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The Good, The Bad and The Ugly: The (Im)Possible Exemplum of Prévost's
Chevalier Des Grieux

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Abstract

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Chevalier Des Grieux
By Ashley M. Ellis

This thesis analyzes the paradoxical nature of Le Chevalier Des Grieux in Prévost's Manon Lescaut. Des Grieux is an ambiguous character—*un mélange des vertus et de vices*—with conflicting actions and sentiments. He establishes a new moral code—a code not defined by those around him but created exclusively by himself—in order to gratify his desires. Not only is the morality of Des Grieux called into question, but also the idea of morality itself. The opposing systems of values present in the novel demonstrate how the psychology of man changes in the 18th century towards the idea of *l'individu*, a psychological revolution in comparison to the doctrine of the 17th century.

This thesis examines how the opposing sides of Des Grieux's character develop and how he establishes a new sense of morality. The main figures who influence Des Grieux's views, perceptions, and actions are: Manon Lescaut, who appears to represent the fatality of passion; Tiberge, who symbolizes the quest for virtue; and Des Grieux's father, who exemplifies the problematization of the *loi du père*. Analyzing Des Grieux's relationship with these three personages elucidates the ambiguity of his nature and of the novel.

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Introduction

J'ai à peindre un jeune aveugle, qui refuse d'être heureux, pour se précipiter volontairement dans les dernières infortunes; [...] un caractère ambigu, un mélange de vertus et de vices, un contraste perpétuel de bons sentiments et d'actions mauvaises. Tel est le fond du tableau que je présente. (Prévost 47-48) [emphasis is mine]

In John Rohou's Le XVII^e siècle, une révolution de la condition humaine, he writes:

Auparavant, l'orientation majeure de la civilisation était une adhésion à un ordre antérieur et supérieur aux hommes. Leur attitude était dominée par une aspiration à la sagesse et au salut dans l'intégration à un ordre divin, naturel, communautaire et idéologique, préétabli, qui définissait le vrai, le bien, le juste, ainsi que le statut et la personnalité même des individus. Par la suite au contraire, *remplaçant cette soumission par une volonté de domination pour la satisfaction de leurs désirs*, les hommes ont entrepris de se rendre 'maîtres et possesseurs de la nature,' *d'émanciper leur pensée des dogmes, traditions et autorités [...]*, et même de *soumettre la religion à la conscience personnelle*. Bref, d'être entrepreneurs de leur condition plutôt que des héritiers assujettis. (Rohou 14) [emphasis is mine]

Antoine-François Prévost's Histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut, published in 1731 as part of a collection of stories about "un homme de qualité," is the perfect exemplum of Rohou's remarks. Driven by a bewitching passion for a woman whose values oppose those dictated by society and whose morals are frequently called into question, Des Grieux embarks on a search for happiness—through the fulfillment of his desires—that leads him to revolt against everything he

has been taught about honor and proper behavior and to turn his back on religion, his family and his friend. In his “Avis de l’auteur” that precedes the narrative, l’homme de qualité foreshadows Des Grieux’s rebellion and prescribes the way in which the reader should approach the reading. Initially, he establishes a type of “reading contract” with the reader in order to negotiate with him an understanding of the novel and an appreciation of its importance. The narrator calls himself “une personne d’honneur et de bon sens” to prove that he is on the same critical playing field as the reader, who is one of “les personnes de bon sens” as well (Prévost 48-49). He is a reasonable author writing to a community of reasonable readers. With this bond between author and reader hence established, l’homme de qualité continues to explain why the reader “ne [doit pas] regarder un ouvrage de cette nature comme un travail inutile” (Prévost 48).

The narrator describes Des Grieux as “un contraste perpétuel de bons sentiments et d’actions mauvaises” (Prévost 48), but explains that Des Grieux is not alone in this characteristic of ambiguity. He contends that it is impossible to look at morality without observing “les préceptes de la morale [...] à la fois estimés et négligés” due to a “bizarrerie du cœur humain” (Prévost 48). This weakness in human nature “[nous] fait goûter des idées de bien et de perfection, dont il [nous] éloigne dans la pratique”(Prévost 48). L’homme de qualité argues that because “tous les préceptes de la morale n’étant que des principes vagues et généraux, il est très difficile d’en faire une application particulière au détail des mœurs et des actions” (Prévost 48). There is, necessarily, often a “contradiction de nos idées et de notre

conduite” (Prévost 48). Such is the case with Des Grieux, and, according to l’homme de qualité, this is a predicament for the reasonable reader as well:

Les âmes bien nées sentent que la douceur et l’humanité sont des *vertus aimables*, et sont *portées d’inclination à les pratiquer*; mais sont-elles au *moment de l’exercice*, elles *demeurent souvent suspendues*. En est-ce réellement l’occasion? Sait-on bien quelle en doit être la mesure? Ne se trompe-t-on point sur l’objet? *Ces difficultés arrêtent*. On craint [...] d’excéder ou de *ne pas remplir assez des devoirs qui sont renfermés d’une manière trop obscure dans les notions générales d’humanité* et de douceur.
(Prévost 49) [emphasis is mine]

Even if one knows what is “good” and what is “bad” in theory, in times when this sense of morality must be applied, it is not always easy to exercise this awareness.

In The Use of Pleasure, Michel Foucault writes that there is a difference between “morality” in the sense of a “moral code,” a “set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies” and what he calls “the morality of behaviors,” that is, “how and with what margins of variation or transgression individuals or groups conduct themselves in reference to a prescriptive system that is explicitly or implicitly operative in their culture, and of which they are more or less aware” (*Pleasure* 25-26). Foucault explains that in analyzing this “morality of behaviors,” one must analyze to what degree standards of conduct are followed or defied and whether values are upheld or ignored (*Pleasure* 25). He contends that it is also necessary to analyze the way one “ought to ‘conduct oneself,’” for “there are different ways to

‘conduct oneself morally’ in reference to the code (*Pleasure* 26). Thus, morality is not black and white. A moral code, in theory, cannot be followed in actual events, because reality often deviates from theory. As l’homme de qualité supports, “il n’y a que l’expérience, ou l’exemple, qui puisse déterminer raisonnablement le penchant du cœur” (Prévost 49). Yet this experience “dépend des situations différentes où l’on se trouve placé par la fortune” (Prévost 49). Hence, there is an importance of *individual* experience in analyzing morality. It causes one to adjust “aux circonstances où l’on se trouve” and consequently regard morality through a different perspective (Prévost 49).

L’homme de qualité informs the reader that he will see “un exemple terrible de la force des passions” in the conduct of Des Grieux (Prévost 48). It’s as if he is giving a disclaimer justifying Des Grieux’s behavior before it is even read. L’Homme de Qualité is asking the reader to be more flexible in his moral judgment of Des Grieux, because, as Foucault contends, there are different ways of interpreting morality. Accordingly, our reading will follow this Foucaultian concept of not immediately qualifying Des Grieux’s actions as either morally good or bad, but analyzing the reasoning behind his behavior as well as how he establishes a new moral code for himself based on his interactions with the significant people in his life. Rohou writes, “La littérature ne présente plus guère de figures de l’homme en général dans des situations exemplaires, mais plutôt des individualités originales, dans des conditions singulières et des aventures surprenantes” (Rohou 501). Our analysis will then reveal how in this novel, “il ne s’agit plus d’exposer, à travers un cas exemplaire, les certitudes systématisées de la nature humaine, de la raison, de

la morale, mais de raconter, du point de vue d'un protagoniste dynamique et avide, des accidents surprenants, anarchiquement juxtaposés: *la vérité de l'expérience se révèle au gré des expériences*" (Rohou 502). [emphasis is mine]

Manon, or The Fatality of Passion

Par quelle fatalité, disais-je, suis-je devenu si criminel? L'amour est une passion innocente; comment s'est-il changé, pour moi, en une source de misères et de désordres? (Prévost 103)

Manon Lescaut, with her sweet charms and tantalizing beauty, appears to epitomize all notions of vice in Manon Lescaut. After seducing le Chevalier Des Grieux in order to help herself escape the future chosen for her by her parents, the “toute-puissante Manon” ensnares him with an intoxicating love that causes him to abandon his friends and family and to revolt against all notions of duty and honor (Prévost 166). This “perfide créature,” as Des Grieux repeatedly refers to her,¹ leads him into a whirlwind of adventures of depravity and debauchery. Des Grieux himself remarks to the narrator at the end of his adventures with Manon that if he had only left Amiens to return to his father a day sooner, if he had never met Manon, he would have returned to his father with his innocence still intact.² In addition to her portrayal as “vice incarnate,” Manon is meant to represent the fatality of passion. Des Grieux’s infatuation with her grows so controlling that she becomes “le seul bien qui [s]’attachait à la vie” (Prévost 135). A captive of her love, he is doomed to be “toujours malheureux par cette fatale tendresse dans laquelle [il] ne [se] lasse point de chercher [son] bonheur” (Prévost 118).

¹ See Prévost: “cette charmante et perfide créature” (79); “Perfide Manon! Ah! perfide! perfide!” (81)

² “J’avais marqué le temps de mon départ d’Amiens. Hélas ! que ne le marquais-je un jour plus tôt ! J’aurais porté chez mon père toute mon innocence.” (Prévost 57)

How does a man leading “une vie si sage et si réglée,” who once possessed an innate aversion to vice,³ stray so far from his path? Manon uses “une modestie si douce et si charmante” to captivate and capture Des Grieux (Prévost 55). He explains to l’homme de qualité how his first view of Manon instantly abates his former inclination for piety and reason:

Mais il en resta une, fort jeune, qui s’arrêta seule dans la cour [...] Elle me parut si charmante, que moi, qui n’avais jamais pensé à la différence des sexes, ni regardé une fille avec un peu d’attention, moi, dis-je, dont tout le monde admirait la sagesse et la retenue, je me trouvai enflammé tout d’un coup jusqu’au transport. J’avais le défaut d’être excessivement timide et facile à déconcerter ; mais loin d’être arrêté alors par cette faiblesse, je m’avançai vers la maîtresse de mon cœur. (Prévost 59)

His initial discourse with her only intensifies this diminishment of reason, and he resolves a new life plan of liberating her from her parents’ “tyrannie” and ensuring her happiness.⁴ How does she so easily persuade him to forget his father, his friend, and his future and change his life for her? She cunningly evokes Des Grieux’s sympathy and compassion with “la douceur de ses regards, un air charmant de tristesse en prononçant ces paroles” to forever alter his future.⁵ According to Segal

³ “Je menais une vie si sage et si réglée, que mes maîtres me proposaient pour l’exemple du collège. [...] l’on me comptait pour des vertus quelques marques d’aversion naturelle pour le vice.” (Prévost 56)

⁴ “J’emploierais ma vie pour la délivrer de la tyrannie de ses parents et pour la rendre heureuse.” (Prévost 59-60)

⁵ “La douceur de ses regards, un air charmant de tristesse en prononçant ces paroles, ou plutôt l’ascendant de ma destinée, qui m’entraînait à ma perte,” (Prévost 59)

in The unintended reader: feminism and Manon Lescaut, “The narrative in this first scene suggests a calculating and hard-headed sexual maturity in Manon which is presented as enigmatic and powerful. [...] her strength of purpose and will is indisputable. She knows what she wants and [...] she knows how to get it” (Segal 132). The emotions provoked by her entreaty manifest so swiftly into love that Des Grieux describes the thought of her leaving as a mortal wound: “L’amour me rendait déjà si éclairé, depuis un moment qu’il était dans mon cœur, que je regardai ce dessein comme un coup mortel pour mes désirs” (Prévost 59). And thus begins the violent and intoxicating passion for Manon that motivates his journey into vice as he grants her every wish and participates in her ruses, following her wherever she goes — a fatal passion that ultimately renders Le Chevalier Des Grieux “le plus infortuné de tous les hommes” (Prévost 60).

Manon’s influence has an immediate effect on the actions of Des Grieux. He finds himself participating in one of Manon’s schemes just minutes after meeting her, when she lies to her conductor about their relationship. Des Grieux explains, “elle m’appelât son cousin, [...] j’entrai fort bien dans le sens de cette ruse” (Prévost 60). The once innocent Des Grieux has now dipped his foot in the pool of vice, and in the days that follow, he wades deeper and deeper into depravity as he completely transforms his behavior in favor of his one new concern—Manon. He lies to his friend Tiberge to stop him from halting his plans with Manon. And after only one day with her, Des Grieux forgets all plans of marriage. In “Scandal: Law, Literature and Morality in the Early Enlightenment,” Graham asserts, “As he distances himself from traditional precepts of religion and morality, Des Grieux moves deeper into

Manon's world of unregulated desire for which he has no training" (Graham 230). Manon continues to use the charms with which she originally seduced Des Grieux to keep him under her love spell. Des Grieux explains, "Plus je la connaissais, plus je découvrais en elle de nouvelles qualités amiables. Son esprit, son cœur, sa douceur et sa beauté formaient une chaîne si forte et si charmante, que j'aurais mis tout mon bonheur à n'en sortir jamais" (Prévost 64). He is so blinded by her love that he can see neither how he is changing nor the truth about what the two are doing. Manon lavishes him with kisses and caresses to distract him from reality. Graham explains, "While Des Grieux seeks to endow their liaison with social legitimacy, Manon insists on her freedom to pursue her fancies" (Graham 230). When Des Grieux expresses wishes to reconcile with his father, she refuses and "adoucit son refus par des caresses si tendres et si passionnées" that Des Grieux "[applaudit] à toutes ses réponses et à toutes ses résolutions" (Prévost 65). Later, when Tiberge storms out of their house and Des Grieux wishes to pursue him, Manon soothes Des Grieux with caresses, and he once more forgets about his virtuous friend.

Des Grieux cannot see anything but his future with Manon and convinces himself that every questionable act he commits is not voluntary, but instead done through necessity. When poverty threatens, he learns to cheat at cards in order to have money to provide for Manon although he knows this is wrong: "Quelque répugnance que j'eusse à tromper, je me laissai entraîner par une cruelle nécessité" (Prévost 95). This is only the beginning of his crime spree. He later attempts to swindle M. de G... M...—which he admits is "une véritable friponnerie" (Prévost 108)—and even commits murder in order to free Manon from prison. Des Grieux

admits to l'homme de qualité that his obsession with Manon's welfare had such a power over him that he was capable of anything.⁶ In desperation, he contemplates his actions, demonstrating how Manon is his number-one priority:

Mais lorsque j'eus fait quelques pas dans les rues, et que l'air eut un peu rafraîchi mon sang et mes humeurs, ma fureur fit place peu à peu à des sentiments plus raisonnables. [...] D'ailleurs aurais-je eu recours à un lâche assassinat? Quelle autre voie pouvais-je m'ouvrir à la vengeance? Je recueillis toutes mes forces et tous mes esprits pour travailler d'abord à la délivrance de Manon, remettant tout le reste après le succès de cette importante entreprise. (Prévost 187-188)

There is evidently a battle waging inside of Des Grieux between his conscience and his passion. While at times he admits his wrongdoings, he denies his crimes on most occasions. Such is the latter case when he is imprisoned for trying to dupe the young M. de G... M...: "Il était clair qu'il n'y avait rien d'absolument criminel dans mon affaire" (Prévost 180). How is it that such a man of "un naturel si doux et si aimable" and "de si bonnes qualités," as the Supérieur of Saint-Lazare calls him,⁷ can commit such acts? Furthermore, why can he not see the criminality of his actions? As Tiberge puts it, there is still a virtue in Des Grieux and thus "il n'y a que la violence de [ses] passions qui [l']écart" (Prévost 94). Des Grieux is a virtuous soul driven to extremes by Manon's inebriating affection.

⁶ "[...] de quoi n'étais-je pas capable, avec les motifs qui m'animaient?" (Prévost 123)

⁷ "Vous êtes d'un naturel si doux et si aimable, me dit-il un jour, que je ne puis comprendre les désordres dont on vous accuse. Deux choses m'étonnent : l'une, comment, avec de si bonnes qualités, vous avez pu vous livrer à l'excès du libertinage [...]" (Prévost 111-112)

In fact, Manon's love is so intoxicating that Des Grieux lets her control every aspect of their lives, including where they live and what they do for fun as well as how they spend their money. When he sees their wealth suspiciously increasing, she laughs off his questions, and he is too in love with her to let this alarm him in the least.⁸ He stops himself from believing his first suspicions of her infidelity. Des Grieux tells the narrator, "Il me paraissait si impossible que Manon m'eût trahi, que je craignais de lui faire injure en la soupçonnant" (Prévost 66). He cannot believe that she could possibly betray him and concurrently be so tender and loving. Even after his father informs him that it is, indeed, true that Manon has duped him, he cannot allow himself to believe this. Des Grieux contends to his father that "elle n'est pas capable d'une si noire et si cruelle lâcheté" (Prévost 73). When he finally realizes that he has been betrayed, Des Grieux returns to the church. His hatred for her brews for two years, as he describes, "Tantôt je ne considérais en elle que la plus aimable de toutes les filles, et je languissais du désir de la revoir; tantôt je n'y apercevais qu'une lâche et perfide maîtresse, et je faisais mille serments de ne la chercher que pour la punir" (Prévost 74). However, the mere sight of her bewitches him again.⁹ Although he first criticizes her, he is enchanted once more by her (ch)arms: her tears; her timid tone; and the "mille caresses passionnées" with which she asserts that she loves only him (Prévost 81), and he forgives all that she has

⁸ "Elle me pria, en riant, d'être sans embarras. Ne vous ai-je pas promis, me dit-elle, que je trouverais des ressources? Je l'aimais avec trop de simplicité pour m'alarmer facilement." (Prévost 65)

⁹ "[...] quelle apparition surprenante ! plus brillante que je ne l'avais jamais vue [...] Ses charmes surpassaient tout ce qu'on peut décrire. C'était un air si fin, si doux, si engageant ! l'air de l'Amour même. Toute sa figure me parut un enchantement." (Prévost 79)

done to him. She uses her tears, caresses, and affirmations of love repeatedly to regain his affection every time she betrays him or leads him to ruin. Des Grieux declares to Manon, “Je vais perdre ma fortune et ma réputation pour toi, je le prévois bien; je lis ma destinée dans tes beaux yeux; mais de quelles pertes ne serai-je pas consolé par ton amour!” (Prévost 81). In this moment, it is clear that Des Grieux is now so ensnared by his passion for Manon, that he is willing to sacrifice everything for her, even his life. He feels he has no life without her, as he affirms in a conversation with Tiberge, declaring a separation from her would be “la mort la plus cruelle” (Prévost 93).

Manon has, in fact, entrapped Des Grieux so permanently with her affection, that when she is banished to America, it is as if he has been mortally wounded.¹⁰ He resolves to give up everything for her:

Mais lorsque je l’eus assurée que rien n’était capable de me séparer d’elle, et que j’étais disposé à la suivre jusqu’à l’extrémité du monde, pour prendre soin d’elle, pour la servir, pour l’aimer et pour attacher inséparablement ma misérable destinée à la sienne. [...]j’avais perdu, à la vérité, tout ce que le reste des hommes estime ; mais j’étais maître du cœur de Manon, le seul bien que j’estimais. (Prévost 198-199)

He goes to the extreme length of following her to America, but any regret he might feel at leaving his homeland is assuaged before it can be manifested by her “perpétuelle émulation de services et d’amour” (Prévost 202). Further, in America,

¹⁰ “Jamais apoplexie violente ne causa d’effet plus subit et plus terrible. Je tombai avec une palpitation de cœur si douloureuse, qu’à l’instant que je perdis la connaissance, je me crus délivré de la vie pour toujours.” (Prévost 186)

without the luxuries they have been so accustomed to in Europe, she gains Des Grieux's sympathy by claiming that she weeps only for his losses: "Ses pleurs, son discours, et le ton dont elle le prononça, firent sur moi une impression si étonnante, que je crus sentir une espèce de division dans mon âme[...] Je suis assuré du cœur de Manon" (Prévost 205). It is because of this reaffirmed love that he duels Synnelet in order to ensure his freedom to be with her. He describes his victory with the claim that "L'Amour conduisait [son] épée" (Prévost 211). He has declared that "l'Amour est un bon maître" (Prévost 91), and like a devoted follower, he has given everything he possesses to it, or rather to his passion.

Through seducing Des Grieux and becoming "la souveraine de [son] cœur," Manon Lescaut leads Des Grieux into a life of immorality, subjecting him to social and economic hardships, imprisonment, and even expatriation.

He becomes attached to her to such a degree that his life force depends on her.¹¹ This fatal attraction prompts him to turn against everything he knew and believed before her. Des Grieux describes the impact of Manon's influence: "moi qui m'y expose si volontiers pour elle, en renonçant à ma fortune et aux douceurs de la maison de mon père; moi qui me suis retranché jusqu'au nécessaire, pour satisfaire ses petites humeurs et ses caprices" (Prévost 101). Des Grieux's love becomes so strong that he cannot imagine a life without Manon, and, as a result, he turns to murder and even risks his own life in order to preserve hers. Thus, Manon's love is

¹¹ "[...] il s'agit bien ici de mon sang ! Il s'agit de la vie et de l'entretien de Manon" (Prévost 138)

that of a lethal passion — a passion from which Des Grieux cannot escape until Manon herself is dead.

Tiberge, or The Path of Virtue

Il avait mille bonnes qualités. Vous le connaîtrez par les meilleures dans la suite de mon histoire, et surtout par un zèle et une générosité en amitié, qui surpassent les plus célèbres exemples de l'antiquité. (Prévost 57)

While Manon Lescaut represents the fatality of passion and the deterioration of Des Grieux's values, Tiberge serves as the virtuous influence in Des Grieux's life, the force attempting to sustain his virtue. At the beginning and end of Des Grieux's story, he is accompanied with this righteous friend, affirming a direct correlation between the strength of their friendship and the strength of Des Grieux's virtue. Throughout his relationship with Manon, it is Tiberge who repeatedly attempts to instill a sense of rectitude in Des Grieux, ardently trying to put him back on the "right" path by ending his relationship with Manon. Tiberge's attempts are often made in vain, because the potent passion for Manon that drives Des Grieux proves more powerful than Tiberge's influence, but Tiberge never loses his virtue or purpose. In times when Manon is not present, Des Grieux regards Tiberge with great respect, for he knows that Tiberge is "un garçon d'un sens mûr et d'une conduite fort réglée" who loves him with a "tendresse extraordinaire" (Prévost 62). Thus, when Des Grieux is without Manon, this respect yields Tiberge the power to be a source of reason and morality when Des Grieux has lost sight of his own sensibility and to influence Des Grieux for the better.

Tiberge's importance to Des Grieux is evident by the fact that it is not Manon but Tiberge who is first mentioned in Des Grieux's tale as he explains his regret in

abandoning his friend.¹² Although Des Grieux repeatedly leaves his friend to pursue his passion with Manon, Tiberge later reappears time after time with the same ardent affection for Des Grieux and faith in his virtuous nature. As Wellington writes in "Unity and Symmetry of the Character of Tiberge," "The constancy of his presence repeatedly animates the intercharacter and, in the case of Des Grieux, the intracharacter conflicts" (Wellington 27). The true nature of Des Grieux is ambiguous, as supported by Wellington when she writes, "Manon may be amoral, and Tiberge, the epitome of religion and morality, but Des Grieux fits midway between these two extremes in his moral ambiguity" (Wellington 28). However, Des Grieux's immoral acts with Manon overshadow his virtuous side. Tiberge's presence in the novel underlines the sometimes hidden good-natured quality of Des Grieux. When Des Grieux is held prisoner in his father's house, Tiberge reaffirms the virtue still inside of him, attempting to make Des Grieux cognizant of his own character. Tiberge tells him, "Je connais l'excellence de votre cœur et de votre esprit; il n'y a rien de bon dont vous ne puissiez vous rendre capable. Le poison du plaisir vous a fait écarter du chemin" (Prévost 75). In reassuring Des Grieux of his own inherent goodness, Tiberge is also informing the reader that Des Grieux still possesses a sense of virtue, however hidden it may appear. Tiberge blames Manon for Des Grieux's folly, and maintains that Des Grieux can still recover if he abandons all thoughts of her. Of course, Des Grieux leaves Tiberge again to follow his heart and Manon, but this still does not make him lose any respect from Tiberge. When

¹² "Mon seul regret, en quittant Amiens, était d'y laisser un ami, avec lequel j'avais toujours été tendrement uni." (Prévost 57)

Des Grieux goes to Tiberge for help and inquires if he still regards him as a friend, Tiberge asserts his steadfast feelings for Des Grieux:

Il me répondit, du ton le plus tendre, que rien n'était capable de le faire renoncer à cette qualité; que mes malheurs mêmes, et si je lui permettais de le dire, mes fautes et mes désordres, avaient redoublé sa tendresse pour moi; mais que c'était une tendresse mêlée de la plus vive douleur, telle qu'on la sent pour une personne chère, qu'on voit toucher à sa perte sans pouvoir la secourir. (Prévost 92)

Tiberge attempts once again to make Des Grieux understand that he has the ability to lead a virtuous life if only he would cut ties with Manon, and that he himself will help Des Grieux find the righteous path once more.¹³

Tiberge speaks to Des Grieux with the utmost kindness and respect and genuine regard, and this yields Tiberge respect in return from Des Grieux.¹⁴ Des Grieux claims that even when he has not the slightest intention of following Tiberge's advice, he still respectfully listens to all that Tiberge tells him and knows that it is coming from a friend out of sincere compassion.¹⁵ There are times, though, that it appears Tiberge does get through to Des Grieux, and the reader can see momentary sentiments of virtue that break through the fatal sentiments of passion. For instance, when he visits Des Grieux in his father's house, Tiberge explains how

¹³ "[...] que vous souffrirez que je fasse du moins mes efforts pour vous ramener à la vertu, que je sais que vous aimez, et dont il n'y a que la violence de vos passions qui vous écarte." (Prévost 94)

¹⁴ "[...] sa figure et le ton de son discours m'inspirèrent du respect." (Prévost 75)

¹⁵ "Je recevais ses avis avec amitié ; et quoique je n'eusse pas la moindre disposition à les suivre, je lui savais bon gré de son zèle, parce que j'en connaissais la source." (Prévost 96)

he too had a penchant towards “la volupté,” but “le Ciel [lui avait] donné, en même temps, du goût pour la vertu” (Prévost 75). After this, Tiberge explains that Des Grieux has the ability to follow his example and lead a life of virtue, because it still exists in his own heart. Des Grieux is so flattered by Tiberge’s faith in his character, that “il [se] fit naître dès cette première visite, une forte envie de renoncer comme lui à tous les plaisirs du siècle pour entrer dans l’état ecclésiastique” (Prévost 76). He resolves to reject what other men admire and the pleasures of love.¹⁶ On the other hand, once Manon is back in the picture, and Tiberge grants his request for money, Des Grieux expresses temporary feelings of remorse toward his intentions, but they are short lived:

Je sentais tout le prix de sa générosité. J’en fus touché, jusqu’au point de déplorer l’aveuglement d’un amour fatal, qui me faisait violer tous les devoirs. La vertu eut assez de force, pendant quelques moments, pour s’élever dans mon cœur contre ma passion, et j’aperçus du moins, dans cet instant de lumière, la honte et l’indignité de mes chaînes. Mais ce combat fut léger et dura peu. La vue de Manon m’aurait fait précipiter du ciel, et je m’étonnai, en me retrouvant près d’elle, que j’eusse pu traiter un moment de honteuse, une tendresse si juste pour un objet si charmant. (Prévost 94)

Evidently, the mere sight of Manon is enough to overcome whatever virtuous feelings arose after his encounter with Tiberge. Respect and friendship just cannot measure up to passion.

¹⁶ “Je mènerai une vie sage et chrétienne, disais-je; je m’occuperai de l’étude et de la religion, qui ne me permettront point de penser aux dangereux plaisirs de l’amour. Je mépriserais ce que le commun des hommes admire;” (Prévost 76)

It is evident that Des Grieux's innocence is still intact when he first goes with Tiberge to investigate the girls in the street. Des Grieux claims, "Nous n'avions pas d'autre motif que la curiosité" (Prévost 57). It is only after he meets Manon that his morals and reason start to decline. Tiberge, then, "si formé" and "conseiller sage" (Prévost 75), takes on the role of the voice of reason for Des Grieux. He becomes Des Grieux's *directeur de conscience*, or spiritual director, defined by Foucault as one who guides another in "the way in which they comport themselves with their fellow man and in their external actions" (*Abnormal*, 183). He describes that with the *directeur de conscience*, "one must deal with those things that concern the self and one's inner being: the little trials of the spirit, temptations, and bad habits, along with the sources from which they spring and the means to be employed to correct them" (*Abnormal*, 183). However, just as one is sometimes hesitant to face his conscience, Des Grieux is apprehensive to face his *directeur de conscience* Tiberge. When he first sees Tiberge after meeting Manon, Des Grieux professes, "Sa présence me chagrina" (Prévost 62). After he reveals his plans of elopement to Tiberge, Tiberge tries to stop him by attempting to make Des Grieux see the rashness in this "misérable résolution" and by threatening to report him to those who could stop his plan.¹⁷ This is the first instance where Tiberge's inherent virtue impedes Des Grieux plans, and it represents as well the first cut in their bond of friendship. Wellington writes that after he first leaves Tiberge for Manon, Des Grieux "acknowledges a sense of guilt and inclination of his subconscious, thus establishing Tiberge and

¹⁷ "[...] si je ne renonçais pas ensuite à cette misérable résolution, il avertirait des personnes qui pourraient l'arrêter à coup sûr." (Prévost 62)

Manon as channels for fulfillment of concurrently sought but diametrically opposed desires” (Wellington 28). After this instant, there is always conflict between his conscience (Tiberge) and his desire (Manon).

The more absorbed Des Grieux becomes in his relationship with Manon, the less Tiberge has any influence on Des Grieux’s actions. Wellington writes: “Tiberge’s arguments rest on reason and logic, and the more Des Grieux becomes involved with Manon, the more devoid of persuasiveness are these arms” (Wellington 30). Jaccard supports this same theory, writing that although Tiberge’s reproaches and “tendresse profonde” should turn Des Grieux from Manon and back to the right path, they actually have “un effet radicalement contraire” (Jaccard 85). He contends that Des Grieux “trouve un justification à sa conduite et annihile ainsi sa mauvaise conscience. Non seulement les efforts de Tiberge sont vains, mais il semble que par sa seule présence, il renforce encore la détermination de son ami de se laisser aller à sa passion” (Jaccard 86). The reader can see, in the instance where Tiberge finally scorns Des Grieux intensely for his behavior and informs him of the punishment he will surely receive, that although Des Grieux is somewhat impacted by these words, Manon immediately mitigates any remorse Tiberge has made him feel:

Lorsqu’il vit que [...] j’allais me replonger plus que jamais dans les plaisirs, il changea entièrement de ton et de manières. Il se plaignit de mon endurcissement: il me menaça des châtimens du Ciel, et il me prédit une partie des malheurs qui ne tardèrent guère à m’arriver. [...] Son discours ne laissa pas de faire quelque impression sur moi. Je remarque ainsi les diverses occasions où mon cœur sentit un retour vers le bien, parce que c’est

à ce souvenir que j'ai dû ensuite une partie de ma force, dans les plus malheureuses circonstances de ma vie. Les caresses de Manon dissipèrent en un moment le chagrin que cette scène m'avait causé. (Prévost 97).

Tiberge's reason and virtue no longer holds any sway over Des Grieux once his passion for Manon is complete, and they thus cannot have any effect on him. With her caresses and endearing words, Manon creates a shield of intoxicating love around Des Grieux that Tiberge just will not be able to penetrate with reason. Moreover, in losing his temper with Des Grieux and threatening to end all ties with him, Tiberge grants Manon an opportunity to become a source of comfort, a haven, a transformation that only strengthens Des Grieux's passion and leads him to abandon his friendship with Tiberge altogether. Des Grieux does not see Tiberge again except for in instances where he can use Tiberge as a means of liberating either himself or Manon from prison.

In taking on the role of Des Grieux's *directeur de conscience*, Tiberge is morphed into a part of Des Grieux, literally following him wherever he goes. Des Grieux recounts how Tiberge ardently searches for him when he first betrays Tiberge: "[...] la conduite de Tiberge, lorsqu'il s'aperçut que je l'avais trompé. Son zèle n'en devint pas moins ardent. Vous verrez à quel excès il le porta" (Prévost 63). His concern for his friend blocks him from feeling any sense of betrayal. As Jaccard explains in Manon Lescaut, le personnage-romancier, "Tiberge n'a pas reconnu sa défaite et sa fidélité restera acquise jusqu'à la fin" (Jaccard 90). Once Tiberge discovers that Des Grieux is being held in his father's house, he visits Des Grieux

frequently, unremittingly trying to reform him.¹⁸ When Des Grieux is imprisoned at Saint-Lazare, Tiberge jumps at Des Grieux's request to meet, seeing it as another chance to try to reform him.¹⁹ As Des Grieux's conscience, Tiberge feels it is his duty to do whatever he can and to go to whatever lengths necessary to find Des Grieux and enable him to see the wrongful path he is on. If anything convinces the reader of this relentless attachment, it is the fact that Tiberge travels all the way to Nouvel Orléans for the sole purpose of finding Des Grieux and bringing him back to France.²⁰ These extreme measures can only be explained by the fact that Tiberge is not only emotionally attached to his friend, but also literally attached to him, because he has taken on the role of being his guide. But, as Jaccard continues, "Cette bonté, cette fidélité à toute épreuve seront inutiles. Dans l'esprit du Chevalier, Tiberge est un vaincu" (Jaccard 90). Because he is an ever-faithful friend and a literal attachment to Des Grieux, Des Grieux can treat Tiberge however he wants, for there is no question of his future loyalty and devotion. Thus, he sets himself up to be misused and ill treated by Des Grieux.

Tiberge, therefore, becomes a pawn in Des Grieux's plans with Manon, always taken for granted and never repaid. When Des Grieux finds himself in want of money, it is Tiberge, his poor friend, who he asks for help:

¹⁸ "Tiberge n'avait pas manqué, pendant ce temps-là, de me rendre de fréquentes visites. Sa morale ne finissait point. Il recommençait sans cesse à me représenter le tort que je faisais à ma conscience, à mon honneur et à ma fortune." (Prévost 96)

¹⁹ "[...] il savait que j'étais à Saint-Lazare, et peut-être n'avait-il pas été fâché de cette disgrâce qu'il croyait capable de me ramener au devoir." (Prévost 118)

²⁰ "Il m'apprit que l'unique motif de son voyage avait été le désir de me voir, et de m'engager à retourner en France;" (Prévost 218)

Enfin, cette confusion de pensées en produisit une qui remit le calme tout d'un coup dans mon esprit, et que je m'étonnai de n'avoir pas eue plus tôt. Ce fut de recourir à mon ami Tiberge, dans lequel j'étais bien certain de retrouver toujours le même fond de zèle et d'amitié. Rien n'est plus admirable et ne fait plus d'honneur à la vertu, que la confiance avec laquelle on s'adresse aux personnes dont on connaît parfaitement la probité. On sent qu'il n'y a point de risque à courir. Si elle ne sont pas toujours en état d'offrir du secours, on est sûr qu'on en obtiendra du moins de la bonté et de la compassion. (Prévost 91)

Des Grieux knows that Tiberge will grant him, if not money, at least compassion. Tiberge is, of course, hesitant to give Des Grieux money, and he finds himself in a dilemma. He has to either betray his principles in helping Des Grieux or betray Des Grieux by not helping him. In the end, Tiberge chooses to assist Des Grieux, hoping that he will use the money for a virtuous purpose, but Des Grieux of course goes back to his life with Manon. This is not the only time Des Grieux will use and betray his friend, nor the only time Des Grieux requests money from him, although Tiberge himself has little to give. This act is repeated numerous times, and, in accordance with Wellington, Tiberge is "reduced to a resource" and treated as "a machine that dispenses at intervals" (Wellington 31). While Des Grieux initially finds peace in his solution to ask Tiberge for help, he later laments having to endure Tiberge's "reproches, ses exhortations, ses menaces" in order to obtain the money (Prévost 137). In this, it is evident that Des Grieux truly has lost any regard for Tiberge in terms of friendship, and his sole purpose in meeting with him is for his purse. Des

Griex says to himself, “le bon Tiberge me refusera-t-il ce qu’il aura le pouvoir de me donner? Non, il sera touché de ma misère” (Prévost 137), showing the reader that he knows Tiberge will concede to his request under the right emotional appeals. He often allows Tiberge to believe he has reformed to *devoir*, or that he is weak rather than malicious.²¹ He even admits to treating Tiberge as an unaware accomplice in his scheme, when he knows Tiberge could or would not help him voluntarily: “C’était mon ami Tiberge dont il était question; non que j’espérasse de lui les secours nécessaires pour ma liberté; mais je voulais l’y faire servir comme un instrument éloigné, sans qu’il en eût même connaissance” (Prévost 117). As Wellington explains, “Des Griex thinks he can dominate Tiberge because he is in need and Tiberge needs to provide” (Wellington 30). He exploits Tiberge’s sense of responsibility to him. A captive of the power of Manon’s love, Des Griex continues to lie to Tiberge in order to achieve his ends.

Because of the overwhelming influence of Manon, Des Griex cannot think reasonably enough to follow the advice of Tiberge. As Jaccard writes, “Tiberge n’a pas eu le pouvoir dans le temps de l’aventure de ramener Des Griex à de meilleurs sentiments” (Jaccard 86). However, once Manon has died and she can no longer influence Des Griex—once this “rivalry of same-sex friendship and heterosexual passion” has come to a close (Wellington 173)—Tiberge can once again regain power and influence in Des Griex’s decisions. Tiberge’s enduring friendship and loyalty has had a tremendous and lasting impact on Des Griex. Tiberge gave him

²¹ “Il comprit qu’il y avait plus de faiblesse que de malignité dans mes désordres.” (Prévost 121)

everything he possessed, both spiritually and materially, with no guarantee of recompense. And in the end, these sacrifices do not go unnoticed.²² Des Grieux realizes how awful he has treated Tiberge: “[...] combien je devrais verser de larmes, en songeant quelle en a toujours été la récompense” (Prévost 63). And moreover, Des Grieux expresses extreme remorse in not heeding Tiberge’s instructions:

Si j’eusse alors suivi ses conseils, j’aurais toujours été sage et heureux. Si j’avais du moins profité de ses reproches dans le précipice où mes passions m’ont entraîné, j’aurais sauvé quelque chose du naufrage de ma fortune et de ma réputation. Mais il n’a point recueilli d’autre fruit de ses soins, que le chagrin de les voir inutiles, et quelquefois durement récompensés, par un ingrat qui s’en offensait et qui les traitait d’importunité. (Prévost 57)

However, while it is evident that Des Grieux is cognizant at the end of his adventure of how he wronged Tiberge and expresses regret for his past behavior, it is ambiguous if he is being truthful when he claims that he will return to “une vie sage et réglé” (Prévost 218). Wellington writes of the ending, “It is not at all clear if he has really joined the path of virtue and friendship and intends to rejoin Tiberge” (Wellington 186). Des Grieux explains how he comforts Tiberge with assurances of his newfound virtue: “[...] et pour lui causer une joie à laquelle il ne s’attendait pas, je lui déclarai que les semences de vertu qu’il avait jetées autrefois dans mon cœur commençaient à produire des fruits dont il allait être satisfait” (Prévost 118). Is he merely feigning repentance once more in order to gain emotional support from his

²² “Il me présenta aussitôt sa bourse. Je pris cinq cents francs, sur six cents que j’y trouvai. Je lui offris mon billet ; il était trop généreux pour l’accepter.” (Prévost 188)

friend or regain amicable relations with him? After all, he has lost Manon, and Tiberge is all he has left in the new world. Byrne poses similar questions in “The Love of Pleasure” when he writes, “Is it simply a rhetorical ploy, used in the knowledge that his audience will certainly have more sympathy for a man who seems finally to have taken heed of his mentor’s advice [...] and learnt a lesson from experience? Is it just a part of the moralizing ‘packaging’ of the story[...]?” (32). Despite Tiberge’s fervent attempts to reform Des Grieux, it cannot be said for sure that Des Grieux completely reformed. Des Grieux is by himself when l’Homme de Qualité finds him; hence, it is evident that Des Grieux’s declaration of his own virtue has convinced Tiberge that he no longer needs to play the role of *directeur de conscience*. Tiberge has helped preserve Des Grieux’s virtue for him, and has resigned from his self-appointed position, transferring back to Des Grieux the responsibility of being his own sense of reason and listening to his conscience without a guide. Their unity is no longer necessary at the end of the story, because they are no longer tied together. Tiberge has served his purpose, allowing Des Grieux the possibility to recover his sense of morality, duty and virtue. The question remains whether or not Des Grieux will attempt to accomplish this.

The Law of the Father

Qu'un père est malheureux, lorsqu'après avoir aimé tendrement un fils, et n'avoir rien épargné pour en faire un honnête homme, il n'y trouve à la fin qu'un fripon qui le déshonore! (Prévost 182-183)

While Manon, who represents the fatality of passion, and Tiberge, who represents the path to virtue, are the most obvious and influential personages in Des Grieux's life, there is a third prominent character in Des Grieux's story—his father. During Des Grieux's adventures with Manon, along with his internal struggle between vice and virtue there is also a struggle between following the *loi du père*, the law of the father, and ignoring all sense of *devoir*, of duty to his father and his family name, in the name of love. In "The Law of the Father," Cusset-Jenkins defines *loi du père* in Manon Lescaut as "the moral, economical and symbolic power of the father over his son established in eighteenth-century French law" (Cusset-Jenkins 1284). While the father is not always present in his physical form, the morals and values he has tried to instill in Des Grieux play a role in Des Grieux's every decision, although this role swiftly loses its power once Manon begins wielding her influence over Des Grieux. The more powerful she becomes, the less authority his father, or rather the idea of his father, has on his behavior. Thus, there is a constant battle waged inside Des Grieux's subconscious between following the *loi du père* and pursuing his relationship with Manon. As she moves in and out of Des Grieux's life, the power of the paternal law falls and rises.

Manon symbolizes the complete opposite of everything his father represents. As Cusset writes in "Loi du père et symbolique de l'espace": "L'amour du Chevalier des Grieux pour Manon Lescaut, une fille de 'naissance commune,' et son refus

répété de renoncer à cet amour, représentent la transgression de cette loi du père aristocratique et tyrannique” (Cusset 94). She is the epitome of the antithesis of *devoir* and sense of responsibility. Thus, it is quite revealing that Des Grieux begins revolting against *la loi du père* within moments of meeting Manon, even before he begins rebelling against the wishes of his own father. Before Des Grieux decides to stay with Manon and loses his sense of *devoir*, he first defies the wishes of Manon’s parents. When Manon informs Des Grieux that her parents have planned for her to become a nun, he decides, “Je combattis la cruelle intention de ses parents, [...] j’emploierais ma vie pour la délivrer de la tyrannie des ses parents et pour la rendre heureuse” (Prévost 59-60). Thus, his conflict with the figure of *le père* begins upon the instant of meeting Manon, not just after he has started living with her.

Not only does Manon’s influence on Des Grieux lead him into vice, but it also concurrently leads him astray from his father and his sense of duty, both to his family and to himself. The subtle beginnings of rebellion against the *loi du père*, spurred by Des Grieux’s introduction to Manon, become full-fledged once he leaves Amiens with Manon and starts his cohabitation with Manon, although Des Grieux is not yet conscious of his full revolt. Her overwhelming passion blinds Des Grieux, making him forget all that was once important to him. He is no longer concerned with worries about his future career, fiscal responsibilities, maintaining his (or rather, his father’s) values, upholding his family name, or even staying in contact his friends or family. Des Grieux readily admits to l’homme de qualité, “[...] j’avais été si rempli de ma passion, que j’avais peu songé à ma famille, et au chagrin que mon père avait dû ressentir de mon absence” (Prévost 64). He is so enamored with

Manon that he forgets about his family and does not think about the dishonor he is bestowing upon them. Shortly after fleeing with Manon, there is a moment where he finally remembers his father. Des Grieux wants to marry his love and wants his father's approval (more for the material benefits this would provide than for the moral implications of his consent), but this desire lasts only until he shares it with Manon:

Je résolu de me réconcilier, s'il était possible, avec mon père. [...] je me flattai d'obtenir de lui la liberté de l'épouser, ayant été désabusé de l'espérance de le pouvoir sans son consentement. Je communiquai ce projet à Manon ; et je lui fis entendre qu'outre les motifs de l'amour et du devoir, celui de la nécessité pouvait y entrer aussi pour quelque chose, car nos fonds étaient extrêmement altérés, et je commençais à revenir de l'opinion qu'ils étaient inépuisables. Manon reçut froidement cette proposition. (Prévost 64)

Manon follows her protests with such passionate caresses that Des Grieux consents to her objections to getting his father's approval.²³ After this fleeting idea of a reunion with his father, Des Grieux never again considers the possibility of both living in accordance with his father's wishes and catering to Manon. Every instance thereafter that Des Grieux entertains the idea of meeting with his father, it is not because he seeks his father's approval but because he requires his aid.

Manon first gains power over the *loi du père* by clouding Des Grieux's vision. He explains, "la tranquillité où nous vivions servit à me faire rappeler peu à peu

²³ "Elle adoucit son refus par des caresses si tendres et si passionnés, que [...] j'applaudi à toutes ses réponses et à toutes ses résolutions." (Prévost 65)

l'idée de mon devoir" (Prévost 64). All he can see is Manon. This power soon becomes so strong that it actually usurps the authority of the father altogether. Des Grieux's sense of *devoir*, of duty to the father, is replaced by a sense of duty to Manon.²⁴ He no longer serves his father or his own name; that is, he is now a subject under the law of Manon. He disregards whatever his father says to him because he is now wholly concerned with serving Manon. When Des Grieux is first captured by his father, he knows his father will lecture him. He, thus, resolves to listen patiently and to tell his father whatever he needs to hear in order to swiftly leave the paternal house, return to Paris and "d'aller rendre la vie et la joie à [sa] chère Manon" (Prévost 69). Des Grieux tries to manipulate his father into believing he is remorseful and has regained his sense of *devoir* in order to gain freedom to pursue Manon:

Pour ce qui regardait ma maîtresse, il me dit que j'avais bien mérité ce qui venait de m'arriver, [...] mais qu'il espérait que cette petite aventure me rendrait plus sage. Je ne pris ce discours que dans le sens qui s'accordait avec mes idées. Je remerciai mon père de la bonté qu'il avait de me pardonner, et je lui promis de prendre une conduite plus soumise et plus réglée. Je triomphais au fond du cœur, car de la manière dont les choses s'arrangeaient, je ne doutais point que je n'eusse la liberté de me dérober de la maison, même avant la fin de la nuit. (Prévost 70)

Here, Des Grieux's premeditated feigning of remorse shows that his rebellion against his father has now become a conscious act. He deliberately plans to go

²⁴ "Elle me tient lieu de gloire, de bonheur et de fortune." (Prévost 138)

against his father's advice and instructions in order to shorten his separation from Manon.

Once Des Grieux has clearly begun to consciously act against his father and the social values he represents, his father transforms from a figure of figurative authority into a literal lawmaker. In accordance with Cusset, "Du début à la fin du roman, la relation du père et du fils reste sous le signe de l'emprisonnement" (Cusset 95). Just as a government puts leaders of rebellion in prison in order to stop their insurgency, Des Grieux's father detains him in his own house. Being entrapped in his father's house prevents him from consorting with Manon. Des Grieux explains how his father "imprisoned" him shortly after his arrival:

Comme je parlais toujours de retourner promptement à Paris, et que je me levais même à tous moments pour cela, mon père vit bien que dans le transport où j'étais, rien ne serait capable de m'arrêter. Il me conduisit dans une chambre haute, où il laissa deux domestiques avec moi pour me garder à vue. Je ne me possédais point. [...] on ne me permettrait pas aisément de sortir de ma chambre. Je mesurai des yeux la hauteur des fenêtres ; ne voyant nulle possibilité de m'échapper par cette voie, je m'engageai, par mille serments, à faire un jour leur fortune, s'ils voulaient consentir à mon évasion. Je les pressai, je les caressai, je les menaçai ; mais cette tentative fut encore inutile. (Prévost 72)

This description from Des Grieux's own point of view confirms that he has come to regard the paternal authority like that of the law. As Jaccard writes, his father is "le juge suprême pour Des Grieux" (Jaccard 150). He is no longer a father keeping his

son in his house, but a warden keeping an inmate in a prison, complete with guards who cannot be won over and windows through which one cannot escape. It also illustrates that his own father has realized that nothing but a prison cell can keep Des Grieux from seeking out Manon. Des Grieux has become, thus, a criminal even before he breaks the federal law.

Just as a warden tries to rehabilitate his prisoners, Des Grieux's father attempts this as well. Des Grieux explains how he "continuait toujours de [lui] apporter les raisons qui pouvaient [le] ramener au bon sens et [lui] inspirer du mépris pour l'infidèle Manon" (Prévost 73). Like a missionary visits an inmate, Tiberge also visits Des Grieux in "[sa] prison" (Prévost 75), his prison being both his father's house as well as the mental torment he is currently undergoing while his father's words and his desires are battling inside his mind. As Tiberge believes that inside of Des Grieux lies virtue, his father similarly believes that Des Grieux knows how to honor his family, if only he can be convinced that doing so is more important than following his desires.²⁵ Jaccard explains, "Le père est le seul personnage capable de fixer encore les Des Grieux sur la moral sociale et l'empêcher de s'en tenir au seul niveau de l'idéal" (Jaccard 107). It is important to note that Des Grieux's father is not trying to rid his son of all heterosexual desires nor trying to choose his son's career path. On the contrary, he acknowledges that Des Grieux has a penchant for women and offers to find him a substitution, another beautiful woman: "Chevalier, me dit-il, j'ai eu dessein, jusqu'à présent, de te faire porter la croix de Malte ; mais je vois que tes inclinations ne sont point tournées de ce côté-là.

²⁵ "Il me connaissait des principes d'honneur." (Prévost 73)

Tu aimes les jolies femmes. Je suis d'avis de t'en chercher une qui te plaise. [...] qui ressemblera à Manon, et qui sera plus fidèle" (Prévost 73). Thus, it is solely Manon that the father opposes, for it is from her that this opposition to the paternal law spawns. As Cusset-Jenkins asserts, it is she who is without a paternal home, and who "gains her freedom by seducing a son who was returning to his father's house" (Cusset-Jenkins 1285). Des Grieux's father also remarks that he has the intention of merely *guiding* his children while leaving them free to choose what they want in life.²⁶ Des Grieux, therefore, has many ways in which he could please his father. He can pursue any career path and marry any woman he pleases, as long as he abandons all thoughts of Manon. But whatever his intentions, he cannot rid his thoughts of her and is, therefore, doomed to reject his father's command.²⁷

When his father no longer has any control over Des Grieux, and he follows Manon down a path of lying, cheating, stealing, and murder, his figurative imprisonment in his father's house becomes a literal incarceration.

At St. Lazare, with the literal father absent, the Supérieur takes on the role of the père. He tells Des Grieux that "son devoir serait de travailler à [lui] inspirer le goût de la vertu et de la religion," and that Des Grieux should "profiter de ses exhortations et de ses conseils" (Prévost 110). Like Des Grieux's father, the new "Père" (as Des Grieux calls him) attempts to utilize Des Grieux's incarceration to

²⁶ "Il me déclara que son intention était de laisser ses enfants libres dans le choix de leur condition et que, de quelque manière que je voulusse disposer de moi, il ne se réserverait que le droit de m'aider de ses conseils." (Prévost 77)

²⁷ "Il est certain que ce projet flattait extrêmement mes inclinations. Mais, à la fin d'un si sage arrangement, je sentais que mon cœur attendait encore quelque chose ; et que pour n'avoir rien à désirer dans la plus charmante solitude, il y fallait être avec Manon." (Prévost 77)

rehabilitate him.²⁸ Des Grieux feigned reform with his father in order to escape from his home, and once again he tries to exploit paternal affection to secure a release from prison. When the Supérieur speaks highly of Des Grieux, he sees this as an opportunity to gain his affection and confidence in his reformation:

Je fus ravi de lui voir cette opinion de moi. Je résolus de l'augmenter par une conduite qui pût le satisfaire entièrement, persuadé que c'était le plus sûr moyen d'abrégier ma prison. [...] Je *feignis* de m'appliquer à l'étude avec le dernier attachement, et je lui donnai ainsi, dans toutes les occasions, des preuves du changement qu'il désirait. Cependant il n'était qu'extérieur. Je dois le confesser à ma honte, je jouai, à Saint-Lazare, un personnage d'hypocrite. (Prévost 112)

When the opportunity presents itself, Des Grieux abuses the Supérieur's faith in his restored virtue to help him escape the prison. Segal contends that in "[breaking] away as he failed to do from his father's house, and with a brutal gesture of parricide which he will only be able, later to imitate in words," he metaphorically commits an Oedipal murder (Segal 181). He once was not strong enough to break directly away from his father. However, from this act, it is evident that Des Grieux's contempt for the figure of the père has grown exponentially; he is now willing to commit murder in order to escape the father.

It is during his second incarceration that Des Grieux finally "kills" his real father. His father visits him at le Châtelet and reproaches his criminal behavior, telling him, "Vous allez à la renommée par un chemin infallible," and that he

²⁸ "Eh bien, mon Père, que prétendez-vous faire de moi?" (Prévost 110)

deserved all the punishment he has received for the dishonor he has bestowed upon his father (Prévost 182). Des Grieux attempts to win over his father's sympathy by begging him to "pardonner cette faiblesse aux deux violentes passions qui [l]'avaient agité, la vengeance et l'amour" (Prévost 184), and tries to solicit his compassion and understanding by citing other "exemples célèbres" of well-known aristocrats who have fallen into this trap.²⁹ At first, this ploy seems to work; his father takes him back with open arms.³⁰ As Graham explains, "By acknowledging his misconduct but denying evil intent, Des Grieux sways his father to forgive him. The sudden change of heart undermines paternal authority" (Graham 110). This is the first blow Des Grieux commits towards his father's figurative murder. He cannot escape from Le Châtelet like his prison before, but leaves only through the influence of his father on his captors. As Cusset-Jenkins points out, "He can secure his release only if he submits himself to his father's will: paternal authority has the same value as the law" (Cusset-Jenkins 1284). However, once Des Grieux discovers that it is his father who conspired against him and helped banish Manon to America, all possibility of following this law is lost. He delivers a fatal blow to his father with an ultimate renouncing of the *loi du père*. Des Grieux explains to his father: "Il est impossible que je vous suive. Il ne l'est pas moins que je vive, après la dureté avec laquelle vous me traitez. Ainsi je vous dis un éternel adieu" (Prévost 192). And while his

²⁹ "A chaque faute dont je lui faisais l'aveu, j'avais soin de joindre des exemples célèbres, pour en diminuer la honte. » (P. 184)

³⁰ "Viens, mon pauvre Chevalier, me dit-il, viens m'embrasser ; tu me fais pitié. » (Prévost 184)

father claims that he would rather see Des Grieux dead than living without honor,³¹ it is he himself that will die in Des Grieux's absence, possibly from the fatal "wound" Des Grieux has inflicted upon him.³²

Des Grieux travels with Manon to America, attempting to escape from the *loi du père*. Cusset writes, "L'exil dans le Nouveau Monde ouvrirait ainsi un espace utopique transcendant les contradictions logiques d'un monde où règne la loi du père" (Cusset 98). Byrne contends as well that America offers Des Grieux "refuge and respite for the ever-present dilemmas of love and honour" (Byrne 29-30). However, America is an ambiguous space, for it both allows Des Grieux to first escape from the *père*, and then to establish his own fatherland—he creates a new home with Manon where he can govern himself. But, as utopic as America might seem at first glance, there is still a *père* present. This becomes apparent when Des Grieux attempts to marry Manon, seeking legitimacy under the law of the ultimate Père—God. M. le Gouverneur, the law in this new land, has other plans for the two lovers, and in order to remain with Manon, Des Grieux must rebel against the *loi du père* once more by attempting to kill the governor's nephew. Thus, there is an "immobility of an escape from the law of the father" (Cusset-Jenkins 1287). In the end, Des Grieux resolves to return to his fatherland, and claims that he will strive towards "inspirations de l'honneur" (Prévost 217).

³¹ "J'aime mieux te voir sans vie que sans sagesse et sans honneur." (Prévost 191)

³² "J'ai appris, par la réponse de mon frère aîné, la triste nouvelle de la mort de mon père, à laquelle je tremble, avec trop de raison, que mes égarements n'aient contribué." (Prévost 219)

Des Grieux returns to France, and to what Cusset-Jenkins calls “a life limited by a space that is socially and symbolically defined” (Cusset-Jenkins 1286). She contends that he returns to “what had been his life before he met Manon,” but this cannot be known for certain (Cusset-Jenkins 1286). With his father gone, he has the possibility of now carrying his family name, and according to Segal, “[taking] back his father’s place, language and principles” (Segal 73). But it is unclear if he indeed does so. Manon has died, but this doesn’t necessarily mean the *loi du père* has regained its supremacy in Des Grieux’s actions. As Byrne explains, Des Grieux’s “feeling for her [set] him on a collision course with his father’s views on behaviour appropriate to a gentleman, because it [...] captured and alienated his aristocratic value-system and replaced it with one which [...] can at the end of the day justify all actions done in the name of love” (Byrne 23). If his value-system, or that of the father, was so easily replaceable, how can one contend that Des Grieux has, at the end, steadfastly returned to the path of virtue? His relationship with Manon has forever altered his bond with *le père*, but just how much Manon’s influence has been retained within him in his return to the fatherland remains uncertain.

Point of (No) Return: “La vie sage et réglée”

Je me livrai entièrement aux inspirations de l'honneur, et je continuai de remplir mon petit emploi[...]. J'étais résolu de retourner dans ma patrie, pour y réparer, par une vie sage et réglée, le scandale de ma conduite. (Prévost 218)

As Manon and Tiberge move in and out of the life of le Chevalier Des Grieux, his sense of virtue weakens and strengthens repeatedly. He begins his adventure as an honorable and virtuous man, dedicated to his father and to his friend Tiberge. But over the course of his years with Manon, Des Grieux begins to lose his sense of honor and virtue to the point where it is virtually indiscernible. Some critics note that once he has gone to America with Manon to leave his father and his friend forever, Des Grieux “begins his reversal with the idea of making genuine and legitimate his ‘marriage’ to Manon” (Wellington 31). However, this is not the first instance where Des Grieux begins reinstating his virtue. Along his journey with her, there are times, always in Manon’s absence, where he begins reforming. Reexamining these instances is essential to fully understanding his final reformation.

Des Grieux’s first attempt at reformation occurs after his imprisonment in his father’s home. Following Tiberge to Saint-Sulpice, he makes a resolution to a new lifestyle:

Je mènerai une vie sage et chrétienne, disais-je ; je m’occuperai de l’étude et de la religion, qui ne me permettront point de penser aux dangereux plaisirs de l’amour. Je mépriserai ce que le commun des homes admire ; et comme je sens assez que mon cœur ne désira que ce qu’il estime, j’aurai aussi peu

d'inquiétudes que de désirs. Je formai là-dessus, d'avance, un système de vie paisible et solitaire. (Prévost 76)

Under a new identity of “Abbé Des Grieux,” he immerses himself in studies, making, in his own words, “de progrès extraordinaires en peu de mois” towards restoring his virtue (Prévost 77). Just when he thought he had forgotten his immoral ways and his passion for the disloyal Manon, he sees her again, and everything he has worked for during the past two years is reset. He describes their meeting as “un instant malheureux [qui le] fit retomber dans le précipice” and an irreparable relapse of his virtue (Prévost 78).

There are other instances of “mini-returns,” in Manon’s absence or when things are going poorly for him, where Des Grieux thinks of his family and expresses some remorse, but is this penitence believable? When Manon abandons him for M. de G... M..., he explains:

Je me trouvai dans un partage de sentiments, et par conséquent dans une incertitude si difficile à terminer [...] Ce fut dans ce moment que l'honneur et la vertu me firent sentir encore les pointes du remords, et que je jetai les yeux en soupirant vers Amiens, vers la maison de mon père, vers Saint-Sulpice et vers tous les lieux où j'avais vécu dans l'innocence. (Prévost 102-103)

Des Grieux’s remorse in this event is ambiguous, because he further explains that what he actually regrets is his unhappiness and unprofitable love (Prévost 103). Self-pity drives his repentance more than remorse for what he has done and all he has betrayed. Des Grieux refers to his current state as a “revers funeste” (Prévost

103), most certainly referring to how his love has abandoned him. But what Des Grieux is not aware of is that he could actually be talking about himself, because in following Manon he has made a fatal reversal in his morality. Even after her second betrayal, he still continues to ere on his path to virtue and seek out her love once again.

Everything changes for Des Grieux in America. Without the influences of his father and of Tiberge, he begins his advancement towards virtue. Once considered criminals in France, he and Manon are welcomed in America “comme des gens descendus du Ciel” (Prévost 203). Des Grieux describes America as “le rivage désiré” (Prévost 202), and it is quite obvious why he finds this new land to be a paradise. Before traveling there, he resolves that it is in America where he and Manon will finally be left in peace.³³ That presupposed peace and tranquility is precisely what he attains there. The governor finds them to be “deux personnes d’esprit et de mérite” (Prévost 203), and, in the assumption that they are married, allows them to live together in peace. He promises to help in adjusting to this new land and even provides them with a modest home.³⁴ Stranded in this desert land with hardly any money and a home that is little more than shack, Des Grieux still (finally) finds “félicité” (Prévost 205). When Manon informs him of her concern that he must suffer for her mistakes, he responds: “De quoi me plaindrais-je? [...] Je

³³ “Il nous laisseront du moins vivre en paix. [...] Ils ne troubleront point deux amants qu’ils verront vivre avec autant de simplicité qu’eux. J’étais donc tranquille de ce côté-là.” (Prévost 199)

³⁴ “Je n’épargnerai rien pour adoucir votre sort, et vous contribuerez vous-mêmes à me faire trouver quelque agrément dans ce lieu sauvage et désert.[...] le soir, il nous fit conduire au logement qu’on nous avait préparé. Nous trouvâmes une misérable cabane [...]” (Prévost 203-204)

possède tout ce que je désire. Vous m'aimez, n'est-ce pas? Quel autre bonheur me suis-je jamais proposé?" (Prévost 204). Manon assures Des Grieux that he is undeniably "la plus riche personne de l'univers," even amidst their squalor, because it is impossible "d'être aimé plus tendrement qu'[il l'est]" (Prévost 204). He claims that, indeed, while others have come to America in search of gold, he and Manon have discovered "des trésors bien plus estimables" (Prévost 205-206). He has accomplished his ultimate objective and found that for which he has searched throughout the entire journey—Manon's true love and, with it, happiness.³⁵

With his happiness intact, America appears to him as "un lieu de délices" (Prévost 205). He tells Manon that New Orleans will be where they can "goûter les variés douceurs de l'amour," because, "c'est ici qu'on s'aime sans intérêt, sans jalousie, sans inconstance" (Prévost 205). They can love each other freely. Des Grieux then begins on a new path without the pressures of father and society. He makes a complete turnaround in this new country, gaining the respect of his neighbors and even the governor:

J'étais réglé dans ma conduite. Manon ne l'était pas moins. Nous ne laissons point échapper l'occasion de rendre service et de faire du bien à nos voisins. Cette disposition officieuse et la douceur de nos manières nous attirèrent la confiance et l'affection de toute la colonie. Nous fûmes en peu de temps si considérés que nous passions pour les premières personnes de la ville après le Gouverneur. (Prévost 206)

³⁵ "Je suis assuré du cœur de Manon; il est tel que je l'ai souhaité pour être heureux: je ne puis plus cesser de l'être à présent. Voilà ma félicité bien établie." (Prévost 205)

Notably, Des Grieux makes his reformation without any outside influence. He has learned on his own how to behave more honorably and lawfully. What's more, according to Des Grieux, Manon also makes this transition with him.³⁶ America, thus, spawns a double conversion for the two lovers. The one who once led Des Grieux astray from virtue is now reforming herself.

Along with emulating a virtuous lifestyle, Des Grieux also makes strides towards restoring his virtue by addressing his religious responsibility. He describes to *l'homme de qualité* how he started returning to religion and God and, hence, wished to sanctify his "marriage":

Nos conversations, qui étaient toujours réfléchies, nous mirent insensiblement dans le goût d'un amour vertueux. Je fus le premier qui proposai ce changement à Manon. [...]Je lui fis comprendre qu'il manquait une chose à notre bonheur: C'est, lui dis-je, de le faire approuver du Ciel. Nous avons l'âme trop belle, et le cœur trop bien fait l'un et l'autre, pour vivre volontairement dans l'oubli du devoir. (Prévost 206)

Des Grieux explains that while they were under multiple legal and filial obligations, it was impossible to satisfy their desire to be legitimate;³⁷ but now they are in America, where they are self-dependent and "où [ils n'ont] plus à ménager les lois arbitraires du rang et de la bienséance" and where no one would stop them from obtaining legitimacy from a religious authority (Prévost 206). From this alone, it would appear that Des Grieux has finally regained his sense of virtue and social and

³⁶ "J'étais réglé dans ma conduite. Manon ne l'était pas moins." (Prévost 206)

³⁷ "Passe d'y avoir vécu en France, où il nous était également impossible de cesser de nous aimer, et de nous satisfaire par une voie légitime;" (Prévost 206)

religious responsibility. However, when M. le Gouverneur opposes this marriage, Des Grieux reverses his new religious convictions. He claims that right when he and Manon start returning to virtue, God punishes him for something he has tried to do in the name of God:

Mais se trouvera-t-il quelqu'un qui accuse mes plaintes d'injustice, si je gémiss de la rigueur du Ciel à rejeter un dessein que je n'avais formé que pour lui plaire? Hélas! que dis-je, à le rejeter? Il l'a puni comme un crime. Il m'avait souffert avec patience, tandis que je marchais aveuglément dans la route du vice; et ses plus rudes châtimens m'étaient réservés, lorsque je commençais à retourner à la vertu. (Prévost 207) [emphasis is mine]

Nevertheless, Des Grieux does not let his dissatisfaction with the Heavens dissuade him from maintaining the honor code that his name of *Chevalier* implies. Synnelet, the governor's nephew, challenges him in a duel to determine who should marry Manon. He honors the challenge, and uses his sword to prove that he is still worthy of his title. Later, when Manon begins to die in their attempt to flee the town, Des Grieux continues his duty of protecting her, making every attempt possible to keep her alive and remaining by her side, despite the injuries he sustains in doing so. After Manon's inevitable death, he breaks his sword—the symbol of his knighthood—and with this act, breaks away from his sense of honor to love (Prévost 216). Graham explains, “Without Manon to protect, he is now free to protect and defend his own reputation once more” (Graham 32). Le Chevalier Des Grieux that the reader has come to know is gone. In facing his death, an enormous transformation occurs in Des Grieux's consciousness. Even after being rescued, he

resigns to his death and pleads with Death to take him away.³⁸ It is exactly during this dramatic period that he has a final conversion to virtue. He describes it to l'homme de qualité:

Mais le Ciel, après m'avoir puni avec tant de rigueur, avait dessein de me rendre utiles mes malheurs et ses châtements. Il m'éclaira de ses lumières, qui me firent rappeler des idées dignes de ma naissance et de mon éducation. La tranquillité ayant commencé à renaître un peu dans mon âme, ce changement fut suivi de près par ma guérison. Je me livrai entièrement aux inspirations de l'honneur, et je continuai de remplir mon petit emploi [...] J'étais résolu de retourner dans ma patrie, pour y réparer, par une vie sage et réglée, le scandale de ma conduite. (Prévost 217-218)

Here, on the verge of death—a death which he tries to invoke—Des Grieux resolves to return to virtue, once and for all. He wants to return to his fatherland, return to his honorable ways, and atone for his past behavior.

This moment conspicuously resembles others in Des Grieux's life. It first mirrors the resolution Des Grieux makes after Manon's first betrayal, when he promises to lead a sage and Christian life. He went back on this promise, and in addition lied about his progress. He admits trying to fake a conversion in an attempt to get what he needs: "Il me vint plusieurs fois à l'esprit [...] de feindre une nouvelle conversion pour obtenir de [mon père] quelque secours d'argent" (Prévost 91). Now, when he describes to Tiberge his new virtue in order to please him, the reader

³⁸ "Ma haine pour la vie ne diminuait point. J'invoquais continuellement la mort, et je m'obstinaï longtemps à rejeter tous les remèdes." (Prévost 217)

cannot know if he's telling the truth this time (Prévost 219). In both situations, Des Grieux was in need of pardon and assistance. The only difference is that this time Manon is not in the picture. Does he retain the memory of her? Is her physical absence alone enough to prove that Des Grieux is now genuine in his conversion? Secondly, as Cusset asserts, "Cette décision finale du chevalier fait écho aux premiers mots de son récit, avant la rencontre de Manon" (Cusset 100). In describing his past life to l'homme de qualité, Des Grieux claims, "Je menais une vie si sage et si réglée" before he encountered Manon (Prévost 56). Maybe, then, with her no longer in his life, he truly can return to this past lifestyle. The novel ends when Des Grieux is "returning to virtue," underlining the ambiguity of his character. It is impossible to know for sure if he truly has converted to virtue. It is certain, however, that Des Grieux has changed, irrespective of whether or not he is faking his virtuosity. He returns to France no longer le Chevalier Des Grieux, but a new man forever altered by Manon, Tiberge, and his father.

Conclusion

While “l’Avis de l’auteur” presents Des Grieux as “un homme de bien qui agit mal” (Deloffre CXVII), at the end of the novel Des Grieux remains this same paradoxical character. In the name of love and passion, Des Grieux revolts against his father, his honor, his friend Tiberge and his religion. His return to virtue in his fatherland after the death of his love (and as the reader learns, after the death of his father) is uncertain. Jean Sgard writes in the introduction to the novel that Manon Lescaut is “une histoire qui restera définitivement ambiguë” (Prévost 21). At the end of the narrative, “le vice y devient vertu [...] les actions mauvaises finissent par paraître héroïques” (Prévost 21). Thus, not only the morality of Des Grieux but also the idea of morality itself is called into question. While the behavior of Des Grieux is generally more than problematic, we do know that he is following a new moral code — a code not defined by those around him, but created exclusively by himself.

Des Grieux’s invents a new code for himself based on a system of values where love is considered the “sovereign good” (Byrne 21). He explains to Tiberge the contrast between his new path and Tiberge’s code, founded in religion:

“J’aime Manon; je tends au travers de mille douleurs à vivre heureux et tranquille auprès d’elle. La voie par où je marche est malheureuse; mais l’espérance d’arriver à mon terme y répand toujours de la douceur; et je me croirai trop bien payé, par un moment passé avec elle, de tous les chagrins que j’essuie pour l’obtenir. Toutes choses me paraissent donc égales de votre côté et du mien; ou s’il y a quelque différence, elle est encore à mon avantage, car le bonheur que j’espère est proche, et l’autre est éloigné; le mien est de la

nature des peines, c'est-à-dire sensible au corps, et l'autre est d'une nature inconnue, qui n'est certaine que par la foi. (Prévost 119)

Des Grieux claims that the suffering and alienation he must endure because of his new value system means nothing in comparison with the happiness he receives from Manon. Thus, Des Grieux's new moral code is based on "Me, Myself, My Happiness," as opposed to, on one hand, Tiberge's code with the virtue as the sovereign good, and, on the other hand, Des Grieux's father's code of honoring one's name and the rules of society. In consequence, we observe "une tendance générale à refuser les modèles au bénéfice des vérités particulières" (Rohou 500). Jean Rohou writes, "Auparavant, les moralistes proposaient de se conformer à des types exemplaires. Certains ont tendance maintenant à prôner l'authenticité personnelle—ou simplement à goûter l'originalité" (Rohou 500). It's not by accident that Tiberge perceives this moral code as "monstrueux" (Prévost 119). Des Grieux explains that Tiberge "paru effrayé de ce raisonnement" (Prévost 119), emphasizing the clash between two completely different moral codes. "Morality" for Tiberge is that of a timeless virtue based in "l'antiquité" (Prévost 57), whereas Des Grieux's take on "morality" is quite revolutionary. No one in Des Grieux's life truly understands the reasoning behind his creation of this radical code or the perpetuation of it once it begins to spawn hardships and suffering.

This new system of values dictates that one sacrifices himself in the name of love, not virtue. Instead of "se conformer à l'ordre par la restriction des désirs et de passions" (Rohou 530), this new code seeks to realize those desires. In so doing, this uncomformistic tendency marks the genesis of modern subjectivity. Rohou

describes this new concern of “l’individu” as “une révolution *psycho-logique* de la condition humaine” (Rohou 630). He explains that this inversion of attitude towards the individual and the group is “au principe de la civilization moderne” (Rohou 630). And not only is the psychology of man changing, but we see novels evolving as well due to this transformation of attitude. Rohou writes, “Quant aux difficultés, on commence à les imputer aux structures sociales, idéologique et culturelles, qui briment les aspirations qu’on invite le lecteur à partager, même quand elles sont moralement contestables : le roman évolue de *La Princesse de Clèves* vers *Manon Lescaut*” (Rohou 553). Whereas Madame de LaFayette’s Princess de Clèves ends with the unambiguous triumph of “des exemples de vertu inimitables” (Rohou 239), Manon Lescaut has a completely indefinite conclusion, leaving the reader questioning the intentions of Des Grieux. Thus, no reader can imagine Des Grieux as anything but an ambiguous character who has revolted against family and religion, created a controversial system of values to gratify his perception of love and happiness, and who, at the end of the day, may or may not dispose of this new code in returning to his home. Prévost leaves nothing certain about the true nature of le Chevalier Des Grieux, who will remain—forever—“un mélange de vertus et de vices” (Prévost 48).

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