses, is quite as jaundiced as any given by Rousseau - in the depiction of Parisian life in La Nouvelle Héloïse, for example. If we are to judge from the fragments which have been gathered together under the title of De l'Éducation des Femmes, we find a Rousseauesque note in Laclos's view of Natural Woman:

"Se conserver et se reproduire, voilà donc les lois auxquelles la nature a soumis les femmes. Ainsi, pourvoir à leur nourriture personnelle, recevoir les approches du mâle, nourrir l'enfant qui en est provenu et ne l'abandonner que lorsqu'il peut se passer de ses soins, telles sont les impulsions naturelles que les femmes reçoivent.... La femme naturelle est, ainsi que l'homme, un être libre et puissant; libre, en ce qu'il a l'entier exercice de ses facultés; puissant, en ce que ses facultés égalent, ses besoins. Un tel être est-il heureux? Oui, sans doute.... Les hommes ont voulu tout perfectionner, et ils ont tout corrompu; ils se sont chargés de chaînes..."(2)

1. P. Gay, Three Stages on Love's Way: Rousseau, Laclos, Diderot, in The Party of Humanity: Studies in the French Enlightenment, London, 1964, p. 135. Gay gives an interesting study of the attack on conventional morality as shown in certain writings of these three authors.
2. Laclos, Des Femmes et de leur Éducation, in O.C., 430-1.

In Laclos's view of the world and society, the time when women were able to receive "les approches du mâle" as blithely as the Tahitians of Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* or the natural woman of Rousseau's *Discours* did not last long. Women received more chains than men:

"O! femmes... 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..."(1)

There is only one way for woman to escape from this sorry plight:

"Apprenez qu'on ne sort de l'esclavage que par une grande révolution..."(2)

Laclos does not presume to say whether such a revolution is probable or even possible. He simply says that unless it does come about, the only possible conclusion to be drawn is that Social Woman is ineducable.

Are we to see the war waged by Mme de Merteuil as the beginnings of such a revolution? Perhaps not. Perhaps it is too late, for if this were Mme de Merteuil's intention, she has lost sight of the true enemy and hits out indiscriminately at both sexes, despite her declaration to Valmont that she considers herself "née pour venger mon sexe et maîtriser le vôtre."(3) The canker has too firm a hold. Rousseau recognised that a return to his (in any case hypothetical) State of Nature was impossible, but much of his work is given over to a forward-looking approximation to it based on the heart. Mme de Merteuil's revolt certainly leads in any direction save that of "la femme naturelle". She

1. Laclos, *Discours sur la Question.. 'Quels seraient les meilleurs moyens de perfectionner l'éducation des femmes'*, in *O.C.*, 428.

2. *ibid.*, in *O.C.*, 429.

3. *I.D.*, LXXXI, 199. (Cf. *supra*, Pt. II, chapter 5)

is essentially of civilisation. Her life is based on the intellect. The very remark we have just quoted from her autobiographical letter is followed immediately by her blistering attack on "femmes... à sentiment"(1).

Therefore, if we are not content to leave the Laclos enigma unresolved, if we try to integrate the Laclos of the essays with the Laclos of the novel, we arrive at an impasse - Mme de Merteuil is, in fact, one manifestation, however extreme, of "la femme sociale", and the best excuse Laclos could offer for her, in terms of his essays, would be that she is not to be blamed for her excesses - society is the guilty party:

"On ne peut sortir de ce principe général que sans liberté point de moralité et sans moralité point d'éducation."(2)

To try to see Mme de Merteuil as an illustration of the revolution to which Laclos refers would be to attribute to him a singularly perverse interpretation of Rousseau which it is impossible to sustain, either from the text of the essays or from Laclos's correspondence. Gay refers to the epigraph of Les Liaisons, taken from La Nouvelle Héloïse ("J'ai vu les mœurs de mon temps, & j'ai publié ces lettres") and suggests that eighteenth-century readers must have suspected that Laclos was making fun of them. He goes on:

"The conclusion suggests itself... that Laclos chose his motto in bad faith and that he was not a disciple but a parodist of Rousseau! But this conclusion, plausible as it is, is mistaken. The two novels are related to each other dialectically; they embody different stages in the eighteenth-century mind."(3)

Although we cannot agree with every detail of Gay's argument from this point on, his basic observation here seems quite plausible. Les Liaisons could quite easily be seen as a straightforward illustration of Rousseau's doctrine

1. Sensibility being a characteristic of Laclos's, as well as Rousseau's natural woman. (cf. O.C., 441)

2. Laclos, Discours..., in O.C., 429.

3. P. Gay, The Party of Humanity, p. 134.

of the corrupting influence of civilisation.

The position of Sade is different. Here we are justified in speaking, without hesitation, of a distorted Rousseauism, and indeed the theme of freeing women from their subjugation to men which we have noted in Laclos appears too in Sade(1). Remarks such as that of Blamont on the destructibility of the human heart in Aline et Valcour(2), or that of Domagné in La Philosophie dans le Boudoir(3) advising Eugénie never to listen to her heart, might conceivably be taken merely as the perfidious philosophy of professional seducers, were there not ample evidence that Nature, from the earliest works of Sade, has ceased to be good, that it has become amoral, if not positively malevolent: 60

"Ne cherche que ses lois pour unique cause à notre inconséquence humaine, et ne cherche à ses lois d'autres principes que ses volontés et ses besoins."(4)

If it is not too much of an oversimplification to accept Gay's view that at the base of Enlightenment attempts to find a replacement for Christian ethics was "a favourable estimate of human nature", then clearly we cannot count Sade as within the bounds of the Enlightenment, although he was certainly a product of it(5). As for Laclos, on the strength of the picture of humanity given in Les Liaisons, we should have to exclude him too. On the other hand, Laclos seems to have thought of writing a

1. Cf., for example, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir.

2. Cf. supra, p. 691, n. 5.

3. Cf. supra, p. 695, n. 1.

4. Dialogue entre un Prêtre et un Moribond, p. 15.

5. Gay takes the view that "Sade was not an heir but a caricature of the 'philosophes'" (op. cit., p. 285). Perhaps so, but surely, in the last analysis, a caricature is an heir of that which it caricatures.

second novel which might well have been more gentle with human nature, and perhaps acted as the equivalent of the idealistic sections of La Nouvelle Héloïse, leaving Les Liaisons dangereuses to fulfil the role of those sections of Rousseau's novel which castigate contemporary society. Certainly the essays on women(1), his letters, and his speeches to the Jacobin club are evidence that the disillusioned picture of mankind given in Les Liaisons does not represent Laclos's total view of his fellows.

XI

The aim of this rather long series of rapprochements of Laclos's novel with other works of the eighteenth century both before and after 1782 has been two-fold. It is hoped that it has helped to situate Laclos in a tradition which goes back some way, and one which is complex in nature, which derives in part from the analytical tradition which can, it might be argued, be traced back in prose fiction to Mme de La Fayette, which becomes debased, from the point of view of theme and the moral stature of the heroes, in writers like Crébillon, Duclos and Dorat, and merges with

1. Despite his statement in the Discours that "la femme sociale" is ineducable, Laclos does give in his Essai sur l'Éducation des Femmes what amounts to a reading-list for a young lady of quality. It may be a little condescending here and there ("On sent qu'il faut avoir une idée de l'histoire de toutes les nations européennes, mais une femme peut en négliger les détails" (O.C., 477), but it is somewhat more enlightened than Rousseau's idea of the education of women, whom he considers naturally inferior to men (Cf. Émile, V, Garnier, p. 488) and therefore fit only to be educated with man's need in view: "La femme est fait spécialement pour plaire à l'homme" (ibid., V, p. 446); "toute l'éducation des femmes doit être relative aux hommes" (ibid., V, p. 455).

another, sentimental tradition owing much to Prévost, Richardson and Rousseau. The second thing that it is hoped that this chapter may do is, although most often it has proved impossible to point to clear, unquestionable borrowings on the part of Laclos from other novelists or on the part of other novelists from Laclos, to suggest some possible indirect influences operating within the community of spirit and outlook which we have sought to show in Laclos and some of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors in the field of the novel.

The story does not end in the eighteenth century, and it remains for us to examine one or two writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who have evinced a considerable interest in Laclos and stand as proof of the continuing influence of Les Liaisons dangereuses.

3. THE CONTINUING INFLUENCE OF LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES.

I

The first nineteenth-century writer we propose to examine in terms of Laclos and Les Liaisons dangereuses is one whose fame, like that of Laclos himself, rests almost entirely on one psychological novel: Benjamin Constant.

Although Constant, who was born in 1767, was considerably younger than Laclos, and although there is no reference to Laclos in either Constant's Cahier rouge or his Journaux intimes(1), there is evidence that to some extent they moved in the same circles and indeed that they met. The likely place for such a meeting is the salon of Madeleine-Augusta Pourrat (c. 1740-1818), the wife of a prosperous Lyonnais banker. It was with Mme Pourrat's daughter Jenny that Constant, in need of a rich wife, fell in love in 1787. The outcome of the affair, in the best Constant tradition, was tragi-comic - he tried to poison himself when surprised by Mme Pourrat's lover in tête-à-tête with that lady and called upon to explain that it was with her daughter that he was in love. The

1. Neither does Laclos ever mention Constant.

humiliation was too much for him:

"... Je me vis entraîné devant un étranger pour lui avouer que j'étais un amant malheureux, un homme repoussé par la mère et par la fille."(1)

There is no report of any such heady behaviour in Laclos's relationship with Mme Pourrat, although the fact that she was of about the same age as Laclos and that, according to Constant, "(Elle) avait été galante toute sa vie"(2), might tempt those who insist on confusing Laclos with Valmont to imagine almost anything.

There are several references to Mme Pourrat in Laclos's letters to his wife(3) and all of these show warmth of feeling. She is "une bien bonne amie", "la tant aimable et tant bonne Mme Pourrat", and she is an old friend too ("Je connois Mme Pourrat depuis bien longtemps") - which may well signify that Laclos was frequenting her salon around about the time when Benjamin Constant was engaged upon his affair with Jenny. Mme Pourrat was also an influential friend, held res-

1. B. Constant, Le Cahier rouge, Paris, Stock, n.d. (1928), p. 49. Constant's account of this affair in detail is given on pp. 42-57.

2. *ibid.*, p. 47.

3. L.I. The letters cover the period, late in Laclos's life, between 1 May 1800 and 22 April 1801 (11 floréal an VIII and 2 floréal an IX). The passages quoted here are to be found on pp. 112, 214 and 185-6 respectively. Mme Pourrat is mentioned also on pp. 106, 115 (in connection with Laclos's coal interests); 137; 143-4; 164; 178; 193-4; 199; 226 (again in connection with Laclos's coal interests); 231-2 and 245 (in connection with the Liste Communale). Cf. *supra*, pp. 268-9.

possible for the Laclos' success in their investment in the Anzin coal-mines, and one who may be able to help Laclos have his name inscribed on the Liste Communale(1).

It is a pity that we have no detailed description of Laclos by Constant. The only reference to their having met comes in a letter from Constant to Mme de Charrière dated 9th March, 1790. In this letter Constant gives an account of a conversation with a thoroughly stupid French master by the name of Routemy who denied that Les Liaisons had been written by Laclos, and indeed called into question the very existence of Laclos himself. Constant replies:

"Mais Monsieur, j'ai dîné, moi, avec Mr de Laclos..., j'ai vu à Paris Mr de Laclos et toute la société qui l'avait vu faire son roman.." (2)

There is no proof that this meeting took place at the house of Mme Pourrat, but the chances seem to be that such was the case.

What evidence is there that Constant was influenced by Les Liaisons dangereuses in writing Adolphe? Immediately it must be stated that there is no direct evidence whatsoever. It is obvious that it would be quite wrong, simply because one author knew another, as it seems that Constant may have known Laclos, to assume that there was any influence of that other writer on his work. Moreover, the differences between Adolphe and Les Liaisons are sufficiently self-evident for it to be clear that any attempt to arrive at a close, direct artistic link between the two authors would be doomed to disas-

1. According to J.-P. Palowski (Mme Pourrat, ses Filles et ses Amis, Versailles, 1934, p. 24 (abstracted from the Revue de l'Histoire de Versailles et de Seine-et-Oise, Jan.-March, 1934, Mme Pourrat "intercède personnellement... auprès du boucher Le Gendre pour sortir Laclos de la prison du Petit-Luxembourg"

2. Quoted in G. Rudler, La Jeunesse de Benjamin Constant (1767-1794), Paris, 1909, pp. 205-6 (Etrennes Nationales faisant suite au Conservateur Suisse, ed. H.-H. Gaullieur, Geneva, 1854, pp. 119-21. The precise meaning of this remark is obscure. "Faire" cannot mean "écrire".

trous failure. It is not, however, our intention to seek to forge such a link.

On the other hand, Sainte-Beuve felt that he saw an affinity between the two, but felt that Laclos's influence might be detected not in Constant's work but rather in his life. He wondered whether, in Constant's letters to Mme de Charrière in 1788, in which he vaunts the qualities of Wilhelmina von Gramm, there is not

"... une pointe de cruauté très française, comme de quelqu'un qui sait trop bien son Laclos." (1)

This is rather tenuous speculation, however. If Laclos made such an impact on Constant as such a suggestion would imply, it might not be unreasonable to hope to find some sign of it in the latter's novel. We shall, therefore, examine the text of Adolphe, together with Constant's declarations as to his intentions in writing it.

Gustave Rudler is right in arguing that, despite the obvious affinities between the plot of Adolphe and Constant's own life, there is more to the work than this:

"On a beaucoup trop parlé du romantisme de Benjamin Constant. Il souffre d'une maladie éternelle: la maladie des âmes sèches qui perçoivent leur sécheresse, qui en souffrent, qui s'en éloignent éperdument et y retombent promptement, incapables du sentiment frais, spontané et durable après lequel elles soupirent. Loin d'appartenir au romantisme, il appartient au parti de l'idéologie française." (2)

1. Sainte-Beuve, Portraits Littéraires, Paris, Garnier, n.d., III, 254.
2. In B. Constant, Adolphe, édition historique et critique par Gustave Rudler, Manchester University Press, 1919, pp. xl, xlvii. Before turning to Constant's own writings, there is one historical point worthy of mention. Rudler points out that Constant read his novel to various friends, who reacted violently against the hero. In the entry of the Journaux intimes for 24th February, 1807, we read: "Lu mon ouvrage à Mme de Coigny. Effet bizarre de cet ouvrage sur elle. Révolte

If we turn to Constant's preface to the second edition of Adolphe, we find ample evidence in support of Rudler's view. Constant was brought up on eighteenth-century thought(1), and we have no need to think in terms of a nineteenth-century "mal du siècle" to explain the hero of his novel:

"J'ai voulu peindre dans Adolphe une des principales maladies morales de notre siècle(2), cette fatigue, cette incertitude, cette absence de force, cette analyse perpétuelle, qui place une arrière-pensée à côté de tous les sentiments, et qui par là les corrompt dès leur naissance. Adolphe est spirituel, car l'esprit aujourd'hui est descendu à la portée de tous les caractères; il est irritable, parce que l'obstacle est une sorte de galvanisme qui rend à la mort un moment de vie; mais il est incapable de suite, de dévouement soutenu, de générosité calme; sa vanité seule est permanente. Il s'est nourri, dès son enfance, des arides leçons d'un monde blasé; il a adopté, pour gaieté, sa triste ironie, pour règle son égoïsme; en s'observant et se décrivant toujours, il a cru se rendre supérieur à lui-même, et n'est parvenu qu'à dompter ses bonnes qualités."(3)

Much of this, especially the remarks about the "arrière-pensée", the obstacles and vanity, could be taken as a description of Valmont. More generally, it is an illustration of Servais Etienne's amoindrissement du héros de roman. In the preface to the third edition Constant returns to more or less the same theme, adding, in language which might have come from a Chamfort or a Duclos,

"... on est encouragé par l'approbation d'une société toute factice, qui supplée aux principes par les règles et aux émotions par les convenances, et qui hait le scandale comme importun, non comme immoral, car elle accueille assez bien le vice quand le scandale ne s'y trouve pas..."(4)

This is almost a definition of the world of Les Liaisons dangereuses, a world in which the important thing is for Mme de Merteuil to put on a show of virtue,

1. Cf. Le Cahier Rouge: Constant says of his childhood reading, "Je lisais huit à dix heures par jour tout ce qui me tombait sous la main, depuis les ouvrages de La Mettrie jusqu'aux romans de Crébillon. Ma tête et mes yeux s'en sont ressentis pour toute ma vie" (p. 4); and he describes himself at the age of eighteen or nineteen in the following manner: "Nourri des principes de la philosophie du XVIIIe siècle et surtout des ouvrages d'Helvétius, je n'avais d'autre pensée que de contribuer pour ma part à la destruction de ce que j'appelais les préjugés." (p. 23)

2. The first version of Adolphe was written early in 1807, and the work had virtually reached its definitive form by 1810. The first edition appeared in 1816. (cf. G. Rudler's edn., Introduction historique, passim, & that of F. Baldensperger, Geneva, Droz, 1950, pp. xix-xxi).

3. Adolphe, preface to 2nd edn. Rudler edn., pp. xi-xii. This passage is omitted from the Baldensperger edn.

4. *ibid.*, p. xv. Baldensperger edn. p. 105.

a world in which Valmont is accepted socially by women like Mme de Volanges, who would be most upset by any suggestion that they are anything other than the soul of respectability, a world into which Prévau, although universally recognised to be a rake, is re-admitted once the burden of scandal has been transferred from his shoulders to those of Mme de Merteuil. Let us now turn to the text of the novel itself.

The great difference, of course, is that whereas Valmont and Mme de Merteuil are at home in this world, and possess an utter contempt for conventional morality, Adolphe is considerably less at ease. If he defies the conventions, it is not because he disregards them. There is a good deal more torment in this work than in Laclos's, and it is this which in some measure is the justification of the talk of Romanticism against which Rudler puts us on our guard. There are, then, obvious differences between Adolphe and Valmont.

Valmont would have been incapable of a thought such as

"C'est un affreux malheur de n'être pas aimé quand on aime. Mais c'en est un bien grand d'être aimé avec passion quand on n'aime plus"(1),

and a remark such as the following amounts to a direct attack on the Valmonts of the world;

"Malheur à l'homme qui, dans les premiers moments d'une liaison d'amour, ne croit pas que cette liaison doit être éternelle! Malheur à lui, dans les bras de la maîtresse qu'il vient d'obtenir, conserve une funeste prescience, et prévoit qu'il pourra s'en détacher!. Une femme que son cœur entraîne a, dans cet instant, quelque chose de touchant et de sacré. Ce n'est pas le plaisir, ce n'est pas la nature, ce ne sont pas les sens qui sont corrupteurs; ce sont les calculs auxquels la société nous accoutume, et les réflexions que l'expérience fait naître."(2)

1. *Adolphe*, Baldensperger edn., pp. 44-5.
2. *ibid.*, p. 31.

Despite its use of the language of sensibility, Adolphe remains an economical novel of psychological analysis in the tradition of La Princesse de Clèves, Manon Lescaut and Les Liaisons dangereuses; and its hero, despite himself, becomes essentially a cerebral character, always analysing himself and his next move. Unlike Valmont, however, he has not the strength of will to put the next move into action, for example to desert Ellénore. Adolphe himself says,

"... Je puis au moins me rendre ici ce solennel témoignage, que je n'ai jamais agi par calcul."(1)

This is more or less true: indeed, he rarely has the will-power to act at all. Nevertheless, it remains true that the entire liaison is based upon calculation:

"Offerte à mes regards dans un moment où mon coeur avait besoin d'amour, ma vanité de succès, Ellénore me parut une conquête digne de moi."(2)

The terminology itself is reminiscent of Valmont's "Voilà l'ennemi digne de moi". Adolphe, of course, is a neophyte in the matter of liaisons with the fair sex, and throughout the book he places great emphasis on the heart. His great trouble is one not far removed from the affliction of Stendhal's heroes: an inability to feel for any length of time what he wants to feel. He wishes to break away from the world of Valmonts, but he finds himself unable to do so and, moreover, displays symptoms of the disease which contaminates Valmont. The root cause of it is ennui, possibly a rather more Romantic ennui in Adolphe's case than in Valmont's, but none the less real for that:

"Je trouvais qu'aucun but ne valait la peine d'aucun effort."(3)

Both of them have talent; neither can make proper use of it. Adolphe wants

1. *ibid.*, p. 75.

2. *ibid.*, p. 16.

3. *ibid.*, p. 8.

a woman, initially, for form's sake. He and Valmont share in this respect a certain narcissism:

"Presque toujours pour vivre en repos avec nous-mêmes, nous travestissons en calculs et en systèmes nos impuissances ou nos faiblesses. Cela satisfait cette portion de nous qui est, pour ainsi dire spectatrice de l'autre." (1)

This is as good a riposte as any that could be devised to Valmont's remark about Danceny:

"Voilà bien les hommes! tous également scélérats dans leurs projets, ce qu'ils mettent de faiblesse dans l'exécution, ils l'appellent probité." (2)

If Adolphe's remark could be applied to Valmont with some degree of appositeness, so could Valmont's be applied to Adolphe, particularly in connection with his plan, towards the end, to leave Ellénore. It is weakness in execution of his plans which really enables Adolphe to comfort himself with the thought that he has never "agi par calcul". In the letter from which we have just quoted, Valmont remarks, "Il est encore bien jeune, ce Danceny!" (3) The same remark could be applied to Adolphe. And yet, relatively naïve though he is, we find Danceny, in his inexperienced way, using arguments similar to those of Valmont in a carefully written letter - and this quite early on. Compare the following two passages. Danceny writes to Cécile, after his declaration of love to her (4):

"Je n'ose pas me flatter d'une réponse; l'amour l'eût écrite avec empressément, l'amitié avec plaisir, la pitié même avec complaisance: mais la pitié, l'amitié et l'amour, sont également étrangers à votre coeur." (5)

1. *ibid.*, n. 18.
2. *L.D.*, LXVI, 161.
3. *ibid.*, loc. cit.
4. This declaration appears in *L.D.*, XVII, 64-5.
5. *L.D.*, XXVIII, 87.

Valmont writes to Mme de Tourvel, after his declaration,

"Ah! malheureuse!(1) Madame, ces deux mots retentiront longtemps dans mon coeur. Par quelle fatalité, le plus doux des sentiments ne peut-il vous inspirer que l'effroi? quelle est donc cette crainte? Ah! ce n'est pas celle de le partager: votre coeur que j'ai mal connu n'est pas fait pour l'amour: le mien, que vous calomniez sans cesse, est le seul qui soit sensible; le vôtre est même sans pitié. S'il n'en était pas ainsi, vous n'auriez pas refusé un mot de consolation au malheureux qui vous racontait ses souffrances..."(2)

Is this merely a case of the roué imitating the language of the honest man for his own ends? Perhaps. But if we accept Valmont's reflections on the psychology of men in general and of Danceny in particular it is more than that. Adolphe is not precisely a Danceny who, if Valmont is right, follows "projets scélérats" unconsciously, more or less: nor is he precisely a Valmont. He is, to use a term of Mme de Marteuil's, too Céladon, and altogether too inexperienced to be a Valmont, and he is too basically disgusted that a cynical attitude towards the opposite sex should be the accepted social norm to be either a Valmont or a Danceny. He suffers torments of the heart of an intensity unknown to either of them (this is, after all, "une histoire.. de la misère du coeur humain"(3)). If Danceny leaves for Malta at the end of Les Liaisons, the terms in which he announces this decision(4) do not reflect by any means, polished and urbane as they are, the degree of suffering conveyed by the last pages of Adolphe or the picture of the despair of the mysterious traveller (later identified as the hero) given in Constant's Avis de l'Éditeur. This is where Adolphe is more "romantic" than Les Liaisons.

1. Her words when he made his declaration (cf. XXIII, 77).
2. I.D., XXIV, 79.
3. Adolphe, p. 98 (reply to Lettre à l'Éditeur).
4. I.D., CLXXIV, 421.

Despite all this, however, Adolphe does find himself in his role as apprentice roué, as he sets about the seduction of Ellénore, adopting attitudes by no means foreign to Valmont. Quite apart from the general references to ennui and vanity to which we have already alluded, there are other, more precise, similarities between the two of them.

Initially, Ellénore refuses to see Adolphe. His reaction is similar to that which makes Valmont set his cap at Mme de Tourvel and which causes him to react violently to the word "impossible" in his affair with the Vicomtesse de M...(1):

"Cette réponse me bouleversa. Mon imagination, s'irritant de l'obstacle, s'empara de toute mon existence."(2)

It is true that Adolphe deludes himself into thinking that from this moment on he is in the power of love, but the important thing is that he is now determined, like Valmont in both of the cases mentioned above, to possess the woman.

Secondly, it is worth noting that Adolphe is not satisfied with Ellénore's merely agreeing to receive him. This is understandable in any lover, no doubt, but what is interesting is that his expression of protest is full of the vanity which, in the case of Valmont, Mme de Merteuil, and, for that matter, Mme de Tourvel, Laclos had shown to be at the root of the relationship between the sexes. Each of these characters is determined to be recognised as unique. Like Alceste in his relationship with Célimène, each of them is more concerned with himself, with his own image (another manifestation of narcissism) than with the other person involved in the relationship:

1. L.D., LXXI, 169.

2. Adolphe, p. 19.

"On dirait qu'en vous demandant de me recevoir, j'ai obtenu pour tout l'univers la même faveur que pour moi.... Chère Ellenore, .. ne mérite-je donc pas d'être distingué des mille importuns qui vous assiègent?"(1)

Years before Proust, in both Laclos and Constant we have a clear formulation in fiction of the idea that love is not so much a reaction to another personality as a projection of oneself, in a sense the exploitation of another personality.

That Constant knew Laclos is no evidence that he was influenced by him. Nevertheless, despite its obvious "Romantic" elements, Adolphe, as its form and style as well as its content clearly show, has roots which stretch back through the eighteenth and into the seventeenth century. Constant displays a remarkable economy of expression and has no interest whatsoever in physical details or local colour, despite the fact that his heroine is supposed to be Polish and his hero is fresh from the university of Göttingen, and that the action is divided between Germany and Poland. This simplicity of form is shared by the great "classical" psychological novelists, amongst whom one must number not only Mme de La Fayette, but eighteenth-century erotics like Crébillon films and Laclos, and the Prévost of Manon Lescaut. A greater contrast to the out-and-out sensible writers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century it would be difficult to find.

Adolphe belongs to the world of Valmont. He does not like it, but he cannot break out, try as he may. Valmont is cold, cerebral. Adolphe is cold, cerebral, but with aspirations towards warmth and sensibility. In this

1. *ibid.*, P. 27.

respect he serves as a natural transition to an examination of the heroes of Stendhal in terms of Laclos.(1)

II

We have already referred to Stendhal's claim to have met Laclos, and to his claim to have known the original of Mme de Merteuil(2). Whatever the accuracy of these claims, it remains the case that we are justified in holding the view that the influence of Laclos on Stendhal was not inconsiderable, and in believing that the name of Laclos may have come to the ears of the young Henri Beyle very early on indeed(3).

1. One other similarity between the works of Laclos and Constant deserves mention in passing. It is interesting to note that Benjamin Constant continues to make use, in the full title of his work and in his Avis de l'Éditeur, of a convention which aims at giving an aura of realism to the work, but which can scarcely have fooled anyone. Just as Laclos claims that Les Liaisons dangereuses consists of lettres recueillies dans une Société, and published with a moral purpose in view, so Constant claims that Adolphe is an anecdote trouvée dans les Papiers d'un Inconnu and published, according to the Avis, to locate the owner of the belongings amongst which it has been found, but, according to the Lettre à l'éditeur, because "le malheur d'Ellénore prouve que le sentiment le plus passionné ne saurait lutter contre l'ordre des choses. La Société est trop puissante... elle met trop d'amertume à l'amour qu'elle n'a pas sanctionné...", and, according to the Réponse, because the work "prouve que cet esprit dont on est si fier, ne sert ni à trouver du bonheur ni à en donner" (Adolphe, pp. 96 and 98). This last remark, together with what follows shortly afterwards, the notion that "la grande question dans la vie, c'est la douleur que l'on cause, et la métaphysique la plus ingénieuse ne justifie pas l'homme qui a déchiré le cœur qui l'aimait" (ibid., p. 98), represents as good a moral as even the most earnest and determined searcher for moral instruction could extract from the pages of Les Liaisons.

On the other hand, it should be remembered that Adolphe is a personal novel, which Les Liaisons is not.

2. Cf. supra, pp. 505-7, 483-5.

3. That Laclos was known to Stendhal's family seems well enough attested: A. & Y. Delmas (À la Recherche des Liaisons dangereuses, Paris, 1964, p. 106) point out that it was Stendhal's grandfather, Dr. Gagnon, who ensured Laclos's election as a corresponding member of the Lycee des Sciences et des Arts of Grenoble. Laclos's letter of thanks, dated 16 fructidor, an X (3rd September, 1802)⁺ is to be found in the Bibliothèque de Grenoble, R. 7591.⁺⁺ As we have already mentioned, Stendhal's master at the École Centrale in Grenoble, Dubois-Fontanelle, held Les Liaisons in high esteem.

⁺ Laclos was admitted on 3 germinal, an IX (24 March, 1801).

⁺⁺ It is published in Petite Revue des Bibliophiles dauphinois, vol 5, no. 2, 1951, p. 58.

Critics have frequently been prepared to link the names of the two writers. Pierre Moreau describes Les Liaisons dangereuses as "la préface de l'oeuvre de Stendhal"(1). Marcel Arland speaks of Stendhal as being "si proche de Laclos par son culte de la volonté de ~~le~~ l'indépendance, comme par sa psychologie de la conquête amoureuse"(2). The only writers so far to have made anything like a detailed approach to the problem of the Laclos-Stendhal relationship, however, are A. and Y. Delmas(3). At the risk of, to some degree, duplicating their excellent work, it seems important to endeavour to get clear the nature of this relationship.

Whatever the initial reasons for Stendhal's interest in Laclos(4), there is evidence, quite apart from the universally laudatory references to Laclos himself in Stendhal's writings, that the author of Les Liaisons exercised an appreciable influence on him. It would, however, as in the case of Sade, be both foolish and wrong to seek to suggest any real identity of purpose or attitude in the two writers: there are plenty of points of dissimilarity between them, as well as points of similarity. André Maurois is surely correct in suggesting that if "la dure sécheresse de Laclos" produces le Rouge et le Noir and La Chartreuse de Parme, it is only when Stendhal's individual genius combines this sécheresse with "les ardeurs de Rousseau" and at the same time makes its own particular contribution(5). This, surely, is fundamental to what René de Planhol has

1. P. Moreau, Les Stendhaliens avant Stendhal, III, De Valville à Valmont, Revue des Cours et Conférences, 30 March, 1927, p. 741.

2. M. Arland, Les Echanges, Paris, 1946, pp. 180-1.

3. A. & Y. Delmas, op. cit., pp. 104-35.

4. A. & Y. Delmas suggest the nature of the "émotions" which Stendhal professes to have sought in Laclos's novel - cf. Vie de Henri Brulard, Divan, II, p. 60, where Stendhal, writing (admittedly) not about Laclos but about La Fontaine's Contes and Merciat's Félicie, says: "Mais ce n'étaient pas des plaisirs littéraires. Ce sont de ces livres qu'on ne lit que d'une main, comme disait Mme ***". (Cf. Journal, IV, 244, quoted supra, p. 507.

5. A. Maurois, Sept Visages de l'Amour, Paris, 1947, p. 86.

called the "parenté spirituelle" of Laclos and Stendhal(1), and this fusion of the two influences in Stendhal goes some way towards explaining Roger Vailland's suggestion that "Laclos ressemble bien davantage à Julien Sorel qu'au vicomte de Valmont"(2). We have already said enough concerning the folly of identifying a novelist with a given character to feel justified in saying no more on this particular point at this juncture. On the other hand, Vailland's suggestion can be said to bring us face to face once again with the Laclos enigma, and Laclos, combining as he does authorship of Les Liaisons dangereuses and his verse with a profoundly Rousseauesque side, might well be seen as a precursor of the character Julien Sorel, with his mixture of a desire for passion and cerebral calculation in his relationships with Mme de Renal and Mathilde de La Mole. It is for this reason that we cannot entirely agree with A. and Y. Delmas when they write,

"Bien entendu, nous laisserons dans l'ombre l'autre aspect de Stendhal, l'aspect Saint-Preux, l'influence également féconde de Rousseau, - celui des Confessions et de l'Héloïse -, comme le côté sensible de la nature de Stendhal. Cette sensibilité, ce manque d'une maîtrise absolue de soi-même, empêchera Stendhal, sur le plan de la vie, d'être un Valmont, et ses héros, dans la mesure où il les nourrit de sa propre substance, porteront, eux aussi, la marque des productions de Rousseau."(3)

It is true that there is a passionate side to the characters of Stendhal which is lacking in those of Laclos, with the possible exception of Mme de Tourvel, but there appears to be an enigma in Stendhal not dissimilar from that to which we have referred in Laclos. A. and Y. Delmas, after observing that in the case of Stendhal,

"... de surcroît, c'est par l'utile que l'homme arrive au plaisir;

1. R. de Planhol, Les Liaisons dangereuses, Rossard, Paris, 1925, I, p. xviii.
2. R. Vailland, Laclos par lui-même, p. 7.
3. A. & Y. Delmas, op. cit., p. 105.

mais l'idée de bonheur selon Stendhal a évolué et, en définitive, elle prend une forme très opposée à la conception de Laclos d'après Les Liaisons dangereuses..."

come near to acknowledging this apparent similarity in the personal psychology of the two writers. They are right to say "d'après Les Liaisons dangereuses".

If we restrict ourselves to the Laclos of the novel, the above argument is unimpeachable. If we take a wider view of Laclos, it may be less so, although further point may be given to the Delmas' subsequent remark:

"Dans la même lettre au baron de Marestre (a letter written in 1820), Stendhal ajoute en parlant d'Helvétius: 'Mais il avait l'âme froide, il n'a connu ni l'amour, ni l'amitié, ni les autres passions vives qui créent des intérêts nouveaux et singuliers.' C'est encore ici l'influence de La Nouvelle Héloïse qui reparait. Le bonheur n'est plus le résultat logique 'd'une démarche concertée de la pensée' mais 'une extase poétique et presque mystique du cœur' (Léon Blum, Stendhal et le Beylisme, first appeared in La Revue de Paris, 1914). Comment ces tendances opposées peuvent-elles coexister? C'est 'le secret de Stendhal', et ce n'est pas notre affaire de le percer." (1)

Stendhal combined an interest in Helvetius and the idéologues with an aversion for "les âmes froides", and this junction of apparent opposites is reflected in the characters of his novels. Laclos wrote Les Liaisons dangereuses, a novel of sécheresse if ever there was one, and yet projected a second novel which seemed to call for the style of Rousseau's Confessions...

Before broaching the subject of Stendhal's novels, we intend to look at certain of Stendhal's other writings in terms of Laclos, beginning with his early work, Du Caractère des Femmes françaises(2), which was first published by Paul Arbellet in 1909. This work, which is mentioned by A. & Y. Delmas(3),

1. *ibid.*, p. 124.

2. Stendhal, Du Caractère des Femmes françaises, in P. Arbellet, Le Catechisme d'un Roué, in Revue politique et littéraire (Revue bleue), 19 June, 1909, pp. 769-73.

3. A. & Y. Delmas, *op. cit.*, pp. 105 & 109-10.

deserves slightly fuller consideration than they give it. It was written in 1803, when Stendhal was only twenty, or in other words when he had just returned to Grenoble from Italy, where he claims to have met Laclos himself.

The work sets out to be a manual of seduction or, in the words of the title of Arbelet's introductory essay, Le Catéchisme d'un Roué. That Stendhal should at this stage in his life consider himself a roué, was wishful thinking, as Arbelet emphasises in describing the work as

"Le premier et naïf essai de ce don Juan manqué, au temps où il ne connaissait encore l'amour que par ouï-dire." (1)

The inspiration of the work is in fact essentially literary. The influence of La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld is clear, but Arbelet is right in suggesting that the supreme influence is that of writers to whom we have already had occasion to refer in a different context, writers like Duclos and Chamfort, and Laclos himself (2). Stendhal had by this time read Les Liaisons - Du Caractère des Femmes françaises contains two separate references to it.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of the essential bookishness of this work is the observation,

"Il y a un cérémonial dans l'amour: nos seuls maîtres en ce genre sont les romans que nous lisons..."

This notion is explicitly linked with Les Liaisons dangereuses:

"Pour la confection des plans de campagne, on peut consulter les grands auteurs. Par exemple, sur le problème: jouer l'amour auprès d'une jeune fille simple de 13 ans, le Danceny, des Liaisons; - auprès d'une dévote de 28, le Valmont du même..." (3)

1. P. Arbelet, op. cit., p. 773.

2. ibid., p. 770.

3. Du Caractère des Femmes françaises, p. 772. This observation does not betoken a particularly accurate memory of Laclos's novel. Neither Cécile nor the Présidente is as old as Stendhal indicates and, moreover, it is essential to remember that Danceny is too "Céladon" to conquer Cécile.

Here we have Stendhal speaking of sexual encounters in terms of military campaigns, a notion familiar to readers of Les Liaisons, although by no means peculiar to that work, despite Laclos's own military background.

This attitude is even more clearly expressed a little earlier in Stendhal's work:

"Je puis appliquer à l'art d'avoir une femme tout ce que je sais de l'art de gagner une bataille, et de prendre une ville."(1)

It seems, nevertheless, justifiable to suggest, in view of the direct references to Les Liaisons, that the parallels between Laclos's novel and the principles enunciated here by Stendhal are rather more than coincidental. In her autobiographical letter LXXXI, Mme de Merteuil emphasises that relatively few obstacles are set by society in the way of men who seek to exercise themselves on the sexual battlefield, by comparison with those facing women. Stendhal opens his work by stating that "la fausseté des femmes", which he sees as the principal characteristic of female psychology, is

"... l'effet nécessaire d'une contradiction entre les désirs de la nature et les sentiments que, par les lois et la décence, les femmes sont contraintes d'affecter."(2)

When he writes of the power of curiosity, Stendhal, who argues that "la curiosité entre pour beaucoup dans l'amour"(3), is expressing a similar point of view to that of Valmont, who remarks of Cécile that "la curiosité mènera peut-être plus vite que l'amour"(4). A. & Y. Delmas are no doubt

1. *ibid.*, p. 771.
2. *ibid.*, p. 770.
3. *ibid.*, p. 772.
4. *L.D.*, IV, 41.

right to point to this as being at least a partial explanation of how Cécile comes to allow herself to be seduced by Valmont(1), but surely this deliberate awakening of curiosity is also an essential part of Valmont's tactics in his campaign against Mme de Tourvel, whose curiosity plays an important part in the auto-séduction which characterises her.

Stendhal takes this point further when he continues,

"Moi à qui le dessin a donné l'habitude de chercher le nu sous les vêtements et de me le figurer nettement, je suis donc moins susceptible d'amour qu'un autre." (2)

Exercise of analytical powers leads to emotional sterility. This is precisely the state of both Valmont and Mme de Merteuil(3).

Stendhal's other direct reference to Les Liaisons runs as follows:

"Valmont le dit: c'est le coeur qui nous donne les plus grands plaisirs." (4)

A. and Y. Delmas are quite correct when they state(5) that in fact Valmont never says this, and they may well be equally correct in suggesting that this remark may be a reminiscence (and a rather muddled one) of Valmont's somewhat disenchant~~ed~~ observations after his act of charity, to which we have already referred more than once(6). What Stendhal here gives as an observation of Valmont is, in fact, as it stands, out of character with Valmont.

1. A. & Y. Delmas, op. cit., p. 109.
2. Du Caractère des Femmes françaises, p. 772.
3. Cf. ibid., p. 772: "Jamais on n'a été amoureux par raison."
4. ibid., p. 771.
5. A. & Y. Delmas, op. cit., p. 109.
6. Cf. L.D., XXI, 72.

A. and Y. Delmas see another reference to Les Liaisons in Stendhal's note, "Influence des bagatelles: 'je sautai le fossé'" (1), which they compare with the play on words in Valmont's account of his walk with the Présidente early in the novel:

"J'ai dirigé sa promenade de manière qu'il s'est trouvé un fossé à franchir et quoique fort lesté, elle est encore plus timide: vous jugez qu'une prude craint de sauter le fossé..." (2)

Stendhal's note may be an allusion to this, but one finds it a little difficult to be quite as confident about the matter as the authors of À la Recherche des Liaisons dangereuses.

There are, however, more general similarities between Du Caractère des Femmes françaises and the atmosphere of Les Liaisons dangereuses. Ennui, which plays such an important part in eighteenth-century erotic novels, including Les Liaisons, as well as in Stendhal's own novels, is emphasised here:

"Le principe VII(3) (... se mêler à tous les plaisirs des femmes, leur en procurer sans cesse...) avec le suivant, est la base de tout l'art d'avoir des femmes.

Les femmes cherchent dans leur amant plaisirs des sens et un remède contre l'ennui qui assaillit (sic) de toutes parts un esprit inhabile à l'application et par conséquent oisif.

L'ennui est une maladie de l'âme. Quel en est le principe? L'absence de sensations assez vives pour nous occuper...

Une femme ennuyée est facile à avoir..." (4)

Stendhal also emphasises the importance of appeals to the vanity, one of the principal themes of Les Liaisons:

"Amusez une femme et vous l'aurez. Comment l'amuser? par des anec-

1. Du Caractère des Femmes françaises, p. 771 (Stendhal's italics); cf. A. & Y. Delmas, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

2. L.D., VI, 45-6.

3. This systematic, mechanistic way of cataloguing these principles clearly illustrates Stendhal's sympathy with the eighteenth century.

dotes plaisantes, qui lui fassent faire sur elle-même des réflexions flatteuses ou utiles."(1)

The element of the chase is another feature of the motivation of Valmont which is stressed here too:

"Sur le mariage: le bonheur réside moins dans la possession que dans l'acquisition des objets de nos désirs."(2)

All this is very general, and does not reveal a definite, direct influence of *Laclos*. Indeed, certain aspects of the first two passages quoted above differ from what we find in *Les Liaisons*: for example "le principe VII" and the advice continually to amuse the lady "par des anecdotes plaisantes" are perhaps not in the literal sense characteristic of Valmont's technique. Nevertheless, the emphasis on *ennui*, on vanity and on the chase, is very characteristic of the world of *Les Liaisons*.

Possibly the most important fact about this work of Stendhal is that, as Arbelet points out, it is the first move in the direction of *De l'Amour*(3), some twenty years earlier than this celebrated work, and that it contains the beginnings of Stendhal's notion of crystallisation:

"Les hommes n'agissent pas sur ce qui est... mais sur ce qui semble être à leurs yeux."(4)

This notion of crystallisation is presaged in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, as we shall seek to show in discussing *De l'Amour* in the light of *Laclos*.

It is, of course, impossible to treat the subject of Stendhal and the relationship between the sexes without referring to *De l'Amour*(5).

1. *ibid.*, p. 770.
2. *ibid.*, p. 772.
3. Not quite the first. Arbelet quotes a previously unpublished note of Stendhal's of the same year, 1803, which amounts to a project to write "L'Art d'aimer, en d'autres termes l'art de séduire" (this last phrase is crossed out in the MS) in four verse cantos (*ibid.*, p. 773.)
4. *ibid.*, p. 771.
5. For an interesting parallel between *Laclos* and Stendhal, and a possible borrowing, cf. the anecdote in *De l'Amour*, *Divan*, I, 118-9, quoted by A. & Y. Delmas, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-8. The possibilities of a direct influence of a) the manner in which

The general verdict of Stendhal on the sexual mores of France is closely related to the essential theme of Les Liaisons as we have analysed it.

France, says Stendhal, is a country

"... où la plante nommée amour a toujours peur du ridicule, est étouffée par les exigences de la passion nationale, la vanité, et n'arrive presque jamais à toute sa hauteur." (1)

This is very much an eighteenth-century idea, as is evidenced by a similar remark in Duclos's Confessions du Comte de *** :

"Je compris que je ne devois pas chercher à Paris la passion Italienne, ni la constance Espagnole; que je devois reprendre les moeurs de ma patrie, & me borner à la légèreté Françoise (sic) (2)

Moreover, the basic idea of De l'Amour, that it is possible to give "une description exacte et scientifique" of love(3), is very much akin to the attitude of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, who believe it possible to arrive at an exact analysis of the feelings of others, and work on their fellow men and women in consequence, using them as puppets.

The famous division of love into four categories in the opening chapter of Stendhal's work is, methodologically as well as in content, very much of the eighteenth century. Whether love as it is depicted in Les Liaisons dangereuses falls into the second category, that of amour-gout,

"... celui qui régnait à Paris vers 1760, et que l'on trouve dans les mémoires et romans de cette époque, dans Crébillon, Launay, Duclos, Marmontel, Chamfort, Mme d'Epinay, etc., etc.",

and of which Stendhal says,

"Il est vrai que, si l'on ôte la vanité à ce pauvre amour, il en reste bien peu de chose..."

1. Stendhal, De l'Amour, Divan, I, 11. Cf. ibid., II, 13: "Il y a toujours une chose qu'un Français respecte plus que sa maîtresse; c'est sa vanité."
2. Duclos, Les Confessions du Comte de ***, écrites par lui-même à un ami, Amsterdam, 1741, I, 76.
3. De l'Amour, I, 3.

or whether it falls into the fourth category, amour de vanité, concerning which Stendhal remarks,

"L'immense majorité des hommes, surtout en France, désire et a une femme à la mode, comme on a un joli cheval, comme chose nécessaire au luxe d'un jeune homme"(1)

is perhaps difficult to say. But then, Stendhal himself has to use the word "vanité" in terms of amour-goût and, as he says a little later in the same chapter,

"Au reste, au lieu de distinguer quatre amours différents, on peut fort bien admettre huit ou dix nuances."(2)

Broadly speaking, then, these are the two categories of love with which Les Liaisons deals. These labels are particularly applicable, perhaps, to Valmont's relationship with Mme de Merteuil, and to Mme de Merteuil's with Prévan, although to some degree they can be applied to Valmont's seduction of Cécile and Mme de Tourvel(3).

The other two categories, however, are not totally absent from the pages of Laclos's novel. We can see, in Mme de Tourvel's utter devotion to Valmont, once she has given herself to him, an example of amour-passion, described by Stendhal as

"... celui de la religieuse portugaise, celui d'Héloïse pour Abelard..."

Perhaps the nearest to an example of the remaining category, amour-physique, characterised by Stendhal in the following terms;

1. *ibid.*, I, 27-9. It may be objected that Mme de Tourvel is not a "femme à la mode". True, except in the sense that the seduction of her, as an apparently extremely difficult prey, will bring great glory to the seducer.
2. *ibid.*, I, 31.
3. Cf. *supra*, n. 1.

"À la chasse, trouver une belle et fraîche paysanne qui fuit dans les bois.... On commence par là à seize ans",

is the pleasure found by Valmont in the company of Émilie, except that Émilie is by no means a "belle et fraîche paysanne". Valmont is far from his salad days. Everything in his world is tainted -- an aspect of, by comparison with certain of the other erotics, the high seriousness of Laclos. No gambolling in the woods here.

In the second chapter of De l'Amour(1), Stendhal describes the stages in the birth of love, and it is here that he introduces his theory of crystallisation:

"5^o La première cristallisation commence.

On se plait à orner de mille perfections une femme de l'amour de laquelle on est sûr; on se détaille tout son bonheur avec une complaisance infinie. Cela se réduit à s'exagérer une propriété superbe, qui vient de nous tomber du ciel.....

Ce que j'appelle cristallisation, c'est l'opération de l'esprit, qui tire de tout ce qui se présente la découverte que l'objet aimé a de nouvelles perfections....

En un mot, il suffit de penser à une perfection pour la voir dans ce qu'on aime.....

Un homme passionné voit toutes les perfections dans ce qu'il aime..."

It does not seem fanciful to suggest that Mme de Merteuil puts forward precisely this theory of crystallisation in two different passages. In the first passage, which appears in a letter to Mme de Volanges(2), the Marquise is dealing in general terms with women. She writes:

"J'ai rencontré, comme vous pouvez croire, plusieurs femmes atteintes de ce mal dangereux (love): j'ai reçu les confidences de quelques-unes. À les entendre, il n'en est point dont l'Amant ne soit un être parfait; mais ces perfections chimeriques n'existent que dans leur imagination. Leur tête exaltée ne rêve qu'agréments et vertus; elles en parent à plaisir celui qu'elles préfèrent: c'est la draperie d'un Dieu, portée souvent par un modèle abject: mais quel qu'il soit, à peine l'en ont-

1. De l'Amour, I, 32 et seq.

2. L.D., CIV, 268-9.

elles revêtu, cue, dupes de leur propre ouvrage, elles se prosternent pour l'adorer."

Mme de Merteuil may here be writing in general terms; it is nevertheless true that what she describes is precisely what happens to Mme de Tourvel. The second passage with which we are here concerned, and which occurs in a letter to Valmont(1), is also relevant to the liaison between the Présidente and the Vicomte. It takes the form, however, not of strictures on Mme de Tourvel's state of mind, but of yet another accusation that Valmont himself is in love and a consequent demand for the sacrifice of the Présidente:

"J'exigerais donc, voyez la cruauté! que cette rare, cette étonnante Madame de Tourvel ne fût plus pour vous qu'une femme ordinaire, une femme telle qu'elle est seulement: car il ne faut pas s'y tromper; ce charme qu'on croit trouver dans les autres, c'est en nous qu'il existe(2); et c'est l'amour seul qui embellit tant l'objet aimé."

The reason Mme de Merteuil, and for that matter Valmont, are anxious not to allow their sentiments to become involved is their insistence on an intellectual control of their lives, a determination to see things as they are, by the cold light of reason. They would agree with Stendhal that,

"Du moment qu'il aime, l'homme le plus sage ne voit plus aucun objet tel qu'il est."(3)

Stendhal himself certainly agreed with Mme de Merteuil's assessment of the Présidente:

"C'est uniquement pour ne pas être brûlée en l'autre monde, dans une grande chaudière d'huile bouillante, que madame de Tourvel résiste à Valmont. Je ne conçois pas comment l'idée d'être le rival d'une chaudière d'huile bouillante n'éloigne pas Valmont par le mépris."(4)

1. L.D., CXXXIV, 347.

2. It is interesting to compare this with Marcel Proust: "Notre nature... crée elle-même nos amours, et presque les femmes que nous aimons..." (*À l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*, Paris, Gallimard, n.d., I, 196).

3. *De l'Amour*, I, 65. cf. *ibid.*, I, 64: "Voilà la raison morale pour laquelle l'amour est la plus forte des passions. Dans les autres, les désirs doivent s'accommoder aux froides réalités; ici ce sont les réalités qui s'empressent de se modeler sur les désirs."

4. *ibid.*, II, 137.

This final boutade is not to be taken too seriously, of course. The furthest one can go in speaking of Valmont and love, unless one has, like Mme de Merteuil, an ulterior motive, is to argue that Valmont may feel for the Présidente as much love as such a man is capable of. He certainly has none of the passion of a Julien Sorel, or a Fabrice Del Dongo. But to fail to see, as Stendhal here pretends(?) to do, how Valmont could conceive for Mme de Tourvel "l'admiration" which Stendhal gives as the first stage in the birth of love, is completely to misunderstand Les Liaisons. Were this boutade to be taken seriously, however, perhaps the reply to it would lie in Stendhal's own work:

"L'homme n'est pas libre de ne pas faire ce qui lui fait plus de plaisir que toutes les autres actions possibles."(1)

That Stendhal does not misunderstand Valmont is suggested by his remarks upon the Don Juan. Here it should be made clear that Stendhal does not seem to mean by the Don Juan the mere coureur de jupes, interested only in the length of his list of conquests. He sees vanity as the principal characteristic of the Don Juan:

"Il faut l'excuser: il est tellement possédé de l'amour de soi-même qu'il arrive au point de perdre l'idée du mal qu'il cause, et de ne voir plus que lui dans l'univers qui puisse jouir ou souffrir."(2)

Whatever signs of weakness Valmont may from time to time display, whatever accusations Mme de Merteuil may hurl at his head, the above seems an accurate enough description of him, as indeed of the Marquise herself. For Stendhal,

"... l'amour à la don Juan est un sentiment dans le genre du goût pour la chasse. C'est un besoin d'activité qui doit être réveillé

1. *ibid.*, I, 44, a dictum drawn from Helvétius.
2. *ibid.*, II, 159.

par des objets divers en mettant sans cesse en doute votre talent."(1)

This emphasis on "talent", on tactics, on "pureté de méthode", is precisely what we find in Valmont, in Mme de Merteuil and in Prévan. Stendhal describes them accurately, when he says of the Don Juan,

"Au lieu de se perdre dans les rêveries enchanteresses de la cristallisation, il pense comme un général au succès de ses manoeuvres (comparez Lovelace à Tom Jones), et en un mot ~~true~~ l'amour au lieu d'en jouir plus qu'un autre, comme croit le vulgaire."(2)

This, again, is very much Valmont (despite the Marquise's accusations), very much Mme de Merteuil herself, and it is this kind of thing, this cerebral avoidance of (or incapacity to experience) the "rêveries enchanteresses de la cristallisation" which is to be found in the characters of Stendhal's own novels, fighting against a desire for "l'amour à la Werther" which is

"un but nouveau dans la vie auquel tout se rapporte, et qui change la face de tout."(3)

If we turn, then, to the novels themselves, there are several parallels to be drawn with Les Liaisons. The first novel about which a brief word should be said is Armance, which appeared in 1827(4). Firstly, like Constant's Adolphe, it is basically classical in form. Secondly, much as Laclos pretends that Les Liaisons is not his work, and that he is merely editing genuine letters, so Stendhal, in a signed avant-propos, claims that Armance is the work of

"... une femme d'esprit, qui n'a pas des idées bien arrêtées sur les mérites littéraires"(5),

1. ibid., II, 162.

2. ibid., II, 156. Stendhal's italics.

3. ibid., II, 162.

4. Like L.D., Armance is the first novel of a man in his forties.

5. Armance, in Armance/Lamiel, introductions et notes par Henri Martineau, Paris, Fernand Hazan, Les Classiques du Monde, n.d. (1949), p. 1. No doubt an indirect allusion to the Duchesse de Duras, who had written a short story on a similar theme a year or two earlier, entitled Olivier ou le Secret. Re this and Hyacinthe Thabaud de la Touche's novel Olivier (1825-1826), cf. H. Martineau, ibid., pp. xii-xiv.

and who has asked him to correct the style. Thirdly, it possesses, in common with the other novels of Stendhal, an emphasis on ennui - for example,

"Madame d'Amale avait raison de dire que (Octave) c'était l'homme le plus séduisant qu'elle eût jamais rencontré, car il n'ennuie jamais, disait-elle étourdiment. Avant de le voir, je n'avais pas même rêvé ce genre de mérite, et le principal est d'être amusé." (1)

Flight from boredom is one of the principal themes not only in Stendhal but also in many an eighteenth-century erotic novel, including Les Liaisons.

Fourthly, Octave de Malivert, like Valmont, and like Mme de Merteuil, is an exceptional being. As Martin Turnell points out, he is frequently described as "un être à part" (2). At first sight, in view of Octave's sexual incapacity, it may seem that his uniqueness is the result of factors totally opposed to those which exist in Laclos's characters. It is however at least arguable that there is a link between ^{the fear of} sexual impotence and the incessant chasing of women in which Valmont indulges. Henri Martineau says of Octave,

"Le voyons-nous fréquenter des maisons de joie, c'est qu'il veut à la fois douter de son infirmité et l'éprouver, c'est qu'il veut surtout donner le change à son entourage. Il aime mieux passer aux yeux de tous pour un débauché que se laisser deviner." (3)

We have, of course, evidence in Les Liaisons dangereuses which puts Valmont's virility beyond question! However, there does seem a case for arguing that excessive insistence on sexual energy can often denote doubts about the individual's virility (4). The themes being dealt with by Laclos and Stendhal may not be so very far removed from each other.

1. ibid., p. 162. Stendhal's italics.
2. M. Turnell, The Art of French Fiction, London, 1959, pp. 71 et seq.
3. Armance, p. xix: cf. ibid., pp. 72-3.
4. Cf. B. Karman, op. cit., pp. 10-11: "Sadism is a paraphiliac neurosis in which the will to power is sexually accentuated.... A strong sense of inferiority is characteristic... (The sadist) is often under-sexed rather than over-sexed." Valmont, of course, is not a sadist in the complete physical sense of the term. He is, however, desperately determined to prove himself (in Mme de Merteuil's eyes).

There are, however, manifest differences between Octave de Malivert and Valmont, differences which are precisely those which we have suggested as being the elements which in general terms set Stendhal's characters apart from those of Laclos. Turnell is right to insist that Stendhal's ideal ultimately is a contemplative one, as evidenced by Julien Sorel in prison, or Fabrice del Dongo in the Abbé Blanès's tower and the Tour Farnèse(1). He is further right in emphasising the positive role of sensibility in Stendhal, exemplified in Armance by Octave's comment on society to the effect that

"... la seule ressource contre cet avilissement général... serait de trouver une belle âme, non encore avilie par la prétendue sagesse des duchesses d'Ancre, de s'y attacher pour jamais, et de ne voir qu'elle, de vivre avec elle et uniquement pour elle et pour son bonheur."(2)

The fifth point to be mentioned concerning Armance is that the work contains one direct reference to Laclos. This appears as a consequence of the Commandeur de Soubirane's plot to prevent the marriage of Octave and Armance by means of a forged letter purporting to be from Armance to her friend Méry de Tersan:

"... M. de Soubirane avait employé deux jours à faire un modèle de lettre pétillant d'esprit et surchargé d'idées fines, réminiscence de celles qu'il écrivait en 1789.

Notre siècle est plus sérieux que cela, lui dit le chevalier (de Bonnavet), soyez plutôt pédant, grave, ennuyeux... Votre lettre est charmante; le chevalier de Laclos ne l'eût pas désavouée, mais elle ne trompera personne aujourd'hui. -- Toujours aujourd'hui, aujourd'hui! reprit le commandeur, votre Laclos n'était qu'un fat. Je ne sais pourquoi vous autres, jeunes gens vous en faites un modèle. Ses personnages écrivent comme des perruquiers, etc., etc.

1. Octave "regrettait vivement sa petite cellule de l'école polytechnique" (Armance, p. 9.)

2. M. Turnell, op. cit., pp. 75-6: Armance, p. 21.

Le chevalier fut enchanté de la haine du commandeur pour M. de Laclos; il défendit ferme l'auteur des Liaisons dangereuses, fut battu complètement, et enfin obtint un modèle de lettre point assez emphatique et allemand, mais enfin à peu près raisonnable." (1)

This reference to Laclos justifies one's belief that his influence on Stendhal may not have been insignificant. The implications of this conversation are, in fact, entirely to the benefit of Laclos, defended as he is by the intelligent Chevalier de Bonnavet and attacked by "cette âme vulgaire" (2), the Commandeur. Of the former, we are told that,

"... bientôt on éprouvait auprès du chevalier de Bonnavet, quoique si jeune, une sorte de repoussement. On sentait en lui une singulière absence de sympathie pour tout ce qui nous intéresse; ce jeune homme avait un avenir à part. On devinait en lui quelque chose de profondément perfide pour tout ce qui existe." (3)

In other words, the Chevalier has about him something of the Machiavelli (4), not to say of the Valmont, and he is, whatever else, a man of energy (it is he who devises the plot involving the letter and has to wait for the slow-witted Commandeur to seize upon the idea he dangles before him). Turnell describes this episode of the letter as "worthy of seventeenth-century comedy" (5). Considering its context, in view of the rather clumsy, though successful, manner in which this plot is carried out, one may feel inclined to agree. On the other hand, it is at least worth mentioning that here we

1. Armance, p. 103.

2. Ibid., p. 28.

3. Ibid., p. 164.

4. Cf. ibid., pp. 163-4, his, in view of the opinions of his audience, astute reaction to the arrival of the right-wing journal L'Etoile, bound only by one

paper band, thus making it possible for the porter to read it. . . Another band at right angles to the first is needed: "... Comme si le peuple était fait pour lire! comme si le peuple pouvait distinguer le bon du mauvais! Que faut-il attendre des journaux jacobins quand on voit les feuilles monarchiques se conduire ainsi?"

5. M. Turnell, op. cit., p. 67.

have a letter being used as a weapon, one of the greatest characteristics of Les Liaisons dangereuses, as Seylaz has rightly emphasised. The technique of Stendhal here may be immeasurably less subtle than that of Laclos, but the aim of the Commandeur and the Chevalier is to end a liaison by means of a letter. Such too is the aim of Mme de Merteuil in demanding the "Ce n'est pas ma faute" letter from Valmont: this is not a forged letter, but it is to all intents and purposes dictated under pressure. Both letters are intended to cause, and do cause, pain and separation. Both Octave and Mme de Tourvel die in consequence.

Finally, Octave may be physically impotent, but he is not emotionally sterile. Our earlier remark on the positive role of sensibility in Stendhal is as true here as in his other works. Octave has not the Chevalier's "singulière absence de sympathie pour tout ce qui nous intéresse": he does, after all, fall in love with Armance. But his sexual sterility has led him, as Turnell points out, to a curious sense of duty which takes, not a positive form as in the case of Julien Sorel (the taking of Mme de Rênal's hand), but a negative form,

"... a desire to retire from the world.... The principal characters turn duty into an imaginary obstacle race, and continually evoke it as an excuse for not doing what they want to do or for not choosing the path which leads to happiness. It is undoubtedly a censor which comes into play as soon as there is any question of marriage, but it also becomes an issue in the smallest matters..." (1)

The result is that Octave seems to be the possessor of, as Soubirane puts it, "(une) âme si pure qu'elle en est glacée" (2). No one would accuse either

1. ibid., p. 77.
2. Armance, p. 6.

Valmont or Mme de Merteuil of having "une âme pure" in the usual sense of the word. However, each of them has a singleness of mind, a sense of duty of a kind, which causes them to erect obstacles, although certainly not obstacles against doing what they want to do. They are both positive characters, and it will be seen that they have much in common with the more positive creations of Stendhal. Their obstacle race, however, is just as real.

Apart from A. and Y. Delmas, several critics to whom we have already referred have seen parallels between Les Liaisons dangereuses and Le Rouge et le Noir. For example, Arland, Augustin-Thierry, Carco and Faurie have suggested a parallel between Valmont and Julien Sorel; Arland, Beychéras, Carco, Faurie and Josephson one between Mme de Tourvel and Mme de Rênal(1). In the main, however, they content themselves with suggesting the parallels rather than examining them.

That ennui is again a central theme in Le Rouge et le Noir is cryingly obvious. Without going into the numerous occasions when the word appears, it will be enough to point out that the word is twice used as a chapter-heading.

There are, of course, several important differences between Julien Sorel and Valmont. Not the least of these are Julien's class-consciousness(2),

1. Carco (op. cit., pp. ix-xi) found it necessary to insist that Cécile de Volanges and Mathilde de La Mole have nothing in common. This does not seem to be a point worth labouring.

2. Cf. Le Rouge et le Noir, Paris, Garnier, n.d., p. 70: "Le sourire de plaisir expira sur ses lèvres: il se souvint du rang qu'il occupait dans la société... Il éprouvait un violent dépit d'avoir pu retarder son départ de plus d'une heure pour recevoir un accueil aussi humiliant."

which arises from his basic need to make his way in the world and endows his will to domination with nuances which are absent from Valmont's, his lack of self-confidence(1), and the romantic, passionate side of his nature. This taken into account, the essential similarities are at least equally striking.

Where Laclos's characters speak of destiny ("Conquérir est notre destin"), Julien speaks of duty ("un devoir héroïque"(2)). He has his idea of purity of method, or rather several: after having held Mme de Renal's hand,

"... il s'enferma à clef dans sa chambre, et se livra avec un plaisir tout nouveau à la lecture des exploits de son héros."(3)

This enthusiasm for Napoleon is at one and the same time an indication of the romanesque in Julien and an appropriate expression of the budding roué's need for a master in the art of seduction. If Valmont can compare himself with Turenne or Alexander the Great, no doubt Julien Sorel can compare himself with Bonaparte - but the amoindrissement is considerably more exaggerated in his case than in that of the Vicomte. What a contrast between the military exploits of Napoleon and the timidity of a youth afraid even to hold a woman's hand!

This is not the only example of Julien's possessing ideas concerning purity of method in this field. On one occasion he draws up his own plan of seduction, and here we see another great theme of Les Liaisons

1. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 322-3, 335, 336, etc.

2. *ibid.*, p. 55.

3. *ibid.*, p. 55.

4. *ibid.*, p. 31.

dangereuses coming openly into play, that of vanity:

"Son orgueil ne voulut rien laisser au hasard et à l'inspiration du moment. D'après les confidences de Fouqué et le peu qu'il avait lu sur l'amour dans sa Bible(!), il se fit un plan de campagne fort détaillé. Comme, sans se l'avouer, il était fort troublé, il écrivit ce plan."(1)

Julien spends the entire day trying to put this plan of seduction into operation(2). Unfortunately, he has none of the talent of a Valmont, and is unwilling to play it by ear as the Vicomte is prepared to do within the broad limits of his basic principles ("Sans cette sottise de faire un plan, l'esprit vif de Julien l'eût bien servi..."(3)). Mme Derville is suspicious of him in consequence, and says so to Mme de Rênal:

"Ton petit précepteur m'inspire beaucoup de méfiance... Je lui trouve l'air de penser toujours et de n'agir qu'avec politique."(4)

Valmont is nothing like as transparent as this, although it must be added that the hypocrisy of everyone in the world of Les Liaisons is a considerable help to him.

By far the clearest example of a "manual of seduction" in Le Rouge et le Noir, however, is that given to Julien by his friend Korasoff, of whom we are told that "l'art de séduire est son métier"(5). Korasoff has something to tell Julien on the subject of ennui, and what he has to say runs counter to Julien's tendency to escape from ennui by the means of the grand emotion:

"L'air triste ne peut être de bon ton: c'est l'air ennuyé qu'il faut. Si vous êtes triste, c'est donc quelque chose qui vous manque, quelque chose qui ne vous a pas réussi.
C'est montrer soi inférieur. Êtes-vous ennuyé, au contraire, c'est ce qui a essayé vainement de vous plaire qui est inférieur."(6)

1. *ibid.*, p. 81.
2. *ibid.*, p. 82.
3. *ibid.*, p. 81.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 81-2.
5. *ibid.*, p. 394.
6. *ibid.*, p. 391. Stendhal's italics.

Here we see several themes of Les Liaisons, the desire for domination, the desire to be self-sufficient and superior. This advice appeals to one side of Julien, to the roué he is trying to be but never quite succeeds in being. In saying that, we refer to the chief difference between Julien and Valmont. Korasoff's principles are clear. Speaking of the woman at whom Julien has set his cap and who has, Julien fears, lost interest in him, Mme de Dubois (i.e. Mathilde de La Mole), he lays down the following rules of conduct:

"1^o Vous la verrez tous les jours:

2^o Vous ferez la cour à une femme de sa société, mais sans vous donner les apparences de la passion, entendez-vous? Je ne vous le cache pas, votre rôle est difficile; vous jouez la comédie, et si l'on devine que vous la jouez, vous êtes perdu." (1)

The interesting thing about the advice which Julien receives from Korasoff is that it depends on the use of letters. As the Russian tells Julien,

"Lire une lettre d'amour bien écrite est le souverain plaisir pour une prude; c'est un moment de relâche. Elle ne joue pas la comédie, elle ose écouter son cœur, donc deux lettres par jour."

And when Julien objects that he will never find the necessary inspiration the answer is simple. Korasoff replies:

"Et qui vous parle de composer des phrases? J'ai dans mon nécessaire six volumes de lettres d'amour manuscrites. Il y en a pour tous les caractères de femme, j'en ai pour la plus haute vertu." (2)

Thus it is that Julien opens his campaign against Mme de Fervaques, still unsure of himself ("Il faut, se dit-il, en rentrant à l'hôtel, que je tiens un journal de siège; autrement j'oublierais nos attaques" (3)).

If Julien never quite makes the grade as a roué, it is equally true

1. *ibid.*, p. 393.
2. *ibid.*, p. 394.
3. *ibid.*, p. 400.

that he never entirely loses the mechanistic habits of thought associated with that profession in so much eighteenth-century erotic literature, a certain icy detachment, an idea that people can be reduced to formulae and, by extension, that methods of dealing with people can be clinically or mathematically worked out. There may be a passionate side to Julien, but this other aspect of him is very important, and is present in him from the early days of his career. More or less from the outset, Julien is "un froid politique"(1). The celebrated scene in which he first holds Mme de Rênal's hand and, later, that in which he holds it again in the presence of her husband show this clearly enough (the class problem, of course, enters into these scenes too)(2). The same remarks apply to the scene in which Mme de Rênal plucks up the courage to ask Julien whether he is really thinking of leaving the household and his pupils:

"Julien fut frappé de la voix incertaine et du regard de Mme de Rênal. Cette femme-là m'aime, se dit-il; mais après ce moment passager de faiblesse que se reproche son orgueil, et dès qu'elle ne craindra plus son départ, elle reprendra sa fierté. Cette vue de la position respective fut, chez Julien, rapide comme l'éclair; il répondit, en hésitant:

« J'avais beaucoup de peine à quitter des enfants si aimables et si bien nés, mais peut-être le faudra-t-il. On a aussi des devoirs envers soi.

En prononçant la parole si bien nés (c'était un de ces mots aristocratiques que Julien avait appris depuis peu), il s'anima d'un profond sentiment d'anti-sympathie."(3)

When he eventually becomes Mme de Rênal's lover, Julien is disillusioned -- his "n'est-ce que ça?"(4) is later to be echoed by Lamial -- but this

1. *ibid.*, p. 219.

2. That he chooses the moment when M. de Rênal is present to repeat this exercise is a deliberate decision on Julien's part -- an example of obstacles adding spice to the action (cf. *ibid.*, p. 65.)

3. *ibid.*, p. 77.

4. *ibid.*, p. 87.

does not mean that his relations with the opposite sex become any the less calculating. We see this clearly when, after leaving the seminary at Besançon, Julien spends one night with Mme de Rênal:

"Assis à côté d'une femme qu'il adorait, la serrant presque dans ses bras... il eut le malheur de devenir un froid politique, presque aussi calculant et aussi froid que lorsque, dans la cour du séminaire, il se voyait en butte à quelque mauvaise plaisanterie de la part d'un de ses camarades plus fort que lui." (1)

Once again there is no real pleasure in the moment of possession:

"Ainsi, après trois heures de dialogue, Julien obtint ce qu'il avait désiré avec tant de passion pendant les deux premières. Un peu plus tôt arrivés, le retour aux sentiments tendres, l'éclipse des remords chez Mme de Rênal eussent été un bonheur divin; ainsi obtenus avec art, ce ne fut plus qu'un plaisir." (2)

He does in fact still derive pleasure of a certain kind from the experience, a pleasure of domination such as lay behind Valmont's declaration that he would ravish Mme de Tourvel from the God whom she adored, and which finds full expression in the Vicomte's triumphant announcement, "la voilà donc vaincue, cette femme superbe qui avait osé croire qu'elle pourrait me résister!" (3) Stendhal expresses it as follows:

"Le jour croissait rapidement et éclairait vivement la chambre; Julien retrouva toutes les voluptés de l'orgueil, lorsqu'il put revoir dans ses bras et jusqu'à ses pieds cette femme charmante, la seule qu'il eût aimée et qui, peu d'heures auparavant, était tout entière à la crainte d'un Dieu terrible et à l'amour de ses devoirs." (4)

For all the passionate element within him, the spirit of calculation is an essential part of Julien. When he suspects that the appointment with Mathilde in her room may be a plot between her and her brother to make

1. *ibid.*, p. 219.
2. *ibid.*, p. 220.
3. *L.D.*, CXXV, 320.
4. *Le Rouge et le Noir*, p. 221.

a fool of him, "ce raisonnement le laissa plus froid et plus calculant qu'il n'avait jamais été"(1). It is this spirit of calculation which leads him to make copies of Mathilde's letters as a safeguard(2); it is this which makes him, parrot-fashion, repeat "plusieurs des plus belles phrases de la Nouvelle Héloïse" in his attempt to win Mathilde. He had used the same device earlier with Amanda Binet(3).

Indeed, if calculation plays a part in Julien's relationship with Mme de Rênal, it plays a still greater part in his pursuit of Mlle de La Mole, and his campaign against Mme de Fervacques, which is in fact part of this pursuit in accordance with the principles laid down by Korasoff, is a vivid example of a person being used as a puppet:

"Il adressait la parole à la maréchale, mais son but unique était d'agir sur l'âme de Mathilde."(4)

This campaign against Mme de Fervacques is interesting on several counts. It introduces the theme of conversion, which we have seen in Les Liaisons dangereuses. Mme de Fervacques' reflections on Julien run as follows:

"... ce jeune prêtre a de la distinction. Il faut que, les premiers jours, ma présence l'ait intimidé. Dans le fait, tout ce que l'on rencontre dans cette maison est bien léger; je n'y vois que des vertus aidées par la vieillesse, et qui avaient grand besoin des grâces de l'âge. Ce jeune homme aura su voir la différence; il écrit bien; mais je crains fort que cette demande de l'éclairer de mes conseils... ne soit au fond qu'un sentiment qui s'ignore soi-même.

Toutefois, que de conversions ont ainsi commencé!"(5)

Like Mme de Tourvel(6), Mme de Fervacques is determined to see what she wants to see in her suitor.

1. *ibid.*, p. 329.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 334, 339-40.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 340 & 164.
4. *ibid.*, p. 404.
5. *ibid.*, pp. 405-6.
6. Cf. L.D., VIII, 49, & XI, 56-7.

"Il écrit bien", says Mme de Fervagues of Julien. Julien's great weakness in the matter of letter-writing is that, unlike Valmont (for the most part(1)), he is incapable of inventing his own stratagems. The idea, and indeed the material, is given to him by Korasoff, as we have said. He follows the instructions given in the volumes of letters presented to him by his friend down to the last detail:

"Julien vit en note au bas de la première lettre: On envoie le n° 1 huit jours après la première vue.

Je suis en retard, s'écria Julien... Il se mit aussitôt à transcrire cette première lettre d'amour";

or again,

"Au bas de l'original, il aperçut une note au crayon.

On porte ces lettres soi-même: à cheval, cravate noire, redingote bleue. On remet la lettre au portier d'un air contrit: profonde mélancolie dans le regard. Si l'on aperçoit quelque femme de chambre, essuyer ses yeux furtivement. Adresser la parole à la femme de chambre.

Tout cela fut exécuté fidèlement."(2)

However, Julien is not so far away from Valmont in playing this game. He falls asleep on the second page of his first letter; and he expresses his opinion of the letters in no uncertain terms:

"Est-il possible, se disait-il, qu'il se soit trouvé un jeune homme pour écrire ainsi!"(3)

Indeed, he is so bored by the whole procedure that to save time and effort he copies the letters out word for word, failing on one occasion to replace the place-names London and Richmond by Paris and Saint-Cloud(4). Laclos's Valmont would never have committed such a gross error, but the motivation behind Julien's action is not dissimilar from that behind Valmont's time-

1. The idea of the brilliantly cruel "Ce n'est pas ma faute" letter is of course given to him by Mme de Merteuil and is, in fact, whatever he may think, a stratagem directed against him.

2. Le Rouge et le Noir, pp. 404-5.

3. ibid., p. 404.

4. ibid., p. 412.

and effort-saving device, which he describes in a letter to Mme de Morteuil:

"J'en suis à ma quatrième lettre renvoyée. J'ai peut-être tort de dire la quatrième: car avant bien deviné dès le premier renvoi, qu'il serait suivi de beaucoup d'autres, et ne voulant pas perdre ainsi mon temps, j'ai pris le parti de mettre mes doléances en lieux communs, et de ne point dater: et depuis le second courrier, c'est toujours la même Lettre qui va et vient; je ne fais que changer d'enveloppe. Si ma Belle finit comme finissent ordinairement les Belles, et s'attendrit un jour, au moins de lassitude, elle gardera enfin la missive, et il sera temps alors de ne remettre au courant."(1)

We have the same boredom, the same cynical detachment, and the same contempt for the recipient in both Julien Sorel and Valmont.

There is one facet of Valmont's technique which on occasions Julien copies to the letter, his refusal to cease to dominate and to become the one who is dominated. Thus Valmont is capable of refusing to take the Présidente when she is upset -- "il faut qu'elle se livre". Julien is capable of the same self-restraint. He demonstrates this when Mathilde shows signs of wishing no longer to be distant with him:

"... Il aida Mathilde à s'asseoir; elle s'abandonnait presque dans ses bras.

Le premier instant où il s'aperçut de ce mouvement fut de joie extrême. Le second fut une pensée pour Keresoff: je puis tout perdre par un seul mot."(2)

He sometimes wavers:

"Elle était placée sur le divan et fort près de lui. Il voyait ses cheveux et son cou d'albâtre; un moment il oublia tout ce qu'il se devait(3); il passa le bras autour de sa taille, et la serra presque contre sa poitrine."(4)

1. L.D., CX, 285.

2. Le Rouge et le Noir, p. 417. Cf. L.D., CX, 286 & XXIII, 77-8.

3. A significant phrase: cf. Valmont's "Au fait, je vau**x** bien peu, si je ne vau**x** pas la peine d'être demandé" (L.D., LXX, 167).

4. Le Rouge et le Noir, pp. 419-20.

But ultimately he always stands firm(1). This self-control, this determination to remain the dominant partner in the liaison, is perhaps most vividly expressed in the chapter significantly entitled lui faire peur. Having consciously stood fast against his temptation to give in to Mathilde, Julien returns to his room and gives thanks to Korasoff. Stendhal gives explicit approval of this act of will by Julien:

"C'est, selon moi, l'un des plus beaux traits de son caractère; un être capable d'un tel effort sur lui-même peut aller loin, si fata sinant,"(2)

Like Valmont after his greatest victory, Julien goes on to compare himself with a great general(3). He sums up this urge to domination in the following terms:

"Ici, c'est un démon que je subjugue, donc il faut subjuguer,"(4)

Right up to the end, Julien retains this spirit of calculation. It is true that at his trial he speaks his mind and vents his spleen on his class enemies, but he himself admits to Mathilde that this is an exception:

"N'étais-je pas beau hier quand j'ai pris la parole?... J'improvisais, et pour la première fois de ma vie! Il est vrai qu'il est à craindre que ce ne soit aussi la dernière."

And indeed the cerebral element in Julien is far from dead. Stendhal continues,

"Dans ce moment, Julien jouait sur le caractère de Mathilde avec tout le sang-froid d'un pianiste habile qui touche au piano,"(5)

1. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 424-30.

2. *ibid.*, p. 424.

3. *ibid.*, p. 425. Julien is, no doubt thinking of Napoleon. (cf. *L.D.* CXXV, 326)

4. *ibid.*, p. 425. Stendhal's italics.

5. *ibid.*, pp. 486-7.

Thus, Julien retains up to the moment of his death a spirit of calculation, a desire for domination, which is not unlike that which we find in Valmont. It is true that Julien, unlike Valmont, apparently, is not content with this. He has an aspiration towards something more. There is a warmth of passion within him trying to break free of the bonds which circumstances and the other side of his nature impose upon him. It is perhaps in this respect above all that Augustin-Thierry is justified in suggesting that Julien Sorel, with his passion and his hesitancy, can be compared, not with Valmont but with Danceny, and his relationship with Korasoff be compared with that which exists between Danceny and Valmont(1). Perhaps a more significant point, however, is one which points to an important difference between the approach of Laclos and that of Stendhal, and which is something also raised by Augustin-Thierry, amongst others:

"Celui-ci s'est point tout entier dans Julien Sorel; celui-là n'a rien mis de son âme en Valmont." (2)

We have tried to suggest the truth of this view as it affects Laclos earlier on in this work. Its accuracy in terms of Stendhal has been demonstrated by numerous writers.

Now let us consider Mme de Rênal in terms of the Présidente de Tourvel. First of all, there is the basic situation of her marriage. True, whereas when Valmont opens his campaign against Mme de Tourvel, M. le Président is physically absent, this is not the case with Mme de Rênal when Julien enters his wife's life. On the other hand, the emptiness of the relationship

1. A. Augustin-Thierry, *Les Liaisons dangereuses de Laclos*, Paris, 1930, p. 93.

2. *ibid.*, p. 152. Cf. E. Maynial, *op. cit.*, p. lxxvi, where the same point is made.

between husband and wife is in each case similar. We have already referred to the purely conventional way in which Mme de Tourvel alludes to her marriage. We have the pompous, unconvincing, balanced style of phrases like,

"Chérie et estimée d'un mari que j'aime et respecte...",

the hollowness of which is immediately revealed by the way in which the Présidente goes on to qualify her position:

"Je suis heureux, je dois l'être. S'il existe des plaisirs plus vifs, je ne les désire pas; je ne veux point les connaître..."(1);

we have the anguished cry,

"De quel droit venez-vous troubler ma tranquillité?"(2),

the cry of a mediocre woman who, if left alone, would probably have been perfectly faithful to her husband; we have, later on, the forced, banal reference to her conjugal duties,

"Non, je n'oublie point, je n'oublierai jamais ce que je me dois, ce que je dois à des nœuds que j'ai formés, que je respecte et que je chéris..."(3).

in which the very word-order itself illustrates the emptiness of the relationship. Mme de Rênal, too, is in a ^{peaceful} tranquil rut:

"... Pourvu qu'on la laissât seule errer dans son beau jardin, elle ne se réjouissait jamais.

C'était une âme naïve, qui jamais ne s'était élevée même jusqu'à juger son mari, et à s'avouer qu'il l'ennuyait. Elle supposait, sans se le dire, qu'entre mari et femme il n'y avait pas de plus douces relations."(4)

Like Mme de Tourvel, once roused from this rut, Mme de Rênal will prove incapable of coping with the situation.

1. L.D., LVI, 141.

2. L.D., LVI, 142.

3. L.D., LXXVIII, 188.

4. Le Rouge et le Noir, p. 14.

It is true that at one moment she thinks of imitating the Princesse de Clèves and confessing her predicament to her husband:

"... L'avenir se peignait sous des couleurs terribles. Elle se voyait méprisable.

Ce moment fut affreux: son âme arrivait dans des pays inconnus. La veille elle avait goûté un bonheur inépuisé, maintenant elle se trouvait tout à coup plongée dans un malheur atroce. Elle n'avait aucune idée de telles souffrances, elles troubleront sa raison. Elle eut un instant la pensée d'avouer à son mari qu'elle craignait d'aimer Julien. C'eût été parler de lui. Heureusement elle rencontre dans sa mémoire un précédent donné jadis par sa tante, la veille de son mariage. Il s'agissait du danger des confidences faites à un mari, qui après tout est un maître. Dans l'excès de sa douleur, elle se tordait les mains."(1)

But Mme de Renal is much closer to Mme de Tourvel than to the heroic Princesse de Clèves, just as her aunt's advice, in its implicit indulgence, is remarkably like that of Mme de Rosemonde. Mme de Renal makes no confession to her husband, and in due course of time becomes Julien's mistress.

The steps by which she arrives at this situation are familiar to readers of Les Liaisons dangereuses. The fear of appearing méprisable mentioned above may refer to the opinion of society in general and her husband in particular, considerations which no doubt played some part in the reluctance of Mme de Tourvel to give in to Valmont, but Mme de Renal also has something of the Présidente's fear that her lover will not recognise her as an exceptional being and will fail to distinguish her from other women. She must be everything to Julien. Hence her jealousy over the portrait of Napoleon, which she thinks is that of another woman(2).

In the initial stages of her relationship with Julien she is very much

1. *ibid.*, p.67.

2. *ibid.*, p. 67.

afraid of the qu'en dira-t-on. Hence her abandonment to Julien of a little to save the whole:

"... il s'approcha sa joue de ce joli bras, il osa y appliquer ses lèvres.

Mme de Rênal frémit. Son mari était à quatre pas; elle hâta de donner sa main à Julien, et en même temps de le repousser un peu." (1)

Hence too, and this affords a closer parallel with the behaviour of Mme de Tourvel in Les Liaisons, her decision to offer Julien friendship:

"... L'idée même de la vertu et de la fidélité jurée à M. de Rênal, qui l'avait agitée quelques jours auparavant, se présenta en vain, on la renvoya comme un hôte importun. Jamais je n'accorderai rien à Julien, se dit Mme de Rênal, nous vivrons à l'avenir comme nous vivons depuis un mois. Ce sera un ami." (2)

She is on the verge of capitulation, just like Mme de Tourvel when the latter finds it possible to ask Valmont,

"... N'aimerez-vous pas mieux être l'objet de l'amitié d'une femme honnête, que celui des remords d'une femme coupable?" (3)

It is true that when Mme de Rênal becomes Julien's mistress there is no real similarity with the seduction of either Mme de Tourvel or Cécile, although the nocturnal secrecy makes it more comparable with the latter rather than the former. Julien is a neophyte in the art of seduction, and Mme de Rênal is ready to give in. He does try to be a tactician on this occasion:

"Il se fatigua le cerveau à inventer des manoeuvres savantes, un instant après il les trouvait absurdes: il était en un mot fort malheureux, quand deux heures sonnèrent à l'horloge du château." (4)

Julien has none of the obstacles to face which confront Valmont (e.g. the

1. *ibid.*, p. 65.

2. *ibid.*, p. 80.

3. *L.D.*, LXVII, 163.

4. *Le Rouge et le Noir*, p. 85.

portrait of the husband), and in any case, he would almost certainly have been totally incapable of overcoming them:

"Julien oublia ses vains projets et revint à son rôle naturel... Il ne répondit à ses reproches qu'en se jetant à ses pieds, en embrassant ses genoux. Comme elle lui parlait avec une extrême dureté, il fondit en larmes.... En effet, il devait à l'amour qu'il avait inspiré et à l'impression imprévue qu'avaient produite sur lui des charmes séduisants, une victoire à laquelle ne l'eût pas conduit toute son adresse si maladroite." (1)

It is only after the event that Julien manages to take on once again some of the attributes of a Valmont, to

"jouer le rôle d'un homme accoutumé à subjuguier les femmes."

He comes back to the "modèle idéal qu'il se proposait de suivre", and

Stendhal analyses the situation in terms which could be applied to

Valmont:

"... Ce qui faisait de Julien un être supérieur fut précisément ce qui l'empêcha de goûter le bonheur qui se plaçait sous ses pas." (2)

It is not, then, purity of method which causes Julien to triumph in his campaign against Mme de Rênal, but nevertheless triumph he does.

One of the factors in his mistress's psychological constitution is a superstitious turn of mind, a piety which has no firmer a basis than that of

Mme de Tourvel in her half-hearted appeals to the divinity. Mme de

Rênal's son Stanislas falls ill, and Julien tries to console her:

1. *ibid.*, p. 86. Contrast this with Valmont on the subject of a letter to the President: "Je me suis aperçu que je ne m'y étais pas assez observé, que j'y montrais plus d'ardeur que d'amour, et plus d'humeur que de tristesse. Il faudra la refaire; mais il faudrait être plus calme" (*L.D.* XXIII, 78). It is true that it is easier to bother about purity of method when one is only writing a letter! Still, it should be noted that, true to his maxim "il faut qu'elle se livre", Valmont refuses to profit by Mme de Tourvel's confusion, but waits until he can genuinely win a tactical battle and force her to unconditional surrender in full *connaissance de cause*.

2. *ibid.*, p. 86.

"Mais ses consolations ne produisaient aucun effet; il ne savait pas que Mme de Rênal s'était mis dans la tête que, pour apaiser la colère du Dieu jaloux, il fallait haïr Julien ou voir mourir son fils... Dieu me punit (dit-elle), il est juste; j'adore son œuvre; mon crime est affreux, et je vivais sans remords! C'était le premier signe de l'abandon de Dieu: je dois être punie doublement."(1)

Similarly, involving her husband in her incoherent letter CLXI, Mme de Tourvel writes:

"Que cette Lettre au moins t'apprenne mon repentir. Le ciel a pris ta cause; il te venge d'une injure que tu as ignorée..."(2)

The end of the story is somewhat different in each case. Valmont is killed in a duel (the event is announced in letter CLXIII, 7 December, 17--); Mme de Tourvel loses her reason and dies (letter CLXV, 9 December). Julien Sorol is guillotined. Mme de Rênal, we are told,

"... fut fidèle à sa promesse. Elle ne chercha en aucune manière à attenter à sa vie; mais trois jours après Julien, elle mourut en embrassant ses enfants."(3)

Julien is killed by the representatives of justice of an alien society.

Valmont is killed by the hand of the outraged Danceny -- to see this young man as the representative of Society, even of the hypocritical society depicted in the pages of Laclos's novel, would be somewhat incongruous. However, if one takes Laclos's moral claims at their face value, that is precisely what one has to do... To suggest any real parallelism in the denouements of the two works would, however be pushing things altogether too far. However, it is interesting to note that in each case, however, inadvertently, it is the lady's confessor who is responsible for precipitating the catastrophe,

1. *ibid.*, p. 113.
2. *ibid.* CLXI, 397.
3. *Le Rouge et le Noir*, p. 506.

Mme de Tourvel's by being gulled by Valmont, Mme de Rênal's by persuading her to write the accusatory letter concerning Julien to M. de La Mole. In both cases the result is, in fact, before the actual catastrophe, to bring about absolute adoration in the mind of the lady in question. We have already seen this in the case of the Presidentes; in the case of Mme de Rênal it takes the form of her at last flouting propriety and openly visiting Julien in prison.

One other note remains to be made on the characters of Le Rouge et le Noir. Mathilde de La Mole has, of course, a fund of energy infinitely beyond the scope of Mme de Tourvel. She has the disease of ennui common to so many characters in the literary tradition which we are examining(1), but she has an overwh/oming desire, by the means of energy, to rid herself of it, a desire which is illustrated by her admiration for her ancestors. It is said of her that

"... cette Âme sèche sentit de la passion tout ce qui en est possible dans un être élevé au milieu de cet excès de civilisation que Paris admire,"(2)

"Cette Âme sèche" - the phrase might well be used about Mme de Mortouil. It is true that it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine Mme de Mortouil having sufficient passion to indulge in such roman noir activities as the kissing of the severed head of her lover(3), but it is true that the cerebral side of Mlle de La Mole's character does bear some similarity to that of the Marquise. One of the Marquise's prime needs - as a rouée - is to show off to a public. It is in this capacity that she uses Valmont.

1. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 243 & 251.
2. *ibid.*, p. 445.
3. *ibid.*, p. 507.

Similarly, although in a less icy, calculated way(1), Mathilde needs an audience:

"Julien se trouvait peu digne de tant de dévouement, à vrai dire il était fatigué d'héroïsme. C'eût été à une tendresse simple, naïve et presque timide, qu'il se fût trouvé sensible, tandis qu'au contraire, il fallait toujours l'idée d'un public et des autres à l'âme hautaine de Mathilde"(2);

and again:

"Si'il meurt, je meurs après lui, se disait-elle avec toute la bonne foi possible. Que diraient les salons de Paris en voyant une fille de mon rang adorer à ce point un amant destiné à la mort?"(3)

Mme de Merteuil, it must be stressed, would never have had such romantic ideas as those in which Mathilde delights. For all her bonne foi, Mathilde is playing a part, indulging in flights of fancy. Mme de Merteuil is as coldly objective as it is possible to be. What she needs to have admired is her hyper-scientific purity of method. This is the great distinction between the two women.

Nevertheless, there are similarities there too. They have in common a desire for domination:

"Je me suis donné un maître! se disait Mlle de La Mole en proie au plus noir chagrin..."(4)

Once Julien has threatened her with a sword, however, Mathilde accepts him as a worthy master, abandoning her will to his completely, and becoming masochistically devoted to him to a degree at least equal to

1. Mathilde is intent on being a great heroine from the same mould as her ancestors such as Poniface de La Mole.

2. Le Rouge et le Noir, p. 470. Stendhal's italics.

3. ibid., p. 471.

4. ibid., p. 345.

Mme de Tourval's devotion to Valmont(1). She is still, nevertheless, capable of a cruelty which brings her closer to Mme de Merteuil, telling Julien in detail of her past loves, much as the Marquise enjoys torturing Valmont, for example, in her account of her night with Bellerouche(2). It is worth noting, too, in terms of Mathilde's belief in energy and will, that she is not seduced but deliberately gives herself to Julien as a reward once she feels he is worthy of her. Afterwards she may become his slave, but up to this point Mme de Merteuil would have found much to approve of in her, even if the Marquise would not entirely have sympathised with Mathilde's mania for "les coeurs du siècle de Charles IX et de Henri III"(3). Even so, a qualification is needed here. Mme de Merteuil is capable of introducing an indulgent reference to the heroes of the past:

"... quelquefois il m'est arrivé de me rendre, uniquement comme récompense. Telle dans nos anciens Tournois, la Beauté donnait le prix de la valeur et de l'adresse."(4)

Finally, one point concerning the use of personal intervention by Stendhal deserves to be noted. A. and Y. Delmas refer to this in terms of Lucien Leuwen(5), but do not go into it quite as fully as they might. This point has to do with Stendhal's use of footnotes on occasions when his characters are expressing views which might be considered dangerous or shocking. A. and Y. Delmas refer to observations in Lucien Leuwen

1. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 349, 359, 360.
2. *ibid.*, p. 350; cf. *L.D.*, X.
3. *ibid.*, p. 471.
4. *L.D.*, X, 53; cf. XX, 69.
5. A. & Y. Delmas, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

such as,

"Au moment où nous le prenons, cet ennemi des cigares ne pensait guère plus à la république, qui tardetrop à venir",

which calls forth from Stendhal the footnote

"Dans l'opinion du héros, qui est fou et qui se corrigera"(1),

or

"La majorité aime apparemment cet ensemble doucereux d'hypocrisie et de mensonge qu'on appelle gouvernement représentatif",

which calls forth the footnote

"C'est un républicain qui parle."(2)

A. and Y. Delmas point out that this device is quite common in the first volume of Lucien Leuwen. They could have mentioned that it also appears in volume two of Lucien(3), and in Le Rouge et le Noir: Julien is reflecting on the atmosphere of the Hôtel de La Mole -

"Mais quant à moi, pensait-il, je serais bien dupe de vivre encore deux mois dans ce séjour dégoûtant, en but à tout ce que la faction patricienne peut inventer d'infâme et d'humiliant...." -

and at this point Stendhal introduces his footnote:

"C'est un jacobin qui parle."(4)

This is precisely the sort of device used by Laclos to comment on Mme de Merteuil when the latter tells Valmont that she has raised doubts in Cécile's mind as to the discretion of confessors, so that "elle n'ira plus raconter ainsi ses sottises au premier venu." Laclos's footnote reads as follows:

"Le lecteur a dû deviner depuis longtemps par les mœurs de Madame de Merteuil, combien peu elle respectait la Religion. On aurait supprimé tout cet alinéa, mais on a cru qu'en montrant les effets, on ne devait pas négliger d'en faire connaître les causes."(5)

1. Lucien Leuwen, 3 vols., Divan, Paris, 1929, I, 10 & note.

2. ibid., I, 11 & note.

3. cf. ibid., I, 20, 22, 35, 162 & II, 154, 159.

4. Le Rouge et le Noir, p. 488 & note.

5. L.D., II, 133 & note.

This precautionary note, incidentally, is not to be found in the manuscript of Les Liaisons in the Bibliothèque nationale. Laclos and Stendhal show themselves equally cautious and equally clumsy in this use of the device of footnotes.

When we turn to La Chartreuse de Parme, we once again find a stress laid on two themes to which we have already referred, ennui and vanity. A particularly vivid illustration of the former is Mosca's remark about Gina Sanseverina, "Il faut du nouveau à cette âme si jeune"(1), and there are countless allusions to vanity in the work. Vanity is seen as the prime characteristic of the French. Fabrice remarks,

"Avec ces Français il n'est pas permis de dire la vérité quand elle choque leur vanité."(2)

By contrast, it is said of Borda that,

"... ce chanoine avait beaucoup d'esprit... il... montra une bonté complète, et une ouverture de cœur sans réserve que l'on ne trouve guère que dans les pays où la vanité ne domine pas tous les sentiments"(3),

and, of the hero of the novel, that

"Fabrice avait un cœur italien; j'en demande pardon pour lui: ce défaut, qui le rendra moins aimable, consistait surtout en ceci: il n'avait de vanité que par accès..."(4)

Fabrice has, most of the time, many of the qualities towards which Julien Sorel and Mathilde de La Mole are striving in Le Rouge et le Noir. This is partly an expression of Stendhal's enthusiasm for all things Italian, and enthusiasm, incidentally, by no means shared by Laclos, as the latter's

1. La Chartreuse de Parme, Paris, Garnier, n.d., p. 136.
2. ibid., p. 55.
3. ibid., p. 85; cf. p. 104.
4. ibid., pp. 146-7.

correspondence shows(1). But ennui and vanity are two of the chief characteristics of the society depicted in Les Liaisons dangereuses, and so here we have a point of contact. Stendhal's characters try to escape from the stultifying atmosphere in which these twin attitudes thrive by means of the chasse au bonheur, and this chasse au bonheur, in all Stendhal's prose fiction, is another facet of his work which has its parallel in Laclos, for, as Pierre Moreau puts it,

"Cette chasse au bonheur... n'est pas seulement une chasse au plaisir: elle est une chasse au pouvoir."(2)

The search for domination is crucial in Laclos's novel.

Social life is hypocrisy, and Stendhal gives us the image of the game of chess which critics, ourselves included, are so fond of using in connection with Laclos(3). This desire for domination in an empty world is clearly exemplified by Ramice-Ernest IV:

"Il faut avoir cette femme, se dit-il, c'est ce que je me dois, puis il faut la faire mourir par le mépris."(4)

These thoughts of Ramice-Ernest about Gina Sanseverina, and the attitude they imply, closely parallel Valmont's attitude towards Mme de Tourvel, if one makes allowances for the different positions of the characters in the two novels. The Prince's methods are cruder, but the determination to place the woman at his mercy is the same ("Voilà l'ennemi digne de moi"),

1. Cf. L.I.: "... il n'y a rien sous le ciel de plus mortellement ennuyeux qu'un opéra bouffon italien, si ce n'est peut-être un opéra sérieux..." (p. 167); "... Les suberges y sont détestables, les villes, hors les principales, petites et vilaines..." (p. 263)

2. P. Moreau, Les Stendhaliens avant Stendhal, III, De Valville à Valmont, in Rev. des Cours et Conférences, 30 March, 1927, p. 746.

3. La Chartreuse de Parme, p. 91. Closely followed by a whist image (p. 117)

4. ibid., p. 234. cf. also pp. 132-3.

and the ultimate casting-off in his plan is the fulfilment of the roué's code. The last phrase denotes the Prince's determination to behave in a way which will have the same consequences Mme de Tourvel anticipated if she gives in to Valmont only to find herself cast aside like any other woman.

We find something of the same attitude in Fabrizio himself. He may suffer from vanity only par accès, but he does suffer from it, nevertheless, and there is a coldly cerebral attitude akin to that of Valmont, together with a desire for domination, in his galanteries in Naples and in the La Fausta affair in Bologna. What we are told of his attitude in the Naples episode reveals him as similar to the vision of Valmont possessed by the Présidente, and which exposes her determination not to be confused by him with his other mistresses (although it should be pointed out that Mme de Tourvel's own vanity and understandable lack of comprehension lead her to make the mistake of thinking Valmont a mere coursur de jupes):

"Sans doute il (i.e. Fabrizio) ne manquait pas de maîtresses, mais elles n'étaient pour lui d'aucune conséquence, et, malgré son âge, on pouvait dire de lui qu'il ne connaissait point l'amour; il n'en était que plus aimé. Rien ne l'empêchait d'agir avec le plus beau sang-froid, car pour lui une femme jeune et jolie était toujours l'égale d'une autre jeune femme jeune et jolie; seulement la dernière comme lui semblait la plus piquante. Une des dames les plus admirées à Naples avait fait des folies en son honneur pendant la dernière année de son séjour, ce qui d'abord l'avait amusé, et avait fini par l'excéder d'ennui, tellement qu'un des bonheurs de son départ fut d'être délivré des attentions de la charmante duchesse d'A..."(1)

Here we have a view of women which, although it may have certain similarities

1. *ibid.*, pp. 124-5.

ities with that adopted by Valmont, seems to differ from the Viconte's in certain respects. It is untrue in one sense, despite Mme de Tourvel's remarks, that all women are equal in value in Valmont's eyes. The Présidente is of greater worth in his view than Cécile de Volanges, and he makes this quite clear. However, this greater worth is not intrinsic in her as a woman - it is simply that she presents a keener challenge to his pride in pureté de méthode. Hence his remark about her being "l'ennemi digne de (lui)". It is once she has been vanquished, if Valmont is to be true to his principles, that she has to become like any other woman to him. Her worth lies in the chase, and disappears after the kill. There is nothing in the above description of Fabrice's amours which could be likened to Valmont's insistence on method, unless it be the somewhat cursory reference to his acting "avec le plus beau sang-froid". All in all, Fabrice may here seem nearer to Casanova than to Valmont. Yet there is something about Fabrice's approach which sets him apart from the mere coureur de junes. He has Valmont's refusal to be dominated, and when he sees himself in danger of this he can act quickly and cruelly. As we are told later on,

"À Naples, surtout dans les derniers temps, Fabrice avait rencontré des femmes qui, fières de leur rang, de leur beauté et de la position qu'elles lui avaient sacrifiée, avaient prétendu le mener. À la vue de ce projet, Fabrice avait rompu de la façon la plus scandaleuse et la plus rapide."

Like Valmont, he will not allow himself to become the seduced. He is, too, capable of considerable calculation in his own interests. Immediately after the above, we are told that it is because of such fears of domination by her that he refrains from becoming the lover of Gina

Sanseverina. If he does that, he argues, he will become exactly like "ce Français étourdi qui tua un jour la poule aux oeufs d'or."(1)

The episode involving the singer, Fausta F***, is described by Stendhal as the result of "une misérable pique de vanité." One of the motives behind Fabrice's decision to seduce "la Fausta" illustrates the love of obstacles which characterises Valmont: Fabrice is "amusé par l'action de braver ce comte M***," the lady's current lover.

"Fabrice vit ce comte dans les rues de Bologne, et fut choqué de l'air de supériorité avec lequel il occupait le pavé, et daignait montrer ses grâces au public."(2)

The aim of this episode(3) is realised:

"La physionomie de la duchesse trahit la plus vive douleur: Fabrice n'était donc qu'un libertin tout à fait incapable d'un sentiment tendre et sérieux."(4)

In his own interests, so as not to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs, Fabrice has manipulated people like so many puppets to create the desired effect on the duchess Sanseverina(5).

Despite his own fears, there is in Fabrice a passion, a capacity for love, which is not found in Valmont. This finds expression in his relationship with Clélia Conti:

"Il sentait trop bien que l'éternel bonheur de sa vie allait le forcer de compter avec la fille du gouverneur, et qu'il était en son pouvoir de faire de lui le plus malheureux des hommes."(6)

1. *ibid.*, p. 208.

2. *ibid.*, p. 210. The whole episode is in fact the result of calculation. As Stendhal remarked in a letter to Balzac, "Fabrice saisit l'occasion qui se présente de démontrer à la duchesse qu'il n'est pas susceptible d'amour." (*Correspondance*, Divan, X, 281, quoted by H. Martineau, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, p. 629, n. 743.)

3. Cf. n. 2 *supra*.

4. *La Chartreuse de Parme*, p. 213.

5. Stendhal's remark to Balzac supports this (n. 2). It is true that Fabrice wonders whether what he feels for "la Fausta" is love ("Serait-ce enfin-là de l'amour"), but his overall attitude is clinical ("Fort curieux d'éprouver ce sentiment, et d'ailleurs amusé par l'action de braver ce comte M***...")(*ibid.*, p. 210. Our italics). Cf. the Vicomtesse de M. episode in L.D.

6. *La Chartreuse de Parme*, p. 305.

Nevertheless, the cerebral, calculating side of Fabrice finds expression even here. The seduction of Clélia is the result of a trick:

" - As-tu mangé?

Ce tutoiement ravit Fabrice. Dans son trouble, Clélia oubliait pour la première fois la retenue féminine, et laissait voir son amour.

Fabrice allait commencer ce fatal repas: il la prit dans ses bras et la couvrit de baisers. Ce dîner était empoisonné, pensa-t-il: si je lui dis que je n'y ai pas touché, la religion reprend ses droits et Clélia s'enfuit. Si elle me regarde au contraire comme un mourant, j'obtiendrai d'elle qu'elle ne me quitte point...

Pendant l'instant de silence occupé par ces réflexions, Fabrice sentit que déjà Clélia cherchait à se dégager de ses embrassements.

- Je ne sens point encore de douleurs, lui dit-il, mais bientôt elles me renverseront à tes pieds; aide-moi à mourir.

- O mon unique ami! lui dit-elle, je mourrai avec toi. Elle le serrait dans ses bras, comme par un mouvement convulsif."

Stendhal shows a positively Laclosian modesty and concision in his dismissal of the sexual act:

"Elle était si belle, à demi vêtue et dans cet état d'extrême passion, que Fabrice ne put résister à un mouvement presque involontaire. Aucune résistance ne fut opposée." (1)

Several of the themes of Les Liaisons dangereuses are there: the remorseless calculation and manoeuvring of the seducer's mind, the somewhat suspect religious attitude of the victim, her state of extreme desperation and hesitation. Valmont is able to boast of his pureté de méthode in the seduction of the Présidente. On earlier occasions he had been able to resist the temptation to give in to "un mouvement presque involontaire" such as that experienced by Fabrice. This at first sight might seem to indicate that Fabrice's method is less under control than Valmont's. But their situations, of course, are by no means identical,

1. *ibid.*, pp. 422-3.

and, as we have said, Valmont on several occasions does have to fight against such impulses, even if ultimately he conquers them. In the very letter in which he triumphantly describes his victory over Mme de Tourvel, he observes,

"... si j'ai eu quelquefois, auprès de cette femme étonnante, des moments de faiblesse qui ressemblaient à cette passion pusillanime (l'amour), j'ai toujours su les vaincre et revenir à mes principes. Quand même la scène d'hier m'aurait, comme je le crois, emporté plus loin que je ne comptais; quand j'aurais, un moment, partagé le trouble et l'ivresse que je faisais naître: cette illusion passagère serait dissipée à présent; et cependant le même charme subsiste. J'aurais même, je l'avoue, un plaisir assez doux à m'y livrer, s'il ne me causait quelque inquiétude..."

He then declares the necessity to fight this, and goes on to argue that he thinks and hopes he has found the cause of his uneasiness in the fact that Mme de Tourvel had proved such a worthy enemy:

"Dans la foule des femmes auprès desquelles j'ai rempli jusqu'à ce jour le rôle et les fonctions d'Amant, je n'en avais encore rencontré aucune qui n'eût, au moins, autant d'envie de se rendre, que j'en avais de l'y déterminer..."

It is the fact, he argues, in an attempt to convince himself as much as to convince Mme de Merteuil, that Mme de Tourvel is not like this, which has given him, after his victory, the unaccustomed uneasiness of which he speaks. This is, in that sense, a new experience. It is no intention of ours, at this point, to go once again into the thorny question of whether Valmont is or is not "genuinely in love" with Mme de Tourvel. What such an expression means is open to any number of interpretations. Suffice it to say that Valmont himself is very uneasy, as the language he uses demonstrates:

"Je chéris cette façon de voir, qui me sauve l'humiliation de

penser que je puisse dépendre en quelque manière que ce soit de l'esclave même que je ne serais asservie: que je n'aie pas en moi seul la plénitude de mon bonheur; et que la faculté de m'en faire jouir dans toute son énergie soit réservée à telle ou telle femme, exclusivement à toute autre."

It is true, of course, that he has no intention of giving into his uneasiness:

"... vous pouvez être sûre que je ne me laisserai pas tellement enchaîner, que je ne puisse toujours briser ces nouveaux liens, en me joignant et à ma volonté."

In a sense, then, Mme de Tourvel can, at this point, be said to have had a victory -- whatever Valmont's precise feelings, it is quite clear that he does not consider her as the same as any other woman. There can be no doubt about it that there is a fault in her cerebral control-system.

Valmont is, in fact, by no means as clear-sighted as he likes to think himself. This he shows in this episode in his description of the Présidente, when he misunderstands her in several important respects:

"Ici... j'ai trouvé une première prévention défavorable et fondée depuis sur les conseils et les rapports d'une femme haineuse, mais clairvoyante; une timidité naturelle et extrême, que fortifiait une valeur éclairée; un attachement à la vertu, que la Religion dirigeait..."(1)

We have already said something about the Présidente's religion and the conventional expression of her "attachement à la vertu"; as for the "première prévention défavorable", as early as letter VIII Mme de Tourvel is expressing the view that Valmont is worth more than his reputation would imply; and as for "les conseils et les rapports d'une femme haineuse...", Mme de Tourvel does come, before the seduction, to replace Mme de Volanges as her confidant by Mme de Roseronde, a far more indulgent friend. Valmont, of course, was not to know this, but he

does fail here to appreciate the extent of the influence of auto-séduction. It is important, of course, for his self-esteem, that he should estimate as highly as possible the difficulties which lay in his path in this campaign, and underestimate the help which, from quite early on, Mme de Tourvel was herself giving him, even though unwillingly and unconsciously, in his grand design to make her se livrer. We must, no doubt, accept this uneasiness in Valmont as akin to the capacity for love to which we have referred in Fabrice, although of course it is much less highly developed in the Viconte, and when it tries to appear is immediately withered by the sacrifice of Mme de Tourvel to Valmont's vanity. Fabrice wishes for a grand passion, and for a long time thinks himself incapable of experiencing love; Valmont is determined to behave coldly and calculatingly, and for a while is afraid that he has contracted the disease. In this respect, the two are compounds of the same basic materials, but in differing proportions.

There are other parallels to be drawn between the tactics of Fabrice and Valmont. Valmont sends the Présidente a letter timbrée de Dijon(1), so that she will think it comes from her husband. Fabrice, "écoussé à bout par l'excès de sa mélancolie et par ces regards de Clélia qui constamment se détournent de lui", adopts a not dissimilar stratagem:

"Un jour, à la tombée de la nuit, Fabrice, habillé comme un bourgeois de campagne, se présenta à la porte du palais, où l'attendait l'un des domestiques garnés par lui; il s'annonça comme arrivant de Turin, et ayant pour Clélia des lettres de son père."(2)

1. L.D., XXXVI, 100-3. cf. XXXIV, 97.

2. La Chartreuse de Parme, p. 438. It is true that this incident comes after the seduction of Clélia, that Valmont has none of Fabrice's melancholy, except by affectation, and that Fabrice presents the letter himself. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that the basic device springs from a recollection of Laclos's novel. One can put it no more strongly than that.

Fabrice may be more "romantic" as a hero: his tactics are those of Laclos's roué.

We have already referred to Clélia Conti's religion. Her interpretation of her vow never again to see Fabrice(1) makes it clear that it has no firmer a foundation than that of the Présidente de Tourvel. What is more interesting about Clélia, however, in terms of Laclos, is that her attitude towards Fabrice, before she becomes his mistress, is remarkably similar to Mme de Tourvel's view of Valmont. She remarks;

"Je n'eus point le courage de quitter la forteresse et je suis une fille perdue, je me suis attachée à un homme léger: je sais quelle a été sa conduite à Naples; et quelle raison aurais-je de croire qu'il aura changé de caractère? Enfermé dans une prison sévère, il a fait la cour à la seule femme qu'il pût voir, elle a été une distraction pour son ennui. Comme il ne pouvait lui parler qu'avec de certaines difficultés, cet amusement a pris la fausse apparence d'une passion. Ce prisonnier s'étant fait un nom dans le monde par son courage, il s'imagine prouver que son amour est mieux qu'un simple goût passager, en s'exposant à d'assez grands périls pour continuer à voir la personne qu'il croit aimer? Mais dès qu'il sera dans une grande ville, entouré de nouveau des séductions de la société, il sera de nouveau ce qu'il a toujours été, un homme du monde adonné aux dissipations, à la galanterie, et sa pauvre compagne de prison finira ses jours dans un couvent, oubliée de cet être léger, et avec le mortel regret de lui avoir ait un avou."(2)

There are, of course, inevitable differences(3), but this passage, and more especially the last sentence of it, closely parallels Mme de Tourvel's feelings and indeed, to some degree, her subsequent history. The similarities with certain of the Présidente's observations are striking, especially with what she has to say in Letter I:

1. *ibid.*, pp. 438-9.

2. *ibid.*, p. 334.

3. Not the least of which is the fact that Clélia charitably assumes that Fabrice's feelings for her, however temporary, are genuine.

"De retour à Paris, vous y trouverez assez d'occasions d'oublier un sentiment qui peut-être n'a dû sa naissance qu'à l'habitude où vous êtes de vous occuper de semblables objets, et sa force qu'au dés-couragement de la campagne... Y pouvez-vous faire un pas sans y rencontrer un exemple de votre facilité à changer...?... Vous demander de ne plus vous occuper de moi, ce n'est donc que 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." (1)

Valmont is in the country, Fabrice is in prison. That apart, there is a remarkable similarity between the two situations. Mme de Tourvel would certainly have sympathised with Clélia's uneasiness.

A brief word concerning two other characters in La Chartreuse de Parme seems not out of place here. Gina Sanseverina is a remarkable example of energy and intrigue in a female character - in large measure Fabrice is her creation. She is used to manipulating people and at times is more akin to certain of Sade's creations, particularly Juliette, than to Mme de Merteuil (2). She may have her moments of weakness, but a prime element in her psychological composition is cruelty, as is shown in the following description of her reaction to Fabrice:

"Elle le trouva tellement changé, ses yeux, encore agrandis par l'extrême maigreur, avaient tellement l'air de lui sortir de la tête, et lui-même avait une apparence tellement chétive et malheureuse, avec son petit habit noir et râpé de simple prêtre, qu'à ce premier abord la duchesse, elle aussi, ne put retenir ses larmes; mais un instant après, lorsqu'elle se fut dit que tout ce changement dans l'apparence de ce beau jeune homme était causé par le mariage de Clélia, elle... eut la barbarie de parler longuement de certains détails pittoresques qui avaient signalé les fêtes charmantes données par le marquis Crescenzi (3). Fabrice ne répondait pas; mais ses yeux se fermèrent un peu par un mouvement convulsif, et il devint encore plus pâle qu'il ne l'était, ce qui d'abord eût semblé impossible." (4)

1. I.D., I. 130.

2. e.g. in the matter of the deliberately engineered flood and the poisoning of the prince (La Chartreuse, pp. 382, 387 etc.). She manipulates people less by cold calculation and more by intuitive impulse than Mme de Merteuil.

3. On the occasion of his marriage to Clélia Conti.

4. La Chartreuse de Parme, p. 443.

The guiding motive behind this is jealousy. Cruelty out of jealousy is the basis of many of Mme de Morteuil's actions, although the analysis of it is mathematically more precise in her case than in that of Gina Sanseverina.

Mosca is another character with definitely Laclosian overtones. He too is a brilliant intriguer, working on the political plane. We are told that,

"... entre autres idées enfantines, le prince prétendait avoir un ministère moral." (1)

Mosca, like Gina Sanseverina, is too good a Machiavellian to accept this, but, although basically a rationalist, he is also capable of emphasising impulse. When he first sees the countess Pietranera he vaunts those who can "(se livrer) tout entière(s) à l'impression du moment... Je conçois les folies du comte Mani." (2) It is as though Laclos had indeed written a second novel: one is forcibly reminded of his admiration and enthusiasm for Lacretelle's political intriguer Courville, of whom Laclos remarked,

"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)

- and yet this Courville is capable of remarking,

"Je crois que les beaux mouvements de l'âme valent mieux que toutes les combinaisons de l'esprit..." (4)

Gina Sanseverina may bear certain similarities to Laclos's creations.

1. *ibid.*, p. 401. Stendhal's italics.
2. *ibid.*, p. 95.
3. Observations du Général Laclos sur le Fils naturel, in Oeuvres complètes de Lacretelle aîné, Paris, 1823-4, vol. IV, pt. I, p. 58.
4. Lacretelle aîné, *ibid.*, Le fils naturel, Action, Act III, p. 145.

It is in the heroine of Lamiel, however, that we find the clearest example of a Laclosian female character in the work of Stendhal.

Lamiel, described by Henri Martineau as "une sorte de Julien femelle" (1), is a truly remarkable female character, striving after lucidity, and comparable, despite her lowly social origins, with the Marquise de Merteuil. Laclos, moreover, was in Stendhal's mind when he wrote this work: in his plan for Lamiel, Stendhal makes a direct reference to the author of Les Liaisons (2). In certain notes made in 1840-1 Stendhal states the essence of Lamiel as being "le dégoût profond pour la pusillanimité...; suivant elle une âme de quelque valeur devait agir et non parler." (3) This could be applied equally to Valmont and to Mme de Merteuil, although, like Stendhal's other characters, Lamiel has a passionate side to her nature, upon which Stendhal insists (4), and which differentiates her from Laclos's creations.

Vanity and ennui once again play prominent parts in this work.

Vanity, as Stendhal himself points out, is "la seule passion de Sansfin" (5), and ennui is a term which regularly appears - it is, for example, Sansfin's diagnosis of Lamiel's disease (6).

The relationship between Sansfin and Lamiel is an exceptionally fascinating one for any student of Laclos. "Ce don Juan bossu" (7), in effect,

1. Lamiel, in Armance/Lamiel, preface, p. 213. The incomplete novel occupies pp. 229-407.
2. ibid., p. 413: "Sansfin arrange la reconnaissance de Lamiel par un vieux libertin de l'école de Laclos sans principes et sans un sou, M. le Marquis d'Ornière..."; the work also contains a character named Provau (ibid., p. 397).
3. ibid., pp. 417-8.
4. ibid., p. 418.
5. ibid., p. 421.
6. ibid., p. 286. cf. also pp. 276, 363, 365, 366, 367, 368, 371, 378, 383, 385, 386, 387, 397.
7. ibid., p. 232.

embarks upon the task of providing Lamiel with a catechism of debauchery. He originally plans to seduce Lamiel and to marry the "duchessa de Miassens, subsequently dropping the second part of his plan. The seduction of Lamiel is begun by Sansfin seeking to take complete control of Lamiel's mind, winning her complete trust and confidence, an operation very similar to that undertaken by Mme de Merteuil in respect of Cécile de Volanges:

"Bientôt Lamiel fut convaincu que ce pauvre médecin d'une figure aussi burlesque était le seul ami qu'elle eût au monde. En peu de temps, par des plaisanteries bien calculées, Sansfin réussit à détruire toute l'affection que le bon cœur de Lamiel avait pour sa tante et son oncle Hautenare." (1)

Sansfin's tactics are curious. His attitudes, however, are not unfamiliar to readers of *Les Liaisons*. When he persuades Lamiel to place a sponge filled with the blood of a decapitated bird in her mouth to convince the duchess that she is ill, Lamiel, not unnaturally, feels some revulsion. Nevertheless, she does it, and Sansfin revels in his domination over her:

"... le docteur jouissait profondément en voyant les émotions si vives qu'il donnait à cet être si joli.

"Elle sera à moi," se disait-il.

Toute son âme était remplie du bonheur d'avoir réduit la jeune fille à l'état de complice. Il l'eût engagée aux plus grands crimes qu'elle n'eût pas été davantage sa complice. Le chemin était tracé dans cette âme si jeune, c'était là le point essentiel. Un second avantage, non moins important, qu'il avait obtenu en amplifiant la terreur, c'est que la jeune fille allait acquérir l'habitude de la discrétion." (2)

Perhaps Mme de Merteuil and Valmont, with the exception of Valmont in the actual seduction of Cécile, do not usually feel the need to make use of

1. *ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 287-8. *Stendhal's italics.*

terror, but both of them set out to make accomplices of their victims, and both of them feel a desire to form pupils, even though they eventually decide that their pupils are unworthy of them.

That vanity is, as Stendhal suggests, the basis of the doctor's character, is shown in the description of his usual approach to women. This description also reveals him as an amateur, by comparison with Valmont -- although, of course, Valmont does not suffer from the disadvantage of physical deformity in this field of endeavour:

"Son premier pas, c'était de les isoler sous prétexte de maladie; par ce moyen simple il les jetait dans l'ennui; puis il les amusait par ses mille attentions, et quelquefois parvenait à faire oublier son étrange difformité. Pour mettre sa vanité à l'aise, il avait pris l'habitude salubre de ne pas compter ses défaites, mais seulement ses succès. 'Fait comme je suis, s'était-il dit de bonne heure, sur cent femmes que j'attaquerai, je ne puis guère compter que sur deux succès.' Et il ne s'affligeait que lorsqu'il se trouvait au-dessous de ce taux." (1)

Sansfin's principles are indeed strikingly similar to those of Laclos's characters. The emphasis on pleasure is there, as is the recognition of a woman's need to keep up social appearances. Sansfin remarks to Lamiel,

"Il y a donc doublement à gagner à écouter la voix de la nature, et à suivre tous ses caprices: d'abord l'on se donne du plaisir (2), ce qui est le seul objet pour lequel la race humaine est placée ici-bas; en second lieu l'âme fortifiée par le plaisir, qui est son élément véritable, a le courage de n'omettre aucune des petites comédies nécessaires à une jeune fille pour gagner la bonne opinion des vieilles femmes en crédit dans le village ou dans le quartier qu'elles habitent." (3)

1. *ibid.*, p. 289.

2. On the strength of this, Martineau points out (*ibid.*, p. 493, n. 297) that Stendhal, in this belief that the search for happiness and pleasure must go hand in hand with the individual's self-interest, reveals himself as "un disciple suranné d'Helvétius". Once again we may detect common ground with Laclos here.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 297-8.

Compare this with certain of the declarations of Jacques's Marquise de Merteuil. One of her principal objections to Valmont's proposed liaison with Mme de Tourvel is that pruders such as she are incapable of giving him this all-important pleasure:

"N'en espérez aucun plaisir.... Cet entier abandon de soi-même, ce délire de la volupté où le plaisir s'épure par son excès, ces biens de l'amour, ne sont pas connus d'elles." (1)

In this rarefied world, pleasure comes not through the emotions: delirium is brought about by the imagination working on the senses. Secondly, on the necessity of hypocrisy on the part of the woman, it is worthwhile to compare Sansfin's observations with the passage in the autobiographical Letter LXXXI in which Mme de Merteuil tells how she learned to dissimulate:

"Dès que j'eus touché le but que je voulais atteindre, je revins sur mes pas, et fis honneur de mon amendement à quelques-unes de ces femmes qui, dans l'impuissance d'avoir des prétensions à l'agrément, se rejettent sur celles du mérite et de la vertu. Ce fut un coup de partie qui me valut plus que je n'avais espéré. Ces reconnaissantes Dignes s'établirent mes apologistes; et leur zèle aveugle, pour ce qu'elles appelaient leur ouvrage, fut porté au point qu'au moindre propos qu'on se permettait sur moi, tout le parti Prude criait au scandale et à l'injure.... Alors je commençai à déployer sur le grand théâtre les talents que je m'étais donnés." (2)

Other striking similarities between Sansfin's principles and those put forward in Les Liaisons are to be found. Sansfin counsels Lamiel that "il ne faut jamais écrire" (3). Mme de Merteuil makes a point of

1. L.D., V, 43.

2. L.D., LXXXI, 203-4; cf. also LXXXI, 200, and IX, 51, where Mme de Volanges describes Mme de Merteuil as the only woman approached by Valmont to have withstood him.

3. Lamiel, p. 298.

saying that when Belleruche comes to her petite maison he is given

"un billet de moi, mais non de mon écriture, suivant ma prudente règle." (1)

The letters which help to make up Laclos's novel must, of course, be seen as the exception to this rule, but we have no need to consider their existence as an example of lack of verisimilitude. There is a very good explanation for this given in the novel itself, and this reason leads us to the next similarity between Les Liaisons and Sansfin's principles.

Sansfin tells Lamiel that

"... le danger de la doctrine du plaisir c'est que celui des hommes les porte à se vanter sans cesse des bontés que l'on peut avoir pour eux. Le remède est facile et aisant, il faut toujours mettre en désespoir l'homme qui a servi à vos plaisirs." (2)

Mme de Merteuil adopts one method to "mettre en désespoir" Prévan; she uses another in respect of Valmont, and it is this which enables her to express herself freely to him in her letters.

"Descendue dans mon coeur," she says, "j'y ai étudié celui des autres. J'y ai vu qu'il n'est personne qui n'y conserve un secret qu'il lui importe qui ne soit point dévoilé.... Nouvelle Dalila, j'ai toujours, comme elle, employé ma puissance à surprendre ce secret important.... À la vérité, je vous ai... livré tous mes secrets: mais vous savez quels intérêts nous unissent, et si de nous deux, c'est moi qu'on doit taxer d'imprudence." (3)

Similarly, Sansfin warns Lamiel that

"... il ne faut jamais témoigner de confiance à une femme, si l'on n'a en mains le moyen de la punir de la moindre trahison. Jamais une femme ne peut ressentir d'amitié pour une autre femme du même âge qu'elle." (4)

1. L.D., X, 54: cf. also LXXXI, 204.

2. Lamiel, p. 298.

3. L.D., LXXXI, 205. The nature of this secret, which seems to be political in Valmont's case, is hinted at in CIII, 383.

4. Lamiel, p. 298.

Mme de Merteuil, long before Sansfin, had laid down this principle, in anticipating Valmont's argument that she is, after all, in the hands of her maid-servant. Mme de Merteuil agrees that this servant is aware of all her actions, if not all her ideas, but goes on to point out that the girl is her foster-sister and that, although of course such bonds have no meaning for enlightened people such as the Marquise herself or Valmont, they are not "sans force pour les gens de cet état". Furthermore, says the Marquise, "J'ai son secret"; and, better still, we learn that Mme de Merteuil was responsible for rescuing her maid-servant from being locked away by her parents after some unwise love affair. She still holds the official order and, as she says,

"... profitant de mon crédit auprès du vieux Ministre, je les fis tous consentir à me laisser dépositaire de cet ordre, et maîtresse d'en arrêter ou demander l'exécution... Elle sait donc que j'ai son sort entre les mains..."(1)

Lamiel herself, despite the fact that her social origin is very different from that of Mme de Merteuil, nevertheless manifests attitudes remarkably similar in certain respects to those of Laclos's Marquise. Lamiel is essentially a cerebral character, a fact which is clearly brought out by her creator:

"Le lecteur pense peut-être que Lamiel va prendre de l'amour pour l'aimable abbé Clément, mais le ciel lui avait donné une âme ferme, modeste et peu susceptible d'un sentiment tendre."(2)

The novels she reads warn her against love, but without making it clear what love is: this arouses in her a curiosity about the subject(3).

1. I.D., LXXXI, 205-6.
2. Lamiel, p. 300.
3. ibid., p. 301.

Her approach, however, is essentially intellectual:

"Elle n'avait aucune disposition à faire l'amour; ce qu'elle aimait par-dessus tout, c'était une conversation intéressante. Une histoire de guerre, où les héros bravaient de grands dangers et accomplissaient des choses difficiles, la faisait rêver pendant trois jours, tandis qu'elle ne donnait qu'une attention très passagère à un conte d'amour.... Lamiel n'était attentive qu'aux obstacles que les héros rencontraient dans leurs amours." (1)

The community of spirit between Lamiel and Laclos's Marquise and Vicomte here is closer than at first sight may appear to be the case. The interest in obstacles, and the importance of obstacles, we have already mentioned in connection with Les Liaisons. We have also stressed that it is not so much the actual enjoyment of the victim which matters to Mme de Merteuil or to Valmont, as the pureté de méthode in overcoming the obstacles, the skill and effectiveness of the campaign. It is not insignificant that they frequently write in military jargon and on occasion liken themselves to the great military leaders of the past, any more than it is insignificant that Lamiel should have such a lively interest in stories of war. The mentality of Laclos's characters is in one sense essentially military, involving the application of the art of war to campaigns which may have as their goal what ultimately amounts to no more than trivia, even in the eyes of the characters themselves. This is one important sense in which the phrase l'amointrissement du héros de roman has real meaning.

The sterility of human relationships which is apparent in Valmont and Mme de Merteuil is akin to the discovery made by Lamiel as a result

1. *ibid.*, p. 307.

of the experiments which, like Mme de Merteuil, she deliberately makes in the sexual domain. The word "experiment" is important. Lamiel and Mme de Merteuil have a similarly detached approach to the subject of love. Lamiel's uncle, Hautemare, warns her of the dangers of walking in the woods with a young man:

"'Eh bien! j'irai me promener au bois avec un jeune homme,' se dit Lamiel...

'Je veux savoir absolument, se dit-elle, ce que c'est que l'amour. Mon oncle dit que c'est un grand crime, mais qu'important les idées d'un imbécile tel que mon oncle? C'est comme le grand crime que trouvait ma tante Hautemare à mettre du bouillon gras dans la soupe du vendredi... Il faut convenir que tout ce que disent mes pauvres parents Hautemare est cruellement bête. Quelle différence avec les paroles du docteur!'"(1)

Lamiel suffers from somewhat stupid, superstitious guardians much as Cécile de Volanges suffers from a stupid, hypocritical mother. In consequence, both place their trust in roués, Lamiel in Sansfin, Cécile in Mme de Merteuil. Lamiel, however, is considerably more intelligent than Cécile, and an altogether stronger personality. The fact that "elle n'avait aucune disposition à faire l'amour", coupled with her observation, "Je veux savoir absolument ce que c'est que l'amour", seems directly to echo Mme de Merteuil's remark about her own youth:

"Ma tête seule fermentait, je ne désirais pas de jouir, je voulais savoir; le désir de m'instruire m'en suggéra les moyens."(2)

The parallel becomes even clearer when we compare the actual steps taken by Lamiel to educate herself in this matter with Mme de Merteuil's statements in her brilliant autobiographical letter.

1. *ibid.*, pp. 308-9.
2. *L.D.*, LXXXI, 201.

Before we go on to make this examination, however, it may well be useful to emphasise the basically cerebral nature of Lamiel's temperament, which is fostered and nurtured by Sansfin. The doctor

"... voulait surtout qu'elle se donnât la peine de réfléchir," and, as for Lamiel herself,

"... elle ne se trompait point: la nature lui avait donné l'âme qu'il faut pour mépriser la faiblesse."(1)

Thus, we are told,

"... le premier sentiment de Lamiel à la vue d'une vertu était de la croire une hypocrisie,"

an idea which is aroused in her by Sansfin's view that

"le monde... n'est point divisé, comme le croit le nigaud, en riches et en pauvres, en hommes vertueux et en scélérats, mais tout simplement en dupes et en fripons."(2)

This attitude can be compared not only with Valmont's verdict on the like of Mme de Tourvel after his act of bienfaisance(3), but also, and perhaps more directly, with his scathing dismissal of Danceny:

"Voilà bien les hommes! tous également scélérats dans leurs projets, ce qu'ils mettent de faiblesse dans l'exécution, ils l'appellent probité."(4)

Hence the importance in Lamiel, in Valmont and in Mme de Merteuil of what Sanfin calls "la fermeté de caractère".(5)

Lamiel goes off to the woods and conducts her experiment with the aid of Jean Berville. Her first experiment, however, is with a drunk whom

1. Lamiel, p. 311.
2. ibid., p. 310.
3. L.D., XXI, 72.
4. L.D., LXVI, 161.
5. Lamiel, p. 310. Stendhal's italics. If Lamiel is, despite all this, still capable of "tendre pitié" (ibid., p. 311), Valmont too, has moments of weakness.

she allows to kiss her. Her "Quoi! n'est-ce que ça?"(1) clearly echoes Julien Sorel's disenchantment after his first night with Mme de Rênal. "Experiment" is clearly the word to use of this episode, and of the subsequent and more important episode between Lamiel and Jean Berville - and if we make suitable allowances for the directness and relative simplicity of a country girl, even one of Lamiel's astounding calibre, the parallel with Mme de Merteuil's puppeteering and experimentation become apparent enough. Lamiel deliberately controls Berville's actions throughout the scene:

"Mène-moi me promener au bois... Embrasse-moi, serre-moi dans tes bras... Allons-nous-en; toi, va-t'en jusqu'à Charnay, à une lieue de là, et ne dis à personne que je t'ai mené au bois."(2)

Later, she meets him again. He makes the advances, and scratches her with his beard. Lamiel is not prepared to become the dominated partner: she repulses him, but says she will meet him again, tells him where and when to meet her, and offers him money. The pattern is repeated:

" - Embrasse-moi, lui dit-elle.

Il l'embrassa, Lamiel remarqua que, suivant l'ordre qu'elle lui en avait donné, il venait de se faire faire la barbe; elle le lui dit.

Oh! c'est trop juste, reprit-il vivement, mademoiselle est la maîtresse; elle paye bien et elle est si jolie!

- Sans doute, je veux être ta maîtresse.

- Ah! c'est différent, dit Jean d'un air affairé; et alors sans transport, sans amour, le jeune Normand fit de Lamiel sa maîtresse."(3)

All this shows, on a cruder, more rustic plane, a remarkable similarity to the technique of Mme de Merteuil, not only in her early education, but also

1. *ibid.*, p. 340.

2. *ibid.*, p. 340. Stendhal's italics ("Le curé défendait surtout aux jeunes filles d'aller se promener au bois." *ibid.*, loc. cit.)

3. *ibid.*, pp. 341-2.

in her subsequent treatment of members of the male sex, from Belleruche to Prévau and to Valmont himself. They are the things, the instruments on which she plays. Both Lamiel and Mme de Merteuil take certain precautions against discovery, although admittedly the steps taken by Lamiel are inexpressibly clumsy by comparison with those of the Marquise. Both ensure that they are in control, and above all both are essentially cerebral in approach.

Between her first and second interview with Berville, when she has done no more than kiss him, Lamiel goes to see her confessor:

"Elle raconta au saint prêtre sa promenade dans le bois; elle n'avait garde de rien lui cacher, dévorée qu'elle était par la curiosité.

L'honnête curé fit une scène épouvantable mais n'ajouta rien ou presque rien à ses connaissances."(1)

Similarly, Mme de Merteuil, in her mood of scientific curiosity, goes to see her confessor, but shows rather more imagination in her approach:

"Je sentis que le seul homme avec qui je pouvais parler sur cet objet, était mon Confesseur. Aussitôt je pris mon parti; je surmontai ma petite honte; et me vantant d'une faute que je n'avais pas commise, je m'accusai d'avoir fait tout ce que font les femmes. Ce fut mon expression; mais en parlant ainsi je ne savais en vérité quelle idée j'exprimais. Mon esprit ne fut ni tout à fait trompé, ni entièrement rempli; la crainte de me trahir m'empêchait de m'éclairer: mais le bon Père me fit le mal si grand, que j'en conclus que le plaisir devait être extrême; et au désir de le connaître succéda celui de le goûter."

Mme de Merteuil continues, "je ne sais où ce désir m'aurait conduite";

however, happily for her, at this precise moment her marriage was arranged:

"... sur-le-champ la certitude de savoir éteignit ma curiosité, et j'arrivai vierge entre les bras de M. de Merteuil."(2)

1. *ibid.*, pp. 340-1.
2. *L.D.*, LXXXI, 201.

We have already seen where this same desire led Lamiel - back to the woods with Jean Berville, to become his mistress.

The two women are equally objective in the conduct of this experiment, although there is a slight difference in the reactions. Lamiel, as she had done after her first kiss, expresses disappointment;

- " - Il n'y a rien d'autre? dit Lamiel.
 - Non pas, répondit Jean.
 - As-tu eu beaucoup de maîtresses?
 - J'en ai eu trois.
 - Et il n'y a rien d'autre?
 - Non pas que je sache.....
 - Quoi! l'amour n'est que ça?..... Lamiel s'assit et le regarda s'en aller (elle essuya le sang et songea à peine à la douleur).
 Puis elle éclata de rire en se répétant:
 - Comment, ce fameux amour, ce n'est que ça!"(1)

In this respect above all, Lamiel is indeed "une sorte de Julien femelle".

There are here, too, as we have suggested, certain similarities with Mme de Merteuil's reaction to the same experience:

"Cette première nuit, dont on se fait pour l'ordinaire une idée si cruelle ou si douce, ne me présentait qu'une occasion d'expérience: douleur et plaisir, j'observai tout exactement, et ne voyais dans ces diverses sensations que des faits à recueillir et à méditer."(2)

If she admits that, after the first objective experiment, "ce genre d'étude parvint à me plaire", her enjoyment is still cerebral, and she decides to

"... donner un champ plus vaste à mes expériences. Ce fut là (on her husband's country estate), surtout, que je m'assurai que l'amour que l'on nous vante comme la cause de nos plaisirs, n'en est au plus que le prétexte."(3)

And Lamiel, despite her initial sense of disappointment, is not slow to

1. Lamiel, p. 342.
2. L.D., LXXXI, 202.
3. L.D., LXXXI, 202.

indulge in further experiments.

This time it is the young Duc Féodor who becomes her guinea-pig. Lamiel remains in control throughout the young aristocrat's courtship of her(1):

"Lui était fou d'amour. Elle passait sa vie à inventer des tourments."

These torments, which demonstrate her desire for domination, can be extremely capricious in character. For example, to humiliate her aristocratic suitor she insists that he wear black. He agrees, but enquires why he should be called upon to wear a melancholy costume:

"Un de mes cousins vient de mourir; il était marchand de fromage."

Féodor duly obeys, and Lamiel embraces him:

"Le pauvre enfant pleura de joie. Mais Lamiel n'éprouva d'autre bonheur que celui de commander."(2)

Her attitude towards the Duc is essentially very similar to her attitude towards Jean Berville:

"Quant au duc, elle le regardait par curiosité et pour son instruction."(3)

She is able to insult him, much as Mme de Merteuil is able to insult Valmont, although in Lamiel there is a class element which is absent from Les Liaisons dangereuses. Lamiel can see the advantage of "cet imbécile de Jean Berville" over this somewhat effete aristocrat, and she makes no bones about telling the Duc that she prefers the abbé Clément to him:

1. Lamiel, pp. 346 et seq.
2. ibid., p. 347.
3. ibid., p. 350.

"... Connaissez-vous l'abbé Clément, ce pauvre jeune homme qui n'a qu'un seul habit noir et bien râpé?

- Et que voulez-vous faire de ce pauvre Clément? dit le duc en riant avec hauteur.

- Celui-là a l'air de penser ce qu'il dit et au moment où il le dit. S'il était riche et qu'il eût un Épervier (the duc's prize thoroughbred stallion), c'est à lui que je m'adresserais.

- Mais vous me faites là une déclaration de haine et non d'amour."(1)

Despite such insults, however, Féodor is fascinated by Lamiel. The social context is very different, but the fact that Valmont, despite the Marquise's taunts, still does his best to impress her, and nurses the forlorn hope of a return to her bed, is not entirely unrelated to this situation. Both Valmont and Féodor are being used as expressions of their ladies' mastery. Lamiel's letter of rupture to the Duc, too, is as cold, as casual and, in the last analysis, as cruel as the "Ce n'est pas ma faute" letter with which Mme de Merteuil presents Valmont for despatch to the Présidente de Tourvel:

"Cher ami, ou plutôt Monsieur le duc,

J'ai admiré en vous des manières parfaites; vos bontés sans fin et sans exemple m'ôtent presque le courage de vous dire un mot qu'à coup sur vous ne permettriez pas et qui me semble cruel mais nécessaire à votre bonheur et à votre tranquillité. Vous êtes parfait, mais vos attentions m'ennuient. J'aimerais mieux, ce me semble, un simple paysan qui ne serait pas éternellement occupé à me dire des choses délicates et à me plaire. Il me semble que j'aimerais un homme d'humeur franche, en tout simple, et surtout pas poli. J'ai laissé vos malles et mille cinq cent cinquante francs à Cherbourg, en passant."(2)

Féodor, like Mme de Tourvel, is a toy which has been cast aside, despite the different reasons for abandonment which are given in the two letters.

1. *ibid.*, p. 351.

2. *ibid.*, p. 371. It is perhaps worthwhile to mention that the 1550 francs referred to here represents half of the duc's assets. Lamiel keeps the other half for herself.

One final general observation by Lamiel on the subject of love will serve to show how much in common there is between her attitude and that of Mme de Merteuil. It runs as follows:

"Dieu me délivre des amoureux! J'aime mieux ma liberté que tout Rien n'est plus ennuyeux pour moi. Tout le monde me vante cet amour comme le plus grand des bonheurs; dans toutes les comédies on ne voit que des gens qui parlent de leur amour; dans les tragédies ils se tuent pour l'amour; moi je voudrais que mon amoureux fût mon esclave, je le renverrais au bout d'un quart d'heure." (1)

This observation, which reinforces our views concerning the cruelty of Lamiel's letter of rupture, can be compared with Mme de Merteuil's emphasis on the importance to her of her personal freedom:

"... mes principes... sont le fruit de mes profondes réflexions; je les ai créés, et je puis dire que je suis mon ouvrage." (2)

Her contempt for love, as it is usually understood, comes out clearly in the Marquis's comments on the "femmes à sentiment" in her autobiographical letter and in her description of Danceny as a latter-day Céladon. The desire for domination followed by rupture expressed by Lamiel in the passage quoted above is extended by Mme de Merteuil into a vicious, wholesale war on the male sex ("née pour venger mon sexe et maîtriser le vôtre" (3)).

One striking difference between Lamiel and Mme de Merteuil lies in Stendhal's observation about his heroine to the effect that

"L'épigramme était chose absolument inconnue dans sa bouche." (4)

1. *ibid.*, p. 367.

2. *L.D.*, LXXXI, 200.

3. *L.D.*, LXXXI, 199. It is true, however, as we have already stated, that in practice the Marquise is less discriminating. She has no qualms about destroying a member of her own sex to meet her own ends.

4. *Lamiel*, p. 398.

It is perfectly true that stylistically there is no comparison between the two women. Psychologically, however, if we make the necessary allowances for differences of plot and social context, where one is tempted to see the influence of La Vie de Marianne, or Manon Lescaut and indeed that of Rousseau (Lamiel is considerably less of society, of course, than Mme de Merteuil - her attack on "la politesse" in her letter to Féodor could never have been made by Mme de Merteuil), then the similarities are there for all to see.

Sansfin and Lamiel are not the only Laclosian characters to be found in this work. A brief word must be said about another, whom Stendhal initially calls the Comte d'Aubigné but whose name he subsequently changes to the Comte de Nerwinde. The Comte is a roué, with the roué's desire for self-advertisement: he says of Lamiel,

"Si je la désire, c'est pour montrer mon luxe; c'est pour la montrer à l'Opéra et au bois de Boulogne, c'est parce qu'il s'agit d'une primeur, c'est parce que j'aurai à conter son histoire où je mettrai du piquant."(1)

It is true that the Comte's motives here show him as much more a run-of-the-mill roué than Valmont. Moreover, he is not here concerned with the obstacles, minimal as they are, which stand between him and Lamiel who is, in fact, at the time of their meeting, more of a Manon in situation than a Mme de Tourvel. He has something of the vanity of Valmont, however:

"J'ai déjà trois ou quatre jugements qui peuvent me conduire à Clichy, je me dois à moi-même d'avoir cette petite provinciale; ce devoir rempli, il s'agit de disparaître en grand."

The outcome is speedy:

"Lamiel s'ennuyait à mourir, il ne fallut au comte que deux jours de soins."(2)

1. *ibid.*, p. 382. Stendhal's italics.
2. *ibid.*, p. 385. Stendhal's italics.

The end of the liaison is unknown, this novel being unfinished. However, this relationship expresses certain themes we have seen in Les Liaisons. Lamiel is still manipulating the people with whom she comes into contact like puppets, still experimenting, doing her utmost to escape ennui, motivated by

"... la profonde curiosité qui, à vrai dire, était sa seule passion ..." (1)

The Comte, for his part, is motivated almost entirely by vanity. It is said of him that

"... les coeurs dominés par la vanité ont une peur instinctive des émotions, c'est la grande route pour arriver au ridicule" (2),

an observation which closely parallels that of Valmont about himself to the effect that

"J'ai besoin d'avoir cette femme, pour me sauver du ridicule d'en être amoureux..." (3),

together with the Vicomte's subsequent uneasiness about the precise nature of his attitude towards Mme de Tourvel.

There can be no doubt that Stendhal was soaked in the eighteenth century and, whatever the truth about his having met Laclos, there can be no doubt that he was familiar with the latter's writings, or at any rate with his novel. The points which differentiate these two writers one from the other may well be at least as significant as those which throw light on a community of attitude, but nevertheless the similarities cannot and should

1. *ibid.*, p. 405.
2. *ibid.*, p. 388.
3. L.D., IV, 42.

not be overlooked. Pierre Moreau argues that Stendhal

"... doit beaucoup à l'art même de Laclos, à sa manière sèche et dépouillée, à son habitude à découvrir le menu détail, auquel un récit emprunte sa vie et sa réalité: 'Ce sont ces petits détails qui donnent la vraisemblance,' dit Valmont à Cécile Volanges (sic)(24 décembre 17..)(1). N'est-ce pas là un des principes les plus célèbres de Stendhal...?... Il lui devait surtout l'art de cheminer sur la fange sans trop s'y salir."(2)

The principal differences between the two writers can be put as follows.

Although Stendhal places considerable emphasis on individualism and on the ability of the mind and the imagination to control the heart, themes which are to be found frequently in the eighteenth-century novel, and more particularly in Les Liaisons dangereuses, it remains true that in Stendhal's heroes and heroines there is a warmth, a capacity for tenderness, a reluctance entirely to abandon the heart to cerebral activity, which is not to be found in Laclos's Marquise and Vicomte. Moreover there is a great deal of Stendhal himself in Julien Sorel, in Fabrice and, for that matter, in Lamiel. The same cannot be said of Laclos in terms of his characters. A Romantic Revolution had taken place in the years which separate Les Liaisons from the great works of Stendhal.

III

A. and Y. Delmas, in their À la Recherche des Liaisons dangereuses, draw parallels between Laclos and many writers of the nineteenth century quite

1. L.D., LXXXIV, 213. In fact the date is 24th September. This remark in fact concerns Valmont's plot to gain access to Cécile's room, and so may seem to have been torn somewhat unceremoniously from its context. Moreau's basic point, however, seems acceptable.

2. P. Moreau, Les Stendhaliens avant Stendhal, p. 745 & note.

apart from Constant and Stendhal, and these writers are not all novelists. Amongst them are Balzac, Baudelaire, Bourget, Dumas, Octave Feuillet, Théophile Gautier, Hervieu, Maupassant, Musset, Marcel Prévost, Sainte-Beuve, Eugène Sue and Verlaine. Some of these parallels seem considerably more valid than others. In particular, the comparison with the Alfred de Vigny of Eloa seems extremely forced. Any debt owed by Dumas or Eugène Sue to Laclos must certainly be very indirect, as indeed the Delmas' themselves imply(1). Amongst more recent writers, they suggest parallels with the Montherlant of the cycle of novels entitled respectively Les Jeunes Filles, Pitié pour les Femmes, Le Démon du Bien and Les Lépreuses, the Robert Margerit of Le Dieu nu and Mont-Dragon, and, inevitably, Roger Vailland, the author of Laclos par lui-même and the screen-play of Roger Vadim's film Les Liaisons dangereuses 1960 as well as of novels such as Drôle de Jeu, Les Mauvais Coups, La Loi, and La Fête. The pages devoted by the Delmas' to these comparisons are always interesting, although one would wish that the debt, direct or indirect, of these authors of the last century and a half or so to Laclos were always as clear as it is in the case of Vailland. We do not intend once again to go into these comparisons, but merely to raise the case of another contemporary novelist not mentioned in À la Recherche des Liaisons dangereuses, but whose debt to Laclos seems to us to be clear, presenting yet more evidence of the fascination exercised by him over our contemporaries. The writer in question is Françoise Mallet, and the novel of hers which we

1. A. & Y. Delmas, op. cit., p. 73.

intend to examine in terms of Laclos is Le Rempart des Béguines.

The theme of this work may not seem at first to have much in common with that of Les Liaisons. It is, basically, a study of a lesbian relationship between Hélène Noris, the daughter of René Noris, a successful small-town businessman, and Tamara, Hélène's father's Russian mistress. At the same time, however, it is a study in domination. Hélène is an adolescent, aged between fifteen and seventeen during the course of the action, and a comparison with Laclos's Cécile de Volanges immediately springs to mind. Tamara, in a sense, combines the rôles of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil(1) in her relationship with Hélène, who tells the story.

The corruption of the young Hélène begins when René Noris, unable to keep an appointment with Tamara, and too afraid of her to telephone her, asks Hélène to do so. Instead, Hélène goes in person to visit Tamara in the street called Le Rempart des Béguines. A homosexual relationship is rapidly established between them. The theme of individualism is soon introduced. Tamara had been dominated by her husband, and had resented it:

"... il prenait un malin plaisir à détruire par sa seule présence toute illusion de liberté dans l'esprit de Tamara."(2)

Her reaction against this was to set up house with the young student Emily, who eventually left Tamara for a Belgian engineer.

There are moments when this novel resembles what is to be found in Sade

1. It should be remembered that there are, as we pointed out earlier, signs of a homosexual interest in Mme de Merteuil's attitude towards Cécile.
2. F. Mallet, Le Rempart des Béguines, Paris, 1951, p. 46.

rather than what is to be found in Laclos. Algolagnia soon appears:

Hélène and Tamara fall out, and when Hélène pleads for forgiveness

Tamara forces her to beg for pardon on her knees:

"Je repensai à l'attitude de Tamara durant cette dispute, à la façon dont je m'étais laissé humilier par elle, qui y prenait plaisir... Et pourtant j'avais trouvé dans ses caresses plus brutales ce jour-là, empreintes encore d'une volonté d'abaisser, de plier, presque de faire mal, un plaisir plus vif que je n'en éprouvais d'habitude..."(1)

Henceforth Hélène has to pay for each moment of tenderness by undergoing

"de bizarres épreuves":

"Je résistais parfois un long moment, mais je finissais toujours par céder, et cette défaite qui m'exaspérait me causait pourtant un plaisir confus et indéfinissable."(2)

In this respect, the relationship is quite different from anything in Les Liaisons, with the possible exception of the voluntary - and total - self-immolation of Mme de Tourvel to Valmont after she has been seduced.

Generally speaking, the characters in Laclos's novel do not realise that they are being used. Mme de Tourvel alone reaches the stage of not caring, when she declares that Valmont is happy and that that is all that matters to her:

"Ce n'est pas que je n'aie des moments cruels: mais quand mon coeur est le plus déchiré, quand je crains de ne pouvoir plus supporter mes tourments, je me dis: Valmont est heureux; et tout disparaît devant cette idée, ou plutôt elle change tout en plaisirs."(3)

Tamara's reading demonstrates to us that she is as cerebral, as mathematical, in her attitudes as either Mme de Merteuil or Valmont:

1. *ibid.*, p. 76.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 77-8.
3. L.D., CXXVIII, 333.

"Ses préférences se portaient ou bien sur des ouvrages nettement érotiques, ou sur des oeuvres classiques et de préférence assez arides. Elle lisait peu de romans. Chaque fois qu'elle se sentait énervée, elle se plongeait dans un passage du Discours de la méthode, des Provinciales, voire dans un livre de géométrie dont elle s'amusait à résoudre les problèmes comme elle eût fait des mots croisés..."

If Tamara reads few novels, it is all the more interesting to note that Laclos's is one of them. Hélène continues:

"... Si je participais peu à de telles lectures, il en était d'autres qu'elle me faisait partager et dont la plus recommandable se trouvait être les Liaisons dangereuses; elles eurent du moins le résultat, que je jugeais salulaire, de me débarrasser d'une sentimentalité à la Werther vers laquelle mes origines germaniques ne m'inclinaient que trop. J'aurais volontiers collectionné des bouts de ruban ou des cigarettes, regardé une étoile chaque soir, à la même heure que ma bien-aimée: Tamara fit un sort à ces rêveries naissantes et m'en démontra le ridicule."(1)

So we have Les Liaisons being used as a manual of corruption - if the purging of "une sentimentalité à la Werther" can be fairly described as corruption. We have, at any rate, direct evidence to suggest that Francoise Mallet is consciously in the tradition of Laclos.

Hélène's father gives her permission to meet Tamara openly. This development is followed by a lull in Tamara's acts of cruelty:

"Sade? Les Liaisons dangereuses? Cela n'avait jamais existé. Des violences, des brutalités? Elle avait été un peu nerveuse, voilà tout..."(2)

Such is Tamara's justification. This lull, once the liaison has, so to speak, become legalised, is symptomatic of future developments. Tamara needs to dominate, but she also needs security: she is seeking revenge for her failure to dominate and control Emily and thus arrive at a state of stability. Her

1. Le Rempart des Béguines, p. 86.
2. ibid., p. 94.

lover, the painter Max Villar, puts this succinctly:

"Elle affecte des complications pour dompter un vieux complexe d'infériorité." (1)

Similarly, the whole intrigue concerning Cécile de Volanges stems from Mme de Merteuil's wounded vanity at having been deserted by Gercourt, and indeed it is interesting to contemplate the possibility that the whole state of aggressive war which is the Marquise's life is the result of an inferiority complex, that this is the impulsion behind her remark that she is born to avenge her own sex and conquer the male sex, preferably taking on the most complicated and obstacle-ridden campaigns to prove her point, such as the gulling of Prévau and indeed her campaign against Valmont.

The great battle between Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, however, prevents the Marquise from arriving at a position of stability, despite the hint of a wistful note in certain of her remarks about her past liaison with the Vicomte, the remark in her autobiographical letter, for example, that

"C'est le seul de mes goûts qui ait jamais pris un moment d'empire sur moi." (2)

One might be tempted to argue that this may be nothing more than a deliberate gambit to nurture Valmont's hope, a move in the Marquise's campaign to dominate him, and yet one is in fact more inclined than is often the case with Mme de Merteuil's observations to accept it at face value, for this letter is characterised by a striking frankness, and is indeed the letter in which we see more

1. *ibid.*, p. 123.

2. *L.D.*, LXXXI, 205. Cf. CXXXI, 340: "Dans le temps où nous nous aimions car je crois que c'était de l'amour, j'étais heureuse; et vous, Vicomte!... Mais pourquoi s'occuper encore d'un bonheur qui ne peut revenir? Non, quoi que vous en disiez, c'est un retour impossible." It can certainly be argued that the above is not to be taken at face value, that it is merely a piece of acting to persuade Valmont to sacrifice the Présidente to her - she immediately plants the idea of this sacrifice in his mind as the price of a possible retour. LXXXI is much less certainly insincere.

clearly than anywhere else the Marquise without her mask. Whether or not Valmont and the Marquise, even for a fleeting instant, have any real degree of yearning for a return to a stability they have glimpsed together in the past is problematical, but the fact remains that, whatever the Marquise's motives for raising the subject in Letter CXXXI(1), this is clearly "un retour impossible". The ultimate clash must come. Such is not the case for Tamara.

The way out for her comes shortly after a scene which is incontestably highly reminiscent of Les Liaisons dangereuses. Tamara receives a proposal of marriage from Hélène's father over the telephone whilst Hélène is naked beside her on a divan undressing her in her turn. At the foot of the divan is a mirror in which they can see their reflection(2). The setting is similar to any number to be found in eighteenth-century erotic novels, but the more precise echo of Les Liaisons lies in the similarity with the scene in which Valmont writes a letter of love to Mme de Tourvel, a letter full of double-entendres, in the composition of which he uses the whore Emilie as a desk(3).

It is true that, having received this proposal, Tamara makes Hélène look into the mirror and assures her,

"Voilà ce qui est vrai, ma chérie..., toi et moi. Rien ne changera entre nous. Tu sais bien que tu m'aimes, que tu vas continuer à m'aimer, quoiqu'il arrive..."(4)

1. Cf. supra, p. ⁷⁹⁴~~815~~ note 2.
2. Le Rempart des Béguines, pp. 170-1.
3. L.D., XLVIII, 126-8.
4. Le Rempart des Béguines, pp. 171-2.

Hélène says that she will tell her father of the precise nature of her relationship with Tamara if the latter goes ahead with her intention of marrying him. Tamara's reply is as cynical as Valmont's when Cécile threatens to call for help against him, or as the machinations of Mme de Merteuil in acquiring a reputation for virtue before seducing Cécile's confidence:

"Veux-tu que ton père te croie folle? Tu lui as tellement parlé de ma bonne influence.... Il n'y a vraiment aucune raison de changer d'avis aussi brusquement." (1)

Tamara offers final words of consolation to Hélène:

"Tu sais que je n'aime pas ton père, cela devrait te suffire; je t'aime autant que je puis aimer quelqu'un, ma chérie, et si je te promets que rien ne changera entre nous, tu sais bien que c'est vrai."

She is, however, almost pleading with Hélène, and shows

"... cette humilité odieuse des mendiants et des femmes battues, cette lâcheté des êtres irresponsables, cette même faiblesse que j'avais hâte en moi, et qu'elle m'avait appris à haïr.

Et elle qui, autrefois, mentait avec tant de superbe assurance, sans le moindre souci d'être crue, de quelle écoeurante façon venait-elle d'affirmer qu'elle m'aimait, d'avouer implicitement qu'elle avait besoin de moi..... Elle n'avait pas su me vaincre, cette fois: je ne l'admirais plus." (2)

In this vigorous expression of her contempt, Hélène shows herself as overtaking her erstwhile teacher in the art of amorality. She says of Tamara,

"Je n'en voulais plus, elle me dégoûtait, cette femme, cette égale, cette faible créature qui avait besoin d'un homme, de mon père, qui sollicitait sa protection." (3)

On her wedding night Tamara acts the modesty of a virgin bride. The final words of the novel read,

"En bas, une porte se ferma, qui devait être la porte de leur chambre à coucher. Dans l'obscurité je me mis à rire." (4)

1. *ibid.*, p. 173.
2. *ibid.*, p. 174.
3. *ibid.*, p. 178.
4. *ibid.*, p. 190.

The influence of Laclos is manifest on almost every page. We are presented with the story, told by herself, of a Cécile de Volanges, and her introduction to and education in homosexual depravity. Tamara is a homosexual Mme de Merteuil who betrays her principles for the sake of conventional, material security(1). For this reason, of course, she is decidedly inferior in stature to Laclos's Marquise as a rational intriguer. She throws in the sponge. What happens at the end of the novel is rather as though Mme de Merteuil had taken on Cécile de Volanges as her disciple, and then contracted out of this world of hers in favour of orthodox respectability. In Le Rempart des Béguines the future of Hélène is left in some doubt, but she is now clearly committed to homosexuality and has acquired the sense of superiority, the desire for domination, which had attracted her in Tamara initially. One feels that she in turn will find a pupil. There is no pretence at a moral ending in this excellent, totally analytical novel. It seems to Hélène that "Tamara et moi avions peut-être changé d'âme(2). The balance within Hélène, in terms of algolagnia, has changed. The victim has become the persecutor, the masochist has become the sadist. Cécile de Volanges has become the Marquise de Merteuil.

1. *ibid.*, p. 173: "... ton père, qui représente pour moi la stabilité, la sécurité..."

2. *ibid.*, p. 190.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this work, if it has done nothing else, has helped to place Laclos and Les Liaisons dangereuses in perspective. We have endeavoured to show that Laclos himself does not appear by any means to have been the Machiavelli so many critics, from his own day onward, have made him out to be. He was certainly not particularly adventurous in his political views or in any sense an extremist. During his days at the Palais Royal and the Jacobin Club he advocated, like the vast majority of his politically aware contemporaries, some form of constitutional monarchy, perhaps roughly on the English pattern. Orleans was, of course, a strong contender for the throne in such a monarchy, but there is precious little evidence that Laclos ever resorted to devilish or underhand means to further his employer's cause. The evidence of hostile pamphleteers and the like simply cannot be accepted at face value. Furthermore, any attempt to see Les Liaisons itself as a political pamphlet seems doomed to failure. Its implications are wider than this. Certainly to see it as a deliberate political attack on the aristocracy seems meaningless and, amongst other things, neglects the character of Laclos's principal political allies. Laclos was certainly no republican. The attack is on man, not on aristocratic man. To see this work as an example of the literature of a class war would necessitate seeing Valmont and Mme de Merteuil on the one hand and Mme de Tourvel on the other as two opposing poles. The truth, as we have tried to suggest, is less simple than this. Moreover, it would surely necessitate considering the conflict between Valmont and the Présidente as the main plot of the novel. This is not the case.

Les Liaisons dangereuses is, certainly, a novel which lays bare certain facets of humankind which are usually carefully hidden from view. What are these facets? Sensuality? Yes, and sensuality where it would appear not to be, at the heart of the actions of the conventional representatives of virtue and decorum. But more than this, for Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, the great seducers, are in fact not principally concerned with sexual pleasure as such. Above all, we are brought face to face with vanity operating the law of the jungle, with the desire to dominate, expressed chiefly through the intellect in the Vicomte and the Marquise, but also through sentiment in the Présidente. Beneath the polished veneer of the society to which we are introduced is cold-blooded exploitation for exploitation's sake. Perhaps the weakness of this (on the whole) beautifully proportioned work is the fact that the diabolical taint is universal. There is scarcely a redeeming trait possessed by any one of these people. All are either deliberately wicked, or hypocritical, or stupid, with the result that some critics, in a desperate search for a glimmer of virtue, have been led to point their finger, somewhat unsatisfactorily, at the indulgence (and self-indulgence) of a Mme de Rosemonde.

As a microcosm, Les Liaisons dangereuses, then, is unsatisfactory. As a world, what Laclos offers us exists only in the abstract. The picture is too one-sided, too dark, for it to be considered an accurate reflection of reality. It is not necessarily the novelist's function, however, to seek to give the reader a rounded picture of all the aspects of the world in which he lives: he may quite legitimately exaggerate certain of these aspects and

so throw them into striking relief. No more is it the critic's function to make moral judgments on a book or on its characters.

The world of Les Liaisons is not the real world; nor is it entirely an original creation of Laclos. This novel is not an isolated, spontaneous eruption of genius. It has its roots in the past and is an example (a very good one, perhaps the best produced in the eighteenth century) of a literary tradition of psychological analysis. In a more restricted sense, it is a particularly good example of the erotic novel. No doubt it transcends its predecessors. Its characters are, on the whole, more fully developed. Nevertheless, they have their origin in a strong tradition of writing and, what is more, they run the risk of ceasing to be characters at all in one sense, to become types. The erotic novel is not an isolated phenomenon. It is often, at its best, a branch of the psychological novel, and often, in its treatment of the war of the sexes, it is, consciously or otherwise, saying something more general about man. It is in this sense that it can be argued that it is largely an accident that Les Liaisons is, on the surface, about sex. Stendhal's heroes are not primarily concerned with sex, but essentially they come from the same mould as those of Laclos.

Often, as one reads this novel, one suspects that Mme de Tourvel is not what Laclos may have intended her to be. It may well be that she was intended as a straightforward foil to Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, a conventional representative of virtue waging war against vice, such as is all too often to be found in the literature of sensibility and such as is guyed by

Sade in Justine. If this was Laclos's intention, then both she and the novel might well have been considerably more platitudinous than in fact they are. If these suspicions are correct, and this cannot, after all, be demonstrated, then what we have here is a masterpiece by accident, but none the less a masterpiece for all that.

APPENDIX "A"

THE NAMES OF THE CHARACTERS

Dorothy R. Thelander, in her book Laclos and the Epistolary Novel, despairing, in our view quite rightly, of discovering exact historical models for Laclos's characters, goes on to suggest that we can, perhaps find some of the sources for their names. She remarks that there is no sign of originality in Laclos's choice of proper names in his poems, and goes on to list ten Greek names (Aglaé (or Églé), Thémire, Céphisé, Glicère, Corinne, Iphisé, Zélis, Cléon, Pamphile and Isodore), three names of Latin origin (Flore, Julie and Hortense), together with the following: Rosine, Lubin, Isabelle, Zulme, Lison, and Margot. These names, as Dr. Thelander points out, were common literary property. She then goes on to argue, however, that "in Les Liaisons dangereuses, the characters do not seem to have stock names".

In her search for possible sources for the names of the characters in the novel, Dr. Thelander puts forward the following suggestions. She points to the existence of "a town of some 770 inhabitants on a river of the same name" some 150 kilometres from Amiens, Laclos's birthplace. This town is called Valmont(1). Vressac is called Pressac in the manuscript and Dr. Thelander draws our attention to a town in the Lot called Prayssac and a commune of Vienne named Pressac "The Chevalier Danceny,"

1. Dr. Thelander, somewhat surprisingly in view of the approach she adapts here, does not mention that about 10 km from Valmont lies Tourville-les-ifs. With a little imagination, no doubt much could be made of this proximity!

we are told, "could be linked with Ancenis, a small town in the Loire-Inférieure between Nantes and Angers. Sophie Carnay, Cécile's convent friend, has a last name which suggests a combination of two Breton towns, Auray and Carnac." Her first name, it is suggested, may have been provided by the heroine of Fielding's Tom Jones. Dr. Thelander's suggestion for Azolan runs as follows: "Voltaire wrote a verse story, 'Azolan ou le Bénéficiaire,' which was turned into a ballet in three acts, 'Azolan ou le Sermon indiscret,' presented in 1774 at the Opéra in Paris. This Azolan is a very religious young Moslem who discovers he prefers at least one woman to the riches and fame the Angel Gabriel has promised him if he will shun all women. Valmont's servant is not religious."(!) There are other suggestions: the fact that La Fontaine gave the name Bertrand to the monkey who eats the chestnuts the cat pulls out of the firt in Le Singe et le Chat is linked with the M. Bertrand of Les Liaisons. "Our M. Bertrand," says Dr. Thelander, "as the legal advisor to Mme de Rosemonde and Valmont profits indirectly from their misfortunes." La Nouvelle Héloïse is, inevitably, suggested as the source for the name of Mme de Tourvel's servant Julie. "Finally," we are told, "three of the names seem to have historical or religious associations. Surely it is an example of Laclos' satire rather than an accident that Mlle de Volanges who plays the harp and sings should be named after the Roman martyr who is the patron saint of musicians. There are three historical 'Pères Anselme': the saint and scholastic (1033-1109) Anselme of Laon, teacher of Guillaume de Champeaux (d. 1117); and Pierre Guibours, called Père Anselme, author of the Histoire généalogique et chronologique de la

maison de France (1625-1694). There is a Germanic princess named Rosemonde who, married to her father's assassin, killed him. One would rather link Valmont's kindly aunt with the fair Rosamund, incorrectly styled in French 'Rosemonde!.' (1)

Much of this may seem, at the very least, somewhat fanciful. It is difficult to see why Dr. Thelander should argue that the characters of Laclos's novel do not seem to have stock names when she promptly goes on to observe (and apparently with approval) that M. Seylaz has listed the "similarities between the names used by Laclos and those of other eighteenth-century novelists". Dr. Thelander quotes four of the examples of names bearing similarities to some degree with those of Laclos's characters taken from Crébillon films. In fact Saylaz gives six from Crébillon and four from Sade(2). As Seylaz is doing no more than referring to Jean Mistler's introduction to his edition of Les Liaisons, it may be of some interest to see what Mistler has to say on this subject.

Mistler is making a comparison between Laclos and Crébillon:

"Les personnages de Crébillon s'appellent Germeuil, Versac, Prévannes, Pressac, Mme de Sénanges, Mme de Meilcour; ne dirait-on pas qu'il s'agit de noms fabriqués avec des syllabes interchangeable, les mêmes que pour Gercourt, Merteuil, Volanges, Prévan, Vressac? Et dix ans plus tard, nous retrouverons dans les plates ordures du Marquis de Sade, Blamont, Valcour, Valrose et Emilie de Volnanges." (3)

Seylaz, after referring to this passage, adds,

1. Dorothy R. Thelander, Laclos and the Epistolary Novel, Geneva, 1963, pp. 78-80.
2. J.-L. Seylaz, 'Les Liaisons dangereuses' et la Création romanesque chez Laclos, Geneva, 1958, pp. 85-6. Referred to by Thelander, op. cit., p. 78.
3. Mistler, op. cit., p. xxvii.

"Il y a même dans une des nouvelles des Crimes de l'amour, Eugénie de Franval, un scélérat du nom de Valmont."(1)

In a footnote, Seylaz adopts a line similar to that of Gilbert Lély, which we have already discussed, when, commenting on the absence in Sade's Idée sur les Romans, he goes on to say that

"la présence du nom de Valmont dans Eugénie de Franval nous semble difficile à expliquer par une simple coïncidence."(2)

We stand by our earlier view that direct influence on Sade by Laclos is not proven, a view which is strengthened by the use of the same name, Valmont, and of very similar names, before Laclos produced Les Liaisons dangereuses. This name is indeed no invention of Laclos's. We are led to agree with Mistler that there does seem in the eighteenth century to have been almost a pool of similar names for the characters of prose fiction. Mistler need not have confined himself to pointing to Crébillon, Laclos and Sade. Similar names are to be found in the novels of several other novelists of the period. We have already referred to one or two of these in passing. It may be worthwhile, in order to make our point as forcefully as possible, to recall these examples here, and to mention one or two other cases(3).

First of all, of course, there is Marivaux's Valville in La Vie de Marianne (1731-1742). Then, in his Histoires et Aventures(sic) de*** par Lettres (1744), Godard d'Aucour has a Danteuil. In Mme de Saint-Aubin's

1. Seylaz, op. cit., p. 86.

2. ibid., p. 86, n. 8. The Valmont of Eugénie de Franval (which is to be found in the Blihl. de la Pléiade Romanciers du XVIIIe Siècle, II, 1965, pp. 1477-1540), although a rake, has little in common with Laclos's Valmont. He is decidedly inferior to him in technique, fails to seduce Mme de Franval at her husband's orders, falls in love with Eugénie, and is killed by Franval.

3. It is in no way suggested that the list which follows is exhaustive.

Le Danger des Liaisons (1763) we find a Valnel and a Mme de Montval, and in her Mémoires, en forme de Lettres, de deux Personnes de Qualité (1765) we find a Vicomte de Valmire who has as a friend a Chevalier de Valmon. Mme Élie de Beaumont introduces a Valville into her Lettres du Marquis de Roselle (1764). A Germeuil is to be found both in Louis-Sébastien Mercier's conte moral entitled Sophie (1768)(1) and in Mme Riccoboni's Lettres d'Élisabeth-Sophie de Vallière à Louise-Hortence de Cantelieu, son amie (1772), in which latter work there is also a Cécile. One of the principal characters of Dorat's Les Sacrifices de l'Amour (1771), is a Vicomtesse de Senanges(2). The title of the Abbé Philippe-Louis Gérard's Le Comte de Valmont, ou les Égaremens de la Raison (1774) speaks for itself; another Valmont, this time a Comte, appears in Mme de Genlis's Adèle et Théodore (1782), together with a daughter-in-law named Cécile. Andréa de Nerciat's Le Doctorat impromptu (1788) contains a Vicomte de Solange, and before the end of the century Mme de Souza had written her Adèle de Sénange. Furthermore, to the list given by Mistler and Seylaz, there can be added from the contes of the Marquise de Sade a Courval(3) and an Émilie de Tourville(4), and in addition, from the plan for an epistolary novel which we have discussed in some detail, a Mme de Roseville.

1. L. S. Mercier, Contes moraux, ou les Hommes comme il y en a peu, Paris, 1768, pp. 1-94.

2. Dorat is also the author of a Lettre de Zéila, jeune sauvage, esclave à Constantinople, à Valcour, officier français (1764) and a subsequent Lettre de Valcour à son Père, pour servir de ... fin au roman de Zéila (1767)

3. In Florville et Courval ou le Fatalisme, to be found in Romanciers du XVIIIe Siècle, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1965, II, pp. 1378-1421.

4. In Émilie de Tourville ou la Cruauté fraternelle, to be found *ibid.*, pp. 1354-1374.

What does all this show? It seems to us to show that, pace Dr. Thelander, Laclos does appear to be using stock names for his characters in Les Liaisons. All these names would fit Mistler's description of "noms fabriqués avec des syllabes interchangeables". This is a curious manifestation, but it is not dissimilar from what Frank Gees Black has noticed in eighteenth-century English literature:

"The opportunities for utilizing names for characterization are seldom considered. In this detail letter-writers exhibit poverty of imagination: the Emiliias, Harriets, Sophias, Elizas, the Belfords, Byrons, Stanleys, Nevilles, Revels, Villarses appear in tiring succession..."(1)

One can offer no really satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon. Even today there are proper names which one associates with popular fiction, as being in some way or other particularly "romantic".

1. F. Gees Black, The Epistolary Novel in the late Eighteenth Century. A Descriptive and Biographical Study, University of Oregon, Eugene, 1940, p. 11.

APPENDIX "B"

THE TEXT OF THE ÉPÎTRE À MARGOT AS IT APPEARS
 IN THE ANONYMOUS MANUSCRIPT IN THE
 BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE L'ARSENAL
 (MS 6874, tome IV)

Pourquoi craindrais-je de le dire?
 C'est Margot qui fixe mon goût:
 Oui, Margot! cela vous fait rire?
 Que fait le nom? la chose est tout.
 Je sais que son humble naissance
 N'offre point à l'orgueil flatté
 La chimérique jouissance
 Dont s'enivre la vanité;
 Que, née au sein de l'indigence,
 Jamais un éclat fastueux,
 Sous le voile de l'opulence
 N'a pu dérober ses aïeux;
 Que, sans esprit, sans connaissance,
 À ses discours fastidieux
 Succède un stupide silence.
 Mais Margot a de si beaux yeux
 Qu'un seul de ses regards vaut mieux
 Que fortune, esprit et naissance.
 Quoi! dans ce monde singulier
 Triste jouet d'une chimère,
 Pour savoir ce qui doit me plaire,
 Irai-je consulter d'Hozier?
 Non, l'aimable enfant de Cythère
 Craint peu de se mésallier:
 Souvent pour l'amoureux mystère,
 Ce Dieu, dans ces goûts roturiers,
 Donne le pas à la Bergère,
 En dépit des seize quartiers.
 Eh! qui sait ce qu'à ma maîtresse...
 Garde l'avenir incertain?
Margot, encor dans sa jeunesse,
N'est qu'à sa première faiblesse.
Laissez-la devenir Catin.
Bientôt, peut-être, le Destin
La fera Marquise ou Comtesse.
 Joli minois, coeur libertin
 Font bien des titres de noblesse.
 Margot est pauvre, j'en conviens;
 Qu'a-t-elle besoin de richesse?
 Doux appâts et vive tendresse
 Ne sont-ce pas d'assez grands biens?
 Ne sait-on pas que toute belle

Porte son trésor avec elle?
 Doux trésor, objet des désirs
 De l'étourdi, comme du sage,
 Où la nature, d'âge en âge,
 A su conserver nos plaisirs!
 Des autres biens qu'a-t-on affaire?
 Source de peine et d'embarras,
 Qui veut en jouir les altère,
 Qui les garde n'en jouit pas;
De son temps faire un bon usage,
Voilà la richesse du sage,
Et celle dont Margot fait cas;
 Ainsi, malgré l'erreur commune
Elle me prouve chaque jour
 Que, sans naissance et sans fortune,
 On peut être heureux en amour.
 Reste l'esprit; j'entends d'avance
 Nos beaux diseurs, docteurs subtils,
 Se récrier: 'Quoi! diront-ils,
 Point d'esprit! Quelle jouissance!
 Que deviendront les doux propos,
 Les bons contes, les jeux de mots,
 Dont un amant, avec adresse,
 Se sert auprès de sa maîtresse,
 Pour charmer l'ennui du repos?
 Si l'on est réduit à se taire,
 Quand tout est fait, que peut-on faire?'
 Ah! les beaux esprits ne sont pas
 Grands docteurs en cette science.
 Mais voyez le bel embarras!
 Quand tout est fait l'on recommence,
 Et même, sans recommencer,
 Il est un plaisir plus facile,
 Et que l'on goûte sans penser:
 C'est le sommeil, repos utile,
 Et pour les sens et pour le cœur,
Très préférable à la langueur,
 De cette tendresse importune
 Qui, n'abondant qu'en beaux discours,
 Jure cent fois d'aimer toujours,
 Et ne le prouve jamais qu'une.
 O toi dont je porte les fers,
 Doux objet d'un tendre délire!
 Le temps que j'emploie à t'écrire,
 Est sans doute un temps que je perds!
 Jamais tu ne liras ces vers,
 Margot; car tu ne sais pas lire:
 Mais pardonne un ancien travers.
 De penser, la triste habitude

M'obsède encore malgré moi,
Et je fais mon unique étude,
Au moins, de ne penser qu'à toi.
À mes côtés, viens prendre place,
Le plaisir attend ton retour;
Viens, et je troque, en ce jour,
Les lauriers ingrats du Parnasse,
Contre les myrtes de l'amour.

The variants, by comparison with the 1776 text of the Almanach des Mises (reproduced by Allem, O.C., pp. 502-5), have been indicated by italics. The spelling of the manuscript has been modernised.

APPENDIX "C"

Questions sur l'État des Comédiens françois

The Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal possesses a copy of a work of the above title which it tentatively attributes to Laclos. The work, catalogued under Rt. 1757, was published in Paris by Baudoin in 1789 and runs to fifteen octavo pages.

One feels that the only reason for attributing it to Laclos is the fact that it ends with the initials "M^r C. D. L." Now, whether this "M^r C. D. L." is in fact Monsieur Choderlos de Laclos it is impossible to say with any degree of confidence. That Laclos was interested in the theatre we know, and therefore it is perfectly possible that he should have seen fit to write a brief work on the theatre and actors. The style of this piece is of little or no help to us in ascertaining its authorship. From time to time it is pompous, and it is never very distinguished. The content of the work is a mixture of liberalism and conventional attitudes. There are some plays, we are told, which morally are perhaps not all they might be, but these are the exception, and in any case the responsibility for this is not to be levelled at the actors, for "ils n'ont pas le droit de corriger les Censeurs". The responsibility for seeing that these plays do not appear rests with the civil and ecclesiastical authorities (p. 11). And yet the conclusion of the work is that "le règne des préjugés est passé; la saine raison sera dorénavant le flambeau des hommes" (p. 15).

The argument of this little work can be put fairly briefly. It opens with a series of questions:

- "1° Les Comédiens François sont-ils Citoyens?
- 2° Doivent-ils jouir de toutes les prérogatives attachées à ce titre?
- 3° Leur état n'y répugne-t-il pas?"

The author's answers to these questions are given immediately:

- "1° Pour être Citoyen il ne faut qu'avoir une existence physique dans la Société.
- 2° Pour jouir des prérogatives de Citoyen, il ne faut que rendre à la Société les devoirs que chacun lui doit dans l'état qu'il a embrassé.
- 3° L'état de Comédien ne peut être réprouvé par la Société même qui l'a admis, l'a reçu, & en retire des avantages." (p. 3)

There then follows a description of the theatre's struggle for recognition by society and religion from the days of Ancient Greece.

The writer argues that the theatre is not of its nature immoral, and turns to the productions of the French dramatists to illustrate his point, beginning with Corneille and Racine, and the only reservation he has here is a slight regret that Molière had to "sacrifier (sa) gloire au plaisir de faire rire le peuple", that he had to create Scapin as well as Alceste and Tartuffe. Then there comes a brief survey of other playwrights: Racine "présenta la Vertu dans des tableaux touchans" (the tendre Racine..); Crebillon père showed "l'atrocité des Mœurs anciennes"; Voltaire "nous fit aimer la Religion par la conversion de Zamore" (in Alzire); and if Polyeucte "éleva notre âme vers le Ciel", why,

"... quelles vertus ne portèrent dans nos cœurs la Chaussée, Des-touches! L'un prêche l'Amour maternel, l'union conjugale (L'École des Mères; Le Préjugé à la Mode); l'autre, en nous peignant l'Ambition & la Vanité (Le Glorieux; Le Philosophe marié) sous des traits honteux, nous fait détester l'orgueil, & réunit deux époux,

dont un faux préjugé d'esprit séparoit les coeurs..... Est-il un Auteur qui se permît à présent de présenter des vices sur le théâtre, autrement que pour les corriger?" (pp. 8-9)

As we have mentioned above, there are exceptions, but these are not the responsibility of the actor. What is an actor? He who by his talents seeks to "inculquer par le feu de (son) éloction les bons principes du poëme dans l'ame des Spectateurs (sic)". One cannot condemn the entire profession because some actors fail to lead a praiseworthy life (p. 12).

One cannot say that this work is by Laclos, one may even think it unlikely. Certainly the evidence that it is his work is very slight indeed. It is quite an interesting shot in a battle which had been going on for centuries.

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MANUSCRIPTS

A. Bibliothèque nationale: fonds français 12845, containing;

Fol. 1: Copie des armes de la famille du Général Choderlos de Laclos.

Fol. 2: Poésies: "Des beaux esprits je hais la vanité" (Le Bon Choix, but without title).

Fol. 6: La Procession, conte.

Fol. 10: Les Désirs contrariés, air.

À Mlle de Sivry ("Jeune fleur...").

Fol. 11: Rondeau ("Elle est à moi, cette aimable Rosine").

Le Paradis et l'Enfer.

Fol. 12-17: Correspondence between Mme Riccoboni and Laclos, viz.,

Fol. 13: Letter I (O.C., pp. 710-711).

Fol. 14: blank.

Fol. 15: Letter III (O.C., p. 713).

Fol. 16: blank.

Fol. 17: Letter II (O.C., pp. 711-712).

Fol. 18: Épître à la Mort from "À peine il a goûté" (O.C., p. 510 line 12) to the end.

Fol. 19: blank.

Fol. 20-21: Épître à Mme la Marquise de Montalembert.

Fol. 22-23: Épître à la Mort from beginning to "Par leurs vaines frayeurs t'ont souvent fait outrage" (O.C., p. 510, line 1).

Fol. 24-25: Laclos to Mme Riccoboni, Letter IV (O.C., pp. 713-6).

Fol. 26-27: Mme Riccoboni to Laclos, Letter V (O.C., pp. 716-7).

Fol. 28-29: Laclos to Mme Riccoboni, Letter VI (O.C., pp. 718-20).

Fol. 30: Laclos to Mme Riccoboni, Letter VII (O.C., pp. 720-1).

Fol. 31: Mme Riccoboni to Laclos, Letter VIII (O.C., p. 725. This letter still retains the address,

À monsieur,
Monsieur de La Clos,
à l'hôtel de la Garde de Paris,
rue Mellee,
à Paris (Fol. 32),

and part of the seal.

Fol. 33-34: Letter from Duchastellier to Laclos (O.C., p. 925), dated 2nd May 1787.

Fol. 35-127: Les Liaisons dangereuses.

Fol. 35: MS. title page

Fol. 36: Agreement with Durand.

Fol. 38: Notes to Part I.

Fol. 89: MS. title page: "Les Liaisons dangereuses, 2e partie". Two notes to Part I.

Fol. 90: Notes to Part II

Fol. 123: The letter from Valmont to Mme de Volanges omitted from the printed novel (O.C., pp. 854-5).

Fol. 127: An unfinished letter from Mme de Tourvel to Valmont (O.C., pp. 841-2).

Fol. 128-129: Letter of Alexandre Pieyre on Laclos and his work.

Fol. 130: Letter from Laclos's widow (apparently to Pieyre - "Monsieur, vous m'avez réveillée d'une l'hétargie (sic) profonde. Tout mon être moral reposait dans le cercueil d'un époux adoré.... dont la mort a été belle comme la vie et fait honneur à la philosophie" - implying that she would like him to write a biography of her husband. (Date, 23 (illegible month), an XII).

- Fol. 131-2: Letters from Laclos's son against an imputation by Lacretelle that Laclos was "peut-être" responsible for the events of the 5th-6th October 1789 and referring to the correspondence with Mme Riccoboni as an indispensable guide to the aim of Les Liaisons.
- Fol. 134-7: Pariset's Notice sur le Général de La Clos taken from the Moniteur of 13th December 1803 (not, of course, MS).
- Fol. 138-9: Laclos's son to Lacretelle (6 November 1822).
- Fol. 140-1: Article on Laclos in Arnault's Biographie des Contemporains, vol. 10, 1823 (transcribed by Laclos's widow).
- Fol. 142: Copy (by Mme Laclos) of letter written by Laclos to the Maréchal de Ségur concerning his letter on Vauban.
- Fol. 143: Certificate that the letter on Vauban "est inscrit sur la Feuille des Permissions Tacites du 16 Mars 1786 sous le N° 982".

We consider it worthwhile to give the contents of this MS. in some detail. It will be seen that it differs in certain respects from the account given by Allem (O.C., p. 749). The reason for this is given by Allem himself: when he was working on his edition of the Oeuvres complètes this dossier had not yet been returned to the Bibliothèque nationale after its wartime evacuation and therefore Allem was obliged to rely on the account given of it by Édouard Champion in his edition of Sur l'Éducation des Femmes.

For the sake of clarity we shall give next a list of the differences between the account given by Allem and what we ourselves found upon examination of the MS:

- Fol. 10: Allem makes no mention of À Mlle de Sivry.
- Fol. 11: Allem makes no mention of the rondeau "Elle est à moi..." or of Le Paradis et l'Enfer.

Fol. 12: Allem writes "Fol. 12 et passim", apparently referring to Fols. 12-17, and given as the contents "Correspondance entre Mme Riccoboni et Choderlos de Laclos. Lettre de M. Duchastellier". Full details concerning the Riccoboni correspondence are given above. The Duchastellier letter, thanking Laclos for having sent him a copy of his novel, appears in Fols. 33-34 (cf. *supra*). Allem, then, is rather misleading.

Fol. 18 & Fol. 22-23: Almost the whole of the Épître à la Mort (cf. *supra*). Allem simply points to Fol. 22.

Fol. 20-21: Épître à Mme la Marquise de Montalembert. Allem incorrectly states that this appears in Fol. 18.

Fol. 134-7: Pariset's Notice. Not, as Allem says, Fol. 139.

In addition, in his printed version of Duchastellier's letter, Allem suggests "chambre des rancunes" where "chambre des communes" is clearly the correct reading (*O.C.*, p. 925) and expresses unreasonable doubt concerning "chambre des pairs" (*ibid.*, p. 926).

Allem assures us that he made use of this MS. in preparing his earlier edition of Les Liaisons dangereuses in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (*O.C.*, p. 729), and much of what he has to say about it, on pp. 22-23, 749-750 and in his notes on the novel in the Oeuvres complètes is unexceptionable. We have said something about the MS. in the main body of our work, but feel it necessary to conclude our comments on it here by pointing to one or two occasions when Allem is in error, even if only in a minor way:

1) Letter VI, n. 19, *O.C.*, p. 770. Where Allem gives "Ah! ne m'accusez pas d'être barbare, car qui ne partagerait (?) doublement des plaisirs; qu'elle nenpuisse vaincre ses terreurs...", Mistler in his Monaco edition of the novel

gives "... barbare, ces peines passagères doubleront son plaisir...: qu'elle ne puisse vaincre sa terreur" (crossed out). Examination of the MS. suggests that Mistler is right. (Fol. 44)

2) Letter XXXV, n. 17, O.C., p. 784. Where Allem suggests "cofter" Mistler suggests "arreter". Again Mistler seems to be right. (Fol. 67)

Although the omitted letter from Valmont to Mme de Volanges (Fol. 123) and the unfinished letter from Mme de Tourvel to Valmont (Fol. 127) are not mentioned by Allem in his analysis of the MS. on p. 729 of the Oeuvres complètes, they are mentioned by him in his notes (pp. 854-5 and 841-2 respectively). The second of these is implicitly placed in the MS. by Allem's opening remark in note 91, p. 841. The first is not placed at all.

B. Bibliothèque nationale: fonds français 12846, containing:

Fol. 1-2: A letter to the Ministre de la Guerre in reply to Ministerial wrath over his work on Vauban.

Fol. 3-4: Letter on the numbering of the streets and houses of Paris, headed "Lafère, 17 juin 1787" and intended for the Journal de Paris, in which it was published on 22 July 1787.

Fol. 5: The first essay on women (Discours sur la Question proposée par l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne...) A very minor point is that Allem is incorrect in stating that the words "M. Sabathé, secrétaire perpétuel" appear after the title. Laclos in fact writes "M. Sabathier, Sec^{re} perpétuel", and not after the title but in the extreme right-hand top corner.

Fol. 6-12: The second essay (Des Femmes et de leur Éducation).

Fol. 13-15: The third essay (no title).

Fol. 16-22: De la Guerre et de la Paix.

Fol. 23-27: His study on the voyage of La Pérouse (no title).

Fol. 28-29: Notes on the voyage of La Pérouse.

Fol. 30 et seq.: sundry letters concerning Rousseau's supposed suicide, one of which appears to be by Mme de Staël.

C. Bibliothèque de Grenoble: R7591: a letter to the Grenoble Lycée des Sciences et des Arts, dated 16 fructidor, an X (3 September 1802)

D. The Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal possesses (MS 6874, tome IV) a manuscript collection of poems etc. by various authors including Voltaire and Dorat. Amongst these is a version of the Épître à Margot which differs in certain respects from the version given by Allem. These differences have been pointed out in the main body of this work.

WORKS

Oeuvres complètes. Texte établi et annoté par MAURICE ALLEM, Paris, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951.

This work comprises: Les Liaisons dangereuses; de l'Éducation des Femmes; Poésies; Critique littéraire ('Sur le roman Cecilia' and 'Le Voyage de La Pérouse'); Sur l'Éloge de Vauban; Oeuvres politiques; and, as appendices, the Projet de numérotage des rues et des maisons de Paris, the Instructions envoyées par le duc d'Orléans aux Assemblées des bailliages, the Galerie des Dames ('Elmire' and 'Polixène'), the Exposé de la conduite de M. le duc d'Orléans dans la Révolution française, the correspondence between Laclos and Mme Riccoboni on the subject of Les Liaisons dangereuses, comments of contemporaries on the novel (the Correspondance littéraire of Grimm and others; La Harpe; Mouflé d'Angerville; Tilly, and D'Allonville), and Baudelaire's notes on the novel.

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