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# Rake Sentimentalism, or the Libertine Re-Formed: Re-Evaluating Late Eighteenth-Century Libertinage, 1770-1812

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# ABSTRACT

## Rake Sentimentalism, or the Libertine Re-Formed: Re-Evaluating Late Eighteenth-Century Libertinage, 1770-1812

This dissertation constitutes a re-evaluation of the popular and critical understanding of eighteenth-century libertinage. In particular, I contest the distinction between sentimentalism and libertinage, which are typically seen as two, irreconcilable approaches to emotional expression. As sentimentalism became prominent in the second half of the eighteenth century, I argue, it came to inflect libertine texts and archetypes. My project, thus, examines libertine texts through the lenses of sentiment, reflection, moderation, and consideration.

I begin the dissertation with a discussion of Giacomo Casanova's memoirs, *Histoire de ma vie,* and show how they may be seen as an expression of what I call libertine sentimentalism. In particular, I look at how Casanova constructs an emotional fidelity to the many women he loved through memory. In Chapter 3, I analyze La Mettrie's sensualist essay, *La Volupté*, and Mirabeau's erotic novel, *Le Rideau levé*. Both deal with the epistemology of libertinage, that is, the physical and mental development and refinement that is required to gain access to the highest forms of libertine pleasure (and thus become the ideal lover). Moderation, taste, and an attention to the pleasure of one's partner are held up as ideals as opposed to the coarse, narcissistic, and violent pleasures of the debauched. Chapter 4 synthesizes the ideas presented in the previous two chapters. I read Vivant Denon's novella *Point de lendemain* as a narrative about the young

male protagonist's sentimental education over the course of a *nuit merveilleuse*, one that teaches him to be tender, delicate, and sensitive with his mistress.

I end the dissertation with an exploration of how libertinage has been memorialized and misunderstood within modern French popular culture. I take as case studies two re-writings of *Point de lendemain* (Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage* and Milan Kundera's *La Lenteur*) and two contemporary films (Gabriel Aghion's *Le Libertin* and Jean-Claude Brisseau's *Choses secrètes*). These works, I contend, nostalgically draw upon (and perpetuate) the libertine past but do so by evacuating sentiment and equating libertinage with sexual liberation and sex without attachment. In doing so, I suggest, these works fundamentally misrepresent the complexity and diversity of eighteenth-century libertinage.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In Eliza Haywood's 1725 novella, *Fantomina or Love in a Maze*, the nameless heroine, a "young Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit," finds herself at a London playhouse, gazing upon the men in the parterre vying for the attentions of prostitutes.[1] At first, she is shocked and disgusted by the bargaining and loose morals displayed before her but the more she reflects on the scene, the more curious she becomes "to know in what Manner these Creatures were address'd."[2] She resolves to descend from her box the next night, dressed as one of those women and affecting their habits as best as she had been able to observe. She is gratified to find herself taken for one of the ladies, with all the men gathering about her, trying to outbid each other for her favors. Her vanity is ultimately piqued (and her virtuous scruples undone) by the attentions of the handsome, dashing Beauplaisir, a gentleman she had seen numerous times in society drawing rooms but had never had the freedom to speak with. She arranges to meet him the next evening, at which time she is so transported by his amorousness that she grants him her favors. She becomes his mistress under the assumed identity of Fantomina, and thus embarks on a double life: by day she is Fantomina, the "Daughter of a Country Gentleman" turned courtesan, and by night she reverts to the "Haughty Awe-inspiring Lady."[3] Beauplaisir somehow never suspects that both women are, in fact, one and the same, "It never so much as enter'd his Head, and though he did fancy he observed in the Face of the latter,

[1] Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina and Other Works* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2004), 41.
[2] Haywood, *Fantomina,* 41.
[3] Haywood, *Fantomina,* 48 and 50.

Features which were not altogether unknown to him, yet he could not recollect when or where he had known them."[4]

Beauplaisir's ardor very soon wanes and he leaves Fantomina to seek his pleasures elsewhere. Our heroine is not deterred, however. She concocts a stratagem based on her previously successful dissimulation as Fantomina whereby she will assume a second disguise (that of Celia, a chambermaid) in order to recapture Beauplaisir's roving eye. Her plan succeeds but it is not very long before she must come up with new identities to keep Beauplaisir ensnared. All told, our heroine deftly negotiates four characters – Fantomina, Celia, a widow, and a masked stranger named, appropriately, Incognita – becoming one or another as the need and circumstances arise. "But not being of a Humour to grudge any Thing for his Pleasures,"[5] Beauplaisir never once catches on that all these different women are in fact merely the phantasmic iterations of one woman. He remains amazingly unaware, flying from one "lover" to the next as a bee in a garden of flowers.

For most of the novella, the joke is most definitely on Beauplaisir and his comically non-existent powers of observation, reflection, and memory. The heroine is keenly aware of the inconstant nature of men and thus not at all surprised when he tires of one of her disguises, for "he varied not so much from his sex as to be able to prolong Desire, to any great Length after Possession."[6] She therefore reasons that all she need do is come up with new and more dramatic personas to feed his desire for novelty and consistently "have him always raving, wild, impatient, longing, dying."[7] In doing so, she manages to secure Beauplaisir's constancy in spite of himself.

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[4] Haywood, *Fantomina,* 57.
[5] Haywood, *Fantomina*, 46.
[6] Haywood, *Fantomina,* 50.
[7] Haywood, *Fantomina,* 50.

Our heroine's theories about Beauplaisir (and, by extension, men's) inconstant, fickle nature are ultimately proved true when she becomes pregnant and is forced to reveal herself to Beauplaisir. Faced with the stunning realization that he has been with one woman instead of four all along, Beauplaisir leaves the scene, exposing the heroine to near certain public shame. At the end we learn that she and her newborn child have been surreptitiously dispatched to a "Monastery in *France*," ostensibly never to be heard from again.[8] Ahead of the curve for so long, our heroine ultimately succumbs to the fate of oblivion shared by many a tragic heroine in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century novel, while the rake slinks away to seduce another day.

Beauplaisir is emblematic of a certain type of libertine, one that litters the pages of eighteenth-century French and British fiction – the rake or *petit maître*. This archetype exists in a perpetual present, cut off from both his past deeds and their future consequences. His sole motivation seems to be the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of boredom. Once an affair has run its course, he retains no sentimental attachments; he simply moves on to seek his pleasures (and another notch on the bedpost) elsewhere.

In many ways, Haywood's novella anticipates many of the central critiques of libertine sociality and sexuality leveled by turn of the twenty-first century cultural feminists. One such critique, Nancy K. Miller's *French Dressing*, has become a classic account of the gender dissymmetry at the heart of libertine texts, one which has gained currency in American scholarship. Miller contrasts the world of (mostly male-authored) libertine fiction with (mostly female-authored) sentimental fiction, thus splitting the literary eighteenth-century into two distinct (potentially irreconcilable) emotional spheres. Libertine novels revel in the strategies of seduction (power, play, and sexual performance) whereas sentimental novels feature affective

[8] Haywood, *Fantomina,* 71.

ties and chillingly enact the consequences of libertine love affairs gone bad, e.g., unwanted pregnancies, disease, and death. In particular, "libertine sociality," according to Miller, "depends […] on a separation of sexuality from feeling; a split, most importantly, that allows the one to forget the other. From the realm of feeling in which women are meant to live, the libertine view of the world is a world without memory – except, we might say, as a track record: a world of sequences cut off from meaning, from the 'meaningful bodies' that women inhabit in the sentimental universe."[9] Miller's indictment of the libertine worldview is clear: rakes take their pleasures without regard for their partners, quickly discard them, and just as quickly forget them.

The French and British libertine literary traditions would seem to provide more than enough examples of rakish men behaving badly to concur with Miller's thesis. In addition to the example of Beauplaisir, we might also be reminded here of the advice Almaïr gives his friend Angola, the hero of La Morlière's novel of the same title,

> Les premières passions sont toujours accompagnées de cet excès d'ardeur qui en rend le charme délicieux. Votre imagination se fera peu à peu à ces sortes d'images, leur impression en deviendra moins sensible, et vous serez obligé d'avoir recours au spécifique dont je me sers pour la ranimer; le changement vous deviendra nécessaire, et entrainé par l'exemple et autorisé par la conduite des femmes, vous parviendrez à regarder les passions comme une affaire de convenance. C'est le bon ton d'aujourd'hui, et j'ai des espérances certaines de vous y voir bientôt conformé.[10]

Almaïr implies that his friend will grow out of his immature and naive beliefs in attachment and love. After he gains experience as a lover, Angola will necessarily become more jaded (charitably, more realistic), the impact of emotional ardor will become less intense, and he will

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[9] Nancy K. Miller, *French Dressing: Women, Men and Ancien Regime Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 79.
[10] La Morlière, *Angola, histoire indienne* in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, vol. 1, ed. Patrick Wald Lasowski, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 734.

finally realize that love is but a "convenance," an element of the vocabulary of *bienséance*, a polite address that lovers use to cut to the chase.

We might also consider the perhaps more often cited counsel of the jaded *mondain,* Versac to his would-be pupil, Meilcour in Crébillon fils' novel *Les Égarements du coeur et de l'esprit* (1736-38), "Croyez-vous qu'il ne faille pas avoir dans l'esprit bien de la variété, bien de l'étendue, pour être toujours, et sans contrainte, du caractère que l'instant où vous vous trouvez exige de vous: tendre avec la délicate, sensuel avec la voluptueuse, galant avec la coquette? Être passionné sans sentiment, pleurer sans être attendri, tourmenter sans être jaloux : voilà tous les rôles que vous devez jouer, voilà ce que vous devez être."[11] The libertine, according to Versac, is a Proteus, able to take on whatever form the situation and the woman in question requires; there does not seem to be a core self, only a parade of personalities and a gift for method acting. Versac places particular emphasis on the superficiality of the emotions. The libertine should never actually feel the emotions he performs or inspires. Love, as another of Crébillon fils' protagonists, Clitandre, tells us (in *La Nuit et le moment*), "n'est entré pour rien dans tout cela; mais l'amour, qu'était-il qu'un désir que l'on se plaisait à s'exagérer?" In sum, the libertines of both texts reiterate the conventional characterization of libertine behavior, advocating dissimulation over emotional transparency, disinterested amorous engagement over loving attachment.

Miller sees herself as repairing tradition, that is, contesting received notions about the meaning, value, and influence of libertine literature. Chief amongst those received notions is that libertinage is somehow to be equated with sexual liberation, that libertine texts playfully and

[11] Crébillon fils, *Les Égarements du coeur et de l'esprit* in *Romans libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Raymond Trousson (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1993), 136.

rebelliously represent, enact, and display a set of practices and (socio-political) positions that favor sexual freedom outside the bounds of moral, religious, and legal authority.[12] The equation of playfulness, rebellion, and (sexual) emancipation with libertinage is an old one, one that has its roots in the dominant discourse of the eighteenth century. The venerable and conservative *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* after all, conceives of the libertine as one who "aime trop sa liberté et l'indépendance, qui se dispense aisément de ses devoirs, qui hait toute sorte de sujétion et de contrainte."[13] This definition was carried through in various forms from the nineteenth century forward; yet, beginning in the twentieth century, the rebelliousness for which libertines were condemned by moral authorities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came to be celebrated, taking numerous guises within modern commentary. First, we might cite the recuperation of libertinage, and, in particular, the strain represented by the Marquis de Sade, by surrealists and existentialists during the first half of the twentieth century as varied as Magritte, Man Ray, Georges Bataille, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir. For Camus, Sade "est notre contemporain," a figure of rebellion – both a quintessential *homme révolté* and "le premier théoricien de la révolte absolue."[14] Similarly, in his influential essay, *La Littérature et le Mal*, Bataille reads Sade as the embodiment of a hyper-sovereignty.[15]

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[12] In this, we may say that Miller squarely fits in with a larger critical discourse that has sought to challenge the notion that the Enlightenment was a liberatory moment, particularly with respect to women. See, for instance, Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) and Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[13] "Libertin(e)," *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1762).

[14] Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté* in *Essais*, ed. Roger Quilliot and Louis Faucon, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 447.

[15] Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil,* trans. Alastair Hamilton (New York and London: Marion Boyars, 2001), 105-125. For the surrealist appropriation of Sade, see Jane Gallop, *Intersections: A Reading of Sade with Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1981) as well as Carolyn Dean, *The Self and its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Within the last fifty years, the connection between libertinage, emancipation, and revolution has been especially prominent in French literary criticism. In the literary tradition, as in the philosophical one noted above, the libertine is defined as the ultimate counter-cultural warrior; in the words of Roger Vailland, "le libertin […] s'insurge, défie, nie l'autorité, jure qu'il ne demandera jamais pardon."[16] Libertinage has been identified as a *porte-parole* of Enlightenment thought, taking up in a more piquant literary form (than a treatise) contestatory positions on education, materialism, anti-clericalism, paternal/royal authority, etc.[17] In this way, the libertine is a *libre penseur* in the grand tradition of the so-called *libertins érudits* of the seventeenth century (Théophile de Viau, Cyrano de Bergerac, et al.), "libérant les esprits des tabous et des interdits."[18] Still other modern commentators have suggested that the libertine novel's depiction of aristocratic decadence helped to pave the way for a rejection of feudal privilege under the Revolution.[19] Finally, and to Miller's point, in its rejection of lasting attachments and its cynicism with respect to true love, libertinage has been read as a defense of

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[16] Roger Vailland, *Laclos par lui même* (Paris: Seuil, 1953), 49. In an interview with Catherine Cusset published for a special issue of *Yale French Studies* on libertinage and modernity, Miller cites Vailland's essay as the quintessential masculinist defense of eighteenth-century libertinage. See, Miller, "Libertinage and Feminism," *Yale French Studies* 94 (1998): 17-18.

[17] "Par des voies différentes," suggests Peter Nagy, "ils [philosophy and libertine texts] poursuivent le même objectif: l'établissement d'une morale naturelle fondée sur l'épanouissement des instincts vitaux de l'homme et non sur leur oppression," Peter Nagy, *Libertinage et Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 31. On the usage of the libertine novel as a delivery system for Enlightenment philosophy, see also Roland Mortier, *Le Coeur et la raison: recueil d'études sur le dix-huitième siècle* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1990), 381-392.

[18] Trousson, Preface to *Romans libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, xvii. On the *libertins érudits*, see the classic works on the subject by René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Boivin, 1943); Antoine Adam, *Les Libertins au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Buchet/Castel, 1964); and Joan De Jean, *Libertine Strategies: Freedom and the Novel in Seventeenth-Century France* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1981).

[19] As Trousson notes, "Ancrée dans l'Ancien Régime dont elle exprime les idéaux et les valeurs, cette littérature serait subversive dans la mesure où elle dénonce la vacuité et le facticité auxquelles ces idéaux et valeurs ont été réduits," Preface to *Romans Libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, lxii. See also Nagy, *Libertinage et Révolution*, 153 and Laurent Versini, *Laclos et la tradition: Essai sur les sources et la technique des Liaisons dangereuses* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968), 50.

frivolity, a celebration of sex liberated from the constraints of attachments, and an unqualified rehabilitation of pleasure.[20]

Miller's intervention, then, can be seen as two-fold. First, there is a critique of libertine literature itself as essentially masculinist, that is, producing gender dissymmetry and proliferating hyper-masculine sexual norms. Second, Miller suggests that the critical literature on libertinage is, in fact, anything but critical – scholars and critics largely perpetuate the same masculinist path as the texts they study. In her words, modern commentators discuss at great lengths the strategies of seduction at the heart of most libertine texts and the witty, playful exchanges therein but "remain completely untroubled by the asymmetry of power between men and women. The assumption is that this is a game in which women play as well as men."[21] Libertine narratives do not, in fact, provide liberation for women, but instead make them objects within male fantasies of dominance, submission, and conquest (however playfully or aesthetically they may be enacted or staged).

Although I largely accept the political and social challenges posed by the cultural feminist critique of libertinage, one problem with Miller's analysis is that she assumes that the libertine corpus is homogeneous, that it is univocal and is united by certain concerns and preoccupations – in her case, by a rejection of sentiment and memory in favor of a masculinist liberatory politics. As Stéphanie Genand points out, Miller's assumption that libertine literature

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[20] As Trousson notes, whatever form a libertine novel takes, "ces romans ont en commun ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler l'amour et les relations entre des êtres qui en font leur préoccupation essentielle. Même cérébral et stratège, le libertinage spécule sur le role des sens et la quête inlassable du plaisir," Preface to *Romans libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, xx. See also Catherine Cusset, *No Tomorrow: The Ethics of Pleasure in the French Enlightenment* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999); and Robert Mauzi's classic work, *L'Idée du bonheur dans la littérature et la pensée française au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: A. Colin, 1965). Mauzi's study frequently cites libertine texts as part of a pervasive concern about *bonheur* in the eighteenth-century.

[21] Miller, "Libertinage and Feminism," 17.

is homogenous is one that is shared widely with other prominent scholars of eighteenth-century French literature. Indeed, Genand describes a pervasive "volonté d'homogénéisation" in modern commentary with respect to libertine textuality, expressed most often as an effort to pigeonhole libertine texts into fixed categories: "il fallait leur donner un nom, un visage définitif, et ce malgré une conscience aiguë des différences qui les séparent."[22] Some critics, like Jean-Marie Goulemot have sought to distinguish libertine texts from pornographic texts, a distinction that relies on seeing libertine texts as cerebral, concerned more with words, strategies, and argument in their depiction of sex; whereas the sole purpose of pornographic texts is to trigger in their readers "certain physiological reactions."[23] Relatedly, other scholars, such as Peter Nagy, have defined as libertine those texts that have erotic components but "les dépasse […] dans une direction philosophique ou artistique."[24] That is, the libertine text's philosophical message is ultimately what defines it as libertine (as opposed to obscene or pornographic). Finally, many critics have tried to limit the category of libertine textuality to so-called novels "de la bonne compagnie," that is, narratives that depict the habits, *moeurs*, and lifestyle of the (declining) French aristocracy.[25] All of this effort to define and circumscribe the field of study, while well-intentioned, only serves to create situations wherein some texts are excluded under certain

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[22] Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire: politique de la séduction à la fin de l'Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005), 1.

[23] Goulemot sees the erotic novels of Andréa de Nerciat as the chief examples of pornography, as they "contain little more than a series of pornographic scenes featuring people going through the motions, in a sort of gymnastic exercise intended to produce very possible carnal delight, without any real narrative to link them." Goulemot, "Toward a Definition of Libertine Fiction and Pornographic Novels," *Yale French Studies* 94 (1998): 134-135. See also his book-length treatment of pornographic texts, *Ces livres qu'on ne lit que d'une main. Lecture et lecteurs du livre pornographique au XVIIIe siècle* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinea, 1991).

[24] Nagy, *Libertinage et Révolution,* 47.

[25] Laurent Versini, , for instance, submits that "le véritable libertinage ne consiste pas à braver les bienséances de la façon la plus directe." True libertinage is connected here to the specifically aristocratic sphere of conduct and language. Versini, *Laclos et la tradition*, 57.

definitions that are considered essential under others.[26] By privileging generic coherence, the honomogenization of the libertine corpus obscures complexity, difference, and diversity – the set of works called "libertine" is perhaps helpfully defined but disturbingly static and univocal.

The most recent scholarship on libertine literature, rather than trying to pigeonhole texts into generic categories, has sought to evoke and account for the heterogeneity of libertine textuality in the eighteenth century, viewing it as "une production littéraire polymorphe."[27] Much of this work has been concerned with exploding the notion of a stable libertine genre, as evidenced by an international conference organized in 2002 by Philip Stewart and Jean-François Perrin under the intriguing (if disquieting) title, "Existe-t-il un genre libertin?"[28] The tone with which the question was posed (and the sheer diversity of the opinions and theories towards which the various papers gestured) would suggest that the answer is negative. At the very least, to speak of a libertine genre is very much like Justice Potter Stewart's oft-quoted standard for defining hardcore pornography from *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, "I know it when I see it."[29]

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[26] For instance, in his classic study of the eighteenth-century French novel, *Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution*, Henri Coulet excludes "romans pornographiques" from his definition of libertine literature (including *Dom Bougre, Le Portier des Chartreux* (1741) and *Thérèse philosophe* (1748)). Moreover, and perhaps most disturbingly, Coulet excludes Sade from the category of libertine texts, "Dès que le problème du style est écarté et que l'écrivain appelle les choses par leur nom, l'oeuvre n'est plus libertine: les romans de Sade, comme on sait, sont rangés parmi les 'romans philosophiques,' non parmi les romans libertins." Coulet, *Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution* (Paris: A. Colin, 1967), 386.

[27] Michel Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin* (Paris: Hachette littératures, 2000), 37.

[28] The essays presented at this conference were recently collected and published as Jean-François Perrin and Philip Stewart, eds., *Du genre libertin au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Desjonquères, 2004). I also refer the reader to three related pieces on the problem of libertine genre: Jean-Pierre Dubost, "Libertinage and Rationality: From 'Will to Knowledge' to Libertine Textuality," *Yale French Studies* 94 (1998): 52-78; Dubost, "Préface: De l'essence à la topique, mais où est notre sujet?," *Esprit Createur* 43, no. 4 (2003): 3-15; and Jean Goldzink, *À la recherche du libertinage* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).

[29] Faced with the daunting task of legally defining what constituted "obscenity" in light of several unsuccessful attempts to develop an adequate standard theretofore, a frustrated Justice Stewart could only proverbially throw up his hands and exclaim, "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description [obscenity]; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it […]." *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 164 (1964) (Stewart, J., concurring).

I do not directly address the issue of genre in this dissertation, but I cite this new scholarship because it is an indication of how scholars are increasingly interested in grappling with the diversity of libertine texts. As Michel Delon writes in *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, recent scholarship is less interested in defining "un système fantasmatique ou narratif fixe," than in reconstituting "l'imaginaire libertin," understood as a "concurrence de modèles idéologiques, de constituents spatio-temporels."[30] Thus, Delon's work focuses on themes, tropes, and tendencies that span a range of libertine texts, and that attest to the dynamism and diversity of libertine production in the eighteenth century (e.g., "le modèle militaire et la violence," "l'aisance aristocratique," "l'art de la gradation," "l'éclat du luxe," "gastronomie," "virilité," etc.).

Building upon this important recent scholarship, my aim in this dissertation is to suggest that the libertine tradition is far more nuanced, complex, and polyvocal than Miller and other modern commentators have suggested. In particular, my work seeks to break out of the dichotomy between sentimentalism and libertinage. As we have seen in Miller's analysis, sentiment, attachment, and emotional expression are generally seen as incompatible with libertinage (which privileges playfulness, frivolity, and cynicism). Raymond Trousson is perhaps more explicit than Miller on this point in his preface to the anthology, *Romans libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, suggesting that libertine texts examine "dans des registres et des styles différents, tous les aspects de l'amour, à l'exclusion du sentimentalisme, dont il [libertinage] constitue la négation."[31] A handful of scholars have suggested that the antagonism between

[30] Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, 18.
[31] Trousson, Préface to *Romans libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, xx.

libertinage and sentiment is a false one.[32] However, none have, to date, offered a full account of how this apparent antagonism could be resolved. In this project, then, I propose a reading of some eighteenth-century libertine texts with the aim of reconciling libertinage with feeling.

While the existence of the libertine archetype emblematized by figures such as Versac, Almaïr, and Beauplaisir cannot (and will not) be denied, I suggest that libertine texts provide other archetypes, ones that, particularly at the end of the eighteenth century, can be seen as synthesizing libertinage *mondain* and the seemingly conflicting culture of sentimentalism post-Richardson and Rousseau. Existing alongside the energy, violence, and philosophizing of Sadean texts; the cynicism of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*; and the frenetic dissipation of Nerciat's novels, I suggest, is a strand of libertinage that directly incorporates and nuances the pervasive discourse of sentiment and sensibility. These are not merely sentimental narratives with libertine characters or plotlines, but libertine texts in which libertines grapple with emotion, fidelity, and sensitivity to their partners. Creatures of pleasure all, they are also characters steeped in etiquette, memory, and sentiment.

Two recent works that have been particularly influential with respect to my project are Valérie van Crugten-André's *Le Roman du libertinage, 1782-1815: redécouverte et réhabilitation* (1997) and Stéphanie Genand's *Le Libertinage et l'histoire: politique de la séduction à la fin de l'Ancien Régime* (2005). As their titles indicate, both studies focus on libertine texts written and published in the second half of the eighteenth century. In doing so, they correct a considerable scholarly lacuna. That is, while this was a period that saw an explosion both in publication and

[32] See Philippe Roger, "Sensibles libertins: Réflexions sur un oxymoron" in *Continuum*, vol. 4 (New York: AMS Press, 1992), 93-100; Michel Delon and Pierre Malandain, *La Littérature française du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1996), 370-383; and, especially, Claire Jaquier, *L'Erreur des désirs: romans sensibles au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Payot, 1998).

readership, it is often seen as "stérile et peuplée d'épigones."[33] Critics have tended to dismiss texts from this period as merely "more of the same," a tired script endlessly rehearsed and performed. This critical oversight is partly due to the status afforded Laclos' undeniable masterpiece, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) as "à la fois le chef d'oeuvre et le chant du cygne" of eighteenth-century libertine literature.[34] The quintessential "one hit wonder," *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is implicitly viewed as impossible to top. Ergo, why try?[35] Additionally, as Genand argues, because Laclos' novel essentially reproduces the rarefied world of the *libertin(e)s mondain(e)s*, depicted in earlier texts from Crébillon, Duclos, Dorat, and La Morlière, juxtaposing *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (at the end of the *ancien régime*) with texts written at the beginning of the century "donne l'illusion que la société française n'a pas changé" since the 1730s.[36] By focusing on libertine production in the late eighteenth century, then, Crugten-André and Genand demonstrate that this literary movement cannot be considered "comme un bloc immuable entre le début et la fin du dix-huitième siècle," but rather "un courant évolutif qui subit de considérables transformations entre les années 1730 et la veille de la Révolution."[37]

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[33] Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage, 1782-1815: redécouverte et réhabilitation* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), 11. Crugten-André quotes in particular, the opinion of Gustave Larson, who, in his *Histoire de la littérature française*, professes unqualified disdain for the literary production of late eighteenth-century France, "À parler en général, elle [la production] n'a jamais été plus insignifiante, de forme plus vulgaire ou plus factice, plus mediocre ou plus fausse de pensée. Ecartons donc toute cette masse d'écriture inutile, qui n'ajoute qu'un poids mort à notre littérature," quoted in Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, 34.

[34] Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage,* 16.

[35] In her study of libertinage in the novels of Crébillon, Richardson and Laclos, Colette Cazenobe displays just such a chauvinism for the libertinage depicted in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, "Et après [*Les Liaisons*]? Le modèle exemplaire du libertin ne connaît plus guère que des atténuations, des retouches, des replâtrages: le type est fixé. Sade n'y ajoute rien; il peint, repeint inlassablement autre chose, et à côté," *Le Système du libertinage du Crébillon à Laclos* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991), 9.

[36] Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire*, 5.

[37] Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire,* 3.

Of particular interest for the purposes of this dissertation is Genand's account of "la confrontation" between the libertine novel and the sentimental novel.[38] As I have shown, libertinage and sentimentalism are seen (more often than not) as two irreconcilable approaches to emotional expression, ones that ostensibly divide the eighteenth century into two, separate affective spheres. That said, argues Genand, "La lecture des textes publiés entre 1782 et 1802 montre en effet les liens étroits qui se nouent entre ces deux sphères."[39] She proceeds to highlight texts where a "traditional" libertine "récit de séduction" cohabits with a sentimental aesthetic, such as Loaisel de Tréogate's *Dolbreuse, ou l'Homme du siècle ramené à la vérité par le sentiment et par la raison* (1783) or Louvet de Couvray's *Les Amours du chevalier de Faublas* (1787-1790). In the case of *Dolbreuse*, Genand shows how late eighteenth-century sentimental and moral novels often included libertine characters and plotlines. Libertinage here, however, "ne représente quelquefois qu'un décor, un univers périphérique à l'intrigue. Le roman appartient au genre sentimental, mais maintient la présence, en toile de fond, d'un microcosme libertin."[40] Libertinage is a detour within a larger sentimental arc, one that ends up re-enforcing a moral conclusion (e.g., the rejection of dissolute behavior and licentious wandering in favor of religion, marriage, or moral ecstasy). In spite of her efforts to trace linkages between libertinage and sentiment, however, Genand still sees them as essentially opposing categories that cohabitate for an instant (like matter and anti-matter). This dissertation aims to break down the distinction between these categories, offering an account of libertine engagement with affection, reflection, and sensibility.

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[38] Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire,* 81-116.
[39] Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire,* 81.
[40] Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire,* 82.

The eighteenth-century libertine texts analyzed in this dissertation are Giacomo Casanova's twelve-volume memoir, *Histoire de ma vie* (1789-1798); *Le Rideau levé ou l'éducation de Laure* (1781), attributed to Honoré Gabriel Riquetti, comte de Mirabeau; and Vivant Denon's novella, *Point de lendemain* (1777/1812). Like Genand and Crugten-André, I have chosen to focus my analysis on texts from the latter half of the long eighteenth century (1770-1812). First, as Crugten-André has noted, libertine texts written and published immediately before, during, and after the Revolution "[ont été] négligés, voire passés sous silence."[41] Each of the texts chosen for this project, then, are well known within scholarly circles but are not, with the exception perhaps of *Point de lendemain*, particularly prominent within the canon.

In addition to addressing a critically neglected corpus, my choice of the late eighteenth century is predicated on a belief (shared by Genand) that this is a period that merits (and demands) specific and substantive historicization. The latter half of the eighteenth century was marked by a culture of sentimentalism, one which extended from literary production to music, the visual arts, science, philosophy, and the domain of individual behavior (observed in personal correspondence). The eighteenth-century discourse on sentiment encompassed a number of socio-moral ideals, including heightened emotional expression, deep attachment, sensitivity, and the valuation (and naturalism) of feeling. Although libertinage is often viewed in direct opposition to sentiment, I show that some texts of the period were imbued by it. The texts I have chosen each demonstrate a libertine engagement with facets of sentiment and sensibility.

[41] Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, 46.

On thing that is noteworthy about each of the three primary libertine texts studied in this dissertation is that none of them ends with a renouncement of libertinage. This is in contrast to a novel like *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, where the libertines are punished, or novels wherein the libertines are reformed (by sentiment) to reject libertinage, as in Richardson's *Pamela* or Duclos' *Confessions du Comte de* ***. The protagonists of *Le Rideau levé, Histoire de ma vie*, and *Point de lendemain* end their tales confirmed, unrepentant, joyful libertines. The ending of Denon's *Point de lendemain* literally rejects *morale*, the tidiness of a clear and unambiguous conclusion, "Je cherchai bien la morale de toute cette aventure, et… je n'en trouvai point."[42] Unlike Saturnin, the protagonist of Gervaise de Latouche's *L'Histoire de Dom Bougre, Portier des Chartreux* (1741), who ends the novel chastised by *la vérole* (syphilis), Mirabeau's Laure meets no fate that would dissuade her from the epicurean sexual philosophy of her youth. Casanova is perhaps the most explicit in his refusal to reject or repent for his libertine past. While referring to *Histoire de ma vie* as "une confession générale" (thus citing Rousseau's and St. Augustine's respective *Confessions*), he undercuts the desire for absolution that the act of confession may imply, "dans le style de mes narrations vous ne trouverez ni l'air d'un pénitent, ni la contrainte de quelqu'un qui rougit rendant compte de ses fredaines."[43] Casanova's reader is to take him as he is – a man (like any other) with imperfections and faults, who laughs and takes pleasure in his mistakes rather than seeking forgiveness for them. If, in this dissertation, I argue that these same texts bear the imprint of sentiment, affection, reflection, and memory, it is striking that libertinage

[42] Vivant Denon and Jean-François de Bastide, *Point de lendemain; La Petite maison,* edited by Michel Delon (Paris: Gallimard, 69 (ellipses in original). As I will discuss in greater depth within Chapter 4, there are two versions of *Point de lendemain*, an original version published in 1777 and a re-edited version published in 1812. Both versions are included in the edition cited here (and throughout). To distinguish between the versions when citing them, hereafter I cite them as either *PdL* (1777) or *PdL* (1812).
[43] Giacomo Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie, suivi de textes inédits*, 12 vols. in 3 (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1993), 1:3.

is never rejected in favor of sentiment. Rather, sentiment intertwines with libertinage and enhances it. Neither is rejected; both manage to comfortably co-exist.

Lastly, I have chosen these texts specifically because they each represent different facets of libertine literature in the eighteenth century. *Point de lendemain* might be said to directly come out of the *mondain* libertine tradition of Crébillon, Duclos, Dorat, and Laclos. *Le Rideau levé* is decidedly more explicit in its representations of libertine sexuality, belonging less to the rarefied world of the aristocracy, and more to the long and distinguished line of eighteenth-century pornographic texts (such as *Thérèse philosophe*). Casanova's *Histoire de ma vie* belongs to the well-established memoir genre. Despite their different literary pedigrees, they each represent a nuanced picture of libertinage, one which breaks out of the "love 'em and leave 'em" model of the unfeeling, libertine womanizer to show a complex libertine engagement with love, attachment, consideration, and sentiment.

In any treatment of late eighteenth-century libertinage, one might expect to see chapters devoted to Sade or Laclos, the most well-known and most read figures of the period. Sade does not figure within my analysis precisely because he explicitly and unambiguously rejects sentiment in any form (indeed, expressing affection in a Sadean novel is generally the best way to come to a quick and painful demise).[44] The novels of Nerciat would probably fall into a similar category. As for Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is perhaps the libertine text most often

[44] Although Sadean libertines unequivocally reject sentiment, Sade himself greatly admired the novels of Samuel Richardson, especially *Clarissa* (1748). I would argue that Sade takes the trope of "virtue in distress" at the heart of Richardson's novels, *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa,* and takes it to its logical conclusion in *Justine* and *Juliette*. See R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

studied; accordingly, it has the most critical baggage to bear. Because of the explicit references to sentimentalism (and especially to Rousseau and Richardson) within the novel, a study of libertine sentimentalism in Laclos would be a fruitful area of inquiry. Nevertheless, in the present study, I have chosen to concentrate on less canonical texts because they offer potential for attesting to a larger engagement with sentiment outside of the Laclosian context.

By contrast, it may be surprising to see Casanova so prominently featured in a study of French libertinage. Casanova was, after all, a Venetian, not a Frenchman (unlike the other figures studied within this dissertation). I include Casanova within the French canon for a couple of reasons. First, Casanova is a francophone writer – he wrote predominantly in French and, like many of his contemporaries, French was the language he employed when speaking with most anyone who was not Italian. He visited France often, claimed (falsely) French citizenship (referring to himself as the chevalier de Seingalt), and frequently commented on events transpiring in France (he was a vocal critic of the Revolution, especially after 1792). In many ways, that is, he self-identified as French. Like other scholars, I consider Casanova's oeuvre, and particularly his memoirs, to be a vital and important contribution, not only to French libertinage, but to eighteenth-century French literature more broadly.[45]

[45] See, for instance, Thomas Kavanagh's *Esthetics of the Moment: Literature and Art in the French Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1996), which includes a chapter devoted to Casanova (alongside chapters devoted to Lahontan, Diderot, Graffigny, and Rousseau). Moreover, in the special issue of *Yale French Studies* devoted to "Libertinage and Modernity," Catherine Cusset makes a point of noting that she wished to "assure the inclusion" of Casanova in any consideration of French libertinage. She considers Casanova here a major libertine writer within the French tradition, Cusset, "Editor's Preface: The Lesson of Libertinage," *Yale French Studies* 94 (1998): 10.

In addition to contributing to the growing body of scholarship on the individual authors and texts treated within this dissertation,[46] my project adds to the significant work on the culture of sentiment and sensibility in eighteenth-century Europe[47] as well as libertinage and *apprentissage*.[48] Moreover, this project straddles the intersection between eighteenth-century studies and contemporary French cultural studies. To date, there have been very few critical

[46] Of the four authors discussed in this project, Casanova has elicited the most critical attention to date. Much of the major recent work in Casanova studies is published within the journal *Intermédiaire des Casanovistes*, published annually under the direction of Helmut Watzlawick. Other relevant contributions on Casanova's *Histoire de ma vie* include, Chantal Thomas, *Casanova: un voyage libertin* (Paris: Denoël, 1985); François Roustang, *The Quadrille of Gender: Casanova's "Memoirs,"* trans. Ann C. Vila (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); and Marie-Françoise Luna, *Casanova mémorialiste* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998). With respect to Vivant Denon's *Point de lendemain,* I would point the reader to the following recent critical interventions: chapter 8 of Thomas Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Philippe Sollers, *Le Cavalier du Louvre: Vivant Denon, 1747-1825* (Paris: Plon, 1995); and chapter 6 of Catherine Cusset, *No Tomorrow*. For a recent monograph on La Mettrie see, Kathleen Wellman, *La Mettrie: Medicine, Philosophy, and Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992).

[47] The secondary literature on the pervasive culture of sentimentalism and sensibility in eighteenth-century Europe is voluminous and diverse, ranging from studies of sentimental novels, to science, economics, moral physiology, and emotional expression. I have provided those works that have proved most useful in constructing my argument. For the culture of sensibility in general, see: William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Anne Vincent-Buffault, *The History of Tears: Sensibility and Sentimentality in France* (London: Macmillan, 1991); and Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986). For studies of the so-called sentimental novel, see, of course, the aforementioned study by Claire Jacquier, *L'Erreur des désirs* but also Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress;* and Anne Coudreuse, *Le Goût des larmes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1999). For treatments of the intersections between Enlightenment science and sentimentalism/sensibility, see Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Finally, for an account of moral sentiments and how they factor into economic theories, see, Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[48] As Patrick Wald Lasowski recently noted in his preface to volume one of the Pléiade's *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), "Il y a à travers la diversité des formes, une structure romanesque dominante. Le roman libertin est on l'a dit, roman de formation. Il fait le récit d'une initiation, d'une découverte, d'une exploration du monde, au terme de laquelle le héros s'est délivré des doutes, des hésitations, des aveuglements, des terreurs qui l'habitaient. L'entrée dans le monde est une nouvelle naissance," xlvii. A number of studies have explored the connection between libertinage and narratives of education/formation, including Peter Brooks, *The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1969); chapter 4 of Nagy, *Libertinage et Révolution*; Peter Cryle, *Geometry in the Boudoir: Configurations of French Erotic Narrative* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994); Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, 221-332; and James Turner, *Schooling Sex: Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France and England, 1534-1685* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

engagements with modern appropriations and deployments of eighteenth-century libertinage. Those works that have, such as Isabelle Rabineau's essay, *Modernes libertins* and Delon's *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, have seen an essential continuity between eighteenth-century libertinage and contemporary evocations of it. Rabineau, for instance, defines libertinage as an art of resistance, one that is practiced by modern French artists and writers as much as it was in the eighteenth century. She suggests that there is not so much a "continuité d'une forme de sociabilité qui frappe, mais plutôt la résurgence précise d'un point de vue libertin sur la vie, dans une société plus censurée qu'il n'y paraît."[49] Delon, for his part, briefly sketches the ways in which contemporary sexual-political debates "peuvent nous rapprocher de la crise de l'Ancien Régime."[50] In contrast to these works, I see a fundamental discontinuity between the modern and the early modern, rupture and compelling strangeness rather than *rapprochement*. Accordingly, this dissertation seeks to uncover how eighteenth-century libertinage has been misunderstood and mis-appropriated in the modern imaginary. In the final chapter, in particular, I consider how libertinage has been reconfigured and deployed as a powerful template for thinking about, visualizing, and staging contemporary sexual-political debates. I suggestively consider the extent to which the figure of the libertine has become a projection for the anxieties, phantasms, and aspirations of successive generations with respect to the possibility of sex and sexuality.

This dissertation consists of two parts. The first part (Chapters 2-4) examines eighteenth-century libertinage through the lenses of sentiment, reflection, moderation, and

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[49] Isabelle Rabineau, *Modernes libertins: un art de la résistance* (Paris: Le Castor Astral, 1994), 12. The book cites, among others, Jean Dutourd and Philippe Sollers as archetypical modern libertines.
[50] Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, 9-10.

consideration. Here, I suggest a re-evaluation of the critical and popular understanding of what constitutes libertine behavior. I begin the dissertation with a discussion of legendary adventurer and infamous seducer, Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798). I read the twelve volumes of *Histoire de ma vie* as an expression of what I will call libertine sentimentalism. In particular, I look at how Casanova constructs an emotional fidelity with his lovers through memory. In Chapter 3, I engage with two texts, Julien Offray de La Mettrie's sensualist essay, *La Volupté* (1744), and Mirabeau's erotic novel, *Le Rideau levé* (1781). Both texts deal with the epistemology of libertinage, that is, the physical and mental development and refinement that is required to gain access to the highest forms of libertine pleasure (and thus become the ideal lover). Moderation, temperance, taste, and an attention to the pleasure of one's partner are held up as ideals as opposed to the coarse, narcissistic, frenetic, and violent pleasures of the debauched. Chapter 4, which proposes a new reading of Denon's *Point de lendemain*, can be seen as a synthesis of the ideas presented in the previous two chapters. I read *Point de lendemain* as a narrative about the young male protagonist's sentimental education over the course of a *nuit merveilleuse*, one that teaches him to be tender, delicate, and sensitive with his mistress.

The chief aim of this dissertation is to re-contextualize and historicize eighteenth-century libertinage, to separate it out from the modern commentator's or reader's presentist concerns. As I have begun to show in this introduction, our contemporary understanding of eighteenth-century libertinage is often impacted or clouded by our own anxieties or aspirations about sex, sexuality, power, and politics. In re-claiming libertinage, some critics have claimed libertines as comrades-

in-arms in a shared struggle against social conventions and sexual repression. Others, like Miller, have read libertinage as *part of* those structures of power and domination.

In the final chapter of my dissertation I bring this discussion full circle by considering the politicization and deployment of eighteenth-century libertinage in the contemporary French popular imaginary. I consider novels and films that nostalgically draw upon (and perpetuate) the libertine past but do so by evacuating sentiment and equating libertinage with sexual liberation and sex without attachment. In doing so, I suggest, these works fundamentally misrepresent the complexity and diversity of eighteenth-century libertinage.

I begin Chapter 5 with a discussion of two modern re-writings of *Point de lendemain* – the first written by Honoré de Balzac as part of his *Physiologie du mariage* (1826), the second included as part of Milan Kundera's recent novel, *La Lenteur* (1994). Both Balzac and Kundera use *Point de lendemain* to illustrate libertine behavior in the eighteenth-century, but do so in order to reflect and comment upon the socio-sexual mores of their respective epochs, the nineteenth-century and the turn of the twenty-first century. Their re-tellings of Denon's novel serve as excellent case studies for showing the process by which libertine sentimentalism is forgotten or evacuated in favor of presentist concerns, how libertinage is nostalgically configured as a space for rehearsing contemporary socio-sexual debates (much in the same way as eighteenth-century authors rehearsed their debates in Tahiti, the East, and the New World).

In a similar vein, I then consider two recent films, Gabriel Aghion's *Le Libertin* (2000) and Jean-Claude Brisseau's *Choses secrètes* (2002). Film has been described as the "muse of the twentieth century," the dominant cultural genre of the modern period, especially so perhaps in

the second half of the twentieth century and at the turn of the twenty-first century.[51] I chose films here because they serve such an important role in rehearsing, translating, and recapitulating socio-political debates. The turn of the twenty-first century, in particular, has seen an explosion of debates in France on sexual political issues such as sexual harassment, equality in the workplace, same-sex unions/PACS. Many of these issues have found their way onto the screens of French cinemas. The two films analyzed in Chapter 5 use the specter of eighteenth-century libertinage to stage and interrogate contemporary concerns about female sexual power and the status of the couple as well as to provide a kind of historical precedent for modern sexual liberation movements.

I chose these two films because they explicitly engage with France's libertine heritage, though in quite different ways. Indeed, they could not be more different in tone and style – *Le Libertin* is a period comedy, a "film en costumes" set in the eighteenth-century; *Choses secrètes* is an erotic thriller set in contemporary Paris. Other films could have been considered – Roger Vadim's classic adaptation of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* comes to mind. However, these two films struck me as particularly provocative. I chose *Le Libertin* precisely because its very title engages directly with what a libertine is. *Choses secrètes* is analyzed because it provides an intriguing example of how explicit citations of eighteenth-century libertinage can crop up in a film that would seem to have nothing to do with the eighteenth-century (namely, a gritty independent film about office politics, social climbing, and the place of women in contemporary French society).

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[51] Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), 200.

From literary critics to popular filmmakers, many have sought to "chercher [leur] reflet dans le libertinage d'il y a deux siècles," to locate modern concerns or debates in eighteenth-century texts.[52] My aim in this dissertation, on the other hand, is to view libertinage in all its dazzling complexity and its confounding contradictions, in this case, the seeming contradiction that is the *libertin(e) sensible*, rake sentimentalism.

[52] Here, I paraphrase Delon's suggestion that "notre époque ne cesse de chercher son reflet dans le libertinage d'il y a deux siècles," Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, 9-10.

## Chapter 2: "Constant, mais infidèle" – Casanova, Libertine Sentimentalism, and the Portraits of Past Love

"Je dois passer dans votre esprit pour inconstant; mais je vous jure que si vous me trouviez digne de votre coeur, votre image dans le mien ne s'effacerait plus." – Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*

Returning to the rooms he had previously shared with this lover of three months, Henriette, Casanova finds a parting note etched by the point of a diamond: "*Tu oublieras aussi Henriette*."[53] This directive would be echoed once more in a letter written by Henriette to be opened by him once she had already begun her sad journey back to France (and the confines of a loveless marriage). I reproduce it in its entirety as it appears transcribed in Casanova's memoirs,

> C'est moi, mon unique ami, qui ai dû te délaisser. N'augmente pas ta douleur pensant à la mienne. Imaginons-nous que nous avons fait un agréable songe, et ne nous plaignons pas de notre destin, car jamais un songe si agréable ne fut si long. Vantons-nous d'avoir su nous rendre parfaitement heureux trois mois de suite; il n'y a guère de mortels qui puissent en dire autant. Ne nous oublions donc jamais, et rappelons souvent à notre esprit nos amours pour les renouveler dans nos âmes, qui quoique séparées en jouiront avec encore plus de vivacité. Ne t'informe pas de moi, et si le hasard te fait parvenir à savoir qui je suis, sois comme si tu l'ignorais. Sache, mon cher ami, que j'ai si bien mis ordre à mes affaires que je serai pour tout le reste de ma vie heureuse tant que je pourrai l'être sans toi. Je ne sais pas qui tu es; mais je sais que personne au monde ne te connaît mieux que moi. Je n'aurai plus d'amants dans toute ma vie à venir ; mais je souhaite que tu ne penses pas d'en faire de même. Je désire que tu aimes encore, et même que tu trouves une autre Henriette. Adieu.[54]

In both messages to her *ci-devant* lover, Henriette implores Casanova to seek out new pleasures, to move on, and to forget her. Casanova does indeed seek pleasures in other women's beds and finds love many times over (we are only in volume 3 of 12, after all!) but forget Henriette he does not, if by forgetting we mean that he stops thinking about her and purges her from his

[53] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 521.
[54] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 522.

memory. On the contrary, "Je ne l'ai pas oubliée, et je me mets du baume dans l'âme toutes les fois que je m'en souviens."[55]

"Tout le monde connaît Casanova," writes Marie-François Luna in the introduction to her excellent monograph on Casanova and his *Histoire de ma vie*. This is to say, most everyone knows the mythic Casanova, the literary archetype and sexual icon, "ce héros public, frère mythique de Don Juan."[56] In modern criticism, he has only recently been taken seriously as a writer and an important, flesh-and-blood figure of the eighteenth-century republic of letters.[57] More often than not, however, Casanova is still the victim of his iconic status as a seducer and a lover – much like Sade, his life has been reduced to a name and a caricature.[58] In contemporary parlance, Casanova's name is a by-word for rakishness – a lover good at seducing, but not staying. Casanova has even been associated with a psychological pathology, "the Casanova Complex," a form of hyper-masculine sex addiction.[59]

In contrast to the connotations his name inspires as a smooth lothario who effortlessly preys on the affections of the opposite sex, I intend to show Casanova to be a *sensitive* libertine, a seducer who does not jadedly dismiss love as "un désir que l'on se plaisait à s'exagérer" as many of his brethren do, especially early in the eighteenth century.[60] Rather, Casanova takes pleasure not so much in the sheer number of his conquests but in the fact that these conquests are memorable and have a power to resonate vividly and emotionally to the grave and beyond.

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[55] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 521.
[56] Luna, *Casanova mémorialiste,* 7.
[57] On this point, see Kavanagh, *Esthetics of the Moment*, 103; Félicien Marceau, *Une insolente liberté: les aventures de Casanova* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983); and Luna, *Casanova mémorialiste*, 7-12.
[58] One need only survey recent evocations of Casanova in popular films such as *American Pie* (1999) and Lasse Hallström's recent *Casanova* (2005) to see the extent to which he has been reduced to caricature.
[59] See, for instance, Peter Trachtenberg, *The Casanova Complex: Compulsive Lovers and their Women* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1988).
[60] Crébillon fils, *La Nuit et le moment*, 261.

Though certainly a man who enjoyed affairs with women of many different temperaments, ages, and nationalities, this is not to say that his professions of love should be discounted as mere polite forms of address or as lies meant to gain entry to a woman's bed.

When I read *Histoire de ma vie*, I am consistently struck by the emotional language, tenor, and depth of Casanova's descriptions of his many amorous liaisons with women (and perhaps particularly so in the case of Henriette). *Histoire de ma vie* relates, among many other things, Casanova's relationships and amorous intrigues with over a hundred women. Yet, in nearly every case, he remembers them fondly and with clarity. Indeed, Casanova emphasizes the central role of memory – his memory is both sharp and a site of intense pleasure. Strikingly, Casanova's memory is sentimental in nature rather than a means of keeping a list of conquests or notches on a bedpost.

This chapter endeavors to show Casanova as the very opposite of the libertine archetype so often associated with his name – sentimental and engaged rather than unemotional, disinterested, and flighty. I begin with grounding and elucidating the centrality of emotional-sentimental discussion in Casanova's *Histoire de ma vie* as well as late eighteenth-century culture, more generally. I do so through the lens of the portrait miniature, a clear object of sentiment that Casanova values highly and carries with him. Building on this discussion, I then move to consider how Casanova deploys memory to commemorate, mourn, honor, and even remain faithful to his many lovers. In doing so, I argue, Casanova develops an ingenious form of polyamorous fidelity. That is to say, Casanova does not maintain sexual or relational exclusivity to any one woman, but does develop deep and emotionally significant long-term relationships with numerous lovers over the course of his life. He recasts sentiment and constancy in libertine terms so as to disassociate fidelity from monogamy and physical constancy and place it squarely

within the realm of an emotionally-attuned memory. He is in many ways, thus, the libertine opposite of Beauplaisir – if both men go from woman to woman (or, in Beauplaisir's case, *think* they do), Casanova prides himself on his ability to remember each of his lovers and keep them present in his mind and heart. As such, many of his relationships never truly end.

### Sentimental Portraits

Casanova's affair with the Murano nun M.M. in volume IV of *Histoire de ma vie* is one of the most infamous and oft-cited episodes in the memoirs. The affair begins in 1753 and they carry on secret assignations for over two years, their relationship ending only because he is arrested and imprisoned by the State Inquisitors. To commemorate their love, Casanova and M.M. exchange portrait miniatures with each other. For her, Casanova commissions a medallion concealed under a "sainte image" only she could unlock, "une Annonciation où on voyait l'ange Gabriel brun, et la Sainte Vierge blonde tenant ses bras ouverts devant le divin messager."[61] In turn, M.M. presents Casanova with a similarly ingenious device, a gold snuffbox that contained two likenesses of her – one sacred, one profane, both hidden such that only her lover could view them. "[Je] l'ai trouvée dans le dessous, habillée en religieuse debout, et en demi-profil. Le second fond élevé me la montrait toute nue étendue sur un matelas de satin noir dans la même posture de la Magdelaine du Coreggio."[62]

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[61] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 761. Casanova makes a point of ensuring that the hair types reflect he and M.M.'s likenesses; Casanova has dark brown hair, M.M. has blonde hair. The choice of this particular scene from the life of the Virgin Mary might have also been an ingenious reference to M.M.'s religious order, the order of the Annonciade.

[62] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* , 1: 763.

Throughout *Histoire de ma vie* we find instances wherein Casanova gives, receives, and exchanges portrait miniatures.[63] During a gathering that I shall have occasion to discuss at greater length in the next chapter, for instance, Casanova passes around a portrait of the Elector of Cologne ensconced in a snuffbox given to him by the Elector himself. Doing so helps to highlight Casanova's noble character (even if he could not truly claim a noble title or lineage), thereby giving credence to his princely munificence.[64] But more often than not, portrait miniatures in the memoirs are exchanged between lovers, as above in the case of M.M. These portrait miniatures are extremely valuable to him, though in sentimental terms rather than economic ones. For example, he takes great pains to inform his reader of his relief at receiving a trunk filled with personal effects (including his portrait miniatures) from a faithful friend in Venice shortly after his famous and daring escape from the Leads prison in 1756. Of the value he places on the portrait miniatures contained therein, he boasts, "Je n'ai jamais de ma vie mis en gage une tabatière sans ôter le portrait qu'elle contenait."[65] The gold, tortoise shell, precious stones, and ivory that often encase or surround the portraits are directly tied to Casanova's fortunes, adorning him during periods of affluence, saving him from destitution during more frequent periods of decline. But the portraits of Casanova's friends and lovers transcend the caprices of Chance. As such their value is priceless.

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[63] In a recent article in *L'Intermédiaire des casanovistes*, Isadora Rose de Viejo provides a gloss of the major references to jewelry in *Histoire de ma vie*. As she fully admits, the gloss is not exhaustive. Most notably, she leaves out an episode of portrait exchange that I will treat later in this chapter between Casanova and an M.M. doppleganger. See, Viejo, "References to Jewelry in Casanova's Memoirs," *Intermédiaire des casanovistes* 23 (2006): 5-6.

[64] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 260-1. Casanova describes the snuffbox as "une boîte d'or […] qui avait par-dessus son portrait en médaillon habillé en grand-maître de l'ordre teutonique. Je fus très sensible à cette grâce."

[65] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 33. He proves this to the reader near the end of the memoirs when he sells the gold snuffbox given to him by the Elector of Cologne (see note above) to get money for his voyage to Trieste (and then on to Venice). He removes the Elector's portrait before handing over the snuffbox, Ibid., 3: 1004.

The act of exchanging portrait miniatures between lovers is not by any means unique to *Histoire de ma vie*. Rather, this was a common practice in eighteenth-century Europe, albeit one that has received very little scholarly attention.[66] Like the "portrait objects" M.M. and Casanova exchanged, portrait miniatures in the eighteenth century were generally incorporated into luxury objects (e.g. snuffboxes, rings, brooches, and bracelets) that could be (and often were) worn on the person. Because of the rich materials out of which they were made and in which they were enclosed – precious stones, ivory, gold, silver – portrait miniatures were truly a princely gift. Indeed, they were often gifts made by monarchs and sovereigns to especially loyal subjects as a mark of royal favor. As such, they could be used as a three-dimensional letter of introduction. But portrait miniatures were also intensely personal artifacts, exchanged between lovers, relatives and friends to cement, commemorate, and signify intimate relationships and loving fidelity.

In an era before photography they were the equivalent of the wallet-sized photograph, crumpled but taken out at a moment's notice to remind the bearer of a loved one or, alternately, taken out to display the subject with pride. But, as Marcia Pointon adds, portrait miniatures "not

[66] Few comprehensive studies of the portrait miniature and its variable meanings/uses have been undertaken. The vast majority of the scholarly work on miniatures to date has focused on the miniature as objects within a connoisseur's larger collection (i.e. a collection of portrait miniatures stored in museum-like conditions). Accordingly, these studies tend to ignore the portrait-object's use-functions, viz., under what circumstances they were commissioned and exchanged, how their size and settings might set them apart functionally from "full-scale" portraiture, the significance of having or keeping a portrait miniature. They opt instead to concentrate on providing biographical details of the major artists who made them and information regarding the materials out of which they were made. See, for instance, Ann Sumner and Richard Walker, *Secret Passion to Noble Fashion: The World of the Portrait Miniature* (Bath: Holburne Museum of Art, 1999) or Katherine Coombs, *The Portrait Miniature in England* (London: V&A Publications, 1998). A couple of very recent scholarly articles have begun to reverse this trend. Marcia Pointon's work on sentimental jewelry is the seminal work in this regard. See, especially, Marcia Pointon, "'Surrounded by Brilliants': Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England," *Art Bulletin* 83, no. 1 (2001): 48-71. I also direct the reader to Hanneke Grottenboer's recent article on "eye" miniature portraits, which expounds upon Pointon's arguments and pushes them in a number of intriguing directions. See, Grottenboer, "Treasuring the Gaze: Eye Miniature Portraits and the Intimacy of Vision," *Art Bulletin* 88, no. 3 (2006): 496-507.

only represent people, they also stand in their stead."[67] The portrait miniature becomes a surrogate for its subject, a talisman that is meant to create a sense of physical and emotional immediacy. This is in no small part a function of its size and, by extension, its portability. Unlike large-scale portraiture, that is, miniature portraits are meant to be held, caressed, turned over. Clasped in the hand, worn next to the heart, or held in a pocket, portrait-objects could be constant companions and fellow travelers; they are kissed, covered in tears, and talked to, as Hanneke Grottenboer reminds us.[68]

Numerous paintings from the period, as well as novels and letters, depict and attest to the intimate, affective power of miniature portraits. "[Je] m'enveloppe de toi," Vivant Denon writes to his "Chère Bettine" (Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi) days after he is forced to leave Venice – and thus separate from his great love – in 1793 to return to an uncertain future in a France gripped by the Terror. As he writes Isabella, Denon places her portrait "près de moi sur ma table" so that he may look upon her, conjuring her presence in the room so as to write to her as if he were speaking to her in person. Moreover, he tells her, her portrait substitutes for her in his daily rituals, "J'ai salué et baisé ton portrait aux premiers rayons du jour." The portrait becomes part of Isabella's shadow, "qui me suit, qui m'environne, qui me soutient."[69]

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[67] Pointon, "Surrounded by Brilliants," 57.

[68] "Laurence Sterne's Yorick kisses the portrait of Eliza, one of several heroes and heroines of the sentimental novel to behave this way, or as the young woman in [Richard] Cosway's oil painting [*Margaret Cocks, Later Margaret Smith, 1787*] who, absorbed in thoughts after having read a letter, has a miniature portrait in her lap," Grottenboer, "Treasuring the Gaze," 501.

[69] Vivant Denon, *Lettres à Bettine*, edited by Piergiorgio Brigliadori and Fausta Garavini (Paris: Actes Sud, 1999), 144, 148, 151, 152, 162. Most of the 351 letters collected in this volume had never been published previously and represent the only private correspondence we have from Denon. The letters begin soon after Denon meets Isabella in 1788 and end a few days before his death in 1825. As these letters attest, Isabella – affectionately referred to more often than not as "Bettine" within the correspondence – was the great love of Denon's life. Unfortunately, after his expulsion from the Republic of Venice in 1793, they saw each other infrequently; however, their relationship continued in memory and through their voluminous correspondence.

We find this type of behavior in *Histoire de ma vie* as well. One of Casanova's lovers, C.C., shows similar attachment to a portrait device he gives her (a medallion depicting her name saint, Saint Catherine hides beneath a portrait of Casanova). Citing one of her letters to him, he relates, "d'abord qu'elle était seule rien n'était plus prompt de la pointe de l'épingle avec laquelle elle faisait sauter [le portrait de Sainte Catherine]. Elle donnait alors cent baisers à mon portrait, et elle ne discontinuait pas, si elle était surprise, car dans l'instant elle lui faisait tomber dessus le couvercle. Les religieuses étaient toutes édifiées de la confiance qu'elle avait dans la protection de sa bien heureuse patronne, dont par hasard, à ce que tout le couvent disait, les traits ressemblaient aux siens."[70]

As we see in both examples, the portrait-object's small size, portability, and tactile accessibility created a kind of immediacy between the beholder and the beholden, translating physical absence into symbolic presence. The portrait miniature becomes a talisman of sentiment, love, affection, and fidelity. As such, these portrait-objects fit into the larger, Europe-wide, culture of sensibility and sentimentality in the mid- to late-eighteenth century.

Sentimentalism's impact on eighteenth-century literature, epistolary culture, art, music, philosophy, and science was pervasive and cannot be underestimated. Philosophers and scientists, such as Diderot and Charles Bonnet, sought to uncover the source of the emotions, the limits of sensibility, and the impact of the emotions on the body.[71] Novelists, such as Rousseau in the landmark *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) or Samuel Richardson in *Pamela* (1740), and musicians, such as the opera composer Christoph Willibald von Glück, sought to provoke deep

[70] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 704
[71] For more on "sentimental empiricism," see Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility*.

emotions in their readers/audiences, usually for the purpose of stirring moral feeling.[72] In the realm of interpersonal relations, as Anne Vincent-Buffault has shown, individuals caught up in the sentimentalist fervor (and there was a sizable population of them) sought interactions and relationships based on principles of emotional transparency, openness, and deep connection.[73] Much of the discourse of sentiment(ality) might strike modern readers as emotionally overwrought and inaccessible. *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, for example, is now one of Rousseau's least read works but when it was first published in 1761 it was wildly popular, provoking floods of tears from its readers, as a number of letters to Rousseau from rabid fans attest.[74]

A man of his century if ever there was one, Casanova was clearly caught up in sentimentalism. That he would have chosen to keep and carry with him throughout his wanderings in Europe the letters, mementos, and portraits of his many lovers is but one example of Casanova's emotional attachment to the many women with whom he was involved (and certainly one to which I will return later in the chapter).

More generally, discussion of emotional states and deeply personal revelations are common in the memoirs, placing him well within the late eighteenth-century century vogue for displaying heightened states of emotion. Hearing his great love, Henriette, play the cello at a private concert moves Casanova to such a degree that he surreptitiously excuses himself to go outside to the gardens and weep. He asks himself, "Qui est donc Henriette? Quel est ce trésor dont je suis devenu le maître? Il me paraissait impossible d'être l'heureux mortel qui la

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[72] A superb treatment of audience reaction to late eighteenth-century opera can be found in Part II of James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
[73] Vincent-Buffault, *The History of Tears*. See also, Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, le transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Plon, 1957).
[74] See "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity," ch. 6 of Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

possédait."[75] These tears of joy turn into tears of sorrow a few weeks later when Henriette's family discover her whereabouts and the lovers are forced to part. He leaves the scene of their parting in Geneva for Parma as soon as is practicable, taking only the most difficult mountain routes: "Je ne sentais ni la faim, ni la soif, ni le froid qui gelait la nature sur cette affreuse partie des Alpes. Je suis arrivé à Parme en assez bonne santé allant exprès me loger dans une mauvaise auberge au pied du pont."[76] Once there, Casanova chooses to lock himself in his room, preferring to see no one and eat nothing, "C'est l'effet d'une grande tristesse. Elle assoupit; elle ne donne pas envie à celui qu'elle accable de se tuer, car elle empêche la pensée; mais elle ne lui laisse la moindre faculté de faire quelque chose pour vivre."[77]

As above, or in the case of the Portuguese noblewoman Pauline, the widow Dubois, or the Venetian Marcolina, parting provokes some of Casanova's strongest emotional reactions – tears flow, his health and vitality fail him, he isolates himself, he refuses food and drink.[78] In sum, this creature of pleasure retreats within himself, losing himself in memory and reflection upon what might have been.

In a sense, however, Casanova's affairs never really end. As he crisscrosses Europe, he frequently meets up with old lovers. Sometimes romance is briefly rekindled (as is the case with Donna Lucrezia, who was one of his first initiators into the mysteries of libertinage when he was "jeune abbé sans conséquence"); most the time, though, these encounters merely serve as sweet reminders of happier times in his life, opportunities to stroll down memory lane.[79]

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[75] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 510.
[76] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 521.
[77] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 522.
[78] For the relationship with Marcolina, see Chapters 2-5 of Volume IX; for the widow Dubois, see Chapters 6-8 of Volume VI; and for Pauline see Chapters 8 and 9 of Volume IX.
[79] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* 1: 58. Donna Lucrezia appears three times within the twelve volumes of *Histoire de ma vie*. The first is in Chapters 9-10 of Volume I, comprising the period when he was a young abate in the service

It is in these precious moments that the reader gets a valuable glimpse into how Casanova's former lovers see him. His role in these women's lives is markedly different from that which Beauplaisir plays for the heroine of *Fantomina*, whose personas are dropped without ceremony when they become tiresome to him. Overwhelmingly, they credit him with their happiness and good fortune. Marcolina, one of the beneficiaries of Casanova's good works, remarks that he seemed to travel only "pour faire le bonheur des filles malheureuses" (providing that he found them pretty, of course!).[80] Indeed, this seems to be a conscious strategy on the part of Casanova. If an affair is coming to an end, he often goes to great pains to find adoring and obedient matches for his lovers or makes efforts to secure their professional success. For instance, he helps to launch the career of his lover Teresa, whom he first met as a moderately successful singer posing as a castrato (named Bellino) to get gigs. Ten years after their parting, he would find her again in Florence, rich; happily married to a handsome, younger man; and enjoying a stellar operatic career. She would introduce him to her husband, exclaiming with tears in her eyes, " 'Tu vois mon père […] et plus que mon père, car je lui dois tout. Moment heureux que j'attends depuis dix ans.' […] 'Oui, monsieur,'" he responds with evident joy, "'c'est ma fille, c'est ma soeur, c'est un ange qui n'a aucun sexe, c'est un trésor animé, et c'est votre femme.'"[81]

He takes obvious pride in being able to leave his lovers happier and more successful than he found them. At a dinner party he finds himself surrounded by old flames and their

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of Cardinal Acquaviva in Rome. He encounters her the second time when he is in Naples and learns that she is the mother (and he is the father) of a woman he is enthralled by and wishes to marry (Leonilda). They resume their friendship and their amorous relations at this point and they even contemplate marriage (Chapter 10 of Volume VII). The third time he meets Donna Lucrezia is in Chapter 10 of Volume XI when he is asked by her and their daughter to assist in the production of an heir for their daughter's husband, the Marchese della C.

[80] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 38.

[81] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 573.

husbands/current lovers. He sits in silence (something quite out of character for Casanova at table), marveling at the scene, "je me voyais là l'auteur de toute la belle comédie, très satisfait de voir (sur ma balance) que je faisais dans ce monde plus de bien que de mal, et que sans être né roi il me réussissait de faire des heureux. Il n'y avait personne à cette table qui ne me fût redevable de son contentement particulier; cette réflexion faisait mon bonheur, dont je ne pouvais jouir que dans le silence."[82]

Only a couple of episodes stand out in the memoirs as occasions where Casanova fails miserably in his efforts to bestow happiness upon the women he involves himself with. What is striking is that Casanova is painfully aware of these exceptions and takes responsibility for them, lamenting the women's misfortunes. While in Amsterdam, he is taken to a seedy cabaret where he recognizes a woman he had known and loved in his youth (when they were both virgins). She is now a common whore, spent, ragged, and dissolute: "La débauche beaucoup plus que l'âge avait flétri sa figure et toutes ses adjacences. Lucie, la tendre, la jolie, la naïve Lucie, que j'avais tant aimée, et que j'avais épargnée par sentiment, dans cet état, devenue laide et dégoûtante, dans un bordel d'Amsterdam!" He blames himself for her present state. He reasons that because he had aroused her desires but had not consummated them then and there (out of respect for her naïveté), he had thereby created the conditions for an adventurer with far fewer scruples than he to take advantage of her and lead her down the path of destruction. Filled with these reflections and dark thoughts, he is consumed by guilt, regret, and sadness. "Je lui ai donné deux ducats, et je suis vite parti. Je suis allé me coucher accablé de tristesse. […] Le spectacle de Lucie au musicau me laissa une impression qui me causa les plus funestes rêves. Je me regardais comme

[82] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 57.

la cause de son malheur. Elle n'avait que trente-deux ans, et je prévoyais affreux son état futur."[83]

Whether an affair ends well or ends badly (Lucia, La Corticelli), Casanova is scrupulous in keeping track of his former lovers. He is genuinely interested in their continued happiness and well being, seeking out news of them whenever the occasion arises. Thus, he will always end the narrative of a lover by detailing whatever intelligence he has on her fate. He does this even in the cases of very minor characters, such as the Countess Clementina, of whom he writes, "Je ne [l'ai] plus revu[e]; mais je n'ai jamais pu oublier Clémentine. Six ans après, à mon retour d'Espagne, j'ai su, et j'ai pleuré de plaisir, qu'elle vivait heureuse, marquise de … dans la ville de … mariée depuis trois ans, et mère de deux enfants mâles, dont le cadet, âgé actuellement de vingt-sept ans, est aujourd'hui capitaine dans l'armée autrichiennne. Quel plaisir j'aurais à le voir!"[84] In a few cases, Casanova carries on epistolary relationships with his former lovers, thus continuing their emotional intimacies, as in the case of Henriette: "Je lui ai raconté en gros toutes mes vicissitudes, et elle me communiqua en détail toute sa vie dans trente ou quarante lettres que j'ajouterai à ces Mémoires, si Henriette meurt avant moi."[85] He ends the narrative of Henriette by reassuring his readers, "Elle vit encore aujourd'hui, vieille et heureuse."[86]

All of this is to say that Casanova is not the "love 'em and leave 'em" type of libertine. Rather, he is what I will call a sentimental libertine, and on two important counts. First, Casanova is obviously caught up in the mid to late eighteenth-century culture of sentimentalism. His relationships with women consist not only of the physical-sexual component but also of deep

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[83] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 130.
[84] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 912.
[85] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 732. Unfortunately for us, these letters to Henriette were not a part of the papers and manuscripts found after his death in 1798. Other packets of correspondence with former lovers, such as Manon Balletti, were recovered, however.
[86] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 732.

emotional ties. Expressions of emotion are consistently cited throughout the memoirs. Like other men of his century, he was in no way afraid to cry or seek emotional transparency in his relationships. He also shows himself to be deeply concerned about his lovers' happiness, in both the short-term and the long-term. In the bedroom, his lover's pleasures are "four-fifths" of his own; and when chance or fate should decree that a relationship end, Casanova is careful to ensure that his lovers leave him with their future happiness secured.[87]

Second and, more significantly, Casanova does not forget his lovers. He manages to keep track of them and find opportunities to catch up with them, even in spite of his constant travels through Europe. Even if news is not forthcoming, he retains mementos of his lovers, such as correspondence, jewelry, or, of course, portrait miniatures. These keepsakes, carried with him ostensibly until his death, allow him keep emotional ties alive, despite the vagaries of age and distance.

### Comparison and Memory

In his preface to *Histoire de ma vie*, Casanova establishes memory as the precondition for human thought (as opposed to the blunt instincts of beasts). Human thought, in turn, consists of "des comparaisons faites pour examiner des rapports."[88] One might reasonably infer, following Casanova's logic, that the act of comparing things, principles, and people provides an anchor for memories to be formed and imprinted. It should come as little surprise, then, that Casanova uses comparison to examine his relationships with women. Those comparisons between

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[87] Casanova confesses to his reader that he has always feared reaching climax before his lovers do and always takes steps to restrain ejaculation, "Je fus toute ma vie dominé par la peur que mon coursier récalcitre à la recommencer, et cette économie ne me parut jamais pénible, car *le plaisir visible que je donnais composait toujours les quatre cinquièmes du mien*," Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 245 (my emphasis).
[88] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 4.

relationships, as I will show, serve to cement Casanova's memories of his lovers and are a powerful tool for marking out the significance of a given relationship.

Casanova frequently compares and contrasts his lovers with each other. He will generally take a lover with whom the reader is well acquainted, such as Henriette, and compare her to the lover he is involved with at that moment in the narrative. Casanova assumes that his readers know the major characters of his memoirs so well that he can recall them to serve as referents for different individuals. In doing so, the reader is able to conjure up a sense of the newly-introduced character's demeanor, physical attributes, and, most importantly, their emotional significance to him. To illustrate this point, I cite two examples: the first a positive comparison, the second a negative one.

Five weeks after arriving in London, Casanova is lonely and bored. He is not without distracting pleasures but none of the women are "faite pour moi, et *ressemblante pour le caractère à quelqu'une entre celles que j'avais tant aimées*[.] J'avais déjà vu à Londres cinquante filles que tout le monde trouvait jolies, et je n'en avais trouvé aucune qui m'eût entièrement persuadé."[89] Casanova is not looking for a simple tryst here but for a relationship comparable to the ones he has had in his past, relationships like the ones he shared with Henriette or the opera singer Bellino-Teresa, that is to say, a relationship of emotional and intellectual substance. To pull this off, he concocts a plan to sublease the third and fourth floors of the luxurious flat he is renting to a single woman who would share his meals, converse with him, and (if all went as planned) provide him with an object worthy of his attentions, love, and esteem. "Je n'avais pas besoin de femme pour satisfaire à mon tempérament, mais d'aimer, et de reconnaître dans l'objet qui m'intéressait beaucoup de mérite tant à l'égard de la beauté, comme

[89] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 161 (my emphasis).

à celui des qualités de l'âme[.]'"[90] After interviewing scores of curious women, he finally alights upon a mysterious beauty of noble air going by the name of Pauline. We learn that she is of the Portuguese nobility and that she has been effectively exiled because of her love for a man who was not to be her intended match. Pauline so enchants him with her beauty and the obvious depth of her intelligence that he immediately begs her to take the advertised rooms and does everything in his means to make her comfortable, asking only that she honor him with her presence at table.

Their love buds slowly but soon they are unable to contain their attractions to one another and they decide to live together "comme femme et mari" until she is permitted to return safely to Portugal.[91] They live together in matrimonial and sexual bliss for three weeks following their "noces" until she receives word that she is to return to Portugal to marry the man she had loved and tried to marry before escaping to London. As they go their separate ways, Casanova is struck by the similarity of this parting to another one fifteen years earlier in Geneva – his final moments with Henriette. In both cases, Casanova had to watch as women with whom he had shared marital intimacies and deep emotional connections fade into the distance, leaving him alone with his thoughts and heartbroken. His musing about this similarity leads him to make an explicit comparison between the two women:

> La ressemblance entre cette séparation à Calais, et celle qui m'a percé l'âme à Genève quinze ans auparavant au départ d'Henriette est frappante, frappante la ressemblance des caractères de ces deux femmes incomparables, dont l'une ne différait de l'autre que dans la beauté. Il fallait peut-être cela pour que je devinsse éperdument amoureux de la seconde comme je l'avais été de la première. Toutes les deux sages, toutes les deux douées d'un esprit profond, ce ne pouvait être qu'en force de leur différente éducation que la première était plus gaie, avait plus de talents et moins de préjugés. Pauline avait le noble orgueil de sa nation, pliait

[90] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 165.
[91] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 193.

> au sérieux, et avait la religion dans le coeur encore plus que dans l'esprit. Outre cela elle surpassait Henriette dans le penchant au plaisir d'aimer, et dans les transports qui viennent à sa suite.[92]

The reader should perhaps not be too surprised at the connection Casanova makes between Henriette and Pauline, for he seemed to drop certain clues regarding their resemblance throughout the narrative of his affair with Pauline. The name "Pauline," like "Henriette," is an alias. And, also like Henriette, we learn that Pauline is excellent at languages (speaking French, Italian, Spanish, and English with near-native fluency). Both women are expatriated noblewomen seeking refuge from the oppressive marital economies of their respective native countries (France and Portugal); and both seek to live comfortably but in secrecy, seeing as few people as possible so as not to return to their homelands under anyone else's terms. In any case, that he makes the comparison between Henriette and Pauline explicit is significant. In doing so, Casanova makes it clear that his relationship with Pauline is on the same level of significance as that he shared with Henriette. The highest emotional honors are thus bestowed on Pauline.

In parting from Pauline, Casanova has had to make a promise to her similar to that which he made to Henriette – never come to Lisbon, never seek her out, forget her. Again, as after Henriette, Casanova does not want to be social. When one of his servants suggests to him that he put another notice in the newspaper advertising the available rooms in the apartment, Casanova testily dismisses the servant; even were lightning to strike twice, bestowing him with another woman of Henriette and Pauline's character, he cannot imagine dishonoring Pauline's memory thus. Eventually, however, he feels obliged to resume some semblance of a social schedule. He, thus, reluctantly pays a call on an old acquaintance. At this home, he meets La Charpillon, a courtesan whose destiny, it seems, is to make Casanova suffer and come face to face with his

[92] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 201.

limitations. She will torment him to such an extent that he will ultimately come close to taking his own life. He writes of this first encounter with La Charpillon,

> Ce fut dans ce fatal jour au commencement de septembre 1763 que j'ai commencé à mourir et que j'ai fini de vivre. J'avais trente-huit ans. […] La Charpillon que tout Londres a connue, et qui, je crois, vit encore, était une beauté à laquelle il était difficile de trouver un défaut. Ses cheveux était châtain clair, ses yeux bleus, sa peau de la plus pure blancheur, et *sa taille presque égale à celle de Pauline, comptant les deux pouces qu'elle devait gagner parvenant à l'âge de vingt ans*, car elle n'en avait alors que dix-sept. Sa gorge était petite, mais parfaite, ses mains potelées, minces, et un peu plus longues que les ordinaires, ses pieds mignons, et sa démarche sûre et noble. Sa physionomie douce et ouverte indiquait une âme que la délicatesse des sentiments distinguait, et cet air de noblesse qui ordinairement dépend de la naissance. *Dans ces deux seuls points la nature s'était plue à mentir sur sa figure. Elle aurait dû plutôt n'être vraie que là, et mentir dans tout le reste.* Cette fille avait prémédité le dessein de me rendre malheureux même avant d'avoir appris à me connaître; et elle me l'a dit.[93]

Pauline, like Henriette, the Murano nun M.M., the widow Dubois, and Donna Lucrezia, is an overwhelmingly positive figure in *Histoire de ma vie*. And yet, as Cynthia Craig points out, she is compared to one of the most negative figures in the memoirs.[94] In this instance of comparison and resemblance, the juxtaposition is meant to underline La Charpillon's inherent danger to Casanova: she is a wolf in sheep's clothing, a dangerous woman with the face and figure of an innocent angel. Unlike the comparison between Henriette and Pauline cited above, any resemblance La Charpillon has to Pauline is skin deep. The reader will note that no mention is made of Pauline's character, only her appearance. The meaning is clear: while La Charpillon may be as important as Pauline within the larger scope of the memoirs and while she may share some of Pauline's physical attractions, her character is nothing like Pauline's. By choosing to limit the comparison to physical beauty, Casanova highlights the deceptive powers of La

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[93] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 221-222 (my emphasis).
[94] Cynthia Craig, "*Fleurs blanches or crime?* Disease in Casanova's *Histoire de ma vie*," *RLA: Romance Languages Annual* 5 (1993): 182.

Charpillon while simultaneously and obliquely calling attention to Pauline's essential purity of character.

In both examples cited above, comparison is used by Casanova as a way of examining his relationships. In the example of Henriette and Pauline, similarities are drawn out to demonstrate clearly the nature of these women and the comparable positive effect they had on him; Pauline joins Henriette in his pantheon of great loves. In contrast, Casanova uses Pauline's physical similarity to La Charpillon to insinuate the essential differences in their characters and thereby foreshadow her destructive influence. Comparison is not used in either case to collapse difference but to clearly demarcate character and significance, to fix the individual personalities of his lovers in his memory and that of his reader. In the next section, I will treat yet another example of resemblance and comparison, perhaps one of the most remarkable in the twelve volumes of *Histoire de ma vie*.

### Resemblance and Remembrance: Towards Libertine Fidelity

On his way to Chambéry, Casanova stops at Aix-en-Savoie, "un vilain endroit, où il y a des eaux minérales, et où à la fin de l'été il y a du beau monde."[95] Although he is not at all impressed with the town, he is given a reason to prolong his stay when, walking alone by a fountain one evening, he happens upon two nuns,

> toutes les deux voilées, une qu'à sa taille je ne pouvais juger que jeune, l'autre évidemment vieille. Ce qui me frappe est leur habit, car c'était le même de ma chère M.M. que j'avais vue pour la dernière fois le *24* de juillet *1755*. Il y avait alors cinq ans. Cette apparence suffit non pas à me faire croire que la religieuse que je voyais était M.M., mais à me rendre curieux. Elles allaient vers les champs, je rebrousse mon chemin pour les couper, les voir en face, et me faire voir. Mais je frissonne, quand je vois la jeune, qui marchait précédant la vieille, lever son voile ; je vois M.M. Il était impossible que j'en doutasse, j'étais trop

[95] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 426. Aix-en-Savoie is now known as Aix-les-Bains.

> obligé de la connaître. Je m'achemine vers elle, elle rebaisse vite le voile, et elle prend un autre chemin visiblement pour m'éviter. J'adopte dans l'instant les raisons qu'elle peut avoir, et je retourne sur mes pas, mais sans la perdre de vue ; je la suis de loin pour voir où elle allait s'arrêter.[96]

By her habit and a quick glimpse of the young nun's face, Casanova is convinced that he has just seen his old lover M.M. Curiosity as to why she should be so far from Venice and as to her condition compels him to seek her out and obtain a tête-à-tête. But the young nun is not the Murano nun M.M., a fact he confirms the moment she addresses her first words to him (in French instead of their native Venetian).

She is indeed from the same order as M.M. – the order of the Annonciade – but she is from a convent in Chambéry. Two years after taking the veil, a M. de Cou convinced her to grant him her virginity and he abandoned her once they discovered that she was with child. Fearing the consequences of being found pregnant, the nun convinces her abbess that she must be allowed to go to Aix to take the waters. Casanova resolves to aid her, "Il me semblait en la sauvant d'exécuter un ordre de Dieu. Dieu avait voulu qu'elle me parût M.M."[97]

As Casanova endeavors to help this nun he had taken for M.M. he discovers a host of other bizarre resemblances between the two women. First, we learn that she has the same name as M.M., making her officially a second M.M. (hereafter, I will refer to them respectively as $M.M._1$ and $M.M._2$).[98] But perhaps most shocking to Casanova is the physical resemblance $M.M._2$ shares with her namesake. According to him, the only points of divergence are $M.M._2$'s hair and eye color – $M.M._1$ had blonde hair and blue eyes; $M.M._2$ has black hair and eyes.

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[96] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie,* 2: 431.
[97] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 440.
[98] It is not clear how $M.M._2$'s initials correspond to her name, viz., is it her given name or the name she adopted when she took the veil? The same could be asked about the correspondence between $M.M._1$'s name and her initials.

Casanova underscores the resemblance between M.M.$_1$ and M.M.$_2$ by introducing the portraits of M.M.$_1$. He effectively uses the portraits as a device of seduction, easing this more religiously-inclined nun out of her shell by piquing her curiosity. M.M.$_2$, in turn, holds up the portraits as a mirror to herself, allowing her to identify with a more spirited, sexually liberated, and rambunctious alter ego. He first shows M.M.$_2$ the more subdued portrait of M.M.$_1$ in her habit, revealing the more lascivious pose of M.M.$_1$ only when he sees that M.M.$_2$ is sufficiently excited. "Je le tire alors de mon portefeuille, et je la vois ravie d'aise. Elle la baise. Elle me demande si tout était d'après nature, et elle trouve sa propre physionomie encore plus frappante dans le portrait de ma M.M. toute nue, que dans celui où elle était vêtue en religieuse."[99]

M.M.$_2$ is so enthralled by the portraits of M.M.$_1$ and the resemblance that she asks him to make her a present of them (with the understanding that she would replace his precious portraits of M.M.$_1$ with one of herself). He graciously and happily assents. The next night, their last night together before she is to return to her convent, she presents him with a packet containing her portrait. Once in bed and undressed for their eventual lovemaking, he unwraps the parcel and notes with surprise that her "portrait" is in fact two exact copies of the portraits of M.M.$_1$, differing from the "originals" only in hair and eye color (which are now black). She quickly corrects him: the portraits are not copies at all (for the miniaturist would not have had time to execute them). Rather they are the originals – only the eyes and hair have been painted over. "Ainsi tu peux actuellement dire d'avoir dans un seul portrait l'image de la première et de la seconde M.M. qui à juste titre doit te faire oublier la première, qui est aussi disparue dans le portrait décent, car me voilà habillée en religieuse avec des yeux noirs."[100]

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[99] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 451.
[100] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 462.

M.M.$_2$'s suggestion that Casanova "ought by rights" ("à juste titre doit") forget M.M.$_1$ introduces a central ambiguity. According to M.M.$_2$, he *should* forget the first M.M. She has, after all, painted over the miniature, effacing M.M.$_1$'s features in favor of her own. But that he *ought* to forget M.M. does not mean that he, in fact, *does*. Instead of one portrait being erased in favor of another, a palimpsest is produced, resulting in two portraits of two distinct women co-inhabiting the same space. Thus, while looking at the features of M.M.$_2$ he is automatically sent back to memories of the first M.M., who gives the features of the second substance and additional significance. All this is made manifest when they spend their final hours together in intense lovemaking.

It quickly becomes apparent to the reader that both lovers are complicit in the resemblance emblematized in the palimpsest portraits. Every sexual act, from foreplay to their parting at the end of the torrid evening, consciously references, replicates, and plays upon Casanova's prior relationship with M.M.$_1$. As a way of setting the mood for this final night, M.M.$_2$ places herself just as "on la voyait sur le vélin."[101] In doing so, she identifies herself with the portraits and thus with the palimpsest – she splits herself into two, embracing the essential duality.

Casanova, for his part, takes it upon himself to replicate elements from one of his more memorable sexual encounters with M.M.$_1$ (which he described in great detail in Volume IV, chapter 4). The basic implication here is that what was good for one is good for the other. First, Casanova makes a show of using condoms to convince her that they would not be repeating the follies of her encounters with M. de Cou: "elle le contemple [the condom], elle rit, et elle me dit que je m'étais servi d'habits égaux à celui-là avec sa soeur vénitienne, et qu'elle en était

[101] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 463.

curieuse."[102] Here, Casanova references a trick he had played on M.M.$_1$, stealing condoms she had intended to use that night with him and replacing them with a naughty poem in which he relented to have himself "gelded" in deference to her understandable fear of pregnancy.[103] The trading of witty epigrams on the subject of pregnancy, progeny, and condoms does not take place during his night with M.M.$_2$ but the game is clearly on their minds, as evidenced by her laughter and curiosity at seeing the condoms before her. More explicitly, at the end of their evening together, "Nous prîmes alors l'un de l'autre tous les congés que nous pûmes et j'ai cacheté le dernier de mon sang. Si la première M.M. l'avait vu, la seconde devait le voir aussi."[104] That is, in a last bout of lovemaking with M.M.$_1$ five years before, Casanova had splattered her breasts: "mon âme [sperm] détrempée en gouttes de sang."[105] Casanova's farewell to both women is sealed in his own blood and sperm.

Taking Casanova's operations of comparison and his attentions to resemblance as a whole, it may be tempting to read this practice as a means of obscuring difference, of collapsing individual characters into archetypes and vague impressions. It would be easy to see the palimpsest portrait and the staging of his previous sexual encounter with M.M.$_1$ as an act of forgetting or erasure. In the case of the portraits, the features of M.M.$_1$ are obscured; in his sexual escapes with M.M.$_2$, on the other hand, M.M.$_2$ fades into M.M.$_1$ or, alternately, M.M.$_1$ is erased and replaced by the second holder of her name.

But to read Casanova's encounter with M.M.$_2$ thus is to ignore how comparison is used in the memoirs to highlight differences rather than minimize them. As I showed above in the case

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[102] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 463.
[103] He writes: "*Enfants de l'amitié, ministres de la peur, / Je suis l'amour, tremblez, respectez le voleur. / Et toi, femme de Dieu, ne crains pas d'être mère / Car si tu fais un fils, il se dira son père. / S'il est dit cependant que tu veux te barrer / Parle ; je suis tout prêt, je me ferai châtrer.*" Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 759.
[104] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 467.
[105] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 760.

of Pauline's comparison to Henriette, comparison is used by Casanova as a way of remembering and honoring his past loves. Resemblance acts to give both women significance. Most obviously, Casanova explicitly pursues $M.M._2$ because of her resemblance to his former lover. After he first learns that $M.M._2$ is not in fact $M.M._1$, Casanova confesses that he no longer felt anything but pity for the nun and only helps her because of his inherently good nature. Good nature reverts to passion when he discovers the uncanny and bizarre similarities between $M.M._1$ and $M.M._2$.[106] This is all to say that without the prior affair with $M.M._1$ to give form to his brief relationship with $M.M._2$, the affair would have likely been much less worthy of mention and much less emotionally significant to him. Conversely, by engaging in a relationship with the second M.M. he is able to have a second chance of sorts with $M.M._1$. His replication of their nights together honors her and allows him to relive an affair from a markedly happier, carefree time in his life.

### Conclusion

I began this chapter with a vow Casanova makes to one of his lovers, "Je dois passer dans votre esprit pour inconstant; mais je vous jure que si vous me trouviez digne de votre coeur, votre image dans le mien ne s'effacerait plus."[107] In this moment, Casanova may as well have been addressing a modern audience, one that equates libertinage with inconstancy, a lack of non-dissimulated emotion, and the erasure of memory. This is, in essence, our stereotype of libertine character, nurtured by cultural feminist scholarship as well as the popular imagination. But with this vow Casanova promises something quite different. Rather than slinking away into the night ere the sun should rise, he promises an emotional connection and that he will carry her in his

[106] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 436 and 440.
[107] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 861.

memory, as he would the portrait miniatures he so cherishes. All this, I suggest, points to what I call libertine fidelity. This is a fidelity based not in physical monogamy but, rather, in the dazzling connections memory conjures.

What I have described in this chapter is a particular moment of conjuncture between the libertinage of the eighteenth century and another great eighteenth-century tradition, sentimentalism. It might help to remember that the eighteenth century, and especially its latter half, can be seen as experimenting with affect. In the face of older, more paternalistic models of marriage, for instance, *philosophes* like Diderot and Rousseau posited the radical idea of the companionate marriage, wherein individuals were joined by affection as well as by law and/or economic necessity. What I have shown in the case of Casanova, then, should be read as an example of such affective experimentation, this time within the libertine tradition.

Casanova was not like the *philosophes,* however, who thought a different form of marriage was a solution. He knew that physical fidelity was not in his nature; he was the classic wanderer, and though he would make brief stops in his travels for certain women, he invariably continued his grand tour of Europe's capitals (and their women). This is not to say, however, that he was emotionally inconstant. He went from woman to woman, but he was neither uncaring, nor insensitive, nor forgetful. Through memory, Casanova manages to keep relationship and past loves present, re-vivified. Whether through physical tokens like the portrait miniatures he carried with him throughout his life, or the textual portraits he himself penned, he took great efforts to remember his many loves and keep their images impressed upon his mind.

To quote the words of another libertine author and contemporary, Vivant Denon, Casanova was "constant, mais infidèle."[108]

[108] Denon, *Lettres à Bettine*, 525.

## Chapter 3: An Affair to Remember – On the (Erotic) Standard of Taste

"Trop ardent, on est moins délicat. On court à la jouissance en confondant tous les délices qui la précèdent: on arrache un nœud, on déchire une gaze: partout la volupté marque sa trace, et bientôt l'idole ressemble à la victime." – Vivant Denon, *Point de lendemain* (1812)[109]

Having finally consummated a seduction that had begun in a shadowy opera loge in Paris hours earlier, the lovers in Vivant Denon's novella *Point de lendemain* realize that, in their carnal drive to orgasm, they have committed a grave error. While yielding to passion, ardor, and "natural" sexual impulses may be seen as a good thing generally in Denon's text (and, indeed, in the pantheon of libertine literature), the fault here lies in the way in which the lovers yielded. The narrator describes the sex as having been "brusqué," and like its English counterpart, "brusque," the word implies not only abruptness (a rush through something) but roughness (even callousness).[110] They have been impatient, drunken, unrefined, even brutal (tearing each others' clothes, etc.). In doing so, their experience is thought of as more shallow than it could have been (had they been slower, more attentive to the details around them). Thus, realizing their error, they begin their seduction and lovemaking anew, this time, *molto ritardando*.

We will have occasion to speak of *Point de lendemain* at greater length in the next chapter but this scene raises one of the central lessons of the texts I will discuss within this chapter, namely, "c'est pas dans le fait, c'est dans les manières" – the manner in which a thing is done is ultimately more important than the fact of its accomplishment.[111] In the context of the works I will study here, how one builds up to and achieves orgasm is as important (if not more)

[109] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 50.
[110] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 50.
[111] Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé ou l'éducation de Laure* (Paris: Jean-Claude Gawsewitch, 2004), 82.

than having achieved it. And the manner in which a libertine comports him/herself as a lover is through restraint, delicacy, gradation, and overall aesthetic attunement. In this chapter, then, I establish the reflective character of libertinage, that is to say, its emphasis on the formation of a refined and tempered sexual subject.

I begin the chapter with a brief discussion of Casanova's approach to seduction and acquitting himself in love. Here, I highlight Casanova's attention to aesthetic detail both foregrounding and surrounding his sexual encounters. As we shall in each of the texts analyzed in this chapter, the libertine is more concerned with making a memorable encounter than the mere fact of having a sexual conquest. I next turn to an analysis of Julien-Offray de La Mettrie's essay on erotic pleasure, *La Volupté.* In this work, La Mettrie suggests that the highest form of pleasure is that which is both reflective and aesthetically refined. Lastly, I extend my analysis of La Mettrie to the erotic *bildungsroman*, *Le Rideau levé ou l'éducation de Laure,* attributed to Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau. Here, I study the narrator-protagonist's (Laure) formation as a libertine subject, namely, one who is reflective and judicious, a refined and sensitive connoisseur of sensual pleasure.

### Let's Do Lunch: Casanova's Luncheon at Brühl

When it came to impressing a woman, Casanova rarely seemed to disappoint. He would spend lavishly, very often well beyond his means, and make arrangements with the best tailors, jewelers, artisans, chefs, and purveyors to create the perfect atmosphere for inspiring love. His attention to detail and his aesthetic taste would surely put any modern event planner to shame. For example, he reports on a numbers of occasions that he would audition chefs and vintners

before entertaining important guests, effectively having two dinners in a single night, just to make sure everything was "just so" for his guest(s).

It was in this spirit of event planning that Casanova arranged a sumptuous luncheon in one of the pavilions of the Elector of Cologne's palace at Brühl in 1760.[112] Eighteen invitations were sent out announcing the event; twenty-four guests came (Casanova took great pride in the fact that his party was crashed). But, for Casanova, everything hinged on the presence of one guest, the lovely Madame X., a Burgomaster's wife and the companion of Friedrich-Wilhelm, Count von Kettler (c. 1718-1783).[113] He had been enamored with Madame X ever since their meeting at the theater and a few moments of witty repartee in her box. Beyond her physical beauty, Casanova was struck by her self-assured, even forward, bearing (within moments of being introduced to her she had "forced" him to change his travel plans and stay on in Cologne). Her status as a married woman and another man's mistress made seducing her a difficult project as well as a challenge (especially since Kettler was jealously possessive of Madame X and suspected Casanova's intentions from their first meeting). The luncheon at Brühl, which provided the perfect occasion to advance his seduction, came at Madame X's urging, nay, her command, and he executed her orders while adding his own particular flourishes. First, he ordered that no expense be spared for the outing, stating in princely fashion, that he wished to spend "Plus qu'on peut."[114] He then took care to arrive at the palace pavilion early enough to inspect the table, ordering changes as needed and otherwise complimenting the steward on his

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[112] This episode takes place during one of Casanova's first trips to Germany, detailed in chapter two of the sixth volume of his memoirs, *Histoire de ma vie*.

[113] Casanova scholars have identified the woman referred to as Madame X. in *Histoire de ma vie* as Maria Ursula Columba von Groote, née Zum Pütz (1734-1768), wife of Franz Jakob Gabriel von Groote (1721-1792), who was one of the six burgomasters of Cologne from 1756-1789. Ketteler – and not, as Casanova writes, Kettler – was a General in the Austrian service. Casanova, *History of My Life*, Trans. Willard R. Trask (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 6: 291-2 n. 13 and 15.

[114] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie,* 2: 259.

work preparing the luncheon. When Madame X and the other guests arrived some time later they were awed by the spectacle. Most importantly, "j'ai vu la joie briller dans les beaux yeux de Mme X lorsqu'elle vit la même magnificence qu'aurait étalée l'Électeur [of Cologne]."[115] During the course of the meal he refuses to sit, instead choosing to take his role as magnanimous host as seriously as possible by serving the ladies, "sautant d'une à l'autre, mangeant debout ce qu'elles me donnaient."[116] From Casanova's description of it, the meal was indeed worthy of an Elector or a monarch and Casanova revels in details such as the fact that the "huîtres d'Angleterre ne finirent qu'à la vingtième bouteille de vins de champagne" or that the wines complemented and enhanced the meal to such a degree that "[on] ne but pas une seule goutte d'eau, car le Rhin et le Tokai n'en souffrent point."[117]

Here, Casanova's boasting serves a number of purposes. It is, on one level, a display of wealth. Yet, it is also a display of taste, demonstrating for Madame X, his other guests, and, by extension, the reader of his memoirs, that he has a refined and highly developed aesthetic sense. His discriminating taste and sense of propriety are thus rewarded later that evening when Madame X makes the bold suggestion of dropping him off at his inn in her carriage, a clear pretext for offering him a few well-deserved intimate moments. This is how Casanova describes the scene:

> Il fallait traverser deux fois la villace [vilaine ville] mal pavée. C'était un carrosse coupé. Nous fîmes ce que nous pûmes, mais presque rien. La lune était vis-à-vis de nous, et l'infâme cocher tournait de temps en temps la tête. J'ai trouvé cela horrible. La sentinelle dit au cocher que S.E. [son excellence] était invisible à tout le monde. Elle lui ordonne d'aller à mon auberge, et pour lors nous eûmes la lune derrière. Nous avons fait un peu mieux, mais mal, tout mal. Le coquin n'était jamais de sa vie allé si vite. En descendant cependant je lui ai

[115] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 260.
[116] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie,* 2: 260.
[117] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 261.

> donné un ducat. Je suis allé me coucher amoureux à mourir, et d'une certaine façon plus à plaindre qu'auparavant. Mme X m'avait convaincu qu'en me rendant heureux elle se rendrait heureuse.[118]

After nearly four pages describing in mouth-watering detail the preparations for the luncheon and the meal itself, the moment Casanova (and his reader) had been gearing up for – his first sexual encounter with Madame X – takes up but a paragraph. True, the maddeningly abrupt nature of this first night curtailed any serious play, as Casanova admits. But, all the same, Casanova furnishes no details regarding Madame X's body or what exactly they did manage to do, only offering a tantalizingly vague "*presque* rien." Later, even when he *does* manage to gain a series of proper assignations, Casanova gives more details about the set up for sexual activity than he does about the sex itself.

Clearly, as I have shown above with respect to Casanova's practically Rabelaisian lunch descriptions, Casanova has no problem being descriptive. Anyone who reads *Histoire de ma vie* or anyone in the eighteenth century who was lucky enough to have heard of his adventures first-hand (his daring escape from the Leads prison in Venice, his duel with Branicki in Poland, for example) knows that he is an engaging, masterful storyteller. So why would he not feel it important to give equal descriptive weight to his sexual encounters with Madame X (and many others) as he does to the arrangements or aesthetic flourishes that make his sexual encounters possible? It is not a faulty memory or a sense of prudishness that holds Casanova back. Rather, I wish to suggest that Casanova's written recollections show him to be less preoccupied with sex-in-itself than the way the sex is done.

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[118] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2: 262.

In those occasions wherein he does give a blow by blow account of one of his sexual encounters, the substance is nearly always subjected to stylistic considerations, as in this rather graphic recollection of a night spent with the nun M.M.:

> Après avoir mis impérieusement ma sultane en état de nature, et en avoir fait autant de moi-même, je l'ai couchée et subjuguée dans les plus strictes règles jouissant de ses pâmoisons. […] Après l'ébat, qui dura une heure, elle recueillit la chemisette où voyant la quintessence elle se réjouit ; mais se sentant tout de même inondée par ses propres distillations, nous convînmes qu'une courte ablution nous remettrait d'abord *in statu quo*. Après cela nous nous mîmes de pair devant un grand miroir droit, l'un passant un bras derrière le dos de l'autre. Admirant la beauté de nos simulacres et devenant curieux d'en jouir, nous luttâmes en tous sens toujours debout. Après la dernière lutte elle tomba sur le tapis de Perse qui couvrait le parquet. Les yeux fermés, la tête penchée, étendue sur son dos, les bras et les jambes comme si on l'avait détachée dans le moment de la croix de St-André, elle aurait eu l'air d'une morte, si l'oscillation de son cœur n'eût été visible. La dernière lutte l'avait épuisée de forces. Je lui ai fait faire l'arbre droit et dans cette posture je l'ai soulevée pour lui dévorer le cabinet de l'amour que je ne pouvais atteindre autrement voulant la mettre à portée de me dévorer à son tour l'arme qui la blessait à mort sans la priver de la vie.[119]

In bed, as at table, Casanova is always careful to display his standards of taste. In the above scene, Casanova demonstrates prodigious sexual stamina as well as physical strength and dexterity. But, more importantly, he ably demonstrates mental dexterity and a sense of humor as he places his lover in positions that explicitly reference her religious office – "la croix de St-André," but also the references to ablution and quintessence. We see him as a connoisseur of *ars amatoria*, as if he were correcting or adding to Aretino's sixteen postures on the spot.

On the one hand, these expertly choreographed spectacles (culinary and sexual) impress upon his lovers (and his readers) that he is a man of taste and breeding, the noble host *par excellence*. On the other hand, they function as a mnemonic device for Casanova himself, allowing him to recall his pleasures and re-live them at will in vivid detail, as he frequently

[119] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 760.

claims himself capable of doing. "Me rappelant les plaisirs que j'eus je me les renouvelle et je ris des peines que j'ai endurées, et que je ne sens plus.[120] For Casanova, the capacity to remember his pleasures (and thereby re-live them) is just as important (if not more) than having lived them in the first place. Thus we see the key to understanding Casanova's almost freakish attention to detail in his encounters – memory is tied directly to taste. For, it is the details of his setting – the food, the décor, the clothing, the exchange of gifts, baroque sexual positions – that allow his affairs to live on in his mind. The erotic experience is not so much based on any one cataclysmic sexual act (orgasm) but on a gradual, careful unfolding of pleasure, a meandering process in which the beginning is just as important as the end. And through his displays of aesthetic taste, Casanova establishes himself as a reflective lover, one of judicious restraint. For, as we shall see throughout this chapter, restraint, rather than excess, is the key to unlocking the libertine's storehouse of pleasure.

### La Mettrie's *La Volupté*

The connections I have suggested above between gradation, reflection, and aesthetics are made clearer in the Epicurean ethics of *médecin-philosophe* Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751), whom Casanova had read and greatly admired.[121] La Mettrie is perhaps best known for his controversial essay *L'Homme-machine* (1747), in which he attempts to prove that all mental operations attributed to the soul can in fact be traced to the purely material operations of the nervous system, a hypothesis from which the nameless narrator-protagonist of *Point de*

[120] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 4.
[121] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3: 56-57.

*lendemain* would blushingly draw the conclusion, "Nous sommes tellement *machines*."[122] In this chapter, however, I will concentrate much of my analysis on his equally provocative essay, *La Volupté* (1744).

Continually reworked and republished under different titles until his untimely death in 1751, *La Volupté* begins as a work of literary criticism – in which he proposes a distinction between obscene works and sensual works – but quickly broadens into a general *apologia* for a sensualist ethics and a voluptuous lifestyle.[123] Like many of his works, *La Volupté* is polemical in tone. In this case, La Mettrie sets his sights on moral authorities, both secular and religious, "cette cabale qui ne voit partout que moeurs dépravées" and who repressively condemn even the most innocent pleasures "sous l'odieux nom de libertinage et de débauche."[124] *La Volupté* is, thus, a defense of pleasure, an Epicurean volley against those La Mettrie viewed as killjoys, the modern-day Senecas, who disdain sensuality: "Tout âmes, ils font abstraction de leur corps."[125] The essay is not, however, an amoral defense of hedonism without limits, as one of Sade's characters would "mistakenly" read it in the *Histoire de Juliette* (1797-1801).[126] Rather, La

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[122] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 53. In truth it is not clear if La Mettrie seriously wished to push his materialism to the point of claiming that humans were machines, although he clearly meant the title of the essay to be a provocation. The title references the Cartesian hypothesis that animals were machines without souls.

[123] Portions of *La Volupté* were reworked in two shorter essays, *Ecole de la volupté* (1746) and *L'Art de jouir* (1751).

[124] La Mettrie, *La Volupté* in *Oeuvres philosophiques* (Chécy: Coda, 2004), 294.

[125] La Mettrie, *L'Anti-Sénèque ou Le Souverain bien* in *De la volupté* , edited by Ann Thomson (Paris: Desjonquères, 1996), 28.

[126] "Mais il y a, continuai-je, tout plein de ces petites habitudes, aussi villaines que secretes, aussi horribles que sales, aussi crapuleuses que brutales, que tu ignores peut-être, ma chère, et que je veux t'apprendre à l'oreille; elles te prouveront que *le célèbre La Mettrie avait raison, quand il disait qu'il fallait se vautrer dans l'ordure comme les porcs; et qu'on devait trouver comme eux du plaisir, dans les derniers degrés de la corruption*." Sade, *Histoire de Juliette* IV in *Oeuvres* III, edited by Michel Delon (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 817, my emphasis. This passage also contains a note explicitly referring the reader to La Mettrie's "ouvrage sur la volupté." La Mettrie's position on debauchery is taken out of context and twisted to seem as if La Mettrie advocated a debauched lifestyle. In point of fact, as we will see later in this section, La Mettrie sets himself firmly against debauchery in *La Volupté*. The passage Sade's protagonist cites reads differently (and comes from *L'Anti-Sénèque*): "Mais si non content d'exceller dans le grand art de voluptés, la crapule et la débauche n'ont rien de trop fort pour toi, l'ordure et l'infamie restent

Mettrie clearly believed that only moderated pleasure, pleasure that was carefully unfolded, plotted, and reflected upon, could lead to the highest forms of pleasure available to humans. As I will now discuss, *La Volupté* is an effort to distinguish between high and low pleasures and to argue in favor of the former.

In the second half of the essay, La Mettrie introduces a continuum of sexual pleasure – *le plaisir*, *la volupté*, and *la débauche* – and aims to distinguish between the types. "On confond trop communément le plaisir avec la volupté, et la volupté avec la débauche. Tâchons de marquer la différence essentielle qui se trouve entre toutes ces choses."[127] He then proceeds to compare and contrast these three forms of (or approaches to) pleasure, all the while clearly marking out a preference for pleasure-as-*volupté* (as the title of the essay suggests). First, as Casanova would later argue, *plaisir* is the simplest form of pleasure, one that all sentient beings are capable of experiencing, whereas only humans are privileged enough to enjoy the state of *volupté*:

> L'homme seul, cet être raisonnable, peut s'élever jusqu'à la volupté. Car quel plus beau, quel plus magnifique apanage de la raison? Il est distingué dans l'univers par son esprit; un choix délicat, un goût épuré, en raffinant ses sensations, en les redoublant en quelque sorte par la réflexion, en a fait le plus parfait; c'est-à-dire, le plus heureux des êtres.[128]

*Plaisir*, according to La Mettrie, is limited to the impact an object has on our five senses. But "la volupté veut être recherchée plus loin," he maintains. *Plaisir* becomes *volupté* only when the imagination is reasonably applied, enhancing and transforming the ideas and impressions occasioned by our sense perceptions. Whether one is a voluptuary or a simply a "sot" capable of

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pour ton *glorieux* partage: vautres-y toi, comme font les porcs, et tu seras heureux à leur manière," La Mettrie, *L'Anti-Sénèque*, 92.

[127] La Mettrie, *La Volupté,* 277.

[128] La Mettrie, *La Volupté*, 282.

*plaisir* depends on the cultivation and education of one's sensory apparatus and imaginative faculty – one must be an "homme d'esprit" with "un cerveau bien organisé."[129] Thus, as Michel Delon rightly points out, even among humans *la volupté* is not "promise à tous."[130] Or, as David Hume would later put it in his essay *Of the Standard of Taste* (1760), "Though some objects, by the structure of the mind, be naturally calculated to give pleasure, it is not to be expected, that in every individual the pleasure will be equally felt."[131] *Volupté* is something only humans have the capacity to experience but this form of pleasure remains only *potential* if the *corps* and the *coeur* are not appropriately trained to experience it.

The practice of living a voluptuous life is referred to in this essay and later incarnations of it as the "art de jouir."[132] The word "art," here, is revealing as La Mettrie clearly envisions the voluptuous person as a kind of aesthete. One need only review La Mettrie's word choices in the passage cited above: *esprit, choix délicat*, *goût épuré*, *raffinant*. Having a well-organized mind entails an unimpeachable capacity for aesthetic judgment. For the voluptuous person, sex itself becomes his canvas, and in order to be a good lover one's body and mind (senses and the imagination) must be tuned, refined, delicate, and sensitive.

If the voluptuous person is a practitioner of the delicate *art de jouir*, then the debauched person is his/her perverted, incontinent cousin. His problem is one of excess, of gulping when he should be sipping, as it were: "Or qu'est-ce que la débauche? L'excès du plaisir, sans le goûter."[133] A sexual glutton (rather than a gourmand), the *débauché(e)* is mentally, physically, and morally incapable of making the careful sensual choices and distinctions of the voluptuary,

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[129] La Mettrie, *La Volupté*, 278.
[130] Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, 35.
[131] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" in *Selected Essays* (Oxford and New York City: OUP, 1993), 140.
[132] La Mettrie, *La Volupté*, 278.
[133] La Mettrie, *La Volupté*, 278.

constantly seeking new and more extreme ways of satisfying his/her insatiable sexual appetite. In physiological terms, the voluptuous person possesses an ordered mind and delicately calibrated nerves whereas the debauched person is described as unbalanced and disordered. "Chaque homme porte donc en soi le germe de son propre bonheur avec celui de la volupté. La mauvaise disposition ou le dérangement des organes nous empêche d'en profiter."[134] The difference between the debauched person and the voluptuous person ultimately comes down to a matter of control or restraint. That is, whereas debauchery is negatively conceived in terms of a complete abandonment to desire, *volupté* is attained through discipline (mental, bodily, moral). As Fabrice Teulon argues in a brilliantly suggestive article linking La Mettrie's *La Volupté* to Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie du goût* (1825), "Pour bien jouir ou jouir plus, le 'voluptueux' et le 'gourmand' doivent apprendre à réinvestir parsimonieusement leur plaisir. Il s'agit donc moins ici de se soumettre ou de s'a(ban)donner à la jouissance que de chercher à la maîtriser."[135]

The debauched person's lack of imaginative and sensorial discipline makes him/her a coarse, narcissistic, and dangerous sexual partner, and, thus, a detestable and pitiful being, according to La Mettrie. This is because while both the voluptuary and debauched "conduisent au même but"[136] – orgasm – the voluptuary does so at a measured pace, taking his/her time to enjoy even the most subtle pleasures along the way to orgasm (as well as the aftershocks of post-coital bliss). As such, when engaged in amorous combat no element of the voluptuary's experience is unworthy of consideration, even his surroundings (as we saw above in the case of Casanova).

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[134] La Mettrie, *La Volupté*, 284.
[135] Fabrice Teulon, "Le Voluptueux et le gourmand: économie de la jouissance chez La Mettrie et Brillat-Savarin," *Symposium* 52, no. 3: 178.
[136] La Mettrie, *La Volupté,* 270.

> La volupté est l'objet de tous ses projets et de tous ses vœux: il ne fait pas un pas, pas un geste qui ne tende vers elle. S'il jouit des bienfaits de l'amour, mille jouissances préliminaires précèdent la dernière jouissance; il ne veut arriver au comble des faveurs que par d'imperceptibles degrés. Surtout, il veut qu'on lui résiste autant qu'il faut pour augmenter ses plaisirs.[137]

> Non seulement des amants ainsi organisés sentiront de plus grands transports mais, jouissant encore longtemps après la jouissance, les restes de leur plaisir leur seront chers et précieux. Voyez comme ils les ménagent, les chérissent, les prolongent ; leur état est si charmant qu'ils planent, pour ainsi dire, sur ses délices, comme ferait la volupté même. Ils voudraient ne les perdre jamais.[138]

Indeed, in the passages above, rather than privileging orgasm, La Mettrie would seem to give greater weight to the precious moments before and after orgasm. The staging of one's love affair or foreplay are vital to the voluptuous person because "l'attente contribue à augmenter l'intensité de la jouissance à venir."[139] Furthermore, the moments following orgasm are spaces for reflection where voluptuaries can re-live their pleasures and imagine other possibilities for maximizing (mutual) pleasure in the future.

By contrast, as a conspicuous consumer of pleasure, the debauched person seeks only the immediate gratification of his desires. Notably, whereas La Mettrie describes the voluptuous lover as "complaisant, tendre, amoureux, [et] respectant toujours les voluntés de son amant," he describes the debauched person as thoroughly narcissistic and ungenerous towards his/her partners.[140] Indeed, the debauched person does not seem to be concerned with the pleasure of his partner; he/she is simply "getting off," and doing so does not require that the partner be anything else than an orifice or a phallus. This narcissistic lover is described in violent terms. La Mettrie warns ladies in particular to avoid these brutes, "Belles, vous jugerez vos amants par leur

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[137] La Mettrie, *La Volupté*, 281.
[138] La Mettrie, *La Volupté*, 275.
[139] Teulon, "Le Voluptueux et le gourmand," 181.
[140] La Mettrie, *La Volupté,* 280.

générosité, c'est la balance des coeurs. Veulent-ils forcer vos goûts, violer votre prudence et, sans égard pour de trop justes frayeurs, vous exposer aux suites fâcheuses d'une passion sans retenue? Soyez sûres qu'ils vous trompent, qu'ils ne sont qu'impétueux, que vous n'êtes pas vous-mêmes ce qu'ils aiment le plus en vous, et qu'en un mot, *c'est à leur seul plaisir qu'ils sacrifient*."[141] Obsessed only with the final, cataclysmic orgasm, the debauched person recognizes pleasure only when it is violently expressed (foreplay, after-play, and the lover's mutual pleasure mean nothing to him/her). As such, he/she is a ruined sexual being, a cynic incapable of experiencing or sensing the myriad possibilities in which pleasure reveals itself to its true acolytes.

Like Casanova, La Mettrie prioritizes the reflective component of erotic pleasure. Orgasm is a banal, almost brutish, pleasure compared to what two lovers can share before and following it – before, as they carefully contemplate both their setting and the singularities of each lover's touches; after, as they reflect, re-live, and thus take new pleasure. In the next section, I will show how La Mettrie's continuum of pleasure plays out in Mirabeau's erotic *bildungsroman*, *Le Rideau levé*, a novel that imagines what a sexual education can be without descending into moralistic prudery or health-endangering debauchery.

### Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*

At first glance, Mirabeau's *Le Rideau levé ou l'éducation de Laure* (1786) would appear to figure prominently in the class of books La Mettrie unwaveringly condemns in the first half of *La Volupté* as "obscènes et dissolus."[142] After all, Mirabeau quite literally (in his title, no less!)

[141] La Mettrie, *La Volupté*, 281 (my emphasis).
[142] La Mettrie, *La Volupté*, 266.

tries to "lever le rideau sur les orgies des Bacchantes,"[143] in this case, the sexual exploits of Laure (the narrator-protagonist) and her "father."[144] In her capacity as narrator, Laure announces to her intended reader, a female lover named Eugénie, that her "expressions seront vraies, naturelles et hardies" and that she "[couvrira] d'aucune gaze les tableaux que je mettrai sous tes yeux."[145] That is, every sexual act and every body part shall be called by its proper name without recourse to euphemism and all scenes will be described without a mediating veil of propriety. Nevertheless, in spite of the graphic manner in which Laure relates her education, that which the reader finds within the novel's pages is a La Mettrian dissertation on sensual restraint and refinement, the formation of a mature, reflective female libertine. Under the careful mentorship of her father, Laure is taught to embrace the life of the voluptuary and shun that of the debauched. That is to say, she is taught to be refined, tempered, moderate, and slow in her approach to sexual pleasure.

From the age of ten, when Laure's mother dies after a protracted "état de langueur," her father personally guides his daughter's education. Sensing early on a natural penchant for both pleasure and reflection, "[il] étudiait mes goûts et mes inclinations: il me jugea; aussi cultivait-il mes dispositions avec le plus grand soin. […] Tout ce qui pouvait former une éducation brillante et recherchée partageait les instants de mes jours. Je n'avais qu'un seul maître, et ce maître

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[143] La Mettrie, *La Volupté,* 266.

[144] Following the death of her mother, Laure is told by the man she had always known as her father that he did not, in fact, participate in her conception. He married her mother when she was already pregnant with Laure by another man, a Comte de Norval. Thus, "elle n'est ma fille que par affection," Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 41. As Doris Garraway has suggested, this appears to be a "self-conscious rebuttal" of the incest taboo, an "ironic nod to the conventional morality." However, considering that he plays the role of father (as "primary caregiver") and is referred to as such, this does not diminish the fact that *Le Rideau levé* fits squarely within an established father-daughter incest tradition within French erotic literature. Garraway provides an excellent gloss, not only of the major libertine texts and authors featuring incest (Rétif, Sade), but also the critical literature surrounding the taboo. This is part of a larger discussion of incest and miscegenation in the French colonial context (Chapter 5 – Race, Reproduction , Family Romance). See especially, Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 284-285, 367 n. 127.

[145] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 16 and 19.

c'était mon père."[146] As a number of scholars have pointed out, Laure's educational program is similar in nature to that advocated and outlined by Rousseau in his *Emile ou l'éducation* (1762), with the obvious difference that Laure receives the education of the boy, Emile, rather than the restricted, domestic education of his eventual female companion, Sophie.[147] First, like Rousseau's model pupil, Laure's education seems to be conducted in complete isolation from society. Besides her father and her governess, Lucette, no mention is made of a world outside that of their home until Laure attains maturity at age eighteen. According to Rousseau, isolation was necessary in order to guarantee that society's corrupting influence could not be felt on his pupil until his mind and body had developed sufficiently so as to be immune to them – a child's intellectual faculties and physical strength needed time to ripen.[148]

Emile and Laure's isolated upbringing fits into a larger educational philosophy of developmental gradation. Perhaps the most important of Rousseau's contributions to educational theory is his insistence, now taken for granted, that children should be educated differently as they grow into adulthood, that is to say, according to their age and level of maturity:

> Si les enfants sautaient tout d'un coup de la mamelle à l'âge de raison, l'éducation qu'on leur donne pourrait leur convenir; mais, selon le progrès naturel, il leur en faut une toute contraire. Il faudrait qu'ils ne fissent rien de leur âme jusqu'à ce qu'elle eût toutes ses facultés; car il est impossible qu'elle aperçoive le flambeau que vous lui présentez tandis qu'elle est aveugle, et qu'elle suive, dans l'immense plaine des idées, une route que la raison trace encore si légèrement pour les meilleurs yeux.[149]

Rousseau, thus, lays out a slow and gradual path so as to train the intellectual faculties; everything must be taken in stages and no stage can be skipped or shortened. Laure's father does

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[146] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 23.
[147] See, in particular, Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage,* 292-7.
[148] "Cette éducation solitaire serait donc préférable, quand elle ne ferait que donner à l'enfance le temps de mûrir," Rousseau, *Emile ou l'éducation* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), 129.
[149] Rousseau, *Emile*, 112.

not follow the stages Rousseau lays out to the letter – strenuous physical activity on the part of Laure, so encouraged in Emile, is at least not shown in the novel – but he does take the notion of gradation to heart. He is scrupulously conscious of her age and does not explain certain things to her until he deems her mind sufficiently developed to understand them, "Plus j'avançais en âge, plus la nature parlait en moi, avec d'autant plus de force, que leurs plaisirs l'animaient vivement; aussi lui demandai-je souvent sur quelles raisons était fondée la nécessité de la contrainte où il me tenait, et quel était le sujet des précautions qu'il avait prises vis-à-vis de moi. Il m'avait toujours renvoyée à un âge plus avancé."[150]

Of particular concern to both Laure's father and Rousseau is the faculty of the imagination. Although we, in the twenty-first century, are generally inclined to speak of the imagination in only the most glowing terms – especially with respect to "childlike fancy" – Enlightenment thinkers were largely conflicted on whether or not the imagination was a blessing or a curse. In the eighteenth century, the imagination was both that which made knowledge possible and that which could lead the mind and body into disarray; it was both the material condition for mental advancement and the seed of mental decay.[151] Empiricist philosophers such as Condillac and Hume were concerned that the imagination, left unchecked by reason, could lead the mind to freely associate ideas that were "contraire à la vérité."[152] Moral physiologists such as Samuel Tissot and D.T. Bienville expounded upon this worry, adding that the chimeras

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[150] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé,* 46.

[151] A number of excellent surveys of early modern theories of the imagination have appeared in recent years, including: Eva T.H. Brann, *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991); J.M. Cocking and Penelope Murray, *Imagination: A Study in the History of Ideas* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Vernon Rosario, *The Erotic Imagination: French Histories of Perversion* (New York: OUP, 1997); and Thomas Laqueur, *The Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone, 2003).

[152] Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines. Texte établi et annoté par Charles Porset . Précédé de L'Archéologie du frivole par J. Derrida*, ed. Charles Porset (Auvers-sur-Oise: Galilée, 1973), 142 [Part I, ch. 9, sec. 75].

of the mind could have deleterious effects on the body.[153] This was especially the case with regard to a child's burgeoning sexuality. If a child were exposed to certain (erotic) images and ideas before he or she knew how to properly dispose of them, the imagination could lead him or her to obsess over those perceptions (expressed physically as masturbatory activity) and this obsession could, in turn, eventually lead to serious mental and physical disorders and, ultimately, death.

Such concerns are at the forefront of Laure's father's mind, especially after Laure is inadvertently initiated into the mysteries of sexuality by spying on Lucette and him having sex, "Ma chère Laure, aimable enfant, ta santé et ta conservation m'intéressent: le hasard t'a instruite sur ce que tu ne devais savoir qu'à dix-huit ans; il est nécessaire que je prenne des précautions contre tes connaissances et contre un penchant que tu tiens de la nature et de l'amour."[154] For Laure's father, sexual pleasure is not something to be avoided as such but it can only be enjoyed at the proper time and in the proper circumstances, that is, once Laure has learned to control her passions instead of being controlled by them. If sexual knowledge is not learned slowly and according to one's age and development, the consequences can be disastrous. He explains to her soon after she turns sixteen:

> [Ma] chère fille, je ne te regarde plus comme une enfant ; tu es à présent dans l'âge où l'on peut t'instruire à peu près de tout, et peut-être le dois-je encore plus avec toi. Apprends donc, ma Laurette, que la nature chez l'homme travaille à l'accroissement des individus jusqu'à quinze ou seize ans. Ce terme est plus ou moins éloigné, suivant les sujets, mais il est assez général pour ton sexe ; cependant il n'est dans le complément de sa force qu'à dix-sept ou dix-huit ans. Dans les hommes, la nature met plus de temps à acquérir sa perfection. Lorsqu'on détourne ses opérations par des épanchements prématurés et multipliés d'une manière qui aurait dû servir à cet accroissement, on s'en ressent toute la vie, et les accidents qui en résultent sont les plus fâcheux. Les femmes par exemple,

[153] Samuel Tissot, *Onanisme* (1760) and D.T. Bienville *La Nymphomanie* (1771).
[154] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé,* 44.

> ou meurent de bonne heure ou restent petites, faibles et languissantes, ou tombent dans un marasme, un amaigrissement qui dégénère en maux de poitrine, ou elles privent leur sang d'un véhicule propre à produire leurs règles dans l'âge ordinaire et d'une manière avantageuse, ou elles sont enfin sujettes à des vapeurs, à des crispations de nerfs, à des vertiges ou à des fureurs utérines, à l'affaiblissement de la vue et au dépérissement ; elles terminent leurs jours dans un état quelquefois fort triste. Les jeunes gens essuient des accidents à peu près semblables : ils traînent des jours malheureux, s'ils ne meurent prématurément.[155]

Laure's father, a man "trop voluptueux pour n'être pas ménager des plaisirs," thus teaches his daughter to moderate her desires, to have the proper mindset when conducting an active sex life such that her health is never put in jeopardy. Rather than allowing his daughter immediate access to the pantheon of sensual delights after her discovery of their existence during the spying episode, the curtain is lifted gradually, commensurate with her developing body and intellectual faculties.

Perhaps the most controversial and curious of the teaching tools Laure's father employs is a chastity belt. Laure is fitted for the belt shortly after her sexual awakening at the age of fourteen and wears it almost continuously until her official *dépucelage* at age eighteen. She describes the device in the following terms:

> Ce caleçon avait un trou rond, assez grand, vis-à-vis celui de mon cul, qui me laissait la liberté de faire toutes les fonctions nécessaires sans l'ôter, mais il m'était impossible d'introduire le doigt dans mon petit conin, et encore moins de le branler, point essentiel que mon père voulait éviter, et dont la privation me faisait le plus de peine.[156]

Reflecting on the experience of wearing the chastity belt for much of her adolescence, the experienced Laure-narrator reveals that although she was initially chagrined to be made to wear the device daily, she came to appreciate and understand its continual presence. She even opines

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[155] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 47-48.
[156] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé,* 45.

that it should be necessary equipment for every growing girl and boy![157] One way we might explain Laure's eventual enthusiasm for the device is that her father's use of it on her is unorthodox, at least if we consider how chastity belts are most often employed according to the popular imaginary. For instance, the *Encylopédie* has two small articles devoted to chastity belts, one focusing on classical uses, the second on more modern customs. Diderot, the author of the second article, compares ancient and modern techniques thus: "Chez les anciens l'époux ôtoit à sa femme la *ceinture virginale* la première nuit de ses nôces; & chez les modernes c'est un présent qu'un mari jaloux lui fait quelquefois dès le lendemain."[158] Both uses of the chastity belt, ancient and modern, repress a woman's sexual drives outside the strict confines of the marriage bed but the modern use is seen as particularly repugnant in Diderot's eyes. For, in the modern context, argues Diderot, the belt no longer serves as a sign of sexual (im)maturity, but as a sign of a husband's cruel anxieties about his wife's fidelity. The emphasis here is on the preservation of the marital economy.[159]

In stark contrast, Laure's chastity belt is not designed to guard her virginity for some future jealous husband.[160] Nor is the chastity belt meant to fill Laure with a distaste for sexual pleasure in itself. Rather, it is an educational tool designed to keep her from prematurely engaging in unsupervised sexual activity (especially masturbation), that is, before her body and

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[157] "J'ai pensé bien des fois depuis, ma chère, qu'on ferait bien d'employer quelque chose de semblable pour les garçons, afin d'éviter les épuisements où ils se plongent avant l'âge ; car, de quelque façon qu'on veille sur eux, la société qu'ils ont ensemble ne leur apprend que trop, et trop tôt, la manière de s'y livrer," Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 45.

[158] Diderot, "Ceinture de virginité" in *Encylopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert (Paris, 1751-72), 2:799.

[159] A particularly chilling literary example of the modern use of what Diderot terms "cet instrument si infame, si injurieux au sexe," is found in the fifth dialogue of Nicholas Chorier's *L'Académie des dames* (1685). A chastity belt is placed on the new spouse of Joconde, the lover of Sempronie, in order to completely mute the woman's sexuality. This is done in order to ensure Joconde's continued devotion to his mistress.

[160] Indeed, Laure and her father both reject marriage as a loveless prison designed solely for the "convenances d'état ou de fortune," Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé,* 25.

intellectual faculties had fully developed. Although Laure is prevented from masturbating or from engaging in sex acts at will from the age of 14 to 18, this does not mean that she is prevented from experiencing any form of sensual pleasure. As her father explains, "tu jouiras de nos caresses, tu nous en feras; sans gêne avec toi, tu partageras, en quelque façon, nos plaisirs […]."[161] By allowing Laure certain outlets to express her sensuality, her father effectively makes the chastity belt bearable instead of making it a form of punishment or moral repression: her desires will be channeled, not squelched.

The chastity belt can be understood as an allegory for Laure's father's sexual philosophy. Although he fully intends for his beloved daughter to enjoy all varieties of sexual pleasure, her enjoyment can only come when she is mature enough to taste them safely and fully. In this model of sexual-moral formation, no sex act is itself taboo (for, indeed, Laure will later enjoy all manner of non-reproductive sex acts, such as oral and anal sex) but they must be enjoyed in a particular way, that is to say, with *ménagement*. Once again, process and reflection trump action. Developmental gradation thus translates into bedroom activity, into Laure's sexual behavior, as we will see.

Laure's sexual education is put to the ultimate test when two dangerous temptations are introduced in the form of the young siblings, Rose and Vernol (aged 15 and 17, respectively). They are obvious foils that expose the superiority of Laure's formation as a voluptuous subject, from the way they are educated in sexuality to their behavior during sex. Although both are initially described in glowingly positive terms, we soon learn that they have not received the same kind of libertine formation as Laure has. As she relates to Laure and her father, Rose's introduction to sexuality, like Laure's, was the result of spying on people having sex. However,

[161] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 72-73.

Rose's discovery is never followed up by careful lessons in restraint, as Laure's was. Instead, much of her sexual education is self-taught. In addition, her lessons (begun at age ten instead of Laure's fourteen) quickly escalate in intensity rather than building slowly based on maturity and the development of body and mind. That is, whereas Laure was prevented from engaging in further sexual activity until she had developed sufficiently, Rose quickly becomes obsessed with sex and men such that it overwhelms any other thought or impulse. Worse still (at least for an eighteenth-century audience accustomed to harangues against "self-pollution"), Rose becomes an incorrigible masturbator:

> [Je] me procurais tous les jours les sensations les plus délicieuses du plaisir, souvent même j'en redoublais la dose; mon imagination échauffée n'était remplie que des idées qui y avaient rapport. Je ne pensais qu'aux hommes, je fixais mes regards et mes désirs sur tous ceux que je voyais; les yeux attachés sur l'endroit où je savais que reposait l'idole que j'aurais encensée, animaient mes désirs, dont le feu se répandait jusqu'aux extrémités de mon corps.[162]

With little or no access to men in order to sate her overwhelming lust, Rose's eyes soon turn to her brother, Vernol. One day, when their mother is absent from their home, Rose pounces on her brother, ravenously taking the pleasures she had dreamed of (and constantly re-imagined) since she first spied on her cousin having sex. It is thus that Rose indoctrinates her brother into debauchery.

Having heard Rose's narrative, Laure's father pulls Laure aside and warns her that Rose and her brother are a danger both to themselves and to others, "Rose sera la victime de sa passion et de son tempérament; rien ne la retient, elle s'y livre avec fureur, *sans mesure ni ménagement*; sois assurée qu'elle payera de sa personne cette imprudence, ainsi que le pauvre Vernol qu'elle a

[162] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 121.

jeté dans le même excès."[163] Rose and Vernol's sexual awakening occurred too early and progressed too quickly. Sexually active before their bodies and minds could be shaped as carefully as Laure's had been so as to weather the nervous shocks and imaginative flights occasioned by sensual pleasure, the debauched siblings are ticking time bombs: it is only a matter of time before their impatient natures and excessive tastes overwhelm them and cause acute physical harm.[164]

The difference in libertine mentality between the couples is highlighted (and the voluptuous lifestyle proved superior) during a country outing organized by Laure's father. Pleasure is clearly had by all in the party, but it is soon apparent that Rose and Vernol subscribe to an ethics of pleasure very different from that shared by Laure and her father, namely *la débauche*.

> Vernol était dans une impatience prodigieuse ; mais ce que je n'aurais pas attendu de celle de Rose, elle ne perdit rien de sa gaîté. *Pour moi, dont la volupté était plus délicate, je jouissais par les yeux, par les mains, mais j'étais moins empressée d'arriver au but*, que j'envisageais avec plus de satisfaction en exaltant le désir, et je me trouvais en cela d'accord avec mon papa. Vernol et Rose furent donc obligés de modérer leur impatience, ce qui fut plus facile à Rose, qui par nos caresses et nos attouchements, avait déjà, de son aveu, ressenti trois fois les délices du plaisir.[165]

Throughout their orgiastic lovemaking, Vernol and Rose prove themselves to be both insatiable and impatient, even crazed. Here, as well as throughout the novel, the adjectives associated with the couple and their sexual behavior are *impatient(e), éffréné(e), échauffé(e), indiscrèt(e), furieuse.* While they are eager to experience any sexual novelty, their primary concern is always

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[163] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 130, emphasis added.
[164] Here, father-daughter incest is depicted as more educationally successful (and healthy) than sibling incest. The implication is that paternal authority is needed to properly guide and shape sexual-moral education. Filial incest, by contrast, fails, and leads to dangerous health consequences because of its inherent unruliness and lack of structure.
[165] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 138, emphasis added.

the attainment of orgasm, not the process of attaining it. Rose, we are told, achieves orgasm "trois ou quatre fois contre nous une" and Vernol "n'avait pour but que la jouissance."[166]

Whereas Rose and Vernol are solely concerned with the future attainment of orgasm, Laure and her father pay careful attention to all that is around them. They are moderate and *délicate*, rather than *empressé*, ambling with relaxed, unhurried delight through their ever mounting pleasure. They are also polymorphously perverse – sexual pleasure is not centered solely on the sexual organs; the entire body and mind become instruments capable of feeling and giving pleasure. They are thus able to take delight in the minutest particularities of sensual pleasure.

Rose and Vernol's incorrigibility ultimately proves to be their undoing, just as Laure's father had predicted. The reader learns that a short time after the outing with Laure and her father, Rose and Vernol organize an orgy of their own, wherein Rose attends to several different men, including Vernol. It is this event, Laure reflects, that proves to her that "*la délicatesse des sentiments* n'habitait point leurs cœurs, et qu'ils n'avaient l'un et l'autre que ceux de la passion la plus effrénée et la plus indiscrète."[167] At the end of the day, after having been penetrated at least twenty-two times by the men and after having reached orgasm a staggering thirty-nine times, Rose emerges exhausted from her debauch:

> Rose, livrée sans frein à la passion furieuse dont elle faisait l'idole de son bonheur, à la fin y succomba. Ses règles n'avaient point paru ; elle ne fut pas longtemps sans essuyer un épuisement total, suivi de vapeurs affreuses. Sa vue s'en ressentit, elle ne ressemblait qu'à une ombre ambulante. Sa gaîté fut totalement perdue, et un dépérissement produit par une fièvre lente la conduisit au tombeau.[168]

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[166] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 144, 174.
[167] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 148, emphasis added.
[168] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 154.

Although Vernol's excesses do not prove to be fatal like his sister's, he does not escape unscathed. Indeed, the angelic beauty that had so enflamed Laure's imagination does not survive the orgy; he emerges a wraith, his soul and body irrevocably scarred, "Vernol, qu'elle avait jeté dans le même excès, fut saisi d'une fièvre putride dont il eut beaucoup de peine à revenir, et peu de mois après son rétablissement, la petite vérole lui fit essuyer des ravages qui le défigurèrent totalement; il fut encore très mal et ne fit que languir depuis."[169] Rose and Vernol's story is a tragic narrative of a fall from health and vigor to decay, moral and physical. Their problem is not their pursuit of pleasure as such but that, unlike Laure and her father, Rose and Vernol lack the tools to moderate their desire. Instead, to their detriment, they developed their penchant for sex without a corresponding development of the mental faculties and physical strength that might have not only protected them from folly but enhanced their pleasures.

Like La Mettrie before her, the narrator of *Le Rideau levé* presents two diametrically opposed types of sexual characters, represented by the two main couples: Laure and her father, Rose and Vernol. While not explicitly named in the novel, the contours of La Mettrie's categories – *la volupté* and *la débauche* – are easily detected. The approach to sexuality exemplified and advocated by Laure and her father is based on a philosophy of gradation. Just as Laure is initiated into the mysteries of sex slowly and carefully, corresponding to her developing body and mind, so she proceeds in the bedroom when she is at last admitted. She has learned that pleasure is not only greater but safer when it is enjoyed with restraint and contemplation. In contrast, Rose and Vernol's precipitous fall into debauchery is a consequence of their impatient natures, underdeveloped reflective capabilities, and over-accelerated imaginations. The pleasures they are able to attain are short-lived and lead to their physical demise.

[169] Mirabeau, *Le Rideau levé*, 154-55.

## Conclusion

Each of the texts discussed in this chapter depict and, in the cases of La Mettrie and *Le Rideau levé*, advocate a particular approach to pleasure, that of the voluptuary. The voluptuous person is a gourmand of sexual-sensual pleasure, a person who savors detail and is aesthetically refined and attuned. As a result of "un coeur né sensible" and a carefully educated mind, the voluptuous libertine is able to access the highest forms of pleasure.[170] He/she is as concerned with carefully plotting a sexual encounter as he/she is with achieving orgasm; and when he/she does, it is only by way of a slow, deliberate unfolding of pleasures.

This is all in stark contrast to the debauched lifestyle, which is defined by excess and typified by an utter lack of self-control. The debauched person's desires are immoderate and his/her expression of them frenetic. La Mettrie and Mirabeau attribute this to poor moral-sexual education and a nervous system that is mis-aligned and over-stimulated. Paradoxically, by feeling too much, the debauched person in fact feels nothing. Like a heroin addict, the debauched person needs greater and more extreme doses of stimulus to feel pleasure. In the next chapter, as I turn to a discussion of sentimental education in Vivant Denon's novella, *Point de lendemain*, we will see similar distinctions between moderation and excess playing out (there, in the context of sentiment versus passion).

In sum, we are clearly meant to believe that the voluptuous person is a better lover than the debauched person. This is not merely because of the health dangers a debauched lifestyle poses. As La Mettrie points out, the voluptuous lover is a gracious one, attuned and attentive to the needs and desires of his/her partner. As Casanova rushes around the table at Brühl to serve his guests (stopping only to eat and drink what the ladies hand him), so we must imagine the

[170] La Mettrie, *La Volupté,* 277.

voluptuary taking note of his/her partner's comfort or providing an atmosphere conducive to maximizing pleasure. Casanova said it best, perhaps, when noting that for a voluptuary like him, "le plaisir visible que je donnais composait toujours les quatre cinquièmes du mien."[171] By contrast, the debauched person's frenetic pace, un-moderated desires, and singular focus on orgasm implies that he/she is not only a brutish, coarse lover, but one who is narcissistic. We might think, here, of the Sadean libertine, who is modeled on La Mattrie's conception of *la débauche*. Like Rose from *Le Rideau levé*, the Sadean libertine is concerned with quantity as a barometer for quality – how many positions one can engage in, how many people one can include in an orgy party, how many orgasms one can have, and how cataclysmically eruptive they can be (as if measured on a Richter scale). Partners lose their individuality to become simply numbers in a sexual statistician's calculations, and, as such, they become expendable (used vessels are discarded without a second thought). The voluptuous libertines I studied in this chapter, on the other hand, are interested in creating a memorable experience, in particular a carefully plotted one – an affair to remember, if you will. For, ultimately, once the sun rises on their trysts, forcing lovers to separate, the memory of the night – "un beau rêve" – may be seen as the only tangible thing they can take with them.[172]

[171] Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1: 245.
[172] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 68.

## Chapter 4: The Sentimental Education of the Libertine – *Point de lendemain*

The young narrator-protagonist of Vivant Denon's novella, *Point de lendemain,* goes to the Paris opera one evening, where he is to meet his lover, the Comtesse de … The Comtesse never arrives but her close friend, Madame de T… spots him alone in his box and beckons him to join her. She resolves to save him from "le ridicule d'une pareille solitude," and, ignoring any protests made on his part, she absconds with him in her carriage.[173] As the carriage speeds away from Paris and into the countryside, Madame de T… reveals her intentions: she has recently legally reconciled with her husband (after a long separation) but she wishes to avoid the boredom of a tête-à-tête.[174] As might be expected, dinner with the husband is awkward and uncomfortable. Soon enough, however, Monsieur de T… takes his leave and the couple take a walk in the gardens of the chateau. The two follow a winding path of kisses and confidences that ends finally at a pavilion, where they make love. They later continue their lovemaking within a cabinet attached to Madame de T…'s apartments, offering up their sighs to the fast approaching dawn.

As day breaks and the chateau begins to stir, the lovers part; the young man descends once more to the gardens. There, he is startled to see the Marquis, Madame de T…'s official lover. He learns from the Marquis that he has been a pawn in a scheme to make Monsieur de

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[173] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 36.

[174] Here, Denon references some of the peculiarities of late *ancien régime* marriage and separation laws. Divorce was not enshrined in French legal codes until the Revolution. In the case of personality conflicts, a wife or husband very often only had recourse to legal separation. This is one of many elements that firmly roots the narrative in the *ancien régime*. For a detailed account of the shifts in French marriage and family law from the sixteenth century to the advent of the *Code civil*, see James Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

T… believe that the narrator, and not the Marquis, was his wife's lover. At first, the young man feels that he has been cruelly duped; but he soon learns that he and Madame de T… have departed from plan – they were only to have *appeared* to sleep together, not to have actually done so. Armed with this secret knowledge, the young narrator is prepared to play the part assigned to him – he will be a scapegoat for the husband and an object of ridicule for the Marquis. Having carried off his role with brio, the narrator departs in the Marquis' carriage. Reflecting on the night that he has spent, he notes simply, "Je cherchai bien la morale de toute cette aventure, et… je n'en trouvai point."[175]

*Point de lendemain* tells the story of a one night stand, the cunning, skillful, *décente* seduction of a younger man by a somewhat older, married woman. But, as I will argue in this chapter, Denon's novella can also be read as a novel of education. Like *Le Rideau levé*, I argue, the young narrator's education is in moderation, temperance, and refinement – how to become a better lover. However, Denon's concern is not for the health or sexual adventurousness of his protagonist but for his emotional stability. The young man's tale can readily be described, then, as a sentimental education. Although the narrative takes place over the course of a single night (rather than a lifetime), at its core, *Point de lendemain* charts the young man's emotional maturation and social development, culminating in the emergence of a type of sentimental libertine.

[175] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 69 (ellipses in original).

## The Retelling of a One-Night Stand – *Point de lendemain* and its Re-writings

*Point de lendemain* was first published in 1777 as part of the June issue of a literary journal directed by Claude-Joseph Dorat, *Mélanges littéraires, ou Journal des Dames*. This version would be published several more times in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Then, in 1812, thirty-five years after the original publication of the story, Denon re-edited the 1777 version, modulating the novella's tone, especially, as we will see, at the very beginning of the story. It is this second version that has been taken as the "official" version in subsequent modern editions.[176] But there is also a third version of *Point de lendemain* sandwiched in between the 1777 and 1812 versions, a pornographic "amplification" of the 1777 version published at the end of the Terror under the title *La Nuit merveilleuse ou le nec plus ultra de plaisir*.[177] Like most editions of *Point de lendemain* published in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *La Nuit merveilleuse* is unsigned.[178] Thus, we cannot conclusively attribute authorship of this pornographic rendering to Denon. However, by comparing the three editions side-by-side, the careful reader will note at least two passages that exist in both *La Nuit*

[176] Amusingly, a few contemporary editions have claimed to have published the original 1777 version, only to have reproduced the 1812 re-edition. The 1777 version has largely fallen into obscurity, save for the edition used throughout this chapter, edited and presented by Michel Delon.

[177] The edition available from the BNF dates from 1800 (thus, the first year of the Consulate phase of the Revolution, which would last until Napoleon Bonaparte declared himself emperor in 1804). However, in the prefatory notes to the most recent edition of *La Nuit merveilleuse*, Jean-Jacques Pauvert references an earlier printing in 1794. See, Pauvert, "Bibliographic Notes" in *Point de lendemain suivi de La Nuit Merveilleuse* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1993), 19. Hereafter, when citing *La Nuit merveilleuse*, I will reference this edition as [Denon], *La Nuit merveilleuse*.

[178] The original version of 1777 was the only version published in Denon's lifetime that made an attributable reference to Denon as author; it was signed with the initials M.D.G.O.D.R. (M. Denon, gentilhomme ordinaire du Roi). This edition of *Point de lendemain* would later be republished by Dorat in 1780 as part of second volume of his *Coup d'oeil sur la littérature*. Denon's initials from the first edition do not appear in the 1780 republication but it is the 1777 edition word for word. Because of the suppression of the initials in the 1780 edition and the subsequent death of Dorat in that year, future editions of *Point de lendemain* would be attributed to Dorat instead of Denon. This was the case as early as 1780 when Dorat's *Oeuvres* were published posthumously. This is why *Point de lendemain* is continually attributed to Dorat, instead of Denon, throughout the nineteenth century.

*merveilleuse* and in the version of 1812, but *not* in the version of 1777.[179] As Stéphane Le Couedic suggests, "soit Denon est l'auteur de l'amplification, soit il a eu une version de ce texte et en aurait relevé et réutilisé dans sa version de 1812 juste deux corrections de [*La Nuit merveilleuse*]."[180] We might reasonably argue that in re-editing his novella for the 1812 version, Denon would not have based his edits on those of a pornographic author! For the purposes of this chapter, then, I feel confident in "awarding" authorship to Denon.

That Denon would have chosen to revisit the original 1777 version of the novella two different times after its original publication begs the question as to why he did so. The three versions of *Point de lendemain* were published during three different politico-social regimes – the *ancien régime* (1777), the Revolution (1794), and the first Empire (1812). I suggest that Denon's re-editing modulates the tone and style of the versions such that they would reflect (in small, but tangible, ways) the different eras in which they were published, thereby effectively renewing the story for new readers each time.

These modulations can be perceived most clearly in the respective beginnings of the versions. I reproduce them below in chronological order.

> 1777: La Comtesse de … me prit sans m'aimer, continua Damon : elle me trompa. Je me fâchai, elle me quitta : cela était dans l'ordre. Je l'aimais alors, et, pour me

[179] The first change is, "Il en est des baisers comme des confidences: ils s'attirent, ils s'accélèrent, ils s'échauffent les uns par les autres." [Denon], *La Nuit merveilleuse*, 72. I've underlined the additions found in both *La Nuit merveilleuse* and the 1812 version, based on the original sentence found in the 1777 version. The second change can be found a few pages later. The version of 1777 reads, "Nous suivons, sans nous en douter, la grande route du sentiment," Denon, *PdL* (1777), 85, while the sentence in both *La Nuit merveilleuse* and the version of 1812 reads, "Nous enfilions la grande route du sentiment [...]," [Denon], *La Nuit Merveilleuse*, 79; Denon, *PdL* (1812), 48.

[180] Besides the edits mentioned above found in both *La Nuit merveilleuse* and the 1812 version, Le Couedic raises a number of financial and social considerations that would lead us to argue in favor of Denon as author of *La Nuit merveilleuse*. Stéphane Le Couedic, "De l'amour au 'lendemain' – Du conte philosophique à la nouvelle romantique," in *Vivant Denon: Colloque de Chalon-sur-Saône, le 7 et 8 mai 2001*, ed. Fracis Claudon and Bernard Bailly (Chalon-sur-Saône: Comité Vivant Denon; Université pour Tous de Bourgogne, 2001), 186-187.

> venger mieux, j'eus le caprice de la *ravoir,* quand, à mon tour, je ne l'aimai plus. J'y réussis, et lui tournai la tête : c'est ce que je demandais. Elle était amie de Mme de T… qui me lorgnait depuis quelque temps, et semblait avoir de grands desseins sur ma personne. Elle y mettait de la suite, se trouvait partout où j'étais, et menaçait de m'aimer à la folie, sans cependant que cela prît sur sa dignité et sur son goût pour les décences; car, comme on le verra, elle y était scrupuleusement attachée.
>
> 1794: Madame d'Arbonne me prit sans m'aimer; elle me trompa, je me fâchai; elle me quitta; cela était dans l'ordre. Je l'aimais alors, et pour me venger mieux, j'eus le caprice de la ravoir, quand à mon tour je ne l'aimai plus. J'y réussis, et lui tournai la tête; c'est ce que je demandais. Elle était amie de madame de Terville, qui me lorgnait depuis quelque temps, et semblait avoir de grands desseins sur ma personne. Elle y mettait de la suite, se trouvait partout où j'étais, et me menaçait de m'aimer à la folie, sans cependant que cela prît sur sa dignité et sur son goût pour les décences, car, comme on le verra, madame de Terville y était scrupuleusement attachée.
>
> 1812: J'aimais éperdument la Comtesse de …; j'avais vingt ans, et j'étais ingénu; elle me trompa, je me fâchai, elle me quitta. J'étais ingénu, je la regrettai; j'avais vingt ans, elle me pardonna : et comme j'avais vingt ans, que j'étais ingénu, toujours trompé, mais plus quitté, je me croyais l'amant le mieux aimé, partant le plus heureux des hommes. Elle était amie de Mme de T…, qui semblait avoir quelques projets sur ma personne, mais sans que sa dignité fût compromise. Comme on le verra, Mme de T… avait des principes de décence auxquels elle était scrupuleusement attachée.[181]

The most striking difference between the 1777 and 1794 versions is the addition of full names in *La Nuit merveilleuse*. Gone are the ellipsis points acting to mask and protect the "true" identities of the characters involved in the tale – the Comtesse de … becomes Madame d'Arbonne; Madame de T… becomes Madame de Terville. To the modern reader, the 1794 version's inclusion of full names might not seem like a big deal; but for an eighteenth-century reader, I suggest, this was tantamount to a revolution on paper.

[181] Denon, *PdL* (1777), 73; [Denon], *La Nuit merveilleuse*, 61; Denon, *PdL* (1812), 35.

The practice of obscuring identities behind asterisks, ellipsis points, and initials was widespread in eighteenth-century literature, including memoirs, novels, and published correspondence; particularly when the circumstances described were sensitive or compromising. The practice originated in memoirs (we see this clearly in Casanova's *Histoire de ma vie*) but seems to have quickly migrated to fiction, becoming a trope for novels assuming the form of memoirs (or familiar letters) and wishing to establish the conceit of having been the faithful transcript of licentious or scandalous events. Thus, for example, the "Rédacteur" of the collected letters making up *Les Liaisons dangereuses* indicates to his reader that, "j'ai supprimé ou changé tous les noms des personnes dont il est question dans ces lettres; et que, si, dans le nombre de ceux que je leur ai substitués, il s'en trouvait qui appartiennent à quelqu'un, ce serait seulement une erreur de ma part, et dont il ne faudrait tirer aucune conséquence."[182] The names being suppressed generally belonged to political and social elites (usually members of the aristocracy) and, as we see from the note Laclos' Rédacteur includes, suppression was clearly about "protecting" the "real" individuals from (further) societal reproach and/or condemnation (as well as protecting the author/publisher/editor from legal action). With respect to *Point de lendemain*, then, we should see the suppression of full names in the version of 1777 as fitting in clearly with the principles of *décence* to which Madame de T… is scrupulously attached. The narrator will not (explicitly) kiss and tell; aristocratic codes of propriety and *honnêteté* will be observed and upheld.

[182] Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, 5.

In 1794, of course, aristocratic codes – and aristocracy in general – had no place in France except under the guillotine's blade or as objects of suspicion, ridicule, and derision. "Feudalism" had been outlawed since the early days of the Revolution but the attempted flight of the royal family in June 1791, resentment over perceived aristocratic profligacy and decadence under the *ancien régime*, and the constant threat of counter-Revolutionary forces all contributed to a Jacobin radicalization of anti-aristocratic sentiment and activity, most infamously incarnated in the violence of the Terror. The re-writing of *Point de lendemain* in *La Nuit merveilleuse* does not explicitly champion the ideologies of the new regime (as many other Revolution-era libertine texts did) but it does subtly play into those ideologies in its representation of its aristocratic main characters.[183] *La Nuit merveilleuse*, while not overtly denunciatory, lays bare the decadence of social elites under the *ancien régime* and, in subtle ways, ridicules aristocratic pretension. The revelation of names in *La Nuit merveilleuse* is a signal that aristocracy had no place to hide, that it was exposed to the harsh light of direct observation. In short, the characters no longer had recourse to propriety and *décence* to keep their acts from public view; they were exposed and subject to accusation and condemnation. We might also say that the naming of names corresponds to a general trope of pornographic works to "dire les choses par leur nom," to call things by their proper names.[184] We might remember Laure's promise to her intended reader and lover, Eugénie in the preface to *Le Rideau levé* that her "expressions seront varies, naturelles et hardies," namely, that she would not hide her words behind euphemisms or polite turns of

[183] For a full treatment of Revolution-era libertine texts and their "responses" to the Revolution and its ideologies, see, especially, part three of Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire*.
[184] Nicholas Chorier, *L'Académie des dames*, ed. Jean-Pierre Dubost (Arles: Editions Philippe Picquier, 1999), 52.

phrase; to "lever le rideau" is to invite the explicit, the scandalous. As such, the scandalous naming of names symbolically announces the overall generic shift in *La Nuit merveilleuse* from the polite *libertinage mondain* à la Crébillon, La Morlière or Duclos to a pornographic register. Indeed, the tone and vocabulary of the rest of *La Nuit merveilleuse* follows suit. Those acts which had been cloaked in euphemism or paraphrase in 1777 are explicitly recounted in 1794. Thus, for instance, the scene of lovemaking in the pavilion is amplified significantly in *La Nuit merveilleuse* to become a "rage d'amour":

> Je touchais tout, je pillais tout, je voulais tout dévorer; ma langue impatiente… […] Je saisis l'instant, je pénètre hardiment jusqu'au fond du sanctuaire des amours: un cri doux et étouffé m'avertit qu'elle est heureuse; ses soupirs prolongés m'annoncent qu'elle l'est longtemps; le mouvement précipité de ses reins dont mes doigts habiles provoquent l'agilité, ne fait que me confirmer ce que ses gestes et sa voix m'ont assez indiqué: je redouble d'ardeur et d'audace: un "Ah! frip – on," prononcé en deux temps, mais de cette voix mourante du plaisir qui renaît, double mes forces, mes désirs et mon courage; nos langues s'unissent, se croisent, se collent l'une à l'autre; nous nous suçons mutuellement; nos âmes se confondent, se multiplient à chacun de nos baisers; nous tombons enfin dans ce délicieux anéantissement auquel on ne peut rien comparer que lui-même.[185]

All in all, then, the narration Dorat described as "piquante, spirituelle et originale"[186] becomes explicit and saucy, more a novel one would read with one hand than one which simply stimulated the senses.

Eighteenth-century aristocratic propriety has been restored in the 1812 version with the re-masking of the characters' names, but, as is readily apparent, the text of the first paragraph has been completely reworked. The 1812 revision represents yet another tonal and stylistic

[185] [Denon], *La Nuit merveilleuse*, 80-81.
[186] The first edition of *Point de lendemain*, which appeared in Dorat's *Mélanges littéraires*, was preceded by a note from Dorat which described the tale thus.

revolution, attributable to three main elements: a shift in the way the narrator is portrayed, a shift in the way Madame de T… is introduced and characterized, and a shift in the representation of time and narrative placement/distance.

The narrator-protagonist's age is not given in the first paragraph of the 1777 version (we later learn that he is twenty-five) but a cynicism and a certain worldliness noticeably come across. The series of events, from his lover taking him while not loving him, her betrayal, his anger, and her leaving him due to his harsh reaction are all presented matter-of-factly, without a hint of emotion. "Cela était dans l'ordre" establishes, furthermore, that the sequence of events is to be expected; it is simply the way of the world. The narrator of 1777 is a dangerous man, bitter and calculating; he would seem to keep the same company as Versac (*Les Égarements du coeur et de l'esprit*) or the Vicomte de Valmont (*Les Liaisons dangereuses*). He seeks to be reunited with the Comtesse not because he misses her but because he wants to exact revenge; he wishes to inflict damage on her in defense of his wounded pride. By contrast, the 1812 narrator's passion for his mistress is evident; it is that which motivates him to seek her pardon and to ask her to take him back.

In the version of 1812, the worldly and cynical libertine of twenty-five morphs into a naïve and inexperienced young man of twenty who is just starting out in society. *Vingt ans* and *ingénu* – the protagonist's youthful age and inexperience are highlighted three times within the first sentence alone. The addition of "je me croyais" – the imperfect past form of the verb *croire* (to believe) – likewise emphasizes the protagonist's naïveté: at the age of twenty he might have been naïve enough to believe himself among happiest of men but he knows better, he has gained

additional insight that allows him to better critically assess himself. Clearly, this young man of twenty has something to learn of the ways of the world and we may (rightly) assume that this adventure with no tomorrow will hold the key to the young man's advancement. I shall explore just what this education might entail in the sections that follow.

The tonal shift between the 1777 and 1812 versions is further apparent in the way we are introduced to Madame de T… in each. As Philippe Sollers has shown in *Le Cavalier du Louvre*, "Mme de T…, en 1777, est loin d'être ce qu'elle est devenue en 1812. Elle est beaucoup plus déclarative et même vulgaire."[187] In the 1777 and 1794 versions, Madame de T… "me *lorgnait* depuis quelque temps." The verb *lorgner* is aptly applied, considering the theatrical setting in which she and the narrator meet (*lorgner* being the basis of *lorgnettes*, or, opera glasses) but as a verb denoting observation and interest, it has an overly familiar, even vulgar, connotation. To *lorgne* someone is to ogle them, to leer, to size them up as if they were a tasty morsel. The image we get of Madame de T… in 1777 is that of an almost panting, predatory creature, licking her chops at the sight of the narrator. Indeed, he basically implies that she is stalking him, "Elle y mettait de la suite, se trouvait partout où j'étais, et menaçait de m'aimer à la folie." This portrayal of Madame de T… is close to the character archetype exemplified by Madame de Senanges in *Les Égarements du coeur et de l'esprit*, who menaces the narrator-protagonist of that novel in a similar, forward fashion. Madame de T…'s behavior vis-à-vis the 1777 narrator goes well beyond the bounds of propriety, throwing into question the "goût pour les décences" with which she wishes to associate herself. Here, we have the impression that the narrator lets

[187] Philippe Sollers, *Le Cavalier du Louvre* (Paris: Plon, 1995), 87.

Madame de T… take him away and, then, only because it helps him to take his revenge on the Comtesse, his mistress and Madame de T…'s close friend.

The Madame de T… of 1812 is utterly transformed. As Sollers ably points out, "En 1812, Mme de T…, devenue simplement 'la décente Mme de T…,' produit un effet érotique autrement puissant. […] Mme de T… ne 'lorgne' plus. Elle n'a plus de 'grands desseins' mais 'quelques projets.' Elle se garde bien de dire, plus tard, des phrases trop claires: 'je vous enlève,' 'laissez-vous conduire,' 'abandonnez-vous à la Providence.' Elle se contente de 'Point de question, point de résistance… Appelez mes gens. Vous êtes charmant.'"[188] The traces of vulgarity are entirely swept away in the 1812 version's Madame de T… Instead, the emphasis is placed on propriety, not giving too much away, keeping to an economy of expression. Madame de T…'s intentions and motivations become indefinite ("*quelques* projets"), her desires ambiguous, her presence mysterious and alluring.

The last of the major shifts to be found between the 1777 and 1812 versions is a temporal one. The events related in all three versions of *Point de lendemain* take place during the *ancien régime* but the narrator's position relative to those events, particularly in 1812, is put into question. In 1777, there is no indication that there is any appreciable gap in time between the events narrated and their telling. The only information we are given with respect to the narrator's position vis-à-vis the text is "Damon continua." Beyond placing the overall narrative within a larger, third-person omniscient narrative framing (fascinating in itself) *continua* leaves open-ended the question of what is continued and in what circumstances Damon is continuing. Could the

[188] Sollers, *Le Cavalier du Louvre*, 87-88.

narrator have just returned from the chateau in the Marquis' carriage to relate the tale to a friend? Is that friend, then, the overall narrator of the tale? What is clear is that the memory of Madame de T…'s actions and some of the pain, confusion and feelings of betrayal associated with it is fresh in 1777. In 1812, by contrast, the narrator has clearly gained a large measure of perspective. The repetition of age and naïveté in the version of 1812 establishes that the narrator has developed over the course of time; he is most certainly not the young and naïve man in his twenties just making his way in the world with something to learn. Years have passed since those salad days and the narrator nostalgically reflects on his youth, this time with something to teach.

The differences that can be perceived in the respective beginnings of *Point de lendemain* are vitally important as they ultimately help to guide the reader as to how he or she will read, interpret, and decode the events that follow. In his prefatory note to the edition of 1777, Dorat describes *Point de lendemain* as a "piquante, spirituelle et originale" contribution to the "histoire des moeurs," one which seeks to "faire contraster […] avec les femmes intéressantes dont ce siècle s'honore, celles qui s'y distinguent par l'aisance de leurs principes, la folie de leurs idées et la bizarrerie de leurs caprices."[189] As Dorat notes, the focus of the text in 1777 is clearly Madame de T… and her bizarre caprices and principles of *décence*. The incipit establishes that she is a wily, scheming woman bent on seducing the narrator (who gladly acquiesces as it fits into his own designs for exacting vengeance on his two-timing mistress). In 1812, the focus of the narrative is shifted to the narrator-protagonist, who is no longer the jaded, cynical, cruel libertine of 1777, but is rather a naïve young man of twenty. From mere portrait of female

[189] Denon, *PdL* (1777), 72.

seduction (piquant though it may have been) or the recounting of a *ragoût* the morning after, the edition of 1812 becomes a novel of education, illustrating the sentimental and moral development of the young man over the course of his *aventure d'une nuit*. It is as if the narrator, in growing older, has shifted in his perception of his night with Madame de T… – he has moved beyond the hurt or embarrassment caused by her deception and is now able to look back on the night more tenderly, more critically, even more nostalgically, with the wisdom that hindsight and experience affords. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall seek to elucidate the educational program at the heart of the 1812 version.

### The Second Conspiracy – Madame de T… and Education

Having played his role in the Marquis' Molière-esque comedy to perfection, the young protagonist takes his leave of the party. Madame de T… walks him out, "feignant de vouloir me donner une commission." She addresses him in affectionate terms, exhorting him to remember their night together as a "beau rêve," but to return to a reality that is perhaps sweeter, "Dans ce moment, votre amour vous rappelle; celle qui en est l'objet en est digne. Si je lui ai dérobé quelques transports, je vous rends à elle, *plus tendre, plus délicat, et plus sensible*."[190] Much like the final scenes of *The Usual Suspects* (1995) and *The Sixth Sense* (1999), in which a crucial twist is revealed that throws everything that has come before into a different light, I see Madame de T…'s parting words to the young man as a key to reading the rest of the story, one that serves to both throw into question and illuminate all that has come before. That is, Madame de T…'s seduction of the young man may initially appear to be a self-interested act, a pleasurable expedient to facilitate her continued trysts with the Marquis under her husband's nose. Under

[190] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 68-69, my emphasis.

this reading, the young man is the victim of a conspiracy between a scheming Madame de T… and her official lover. However, I will show that besides duping her husband or obtaining a night of sexual bliss for herself, Madame de T… has another aim, namely, that of aiding in the formation of a proper lover, specifically that of her close friend, the Comtesse. Using the parting scene between Madame de T… and the protagonist as a starting point, then, I propose a re-reading of *Point de lendemain*. In doing so, I hope to bring to the fore a well-intentioned, but well-hidden, *second* conspiracy, this taking place not between Madame de T… and the Marquis, but between Madame de T… and the Comtesse de…

Of the supporting cast of *Point de lendemain* (Monsieur de T…, the Marquis, and the Comtesse de…), the Comtesse is the character most often referenced in the narrative; curiously, she is also the only one never seen. Nevertheless, she is a formidable presence from the first sentence of the novella and is Madame de T…'s preferred topic of conversation (indeed, discussion of the Comtesse's treatment of the narrator is the pretext that allows them to avert an early night and continue their tête-à-tête in the chateau's gardens). My reading will explore in particular, then, her omnipresence in the story and its impact on the lessons we are to draw from it.

At the start of the novel both the Comtesse de… and Madame de T… have problems that need creative remedies. On the one hand, Madame de T… is to reconcile with an unpleasant husband after an eight-year separation and needs to find a way to continue seeing her lover, the Marquis, without raising the husband's suspicions or compromising her dignity. On the other hand, the Comtesse de… has a lover – the unnamed young man – who is far too passionate, indiscreet, possessive, and jealous. She might keep him around but something must be done to bring him into line. After all, she has already had to dismiss him once for acting out (upon

finding her with another man). It is here that the "conspiracy" between the two women is formed; Madame de T…'s seduction of the Comtesse's young and naïve lover is the creative solution that will solve both their problems. Through this seduction, Madame de T… will be able to throw her husband off the Marquis' scent and, in doing so, she will impart valuable lessons on how to be a proper lover, ones that will ultimately benefit her friend, the Comtesse. To our knowledge, Denon never wrote this scene, but, from a close reading of the novel, I believe that we can see contours of the conspiracy as I have described it.

First, we might consider the narrator's "chance" meeting with Madame de T… at the opera. The young man has gone to the opera to meet the Comtesse. Perhaps a little over eager, he arrives early (this was not the fashionable custom amongst elites in the period and, indeed, Madame de T… is quick to point this out – "Quoi! déjà? me dit-on. Quel désoeuvrement!").[191] The Comtesse never arrives, even well into the second act of the performance. What has happened to her? Does she not know that her young lover is waiting for her? Instead, her close friend, Madame de T…, just happens to be there (just as unfashionably early as the narrator and in the box directly next to the one he is occupying). The narrator makes it out to be a chance encounter but we know from later in the text that very few elements said to have been the work of providence or chance actually were (such as the unlocked pavilion that would be the first site of their lovemaking). Is it too much to assume that the Comtesse informed her friend of her intended rendezvous with her lover and that everyone is exactly where they should be? Why,

[191] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 35-36. The 1777 version of the novella is even clearer on this point, "Un jour que j'allais attendre la Comtesse dans sa loge à l'Opéra, j'arrivai de si bonne heure, que j'en avais honte: on n'avait pas commencé. À peine entrais-je, je m'entends appeler de la loge d'à côté. N'était-ce pas encore la décente Mme de T…?" Denon, *PdL* (1777), 73. For a comprehensive treatment of eighteenth-century opera-going practices, see parts one and two of Johnson, *Listening in Paris*.

after all, would someone as *décente* and knowledgeable as Madame de T… be at the opera early, if not for a specific errand?

Indeed, we get the impression that the Comtesse has spoken at length about the narrator to Madame de T… In her efforts to get the young man to speak of his lover, Madame de T… drops tantalizingly clear hints that she already knows quite a bit about him and his relationship, "où en êtes-vous avec mon amie? vous rend-on bien heureux? Ah! je crains le contraire: cela m'afflige, car je m'intéresse si tendrement à vous! Oui, Monsieur, je m'y intéresse…*plus que vous ne pensez peut-être*." When he protests, she counters, "Épargnez-vous la feinte; *je sais sur votre compte tout ce que l'on peut savoir.* La Comtesse est moins mystérieuse que vous."[192] Additionally, the very fact that Madame de T… would insist on talking (at such great length) about her friend throughout her walk with the young man suggests that she is trying to impart wisdom to him about his relationship and perhaps guide his future actions with respect to the Comtesse. It seems clear that Madame de T… did not need to have resorted to provoking the young man's jealousy merely to get him to sleep with her (he seemed quite prepared to do so anyway).

But perhaps the greatest indication that Madame de T…'s seduction of the young narrator had more to do with education than mere self-interest (namely, providing a red herring for her husband) is her last declaration to him, "je vous rends à elle, *plus* tendre, *plus* délicat, et *plus* sensible." Before each word she adds "plus." The use of *plus* here denotes augmentation as well as comparison. That is, *plus* invites a comparison between the young man's state at the end of the *aventure* and his past state (at the beginning of the night, when he was, conceivably, *moins* tendre, *moins* délicat et *moins* sensible) and implies moral development. As Madame de T…

[192] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 45-46, my emphasis.

sends the young man back to his lover, he is to have been transformed, made much better than he was before. But has the narrator in fact learned from his experiences with Madame de T… as she hopes he has? And, if so, what indeed has he learned? After all, the very last line of the narrative would seem to cast doubt on any kind revelatory experience (at least immediately upon the young man's departure from the chateau), "Je cherchais bien la *morale* de toute cette aventure, et … *je n'en trouvai point*."[193] It is to these questions that I now turn.

### "Point de morale" – A Sentimental Education

The three terms Madame de T… uses to describe the moral development she hopes has taken place (*tendre*, *délicat*, *sensible*) appear to be synonyms. For example, the entry for *tendre* in the fifth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1798) contains the words *délicat* and *sensible* as part of its definition. Each word, broadly conceived, is part of the vocabulary of sensitivity, physical and moral. That is, they all refer to both a person's sensory faculties (the capacity to receive and interpret sense impressions) and one's capacity to be touched, moved, affected emotionally.

Each term, however, has very different connotations within the spectrum of sense and sensitivity. Of the three, *tendre* has the most emotional connotation; it refers to one who is open to emotions, who is kind and gentle. We might think, for instance, of the expressions "tender hearted" or a "tender lover." *Tendre* is opposed to one who is harsh of character or severe. *Délicat* is perhaps the most cerebral of the terms Madame de T… employs. It refers to refinement, both of mind and manner. As such, *délicat* has a distinct aesthetic dimension (one who has taste or acts in good taste). *Délicat*, here, is opposed to *grossier* or coarse, one who

[193] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 69, my emphasis.

does not possess a lightness of touch in one's perception or bearing. Hand-in-hand with the *délicat* person's taste, discretion and gentleness of behavior is an attentiveness to the comfort and well-being of others. We might think here of Casanova's behavior at the luncheon at Brühl, discussed in Chapter 3. Indeed, much of Chapter 3 discusses the concept of libertine *délicatesse*. Lastly, *sensible* is, in many ways, a synthesis of the qualities denoted by *tendre* and *délicat*. *Sensible* had essentially two meanings in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the first is one who is open to sense impressions while the second is one who is open to affect. *Sensibilité* is the foundation of two, interrelated, currents of eighteenth-century thought, the interest in empiricism and epistemology, as well as the exploration of the emotions. *Sensible* should not be confused with the English word sensible, which refers to pragmatism or common sense. Rather, one who is *sensible* is sensitive, able to revel in affect while also being receptive to the feelings of others.

Denon's readers would also have recognized *tendre, délicat* and *sensible* as belonging to an older semantic field, that of *honnêteté*. *Honnêteté* did not connote "honesty," as it does in its modern usage. Rather, the term refers to an ideal of aristocratic comportment and social behavior theorized heavily in the seventeenth century (based on earlier, sixteenth-century philosophies of courtliness) and emblematized in the figure of the *honnête homme*.[194]

"L'honnête homme," as Jean-Pierre Dens points out, "est l'homme par excellence; aimable, cultivé sans tomber dans la spécialisation, soucieux d'autrui sans être altruiste, prudent,

[194] Chief amongst the seventeenth-century treatises and essays on *honnêteté* as well as the *honnête homme,* we might cite: Nicolas Faret, *L'Honnete homme; ou, l'art de plaire a la cour* (1630); Antoine Gombaud, Chevalier de Méré, *De la vraie honnêteté* in *Oeuvres posthumes de M. le Chevalier de Méré* (Paris: Chez Jean & Michel Guignard, 1700); and Damien Mitton's essays *Pensées sur l'honnêteté* and *Description de l'honnête homme*, collected within the sixth volume of Saint-Évremond's *Oeuvres mêlées* (Paris: C. Barbin, 1680), 1-12. Each of these texts drew heavily from earlier, sixteenth-century discourses on courtly behavior (especially Baldassare Castiglione's seminal text on the subject, *Il Cortegiano*).

circonspect, sans cesse attentif à l'image qu'il projette."[195] Dens, here, opposes the *honnête homme* to the heroic ideal (typified by the Cornelian hero) and also, to an extent, the courtier (whose object is to serve the king and whose chief desire is to ascend to the pinnacle of the social hierarchy).[196] The *honnête homme* does not seek glory or prestige; rather, he is modest, temperate in behavior, and *délicat* in bearing, seeking solely the selfless satisfaction that comes from pleasing others. This point is exemplified in the Duc de la Rochefoucauld's oft-quoted maxim that the "vrai honnête homme est celui qui ne se pique de rien."[197] *Se piquer* has two senses here. First, La Rochefoucauld means to say that the *honnête homme* is not quick to take offense; his temper is not delicate, that is to say, not easily provoked. But, as Dens again reminds us, the verb *se piquer* has another, older sense, that of wishing to display oneself in front of others, to seek "à se distinguer par an comportment singulier."[198] For, La Rochefoucauld, then, *honnêteté* implies one whose emotions are even and regulated and also one who does not wish to puff himself up so as to be noticed.

Chief amongst the values encompassed by *honnêteté* is a deep and abiding concern with ensuring the comfort and pleasure of others. Indeed, Damien Mitton, in his short essay *Pensées sur l'honnêteté* (1680) makes this value the very definition of true *honnêteté*, "L'Honnnesteté donc doit estre considerée comme le desir d'estre heureux, mais de maniere que les autres le soient aussi."[199] The *honnête homme* recognizes that his place is to please, not to critique or moralize; consistently seeking to, in Méré's words, "ne déplaire à personne," the *honnête homme*

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[195] Jean-Pierre Dens, *L'Honnête homme et la critique du goût: esthétique et société au XVIIe siècle* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1981), 23.
[196] Dens, *L'Honnête homme*, 13-14.
[197] La Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes morales et Réflexions diverses*, edited by Laurence Plazenet (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), 159 (Maxim 203).
[198] Dens, *L'Honnête homme*, 25.
[199] Méré is unequivocal on this point as well, suggesting that "la parfaite honnêteté se montre à prendre les meilleurs voïes pour vivre heureusement, & pour rendre heureux ceux qui le meritent," *De la vraie honnêteté*, 29-30.

is careful not to add notes of sourness or heaviness where only levity is required.[200] (We shall see how Denon's protagonist initially fails in this crucial stricture of *honnêteté*).

Although, as a number of studies on the subject have noted, the discourse on *honnêteté* and courtly behavior reached its apogee around 1680, *honnêteté* as a value and a norm retained its currency well into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[201] While the *honnête homme* was no longer the subject of intense theorizing (at it was in the seventeenth century), as an ideal that emphasized the virtues of modesty, civility, temperance, delicacy, grace, and obliging sociability, it remained a powerful archetype for aristocratic comportment and social commerce, one that Denon's readers would have surely picked up on.[202] Of course, in *Point de lendemain*, *honnêteté* is conspicuously absent (the word *honnête,* in fact, occurs only once in the text) but the concept's contours are apprehended in the terms Madame de T… uses in her parting

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[200] Méré, *De la vraie honnêteté,* 24.

[201] In her study of the normative and prescriptive literature on aristocratic comportment in France, *The Aristocrat as Art*, Domna Stanton links the discourse on *honnêteté* to French classicism in general. Her assertion, agreed to in principle by Dens, is that when classicism waned around 1680, so, too, did the *honnête homme* ideal. However, the *honnête homme* does not simply disappear from the French imaginary. Stanton suggets that a "diachronic link" might be traced between the *honnête homme,* the *philosophe* of the *Encylopédie*, the Rousseauist *homme sensible*, the Romantic hero, and the late nineteenth-century "dandy." Stanton, *The Aristocrat as Art: A Study of the* Honnête Homme *and the Dandy in Seventeenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 10-11. As John Leigh adds, "The *Encylopédie*'s definition of the *philosophe* as 'un honnête homme qui veut plaire et se rendre utile' makes this lineage clear," that is to say, between the *honnête homme* ideal and that of the Enlightenment *philosophe*. See, Leigh, *The Search for Enlightenment: An Introduction to Eighteenth-Century French Writing* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 41-42. For more on the *honnête homme* lineage, see Emmanuel Bury, *Littérature et politesse: l'invention de l'honnête homme, 1580-1750* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996).

[202] This is especially important considering the fact that, in 1812, court life was reconstituting itself under Napoleon. Here, we might cite as an example of the renewed attention on aristocratic comportment and courtly behavior, Félicité de Genlis' *De l'esprit des étiquettes de l'ancienne cour et des usages du monde de ce temps*. Published the same year as the re-edited *Point de lendemain* – 1812 – the book was written at the behest of Elisa Bonaparte, sister of Napoléon and, then, Duchess of Parma. It explores in detail the manners and *mores* of court society at the end of the *ancien régime* based on the author's recollections of her debut and interactions in the courts of Louis XV and Louis XVI. We must remember that Napoléon's courtiers were either unfamiliar with aristocratic and court habits or needed a "refresher" course – many were either too young to have remembered the intensely regulated etiquette of Louis XVI's court, old enough that they would have fallen out of habit after twenty years in exile, or were newly ennobled. Genlis' text would have thus been an essential guide for aristocratic comportment. She would later expand *De l'esprit des étiquettes* into a fuller treatment of courtly behavior, the *Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour* (1818).

words to the narrator. Considered together, then, as referents to both sensibility and *honnêteté*, the three terms *tendre, délicat*, and *sensible*, paint the picture of a lover who is kind, attentive, understanding, graceful in manner and bearing, and keenly aware of both his lover's feelings and his obligations to her within the larger context of society.

The young man at the beginning of the night seems to have a long way to go in achieving this character ideal. "J'aimais éperdument la Comtesse de…," he recalls. A rough translation of this first line of the 1812 version might be, "I was passionately in love with the Comtesse de…" But "passionately" does not completely convey the connotation of "éperdument" in the phrase. To love someone *éperdument* – as the word's root, *perdre*, might imply – is to lose oneself in love; it is to be swept up in emotion, as one might be swept up in heavy currents. This form of emotional expression is viewed negatively, both in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social conventions as well as theories of the emotion. Passion, the word Descartes uses to describe emotions, is operative here. "Passion," as Amy Schmitter notes, "indicated a raw uncorrected emotion, which may be 'violent' in the sense of either agitating us, or being unresponsive to reason."[203] Descartes' model of the emotions conceived the passions as instinctual responses to stimuli that could, in turn, drive us to act; they are passive, unrefined emotions.[204] In eighteenth-century parlance, passions were often contrasted with sentiments, which "specified calm

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[203] Amy Schmitter, "17th and 18th Century Theories of Emotions," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2006 Edition)*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2006/entries/emotions-17th18th/. For an additional account of the shift from passion to sentiment in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theories of emotion, see Amélie Rorty, "From Passions to Emotions and Sentiments," *Philosophy* 57 (1982): 159-172 as well as Rorty, "From Passions to Sentiments: The Structure of Hume's *Treatise*," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (April 1993): 165-179.

[204] Descartes lays out his theory of the emotions as part of a larger, physiological account of how his previously postulated mind and body substances (*res cogitans* and *res extensa*, respectively) interact, *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649). The study arose out of an epistolary exchange between him and one of his chief patrons, Princess Elisabeth of Bavaria. Descartes' model of the passions plays out in terms of what Owen Flanagan calls a reflex arc, or, "a three-term causal sequence beginning with the application of an external stimulus, which gives rise to activity in the nervous system and terminates in a response," Flanagan, *The Science of the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 3. For a modern edition of Descartes' text, see *Les Passions de l'âme* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1998).

emotions, perhaps tempered by reflection, or refined in some other way."[205] Whereas passion is un-moderated, sentiment is naturally derived from reason, and by extension, social maturation. As such, we might say that passion is the affective equivalent to the debauched mindset both La Mettrie and Mirabeau rail against.

All this kept in mind, we may say that the young man's passion for the Comtesse de … is one that is unruly, un-moderated by *délicatesse*. And it is this ungoverned, unrefined passion, combined with a lack of understanding and *tendresse*, that causes his emotions to swing so wildly between anger and jealousy (upon learning that "elle me trompa"), and regret and passionate submission ("J'étais ingénu, je la regrettai; j'avais vingt ans, elle me pardonna"). The young man's oft-noted naïveté is, at least in large measure, attributable to his lack of good judgment and emotional control. He is unreliable, flying from one passion to another; as such, he poses the danger to the Comtesse of creating a scene, thus exposing her to the ridicule of society.

Madame de T… is aware of the young man's character flaws and comments on them throughout the text in subtle ways. Just after making love in the pavilion, for instance, she refers to a severity of character and judgment, fearing that "après le moment d'ivresse" (after she has given herself to him), he will revert back to his "sévérité des réflexions."[206] In other words (to take a cliché from the vocabulary of modern one-night stands), "will you respect me in the morning?"[207]

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[205] Schmitter, "17th and 18th Century Theories of Emotions."
[206] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 55.
[207] In fact, in the very next sentence, she adds another barb to her critique of the narrator's seriousness, implicitly comparing the narrator to her husband, "À propos, dites-moi donc, comment avez-vous trouvé mon mari?" Denon, *PdL* (1812), 55.

The narrator obviously lacks a lightness of touch and his severity of character leads him to make moralistic pronouncements and to rush to judgment, as we see in a key exchange in the carriage (once he learns that he is to be the third wheel in the reconciliation between Madame de T… and her husband):

- Prendre le jour d'un raccommodement pour me présenter, cela me paraît bizarre. Vous me feriez croire que je suis sans conséquence. Ajoutez à cela l'air d'embarras qu'on apporte à une première entrevue. En vérité, je ne vois rien de plaisant pour tous les trois dans la démarche que vous allez faire.

- Ah! point de morale, je vous en conjure; vous manquez l'objet de votre emploi. Il faut m'amuser, me distraire, et non me prêcher.[208]

The young man is particularly troubled by the mere possibility that Madame de T… would consider him to be "sans conséquence." On one level, the narrator blanches at the idea that Madame de. T… would take him for a person of little importance. Examples of persons "sans conséquence" are children and servants, those whose social status, age and/or perceived low level of maturity (mental or emotional) put them below consideration. Despite the narrator's insistence to the reader that he could not possibly suspect that Madame de T… had intentions of sleeping with him (in view of the fact that she had a lover), is he expressing disappointment that he is not even considered a minor threat to the Marquis for the lady's attentions?[209] On a deeper level, however, the young man's concern over *conséquence* is part of a more general preoccupation with meaning and status, a search for unifying principles which might explain the events in which he is a participant and who he is in relation to those events. He seeks to draw conclusions to contextualize actions, to explain them as part of a larger, determined narrative.

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[208] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 38.

[209] "Si je n'avais bien su qu'elle était femme à grandes passions, et que dans l'instant même elle avait une inclination, inclination dont elle ne pouvait ignorer que je fusse instruit, j'aurais été tenté de me croire en bonne fortune. Elle connaissait également la situation de mon coeur, car la Comtesse de … était, comme je l'ai déjà dit, l'amie intime de Mme de T… Je me défendis donc toute idée présomptueuse, et j'attendis les événements," Denon, *PdL* (1812), 37.

The narrator's preoccupation with meaning and context crops up throughout the text. From the very first lines of the novella we are told that Madame de T… "semblait avoir quelques projets sur ma personne."[210] As discussed above, as an indefinite pronoun *quelques* cloaks Madame de T…'s intentions in ambiguity and mystery. Beginning with her "chance" appearance at the opera, we see that the narrator is trying (in vain) to divine "ce qu'on voulait faire de moi."[211] Every time he asks her directly (as in the carriage), she laughs or evades. For instance, when Madame de T… expresses discontent with him for not confiding in her about his mistress, the Comtesse, he tries to turn the tables to his advantage to get her to speak about her own relationship with the Marquis (ostensibly to give some clue as to her relationship status):

- Je suis peu contente de vous… après la confiance que je vous ai montrée, il est mal… si mal de ne m'en accorder aucune! Voyez si, depuis que nous sommes ensemble, vous m'avez dit un mot de la Comtesse. […]

- N'ai-je pas le même reproche à vous faire, et n'auriez-vous point paré à bien des choses, si au lieu de me rendre confident d'une réconciliation avec un mari, vous m'aviez parlé d'un choix plus convenable, d'un choix…[212]

As might be expected, Madame de T… has no intention of revealing her cards, either with respect to her relationship with the Marquis or her reasons for absconding with her intimate friend's lover from the opera. Later, after his night with Madame de T… he again concerns himself with questions of status – viz., what does it mean for me now that I have slept with Madame de T…? Am I now her official lover? What does this mean for my relationship with the Comtesse? "Est-il bien vrai? aurait-elle rompu avec le Marquis? m'a-t-elle pris pour lui succéder, ou seulement pour le punir?"[213]

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[210] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 35.
[211] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 36.
[212] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 44-45.
[213] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 62.

Unfortunately for the young man, his search for definite answers will yield only more confusion and raise more questions. Indeed, this seems to be Madame de T…'s pedagogical method – constant, sustained destabilization. Speaking of the Comtesse is one of the primary weapons of destabilization in Madame de T…'s arsenal. When she begins to tell him about the Comtesse's cunning and her artfulness as an inconstant "Protée pour les formes" who "affecte tout et n'y met rien du sien," her discourse sends the young man into freewheeling confusion, intellectual and emotional.

> Ce qu'elle venait de me dire de l'amant que je lui connaissais, ce qu'elle me savait, ce voyage, la scène du carrosse, celle du banc de gazon, l'heure, tout cela me troublait; j'étais tour à tour emporté par l'amour-propre ou les désirs, et ramené par la réflexion. J'étais d'ailleurs trop ému pour me rendre compte de ce que j'éprouvais.[214]

He is so troubled that he loses track of where he is and where their walk is taking them. This is the state in which Madame de T… wishes to keep the young man, unable to find his footing, searching for meaning and consistently finding none.

As Thomas Kavanagh rightly points out in his own analysis of the novel, each "turn of the story brings with it an experience that fractures the preexisting categories of his understanding."[215] Just as he thinks he has achieved clear insight that allows him to define himself in terms of *conséquence*, one blindfold is replaced with another. Thus, just as he begins to entertain the possibility that he might be the new official lover of Madame de T…, the Marquis shows up (seemingly out of nowhere), shocking the young man out of his reveries of newfound status. The Marquis' revelation of the plot to confuse Monsieur de T… would seem

[214] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 46.
[215] Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance*, 194.

to have definitively "débrouiller le mystère de la veille, et de me donner la clef du reste," but even this new role is short-lived.[216] He learns that the Marquis is as clueless as the husband as to his companion's character, motivations, and affections.[217] In the end, no one's status is secured; all the while Madame de T… "nous jouait tous."[218] Madame de T…'s program of destabilization is not undertaken in malice or for purposes of perverse enjoyment, however. Rather, it appears to have a clear educational purpose, one whose character altering effects will ultimately benefit the Comtesse and modulate how the young man treats his mistress.

The narrator's severity of judgment and his need for *conséquence* has clearly been his undoing with respect to his relationship with the Comtesse. It is this, I suggest, that Madame de T… has sought to correct. Chief amongst the illusions Madame de T… shatters is the young man's confidence (perceived from the start) in the ultimate emotional and physical fidelity of his mistress. Her revelations about the Comtesse make it possible for the narrator to be unfaithful to her in turn and question the force of his ardor (which he does in his stroll in the gardens the next morning). But, in the long run at least, they are not meant to drive a wedge between the lovers; after all, Madame de T… sends him back to the Comtesse and assures him that she is worthy of his affections and attentions. Rather, Madame de T…'s program of destabilization seems to be focused on reshaping and managing the young man's expectations with respect to pleasure. In place of his constant fretting about status and *conséquence* (which, in turn, spawns negative

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[216] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 63.
[217] Indeed, the young man seems to take some amusement in pointing this out to the ever-oblivious Marquis. "Mais sais-tu que tu connais cette femme-là comme si tu étais son mari: vraiment, c'est à s'y tromper; et si je n'eusse pas soupé hier avec le veritable…" Denon, *PdL* (1812), 64.
[218] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 68.

characteristics such as jealousy and harshness), Madame de T… wishes to instill an appreciation for the pleasures of the moment, affairs *sans conséquence*, and an "amour de la liberté."[219] In effect, she disassociates significance from *conséquence*. Following their sexual escapades in the pavilion Madame de T… effectively forecasts both her lesson and the events to come in the *lendemain*:

> Quelle nuit délicieuse, dit-elle, nous venons de passer par l'attrait seul de ce plaisir, notre guide et notre excuse! Si des raisons, je le suppose, nous forçaient à nous séparer demain, notre bonheur, ignoré de toute la nature, ne nous laisserait, par exemple, aucun lien à dénouer…quelques regrets, dont un souvenir agréable serait le dédommagement… Et puis, au fait, du plaisir, sans toutes les lenteurs, le tracas et la tyrannie des procédés.[220]

That which makes their night special and full of pleasure is precisely its open-endedness, its ephemeral character, its spontaneity – it could end upon dawn of a new day (as it, in fact, does) or it could conceivably continue until another natural ending point is mutually reached. Theirs is an affair without expectations, without the tyrannical definitions imposed from without. In this scheme, fidelity, slavish devotion, duty, the polite pretensions of society ultimately serve as the antidote to pleasure, which is meant to be enjoyed *sans conséquence*. Madame de T… thus proposes another model of loving for the narrator and his Comtesse – enjoying the manifold pleasures of the relationship without imposing too many restrictions or trying to make her what she is not, namely, a devoted mistress and a quasi-spouse.

That which Madame de T… advocates is effectively, an affair without passion. Passion, as we have seen above, is unreliable, turbulent, all consuming, and overwhelming; it is an excess of

[219] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 53.
[220] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 53.

emotion that is not tempered by reason or delicacy. In social terms, too, passions runs counter to the ideal of self-control championed by the prescriptive literature on aristocratic comportment – one should be, as Jean Pic argues in his *Devoirs de la vie civile* (1681), "maître absolu de ses mouvements."[221] After all, as we have seen from seventeenth-century essays to La Mettrie and Mirabeau, a lack of moderation implies a kind of narcissism, an insensibility to the comfort and pleasures of others.

But a rejection of passion does not entail an outright rejection of emotion – an affair without *conséquence* is not an affair without meaning and affective content. Madame de T…'s teaching not only rejects passion but also the emotionally detached, unreflective mindset that typifies many stock libertine characters, such as Beauplaisir (*Fantomina*) or Clitandre (*La Nuit et le moment*). In contrast to this "classical" libertine archetype, the young hero of *Point de lendemain* is trained in emotional sensitivity; it is hoped, after all, that he will return to his lover with a greater appreciation of her (while avoiding the temptation of possessiveness). Additionally, while his night with Madame de T… is not to have a sequel, this is not to say that the affair is to be tossed aside as a meaningless *aventure*. Rather, Madame de T… clearly envisions that their mutual pleasure will live on in his memory as *un beau rêve*.

By suggesting that the Comtesse de… is worthy of his love and devotion and by asserting the values of *tendresse, délicatesse*, and *sensibilité*, Madame de T… re-asserts the importance of emotion, albeit controlled, refined, and moderated emotion. This is not to suggest that *Point de lendemain* is a "traditional" sentimental narrative (compared to, say, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle*

[221] Jean Pic, *Devoirs de la vie civile* (Paris: 1681), 25. Quoted in Dens, *L'Honnête homme et la critique du goût*, 27.

*Héloïse* or even Casanova's *Histoire de ma vie*); *Point de lendemain* is far too ironic a text for such heightened emotional expression. But, it is one in which there is a place for sentiment, which wins out over both turbulent passion and emotionally disassociated libertinism.

Having illustrated and clarified Madame de T…'s pedagogical mission vis-à-vis the narrator-protagonist, we can only ask if, at the end of his night, the narrator has learned his lesson. As I noted above, the final line of the novel could be read as casting doubt on the young man's ability to absorb Madame de T…'s teaching. The ellipsis points between the first part of the line "je cherchai bien la morale de toute cette aventure, et" and the second part, "je n'en trouvai point," indicate deep consideration without conclusion. Is he, then, so deep in confusion over what has transpired, so filled with doubt, that he can take nothing from his evening? Clearly, this is not the case, at least in the long run. The incipit reveals that some sentimental development has taken place – the man narrating is not the naïve young man of twenty of whom he speaks. But, furthermore, the very fact that the narrator cannot find a *morale* is, perhaps paradoxically, the very sign that he has learned something from Madame de T…

During the carriage ride from Paris, we might recall the wording Madame de T… uses to frame her reproach to the narrator for complaining about being *sans conséquence*. She responds, simply but firmly, "Point de morale." Her choice of words resonate remarkably with the enigmatic last line of the novella (as well as its title). Madame de T…'s interdiction against *morale* in the carriage is, first and foremost, a reproach to the young man for his moralizing pretensions. *Morale* is associated, as we see in the line that follows, with preachiness and seriousness, and is placed in direct opposition with the ability to amuse, to distract, and to revel in the moment. The narrator has failed to be *sensible* to the levity required of him; instead, he has

dared to inject petulance and a note of sourness and distrust. Instead of asking questions, he should be keeping her company and enjoying the scene (in silence, if necessary).

For readers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, *morale* would have had another connotation, that of the final lesson one finds at end of a fable (La Fontaine) or *conte de fée* (Perrault). The *morale* of a story very clearly spells out what moral lesson one is to take from the tale (as if it had not been clear before then). But Madame de T…, as we have seen, pointedly resists definition, preferring ambiguity and confusion as her means of imparting knowledge. *Point de morale* is thus an interdiction, not only against moralizing and preachiness, but against fixity, the clear definitions that play into creating *conséquence* (and thus damaging the potential for an experience to be truly pleasurable). If, at the end of his *aventure sans conséquence*, the narrator can announce that he has been unable to find the *morale* of his tale, we might say that he has in fact, learned something – a night can be pleasurable and significant without *conséquence*, without imposing an artificial *morale*.

**Conclusion – The morning after…**

The title of this chapter evokes Gustave Flaubert's novel, *L'Éducation sentimentale.* Both texts are essentially concerned with the formation and maturation of their respective young male protagonists (though that formation takes place over more than ten years in *L'Éducation sentimentale* and less than ten hours in *Point de lendemain*). We might say that they both chart a trajectory from passion to sentiment, from un-moderated, turbulent desire to *tendresse, délicatesse,* and *sensibilité*. The love and lust Frédéric Moreau feels for Madame Arnoux for

most of Flaubert's novel can only be described as mad passion, "La contemplation de cette femme l'énervait, comme l'usage d'un parfum trop fort. Cela descendait dans les profondeurs de son tempérament, et devenait presque une manière générale de sentir, un mode nouveau d'exister."[222] This résumé of Frédéric's emotional state with respect to Madame Arnoux is typical of what we find throughout the novel when the narrator reflects on emotions. The reader may note that Frédéric's emotions are overwhelming, swallowing his will and reason and unnerving him – he is passive; the emotions are active. The slightest (perceived) act on Madame Arnoux's part can send him from all-consuming adoration to all-consuming hatred, jealousy, and cruelty. By the end of the novel, however, his emotions have calmed; they are under his control. Violent passion has given way to respect, nostalgia, and sentiment. Through experience and maturation, he has reconciled himself to a moderated, reasonable love.

Likewise, the naïve, twenty-year old protagonist of *Point de lendemain* begins the narrative a man caught up in a turbulent passion for his mistress, the Comtesse de…; his love is inseparable from jealousy and possessiveness. Stepping into the carriage after his *nuit merveilleuse* in the company of Madame de T…, we are meant to assume that he will return to his mistress a better lover, one that is more sensitive and understanding. His affair with Madame de T…, however brief, has given him a template for how levity, voluptuous pleasure, sentiment, and memory can intermingle to create a *beau rêve*, providing significance that transcends the limits of *conséquence* and *morale*. Here, as in the cases of Mirabeau and La Mettrie from Chapter 3, moderation is the key. Moderation of desire, of emotions, of impulses is a

[222] Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1985), 119.

precondition for the enjoyment of higher pleasures but also a stable, happy love affair; it is the key to becoming a proper lover.

The comparison between *Point de lendemain* and Flaubert's novel is also instructive because while both texts chart sentimental educations, neither text is what we might call sentimental. As I noted above, one cannot (and should not try to) confuse *Point de lendemain* with sentimental novels like *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or those by Riccoboni, Charrière or Staël – heightened affect and emotional outbursts or oaths do not figure into the narrator's tale. What is remarkable about the young man's formation as a libertine lover, though, is that it features sentiment. Libertinage and sentiment are not at odds by novel's end; indeed, they seem to have joined together in a harmonious synthesis – a sentimental libertine.

This is a departure from the plot of most sentimental novels that feature rakes, roués, and libertines (such as Richardson's *Pamela*) or even earlier libertine novels that feature a formation in the ways of the world, such as Crébillon fils' *Les Égarements du coeur et de l'esprit* (1736) or Duclos' *Confessions du Comte de**** (1741). That is, as Robert Mauzi has argued, libertinage often constitutes "le principal épisode d'une éducation sentimentale et morale." More often than not, however, libertinage is not where the male protagonists end their lives: "Il se résout finalement dans une conversion au mariage et au bonheur."[223] Libertinage is a sign of immaturity; the adoption of sentiment and true love along with the rejection of youthful libertine exuberance, then, marks the maturation of the protagonist. This form of emplotment is precisely what the preface to *Les Égarements* anticipates:

[223] Mauzi, *L'Idée du bonheur*, 30.

> On verra dans ces mémoires un homme tel qu'ils sont presque tous dans une extrême jeunesse, simple d'abord et sans art, et ne connaissant pas encore le monde où il est obligé de vivre. La première et la seconde parties roulent sur cette ignorance et sur ses premières amours. C'est, dans les suivantes, un homme plein de fausses idées, et pétri de ridicules, et qui y est moins entraîné encore par lui-même, que par des personnes intéressées à lui corrompre le coeur, et l'esprit. On le verra enfin dans les dernières, rendu à lui-même, devoir toutes ses vertus à une femme estimable.[224]

The final parts of Crébillon's novel were never written, but the intended narrative arc provides us with a stark contrast between the development of Meilcour and that of Denon's young protagonist. Both men enter "dans le monde" at a young age (Meilcour is 17; the young man, 20) and are intended to undergo a sentimental transformation, but Denon's protagonist does not, at the end of his night with Madame de T…, reject libertinage in favor of sentiment.[225] Rather, Madame de T…'s lesson includes the incorporation of sentimental values into the libertine mindset and lifestyle. Neither Casanova (the other case of sentimental libertinism featured in this dissertation) nor the hero of *Point de lendemain* disavow libertinage – both appear unrepentant to the end. But, in both of these cases, libertinage is not at odds with sentiment; rather, it is enhanced and nuanced by it.

[224] Crébillon, *Les Égarements du coeur et de l'esprit*, 21.
[225] Crébillon, *Les Égarements du coeur et de l'esprit*, 23.

## Chapter 5: Libertinage as *Lieu de Mémoire* – The Libertine and the French Cultural Imaginary

" 'Nos grands-pères vivaient mieux. Pourquoi ne pas obéir à l'impulsion qui nous pousse?' L'amour, après tout, n'était pas en soi une chose si importante." – Flaubert, *L'Éducation Sentimentale* (1869)[226]

In Chapters 2-4, I excavated facets of libertinage generally ignored or forgotten in critical readings of the eighteenth-century libertine corpus. In opposition to libertines like Beauplaisir and Versac – unfeeling, unreflective, insensitive – the libertines I explored therein are creatures of memory, steeped in sentiment, and deeply consumed with proper comportment in love. I conclude my dissertation with an extended discussion of contemporary memorializations and idealizations of libertinage, and how libertinage has been used for political ends. What I argue, here, is that libertinage has been misunderstood and misappropriated within the modern imaginary. That is to say that only a certain strand of libertinage has been idealized and memorialized; the sentimental and reflective strand of libertinage I have sketched out in the previous chapters has been ignored or simply discarded in favor of a more masculinist, chauvinistic strand, one which conceives of the libertine as a figure of sexual liberation and a symbol of revolt.

I begin the chapter by returning to *Point de lendemain*, focusing on two modern rewritings of the novella, the first by Honoré de Balzac in the early nineteenth century, the second by Czech novelist Milan Kundera in the late twentieth century. Here, I use *Point de lendemain* as a case study for how eighteenth-century libertinage has been re-read and re-

[226] Flaubert, *L'Education sentimentale*, 443.

worked, how a pronounced nostalgia for the eighteenth century is balanced by a tendency to erase, minimize and forget many of the elements described in the first three chapters of this project. The second half of the chapter examines libertinage more generally within the contemporary French popular imagination, using two examples from mainstream French cinema, Gabriel Aghion's *Le Libertin* (2000) and Jean-Claude Brisseau's *Choses secrètes* (2002). I show how the two films each appropriate libertinage for their own ends. Although they do so in very different ways and for very different purposes, they both use libertinage to stand in for sexual liberation and emotional detachment, and co-opt it as a template to discuss the respective filmmakers' very contemporary concerns – female sexual power (Brisseau) and re-definitions of coupling (Aghion).

### Re-Writing a One Night Stand: Balzac and Kundera

"Celui qui n'a pas vécu au dix-huitième siècle avant la Révolution ne connaît pas la douceur de vivre et ne peut imaginer ce qu'il peut y avoir de bonheur dans la vie. C'est le siècle qui a forgé toutes les armes victorieuses contre cet insaisissable adversaire qu'on appelle l'ennui. L'Amour, la Poésie, la Musique, le Théâtre, la Peinture, l'Architecture, la Cour, les Salons, les Parcs et les Jardins, la Gastronomie, les Lettres, les Arts, les Sciences, tout concourait à la satisfaction des appétits physiques, intellectuels et même moraux, au raffinement de toutes les voluptés, de toutes les élégances et de tous les plaisirs." – Talleyrand[227]

"Le XVIIIe siècle a été certainement le plus tentateur et le plus séducteur des siècles, car il a promis à la fois satisfaction à toutes grandeurs et à toutes les faiblesses de l'humanité; il l'a en même temps élevée et énervée, flattant tour à tour ses plus nobles sentiments et ses plus terrestres penchants, l'enivrant d'espérances sublimes et la berçant de molles complaisances. Aussi a-t-il fait pêle-mêle des utopistes et des égoïstes, des fanatiques et des sceptiques, des enthousiastes et des incrédules moqueurs, enfants très-divers du même temps, mais tous charmés de leur temps et d'eux-mêmes, et jouissant ensemble de leur commune ivresse à la veille du chaos." – François Guizot[228]

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[227] Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, *La Confession de Talleyrand: 1754-1838* (Paris: L. Sauvaitre, 1891), 57-58.
[228] François Guizot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps*, vol. 1 (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1858), 6-7.

Talleyrand and François Guizot are towering figures of nineteenth-century French political culture. Talleyrand played vital administrative and diplomatic roles in every regime from the Revolution to the July Monarchy; Guizot served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1840-1848 (essentially *de facto* prime minister) and was crucially involved in excavating a French political culture from the trauma, social fragmentation, and political disarray wrought by the Revolution. And yet, though both men looked forward in their political lives, they both clearly looked backward with nostalgia and longing to an age that had been irretrievably lost, the *ancien régime*. This is particularly curious in the case of Guizot, who is, in many ways, a "classic" figure of the nineteenth century (bourgeois, austere, moralistic, liberal); he is perhaps the person one would *least* expect to have any kind of sympathy for life in the *ancien régime* (a world, by the way, that he would have barely experienced, having been born in 1787). By contrast, Talleyrand was a *bon vivant* (to say the least) and remembered well what life was like before the Revolution (he was born in 1754 and was active in *ancien régime* politics and high society from Louis XV forward).

The nostalgia displayed so clearly in the quotes from Guizot and Talleyrand was by no means unique to them. Indeed, their utterances were only a small part of a larger nineteenth-century nostalgia for the *ancien régime*, one that extended from figures like Félicité de Genlis to the Goncourt brothers to perhaps the greatest nostalgist of them all, Marcel Proust. As we see in the passages cited above, for Guizot and Talleyrand, nostalgia was not for the political system or institutions of the *ancien régime* but for its *moeurs* and sociability. We might note, as well, that

both quotes also positively highlight the sexual *mores* of the *ancien régime* – Talleyrand joyfully recalls the century's "satisfaction des appétits physiques" and the refinement of *volupté*; Guizot, for his part, refers to the eighteenth century as a great seducer/seductress, appealing to all the "faiblesses de l'humanité," including "ses plus terrestres penchants." The eighteenth century, thus, became synonymous with a *douceur de vivre*, a relaxed moral tone, learned and witty conversation, polished manners, and even sexual pleasure.[229]

The 1812 version of *Point de lendemain* clearly fits (and plays) into the era's pervasive nostalgia for the *ancien régime moeurs*. The narrator, after all, tenderly reflects on his youth under the dwindling years of *ancien régime* – both the twenty year-old that he was and the society in which he circulated are gone. As to content, *Point de lendemain* is piquant and light, exploring and celebrating, as I have shown, levity in love and the present enjoyment of sensual pleasure. Finally, its ending is quite literally amoral, reveling in the moral ambiguity of the novel's characters and their playfulness.

However, at the time Denon was re-writing *Point de lendemain* the world he was describing had already ended – the Revolution had, of course, disrupted the aristocratic *douceur de vivre* depicted therein. Some of the society's most notorious playboys, libertines, and *roués* had either become patriots (Sade and Mirabeau) or pious reactionaries (the Comte d'Artois, younger brother of Louis XVI and, later, last Bourbon monarch, Charles X). Though Napoléon

[229] For a good discussion of nineteenth-century nostalgia for eighteenth-century sociability, see chapter 1 of Antoine Lilti's excellent study of salon culture, *Le Monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005). I am also indebted to Sarah Horowitz at the University of California, Berkeley for her insights and expertise with respect to early nineteenth-century French sociability and, in particular, François Guizot and the political culture of post-Revolutionary France.

(Denon's greatest patron) had reinstituted aristocracy beginning in 1804 and sponsored the resurgence of an aristocratic sociability that would flourish during the Bourbon Restoration, he also bears responsibility for the codification of French common law (the Code Napoléon or Code civil), which, in turn, led to a reassertion of paternal authority; at the same time, distinctions between public and private as well as male and female roles in those spheres were sharpened.[230] In particular, from the time of the Revolution forward, we can see a tendency to reassert the value of the family (and, in particular, the nuclear family) as the defining, constitutive element of French society. Thus, at the same time that *ancien régime moeurs* were being memorialized and lauded, they were also being destroyed. A key element that was being lost was the fluidity, the levity, the pleasure without *conséquence* so championed by *Point de lendemain* through the character of Madame de T…

We can perhaps best see this tension playing out in another re-writing of *Point de lendemain*, this at the hand of Honoré de Balzac, who, in his *Physiologie du mariage* (1826) not only inserts a substantially re-edited 1812 version but makes Madame de T… a recurring character in the meditations. While praising *Point de lendemain* as "une délicieuse peinture des moeurs du siècle dernier," Balzac is quick to turn it to his own devices, this in the service of

[230] For the resurgence of aristocratic sociability under the Empire and the Restoration, see Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). As for the ongoing discussion of gender and the split between public and private in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries, see, for example, Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*; Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

critically analyzing the institution of marriage and some of the vices rotting it to the core.[231] *Point de lendemain* is re-written (supposedly to rid it of "certains détails" judged "trop érotiques pour l'époque actuelle") to illustrate and examine the perfidy of women, specifically with respect to their "principes de stratégie" for duping their husbands with other men.[232] Madame de T… becomes the "image vivante de ma Méditation," a perfect illustration of "l'époque où la femme avait atteint à un haut degré de perfection vicieuse."[233] She is no longer tenderly painted as a careful educator of lovers, but reverts in some senses to her initial characterization of 1777 – a scheming, immoral, vicious woman. This is revealed most clearly at the end of the tale. I quote it in its entirety below, redlined against the version of 1812 (deleted 1812 text is crossed out; Balzac's edits are underlined):

> 'Adieu, monsieur. Je vous dois un bien grand plaisir ~~bien des plaisirs~~; mais je vous ai payé d'un beau rêve!... dit-elle en me regardant avec une incroyable finesse. Mais adieu. Et pour toujours. Vous aurez cueilli une fleur solitaire née à l'écart, et que nul homme…' Elle s'arrêta, mit sa pensée dans un soupir; mais elle réprima l'élan de cette vive sensibilité; et, souriant avec malice : -- 'La comtesse vous aime, dit-elle. ~~Dans ce moment, votre amour vous rappelle; celle qui en est l'objet en est digne.~~ Si je lui ai dérobé quelques transports, je vous rends à elle moins ignorant ~~plus tendre, plus délicat, et plus sensible~~. Adieu, ~~encore une fois. Vous êtes charmant… Ne~~ ne me brouillez pas avec mon amie ~~la Comtesse~~.' Elle me serra la main et me quitta. ~~Je montai dans la voiture qui m'attendait. Je cherchai bien la morale de toute cette aventure, et… je n'en trouvai point~~.[234]

Balzac's edits to Denon's original text are both extensive and dramatic. The most striking edit is the deletion of the novella's morally ambiguous and enigmatic final line, an infamous fixture of both the 1777 and 1812 versions (and even the pornographic *La Nuit merveilleuse*): "Je cherchai

[231] Honoré de Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 320.
[232] Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage*, 320 and 297.
[233] Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage*, 377 and 304.
[234] Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage*, 319; Denon, *PdL* (1812), 68-9.

bien la morale de toute cette aventure, et… je n'en trouvai point." As I discussed in the previous chapter, the final line is essential to apprehending the meaning of the narrative – it signals that the narrator has absorbed Madame de T…'s lessons and has developed into a tender and sensitive lover who seeks significance unfettered by *conséquence*, that is, "sans toutes les lenteurs, le tracas et la tyrannie des procédés."[235] Balzac's omission has the effect of shifting the very meaning of *Point de lendemain* from sentimental education to moral didacticism. In effect, *morale* has been re-asserted in 1826; the light-hearted pleasure *sans conséquence* championed in 1812 has been replaced with the fixed meaning of a moral tale.

Balzac leaves the reader no room to interpret Madame de T…'s actions with respect to the young hero as anything less than cruel, immoral, and self-serving. Any sentiment or tenderness that might have been detected or conveyed in Madame de T…'s parting words to the narrator in the 1812 version has been entirely evacuated. Notably, Madame de T… sends him back to his lover, the Comtesse, "moins ignorant," not "plus tendre, plus délicat, et plus sensible." Her aim is not to make the narrator a better lover for her friend and to make him more sensitive and understanding, but to strip away his ignorance and to reveal to him the true and perfidious nature of women. Moreover, this is not done for the narrator's benefit or edification but as part of a way of twisting the knife she has inserted by revealing that he has betrayed his lover the Comtesse, a woman who truly loves him. "Sourirant avec malice," Madame de T… reveals herself to be every bit the marble statue her official lover, the Marquis, insists she is.[236]

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[235] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 53.

[236] In every extant version of *Point de lendemain* (including Balzac's re-writing), the Marquis reveals that he can cite but one fault with his lover, "La nature, en lui donnant tout, lui a refusé cette flamme divine qui met le comble à

All that she has suggested in baroque sentimental terms to the narrator about being "une fleur solitaire née à l'écart" is artifice, a pose adopted to get men to perform for her pleasure. If any moral development has taken place in the young man by narrative's end, it is only that the final blindfold has been lifted and he sees clearly that all women are scheming, self-interested harpies. Balzac's *Point de lendemain* is thus not a tale of sentimental education but of a young man's betrayal at the hands of a malicious woman and his ultimate disillusionment in the existence of female virtue and the possibility of love and sentiment.

Balzac's added passage effectively aligns the character of Madame de T… with that of another scheming seductress of eighteenth-century literature, the Marquise de Merteuil. She manipulates the young man, her official lover and her husband – as Merteuil does Valmont and Danceny – for her own pleasure and to assert power. And, like Laclos, Balzac does not let his heroine get away with her crimes scot-free. Madame de T… reappears later in the *Physiologie du mariage*, along with her husband, in a dialogue representing "la paix conjugale" (Meditation XXIX). Here, she is depicted as a desiccated shrew "d'une cinquantaine d'années," physically wasted and laughably dressed (she "ressemblait assez à une vieille actrice de province").[237] To paraphrase Letter 175 of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Madame de T…'s soul "était sur sa figure" – moral dissolution has ravaged her and stripped her of any pretensions of decency she may have had in her pre-Revolutionary dalliances.[238] As Tim Farrant has noted, Madame de T…'s reappearance in *Physiologie du mariage* (as a sort of flesh and blood character instead of merely

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tous ses bienfaits: elle fait tout naître, tout sentir et n'éprouve rien. C'est un marbre," Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage,* 317.

[237] Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage,* 377.

[238] Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, 385.

a literary example), "ruined by passion and age, reinforces [Balzac's] moral lesson."[239] That is, the institution of marriage is in a deplorable state, and the libertinage and illicit, extra-marital sexual appetites of women (a fixture of the eighteenth century, according to Balzac) are partly to blame.

Although Balzac clearly appreciates the artistry and style of *Point de lendemain*, its message is something that seems to elude him. The moral ambiguity and sentimentalism central to Denon's text is excised and forgotten, the basic narrative dragooned into the service of Balzac's larger moral project, a critique of the institution of marriage and the nature of women in the modern age. *Point de lendemain*, in Balzac's hands, is molded into a tale that supports, illustrates, and confirms Balzac's (and, to an extent, the early nineteenth century's) anxieties about the role of women in French society.

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Like Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, *Point de lendemain* has been taken as an iconic text of eighteenth-century *mores*. Besides Balzac's re-writing of the tale in *Physiologie du mariage*, Denon's novella was also the subject of Louis Malle's 1959 film *Les Amants* and, most recently, has been blended into a fictional account of Denon's life in Lee Langley's novel *A Conversation on the Quai Voltaire* (2006). Arguably, the most famous modern retelling of the novella, however, is to be found in Milan Kundera's *La Lenteur* (1994), that author's first novel written originally in French. Echoing Balzac's sentiment that *Point de lendemain* represents "une délicieuse peinture" of eighteenth-century *moeurs*, Kundera deploys Denon's novella because it "compte aujourd'hui parmi les ouvrages littéraires qui semblent représenter le mieux

[239] Tim Farrant, *Balzac's Shorter Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 45.

l'art et l'esprit du XVIIIe siècle."[240] If Balzac actively participates in the forgetting of eighteenth-century *moeurs*, however, Kundera's novel is a meditation on their loss (as of the late twentieth century).[241]

*La Lenteur* interweaves several plot lines set in the late twentieth century with chapters advancing the story of Denon's unnamed protagonist (now, the Chevalier) and his *aventure d'une nuit* with Madame de T. The modern storylines take place over the course of one night (mirroring the Chevalier's night), ostensibly at the same chateau described in *Point de lendemain*. Now, of course, it is a luxury hotel. *Point de lendemain* is used in *La Lenteur*, as it was in *Physiologie du mariage*, as a case study to meditate upon, theorize, analyze, and critique French *mores* in the modern era. Specifically, juxtaposing *Point de lendemain* against the modern narratives provides the narrator-author (Milan) with a way to critique the narcissism, abstraction, shallowness, and obsession with speed that he believes characterizes post-industrial, technocratic modernity.

For Kundera, the eighteenth-century libertinage represented in Denon's text is an ideal, an Eden of pleasure and sociability from which modern man has been cast and to which he can never return; in short, it is a utopia. The memory of that hedonist, bygone era "tremble sous le plafond" in *La Lenteur* but it proves fleeting and always just beyond reach.[242] The chateau and its gardens become a linking point between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries and serves as a poignant illustration of both Kundera's wistful sentimentalism for the eighteenth century and its

[240] Kundera, *La Lenteur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 16.
[241] For another account of Kundera's appropriation of eighteenth-century libertinage in *La Lenteur*, see Marie-Ève Draper, *Libertinage et donjuanisme chez Kundera* (Montreal and Paris: Editions Balzac, 2002).
[242] Kundera, *La Lenteur,* 21.

loss – it has been literally bulldozed and remodeled. Upon arrival at the chateau, Milan and his wife, Véra, are warned that many things have changed since their last visit, including new conference spaces and a fine swimming pool: "Curieux de la voir, nous traversons un hall très clair, de grandes baies donnant sur le parc. Au bout du hall, un large escalier descend vers la piscine, grande, carrelée, avec un plafond vitré. Véra me rappelle: 'La dernière fois, à cet endroit il y avait un petit jardin de roses.'"[243] The encroachment of the modern is felt even more acutely when they decide to take a turn in the chateau's gardens, "Les terrasses vertes descendent en direction de la rivière, la Seine. C'est beau, nous sommes émerveillés, désireux de faire une longue balade. Après quelques minutes une route surgit où filent des voitures; nous rebroussons chemin."[244] Milan and Véra's stroll is obviously intended to evoke (and stand in stark contrast to) the Chevalier's post-dinner walk with Madame de T…, described thusly by Denon's narrator:

> La nuit était superbe; elle laissait entrevoir les objets, et semblait ne les voiler que pour donner plus d'essor à l'imagination. Le château ainsi que les jardins, appuyés contre une montagne, descendaient en terrasse jusque sur les rives de la Seine; et ses sinuosités multipliées formaient de petites îles agrestes et pittoresques, qui variaient les tableaux et augmentaient le charme de ce beau lieu. Ce fut sur la plus longue de ces terrasses que nous nous promenâmes d'abord : elle était couverte d'arbres épais. On s'était remis de l'espèce de persiflage qu'on venait d'essuyer; et tout en se promenant, on me fit quelques confidences. Les confidences s'attirent, j'en faisais à mon tour, elles devenaient toujours plus intimes et plus intéressantes.[245]

Whereas Madame de T… and the Chevalier are able to use the walk as part of the first act of their lovemaking, Milan and Véra have no such luck – love is blocked by the sound and sight of cars zooming past on a nearby freeway; the sweet images of slow, romantic mutual seduction in

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[243] Kundera, *La Lenteur,* 20-21.
[244] Kundera, *La Lenteur*, 21.
[245] Denon, *PdL* (1812), 41.

picturesque nature are shattered. The Garden of Eden has been demolished, replaced by the crassness of technology, the demon of speed. By contrast, Madame de T… and the Chevalier's path is not obstructed; theirs is a world before the Fall when slowness reigned. Kundera seems to sigh with resignation and regret at this thought, mournfully noting, "ce n'est pas comme aujourd'hui où une jeune fille peut dire, tu le veux, moi je le veux, ne perdons pas de temps! Pour eux [Madame de T… and the Chevalier], cette franchise demeure derrière une barrière qu'ils ne peuvent franchir en dépit de toutes leurs convictions libertines. […] Tout est arrangé, fabriqué, artificiel, tout est mis en scène, rien n'est franc, ou, pour le dire autrement, tout est art; en ce cas : art de prolonger le suspense, encore mieux: art de se tenir le plus longuement possible en état d'excitation."[246]

The utter incompatibility between the eighteenth- and twentieth-century worldviews is best illustrated in the closing chapters of *La Lenteur*, when the two periods briefly collide on the "morning after." Kundera has one of his modern characters, Vincent, meet and interact with the Chevalier as both are leaving the chateau after their respective nights. After getting over their mutual shock at seeing each other's anachronistic costumes, they each try to convey to one another that they have each just spent "a marvelous night." Vincent, however, who has not spent a marvelous night in the slightest (indeed, his attempts at seduction and lovemaking can only be described as comical, shameful, and embarrassingly unsuccessful) is not interested in exchanging stories or listening to his eighteenth-century visitor. He is only interested in speaking, in talking over and past the Chevalier, in drowning out the night before with his own shaky voice.

"Tu es vraiment du XXe siècle?"

[246] Kundera, *La Lenteur,* 45 and 48.

> "Mais oui, mon vieux. Il se passe des choses extraordinaires dans ce siècle. La liberté des moeurs. Je viens de vivre, je le répète, une nuit formidable."
>
> "Moi aussi," dit encore une fois le chevalier, et il s'apprête à lui raconter la sienne.
>
> "Une nuit curieuse, très curieuse, incroyable," répète l'homme au casque qui fixe sur lui un regard lourd d'insistance.
>
> Le chevalier voit dans ce regard l'opiniâtre envie de parler. Quelque chose le dérange dans cette opiniâtreté. Il comprend que cette impatience de parler est en même temps un implacable désintérêt à écouter. S'étant heurté à cette envie de parler, le chevalier perd aussitôt le goût de dire quoi que ce soit et, du coup, ne voit plus aucune raison de prolonger la rencontre.
>
> Il éprouve une nouvelle vague de fatigue. Il se caresse le visage de la main et sent l'odeur d'amour que madame de T. a laissée sur ses doigts. Cette odeur provoque en lui de la nostalgie et il désire être seul dans la chaise pour lentement, rêveusement, se faire porter vers Paris.[247]

Communication between these ambassadors of two separate worldviews is proven to be impossible and futile. The Chevalier is offended by Vincent's crude manners and awkward speech; Vincent is offended that he is not being listened to with due respect (owed to him supposedly as the older, more technologically and morally advanced of the two men). Time, thus, once again diverges to show the Chevalier and Vincent departing in ways indicative of their particular eras – the Chevalier ambles slowly, wishing to prolong pleasure and ensure that the memory of his truly marvelous night is captured; Vincent speeds off on his motorcycle, eager to forget, to erase his thoroughly awful night from memory: "il désire sa moto, il est plein d'amour pour sa moto, pour sa moto sur laquelle il oubliera tout, sur laquelle il s'oubliera lui-même."[248]

Balzac and Kundera's use of *Point de lendemain* in their respective narratives is instructive in at least two respects. First, they illustrate the extent to which eighteenth-century

[247] Kundera, *La Lenteur*, 179-180.
[248] Kundera, *La Lentuer,* 182.

*moeurs* have been forgotten and erased in the decades and centuries following the Revolution. Balzac's retelling of *Point de lendemain* would seem to actively participate in their erasure; Kundera's retelling mourns the loss of the socio-sexual utopia long past its demise. In both cases, the nuances of sentiment at the heart of Denon's text have been thrown out in favor of tales full of *morale* and *conséquence*.

Secondly, they show how the specter of eighteenth-century libertinage can be co-opted to rehearse, confront, and examine the *mores* of nineteenth- through turn of the twenty-first-century French society. In Kundera, in particular, we can see libertinage upheld as an ideal to which modern society (with its pretensions to sexual and social liberation) can only dare and hope to aspire. Kundera uses a re-telling of Denon's novella to put in perspective the emptiness of modern society and the shallowness of its pleasures – its obsession with speed, with fame and public display, with appearance. Kundera's twentieth century is a "society of the spectacle" (to co-opt Guy Debord's term), a stage crammed with dancers garishly preening and strutting for attention, acclaim, and approval. The epicurean hedonism of eighteenth-century libertinage, on the other hand, is presented as a forever-lost utopia of contemplation, slowness, arousal, and pleasure without strings attached. In the following section, as I broaden the scope of analysis to consider eighteenth-century libertinage in the French cultural imaginary more generally, we shall see both of these tendencies playing out.

### The *Splendid* Eighteenth Century: Libertinage on Film

As we saw in the last section, both Balzac and Kundera (at least implicitly) view the eighteenth century as a foundational moment for modern French socio-sexual practices. Libertinage, in particular, is seen as a reference point in the modern sexual imaginary,

particularly with respect to a politics of liberation. Vincent, we are told by *La Lenteur*'s narrator, "porterait comme un insigne sur le revers de sa veste le profil du marquis de Sade."[249] He references Sade (and the libertinage he represents) as a sort of patron saint in his (ultimately, failed) seduction of Julie, "Jadis, dans ces châteaux, il y avait des orgies. Le XVIIIe siècle, tu sais. Sade. *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*."[250] For dix-huitièmistes used to thinking of Sade as an important, though aberrant, figure within the libertine canon, Vincent's idealization of the "divine Marquis" has a certain irony to it. The violence of the Sadean narrative is haphazardly grafted onto the separate and tonally different *libertinage mondain* tradition that *Point de lendemain* figures into. In lumping Sade in with Denon, Vincent effectively erases the difference between the diverse and divergent strains of libertine textuality and emplotment. The unfettered, triumphal, and turbulent libertinage of Sade is held up as opposed to the libertinage of Denon, La Mettrie, Mirabeau, and Casanova, which argues for restraint, moderation, and sentiment.

Moreover, when Vincent finally has the opportunity to meet a true eighteenth-century libertine at the end of the novel, he makes a point of citing the moral progress that has taken place since the eighteenth century, "Il se passe des choses extraordinaires dans ce siècle. La liberté des moeurs."[251] The Chevalier, in Vincent's eyes, represents the beginning of a movement of sexual liberation that was only (and could only be) completed in the twentieth century. Kundera is not alone in seeing eighteenth-century libertinage as a kind of heritage moment for French socio-sexual culture. In this section, I begin to discuss the libertine heritage as a larger cultural phenomenon at the turn of the twenty-first century.

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[249] Kundera, *La Lenteur*, 18.
[250] Kundera, *La Lenteur*, 107.
[251] Kundera, *La Lenteur,* 175.

In the introduction to his critical study of libertine literature, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, Michel Delon suggests that: "Notre époque ne cesse de chercher son reflet dans le libertinage d'il y a deux siècles."[252] Nowhere is this astute and provocative statement better in evidence than in contemporary French mainstream cinema. I take as case studies two films, the first a critical and commercial failure, the second a critical and commercial success – *Le Libertin* (2000), directed by Gabriel Aghion, and *Choses secrètes* (2002), directed by Jean-Claude Brisseau. Both of these films represent, participate in, and meditate upon what post-colonial critic Panivong Norindr calls a "phantasmatic world."[253] That is, at least implicitly, these films reflect and engage a historical fiction of eighteenth-century libertinage that has become engrained in French cultural memory. Although the two films could not be any more different in tone, message, style, or generic heritage, they both posit the eighteenth century as a starting point for framing discussions of contemporary French sexual politics. But, as they do so, they rely on a narrow definition of libertinage, one that stresses liberation, decadent physical pleasure, and emotional disassociation as opposed to sentiment, restraint, and moderation. That is to say that they adopt a more masculinist strand of eighteenth-century libertinage as their ideal rather than the sentimental and reflective one discussed in Chapters 2-4 of this dissertation. I will turn first to a discussion of Aghion's comedic period film, *Le Libertin*.

Perhaps related to the bicentenary of the French Revolution in 1989, eighteenth-century France has been a popular and frequently depicted subject of a great many films produced within the last fifteen years, in both Hollywood and Europe. Since 1990, at least one film set in the *ancien régime* has been in production per year. The films have run the gamut of the period

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[252] Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, 9.
[253] Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film and Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 133.

film's sub-genres: adaptations of seventeenth and eighteenth-century novels, plays, or songs (*Fanfan la tulipe,* dir. Gérard Krawczyk 2003); interpretations of specific historical events or people (*L'Anglaise et le duc*, dir. Eric Rohmer 2002); and period dramas that evoke the "sense" or "mood" of the period without reference to definable historical events (*Ridicule*, dir. Patrice Leconte 1996). Many of these films have featured libertine characters or have been based on libertine texts (the recent adaptations of Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* being only the most obvious examples).[254] All of these productions have been very well funded with high production values and high-profile actors, directors, and screenwriters attached to them. Gabriel Aghion's *Le Libertin*, based on Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's critically hailed stage play of the same title, fits squarely within this rich period film tradition.

The libertine of the film's title is Denis Diderot (1713-1784), *philosophe* and editor-in-chief of *L'Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751-1772), played by Vincent Perez. The film's action takes place at the country chateau of the Baron d'Holbach and his wife (an insatiable glutton and gourmand portrayed by Josiane Balasko), where Diderot and the printers of the *Encyclopédie* are trying to evade the ever-searching eyes of the police and a conservative cardinal (Michel Serrault). They have set up shop in an abandoned room adjacent to an old chapel on the grounds (the only means of access is a secret door from a confessional booth). Joining Diderot and his family at the d'Holbach estate

[254] In fact, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* has been adapted for the screen a staggering six times. Of those six, only two could properly be called French productions, Roger Vadim's classic *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1959), based on a screenplay by Laclos scholar Roger Vailland, and a television miniseries produced for TV1 (dir. Dayan, 2003). Like Vadim's adaptation, Dayan's is set in 1950s and 1960s France rather than in the *ancien régime*. Three of the adaptations are Anglo-American, *Dangerous Liaisons* (dir. Frears, 1989); *Valmont* (dir. Forman, 1990); and *Cruel Intentions* (dir. Kumble, 2000). A notable recent addition to the *Liaisons dangereuses* franchise is a Korean adaptation that transposes the novel's action to nineteenth-century Korea, entitled *Untold Scandal* (dir. Lee Je Yong, 2003). As for other films that prominently feature libertines and libertinage, I would cite the aforementioned *Ridicule* (1996), as well as *The Night and the Moment* (dir. Tatò, 1995); *The Triumph of Love* (dir. Peploe, 2001); *Sade* (dir. Jacquot, 2000); *La Nuit de Varennes* (dir. Scola, 1982); *Le Pacte des loups* (dir. Gans, 2001); and *Casanova* (dir. Hallstrom, 2006).

is a small group of *philosophes*, aristocrats, and pleasure seekers, including a mysterious portraitist, Anna-Dorothea Therbouche (Fanny Ardant). The chateau thus becomes a sort of New Cytherea (as envisioned in the great rococo genre paintings of Boucher, Fragonard, and Watteau), where pleasure and freethinking reign supreme.

The plot of the film is constructed around two anecdotes from Diderot's life: a portrait for which he posed nude and a lacuna in the *Encyclopédie*.[255] Sometime in 1767, Diderot sat for a portrait to be painted by the Prussian artist Anna-Dorothea Therbouche. His account of this event is included as part of his review of Therbouche's work in the *Salon de 1767*, from which I quote below:

> Lorsque la tête fut faite, il était question du col, et le haut de mon vêtement le cachait, ce qui dépitait un peu l'artiste. Pour faire cesser ce dépit, je passai derrière un rideau; je me déshabillai, et je parus devant elle, en modèle d'académie. Je n'aurais pas osé vous le proposer, me dit-elle; mais vous avez bien fait et je vous en remercie. J'étais nu, mais tout nu. Elle me peignait, et nous causions avec une simplicité et une innocence digne des premiers siècles. Comme depuis le péché d'Adam, on ne commande pas à toutes les parties de son corps comme à son bras, et qu'il en a qui veulent, quand le fils d'Adam ne veut pas, et qui ne veulent pas, quand le fils d'Adam voudrait bien; dans le cas de cet accident, je me serais rappelé le mot de Diogène au jeune lutteur, mon fils; ne crains rien; je ne suis pas si méchant que celui-là.[256]

A relatively minor, though comical, episode in Diderot's writing becomes a central event in *Le Libertin*.[257] In Schmitt's adaptation of this anecdote there is an obvious sexual attraction

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[255] Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt and Gabriel Aghion, Liner Notes, *Le Libertin*, DVD, directed by Gabriel Aghion (2000; France: TVA International, 2001).

[256] Denis Diderot, *Salon de 1767* in *Oeuvres complètes*, Tome XVI (Paris: Hermann, 1990), 374-375.

[257] Because there are no other extant accounts of the meeting, especially from Therbouche herself, we cannot corroborate the truth of Diderot's claims. Her portrait of Diderot was finished around 1767, though it is no longer extant (the only evidence we have of the painting are prints after the portrait made by Pierre-François Bertonnier in the early nineteenth century). We know that she was fairly well known in the artistic circles of Europe for her portraits. As her long obituary of 1782 attests, she was known especially as a woman of considerable learning and as a member of the literati. Nothing we know of her, though, would lead us to believe that she would have responded favorably to the philosophe's erection, as Diderot suggests. Moreover, Schmitt and Aghion style Therbouche as a hack artist, a thief, and a spy; she certainly was none of those things. As Bernadette Fort points out, the film is "grossly unfaithful to Diderot's text and even more unjust to Therbusch's art," driving home "the

between Therbouche and Diderot from their first meeting. Additionally, Schmitt styles Therbouche as a hack artist, a thief, and a spy for the cardinal. Her desire to paint Diderot is a ruse so that she may gain his confidence such that he will reveal to her the location of the clandestine press where the *Encyclopédie* is being printed.

The second anecdote references a curious omission from the *Encyclopédie*, an article on Virtue that was planned in the prospectus for the project but was apparently never written. The plot of the film hinges upon Diderot's inability to pen an article on *Morale*. He is torn by contradictory impulses. On the one hand, as a *philosophe* and a proponent of the unencumbered expression of natural impulses he wishes to write an article that defines *morale* as whatever maximizes pleasure. On the other hand, faced with his rebellious, adolescent daughter (who has read enough of her father's writing that she has absorbed his thoughts on sexual permissiveness), he feels obliged to define *morale* conservatively in terms of that which ensures the continued existence of the early modern French marital economy. His only means of resolving this contradiction is to evade the question altogether. He directs his assistant to write beside the term the following entry: "Voir Ethique." But, the article on *éthique* was never written either and beside that term, the printed entry is "Voir Morale."[258] As at the end of *Point de lendemain*, *morale* is rejected in favor of ambiguity – in the reader's continuous flipping back and forth between volumes of the *Encylopédie* to seek clarity in this apparent contradiction, argues Perez's Diderot, a space for reflection will be created.

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misogynous subtext of Diderot's review: the reduction of the woman artist to one basic denominator, her gender, here equated with her sexual drives," Fort, "Indicting the Woman Artist: Diderot, *Le Libertin*, and Anna Dorothea Therbusch," *Selected Proceedings from the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23 (2004): 29.

[258] In point of fact, there are articles on *morale* and *éthique* in the published *Encylopédie*. Schmitt's departure from historical fact is made to achieve maximum comic effect.

If Perez's Diderot cannot commit to a definition of *morale*, it is this same inability to commit that becomes central to his – and, by extension, the film's – definition of libertinage. Near the end of the film, Diderot goes to a bathhouse on the chateau's grounds with his disconsolate assistant, Abraham, in order to relax after a particularly trying day (not) writing the article on *Morale*. While the men receive oral sex from two women in the pool, Diderot advises his friend, "Soyez léger, Abraham. Abandonne ton esprit à son libertinage!" The dialogue in this scene is taken from the first few lines of *Le Neveu de Rameau*, when the narrator (Moi) relates how he debates politics, philosophy, art, and matters of love with himself while walking in the gardens of the Palais-Royal. In doing so, he explains, "J'abandonne mon esprit à tout son libertinage. Je le laisse maître de suivre la première idée sage ou folle qui se présente, comme on voit dans l'allée de Foy nos jeunes dissolus marcher sur les pas d'une courtisane à l'air éventé, au visage riant, à l'oeil vif, au nez retroussé, quitter celle-ci pour une autre, les attaquant toutes et ne s'attachant à aucune. Mes pensées, ce sont mes catins."[259] To abandon oneself to libertinage, according to Diderot's narrator, is to subscribe to a philosophy of non-attachment. Interpreted charitably, one is to be open-minded, but this open-mindedness borders on capriciousness and flightiness.

For Diderot's narrator, libertinage only seems to directly apply to the realm of thoughts and ideas, but in screenwriter Schmitt's interpretation, both in *Le Libertin* and in his prior philosophical work on Diderot (upon which *Le Libertin* is based), the doctrine of non-attachment applies just as equally to deeds as it does to ideas. In his evaluation of Diderot's work, *La Philosophie de la séduction*, Schmitt argues (drawing upon the same lines from *Le Neveu de Rameau*), "Le *libertinage* doit, paradoxalement, devenir le paradigme de la pensée. Liberté et

[259] Denis Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1984), 15

inconstance. Plaisir et renouvellement. Curiosité. Il faut passer de femme en femme, d'idée en idée. Aucune hypothèse ne sera définitive. Tout sens n'est qu'un sens provisoire. Il n'y a pas de liaisons éternelles."[260] In the passage from *Le Neveu de Rameau*, the identification between ideas and women (*les catins*) is figurative; the pursuit of women is an allegory used to explain the narrator's inconstancy with respect to ideas. But Schmitt takes the narrator's philosophy a step further, collapsing the distinction between thoughts and actions. Libertinage, here, is not only a doctrine of non-attachment and inconstancy with respect to ideas, but is also one that applies to personal relations – pleasure must be constantly renewed, both in the pursuit of ideas and of women; there are no such things as lasting relationships (*liaisons éternelles*). Essentially, this becomes the conception of libertinage deployed within *Le Libertin*.

In a crucial scene midway through the film, the Cardinal vents his frustrations against what he perceives as Diderot's abhorrent values and lack of morality, accusing him of being a libertine (evidently, the eighteenth century's equivalent of "the L-word"). Diderot rises to the occasion, accepting the Cardinal's apparent insult and turning it into a compliment, and, indeed, a badge of honor: "Être libertin, c'est savoir dissocier le sexe et l'amour, le couple et l'accouplement; être libertin, c'est avoir le sens de la nuance et de l'exactitude." Diderot's self-identification with and definition of libertinage builds upon the doctrine of non-attachment of Schmitt's reading of *Le Neveu de Rameau* to include emotional detachment. Here, love and the couple are disassociated from (and opposed to) sex and coupling – sex is not about love and forming bonds of affection. For Diderot's character in the film, libertinage is used as an apologia not only for hedonism but philandering, explaining his capacity to stay married while seeking

[260] Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, *Diderot ou la philosophie de la séduction* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), 297.

pleasure elsewhere; marriage, after all, "est une monstruosité dans l'ordre de la nature."[261] I would argue that one of the main targets in this film is the institution of marriage (conservatively defined as an indissoluble union between a man and a woman); ultimately, as I will show, the film can be read as an investigation of "coupling" itself (as hinted at in the film's curious inclusion of "le couple" and "l'accouplement" in its definition of libertinage). It is to this facet of the film, that is, how its notion of libertinage is put to use, that I now turn.

Although the film is set in the eighteenth century, and obviously relies heavily on Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's prior scholarship on Diderot, the film contains a number of anachronisms that give it a contemporary resonance. This is perhaps most apparent with the techno-infused score of Bruno Coulais. It is a fascinating fusion of eighteenth-century rhythms with twentieth century instrumentation. Likewise, the theme song of the film, Boy George's "La Barque," is as much a tribute to Gregorian chant as it is a club anthem. The music of the film would seem to fit better in a Mylène Farmer music video than a historical film, where, typically, the soundtrack is composed of music from the period in which the movie takes place.

Other jarringly anachronistic aspects of the film can be found at the table of the Baronne d'Holbach. Although all the delicacies served at the d'Holbach château were known to a certain extent in eighteenth-century France, none were consumed in quite the way they are presented on screen. For instance, in a scene near to the end of the film, we see the Baronne and the rest of the château's occupants viewing erotic images projected by lantern light (the cinema of the

[261] In a scene made (in)famous by the film's trailer, Diderot chases his wife through the grounds of the d'Holbach estate stark naked. As he runs (though it is difficult to concentrate on his words due to "other" movements), he argues that all humans should be able to seek out sexual gratification, solitary or otherwise, whenever nature suits them (including, much to the chagrin of the on-looking Cardinal, nuns and monks). Institutions such as marriage and monastic orders ordaining chastity are, he exclaims, "[des] monstruosité[s] dans l'ordre de la nature." These sentiments on marriage and the priority of the pursuit of pleasure find great resonance in most libertine texts, including in most of the "real" Diderot's own work, chief amongst which we might cite, *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772), *La Religieuse* (c. 1760), *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), and *Le Neveu de Rameau* (1762).

period). Holding court in the room as always, the Baronne insists that her guests taste her *maïs soufflé* (popcorn). Of course, although certain Native-American tribes had been eating a variety of popcorn well before the eighteenth century, popcorn would not be consumed in France (especially within the cinematic context) until after World War II.

Interestingly, the anachronisms to be found throughout each scene of *Le Libertin* are not present in Schmitt's original stage version. Indeed, the action of the play takes place entirely as Therbouche is painting Diderot's portrait. The gluttonous Baronne; the nymphomaniac Chevalière and her butch girlfriend; the sexually confused, closeted Jerfeuil; and the statuesque, gay Marquis were all added in the adaptation from stage to screen. If, as Mireille Rosello suggests, period films "invent a particular past to construct a particular present," we might naturally ask: what past is being articulated and evoked in *Le Libertin*, and what relation does it have to the present?[262]

Many of the changes in content and style from the original stage version to the film version of *Le Libertin* might be attributable to co-screenwriter and director, Gabriel Aghion. Aghion is best known for writing and directing *Pédale douce* (1996), its sequel, *Pédale dure* (2004), and *Belle maman* (1999) – immensely popular mainstream comedies that explicitly treat and engage with topics and issues important to the French LGBT community. Writing on

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[262] Mireille Rosello, "Dissident Voices before the Revolution: *Ridicule* (Leconte, 1996)" in *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*, edited by Phil Powrie (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 81. Rosello's article on *Ridicule* is part of a large (and ever-growing) body of scholarship (both in and out of academe) that has studied and analyzed the uses of history in period films as well as the uses of film as mediums for reflecting upon and transmitting history. Notable amongst these interventions for our purposes, one might consider: Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Grindon Leger, *Shadows on the Past: Studies in the Historical Fiction Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1994); Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Marcia Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Deborah Carmell, I.Q. Hunter, and Imelda Whelehan, eds., *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 2001); Marcia Landy, ed., *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); and Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

representations of homosexuality in late 1990s French cinema, Cristina Johnston credits Aghion, among others (notably, Josiane Balasko, the Baronne d'Holbach in *Le Libertin*), for releasing comedic films "aimed at broad rather than community-based audiences," which can be seen, whether through "characterization, dialogue, narrative or performance," as "illustrating an attempt to bring aspects of 'gay interest' topics […] out of the realm of more independent gay and lesbian cinema and into mainstream production."[263] *Belle maman*, for instance, highlights the issues of *homoparentalité* as well as the *Pacte civil de solidarité* (*PaCS*). These films, like *Le Libertin*, are high energy in tone and tend to be high camp in style. Moreover, they share with *Le Libertin* a soundtrack that pulls heavily from music and artists popular in the gay community. This is all to say that *Le Libertin* – with its positive and prominent portrayals of gay characters such as the closeted Jerfeuil, the Marquis, and "la cousine;" its techno soundtrack; and its over the top performances from Ardant (César recipient for *Pédale douce*), Balasko, and Serrault (*La Cage aux folles*) – is consistent with Aghion's other film work. I also suggest, going forward, that its release in theaters a few months after the promulgation of PaCS is surely not coincidental.

PaCS, a form of civil union between adults (same-sex or opposite-sex) different from either *concubinage* or marriage, was voted into law in November 1999 after years of heated debate. It is notably designed as a way to recognize same-sex couples under French law, particularly with respect to property and inheritance laws. As might be imagined, the effort to grant same-sex couples rights similar to those recognized under marriage raised considerable hackles, particularly among those on the right-wing, such as Christine Boutin or Philippe de

[263] Cristina Johnston, "Representations of Homosexuality in 1990s Mainstream French Cinema," *Studies in French Cinma* 2, no. 1 (2002): 24.

Villiers, who saw the recognition of same-sex couples as disastrously toxic for French society, especially with respect to the family. Anti-PaCS demonstrations brought to the fore, as Johnston notes, "an increased visibility and audibility of homo- and lesbophobia in the French socio-political arena."[264] As Eric Fassin recalls, anti-PaCS demonstrators and intellectuals conceptualized the possibility of state-recognized same-sex unions as throwing into question, "des 'fondements anthropologiques de notre culture,' autrement dit, de l''ordre symbolique.' Certains, comme la sociologue Irène Théry […] pointaient déjà le 'risque d'y perdre les sources même de l'érotisme.' D'autres, tel le juriste Pierre Legendre […], allaient jusqu'à dénoncer l''homosexualisme' comme une 'logique hédoniste héritière du nazisme.'"[265]

I recapitulate this history because it was a raging, omnipresent debate in French society when *Le Libertin* was being adapted for film, put into production, and released. I believe it is safe say that the PaCS debate was at the forefront of the filmmakers' minds. Indeed, it does not stretch the bounds of credulity to imagine Serrault's Cardinal and Perez's Diderot as standard bearers for the two sides of the PaCS debate, the former a social conservative reactionary, the latter a crusader for sexual liberation. Diderot's railings against the early modern marriage economy as an apparatus for stunting pleasure and limiting personal choice as well as his ultimate refusal to subscribe to restrictive definitions of *morale*, echoes and parallels a call to throw into question the normativity of heterosexuality and heterosexual bonds. In effect, we can see *Le Libertin* as depicting the historical heritage of the PaCs debate. Even if libertinage does not directly speak to the issue of same-sex unions, it does provide a concrete historical grounding to further legitimize and popularize the cause. The libertinage of Diderot and his fellow

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[264] Johnston, "Representations of Homosexulaity," 24.
[265] Eric Fassin and Clarisse Fabre, *Liberté, égalité, sexualités: Actualité politique des questions sexuelles* (Paris: Editions Belfond, 2003), 51.

encyclopedists at the d'Holbach estate becomes the first shot in a socio-sexual revolution, and, as each of those characters reminds the viewer at some point during the film, one should not stand in the way of progress – "on n'arrête pas le progrès!" In Aghion's *Le Libertin*, sexual liberation is a movement that begins in the eighteenth century and is completed in the present day.

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As a drama/erotic thriller set in present day Paris, Jean-Claude Brisseau's *Choses secrètes* could not be more different from the kind of period comedy Aghion's *Le Libertin* represents. From a world of aristocracy and an intellectual leisure class, we are planted within the grittiness of turn of the twenty-first century society, with its seedy bars, banlieus, and impersonal, antiseptic office spaces. While a period film constructs a particular past to obliquely confront present day concerns (such as Sophia Coppola's interrogation of celebrity and female adolescence in her 2006 biopic, *Marie Antoinette*), *Choses secrètes* confronts contemporary society and its discontents head on without the mediating veil afforded by received history or an imagined future. Furthermore, while both *Le Libertin* and *Choses secrètes* are concerned with social and sexual politics, *Choses secrètes* is far more concerned with sex and sexual acts themselves than *Le Libertin* is.

All the same, what is remarkable about *Choses secrètes* is that even if it is tonally and stylistically distinct in almost every way from a period film like *Le Libertin*, it cannot escape the shadow of the eighteenth century. As I will show, while Brisseau's gaze is directed at contemporary French society, his staging of that society continually evokes an eighteenth-century libertine heritage. It is as if a discussion of sexual politics, however modern the context, cannot be framed without a reference to libertinage.

The film's plot revolves around two women "issues de milieux défavorisés," Nathalie (Coralie Revel) and Sandrine (Sabrina Seyvecou), who conspire to use their sexuality to climb the Parisian social ladder. They meet at a shady bar where Sandrine works as a bartender and Nathalie is an erotic performer, and move in together when both are fired from the bar (Sandrine refuses to have sex with a bar patron and Nathalie defends her to the bar owner). Sandrine clearly looks up to Nathalie, envious of her ability to so comfortably display and use her sexuality. Nathalie, thus, takes her new roommate under her wing to explore Sandrine's capacity to be "osée" (daring) with her sexual power and fantasy life. They confide in each other their sexual experiences and fantasies and explore together those fantasies, mostly in the form of mutual masturbation and sexual exhibitionism (notably, in a Metro station).

In exploring the potentiality of female sexual power, they concoct a plan to both get jobs in a traditionally male-dominated career field and seduce/sleep their way to the top. They find jobs as secretaries at a large, prestigious Parisian bank and quickly climb through the echelons of power, eventually attracting the attention of Christophe (Fabrice Deville), the future CEO of the bank and the son of its president. At this point, the film's narrative becomes increasingly convoluted and the movie unfolds as a tragic tale of corporate and sexual intrigue. Sandrine eventually marries Christophe, a ruthless seducer with a reputation for cruelty and for driving his lovers to suicide (we also learn that he has an incestuous relationship with his sister). The film crescendos at a wedding reception that evening at Christophe's chateau with scenes of decadent orgies, gang rapes, and a murder of passion – Christophe is murdered by Nathalie, who we learn is one of his past lovers. With Christophe out of the picture and the marriage still in effect, Sandrine becomes the sole heir to the banking empire, achieving her project of social ascension.

While *Choses secrètes* clearly engages with a number of social themes (e.g., workplace politics, French social hierarchies, the efforts that are required to climb the social ladder in modern France, especially for women, etc.) the film's chief concern (and indeed the "secret things" referenced in film's title) is the fantasy life of women, a *terre inconnue* that clearly mystifies and troubles Brisseau. He blatantly reveals this overriding fascination in an interview with the online film magazine, *Objectif Cinéma*:

> La jouissance des femmes m'intrigue. […] Qu'une femme puisse dire ne pas savoir si elle jouit ou ne jouit pas me rend très perplexe. Homme, on ne peut dire pas ça. Ne serait-ce que, parce qu'on est en érection ou l'on ne l'est pas! On peut voir que vous êtes mouillée ou pas, mais pour la jouissance, on ne sait pas. Que d'autre part, la jouissance vaginale par pénétration, vous ne l'avez pas spontanément immédiatement. Corrigez-moi si je dis une sottise. Il y a même des filles qui m'ont avoué ne pas connaître la jouissance par caresse du clitoris. Je me disais qu'on se foutait de moi, car les filles apprennent ça dès l'enfance. Elles l'ont, mais n'osent pas l'avouer. Par contre, l'autre jouissance se construit, et j'ai rencontré des filles qui ne la connaissaient pas. Elles n'ont jamais joui de leurs vies! Mais par contre, portées par amour ou par tout ce que vous voudrez, parfois et pas toujours, leur pouvoir de jouissance est beaucoup plus fort que le nôtre. Le film s'organise sur le pouvoir que l'on peut avoir à partir de la jouissance et du sexe.[266]

As we may see in this quote, Brisseau sees himself as a kind of anthropologist, pulling up the curtain to reveal to the world the mysteries of female sexuality – the "secret things" women dare not admit or speak of publicly. Thus, for instance, the film's first scene shows Nathalie masturbating nude before an audience rapt with attention and some of her first conversations with Sandrine concern whether she fakes orgasms onstage all the time or if it is possible to feel pleasure when so exposed.

The issue of women's sexual lives and fantasies is bound up in a deeper anxiety about women's sexual power, the potential that women could use their ability to control their sexual

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[266] Jean-Claude Brisseau, Interview with Nadia Meflah, *Objectif Cinéma*, October 18, 2002, http://www.objectif-cinema.com/interviews/177.php (Accessed January 26, 2008).

experience to gain enormous power over men. We see this play out in *Choses secrètes* in Sandrine's seduction and emotional enslavement of the unwitting Delacroix (her superior within the office and the right-hand man to Christophe's father). By controlling Delacroix, she can effectively obtain whatever she wants. We can see, here, how a very old, well-documented tradition of interrogating the source and meaning of the female orgasm intersects with uniquely contemporary concerns about the role of women in the workforce. If women can control their sexuality in a way that men cannot, does this mean that they can control men?

From our perspective as dix-huitièmistes, what is fascinating about *Choses secrètes* is that in spite of its modern dress, setting, and concerns, the film is steeped in references to and evocations of the eighteenth century and libertinage. At times, it is easy to think, as Salon.com reviewer Charles Taylor has suggested, that "the movie feels like an updated version of a scandalous 18th century novel," that its lineage is decidedly *early* modern rather than modern.[267] Indeed, the first half of the film, in which Nathalie teaches the less experienced Sandrine how to capitalize on her sexual power, is structurally similar to late seventeenth-century erotic dialogues such as *L'Académie des dames* (1655), *L'Escole des filles* (1660) and *Vénus dans le cloître* (1682). In these texts, a young novice is put into the care of a slightly older, sexually experienced woman to be prepared for sex with men. Discussions of what to expect from men in bed, how to avoid pregnancy, and how to comport oneself sexually are interspersed with practicums in which the older woman initiates the young student in the pleasures of sex. In these erotic dialogues, marriage and sex with men only "comes after lesbian initiation," as Peter Cryle

[267] Charles Taylor, Review of "Secret Things," *Salon.com*, February 20, 2004, http://www.salon.com/ent/indie/2004/02/20/secret_things/index.html?CP=IMD&DN=110 (Accessed January 26, 2008).

has observed.[268] *Choses secrètes* would seem to fit squarely within this thematic tradition – before Sandrine is ready to put the social climbing plan into action and re-enter the world of male sexual desire, she must first be prepared through Nathalie's principles and experience, as well as through lesbian initiation.

Many of the film's references to the libertine heritage are more explicit (or are meant to be). In the interview with *Objectif Cinéma*, for instance, Brisseau himself cites the influence of libertine literature in the construction of the character Christophe.[269] Indeed, when Christophe engages in sex with his partners, he directs them with the cool precision and the clear, draconian intonations of an absolutist potentate, perhaps reminding the viewer of the disaffected male libertines of Sade's fiction such as Dolmancé from his *Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795). Furthermore, referencing the Sadean appetite for incest (or perhaps even Mirabeau's Rose and Vernol from *Le Rideau levé*), it is made clear that Christophe only seems to feel sexual pleasure and attain orgasm when he is with his sister. Similarly, the orgy scene – from the violence of the gang rape of Sandrine, to the sheer quantity of writhing bodies participating in Christophe's bacchanal, to the secluded, private locale of the chateau – evokes the Sadean emphasis on quantity, violence, seclusion, and desocialization.[270]

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[268] Peter Cryle, *Geometry in the Boudoir*, 25. I would direct the reader to Cryle's fuller account of the French tradition of *ars amatoria* and how these dialogues function as foundational texts within that tradition.

[269] Speaking of the similarity between Christophe and another male character (Bruno) from his earlier film *De bruit et de fureur*, Brisseau adds, "Mais il vient aussi d'autres personnages du cinéma et de la littérature, notamment celle du libertinage." Jean-Claude Brisseau, Interview with Nadia Meflah, *Objectif Cinéma*, October 18, 2002, http://www.objectif-cinema.com/interviews/177.php (Accessed January 26, 2008).

[270] As Annie Le Brun has shown, the settings in which Sadean libertines choose to enact their philosophies, passions, and desires are often desolate and inaccessible, purposefully cut off from society (and, by extension, observation). Le Brun cites the particular example of the château de Silling, the setting for the orgiastic violence of *Les 120 journées de Sodom*. "Rappelons seulement au fond de quelle 'forêt inhabitable,' dans quel 'réduit de cette forêt que, par les mesures prises, les seuls oiseaux du ciel pouvaient aborder,' Sade a trouvé bon de situer sa forteresse de passions. Situation délibérément anormale qui exige le sauf-conduit de l'anormalité pour y parvenir," p. 31. Tranquility, isolation, and solitude, thus, become "le meilleur artifice pour accélérer le surgissement de la

The most explicit references to the *ancien régime* in the orgy scene, and, indeed, the film, are not so much sexual but political. When an attendant informs Christophe that his father has died, leaving him undisputed head of the financial empire, he exclaims, "Le Président est mort; vive le Président!" Here, Christophe makes an overt play on the traditional saying, "Le Roi est mort; vive le Roi," which was said at the death of the king to assert the continuity of government, power, and dynasty. Thus, Christophe inserts himself within the traditions of the *ancien régime* and the belief in the "king's two bodies" and the divine authority of kings.[271] Notably, too, the music that swells in the background during this moment is Handel's "Zadok the Priest" (HWV 258), written and performed for the coronation of George II of Great Britain in 1727 (and performed at every subsequent British coronation ceremony since, usually during the anointing ritual). Truly, Christophe is meant to evoke the eighteenth-century monarch.

At the end of the day, we must ask the question of why all these references to libertinage and the eighteenth century in general are present in a film like *Choses secrètes*. One might be able to understand why a period film like *Le Libertin* might be speaking more about the present than the past but it is interesting that in a film set in the present day, discussions of modern social and sexual behavior (and especially women's roles, sexual power, and fantasy life) should be framed so overtly in the shadow of the eighteenth century. Why are the references needed? What is it about the eighteenth century that makes it such a useful (and, oftentimes, essential) reference point?

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souveraineté passionnelle, dans les conditions optimales," *Soudain un bloc d'abîme, Sade* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1986), 99.

[271] On the Medieval theory of the king's two bodies, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

As I showed in my discussion of *Le Libertin*, the eighteenth century is seen as formative moment for sexual liberation in the French imaginary. The nostalgic literature I discussed above from Guizot to Talleyrand and Kundera views the eighteenth century as an era where people knew how to enjoy themselves (and do sex right) – they talked about sex, wrote about it length, and provided the origin story for France's mythic status as a country of kink. Thus, eighteenth-century libertinage (and the literature it spawned) provides the modern commentator with a series of templates and conventions with which to speak about sex, an erotic heritage to draw from and aspire to, and a liberatory sexual politics to complete (if a one-sided one, as I argue). If the figure of the libertine haunts the screen, it is perhaps because his revolution has only just begun.

## Conclusion

In an effort to advance his pursuit of Mme Dambreuse, a noblewoman who would promise him luxury, professional advancement, and financial security, Frédéric Moreau (the protagonist of Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*), adopts the guise of a libertine rake (perhaps thinking this to be the proper way to seduce an aristocrat). "Nos grands-pères vivaient mieux," he laments, recalling the *douceur de vivre* of the *ancien régime* (a theme we have had occasion to explore at numerous points in this chapter). He implores her to adopt the attitude of their more decadent eighteenth-century ancestors, "Pourquoi ne pas obéir à l'impulsion qui nous pousse?" and adds, to himself, "L'amour, après tout, n'était pas en soi une chose si importante."[272] Appealing to the eighteenth-century frame of mind, to Frédéric, implies a disassociation of sex from love, coupling from the couple (to once again invoke Vincent Perez's libertine Diderot).

[272] Flaubert, *L'Education sentimentale*, 443.

Abandoning oneself to sensual desire seems to necessarily entail emotional detachment. This, at least, seems to be the twenty-first century commentator's assessment – libertinage is often seen as a synonym for swinging, a by-word for sex without limits and without attachments, and the forerunner of modern sexual liberation. But this is a one-sided assessment, one which ignores the complexities of what I have shown eighteenth-century libertinage to include within this project as a whole. Sentiment, reflection, moderation, the formation of a tempered, refined libertine subject – these are all evacuated and ignored in the contemporary cultural imaginary.

While I have outlined the narrowing of our conception of what libertinage entails, I have also shown in this chapter to what ends that conception of libertinage has been put to use. From novels like Kundera's *La Lenteur* to films such as *Choses secrètes* and *Le Libertin*, the specter of libertinage has been effectively co-opted and deployed to interrogate, explicate, and critique modern French society. We have seen the extent to which a masculinist, triumphal image of the libertine eighteenth-century furnishes a familiar heritage, language, and set of conventions to speak about sex, socio-sexual taboos, and gender roles.

In short, we, and our nineteenth-century forebears, look back longingly and with a large measure of jealousy at a world that knew how to enjoy itself. We may admire the *douceur de vivre*, the "polite," skillful seductions, the bold, playful theorizations of sensual pleasure. But somewhere along the way we have suppressed or evacuated the memory of the tenderness, the fidelity, the sentimentality at the heart of many libertine texts, texts where the pleasure was not just physical but emotional, where the affairs may have been short, but were no less significant. We have, in essence, forgotten the joy of Madame de T…'s interdiction and her pupil's lesson… *point de morale*.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

To paraphrase Jean Starobinski, "Il faut reprendre le [libertinage du] XVIIIe siècle à sa légende."[273] My aim in this dissertation has been to do just that, in particular to begin to decouple the connections between libertinage, emancipation, and un-attachment; and to break down the opposition between libertinage and sentimentalism. As I have shown in the introduction of this project as well as in Chapter 5, both contemporary literary critics as well as French popular culture tend to view this essential opposition as a given – libertinage and sentimentalism are like matter and anti-matter; the adoption of one necessarily entails the rejection of the other. Thus, in texts as diverse as Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) or Duclos' *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des moeurs du XVIIIe siècle* (1751), rakes and libertines typically end up in stable, monogamous, devoted relationships – the libertine is reformed by sentiment (often in spite of him or herself).

A multiplicity of libertine archetypes confront the modern commentator and reader – the frivolous *petit-maître*, the cynical *roué*, the debauched, the dissolute cleric, the enlightened prostitute – but in each, it is understood that the libertine's opposite (and sworn enemy) is the man or woman of sentiment. They are the ideal targets and victims of unscrupulous libertines, as the Présidente de Tourvel is for the Vicomte de Valmont early in his pursuit. Libertinage, then, is understood as the celebration of pleasure, the search for liberty; and in these pursuits, the libertine has neither the time nor the inclination for sentiment, affection, and lasting attachments. As the petit-maître, Clitandre, explains in Crébillon fils' *La Nuit et le moment*, "On se plait, on se

[273] Jean Starobinski, *L'Invention de la liberté, 1700-1789* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 13.

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 que si c'était la première fois qu'on s'engageât ensemble. On se quitte encore, et jamais on ne se brouille. Il est vrai que l'amour n'est entré pour rien dans tout cela."[274]

But, as I have shown through my analysis of Casanova, La Mettrie, Mirabeau, and Denon, beside the archetypes enunciated above, should be added that of the sentimental libertine. This is a libertine that departs from other, earlier models of libertine behavior (exemplified by Beauplaisir, Versac, Clitandre, and Almaïr), one who is *tendre, délicat,* and *sensible* (to use Madame de T…'s terms) – *tendre* in the sense that he/she embraces affect and expresses it in his/her relationships; *délicat* in the sense that he/she is a refined connoisseur of pleasure but also acutely sensitive to the needs, comfort, and pleasures of his/her partner(s); and *sensible* in that he/she values sentiment, reflection, memory, and even emotional attachment. Denon's young narrator ostensibly returns to his mistress a changed lover – more refined, more obliging, more understanding, and, indeed, more loving. Casanova travels throughout Europe with the portraits of his lovers (mental and/or physical) stashed near to him at all times – he remains faithful to them all…in his fashion. If chance or circumstances necessitate a rupture, he does not simply move on, detach, and forget. Rather, he is a deeply emotional being, expressing his pain, breaking down into tears, lamenting loss. Mirabeau's Laure, having adopted a philosophy of *la volupté* close to that which is articulated by La Mettrie, grows into a reflective and sensitive libertine. A voluptuary like Laure not only tends to his or her own pleasure but that of his or her partner(s); the height of libertine delights is only available to those who are gourmands, but also who know how to share.

[274] Crébillon fils, *La Nuit et le moment*, 261.

Somehow, however, the model of the sentimental libertine studied within Chapters 2-4 of this dissertation has been forgotten, eclipsed by more triumphant, emotionally detached seekers of sensual pleasure, libertines that evoke for the modern commentator an eighteenth-century search for emancipation, enlightenment, contestation, and *bonheur*.[275] And, as we have seen in Chapter 5, this conception of libertinage as the pursuit of pleasure and sexual liberation plays out not just on the level of formal literary criticism but also within popular culture, in particular within the domain of mainstream cinema. The Diderot of Aghion's *Le Libertin* is a *libre penseur,* boldly contesting what he views as the Church's moronic, hypocritical, and severe limitations on sensual pleasure, that is, man's ability to freely seek out the partners of his choice *à l'occasion*. Christophe, the self-described modern libertine of Brisseau's *Choses secrètes,* is forged in the image of the Sadean libertine, seeking pleasure through debauch, decadence, and a nihilistic revolt against all conventions and laws that would seek to impose limits on sexual desire.

The mode of libertinage explored within this dissertation may be described as the confluence of three currents of eighteenth-century thought – libertinage, sentimentalism, and aristocratic sociality. As we saw in *Point de lendemain*, Madame de T…'s pedagogy relies heavily on aristocratic norms of comportment, ones developed and codified in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as the behavioral, moral, and aesthetic values bound up in the concept of *honnêteté*. Moreover, La Mettrie's *art de jouir*, refined in Mirabeau's *Le Rideau levé* through the lens of a Rousseauist educational program, can readily be seen as an extension of the seventeenth-century *art de plaire* (again, a centerpiece of *honnêteté*). The voluptuary, exemplified by Laure and her father as well as Denon's protagonists, is described as one who is

[275] See Starobinski, *L'Invention de la liberté*; Mauzi, *L'Idée du bonheur*; and Nagy, *Libertinage et Révolution*.

temperate, moderated, reflective, and ever conscious of their partners' needs – clearly, an individual "qui ne se pique de rien."

As for sentimentalism, it is easy for the turn of the twenty-first century reader to forget or minimize how vital, dynamic, and omnipresent the discourse on sentiment and sensibility was in the eighteenth century, especially during its latter half. The second half of the eighteenth-century can readily be thought of as an exciting epoch of affective experimentation, from ethical and economic theories that featured so-called "moral sentiments" at their core (Hume and Smith), to theorizations of companionate marriage, to novelistic explorations of the depth and sweet violence of emotional expression as well as emotional transparency between friends and lovers. It is within this context that libertine sentimentalism must be understood, namely, as another manifestation of this pervasive and multi-faceted experimentation. Each of the texts treated in this dissertation grapple with the implications of sentiment and sensibility – they may not all feature emotion to the extent that Casanova does, but they do provide a template for how libertinage engages with sentiment as well as how we may return to other texts written in this period to seek out similar engagements.

If libertine sentimentalism has disappeared or been obscured by its, shall we say, less than thoughtful, moderated, and emotive cousins in libertinage, it is perhaps because both the aristocratic codes and the affective experimentation that made it comprehensible have both died out and have become less comprehensible in and of themselves. By contrast, the liberatory elements of libertine expression in the eighteenth century – from contestatory politics and philosophical positions to a lighthearted, if male-centered, hedonism – are far easier to relate to and grasp in the modern imaginary. In the post-1968 calls for reform and sexual liberation, for instance, it is tempting to look back at the libertinage of the eighteenth-century as a foundational

moment, the opening salvo in a revolution to correct hundreds of years of moral, social, and sexual repression. But this, I suggest, reflects not only a caricature of libertinage but also a critical misunderstanding.

Modern commentators have often privileged the political or philosophical elements of libertinage. Critics such as Jean-Marie Goulemot and Peter Nagy have long argued that what sets libertine literature apart from the larger categories of pornography and obscenity is that libertinage contains political and philosophical components. To quote another such critic, Jacqueline Marchand, libertine texts, written "dans une intention romanesque et pour le plaisir du récit, ont cependant une portée rationnelle […]: une philosophie discrète sous-tend l'imagination et s'exprime par la fiction romanesque."[276] In other words, the eroticism of libertine texts is but a delivery system for political and social thought. Thus, such a reading of Mirabeau's *Le Rideau levé* would undoubtedly privilege the ways in which Mirabeau (through Laure and her father) postulates and propagates a revolutionary political philosophy. But, as we've seen, *Le Rideau levé* is not just an opportunity to read its author's Revolutionary activism into his pre-Revolutionary fictional work; the novel is not just an extension of Rousseauist principles on education and subject formation. Mirabeau's novel, like the other texts studied in this dissertation, is also concerned with aesthetics, ethics, and personal (sentimental) development.

Perhaps the best example of the tendency to read eighteenth-century libertinage through the lens of politics is the work of Nancy K. Miller. On the one hand, Miller rightly troubles the assumption that libertinage refers "to the playful pursuit of pleasure," arguing that this pursuit (undertaken mostly by men, and often at the expense of women), "includes the exercise of

[276] Marchand, preface to *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. J. Marchand (Paris: Ed. Rationalistes, 1972), quoted in Crugten-André, *Roman du libertinage*, 15.

power, and the free exercise of power."[277] In this, Miller fits squarely within a strain of cultural history, feminist thought, and literary criticism that has sought to investigate the power relations at work in everyday life, to show that "the personal is political." On the other hand, while Miller's intervention is a powerful and much-needed corrective to a body of, frankly, masculinist criticism (which has tended to play up the liberatory and playful aspects of libertinage without considering *for whom* libertinage is playful or liberatory), it, like the work it criticizes, provides an overly reductive reading of libertinage. That is to say, the personal *can only be* political.

The politicization of eighteenth-century libertinage plays out as well among novelists and filmmakers. Balzac co-opts and molds the narrative of *Point de lendemain* to critique the institution of marriage and, in particular, the perfidy and loose morals of scheming wives. Kundera uses the same narrative to highlight the emptiness of our media- and speed-obsessed technocratic society. Aghion's *Le Libertin*, drawing on both Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's stage play and his prior scholarship on Diderot, depicts a carefree libertine utopia targeted to interrogate the status of the couple in the face of raging debates about same-sex unions. Brisseau evokes eighteenth-century libertinage in a gritty thriller set in the present day to stage discussions of female sexual power. In sum, the modern imagination turns to the eighteenth century to find, define, and talk about itself.

However, this dissertation has also shown that libertinage cannot be comprehended solely through the lenses of liberation, politics, and/or power. The problem with the politicization of libertinage, perceived from literary criticism to the popular imagination, then, is that such readings leave out concerns, issues, and questions that were of primary importance to the authors of late eighteenth-century libertine texts as well as their readers. Concentrating on questions of

[277] Miller, "Libertinage and Feminism," 17.

politics and power, for instance, does not help us account for Casanova's obsession with memorialization and his deep emotional expression; nor does this allow us to understand the sentimental education at the heart of Denon's novella.

My aim in this study, then, has not been to further romanticize libertinage or add to its hedonistic mystique, but, rather, to show it to be polyvalent, complex, dynamic, and even emotionally attuned. Too often, the libertine has been reduced to a caricature, that of a hedonist who allows the pleasures of the moment to take him or her where they will; flitting from port to port, thought to thought, and lover to lover with only a notch on the bedpost to commemorate passage. But if we fully come to terms with the complexity of libertine production in the eighteenth century (and especially its latter half), we find a literature that experiments with pleasures of flesh but also pleasures of the mind and heart.

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