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Original Copies: Rousseau, Laclos, Stendhal

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Original Copies: Rousseau, Laclos, Stendhal

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M.A. University of Arizona, 2004

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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in French

2014

Abstract

Original Copies: Rousseau, Laclos, Stendhal
By Gina E. Westbeld Gallois

True originality is, perhaps, the offspring of superior imitation. The practice of imitation as a rite of passage and a show of mastery has a long history in literature. My interest in the concept of copying lies more with internal questions at the level of diegesis and the text than with the external concept of influence; notably ways in which, for instance, Rousseau's *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* is explicitly read though two later novels, Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* and the complex mechanisms at work in scenes in which some form of copying, transcribing and/or imitation takes place. By analyzing key scenes of "copying" as *mise en abyme* for the process of literary creation, I will evaluate the status of the copy in general and how these novels "copy" through an explicit dialog with their predecessors, transcribing their readings into a nonetheless new and original text, affirming their own place in the novelistic tradition. Explicit scenes of copying comment implicitly on the very imitations they are performing. Rousseau's title and basic plot make overt reference to the legendary love story of Abélard and Héloïse. In *Liaisons*, Merteuil claims that Rousseau is the only novelist capable of expressing love convincingly as she criticizes Valmont's efforts to seduce the Présidente by feigning love through writing. In *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Julien is drawn into a *roman par lettres* when Mathilde tosses love letters to him at his desk, harkening back to *Julie* and *Liaisons*. Stendhal's novel emerges in the early 19th century proposing, not the ultimate novel of "psychological realism," as has sometimes been suggested, but the possibility of an escape from the copying and imitation so pervasive in worldly Parisian society. Paradoxically, it is through silence that Julien and Mme de Rênal seem to reclaim a kind of sincere moment of *bonheur* from the well meaning but unstable utopian systems imagined in *Julie* and from the cynical suggestion of the impossibility of Valmont's famous suppressed love letter to the Présidente.

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Thank you, thank you, thank you to my family, friends, colleagues, neighbors and to the occasional innocent bystander who encouraged me along the way with kind words and deeds too numerous to count. Special thanks to Suzanne for befriending Ulysse and spending time with him to help me.

Isis, my beloved feline friend, began this journey with me, warming my lap though thousands of pages of reading and writing. George and Ray took up where she left off, eating my page markers and generally sabotaging my progress, but warming my lap nonetheless.

Finally, I must give credit to my silent friend and constant companion, Earl Grey, whose warmth and caffeine sustained me.

This dissertation is dedicated to the fond memory of Candace Lang.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Mastery Through Imitation

In the years since the publication of Rousseau's *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* in 1761, Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* in 1782, and Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* in 1830, countless volumes of commentary and scholarship have been produced on nearly every imaginable aspect of these works and their authors. Faced with this reality, the aim of any literary dissertation project is nonetheless to contribute something new and compelling to the field of study that will not simply be a cleverly disguised copy of the same old themes. Paradoxically however, as we shall see in the complex interplay of the three works I have chosen as my focus, in many ways it is ill advised if not impossible *not* to "copy" one's predecessors to some extent. Imitation is, after all, one way of paying homage to the work of a great master. As I endeavor to engage in a meaningful way with these three celebrated novels, it is with much gratitude that I acknowledge the great debt I owe to the thinkers whose work has made mine possible. In offering my own contribution to our understanding of eighteenth-century French novels, I have done my best not to become just another "pâle copie."[1]

Though the category of eighteenth-century French novels does not, technically speaking, comprise *Le Rouge et le Noir*, first published in 1830, I am including it in this project due to significant links to the two other novels, which are made clear in Peter Brooks's groundbreaking book, *The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal*. While the "short" eighteenth century is traditionally limited to the years between 1715 to 1798 and the "long" eighteenth century stretches as far back to 1688 and

[1] See Chapter 3.

forward to 1815 and beyond, for my purposes it is not important if this expandable century can be extended far enough to cover the novelistic contributions of Stendhal. Dividing literature into periods of one hundred years may be expedient in some ways, but revolutions and literary movements do not respect these artificial boundaries. I will thus include Stendhal's oeuvre in the tradition of the eighteenth-century French novel, particularly in the subset of novels we will call "worldly novels," even as others writing before or contemporaneously with him are already firmly rooted in nineteenth-century realism.

Peter Brooks's work on the subject of worldliness looks at the novel of worldliness on its own terms, rather than through the lens of realism, a practice that had previously resulted in this literary tradition being largely dismissed as somehow lacking in realism.[2] Stendhal's love of the literature of the *Ancien Régime* led him to imitate its

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[2] In his introduction, Brooks defines "worldliness" as: "an ethos and personal manner which indicate that one attaches primary or even exclusive importance to ordered social existence, to life within a pubic system of values and gestures, to the social techniques that further this life and one's position in it, and hence to knowledge about society and its forms of comportment. The "literature of worldliness" is then a literature directed to man's self-conscious social existence – to know, assess, celebrate, master and give meaning to man's words and gestures as they are formed by his consciousness of society. The "novel of worldliness," finally, is a fictional exploitation of the drama inherent in man's social existence, the encounters of personal styles within the framework and code provided by society." Brooks, Peter. *The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 1969. p. 4.

style, though not without difficulties, since one of the major conditions for the existence of a literature of worldliness is that it be written for and about an elite closed society. By 1830, society had changed dramatically from its pre-Revolution structure, as had the reading public, and Stendhal had to find a way to speak to a broader and more diverse audience, adapting his expression of worldliness accordingly.

The elite Parisian society portrayed and critiqued in each of the three novels studied here is one that is essentially closed to outsiders and in which all members operate within a rigid set of highly refined linguistic and behavioral parameters that fall under the heading of *politesse*. Though this arrangement obliges everyone to speak and act within an extremely narrow range of allowable variations, the universal objective is to play one's part as perfectly as possible, further fortifying one's own reputation by ridiculing the weaknesses and failings of others. Theatrical metaphors are prevalent in this society where each member is an actor in the *théâtre du monde* and going to the theater or the opera is a central part of social life. The imitation of society's most successful "actors," copying their speech, dress and conduct, is thus a natural consequence of this oppressive system. It is incidentally by achieving a pitch perfect imitation of these models that the occasional outsider can be accepted among the most elite Parisian societies; Saint-Preux narrowly escapes the infectious effects of worldliness when he spends time in Paris in *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, while Julien Sorel overcomes his extreme repugnance for the nobility and successfully transforms himself into a perfect specimen of worldliness in *Le Rouge et le Noir*.

Paradoxically, in a system of ubiquitous copying, where everyone is vying for public recognition of their flawless resemblance to an ideal model, innovation does occur,

though its mechanisms remain somewhat mysterious. Those possessing the greatest talent for reproducing this ideal version of what makes a gentleman or a lady are also the ones who determine how that ideal is defined and are continuously modifying it in the most subtle ways, namely through the use of *ridicules*. In *Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit*, an extremely important and foundational work for my project, the young and naïve Meilcour learns from Versac's expert mastery of *le monde* that, "tant qu'un ridicule plaît, il est grâce, agrément, esprit ; et ce n'est que quand pour l'avoir usé on s'en lasse, qu'on lui donne le nom qu'en effet il mérite."[3] Versac continues Meilcour's worldly education by explaining to him the importance of being at once a somewhat eccentric original and a perfect copy: "L'une ne vous est pas moins nécessaire que l'autre : sans la première, vous ne frapperiez personne, sans la seconde, vous déplairiez à tous le monde, . . . on n'est jamais moins à portée de deviner ce que vous êtes que lorsque vous paraissez être tout ; et un génie supérieur sait embellir ce que les autres lui fournissent, et le rendre neuf à leurs yeux mêmes."[4] This advice assists Meilcour in the making of his reputation, but I will also read it on another level; it is essentially what Rousseau, Laclos and Stendhal do in the creation of their respective novels. Each, with his own individual style, "copies" his predecessors, building on their work in such a way that the result is something totally new and original.

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[3] Crébillon, Claude-Prosper J. *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit*. *Romanciers du XVIII^e siècle*.Ed. Étiemble. Vol. II. Paris : Gallimard, 1965. 5-188. p. 153. Henceforth cited as *Égarements.*

[4] *Égarements* 154.

As we move from Rousseau, through Laclos and onto Stendhal, we shall see how the unrelenting societal pressure to copy is dealt with, and more importantly, how it is subverted, with varying results. This pressure to "faire comme les autres"[5] manifests itself through writing, speaking, manner and dress. Close readings of key examples in which characters engage in these different forms of copying will be critical to my larger objective of examining how the imitation on the level of the characters comments and critiques the novel as a genre through a complex performance of imitation on the level of the author. Though worldliness often resembles a game or competition in the way its players are constantly trying to outdo each other, there is a more sinister side to the pervasive imitation, which tends to be represented as having graver and more devastating consequences as the eighteenth century advances. Crébillon's *Égarements* is left unfinished, but we know from the preface that the memoir writer eventually tires of *le monde* and retires to the country in the company of a good woman who helps him to reform. At the end of the third and final existing part however, the reader understands that Madame de Lursay will at best, be bitterly disappointed in her affair with Meilcour, if she is lucky enough not to have her reputation permanently destroyed by a very public *rupture*. Rousseau shows us how even the slightest exposure to worldliness is enough to corrupt an individual *almost* irrevocably. Saint-Preux's letters expose the corruption and hypocrisy of Parisians even as he is totally unaware that he is becoming one of them. Laclos presents us with a society rife with vice and delighting in revenge and pure

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[5] Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. *Œuvres complètes*. Ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Vol.II. Paris: Gallimard, 1964. 1-745. p. 31. Henceforth cited as *Julie*.

malice. Any glimmer of hope for the power of virtue to triumph in the end is destroyed with cynicism and horrific consequences meted out to the innocent and naïve victims of a cruel plot. Valmont's death may in some ways suggest the possibility of his personal reform, but it does not signal the rehabilitation of society as a whole. Julien Sorel is forced to master the worldly system he hates to achieve his goals, only to find that this does not fulfill him. Though Stendhal treats Julien Sorel's execution with less tragedy than might be expected, the specter of imitation remains after he is gone.

The great power of imitation is that it becomes essentially impossible to separate truth from fiction, since both speak the same worldly language. In matters of worldly love and seduction, for example, the man must convince the woman of the strength and authenticity of his "love" and desire for her so that she will eventually give in to her own desire for him. Worldliness's ability to cloak fiction in the appearance of truth functions in insidious ways, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible to distinguish between terms that are normally considered polar opposites: copy and original, vice and virtue, *pudeur* and *coquetterie*, natural and artificial, sincerity and dissimulation…

Though Rousseau will, for the purposes of this project, serve as a kind of artificial starting point, even the title of his novel, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, reminds the reader that there is an original Héloïse whose legendary love for her tutor Abélard is being imitated and refashioned. My first chapter will explore the concept of copying through the story of Julie and Saint-Preux's journey from passion to virtue under the pervasive influences of worldliness with occasional illuminating references from Rousseau's autobiographical work in *Les Confessions*. I will draw upon apparently coincidental biographical details and anecdotes, such as the fact that Rousseau idealized the modest

profession of *copiste* whilst elaborating his own radically original system of thought, to show how the opposing forces of imitation and innovation manifest themselves in his literary project as well as in his life.

Laclos's reverence for Rousseau is presented, in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, perhaps most intriguingly, through the pen of Madame de Merteuil who, as one of those most skilled at deception in the novel, praises the underlying truth of emotion in *Julie*, whereas so many others fall short of a convincing portrayal of true love.[6] In my second chapter, I will examine the ways in which the Vicomte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil exploit their superior mastery of worldly imitation primarily in the service of seduction, manipulation and revenge. The former lovers and longtime co-conspirators take their expertise for flawless imitation in perfect equilibrium with daring innovation to new creative highs, and consequently, to new moral lows. As their conflicting personal schemes increasingly put them at odds with one another, questions of sincerity come to the fore in *Liaisons* in ways that are only obliquely present in *Julie*. Julie and Saint-Preux take for granted that because their love and their intentions are pure, language will transmit their thoughts and feelings transparently. I will point to and analyze the ways in which this idealized transparency is subtly undermined, even if the characters themselves do not or cannot acknowledge it. The possibility, indeed the inevitability of multiple interpretations is either ignored or provisions are made to guide the reader *insensiblement* toward the preferred one, as we shall see to be the case in Julie's *Élysée* garden. But these

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[6] Laclos, Choderlos de. *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. *Laclos: Œuvres completes*. Ed. Laurent Versini. Paris: Gallimard, 1979. 1-386. p. 68. Henceforth cited as *Liaisons*.

provisions, while they may influence Saint-Preux's reading of the landscape before him, cannot control the interpretations Rousseau's reader may conceive.

In *Liaisons* however, Madame de Merteuil mocks Valmont for his supposed failure to convince simultaneously the multiple readers of his letters (herself, the Présidente and Laclos's reader) of contrary objects. While it may in fact be impossible to counterfeit the passionate ramblings of a love that one does *not* truly feel, it may also be impossible to dissimulate from the trained eye the traces of a love that one *does* truly feel. Even as the reader is invited to appreciate Merteuil's talent for reading between the lines of the words on the page, the possibility of sincerely expressing authentic emotion is called into doubt in the most important letter that is present in the novel only in its absence; Laclos does not attempt to write the famous suppressed letter in which Valmont presumably makes his ultimate statement of love for the Présidente.

In *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Stendhal writes his nineteenth-century take on eighteenth-century worldly novels. Julien Sorel at first vehemently resists any form of imitation, with the exception of his dreams to be the next Napoleon, preferring instead to depend solely on his personal merit in order to succeed. In my third chapter, as we follow episodes of his career through the novel, we shall see that it is in Paris that Julien is finally confronted with the inescapable reality that he must become a perfect copy of the young Parisian noblemen around him if he is to win the love of Mathilde de La Mole and be allowed the chance to achieve all that he knows he is capable of doing. But his worldly success is brought down in an instant by a letter from his first love, Madame de Rênal, whose betrayal reignites in him the passionate, *romanesque* side that he had repressed for so long in favor of his ambition.

Each of the novels we will examine in this dissertation deals with the shortcomings of language and the difficulty of securing some form of authentic meaning amidst rampant imitation and dissimulation. In *Julie*, the lovers lament the lack of words adequate to describe their love for one another, and are forced to approximate with long circumlocutions and examples to convey their meaning. *Les Liaisons dangereuses* holds out hope for a love free from worldly influences even as it somewhat cynically refuses to give the reader of glimpse of what the appropriate words to express it might look like. As Julien awaits his execution in the final pages of *Le Rouge et le Noir*, the narrative silence that makes no attempt to describe the Stendhalian *bonheur* he experiences with Madame de Rênal may finally allow for a meaningful, if fleeting escape from the ever present forces of imitation.

Chapter 1

Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse: Julie & The Inimitable Copy

Corrupt people must have novels, but novels corrupt. If this unfortunate cycle is ever to be broken, Rousseau believes that a new kind of novel is the only possible solution. While the list of texts that influenced Rousseau in the composition of his one and only novelistic effort is long, he was well aware that he was breaking new ground with his *Julie*.[7] In doing so, he nonetheless titles the novel after the medieval romance of Abélard and Héloïse. In his essay entitled "L'Ecart Romanesque," Jean Starobinski discusses the genesis of *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* as a sort of entirely new novel built up using the materials of old romances, which Rousseau had read so passionately in his youth, as he recounts in the *Confessions*.[8] Starobinski asserts that for Rousseau "L'invention est inséparable du désir de la répétition."[9] In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which this desire for repetition, a kind of "copying," in the process of invention

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[7] Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Les Confessions*. *Œuvres complètes*. Ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Vol. I. Paris: Gallimard, 1959. 1-656. pp. 546-47.

[8] "Ma mère avait laissé des romans. Nous nous mîmes à les lire après souper mon père et moi. Il n'était question d'abord que de m'exercer à la lecture par des livres amusants; mais bientôt l'intérêt devint si vif, que nous lisions tour à tour sans relâche et passions les nuits à cette occupation. Nous ne pouvions quitter qu'à la fin du volume" *Confessions* 8.

[9] Jean Starobinski. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, La Transparence et l'obstacle: Suivi de sept essais sur Rousseau*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971. p. 406.

manifests itself in the product of that invention, the novel *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*.[10] The letters that compose the novel play an integral part in creating the phenomena that I plan to explore. Paradoxically, the very existence of the letters and indeed the novel itself is owing to the separation of the lovers. While they yearn to be together, they must be apart in order to write to each other about how they yearn to be together. From the first words of the novel, Saint-Preux begs Julie to force him away from her before it is too late: "Il faut vous fuir, Mademoiselle, je le sens bien: j'aurais dû beaucoup moins attendre, ou plutôt il fallait ne vous voir jamais."[11] It is always already too late for them, since each admits that the first sight of the other was an irrevocable and insurmountable *moment fatal*.[12]

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[10] Linda Hutcheon traces the development of texts that point to the process of their own creation throughout the novelistic tradition and argues that self-reflective narratives have existed for as long as the novel itself has existed. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. New York: Routledge, 1991. See also Gérard Genette's study of hypertexts in *Palimpsestes*. Paris: Seuil, 1982.

[11] *Julie* 31.

[12] The *moment fatal* is a central concept in Rousseau's novel as well as in his *Confessions*. In *Julie*, Saint-Preux writes of his first kiss from Julie: "A peine sai-je ce qui m'est arrive depuis ce fatal moment" (p. 65). Later in Part Three, he refers to their first night together as a "nuit fatale" that will cast a shadow over the rest of his life (p.337). In the *Confessions*, Rousseau considers his first literary effort as a "moment funeste" that brought about the "longue chaîne de [s]es malheurs" (p. 260).

My objective in this chapter is to compare the corrupt Parisian society that Saint-Preux describes to Julie in Part Two, with its ubiquitous forms of copying, with its antithesis in the natural world, especially Julie's *Elysée* at Clarens, where different, if not less powerful forms of copying are, on the contrary, considered virtuous. While it seems evident that Rousseau favors a more "natural" form of existence, the endorsement of it that is put forth in *Julie* is complex and remains problematic. Before beginning this analysis however, it will be necessary to establish a foundation for it by observing Julie and Saint-Preux's relationship, which is presented in the novel as the most natural and perfect union possible. The apparent purity and authenticity of Saint-Preux's interactions with Julie will serve as a touchstone for this study as he moves from the Swiss village of Vevai, to *le monde* of elite Parisian society, and then back to the countryside at Clarens in Julie's *Elysée* garden. I will focus primarily on the different kinds of copying occurring in these scenes, and I will use my findings to show how their implicit commentary on imitation and originality attests to the originality of Rousseau's novel, itself a masterful copy. As Peter Brooks points out, Rousseau's message criticizing worldliness and promoting private morality and virtue could only come in the form of a "novel of anti-worldliness," [13] which thus remains fundamentally marked, and perhaps compromised, by the object it purports to attack.

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[13] In talking about *le monde*, worldly practices, worldliness, Parisian society, etc. I am drawing on the work of Peter Brooks (p. 147). Jean-Louis Lecercle also examines Rousseau's writing of *Julie* as a new type of novel in *Rousseau et l'art du roman*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1969. p. 70.

Marked by Perfection: The Paradoxical Copy

Milord Edouard Bomston is Julie and Saint-Preux's most dedicated friend and ally in the novel. When he realizes that he has inadvertently angered Julie's father, the Baron d'Etange, by arguing in favor of her marriage to a commoner like Saint-Preux, Edouard writes to Julie to persuade her to accept his assistance in escaping her father to marry Saint-Preux. He offers them land from his estate in England, where they could live together in anonymity and innocence. One reason he feels so strongly that they should be (re)united is, as he explains: "…de tout ce que j'ai observé jusqu'ici, je n'ai rien vu de si extraordinaire que vous et votre amant."[14] He cannot bear the thought of such a perfect and unique work of nature being destroyed by the prejudice and obstinacy of Julie's father.

Experience has made a philosopher of Milord Edouard and his insight penetrates deeply into the intimate relationship of his young friends. Much of his justification for wanting so desperately to help Julie and Saint-Preux hinges on his assertion that together, they form a "modèle unique de vrais amans."[15] The following enigmatic characterization of Milord Edouard's view of the lovers and of their relationship will resonate later in my discussion of certain elements of Parisian high society as Saint-Preux describes them.

> Ce n'est pas que vous ayez ni l'un ni l'autre un caractère marqué dont on puisse au premier coup d'œil assigner les différences, et il se pourrait bien que cet embarras de vous définir vous fit prendre pour des âmes communes par un observateur superficiel. Mais c'est cela même qui vous

[14] *Julie* 197.

[15] *Julie* 199.

> distingue, qu'il est impossible de vous distinguer, et que les traits du modèle commun, dont quelqu'un manque toujours à chaque individu, brillent tous également dans les vôtres. Ainsi chaque épreuve d'une estampe a ses défauts particuliers qui lui servent de caractère, et s'il en vient une qui soit parfaite, quoiqu'on la trouve belle au premier coup d'œil, il faut la considérer longtemps pour la reconnaître. La première fois que je vis votre amant, je fus frappé d'un sentiment nouveau qui n'a fait qu'augmenter de jour en jour, à mesure que la raison l'a justifié. A votre égard, ce fut tout autre chose encore, et ce sentiment fut si vif que je me trompai sur sa nature. Ce n'était pas tant la différence des sexes qui produisait cette impression, qu'un caractère encore plus marqué de perfection que le cœur sent, même indépendamment de l'amour. Je vois bien ce que vous seriez sans votre ami; je ne vois pas de même ce qu'il serait sans vous; beaucoup d'hommes peuvent lui ressembler, mais il n'y a qu'une Julie au monde.[16]

Paradoxically, according to Milord Edouard, Julie and Saint-Preux are, simultaneously unmarked and marked. Because they lack obvious character traits, they are easy to mistake for "des âmes communes," but at the same time, they are marked, especially Julie, by a kind of perfection that only the heart can feel. Milord Edouard's first meeting with Saint-Preux causes him to experience a "sentiment nouveau," which he is nonetheless able to moderate with the help of his reason. Upon meeting Julie however, he admits that he at first mistook her effect on him for romantic love because it was so

[16] *Julie* 197-98.

strong and unfamiliar that it temporarily overwhelmed him.[17] Reason's proper functioning is forestalled in Julie's case, where the heart must be the judge. The simplicity generally perceived in Julie and Saint-Preux acts as a veil, functioning like *pudeur*, the defensive mechanism that protects Julie's virtue.[18] The veil of simplicity conceals their real beauty and perfection from the vulgar onlooker and simultaneously reveals their true nature only to those who know how see it. What is labeled as simplicity or apparent commonness in the novel is thus in fact exceedingly complex. Milord Edouard's analogy compares Julie and Saint-Preux to the exceptionally rare, yet nearly indiscernible perfect *épreuve* of an *estampe*.[19] Like the English word *engraving*, the French word *estampe* may be used to refer to both the surface of a plate carved by an engraver and the print produced on paper by the engraved plate. For the purposes of this discussion, I will use the term *estampe* to refer exclusively to the engraved plate, and the term *épreuve* to speak of the resulting print. It is not insignificant that the same word can be used for these two intimately related but fundamentally different objects, and the

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[17] While Milord Edouard never proposed to Julie officially, Saint-Preux's fear that he might is mentioned in letter XLVII and in letter XLIX Julie vows that she will never be Lady Bomston. Edouard abandons the thought of pursuing Julie when she writes to him directly in letter LVIII to confess her relationship with Saint-Preux in hopes that the two would not duel over her.

[18] *Julie* 141. See Geoffrey Bennington's thorough analysis of *pudeur*, *coquetterie* and the figure of the veil in *Sententiousness and the Novel: Laying Down the Law in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. p. 144-47.

[19] "Engraving, n." *OED Online*. Oxford UP. "Estampe," *Dictionnaire du CNTRL*. CNRS.

resulting ambiguity renders differentiation more complex. The ease with which the signified can slip from plate to print and vice versa already problematizes the distinction between "original" and "copy." We might also consider the fact that a talented engraver would be capable of using an *épreuve* to produce a high quality *estampe* whose subsequent *épreuves* would be virtually indistinguishable from the model. For the sake of clarity, it is useful to note that an *estampe* is made by applying a layer of a waxy substance to a smooth copper plate and carving out the desired image in reverse. The plate is placed in an acid bath, which corrodes the exposed copper. The wax is then removed, revealing the smooth metal plate, engraved in only the areas where it has come into contact with the acid. When prepared for printing, ink is forced into the grooves and carefully wiped away from the unmarked surfaces. Damp paper or cloth is then applied to the plate by a roller using great pressure so that it not only absorbs the ink from the carvings, but also takes on a subtle physical impression of the *estampe*.[20]

Each individual *épreuve* has its own specific flaws, which give it character according to Milord Edouard. When a flawless example is produced however, it is not immediately perceptible, even to the expert eye. Its beauty may be obvious and undeniable, but careful consideration is required to recognize exactly what makes it so beautiful. The difficulty in recognizing Julie and Saint-Preux's perfection as a couple

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[20] Watelet, Claude-Henri. "Estampe." *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. Ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. U of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Projet (Spring 2010 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/.

comes not in fact from their seemingly unmarked character, but rather from markings that are both so general and so uniform as to render them indistinguishable from the complete absence of the markings of perfection. Perfection might even be said to imitate commonness or imperfection in this case, another protective veil-like function of their paradoxical simplicity.

Edouard's mention of the "modèle commun" makes reference to an ideal, theoretical original, analogous to a given *estampe*, of which there is only one. The ambiguity of the phrase "modèle commun" is worth examining first. On the one hand, we might envision a single model used to produce all *épreuves* so that they all have that model as their common origin. On the other hand, a "modèle commun" allows for the existence of several virtually identical models and blurs the line between model and copy.[21] In the second part of *De la Grammatologie*, Jacques Derrida discusses the art of mimesis as "une reproduction originaire," where "l'origine de l'art est la possibilité de l'estampe."[22] Since an *estampe* represents life or even another work of art, such as a painting, it is, from the beginning, caught up in a cycle of copying. Significantly, in his *Encyclopédie* article on the *estampe*, Claude-Henri Watelet writes:

> La premiere espece d'écriture a été sans doute un choix de figures & de traits marqués & enfoncés sur une matiere dure, qui pût, en résistant aux injures de l'air, transmettre leur signification; & si cette conjecture est plausible, de quelle ancienneté ne peut pas se glorifier l'art de graver?

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[21] "Commun." *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 4e édition*, 1762. U of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois.

[22] Jacques Derrida. *De La Grammatologie*. Paris: Minuit, 1967. p. 296.

> Cependant l'un de ses effets (le plus simple, & en même tems le plus précieux), l'art de multiplier à l'infini par des empreintes, les traits qu'il sait former, ne prend naissance que vers le milieu du xv. siecle.[23]

As Watelet notes, his explanation is conjecture, but he nonetheless links the original act of writing to the art of engraving. Though the capacity for infinite reproductions may not have been discovered and put into practice until the fifteenth century, its potential was born with the first signifying marking carved into a hard surface. In the passage we are reading, Edouard discretely links writing and engraving in his description through his use of the words *marqué*, *traits*, *caractère* and *impression*, all of which may refer to marks on the scripted or printed page.

The *épreuves* of a given *estampe* necessarily lack one or more of its traits or may even have extra, unintended traits, which give rise to those distinguishing marks and make them comprehensible and recognizable. Julie and Saint-Preux, in possessing *all* possible idealized traits, "qui brillent tous également," are superior, but their perfect resemblance to a theoretical original simply does not register in the minds of most people. The relative perfection of a given individual, as Edouard points out, is generally only present to a certain recognizable degree. The verb *reconnaître*[24] however, implies

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[23] "Estampe." Watelet.

[24] The verb reconnoître is defined by *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* as "Se remettre dans l'esprit l'idée, l'image d'une chose, d'une personne, quand on vient à les revoir" and also "On dit aussi, qu'*On reconnoît une chose, une personne, quoiqu'on ne l'ait jamais vue,* Quand on s'aperçoit à quelque marque ou par quelque discours, que c'est

and indeed, requires some original *connaissance* of such a specimen, but Milord Edouard insists that Julie and Saint-Preux compose a *modèle unique*, the likes of which has never been seen before. It is unclear how recognition is then even possible with no basis for comparison, except perhaps by a similarly gifted and sensitive observer such as Milord Edouard. Matters are further complicated if we take into consideration the short introduction to the collection of engravings that were to be produced by the artist Gravelot for *Julie*, where Rousseau writes: "L'habilité de l'Artiste consiste à faire imaginer au Spectateur beaucoup de choses qui ne sont pas sur la planche; & cela dépend d'un heureux choix de circonstance, dont celles qu'il rend font supposer celles qu'il ne rend pas."[25] This ambitious view of how the art of *estampe* making ought to function demands effort and skill from both the artist and the observer. Rousseau's instructions for each individual *estampe* show that he expects the artist to pack an enormous multitude of very specific and minute features onto the plate itself. He then goes a step further in demanding that the existing physical markings cause the observer to infer those, which are not visible, but are nevertheless somehow present through the artist's talent for suggestion.[26] In using this method Rousseau puts a great deal of faith in the artist as well

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telle chose, telle personne." "Reconnaître." *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 4e édition*, 1762. U of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois..

[25] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Recueil d'Estampes pour La nouvelle Héloïse, avec les Sujets des mêmes Estampes tels qu'ils ont été donnés par l'Editeur*. Paris: Chez Duschene, 1761. p. 4.

[26] Jacques Borel points out that Rousseau not only collected engravings, but dabbled in engraving himself and had a highly developed esthetic concerning the paper and ink he

as in the onlooker, and while it may speak volumes to the likes of Milord Edouard, it also creates space for alternate and unintended interpretations. The possibility for uncontrolled interpretation will also be problematic later on in Julie's garden, where Saint-Preux must learn properly to interpret the signs of virtue that Julie has infused into her imitation of nature, rather than the nearly identical signs of untamed sensuality that still enflame his passion for her.

The tendency for the "observateur superficiel" to equate unheard of perfection with mere everyday commonness leads Edouard to intimate that a language deficit is at least partly at fault. The "embarras de vous définir" that he evokes suggests that there is a void in the existing lexicon, which precludes articulation. Edouard himself can only approximate a description of the couple through a long paragraph of circumlocutions and metaphor. If indeed Julie and Saint-Preux as a couple constitute something absolutely unique and new, then it follows logically that no words could yet exist to define them. The "sentiment nouveau" that Milord Edouard experiences is perhaps impossible to accurately describe using the linguistic tools available to him, but like Saint-Preux and Julie, in their letters to each other, he continues his endeavor toward an adequate if not an accurate depiction. Saint-Preux similarly evokes the poverty of catalogued emotions when he writes to Julie, "il faut que mon amour s'augmente et croisse incessamment avec tes charmes, et tu m'es une source inépuisable de sentiments nouveaux que je n'aurais

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used to write his letters as well as the type used to print his books. He had very precise ideas about how each scene in Julie should be represented by engravings and they had to be redone multiple times before he was satisfied with the results. *Génie et folie de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Paris: José Corti, 1966. p. 142-43.

pas même imaginés."[27] Whereas Saint-Preux provokes *a* "sentiment nouveau" in Edouard, Julie is an *infinite* source of previously unimaginable sentiments. Later Saint-Preux proclaims that Julie does not know well enough "ce cœur qui voudrait inventer pour [elle] de nouveaux hommages inconnus aux mortels!"[28] In response to new emotions, he would like to invent new words, but the conditional "voudrait" alludes to the difficulty of the task as well as to the possibility of failure. The only apparent outlet in the novel for these new, previously unimagined sentiments is writing, where even if perfectly nuanced words are not to be found, they can be approximated by the volume of varied descriptions and increasingly precise explanations. Julie's letter to Saint-Preux immediately after their first night together laments the loss of the time when their letters were "faciles" and "le sentiment qui les dictait coulait avec une élégante simplicité."[29] Saint-Preux regrets a similar loss of less complicated times in the first letter of Part Two, when he has been dragged away from Julie: "Il n'est donc plus ce temps où mille sentiments délicieux coulaient de ma plume comme un intarissable torrent!"[30] In each case, writing is inextricably related to feeling, which flows like an endless rush of water. For Julie, existing sentiment is transcribed from her heart directly onto the page, whereas for Saint-Preux, the act of writing initiates a flood of emotions. The more he writes, the more he feels, and thus he must continue writing in order to find ways to describe new emotions as they are generated. By extension, emotions flowing like water are then traced

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[27] *Julie* 115.

[28] *Julie* 140.

[29] *Julie* 102.

[30] *Julie* 189.

onto the page with ink, another flowing liquid medium that is simultaneously writing the letters and the novel we are reading. Rousseau experiences a similar flood of emotion related to writing, as he states in his *Confessions*: "je ne sus jamais écrire que par passion."[31] While each of the above examples is taken from a moment of crisis in the novel when one or both of the lovers fear that their love has reached an impasse, it must be remembered that if the simpler times they yearn for are gone forever, Julie and Saint-Preux do find a certain equilibrium in their relationship several times throughout the novel that allows them to continue writing.

Returning to Milord Edouard's *estampe* analogy, it is vital to address the theoretical genesis of a perfect and absolutely unique specimen. Although we may vulgarly refer to an *épreuve* as a copy, it is significant that an *estampe* and each *épreuve* it produces are, from the start, imperfect mirror images of each other. Even the best possible *épreuve* in a sense never looks anything like the *estampe* that produces it. Everything about them, down to the materials composing them, is different. Additionally, if we were to assume that the *estampe* is "perfect" by virtue of its uniqueness and print-

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[31] *Confessions* 613. Interestingly, in Book Three, Rousseau blames his slow thought processes for the difficulties encountered when speaking and writing: "De là vient encore que je reussis mieux aux ouvrages qui demandent du travail, qu'à ceux qui veulent être faits avec une certaine légéreté, comme les lettres; genre dont je n'ai jamais pu prendre le ton, et dont l'occupation me met au supplice. Je n'écris point de lettres sur les moindres sujets qui ne me coûtent des heures de fatigue, ou si je veux écrire de suite ce qui me vient, je ne sais ni commencer ni finir, ma lettre est un long et confus verbiage; à peine m'entend-on quand on la lit" (p. 114).

worthiness, then each *épreuve* is necessarily imperfect for all practical purposes, since each will almost inevitably bear the marks of various necessary and contingent imperfections relative to the *estampe* that produces it. The *épreuve* is the unavoidably imperfect result of the momentary contact between the "perfect" or at least "unique" model, the ink and the paper. The transfer of the ink, a substance foreign to both other mediums, leaves an indelible trace of their union, in addition to the more subtle and corresponding relief left by the grooves. Rather than assuming that the perfection observed in Julie and Saint-Preux is analogous to the result of the "ideal" union of paper, plate and ink, it is possible that their coming into being as a couple is something of an accident. Under certain conditions, such a combination could conceivably result in the unexpected and radical deviation from the "modèle commun."[32] This kind of accident could potentially generate something totally new that could not be repeated, recognized or traced back to a clear origin. Although Milord Edouard sees Saint-Preux as an exemplary young man, he concedes that "beaucoup d'hommes peuvent lui ressembler," and he is truly special only thanks to his involvement with Julie, an absolutely unique woman who is the sole example of her kind. Unlike Saint-Preux, she needs no one to be who she is, and "il n'y a qu'une Julie au monde." Speaking for herself on behalf of Saint-Preux, Julie writes: "Quand je retrouverais un mérite égal au tien, quand il se présenterait un autre toi-même, encore le premier venu serait-il le seul écouté."[33] This ambiguous

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[32] The *Encylopédie* entry for "Estampe" specifies "l'on dit d'une *estampe* mal imprimée, *c'est une mauvaise épreuve;* on le dit aussi d'une *estampe* dont la planche est usée, ou devenue imparfaite" Watelet.

[33] *Julie* 261.

statement at once sets Saint-Preux apart from others who might resemble him because Julie loves *him*, but it also diminishes him somewhat by suggesting that she loves him is because he is "le premier venu" among many other possible matches.[34]

Virtue as the Most Dangerous of Seductions

In his audacious first letter to Julie, opening the novel, Saint-Preux declares his love to her and daringly wonders if destiny has not brought them together:

> Avant que d'avoir pris les uniformes préjugés du monde, nous avons des manières uniformes de sentir et de voir, et pourquoi n'oserais-je imaginer dans nos cœurs ce même concert que j'aperçois dans nos jugements? Quelquefois nos yeux se rencontrent; quelques soupirs nous échappent en même temps, quelques larmes fugitives..... ô Julie! si cet accord venait de plus loin.... si le Ciel nous avait destinés.... toute la force humaine..... ah, pardon![35]

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[34] Tony Tanner's chapter on *Julie* discusses the Baron d'Etange's rejection of Saint-Preux as a potential match for Julie on the grounds that he is a *quidam*, or a "person (name unknown.)" Tanner focuses on Saint-Preux's lack of a name and a noble title that would give him an existence in the eyes of Julie's father. The notion that he is a nameless no one/anyone and that many others could resemble him as Edouard claims, reduces him to merely occupying a place that could just as easily be occupied by another. "Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse." In *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1979. p. 138.

[35] *Julie* 32-33.

When Julie finally admits that she loves him too and allows herself to be her natural authentic self in his presence, the lovers marvel at the ease of communication between two hearts that have become one, and the utter inability of each to hide even the most minor sentiment from the other. Even the letters they exchange boast a transparency of expression and feeling that requires no interpretation.[36] Saint-Preux comments on Julie's writing, "Ma Julie, que la simplicité de votre lettre est touchante! Que j'y vois bien la sérénité d'une âme innocente, et la tendre sollicitude de l'amour! Vos pensées s'exhalent sans art et sans peine; elle portent au cœur une impression délicieuse que ne produit point un style apprêté."[37] Julie's letter, presumably in its form, through her handwriting, as well as its content, is legible to Saint-Preux on a higher, more intimate level. In the words she has written and in her manner of writing, he can also read the state of her soul, the preoccupations of her heart and the completely unornamented, degree zero[38] of her thoughts. Had she attempted to overlay any kind of artificial style onto her message, it would have been all the less legible to him. The adjective *apprêté* is defined,[39] in speaking of an object, as "qui a subit une certaine préparation," and figuratively as

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[36] See Starobinski's excellent analysis of the transparency of their relationship in *La transparence et l'obstacle*. p. 102-6.

[37] *Julie* 56.

[38] Roland Barthes develops a theory of the *degré zéro*, which works toward situating writing in a "neutral" point between language and style. Julie and Saint-Preux do not acknowledge, or are unaffected by the role of language in their direct transparent communication. *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*. Paris: Seuil, 1953.

[39] "Apprêté." *Dictionnaire du CNTRL*. CNRS.

"[d]épourvu de naturel; qui indique un manque de spontanéité et de simplicité." Thus, anything less than the spontaneous, pure and unmediated flow of sentiment from Julie's heart and soul would have produced a less "délicieuse" impression on Saint-Preux. Nature's "préparation" is the only acceptable one. Still, questions remain about how to distinguish between a "style apprêté" and a natural style, if truly natural communication is even possible or if it can be said to have any style at all. This may be another example of Julie's perfections as Milord Edouard describes them. Julie's letters are simple and lack art, which gives them the same simultaneously marked and unmarked quality as her personality. Thanks to the "impression" her writing produces directly on his heart, Saint-Preux can appreciate this, though the common reader might not. It will be necessary, however, to ask the question of whether or not a writer's style can be so well "apprêté" that it is identical to and indistinguishable from authentically spontaneous simplicity?[40] Later in this chapter, in Paris and in Julie's *Elysée*, additional analogous and possibly unanswerable questions of this kind will arise.

Tucked in the safety of their small Swiss-Alpine village, neither Julie nor Saint-Preux believes the other capable of "art," dissimulation or deception, and the pair enjoys a privileged relationship defined by absolute truth,[41] confidence and sincerity, in which

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[40] See also ch. 2, pp. 89-92 for a discussion of Madame de Merteuil's claim that nothing is harder to put in writing than what one does *not* feel, particularly love.

[41] In letter XLVI Julie writes: "Tes éloges me plaisent sans me séduire, parce que je vois qu'ils sont le langage de l'erreur et non de la fausseté, et que tu te trompes toi-même; mais que tu ne veux pas me tromper." His "errors" represent the truth of his love even if they are factually questionable. *Julie* 129.

each depends on the other to protect Julie's innocence and virtue from the passion and desire they feel for each other. This task is made more difficult for the young lovers as each must strive to be the least seductive in the worldly sense of the word as possible. Worldly values, as described by Peter Brooks in his book *The Novel of Worldliness*, place a premium on the men who most skillfully seduce women, often with the help of novels. Women in turn must resist men's amorous declarations and seductions, not indefinitely, but for a certain period of time, which depends on the circumstances and is proportional, in the eyes of society, to their virtue and inversely proportional to their weakness. Even as they defer their inevitable *défaite*, however, worldly women dress and comport themselves in a way that transmits a clear message to a potential lover. *Coquetterie*, the worldly attribute used to describe the purposeful, self-conscious way in which a woman presents herself in public, is opposed to *pudeur*, its virtuous, though mysterious, counterpart. Saint-Preux writes to Julie about *pudeur* as a kind of "douce honte" that veils and protects her modesty as a "vêtement sacré" even when no other clothing is present.[42] As neither Julie nor Saint-Preux is a member of this worldly society, the absence of its subterfuges is all the more alluring to them. Julie writes that she is more susceptible to Saint-Preux's respect for her than to his passionate outbursts: "je crains bien qu'en prenant le parti le plus honnête, vous n'ayez pris enfin le plus dangereux."[43] Soon after, she teases him about the pedagogical plan he has laid out for her, which is designed to give her the intellectual tools to combat his eventual advances and contains no "livres d'amour." She comments that:

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[42] *Julie* 140-41.

[43] *Julie* 54-55.

> En effet, employer la voie de l'instruction pour corrompre une femme est de toutes les séductions la plus condamnable, et vouloir attendrir sa maîtresse à l'aide des romans est avoir bien peu de ressource en soi-même. Si vous eussiez plié dans vos leçons la philosophie à vos vues, si vous eussiez tâché d'établir des maximes favorables à votre intérêt en voulant me tromper vous m'eussiez bientôt détrompée; mais la plus dangereuse de vos séductions est de n'en point employer.[44]

In this case, the absence of seduction, and even the effort put into not seducing her, is the most powerful possible form of seduction.[45] It is enough for Julie to know that Saint-Preux has no plans to read novels with her during their lessons to be entirely charmed by him. Julie's assertion that "vouloir attendrir sa maîtresse à l'aide des romans est avoir bien peu de ressource en soi-même," condemns the practice even as it seems to invite more creative approaches. Though it is probably safe to assume that she is referring to the inherently virtuous resources provided by nature rather than by the artifice of corruption, the question of exactly which resources she means remains. In Julie's eyes, the repeated and systematic use of the narratives of seduction for the purpose of additional seductions is unoriginal and unattractive.[46] The proof that Saint-Preux's non-seductive method is in

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[44] *Julie* 62.

[45] Paul Young analyzes Rousseau's relationship to literature's seductive qualities in his book, *Seducing the Eighteenth-Century French Reader: Reading, Writing, and the Question of Pleasure*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008.

[46] See Bennington's analysis of the particular role of novels in seduction (pp.140-44). See also Crébillon's novels *Le Sopha* and *La nuit et le moment* for particularly explicit

fact more seductive when applied to a woman like Julie is that later in the same letter, she announces that, with the help of her *inséparable* cousin Claire, she is planning a secret surprise for him: their first kiss in the nearby *bosquet*. Contradiction abounds in this unique relationship where the unseductive is irresistible, common romantic practices are completely ineffectual and deception is apparently impossible.

For his part, Saint-Preux complains that Julie is all the more appealing to him the less she adorns herself. She makes it especially difficult for him at a dinner party, during which she has promised to be discreet and the least attractive she can manage. Saint-Preux, who has already missed several opportunities to see her at M. d'Orbe's chalet while her parents are away, is brought to his knees by Julie's simple attire and demure behavior at the dinner and admonishes her in his next letter:

> Ah, mauvaise! Est-ce là la circonspection que tu m'avais promise? Est-ce ainsi que tu ménages mon cœur et voiles tes attraits? Que de contraventions à tes engagements! Premièrement, ta parure; car tu n'en avais point, et tu sais bien que jamais tu n'es si dangereuse. Secondement ton maintien si doux, si modeste, si propre à laisser remarquer à loisir toutes tes grâces. Ton parler plus rare, plus réfléchi, plus spirituel encore

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examples of seduction narratives being used for the purpose of subsequent seductions. Crébillon, Claude-Prosper J. *Le Sopha* and *La nuit et le moment*. *Romanciers libertains du XVIII^e siècle*. Ed. Patrick Wald Lasowski. Vol. I. Paris : Gallimard, 2000. (pp. 69-247 and 249-332).

> qu'à l'ordinaire, qui nous rendait tous plus attentifs, en faisait voler l'oreille et le cœur au-devant de chaque mot.[47]

Given Julie and Saint-Preux's non-worldly sensibilities, they become ensnared in a dangerous paradox. Not being of the corrupt vice-ridden world, they are not affected by its traditional seductive practices. Instead, the flames of their passion are fanned by the strict practice of virtue, honesty, honor, sincerity and natural simplicity. In order to be less attractive to one another, they would have to adopt the very vices they abhor and which would never have allowed their love to be born in the first place. Saint-Preux is right to scold Julie since she is perfectly cognizant of the effect her behavior and simple garb will have on him. Julie's tactics, while far from resembling worldly *coquetterie*, are in fact its non-worldly equivalent, since the system in which she is operating functions contrary to worldly values, preferring simple attire to intricate adornment.[48] The lovers' refusal of worldly practices is so complete, that even the attempt they make to see each other more often and more innocently at public gatherings is quickly abandoned because of the social pressure put on them to appear to be interested in anything and everything besides one another. The insincerity and role-playing that is required if they are to keep their relationship a secret from the people around them ruins the charm of seeing each other innocently. Immediately following their first public social encounter, Julie requests that they return to the honest solitude of their clandestine meetings.

In spite of Julie and Saint-Preux's frequent and adamant claims to the unquestioning trust and transparency of their relationship, doubt still occasionally

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[47] *Julie* 129.

[48] Bennington 144-47. Also, Starobinski's *La transparence et l'obstacle*, ch. 4 and 5.

manages to squeeze through the cracks and undermine the foundation upon which their love is built. Soon after they have consummated their relationship, Julie, who in letter IX had referred to the moment of possession as a "crise de l'amour,"[49] laments what they have done and the changes it has brought about between them: "Il fut un temps, mon aimable ami, où nos Lettres étaient faciles et charmantes; le sentiment qui les dictait coulait avec une élégante simplicité; il n'avait besoin ni d'art ni de coloris, et sa pureté faisait toute sa parure. Cet heureux temps n'est plus: hélas! il ne peut revenir; et pour premier effet d'un changement si cruel, nos cœurs ont déjà cessé de s'entendre."[50] This mournful assertion implies, again, somewhat paradoxically, that the ultimate form of intimate knowledge, which they now have of each other, has somehow broken the lines of communication previously flowing so freely between them. Pure sentiment that "coulait avec une élégante simplicité" is now by some means inhibited, and although Saint-Preux sees the outward signs of Julie's sadness,[51] he does not have the same unrestricted access to her soul that he used to, and he misreads the reasons for it. Julie writes that she took pity on her lover and forgot everything except love when she gave herself to him, even though he was keeping his promise to resist his passion for her. She becomes despondent over what she believes to be the irrevocable loss of her virtue and innocence while Saint-Preux is overjoyed in spite of himself. This is the first time the lovers have ever tried to hide their true feelings, albeit in an effort to protect each other, and because they are incapable of effectively deceiving each other, the result is a mutual

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[49] *Julie* 51.

[50] *Julie* 102.

[51] *Julie* 100.

feeling of alienation. Julie finds a solution to this that satisfies her need for transparency by appealing to Saint-Preux's inviolable sense of *honor* rather than to his *love*. Still, this preventative measure does not entirely preclude the possibility of betrayal since her comfort still relies on faith and trust in something and cannot be definitively verified.

Seeing each other in public only adds to the tension in Julie and Saint-Preux's relationship by bringing previously unimagined anxieties to the surface. Julie regrets the obligatory role-playing of social settings and wonders how it is possible to be "si différent de soi-même."[52] Their multi-letter discussion about an evening spent in the company of others leads Julie to the topic of jealousy and doubt about what constitutes infidelity, of which she writes:

> Ce n'est pas que je ne sache que ton cœur est fait pour le mien et non pour un autre: Mais on peut s'abuser soi-même, prendre un gout passager pour une passion, et faire autant de choses par fantaisie qu'on en eût peut-être fait par amour. Or si tu peux te croire inconstant sans l'être, à plus forte raison puis-je t'accuser à tort d'infidélité. Ce doute affreux empoisonnerait pourtant ma vie; je gémirais sans me plaindre et mourrais inconsolable sans avoir cessé d'être aimée.[53]

The only way Julie sees to secure herself from doubt is to elicit from Saint-Preux a vow of eternal honor rather than one of eternal love. Since she can have no doubts about his honor, she trusts that it will require him to keep her apprised of any changes in his love for her, the strength and duration of which he is not himself the master. Her reasoning is

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[52] *Julie* 104.

[53] *Julie* 109.

condensed into a concluding declaration: “Voilà, mon cher, l’effet assuré de l’engagement que je t’impose; car je pourrais te croire amant volage, mais non pas ami trompeur, et quand je douterais de ton cœur, je ne puis jamais douter de ta foi.”[54] Even this precaution has its flaws however, since ultimately, Julie is only exchanging faith in one unverifiable promise for another. Later, a sexually and emotionally frustrated Saint-Preux finally sees Julie after a string of thwarted secret rendez-vous. In addition to being inebriated to the point of not remembering his actions, he makes some unsavory comments to Julie. She is so outraged that she wonders in her next letter if she has not simply been deceived all along by a clever disguise and has finally discovered Saint-Preux’s true nature and intentions: “Mais ce qui m’alarme sur votre compte, c’est que souvent la conduite d’un homme échauffé au vin n’est que l’effet de ce qui se passe au fond de son cœur dans les autres temps. Croirai-je que dans un état où l’on ne déguise rien vous vous montrâtes tel que vous êtes.”[55] If wine does in fact break down all barriers and inhibitions between a person’s “real” and apparent selves, then it would be impossible to reconcile the Saint-Preux Julie knows and loves with the Saint-Preux who could treat her so cruelly. At the end of the letter, she refutes her own suspicion, saying “Votre cœur n’est point coupable, j’en suis très sûre.”[56] Rather than confronting this ambiguity, Julie flatly denies it, but she has nonetheless suggested to herself and more importantly, to the reader, that her lover may not be as entirely knowable and transparent to her as she claims to believe.

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[54] *Julie* 110.

[55] *Julie* 137.

[56] *Julie* 139.

Saint-Preux on the other hand, perhaps more naïve in this respect, does not manifest the slightest doubt about Julie's sincerity until Milord Edouard has led him away from her at the end of Part One. Part Two of the novel begins with a dejected and sorrowful letter from Saint-Preux to Julie in which he questions their relationship and regrets that he no longer knows the person to whom he is writing. He then demands an explanation, for the first time, accusing Julie of deceiving him:

> Réponds-moi, maintenant, Amante abusée ou trompeuse: que sont devenus ces projets formés avec tant de mystère? Où sont ces vaines espérances dont tu leurras si souvent ma crédule simplicité? Où est cette union sainte et désirée, doux objet de tant d'ardents soupirs, et dont ta plume et ta bouche flattaient mes vœux? Hélas! Sur la foi de tes promesses j'osais aspirer à ce nom sacré d'époux; et me croyais déjà le plus heureux des hommes. Dis, cruelle! Ne m'abusais-tu que pour rendre enfin ma douleur plus vive et mon humiliation plus profonde?[57]

While he does leave room for the possibility that Julie's hand has been forced in this matter, Saint-Preux casts himself as the victim of a cruel plot, into which he has been lured by written as well as spoken words that flattered his desires, only to be more effectively and completely humiliated in the end. As Rousseau's footnote specifies, these are not the words of reason.[58] This unfortunate separation is the beginning of the long

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[57] *Julie* 191.

[58] "*Je n'ai guère besoin, je crois, d'avertir que dans cette seconde partie et dans la suivante, les deux Amants ne font que déraisonner et battre la campagne; leurs pauvres têtes n'y sont plus" *Julie* 189.

process of learning to love each other virtuously rather than passionately, since Julie is to be married to M. de Wolmar. Their correspondence continues however, and Saint-Preux relates his experiences in his letters to Julie and Claire as he discovers the world beyond the Swiss countryside, particularly that of Paris, where all notions of authenticity are illusory and quickly give way to skillful imitation.

Worldly Paris: "Ce peuple imitateur"

Saint-Preux arrives in Paris in Part Two hopeless and distraught, asking: "Hélas! à quels maux faut-il m'attendre, s'ils doivent égaler mon bonheur passé?"[59] The answer he finds to help him relieve the pain of his "maux" as well as relive his past happiness lies in the "mots" of Julie's letters. As is often the case in Rousseau's writing, the best that one may hope for is to find a way to "tirer le remède du mal lui-même."[60] Just as the words in their letters can serve to intensify their passion, they can also intensify or alleviate their pain. Here, Saint-Preux will use Julie's "mots" to ease his "maux," finding relief in the

[59] *Julie* 228.

[60] This is a prevalent figure in Rousseau's work: "c'est que l'amour qui fit nos maux doit nous en donner le remède" (*Julie* 105). "La cause du mal trouvée indique le remède." *Emile*. *Œuvres complètes*. Ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Vol. IV. Paris: Gallimard, 1969. 53-877. (p. 384). "Quand, cherchant le remède dans le mal même, on eut voulu pour jamais amortir mes sens dépravés, on n'aurait pu mieux s'y prendre" (*Confessions* 19). See also: Michèle Crogiez. *Rousseau et le paradoxe*. Paris: Honoré Champion Editeur, 1997. (p. 507-08) and Jean Starobinsk. *Le remède dans le mal*. Paris: Gaillmard, 1989.

homophonic slippage between words and suffering. Faced with Julie's anxiety that Paris will corrupt him, Saint-Preux determines that he can only begin a serious study of Parisian society once he has completed the transcription of Julie's letters into a blank book. He plans to read and reread this book, using it as his moral code and antidote against the maxims so prevalent in Paris:

> En méditant en route sur ta dernière lettre, j'ai résolu de rassembler en un recueil toutes celles que tu m'as écrites, maintenant que je ne puis plus recevoir tes avis de bouche. Quoiqu'il n'y en ait pas une que je ne sache par cœur, et bien par cœur, tu peux m'en croire; j'aime pourtant à les relire sans cesse, ne fût-ce que pour revoir les traits de cette main chérie qui seule peut faire mon bonheur. Mais insensiblement le papier s'use, et avant qu'elles soient déchirées je veux les copier toutes dans un livre blanc que je viens de choisir exprès pour cela. Il est assez gros, mais je songe à l'avenir, et j'espère ne pas mourir assez jeune pour me borner à ce volume. Je destine les soirées à cette occupation charmante, et j'avancerai lentement pour la prolonger. Ce précieux recueil ne me quittera de mes jours; il sera mon manuel dans le monde où je vais entrer; il sera pour moi le contre-poison des maximes qu'on y respire; il me consolera dans mes maux; il préviendra ou corrigera mes fautes; il m'instruira durant ma jeunesse, il m'édifiera dans tous les temps, et ce seront à mon avis les premières lettre d'amour dont on aura tiré cet usage. [61]

[61] *Julie* 229.

Saint-Preux relishes and prolongs the intensive activity of transcription, combining yet another reading of the beloved letters with his own writing, since the originals have become worn and fragile. While he preserves the words themselves for future readings, Julie's handwriting, and everything that it carries with it of her personality, style and physical self, is lost.[62] In copying her letters one by one, however, he appropriates these things as he puts himself *into* Julie's writing, experiencing it in a wholly new way, not just passively absorbing it, but actively re-producing it. The act of writing, rewriting, retracing familiar lines recalls for him the emotions he experienced in the times of his "bonheur passé" in Julie's presence.

It is significant to the scope of this study to point out the *mise en abyme*[63] status of Saint-Preux's letter copying project. His inscribing the objects of his favorite readings into a blank book is reminiscent of Starobinski's above-cited remarks about invention and the desire for repetition in Rousseau's novel. Saint-Preux ambitiously claims that his book will be the first of its kind in its use of love letters for the purpose of teaching virtue. By stepping back in the narrative to the level of the author, one can easily

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[62] Paul Young considers the book of copied letters as a fetish and links its production to Rousseau's own copying of his novel for Mme d'Houdetot. pp.117-18.

[63] The term *mise en abyme* was coined by André Gide and studied extensively by Lucien Dällenbach who has described three distinct types of *mise en abyme* in *Le Récit spéculaire*. Paris: Seuil, 1977.

transpose a large part of Saint-Preux's technique directly to Rousseau.[64] *Julie* is, at least in France, the first novel of its kind,[65] and this episode of explicit copying underlines the ambition and originality of Rousseau's overall project.[66] Rousseau, of course, complicates matters further by positioning himself as the editor of a collection of letters, in effect, supposedly copying them into a bound volume so that others may benefit from their moral lessons, all the while suggesting subversively that it *may* or even *must* be

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[64] "Nous définirons cette différence de niveau en disant que tout événement raconté par un récit est à un niveau diégétique immédiatement supérieur à celui où se situe l'acte narratif producteur de ce récit." Gérard Genette. *Figures III*. Paris: Seuil, 1972. p. 238.

[65] In *Virtue, Gender, and the Authentic Self in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: Richardson, Rousseau, and Laclos*, Christine Roulston analyzes the relationship between writing and authenticity, Richardson's influence on Rousseau and Laclos and the interactions of their texts with each other. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1998. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Martin Turnell traces development and influence in the French novel from Marivaux to Radiguet in *The Rise of the French Novel: Marivaux, Crébillon Fils, Rousseau, Stendhal, Flaubert, Alain-Fournier, Raymond Radiguet*. New York: New Directions, 1978.

[66] In Michel Launay's edition of *Julie*, he refers to the novel itself as an example of Rousseau's theoretical claim for "tirer le remède du mal lui-même." He hoped to overcome the problems inherent in the novel as a genre by writing his own version of what the novel ought to be. "Introduction." *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. Paris: GF Flammarion, 1967. p. XIV.

fiction that we are reading.[67] Rousseau declares in his preface that "[i]l faut . . . des Romans aux peuples corrompus," and that *Julie* may be more useful to women than philosophy, especially for those women who are living a life of disorder, but still value honesty. After describing the corruption of Parisian women to Julie, Saint-Preux concludes that novels may be the last hope for guiding corrupted readers back to the path of virtue *insensiblement*.[68] The reader is thus also guided, *insensiblement,* to consider how the novel s/he is reading points to the moral lessons embedded within its own text.

Unfortunately for Saint-Preux, his "contre-poison" for worldly corruption is not potent enough to inoculate him against the infectious nature of Paris's maxims. The practice of inoculation uses the same theory as Rousseau's "tirer le remède du mal lui-même" best case approach to remediating many different kinds of societal problems. That a small amount of seemingly dangerous disease material, purposely inserted into an

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[67] "Ai-je fait le tout, et la correspondance entiere est-elle une fiction? Gens du monde, que vous importe? C'est sûrement une fiction pour vous" (*Julie* 5). See Young's discussion of Rousseau's play on his role as editor/writer through his use of footnotes (p. 97-104). Also, Gérard Genette's typology of footnotes in *Seuils*. Paris: Seuil, 1987.

[68] "Les Romans sont peut-être la dernière instruction qu'il reste à donner à un peuple assés corrompu pour que tout autre lui soit inutile: je voudrais qu'alors la composition de ces sortes de livres ne fût permise qu'à des gens honnêtes mais sensibles, dont le cœur se peignît dans leurs écrits; à des auteurs qui ne fussent pas au-dessus des foiblesses de l'humanité, qui ne montrassent pas tout d'un coup la vertu dans le Ciel hors de la portée des hommes, mais qui la leur fissent aimer en la peignant d'abord moins austere, et puis du sein du vice les y sussent conduire insensiblement" *Julie* 277.

incision could protect a patient from that very same disease is a radical concept.[69] Developing an effective inoculation for smallpox, the infectious and deadly disease *par excellence* at the time, was an experimental enterprise, however, and it was not always clear or without controversy how the dosage should be measured and administered. According to the *Encyclopédie*, the procedure was generally successful and patients remained well, but the risk and particularly the fear remained that they could fall ill in spite of the inoculation or even because of it. Saint-Preux's situation with respect to Parisian maxims is also experimental since he has never before been in contact with "les maximes qu'on y respire." The only exposure he could have possibly had to them would have been through books. Because the only marks this kind of infection would leave are not physical, but as we shall see, textual, Saint-Preux cannot be diagnosed by examining outward symptoms. But the inoculation analogy breaks down if we consider that Saint-Preux believes he can protect himself from vice with a large dose of virtue, whereas the logic of immunity and of Rousseau's system of thought would require at least a small dose of vice for his "contre-poison" to be effective. It must be remembered in this

[69] *L'Encyclopédie* contains a lengthy article on the subject of "Inoculation" including its long history in the world, various methods developed and medical and social controversies about the dangers of inoculating against smallpox. *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. Uof Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Projet (Spring 2010 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/.

context, that while Julie is far removed from "le monde" and does not read novels,[70] she and Claire were nonetheless taught some of the *maximes de la galanterie*[71] by their old governess, La Chaillot. The two women each write letters disputing the relative usefulness of La Chaillot's teachings as opposed to the risks associated with such exposure, an inoculation of sorts.[72] While the risks of worldly knowledge are real, Julie and Claire are later successful in recognizing and denouncing the corrupting influence that infects Saint-Preux when he goes to Paris without being infected themselves: La Chaillot's inoculation functions properly. The episode of the "inoculation de l'amour" recounted to Julie by Claire in Letter XIV of Part Three is implicitly linked to this discussion. Upon learning that Julie has fallen ill with smallpox, Saint-Preux rushes to her bedside and purposely infects himself with her disease in the hopes that if both succumb to it, they will be reunited in death. Both recover, but her bout of smallpox leaves Julie physically marked. She is relieved that "[i]ls ne sont plus, ces agréments de

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[70] Rousseau's preface to *Julie* claims that "Jamais fille chaste n'a lu de roman." Novels teach the reader worldly maxims and through La Chaillot's lessons, Julie is already a little bit worldly at the start of the novel. p. 6.

[71] Bennington's *Sententiousness and the Novel* analyzes the use of maxims and other kinds of sententious discourse in 18th century French novels of worldliness and their role in scenes of education. Maxims are a key feature of worldliness, so simply by knowing a few of them, Julie has been initiated, albeit minimally, into worldly practices. Saint-Preux writes, for example, that "*Il faut faire comme tout le monde*, c'est la première maxime de la sagesse du pays" *Julie* 250.

[72] *Julie* 43-47.

[s]on visage que [s]on cœur a payés si cher," and hopes it will be enough to dissuade M. de Wolmar from marrying her.[73] Claire assures her that her face has been largely spared and that Wolmar's love for her would not be changed by so little.[74] The minor marks that do remain on her face however, rather than disfiguring her and detracting from her charms, somehow succeed in augmenting them.[75] In the end, the illness that could have killed her and should have at least made her less attractive only serves to produce an ever so slight physical manifestation, the marks of perfection, on her face, which

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[73] *Julie* 328.

[74] *Julie* 334.

[75] Angela Hunter analyzes the inoculation scene and Julie's barely visible pockmarks, which remain on her face as the permanent readable trace of Saint-Preux's enduring love for her in her article, "Reading, Marks, Love: Rousseau, Stendhal, Baudelaire." *The Oxford Literary Review* 33.1 (2011): 45-63. (p. 53). Stendhal comments on the scars left by smallpox in *De l'Amour*: "Est-il étonnant qu'il leur préfère les traits de sa maîtresse, qui lui promettent cent unités de bonheur ? Même les petits défauts de sa figure, une marque de petite-vérole, par exemple, donnent de l'attendrissement à l'homme qui aime, et le jettent dans une rêverie profonde, lorsqu'il les aperçoit chez une autre femme ; que sera-ce chez sa maîtresse ? C'est qu'il a éprouvé mille sentiments en présence de cette marque de petite-vérole, que ces sentiments sont pour la plupart délicieux, sont tous du plus haut intérêt, et que, quels qu'ils soient, ils se renouvellent avec une incroyable vivacité, à la vue de ce signe, même aperçu sur la figure d'une autre femme. / Si l'on parvient ainsi à préférer et à aimer la laideur, c'est que dans ce cas la laideur est beauté." Stendhal. *De l'Amour*. Paris: Gallimard, 1980. (p. 59).

paradoxically make her more beautiful and indicate the perfections of her soul as described by Milord Edouard.

Saint-Preux's "contre-poison" for the worldly maxims of Paris is intended to keep him well, and *prevent* him from contracting the moral diseases of worldliness. This treatment is less successful than his "inoculation de l'amour," which, on the contrary, was meant to make him sick, if not kill him. But simply copying out Julie's love letters is not enough to protect him and indeed, they effectively protect him only for as long as it takes to finish his transcription. He puts himself in danger by taking for granted that because he knows Julie's letters by heart, they will protect him. Even Julie's foresight and warnings do not deter him from taking the "wrong path"[76] and keeping bad company in Paris. Ostensibly, he has not read and transcribed his manual of virtue carefully enough. But the maxims of Paris are, as he claims, written in an artful language incompatible with the natural language of his heart, to the point that they are able to pervert and corrupt him in spite of the moral lessons he says he knows by heart.[77] Julie, in her response to Saint-Preux's confession of unintentional infidelity in letter XXVI, knows exactly what went wrong: "Les grossières amorces du vice ne pouvaient d'abord vous séduire, mais la mauvaise compagnie a commencé par abuser votre raison pour corrompre votre vertu, et

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[76] Julie scolds Saint-Preux for not having heeded her warnings, going down the wrong path with the wrong people – had he listened to her, he never would have ended up in the house of ill repute. *Julie* 297-300.

[77] "Mon cœur voudrait parler, il sent qu'il n'est point écouté: Il voudrait répondre; on ne lui dit rien qui puisse aller jusqu'à lui. Je n'entends point la langue du pays, et personne ici n'entend la mienne" *Julie* 231.

fait déjà sur vos mœurs le premier essai de ses maximes."[78] Saint-Preux teases Julie and Claire in an earlier letter for their naïve critiques of his Parisian *jargon*, but at the time he writes the letter, *insensiblement*, his indoctrination has already begun, so that he has already become incapable of detecting his own metamorphosis. He does tellingly point out a great obstacle to his study of Paris early on: "Ainsi je commence à voir les difficultés de l'étude du monde, et je ne sais pas même quelle place il faut occuper pour le bien connaître. Le philosophe en est trop loin, l'homme du monde en est trop près. L'un voit trop pour pouvoir réfléchir, l'autre trop peu pour juger du tableau total."[79] Still, Saint-Preux only takes this problem into account insofar as his point of view in society might not leave him time to think about what he observes, not that what he observes might have the power to corrupt his thinking. Once he has taken the first step toward *le monde*, the philosopher in him begins to lose ground and "l'homme du monde" is unable to perceive his own devolution. Saint-Preux's claim that the best way to describe elite Parisian society to Julie and Claire is to demonstrate it for them by imitation seems plausible enough, until his rude awakening from imitation/mutation in the arms of a prostitute at the end of Part Two. Although for Saint-Preux, this experience represents an extreme low point, it is in a way, his salvation; that fateful night with the prostitute really does finally "inoculate" him against further degradation and jolts him into greater awareness as he makes his way back to the virtue he holds so dear. Julie forgives him for

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[78] *Julie* 298.

[79] *Julie* 245. On the theme of entering the elite society of Paris for the first time, see Brooks and for a more specific discussion of education as ineffective preparation for this, see Bennington's *Sententiousness and the Novel*.

all but the harm he has done himself and is satisfied to leave him with a simple entreaty: "Adieu, mon ami; veille avec soin sur ta santé, je t'en conjure, et songe qu'il ne doit rester aucune trace d'un crime que j'ai pardonné."[80] Not only must he be sure that physical disease does not infect him or leave him physically scarred, he must endeavor to erase all traces of the moral disease that has been encroaching on his virtue.

The letters exchanged concerning Saint-Preux's Parisian *jargon* mark the intersection of at least[81] two instances of copying, emphasizing the complexity involved in seemingly simple acts. Firstly, Saint-Preux's letter performs his description of Parisians by way of his derisive (or so he claims) imitation of their discursive style and language. Secondly, Julie only reveals at the end of her letter that Claire dictated nearly every word of it to her.[82] Claire and Julie criticize Saint-Preux's imitation whilst engaging in an imitation of their own. Although Saint-Preux asserts that he would have known Claire's voice even without Julie's admission of taking dictation from her, it appears to be problematic for transparency that the women are unable to detect the purposeful imitation Saint-Preux supposedly performs for them in his letter. I would argue that the signal he is trying to transmit in his letter is scrambled by the fact that Saint-Preux believes himself to be merely imitating while, in reality, this imitation has a transformative capacity that acts upon him with every word. As a result, the real irony of

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[80] *Julie* 305.

[81] Saint-Preux's critiques copy or at least reprise/echo the social critiques put forth in other novels (e.g. Crébillon's *Les Egarements du Coeur et de l'esprit*, Marivaux's *Le paysan parvenu. Romans*. Ed. Marcel Arland.Paris: Gallimard, 1949. 565-791.)

[82] *Julie* 239.

his letter is that the language of virtue, which he believes himself to be speaking through facetious criticism, is already being translated into the *jargon* he is imitating. In order to be admitted into Parisian society, even for the purposes of mere observation, a certain degree of imitation is a prerequisite and it is unclear at this point whether or not pure imitation is practicable without the negative transformative effects Julie and Claire detect in Saint-Preux. In the following more specific discussion of Saint-Preux's time in Paris and his account of what he observes there, I hope to shed some light on this question.

Though Saint-Preux does undergo a transformation in Paris, his observations about Parisian society are all the more compelling when considering his own implication in the very system he is criticizing. He remarks in great detail that Parisians put on different types of unnatural, insincere speech as they would don different styles of clothing depending on the social context. This is precisely what he does himself in his letter to Julie condemning the practice. Rousseau's anti-worldliness novel is inescapably caught up in the same paradoxical worldliness bind as well; in order to talk about or criticize worldliness, one must already be a participant in the system.

> Quand un homme parle, c'est pour ainsi dire, son habit et non pas lui qui a un sentiment, et il en changera sans façon tout aussi souvent que d'état. Donnez-lui tour à tour une longue perruque, un habit d'ordonnance et une croix pectorale; vous l'entendrez successivement prêcher avec le même zèle les lois, le despotisme, et l'inquisition. Il y a une raison commune pour la robe, une autre pour la finance, une autre pour l'épée. Chacune prouve très bien que les deux autres sont mauvaises, conséquence facile à tirer pour les trois. Ainsi nul ne dit jamais ce qu'il pense, mais ce qu'il lui

> convient de faire penser à autrui, et le zèle apparent de la vérité n'est jamais en eux que le masque de l'intérêt.[83]

Clothes dictate the sentiments and in turn the speech produced by each social class. The sincere and honest language Saint-Preux speaks with Julie and Claire then, is the natural, minimal "clothing," not unlike the veil of *pudeur*, which still marks them enough to differentiate them and allows them to recognize one another by their speech. Considering the above discussion of Milord Edouard's observations on the marked/unmarked characteristics of Julie and Saint-Preux however, the virtuous veil that is *pudeur* stands alone as the only acceptable, if barely perceptible marker for dress as well as for speech. The idea of changing modes of thought and speech like clothing is repugnant to Saint-Preux, but he does not consider clothing his letters in *jargon* to be anything more than a demonstration for pedagogical purposes. He is more concerned with those who are able and willing to "change clothes" continually as they move from one setting to another:

> Quiconque aime à se répandre et fréquente plusieurs sociétés doit être plus flexible qu'Alcibiade, changer de principes comme d'assemblées, modifier son esprit pour ainsi dire à chaque pas, et mesurer ses maximes à la toise. Il faut qu'à chaque visite il quitte en entrant son âme s'il en a une; qu'il en prenne une autre aux couleurs de la maison, comme un laquais

[83] *Julie* 233-34.

> prend un habit de livrée, qu'il la pose de même en sortant et reprenne s'il veut la sienne jusqu'à nouvel échange.[84]

Saint-Preux presents these socialites as if they were servants forced to conform to the rules of each house in which they are employed. He quickly forgets the talent of Alcibiades, which he imagines in his previous sentence such an undertaking must require. The fact that a one can exist in the world, alternating between so many different "clothes," in constant contradiction with oneself, amazes Saint-Preux and challenges his ideals. It is striking however, that he assumes that these Parisians, so dependent on their clothing, exchange one artificial uniform upon leaving one house, for the attire of their own authentic personality, if desired, until entering the next house and again slipping into the required uniform. It is not entirely clear whether this is a case of superimposing an artificial façade over an authentic core, or rather an exchange of one totally artificial façade for another one that is equally inauthentic, but differently artificial. In his letter about Parisian women, Saint-Preux evokes a similar image of an artificial exterior façade concealing a more genuine natural personality:

> En abordant une dame dans une assemblée, au lieu d'une Parisienne que vous croyez voir, vous ne voyez qu'un simulacre de la mode. Sa hauteur, son ampleur, sa démarche, sa taille, sa gorge, ses couleurs, son air, son regard, ses propos, ses manières, rien de tout cela n'est à elle ; et si vous la voyiez dans son état naturel, vous ne pourriez la reconnaître. Or cet

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[84] *Julie* 234. This talent for disguise is also implicitly critiqued in Crébillon's *Egarements* through Meilcour's apprenticeship with Versac and commented in Brooks as the necessary counterpart of the "lucid and penetrating glance turned toward others" p. 22.

> échange est rarement favorable à celles qui le font, et en général il n'y a guère à gagner à tout ce qu'on substitue à la nature. Mais on ne l'efface jamais entièrement ; elle s'échappe toujours par quelque endroit, et c'est dans une certaine adresse à la saisir que consiste l'art d'observer.[85]

This example will resonate more clearly in the last part of this chapter as we examine how the natural state of Julie's garden always threatens to reassert itself if the gardener's vigilance relaxes but for a moment. Julie's garden however, is the one place where something may be gained from substituting artifice for nature. Whereas Parisian women disfigure and corrupt themselves by obscuring their natural charms with fashion, in the *Elysée* garden, the skillful use of artifice enhances the beauty of nature through the work of virtue.

Amid these clothing-dominated metaphorical descriptions of social interaction in Paris, Saint-Preux also explains how Parisian women have developed their own particular clothing-discourse. Again, we will be reminded of Milord Edouard's remarks about the rarity of a perfect engraving and the minor defects that are characteristic in each.

> Elles se mettent si bien, ou du moins, elles en ont tellement la réputation, qu'elles servent en cela comme en tout de modèle au reste de l'Europe. En effet, on ne peut employer avec plus de goût un habillement plus bizarre. Elles sont de toutes les femmes, les moins asservies à leurs propres modes. La mode domine les provinciales; mais les Parisiennes dominent la mode, et la savent plier chacune à son avantage. Les premières sont comme des copistes ignorants et serviles qui copient jusqu'au fautes d'orthographe;

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[85] *Julie* 267.

> les autres sont des auteurs qui copient en maîtres, et savent rétablir les mauvaises leçons.[86]

The reputation that Parisian women are so well dressed is enough for all of Europe to hold them up as a model to be copied. Parisian women initiate and master this endless cycle of imitation, establish and reestablish the rules with each changing season. As masters, they are able to use the ephemeral elements of each fashion trend to their individual advantage. Every woman is subject to the same fashions, but each woman must find her own way to "la plier chacune à son avantage." Saint-Preux tells us that Parisian women are thus the women the least enslaved by fashion, dominating it, literally making it bend to their own tastes and physical features. Provincial women, caught in an endless cycle of double imitation, imitating master imitators, but without the benefit of their talent, are always already behind what is in vogue by the time it reaches them in their villages. They must bend to the demands of fashion, unthinkingly and unskillfully, producing at best, a flawed, if still recognizable copy of the "original" Parisian copies. They lack the supplementary *je ne sais quoi* that makes all the difference between "copistes ignorants et serviles qui copient jusqu'au fautes d'orthographe" and "auteurs qui copient en maîtres."

Perhaps not coincidentally, Rousseau frequently complains in the *Confessions* that his greatest desire is to live peacefully and independently in the countryside, making a living as a *copiste* of music. Visits from his friends and benefactors as well as irresistible writing projects often divert him from this noble profession, so he never earns as much money as he feels necessary for his subsistence. There is of course, also the problem that

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[86] *Julie* 266.

he is easily distracted from his copying and rather than copying everything, down to the spelling mistakes, he introduces them himself through negligence. He recounts about his very first employment as a *copiste*: "Quelques jours après M. Rolichon que je rencontrai dans la rue m'apprit que mes parties avoient rendu la musique inexécutable; tant elles s'étoient trouvées pleines d'omissions, de duplications et de transpositions. Il faut avouer que j'ai choisi là dans la suite le métier du monde auquel j'étois le moins propre."[87] Just after winning the *prix de Dijon*, Rousseau already wishes to escape the pressures of having a name and renounces all thoughts of fame and fortune in an effort to live in solitude according to his moral convictions. He chooses copying music as the best way to do this: ". . . et je jugeai qu'un copiste de quelque célébrité dans les lettres ne manqueroit vraisemblablement pas de travail."[88] Rousseau rejects the prospect of writing expressly to earn money not only because he fears it would stifle his talent, but also because he sees it as a mercenary profession.[89] Later, in recalling the many supposed plots against him, Rousseau complains bitterly that Grimm ruined his career as a *copiste*: "Il m'ôtoit même autant qu'il étoit en lui la ressource du métier que je m'étois choisi, en me décriant comme un mauvais copiste, et je conviens qu'il disoit en cela la vérité, mais ce n'étoit pas à lui de le dire."[90] Though he asserts that he chose this career himself for specific reasons, it is curious that such a talented man would deliberately set out to make his livelihood at an occupation for which he had absolutely no aptitude. While Rousseau's account of his

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[87] *Confessions* 170.

[88] *Confessions* 363.

[89] *Confessions* 402-03.

[90] *Confessions* 471.

actions declare a desire to produce mindless copies for the sake of ease and simplicity in his personal life, an unconscious resistance to blind copying consistently undermines this professed desire. Though he maintains that he prefers a life resembling that of the "copistes ignorants et serviles qui copient jusqu'au fautes d'orthographe," his *malheur* leads him to become one of the great "auteurs qui copient en maîtres." The very volume in which he recounts his struggles to live a simple life begins: "Je forme une entreprise qui n'eut jamais d'éxemple, et dont l'exécution n'aura point d'imitateur."[91] Clearly, Rousseau sees himself as an inimitable original, even as he claims to want nothing more than to copy in peace.

This complex relation of imitation and originality is taken further in *Julie* through another division in Parisian fashion existing between aristocratic women, who want to advertise their nobility, and bourgeois women, whose money allows them any extravagance. Because they cannot compete financially, aristocratic women opt to imitate prostitutes, rendering themselves essentially "inimitable" since bourgeois women are too attached to their *pudeur* to dare dressing so immodestly.

> Qu'ont-elles donc fait ? Elles ont choisi des moyens plus sûrs, plus adroits, et qui marquent plus de réflexion. Elles savent que des idées de pudeur et de modestie sont profondément gravées dans l'esprit du peuple. C'est là ce qui leur a suggéré des modes inimitables. Elles ont vu que le peuple avait en horreur le rouge, qu'il s'obstine à nommer grossièrement du fard, elles se sont appliqué quatre doigts, non de fard, mais de rouge ; car, le mot changé, la chose n'est plus la même. Elles ont vu qu'une gorge découverte

[91] *Confessions* 5.

> est en scandale au public ; elles ont largement échancré leur corps. Elles ont vu… oh ! bien des choses, que ma Julie, toute demoiselle qu'elle est, ne verra sûrement jamais. Elles ont mis dans leurs manières le même esprit qui dirige leur ajustement. Cette pudeur charmante qui distingue, honore et embellit ton sexe, leur a paru vile et roturière ; elles ont animé leur geste et leur propos d'une noble impudence ; et il n'y a point d'honnête homme à qui leur regard assuré ne fasse baisser les yeux. C'est ainsi que cessant d'être femmes, de peur d'être confondues avec les autres femmes, elles préfèrent leur rang à leur sexe, et imitent les filles de joie, afin de n'être pas imitées.[92]

Provincial women pose no real threat to Parisian women. The real competition for the spotlight is between the rank of noble women and the almost limitless financial resources of bourgeois women. Because being imitated, or worse, *upstaged* by anyone they outrank is unthinkable, noble women take the genius, if paradoxical approach of adopting a form of imitation that goes beyond the realm of possibility for those who would imitate them. By imitating prostitutes, noble women effectively purge every last trace of the *modestie* and *pudeur charmante* that would allow them to be identified as *femmes*, in favor of an inimitable imitation of "les filles de joie." Saint-Preux's claim intimates that prostitutes are not women, at least not women occupying the same elite social sphere or possessing any power to act there. These women take their imitation of prostitutes so far that they even copy their behavior and "elles ont animé leur geste et leur propos d'une noble impudence."

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[92] *Julie* 267-68.

Much of what distinguishes elite Parisians is related to clothing and purposefully inauthentic behavior that is interchangeable depending on the audience. These characteristics of dress and behavior would likely lead us compare Parisians to actors even if the theater were not such a central figure in elite Parisian life as well as in worldly fiction of the eighteenth century.[93] Saint-Preux explains to Julie how theaters produce plays that present an inappropriate model of behavior to spectators, which leads to a vicious cycle of corruption through imitation. Many of these plays, those of Molière in particular, are not contemporary and therefore represent courtly life in an outdated light. Contemporary plays however, pose a more sinister threat since they are written to represent the way of life of their *elite* spectators. "C'est pour eux uniquement que sont faits les spectacles. Ils s'y montrent à la fois comme représentés au milieu du théâtre et comme représentants aux deux côtés ; ils sont personnages sur la scène et comédiens sur les bancs."[94] This representation is always problematic because authors are more likely, for example, to see "dans les femmes des ridicules qu'ils partagent que les bonnes

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[93] In *Le paysan parvenu*, Jacob goes to the theater in the last scene of the novel, just as he has gained entrance into *le monde* thanks to his marriage; in *Égarements*, Meilcour first sees his love interest, the virtuous Hortense at the Opera; later in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Mme de Merteuil's perfidy is finally denounced publicly at the theater. "If this consciousness of society's image has such coercive presence and reality, it is because society is seen as a theater, closed to the outside but utterly public to its members, who are both actors and spectators and must perform their social parts before the eyes of others" Brooks 18.

[94] *Julie* 252.

qualités qu'ils n'ont pas."[95] But all audience members, not only the elite who are portrayed, then imitate this inaccurate representation, which is in turn re-misrepresented on the stage to be re-imitated and so on and so forth. Rousseau's *Lettre à d'Alembert* elaborates in great detail his arguments against the theater in general for its negative effects on public morality as a way of making a more specific case against establishing a theater in Geneva. Rousseau is extremely suspicious of the theater and especially of actors because of the nature of their work, which requires a great talent for "[l]'art de se contrefaire, de revêtir un autre caractère que le sien, de paraître différent de ce qu'on est, de se passionner de sang-froid, de dire autre chose que ce qu'on pense aussi naturellement que si l'on le pensait réellement, et d'oublier enfin sa propre place a force de prendre celle d'autrui."[96] This description bears a striking resemblance to Saint-Preux's portrayal of Parisians likening them to servants wearing the livery of a certain house as discussed above. More importantly however, acting as a profession is suspect in Rousseau's eyes because an actor "met publiquement sa personne en vente" and engages in the base and servile "trafic de soi-même."[97] Actors are essentially prostitutes, a link

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[95] *Julie* 277.

[96] Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Lettre à d'Alembert*. *Œuvres complètes*. Ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Vol. V. Paris: Gallimard, 1995. 1-125. pp. 72-73. The actor's lot as described here by Rousseau will be complicated further in the following chapter as we discuss how Valmont's feigned passion and generosity, in writing as well as in deed, fool not only his audience, but himself as well. See ch. 2, the section entitled Valmont's Innovations & Imitations.

[97] *Lettre à d'Alembert* 73.

that is made explicitly with reference to women in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, but applies to both sexes.[98] Parisian spectators then, purposely imitate actors who are paid to imitate them. Because, as we have already seen, a perfect copy is extremely rare, this cycle is necessarily a devolving one. "Le vice ne s'insinue guère en choquant l'honnêteté, mais en prenant son image; et les mots sales sont plus contraires à la politesse qu'aux bonnes mœurs. Voilà pourquoi les expressions sont toujours plus recherchées et les oreilles plus scrupuleuses dans les pays plus corrompus."[99] Vice is able to corrupt by imitating virtue, but before long virtue imitates vice, as Saint-Preux realizes too late in Paris; the flaws in the imitation are barely distinguishable and the change happens slowly and *insensiblement* over time.

One of Rousseau's major claims in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* is that there is less imitation and thus more genius and originality in small villages than in large cities. Social pressure to "faire comme les autres" is the cause of this, as Saint-Preux laments: "Ce peuple imitateur serait plein d'originaux qu'il serait impossible d'en rien savoir; car nul homme n'ose être lui-même."[100] In the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Rousseau asserts that in small villages, one finds "plus d'esprits originaux, plus d'industrie inventive, plus de choses vraiment neuves : parce qu'on y est moins imitateur, qu'ayant peu de modèles, chacun tire plus de lui-même, et met plus du sien dans tout ce qu'il fait."[101] With nothing,

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[98] *Lettre à d'Alembert* 82-83.

[99] *Lettre à d'Alembert* 113.

[100] *Julie* 250.

[101] *Lettre à d'Alembert* 55.

or very little available for imitation, the inhabitants of small towns have no choice but to rely on themselves for inspiration and are thus free to innovate.

In the final section of this chapter, we will explore the example of the countryside Wolmar estate at Clarens and how it might shed additional light onto our discussion of originality and imitation. In Julie's *Elysée* garden, we will examine a different kind of copying in order to determine if it is in fact the virtuous alternative to the corruption of Parisian imitation we have analyzed thus far.

Julie's *Elysée*: Cultivating Virtue?

In Part Four of *Julie*, Saint-Preux has been invited to return to Clarens by the Wolmars and writes two extensive letters to Milord Edouard in which he describes the domestic economy of the household and surrounding land. After three weeks of residence at Clarens, as he waits for Edouard's arrival he writes to him in order to "[lui] en donner idée par le détail d'une économie domestique qui annonce la félicité des maîtres de la maison, et la fait partager à ceux qui l'habitent."[102] This letter paints a picture of "une maison bien réglée, où règnent l'ordre, la paix, l'innocence; où l'on voit réuni sans appareil, sans éclat, tout ce qui répond à la véritable destination de l'homme!"[103] Saint-Preux praises one by one each aspect of the functioning of the household and its servants. Since taking up residence at Clarens, the Wolmars have established a domestic system that produces a quasi-idyllic atmosphere in which the servants are attached to their masters by affection and the masters tend to them as if they were their own children,

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[102] *Julie* 441.

[103] *Julie* 441.

rendering their attachment even stronger. Saint-Preux is profoundly impressed that all participants in this system are treated as equals: "Enfin, je n'ai jamais vû de maison où chacun fit mieux son service, et s'imaginât moins de servir."[104] Among the changes that have been enacted on the property and in the house, any superfluous or nonfunctional ornamentation has been replaced by something useful or valuable in economic terms.[105] Saint-Preux could not be more enthusiastic about the results of these changes and declares that "[p]ar tout on a substitué l'utile à l'agréable, et l'agréable y a presque toujours gagné."[106] There is only one place at Clarens where this affirmation might be contested, but Saint-Preux opens his next letter, in which he writes principally about Julie's *verger*, with a caveat:

> Non, Milord, je ne m'en dédis point ; on ne voit rien dans cette maison qui n'associe l'agréable à l'utile ; mais les occupations utiles ne se bornent pas aux soins qui donnent du profit ; elles comprennent encore tout amusement innocent et simple qui nourrit le goût de la retraite, du travail, de la modération, et conserve à celui qui s'y livre une âme saine, un cœur libre du trouble des passions.[107]

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[104] *Julie* 445. For a complete analysis of the political and economic system of Clarens, see Andrew Billing's article, "Political And Domestic Economy In Rousseau's Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse." *Romantic Review* 100.4 (2009): 473-491.

[105] Starobinski adeptly addresses the question of self-sufficiency in the closed system economy of Clarens in *La transparence et l'obstacle*, pp. 129-39.

[106] *Julie* 442.

[107] *Julie* 470.

This *verger*, which Julie affectionately calls her *Elysée*, reproduces the functional structure of Clarens as a whole on a smaller scale. Although it produces nothing in terms of monetary or material gains, as Saint-Preux explains, its cultivation favors virtue and is thus not without value. To the greatest extent possible, Clarens is managed as a closed system. While servants are not prohibited by any explicit rules from leaving the property during their time off, a number of activities organized on the grounds of Clarens, especially on Sundays, are intended to ensure that all participants enjoy themselves in an honest manner under the ever-watchful *œil vivant* of Wolmar.[108] At Clarens, strangers are met with suspicion and only those who have been approved by the masters are welcome. The *verger*[109] functions in much the same way, since its only permanent residents, the birds, may leave at any time. They choose to stay, or at least forget any thought of leaving, thanks to the care taken to make their stay their agreeable to them. Julie's *Elysée* is secured under lock and key at all times and the only people who have the key are Julie, her father, M. de Wolmar and Julie's maid, Fanchon Regard. Saint-Preux is awed and bewildered by Julie's creation; it is a totally singular place worthy of closer examination.

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[108] Julie explains to Claire that Wolmar's "passion dominante est celle de l'observation." Though Wolmar claims to wish only to observe, not to act, his watchfulness has an authoritative aspect that may not be entirely without effect on those being watched (*Julie* 491). Jean Starobinski's collection of essays entitled *L'œil vivant* takes the critical position of the all seeing observer with respect to Rousseau and his work. Paris: Gallimard, 1961.

[109] I will use the terms *verger*, garden and *Elysée* interchangeably to refer to Julie's garden.

In this section, I will examine the rich signification embedded in Julie's *Elysée* through the lens of Saint-Preux's descriptions. In effect, the garden is meant to transmit a precise message, but in order for that message to be correctly understood, it must be properly interpreted. Significantly though, the message is unstable and I plan to expose the reasons for this instability as well as its effects.

After having prolonged the mystery surrounding the name *Elysée* for several days, Saint-Preux is finally introduced to Julie's garden on a hot day when Wolmar deems him ready to be enlightened:

> Ce lieu, quoique tout proche de la maison est tellement caché par l'allée couverte qui l'en sépare qu'on ne l'apperçoit de nulle part. L'épais feuillage qui l'environne ne permet point à l'œil d'y pénétrer, et il est toujours soigneusement fermé à la clé. A peine fus-je au dedans que la porte étant masquée par des aulnes et des coudriers qui ne laissent que deux étroits passages sur les côtés, je ne vis plus en me retournant par où j'étois entré, et n'appercevant point de porte, je me trouvais là comme tombé des nues.[110]

The *verger* is separated from the house only by a covered alleyway, which hides it from the eyes of strangers and at the same time links it to the house. The house's proximity to the garden ensures its safety since it can be observed from the outside (thanks to the covered passage, the *verger* is imperceptible except to those who know it is there) and because access to it is only possible from the covered passage which seems to be part of the house and the *verger*. In this way, the *verger* is an extension of the house,

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[110] *Julie* 471.

simultaneously benefitting from its proximity and protection but nonetheless separated from it. It is impossible to see through "l'épais feuillage" surrounding the garden, creating an isolated and intimate space, though it is not far from the society of Clarens. Not only does light not penetrate the enclosure, but as the door is "toujours soigneusement fermé à la clé," none can enter but those who possess one of only four keys. All others must be accompanied by one of the key holders.[111] While the house is quite close to the *verger*, once inside, the door is so well masked by trees that Saint-Preux comments, "je ne vis plus en me retournant par où j'étois entré," which produces a sudden, surprising and disconcerting sensation: "je me trouvais là comme tombé des nues."[112] The entrance and the exit are quickly forgotten and Saint-Preux is entirely absorbed in his experience of the garden. He marvels at the apparently wild and natural spectacle of the *verger* and spontaneously cries out "O Tinian ! ô Juan Fernandez ! Julie, le bout du monde est à votre porte !"[113] In the time since he last saw Julie, Saint-Preux has travelled the world, visiting places such as Tinian and Juan Fernandez. But Julie reminds him that he knew this very place in his youth and that it has simply changed

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[111] Joan DeJean convincingly shows how Julie and Wolmar have created a tightly controlled and fiercely defended space in the *Elysée* in *Literary Fortifications: Rousseau, Laclos, Sade*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 1984. pp.174-79.

[112] *Julie* 227. The expression "tombé des nues," is defined as: "On dit proverbialement & figurément, Tomber des nues, pour dire, Être extrêmement surpris & étonné." *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 4e édition*, 1762. U of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois.

[113] *Julie* 471.

form thanks to her efforts: "[v]ous savez que l'herbe y étoit assés aride, les arbres assés clair-semés, donnant assés peu d'ombre, et qu'il n'y avoit point d'eau. Le voilà maintenant frais, verd, habillé, paré, fleuri, arrosé . . ."[114] The *verger* more closely resembles an English garden than a French one, the difference being that the former strives for a natural effect, working in harmony with nature, while the latter prefers to conquer and control it. To calm Saint-Preux's enthusiasm, because he believes himself to be in the heart of a completely neglected and untamed natural environment, Julie recounts how she transformed it.[115] Though she has invested her own time and the help of a gardener and M. de Wolmar, the garden cost her no money to accomplish. Julie and Wolmar accompany Saint-Preux through the various stations of the garden, at each step calming his ecstasy with reasonable explanations. Elizabeth MacArthur shows in her article "Textual Gardens: Rousseau's Elysée and Giradin's Ermenonville," that Julie and Wolmar teach Saint-Preux to read the garden and to understand a precise message. During his first visit of the garden, Saint-Preux:

> . . . reveals a tendency to spontaneous emotional reaction, and particularly to a passionate identification of the garden and Julie herself. Julie and Wolmar, his guides, constantly engage him in conversation in order to prevent this response to the Elysée. By the time he is allowed to enter the garden unattended, a day later, a network of linguistic canals and dams has

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[114] *Julie* 471-72.

[115] Joan DeJean argues that Julie's garden is in fact, more closely modeled on Chinese gardens, except for the fact that Chinese gardens are problematic for their miniaturization of nature, which Julie does not do in her garden. pp. 174-75.

> been set up in his mind to channel his experience of the garden into appropriate paths. [116]

The use of this technique is particularly evident toward the end of the visit when Saint-Preux naively asks Julie why she has put so much effort into creating an artificially natural space when a truly natural one is located nearby. M. de Wolmar quickly reprimands Saint-Preux for his lack of discretion: "Jamais ma femme depuis son mariage n'a mis les pieds dans les bosquets dont vous parlez. J'en sais la raison quoiqu'elle me l'ait toujours tue. Vous qui ne l'ignorez pas, apprenez à respecter les lieux où vous êtes ; ils sont plantés par les mains de la vertu."[117] In effect, the next day, when Saint-Preux returns to the garden with the intention of indulging in his passion in the midst of the work of Julie's hands, he is reminded of Wolmar's "juste réprimande." As he arrives on the spot where he received it, his perception and thus his reading of the garden are suddenly transformed: "J'ai cru voir l'image de la vertu où je cherchois celle du plaisir. Cette image s'est confondue dans mon esprit avec les traits de Madame de Wolmar, et pour la premiere fois depuis mon retour j'ai vu Julie en son absence, non telle qu'elle fut pour moi et que j'aime encore à me la représenter, mais telle qu'elle se montre à mes yeux tous les jours."[118] Thanks to the lessons of the day before teaching him to regulate

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[116] MacArthur, Elizabeth. "Textual Gardens: Rousseau's Elysée and Giradin's Ermenonville." *Romance Quarterly* 38.3 (1991): 331-40. p. 332.

[117] *Julie* 485. Gail Finney considers the Rousseauian garden as an erotic space, serving as an escape from culture and convention in "Garden Paradigms in 19th-Century Fiction." *Comparative Literature* 36.1, Winter (1984): 20-33.

[118] *Julie* 486.

his response to the garden, the Julie he loved is restored to her status of the virtuous wife and mother, madame de Wolmar.

Julie's garden is composed uniquely of indigenous plants and trees. Julie avoids all exotic species and instead she simply mingles domestic and wild flowers so that they "semblaient croître naturellement avec les autres."[119] Trees and vines are carefully arranged in order to protect visitors from the sun: "Je rencontrois de tems en tems des touffes obscures, impénétrables aux rayons du soleil, comme dans la plus épaisse forêt ; ces touffes étoient formées des arbres du bois le plus flexible, dont on avait fait recourber les branches, pendre en terre, et prendre racine, par un art semblable à ce que font naturellement les mangles en Amérique."[120] Thanks to Julie's care and attention, everything in the garden appears to function in a perfectly natural way. The garden's alleyways are "tortueuses et irrégulières" and they are "bordées et traversées d'une eau limpide et claire, tantôt circulant parmi l'herbe et les fleurs en filets presque imperceptibles ; tantôt en plus grands ruisseaux courans sur un gravier pur et marqueté qui rendoit l'eau plus brillante."[121] Similarly, the manmade waterways are artfully arranged to look as natural as possible. The *verger*, in its original state had been arid. Thanks to the water that is redirected from a lake and public fountain, Julie irrigates her *Elysée*. In his descriptions, Saint-Preux insists repeatedly on four principle aspects of the garden: water, greenery, shade and freshness. These are also the constitutive traits of the *locus amoenus*, an idyllic place that has become an important topos in European

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[119] *Julie* 473.

[120] *Julie* 473.

[121] *Julie* 473-74.

literature. The historical role of the *locus amoenus* is traced by David Evett in his article " Paradice's Only Map:"

> To summarize: the *locus amoenus* is comprised of three essential elements: trees, grass, and water. It is a landscape of the mind, an aid to conceptualization, imitated from books, not life, and if it is based on a real place, that place assumes an extraordinary dimension. The *topos* as such has a structural function, which is synchronous, not diachronous; it operates as a single homogeneous rhetorical member. But in the course of historical development it comes to have certain traditional expressive capabilities as well, to connote any or all of the categories of refection, numinous creativity or generation, and eroticism. And it becomes morally ambiguous.[122]

According to this description, the only additional feature in Julie's *Elysée* is the freshness, which in fact naturally accompanies the three others. On the level of the novel *Julie*, it is reasonable that Rousseau might look for inspiration in classical literature. On the level of the characters, Saint-Preux immediately believes he sees the desert islands of Tinian and Juan Fernandez as they are described in the travel journal of Admiral Anson.[123] Because Julie cultivates her garden as a way of cultivating her virtue, we might infer that she finds inspiration in the garden of Eden. But the name of the garden,

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[122] Evett, David. ""Paradice's Only Map": The "Topos" Of The "Locus Amoenus" And the Structure of Marvell's "Upon Appelton House"." *PMLA* 85, no. 3 (1970): 504-13. p. 507.

[123] *Julie* 471.

l'Elysée, evokes Greek mythology and the souls of the great, who go there upon their death. While the *locus amoenus* does not often imitate a real place, Julie's garden seems to attempt to improve and idealize the neighboring *bosquet*. This *bosquet*, where Julie and Saint-Preux shared their first kiss and where she apparently lost her innocence, is thus the original, truly natural version of the garden. The *Elysée*, in turn, is the artificially natural imitation of the *bosquet*, but so artfully arranged that the artifice is nearly indiscernible. In his article "Order and Disorder in Rousseau's Social Thought," Lester G. Crocker sees Julie's garden as holding the key to Rousseau's system of thought. He writes about the garden:

> Everything is 'natural,' but everything is artificial, and we find it to be natural only because it is artificial, the product of human will and rationality. In a civilized setting, in order to recover nature, men are 'réduits à lui faire violence, à la forcer en quelque sorte à venir habiter avec eux.' This is the work of cultivation. But it is much more than a 'recovery' of nature. It adds something nature does not provide – even as nature makes no provision for the citizen.[124]

In looking to recover nature in this way, it is important to remember that Julie literally constructs her *Elysée* on the foundations of the sin she wishes to expiate. The *bosquet* and the garden are separated only by the house. The *Elysée* still contains the trees that were there in its original state. Here artificial nature takes its source in, and depends upon authentic nature, which will always be present, whether forgotten or hidden, as if by the

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[124] Crocker, Lester G. "Order and Disorder in Rousseau's Social Thought." *PMLA* 94.2 (1979): 247-60. p. 253.

shadows of the original trees. As is often the case in Rousseau's writing, it seems to be possible to "tirer le remède du mal lui-même." The problem is that the *mal* can always be derived from the remedy, as we shall see. The *Elysée* is transformed by Julie's attentiveness from a state where man acts according nature, a place of sin for social man, into a more appropriate place of virtue. The work she performs in her garden, is by extension, work she performs on herself, resisting her own passionate nature as she does the weeds in her garden. She denies her authentic nature in favor of an artificial but virtuous one. Crocker reminds us that "[n]ature's nature is always ready to reassert itself against the gardener's, if he but relax his watchfulness."[125] Even if Julie invests "plus de soins que de peine" to maintain her garden, a minimum of vigilance is necessary, just as for resisting one's passions. If she does not pull out the weeds in her literal garden by the roots, they are always ready to grow back and invade it entirely. Likewise, if she does not continually pull them out from her metaphorical garden, it too could be invaded by the persistent seeds of a passion that grew and was nourished there in the past. Julie and Wolmar's efforts to coax Saint-Preux into considering the garden as a product of virtue and not as consubstantial with Julie herself, give rise to questions about this consubstantiality. If the artificial *verger* can be produced in the same place with the same elements as the original natural one, then by extension, Julie is cultivating virtue on the same terrain where her passion formerly grew quite naturally. Her *Elysée* presents a visual spectacle that hides its own artifice just as Julie presents herself as a changed woman to Saint-Preux. The original nature of the *Elysée* exerts constant force against the efforts of artifice and virtue, just as Julie's original nature does against her efforts to rid

[125] Crocker 254.

her heart of passion. Perhaps the virtue Julie practices is mere artifice as well, in spite of her best intentions. Though Saint-Preux claims that the garden "conserve à celui qui s'y livre une âme saine, un cœur libre du trouble des passions," but to conserve entails "[g]arder avec soin, apporter le soin nécessaire pour empêcher qu'une chose ne se gâte, ne dépérisse."[126] The veritable nature of the heart and of the soul thus remain unchanged, and their suppression is only maintained through constant care in an alternate and artificially natural state.

In his chapter on *Julie ou La nouvelle Héloïse*, Tony Tanner discusses the reasons Julie gives for her decision to marry Wolmar even though she does not love him. In marriage, she seeks the peace that will protect her from the *inquiétudes* of love.[127] Tanner shows that a life lived without a minimum of tumult, inevitable in all human relationships, would more closely resemble death, or at least a state very near to it. Julie explains to Saint-Preux that she would like her children to continue to care for her garden after she is gone. She says that "des jours ainsi passés tiennent du bonheur de l'autre vie, et ce n'est pas sans raison qu'en y pensant j'ai donné d'avance à ce lieu, le nom d'Elisée."[128] The very name of *Elysée* evokes the idea of death; in Greek mythology, a stay in the Elysian Fields is reserved for the souls of heroes and the virtuous. More importantly, one must first die to go there. Is the practice of virtue then analogous to the death of human nature (even if Rousseau proposes that virtue is the true nature of social

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[126] *Julie* 374. "Conserver." *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 4e édition*, 1762. U of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois.

[127] Tanner 144.

[128] *Julie* 486.

man)? A closer look at Saint-Preux's description of Julie's *Elysée* is not reassuring. It is a closed system, always locked, where "on n'a pas de vue hors du lieu," nor can the eye penetrate its dense foliage from the exterior.[129] Saint-Preux insists repeatedly on the abundance of shade in the *Elysée*. Incidentally, the only light that exists in the garden, according to the text, seems to come from the water, which is "limpide et claire, tantôt circulant parmi l'herbe et les fleurs en filets presque imperceptibles ; tantôt en plus grands ruisseaux courans sur un gravier pur et marqueté qui rendoit l'eau plus brillante. On voyoit des sources bouillonner et sortir de la terre, et quelquefois des canaux plus profonds dans lesquels l'eau calme et paisible réfléchissoit à l'œil les objets."[130] There is only one place in his letter where Saint-Preux mentions some "lieux plus découverts" in the garden, but he never speaks of the sun except to say that its rays do not penetrate this foliage or that hedge.[131] The pebbles lend a certain mirror-like quality to the water so that it reflects nearby objects, but where does the light being reflected originate? The text does not disclose the source of the light, but perhaps we can link this light that seems to originate inside the garden to the concept of the *Lumières* of the eighteenth century. One must strive, with the help of one's reason or *lumières*, and against one's raw passionate nature, to lead a virtuous life in human society. In the *Elysée*, this light alone allows us to read the message that Julie wishes to transmit. Unfortunately, the language of her garden is undermined by the same difficulties faced by all languages. The nature of language renders it impossible to stabilize or secure meaning, which can be fluid and multifaceted,

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[129] *Julie* 483 and 471.

[130] *Julie* 474.

[131] *Julie* 473.

even contradictory. Even "dead" languages are subject to interpretation. We might recall that David Evett writes about the *locus amoenus* that "in the course of historical development it comes to have certain traditional expressive capabilities as well, to connote any or all of the categories of refection, numinous creativity or generation, and eroticism. And it becomes morally ambiguous." Because all of these languages are spoken by the same garden and at the same time, in spite of Wolmar's efforts to secure a precise message, the original nature of the *Elysée* remains in tact, ready in an instant to regain control.

We have explored the different possible readings of Julie's Elysée. In discovering her garden, Saint-Preux moves from a naïve reading, believing himself to be in a perfectly wild place, to a reading arbitrated by the meaning imposed by Julie and Wolmar. The *Elysée* is a kind of sanctuary where Julie goes to tend to her virtue as she tends to nature, giving a purely natural appearance to both and carefully hiding the traces of this work. But the garden has a more sinister side as well; the name *Elysée* signifies, firstly, the resting place of departed heroes. We can thus deduce that Julie wishes one day to deserve a place among them through her assiduous double cultivation. But underpinning this interpretation are the signs of a different motivation. Saint-Preux's description of the garden seems, on several levels, to make allusions to a kind of tomb, which is kept closed under lock and key, where sunlight cannot penetrate and where Julie is not troubled by life's inherent disorder and instability. As we have seen, what defines any relationship with others is the fact that it may cause "inquiétudes," whether these be feelings of love or other worries of the soul. In her marriage, as in her garden, Julie chooses peace, protection from her worries. Her life and her marriage, in this way, cannot

but resemble death, with her garden as her living tomb. But in spite of her efforts to avoid, stifle and transform her passions, the seed persists and we see its traces in Julie's last letter as she allows herself to waste away: "Oui, j'eus beau vouloir étouffer le premier sentiment qui m'a fait vivre, il s'est concentré dans mon cœur."[132] The discussion that follows this declaration affirms that the love persisting in her heart for Saint-Preux is involuntary, but her virtue remains unblemished. The garden is inscribed with the trace of this love in the equivocal language of nature. Before Julie and Wolmar could impose their message onto Saint-Preux's reading of the garden, it had already awakened his passions as if it had been a virgin forest.

To his credit, Rousseau does not bring his *Julie* to the happy ending his readers might have desired, as he could have done. Happiness is, paradoxically, the root of the problem for Julie. In Book Six, she writes to Saint-Preux in an attempt to explain the languor that hangs over her despite having everyone that she loves around her and having nothing left to desire from life: "Mon ami, je suis trop heureuse; le bonheur m'ennuye."[133] Copying, whether the corrupted Parisian version or the virtuous, though problematic natural version, is a mesmerizing form of seduction, but it leaves a void just below the surface that is impossible to fill in the world Rousseau presents to the reader. In the *Confessions*, he admits to falling victim to the charms of imitation himself: "Je passai deux ou trois ans de cette façon, . . . cherchant à me fixer sans savoir à quoi, mais entraîné pourtant par degrès vers l'étude, voyant des gens de lettres, entendant parler de litterature, me mêlant quelquefois d'en parler moi-même, et prenant plutôt le jargon des livres que la

[132] *Julie* 741.

[133] *Julie* 694.

connoissance de leur contenu."[134] On the very next page, he recounts his failed efforts to retain musical knowledge by copying and recopying difficult theoretical texts: ". . . par mon invincible obstination à vouloir en charger ma mémoire qui s'y refusoit toujours, par mes courses continuelles, par les compilations immenses que j'entassais, passant très souvent à copier les nuits entiéres."[135] Through the years of imitation during his social and intellectual apprenticeship, *insensiblement*, Rousseau nonetheless perfects his own personal practice of copying to produce a totally unique and original novel. While the success of the aim outlined in the preface, to guide "celles qui ont conservé quelque amour pour l'honnêteté" back to a virtuous path is perhaps questionable, the great, if unintended success of the novel is its implicit suggestion that perfect virtue and innocence are impossible when worldly imitation is present from the start. Julie's worldly education from La Chaillot may have "inoculated" her against the dangers of Paris she reads about in Saint-Preux's letters, but it also introduces her to worldliness and the passions that allow her to fall in love in the first place. She is lost before the novel even begins, just as she who dares to read a single page of *Julie*. We shall see, in the next chapter, how Laclos presses these issues further, implicating the reader more seriously in the perverse system he expertly portrays. His implied critique of the inescapable forces of imitation suggests an equally complex, if more vicious reality as well as the dire consequences it entails.

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[134] *Confessions* 218.

[135] *Confessions* 219.

Chapter 2

Les Liaisons dangereuses: "Cherchez-en dans le siècle un second exemple!"

As we saw in the first chapter, Rousseau's *Julie* presents the reader with endless cycles of imitation whose origins are often difficult to trace. In this chapter, we shall look at Laclos's more subversive and sinister approach to questions of imitation and originality through the complex and frequently malicious forms copying takes on throughout *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.

How to Read a Copy

It must be remembered that according to the fictional, if intentionally misleading prefaces of the *Éditeur* and the *Rédacteur*, the volume of correspondence known as *Les Liaisons dangereuses* exists at least in part thanks to copies made by the characters themselves of their own letters and sometimes of the letters of others.[136] At the end of the novel, as the Chevalier Danceny is fulfilling his pledge to Madame de Rosemonde to send her all of the correspondence in his possession related to the events of the novel, he writes:

> N'en croyez pas mes discours ; mais lisez, si vous en avez le courage, la correspondance que je dépose entre vos mains. La quantité de Lettres qui s'y trouvent en original, paraît rendre authentiques celles dont il n'existe que des copies. Au reste, j'ai reçu ces papiers, tels que j'ai l'honneur de

[136] Valmont is probably the best example – his letters to Merteuil, for example, must be copies (or *brouillons*) as she never gave her correspondence to Rosemonde.

> vous les adresser de M. de Valmont lui-même. Je n'y ai rien ajouté, et je n'en ai distrait que deux Lettres que je me suis permis de publier.[137]

After reading nearly the entirety of the letters, Danceny's explanation of those in his possession adds a large degree of materiality to the collection. Turning pages in a bound volume, or indeed, swiping through them on a modern tablet device, the reader might easily take for granted that such correspondence is naturally organized in such a way. Danceny's letter then forces the reader to consider that this is not in fact the case, bringing out a physical aspect of the letters that is otherwise easily overlooked. While the fictional Editeur and Rédacteur's prefaces calling into question the status of the letters may muddle the reader's impressions of the novel somewhat, they are first and foremost adhering to a common trope in early novels. All of these features merge seamlessly to produce the conditions for the existence of a collection of letters, which are expertly, if conveniently, put into place as each characters' correspondence is delivered to a confidant who in turn entrusts them to Madame de Rosemonde as their rightful guardian.[138] Her coming into possession of the near complete correspondence and the subsequent decision to publish it is of great significance in the overall plot of the novel.

One important episode in the first part of the novel brings to the fore the act of copying letters, which is one of the major focal points of my project. In letter XXXIV, Valmont describes the difficulties he encounters in his attempts to deliver his letters to

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[137] *Liaisons* 374.

[138] See René Pomeau's subsection "Le Dieu caché des *Liaisons*" on the importance of the arrangement of the letters in *Laclos ou le paradoxe*. Paris: Hachette, 1993. pp. 139-44.

Madame de Tourvel, in spite of the fact that they are both living at Madame de Rosemonde's house at the time. Valmont ends his letter by flippantly informing the Marquise de Merteuil: "Je joins à ce récit le brouillon de mes deux Lettres ; vous serez aussi instruite que moi. Si vous voulez être au courant de ma correspondance, il faut vous accoutumer à déchiffrer mes minutes : car pour rien au monde, je ne dévorerais l'ennui de les recopier."[139] As my analysis of this and several other key scenes in the novel will show, Valmont's lazy self-assured arrogance in the way he repeatedly casts off his *brouillons* into Merteuil's lap plays an important role in helping her to ultimately destroy him and by proxy, Madame de Tourvel. I will also argue that Valmont actively resists societal pressure to copy, even in the seemingly benign act of refusing to copy a letter for his confidant to read. Because no mechanical means of making multiple copies of a letter is available to him, and because of the sensitive nature of the subjects, Valmont alone is left with the burden of producing a copy of his letter, or not. The monotony of the verbatim copy is understandably intolerable since it does not allow any room for innovation or invention; it is a repeat performance.[140] Once he has composed his letter, in the creative phase of the project, reproducing it, aside from the clean final copy that must be made for the letter's addressee, is without interest. He also resists the drive to copy himself and others in the long process of seducing the Présidente, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

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[139] *Liaisons* 71.

[140] In Chapter 3, we will examine how Julien Sorel deals with the problem of copying 53 long love letters as part of a worldly seduction scheme. See pp. 173-77.

The word *brouillon* is defined as "[c]e qu'on écrit d'abord et qu'on jète sur le papier, pour le mettre ensuite au net."[141] The composition of a letter by way of a *brouillon*, not unlike the composition of a novel, creates a space for testing and reworking ideas, word choice, tone, style and other writing techniques intended to help elicit the desired response from one's reader.[142] Though more or fewer alterations and corrections may be made depending on the writer and his or her writing habits, it is reasonable to assume that the *brouillon* is, at the very least, a less controlled, less perfect version of the final product. Valmont refers to the need for Merteuil to learn to decipher his *minutes* in order to understand his writing, so he has apparently developed some sort of system of notation or short hand for composing his letters. By definition, the draft stages of a project can be extremely fluid, changing and unstable. This is a space where anything is possible until definitive editorial choices are made through trial and error and where conscious as well as unconscious leakages of sensitive or inappropriate information can

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[141] "Brouillon." *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 4^e^ édition*, 1762. U of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois.

[142] In letter CV, Mme de Merteuil advises Cécile: "P.S. A propos, j'oubliais…un mot encore. Voyez donc à soigner davantage votre style. Vous écrivez toujours comme un enfant. Je vois bien d'où cela vient ; c'est que vous dites tout ce que vous pensez, et rien de ce que vous ne pensez pas. Cela peut passez ainsi de vous à moi, qui devons n'avoir rien de caché l'une pour l'autre : mais avec tout le monde ! avec votre Amant surtout ! vous auriez toujours l'air d'une petite sotte. Vous voyez bien que, quand vous écrivez à quelqu'un, c'est pour lui et non pas pour vous : vous devez donc moins chercher à lui dire ce que vous pensez, que ce qui lui plaît davantage" *Liaisons* 242-43.

be suppressed from the final version. We know from several of Valmont's letters that he struggles to adopt the proper tone in his letters to the Présidente and refers unsuccessfully to novels and to his own past correspondence, as well as to his *mémoires* for assistance in communicating effectively with her.[143]

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[143] "Retiré chez moi, j'écrivis une longue Lettre pour me plaindre de cette rigueur, et je me couchai avec le projet de la remettre ce matin. . . . Je me suis levé, et j'ai relu mon Epître. Je me suis aperçu que je ne m'y étais pas assez observé, que j'y montrais plus d'ardeur que d'amour, et plus d'humeur que de tristesse. Il faudra la refaire ; mais il faudra être plus calme" (*Liaisons* 53). As Michel Delon points out in his notes, Goldzink remarks in *Le Vice en bas de soie* that we do not know which version of letter XXIV is then presented to the reader. "Notes complémentaires." in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2002. Goldzink, Jean. *Le Vice en bas de soie, ou, le roman du libertinage*. Paris: J. Corti, 2001. (p. 70). "Comme je ne me dissimule point que ce titre, qui ne paraît d'abord qu'une dispute de mots, est pourtant d'une importance réelle à obtenir, j'ai mis beaucoup de soin à ma Lettre, et j'ai tâché d'y répandre ce désordre, qui peut seul peindre le sentiment. J'ai enfin déraisonné le plus qu'il m'a été possible : car sans déraisonnement, point de tendresse ; et c'est, je crois, par cette raison que les femmes nous sont si supérieures dans les Lettres d'Amour" (*Liaisons* 139). "Cette Lettre m'a mené plus loin que je ne comptais . . . " (*Liaisons* 225). "Jusque-là, je ne puis rien faire qu'au hasard : aussi, depuis huit jours, je repasse inutilement tous les moyens connus, tout ceux des Romans et de mes Mémoires secrets ; je n'en trouve aucun qui convienne, ni aux circonstances de l'aventure, ni au caractère de l'Héroïne" (*Liaisons* 254). The only letter Valmont overtly claims not to have revised or thought twice about is

Manuscripts of novels, showing words, sentences and sometimes entire passages that have been crossed out or rewritten one or more times can be particularly revealing of an author's thoughts during the creative process. A close study of Laclos's drafts and variations of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* may provide some clues about the development of his novel.[144] Similarly, the letters and drafts of letters Valmont furnishes to Merteuil supply her with more information about his thoughts and intentions than he is able to recognize himself. She uses her intimate knowledge of him and her talent for reading people to decipher subtleties he cannot be bothered, or does not think necessary to hide from her; she tells him as much in several letters.[145] The reader, who has access to Laclos's drafts, but not to Valmont's, can only speculate what kinds of words, expressions, *lieux communs* and other formulas the fictional character might test and reject as he endeavors to craft the perfect composition to appeal to this "adorable" and "étonnante" woman.[146] All of this invaluable information is, however, available to Merteuil, enabling her to analyze his thoughts and feelings for use against him. Her

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the *Ce n'est pas ma faute* letter written for him by Merteuil: "c'est que ce dernier ma paru original et propre à faire de l'effet : aussi je l'ai copié tout simplement et tout simplement encore je l'ai envoyé à la céleste Présidente" (*Liaisons* 329).

[144] The Pléiade edition of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* contains 248 pages of *Notes et variants* from different versions of Laclos's manuscript.

[145] See letter XXXIII about sentiments expressed in novels (*Liaisons* 68). In letter CXXXIV Merteuil sees how he avoids certain words, but keeps the same ideas (p. 312).

[146] Letters CXXV and CXXXIV. *Liaisons* 287-95 and 312-14.

natural as well as cultivated talents for reading people,[147] her experience and her intimate knowledge of Valmont give her a considerable advantage over the innocent and naïve Présidente, not to mention that she is working with far more information at her disposal. Merteuil's access to this privileged information leads her little by little to the undeniable certainty that Valmont is truly in love with the Présidente[148] and that she has not and may never become a "femme ordinaire" for him as so many others have before her.[149] This is one of the conditions Merteuil imposes upon Valmont if they are to be reunited. Throughout the novel, however, the adamancy with which he claims to desire to want Merteuil is inversely proportional to its success in convincing both her and the reader of his sincerity.

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[147] Letter LXXXI. *Liaisons* 167-77.

[148] "Or, est-il vrai, Vicomte, que vous vous faites illusion sur le sentiment qui vous attache à Mme de Tourvel ? C'est de l'amour, ou il n'en exista jamais : vous le niez bien de cent façons ; mais vous le prouvez de mille" *Liaisons* 312.

[149] "Ah ! le temps ne viendra que trop tôt, où, dégradée par sa chute, elle ne sera plus pour moi qu'une femme ordinaire" (*Liaisons* 210). "Je suis encore trop plein de mon Bonheur, pour pouvoir l'apprécier, mais je m'étonne du charme inconnu que j'ai ressenti. . . . Quand même la scène d'hier m'aurait, comme je le crois, emporté un peu plus loin que je ne comptais; quand j'aurais, un moment, partagé le trouble et l'ivresse que je faisais naître, cette illusion passagère serait dissipée à présent: et cependant le même charme subsiste" (p. 287). "L'ivresse fut complète et réciproque ; et, pour la première fois, la mienne survécut au plaisir" (p. 295).

Merteuil, in fact, is such a skilled reader that she is even able to discern Valmont's editing process and ascertain his true, if poorly disguised meaning when she is reading letters addressed to herself rather than to Tourvel: "C'est ainsi qu'en remarquant votre politesse, qui vous a fait supprimer soigneusement tous les mots que vous vous êtes imaginé m'avoir déplu, j'ai vu cependant que, peut-être sans vous en apercevoir, vous n'en conserviez pas moins les mêmes idées."[150] In this case, Merteuil does not need the draft version of the letter to read between the lines. It is clear that Valmont is the only person left unaware or in denial, as Merteuil rightly claims; her growing jealousy and her astuteness as a reader, Valmont's vehement but unconvincing denials of her assertions, and his subsequent death all indicate that she was right about his feelings for the Présidente. Just as the famous *persiflage* letter he writes to Tourvel using the body of a prostitute as his writing table reveals much more to Merteuil, the unnamed addressee of the letter, than to its named addressee, his other letters, particularly the ones in which he writes about the Présidente, appear to Merteuil as a kind of accidental *autopersiflage* only she and Laclos's reader can fully appreciate.

Returning again to letter XXXIV, I would like to examine another important thread of the novel that originates here. In addition to learning how Valmont opens himself with such nonchalant confidence to Merteuil's scrutiny by sending her the drafts of his letters, the reader also learns about the various ruses Valmont must invent for getting his final product into Tourvel's hands. He disguises one such letter as coming from Dijon so that she will be tricked into believing it has something to do with her husband. After realizing that she has been fooled, Tourvel is so upset that she rips the

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[150] *Liaisons* 312.

letter into pieces and stuffs it in her pocket without reading it thoroughly. But this letter's significance does not become entirely clear until later when Valmont gains access to the contents of her pockets by blackmailing her maid. There he finds not only the supposed letter from Dijon, carefully reassembled, but also all of his other letters, in order of reception, including a copy his first letter, the original of which she had returned to him.

> Une fois maître de ce trésor, je procédai à l'inventaire avec la prudence que vous me connaissez : car il était important de remettre tout en place. Je tombai d'abord sur deux Lettres du mari, mélange indigeste de détails de procès et de tirades d'amour conjugal, que j'eus la patience de lire en entier, et où je ne trouvai pas un mot qui eût rapport à moi. Je les replaçai avec humeur : mais elle s'adoucit, en trouvant sous ma main les morceaux de ma fameuse Lettre de Dijon, soigneusement rassemblés. Heureusement il me prit fantaisie de la parcourir. Jugez de ma joie, en y apercevant les traces, bien distinctes, des larmes de mon adorable Dévote. Je l'avoue, je cédai à un mouvement de jeune homme, et baisai cette Lettre avec un transport dont je ne me croyais plus susceptible. Je continuai l'heureux examen ; je retrouvai toutes mes Lettres de suite, et par ordre de dates ; et ce qui me surprit plus agréablement encore, fut de retrouver la première de toutes, celle que je croyais m'avoir été rendue par une ingrate, fidèlement copiée de sa main : et d'une écriture altérée et tremblante, qui témoignait assez la douce agitation de son cœur pendant cette occupation.[151]

[151] *Liaisons* 92.

The discovery of the Dijon letter and the copied letter in particular has immense significance for Valmont as it gives him access to a privileged reading of *his own* letters from another reader's perspective, not unlike the reading Merteuil is afforded by his *brouillons*. Valmont had already witnessed first hand the emotional response produced by the Dijon letter as Tourvel ripped it to pieces and left the room. He could not be sure though, that she had read the letter in its entirety or of her reaction to it. The meticulous piecing together of the torn missive already adds a layer of meaning, revealing the Présidente's curiosity and proving a certain amount of interest in the letter's contents, even though she adamantly claims that it offends her. As he peruses the letter, her tearstains add another important component to his text: his words have touched her in a profound way, causing her tears and possibly pain rather than just the anger and contempt she had expressed upon receiving the letter. Valmont thus definitively concludes that he has hit upon an effective style for communicating with Tourvel, in spite of and thanks to her insistence to the contrary.

As an epistolary novel, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* takes its status as a novel composed entirely of letters to a new and unprecedented level of importance in driving the plot. The Dijon episode described above is just one illustration of the multiple ways in which the physical aspects of the letters must be considered in any analysis of Laclos's novel. This particular letter is disguised, delivered, only partially read before being torn to pieces, put back together to be read in private, wept over, and then discovered as such by Valmont, who is able to plan his next move accordingly. All of these possible scenarios, as well as a number of others characteristic of letters, are fundamental to the

functioning of this novel in a way that simply is not the case in *Julie*, for example.[152] Rousseau's epistolary novel is considerably more cumbersome and awkward in its justification for the writing of the letters; the first letter begins with Saint-Preux's famous "Il faut vous fuir, Mademoiselle . . ." followed by a request for her advice on his predicament and a plea for her to show the letter to her mother so that he might be driven away from her. When she does not immediately return a reply, he writes again and then a third time. While Merteuil and Valmont never meet face to face throughout the duration of the novel, and are thus obliged to communicate through letters, Julie and Saint-Preux spend almost every day together for two years and write to each other longingly when they are apart. Rousseau, in order to include the narration of certain events, is forced to push the limits of verisimilitude for motivating the letters. The most glaring example of this is the letter in which Saint-Preux exclaims "[q]uel bonheur de trouver du papier et de l'encre!" as he awaits the arrival of Julie in her *cabinet*.[153] The real geographic separation of Valmont and Merteuil, as well as the necessity that they not be seen together in public furnishes a more compelling impetus for writing letters than for two young lovers who might simply arrange clandestine meetings rather than write. The multiple intrigues running throughout *Liaisons* also impose the need for the discretion and secrecy made possible by letters: Valmont's unseemly pursuit of the Présidente, his otherwise inappropriate communication with Cécile to facilitate her forbidden relationship with

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[152] Brooks insists: "Never has the epistolary form been so completely motivated as it is here: non only is the art of the letter a central question, the letter itself, in a physical sense . . . becomes a subject of correspondence, a theme as well as a form" p. 174.

[153] *Julie* 147.

Danceny and most importantly, Valmont's and Merteuil's vicious plans for revenge on their former lovers and other various enemies.

While the pieced together faux Dijon letter is important and revealing, the transcription of his first letter is an even more significant discovery for Valmont as it allows him to interpret her reading of the letter, which is copied in an "écriture altérée et tremblante, qui témoignait assez la douce agitation de son cœur pendant cette occupation." Since Tourvel has previously written to Valmont, he is able to differentiate between the controlled handwriting meant for him to read and this altered and trembling, demonstrative display of emotion written within the handwriting itself. Valmont now has a kind of lover's Richter scale provided to him by this letter, thanks to which he is able to see how each word, expression and sentiment has affected her according to the relative amount of disturbance visible in her script.

In this chapter, I am not interested in simply pointing out and analyzing incidents of copying found in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, though I hope that these examples will help me illustrate my case for the novel itself as simultaneously both a copy and a true original. My suspicion of Merteuil's careful study of Valmont's *brouillons* and his interpretation of the two letters described above does move the plot forward, helping him plan his next move more effectively, but my principal claim is that on a deeper level, this type of copying in the novel comments implicitly on Laclos's role as author and creator, copier and imitator. In the following sections of this chapter, I will address Merteuil's accusations that Valmont is a mere copy of himself and invents nothing, as compared to Valmont's assertions that he is in fact a great innovator in his field. A few key examples of each side's claims will assist me in proving my case that Laclos struggles, as does

Rousseau, in a worldly society rife with imitation yet hungry for originality. Finally, I will approach two of the novel's most crucial letters: the *Ce n'est pas ma faute* letter and Valmont's "suppressed" last letter to Madame de Tourvel. Merteuil suggests a template for the former to Valmont and sees its success as her true masterpiece of manipulation when he faithfully transcribes it so impulsively and unthinkingly. The latter is widely recognized as Laclos's chef-d'oeuvre of genius and originality in the novel. Laclos demonstrates his mastery, ingenuity and wisdom in his judgment that only the *absence* of such a letter could possibly fill the void that would have been left by additional words, indistinguishable in their truth and sincerity from any of his other letters and indeed, from any of those contained in the whole of the novel itself.[154]

Valmont's Innovations & Imitations

Though Merteuil repeatedly chastises Valmont for what she perceives in him as a lack of originality, his ability to copy the style of any other character and effectively write their letters for them is worth noting as a prime factor contributing to his success in contending with the victims of his and Merteuil's diabolical plot. More generally, his mastery of the art of imitating others is crucial to the success of his long career seducing and ruining women. Throughout the novel tensions gradually rise between Merteuil's

[154] "While we can be more conclusive than Mme de Volanges and the Editor – we surely have sufficient evidence that Valmont's despair at loss of the Présidente is far from feigned – the artistic advantage gained by suppressing the letter is evident. For who could write such a letter? What would an unfeigning Valmont sound like? Were could he find the terms, the vocabulary, the code to express himself?" Brooks 208.

disdainful accusations of his unoriginal methods, his desire to accomplish something totally new and without example and the constant force exerted by society, which requires continuous and faithful imitation. Impatient with Cécile's ineffective love letters to Danceny, Valmont dictates a letter to Cécile, perfectly capturing her "petit radotage," while infusing her otherwise cold and constrained letter with hope for their forbidden love: "Que n'aurai-je pas fait pour ce Danceny? J'aurai été à la fois son ami, son confident, son rival et sa maîtresse!"[155] Previously, he had coached Danceny on how to write in order to coax Cécile into obeying him, supposedly so that he could help them arrange a meeting. Valmont's first letter in the novel, written to Merteuil to explain his recent absence from Paris and to excuse himself from her plans for him, speaks, or rather imitates, the language of religious devotion spoken by the Présidente de Tourvel and his aged aunt Rosemonde: "Ce langage vous étonne, n'est-il pas vrai ? Mais depuis huit jours, je n'en entends, je n'en parle pas d'autre ; et c'est pour m'y perfectionner, que je me vois forcé de vous désobéir."[156] Playing the role of a man corrupted in his youth by irresistible Parisian influences, but brought to see the error of his ways by the pious lectures and reprimands of a virtuous woman,[157] Valmont has found the perfect way to

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[155] *Liaisons* 270.

[156] *Liaisons* 16.

[157] This type of claim is a common trope in eighteenth century fictional memoires. See the first page of Duclos's *Confessions du comte de* ***, where the writer claims to be reformed and compensated for the loss of worldly pleasures with the charm of friendship: "Je possède un ami fidèle, qui partage ma solitude, et qui, me tenant lieu de tout, m'empêche de rien regretter." *Romanciers du XVIII^e siècle*. Ed. Étiemble. Vol. II. Paris :

get close to Tourvel. He often refers to her as a divinity to be worshipped and to himself as the god to whom she must sacrifice everything in order for his victory to satisfy him completely.[158] Not only does Valmont imitate the Présidente's religious language, he even adopts her favorite pastimes: going to mass daily and engaging in philanthropy. In his efforts to demonstrate his sincere and permanent rehabilitation, thanks to her influence over him, he organizes an elaborate *mise en scène* of extravagant generosity to a poor family about to lose everything to debt collectors, which she is meant to discover when she sends a servant to spy on him. In this way, Valmont manages to impress Tourvel with his specious generosity, but also have it advertised to his aunt by Tourvel, who cannot resist singing his praises to all present in the parlor that afternoon. Valmont admits that in acting the part of the virtuous benefactor, imitating actions worthy of Tourvel herself, he is drawn in by his own performance:

> J'avouerai ma faiblesse ; mes yeux se sont mouillés de larmes, et j'ai senti en moi un mouvement involontaire, mais délicieux. J'ai été étonné du plaisir qu'on éprouve en faisant le bien ; et je serais tenté de croire que ce que nous appelons les gens vertueux, n'ont pas tant de mérite qu'on se plaît à nous le dire. Quoi qu'il en soit, j'ai trouvé juste de payer à ces

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Gallimard, 1965. 195-301. (p. 199). In the preface to Crébillon's *Égarements*, the reader is told that in the last part of the memoir, the writer will be seen to be "rendu à lui-même, devoir toutes ses vertus à une femme estimable" (p. 11).

[158] "[Rosemonde] ne se doute pas de la Divinité que j'y adore" (*Liaisons* 18). "Je n'étais, puisqu'il faut le dire, que le faible agent de la Divinité que j'adore . . ." (p. 51). "Je serais vraiment le Dieu qu'elle aura préféré" (p. 22).

> pauvres gens le plaisir qu'ils venaient de me faire. . . . Cependant, au milieu des bénédictions bavardes de cette famille, je ne ressemblais pas mal au Héros d'un Drame, dans la scène du dénouement. . . . Tout calculé, je me félicite de mon invention.[159]

As a natural extension of his behavior as a reformed sinner, Valmont's imitation leads him not only to speak the part, but to act it as well. He carries out his ruse so skillfully, that he easily convinces the Présidente of his efforts at rehabilitation. The most important part of the scene is its supposed clandestine nature; Tourvel must believe that Valmont is being modest in his newfound virtue, not wishing to draw attention to his good deeds, if she is to believe it. In sending a spy after Valmont to report back to her about his activities, she is forced to confront her own duplicity and to lie about how her servant just happened to witness these events. Valmont is surprised by the unintended consequences of being affected physically and emotionally by the flow of his own tears, accompanied by "un mouvement involontaire, mais délicieux," in performing this charitable stunt (nearly) to perfection.[160] Glossing casually over his inadvertent, but expedient reaction, Valmont remarks that this simple pleasure was worth the small monetary price he paid to experience it. His main concern lies in the successful accomplishment of his plot and how favorably it casts him in the role of the "Héros d'un Drame, dans la scène du dénouement." He goes on to emphasize the importance of his "invention," thus, he believes, proving himself comparable to a master playwright as well as a gifted actor. But

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[159] *Liaisons* 46-47.

[160] Brooks also discusses the "extent to which parody can become emotional reality for Valmont" p. 191.

just as Merteuil easily derives the underlying authentic gestures from his writing, the reader might begin to suspect the hero of this epistolary drama of more than merely a calculated act. Valmont, in freely admitting to an *involuntary* reaction to his own performance, also becomes one of its victims. Though he does admit his "faiblesse," he does not directly disavow his tears or recognize the danger they represent for himself or his plans. A perfectly orchestrated scene would have left everyone, save himself, moved to tears; his tears should have been a flawlessly executed simulation that nonetheless left him alone free of emotion. As a precautionary measure, rather than recognizing the value of being overcome by true feelings, Valmont prefers instead to cheapen them by assigning them monetary value. Paying to feel something rather than coming by it honestly lowers this innocent family down to the level of prostitutes in his eyes, or so he wishes to portray the scene to Merteuil and to himself.

Later the same day, Valmont passes up, or claims to pass up an opportunity to take advantage of his apparently successful role play, choosing instead to avoid losing, "par un triomphe prématuré, le charme des longs combats et les détails d'une pénible défaite."[161] In effect, taking this "premature" opportunity to triumph over Tourvel would have short circuited the new and original drama of which Valmont fancies himself the hero as well as Laclos's novel itself. Merteuil however, is dubious of this near victory and mocks him openly in Letter XXXIV for missing the chance to speak and act quickly, in the heat of passion, instead of returning to the slow and uncertain progress of the written word for seduction: "Votre conduite est un chef-d'œuvre de prudence."[162]

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[161] *Liaisons* 52.

[162] *Liaisons* 67.

Interestingly, for the purposes of this study, Merteuil argues against Valmont's attempts at seduction through letter writing with the claim that in novels, fictional love is almost impossible to render convincingly:

> De plus, une remarque que je m'étonne que vous n'ayez pas faite, c'est qu'il n'y a rien de si difficile en amour, que d'écrire ce qu'on ne sent pas. Je dis écrire d'une façon vraisemblable : ce n'est pas qu'on ne se serve des mêmes mots ; mais on ne les arrange pas de même, ou plutôt on les arrange, et cela suffit. Relisez votre Lettre ; il y règne un ordre qui vous décèle à chaque phrase. Je veux croire que votre Présidente est assez peu formée pour ne s'en pas apercevoir : mais qu'importe ? l'effet n'en est pas moins manqué. C'est le défaut des Romans ; l'Auteur se bat les flancs pour s'échauffer, et le Lecteur reste froid. *Héloïse* est le seul qu'on puisse excepter ; et malgré le talent de l'Auteur, cette observation m'a toujours fait croire que le fond en était vrai.[163]

Though Valmont prefers to defer the moment of his inevitable victory in order to increase the glory and pleasure he will enjoy as a result, Merteuil sees swift action as the most efficient and sure solution. This early on in the novel, Merteuil's suspicions and jealousy have not yet been roused and Valmont continues to struggle with style and tone as he composes his letters. Neither character takes seriously the effects of playing such a dangerous game of imitation. Merteuil is easily able to discern the order and forced arrangement of his words, which "décèle [him] à chaque phrase." Novels provide a perfect example of this type of deliberate arrangement of words, since the stories

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[163] *Liaisons* 68.

contained within them are necessarily invented by the author, who must find the best way to elicit particular emotions from the reader through the careful arrangement of words. Through the medium of Merteuil's cynical plume, Laclos calls the representation of love in novels, which would necessarily include his own novel, into question. But Merteuil makes a pointed exception for Rousseau's *Héloïse* in her critique of novels. It is well known that Laclos held Rousseau in great admiration and relied heavily on his writings in the composition of his incomplete treatises on the education of women. Rousseau's influence is also clear, both implicitly and explicitly in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* as many previous studies have effectively shown.[164] Merteuil's praise of Rousseau's talent however, appears to credit his novel's ability to stimulate such great emotion in the reader to the belief that it is based in fact, perhaps in real lived experience. It is unclear then whether she is questioning *Héloïse*'s status as a legitimate novel or veritably admiring her author's talents. She seems to suggest that in order for the emotions expressed to be effectively transmitted to and felt by the reader, they must be real, but if they are real, they lose their fictional character and therefore, less talent is necessary to produce them.[165] On the other hand, in his own account of the writing of *Julie*, Rousseau

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[164] Annie Collognat-Barès thoroughly traces Rousseau's influence in her introduction to Laclos's essays on the education of women. Laclos, Choderlos de. *Traité sur l'éducation des femmes*. Paris: Pocket, 2009. See also Laurent Versini's Notice in the notes of the Pléiade edition. Laclos, Choderlos de. *Des Femmes et de leur éducation*. *Laclos: Œuvres complètes*. Ed. Laurent Versini. Paris: Gallimard, 1979. 387-443. pp. 1411-16.

[165] Versini's chapter "Le roman épistolaire symphonique et total : *La Nouvelle Héloïse*" traces the production of *Julie* and his unrequited love for Sophie Houdetot, which

describes how deeply he loves Sophie Houdetot.[166] We might thus conclude that while the story of the novel is fictional, there is truth and authenticity in the emotions expressed by its invented characters.[167]

In Merteuil's autobiographical manifesto, letter LXXXI, she details how she learned to control and counterfeit her emotions flawlessly according to the situation. Because she is such a virtuoso, she does not simply learn from and copy those around

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influenced his novel. *Le Roman épistolaire*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1979. (pp. 84-99). Saint-Preux, in Letter XIX of Part I, writes to Julie during his brief exile after their first kiss: "Cent fois en lisant des Romans, j'ai ri des froides plaintes des amans sur l'absence. Ah, je ne savois pas alors à quel point la vôtre un jour me seroit insupportable! Je sens aujourd'hui combien une ame paisible est peu propre à juger des passions, et combien il est insensé de rire des sentimens qu'on n'a point éprouvés" (*Julie* 70).

[166] See Rousseau's account of his meeting with Mme d'Houdetot, his love for her and the concurrent writing of Julie. He writes of his first visit from Mme d'Houdetot: "Cette visite eut un peu l'air d'un début de roman" (Confessions 432). See book IX beginning on p. 430 for the full story of Mme d'Houdetot.

[167] André Malraux makes an interesting point about the relative believability of truth/lies in his Laclos essay: "Laclos ne devenait maître de ses moyens que lorsqu'il échappait au style de son époque. Et sans doute avait-il confusément senti qu'il n'y échappait que dans la mesure où il échappait au mensonge. Ses personnages, l'auteur compris, écrivent mal dès qu'ils mentent. Mauvaises les dissertations, pas très bonnes les préfaces ; et les lettres de Valmont à Mme de Tourvel sont moins bonnes que celles à la marquise." "Laclos et *Les Liaisons dangereuses*." *Le triangle noir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1970. pp. 40-41.

her, but strives to go above and beyond the known limits of imitation in the game of seduction:

> En vain m'avait-on dit, et avais-je lu qu'on ne pouvait feindre ce sentiment ; je voyais pourtant que, pour y parvenir, il suffisait de joindre à l'esprit d'un Auteur, le talent d'un Comédien. Je m'exerçai dans les deux genres, et peut-être avec quelque succès : mais au lieu de rechercher les vains applaudissements du Théâtre, je résolus d'employer à mon bonheur ce que tant d'autres sacrifiaient à la vanité.[168]

Clearly, Merteuil fancies herself to be one of these author/actor hybrids, perhaps even the first or, at the very least, the most talented of her kind. Each vocation by itself boasts certain advantages. An author writes eloquently, with style and originality, always finding just the right turn of phrasing for a desired effect. But the expression of these talents generally remains on the page, whereas a gifted actor brings the author's words to life and renders them convincingly on the stage, before an audience. By combining the aptitudes required for practicing these two complimentary professions, Merteuil is sure that she will always have the appropriate words, instantaneously composed and efficaciously delivered for her carefully chosen audience of one. This is particularly important to her as a woman operating in a society where men occupy the privileged position in romantic relationships. Men enjoy the advantage of public applause for each successful conquest and subsequent *rupture*, while women are usually left to suffer the shame and ostracization of a reputation forever ruined. Considering the fact that she refuses to leave any written trace or other physical evidence of her craft that might later

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[168] *Liaisons* 173-74.

implicate her in an unsavory public scandal, Merteuil's performances must be ephemeral, never to be exactly repeated and the only remaining proof of their existence is contained in private letters exchanged between herself and Valmont.

As she grows more exasperated with Valmont's slow progress and jealous of his increasingly serious attachment to Tourvel, Merteuil berates him with escalating severity for what she perceives not only as his own personal incompetence, but also general masculine weakness resulting from the lack of impediments men typically encounter in their efforts at seduction:

> C'est que réellement vous n'avez pas le génie de votre état ; vous n'en savez que ce que vous en avez appris, et vous n'inventez rien. Aussi, dès que les circonstances ne se prêtent plus à vos formules d'usage, et qu'il vous faut sortir de la route ordinaire, vous rester court comme un Écolier.[169]

Though Valmont may be a passable actor, perfectly capable of carrying out time-tested schemes learned from his predecessors, Merteuil does not see him, or no longer sees him, as possessing the same level of skills as she is required to master entirely. In her eyes, he is a mere copyist who has achieved undeserved success simply by being *better* at copying that his competitors, not because he has any real talent. His supposed inability to combine the talents of the actor and the author contribute to his mishaps with the Présidente as far as Merteuil is concerned and make his efforts to disguise his feelings for her totally transparent to her.

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[169] *Liaisons* 243-44.

Merteuil and Valmont spend a great deal of time working to outdo one another at imitating love and its corollary emotions and behaviors. Directly contrasting to the way Julie and Saint-Preux feel about the importance of pure unmediated sincerity, in Merteuil and Valmont's domain of activity, it is of absolutely no value. Instead, enormous significance is placed on minimizing sincerity, while deftly maximizing its pretense. The less truth behind the words, the more artfully they must be "arranged" so as to appear in disorder, and thus the greater the triumph when their target is taken in by them.[170] But problems arise when the feigned emotions begin to take in their author along with the reader. As we have already seen, Valmont is moved to real tears by his own semblance of sincerity. Additionally, assuming that Merteuil is right in her estimation of the emotions expressed in most novels, if the reader is convinced by the emotions of Laclos's novel, it must be that, as the *rédacteur* claims, the story is true, or Laclos is so skilled as an author that he fashions an imitation of the society he portrays indistinguishable from reality. In either case, another important feature of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, as opposed to its predecessors, is the greater degree to which it implicates the reader in the plot and its tragic unraveling. Whereas in *Julie*, the reader exults with the virtuous young lovers in their happiness and cries over their misfortunes, here the reader is brought in on the malicious plans of the two main protagonists, knows the pain and suffering they wish to cause others and nonetheless, wishes for their success. When it all goes wrong, the reader

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[170] We might remember Saint-Preux's letter to Julie, in which he praises her innocent style "sans art." He claims that such delicious impressions cannot be produced by a "style apprêté" *Julie* 56.

is left to mourn the victims with the knowledge that he or she has sided with vice rather than virtue.[171]

Returning to the question of Valmont's originality, or lack thereof, in Part III of the novel, Valmont once again exposes himself to Merteuil's derision when he lets another opportunity for concluding his seduction of the Présidente escape without acting.[172] His challenge becomes infinitely more difficult when she leaves Madame de Rosemonde's house in the middle of the night and he is left with no way to communicate

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[171] Malraux's famous essay on Laclos meditates on the skill with which the reader is manipulated: "Le créateur de héros faisait appel à des qualités connues de tous et portées dans un personnage au plus haut période. La force de caractère du héros antique ou cornélien est *donnée* pour le lecteur, à la façon de la force physique d'Hercule. Don Juan est la séduction comme Vénus est la beauté. Ce qui est nouveau chez Laclos, ce qui explique l'action foudroyante du livre, c'est qu'à la fois, il peint Don Juan et vent la mèche. / Double jeu difficile à mener, rarement menable. Et pourtant indispensable à ce genre de création romanesque. La marquise, Valmont, Julien Sorel, Vautrin, Rastignac, Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov ont ceci de particulier qu'ils accomplissent des actes *prémédités*, en fonction d'une conception générale de la vie. Leur force romanesque vient de ce qu'en eux cette conception vit exactement comme un passion ; elle est leur passion. Invincible, irréductible, toujours liée d'ailleurs à une passion commune (ambition, sexualité) qu'elle ordonne et fonde en qualité. De tels personnages répondent au désir toujours profond de l'homme, d'agir en gouvernant son action. Avec eux, le héros finit, et le personnage significatif commence" pp. 31-32.

[172] See letter XCIX. *Liaisons* 219-225.

with her. He writes candidly and without embarrassment to Merteuil about his struggles to find a new approach:

> Jusque-là, je ne puis rien faire qu'au hasard : aussi, depuis huit jours, je repasse inutilement tous les moyens connus, tous ceux des Romans et de mes Mémoires secrets ; je n'en trouve aucun qui convienne, ni aux circonstances de l'aventure, ni au caractère de l'Héroïne. La difficulté ne serait pas de m'introduire chez elle, même la nuit ; même encore de l'endormir, et d'en faire une nouvelle Clarisse : mais après plus de deux mois de soins et de peines, recourir à des moyens qui me soient étrangers ! me traîner servilement sur la trace des autres, et triompher sans gloire !... Non, elle n'aura pas *les plaisirs du vice et les honneurs de la vertu**. Ce n'est pas assez pour moi de la posséder, je veux qu'elle se livre. Or, il faut pour cela non seulement pénétrer jusqu'à elle, mais y arriver de son aveu ; la trouver seule et dans l'intention de m'écouter ; surtout, lui fermer les yeux sur le danger, car si elle le voit, elle saura le surmonter ou mourir. Mais mieux je sais ce qu'il faut faire, plus j'en trouve l'exécution difficile ; et dussiez-vous encore vous moquer de moi, je vous avouerai que mon embarras redouble à mesure que je m'en occupe davantage.[173]

Valmont normally encounters very little difficulty seducing the average woman in his elite Parisian society. Merteuil bemoans the fact that men have it far too easy in the game

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[173] *Liaisons* 254-5. The * in this passage is a note from the *rédacteur* referring the reader to *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. In the same passage, a *clin d'œil* to two great epistolary writers who preceded Laclos: Richardson and Rousseau.

of seduction and are always able to rely on the same tired old methods to achieve their goals. Moreover, as discussed above, real talent is, practically speaking, optional for men, though it is absolutely indispensable for women who wish to enjoy more than one or two adventures before having their reputations ruined publicly. In letter LXXXI, she writes:

> Croyez-moi, Vicomte, on acquiert rarement les qualités dont on peut se passer. Combattant sans risque, vous devez agir sans précaution. Pour vous autres hommes, les défaites ne sont que des succès de moins. Dans cette partie si inégale, notre fortune est de ne pas perdre, et votre malheur de ne pas gagner. Quand je vous accorderais autant de talents qu'à nous, de combine encore ne devrions-nous pas vous surpasser, par la nécessité où nous sommes d'en faire un continuel usage ![174]

Why invent new strategies when the old ones work every time? Merteuil owns that she occasionally reuses similar structures in her own schemes, but unlike him, she varies crucial key elements each time: "En vérité, Vicomte, vous n'êtes pas inventif ! Moi, je me répète aussi quelquefois, comme vous allez voir ; mais je tâche de me sauver par les détails, et surtout le succès me justifie."[175] Though some invention must be involved in Valmont's many seductions, since apparently he has kept an entire catalog of success stories to which he refers for inspiration, his previous techniques simply will not work

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[174] *Liaisons* 168-9.

[175] *Liaisons* 263. Versini remarks that Laclos uses a similar technique in his novel: "Laclos sait rénover les lieux communs par des variations originales . . ."*Laclos Et La Tradition: Essai Sur Les Sources Et La Technique Des Liaisons Dangereuses*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1968. p. 172.

with a woman like Tourvel. The Présidente is so far removed from anything Valmont has ever encountered in his past endeavors, that neither his own "Mémoires secrets," nor anything he has found in literature is of the least assistance to him. This is, of course, one of the primary attributes of the Présidente that first attract him to her: she represents totally new and uncharted territory. While real talent and invention are not indispensable for men, given the structure of the typical seduction in this society, as outlined by Merteuil, Valmont nonetheless seeks out opportunities to test his skills and prove his ingenuity. He is not, at first, interested in seducing Cécile; her complete ignorance and inability to defend herself against his advances would make it too easy.[176] The Présidente, however, is aware of the perils of Parisian society and has chosen to avoid them, preferring instead, a life of virtue and devotion, faithful to her marriage.

Interestingly, when Valmont does successfully carry out his attack on the Présidente after implementing an intricate plan to obtain a meeting with her and performing a dramatic scene in order to coerce her, she is unconscious when he finally claims his victory over her. In the beginning of the novel, he had described his aspirations to Merteuil as follows: "Qu'elle croie à la vertu, mais qu'elle me la sacrifie ; que ses fautes l'épouvantent sans pouvoir l'arrêter ; et qu'agitée de mille terreurs, elle ne puisse les oublier, les vaincre que dans mes bras. Qu'alors, j'y consens, elle me dise : « Je

[176] "Que me proposez-vous ? de séduire une jeune fille qui n'a rien vu, ne connaît rien, qui, pour ainsi dire, me serait livrée sans défense ; qu'un premier hommage ne manquera pas d'enivrer, et que la curiosité mènera peut-être plus vite que l'amour. Vingt autres peuvent y réussir comme moi. Il n'es est pas ainsi de l'entreprise qui m'occupe ; son succès m'assure autant de gloire que de plaisir" *Liaisons* 17.

t'adore ».”[177] What he actually reports to Merteuil, however, appears to pass, in his eyes, for the equivalent, though it comes dangerously close to reducing him to the level of Richardson's Lovelace and making the Présidente into a “nouvelle Clarisse,” an approach he claims is below him.[178] Just after making his Saint-Preuxesque monologue, hinting that suicide is imminent since she does not return his love, and culminating with the ultimate Saint-Preux pronouncement, “Il faut vous fuir, il le faut,” Tourvel manages to cry out “Non !” before fainting into his arms.[179] Presumably, what he considers most important in vanquishing this surprisingly formidable enemy is not that she be mentally present at the moment of her defeat, but rather that she give some kind of signal indicating her abdication to him. In the end, the conclusion of his innovative plot is not so original after all.[180] It is true that a great deal of maneuvering goes into preparing this meeting: his pleading letter of rehabilitation to Père Anselme, Père Anselme's complicity with him and influence over the Présidente, and finally, the theatrics of their confrontation. Valmont is, throughout the encounter, acutely aware of each minute detail of the setting and of every move he makes in it; he takes note of “le théâtre de [sa]

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[177] *Liaisons* 22.

[178] *Liaisons* 254. See also letter 314 where Clarissa recounts being drugged and raped by Lovelace. Richardson, Samuel. Ed. Angus Ross. *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*. London: Penguin Books, 1985. p. 1005-13.

[179] *Liaisons* 293.

[180] We know from Valmont's man Azolan, that Tourvel has also been reading *Clarissa*, be it to look for ways to better resist her suitor, or to appropriately fall victim to him.

victoire" immediately upon arriving in her chamber.[181] As he dramatically lays out his case before her, he comments in his letter to Merteuil that he had "remarqué plusieurs fois que les scènes de désespoir menées trop vivement, tombaient dans le ridicule dès qu'elles devenaient longues, ou ne laissaient que des ressources vraiment tragiques, et que [il était] fort éloigné de vouloir prendre."[182] Whereas his tears flow easily, if unintentionally, in the scene of charity to a poor family discussed above, here he is unable to conjure them up when he feels they would be such an asset to his act. In the former scene, Valmont is surprised by authentic emotion resulting from a highly artificial event; in the latter, the one thing he feels would be of assistance to him in that moment is the one thing he cannot produce. It has been put forward that this suggests a newfound sincerity in Valmont, but I would argue that it is not until after he has had his victory that he discovers something approaching sincerity.[183]

Madame de Tourvel is initially mortified by what she has done and falls into fits of convulsions and silent crying. It is only when Valmont resorts to the old cliché, "Et vous êtes dans le désespoir, parce que vous avez fait mon bonheur?" that she is placated

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[181] *Liaisons* 289.

[182] *Liaisons* 291.

[183] "Alors que le libertin a « la facilité des larmes » . . . , la sècheresse de Valmont suggère une sincérité nouvelle. Dans la tradition religieuse, « le don des larmes » est vécu comme une grâce." Michel Delon's footnote in Le Livre de Poche edition, p. 395. Referring to pp. 68 & 291 in the Pléiade edition.

and gives herself over completely to making *him* happy.[184] This is the point at which the relationship is truly consummated by two *conscious* participants and Valmont writes: "Ce fut avec cette candeur, naïve ou sublime, qu'elle me livra sa personne et ses charmes, et qu'elle augmenta mon bonheur en le partageant. L'ivresse fut complète et réciproque ; et, pour la première fois, la mienne survécut au plaisir." It seems that her "candeur" somehow gets through to him, like that of the poor family, allowing him to experience another accidental moment of honest and unexpected emotion, when he is not acting, imitating or otherwise falsifying the interaction.

The Blind Copy: "Ce n'est pas ma faute"

Though he pursues the Présidente unrelentingly for three long, laborious months, Valmont only basks in the pleasure of his conquest for about one month before allowing Merteuil to goad him into transcribing and dispatching the cunningly crafted break-up letter she offers him.[185] Even this short period of time is punctuated by multiple infidelities, including the episode where Tourvel sees Valmont with the prostitute Emilie, threatening to cause a premature end to their brief liaison. Merteuil composes the "Ce n'est pas ma faute" letter with, at its core, the very words Valmont uses to try to pass off his amorous behavior in a previous letter to her: "Je persiste, ma belle amie : non, je ne suis point amoureux ; ce n'est pas ma faute si les circonstances me forcent d'en jouer le

[184] *Liaisons* 294. Valmont himself labels his words as being cliché: "Je me rebattis sur les lieux communs d'usage ; et dans le nombre se trouva celui-ci . . ."

[185] According to the dates on letters CXXV and CXLII, the affair began October 28, 17** and ended November 26, 17**. *Liaisons* 287 & 329 respectively.

rôle."[186] This is, once again, an example of Valmont becoming caught up in his own imitations, though his ensnarement becomes increasingly more complicated and thus, more perilous. Valmont's performance is a double-edged sword, in that he has played his role so convincingly, that he has won over not only the Présidente, but inadvertently, Merteuil and himself as well. His claims that the circumstances required him to "jouer le rôle" of the man in love only confirm Merteuil's suspicions and expose him to more of her mockery and ridicule in proportion to his insistence that he is simply interested in the glory such a victory will bring him.

Naturally his and Merteuil's libertine careers demand that they be capable of playing a number of various roles for the purposes of seduction; she uses novels to prepare herself for the different attitudes she wishes to adopt on a given occasion and he relies not only on fiction, but also on his *mémoires secrets* of past adventures for inspiration. In this way, Merteuil's assertion that he is a copy of himself does have some validity. Because he wishes to disavow the as yet unconscious authenticity of his conduct in this affair, Merteuil takes full advantage of his desire, subverting it into a clever *histoire* intended to prove to him in the most devastating fashion, not only just how *amoureux*, and thus out of control he is with regards to the Présidente, but also how it can and will lead to the destruction of the one person for whom he has ever genuinely felt anything. The text of the letter is as follows:

> « On s'ennuie de tout, mon Ange, c'est une Loi de la Nature ; ce n'est pas ma faute.

[186] *Liaisons* 320.

> « Si donc je m'ennuie aujourd'hui d'une aventure qui m'a occupé entièrement depuis quatre mortels mois, ce n'est pas ma faute.
>
> « Si, par exemple, j'ai eu j'ai eu juste autant d'amour que toi de vertu, et c'est sûrement beaucoup dire, il n'est pas étonnant que l'un ait fini en même temps que l'autre. Ce n'est pas ma faute.
>
> « Il suit de là, que depuis quelque temps je t'ai trompée : mais aussi, ton impitoyable tendresse m'y forçait en quelque sorte ! Ce n'est pas ma faute.
>
> « Aujourd'hui, une femme que j'aime éperdument exige que je te sacrifie. Ce n'est pas ma faute.
>
> « Je sens bien que voilà une belle occasion de crier au parjure : mas si la Nature n'a accordé aux hommes que la constance, tandis qu'elle donnait aux femmes l'obstination, ce n'est pas ma faute.
>
> « Crois-moi, choisis un autre Amant, comme j'ai fait une autre Maîtresse. Ce conseil est bon, très bon ; si tu le trouves mauvais, ce n'est pas ma faute.
>
> « Adieu, mon Ange, je t'ai prise avec plaisir, je te quitte sans regret : je te reviendrai peut-être. Ainsi va le monde. Ce n'est pas ma faute. »[187]

Merteuil alludes to the power of the story she recounts, within which is contained the famous break-up letter, but reserves the telling of its ending for a later date.[188] This

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[187] *Liaisons* 328.

technique functions doubly: on the level of the characters, Valmont predictably desires to know the end of the story in his reply; on the level of Laclos's reader, it defers the tragic revelation of the letter's only possible outcome and prolongs the reader's complicity with the seemingly harmless scheme. Valmont however, continues to operate under the long held misogynist assumption, later summarized so succinctly in Benjamin Constant's 1816 novel *Adolphe*, that "*Cela leur fait si peu de mal, et à nous tant de plaisir*!"[189] He believes that his skill for manipulation will allow him to break and mend women's hearts as many times as he might desire to do so in the interest of intrigue and glory. His memoires probably contain countless entries detailing such exploits, but he seems to forget that this particular modus operandi functions when both parties implicitly agree that *true* love has nothing to do with their involvement with one another.[190] In spite of his

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[188] Brooks credits the "tone of cheap, cynical worldliness" of the letter for making it such an effective weapon against the Présidente. p. 201.

[189] Constant, Benjamin. *Adolphe*. *Œuvres*. Ed. Alfred Roulin. Paris: Gallimard, 1957. 37-117. p. 53.

[190] Crébillon fils illustrates this phenomenon of worldliness: In *Égarements*, Versac mocks Meilcour for his naiveté in assuming Mme de Senanges is interested in his heart, "Votre cœur! dit-il, jargon de roman. . . . Elle est incapable d'une prétention si ridicule" (p. 149). In *La Nuit et le Moment*, Clitandre explains, "On se plaît, on se prend. S'ennuie-t-on l'un avec l'autre ? on se quitte avec tout aussi peu ce 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 ; mais l'amour, qu'était-il qu'un désir que

efforts to play the cold, callous, unfaithful lover, he does not realize until it is too late that he is, in fact, in love. The Présidente is completely unaware of this generally tacit agreement, believing instead that Valmont has changed thanks to her good influence and his love for her. While Valmont nonchalantly attempts to go on as normal after sending the fatal letter, keeping Merteuil abreast of his affair with Cécile, he nonetheless begins to worry when he has received no reply from Tourvel by the next day. Merteuil does not reply to the first letter, in which he casually informs her that he has taken her suggestion for dealing with the Présidente. Instead, she waits until he has written again, revealing his astonishment at Tourvel's silence and her going to stay at a convent, as well as his own overblown vanity and certainty that he will easily win her back again. His letter reads like one long unfortunate *persiflage*, so well orchestrated that Merteuil has managed to incite Valmont's enthusiastic, if unknowing participation in the entire enterprise; the joke is on him. With his second letter, he confirms for her that he has fallen entirely into her trap and also given her all the material she needs to shame him ruthlessly for his pride and vanity. At this point, she sees fit to open his eyes to exactly what he has done:

> …mais c'est que ce n'est pas sur elle que j'ai remporté cet avantage; c'est sur vous : voilà le plaisant, et ce qui est vraiment délicieux.

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l'on se plaisait à s'exagérer, un mouvement des sens, dont il avait plu à la vanité des hommes de faire une vertu ? On sait aujourd'hui que le goût seul existe ; et si l'on se dit encore qu'on s'aime, c'est bien moins parce qu'on le croit, que parce que c'est une façon plus polie de se demander réciproquement ce dont on sent qu'on a besoin" (p. 261). In *Les Confessions du comte de* ***, Duclos's hero spends his time in *le monde* jumping from one seduction to the next until his retirement from Parisian high society.

> Oui, Vicomte, vous aimiez beaucoup Mme de Tourvel, et même vous l'aimez encore ; vous l'aimez comme un fou : mais parce que je m'amusais à vous en faire honte, vous l'avez bravement sacrifiée. Vous en auriez sacrifié mille, plutôt que de souffrir une plaisanterie. Où nous conduit pourtant la vanité! Le Sage a bien raison, quand il dit qu'elle est l'ennemie du bonheur."[191]

Although Merteuil alleges that Valmont lacks talent and originality, it is clear to Laclos's reader that this cannot entirely be the case. As we see throughout the novel, Valmont deftly plays multiple roles simultaneously: the reformed sinner, the devoted nephew, the young lovers' concerned friend and confidant, the crafty seducer of women and destroyer of reputations. He dictates letters for Cécile to Danceny, improving upon the effectiveness of their content while perfectly preserving her "petit radotage" for authenticity; he advises Danceny about how to write his letters to Cécile in order to produce a particular effect. He masters not only the art of writing for others, but also that of writing the letter each addressee wishes to read, with the not insignificant exception, as we saw above, of Merteuil.[192] She seizes the opportunity his disavowed love for Tourvel has produced and trusts that he will send the letter she furnishes for him. As with so many of the letters in the novel, this one is written for multiple readers: Tourvel, for whom Merteuil intends a fatal wound as well as Valmont, who fails to read between the lines of its simple, but merciless text to understand what she is really asking of him.

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[191] *Liaisons* 333.

[192] See footnote 142 above for the passage from letter CV Merteuil advises Cécile to write not what she thinks, but what her reader wishes to read.

> C'est dommage qu'avec tant de talent pour les projets, vous en ayez si peu pour l'exécution ; et que par une seule démarche inconsidérée, vous ayez mis vous-même un obstacle invincible à ce que vous désirez le plus.
>
> Quoi ! vous aviez l'idée de renouer, et vous avez pu écrire ma Lettre ! Vous m'avez donc crue bien gauche à mon tour ! Ah ! croyez-moi, Vicomte, quand une femme frappe dans le cœur d'une autre, elle manque rarement de trouver l'endroit sensible, et la blessure est incurable.[193]

With the *ce n'est pas ma faute* letter, Merteuil strikes directly at the heart of her rival through Valmont's unwitting pen, but she also reveals her own desires for its corollary effects. She makes clear to Valmont at the start of their agreement that in order for them to reunite, Tourvel must be nothing more than a "femme ordinaire" for him. In light of this, her proposed letter might be read as a desperate attempt to bring about such a result. Since he has previously become ensnared in his own feigned sentiments of charity and love, it is at the least worth trying to cause the opposite to occur. If after an entire month Valmont has *not* grown weary of the Présidente's tenderness, perhaps provoking him into writing that he has will make it happen. Though in their elite Parisian society, such is an important and unavoidable "Loi de la Nature," for the first time, their world order is threatened by someone completely foreign to it. The letter compares the strength of Tourvel's virtue to that Valmont's love, claiming that "il n'est pas étonnant que l'un ait fini en même temps que l'autre." While it is true that Valmont betrays the Présidente many times during their short time together, the betrayals are purely physical as were all of his romantic encounters up to that point. Merteuil writes to Valmont in an earlier letter,

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[193] *Liaisons* 334.

about Cécile with regard to Danceny: "Ce n'est même pas, à vrai dire, une entière jouissance : vous ne possédez absolument que sa personne ! je ne parle pas de son cœur, dont je me doute bien que vous ne vous souciez guère : mais vous n'occupez seulement pas sa tête. Je ne sais pas si vous vous en êtes aperçu mais moi j'en ai la preuve dans la dernière Lettre qu'elle m'a écrite . . ."[194] She easily sees that Valmont's forced infidelities occupy merely his body, in his efforts to convince her that his heart and his head are free as well. The letter cruelly informs the Présidente that Valmont has chosen another lover, as she ought to do herself, that he has cheated on her and that "une femme qu'[il] aime éperdument exige qu'[il la] sacrifie." Merteuil has required all of these things of him, but in her letter, it reads more like a wish list than a *fait accompli*. The final verse of the letter perfectly sums up the way things have always gone, the way they should go: ". . . je t'ai prise avec plaisir, je te quitte sans regret: je te reviendrai peut-être. Ainsi va le monde." This is the way their *monde* has always functioned, until now. Obviously, that Valmont could leave Tourvel "sans regret" is not possible, as Merteuil knows well in advance of this stage in the novel. She ridicules him for his readiness to make up with the Présidente as another show he might put on for her benefit.

The tragedy of Valmont's casual transcription of the *ce n'est pas ma faute* letter is manifold. Aside from the pure cruelty of its message, this letter is completely out of character for him; he can copy anyone's style and write their letters for them so that they are indistinguishable from those of their supposed author, so the fact that he allows another to usurp his own pen on this occasion is a rare and unfortunate abdication of his

[194] *Liaisons* 262.

power and ability.[195] Throughout the novel, Valmont resists the ease and predictability of the pure copy. He has a reputation in Paris for being the best at what he does and from the outset, he decides to pursue Tourvel as a fresh challenge that will ensure him unprecedented glory: "L'amour qui prépare ma couronne, hésite lui-même entre le myrte et le laurier, ou plutôt il les réunira pour honorer mon triomphe."[196] A truly original conquest merits an exceptional reward. As with so many other features of this particular seduction, because it is so radically out of the ordinary, ordinary measures simply will not do. Under normal circumstances, the harm of copying such a letter, or any other letter in their correspondence for that matter, probably would have been minimal, if not negligible.[197] This letter, however, is singular in that it was written by Merteuil with one spiteful and indeed, murderous motive, and sent to the Présidente by Valmont with quite another motive in mind.[198]

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[195] Versini credits Valmont with the greatest diversity of tone in the novel, the disadvantage being that "on se demande où est son vrai visage" *Laclos et la tradition* 340-41.

[196] *Liaisons* 17. Myrtle is a symbol of love and immortality, Aphrodite; Bay Laurel is linked to Apollo and is a symbol of the highest status, victory.

[197] In the following chapter we shall see how Julien courts the Maréchale de Fervaques exclusively using a collection of 53 letters given to him by Prince Korasoff, which he copies verbatim for the purpose of making Mathilde de La Mole jealous. See the section entitled Pâle Copies.

[198] Laurent Versini points out that the "lettre de rupture," particularly those that are "impertinente" or "cinglante" are a genre of their own in eighteenth-century fiction

In the previous chapter, we saw from Saint-Preux's observations of elite Parisian society that new fashions in Parisian clothing are continually copied and recopied, evolving and changing *insensiblement*, through a rather mysterious process, thanks to those "auteurs qui copient en maîtres," with the rest following their lead as "des copistes ignorants et serviles qui copient jusqu'au fautes d'orthographe" [199] Valmont is, in the domain of seduction, one of these master copiers who leads rather than follows,[200] innovating as a crucial component of his copying rather than simply aping the successful maneuvers of others. Though he may copy others and even himself, as Merteuil alleges, the distinctive characteristic of his imitation has, up to this point, been that he does it with infinitely greater skill and panache than the others, such that in his expert hands, the hackneyed copy is made thrilling and new once again. There is always some inventive aspect supplementing even the most banal imitation he undertakes. When Valmont allows himself to be provoked into sending Merteuil's letter, however, this inventive aspect is radically absent. He does not, as is his usual practice, endeavor to craft the perfect tone

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(*Laclos et la tradition* 176-79). René Pomeau points out that this letter is the only letter written by Madame de Merteuil to the Présidente de Tourvel, who must have been acquainted with each other (p. 162).

[199] *Julie* 266.

[200] Versac explains to Meilcour in *Égarements*, that in order to succeed in society, one must do as everyone else does, only better: "Moi, par exemple, qui suis l'inventeur de presque tous les travers qui réussissent, ou qui du moins les perfectionne, pensez-vous que je les choisisse, les entretienne et les varie uniquement par caprice, et sans que la connaissance que j'ai du monde règle et conduise mes idées là-dessus ?" p. 152.

and style for eliciting the desired reaction from his reader. He does not carefully vet each word and phrase, as Merteuil accuses him in his other letters. This consummately imitative gesture, "ignorant et servile," is the epitome of copying, the only distinction being that by transcribing it, he marks the letter with his own handwriting, thereby erasing any trace of Merteuil's involvement in the affair with a few strokes of the pen. At first, he confidently announces that Tourvel will soon reply in a predictably indignant fashion and when she does not, he determines to go extract his pardon from her face to face. Even the news that she has shut herself up in a convent indefinitely only appears to please him further, leading him to believe that he must have truly made an extraordinary impression on her. He continues his self-satisfied letter with a discussion of the glory that awaits him upon his return to Paris:

> "Le Couvent est le véritable asile d'une veuve ; et si elle persiste dans une résolution si louable, je joindrai à toutes les obligations que je lui ai déjà, celle de la célébrité que va prendre cette aventure.
>
> Je vous le disais bien, il y a quelque temps, que malgré vos inquiétudes, je ne reparaîtrais sur la scène du monde que brillant d'un nouvel éclat. Qu'ils se montrent donc, ces Critiques sévères, qui m'accusaient d'un amour romanesque et malheureux ; qu'ils fassent des ruptures plus promptes et plus brillantes : mais non, qu'ils fassent mieux ; qu'ils se présentent comme consolateurs, la route leur est tracée. Hé bien ! qu'ils osent seulement tenter cette carrière que j'ai parcourue en entier ; et si l'un d'eux obtient le moindre succès, je lui cède la première place. Mais ils éprouveront tous, que quand j'y mets du soin, l'impression que je laisse

> est ineffaçable. Ah ! sans doute, celle-ci le sera ; et je compterais pour rien tous mes autres triomphes, si jamais je devais avoir auprès de cette femme un rival préféré."[201]

This letter certainly makes a good show of confidence and even arrogance, but the ideas behind the vainglory belie his words. If what he writes here is true, why then does he go on in the same letter to suggest that he attempt to win the Présidente back again?[202] He has already mercilessly manipulated her emotions, expertly arranged their exchanges and encounters, seduced and possessed her body and soul only to abruptly end it all with the cruelest of break-up letters. What further *éclat* could possibly be necessary for him to reappear victoriously in polite society to collect his crown of *myrte* and *laurier*?

The fame and glory that could be his does, however, require that he sacrifice Tourvel unequivocally and irrevocably, trading in the unprecedented pleasure and lasting charm he experiences with her, for the "première place" at the head of a legion of competitors anxiously awaiting his downfall to take it from him. Not only does Merteuil make this demand of him as a condition of their increasingly unlikely reunion, but their society as a whole fetishizes the scandalous nature of relationships that end with the virile male lover betraying and humiliating his female victim, publicly ruining her reputation forever before moving onto the next conquest. Loving authentic relationships that continue beyond the initial *jouissance* are the stuff of fables and can bring only ridicule

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[201] *Liaisons* 331.

[202] *Liaisons* 332. Valmont makes this suggestion as a kind of project he and Merteuil could plan together if she wished it.

and disgrace to any man foolish enough to admit to or even be suspected of "un amour romanesque et malheureux."

Valmont is so sure of his absolute domination of the Présidente's body and soul that he dares his adversaries to attempt to take his place in her heart. He invites his inferiors to mimic what he has done to make her fall in love with them one by one as consolation prizes, since "la route leur est tracée." His efforts, apparently, have primed her for future seductions, now that she has sacrificed the virtue and honor she once held so dear for love. The very next sentence, however, makes the claim that "quand [il y met] du soin, l'impression [qu'il] laisse est ineffaçable." Believing that he truly is the god she has come to worship over any other, he effectively forecloses any possibility of her ever accepting another suitor in his place. Interestingly, the terms he chooses for this declaration are implicitly linked to writing, printing, and by extension, the production of novels. The same words could also describe Laclos's novel and the impression it made on his contemporaries, and indeed, on the epistolary novel as a genre. The *roman par lettres* essentially reaches "la première place" with *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and though the path was brilliantly traced out for them, any who tried to follow were sure to be pale imitations. In the wake of Laclos's masterpiece, the nineteenth century sees a great decline in the production of epistolary novels, as we shall see in the following chapter with the third-person narrative of Julien Sorel's exploits in *Le Rouge et le Noir*. [203] Just as

[203] Brooks notes several features of Liaisons that go above and beyond its epistolary predecessors: " . . . in contrast to *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and much more than in *Clarissa*, the letters of the principal characters are active. Only the ignorant, like Cécile, recount naively what has happened; the others, and especially Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, use

Valmont foresees no "second exemple" of his incredible seductive prowess in his time, so too, the novel telling his story "[n'aura] point de successeur."[204] In the end, Valmont is right about never having a successor in the heart of the Présidente, but the steps he takes to ensure his legacy also bring it to a tragic halt. Hypothetically speaking, had Valmont survived this *aventure* and returned to his normal way of life, we might wonder how he ever could have bested this particular performance for the sake of maintaining his hard earned, but ever precarious reputation. Like the novel in which he plays such a compelling part, "true love," in the standard worldly tradition to which Valmont allegedly

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letters to specific ends and are unfailingly conscious of their audience" (pp. 173-74). See also note 152 on the subject of the motivation of the letters; Though he goes on to show how Laclos has perfected the epistolary style in several ways, Laurent Versini begins his chapter "*Les Liaisons dangereuses* : couronnement ou liquidation d'un genre ?" by denying Laclos any claim to originality with regard to the form and the title of his novel; Rousseau and Richardson had already done epistolary and Laclos owes much to both (*Le Roman Épistolaire* 149-67). In his earlier work, *Laclos et la tradition*, Versini is more generous in his praise of Laclos's mastery. Though he consistently holds *Julie* up with *Liaisons* as the most brilliant examples of the eighteenth century, he also shows how Laclos has surpassed all other writers of epistolary novels (e.g. Duclos, Marivaux, etc.) (pp. 430-31). See also René Pomeau's short section entitled "Le rousseauisme" in *Laclos ou le paradoxe* (pp. 233-36). In the same volume, Pomeau also points out rather dismissively of any originality on Laclos's part that Rousseau is the true master of the epistolary genre (p. 133).

[204] *Liaisons* 267. Both quotes.

subscribes is essentially a fiction. Repeated references to this fabled phenomenon, made most critically by Merteuil, ridicule it as existing only in novels.[205] Valmont begins letter CX: "*Puissances du Ciel, j'avais une âme pour la douleur ; donnez-m'en une pour la félicité !* C'est je crois, le tendre Saint-Preux qui s'exprime ainsi."[206] In this letter, he describes to Merteuil how Tourvel will not receive his letters, but he has discovered that Rosemonde is her new confidant. Later in the same letter, he introduces then rejects the idea of making a new Clarissa, after Richardson's novel, out of the Présidente. In spite of the dark undertones in this mention of *Clarissa*, something in the fact of explicitly harkening back to two of *Liaisons's* most famous and influential predecessors, where new ground had been broken in exploring and describing the most minute movements of the human heart, indicates that Valmont is ruminating on the subject of love. After all, Saint-Preux makes the above exclamation just after Julie admits that she loves him.[207]

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[205] Merteuil scolds Cécile about her ideas of "love" after she has been raped by Valmont: "Il vous apprend ce que vous mouriez d'envie de savoir ! En vérité, ces procédés-là sont impardonnables. Et vous, de votre côté, vous voulez garder votre sagesse pour votre Amant (qui n'en abuse pas) ; vous ne chérissez de l'amour que les peines, et non les plaisirs ! Rien de mieux, et vous figurerez à merveille dans un Roman" (*Liaisons* 239). Merteuil warns Valmont about his reputation in Paris: " . . . il y fut dit positivement que vous étiez retenu au Village par un amour romanesque et malheureux : aussitôt la joie se peignit sur le visage de tous les envieux de vos succès, et de toutes les femmes que vous avez négligées" *Liaisons* 259.

[206] *Liaisons* 253.

[207] *Julie* 41.

Valmont's discovery of something, at the very least, approaching this type of fabled or mythical love coincides with Laclos's reappropriation of that fiction, doing so in the very cadre of worldly fiction and cynicism the novel implicitly criticizes and problematizes. Ironically, among his contemporaries, Valmont may not have achieved the victory and glory he sought, but the impression his misguided efforts make on the reader are nothing if not "ineffaçables." We have already seen in the previous chapter, how Rousseau's *Julie* was meant to be a denunciation of worldly values, an anti-worldly novel, and yet there was no other way to reach the worldly readers without inscribing his novel into the very tradition he criticizes.[208] Stendhal's admiration for eighteenth-century novels leads him to write his own novel, well into the nineteenth century, yet in such a way as to commemorate and honor the worldly tradition and his predecessors.[209] He expands upon the possibility of sincerity and love in a closed and rigid society, carrying it to a new level, as we shall explore in the next chapter.

Valmont's Suppressed Letter: The Impossible Copy

Perhaps the most celebrated letter in the novel, Valmont's final letter to the Présidente never reaches its addressee, nor is it presented to the reader. The place it ought to have occupied is marked merely by a note from the *Rédacteur* explaining its absence

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[208] Brooks 147.

[209] As Peter Brooks writes in the chapter on Stendhal in his book, *The Novel of Worldliness*, " In Stendhal's fiction, the attitudes and techniques of worldliness become a dramatized problem, no longer an assumed point of view, but one that is created, celebrated, put into question, and forced to demonstrate the range of its validity" p. 226.

from the collection, since Madame de Volanges makes reference to it in letter CLIV to Madame de Rosemonde. The note simply informs the reader that: "C'est parce qu'on n'a rien trouvé dans la suite de cette Correspondance qui pût résoudre ce doute, qu'on a pris le parti de supprimer la Lettre de M. de Valmont."[210] The doubt communicated by Volanges pertains to the difficulty, or more likely, the impossibility of ever determining with any degree of certainty, the authenticity of the sentiments expressed in the letter he writes to her entreating her to deliver the enclosed letter (the suppressed letter) to Tourvel. Though neither the letter to Volanges, nor the letter to Tourvel are present in the final version of the novel, Laclos did, in fact, compose a draft of the letter to Volanges.[211] In this draft, Valmont appeals to her to help him by at least convincing the Présidente to read his letter, arguing that because he is the one who has hurt her, he is the only one who can heal her. He pleads with Volanges to put aside her personal opinion of him in the best interest of the person dear to them both. In more typical Valmont fashion, however, as one component of his efforts at persuasion, he threatens her and attempts to intimidate her in spite of the fact that she alone may hold his and Tourvel's destiny in her hands:

> Je sais que j'ai outragé indignement une femme digne de toute mon adoration ; je sais que mes torts affreux ont seuls causé tous les maux qu'elle ressent ; je ne prétends ni dissimuler mes fautes, ni les excuser ; mais vous, Madame, craignez d'en devenir complice en m'empêchant de les réparer. J'ai enfoncé le poignard dans le cœur de votre amie, mais je peux seul retirer le fer de la blessure ; seul je connais les moyens de la

[210] *Liaisons* 352.

[211] The text of the draft is printed in the notes of the Pléiade edition. *Liaisons* 1391-92.

> guérir. Qu'importe que je sois coupable si je puis être utile. Sauvez votre amie, sauvez-la, elle a besoin de vos secours et non de votre vengeance.[212]

As in Madame de Volanges's consideration of the letter, it is impossible to know Valmont's veritable motives. Does he simply wish to torture a miserable dying woman to the bitter end, or could he be, for once, sincere in his remorse and desire to remedy what ails the Présidente? Is he capable of love, and if so, how can he differentiate an earnest representation of that love from the previous feigned versions? If indeed he is sincere in his remorse, he has become a victim of his own talent and success for artful imitations. One clue that the reader may perceive in letter CXLIV is that Valmont casually suggests that he and Merteuil might "de concert," plan an attempt at his reconciliation with Tourvel for the sake of re-sacrificing her in Merteuil's honor.[213] Merteuil ridicules him sharply for this suggestion and there is no indication in the text that she ever authorizes the letters to Volanges and Tourvel. Indeed, once she reveals the projected ending of her clever *histoire*, the already shaky foundation of their complicity crumbles all the more quickly and dangerously. It has been speculated that Valmont is not beyond striving to win the Présidente back, only to cynically abandon her again, but particularly in light of Laclos's draft of his letter to Volanges, she appears to be the more cynical of the two.[214]

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[212] *Liaisons* 1391-2. Notation of variants not included here for the sake of clarity.

[213] *Liaisons* 332.

[214] *Liaisons* 1392. From Versini's notes on the text: "La note de l'auteur met sur la voie : ce *désespoir* était-il sincère, ou ne s'agissait-il que d'un lieu commun propre à permettre à Valmont de rentrer en grâce comme il le croyait possible (lettre CXLIV, p. 332) ? Laclos n'a pas voulu que la question se posât au lecteur, et a préféré, pour des raisons

Her letter to Rosemonde asks, perhaps rhetorically, for an opinion, but goes on to pronounce her judgment against him and his subsequent punishment: "Mais que direz-vous de ce désespoir de M. de Valmont ? D'abord faut-il y croire, ou veut-il seulement tromper tout le monde, et jusqu'à la fin* ? Si pour cette fois il est sincère, il peut bien dire qu'il a lui-même fait son malheur."[215] She who clings desperately to strict ideas of religion, morality and virtue is unwilling to take the chance that her friend be hurt again, but also to admit that someone as vicious as she knows him to be could ever be capable of doing something out of character, for a genuinely good purpose, namely love. One of the most compelling characteristics of Valmont, on the other hand, is his elusive, indeterminate persona. His mastery of imitation in letter writing for himself and others implies that his own letters are quite possibly nothing more than skillful imitations as well. In the previous chapter, we discussed Saint-Preux's description of the protean Parisian, exchanging one *langage* for another according to the tone of house he visits, just as a valet changes liveries with each employer. The question I asked there also applies

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esthétiques aussi bien qu'en faveur de la cohérence du caractère, éviter à Valmont de se déclarer de façon édifiante pour le bien, et lui conserver son ambiguïté de roué capable d'élans sensibles aussitôt annulés par un retour de cynisme." In René Pomeau's book, *Laclos ou le paradoxe*, he discusses the careful arrangement of the letters by the author, or "Dieu caché." Once this delicate task is accomplished, the reader must do the work of interpretation and the author remains in a more passive role. pp. 139-44.

[215] *Liaisons* 352. (*Rédacteur*'s note: "*C'est parce qu'on n'a rien trouvé dans la suite de cette Correspondance qui pût résoudre ce doute, qu'on a pris le parti de supprimer la lettre de M. de Valmont.")

here to Valmont: does there exist an authentic core self underneath the interchangeable facades or is it rather an endless palimpsest of masks? For every indication that he is incorrigibly bad, there is a counterweight throwing the balance back in favor of his potential reform followed by another reversing the situation once again. But is there an authentic Valmont somewhere underneath all the imitation, and if so, how can it be identified? Throughout the novel, he is dutifully reforming himself and learning his catechism with Tourvel, aiding, abetting and corrupting Cécile, betraying Danceny's honest friendship and all the while keeping up with his rakish career. Merteuil's certainty that he is in love with the Présidente is the most convincing proof available to the reader, but his anger over her *plaisanterie* could have several origins: vanity, wounded pride, desire for revenge, regret, pain, or some unverifiable combination of these. As was the case in the previous chapter, where *pudeur* may meld indistinguishably into *coquetterie*, sincerity is impossible to differentiate from well-disguised deceit. Considering his past, it is probably more prudent of Volanges to refuse to deliver Valmont's letter to the Présidente, but prudence is not what inspires or nourishes love. As we saw in *Julie*, some of the most passionate and intriguing moments are those in which the characters are at their least prudent (e.g. Julie hiding Saint-Preux in her dressing room and her repeated attempts to get pregnant in order to avoid marrying Wolmar.) In the next chapter, we shall also examine Julien Sorel's propensity for passion over reason.

By choosing not to include Valmont's appeal to Volanges or the letter he implores her to deliver to Tourvel in the novel, Laclos leaves the reader to infer, imagine and judge what their content might have been for him or herself. One might suspect that Volanges simply did not find Valmont's letter convincing enough to take the chance of exposing

the Présidente to more of his manipulations. Moreover, had this letter remained in the novel, it might have wielded greater influence on the reader than Laclos wished to allow. Versini's note, cited above in footnote 214 suggests that Laclos preferred to leave Valmont's character more ambiguous, and while I agree with that claim, I believe that we can extrapolate that assumption further. Valmont is not the only one whose character would have perhaps been a little too clearly defined had the letter remained in the novel. In the draft letter, Valmont accuses Volanges of taking her own personal revenge on him by refusing her help and effectively handing down a judgment that is beyond the scope of her role. Leaving the reader instead to interpret the few lines she writes to Rosemonde about Valmont's letter gives the reader more freedom to condemn or condone her actions, but also more responsibility in that choice. Though Volanges's faults are numerous and tragic in their own right, particularly in regard to her handling of her daughter Cécile, it would be unfair and unrealistic to let the blame for the tragedy of the entire novel come to rest on the shoulders of one narrow minded prude. Her actions and assumptions are mere cogs in a much weightier worldly machine of expected and accepted behaviors. At the end of the novel, Volanges is already devastated by the loss of her daughter as a functioning member of society when Cécile commits herself to religious life in a convent in reaction to the realization that she has been irretrievably corrupted and ruined. The preface of the *Rédacteur* warns that "toute mère est au moins imprudente, qui souffre qu'un autre qu'elle ait la confiance de sa fille."[216] Volanges has been punished enough for her complicity in the worldly system.

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[216] *Liaisons* 7.

Complicity, however, is an intricate phenomenon in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, which the suppression of these two letters further complicates. Perhaps because Valmont's letter to Volanges may have invited the reader too overtly to pass easy judgment on her, it was better left out of the novel. This thereby allows and indeed forces the reader to evaluate the situation and its main actors on more even terms, helping to bring his or her own implication in the events of the novel into stark contrast. The reader is manipulated by Valmont's charm and talent; even as he seduces Tourvel with his letters and grand machinations, the reader is seduced into wanting his cruel plot to succeed.[217] Wanting him to be allowed one last chance and blaming the person who refuses it to him, when it could be argued that she does so for good reason, is yet another indication of how completely he, and thus Laclos, have their readers in their power. Conversely, to condemn Valmont, the seemingly logical response, is also to cynically condemn the possibility of "true love," as he navigates, albeit badly, the uncharted territory of such an emotion in elite Parisian society. Opting rather to blame Volanges for

[217] Malraux points to yet another way the reader is drawn into the novel, which is intimately related to the question of imitation: "Les personnages significatifs de Laclos ont, pour agir sur le lecteur, une raison profonde : ils portent d'autant plus à l'imitation qu'eux-mêmes imitent leur propre personnage. Fait nouveau en littérature : ils se conçoivent. Et non par une comédie. Don Quichotte se conçoit en tant que Mambrin, mais il est fou ; Valmont se conçoit bien comme Valmont. Il projette devant lui un représentation de lui-même faite d'un ton particulier, de lucidité, de désinvolture et de cynisme, très concrète pour le lecteur ; et les moyens qu'il emploie pour se conformer à cette image sont ceux que Laclos suggère au lecteur pour ressembler à Valmont" p. 34.

her many shortcomings as a woman and mother and their ramifications in the outcome of the novel is, in a way, to excuse the appalling motives and behavior of Valmont and Merteuil. This option is, however, perhaps no less cynical with respect to the question of love; as she is also a product of this rigid society, Volanges is no better equipped to recognize or deal with such a foreign and unfamiliar entity than is Valmont. The reader of *Les Liaisons* falls inevitably into something of a double bind in choosing between these two (or possibly other) interpretations. It seems therefore, that a truly satisfying judgment is impossible and the reader must instead be content to experience the uncomfortable disjunction Laclos has devised with the suppressed letter.

The problems encountered in trying to determine the sincerity of words, particularly written words, in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* are not new.[218] According to

[218] Julie and Saint-Preux initially believe that they communicate with pure transparency, from one heart to another, but as we saw in the previous chapter, sincerity is more complicated than they suspect. In *La Princesse de Clèves*, Mme de Chartres's dying admonition to her daughter is to beware of appearances and that "ce qui paraît n'est presque jamais la vérité" and at the end, no amount of promises or protest can reassure the princess that M. de Nemours's love will last beyond the initial passion. Lafayette, Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne de. *Correspondance*. Ed. André Beaunier. Paris: Gallimard, 1942. (p. 94). Much is made in worldly novels of being able to penetrate the defenses of others and to understand their true meaning while protecting oneself from the same by others. Extraordinary individuals such as Marivaux's Jacob and Marianne, Crebillon's Versac and later Meilcour, have an uncanny ability to discern truth from fiction in their peers. *Adolphe* comments on the problem of sincerity as follows: " …il

Merteuil, as discussed above, love cannot be convincingly simulated because it is too obvious that the words have been arranged. Only the most naïve and inexperienced of women, such as Tourvel, might be fooled by such obviously feigned sentiment.[219] Merteuil is able to glean inspiration from passages of novels, even those she finds personally unconvincing, in her preparations for a lover, but in keeping with her personal system, she never leaves a trace of any of her affairs written in her own hand. She prefers action, even force, and thinks Valmont foolish, if not incompetent to let so many opportunities to act pass by him. Words Tourvel will read when he is not there might reach beyond her usual defenses, but he is not there to take advantage of the moment of weakness and claim his victory. Valmont, in his quest for the crown of *myrte* and *laurier* has a clear vision of how he wishes his affair with the Présidente to transpire.[220] His

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n'y a point d'unité complète dans l'homme, et presque jamais personne n'est tout à fait sincère ni tout à fait de mauvaise foi" (p.57).

[219] Saint-Preux found descriptions of absence in books left him cold until he had experienced it for himself. See footnote 165 for full quote. Valmont is often moved by the things he writes to the Présidente. Later, the drama of Constant's *Adolphe* revolves around the fact that true sentiments can be generated through imitation. The first time Adolphe writes to Ellénore, his letter "ressemblait fort à l'amour. Échauffé d'ailleurs que j'était par mon propre style, je ressentais, en finissant d'écrire, un peu de la passion que j'avais cherché à exprimer avec toute la force possible" *Adolphe* 57.

[220] Versini refers to Valmont as "l'homme des lenteurs" for his skill at drawing out his seduction of Tourvel. Though Versini sees him as being more dangerous than Crébillon's seducers, he is perhaps more vulnerable as well. *Laclos et la tradition* 442.

mastery of language and more precisely of the various *langages* commonly used, such as the religious language he jokes about perfecting in his first letter to Merteuil, add to his power of persuasion and seduction. Adopting the Présidente's preferred language, as well as the one through which she understands her world, allow him to subvert it in favor of his own personal agenda. Throughout the novel, he claims that in order to be fully satisfied, she must renounce the religion she holds dear and worship him as her god.[221] He leaves her in her room at Madame de Rosemonde's house, though she is completely vulnerable, because as he says: "Depuis quelques temps, assuré du succès un jour ou l'autre, et la voyant user tant de force dans d'inutiles combats, j'avais résolu de ménager

[221] "Qu'elle croie à la vertu, mais qu'elle me la sacrifie ; que ses fautes l'épouvantent sans pouvoir l'arrêter ; et qu'agitée de mille terreurs, elle ne puisse les oublier, les vaincre que dans mes bras. Qu'alors, j'y consens, elle me dise : « Je t'adore »; elle seule, entre toutes les femmes, sera digne de prononcer ce mot. Je serai vraiment le Dieux qu'elle aura préféré" (*Liaisons* 22). "Les ferventes prières, les humbles supplications, tout ce que les mortels, dans leur crainte, offrent à la Divinité, c'est moi qui le reçois d'elle ; et vous voulez que, sourd à ses vœux, et détruisant moi-même le culte qu'elle me rend, j'emploie à la précipiter, la puissance qu'elle invoque pour la soutenir ! Ah ! laissez-moi du moins le temps d'observer ces touchants combats entre l'amour et la vertu" (pp. 209-10). "Elle résistera au besoin de consolation, à l'habitude du plaisir, au désir même de la vengeance. Enfin, elle n'aura existé que pour moi ; et que sa carrière soit plus ou moins longue, j'en aurai seul ouvert et fermé la barrière. Une fois parvenu à ce triomphe, je dirai à mes rivaux : « Voyez mon ouvrage, et cherchez-en dans le siècle un second exemple ! »" (p. 267).

les miennes, et d'attendre sans effort, qu'elle se rendît de lassitude."[222] In the same letter to Madame de Merteuil, however, he twice mentions the emotion he felt during the encounter and how he was touched by her anguishing struggles.[223] In keeping with the tradition of worldly seduction, Valmont wishes to defer the moment of his victory in order to maximize the pleasure of her resistance as well as the moment of their mutual *jouissance*. Neither the pursuit of Tourvel nor the effect it has on Valmont proceed according to his plans and though he manages artfully to overcome each challenge he faces leading up to the *dernière faveur*, he loses control of the situation and himself, *taking* what he wants rather than waiting any longer for her to forsake her virtue as he had predicted.[224] The one absolutely unforeseen and apparently insurmountable obstacle he encounters is that in the persistent measures taken to seduce her, he is himself seduced. The novel's devastating dénouement is directly linked to Valmont's tragic failure to extricate himself from *le monde* and its cold, restrictive conventions even for

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[222] *Liaisons* 222.

[223] "J'ai besoin de me faire violence pour me distraire de l'impression qu'elle m'a faite ; c'est même pour m'y aider, que je me suis mis à vous écrire" (*Liaisons* 221). "J'étais, je l'avoue, vivement ému, et je crois que j'aurais consenti à sa demande, quand les circonstances ne m'y auraient pas forcé" (p. 223).

[224] Jean Goldzink, in his study of libertinage, Le Vice en bas de soie, calls into question the plausibility of the Présidente resisting so long only to then give herself entirely over to love, abandoning her God, as Valmont wished. Interestingly, Goldzink does not mention that Tourvel is essentially raped, since the text makes clear that she is unconscious at the moment of her "chute" pp. 165-70.

the chance at some form of real emotion. This unfortunate conclusion is Laclos's much more searing and cynical take on his predecessors' suggestion that such a thing can exist.[225] A kind of idyllic *un*-worldly place, far from Paris, where authenticity is possible seems to be the only place from which an account of *le monde* can be written, as can be seen in *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit* as well as in *Les Confessions du comte de* ***. Aside from a cursory account of the peace and tranquility to be found there, often with the positive influence of a good woman, nothing much is ever said about life in this place, nor, incidentally, about the woman. Stendhalian *bonheur*, in a way, picks up from the idea of this type of refuge for love, but tends to situate it in his narrators' silence or in the refusal to attempt a description rather than in a particular geographic location.

While Laclos initially sketches out Valmont's letter to Volanges, he ultimately decides it is better left out of the novel. This is not the case for the suppressed letter; there is no draft and thus, no indication from the author of what such a letter may have looked

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[225] Crébillon's Meilcour writes his memoirs from the calm of the countryside and claims to have been "rendu à lui-même, devoir toutes ses vertus à une femme estimable" (*Égarements* 11). Duclos's Comte de *** writes in the first pages of his memoires: "J'ai usé le monde, j'ai usé l'amour même ; toutes les passions aveugles et tumultueuses sont mortes dans mon cœur. J'ai par conséquent perdu quelques plaisirs, mais je suis exempte de toutes les peines qui les accompagnent, et qui sont en bien plus grand nombre. Cette tranquillité, ou, si vous voulez pour m'accommoder à vos idées, cette espèce d'insensibilité est un dédommagement bien avantageux, et peut-être l'unique bonheur qui soit à la portée de l'homme. . . . Je possède un ami fidèle, qui partage ma solitude, et qui me tenant lieu de tout, m'empêche de rien regretter" p. 199.

like. Laclos's decision, while frustrating to readers hungry for the full story and eager to learn what Valmont could possibly write to redeem himself or save the Présidente, is vital to the drama of his novel. Essentially, there is nothing Valmont could write, necessarily using the same words of the same language with which he has previously deceived the Présidente and everyone else, that would be more believable or verifiable in any way. Without Laclos's best attempt at such an unattainable objective, the reader is nonetheless left to imagine for him or herself its possibility, to wish for its existence, to cheer, lament or blame Volanges for resisting its influence. Peter Brooks justly indicates in the opening pages of his chapter dedicated to *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, "[t]he texture of the novel effectively imitates its subject: we, as readers, are involved in an essentially epistemological problem – how to know, how, from fragmentary and slanted accounts of characters and events, to put together a total and objective view."[226] The skill with which Laclos draws us into the ruthlessness of the worldly machine he represents and malaise we experience in turn as we attempt to take it *all* in is part of the enduring legacy of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.

[226] Brooks 175.

Chapter 3

Le Rouge et le Noir: An Escape from Copying?

Some form of copying, specifically of written texts, and more generally of style or behavior, functions as a governing tension throughout Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*. In this chapter, I will analyze several key instances of copying and show how Julien's long painful initiation to imitation and his ultimate mastery of it come to a head with the shooting of Madame de Rênal. After learning to conform so perfectly to the Parisian models before him, Julien frees himself quite radically from the oppressive imitative systems at work in elite Parisian society. His last two months in prison, turn out to be the best of his life since he is able to spend them with Madame de Rênal. In examining the relative narrative silence surrounding their visits, we shall see how the sincerity aspired to, yet somehow undermined in *Julie*, and flatly denied in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, may finally be, at least partially, if problematically reclaimed by Julien and Mme de Rênal in their last moments together.

As Peter Brooks writes in his chapter "Stendhal and the Styles of Worldliness," the young Henri Beyle's earliest creative aspirations, to write comedy in the style of Molière, are no longer attainable in the post-revolution nineteenth century.[227] The single unified elite class that had chiefly been consuming literary and theatrical productions and for whom it had exclusively been produced under monarchical rule no longer exists in isolation. New political and socio-economic factions of society who do not identify with or understand the strictly respected codes of conduct and signification are now

[227] Brooks 219-220.

consuming cultural productions as well. This diversification of points of view leads to the need for a new mode of addressing the reader and soliciting his or her identification with the hero of the novel. Brooks asserts: "In Stendhal's fiction, the attitudes and techniques of worldliness become a dramatized problem, no longer an assumed point of view, but one that is created, celebrated, put into question, and forced to demonstrate the range of its validity."[228] In order to salvage some degree of worldliness in his literary project, Stendhal is forced to recreate scenes that in some ways mimic the social isolation of the eighteenth century Parisian elites, but also allow for interaction with other social groups.[229] Brooks contends that rather than focusing on worldliness à la Valmont, Stendhal's characters must develop an appropriate "style" or way of being in their world. In each of his three major novels, a different perspective is explored through the eyes of heroes originating from different social backgrounds: Julien Sorel is the poor son of a carpenter who climbs the ranks of society by his own merit in *Le Rouge et le Noir*;

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[228] Brooks 226.

[229] Ann Jefferson discusses the divergent readership for whom Stendhal intended *Le Rouge et le Noir* and how Parisians are criticized implicitly throughout the novel. "Through this juxtaposition of provincial and Parisian readings of the provinces Stendhal creates a dialogic effect which, as it is developed, leads to a questioning of the Parisian interpretative system that is established at the opening of the novel. The Parisian reader gradually becomes the object of a second reading." "Stendhal and the Uses of Reading: *Le Rouge et le Noir*." French Studies: A Quarterly Review. 37.2 1983): 168-183. MLA International Bibliography. p. 171.

Lucien Leuwen, in the eponymous unfinished novel, is the son of a rich and powerful banker who reluctantly embarks on a career in the government with the influential support of his father; Fabrice del Dongo is the youngest son of a marquis whose dreams of fighting for Napoleon make him a political enemy of his native Milan. Though in each novel, various social and political environments are explored and critiqued, what they all have in common, and what also forms a link to the tenets of worldliness, is the tacit agreement that all members of each group speak the same *langage*, behave according to the same principles and espouse the same, often hypocritical beliefs. They must be almost perfect copies of one another.

In the particular case of Julien Sorel, which will be my prime focus in this chapter, our young hero is a parvenu, contrasting in almost every possible way to the likes of Marivaux's Jacob and Marianne. While Julien does come from a peasant family and does eventually earn his place in Parisian society, he does not possess the openness of character, easy *badinage* and innate ability to read people like Marivaux's heroes. Rather he is a brooding intellectual, slight in stature and strikingly beautiful, who holds a deep resentment toward and suspicion of his social superiors. Julien does not naturally fall into the good graces of those he encounters, first in Verrières at the home of the Rênal family, then at the seminary in Besançon and finally in Paris as the Marquis de La Mole's secretary. Instead he rejects the prescriptive codes of conduct of these societies and insists on proving himself to himself as well as to others through his personal merit alone.

Julien's romantic engagement with Madame de Rênal begins as a series of self-imposed tests of courage and resolve intended to force him to live up to what calls his

devoir.[230] Though he initially sees her as just another haughty representative of a society to which he does not belong, it is not until he forgets the role he has been playing and begins to simply enjoy being in Madame de Rênal's company that he can truly fall in love with her. Somewhat differently from examples we have seen in the previous chapter, where feigning love can go a long way in generating genuine love, Julien's acting the part of the passionate and audacious lover does not produce significant or lasting feelings of love for her. When Julien embarks on his military style campaign to seduce Madame de Rênal, he has not the slightest idea of feeling anything for her besides contempt, much

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[230] Immediately after arriving at the Rênal household: "Il eut sur-le-champ l'idée hardie de lui baiser la main." Stendhal. *Le Rouge et le Noir*. *Œuvres Romanesques Complètes*. Ed. Philippe Berthier and Yves Ansel. Vol. I. Paris: Gallimard, 2005. 347-807. (p. 375). Henceforth, cited as *Rouge*. When Julien decides he will hold Mme de Rênal's hand: "Au moment précis où 10 heures sonneront, j'exécuterai ce que, pendant toute la journée, je me suis promis de faire ce soir, ou je monterai chez moi me brûler la cervelle" (p. 397). Soon after he manages to hold her hand: "Il faut dire à cette femme que je l'aime" (p. 399). After Fouqué tells him about his various disappointments in love: "Cette femme ne peut plus me mépriser: dans ce cas, se dit-il, je dois être sensible à sa beauté; je me dois à moi-même d'être son amant" (p. 420). In the service of his ambition: "Je me dois d'autant plus, continua la petite vanité de Julien, de réussir auprès de cette femme, que si jamais je fais fortune et que quelqu'un me reproche le bas emploi de précepteur, je pourrai faire entendre que l'amour m'avait jeté à cette place" (p. 420). To rebuild his dignity after an embarrassing incident: "…il crut de son devoir de donner un baiser à madame de Rênal" (p. 422).

less of falling in love with her. However, after successfully completing a number of his self-imposed challenges, each task escalating in danger and seriousness over the previous one, he takes the risk of whispering in her ear: "Madame, cette nuit à 2 heures, j'irai dans votre chambre, je dois vous dire quelque chose."[231] Julien's wholly unpredictable success in this attack, that is, having "plus rien à désirer" upon leaving her room a few hours later, provides a prime example of one of the major elements of Stendhal's novels: *l'imprévu*.[232] Madame de Rênal, having as little experience in matters of seduction as her young lover, is utterly surprised by his actions: "En effet, il devait à l'amour qu'il avait inspiré, et à l'impression imprévue qu'avaient produite sur lui des charmes séduisants, une victoire à laquelle ne l'eût pas conduit toute son adresse si maladroite."[233] Perhaps the most crucial factor in his success is Madame de Rênal's consciousness of her ever-increasing love for him. Had Julien been more experienced, "adresse," clumsy or otherwise could never have had the same effect. Though his bravado accomplishes much for him in the physical realm, Julien's heart is still only momentarily touched by the excitement of the evening's events.[234] In keeping with his *devoir* however, when he visits

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[231] *Rouge* 424.

[232] *Rouge* 426. (More discussion of the *imprévu* to follow.)

[233] *Rouge* 426.

[234] Worldly seductions characteristically function in the opposite way: the male suitor attacking and the woman resisting him feed their mutual desire by deferring it until it is exhausted at the moment of her defeat. Valmont purposely prolongs the period leading up to the inevitable moment when he expects the Présidente to become just another "femme ordinaire" *Liaisons* 210.

her room the following night, "il trouva plus de bonheur auprès de son amie, car il songea moins constamment au rôle à jouer. Il eut des yeux pour voir et des oreilles pour entendre."[235] When a developing relationship of sincerity about their respective fears and doubts allows him to relax and enjoy the moment, Julien forgets his role-playing almost entirely and in just a few days, becomes "éperdument amoureux."[236]

As in the two previous chapters, experience of the world, *le monde*, or rather lack thereof, is a central attribute of the plot. Julie does not read novels, but the informal education in gallantry she receives from La Chaillot gives her just enough of an understanding of *le monde*, that she feels it contributes significantly to her "passion fatale" for Saint-Preux.[237] At the same time, this "inoculation" of worldliness serves as a kind of protection for herself and for her lover, particularly when she is able to detect Saint-Preux's descent into vice during his stay in Paris. Madame de Tourvel, although technically speaking, a member of elite Parisian society, chooses not to engage in its worldly customs and instead prefers the quiet life of the countryside. She is completely ignorant of how seduction is meant to function, but while she is not susceptible to its clichéd techniques, she is also poorly armed against a skilled attacker, who instead adapts his plans to use her own weapons against her.

In *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Madame de Rênal is presented as an extremely ignorant woman, with absolutely no life experience, and who has never read novels. This assertion

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[235] *Rouge* 429.

[236] Julien fears being an "amant subalterne" to Madame de Rênal. She fears being far too old for him and a possible rival in his heart. *Rouge* 429.

[237] *Julie* letter VI and p. 68.

is qualified however, in a brief résumé of her education, given soon after she begins to scrutinize the strange new sensations she feels for Julien:

> Madame de Rênal, riche héritière d'une tante dévote, mariée à seize ans à un bon gentilhomme, n'avait de sa vie éprouvé ni vu rien qui ressemblât le moins du monde à l'amour. Ce n'était guère que son confesseur, le bon curé Chélan, qui lui avait parlé de l'amour, à propos des poursuites de M. Valenod, et il lui en avait fait une image si dégoûtante que ce mot ne lui représentait que l'idée du libertinage le plus abject. Elle regardait comme une exception, ou même comme tout à fait hors de la nature, l'amour tel qu'elle l'avait trouvé dans le très petit nombre de romans que le hasard avait mis sous ces yeux. Grâce à cette ignorance, madame de Rênal, parfaitement heureuse, occupée sans cesse de Julien, était loin de se faire le plus petit reproche.[238]

Again we find that even extreme ignorance of novels and *le monde* does not equate exactly with absolute ignorance. Madame de Rênal is sufficiently inexperienced that she unquestioningly believes the repulsive representation of love given to her by her priest, who ought not, in accordance with his profession, have any more practical experience than she does. Additionally, the few pages of novels she has inadvertently glanced over in her life seem to her too fantastic to be believable, let alone true. In this light, Madame de Rênal cannot be said to be completely ignorant, but the misinformation provided by Chélan compared with the fictional representations she has perused over the years appear to have combined in her psyche to produce a kind of functional ignorance. Madame de

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[238] *Rouge* 388.

Rênal is in effect, defenseless against the sensations of nascent love because it in no way resembles the extreme images that have been planted in her mind by nameless "romans" and by her equally inexperienced priest.

In *Julie*, Saint-Preux comments that before loving Julie, he had always been left cold by representations of the lover's absence in novels.[239] Madame de Merteuil complains that the only author who manages to render love in an authentic manner in her opinion is Rousseau.[240] She contends that writing what one does not legitimately feel will never be convincing because of the necessary arrangement in the words and contrivance of the overall composition. In contrast to the Présidente de Tourvel's mortal terror in response to Valmont's courtship and the emotions it elicits in her, since she is aware of what constitutes a sin in the eyes of the church, Madame de Rênal is not in the least troubled at first by her nonetheless adulterous thoughts; she does not know any better, having no previous experience to compare.[241] We might imagine that she is thus able to experience the rush of first love in a more natural way than Julie d'Etange. Rather than struggling with the opposing forces of love and shame, *pudeur* and *coquetterie* she simply marvels at the newness of it all, enjoying every moment: "Madame de Rênal,

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[239] *Julie* 70. See footnote 166.

[240] *Liaisons* 68. See also ch. 2, p. 90.

[241] More exactly, she does unconsciously know that there is something wrong in the way she feels about Julien from the moment she meets him. She is not totally honest with her husband when she gives him her opinion of Julien, lying by omitting her true first impressions. "Par un mouvement presque instinctif, et dont certainement elle ne se rendit pas compte, madame de Rênal déguisa la vérité à son mari" *Rouge* 377. Also p. 384.

transportée du bonheur d'aimer, était tellement ignorante, qu'elle ne se faisait presque aucun reproche. Le bonheur lui ôtait le sommeil."[242] Still, as her love for Julien grows deeper and more serious, doubt and jealousy and self-reproach seep in. Madame de Rênal begins to consider her circumstances more seriously when her maid receives an inheritance and wishes to use it to marry Julien.[243] Prior to these unpleasant but revelatory realizations, she revels more or less innocently in what Rousseau might have labeled *coquetterie honnête*: "Une chose singulière qui trouvera peu de croyance parmi nous, c'était sans intention directe que madame de Rênal se livrait à tant de soins. Elle y trouvait du plaisir; et, sans y songer autrement, tout le temps qu'elle ne passait pas à la chasse aux papillons avec les enfants et Julien, elle travaillait avec Élisa à bâtir des robes."[244] It is clear here that in her conscious mind, Madame de Rênal's intentions are pure and innocent, even if the end result, indeed, the desired result for a woman purposefully trying to attract a man's attention, is that Julien might notice and admire her.

In his many of his works, both fictional and autobiographical, Stendhal and his narrators claim that people tend to be more natural in provincial France than in the capital.[245] The Parisian elites we have been studying are largely isolated and thanks to

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[242] *Rouge* 398.

[243] *Rouge*, ch. VIII; See also p. 408 for more on self-questioning.

[244] *Rouge* 394. For the reference to Rousseau, see *Emile ou de l'éducation*, pp. 734-39.

[245] "Tout va lentement, tout se fait peu à peu dans les province, il y a plus de naturel" (*Rouge* 383). "Vers ce temps, l'effet de nouveauté de la société de Nancy sur l'âme de notre héros était tout à fait anéanti. Lucien connaissait par cœur tous les personnage. Il était réduit à philosopher. Il trouvait qu'il y avait plus de naturel qu'a Paris ; mais, par

their proximity to the royal court, subject to greater social constraints and a more finely tuned system of behavioral signification. In *De l'Amour*, Stendhal advances the following: "Il n'est rien moins que facile de déterminer le sens de cette parole: naturel, condition nécessaire du bonheur par l'amour."[246] If *naturel* is necessary for *bonheur* in love, and people are more natural in the provinces than in Paris, then it follows quite logically that Stendhal's heroes exhibit such a tendency to fall in love and find their true happiness outside of the capital. As we have already seen, due to her lack of education, her lack of experience, the fact that she does not read novels and that she lives in the provincial town of Verrières, Madame de Rênal is perfectly natural in her behavior, speech and emotions. Her and Julien's combined ignorance and lack of experience make for a stunningly *romanesque* seduction, as opposed to the classic worn out tale of worldly seduction so often found in novels. Very shortly after Julien's arrival in the Rênal household, when Madame de Rênal is still poorly acquainted with her own feelings for him and Julien feels nothing but hatred for her, the narrator asserts:

> À Paris, la position de Julien envers Mme de Rênal eût été bien vite simplifiée ; mais à Paris, l'amour est fils des romans. Le jeune précepteur et sa timide maîtresse auraient retrouvé dans trois ou quatre romans et jusque dans les couplets du Gymnase, l'éclaircissement de leur position.

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une conséquence naturelle, les sots étaient bien plus incommodes à Nancy." Stendhal. *Lucien Leuwen*. *Romans et Nouvelles*. Ed. Henri Martineau. Vol. I. Paris: Gallimard, 1952. 765-1384. (p. 894). Henceforth cited as *Leuwen*.

[246] *De l'Amour* 112.

> Les romans leur auraient tracé le rôle à jouer, montré le modèle à imiter ; et ce modèle, tôt ou tard, et quoique sans nul plaisir, et peut-être en rechignant, la vanité eût forcé Julien à le suivre.[247]

While in Paris, their affair would certainly have commenced more quickly and efficiently, the pleasure, not only on the level of Julien and Madame de Rênal, but also on the level of Stendhal's reader would have been significantly reduced, if not negated entirely. Julien's role-playing which might be seen as comical, even burlesque, had it not been done with such complete naïveté, prevents him from experiencing any real pleasure in his conquest. Had they both adhered strictly to the models laid out in novels, theirs would have been a quite different and less compelling story. Julien only manages to relax his rigid posturing *after* their first night together: "Heureusement il n'eut presque pas ce jour-là cet air emprunté qui avait fait du rendez-vous de la veille une victoire, mais non pas un plaisir."[248] Acting in a more authentic way allows for the experience of unadulterated pleasure, which in turn leads the lovers to a relationship founded on sincerity, in which Julien "trouvait une douceur extrême à avouer à cette grande dame qu'il admirait, son ignorance d'une foule de petits usages."[249] Rather than learning the parts they are meant to be playing by following along in the first novel they find, they play the roles that come naturally to them, reminiscent of the transparency of

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[247] *Rouge* 383.

[248] *Rouge* 429.

[249] *Rouge* 431.

communication enjoyed by Julie and Saint-Preux.[250] At the same time, Julien, full of his first amorous victory, feels that he "devait à Madame de Rênal de comprendre les livres d'une façon toute nouvelle."[251] Something about the intimacy, both physical and emotional, that he experiences for the first time in his life with Madame de Rênal helps to open his eyes to a totally new perspective on the world around him. In spite of their mutual ignorance, Madame de Rênal helps Julien to understand the society in which he is now living with her.

The *Lettre anonyme*

Julien is ultimately sent away from Verrières as a consequence of the long string of events set in motion by the *lettre anonyme* that Valenod, inspired by jealousy, wounded pride and vindictiveness, sends to M. de Rênal, "qui lui apprenait dans le plus grand détail ce qui se passait chez lui."[252] Julien has so little experience of the world and so little knowledge of novels that it comes across as rather incongruous with his education that he would suspect M. de Rênal's agitation to be in reaction to a *lettre*

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[250] Julien's ideas about women only begin to develop in his mind as he reads between the children's lessons, before he has made any plans of pursuing Madame de Rênal: "Certaines choses que Napoléon dit des femmes, plusieurs discussions sur le mérite des romans à la mode sous son règne, lui donnèrent alors, pour la première fois, quelques idées que tout autre jeune homme de son âge aurait eues depuis longtemps" *Rouge* 395.

[251] *Rouge* 433.

[252] *Rouge* 455. "Note du manuscript de *Leuwen*: 'Ne pas oublier les lettres anonymes, essentielles à la vie de province.'" Endnote from *Rouge* 1034.

anonyme. Even for a more traditional worldly hero like a Versac or a Valmont, such discernment would be regarded as a triumphant demonstration of great savvy and keen insight. That Julien's wild surmise would be so apropos in this situation is so unlikely it is almost farcical. That it turns out to be true in the fiction of the novel is excessive to the point of going beyond novelistic verisimilitude and spilling over into the *romanesque*, one of the signature attributes Stendhal's fiction. Though a skeptical reader might balk at this incredible chain of events, it is pure Stendhal, whose brazen disregard for more plausible storylines is one of his most endearing qualities as an author.

In response to this suspected letter, Madame de Rênal nearly loses her composure, first going to Julien's room in the night in spite of his insistence that they should avoid taking unnecessary risks, then writing a long haranguing letter about her apparently unreciprocated love for him. Curiously, however, in the middle of the letter, once she has exhausted her hapless lover's complaints and self-sacrificing declarations, she suddenly becomes self-possessed and calculating in spite of her worries. In the second half of her letter, Madame de Rênal, whose complete ignorance of novels is stressed repeatedly, lays out a shrewd plot to discredit Valenod's *lettre anonyme*. She explains step by step, how they both must act, in order to "faire penser à [s]on mari que la lettre vient de M. Valenod."[253] Included in her instructions is a prototype *lettre anonyme* of her own composition that he is to recreate using words and letters painstakingly cut from the book in which Madame de Rênal's letter was delivered to him. Her precautions extend even to burning the mutilated pages to destroy any potential evidence against him. The text of the counterfeit letter is as follows:

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[253] *Rouge* 457.

> Madame,
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> Toutes vos petites menées sont connues, mais les personnes qui ont intérêt à les réprimer sont averties. Par un reste d'amitié pour vous, je vous engage à vous détacher totalement du petit paysan. Si vous êtes assez sage pour cela, votre mari croira que l'avis qu'il a reçu le trompe, et on lui laissera son erreur. Songez que j'ai votre secret ; tremblez, malheureuse ; il faut à cette heure *marcher droit* devant moi.[254]

The *lettre anonyme*, as its name suggests, has no specific addressee and no signature. For all its brevity, however, the letter contains enough carefully crafted personality markers to easily interpret its allusions and make them clearly attributable to Valenod. Knowing her husband and his temperament as well as she does, Madame de Rênal expertly foresees and plans for every step he is likely to take in his humiliating investigation. The supposed writer has just enough remaining "amitié" for her to warn her of her peril, already narrowing down the list of suspects to a circle of close relations. She furnishes Julien with a piece of the same "papier bleuâtre" that Valenod has used to write to her for six years, also the same paper Julien describes having seen in M. de Rênal's hands.[255] Beyond the clever use of Valenod's own paper, Madame de Rênal is pleased with the letter's style and playfully asks Julien, "y as-tu reconnu les façons de parler du

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[254] *Rouge* 457-58.

[255] M. de Rênal receives letter (*Rouge* 455). Julien's instructions (p. 457). Madame de Rênal delivers the second letter (p. 464). M. de Rênal's long awaited discovery that both anonymous letters and the letters Valenod writes to Madame de Rênal are written on the same paper (p. 468).

directeur?"[256] If her experience of the world has not taught her the tactics of imitation for the sake of her reputation, her long experience of Directeur Valenod has at least put it in her power to perfectly copy the essence of what makes him *him*. The one notable weakness of the counterfeit letter is the unavoidable use of cutout printed words instead of handwriting; ideally, the writing in both letters would have been identical. Obviously however, since M. de Rênal would immediately recognize Valenod's hand, it would be too much to hope that he would identify himself in such a way even in the anonymous letter he really did send. Because Julien and Madame de Rênal cannot do the job themselves, and because they suspect the maid Elisa of betraying them, for want of a trusted hand to write for them, printed words are their only recourse.

Though Madame de Rênal writes her counterfeit letter first and foremost to confuse M. de Rênal and to cause him to question which letter, if either, is telling the truth, it might also be read as a letter of warning she writes to herself and Julien. As a ruse, she encourages her husband to send Julien away for a time so that the storm of public opinion might pass. In her fantasies, however, he remains in Verrières so that she and the children can still see him occasionally. Still, her letter seems to unconsciously know that for the protection of her family, Julien and herself, she must "[se] détacher totalement du petit paysan." Ultimately, Elisa's strategic confession to Abbé Chélan is the deciding factor in the affair. When Chélan becomes aware of their *amours*, he orders Julien to report to the seminary in Besançon and becomes Madame de Rênal's confessor and reformer. It is with great remorse that she thus begins a life of strict devotion and

[256] *Rouge* 458.

forces herself to "marcher droit" before a higher power, be it God or the ambitious Valenod.

The ability to write not just a convincing *lettre anonyme*, but a faux *lettre anonyme* is a surprising aptitude to be found in a woman like Madame de Rênal, but even more unexpected is her flawless execution of the plan to deliver it into her husband's hands and then subtly guide his investigation. From the vulnerable and delicate position of a woman whose honor has been questioned and attacked, she expertly presents him with the clues that will inevitably lead him to the desired conclusions, all the while ensuring that he comes to them using his own lumbering logic and suspicion. The danger of her predicament is very real; no proof is needed for her husband to repudiate her irrevocably.[257] M. de Rênal is not by nature a man of intrigue and his wife must therefore gently and patiently nudge him along the way so that he links the bluish paper from the anonymous letters to the letters she has received from Valenod over the years. As she surreptitiously builds his case for him, inventing unpleasant accusations of Julien's awkward efforts to impress her, she nonchalantly mentions that he refused to marry Elisa because of her secret relationship with Valenod.[258] By the end of her brilliant performance, M. de Rênal is thoroughly confounded, but nonetheless comes to the sought after conclusion that the proper strategy must be employed to preserve himself, his

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[257] M. de Rênal thinks to himself,: "la façon dont je vais punir la mère ne nuira point à l'établissement de mes enfants ; je puis surprendre ce petit paysan avec ma femme et les tuer tous les deux ; dans ce cas, le tragique de l'aventure en ôtera peut-être le ridicule" *Rouge* 461.

[258] *Rouge* 465-66.

position and his family from public ridicule. Still more striking is the fact that Julien and Madame de Rênal enter into this dangerous *coup de théâtre* with the impression, but not the certitude, that M. de Rênal had received a *lettre anonyme* and that it must be about her. When Julien's assumption seems to have been confirmed, she is overwhelmed with admiration for his perspicacity: " . . . elle comprit que Julien avait deviné juste. Au lieu de s'affliger de ce malheur fort réel, quel génie, pensa-t-elle, quel tact parfait ! et dans un jeune homme encore sans aucune expérience ! À quoi n'arrivera-t-il pas par la suite ? Hélas ! alors ses succès feront qu'il m'oubliera."[259] Firmly entrenched in the *romanesque* side of her precarious situation, Madame de Rênal worries little about reality, wondering instead at the astonishing talents she perceives in her young lover. While it is true that he is particularly astute in his assessment of M. de Rênal's mood and behavior on the night he receives Valenod's letter, she is far more deserving than Julien of the praise she heaps upon him. Comparatively, Julien's part in the plot is relatively minor: producing the counterfeit letter from printed words *she* provides to him and occupying the children during her performance. Meanwhile, Madame de Rênal must deliver the letter and play the role of the offended wife for several hours. Julien, in his typical fashion, after grossly underestimating Madame de Rênal's masterful performance repents only slightly: "Je l'aurais méprisée comme une femmelette, si, par faiblesse, elle avait manqué sa scène avec M. de Rênal ! Elle s'en tire comme un diplomate, et je sympathise avec le vaincu qui est mon ennemi."260

Considering the love and passion Julien is reported to feel for Madame de Rênal in the first part of the novel and the lengths he goes to for her protection, the relative ease

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[259] *Rouge* 464.

[260] *Rouge* 471.

with which he leaves her behind in order to pursue his ambitions is somewhat shocking. During his brief exile in Verrières before being sent to the seminary in Besançon, he enjoys a period of great popularity during which he is invited to dinners where he is asked to perform his parlor trick of reciting long passages of the New Testament and even translating it impromptu for the women. "Julien fut à la mode" in Verrières.[261] The spectacle of his innate gift for memorization astonishes everyone, but it is a talent lacking any depth or reflection; it is pure repetition, faithful reproduction, absolute imitation. Many of the examples of copying we have examined thus far have featured instances of copying behavior with behavior or writing with writing.[262] In this case, Julien essentially transcribes the New Testament in his mind and becomes a kind of walking, talking reproduction of it. Spectators in awe of his impressive verbal repetition of the sacred text then superimpose their impression of his religiosity onto his overall character; speaking the words of religion, which must have taken great amounts of time, effort (if not faith) to memorize, signals or is meant to signal religious devotion. This gives Julien the appearance of an exceedingly devout apprentice priest to those who do not care to look any deeper than appearances. This seemingly simple surface/depth dichotomy is quickly

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[261] *Rouge* 477.

[262] We have seen the influence of novels on behavior: Mme de Merteuil's seduction warm-up and Valmont's looking for strategies and inspiration, but not for recitation. Julien, on the other hand, uses recitation of memorized passages of *Julie* to impress a bar maid in Besançon (*Rouge* 497). To seduce Mathilde their first night together (p. 656). The narrator tells us early on of Julien's feelings for Rousseau's *Julie*: "C'était le seul livre à l'aide duquel son imagination se figurait le monde" (p. 366).

complicated, however. Subjectively judging the quality of learned physical gestures is perhaps the best, and indeed, only way to attempt to distinguish between the authentic and the feigned. Whether these gestures indicate sincere adherence to a particular group, in this case a religious one, or whether they are used opportunistically for some kind of advancement in the absence of the sincere beliefs they are meant to represent, no reliable verification process exists. For want of such a process, worldly society turns to the careful study of the physiognomies of others in tandem with the practice of dissimulation as well as reliance upon reputations painstakingly built over time and fiercely protected. Those most skilled at observation, dissimulation and imitation often enjoy the best reputations, though they are often not what they appear to be. Paradoxically, looking and acting the part of a member of a particular group does not come automatically even to its most sincerely devout members. Conventional gestures and language nevertheless must be learned and practiced and the distinction between the authentic and the feigned is disconcertingly blurred by the fact that it all comes down to who produces and maintains the best posture, not who has the purest intentions.[263]

The young bishop d'Agde, who Julien meets in Verrières during the king's visit provides a useful example of this phenomenon. Though the narrator does not present the reader with enough information to judge the sincerity of the bishop's religious faith, we might still examine his preparatory routine, which he performs in front of a mirror, to appreciate the importance of the proper execution of certain gestures. Julien watches in confusion as the bishop rehearses his blessing many times with particular attention to his posture and countenance in order to elicit the desired effect from the parishioners: "Julien

[263] See ch. 1 for the difficulty of distinguishing *pudeur* from *coquetterie* in Rousseau.

était immobile d'étonnement ; il était tenté de comprendre, mais il n'osait pas."[264] Interestingly, when Julien does finally "dare" to understand what he sees, he understands the scene in the most naïve way possible: "il s'exerce à donner la bénédiction."[265] At this stage in his education, Julien is not capable putting the pieces of this scene together in his mind in a more complex way. What he would dare to understand if he could is that the bishop is not concentrating so deeply on positioning his miter exactly and contorting his face into an angry scowl while he gives his blessing because he is not sure of how to give a blessing.[266] Rather, because he is very young for his high position, he is intimidated by the prospect of saying mass before the king and is especially keen to look the part he is playing. He wishes to appear older and more experienced, as shown by his sudden and dramatic change of demeanor to his more natural youthful appearance when he turns to address Julien.

As mentioned above, for lack of information, we can only speculate about the successful young bishop's quick rise through the ranks of the church. To return to Julien's case, it is notable that his mentor Abbé Chélan, who takes the time to carefully scrutinize his pupil, worries about whether or not Julien is truly called to the priesthood and warns him sternly when he proudly refuses Elisa's proposal of marriage: "Prenez

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[264] *Rouge* 443.

[265] *Rouge* 443.

[266] The bishop is finely attuned to the consequences if his miter is not in the perfect position: "Elle n'est pas trop en arrière ? cela aurait l'air un peu niais ; mail il ne faut pas non plus la porter baissée sur les yeux comme un schako d'officier" (*Rouge* 443). It is easy to see how such a young man has risen to such a position so early in his career.

garde, mon enfant, à ce qui ce passe dans votre cœur ; . . . il s'agit de faire fortune dans ce monde ou dans l'autre, il n'y a pas de milieu. . . . j'augure bien de votre esprit ; mais, permettez-moi de vous le dire, ajouta le bon curé, les larmes aux yeux, dans l'état de prêtre, je tremblerai pour votre salut."[267] In Chélan's brand of Jansenist Catholicism, being called to the Church is a calling to a religious life of poverty and service, not a stepping-stone to greater, more powerful positions. Ironically, Julien's sole motivation for learning the New Testament by heart is his ambition and his need to have the venerable old priest as his protector. Julien sees the Church solely as an escape from the life he hates as a carpenter's son and forced laborer. Though Chélan respects his intellect, he easily sees through Julien's façade of religious devotion. Julien does not realize until much later, as we shall see in the next section, that simply going through the gross mechanical gestures of religious life may fool some, but it does not a man of religion make. Repeating the words of the sacred texts better than anyone else is still just a parlor trick without the belief and the faith to bring them to life and give them a deeper meaning.[268] Abbé Chélan questions Julien's calling to the church because he suspects that he has bigger aspirations for himself than poverty and self-sacrifice.[269] The narrator tells us that, "[a]vec une âme de feu, Julien avait une de ces mémoires étonnantes si souvent

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[267] *Rouge* 389-90.

[268] Pascal sees these repetitions as being part of "la machine" of religion. Pascal, Blaise, and Jacques Chevalier. *Œuvres Complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.

[269] Abbé Chélan writes in his letter to Abbé Pirard "La mémoire, l'intelligence ne manquent point, il y a de la réflexion. Sa vocation sera-t-elle durable ? Est-elle sincère ?" *Rouge* 503.

unies à la sottise."[270] Happily for him, or perhaps unhappily, as he discovers at seminary, Julien does in fact possess talents that go well beyond mere rote memory; he is capable of thought.

The Problem with Thinking

From beginning to end, Julien's stay at the seminary in Besançon is fraught with *faux pas*. Though the Abbé Pirard feels a certain affection for him, his austere Jansenist philosophy prevents him from treating Julien any differently from the others; Julien thus finds himself utterly isolated and ill-prepared to take on hundreds of ferocious enemies. His first impressions of his comrades, whom he judges uncouth and slow witted, turn out to be unfortunate misinterpretations and the "rapides succès" he foresees for himself academically is in fact not only a great blunder, but also a "péché *splendide*" in this strange new society.[271] Day after day, Julien persists in behaving as he always has toward his perceived enemies, coldly and contemptuously. His self-imposed challenge to remain within the walls of the seminary for as long as possible saves him from a treacherous scheme, but in fact, he is lost more by trifles than by glaring wrongdoings:

> À la vérité, les actions importantes de sa vie étaient savamment conduites ; mais il ne soignait pas les détails, et les habiles au séminaire ne regardent qu'aux détails. Aussi, passait-il parmi ses camarades pour un *esprit fort*. Il avait été trahi par une foule de petites actions.

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[270] *Rouge* 367.

[271] *Rouge* 508-09.

> À leurs yeux, il était convaincu de ce vice énorme, *il pensait, il jugeait par lui-même*, au lieu de suivre aveuglément l'*autorité* et l'exemple.[272]

Whereas in Verrières, he amuses those around him with his dazzling talent for perfectly reciting long passages of the Bible, he would do better in seminary to rely on his memory for studying and replicating the conduct of those around him rather than setting himself apart in any way. In the same way as we have seen in the previous chapters, copying, in its most ideal manifestations paradoxically does not reproduce an *exact* and therefore indistinguishable copy of the original, but rather something almost imperceptibly different, new and better than the original.[273] This is Julien's first experience in a society where perfect and unthinking imitation is encouraged and even rewarded. In spite of his intelligence and talents, however, we shall see how his originality works against him in this oppressive environment.

The seminary is in some notable ways reminiscent of worldly society: an "esprit fort" is shunned among the seminarians just as a pedantry is frowned upon in polite society. In worldly Parisian salons, fashion and fear of ridicule are analogous to the "autorité" of the seminary professors, the earthly representatives of God. In both settings, thinking and judging for oneself, or at least the appearance of doing so, are to be avoided at all costs. As we have seen, however, those who tend to rise above the others in the

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[272] *Rouge* 511.

[273] See my discussion of the *estampe* in ch. 1, section entitled, Marked by Perfection: The Paradoxical Copy. See also the example of Valmont/Versac in ch. 2, p.111.

perpetual cycles of imitation are in fact those who *can* think and reason, but skillfully hide their intelligence and instead focus their energy on imitating better than anyone.[274]

Though Julien is in nearly every way superior to his classmates, the penetration of their motives and behaviors that a true worldly hero would normally achieve almost effortlessly is quite lacking in him for some months. After many attempts and nearly as many failures, it does finally begin to occur to him that in seminary, quite contrary to what he had assumed, unconcealed intellectual fortitude poses a considerable obstacle to his success there. In his shock over this discovery, he exclaims to himself, "[l]a science n'est donc rien ici! . . . Tout ce qu'on dit à ce sujet est destiné à faire tomber dans le piège les fous tels que moi. Hélas! Mon seul mérite consistait dans mes progrès rapides, dans ma façon de saisir ces balivernes. Est-ce qu'au fond ils les estimeraient à leur vraie valeur? les jugent-ils comme moi?"[275] Significantly, the minute details that could make or break his performance of the model student still elude him: "En réfléchissant sévèrement sur lui-même, et cherchant surtout à ne pas s'exagérer ses moyens, Julien n'aspira pas d'emblée, comme les séminaristes qui servaient de modèles aux autres, à faire à chaque instant des actions significatives, c'est-à-dire prouvant un genre de perfection chrétienne."[276] As we saw in the previous chapter, this passage and the above-cited block

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[274] Crébillon's Versac, Laclos's Merteuil and Valmont are prime examples of this phenomenon. Meilcour is surprised to learn that Versac is not the buffoon he pretends to be in public and incredulously protests: "Quoi ! . . . vous pourriez être fâché que je dise : *Versac sait penser* ?" *Égarements* 151.

[275] *Rouge* 512.

[276] *Rouge* 512.

quote may remind us of the importance of carefully scrutinizing the minute details. Madame de Merteuil insists that though she often returns to the same general structures for her seduction scenarios, it is the continuously varied details that save them from being recognized for the tired old conventional plots they are and combine to produce an aura of *vraisemblance* about them. One of the "détails" that betrays Julien in spite of his efforts, is his neglect of performing the "actions significatives," which would denote devotion to those around him, however hypocritical and exaggerated it may be. Getting the rudiments of his seminary persona right without also, and perhaps more importantly, mastering the details makes for a poor copy.[277] Paradoxically, the meticulous attention to detail that consistently makes Madame de Merteuil's continually recycled plots perfectly original, is also imperative in producing a flawless copy; in order to carry out her private schemes without fear of exposure, her public performance as a woman of unassailable virtue must be perfect as well. In the strange claustrophobic environment of the seminary, Julien is primarily performing on a single public stage where his rivals scrutinize every action and every word.[278] In their efforts to resemble the model of the ideal seminarian,

[277] In chapter 1, we saw that tiny, almost unperceivable details, even when they are in fact imperfections on their own, are what come together to produce the "perfect" engraving.

[278] Julien's only opportunities for breaking with his seminary character are in rare private audiences with Abbé Pirard, Abbé Chas-Bernard and the Bishop, who all value in him the very things that set him unforgivably apart from the others.

essentially to be identical copies of "perfection chrétienne," one of them will nonetheless rise above the masses and be selected as the best in the class.[279]

Somehow, these dim-witted young peasants, most of whom have even less life experience than Julien, have a great advantage over him in one, seemingly trivial, yet supremely important domain. That many of them are *genuinely* dim-witted and ignorant is perhaps the sole attribute of a seminarian that he is not capable of learning or feigning, for even with all his effort, "[a]près plusieurs mois d'application de tous les instants, Julien avait encore l'air de *penser*."[280] Sincerity, even if it is only in the form of sincere stupidity, seems to be to some extent *inimitable* and, at least for Julien, no amount of mental exertion can help to efface the distinguishable signs of its own existence. The word sincerity, which has some importance in my overall project, is somewhat problematic here, because while the seminarians' lack of academic intelligence is genuine for most of them, this genuineness cannot be extrapolated to other aspects of their being, such as their religious devotion.[281] Additionally, being unintelligent does not preclude having impure motives for embracing religious life; Julien is the target of pranks and overt antipathy. Although book learning is clearly not something at which Julien's rivals excel, they do appear have just enough sense to identify and imitate successful role

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[279] Once again, see the example of Versac and his ridicules, imitated but never equaled. He innovates as he goes along. *Égarements* Part III.

[280] *Rouge* 513.

[281] The majority of Julien's fellow seminarians do not understand the Latin they memorize (*Rouge* 508). They are more interested in having guaranteed meals and basic needs met than they are in anything else (*Rouge* 513).

models in seminary to the best of their ability. We might conclude that without a complete understanding of how the Church functions in reality, something more akin to instinct drives the imitative response in these seminarians. Their comprehension of their future profession seems to be even more naïve than Julien's assessment of the Bishop d'Agde giving his benedictions; all the better for their success as rank and file clergymen. Something about Julien, be it his innate intelligence, or some effect his intelligence has on his countenance and conduct, "Julien avait beau se faire petit et sot, il ne pouvait plaire, il était trop différent."[282] Difference is simply not tolerated in the Church, nor for that matter, in any closed society where strict obedient adherence to its doctrine and dogma is the law. While his evident differences with his fellow students do not win him any awards in seminary, least of all during exams when a malicious professor tricks him into talking about the profane works of Horace and Virgil, they do distinguish him in the eyes of a few of the more influential people around him, most notably, the Marquis de La Mole.[283] Julien's hard work and perseverance pay off when his mentor Abbé Pirard

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[282] *Rouge* 520.

[283] The Abbé Chas-Bernard takes him under his wing and enlists his help decorating the cathedral for the *Fête-Dieu* (*Rouge*, Book I, ch. XXVIII). When Julien delivers Pirard's resignation to the Bishop, he is interrogated about his studies and charms the Bishop with his knowledge of humanist texts (pp. 535-36). Ann Jefferson confirms Julien's difference: "Julien fails to conform with Parisian norms because he invents his ideas, rather than repeating the orthodoxy, and because he doesn't speak 'la langue dont on se sert à Paris', a language which, to judge by other cases, is best learned parrot-fashion. Croisenois and Norbert are probably some of the best practitioners of this language —

recommends him to the Marquis as his personal secretary just as he finally accepts the Marquis's generous offer of a rich parish in Paris for himself. Persecuted by his own peers for his unacceptable differences, Pirard prefers to resign before being deposed after years of struggling to keep his position as head of the seminary and its last remaining Jansenist.

"Pâle Copies"

Fittingly, Julien's main responsibility when he first arrives in Paris is transcribing, or making copies of letters for the Marquis de La Mole's personal affairs. In spite of the apparent simplicity of the task and of Julien's characteristic diligence, his ignorance of conventional spelling and Parisian *savoir vivre* almost immediately causes the Marquis to rethink if not regret the decision to hire him.[284] Thus begins the final chapter in the *roman* of how Julien will *faire fortune*, and so also begins another episode in his personal drama. The telling fact that his main duty is to produce pristine copies of documents, down to the conventionally determined spelling, is a mere introduction to the ubiquitous forms of copying Julien will be forced to adopt and master if he is to fit into this unfamiliar

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Croisenois because he is clearly such an elegant copy of René, and Norbert, because he makes no bones about wrapping up his reading in a series of 'idées toutes faites.'" pp. 175-76.

[284] Thanks to the Marquis's noble manners, he kindly instructs Julien to verify his spelling in a dictionary whenever he is unsure of himself. French spelling only begins to be standardized in 1740 with the publication of the third edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*.

society, particularly if he wishes to thrive there. In Paris, his many talents in combination with his eccentric charm all work in Julien's favor with the Marquis and his daughter, if not with society in general. Sheer luck plays a key role as well when a reckless and imprudent duel ends nonetheless felicitously for him in an advantageous and educational acquaintance with the Chevalier de Beauvoisis: "Jamais Julien n'avait trouvé réunis dans un seul être le ridicule qui amuse, et la perfection des manières qu'un pauvre provincial doit chercher à imiter."[285] Julien is captivated by this perfect Parisian specimen and makes every effort to hone his manners by emulating the Chevalier. The Marquis de La Mole, during an extended flare up of gout when he is confined to his bed and reduced almost exclusively to Julien's company, "fut étonné de lui trouver des idées" and quickly realizes that "il est original."[286] These nightly lessons in *politesse*, along with the Marquis's insistence that Julien be present each night to observe and learn from the *beau monde* at the opera help him to shed the last remaining hints of provincialism in his persona.

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[285] *Rouge* 594. Julien is determined not to miss a second opportunity for a duel, in spite of the obvious misunderstanding that leads him to the doorstep of the Chevalier de Beauvoisis demanding reparations for insults received the previous day from the Chevalier's coachman. He receives a minor bullet wound to the arm.

[286] *Rouge* 595 and 597 respectively. Interestingly, in order to reconcile his affection for a low-born *paysan* with the nobility of character he discovers in him, the Marquis feels compelled to give Julien a special blue suit which he is to wear when he makes social visits to him. The blue suit is the signal that Julien is, while he is wearing it, the Marquis's equal, and thus he is worthy to be treated as such.

> M. de La Mole s'intéressa à ce caractère singulier. Dans les commencements, il caressait les ridicules de Julien, afin d'en jouir ; bientôt il trouva plus d'intérêt à corriger tout doucement les fausses manières de voir de ce jeune homme. Les autres provinciaux qui arrivent à Paris admirent tout, pensait le marquis ; celui-ci hait tout. Ils ont trop d'affectation, lui n'en a pas assez, et les sots le prennent pour un sot.[287]

Though the Marquis is well versed in worldly manners and maintains his posture in society to perfection, he is able to appreciate Julien's deviations from the acceptable standard, see his potential and help him to make the most of his natural gifts, rather than simply ridiculing him. Much of the worldly education he provides to Julien, while in some ways charitable and open-minded of him, is also clearly to his own advantage and works to the good of his personal and business interests. Before those he looks on so contemptuously will take him seriously, he must learn to be just like them and speak their *langage*. The better Julien conducts himself in polite society, the better he will represent the Marquis's affairs and the more he may be relied upon.[288]

In spite of the Marquis's affection and confidence in Julien, few others prove to be more than momentarily interested in him in Paris. The Marquis's daughter, Mathilde de La Mole, the second woman to fall in love with Julien unsolicited and regardless of his

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[287] For opera: *Rouge* 594; For block quote: Rouge 596.

[288] A good example of their mutually beneficial relationship is Julien's adventure with the "note secrète" he helps to compose and then must memorize and recite before a powerful Duke after a dangerous journey; his success earns him much favor and trust. *Rouge* ch. XXI-XXIII.

contempt for her, resists her passion for him for several months before finally succumbing to it. Mathilde, who dresses in full mourning garb each year to mark the noble and glorious death of her distant ancestor, Boniface de La Mole, finds the young noblemen courting her to be supremely boring. She begins to notice and admire Julien precisely because he is different from the "patron commun" from which her many suitors all seem to be cut.[289] As we have seen above and in the two previous chapters, the *patron commun* as a model for succeeding in elite Parisian society, or something analogous to it, is a consistent theme of worldliness. Mathilde, who has grown up in this society knowing she would one day marry one of these men, is extremely sensitive to the fact that Julien is not of noble birth, nor does he grovel at the feet of the nobility as parvenus are generally wont to do. Clearly, the rough edges of Julien's demeanor overhang the unforgiving *patron commun* to which they all tacitly conform, if they are even self-aware enough to realize to what extent they do so.

Mathilde is known and feared for her keen eye, immediately identifying even the slightest discrepancy or *ridicule* in those in her company and her sharp wit for publicly and mercilessly eviscerating her victims. She is intelligent and inquisitive, habitually stealing books from her father's library and reading them in secret.[290] Looking around at

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[289] *Rouge* 645.

[290] Mathilde begins to respect Julien little by little: When Julien begs Pirard to be excused from the boring dinners he must attend each evening, "Julien vit Mlle de La Mole qui écoutait. Il rougit. Elle était venue chercher un livre et avait tout entendu, elle prit quelque considération pour Julien. Celui-là n'est pas né à genoux, pensa-t-elle, comme ce vieil abbé. Dieu! qu'il est laid" *Rouge* 578.

these nevertheless brave and honorable young men and comparing them to Julien, Mathilde reflects, "Ah ! s'il savait combien ils sont peu dangereux pour moi ! combien auprès de lui ils me semblent étiolés et tous pâles copies les uns des autres."[291] The Grand Robert dictionary defines the verb "étioler" figuratively in an entry dating from 1830 as "affaiblir, atrophier," but this word is also commonly used in horticulture to describe how plants deprived of air or light wither and lose all color and vigor.[292] Both of these definitions are useful in this case; in Mathilde's eyes at least, sameness among her suitors, even if in positive qualities, only weakens them all collectively rather than giving them strength in numbers. Because they are all taught to value the exact same attributes and to emulate the same model, it is as if they expend all of their energy in generating yet another imitation of that model ideal, and are left with no life force, no creative energy for originality or innovation of any sort.[293] In the "Fragments divers" at the end of *De l'Amour*, Stendhal succinctly reduces the problem to the size of a maxim: "La

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[291] The Pléiade edition of *Rouge*, which reprises the original version of the novel, is slightly different from the Bucci edition cited above, which adopts only corrections done by Stendhal himself: "S'il savait combien ils sont peu dangereux pour moi ! combien auprès de lui ils me semblent étiolés et tous copies les uns des autres" p. 669. ("tous pâles copies" attributed to the Bucci edition. p. 1102.)

[292] "Etioler." www.lerobert.com. Le Grand Robert, 2013.

[293] Shoshana Felman's chapter "L'Opposition entre le fou et la société" discusses the societal pressure to conform and the *folie* of those who do not. *La "folie" dans l'œuvre romanesque de Stendhal*. Paris: J. Corti, 1971. pp. 134-7.

cristallisation ne peut pas être excitée par des hommes copies, et les rivaux les plus dangereux sont les plus différents."[294]

As Mathilde considers Julien's merits, she determines that "[d]ans ce siècle, où toute énergie est morte, son énergie leur fait peur."[295] Julien alone is alive and full of energy in this Restoration era society where those in power, or rather those reinstated to a kind of power more symbolic than real, appear as lifeless vestiges of a dead past in which they still desperately linger. The energy these listless relics fear so much is that which allows, even compels Julien to take risks, to act rashly on inexplicable impulses, to do things that are totally *imprévus*, all of which coalesce to make him a quintessential

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[294] *De l'Amour* 284. Ann Jefferson discusses Julien's originality in her article, "Stendhal and the Uses of Reading: *Le Rouge et le Noir*": "But as Julien gains in experience and loses his initial naivety, he seems to move further and further away from, and not closer to, this Parisian view of things. He learns to speak the 'langue étrangère' of the salons, takes fencing lessons, dancing lessons, and, in short, becomes a dandy. But it is not these accomplishments that endear him to Mathilde or which make him the hero of Stendhal's novel" p. 172.

[295] *Rouge* 631. Just prior to this observation, Mathilde ponders what sets Julien apart from the others after her brother warns her to beware of him if the revolution starts up again. Felman links energy to *folie*: "Dénoncée comme « folle » par ceux qui la craignent comme par ceux qui ne la comprennent pas, l'énergie finit par s'identifier à la « folie ». Elle demeure en effet le privilège des « fous »" p. 58.

Stendhalian hero.[296] Mathilde clearly recognizes their fear: "Ce n'est au fond que la peur de rencontrer l'imprévu, que la crainte de rester court en présence de l'imprévu…"[297] These men, noble in name, but no longer living in a society that automatically recognizes them as such are bred to act and react according to strict antiquated codes of "noble" behavior. Times are changing and they lag pitifully behind, unable to comprehend or compensate with new ideas for their changing position in society. To their great detriment, any other possible ideas or ways of being have long since been quashed out of them so that nothing else can even be imagined, let alone attempted.

Energy is feared as a threat to these noblemen's way of life, even if that threat is already coming to fruition before their very eyes. Julien's energy is one of the prime differentiating factors between him and his noble rivals. His proud and noble character, organically springing up in the person of a carpenter's son flies in the face of the idea that nobility is a birthright or an inherited trait. If it is possible to learn and master the codes of *politesse* and the exquisitely refined mannerisms that denote nobility without being

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[296] Christopher Prendergast's study of melodrama in Balzac nonetheless contains quite a few excellent points about Stendhal's fiction, albeit often by way of comparison of the two writers: "At their most important moments, Stendhal's characters are hardly ever found doing the 'right thing', the expected thing, in either the psychological or generic sense of expectation. As has often been remarked, what distinguishes Stendhal's creations is their inexhaustible capacity for the imprévu, their constant ability to surprise themselves, the reader and perhaps even their creator himself." *Balzac: Fiction and Melodrama*. London: Edward Arnold. 1978. p. 139.

[297] *Rouge* 631.

born into it, then where is nobility really situated? Julien's surprise appearance in *their* worldly scene, his perfect mastery of *their* starring roles and the lively energy he brings to his performance make it look as though *they* are "pâles copies" of him than that his flawless imitation of *them* might possibly be the mark of his superiority. Stendhal also makes use of this intriguing word, *étiolé* in his autobiographical work, *Souvenirs d'égotisme*: "je semblais atroce à ces petites âmes étiolées par la politesse de Paris."[298] For Stendhal, *politesse* itself then acts as a suffocating force or a dense gas that hangs at ground level, intoxicating those who inhale it and chasing all life sustaining oxygen and fresh air away. Those subjected to it are weakened and atrophied by its effects. Intolerance of differences, resistance to the energy that is needed to produce the *imprévu* would thus appear to be one of the effects of Parisian *politesse*, from which Stendhal apparently suffered himself.

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[298] Stendhal. *Souvenirs d'égotisme*. *Œuvres Intimes*. Ed. V. Del Litto. Vol. II. Paris: Gallimard, 1982. 425-521 (p. 462). Henceforth cited at *Souvenirs*; See also, in *Vie de Henry Brulard*, "Je ne puis décrire au long que mes sentiments qui probablement sembleraient exagérés ou incroyables au spectateur accoutumé à la nature fausses des romans . . . ou à la nature étiolée des romans construits avec des cœurs de Paris." *Œuvres Intimes*. Ed. V. Del Litto. Vol. II. Paris: Gallimard, 1982. 523-959 (p. 562). Henceforth cited as *Brulard*.; Mathilde uses the same word in comparing ideas of noble birth/upbringing to the likes of Julien: "Une haute naissance donne cent qualités dont l'absence m'offenserait, je le vois par l'exemple de Julien, pensait Mathilde, mais elle étiole ces qualités de l'âme qui font condamner à mort" (*Rouge* 609).

Coming from a place of radical difference as compared with his rivals, and in spite of the fact that his difference and his energy are what initially attract Mathilde to him, in order to win over this "monstre d'orgueil" once and for all, he must prove that he can be just like them, only better.[299] To that end, a fortuitous meeting with a friend and expert in "la haute fatuité," the Russian Prince Korasoff, provides him with a guaranteed plan of seduction and all the necessary tools to carry it out.[300] As Korasoff listens to Julien's misfortunes and observes him, he quickly discerns that Julien has forgotten the maxim of his century: "*Faites toujours le contraire de ce qu'on attend de vous*."[301] Julien greatly admires Korasoff and though he resists and despises the sound, if seemingly

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[299] *Rouge* 749.

[300] *Rouge* Book II, ch. VII and XXIV.

[301] Prince Korasoff gives Julien this piece of advice during Julien's stay in London. At the time of their second meeting, Julien has already been to Mathilde's room on two different occasions and believes that he has been rejected for good when he is sent on the mission with the *note secrète* for the Marquis (*Rouge* 599). This is in effect, a worldly authorization of a certain form of the *imprévu*. The last thing Mathilde expects from Julien is that he might change his conduct so radically and adopt a persona so contrary to what she knows he fervently believes from their frequent long discussions. See also Versac's advice to Meilcour in the third part of *Égarements*: the importance of constant slight variations on the *ridicules* in vogue (p.153). The importance of remaining indefinable by appearing to be everything at once (p.154). The instructions for maintaining conversation in *bonne compagnie* by constantly talking without ever saying anything (p. 161).

outrageous advice that follows, he knows from what little experience he now has, that the Prince could not be more correct in his estimation of the situation.[302] Julien's desperation, as he miserably wiles away his time in Strasbourg is intolerable to him and he bitterly laments his predicament, "Ah ! si j'eusse été ainsi, elle ne m'eût pas préféré Croisenois ! Plus sa raison était choquée des ridicules du prince, plus il se méprisait de ne pas les admirer, et s'estimait malheureux de ne pas les avoir. Le dégoût de soi-même ne peut aller plus loin."[303] Julien's natural charm is sufficient to spark Mathilde's interest, but he is woefully lacking the social proficiency necessary to overcome her noble prejudices and swollen pride; that will require an altogether different, or rather a totally conventional kind of "charm." He will have to become what he hates, and not only that, he will have to play his role to perfection in order to produce the desired effect. As Korasoff finally convinces Julien, "[Mathilde] est profondément occupée d'elle-même, . . . Elle se regarde au lieu de vous regarder, donc elle ne vous connaît pas. Pendant les deux ou trois accès d'amour qu'elle s'est donnés en votre faveur, à grand effort d'imagination, elle voyait en vous le héros qu'elle avait rêvé, et non pas ce que vous êtes réellement…"[304] This concise

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[302] Julien is sent to Strasbourg to await the reply to the *note secrète* he recited a few days earlier. As he explores the countryside where Napoleon fought a battle, he is surprised to meet Prince Korasoff. *Rouge* ch. XXIV.

[303] *Rouge* 703.

[304] *Rouge* 704. It must not be forgotten that during their first night together, as Julien nervously recites more memorized lines from *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Mathilde is so busy playing the role she has cobbled together from novels, that she doesn't even notice his role playing. "Il eut recours à sa mémoire, comme jadis à Besançon auprès d'Amanda

résumé of Julien's state of affairs explicitly reveals to him the mystery of Mathilde's tergiversations, although it does not make him love what he must do any more.

As we have seen in the above quoted lamentation, Julien is overcome with self-loathing for not having the Prince's panache, but he has never previously needed to change himself so fundamentally to succeed in his goals. He has never really fit in, whether in his own family, in Verrières, at seminary school or now in Parisian society; his contempt for others and fierce loyalty to his ideals had always outweighed any tendency toward self-loathing. *En province*, he was able to prove his merit to benevolent people with the power to help him in spite of his quirks. In Paris, however, there are clear, ineluctable limits to what he can achieve without publicly emulating the identical role models all around him in society. Previous to Korasoff's coaxing him to this realization, Mathilde had twice momentarily yielded to her passionate impulses before bitterly regretting her weakness and coldly rejecting him. Seeing Julien as the potential hero she desires him to be, of the same sort as her ancestor Boniface de La Mole,

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Binet, et récita plusieurs des plus belles phrases de la *Nouvelle Héloïse*. / - Tu as un cœur d'homme, lui répondit-on sans trop écouter ses phrases . . ." (p. 656). Once they have managed to negotiate some kind of conclusion to their role-playing, we learn that: "À la vérité, ces transports étaient un peu *voulus*. L'amour passionné était bien plutôt un modèle qu'on imitait qu'une réalité" (p. 657). In *De l'Amour*, we are reminded of the problematic role of novels in love affairs: " . . . les idées de roman vous prenant à la gorge, on croit être amoureux et mélancolique, car la vanité aspire à se croire une grand passion" (p. 28).

Mathilde puts his mettle to the test with a gauntlet of dangerous trials.[305] So engrossed is she in her own fantasies that she transgresses all the rules of decency for a young woman and writes to him, a *paysan*, first: "c'était tout simplement une déclaration d'amour."[306] In her impatience, the rapid succession of her letters causes Julien to muse famously, "Il paraît que ceci va être le roman par lettres . . ."[307] We are overtly reminded in this way, that *Le Rouge et le Noir* is *not* a *roman par lettres*, like so many of its eighteenth century predecessors, two of the most influential of which are treated in the previous chapters. It is often thought that epistolary novels became impossible to write in the wake of Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, since he essentially brought the genre to its apotheosis and any serious attempt to equal or surpass it would be in vain.[308] Julien's somewhat flippant

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[305] Julien would be in real danger if caught in or trying to get into Mathilde's room. He forces himself to brave the challenge, all the while expecting to be ambushed by her brother and her other suitors.

[306] *Rouge* 639.

[307] *Rouge* 647.

[308] Brooks asserts: "Never has the epistolary form been so completely motivated as it is here: not only is the art of the letter a central question, the letter itself, in a physical sense. . . becomes a subject of correspondence, a theme as well as a form" (p. 174). Laurent Versini's chapter "*Les Liaisons dangereuses*: couronnement ou liquidation d'un genre ?" discusses the many techniques perfected by Laclos, concluding with: ". . . triomphe d'une technique et d'une esthétique dont les ressources sont exploitées jusqu'à épuisement, jusqu'à la contestation même, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* pourront bien laisser le roman par lettres survivre comme la tragédie a survécu à Racine, il ne devra jamais autant aux

comment to himself puts the recurrent references to *Liaisons* and *Julie* into a more explicit dialog with the third-person novel of which he is the hero. The direct reference to the long, but now rather passé epistolary tradition combined with the role letters play in this scene (and at least one other, as we shall see later,) turns *Le Rouge et le Noir* into a *roman par lettres* as well, if ever so briefly. We, as readers, may regard Julien's comment as an homage to Laclos, the master of the genre, who Stendhal admired and met personally as a young man.[309] Once again, however, Julien's scant experience of worldly matters, even if he has begun to read and understand novels in a more mature way, probably does not qualify him to understand the multiple interpretations Stendhal's reader may perceive. Stendhal's great appreciation for the literature of the *Ancien Régime* is no secret in his autobiographical writings and implicitly manifests itself in his novelistic pursuits.[310] This *clin d'oeil* to Laclos, Rousseau and others through the medium

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poètes qui suivront qu'au géomètre qui n'a rien masqué si mal que sa sensibilité et son art" (*Le Roman Épistolaire* 164). René Pomeau, however, seems to consider Rousseau the master of the epistolary genre: "Laclos ne faisait preuve d'aucune originalité en publiant, en 1782, un roman par lettres. Il n'y prétendait pas : par l'épigraphe, il plaçait son livre sous le patronage de *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, dont le succès inouï vingt ans plus tôt, avait donné à cette forme romanesque sa plus brillante illustration" *Laclos ou le paradoxe* 133.

[309] *Souvenirs* 518.

[310] "Je trouve comme fait établi dans ma tête que dès l'âge de sept ans j'avais résolu de faire des comédies comme Molière" (*Brulard* 619). "Enfin, je fus attiré vers un tas de livres brochés, jetés confusément en L. C'étaient de mauvais romans non reliés que mon

of the naïve thoughts of Julien Sorel also reads as a kind of challenge to the idea that epistolary novels can no longer be written in an innovative manner. Though he does not attempt a pure *roman par lettres* in the style of his mentor, he circumvents the taboo by using Julien, his impetuous and talented hero, as a channel for reclaiming and reappropriating the genre, and integrating it seamlessly into his own unique third-person narrative style.[311] In so doing, he shows his own mastery of the genre and its implications

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oncle avait laissé. . . . Cette découverte fut décisive pour mon caractère. J'ouvris quelques-uns de ces livres, c'étaient de plats romans de 1780 mais pour moi c'était l'essence de la volupté. . . . Je ne saurais exprimer la passion avec laquelle je lisais ces livres. . . . Dès ce moment ma vocation fut décidée: vivre à Paris en faisant de comédies comme Molière" (p. 699). Also in *Brulard*, see pp. 701 and 717 for Stendhal's childhood love of *Julie*. For a thorough account of Stendhal's literary career, see Paulette Trout's *La Vocation romanesque de Stendhal*. Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1970.

[311] In Lucien Leuwen, the hero is seized by a sudden need to write to Madame de Chasteller and enjoys a Rousseauian moment reminiscent of Saint-Preux's letter written in Julie's closet, but also imbued with traits of correction and calculation later seen in Laclos: "Cette raison le décida. Là, au milieu du bois, avec un crayon qu'il se trouva par bonheur, et en appuyant sur le haut de son shako la troisième page de la lettre de madame de Chasteller qui était restée en blanc, il fabriqua une réponse qu'avec la même sagacité qui dirigeait toutes ses pensées depuis une heure, il jugea fort mauvaise. Elle lui déplaisait surtout parce qu'elle n'indiquait aucune espérance, aucun moyen de retour à l'attaque. Tant il y a toujours du fat dans le cœur d'un enfant de Paris ! Cependant,

by playing with its possibilities through his characters. Mathilde's petulant letter tossing in her father's library harkens back to Valmont's publicly dropping a letter in Cécile's lap or to the letter he forces the Présidente to accept as he visits her bedside, lest Madame de Rosemonde should see it.[312] In the next section, we shall examine Korasoff's collection of love letters for all occasions and types of women and their strange generic effectiveness in the ultimate seduction of Mathilde.

In another overt mark of reverence to the epistolary tradition, even if that reverence is again lightly infused with coy defiance, Julien, who had supposedly never read novels, has nonetheless memorized passages of one of the most important novels of the French eighteenth century. It may be argued, however, that like Saint-Preux, he is unable to appreciate the sentiment represented in them until he has experienced it for

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malgré lui et les corrections qu'il y fit en la relisant, elle montrait un cœur navré de l'insensibilité et de la hauteur de madame de Chasteller" *Leuwen* 961.

[312] " . . . Mlle de La Mole parut sur le seuil de la porte de la bibliothèque, lui jeta une lettre et s'enfuit" (*Rouge* 647). "Je saisis un moment, où Mme de Rosemonde s'était éloignée, pour remettre ma Lettre : on refusa de la prendre ; mais je la laissai sur le lit, et allai bien honnêtement approcher le fauteuil de ma vieille tante, qui voulait être auprès de *son cher enfant* : il fallut bien serrer la Lettre pour éviter le scandale" (*Liaisons* 55). "J'étais un peu loin d'elle; je jetai l'Épître sur ses genoux. Elle ne savait en vérité qu'en faire. Vous auriez trop ri de son air de surprise et d'embarras ; pourtant je ne riais point, car je craignais que tant de gaucherie ne nous trahît. Mais un coup d'œil et un geste fortement prononcés lui firent enfin comprendre qu'il fallait mettre le paquet dans sa poche" (p. 154).

himself. He may thus know words and passages of letters from *La Nouvelle Héloïse* by heart without really having *read* them. The scene of Mathilde and Julien's first night together is reminiscent of his first night with Madame de Rênal with regard to the recurrence of its conspicuous "absence du bonheur."[313] Novels, even the few pages inadvertently perused here and there, and their accounts of what love and passion ought to feel like seem to inhibit the lovers' ability to appreciate and be present in the reality of the experience. With both women, Julien's real unfeigned love and passion develop *after* the *dernière faveur* is granted, not before. In worldly novels, passion is generally escalated by deferring its satisfaction and exhausted if not totally extinguished in the very moment the *dernière faveur* is bestowed, though we saw at least the suggestion that this may not be a foregone conclusion in Valmont's reaction to the consummation of his relationship with the Présidente.

Returning to Prince Korasoff, I would like to continue my analysis of the advice and materials he gives to Julien to remedy his unhappy passion for Mathilde. Once he has ascertained exactly which type of woman Julien loves, he instructs him that to conquer Mathilde's pride, he must court a beautiful prude in his entourage by writing her letters twice daily, but never showing the slightest hint of his supposed passion in public. When

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[313] "Ce tutoiement, dépouillé du ton de la tendresse, au bout d'un moment ne fit aucun plaisir à Julien ; il s'étonnait de l'absence du bonheur ; enfin, pour le sentir, il eut recours à sa raison. . . . il parvint à un bonheur d'amour-propre" (*Rouge* 656). For Mathilde: "Il n'eut rien d'imprévu pour elle dans tous les événements de cette nuit, que le malheur et la honte qu'elle avait trouvés au lieu de cette entière félicité dont parlent les romans" (p. 658).

Julien balks at the thought of writing so many letters, Korasoff reassures him: "Et qui vous parle de composer des phrases ? J'ai dans mon nécessaire six volumes de lettres d'amour manuscrites : Il y en a pour tous les caractères de femme, j'en ai pour la plus haute vertu."[314] While Julien is relieved that he will not be required to "composer des phrases," he cannot escape transcribing the tiresome, longwinded letters to the lovely and virtuous Maréchale de Fervaques. The letters, which Korasoff obtained from a friend in a similar situation, were ultimately ineffective in the case of their original writer; the Maréchale is finally touched by Julien's letters, but the letters also accomplish his real goal of bringing Mathilde to her knees with jealousy.[315]

Out of sheer desperation Julien determines that he *will* court the Maréchale de Fervaques for the sake of his love for Mathilde: "Elle m'ennuiera bien peut-être, mais je regarderai ces yeux si beaux, et qui ressemblent tellement à ceux qui m'ont le plus aimé au monde. Elle est étrangère ; c'est un caractère nouveau à observer. Je suis fou, je me

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[314] *Rouge* 705. We might also remember a scene from *Égarements* when Meilcour resists Versac's suggestion that he court Madame de Sénanges: "À propos de quoi peut-elle croire que je lui dois mon cœur? / – Votre cœur! dit-il, jargon de roman" (p.149). Both young men find themselves in need of help understanding the position they occupy in the world and both resist the more unpleasant tasks they must perform for their success. Nothing authentic is required in matters of worldly love. Meilcour's heart is not in play and Julien need not compose a single word on his own.

[315] There are only 53 letters because the unlucky Kalinsky "se fit éconduire" (*Rouge* 705). Gérard Genette points out that this seduction by letters acts as a kind of parody of Laclos in his chapter, "Stendhal" in *Figures: II*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979 (p. 163).

noie, je dois suivre les conseils d'un ami et ne pas m'en croire moi-même."[316] The Maréchale is quite literally nothing more than a stand-in. Julien sends copied letters to her and spends time with her in order to seduce Mathilde while thinking about Madame de Rênal. He motivates his unpleasant courtship by concentrating on the resemblance of the Maréchale's eyes to those of Madame de Rênal.[317]

The Prince generously hires a *copiste* to make Julien his own set of the 53 love letters, which he dutifully begins copying in turn and delivering twice daily. Nothing bores or exhausts Julien more than the effort required for re-copying the long and vacuous love letters for the Maréchale.[318] His employment with the Marquis de La Mole begins mainly consisting of copying his correspondence, but he never reacts so viscerally to it as he does to this copy job, perhaps due to the fact that his diligence at the service of the Marquis is quickly rewarded with more trust and responsibility so that Julien is soon

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[316] *Rouge* 706.

[317] It is oddly incongruous that he would invoke Madame de Rênal to help him get through the process of indirectly seducing another woman; it seems more probable that finding some resemblance to Mathilde would be more helpful. On the other hand, we might take this as a sign that though she is far away, Julien has not entirely left Madame de Rênal behind him. He knows that she loved him more than he has ever been loved before, yet leaves his feelings for her conspicuously out of the equation.

[318] "Il se mit aussitôt à transcrire cette première lettre d'amour ; c'était une homélie remplie de phrases sur la vertu et ennuyeuse à périr ; Julien eut le bonheur de s'endormir à la seconde page" *Rouge* 714.

composing the letters himself for the Marquis to sign.[319] His copying has a clear goal: the better the quality of his work, the more freedom to think and judge for himself he will gain. Faced with what he considers endless and absurd copying, Julien must force himself to continue with the love letters. Although the letters were once of great importance to their original writer, in the hands of someone like Julien, they too become "pâles copies," a kind of passe-partout generic that play a specific role in a particular kind of seduction.[320] They do the job they were meant to do to perfection and there is no place for originality or straying very far from the script as it is written. But Julien day dreams as he copies and makes mistakes, neglecting even to change what few specifics the letters contain to match his situation with the Maréchale.[321] This apparent blunder, however,

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[319] "Sur les courtes notes que le marquis griffonnait en marge des papiers de tout genre qui lui étaient adressés, Julien composait des lettres, qui presque toutes étaient signées" *Rouge* 586.

[320] Valmont consults his memoires for inspiration in his seduction of the Présidente: "Jusque-là, je ne puis rien faire qu'au hasard : aussi, depuis huit jours, je repasse inutilement tous les moyens connus, tout ceux des Romans et de mes Mémoires secrets ; je n'en trouve aucun qui convienne, ni aux circonstances de l'aventure, ni au caractère de l'Héroïne" *Liaisons* 254.

[321] "Julien répondait par des copies fidèles des lettres russes, et tel est l'avantage du style emphatique : Mme de Fervaques n'était point étonnée du peu de rapport des réponses avec ses lettres" *Rouge* 724.

raises only a vague question from the Maréchale.[322] As Korasoff had predicted, "[l]ire une lettre d'amour bien écrite est le souverain plaisir pour une prude ; c'est un moment de relâche. Elle ne joue pas la comédie, elle ose écouter son cœur . . ."[323] She needs the exaltation the letters inspire in her to be freed from her rigid façade, just as Mathilde uses her fantasies of Julien's heroism to "se donne[r] des accès d'amour."[324]

Concurrently with his letter writing campaign, Julien is also fighting for Mathilde on another front: the very public drawing room. As Korasoff gives Julien his instructions, he warns, "Je ne vous le cache pas, votre rôle est difficile ; vous jouez la comédie, et si l'on devine que vous la jouez, vous êtes perdu."[325] Writing, or rather copying a letter in privacy is a rather simple task, but playing a role so drastically different from his natural personality, with such high stakes, and before such an attentive audience is extremely intimidating. It is with his signature Napoleonic military style that Julien soldiers along, abhorring each step in the process and suffering every minute, but his heroic efforts pay off in a strangely paradoxical way. Just as Korasoff had told him to do the opposite of

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[322] "Comment se fait-il, lui dit-elle le lendemain d'un air d'indifférence qu'il trouva mal joué, que vous me parliez de *Londres* et de *Richemond* dans une lettre que vous avez écrite hier soir, à ce qu'il me semble, au sortir de l'Opéra? / Julien fut très embarrassé; il avait copié ligne par ligne, sans songer à ce qu'il écrivait, et apparemment avait oublié de substituer aux mots *Londres* et *Richemond*, qui si trouvait dans l'original, ceux de *Paris* et *Saint-Cloud*" *Rouge* 720.

[323] *Rouge* 705.

[324] *Rouge* 704. Taken from longer quote cited above on p. 166.

[325] *Rouge* 704.

what is expected of him, he surprises Mathilde by completely ignoring her in public and instead spends his time waxing poetic for the Maréchale de Fervaques: "Il commençait à ne pas mal se tirer de la phrase sentimentale et pittoresque qu'on appelle *esprit* dans certains salons."[326] Something about his desperately intolerable predicament seems to instill a kind of genius in him so that he is almost magically inspired to prattle on in a pitch perfect worldly tone for the Maréchale. But again, though it is meant to appear that he is speaking to the Maréchale, she unwittingly serves as a sounding board for the words he hopes might reach Mathilde.[327] The seemingly infinite and meaningless letters he copies out each day and the unintelligible speeches that flow from his lips each evening produce the promised results and Julien is amazed at the bizarre power of language. The Maréchale's discreet warning about his rumored admiration for Napoléon reveals to him some of the heretofore unfathomable mysteries of just how much words can accomplish: "*Quand on m'aime* ! se répétait Julien ; cela ne veut rien dire, ou veut tout dire. Voilà des secrets de langage qui manquent à nos pauvres provinciaux. Et il songea beaucoup à Mme de Rênal, en copiant une lettre immense destinée à la maréchale."[328] Julien's newfound talents and their effects astonish him as much as they do those around him, but his success in society somehow brings Madame de Rênal back into his thoughts, even as he forges ahead with Korasoff's plan for Mathilde.

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[326] *Rouge* 711.

[327] "Il adressait la parole à la maréchale, mais son but unique était d'agir sur l'âme de Mathilde. Il s'anima de telle sorte que Mme de Fervaques arriva à ne plus comprendre ce qu'il disait" *Rouge* 713-14.

[328] *Rouge* 720.

During the long weeks of Julien's sustained attack, Mathilde's defenses are surprised and weakened as she marvels at his flair for the *imprévu*:

> Ce qui l'étonnait surtout, c'était sa fausseté parfaite; il ne disait pas un mot à la maréchale qui ne fût un mensonge, ou du moins un déguisement abominable de sa façon de penser, que Mathilde connaissait si parfaitement sur presque tous les sujets. Ce machiavélisme la frappait. Quelle profondeur! Se disait-elle; quelle différence avec les nigauds emphatiques ou les fripons communs; tels que M. Tanbeau, qui tiennent le même langage![329]

From the outset of his acquaintance with Mathilde, Julien's paradoxical mistake is his openness during their many discussions. She therefore knows more about the "real" Julien in a few short months than about anyone else in her entourage, most of whom she has known her entire life.[330] Had he not been so authentically himself in her presence, however, she never could have compared him so favorably to his lackluster rivals, or noticed anything different about him at all, save perhaps for his provincial awkwardness. Knowing as much as she does about him, she is all the more shocked by his abrupt and total metamorphosis into a perfect copy of the very men who have bored her so profoundly for years. Mathilde is unimpressed by his depth of thought and character when he freely admits his most personal feelings and opinions to her, though it may draw her to him out of curiosity. It is only when he proves that he can convincingly appear to

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[329] *Rouge* 721.

[330] Assuming there is anything "real" to know about Croisenois, Caylus, de Luz, etc. underneath their public personas.

be absolutely *without* depth that she appreciates his "profondeur." Almost overnight, he has transformed himself into an *uncommon* "fripon," (the kind whose *friponnerie* is so good, it covers its own tracks,) suddenly so good at playing Tanbeau and speaking his language that Tanbeau is made to look ridiculous in Julien's shadow. He becomes a kind of negative image of himself through Korasoff's process; his every word is a fabrication, his "fausseté parfaite" is diametrically opposed to his true self. This perfect falseness is what allows Julien to fashion himself into such an inexplicably perfect copy. Rather than striving to do exactly as the others do, he does as his mentor advises: the opposite of what is expected of him, the opposite of what he would naturally and normally do. It is clear, however, that Julien does not truly understand the mechanisms behind his sudden success. The smallest positive reinforcement of his conduct, obtained by chance as he muddles through as best he can, seems to multiply his energy exponentially, making his performance that much better.[331] He becomes keenly aware of his rivals' apparent

[331] "La veille, le hasard avait révélé à Julien le moyen d'être éloquent; il s'arrangea de façon à voir les yeux de Mathilde. Elle, de son côté, un instant après l'arrivée de la maréchale, quitta le canapé bleu: c'était déserter sa société habituelle. M. de Croisenois parut consterné de ce nouveau caprice ; sa douleur évidente ôta à Julien ce que son malheur avait de plus atroce. / Cet imprévu dans sa vie le fit parler comme un ange ; . . . " (*Rouge* 715). This strange and sudden genius for social interaction, speaking in particular, is not unique to Julien Sorel. Early on during his stay in Nancy, Lucien realizes that the more affectation he puts into his public conduct, the better he is liked: "Quelques mots trop sincères avaient déjà nui à l'engouement dont il commençait à être l'objet. Dès qu'il mentait à tout venant, comme chantait la cigale, l'engouement reprit de plus belle; mais

dissatisfaction and his conquest's poorly dissimulated attentiveness, taking them as indicators that he is doing something right.

Julien's long and painful efforts finally culminate in a spectacular show of Mathilde's desperation, when to her surprise she discovers the collection of letters from

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aussi, avec le naturel, le plaisir s'envola" (*Leuwen* 888). Lucien, who is, in spite of his bourgeois Parisian upbringing, normally gauche and contemptuous, experiences something similar when he is trying to fit in with provincial society and impress Madame de Chasteller: "Au mot que lui adressa madame de Chasteller, Lucien devint un autre homme. Par le noble regard qui daignait s'arrêter sur lui, il se crut affranchi de tous les lieux communs qui l'ennuyaient à dire, qu'il disait mal, et qui, à Nancy, font encore l'élément essentiel de la conversation entre gens qui si voient pour la huit ou dixième fois. Tout à coup il osa parler, et beaucoup. Il parlait de tout ce qui pouvait intéresser ou amuser la jolie femme qui, tout en donnant le bras à son grand cousin, daignait l'écouter avec des yeux étonnés. Sans perdre rien de sa douceur et de son accent respectueux, la voix de Lucien s'éclaircit et prit de l'éclat. Les idées nettes et plaisantes ne lui manquèrent pas plus que les paroles vives et pittoresques pour les peindre. Dans la simplicité noble du ton qu'il osa prendre spontanément avec madame de Chasteller, il sut faire apparaître, sans se permettre assurément rien qui pût choquer la délicatesse la plus scrupuleuse, cette nuance de familiarité délicate qui convient à deux âmes de même portée, lorsqu'elles se rencontrent et se reconnaissent au milieu des masques de cette ignoble bal masqué qu'on appelle le monde. Ainsi des anges se parleraient qui, partis du ciel pour quelque mission, se rencontreraient, par hasard, ici-bas" (p. 923).

the Maréchale unopened and unappreciated in his desk drawer.[332] Still, even as he sees her resistance breaking down before his eyes, he maintains his icy demeanor until he is satisfied he will not again be the victim of her haughty capriciousness. Somewhere in between the moment's ecstatic celebration, when Julien "couvrit de baisers les lettres d'amour données par le prince Korasoff," and planning his next move, his thoughts return to Madame de Rênal.[333] "Ce cœur est bien différent de celui de Mme de Rênal, de disait-il, mais il n'allais pas plus loin. . . . Même dans ses moments les plus heureux, Mme de Rênal doutait toujours que mon amour fût égal au sien. Ici, c'est un démon que je subjugue, donc il faut *subjuguer*."[334] It is of course impossible to determine definitively whether or not Julien ever "really" loves Mathilde or if he loves her as much as or less than Madame de Rênal. Of greater interest are these fleeting moments of near clarity that seem to disappear from Julien's thoughts as quickly and with as little introspection as they occur to him. It is only later, when Madame de Rênal visits him in prison after his trial, that he can honestly declare to her, "[s]ache que je t'ai toujours aimée, que je n'ai aimé que toi."[335]

Once Julien has won over Mathilde and her father, he is granted land, money, position and title in rapid succession. At his young age, Julien's ambition and unyielding determination have already earned him more than he could have desired from his dream to *faire fortune*: "Après tout, pensait-il, mon roman est fini, et à moi seul tout le mérite.

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[332] *Rouge* ch. XXIX.

[333] *Rouge* 731.

[334] *Rouge* 731.

[335] *Rouge* 789.

J'ai su me faire aimer de ce monstre d'orgueil, ajoutait-il en regardant Mathilde ; son père ne peut vivre sans elle, et elle sans moi."[336] Mathilde and whatever feelings he has for her meld into the package deal that represents his worldly victory. He has *arrived* and any further acquisitions of money and power are simply a question of time rather than one of possibility. This realization comes at the end of a chapter as a kind of definitive closure to that chapter of his life. It is as if nothing else can be said of Julien past this point because the next logical, and indeed, perhaps the inevitable next step is that he will gradually become one of the "pâles copies" he has resisted so vehemently, imitating them for the sole purpose of making Mathilde love him.[337] Paradoxically, however, Stendhal's *roman* is not quite *fini*, though Julien's declaration may mark the end of the *roman* as it is conventionally understood and the ensuing return of the *romanesque* Stendhal so highly valorizes. Since the novel *does* continue, the following chapter recounts, or rather glosses over Julien's debut as a military officer in Strasbourg, Mathilde's desperate letter

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[336] *Rouge* 749.

[337] Marivaux's *Le Paysan parvenu* remains unfinished, as does Crébillon's *Égarements*, perhaps in part for similar reasons. It is doubtful that Jacob could plausibly maintain his *gaillard* spirit the longer he remains in Paris. We know from Meilcour's account of his lessons in worldliness from Versac that it takes a long time for him to truly rival Versac's skill, but we do not need every detail once he is on his way to greatness: "Personne ne pouvait lui ressembler, et moi-même, qui ai depuis marché si avantageusement sur ses traces, et qui parvins enfin à mettre la Cour et Paris entre nous deux, je me suis vu longtemps au nombre de ces copies gauches et contraintes qui, sans posséder aucune de ses grâces, ne faisaient que défigurer ses défauts et les ajouter aux leurs" *Égarements* 73.

entreating him to return to Paris because "tout est perdu," Madame de Rênal's letter to the Marquis de La Mole, his subsequent ultimatum, and Julien's attempt on Madame de Rênal's life.[338] As he awaits execution, he muses: "Moi seul, je sais ce que j'aurais pu faire… Pour les autres, je ne suis tout au plus qu'un PEUT-ÊTRE."[339]

Destiny Transcribed: The Return of the *Romanesque*

Just when Julien has achieved his goals and declared "mon roman est fini," everything he worked so hard to achieve comes crashing down in a whirlwind of Stendhalian *romanesque* ignited by what turns out to have been yet another copy: the (nearly) fatal letter Madame de Rênal sends to M. de la Mole, causing him to forbid Mathilde from ever marrying Julien. In the space of one page in the novel, Julien leaves Mathilde in Paris after having read the letter from Madame de Rênal and approved the Marquis's decision, goes to Verrières, buys two pistols, finds Madame de Rênal at church and shoots her. As readers, we have no insight from the narrator about why Julien takes this dramatic and violent action, only that at the sight of her, he trembles and wavers momentarily in his *physical* strength before pulling the trigger twice.[340] When he is finally able to shoot, the text seems to indicate that it is because he can no longer see her and connect the woman who loved him to the woman he sees before him and who wrote the damning letter about him: "Mme de Rênal baissa la tête qui un instant se trouva

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[338] *Rouge* ch. XXXV.

[339] *Rouge* 786.

[340] *Rouge* 754. Gérard Genette discusses this feature of Stendhalian narrative, which he calls "l'ellipse des intentions" in his oeuvre as a whole. *Figures: II* 183-85.

presque entièrement cachée par les plis de son châle. Julien ne la reconnaissait plus aussi bien ; il tira sur elle un coup de pistolet et la manqua ; il tira un second coup, elle tomba."[341] In the dizzying rapidity and stunning *imprévu* of the action, we know nothing about what Julien is thinking or feeling. It is important to remember, however, that this rapidity is purely textual. Julien's several hundred kilometer journey from Paris, where he reads Madame de Rênal's letter, to Verrières in Franche Comté must have taken several days by horse drawn carriage, yet all that is recounted of his travels is that he was unable to write to Mathilde as he wished because "sa main ne formait sur le papier que des traits illisibles."[342] It is understandable that in the heat of the moment, writing would be out of the question, but somehow, for Julien, this passionate "moment" stretches out over an astonishingly long period of time in which no reflection or emotion is reported. As readers, we might envision a troubled Julien trying to write in a moving carriage and forming only "des traits illisibles," but there must have been rest stops along the way where he might have found an inn with a proper table for writing. While it is tempting to desire and imagine a realistic explanation for Julien's action, part of what distinguishes Stendhal's *romanesque* from the *roman* is that while the latter more or less follows the expected cause and effect convention, the former tends to defy reason and elude our best efforts to explain.[343] The final line of *La Chartreuse de Parme* famously dedicates the

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[341] *Rouge* 754. We might reasonably wonder what became of the first bullet – did it hit anyone else, if not Madame de Rênal?

[342] *Rouge* 753.

[343] In his book *Balzac: Fiction and Melodrama*, Christopher Prendergast briefly addresses Stendhal's choice to provide so little detail: "Criticism has speculated endlessly

novel to " the happy few," presumably those who experience a deeply personal, nonlinguistic resonance with the text.[344] In the final section of this chapter, we will look more closely at the phenomenon of silence that defines Julien and Madame de Rênal's relationship and sets it apart from many others in the worldly tradition that so heavily

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about Julien's 'motives'. The crucial literary point, however, is that, whatever the critic's speculations, they get no support whatever from the narrative voice in the text; by way of psychological analysis, the voice says virtually nothing; it respects the mysterious indeterminacy of the act" 145.

[344] Stendhal. *La Chartreuse de Parme*. *Romans et Nouvelles*. Ed. Henri Martineau. Vol. II. Paris: Gallimard, 1952. 21-493 (p. 493). Henceforth cited as *Chartreuse*; Genette refers to a kind of "transparence énigmatique" in Stendhalian discourse that is intended for the "happy few" (*Figures II* 179). Also in *Figures II*: "Le propre du discours stendhalien n'est pas la clarté ; moins encore l'obscurité (qu'il avait en horreur, comme cache-sottise et complice de l'*hypocrisie*). Mais quelque chose comme une transparence énigmatique, qui toujours, ici ou là, déconcerte quelque ressource ou habitude de l'esprit. C'est ainsi qu'il fait *quelques heureux*, et qu'il offense, ou, comme il disait lui-même, « stendhalise » tous les autres (prononcer St*an*dhal)" (p. 192). Ann Jefferson discusses the scholarly desire to explain the unexplainable Stendhalian *imprévu* based largely on the conventions of psychological realism (pp.177-78). "If the âmes sensibles succeed in making sense of the final pages of the novel, this is because their reading is not grounded in any particular kind of language, or any particular set of conventions. Their reading must necessarily be conducted in a state of hilarity and reverie, and they will be profoundly moved by it" (pp. 178-79).

influences Stendhal's writing. In this scene, however, we get a glimpse of how language is no longer adequate or appropriate for explaining what Julien is doing and why. Though he attempts to write to Mathilde, he produces nothing legible. If we view his attempts at writing as physical representations of his thoughts and emotions, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the words he wants to write, presumably about his sudden inexplicable departure from Paris, simply do not exist in a language comprehensible to anyone but Madame de Rênal, and possibly, to the "happy few" of Stendhal's readers.[345] Julien's actions in this situation are, in a way, reminiscent of his earlier self-imposed challenges to hold Madame de Rênal's hand or to kiss her, but lack any definable goal or motivation that would satisfy logic or the demands of realism.

Madame de Rênal's letter brings her inescapably back into his life, superseding everything and everyone else he thought he cared about. The text of the letter, false or at least misleading for the most part, is not important. The significance of the letter here, is *how* it is written, under what circumstances and by whom. The narrator tells us that "[c]ette lettre, extrêmement longue et à demi effacée par des larmes, était bien de la main de Mme de Rênal ; elle était même écrite avec plus de soin qu'à l'ordinaire."[346] As we saw in the previous chapters, non-linguistic characteristics of a handwritten text may

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[345] Again, Prendergast's brief commentary on Stendhal, though in relation to Balzac, is of interest here: "Yet it is arguable that, in its very implausibility, in the fissure [Julien's crime] introduces into the language of common sense and the expectations of verisimilitude, it is the very corner stone of the meaning of the novel as a whole" p. 146.

[346] *Rouge* 753.

reveal more about the writer's state of mind than the words he or she writes.[347] The tears that blur some of the words of the letter are more telling than the words themselves; they demonstrate the intensity of emotion experienced while writing the letter. Although the letter is recognizably written by Madame de Rênal, the care taken to write neatly is apparently not in her usual habits. This too, may be read and interpreted by someone who knows her writing habits well enough. She later admits that her confessor coerced her into copying and sending a letter that he wrote for her: "Quelle horreur m'a fait commettre la religion ! lui disait-elle ; et encore j'ai adouci les passages les plus affreux de cette lettre…"[348] While her neater than usual handwriting may have previously seemed to indicate vengeance and jealousy, in light of these admissions, overwhelming feelings of remorse and desperation are more likely the cause. Madame de Rênal must force herself to concentrate in order to transcribe the terrible words of her confessor that her tears actively resist as they erase her writing.

Both Julien and Madame de Rênal suffer from an affliction they each independently call *le remords*. When Madame de Rênal learns that she will survive being

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[347] In chapter 1, we discussed Saint-Preux's transcription of Julie's letters into a bound volume in order to protect them, since they were beginning to show signs of wear. Something of the charm of the letters in lost in the transcription, however. See the section entitled, Worldly Paris: "Ce peuple imitateur." In chapter 2, the importance of handwriting goes a step further as Valmont's minutes give Merteuil more insight than he is aware of and as he later interprets the handwriting of Présidente's copy of one of his letters. See the first section, How to Read a Copy.

[348] *Rouge* 790.

shot, she is despondent: “La lettre qui lui avait été imposée par son confesseur actuel, et qu’elle avait écrite à M. de La Mole, avait donné le dernier coup à cet être affaibli par un malheur trop constant. Ce malheur était l’absence de Julien ; elle l’appelait, elle, *le remords*.”[349] As for Julien, contemplating from his prison cell and no longer interested in his Parisian success, “[l’]ambition était morte en son cœur, une autre passion y était sortie de ses cendres ; il l’appelait le remords d’avoir assassiné madame de Rênal. Dans le fait, il en était éperdument amoureux.”[350] Love and longing are the veritable emotions thus mislabeled as remorse by the lovers. *Remords* comes from the verb *remordre*, meaning “mordre une seconde fois.”[351] It is easy to see how both lovers are in a way “bitten again” when Julien’s future is ruined by Madame de Rênal’s letter and he shoots her. Their separation sets Madame de Rênal’s suffering into motion and she turns to religion as a means of recovery, believing that her feelings stem from her guilty conscience. We know that Julien frequently conjures up the memory of Madame de Rênal during his time in Paris, but never takes the time to analyze the significance of his memories or why he thinks of her so often. The *Littré* dictionary lists an interesting etymology of *remords* that I have not found explicitly listed elsewhere: “Il y avait dans l'ancienne langue un autre remors, ou mieux remort, qui signifiait souvenir et qui se rattachait à remémorer” [352]

[349] *Rouge* 755.

[350] *Rouge* 771-72. Also: “Jamais il ne pensait à ses succès de Paris; il en était ennuyé.”

[351] “Remordre.” *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, *5e edition*, 1798. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois.

[352] “Remords.” *Émile Littré: Dictionnaire de la langue française*, 1872-77. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois.

These unanticipated events bring the lovers abruptly back to remembering in ways that they had previously refused or repressed. Julien's lack of self-reflection and knowledge combined with his furious ambition prevent him from recognizing or fully embracing his love in the first part of the novel. Although there is no doubt that Julien falls in love with Madame de Rênal as far as he is able at the time, his ambitions clearly remain his main priority. An unfortunate misunderstanding between the lovers marks a decisive moment in the affair, when "[i]l manqua à notre héros d'oser être sincère" and the development of his love for her is pushed into the background where it remains, most of the time, until her letter arrives in Paris.[353]

[353] *Rouge* 433. Fouqué offers Julien a lucrative position as a partner in his sawmill. To his shame, Julien is tempted by the prospect of money, but resists it in favor of the possibility that he will "faire fortune" (p. 153). "Dans les premiers jours de cette vie nouvelle, il y eut des moments où lui qui n'avait jamais aimé, qui n'avait jamais été aimé de personne, trouvait un si délicieux plaisir à être sincère, qu'il était sur le point d'avouer à Mme de Rênal l'ambition qui jusqu'alors avait été l'essence même de son existence. Il eût voulu pouvoir la consulter sur l'étrange tentation que lui donnait la proposition de Fouqué, mais un petit événement empêcha toute franchise" (p. 431). The event referred to is when Julien laments the loss of Napoleon for young men like him and the two lovers misinterpret each other's reaction to the conversation.

The Paradox of Silence

> "Je ne donnerai qu'un exemple de *mot* glissant. Je dis *mot* : ce peut être aussi bien la phrase où l'on insère le mot, mais je me borne au mot *silence*. Du mot il est déjà, je l'ai dit, l'abolition du bruit qu'est le mot; entre tous les mots c'est le plus pervers, ou le plus poétique : il est lui-même gage de sa mort. . . . Le silence est un mot qui n'est pas un mot."[354]

Excepting a few brief exclamations of the extreme happiness Julien cherishes during his time in prison, his last moments with Madame de Rênal are marked most prominently by a kind of narrative silence.[355] While we know that Julien and Madame de Rênal talk to each other, that they explain themselves and their past behavior and misunderstandings, that Julien admits to her all of his *faiblesses*, very little dialog is rendered or reported by the narrator, and the only available descriptions of their

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[354] Bataille, Georges. *L'expérience intérieure*. *Œuvres complètes*. Ed. Denis Hollier. Vol. v. Paris: Gallimard, 1970-88. pp. 28-9.

[355] "À aucune époque de sa vie, Julien n'avait trouvé un moment pareil. / Bien longtemps après, quand on put parler . . . " (*Rouge* 789). "Les transports et le bonheur de Julien lui prouvaient combien il lui pardonnait. Jamais il n'avait été aussi fou d'amour" (p. 790). "Son accent était si triste que Julien l'embrassa avec un bonheur tout nouveau pour lui. Ce n'était plus l'ivresse de l'amour, c'était reconnaissance extrême" (p. 791). "Il songea à saisir le moment pour s'échapper du monde incognito; mais il avait quelque espoir de revoir Mme de Rênal, et il était éperdument amoureux" (p. 792) "Aucune parole ne peut rendre l'excès et la folie de l'amour de Julien" (p. 800).

encounters or of their states of mind insist, for example, that "[a]ucune parole ne peut rendre l'excès et la folie de l'amour de Julien."[356] The narrator's silence or lack of words is closely related to Julien's excessive *folie*, as Shoshana Felman clearly demonstrates in her excellent study of *La « folie » dans l'œuvre romanesque de Stendhal*.[357] Again, though by no means in an unfortunate or negative sense in Stendhal's fictional world, language is simply not *à la hauteur*.[358] Hyperbole is useful to a point, and then silence, a technique Stendhal uses frequently in his fiction as well as in his autobiographical work, is left to do the work words cannot.[359]

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[356] *Rouge* 800. See also previous note. For Julien and Madame de Rênal's mutual explanations, see ch. XLIII, for Julien's *faiblesses*, see p. 800.

[357] Ann Jefferson also refers to Felman's work in her article "Stendhal and the Uses of Reading: *Le Rouge et le Noir*" p. 178.

[358] On the insufficiency of language, see *Brulard*: "Où trouver des mots pour peindre le bonheur parfait goûté avec délices et sans satiété par une âme sensible jusqu'à l'anéantissement et la folie ? / Je ne sais si je ne renoncerai pas à ce travail. Je ne pourrais, ce me semble, peindre ce bonheur ravissant, pur, frais, divin, que par l'énumération des maux et de l'ennui dont il était l'absence complète. Or ce doit être une triste façon de peindre le bonheur" p. 658.

[359] In *Chartreuse*, nothing is said of the happiest moments spent between Fabrice and Clélia: "Après ces trois années de bonheur divin . . . " (p. 488). In *Lucien Leuwen*: "Leuwen descendit l'escalier dans un trouble inexprimable. Bientôt, il fut ivre de bonheur, ce qui l'empêcha de voir qu'il était bien jeune, bien sot. / Quinze jours ou trois semaines suivirent ; ce fut peut-être le plus beau moment de la vie de Leuwen, mais

Madame de Rênal is also subject to a certain kind of *folie* that resists her best efforts to identify and analyze it. During one of her visits, when she convinces Julien to appeal his death sentence, she attempts to "raisonner" with him about the nature of her feelings for him, but words fail her as well and the best she can do is to cite examples to illustrate the lengths she would go to for him:

> – Laisse-moi, continua-t-elle, je veux raisonner avec toi, de peur de l'oublier…Dès que je te vois, tous les devoirs disparaissent : je ne suis plus qu'amour pour toi, ou plutôt, le mot amour est trop faible. Je sens pour toi ce que je devrais sentir uniquement pour Dieu : un mélange de

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jamais il ne retrouva un tel instant d'abandon et de faiblesse. Vous savez qu'il était incapable de le faire naître à force d'en sentir le bonheur" (p. 1037). In the first pages of *Souvenirs d'égotisme*: "Je craignais de déflorer les moments heureux que j'ai rencontrés, en les décrivant, en les anatomisant. Or, c'est ce que je ne ferai point, je sauterai le bonheur" (p.430). See also, in *Brulard* in reference to an voyage with his aunt Camille Poncet: "Tout fut sensations exquises et poignantes de bonheur dans ce voyage, sur lequel je pourrais écrire vingt pages de superlatifs. / La difficulté, le regret profond de mal peindre et de gâter ainsi un souvenir céleste où le *sujet surpasse* trop le disant me donne une véritable peine au lieu du plaisir d'écrire" (p. 659). Benjamin McRae Amoss, Jr. addresses this question: ". . . by foregoing any description of these perfect moments, Stendhal paradoxically preserves their purity, their exceptional character, untainted by the commonality that words represent, while he assures their accessibility by providing the frame, in written form, for a future memorial reenactement." *Time and Narrative in Stendhal*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992 (p. 82).

> respect, d'amour, d'obéissance… En vérité, je ne sais pas ce que tu m'inspires. Tu me dirais de donner un coup de couteau au geôlier, que le crime serait commis avant que j'y eusse songé. Explique-moi cela bien nettement avant que je te quitte, je veux voir clair dans mon cœur ; car dans deux mois nous nous quittons… À propos, nous quitterons-nous ? lui dit-elle en souriant.[360]

There is an undertone of urgency to Madame de Rênal's efforts to make sense of her feelings, to use her reason to understand their relationship before it is too late. Forgetting her duties, her religion and everything else in Julien's presence, she is prepared to commit a crime for him. She is well aware that he produces a powerful and all encompassing effect on her, but she struggles to find words to describe it. Her entreating him to reason with her, lest she forget, is rendered in the text with three ellipses, each marking the difficulty she encounters as she searches for clarity, asking Julien to explain "bien nettement" so that she might "voir clair dans [s]on cœur." Her halting and uncertain description of her symptoms nonetheless seem to paint a picture of something akin to the Stendhalian *folie* Felman outlines as being a relationship between "l'Amour, la Parole, la Raison."[361] The word *amour*, however, is too weak a word for what Madame de Rênal feels for Julien and reason quickly falls away, to be supplanted by *folie*, *imprévu*, *romanesque*, *bonheur*… Stendhal liberally employs these words as rough approximations that, while they may also be inadequate for clearly defining these types of situations in his novels, act as markers for the reader. The ideal Stendhalian reader, the "âme sensible"

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[360] *Rouge* 790.

[361] Felman 162.

or one of the "happy few" is not intimidated, but rather touched by these moments that defy language and reason and may experience them in a state similar to the characters in the novel.

Returning now to the question of silence, I would like to examine a passage from Gérard Genette's Stendhal essay in *Figures II* where he eloquently writes of these elliptical, silent moments in Stendhal's fiction:

> Le silence du récit souligne éloquemment la grandeur et la beauté de l'action : il contribue donc à la qualifier. C'est un commentaire au degré zéro, celui-là même que la rhétorique classique recommandait pour les moments *sublimes*, où l'événement parle de lui-même mieux que ne pourrait le faire aucune sorte de parole : et l'on sait que le sublime n'est pas pour Stendhal une catégorie académique, mais bien l'un des termes les plus actifs de son système de valeurs.[362]

Julien's declaration that his *roman* is *fini* closes one chapter and indeed, one kind of novel in which he has come out victorious, as other *parvenus* have done before him. The next chapter opens Julien's life and future to something quite different and *imprévu*; the *romanesque* carries on where the realist *roman* cannot or will not go. All of the pains he has taken to get to where he stands at this point are like part of a past life when Madame de Rênal's letter arrives and he leaves for Verrières. If an escape from copying is to be made, as the title of this chapter suggests, it happens in the short narrative space between *fini* and the shots fired in the church. In committing his crime, Julien frees himself from the obligation to imitate his rivals in Paris and to outplay them at their own game. He

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[362] *Figures II* 189.

invents as he goes along with a great thrilling flourish of the *imprévu*, which has often put him at odds with convention and authority, but which Stendhal so famously prizes. Julien's "invention" rings out in the church as a shocking crime of passion on the level of the characters, but on the level of the author, Stendhal's invention is no less breathtaking for his readers. The last pages of the novel, with the exception of the visits Julien would rather avoid, may be read as one of these privileged and sublime moments to which Genette is referring above. What is *not* said says far more about Julien's visits with Madame de Rênal and about his reveries in the damp prison cell than any attempts at describing their superlative *bonheur*. Since "aucune parole" is sufficient for expressing their *bonheur*, Stendhal's preferred solution is to allow the beauty and the grandeur speak for themselves to those willing and able to hear. In the context of the shortcomings of language, we cannot help but be reminded of Valmont's suppressed letter from the previous chapter. What the reader is left to imagine might be contained in the lines of Valmont's letter to the Présidente is perhaps somewhat comparable to what Stendhal chooses *not* to tell the reader about Julien's last days. As we have seen previously in both in *Julie* and in *Liaisons*, though in different ways, each of the novels we have considered presents the reader with a theoretical escape from the societal constraints and pressures of constant imitation. Somewhat less edifying, as we have discovered, is that each novel also contains within the proposed escape the very thing that simultaneously suggests its ultimate impossibility.[363] Accordingly, the exquisitely *romanesque* conclusion of *Le*

[363] In chapter 1, we saw how the idealized innocence and virtue aspired to by Julie and Saint-Preux are rendered impossible by the ubiquitous influences of worldly imitation, even in the countryside of a small Swiss village. In chapter 2, we became suspicious of

Rouge et le Noir is not without its caveat. Though Julien and Madame de Rênal manage to briefly evade their worldly burdens, their reprieve from the oppressive systems of copying at work all around them is necessarily fleeting; neither of them lives to tell about it. Additionally, in their absence, the legacy of their triumph is left in a precarious position as well, exposed to the continuous churning of the imitative systems they die rejecting. Indeed, Mathilde de La Mole swiftly reappropriates Julien's tragic story and death, claiming his severed head as the central prop in the morbid reenactment of her ancestral fantasies of Boniface de La Mole.[364]

Julien's infamous end at such a young age when his future promised such great things is not so tragic in his eyes as it is in the eyes of those who love him, including

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the words that might have been written in Valmont's suppressed letter to the Présidente, since everything else he writes is intended to manipulate his reader in some way.

[364] Mathilde, intent on making a public spectacle of Julien's death, performs a bizarre ceremony after which thousands of Francs are ostentatiously thrown to those in attendance. She then erects an ornate tomb, marring Julien's favorite natural environment in the mountains (*Rouge* 804-05). In prison, Julien is bothered by Mathilde's showmanship: "Julien se trouvait peu digne de tant de dévouement, à vrai dire il était fatigué d'héroïsme. C'eût été à une tendresse simple, naïve et presque timide, qu'il se fût trouvé sensible, tandis qu'au contraire, il fallait toujours l'idée d'un public et *des autres* à l'âme hautaine de Mathilde. / Au milieu de toutes ses angoisses, de toutes ses craintes pour la vie de cet amant, auquel elle ne voulais pas survivre, Julien sentait qu'elle avait un besoin secret d'étonner le public par l'excès de son amour et la sublimité de ses entreprises" (p. 771).

perhaps, the reader. As he laments his past obsessions and ambitions to Madame de Rênal, Julien credits her with saving him from a life lived without ever knowing real *bonheur*: "Non, je serais mort sans connaître le bonheur, si vous n'étiez venue me voir dans cette prison."[365] As the narrator forewarns their first night together, Julien is not able to recognize or appreciate the potential for *bonheur* that was right in front of him in Verrières: "En un mot, ce qui faisait de Julien un être supérieur fut précisément ce qui l'empêcha de goûter le bonheur qui se plaçait sous ses pas."[366] He finally takes the time in prison to remember and relive it (or more probably, to live it properly for the first time.)

Even at the moment of his death, the few words used to accomplish the task give the reader only a very few clues about the culminating events of the novel: "Jamais cette tête n'avait été aussi poétique qu'au moment où elle allait tomber. Les plus doux moments qu'il avait trouvés jadis dans les bois de Vergy, se peignaient en foule à sa pensée et avec une extrême énergie. Tout se passa simplement, convenablement, et de sa part sans aucune affectation."[367] Julien accomplishes his final act, dying, with dignity and

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[365] More complete citation: "Autrefois, lui disait Julien, quand j'aurais pu être si heureux pendant nos promenades dans les bois de Vergy, une ambition fougueuse entraînait mon âme dans les pays imaginaires. Au lieu de serrer contre mon cœur ce bras charmant qui était si près de mes lèvres, l'avenir m'enlevait à toi ; j'étais aux innombrables combats que j'aurais à soutenir pour bâtir ma fortune colossale… Non, je serais mort sans connaître le bonheur, si vous n'étiez venue me voir dans cette prison" *Rouge* 802.

[366] *Rouge* 426.

[367] *Rouge* 658-9

authenticity, having moved beyond all traces of imitation and affectation, even on this very public occasion for spectacle. The most poetic moment of his life, as well as the one in which his dearest memories are the strongest and clearest in his mind is his *bonheur*, the real "fortune colossale" he has been after all along. Stendhal's mythic *chasse du bonheur* does not lead to an idyllic happily ever after, but to a more vague and volatile space whose occupants can only ever visit for a time, never take up residence indefinitely. However brief and enigmatic the *bonheur*, it nonetheless proves worthy of the chase, without which it would be impossible, or at least incomprehensible. Even after accompanying Julien as he finds his way, like Stendhal, we are largely at a loss for words to describe what he has done. The scholarly impulse to explain is frustrated by Stendhal's own silence in the matter. The "happy few" who are truly sensitive to what is really at stake are unlikely to then attempt to restrict and confine it to scholarly jargon and interpretation. The work of writing this dissertation implies an intention to bring to light some mystery of Stendhal's literary universe that has not yet been satisfactorily explored. Instead I find that my inquiries have put me in the uncomfortable and paradoxical position of affirming that the more "answers" I present, the less I have probably understood about my subject matter. I am thus bound, in a way, to the passive role of pointing to the magical constellation of terms that coalesce so poetically to approximate Stendhalian *bonheur* and allowing it to "speak" for itself in its essential silence. The misfortune of the Stendhal reader or scholar is that even *knowing* every word (à la Julien Sorel with his New Testament) of this author's oeuvre is to no purpose if we cannot at least sense something of what is alluded to in the silence surrounding the meager words. The greatest glory for a true Stendhalian is, I imagine, to be one of the "happy few," but

the presumptuous gesture of claiming membership to this illustrious group is probably the surest proof of one's unworthiness.[368] Indeed, Stendhal himself never ceases questioning his understanding of the people and the world around him. At the beginning of the first chapter of *Souvenirs d'égotisme*, he asks, "Ai-je tiré tout le parti possible pour mon bonheur des positions où le hasard m'a placé pendant les neuf ans que je viens de passer à Paris ? Quel homme suis-je ? Ai-je du bon sens, ai-je du bon sens avec profondeur ?"[369]

In what would seem like a devastating and unbelievable ending for a typical worldly or realist *roman*, the novel in which Julien throws away everything society has led him to believe he desires for the chance at a few moments of *bonheur* concludes in a way that is not only utterly *imprévu*, but also totally original. Had the novel truly ended when Julien thought his story was finished, the readers of 1880, 1900 and beyond might

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[368] In an as yet unpublished article entitled "Happy Reading," Geoffrey Bennington succinctly lays out the reader's predicament: "To the extent that a reader is able to receive, to begin to read this address to the Happy Few, he or she will *ipso facto* be one of the Happy Few. But, . . . nothing in this structure would justify any complacency of an achieved belonging to an established *community* of readers of Stendhal . . . : the "happiness" of the Happy Few is not so much a state as a tension (what Stendhal elsewhere calls the "chasse du bonheur"), an ongoing effort of reading that does not exactly end in any fulfillment at all. I never really know that I am one of the Happy Few, nor that the Happy Few exist, and the Happy Few could never claim to establish themselves (as Stendhalians, for example) without forfeiting the very happiness to which they felt themselves invited" 2010. Unpublished art. Emory U. p. 2.

[369] *Souvenirs* 429.

never have even heard of a writer called Stendhal.[370] While paying homage to the masters of his art who came before him and influenced his craft as well as his characters, Stendhal "copies" the worldly novels he admires so well, imitation combining so seamlessly with innovation, that *Le Rouge et le Noir* emerges as something totally new. Stendhal, on the level of the author, proves himself equal to his characters on the level of the action, doing precisely as Prince Korasoff might have advised him: "Faites toujours le contraire de ce qu'on attend de vous!"[371]

[370] For a few of Stendhal's frequent speculations about future readers, see *Brulard*, pp. 536, 593, 625, 913; The first page of *Souvenirs d'égotisme*, meant to be published ten years after his death, addresses an audience he imagines to be between the ages of ten and twelve as he writes. p. 429.

[371] *Rouge* 599.

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