

TRANSLATING A DANGEROUS WOMAN:

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL
IN LACLOS' LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES (1782) AND ITS
FIRST TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH (1784)

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Abstract

Les Liaisons dangereuses (1782) by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos was a so-called *succès de scandale*. The most important reason of its shocking nature was the character of Madame de Merteuil, a female libertine. Although contemporary reviews of its first English translation, *Dangerous Connections* (1784), denote the shocking nature of the novel, Merteuil was surprisingly absent from their criticism. Therefore, this study aims to discover in what ways this dangerous woman was transformed through translation with an approach which combines a historical perspective and a gender perspective. In order to get a better idea of what linguistic shifts might have occurred in the translation process, first the common translation practices of the eighteenth century were studied. Next, as context is crucial for the reception of translation, a comparison between the roles of women in eighteenth-century Britain and France is made, based on which the corpus of this analysis was compiled. The linguistic shifts which occurred during the translation process were organised according to semantic categories which constituted Merteuil's deviance. The categories contained additions and omissions, or amplification and brevitatis. Omissions were most often used to decrease Merteuil's deviance, while additions had the opposite effect. However, the study was not limited to these common eighteenth-century practices and also contained substitutions, which sometimes caused a disappearing agent effect. The analysis of the linguistic shifts showed an overall trend of decreasing deviance in the translation. Libertinism was decreased most often while pride was increased most often.

Key words: gender, translation techniques, eighteenth century, women, deviance

Table of Contents

Verklaring i.v.m. auteursrecht	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction	1
1. Gender and translation	4
2. Methodology	5
3. Historical framework.....	6
3.1 Prose fiction translation in France and Great Britain in the eighteenth century	6
3.2 Women in the 18 th century.....	9
3.2.1 Britain and France: Similarities and differences	9
3.2.2 France	10
3.2.3 Great Britain	22
3.2.4 Conclusion.....	28
4. Corpus	30
4.1 Volume 1.....	30
10 th letter: seducing Belleruche	30
20 th letter: libertine pact	30
4.2 Volume 2.....	31
81 st letter: autobiography.....	31
85 th letter: seducing Prévau	31
4.3 Volume 3.....	32
113 th letter: end of affair with Belleruche	32
4.4 Volume 4.....	32
127 th letter: power struggle part 1	32
134 th letter: power struggle part 2	32
141 st letter: power struggle part 3.....	33
152 nd letter: power struggle part 4.....	33
5. Analysis.....	34
5.1 Aspects of Madame de Merteuil's deviance.....	34
5.2 Comparative study	37
5.2.1 Power.....	37
5.2.2 Intelligence	43
5.2.3 Libertinism	56

5.2.4	Pride.....	60
5.2.5	Exposing society, social criticism and taboo topics	68
5.2.6	Other aspects of deviance	73
	Conclusion.....	75
	Works cited.....	77
	Appendix	83
	10 th letter	83
	Les Liaisons dangereuses	83
	Dangerous Connections.....	86
	20 th letter	90
	Les Liaisons dangereuses	90
	Dangerous Connections.....	92
	81 st letter	93
	Les Liaisons dangereuses	93
	Dangerous Connections.....	102
	85 th letter	111
	Les Liaisons dangereuses	111
	Dangerous Connections.....	119
	113 th letter	127
	Les Liaisons dangereuses	127
	Dangerous Connections.....	131
	127 th letter	136
	Les Liaisons dangereuses	136
	Dangerous Connections.....	137
	134 th letter	139
	Les Liaisons dangereuses	139
	Dangerous Connections.....	141
	141 st letter	144
	Les Liaisons dangereuses	144
	Dangerous Connections.....	146
	152 nd letter.....	149
	Les Liaisons dangereuses	149
	Dangerous Connections.....	151

(27154 words)

Introduction

Les Liaisons dangereuses, ou Lettres recueillies dans une société et publiées pour l'instruction de quelques autres (1782) by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos (1741-1803) is a four-volume epistolary novel which relates the power struggle between two libertines and their attempts to conquer as many victims as possible. Although the novel was an enormous success, neither its subject nor its form was innovative. In fact, the subject of libertinism had already been consolidated as a typically masculine literary tradition in 1740 with Crébillon fils' *Le Sopha*. Moreover, the epistolary form was the most practiced genre between 1730 and 1790, especially by women (Darcos, 1992). As a result, Laclos' chef d'œuvre was influenced by sentimental epistolary novels such as Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni's *Lettres de Mistress Fanni Butlerd* (1757) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) (Sol, 2002). What makes *Les Liaisons dangereuses* unique, then, is its combination of the masculine libertine tradition with the feminine epistolary tradition, which provided a detailed look into the minds of its libertine protagonists. Nevertheless, this only accounts for part of its success.

In fact, much of the novel's popularity stemmed from its shock value: it was a so-called *succès de scandale*. Readers were particularly shocked by the character of the Marquise de Merteuil, as she defied many traditional gender roles. Indeed, as a female libertine, she "stands apart" in "the context of eighteenth-century French fiction, where woman is generally represented as a victim and is fated to be the prey of a male character" (Debaisieux, 1987, p. 461). She is an autodidact, and as Laclos observed in his essays *De l'éducation des femmes* (1783), a learned woman in eighteenth-century France would have been "très malheureuse en tenant à sa place et très dangereuse si elle tentait d'en sortir" (1991, p. 48). Merteuil, then, illustrates the second scenario. She strays so far from the place society has designated for her that she becomes a threat to it. Indeed, fears that this dangerous woman would corrupt the female readership of *Les liaisons dangereuses* were so high that in 1824 the novel was banned in France.

During the Enlightenment, there was a lively cross-cultural exchange of ideas and literary products, especially between Great-Britain and France (McMurrin, 2010). As a result, only two years after the publication of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, its first English translation emerged on the other side of the Channel. *Dangerous Connections: or Letters collected in a society and published for the instruction of other societies* (1784) was translated anonymously

and published by Thomas Hookham for his circulating library in London. The *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English* (2000) describes the translation as a “literal” one that is “accurate and complete” (p. 789).

At first glance, this seems to be confirmed in contemporary reviews of the translation, which suggest that the British readers of the novel were just as shocked as the French. *The Critical Review* (1783) calls *Dangerous connections* “delusive and dangerous in a great degree” (“Review”, p. 473), an idea repeated by *The Monthly Review* (1785): “the story . . . is almost too diabolical to be realized” (“Review”, p. 149). What is striking, however, is that none of the two journals blame Madame de Mertueil for the novel’s immorality. The former does not even mention her, while the latter only refers to her in relation to Valmont, who is foregrounded: “In a series of letters addressed to *a female confidante* [emphasis added], . . . this abandoned libertine . . . delineates every step of his progress in this infamous intrigue” (“Review”, 1785, p. 149). It seems unlikely that the journals censored Merteuil’s character in order to protect their readership, as by reviewing the novel, they were attracting readers to it. Instead, it seems plausible that Merteuil’s character was significantly transformed in the translation process, and thus, that *Dangerous connections* is not mere copy of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.

In fact, since the cultural turn in translation studies, many scholars have argued that there is no such thing as a literal translation, as it “always takes place in a continuum, never in a void, and there are all kinds of textual and extratextual constraints upon the translator” (Bassnett, 1998, p. 123). Indeed, the translator has agency over the text and makes choices that cause shifts during the translation process. Sometimes these shifts are purely linguistic, for example because there is no equivalent word in the target language. In the case of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, there is a lot of “verbal ambiguity in Laclos’ style” which makes “the text challenging to translate” (Debaisieux, 1987, p. 462) and may cause (involuntary) shifts. Other times, the translator’s choices are influenced by factors outside of the text. For example, the translator might adapt the text to the expectations of the publisher and target audience. Moreover, like every human being, the translator has personal preconceptions and ideologies, which may seep through to the target text. Lastly, he is influenced by the cultural conceptions of translation and authorship, which determine how faithful he chooses to be to the source text and how visible he is in the target text.

The purpose of this paper is to find out how translation affects questions of gender. More specifically, I investigate *if* the character of Madame de Merteuil, who was considered a dangerous woman in eighteenth-century France, is represented differently in the translation, and if so, *in what ways* – Is she less norm defeating or more? What aspects of her gender deviance were affected by the translation process? Moreover, I try to discover *the causes* of these differences: what linguistic shifts are at the root of them? Do cultural differences influence the perception of this character? I will, however, not pay any attention to *why* the translator might have made these changes. After all, it is impossible to know his ideologies and motivations, since he remained anonymous and did not write any preface disclosing his translation strategies.

The first chapter provides a brief overview of the academic field of translation and gender and explains where this study is situated in it. In chapter 2, I describe my methodological approach before I begin my research. The third chapter provides a historical framework and is split into two sections. The first section explains the cultural conceptions of translation and authorship in eighteenth-century Britain and France, and gives an overview of the most common translation practices in those times. The second section investigates the roles of women in eighteenth-century Britain and France, and compares and contrasts them. In chapter 4, the composition of my corpus is justified and a brief summary of the selected letters is given. Chapter 5, then, is reserved for my comparative analysis of the two texts. In the first section, I justify and explain the categories according to which I organised the linguistic shifts that occurred in the translation process. The second section is reserved for the analysis itself. In the final chapter, I draw conclusions from my findings and answer my research questions.

1. Gender and translation

In *Gender in translation: Cultural identity and the politics of transmission* (2003), Sherry Simon argues that academic field of gender in translation originated in the late 1980s, under the influence of the cultural turn in translation studies and the rise of feminism in the 60s and 70s. Before this turn, the emphasis of translation studies was on the manner in which one should translate, with questions such as: “what is an accurate translation?” After, however, researchers were more concerned with describing the translation process and the influence culture had on it, translation was considered to be a “process of mediation which does not stand above ideology but works through it” (Simon, 2003, p. 7).

This cultural turn in translation paved the way for translation studies and feminism to intersect, with the most important question being: “how are social, sexual and historical differences expressed in language and how can these differences be transferred across languages?” (Simon, 2003, p. 8). In the 90s, many scholars that studied the matter of gender in translation focused on developing new translation theories that were void of sexism. Another area of interest was the translation of older works by women, which had long been excluded from the literary canon. Lastly, works translated by women was a major subject of gender in translation studies.

Translation studies have evolved together with gender studies: their subject matter was expanded along with the definition of gender. The exclusive focus on women in feminist translation studies shifted to include LGBTQ+-related subjects as well. Moreover, works written and translated by men were finally deemed worthy of studying as well, and comparative studies became more numerous than theoretical approaches. This dissertation, then, follows the contemporary path of gender in translation studies, in the sense that it is a comparative study that focuses on a work by a man, and possibly by a male translator.

However, since translation in gender is a relatively new academic field, the “study of gender representation and ideology in translation appears to be in its infancy” (Feral, 2009, p. 12). As a result, the domain is an amalgam of individual comparative studies and there is a lack of conceptual frameworks that cover the broad subject of gender in translation.

2. Methodology

My analysis of Merteuil's transformation through translation rests on a combination of two perspectives, which are complementary and also overlap. On the one hand, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* was written and translated in the eighteenth century, which calls for a historical perspective. Indeed, a study of the most common cross-Channel translation practices in the eighteenth century was the starting point of my analysis, in that it gave an indication of what linguistic shifts might have occurred during the translation process.

However, as my research goal was to discover the shifts that impacted Merteuil's gender deviance, a second perspective in addition to the historical one was in order: a gender perspective. As stated in chapter 2, there is a lack of theoretical frameworks that might serve as a foundation for comparative analyses. As a result, instead of first looking for specific linguistic shifts that caused semantic shifts, I started with the semantic layer.

The first step of the research process was a comparative analysis of women's roles in eighteenth century Britain and France - a meeting point of the historical and gender perspectives. This helped me understand what aspects of Merteuil's character and behaviour might have been shocking and deviant to French and British readers, and gave me a general idea to base my corpus on. Next, in my comparative analysis, I looked for the instances in which these aspects of deviance shifted, and investigated the linguistic shifts behind them. During this process, special attention was paid to the translation practices which were commonly used in the eighteenth century. However, my analysis was not limited to them, as the semantic layer was the most important one to analyse Merteuil's deviance. Lastly, I organised the detected semantic shifts into categories of deviance that made it easier to understand in what direction the shifts occurred, and explained what linguistic shifts lied at the root of them.

3. Historical framework

3.1 Prose fiction translation in France and Great Britain in the eighteenth century

In *The Spread of Novels* (2010), Mary Helen McMurrin argues that eighteenth-century prose fiction translation can be situated “at the juncture of premodern and modern translation” (p. 7). Indeed, it shared characteristics of both translation of ancient texts in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and translation as national literary exchange in the nineteenth century. Moreover, with the emergence of the novel form, translators and novelists shared common goals.

Scholars often categorise eighteenth-century translations as domesticated. Venuti (1998) defines domestication as “an adherence to domestic literary canons” (p. 241), as opposed to foreignization, which “entails choosing and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language” (p. 242). However, McMurrin argues that the distinction between the terms domestication and foreignization does not obtain for this period. First of all, novels were usually published anonymously and translators’ names were rarely mentioned (2010, p. 7). As a result, it was often unclear which version of the text was the original and which was the translation. Not only did this make it hard for eighteenth-century readers to identify the origins of a book and associate it with a specific nation, it seemed that most readers did not care (2010, p. 51). Second, McMurrin points out that to label a translation as domesticated is to “anachronistically impose culture on eighteenth-century fiction translation” as the notion of a nation with one corresponding culture, as we know it today, did not yet exist (2010, p. 6). Instead, she claims that the eighteenth-century nation was an amalgam of languages and communities who “did not yet clearly express a sense of exclusive attachment to the nation over other networks of loyalties such as religion or locality” (2002, p. 61). Moreover, centuries of cross-channel interaction meant there was no clear-cut distinction between the British and French cultures and languages. This was reflected on the literary market, since both in England and France foreign novels were almost as popular as national ones (2010, p. 46).

However, by the middle of the eighteenth century, nationalism gained more ground.

McMurrin identifies the Seven Years’ War in particular as a cause for renewed enmity between France and Britain, which coincided with a revival of patriotism and an aversion

towards cultural contact (2010, p. 103). As novels were increasingly considered as nationally and culturally representative, the translation market transformed (2010, p. 20). French translators complained of the disorderliness of English novels, while the English translators altered the lightness of the French writing style (2010, p. 4). In England, French fiction was perceived to be worldly, immoral and dangerous, a threat which could lead to national degradation (2002, p. 65). As the modern notion of nation was forming, translators became more aware of the translation obstacles caused by different languages and cultures (2010, p. 104). They often reflected on these obstacles and motivated their choices in prefaces and footnotes. Nevertheless, this did not stop novels from moving across the Channel as the linguistic and cultural obstacles could easily be traversed (2010, p. 114). In sum, McMurrin defends both the universalism and the particularity of eighteenth-century English and French fiction, which represents the individual nations but also traverses them (2010, p. 21).

Eighteenth-century translation was still very much influenced by premodern translation. In the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, Latin and Greek were often the only written languages taught to students (McMurrin, 2010, p. 14). Translation was crucial for them in order to memorize vocabulary and understand the grammar and syntax of these dead languages. Yet translation was not only practised by students: writers also resorted to translation as a means of *imitatio*, i.e. the “conscious use of features and characteristics of earlier works to acknowledge indebtedness to past writers” (Fronza, 2013, p. 3416). In the seventeenth century, however, *imitatio* gradually transformed into imitation, a freer form of translation of the ancient works in which ancient cultural elements were modernised. According to McMurrin, these libertine translators – known as the *belles infidèles* in France – “spoke of keeping the spirit of the original rather than following the word, and saw themselves as both authors of their own translation and bearers of the authorial essence of the original” (2010, p. 17). In the early modern period the focus shifted from Latin and Greek to the vernaculars, but translation continued to be crucial for language acquisition. The result, McMurrin argues, was a scene of vernacular bilinguals whose translation practices varied individually and even within one and the same text (2010, p. 14). However, their translations did have shared characteristics as a result of their education in rhetoric (2000, p. 88). The source text was not regarded as an “integral and authoritative whole” (McMurrin, 2010, p. 77), but as a collection of so-called ‘*loci*’: places or occasions for manipulation (2000, p. 92). As a result, eighteenth-century translations contained many infidelities with regard to the source text.

The most commonly used translation practices of the eighteenth century stemmed from two rhetorical techniques: *amplificatio* and *brevitas*. McMurrin describes *amplificatio* as “the addition of material not found in the source text” (2010, p.76), but the concept was quite open and vague, defined in different ways by different rhetorical manuals. In fact, *amplificatio* was a large discursive category, which ranged from extreme additions such as entire chapters to more subtle rhetorical figures of expansion, such as hyperboles or explicitations (2010, p. 76). However, many of the regularly used figures in argumentative texts (e.g. comparison, antithesis, division and *paralepsis*) were seldom employed in translation (2000, p. 94). The second rhetorical technique that eighteenth-century translators commonly used was *brevitas*, or omission. This shows that translators “worked with editorial control, identifying unnecessary and extraneous discourse in the narrative and removing it” (McMurrin, 2000, p. 90). Sometimes these omissions only concerned a few words, phrases, or sentences. Sometimes translators interfered with the source text more drastically, omitting repetitions of the same ideas, summarising entire passages and reducing the number of characters and events (2000, p. 91).

Amplificatio and *brevitas* worked together in complementary ways; by reducing unimportant or trivial parts, the amplified scenes were emphasised even more and the text was vivified (McMurrin, 2000, p. 89). In fact, *vividness* or *energeia* was a rhetorical category which included *amplificatio*. It had two main subcategories: *vivid description* and *vivid characterization* (2000, p. 94). One way to bring characters to life was by means of a figure called *prosopopoeia* or *ethopoeia*, i.e. giving speech to a character in order “to identify milieu or motivations, or explicate the character’s internal state” (2000, p. 94). Although vivifying the narrative was originally a purpose in itself, by the mid-eighteenth century translators resorted to these tropes in order to move the reader (2000, p. 96). They wanted to create ‘interest’: a sympathetic attachment to the story, “expressed in terms of passion and sentiment” (2000, p. 91). In fact, translators aligned themselves with novelists in their pursuit of eliciting the interest of the reader as the novel form was emerging with its sentimental and realist modes.

3.2 Women in the 18th century

In order to determine the differences between the French and the British Marquise de Merteuil, a purely linguistic approach does not suffice. For example, let us suppose that the translator added an element to the target text which emphasises Merteuil's education. This linguistic shift would not have had any influence on the perception of Merteuil's character in the target culture if British women were generally more educated than French women. Therefore, it is crucial to first investigate the roles of women in eighteenth-century Britain and France.

3.2.1 Britain and France: Similarities and differences

In the eighteenth century, there was a lot of cross-Channel interaction between Great Britain and France. In fact, the literary exchange between these two countries was enormous during the Enlightenment. Along with philosophical theories, cultural conceptions were transmitted, resulting in a "mutual admiration" between Britain and France (McMurrin, 2010, p. 104). However, the interaction between these countries was not always peaceful. The War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1714) and the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) illustrate the ongoing hostility between Britain and France as well as their aversion to each other (McMurrin, 2010). Indeed, if there were a lot of parallels between both societies, they were also fundamentally different on many levels. After all, Britain and France had different historical backgrounds and politico-religious contexts.

Up to 1789, France was ruled by absolutist monarchs such as Louis XIV, who "derived their authority from God and could not therefore be held accountable for their actions by any earthly authority such as parliament" ("Divine right", 2017, para. 1). Indeed, the French monarchy and the established order were closely tied to Catholicism. In fact, in 1685 the revocation of the Edict of Nantes illegalised all other religions, resulting in the exile of many Huguenots. The Catholic Church, represented by theologians of the Sorbonne, and the monarchy, represented by royal censors, both exercised censorship until the collapse of the *ancien régime* (Jones, 2017). Nevertheless, it was this oppressive environment that gave rise to many influential enlightened ideas, which eventually became so widespread that they contributed to the French Revolution.

In the eighteenth century, Great Britain had already freed itself from absolutism. In 1689, the Bill of Rights limited the monarch's power and reaffirmed parliamentary sovereignty, turning Britain into a parliamentary monarchy ("Introduction", 2012). After the religious strife of the

seventeenth century, the eighteenth century was relatively peaceful and stable. Like in France, the monarchy had close links to the Church. Unlike in France, however, the king did not have to answer to the pope. He was head of his own, Protestant Church: the Church of England. The Toleration Act (1689) granted freedom of worship to dissenters as long as they supported the monarchy (“Introduction”, 2012). In general, the British were sceptical towards dogmatism, be it “puritan enthusiasm, papal infallibility, [or] the divine right of kings” (“Introduction”, 2012, p. 2182). If censorship flourished in eighteenth-century France, Britain had already abolished its last censorship act in 1695 (Jooken & Rooryck, 2011).

In sum, Britain was “considered the most liberal nation of the modern age” (Jooken & Rooryck, 2011, p. 239), while absolutist, Catholic France was intolerant and oppressive. However, this does not necessarily mean that women were granted more freedom in Britain. Moreover, the French Revolution and its build-up provided an exceptional context in which the old established roles and hierarchies were radically challenged. In order to determine the differences between British and French women in the eighteenth century, a closer examination of the societies in which they lived and the gender roles to which they had to conform is called for.

3.2.2 France

In this chapter, I examine women’s roles in eighteenth-century France, based on the detailed analysis in Godineau’s *Les femmes dans la France moderne: XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle* (2015). I focus on important aspects of women’s lives that determined their agency and empowerment, i.e. education (3.2.2.1), legal and marital status (3.2.2.3), political power (3.2.2.4), religion and chastity (3.2.2.5) and public appearances (3.2.2.6). A separate section (3.2.2.7) is dedicated to the French Revolution, as it provided an extraordinary political and social climate in which women could step outside of their traditional roles and gain more power.

3.2.2.1 Introduction: Enlightenment or tradition?

The Enlightenment is traditionally situated from the second half of the seventeenth century until the late eighteenth century, culminating in Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781). Through reason and experience, enlightened philosophers tried to find universal laws, applying to everyone (p. 216). However, the age of Enlightenment was not all but reason and enlightened theories were not entirely free of contradictions. After all, the philosophers were influenced by their own particular socio-cultural context and traditions.

Most enlightened philosophers did not consider women to be inferior to men, but many of them did not believe in equality between the sexes either (p. 216). In fact, it was commonly believed that Nature had created two complementary sexes which were both physically and intellectually different from each other. The physician Pierre Roussel claimed that women were defined by their uterus, influencing their moral and physical capacities, while men were defined by reason. Since women's bodies were adapted to bear children, their sole purpose in life was motherhood. Piety, tenderness and compassion were deemed inherently female traits, making women perfect homemakers (p. 219). Because of these natural differences, many philosophers believed that women's education had to be different from men's. Laclos, however, was one of few who believed a radical change was necessary to relieve women from their inferior position. In *De l'éducation des femmes* (1783), he urges women to start a revolution in order to escape their state of 'slavery' and gain access to a proper education (p. 258).

Although these enlightened philosophers did sometimes reach the masses – for example their influential ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity, which played a pivotal role in the French Revolution – there is no direct relationship between their theories and the social realities of French society. It is thus necessary to take a closer look at the actual lives of French women in the eighteenth century.

3.2.2.2 Education

In eighteenth-century France, the absolutist monarchy demanded the maintenance of the established order. Everyone had to act according to their particular place and role in society (p. 176). Education was organised according to this principle: it catered to the needs of the different social classes and prepared them for whatever task they had to carry out in later life. As women and men had different roles in society, education was also separated by sex.

The Catholic Church had an impact on almost every aspect of French society until 1789, and education was not an exception to this rule. In eighteenth-century France, there were three main types of schools for girls. The first type were free, charitable schools set up by religious institutions (p. 180). Most of their pupils belonged to the skilled working class, as the most deprived children had to work and did not have time for an education. The second type were primary girls' schools led by schoolmistresses, who charged tuition. These schools were authorised by the Church, which was against mixed-sex education (p. 177). Thirdly, girls

could also be educated in convents, which were fee-paying boarding schools (p. 181). Traditionally, these girls were initiated to the religious lifestyle with the intention of becoming a nun later in life. In the eighteenth century, however, this was no longer the rule, with more and more girls re-entering society after their education to get married. Even if these were the most privileged girls, their education was the most restricted of all. They did not have any contact with the outside world, which kept them innocent and naïve. Aristocratic girls and noble girls were even sent to different convents, as mixture of social classes was out of the question. All three types of schools, however, were more prevalent in the city than in the countryside and boys' education was still preferred over girls' education if there were financial restrictions (p. 180).

The different types of schools taught different subjects according to their usefulness in the later lives of the girls. All girls were taught how to read, write, and count. They were all initiated into household work, except for the best-off girls, who were taught how to run a household with servants and how to manage their fortune (pp. 182;186). In the charitable schools, girls had classes in tapestry, sewing, etc.; useful skills for moving up the social ladder. The paying schools often focused on mathematics, as a lot of girls came from merchant families. In convents, girls did not learn any useful skill except for needlework, as idleness was considered dangerous (p. 186). The main purpose was to prepare them for their duty as an obliging Christian mother and wife. They had drawing, music, singing and dancing classes; subjects considered to make the girls more agreeable. Unlike their brothers, high class girls were not allowed to go to university, nor engage in any activity to develop their minds. At every level, the main purpose of girls' education was making good Christians out of them (p. 187). Modesty, submission, silence and obedience were highly emphasised qualities which girls had to display in their conduct, gestures, speech and clothing (p. 184).

It should be noted, however, that a new type of school emerged in the late eighteenth century: private secular boarding schools, modelled on the English equivalent (p. 253). They were mainly attended by girls from enlightened bourgeois families. In those circles, it was also common to hire private teachers, in which case they received an excellent education. Nevertheless, these girls' education did not serve any practical purpose and they were not allowed to display their knowledge in public (p. 255).

3.2.2.3 *Legal and marital status*

In the *ancien régime*, women's identity depended on their male counterparts, as they were under the legal control of their father or husband (p. 28). While men's profession appeared in the parochial registers, women were simply mentioned as 'wife of', 'daughter of' or 'widow of' (p. 75). The dominant idea was that women were incapable of making their own decisions. In fact, it was believed that a girl should either have a husband or walls to protect herself; she was destined to be either a wife and a mother or a nun (pp. 149; 29).

1) Marriage

Most of the eighteenth-century French women chose to marry. On average, they were 26-27 years old (p. 38). However, aristocratic women tended to get married a lot sooner. Love was slowly being regarded as an essential component to a successful marriage under the influence of enlightened theories that emphasised individualism, and arranged marriages were starting to become outdated (pp. 51; 238). However, they were still a common practice among the higher classes, as they had to marry someone from the same rank in order to keep their status, titles, and wealth. Indeed, women usually could not inherit anything from their fathers. In most cases, the eldest son inherited a large part, the younger brothers inherited the rest and the daughters received a dowry upon marriage, which consisted of goods and/or money (p. 29).

The most important duty of married women was to produce offspring to ensure legal heirs for their husbands. Bourgeois women typically remained in the passive, domestic sphere after marriage, while the upper and lower class did not (p. 224). Aristocratic women often gave their children to wet nurses in order to remain healthy and carry on with their normal lives, a common practice which was nevertheless contested in the eighteenth century. Lower class women simply could not afford to stay at home: they had to work and do their part to put food on the table.

Although marriage was advantageous for financial reasons, it did not offer women (judicial) freedom, quite the opposite (p. 32). Upon marriage, women adopted their husband's name, place of residence and social status (noble or bourgeois) (p. 30). For every civil act, a woman had to ask her husband for permission. She was expected to obey him at any time. This male dominance was not only beneficial to the man from an individual point of view; French society expected it as well. If men failed to exert enough authority over their wives, they were sometimes publicly embarrassed (p. 57). As a result, domestic violence was still very

prevalent in eighteenth-century France, with many men claiming they had the right to beat their wives in order to correct them (p. 242).

Nevertheless, women's powerlessness was not absolute. For example, they could have their husband locked up for bad behaviour, but this was only an option for wealthy women, since it meant they could no longer depend on their husband's income (p. 35). Furthermore, in most places, community property was an established custom (p. 31). However, this was considered as a right that could be taken away from women, and they could not sell the property, even if it came from their side of the family. In the urban lower classes, the couple was considered to be a unit of workers and women were even given the task to manage the family income (p. 49).

2) Widowhood

Widowhood was an advantageous legal status, since it offered women judicial power and independence (p. 32). Only rich women were able to stay unmarried, however, as they could financially support themselves (p. 72). The choice of a second husband was a widow's own choice entirely, since she no longer had to comply with the will of her father (p. 28). Although widows could not inherit anything – to avoid the property from coming into the hands of their new husbands – they were entitled to a dowry; a usufruct on part of their husbands' property. Hence, they were guaranteed an income without being granted ownership of the property (p. 33). Married women were thus protected quite well in case of their husbands' deaths, which was very common in a society with a high mortality rate (p. 38).

3) Divorce

Although divorce was prohibited in France, but a marriage could be annulled in case of non-consummation or impotence (pp. 41; 53). Moreover, French legislation allowed two forms of separation: the separation of goods and of bodies. The former entailed that both parties regained ownership over their own goods – as opposed to community property. The latter entailed that both parties were no longer obligated to live together, which coincided with the separation of goods in most cases. However, this should not be confused with divorce, since none of the parties were allowed to remarry. Moreover, separation was only possible in case of domestic violence, adultery or financial misconduct of the husband. In practice, only the rich resorted to this, either to save the honour of the family or to keep the property in the woman's family.

4) Single and abandoned mothers

Abandoned women were in the most hopeless position, especially if they had children. Married mothers could not remarry as their husbands were still alive, and they did not receive any financial help from their husbands who had left them (pp. 37; 72). Unmarried mothers had a difficult time as well. In the *ancien régime*, whoever had created the child was also obligated to feed it. However, if the father refused to recognise the child, the mother had to appeal to the authorities for financial aid and declare that she was not to blame for the child; she had either been raped or deceived by false promises of marriage from the father (p. 246). However, libertine seducers were more frequently believed than their victims. These men often belonged to the higher classes, and unsurprisingly, servant girls were an easy prey for them. They often fired pregnant servants in order to maintain a good reputation – permitting them to stay was seen as an unofficial recognition of the child. Without the support of their families, these girls were guaranteed to be miserable and poor for the rest of their lives.

5) Celibacy

Finally, celibacy was not desirable either (p. 79). Most celibate women were young girls who had to work in order to constitute a dowry and older, poor women who had never had the opportunity to marry. Since they had few options to sustain themselves financially, they often ended up in prostitution (p. 70). Some women were celibate for religious reasons. They usually belonged to aristocratic families, since the dowry was often reserved for the eldest daughter while the other girls had to enter the convent (p. 71).

3.2.2.4 Political power

1) Lower-class women

Lower-class women were often key components in mass uprisings, such as the so-called ‘bread riots’, and the riots against feudalism. They initiated popular revolts by calling people in the streets and inciting them to follow them to join the rebellion (p. 111). They humiliated law enforcement officers and people who refused to participate, so that the enemy no longer seemed very threatening (p. 113). During these uprisings, they often brought their children along with them and showed their naked breasts in public, a clever way to use their roles as mothers as a justification for the riots. Society wanted them to bring up children, but they were too poor and malnourished to do their jobs properly. Moreover women used the stereotype of the fragile woman to their advantage, as the authorities were much less likely to

shoot the women and children and nip these uprisings in the bud. This allowed the crowd to grow bigger and stronger (p. 112). Once the women had gathered the men, they usually retreated into the background and did not participate in the violence.

Nevertheless, lower-class women simply reacted to what was happening already, but they did not have a say in politics. In fact, eighteenth-century France was not very tolerant towards politically engaged women. Women did not have any direct influence in politics as they could not hold seats in public office and they were excluded from almost all political structures (p. 116). There was no room for women in the royal administration, judicial institutions, city councils or the Estates-General.

2) Higher-class women

Nevertheless, some higher-class women were able to assume political roles, either in the court or in the cities. Court politics were still very intimate and personal in those days, and women could sometimes directly influence them. For example, in times of political disorder, they used their charms to increase the political power of their brothers, fathers, etc. (p. 130).

Indeed, they always acted for the benefit of their male peers; France was still a society where men ruled and held the power (p. 126). In addition, they were exchanged in arranged marriages in order to establish alliances, strengthen ties or acquire political favours. They were mere pawns in the diplomatic game, powerful political tools in the hands of their fathers. Moreover, women's political power had increasingly diminished since Louis XIV's reign (p. 228). Their main function was to boost the prestige of the French court internationally and to popularise its rules of conduct and moral values (p. 124).

Outside of the royal court, aristocratic women were often in charge of the property when their husbands were absent, and in exceptional cases they even led the defence against enemies (p. 131). While these women got involved in conflict, it was only in a mediating capacity. They acted from their homes and were never in the middle of the action and violence, while their husbands actively fought in battle far away (p. 133). In this respect, aristocratic women did not transgress the traditional gender roles all that much.

3) The queen

Unlike in Britain, in France the queen could not inherit the crown (p. 116). This was justified by the popular belief that women were naturally incapable to govern a country and organise the defence of a nation in the face of a threat. She used to hold a seat in the royal council, but

in the eighteenth century this was no longer accepted by the general public (p. 228). The queen was more and more pushed to the background, since absolutist monarchs such as Louis XIV wanted all emphasis to be on the king (p. 120). The main purpose of the queen was to produce rightful heirs to the king (p. 117). She represented the grandeur of the monarchy without possessing any power herself. (p. 228).

However, some queens exerted political power as a regent when the king was still a minor. Nevertheless, this power should not be exaggerated, since the task of a regent was to ensure the link between father and son without making any major political changes, until the king came of age. Moreover, the regent was often criticised with claims that women should be banned from politics because they were hungry for power and impoverishing the state with big unnecessary expenses (p. 222). The general public believed the queen did not act for the good of the state, but in favour of her own private interests, which was the cause of all the country's troubles (p. 229).

3.2.2.5 Religion and chastity

1) Catholicism and Protestantism

In eighteenth-century France, the Catholic Church had reserved very few roles for women (p. 138). They were excluded from all powerful positions: women could not become priests, bishops etc. Moreover, it was believed that women should not read the Bible (p. 136). In any case, they were unable to do so because they were not taught Latin in school. In sum, French society expected women to be pious, but they had to slavishly accept the Holy Scriptures and follow their male religious leaders.

Unsurprisingly, many women were attracted to Protestantism, since it allowed men and women alike to have direct access to the sacred texts through translations in vernacular languages (p. 139). While this was in any case a positive improvement, it did not entail a complete overturn of traditional roles. Religious hierarchies remained in place and the role of women as modest wives and mothers was emphasised (p. 143). With the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), however, all Protestants were systematically oppressed and persecuted, leaving women with few other options than to comply with the ideals and roles Catholicism had reserved for them.

2) Chastity and libertinage

In the eighteenth century as well as the preceding centuries, the Catholic Church put a lot of effort in moralising the people of France (p. 14). The encouragement of the female roles of wife and mother went hand in hand with the promotion of chastity (p. 39). Sexual activity was linked to sin; it was only acceptable for procreation (p. 53). As a result, French society became more and more prude (p. 36). When scientists in the eighteenth century discovered women did not have to orgasm in order to conceive, female lust and pleasure were increasingly condemned (p. 55). Women were considered to be sexually passive, a trait that was linked to other typically feminine characteristics: modesty, obedience, silence, ignorance, submission, intuition, etc. (pp. 89, 103, 162).

In the seventeenth century, the power of the Catholic Church, its dogmas and its excessive emphasis on chastity were questioned by sceptics who wanted spiritual freedom (“Libertinage”). They were called libertines by the Jesuit priest Garasse. These libertines criticised the religious, moral and sexual norms of the time and wrote poems and songs that were deliberately scandalous. Although historians have made a distinction between *libertinage d’esprit* (i.e. freethinking) and *libertinage de moeurs* (i.e. sexual promiscuity), the two often occurred together. However, in the eighteenth century, *libertinage d’esprit* was grouped under enlightened thinking, while the word libertinage came to denote *libertinage de moeurs*. During the Régence (1715-1723), libertinism became a way of life that revolved around seduction and sexual escapades.

The Cambridge dictionary defines ‘libertine’ as “a person, *usually a man* [emphasis added], who lives in a way that is not moral, having sexual relationships with many people” (“Libertine”). Indeed, libertinism was a lifestyle reserved for men (Turekova, 2007). French high society pretended to condemn promiscuous men, yet tolerated their behaviour and even secretly praised it. In fact, for men libertinism was a way to build up their reputation and increase their popularity. The same cannot be said for women, as there was a sexual double standard. Women were deemed to be naturally faithful and chaste, so they were judged very harshly if they had sexual liaisons. If they wanted to avoid social ruin, they had to hide behind a mask of prudery and take extreme precautions in order not to be exposed as a libertine.

3.2.2.6 *Public appearance*

1) Working women

In the *ancien régime*, the public and private spheres were not as clearly separated as they would be later on (Godineau, 2015, p. 74). In fact, by the second half of the eighteenth century, almost all lower-class women – who represented a large part of the population – worked in order to survive, often in the family business. Their large number led to the generalisation and the diversification of paid work by women (p. 86). Sometimes, farmers' wives took over the small agricultural exploitations of their husbands after they died. Similarly, bourgeois widows often led international businesses with their sons (p.80).

In general, women earned half the wage of men because they were unskilled and their work was not highly valued (p. 98). Attempts to provide better training for girls were criticised and thwarted by men, who were afraid to lose their jobs or earn less themselves (p. 96). In any case, female workers were essential to the French economy (p. 99). They were not all exploited victims who worked out of necessity, although their profession was highly dependent on their social rank, their age, their marital status and their general stage in life.

2) Social life

Outside of their jobs, most women had a social life, be it of an informal nature (p. 100). The streets were an important meeting place where they socialised, even with men. Women played an important role in society as they carried out social surveillance and passed on information (p. 104). They also attended mixed parties, dances, processions etc. However, in a formal context, there was no more place reserved for women, who were absent from most organised instances of power that directed 'high' culture, such as academies and masonic lodges (p. 114).

However, it should be noted that (literary) salons were mixed. In fact, they were often held by women were often held by women, who invited important writers, philosophers and artists. Their task was to guide the men, encourage or criticise their work and help them structure their thoughts (p. 261). They were important instigators of enlightened ideas and their salons helped to diffuse revolutionary thoughts (p. 260). Nevertheless, the *salonnières* did not transgress gender boundaries or distinctions of rank and fortune (p. 262).

3.2.2.7 The French Revolution

1) Introduction

The French Revolution marks a profound break with the past. For several years, the French lived in an in-between state in which events were unfolding at a rapid pace (p. 273). In 1789, the absolutist monarchy became constitutional, judicial privileges of the rich were abolished, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was passed, and sovereignty was vested in the Nation, which consisted of citizens who were all equal before the law. However, not all of the changes these events brought about were permanent. Moreover, there was a tension between theory and practice of the newly acquired rights (p. 225). Nevertheless, the years between the French Revolution, its build-up and the founding of the French Republic in 1792 did constitute an exceptional stage in which women assumed new roles and could benefit from new opportunities.

2) Traditional roles and new roles

During the revolutionary years, the roles of women in society were adapted to the new political context. As mothers, it was their responsibility to teach their children the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. Women were still important for social surveillance: they reported any suspicious behaviour to the authorities, as the revolutionaries were afraid of conspiracies against the Republic (p. 296). Like before the revolution, lower-class women initiated revolts by inciting the masses to join them. As they were in charge of cooking and shopping, the so-called 'bread riots' were often exclusively feminine. But women stepped outside their traditional roles as well. During the French Revolution, they massively appeared on the political scene, demanding attention for the first time in history (p. 274). Higher-class women assisted meetings of the National Assembly and the National Convention. They were often more numerous than the male spectators and known to disturb the meetings (p. 278; 300).

Some revolts were organised by political entities, which represented the people but excluded women. As a result, women founded their own political clubs (p. 281). These women's clubs did not only carry out traditionally female charitable tasks, such as collecting clothing items and guns to donate to the army, they also revolved around politics. Their meetings consisted of readings of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, summaries of meetings of the National Assembly, laws and journals. The members led petitions for divorce, mixed

education, female political rights etc. In 1793, however, women's clubs were already prohibited due to fears that women would gain too much political power.

Many women regretted that they could not serve the Republic in combat (p. 298). Since violence was associated with masculinity, they were not allowed to carry weapons or join the army. Nevertheless, some young women disguised themselves as men and served as gendarmes, cannoneers, grenadiers and fusiliers. Afterwards, the people even praised these women as a miracle of the Revolution, which was capable of transforming women into men. Indeed, they were no longer regarded as women. Women who did not want to participate in the violence could watch it from a distance: many of them assisted public executions in order to assure that the enemies of the Republic were punished (p. 296). Nevertheless, they were criticised by men who considered them to be savages.

3) New rights?

In the run-up to the Revolution, public opinion was shaped by Rousseauist ideas that Nature had created women for a life in the domestic, private sphere (p. 225). As a result, a lot of criticism on the established order concerned the fact that politics were influenced too much by women (p. 230). The presence of women in the royal court was claimed to prevent transparency and objectivity. The absolutist monarchy in which the nobility held the power was equated with femininity, regarded as the cause of political decadence and corruption. Meanwhile, the idea of a republic gained ground, as this political system, led by the bourgeoisie, represented masculine values. After the French Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was passed. Although it stated that all citizens were equal before the law, women were excluded from the very rights that defined citizenship: they were not allowed to vote nor serve in the National Guard (p. 273).

Nevertheless, women did gain some new rights. First of all, upon turning 21, their fathers lost parental authority over them, granting them legal rights (p. 304). Second, the revolutionaries established gender equality in inheritance (p. 304). In addition, as more and more couples cohabitated without being legally married, the so-called 'natural' wives of soldiers were granted financial aid and their 'natural' children could inherit (p. 250). Furthermore, in 1791 divorce became legal in case of abandonment or absence of the spouse, assault and battery, or incompatibility of temperament (p. 306). Divorcees were sometimes entitled to alimony from their remarried ex-spouse. Finally, since 1789 enlightened people had been writing brochures

for a better education for girls, which installed a popular belief that education should be organised by the state (p. 308). This resulted in the foundation of state primary schools, which were free but nonetheless still separated by sex. In 1793, primary education became obligatory for girls and boys (p. 310). However, almost all of these newly acquired rights were suppressed within a few years, with gender equality in inheritance as the only remaining improvement (p. 311).

3.2.2.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, during the entire eighteenth century, French women were defined by their roles as mothers and wives. Even if they did enter the public sphere, participating in the cultural, economic and political domains, they were not equal to their male counterparts (p. 326). During the French Revolution, women massively appeared on the political scene, where they assumed new roles. However, this change was only temporary and did not affect the mental structures which were engrained in minds of the French. Although the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen introduced a new form of gender inequality – women were denied basic citizen rights – it also established a new principle: equality. This made women conscious of the injustice towards them, providing hope for the future.

3.2.3 Great Britain

3.2.3.1 Introduction: *The separate spheres model*

According to Barker (1997), it is often believed that new gender roles emerged in eighteenth-century Britain. This influential ‘separate spheres’ model supposes that economic changes transformed both agriculture and manufacturing. On the one hand, capitalism initiated a “move away from the family economy” (p. 10), in which women and men contributed equally to the work on the family farm. When farming was commercialised, men became the main breadwinners, while women were condemned to do low-paying, low-status jobs. Consequently, women were increasingly confined to the “‘private sphere’ of the home”, while men dominated the “‘public sphere’ of work and politics” (p. 10). On the other hand, the industrialisation of manufacturing moved the workplace from the home to factories, which had a similar effect.

However, Barker argues that this theory is problematic. First, it supposes that industrialisation happened suddenly instead of gradually. Second, it postulates that all areas of the economy were affected equally, which does not apply to manufacturing. Finally, it implies the

inevitable death of the family economy, which proved to be incorrect as well. Therefore, Barker rejects the simplistic separate spheres model, which treats women as a homogeneous group. Instead, she proposes to approach eighteenth-century Britain as “a society that was both complicated and contradictory” (p. 24), with multiple roles and responsibilities for both sexes. Of course, there were still many social rules to which women had to oblige, but those depended on factors such as “class, age, location, occupation and religion” (p. 25).

This chapter provides an account of the different roles of women in eighteenth-century Britain, considering the influencing factors mentioned above. I discuss the education of British women in section 3.2.3.1, the implications of their legal and marital status in section 3.2.3.3, their political power in section 3.2.3.4 and lastly the importance of chastity for their reputation in section 3.2.3.5.

3.2.3.2 Education

In the eighteenth century, a lot of girls were homeschooled by their parents or governesses (“A history”, 2017). Working class girls often attended so-called dame schools, led by older women who taught the very basics such reading and counting. Most girls’ education was not very stimulating at all, as it “tailored towards their role as wives and mothers” (“A history, 2017). However, according to Skedd (1997), under the influence of the Enlightenment, Britain slowly realised that girls deserved a good education. Consequently, girls’ schools emerged as an innovative alternative to home education. In these boarding schools, girls were taught a variety of subjects, from traditional polite accomplishments such as dancing and music to more practical subject such as reading, grammar, French and geography. Still, this was only an option for well-off girls, since schools were private enterprises that charged tuition. Moreover, there were concerns that an education could be harmful to girls and detrimental to their traditional roles in British society. Indeed, “male suspicion of female learning and writing was to persist alongside the evolution of more enlightened opinions” (Howard, 1997, p. 243).

Nevertheless, the emergence of girls’ schools was a positive innovation, not only for girls, but for women as well. Indeed, girls’ schools provided employment and business opportunities for enterprising women and their female relatives, as “the most usual partnerships were between two sisters or between a mother and her daughters” (Skedd, 1997, p. 112). In fact, teaching was the fifth most popular female profession, often practised by widows or

unmarried women (Skedd, 1997). It offered women independence from men, freedom, a stable income and an opportunity to escape their traditional domestic roles. On the one hand, the success of their businesses was to some extent tied to their status and wealth; schools led by respectable women were most popular. On the other hand, a woman could also earn respectability by keeping a school.

3.2.3.3 Legal and marital status

1) Single and married women

As was the case in France, in England, marriage did not offer women judicial freedom. This was the result of coverture, an “Anglo-American common-law concept . . . that dictated a woman’s subordinate legal status during marriage” (“Coverture”, 2007):

By marriage, the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended; or at least it is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection and *cover*, she performs every thing; and she is therefore called in our law a feme-covert. (“The laws”, 1777, p. 65)

As opposed to a single woman, a married woman could not sue, conclude economic contracts or buy anything on credit without her husband’s permission (Bailey, 2002). Moreover, her husband was in charge of all her goods and land. Nevertheless, coverture also offered certain benefits to married women. They were allowed to purchase necessities in the name of their husbands, they were protected against violence from their husbands, and they could obtain separate estate, by means of which they were able to hold on to their property. It should also be borne in mind that there was a tension between theory and practice, and there were three other jurisdictions outside of coverture that could override it. Nevertheless, objectively the legal status of a single woman was much more advantageous than that of a married woman.

2) Widowhood

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the number of widows that chose not to remarry increased (Barker, 1997). One of the reasons for this is that, just like in France, widows enjoyed a particularly advantageous status, since:

Under common law, they were treated as single women, ‘femmes soles’, rather than as married women, ‘femmes couvertes’, and as such they had an existence in the eyes of the law that was denied to those with husbands . . . (Barker, 1997, p. 98)

This was especially convenient for middle class women, who often took over the family business after their husbands had passed away. That is, unless they wanted to move up the

social ladder, in which case it was unacceptable to own a business. Most of these women had already contributed to the business while their husbands were still alive, yet behind the scenes. Their new leadership was generally accepted and they were not expected to hand over the business when their sons came of age. Thus, it seems that “age, as well as gender and social class, was a condition of economic power” (Barker, 1997, p. 97) in eighteenth-century Britain.

3) Divorce

Just like in pre-revolutionary France, divorce was not an option in England, except for the richest people who could afford it through a Private Act of Parliament. Adultery was the only legal ground for divorce, and as opposed to men, women had to be able to prove that this adultery was accompanied by life-threatening violence (“Obtaining a divorce”).

4) Single and abandoned mothers

According to Connors (1997), poor widowed or single mothers led particularly precarious lives. If the father of their child was known, they were not entitled to parochial relief, even if he was unwilling to acknowledge the child or if he lacked the means to support it. If the father was unknown or dead, the mother had to be able to prove her true parish of settlement before she could receive any parochial support under the Settlement Laws. These laws “reinforced the patriarchal nature of society by ensuring that a child took his or her father’s parish of settlement and that a married woman took that of her husband” (p. 136). Consequently, many unmarried, widowed or abandoned mothers were denied any relief because they were settled in another parish. Moreover, the fate of these women was often decided by people who interpreted the laws flexibly. In fact, women with (illegitimate) children were more likely to be refused any help, as they usually depended on the parish for a long period of time because it was harder for them to find jobs.

Even if these women undeniably had very little power over their lives, they were not afraid to raise their voices if they were denied the help they were entitled to. In fact, “they understood (...) the intricacies of settlement and had the courage to challenge the judgements of their social superiors publicly in court” (Connors, 1997, p. 146). Far from being passive victims of the system, they took matters into their own hands in the direst of situations, and sometimes they were eventually granted the assistance of the parish.

3.2.3.4 Political power

Elite women were actively involved in British politics. In fact, they “played a greater part in the political life of the nation than anywhere else in Europe” (Foreman, 1997, p. 179), because British politics were very personal and direct. Women’s participation was required for many aspects of the electoral process, especially for canvassing and setting up campaigns (Chalus, 1997). This influence, however, did not mean they possessed any direct political power, since they could not vote or hold seats in parliament. Indeed, just like in France, politically active women merely had “supporting roles” (Foreman, 1997, p. 179); their efforts served their husbands, sons, brothers, etc. What is more, their power was limited to social activities that were suitable for women, such as “teas and visits, carriage rides and courtesies” (Chalus, 1997, p. 171). These traditional female activities were politicised and in that sense not innovative at all.

Whenever a female politician went too far outside of her social circle or her traditional role, she was criticised, for this “social-sexual inversion (...) threatened social hierarchies and accepted modes of female behaviour” (Chalus, 1997, p. 171). Personal ambition in particular was highly frowned upon, as it was a typically male characteristic (Foreman, 1997). The political world was a very artificial one, and the public image of these women was of great importance. Consequently, they constantly had to put on a mask of cheerfulness, generosity and virtuousness to the outside world (Chalus, 1997). In short, even if female politicians were amongst the most powerful women in Britain, they still had to obey traditional gender rules.

3.2.3.5 Chastity and reputation

In the eighteenth century, the British were very concerned with their image and the approval or disapproval of the public. In a society preoccupied “with comparing individual’s private lives with their public characters” (McCreery, 1997, p. 208), it was essential to have a good reputation, to maintain one’s honour. But ‘honour’ was gendered. Male honour was based on displays of courage, whereas chastity was essential to female honour (Ylivuori, 2016).

On the one hand, chastity in its physical sense meant virginity before marriage and faithfulness in marriage. On the other hand, chastity also had a moral connotation; modesty. Modesty was believed to be a naturally feminine virtue, “an innate quality defending women against men’s approaches and guarding their virtue” (Ylivuori, 2016, p. 79). As new enlightened theories revealed female pleasure was unnecessary for conception, women were

considered to be sexually passive and chastity in its physical sense was regarded as a naturally feminine trait alongside modesty (Harvey, 2002). As a consequence, modesty became virtually synonymous to chastity (Ylivuori, 2016).

In those days, it was believed that the body was a mirror of the mind and behaviour was an indicator of good character. Consequently, in order to determine a woman's chastity, one only had to look for the external signs of modesty. Thus, "women's sexual honour was not all about perfect abstinence – it was also about perfect appearance" (Ylivuori, 2016, p. 79). Modesty was thought to be displayed through timidity, modest dress, and blushing, which could all be faked (Ylivuori, 2016). This inspired a fear of insincere women deceiving ignorant men and society as a whole.

Although they were used as a justification for the importance of chastity, Christian principles were not the reason why British society attached so much importance to it. While Christian doctrine demanded chastity of both sexes, British society did not (Dabhoiwala, 1996). In fact, chastity usually had no influence on male honour, so just like in France there was a sexual double standard in Britain. One of the possible causes was the rise of libertinism, which, "as an influential and coherent code of conduct created a powerful polar opposite to the Christian ideal: one in which sexual debauchery was held actually to enhance male reputation" (Dabhoiwala, 1996, p. 205). Indeed, men were encouraged to have mistresses, and they were praised in spite of adultery and an eccentric lifestyle (McCreery, 1997).

The true reason for British society's emphasis on female chastity lies in its structures (Ylivuori, 2016). First, it was essential for a man to ensure that his children were legitimate, since property was inherited by patrilineal transmission. Second, a man's reputation could be tainted by the adultery of his wife, as much like in France, British patriarchal society expected him to be able to control her. If a woman did transgress these social boundaries, the repercussions were usually not mild. Adulterous women were often excluded from society and even shunned by their very own families.

It should be noted that with the end of the chivalrous tradition in the late eighteenth century, female adultery was no longer as irredeemable as before (McCreery, 1997). Generally, a woman's reputation was not automatically and inevitably tainted by one wrong step, because:

Social status, reputation, and respectability were constructed from different, overlapping pieces, all centred on managing external appearances; the appearance of chastity was an important piece of the puzzle, but so were class, connections,

patronage and even location. Accordingly, a failure in one area of social reputation could, in many cases, be compensated by industrious effort in another. (Ylivuori, 2016, p. 91)

The highest ranks had their own particular moral code, and adultery could be covered up with the support of family and friends (Ylivuori, 2016). Still, elite women were judged more harshly than professional mistresses or prostitutes, who were driven by financial needs (McCreery, 1997). Lower-class women could compensate for adultery with virtuous characteristics such as devoutness, housewifery and obedience (Ylivuori, 2016). Moreover, if a woman continued to deny accusations of adultery, her innocence was often defended by her friends, family and even her husband, whose reputation was at stake as well. As a last resort, she could always retreat from society for several years in the hope that people would forget (Ylivuori, 2016). In conclusion, although chastity was essential to women's reputations, it was largely based on external appearances, and it could be compensated by other socio-economic factors as well as personal behaviour.

3.2.4 Conclusion

In Britain and France girls' education was structured differently, but its main purpose was to cater to their future roles as mothers and wives and teach them the importance of modesty and subservience. As a consequence, most girls received a substandard education which kept them ignorant and naïve. However, some of them were able to enjoy a more intellectually stimulating education, but this was only reserved for girls of rich, enlightened families.

Although Britain and France were structured by different laws, the outcome of those laws was comparable. After all, they were both patriarchal societies, ruled by and for men. As a consequence, in both countries women legally depended on their fathers or husbands and had very little rights, which put them in a position of powerlessness and dependence. Widowhood offered them most freedom, although this was only an option for wealthy women.

Both in Britain and France religion played an important role in society. The French monarchy was tied to the Catholic Church and in England the king was head of the Anglican Church. Both societies emphasised the importance of chastity and justified it with religious principles, but in reality it stemmed from patriarchal structures. This explains why there was a sexual double standard in both Britain and France: it was only important for women to be faithful in order to produce rightful heirs. Men could be as promiscuous as they pleased without having to face social ruin.

The biggest difference between these two nations in the eighteenth century was to be detected in the political field. The absolutist monarchy in France excluded women from any position of power, because it was believed women could not make political decisions as they were naturally irrational. Even if the French Revolution offered an opportunity for women to assume new political roles and gain new rights, most of the improvements were only temporary. Women in Britain were much more involved in politics than women in France. However, their political roles were modelled onto their traditional roles and in both societies women's political efforts were used to serve men.

In conclusion, although Britain was considered to be more progressive than France in the eighteenth century, the roles of women in Britain and France were not so different after all. Even if eighteenth-century women were in no way a homogenous group – their lives depended on different factors such as age, class and locality – their main roles were those of mothers and wives. It should be noted that some women did manage to step outside of their traditional roles and assume more power and independence, but they were the exception rather than the rule.

4. Corpus

The Marquise de Merteuil is a master of disguise. As an educated woman and a female libertine, she cannot show her true nature since that would mean social ruin. She manipulates everyone around her in subtle, cunning ways, so nothing that she says can be trusted. Her true nature only surfaces when she talks to her only friend and fellow libertine Monsieur de Valmont (Gehring, 2007). As a result, my analysis only focuses on Merteuil's letters that are addressed to Valmont. However, as there are 21 such letters, an analysis of all of them would be too extensive. Therefore, I narrowed my corpus down to 9 of them, which I selected based on their subject matter and length. My preference went out to long, detailed letters in which Merteuil's deviant nature was most apparent, i.e. her education, her libertinism and her struggle for power and dominance over the Vicomte de Valmont¹. I also made sure to include at least one letter of each of the four volumes of the novel. What follows is a list of the selected letters with a summary of their content.

4.1 Volume 1

10th letter: seducing Belleruche

In the first half of the letter, Merteuil is scolding Valmont. She claims he is in love with the Présidente de Tourvel and gives him advice as to how he should conquer her.

In the second half of the letter, Merteuil tells Valmont how she seduced the Chevalier de Belleruche. She lures him to her villa, which is specifically designed for her liaisons. Merteuil prepares herself for the seduction game by reading excerpts from *Le Sopha*, *La nouvelle Héloïse* and some fables by La Fontaine. When Belleruche arrives, she treats him like a king, they make love and have dinner together. In order not to raise suspicion about the villa, she gives him the key to it and asserts she only bought it so that they could be together.

20th letter: libertine pact

In this letter, Merteuil mocks Valmont, who proposes to reunite with her because he is jealous of her affair with Belleruche. She proposes a different agreement: if he succeeds in conquering the Présidente, she will be his reward. In the meantime, she will remain faithful to Belleruche.

¹ For a more detailed analysis of Merteuil's deviance, see section 5.1.

The second part of letter is about Cécile Volanges, a young girl who is to marry Gercourt, an old lover of Merteuil. Gercourt dumped Merteuil before she could dump him, which infuriated her. She knows he has a preference for young virgins and wants to sabotage him by setting Cécile up with the chevalier Danceny so that the girl loses her virginity before marriage.

4.2 Volume 2

81st letter: autobiography

In this letter, Merteuil laughs at Valmont's non-existing progress with the Présidente and scolds him for warning her about Prévau, a notorious libertine. She then contemplates the dire faith of women, whose reputation is in the hands of their lovers. Merteuil, however, is superior to all those men and women, as she has managed to assert power over her lovers. She then gives an autobiographical account to explain how she established the principles that allowed her to assert this position of power.

As a girl, she learned to read other people's facial expressions and to control her own, so that nobody had access to her thoughts. She was curious about love but had no means to educate herself on the subject. During her first night with her husband, she feigned fear and embarrassment and after her first affairs she learned that pleasure and love were not inseparable. After her husband's death, she refused to remarry and retreated herself from society to educate herself by reading novels, philosophical and moral texts. After her retreat, people thought she was very honourable and she only attracted boring men. Therefore, she carefully selected a few lovers in order to ruin her reputation of a prude. She then pretended that she wanted to become an honourable woman again, simultaneously gaining the support of prude women and of promiscuous women, who were happy she was no longer a competitor in the game. This earned her the reputation of being a woman not averse to love, but picky, and gave her the opportunity to apply her knowledge in real life. She made sure to not leave any trace that could be used against her and accumulated secrets of her lovers that could be used to keep them quiet. She concludes the letter by asserting she will conquer Prévau and ignore Valmont's warnings.

85th letter: seducing Prévau

In this letter, Merteuil recounts how she managed to ruin Prévau's reputation. She makes sure to meet Prévau and seemingly does not respond to his advances. When she finally gives in, she assures him her servants are always watching, whereupon Prévau comes up with a plan.

Merteuil is to organise a dinner party, where he will pretend to go home while sneaking in to her room. She does as she is told, but when Prévau makes his move in the bedroom, she calls her servants to her rescue. Prévau's reputation is ruined, as he is now considered to be a rapist.

4.3 Volume 3

113th letter: end of affair with Belleruche

Merteuil tells Valmont to leave the Présidente and come back to her, as people are starting to gossip. She responds to his concern about the Présidente changing confidantes from Cécile's mother to Valmont's elderly aunt by claiming the change is to his advantage. Contrary to what he believes, older ladies are generally softer than younger ones. After the frustrating process of aging, most women, who were overly attached to their beauty, become apathetic. The others, who have always made sure to develop their minds as well, become very good-natured and lenient. She then goes on to tone down his pride of conquering Cécile, claiming it is easy to seduce an innocent girl and that Cécile is still in love with the chevalier Danceny.

In the last part, she tells him she has gotten tired of the chevalier de Belleruche, who believes she will stay with him forever. This hurt her pride, so she has come up with a plan to get rid of him. She will invite Belleruche to come with her to the countryside and give him so much love and attention that he will become sick of her. She then discloses the identity of her next victim: Danceny.

4.4 Volume 4

127th letter: power struggle part 1

Merteuil responds to Valmont's proposal to meet up with her in order to distract him from the miserable state his Présidente left him in. She assures him she has no intention of becoming part of his seraglio, ranking even lower than his Présidente and Cécile. She then asserts that Danceny makes her happier than he ever can, and she does not even want him as a second lover at this point.

134th letter: power struggle part 2

Merteuil scares Valmont by assuring him he is in love with the Présidente. She tells him she is no longer interested in him, but carries on explaining what she would exact from him if he wanted her back. He is to swear his feelings for his Présidente are over and has to keep

corrupting Cécile. She insinuates that she would reward him with sex if he obeys her. She also tells him her mission to get rid of Belleruche has succeeded.

141st letter: power struggle part 3

Merteuil tells Valmont that she is not convinced he does not love the Présidente anymore, even if he cheated on her with Cécile. She claims he must have humiliated himself in order for his Présidente to forgive him, then goes on telling him a story about a man she used to know. Just like Valmont, he was in love with a woman who did not deserve him, and everyone made fun of him. However, he did not have the courage to break it off, and nothing was ever his fault. He had a female friend who was about to expose him, but tried to help him one last time by passing him a letter to give to his love, that said it is in the nature of men to become bored and cheat, and it is not his fault. Merteuil includes the letter in the hope that Valmont will send it to the Présidente.

152nd letter: power struggle part 4

Valmont naïvely sent the letter to the Présidente, yet his pride is hurt and Merteuil begs him not to take revenge, since it would mean her ruin. Since Valmont still managed to make amends with the Présidente and she finally gave into his charms, he claimed his reward as stated in the libertine pact. Merteuil refused to fulfil her side of the contract and asserts she never will. She claims she never remarried after her husband's death because she does not want any man to have the right to tell her what to do, including Valmont. She will not give herself up to him if he does not worship her and try to be more amiable than Danceny.

5. Analysis

5.1 Aspects of Madame de Merteuil's deviance

In order to analyse how the Marquise de Merteuil was transformed in the translation process, I grouped the linguistic shifts that had an effect on the character's representation according to six different semantic categories that constitute Merteuil's deviance from gender norms.

These categories are not strictly delineated and overlap is possible, but each linguistic shift is assigned to the category on which it had the biggest effect. Table 1 includes all categories of the Marquise's subversiveness as well as their respective opposites, i.e. the social norms for women in the eighteenth century. It should be noted that the shifts can occur in both directions, i.e. from subversiveness to adherence to the norms and from adherence to the norms to subversiveness. Moreover, the columns of the table represent the extremes of a spectrum, which implies that semantic shifts can occur to a greater or lesser degree.

Table 1: Semantic categories: subversiveness vs. social norms

Aspects of subversiveness	Social norms
1. Power: -Agency over oneself -Dominance	1. Powerlessness: -Passivity -Subordination
2. Intelligence: <i>Causes:</i> -Reason -Education <i>Effects:</i> -Self-made rules -Planning -Manipulative -Rhetorical skills	2. Ignorance: <i>Causes:</i> -Irrationality -Lack of education <i>Effects:</i> -Society's rules -Impulsivity -Impressionable -Incredibility
3. Libertinism: -Promiscuity -Aversion to love and marriage	3. Honourability: -Chastity -Sacredness of love and marriage
4. Pride: - Arrogance - Determination - Self-confidence - Selfishness	4. Modesty: - Humility - Hesitance - Insecurity - Selflessness
5. Social criticism/ exposing society/ taboo topics	5. Blind acceptance of society's rules/ self-censorship
6. Other aspects of deviance from gender norms	

The first category is power, which derives from agency, or the “capacity for individualized choice and action” (Meyers, 2009). One can have agency over oneself and agency over others. Agency over oneself is closely related to independency, responsibility for one’s actions and ambition. Agency over others is also called dominance. Most women in the eighteenth century were quite powerless. Legally and financially they depended on their fathers or

husbands, preventing them from being able to make a lot of decisions about their own lives, let alone they had power over others. The Marquise, however, deviates from this norm. As a widow, she has the freedom to manage her own life without having to answer to anyone. Yet agency alone is not enough for her. Her ultimate goal is to dominate everyone else, men and women alike. She emphasises other people's inferiority by insulting them, denigrating them, and laughing at them. Indeed, she is a master of sarcasm and irony.

The second category is intelligence, a quality which was generally not associated with women in the eighteenth century as their education was often substandard and they were deemed to be naturally irrational even by enlightened philosophers. Madame de Merteuil, however, is a self-educated, self-made woman who possesses a great deal of reason. What makes her truly dangerous, however, is how she makes use of her knowledge and reason to attain her goal of subordinating everyone. She lives according to a set of rules she created for herself as to not be exposed. Moreover, her plans are always carefully prepared to the minutest details: she leaves nothing to coincidence. Not only does this give her a great advantage over people who are more impulsive than her, it also enables her to see through the plans of other masterminds. Furthermore, Merteuil's knowledge of human nature also enables her to manipulate not only impressionable children, but even her closest friends. In order to do so, she often employs her rhetorical skills to attract the reader's attention, emphasise her most important arguments and give them credibility.

Libertinism is by far the most shocking and norm-defeating category. Indeed, it forms a threat to the very structures of patriarchal society for which it was of primordial importance that women stay faithful. In addition, it defied the dominant idea that women were naturally chaste, pure and sentimental. The Marquise's libertinism is not only apparent through her liaisons, it also shows in her rejection of love, marriage and sentiment. She is cold-blooded and never experiences love and affection, but only feigns it and inspires it in others in order to subordinate them.

The fourth category includes characteristics that are a natural consequence of the first three. As the Marquise managed to employ her intelligence to assume power over her own life and subordinate others by means of libertinous conquests, she is extremely proud and overly self-confident. She never takes advice from other people, not even from Valmont. As soon as she has set herself a new goal, she is determined to achieve it and does not consider anyone's

feelings in the process. Indeed, her personality is the opposite of the ideal eighteenth century woman who was modest, humble and selfless.

Madame de Merteuil is not only dangerous because of her own subversive conduct, she also unveils that of others who, like her, are immoral and unchaste. What is more, she frequently exposes the hypocrisy of eighteenth-century French society with its many rules of conduct and its preoccupation with keeping up appearances. Merteuil does not follow the common rules of decency and has no filter. She is not afraid to address taboo topics or appear rude or indecent in her letter to Valmont. The fifth category thus consists of examples of the Marquise as an observer of society, a social critic who does not censor herself in any way.

Finally, the sixth category is reserved for all other instances in which the Marquise steps out of the traditional gender roles, for example when she displays aggression and anger, which is typically associated with men.

5.2 Comparative study

As context is crucial for interpretation, all analysed letters and their translations have been included in the appendix. The examples analysed below are marked in bold and underlined in the appendix. The numbers in the appendix accord with the number granted to each example in the analysis, so they can easily be retrieved from the letters in the appendix.

The discussed examples were selected based on a number of criteria. First, I made sure to include examples that illustrated semantic shifts in each of the two directions, i.e. increase and decrease of deviance, where possible. Second, I endeavoured to include examples of each type of linguistic shift that caused semantic shifts. Third, I gave preference to examples where semantic shifts were most clear: instances where verbal ambiguity could have been interpreted in different ways were left out. Lastly, I included multiple examples of one type of linguistic shift if a pattern could be detected.

In the following examples, the underlined parts denote where the linguistic shifts occurred in the translation process, i.e. they are the parts which were omitted, added, substituted etc.

5.2.1 Power

5.2.1.1 Agency over oneself

Agency can be measured by examining semantic roles, i.e. “the underlying relationship that a participant has with the main verb in a clause” (“Semantic role”, 2003). The agent is the one

who carries out the action or process described by the verb, and is typically expressed by the subject (Aarts, 1997). The patient, usually the object, is the one that is affected by action; he undergoes it. LaFrance and Hahn (1994) have described what is known as ‘the disappearing agent effect’, which suggests that “more cause is attributed to the sentence subject when the sentence object is female compared with when the sentence object is male”, implying that “men are more active, woman are more passive” (Weatherall, 2002, p. 30). In terms of semantic roles, this means that the patient position is more often fulfilled by a woman. In my analysis, I only found instances in which Merteuil’s agency over her own life was decreased, i.e. shifts where she was pushed from an agent to patient position, and someone or something else was promoted to the agent position, exercising control over her life.

- Decrease:

Example 1 (85th letter)

ST: . . . qui même laisserait encore des dangers trop grands pour m’y exposer . . .
(Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 238)

TT: . . . and was attended with such dangerous consequences as might expose me . . .
(Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 220)

In the ST, the subject of the non-finite subclause is ‘je’, i.e. the Marquise, as the subclause can be transformed into a that-clause with ‘I’ as a subject: “des dangers si grands que je ne veuille pas m’y exposer”. Thus, in the ST segment, the Marquise is the subject and agent of the sentence: she is the one who assesses the danger and decides she does not want to expose herself to it. In the TT segment, however, the sentence has been transformed and the Marquise is no longer the subject and agent of the subclause, but the object and patient: she might be exposed by the dangerous consequences. As a consequence, Merteuil is represented as having no control over the situation; she is a passive entity that undergoes the action of the clause. In sum, in the translation, Merteuil loses agency.

Example 2 (134th letter)

ST: . . . mais moi, qui ai un grand intérêt à ne pas m'y tromper . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 70)

TT: . . . but I, who am so strongly interested not to be deceived . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 64)

In both the ST and TT segment, the unexpressed subject of the subclause is 'I', i.e. Merteuil. The verb 'tromper' is in the active voice, and the subject is also the agent. In the ST, Merteuil presents herself as being capable of distinguishing Valmont's lies from the truth. If she is deceived, she takes responsibility for it, as it is her fault that she was not able to see through his lies. In the TT segment, however, the verb is in the passive voice, and the subject (I, Merteuil) is the patient. The omitted agent is 'you', i.e. Valmont. Thus, in the translation, Merteuil presents herself as being more passive than in the source text; she expresses that there is a possibility she might be deceived instead of a possibility she might be wrong. In sum, in the translation, Merteuil loses agency again.

Example 3 (152nd letter)

ST: . . . pourquoi je ne me suis jamais remariée? Ce n'est assurément pas faute d'avoir trouvé assez de partis avantageux . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 161)

TT: . . . the reasons I never married again. It was not, I assure you, for want of several advantageous matches being offered to me . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 155)

In the ST, the unexpressed subject and agent is I. Although she does not want to remarry, Merteuil takes responsibility for finding a new husband herself: she is in charge of her own life. In the TT segment however, the verb is in the passive voice and Merteuil is the recipient: the matches are offered to Merteuil by other people, and she only has to accept them. In the translation, she does not take her life into her own hands and plays by the rules of society, according to which it was normal for the girl's family to seek out matches for her.

5.2.1.2 Dominance

1) Increase:

Agency over others can also be measured in terms of semantic roles: Merteuil's agency is increased when she is promoted to the agent position if she was previously absent or in the patient position.

Example 4 (10th letter)

ST: . . . tandis qu'elle se travestit en Laquais . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, pp. 65-66)

TT: . . . I desired her to put on a footman's dress . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 49)

In this example, the translation is an explicitation of what was already implied in the ST segment, i.e. that Victoire, Merteuil's maid, was told by Merteuil to put on the footman's clothes. In the original segment, the maid is the agent of the main clause, putting the focus on the fact that she disguised herself. In the translation however, Merteuil's command was added, putting her in the agent position. The focus is on the command itself, as it is foregrounded in the main sentence while the action itself is subordinated. Thus, in the translation, Merteuil's dominance over her maid is explicitated and emphasised.

Another means of increasing dominance is by asserting one's superiority over others:

Example 5 (81st letter)

ST: . . . c'est aussi vous trop enorgueillir de la confiance que je veux bien avoir en vous! (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 169)

TT: . . . that would be raising your pride too much for the confidence which I have condescended to place in you. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 166)

In this example, there is a shift in meaning in the subclause of the translation. In the ST segment, Merteuil simply tells Valmont that although she wants to have a lot of confidence in him, he estimates it much higher than it is. In the TT segment, however, the verb 'condescended' adds the connotation of Merteuil lowering her standards in order to have confidence in him. Thus, in the translation, Merteuil makes it clear that she is superior to him, increasing her dominance.

Example 6 (81st letter)

ST: . . . et ne m’y trouvant entourée que de gens dont la distance avec moi me mettait à l’abri de tout soupçon . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 180)

TT: . . . and, being surrounded by people whose inferiority sheltered me from suspicion. . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 178)

In the TT segment, the neutral ‘distance’ has been replaced by the word ‘inferiority’, which has a different connotation. ‘Distance’ is quite ambiguous; while it might imply ‘inferiority’, it could also simply mean a lack of acquaintance with Merteuil. In any case, ‘inferiority’ is unambiguous: it explicitly means Merteuil deems herself superior to others, who are more naïve and easy to manipulate.

Asserting one’s dominance does not always have to happen in an explicit way: it can also be done more subtly, for example by insulting others:

Example 7 (127th letter)

ST: . . . et que je ne lui ai pas trouvé le sens commun. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 32)

TT: . . . and did not contain a single syllable of common sense. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 27)

In this example, Merteuil tells Valmont his previous letter did not make any sense, thus implying that he is stupid and irrational and she is more reasonable than him. In the translation, the hyperbole ‘a single syllable’ is added to emphasise her statement and thus increase her dominance.

Another way of looking down on people is by laughing at them:

Example 8 (127th letter)

ST: . . . vous revenez sur elle, que vous paraissez tenir aux idées qu’elle contient . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 32)

TT: . . . you seem fond of this production, and the sublime ideas it contains . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 27)

Here, Merteuil is talking about the same letter as in example 7. The addition of ‘sublime’ in the translation changes the tone of the sentence from neutral to sarcastic. Sarcasm, as defined

by the Cambridge dictionary is “the use of remarks that clearly mean the opposite of what they say, made in order to hurt someone's feelings or to criticize something in a humorous way” (“Sarcasm, n.d.). Indeed, Merteuil really does not find the ideas in Valmont’s letter to be sublime, quite the opposite. She uses sarcasm to laugh at him and look down on him, so in the translation she is more dominant than in the source text.

2) Decrease:

If insults are used to assert dominance, they can be moderated or downplayed to decrease it:

Example 9 (113th letter)

ST: On ne peut pas dire non plus que ces femmes soient ou ne soient pas sévères: sans idées et sans existence . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 3, p. 167)

TT: It is not easy to determine whether those women are or are not severe; without ideas, or in a manner without existence . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 163)

In this example, Merteuil is talking about women who never educated themselves like she did. In the ST, she goes so far as to say these women do not even exist in her eyes, since they do not think for themselves. In the TT segment, ‘in a manner’ is added, moderating her statement and thus lowering her sense of superiority over these women.

Example 10 (113th letter)

ST: La plus nombreuse . . . tombe dans une imbécile apathie . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 3, p. 167)

TT: The most numerous . . . fall into a weak apathy . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 163)

In this example, the Marquise is talking about what happens when uneducated women lose their beauty with age, as it is the only thing they relied on. She is much more unforgiving and rude in the original text, calling them imbeciles, while in the translation this is replaced by weak, which has a less negative connotation.

Gibbs (2000) discovered that rhetorical questions are often used to express irony, sarcasm and mockery (p. 21). The shift from question to assertion, then, can cause these tones to disappear, therefore decreasing the superiority one asserts over another:

Example 11 (152nd letter)

ST: Voyons ; de quoi s'agit-il tant ? Vous avez trouvé Danceny chez moi, et cela vous a déplu ? à la bonne heure . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 162)

TT: Now for the business. You found Danceny at my house, and you was displeased; be it so. . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 156)

In the ST segment, Merteuil uses rhetorical questions to mock Valmont's irrationality. Although the rhetorical questions can be read in a neutral tone as well, the expression that follows them, i.e. "à la bonne heure" is often used ironically according to the Larousse dictionary ("A la bonne heure", n.d.). This would suggest the questions are not meant to be serious either, and Merteuil is expressing her disbelief with and disapproval of Valmont's jealousy. All these connotations, however, are lost in the translation, as the questions in the original text were changed into assertions. Merteuil no longer directly involves Valmont in her reasoning and merely states the facts without any judgement. In doing so, she comes across as less derogatory and less dominant.

5.2.2 Intelligence

The following introductory example is a perfect illustration of how Merteuil is often made to appear less intelligent in the translation than she is in the original text:

Example 12 (20th letter)

ST: . . . mais je n'oublie pas que c'est un enfant, et je ne veux pas me compromettre. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, pp. 102-103)

TT: . . . but she is yet a child, and I must not commit myself. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 88)

In this TT segment, "je n'oublie pas que" is omitted, so only the essence of the message remains, i.e. that the girl is a child. As a result, Merteuil's emphasis on the fact that she keeps this information at the back of her mind at all times is gone, which makes her seem less calculated. Moreover, "compromettre" was substituted by "commit", which has a completely different meaning. In the ST, Merteuil means that she does not want to put herself in a dangerous position because the girl is still a child (and thus might spill the beans to her mother). In the translation, however, she simply states she does not want to become too

attached to the girl. The fact that Merteuil has analysed the entire situation, assessed the dangers and decided to remain careful is completely lost in translation here.

5.2.2.1 Reason

- Decrease

Reason was thought to be a quality only men possessed, as in the eighteenth century people thought women were defined by their uterus, which made them irrational (cf. 3.2.2.1). As a result, Merteuil claiming to reason were norm defeating. However, in the translation, Merteuil appears less threatening because in some instances where she attributes reason to herself, the word is substituted by another which fits more into women's roles:

Example 13 (10th letter)

ST: Soit caprice ou raison, jamais il ne me parut si bien. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1 p. 64)

TT: Whether whim or inclination, he never appeared to so much advantage. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 48)

In this example, 'reason' was substituted by 'inclination' in the translation. In the ST segment, Merteuil contemplates whether or not it is a reasonable thought of her that she likes Belleruche, therefore acknowledging the fact that she possesses reason. However, in the translation, this is no longer the case. The Cambridge dictionary defines "Whim" as "a sudden wish or idea, especially one that cannot be reasonably explained" (n.d.), and "inclination" as "a feeling that you want to do a particular thing, or the fact that you prefer or are more likely to do a particular thing" (n.d.). Neither of those concepts rely on reason, which makes Merteuil seem more irrational.

Example 14 (152nd letter)

ST: Mais vous êtes jaloux, et la jalousie ne raisonne pas. Hé bien ! je vais raisonner pour vous. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 162)

TT: But you are jealous, and jealousy never debates. Well, I will argue for you. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 156-157)

In the source text, Merteuil implies Valmont is acting irrationally because he is jealous, and that is why she will use her reason for him. In the translation, however, it is no longer implied

that Valmont is irrational, only that he is not in a state of mind to debate. Moreover, Merteuil is no longer explicitly presented as rational, since ‘raisonner’ is substituted for ‘argue’.

5.2.2.2 Education

- Decrease

One way to make Merteuil seem less educated is by substituting words which literally refer to her studying by a less specific word:

Example 15 (81st letter)

ST: . . . je m’étudiais à prendre l’air de la sérénité . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 176)

TT: . . . I endeavoured to put on an air of serenity . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 173)

In this example, the meaning of Merteuil studying and thus investing time and conscious effort into training her facial expressions is lost. Indeed, the Larousse dictionary defines “étudier” as “appliquer son esprit, son activité, à connaître un domaine, une discipline, se livrer à leur étude”(n.d.), while ‘endeavour’ is described by the Cambridge dictionary as “to try to do something” (n.d.).

Merteuil’s education is also visible through her use of citations from other works, which illustrates how well-read she is. However, a combination of lay-out adjustments and omissions make it impossible for the reader to identify these citations in the translation:

Example 16 (81st letter)

ST: S’obstine-t-il à rester, ce qu’elle accordait à l’amour, il faut le livrer à la crainte:

Ses bras s’ouvrent encor, quand son cœur est fermé. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 171)

TT : If he persists, what was granted to love must be given to fear; her arms are open, while her heart is shut; . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 169)

Example 17 (81st letter)

ST: . . . j'ai su tour à tour, et suivant mes goûts mobiles, attacher à ma suite ou rejeter loin de moi

*Ces Tyrans détronés devenus mes esclaves**

*On ne sait si ce vers, ainsi que celui qui se trouve plus haut, *Ses bras s'ouvrent encor, quand son cœur est fermé*, sont des citations d'Ouvrages peu connus ; ou s'ils font partie de la prose de Mme de Merteuil. Ce qui le ferait croire, c'est la multitude de fautes de ce genre qui se trouvent dans toutes les Lettres de cette correspondance. Celles du Chevalier Danceny sont les seules qui en soient exemptes : peut-être que, comme il s'occupait quelquefois de Poésie, son oreille plus exercée lui faisait éviter plus facilement ce défaut. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, pp. 172-173)

TT: If I have discovered the secret, according to my roving taste, to detach the one, and reject the other, those dethroned tyrants becoming my slaves . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 170)

In both the examples above, the italics as markers of a citation are gone, and the citations are no longer separated from the main text by whitespace. This makes them completely blend into the rest of the text. Moreover, the footnote which referred to the two citations was deleted. Although the footnotes debates whether or not the verses were borrowed from another author or of Merteuil's own creation, the options are that Merteuil is either well-read or intelligent and creative enough to write poetry herself. In any case, by deleting the footnote and the citation markers, the reader has no way to know that these are in fact citations, making the Marquise seem less educated in the translation than she is in the source text.

Example 18 (113th letter)

ST: . . . depuis que vous connaissiez sa Confidente, vous ne doutez pas que chaque Lettre d'elle ne contienne au moins un petit sermon, et tout ce qu'elle croit propre à *corroborer sa sagesse et fortifier sa vertu**.

**On ne s'avise jamais de tout!* Comédie. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 3, p. 166)

TT: Moreover, as you know her confidant, there is no doubt but every letter contains a little exhortation to corroborate her prudence, and strengthen her virtue. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 162)

Although in the source text, the citation is not separated by white space, it is still marked in italics and is referred to in footnote which explains where it is from. This time, the footnote does not leave any doubt whether the Marquise invented the poetry herself or borrowed it. However, again the footnote is deleted in the translation, and the italics are gone as well. It can be argued that in this case the translator left the citation out because the British reader might not know the piece where the citation is from, but the reasons behind his choices do not impact the effect they have on the representation of Merteuil: it makes her seem less educated.

5.2.2.3 Self-made rules

- Decrease

Merteuil lives a life of libertinism in a society where it is unacceptable for women to do so thanks to the rules she created for herself. She is very proud of this, as it makes her superior to all other women and men. However, in the translation, her genius creativity is often downplayed, for example by decreasing her agency:

Example 19 (81st letter)

ST: . . . j'avais su me créer des moyens inconnus jusqu'à moi ? (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 173)

TT: . . . I found out means unknown to any that went before me. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 170)

In this case, a seemingly subtle change in the meaning of the verbs has a big effect on the meaning of the sentence. In the ST segment, Merteuil is the agent of the process expressed by the verb: she is the one who created the means, i.e. a set of rules she strictly follows in order

not to be exposed. In the translation, she still is the agent of the process expressed by the verb, but it is a different process: she finds out the means instead of creating them. Thus, she is no longer the agent of the process of creating them; the means already existed, she just had to find them. Therefore, she appears to be less of a genius in the translation than she is in the original text.

Example 20 (81st letter)

ST: . . . j'ai su . . . attacher à ma suite ou rejeter loin de moi . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 172)

TT: . . . I have discovered the secret . . . to detach the one, and reject the other . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 170)

Again, Merteuil's unique invention of the rules that enable her to seduce any man she wants is represented as having existed before in the translation. While 'su' implies that she has learned to do this herself, the translation presents Merteuil's unique achievement as a secret which was ready to be unveiled, requiring less effort.

Merteuil is not only the creator of her own rules, she is also the creator of her own person. However, a small substitution in one of her most famous lines takes away her identity of a self-made woman:

Example 21 (81st letter)

ST: . . . mes principes . . . je les ai créés, et je puis dire que je suis mon ouvrage. (Laclos, 1782, Vol.2, p. 175)

TT: . . . my own principles . . . I have given them existence, and I can call them my own work . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 172)

This time, Merteuil is acknowledged as the creator of her own rules in the TT. However, the line "je puis dire que je suis mon ouvrage" has lost some of its meaning. In the source text, Merteuil asserts that she is completely responsible for who she is today: she has created the rules she follows and therefore has created herself. She no longer is influenced by society's rules as she has managed to elevate herself above everyone else like a semi-god, an enlightened genius. However, in the translation, the fact that she is a self-made woman is lost.

She simply states that she made her own rules, which is essentially the same as “I have given them existence”.

Merteuil often emphasises that her behaviour is the consequence of her code by using the personal pronoun ‘ma’ as a means to form a contrast with society’s code of conduct.

However, in the translation, ‘ma’ is sometimes omitted or replaced:

Example 22 (85th letter)

ST: . . . La soirée ne produisit rien qu’un très petit billet, que le discret Amoureux trouva moyen de me remettre, et que j’ai brûlé suivant ma coutume. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 227)

TT: . . . the evening produced nothing but a little note which the discreet lover found means to convey to me, and was burned, according to custom . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 225)

In this example ‘ma’ is left out of the translation. As a consequence, it seems as though burning notes from secret lovers is a custom which is generally practiced and not a rule Merteuil has carefully laid out for herself.

Example 23 (85th letter)

ST: . . . j’étais bien sûre aussi, d’après ma réputation, qu’il ne me traiterai pas avec cette légèreté que, pour peu qu’on ait d’usage, on n’emploie qu’avec les femmes à aventures ou, celles qui n’ont aucune expérience . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 219)

TT: . . . but I was certain that, reputation apart, he would not behave with that kind of familiarity which no well-bred person ever permits himself, only with intriguing or unexperienced women . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 217)

In the original text, Merteuil talks about how she took the time and effort to carefully establish her reputation as someone who is open to love affairs but is still hard to seduce. Indeed, she is known as a woman who is neither inexperienced nor a libertine, which is why Prévau does not seduce her in a very obvious manner but treads more carefully. However, by omitting the possessive determiner ‘ma’ and substituting ‘après’ with ‘apart’, its opposite, the meaning of the sentence is entirely different in the translation. The emphasis on the fact she did an excellent job establishing her own reputation is gone, since the antecedent of “reputation

apart” is now ‘he’, i.e. Prévau, meaning that although he is a famous libertine, he still behaves like a gentleman. Moreover, ‘femmes à aventures’ is translated as ‘intriguing’. Consequently, its meaning of ‘libertine women’ is lost, and so is the opposition between libertines and unexperienced women, two categories to whom Merteuil made sure she does not belong. In sum, in the translation, the effort Merteuil put into establishing her reputation and deceiving society is lost.

5.2.2.4 Planning

1) Increase

One way to increase the emphasis on the fact that Merteuil is an excellent planner who foresees every detail is by giving her more agency or taking agency away from the people she plans to seduce:

Example 24 (10th letter)

ST: Il voit d’abord deux couverts mis ; ensuite un lit fait. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 67)

TT: The first thing which presented itself to his view, was a table with two covers, and a bed prepared. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 50)

In the ST segment, ‘il’, i.e. Prévau is the subject and experiencer, or the “living entity that experiences the action or event” (2001, p. 94) according to Aarts’ categorisation of semantic roles. He is the one who sees the table covers and the bed. In the translation, the roles are reversed, as the table is now the agent who does the action of presenting itself to Prévau’s view. However, as the table is an inanimate object, we know it is not capable of presenting itself; somebody must have put it there so that Prévau would see it first. Indeed, this is the work of Merteuil and her maid Victoire, who have carefully prepared everything for the whole evening. Thus, in the translation, Merteuil’s planning comes forward much better than in the original text, which leaves the planning implied.

2) Decrease

As Merteuil’s accounts of her seductions are quite exhaustive, the translator omitted quite a lot of details. The reason for this might have been to create *energeia* or vividness or to emphasise the more important elements of her letters (cf. 3.1). The effect, however, is that Merteuil seems less calculated and intelligent, as the logic and planning behind her ways of

working is sometimes lost because of the omissions, which are sometimes very obvious and sometimes more subtle:

Example 25 (10th letter)

ST: . . . pendant que Victoire s'occupe des autres détails . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 66)

TT: . . . whilst Victoire was taken up with other matters . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 50)

The difference between the ST segment and the TT segment is in a small detail: 'des' is a contraction of 'de + les', meaning that 'details' is preceded by a definite article in the source text, while in the translation 'other' is an indefinite determiner. The ST segment thus suggests that 'the' other details are the details of the plan that still need to be carried out, while the TT segment does not have such a connotation; Victoire could very well be doing things that are unrelated to the plan. In sum, Merteuil's planning is less apparent in the translation than it is in the source text here.

Example 26 (85th letter)

ST: . . . je devins rêveuse, à tel point qu'on fut forcé de s'en apercevoir . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 217)

TT: . . . I began to grow thoughtful to such a degree that it was taken notice of . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 216)

In this example, the TT segment has a different connotation than the ST segment. In the source text, the verb 'forcé' is used, and the underlying agent is Merteuil, meaning it was her who forces them to notice she is daydreaming because she made it so obvious; she was acting and it was her plan all along. In the translation, however, 'forcé' was omitted. Consequently, it is no longer clear if she was acting or she was really caught up in her daydream so much so that people took notice. Again, Merteuil's talent for planning was lost in the translation.

Example 27 (85th letter)

ST: . . . ma chambre à coucher, d'où vous savez qu'on voit tout ce qui se passe dans mon cabinet de toilette, et ce fut là que je le reçus. Libres dans notre conversation . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 221)

TT: . . . visit in my bed chamber, from whence, you know, one may see every thing that passes in my dressing room. Our conversation was easy . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 219)

In the translation of this example, an important element is omitted: the fact that it is in the dressing room that she receives Prévau. This is a key element to Merteuil's plan, otherwise Prévau would not ask her for more privacy. However, in the translation, it is less apparent that she received him there, which could not only confuse the reader but also does not do Merteuil's planning of the most minute detail justice.

Example 28 (85th letter)

ST: . . . outre que les visites du matin ne marquent plus, il ne tient qu'à moi de trouver celle-ci trop leste; et je le remets en effet dans la classe des gens moins liés avec moi, par une invitation écrite, pour un souper de cérémonie. Je puis dire, comme Annette : *Mais voilà tout, pourtant !* (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 240)

TT: . . . but besides, as the morning visits are no longer exceptionable, it belongs to me to judge of this, and I account it trifling. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 224)

Contrary to the previous example, in this case the translator has omitted a significant amount of text. After Prévau has paid Merteuil a visit in the morning, which custom does not require, it is up to the Marquise to decide whether or not to put him in his place. In the English version, she does not do this, as she does not consider it a big deal. In the original version, however, Merteuil makes it clear that Prévau has crossed a line by sending him a written invitation, which she only does with people she is not well acquainted with. She pretends to have gotten scared because she suddenly realised their relationship is inappropriate, just like Annette in Favart's comedy *Annette et Lubin* (1774)². Indeed, by pretending she wants to distance herself from Prévau, he believes she is innocent and inexperienced, and it will be

² After her Lord tells Annette her relationship with her cousin Lubin is scandalous and illegal since they are not married, the innocent girl is shocked to the core and immediately wants to end it (Hence, "*Mais voilà tout, pourtant!*") . Later, however, she changes her mind and marries Lubin.

easy for him to ruin her reputation. Of course, she is only playing a game – her game, which is unfolding exactly as planned. All of this is lost in the translation, where Merteuil seems to leave more up to coincidence, and she seems less educated since the literary reference is dropped as well.

5.2.2.5 *Manipulation and rhetorical techniques*

1) Increase

Merteuil often makes clever use of rhetorical techniques, structural markers and linking words to manipulate others and Valmont into doing what she wants them to do and to give her arguments more credibility. In some instances, the translator added elements of contrast and tropes, possibly to vivify the text, but with the result of Merteuil seeming more manipulative, persuasive and eloquent:

Example 29 (85th letter)

ST: . . . ils s'indignaient qu'on eût osé manquer à *leur vertueuse Maîtresse*. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 230)

TT: . . . they were enraged to the highest degree, any one should dare to insult *their virtuous mistress* . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 229)

In this example, a hyperbole was added to emphasise the fact that Merteuil successfully manipulated her servants into thinking she is virtuous, while in reality she is a promiscuous libertine.

Example 30 (81st letter)

ST: . . . il veut le dire, et il ne le dira pas . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 192)

TT: He will tell, you say: but he shall not tell. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 190)

In the translation, 'you say' is added. By explicitly recognising Valmont's warning and still denying Prévau will spill the beans, Merteuil emphasises her intelligence, as she believes a genius like her cannot possibly be ruined by Prévau. The conjunction of contrast 'but' is used instead of the neutral 'et' to emphasise her statement, and essentially manipulate him into believing in her genius. In sum, in the translation Merteuil seems more intelligent than in the source text.

2) Decrease

If adding structural markers leads to Merteuil seeming more eloquent and manipulative, omitting them can have a detrimental effect on her arguments and manipulation:

Example 31 (81st letter)

ST: Munie de ces premières armes, j'en essayai l'usage : non contente de ne plus me laisser pénétrer . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 176)

TT: Provided with such arms, I immediately began to try their utility. Not satisfied with the closeness of my character . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 174)

The ST segment is an example of the means Merteuil uses to structure her letters so that everything flows nicely and her arguments are tied together. By speaking of the 'premières' arms, she implies that she gained more. 'Ne plus' suggests that there was a time where people were able to see through her, but that she now has the skill to prevent that. In combination with the rest of the sentence, Merteuil means that she was eager to learn even more skills than she already had. This layer of meaning, however, is lost in translation, since 'premières' was omitted, and the noun phrase 'the closeness of my character' no longer contains the meaning of 'ne plus'. As a consequence, in the translation, it seems as though Merteuil was simply not happy with her own personality (which is an insult to her pride!). Moreover, her ambition to teach herself new skills is no longer apparent through the structure of her text, which makes her seem less intelligent.

Example 32 (113th letter)

ST: . . . et lui, elle ne l'appelle pas Monsieur, c'est bien toujours Danceny seulement. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 3, p. 170)

TT: . . . she does not call him Monsieur, but plain Danceny. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 166)

In this example, the left dislocation "et lui" and the cleft sentence structure "c'est bien toujours" are techniques used to emphasise and contrast. Indeed, Merteuil wants to make it clear that Cécile Volanges is not in love with Valmont, as opposed to Danceny, so that Valmont will try harder to seduce her. However, in the translation these techniques are

omitted, so that the contrast between Danceny and Valmont is less obvious and Merteuil's manipulation is less successful.

Example 33 (113th letter)

ST: . . . et ne lui permettre, par exemple, de se rapprocher de Danceny, qu'après le lui avoir fait un peu plus oublier. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 3, p. 171)

TT: . . . and not suffer her to draw near Danceny, until he is a little worn out of her memory. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 166)

Here, Merteuil's manipulation consists of the fact that she gives a subtle order. She pretends to only be giving an example, since she knows Valmont will likely not carry out a direct order from her as he is too proud. In the translation, however, 'par exemple' is omitted, which makes her seem more dominant but also less clever and less manipulative.

Example 34 (141st letter)

ST: Peut-être n'aurez-vous pas le temps de la lire, ou celui d'y faire assez attention pour la bien entendre? libre à vous. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 107)

TT: . . . perhaps you will not have leasure to read it, or to give so much attention to it as to understand it properly? (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 100)

Merteuil wants to manipulate Valmont by making it seem as though she will not be angry if he decides not to read on. She says she leaves it up to him. Again, by seemingly not forcing him to read it and giving him the option to refuse, she is manipulating him into doing it anyway. However, 'libre à vous' was not translated, thus making her less manipulative in the translation.

Another proof is Merteuil's eloquence is the fact she tries to involve her reader in her arguments by using the interrogative form instead of the assertive form:

Example 35 (152nd letter)

ST: Savez-vous, Vicomte, pourquoi je ne me suis jamais remariée? (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 161)

TT: You do not know, Viscount, the reasons I never married again. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 155)

In this example, the Marquise makes use of a question in order to elicit Valmont's attention: she manipulates him into reading on. Moreover, the question begs for an answer, thus emphasising what comes next, i.e. the fact that she does not want any man, including Valmont, to have any control over her. In sum, the use of a question here does not only serve as an eloquent way to elicit the interest of the reader, but also to emphasise her agency and freedom, and the fact that she is too proud to ever give up that agency again. The emphasis on all of these aspects is lost in the translation. In any case, this example perfectly illustrates the fact that the semantic categories on which my analysis is based sometimes overlap; one shift can influence a number of ways in which Merteuil is deviant.

5.2.3 Libertinism

5.2.3.1 Promiscuity

- Decrease

Although Merteuil is an avid libertine, she likes to use metaphors to refer to sexual activity instead of explicitly saying it like it is. However, it is still clear what she is talking about, and these sexual connotations are sometimes replaced by more neutral ones or omitted altogether:

Example 36 (81st letter)

ST: . . . je brûlais de vous combattre corps à corps. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 188)

TT: . . . I burned with the desire of encountering you face to face. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 186)

In the ST segment, Merteuil uses a metaphor for her desire to defeat Valmont in the game of libertinism. 'Combattre' suggests that she sees it as a war: like a true warrior, she will do anything for glory. The comparison between libertinism and war shows how much this was a lifestyle reserved for men, and how much Merteuil stepped out of the traditional gender roles to engage in it. 'Corps à corps' is a clever wordplay which emphasises the physical aspect of

libertinism and suggest she wants to have sex with Valmont. In the translation, this sexual connotation, as well as the implication of violence and war was traded for a more neutral expression of meeting him in person. Thus, Merteuil's appetite for libertinism was lost in the translation of this segment.

Example 37 (85th letter)

ST: . . . il se rabattit sur la délicate amitié ; et ce fut sous ce drapeau banal, que nous commençâmes notre attaque réciproque. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 213)

TT: . . . then he returned to delicate friendship; and this was the subject that engaged us. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 211)

In the source text, Merteuil states that Prévau tried different tones with her to see which one would work to start flirting. After a few failed attempts, he eventually assumed a delicately friendly tone, which pleased Merteuil, and it is only then the mutual game of seduction can begin. Again, Merteuil uses war language to describe this game -they 'attack' each other – emphasising once more the physical aspect of libertinism, as their ultimate goal is to have a sexual relation with each other. However, in the translation, every implication of this is gone. Merteuil only says that the subject of friendship was the one that initiated a true conversation, and the libertine connotations are entirely gone.

Sometimes Merteuil's clever use of the right element at the right time can have a sexual connotation, once more proving her eloquence. When the element is omitted, however, it is less evident what she actually means:

Example 38 (134th letter)

ST: Il est vrai qu'alors je me croirais obligée de vous remercier ; que sait-on ? peut-être même de vous récompenser. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 73)

TT: Certainly I should think myself obliged to thank you, and, who knows? perhaps to reward you. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 67)

In the source text, Merteuil uses 'même' to emphasise what comes next: the suggestion she will reward Valmont. 'Même' also expresses that this is not just any reward, but a big concession of her, implying that she will sleep with him if he obeys her order. However, 'même' was not translated, so the fact that she will reward him and the sexual connotation of

the reward is absent in the translation. Consequently, Merteuil's promiscuity is less apparent in the translation.

5.2.3.2 *Aversion to love*

- Decrease:

Merteuil is a cold-blooded woman who is rational at all times and does not believe in love. In fact, she laughs at other people's feelings and amuses herself watching other people act irrationally because they are in love. In the translation, however, she is represented as more emotional and more susceptible of love and affection.

One way of making her seem more open to feelings is by increasing the agency of her lover and making her into a patient:

Example 39 (10th letter)

ST: . . . comme il sait sentir vivement! la tête m'en tourne. Sérieusement, le bonheur parfait qu'il trouve à être aimé de moi, m'attache véritablement à lui. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 63)

TT: How sensibly he affects one ! He distracts me. Seriously, then, his happiness in being loved by me, inspires me with a true affection for him. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 47)

In this case, a number of shifts happened in the translation process. First, "comme il sait sentir vivement" was translated by "how sensibly he affects one". In the source text, 'sentir' is an intransitive verb and 'il', i.e. Belleruche is the experiencer: he does not affect something or someone else in the process, since there is no patient. Belleruche simply is a man of feeling, and he gets completely absorbed in his emotions. In the translation however, the emphasis is no longer on how Belleruche is affected by his own feelings, but on how he affects others. Indeed, 'affect' is a transitive verb, Belleruche is the agent, and 'one', i.e. other people, including the Marquise, is the patient. Moreover 'sensibly' is an adverb, suggesting that it relates to the verb 'affect', not to the subject Belleruche. This implies that Belleruche affects people in a way that concerns the senses: he has an influence on Merteuil's feelings.

Although "la tête m'en tourne" may imply that it is Belleruche's behaviour that makes her head spin, the construction that is used makes it less apparent. A more literal translation would be: my head spins because of it. The focus is again on the process and what it affects

and less so on what caused the process to happen. In the translation, however, “he distracts me” is a transitive verb which expresses a process that has an effect on somebody else: Merteuil is again the patient who is affected by the agent, Belleruche. Belleruche is capable of affecting her feelings and her mental state in the translation, whereas in the source text the emphasis is on how emotional Belleruche himself is.

Lastly, “m’attache véritablement à lui” was translated by “inspires me with a true affection for him”. Whereas in the source text Merteuil is simply attached to him, in the translation she has affection for him, and it is a ‘true’ one. This implies that she does have feelings for him and, unlike in the source text, she is not only amused by his pathetic display of feelings for her. In sum, all of these changes make Merteuil appear less like a cold-blooded libertine and more like someone who is emotionally affected by her lovers as well.

Sometimes, smaller shifts, such as punctuation changes and seemingly harmless omissions, can have a big impact on Merteuil’s attitudes towards love:

Example 40 (81st letter)

ST: Cette première nuit, . . . ne me présentait qu’une occasion d’expérience: douleur et plaisir, j’observai tout exactement, et ne voyais dans ces diverses sensations, que des faits à recueillir et à méditer. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 179)

TT: This first night, . . . offered me only an opportunity of experience, pleasure and pain. I observed everything with the utmost exactitude, and those different sensations furnished matter for reflection. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 177)

In the source text, “douleur et plaisir” are placed after the colon, suggesting that they belong to the second part of the sentence, together with “j’observai”. Even if she says it was an opportunity of experience, she does not really experience these feelings, but observes them. This makes it seem more plausible that she actually means an occasion to gain more knowledge, instead of an occasion to feel new things. In the translation, however, “pleasure and pain” are grouped together with ‘experience’ and separated from the next clause by a full stop. This implies that she did consider it as an opportunity to gain experience a.k.a. knowledge, but also an opportunity to feel pleasure and pain. Although in the next sentence of the translation, she still says she observed everything, another detail tells us that she actually felt those sensations. In fact, in the TT segment, the sensations she experienced are a source of reflection for her, while in the ST segment, the use of ‘ne...que’ means that she did not

consider these sensations to be *anything else* but facts, which she could use to gain more knowledge. In sum, it seems that in the original version, Merteuil elevates herself above her own feelings and experiences like an objective observer, while in the translation, she experiences the feelings first and then reflects on them. This makes Merteuil more cold-blooded and averse to emotions and sensations in the original text than she is in its translation.

Example 41 (113th letter)

ST: Je remarque surtout l'insultante confiance qu'il prend en moi, et la sécurité avec laquelle il me regarde comme à lui pour toujours. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 3, p. 172)

TT: I moreover take notice of his insulting confidence, for he really looks on me as his property. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 168)

In the source text, the emphasis is on “pour toujours”, not on “à lui”. Merteuil is insulted by the fact Danceny thinks she will love him forever and remain faithful to him. Indeed, she does not believe in love, only in liaisons, so the insult stems from the fact he thinks she is a person of feeling. However, only “à lui” was translated, and “pour toujours” was omitted. As a result, the emphasis is no longer on the love aspect, but on the fact that Danceny regards her as property. Merteuil is insulted by Danceny’s perceived power over her, as it means she does not come across as a woman who has agency and dominates the rest of the world. This is what hurts her pride in the translation, and the implication that she is a cold-blooded libertine is absent.

5.2.4 Pride

5.2.4.1 Arrogance

1) Increase

The Cambridge dictionary defines arrogance as “unpleasantly proud and behaving as if you are more important than, or know more than, other people” (“Arrogance, n.d.). Indeed, Merteuil is not afraid to boast and emphasise the fact that she is better than everyone else. In the translation, she sometimes comes across as even more arrogant by means of adding a hyperbole:

Example 42 (113th letter)

ST: Ce n'est pas que je sois jalouse d'elle . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 3, p. 175)

TT: Not that I have the least tincture of jealousy . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 171)

In this example, a hyperbole is added to emphasise the fact that Merteuil is not jealous. This makes her seem more arrogant and proud in the translation.

Example 43 (152nd letter)

ST: Je souhaite que vous y avez trouvé beaucoup de plaisir; quant à moi, cela n'a pas nui au mien. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 163)

TT: I hope you received great pleasure from your enquiries; as to mine, it has not been in the least detrimental to them. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 158)

In the translation, the addition of the hyperbole “not in the least” emphasises the fact that she deems herself too important and superior to be affected by anything Valmont does. This increases her arrogance.

2) Decrease

Sometimes Merteuil's arrogance is decreased by taking away her agency:

Example 44 (85th letter)

ST: . . . je me rappelai vos sages conseils et me promis bien... de poursuivre l'aventure ; sûre que je le guérirais de cette dangereuse indiscretion. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 216)

TT: . . . I called to mind your prudent advice, and determined – to pursue the adventure, as I was sure that it would cure him of this dangerous indiscretion. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 214)

In the ST segment, Merteuil is certain that she will change Prévan's habit of ruining women: she is the agent of the action. In the TT segment, however, the agent is 'it', i.e. the adventure. Of course, she is responsible for planning out the whole adventure, but by substituting 'je' with 'it', the emphasis on herself is gone, thus decreasing her arrogance.

5.2.4.2 Determination

1) Increase

A simple addition can cause Merteuil to seem more determined:

Example 45 (10th letter)

ST: . . . je me décide à lui faire connaître ma petite maison dont il ne se doutait pas.
(Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 65)

TT: . . . I immediately resolved to show him my villa, of which he had not the least suspicion . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 49)

In the translation, ‘immediately’ is added, which emphasises Merteuil’s confidence in her own decisions and determination to carry out her plans.

Another technique is to use a hyperbole:

Example 46 (20th letter)

ST: . . . je ne veux pas l’entendre. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 103)

TT: . . . I will have nothing to do with him. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 88)

In this example, the hyperbole emphasises Merteuil’s strong will to avoid Danceny at all costs. Instead of simply not listening to him, she does not want anything to do with him, which makes her seem more resolved and proud than she is in the source text.

5.2.4.3 Self-confidence

1) Increase:

Elements of moderation and doubt can make a speaker seem less confident and less dominant. When they are omitted, or replaced by an unmoderated statement, the opposite effect can be observed:

Example 47 (134th letter)

ST: . . . vous feriez peut-être bien l'effort de me le promettre . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 72)

TT: . . . you would not hesitate to promise . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 66)

In the ST segment, Merteuil uses the word 'peut-être', which means she is not sure that what she is saying will occur. In the translation, however, "you would not hesitate" expresses much more confidence in her own statement.

Example 48 (81st letter)

ST: . . . une impudence assez louable, mais peut-être uniquement due à la facilité de vos premiers succès . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 169)

TT: . . . a tolerable share of impudence, which is solely owing to the facility of your first successes. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 167)

In ST segment, 'mais peut-être' expresses doubt and moderation. This is omitted in the translation, which not only makes Merteuil seem very self-confident, it also increases her dominance, as she is downplaying Valmont's qualities without moderation.

2) Decrease

The addition of elements which express doubt can have a detrimental effect on the representation of one's self-confidence:

Example 49 (10th letter)

ST: Là, moitié réflexion, moitié sentiment, je passai mes bras autour de lui . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 67)

TT: There, in suspense, between reflection and sentiment, I flung my arms around him . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, pp. 51-52)

By adding 'in suspense' to the translation, it seems as though Merteuil is not quite certain her plan will work; otherwise she would not be nervous. Thus, in the translation, Merteuil is more insecure.

Example 50 (81st letter)

ST: . . . si je ne me trompe, voilà tous vos moyens . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 169)

TT: . . . those, I believe, are all your abilities, if I am not mistaken . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 167)

Even if in the original text, Merteuil expresses some hesitation with ‘si je ne me trompe’, the translator added another element of doubt, i.e. ‘I believe’. Contrary to ‘I know’, this makes her seem less confident and again less dominant as she is still talking about Valmont’s merits.

5.2.4.4 Selfishness

1) Increase

Example 51 (81st letter)

ST: . . . dès ce moment, ma façon de penser fut pour moi seule . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 177)

TT: From that moment I became selfish . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 174)

In this example, the translator’s personal interpretation and evaluation of Merteuil’s behaviour shines through. Merteuil simply states that nobody else but herself had access to her thoughts, but this alone does not make her selfish. The Oxford English dictionary defines selfish as “lacking consideration for other people; concerned chiefly with one’s own personal profit or pleasure” (“Selfish”, n.d.), which is not the same as keeping your thoughts to yourself. In any case, the effect is that Merteuil seems more selfish in the translation, since she literally calls herself that way.

2) Decrease

Merteuil is a very selfish woman. Most of the time, she only cares about herself and is easily triggered if she thinks she is not treated fairly. The few times she does think of someone else’s enjoyment, she puts it on the same level of importance as her own. However, in the translation, she sometimes seems to value other people more than herself:

Example 52 (10th letter)

ST: . . . j'avais résolu que tout ce temps fût pour lui également délicieux . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 68)

TT: . . . I was determined the whole time should be devoted to delight him . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 52)

In this example, the translator has significantly altered the meaning of the subclause. In the original version, Merteuil wants to make Belleruche enjoy their time together as much as she does. In the translation, however, 'également' was omitted: she only makes an effort to please him, without mentioning her own enjoyment. In sum, in the translation, she is selfless, while in the source text, her enjoyment matters as much to her as Belleruche's enjoyment.

Sometimes, a simple substitution of a personal pronoun can make Merteuil seem less self-centred:

Example 53 (85th letter)

ST: . . . que nous ne trouverions jamais un moment de liberté; et qu'il fallait regarder comme une espèce de miracle, celle dont nous avons joui hier . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, pp. 221-222)

TT: . . . I easily persuaded him we should never find a favourable opportunity, and he must look upon it a kind of miracle that which he had yesterday . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 220)

In the translation, 'nous' was replaced by 'he'. In the original text, Merteuil values the freedom they had to converse without anyone listening in as much for herself as she does for him. In the translation, however, she only talks about the importance of his freedom.

As mentioned before, Merteuil is an expert in getting her message across exactly as she intends it to. As a result, the omission of one word can make a big difference:

Example 54 (85th letter)

ST: Enfin vous serez tranquille et surtout vous me rendrez justice. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 210)

TT: At length you will be satisfied, and do me justice . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 209)

In the original text, Merteuil uses ‘surtout’ to emphasise what is most important: not that Valmont will be satisfied, but that at last she receives the admiration and respect she believes she deserves. However, in the translation, ‘surtout’ was omitted, which makes it seem as if she believes Valmont’s happiness is just as important as her own. She is thus less selfish and proud in the translation than she is in the original text.

Example 55 (152nd letter)

ST: ...ainsi, pourquoi vous tourmenter? pourquoi, surtout, me tourmenter moi-même ! (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 162)

TT: Why, then, will you torment yourself ? – And why torment me? (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 157)

Again, ‘surtout’ is omitted in the translation of this example, which takes away the emphasis on the second clause. For Merteuil, the most important thing is herself, but in the translation it seems as though she values Valmont’s well-being as much as she values her own, which makes her seem less selfish.

Sometimes, the changes are less subtle. In this case the translator either seems to have made an interpretation error or deliberately shortened the ST segment as he deemed it superfluous. In any case, the result is that Merteuil seems less selfish:

Example 56 (113th letter)

ST: Avant de cesser de m'occuper de vous, pour venir à moi, je veux encore vous dire que ce moyen de maladie que vous m'annoncez vouloir prendre, est bien connu et bien usé . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 3, p. 171)

TT: Before I think of your coming to me, I must tell you this pretended sickness is an exploded common trick. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 166)

In the source text, Merteuil wants to say one last thing about Valmont before she start telling him about her own life. The use of 'pour' makes it clear that this was the actual intent of her letter, but she probably got caught up in her anger with him and therefore wrote more about him than she wanted to. In the translation however, Merteuil has to get something off her chest before she can consider receiving Valmont again. Her eagerness to talk about herself is completely lost in the translation, making her seem less selfish.

In other cases, Merteuil does not deem other as equally important, but only talks about herself, deliberately using first person pronouns. When they are omitted or replaced by a different structure, the importance she places on herself is no longer apparent:

Example 57 (81st letter)

ST: . . . heureusement pour moi, ma mère m'annonça peu de jours après que j'allais me marier . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 179)

TT: . . . but fortunately a few days after my mother informed me that I was to be married. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 176)

In this example, 'pour moi' was omitted in the translation. 'Fortunately' without a postmodifier can mean fortunately for everybody, for example her family, since in eighteenth-century society a girl's social ruin also brought shame to her family. However, in the original version, Merteuil only cares about her own social status, not about other people. Thus, in the translation, she seems less selfish.

Example 58 (85th letter)

ST: Je ne manquai pas d'ajouter que tous ces usages c'étaient établis, parce que, jusqu'à ce jour, ils ne m'avaient jamais contrariée . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 222)

TT: I did not fail to add, those were long-established customs in my family, which, until then, had never varied . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 220)

In this example, the TT segment has a completely different meaning than the ST segment. In the source text, Merteuil claims the customs had been established because they were never an obstacle for her. In the translation, however, she simply states the customs had never been changed. The implied reason for that may be that she values tradition, which is a less selfish reason than in the source text. Again, this makes her seem less self-centred in the translation.

5.2.5 Exposing society, social criticism and taboo topics

5.2.5.1 Lack of freedom

- Decrease

Although Merteuil is very critical of society and its sexual imbalance, she also exposes it in more subtle ways. At first glance, the following ST segments which contain the word 'liberté' do not seem subversive at all. However, upon looking at their translation, it seems likely the translator might have avoided mentioning certain issues on purpose. A reason for this could be that he did not want to make his female readership realise they are not free, as they might take action against this wrongdoing. Although we can never know what the translator's reasons or intentions were, the effect of his actions is that Merteuil seems less subversive:

Example 59 (85th letter)

ST: . . . nous ne trouverions jamais un moment de liberté . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 221)

TT: . . . we should never find a favourable opportunity . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 220)

In the ST segment, Merteuil addresses the fact that she has very little moments when she is not observed by the rest of society. Indeed, privacy and liberty were almost non-existent for women in the eighteenth-century. However, in the translation, this emphasis on liberty is less apparent, as it is replaced by 'opportunity'. Whereas *liberté* is defined as "*État de quelqu'un*

qui n'est pas soumis à un maître [emphasis added]" ("Liberté", n.d.), opportunity has a more limited scope: "*an occasion or situation* that makes it possible to do something that you want to do or have to do, or the possibility of doing something [emphasis added]" ("Opportunity", n.d.). Indeed, *liberté* is favourable state of being in society, whereas opportunity is a favourable specific occasion.

Example 60 (81st letter)

ST: . . . je n'en sentis pas moins vivement le prix de la liberté qu'allait me donner mon veuvage . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 181)

TT: . . . I was very sensibly affected with the liberty my widowhood gave me . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 179)

In the translation, 'prix' was omitted, making the enormous value Merteuil places on liberty and the fact that it can only be obtained by widowhood less apparent. In the source text, liberty is seen as a prize, a gift for the lucky few, but in the translation this connotation is absent.

5.2.5.2 Female lust and libertinism

- Decrease

Merteuil is not only subversive because she is a libertine herself; she also exposes the fact that there are other women out there who have liaisons. Women were deemed to be naturally chaste and modest, and thus Merteuil could be regarded as an abnormality, a monster. However, if she is not the only one, the problem must lie with the structures of society, not with her. Again, the translator seems to have censored this shocking fact in order not to elicit social criticism:

Example 61 (10th letter)

ST: Mais, quelque envie qu'on ait de se donner, quelque pressée que l'on en soit, encore faut-il un prétexte . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 61)

TT: Whatever inclination we may have to yield, however we feel our compliance unavoidable, still must there be a pretence . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 45)

In this excerpt, Merteuil is talking about the pretexts women have to use if they want a liaison. In the source text, 'se donner' implies that women voluntarily want to give themselves

up to their lovers. This is supported by the use of ‘pressée’, which means that women are sometimes so lustful that they cannot wait to give themselves up. However, in the translation, ‘yield’ implies that they do it against their will, because they were put under too much pressure and therefore it becomes ‘unavoidable’ that they give in. Thus, in the translation, Merteuil does not acknowledge the existence of female lust and the fact that women long to have liaisons anymore.

Example 62 (81st letter)

ST: . . . et pour me ménager entre eux et mes infidèles protectrices . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 185)

TT: . . . to keep the balance even between them and my new female friends . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 183)

Again, Merteuil’s reference to the fact that libertine women exist was replaced by a neutral element: instead of her unfaithful friends, she simply refers to them as her new female friends. Thus, in the translation Merteuil is less subversive.

5.2.5.3 Sexual power imbalance and hypocrisy

Sometimes, Merteuil is less subtle and directly criticises the gender imbalance when it comes to liaisons, in which men have all the power and women’s faith was dependent on their mercy:

- 1) Increase

Example 63 (81st letter)

ST: . . . ces liens réciproquement donnés et reçus, pour parler le jargon de l’amour, vous seul pouvez, à votre choix, les resserrer ou les rompre . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 171)

TT: . . . those reciprocal attachments, given and received, to speak in the love cant, you alone have it in your power to keep or break. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 168)

In the translation, the fact that men have all the power and women are powerless to end liaisons is explicitated by means of the addition “in your power”. This means that in the translation Merteuil is more critical than in the source text.

2) Decrease

Example 64 (81st letter)

ST: *Ses bras s'ouvrent encor, quand son cœur est fermé.* (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 171)

TT: . . . her arms are open, while her heart is shut . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 169)

The difference between the ST and the TT segment lies in the omission of 'encor', which emphasizes the fact that women still have to give themselves up to their lovers even if they want to get rid of them. In the translation, this contrast is less apparent, so Merteuil's criticism of this sexual imbalance is downplayed.

5.2.5.4 Society's morals and mores

- Decrease

Example 65 (81st letter)

ST: J'étudiai nos mœurs dans les Romans ; nos opinions dans les Philosophes ; je cherchai même dans les Moralistes les plus sévères ce qu'ils exigeaient de nous . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 182)

TT: I studied my morals in romances, my opinions amongst philosophers, and even sought amongst our most severe moralists, what was required of us. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 179)

What is striking in this example is that Merteuil calls the morals and opinions she studies 'ours' in the original version, while she calls them 'mine' in the translation. The consequence of this substitution in the translation is that Merteuil's shocking behaviour is no longer seen as a reflection of society, but as a peculiarity that can be solely attributed to her. In the original text, her deceit and conduct are a consequence of society's hypocrisy and emphasis on keeping up appearances. In the translation, her shocking behaviour is a consequence of her studying romances and philosophers and deriving her own morals from it. Thus, in the translation, Merteuil does not expose society's hypocrisy as much.

Example 66 (81st letter)

ST: . . . les vraisemblances, sur lesquelles seules on peut nous juger. (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 186)

TT: . . . probabilities on which only a judgment may be formed. (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 184)

In this example, Merteuil makes it clear that women are only judged by their appearances, and they can deceive society by removing all the external signs of their unchastity. ‘On’ is the agent and refers to society and ‘nous’ is the patient and refers to women. In the translation, however, a passive construction is used, making it unclear who is judged by whom.

Therefore, Merteuil’s statement comes across as a general truth, rather than a revelation about the workings of a hypocritical society where women are judged harshly but where there is a gap between appearances and reality.

5.2.5.5 Taboo topics

Merteuil is not afraid to address taboo topics directly, at least not in her letters to Valmont where she can be herself completely. However, the translator may have exercised censorship in certain cases in order not to shock his readers too much.

Example 67 (10th letter)

ST: . . . ces femmes que vous avez eues, croyez-vous les avoir violées? (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 61)

TT: . . . of the different women you have had, do you think you gained any of them by force? (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 45)

In the source text, the Marquise asks Valmont explicitly and directly if he thinks he has raped the women he conquered. In the translation, however, she asks the same question in a more subtle way. Although gaining someone by force is essentially rape, it does not sound quite as bad and rude. In sum, in the translation, Merteuil avoids directly addressing a taboo topic and therefore adheres more to the rules of decency.

Example 68 (81st letter)

ST: . . . deux enfants qui, tous deux, brûlent de se voir, et qui, soit dit en passant, doivent à moi seule l'ardeur de ce désir . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 168)

TT: . . . two children, who are eager to see each other, and who, I will take upon me to say, are indebted to me only for this eagerness . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 165)

In this example, Merteuil uses vocabulary with a sexual connotation to describe the love of two children. In fact, Merteuil has used 'brûler' in a sexual way before: "je brûlais de vous combattre corps à corps" (cf. 5.2.3.1 example 36). In the translation however, this word was substituted with 'eager', which is a more neutral word. While in the source text, Merteuil speaks about the 'desire' these two children have for each other, in the translation this is simply 'eagerness'. It is clear that in the source text, Merteuil is breaking more taboos than in the target text.

5.2.6 Other aspects of deviance

5.2.6.1 Aggression

Aggression and violence were characteristics typically associated with men, and in Britain and France alike, women were excluded from all positions that required them to fight. However, as stated before, Merteuil considers libertinism to be a fight between her and her lovers. She often uses war vocabulary and considers herself a warrior, another aspect of her gender deviance with made her a threat to society.

Example 69 (10th letter)

ST: Vous voyez que je vous bats avec vos armes . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 1, p. 60)

TT: You see I fight you on your own ground . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 1, p. 44)

Fighting with arms was the ultimate chance for men to prove their bravery, but it was absolutely not done for women, so the fact that in the source text Merteuil uses this metaphor was quite shocking. In the translation however, "avec vos armes" was substituted with "on your own ground", which is less norm defeating.

Example 70 (85th letter)

ST: Enfin, pour écarter de la lice un concurrent redoutable, c'est encore moi que vous invoquez . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 2, p. 211)

TT: . . . again, to set aside a formidable competitor, you still invoke me . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 2, p. 209)

In the source text, Merteuil imagines herself to be a knight who clears his competitor out of the way in a tournament. However, in the translation, the meaning of 'lice', i.e. the arena, was omitted. The effect is that the imagery of Merteuil in the arena is lost in the translation, and Merteuil seems less masculine and heroic.

Example 71 (134th letter)

ST: Sachez-moi gré seulement de mon courage à me défendre: oui, de mon courage . . . (Laclos, 1782, Vol. 4, p. 71)

TT: Be thankful for my resolution in defending myself . . . (Laclos, 1784, Vol. 4, p. 65)

Courage was considered to be a typically masculine characteristic. In the ST segment, the Marquise seems to know this is not what Valmont would expect her to call herself as a woman. Indeed, she repeats it a second time and presents it as an answer to the disbelief she thinks Valmont will have. However, in the translation, 'courage' is replaced by a more gender neutral word: resolution. Moreover, the second clause, which emphasised the first, was omitted. Therefore, the Marquise is less norm defeating in the translation than she is in the source text.

Conclusion

Contrary to what might have been expected, cultural differences between Britain and France did not have much influence on the way in which Merteuil might have been perceived by readers. Although both societies relied on different laws and structures, and Britain was considered to be more progressive than France, in essence they were both patriarchal societies. Consequently, there were not many significant differences in the lives of women in these two societies, except from the greater political power British women enjoyed.

The analysis shows that almost all aspects of Merteuil's deviance from traditional roles were affected by the translation process. First, the Marquise was able to assume more power than other women in the eighteenth century. In the translation, both her agency over herself and her dominance over others seem to have been reduced. However, it should be noted that there were also a considerable amount of instances in which her dominance was increased.

Second, Merteuil's intelligence distinguishes her from most other eighteenth-century women: she is a self-educated, self-made woman who follows her own rules to achieve her goals and uses her acquired knowledge to manipulate other people. However, in the translation, all the aspects that constitute her intelligence have been affected. Merteuil was represented as less reasonable and less well-read. Her identity as a self-made woman was negatively impacted and so were her planning skills more often than not. In some instances, her rhetorical skills were improved and in others she seemed less eloquent and manipulative.

Another subversive aspect of the Marquise's behaviour is her libertinism. In the eighteenth century, women were considered to be naturally chaste and emotional, yet Merteuil is quite the opposite. However, in the translation, her promiscuity was masked and her cold-bloodedness decreased. No examples were found of a shift in the opposite direction, which suggest this might have been the most shocking aspect to eighteenth-century readers.

The fourth category which was studied was Merteuil's pride. Women in the eighteenth century were expected to be humble and selfless at all times, yet the Marquise did not adhere to this social rule. She is arrogant, overly self-confident, selfish and determined: aspects which seem to have both been intensified and downplayed in the translation. This finding differs from the other categories, of which the deviant aspects were almost exclusively decreased. One reason for this could be that the translator's goal was to vivify Merteuil's

character and therefore at times exaggerated this personality trait of her, as it was less shocking to readers than other aspects.

The last two categories which I examined were those of Merteuil's social criticism and her aggression, which was a typically masculine trait. Both these aspects of subversiveness were exclusively downplayed, confirming the overall downward trend of the findings.

Most of the linguistic shifts that occurred were additions and omissions, which is in accordance with the two most common translation practices in the eighteenth century: *amplificatio* and *brevitas*. On the one hand, omissions resulted in a decrease of Merteuil's deviancy. Sometimes, only a single word was deleted. Other times, omissions were very obvious and concerned a significant amount of text, such as footnotes. On the other hand, additions most often emphasised Merteuil's deviancy, for example by means of hyperboles or structural markers of contrast. However, in some cases, the addition of moderating elements led to a decrease in deviancy.

Nevertheless, my analysis was not limited to omissions and additions, since all linguistic shifts which influenced Merteuil's representation were deemed equally important. There were many different substitutions which were too diverse to be grouped. However, one important shift deserves to be mentioned: the disappearing agent effect. This effect is the result of structural shifts that switch female actors in the process denoted by the verb from agent to patient positions. In Merteuil's case, this made her appear more passive, less clever and manipulative, more emotional and less proud. Indeed, the disappearing agent effect affected almost every single category of deviance.

In conclusion, the findings of this study confirm my initial hypothesis: the Marquise de Merteuil is less gender deviant in *Dangerous Connections* than she is in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.

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Appendix

10th letter

Les Liaisons dangereuses

LA MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL AU VICOMTE DE VALMONT

Me boudez-vous, Vicomte? ou bien êtes-vous mort ou, ce qui y ressemblerait beaucoup, ne vivez-vous plus que pour votre Présidente ? Cette femme, qui vous a rendu les illusions de la jeunesse, vous en rendra bientôt aussi les ridicule préjugés. Déjà vous voilà timide et esclave ; autant vaudrait être amoureux. Vous renoncez à vos heureuses témérités. Vous voilà donc vous conduisant sans principes, et donnant tout au hasard, ou plutôt au caprice. Ne vous souvient-il plus que l'amour est, comme la médecine, seulement l'art d'aider la Nature ? **Vous voyez que je vous bats avec vos armes**⁶⁹ : mais je n'en prendrai pas d'orgueil ; car c'est bien battre un homme à terre. Il faut qu'elle se donne, me dites-vous : eh ! sans doute, il le faut ; aussi se donnera-t-elle comme les autres, avec cette différence que ce sera de mauvaise grâce. Mais, pour qu'elle finisse par se donner, le vrai moyen est de commencer par la prendre. Que cette ridicule distinction est bien un vrai déraisonnement de l'amour ! Je dis l'amour ; car vous êtes amoureux. Vous parler autrement, ce serait vous trahir ; ce serait vous cacher votre mal. Dites-moi donc, amant langoureux, **ces femmes que vous avez eues, croyez-vous les avoir violées ?**⁶⁷ **Mais, quelque envie qu'on ait de se donner, quelque pressée que l'on en soit, encore faut-il un prétexte ;**⁶¹ et y en a-t-il de plus commode pour nous, que celui qui nous donne l'air de céder à la force ? Pour moi, je l'avoue, une des choses qui me flattent le plus, est une attaque vive et bien faite, où tout se succède avec ordre quoiqu'avec rapidité ; qui ne nous met jamais dans ce pénible embarras de réparer nous-mêmes une gaucherie dont au contraire nous aurions dû profiter ; qui sait garder l'air de la violence jusque dans les choses que nous accordons, et flatter avec adresse nos deux passions favorites, la gloire de la défense et le plaisir de la défaite. Je conviens que ce talent, plus rare que l'on ne croit, m'a toujours fait plaisir, même alors qu'il ne m'a pas séduite, et que quelquefois il m'est arrivé de me rendre, uniquement comme récompense. Telle dans nos anciens Tournois, la Beauté donnait le prix de la valeur de l'adresse.

Mais vous, vous qui n'êtes plus vous, vous vous conduisez comme si vous aviez peur de réussir. Eh ! depuis quand voyagez-vous à petites journées et par des chemins de traverse ?

Mon ami, quand on veut arriver, des chevaux de poste et la grande route ! Mais laissons ce sujet, qui me donne d'autant plus d'humeur, qu'il me prive du plaisir de vous voir. Au moins écrivez-moi plus souvent que vous ne faites, et mettez-moi au courant de vos progrès. Savez-vous que voilà plus de quinze jours que cette ridicule aventure vous occupe, et que vous négligez tout le monde ?

A propos de négligence, vous ressemblez aux gens qui envoient régulièrement savoir des nouvelles de leurs amis malades, mais qui ne se font jamais rendre la réponse. Vous finissez votre dernière Lettre par me demander si le Chevalier est mort. Je ne réponds pas, et vous ne vous en inquiétez pas davantage. Ne savez-vous plus que mon amant est votre ami-né ? Mais rassurez-vous, il n'est point mort ; ou s'il l'était, ce serait de l'excès de sa joie. Ce pauvre Chevalier, comme il est tendre ! comme il est fait pour l'amour ! **comme il sait sentir vivement ! la tête m'en tourne. Sérieusement, le bonheur parfait qu'il trouve à être aimé de moi, m'attache véritablement à lui.**³⁹

Ce même jour, où je vous écrivais que j'allais travailler à notre rupture, combien je le rendis heureux ! Je m'occupais pourtant tout de bon des moyens de le désespérer, quand on me l'annonça. **Soit caprice ou raison, jamais il ne me parut si bien.**¹³ Je le reçus cependant avec humeur. Il espérait passer deux heures avec moi, avant celle où ma porte serait ouverte à tout le monde. Je lui dis que j'allais sortir : il me demanda où j'allais ; je refusai de le lui apprendre. Il insista ; où vous ne serez pas, repris-je, avec aigreur. Heureusement pour lui, il resta pétrifié de cette réponse ; car, s'il eût dit un mot, il s'ensuivait inmanquablement une scène qui eût amené la rupture que j'avais projetée. Etonnée de son silence, je jetai les yeux sur lui sans autre projet, je vous jure, que de voir la mine qu'il faisait. Je retrouvai sur cette charmante figure cette tristesse, à la fois profonde et tendre à laquelle vous-même êtes convenu qu'il était si difficile de résister. La même cause produisit le même effet ; je fus vaincue une seconde fois. Dès ce moment, je ne m'occupai plus que des moyens d'éviter qu'il pût me trouver un tort. « Je sors pour affaire, lui dis-je avec un air un peu plus doux, et même cette affaire vous regarde ; mais ne m'interrogez pas. Je souperai chez moi ; revenez, et vous serez instruit. » Alors il retrouva la parole ; mais je ne lui permis pas d'en faire usage. « Je suis très pressée, continuai-je. Laissez-moi ; à ce soir. » Il baisa ma main et sortit.

Aussitôt, pour le dédommager, peut-être pour me dédommager moi-même, **je me décide à lui faire connaître ma petite maison dont il ne se doutait pas**⁴⁵. J'appelle ma fidèle Victoire. J'ai ma migraine ; je me couche pour tous mes gens ; et, restée enfin seule avec la véritable, **tandis qu'elle se travestit en Laquais**⁴, je fais une toilette de Femme de chambre. Elle fait ensuite venir un fiacre à la porte de mon jardin, et nous voilà parties. Arrivée dans ce temple de l'amour, je choisis le déshabillé le plus galant. Celui-ci est délicieux ; il est de mon invention : il ne laisse rien voir, et pourtant fait tout devenir. Je vous en promets un modèle pour votre Présidente, quand vous l'aurez rendue digne de le porter.

Après ces préparatifs, **pendant que Victoire s'occupe des autres détails**²⁵, je lis un chapitre du Sopha, une Lettre d'Héloïse et deux Contes de La Fontaine, pour recorder les différents tons que je voulais prendre. Cependant mon Chevalier arrive à ma porte, avec l'empressement qu'il a toujours. Mon Suisse la lui refuse, et lui apprend que je suis malade : premier incident. Il lui remet en même temps un billet de moi, mais non de mon écriture, suivant ma prudente règle. Il l'ouvre, et y trouve de la main de Victoire : « A neuf heures précises, au Boulevard, devant les Cafés. » Il s'y rend ; et là, un petit Laquais qu'il ne connaît pas, qu'il croit au moins ne pas connaître, car c'était toujours Victoire, vient lui annoncer qu'il faut renvoyer sa voiture et le suivre. Toute cette marche romanesque lui échauffait la tête d'autant, et la tête échauffée ne nuit à rien. Il arrive enfin, et la surprise et l'amour causaient en lui un véritable enchantement. Pour lui donner le temps de se remettre, nous nous promenons un moment dans le bosquet ; puis je le ramène vers la maison. **Il voit d'abord deux couverts mis ; ensuite un lit fait**²⁴. Nous passons jusqu'au boudoir, qui était dans toute sa parure. **Là, moitié réflexion, moitié sentiment, je passai mes bras autour de lui,**⁴⁹ et me laissai tomber à ses genoux. « Ô mon ami ! lui dis-je, pour vouloir te ménager la surprise de ce moment, je me reproche de t'avoir affligé par l'apparence de l'humeur ; d'avoir pu un instant voiler mon cœur à tes regards. Pardonne-moi mes torts : je veux les expier à force d'amour. » Vous jugez de l'effet de ce discours sentimental. L'heureux Chevalier me releva, et mon pardon fut scellé sur cette même ottomane où vous et moi scellâmes si gaiement et de la même manière notre éternelle rupture.

Comme nous avions six heures à passer ensemble, et que j'avais résolu que tout ce temps fût pour lui également délicieux⁵², je modérai ses transports, et l'aimable coquetterie vint remplacer la tendresse. Je ne crois pas avoir jamais mis tant de soin à plaire, ni avoir été jamais aussi contente de moi. Après le souper, tour à tour enfant et raisonnable, folâtre et sensible, quelquefois même libertine, je me plaisais à le considérer comme un Sultan au milieu de son Sérail, dont j'étais tour à tour les Favorites différentes. En effet, ses hommages réitérés, quoique toujours reçus par la même femme, le furent toujours par une Maîtresse nouvelle.

Enfin au point du jour il fallut se séparer ; et, quoi qu'il dît, quoi qu'il fit même pour me prouver le contraire, il en avait autant de besoin que peu d'envie. Au moment où nous sortîmes, et pour dernier adieu, je pris la clef de cet heureux séjour, et la lui remettant entre les mains : « Je ne l'ai eue que pour vous, lui dis-je ; il est juste que vous en soyez maître : c'est au Sacrificateur que j'ai prévenu les réflexions qu'aurait pu lui faire naître la propriété, toujours suspecte, d'une petite maison. Je le connais assez, pour être sûre qu'il ne s'en servira que pour moi ; et si la fantaisie me prenait d'y aller sans lui, il me reste bien une double clef. Il voulait à toute force prendre jour pour y revenir ; mais je l'aime trop encore, pour vouloir l'user si vite. Il ne faut se permettre d'excès qu'avec les gens qu'on veut quitter bientôt. Il ne sait pas cela, lui ; mais, pour son bonheur, je le sais pour deux.

Je m'aperçois qu'il est trois heures du matin, et que j'ai écrit un volume, ayant le projet de n'écrire qu'un mot. Tel est le charme de la confiante amitié : c'est elle qui fait que vous êtes toujours ce que j'aime le mieux ; mais, en vérité, le Chevalier est ce qui me plaît davantage.

*De... ce 12 août 17**.*

Dangerous Connections

The MARCHIONESS DE MERTEUIL to VISCOUNT VALMONT.

Are you out of temper with me, Viscount, or are you dead, or, which is pretty much the same, do you live no longer but for your Presidente? This woman, who has restored you to the illusive charms of youth, will also soon restore you to its ridiculous follies. You are already a timid slave; you may as well be in love at once. You renounce your happy acts of temerity on many occasions; and thus, without any principle to direct you, give yourself up to caprice, or rather chance. Do you know, that love is like physic, only the art of assisting nature? You see

I fight you on your own ground⁶⁹, but it shall not excite any vanity in me; for there is no great honour in engaging a vanquished enemy. She must give herself up, you tell me; without doubt she must, and will, as others, but with this difference, that she'll do it awkwardly. But that it may terminate in her giving herself up, the true method is to begin by taking her. What a ridiculous distinction, what nonsense in a love matter! I say love; for you really are in love. To speak otherwise would be deceiving you, would be concealing your disorder from you. Tell me, then, my dear sighing swain, **of the different women you have had, do you think you gained any of them by force?**⁶⁷ **Whatever inclination we may have to yield, however**

we feel our compliance unavoidable, still must there be a pretence¹⁰; and can there be a more commodious one for us, than that which gives us the appearance of being overcome by force? For my part, I own nothing charms me so much as a brisk lively attack, where every thing is carried on with regularity, but with rapidity; which never puts us to the painful dilemma of being ourselves constrained to remedy an awkwardness which, on the contrary, we should convert to our advantage; and which keeps up the appearance of violence, even when we yield, and dexterously flatters our two favourite passions, the glory of a defence, and the pleasure of a defeat. I must own that this talent, which is more uncommon than one would imagine, always pleased me, even when it did not guide me, and that it has sometimes happened that I have only surrendered from gratitude: thus, in our tournaments of old, beauty gave the prize to valour and address.

But you, you who are no longer yourself, you proceed as if you dreaded success. And pray how long is it since you have fallen into the method of travelling so gently, and in such bye-roads? Believe me, when one has a mind to arrive, post horses and the high road is the only method.

But let us drop this subject; it the more puts me out of temper, as it deprives me of the pleasure of seeing you. At least, write me oftener than you do, and acquaint me with your progress. You seem to forget that this ridiculous piece of business has already taken up a fortnight of your time, and that you neglect every body.

Now I mention neglect, you resemble those who send regularly to inquire of the state of health of their sick friends, and who never concern themselves about the answer. You finish your last letter by asking whether the Chevalier is dead. I make no reply, and you are no

farther concerned about the matter; have you forgot my lover is your sworn friend? But comfort yourself; he is not dead; or if he was, it would be from excess of pleasure. This poor Chevalier, how tender! How form'd for love! **How sensibly he affects one! He distracts me. Seriously, then, this happiness in being loved by me, inspires me with a true affection for him**³⁹.

The very day I wrote you that I was taken up in contriving our rupture, how happy did I not make him! And yet I was in earnest engaged how I should make him desperate when he appeared. **Whether whim or inclination, he never appeared to so much advantage.**¹³

However, I received him coolly; he expected to spend a couple of hours with me before my time of seeing company. I told him I was going abroad, he begg'd to know where; I refused to tell him. He insisted to know; where you will not be, I replied with some tartness. Happily for him he was petrified at my answer; for had he pronounced a syllable, a scene would have ensued which would infallibly have brought on the intended rupture. Astonished at his silence, I cast a look at him, with no other design, I swear, but to observe his countenance; I was instantly struck with the deep and tender sadness that covered this charming figure, which you have owned it is so difficult to resist. The same cause produced the same effect; I was a second time overcome; from that instant I endeavoured to prevent his having any reason to complain. I am going out on business, said I, in a milder tone, and the business relates to you; ask no more questions. I shall sup at home; at your return you'll know all: he then recovered his speech; but I would not suffer him to go on. I'm in great haste, continued I. Leave me until night. He kissed my hand and departed. In order to make him, or perhaps myself, amend, **I immediately resolved to show him my villa, of which he had not the least suspicion**⁴⁵; I called my faithful maid, Victoire. I am seized with my dizziness, said I; let all my servants know I am gone to bed; when alone, **I desired her to put on a footman's dress**⁴, and metamorphosed myself into a chamber-maid.

She ordered a hackney coach to my garden door, and we instantly set out. Being arrived at this temple dedicated to love, I put on my genteeldest deshabelle; a most delicious one, and of my own invention: it leaves nothing exposed, but every thing for fancy to imagine. I promise you the pattern for your Presidente, when you shall have rendered her worthy of wearing it.

After those preparations, **whilst Victoire was taken up with other matters**²⁵, I read a chapter of the Sopha, a letter of the New Eloisa, and two of La Fontaine's Tales, to rehearse the different characters I intended to assume. In the mean time, my Chevalier came to my house, with his usual eagerness. My porter refused him admittance, and informing him I was indisposed, delivered him a note from me, but not of my writing; according to my usual discretion. He opens, and finds in Victoire's writing-- "At nine precisely, at the Boulevard, opposite the coffee-houses."

Thither he proceeds, and a little footman whom he does not know, or at least thinks he does not know, for it was Victoire, tells him he must send back his carriage and follow him. All this romantic proceeding heated his imagination, and on such occasions a heated imagination is useful. At last he arrives, and love and astonishment produced in him the effect of a real enchantment. In order to give him time to recover from his surprise, we walked a while in the grove; I then brought him back to the house. **The first thing which presented itself to his view, was a table with two covers, and a bed prepared**²⁴. From thence we went into the cabinet, which was most elegantly decorated. **There, in suspense, between reflection and sentiment, I flung my arms around him**⁴⁹, and letting myself fall at his knees -- "alas! my dear friend," said I, "what reproaches do I not deserve, for having, for a moment, given you uneasiness by an affected ill-humour, in order to enhance the pleasure and surprise of this moment, for having concealed my heart from your tenderness! Forgive me; I will expiate my crime with the most ardent love." You may guess what was the effect of this sentimental declaration. The happy Chevalier raised me, and my pardon was sealed on the same sopha where you and I, in a similar way, so cheerfully sealed our eternal rupture.

As we had six hours to pass together, and that **I was determined the whole time should be devoted to delight him**⁵², I moderated his transports, and called lovely coquetry to the aid of tenderness. I don't know I ever took so much pains to please, or ever, in my own opinion, succeeded so well. After supper, by turns, childish and rational, wanton and tender, sometimes even libertine. I took pleasure in considering him as a Sultan, in the midst of his Seraglio, to whom I alternately supplied the places of different favourites; and indeed, his reiterated offerings, though always received by the same woman, were received as by a new mistress.

At length, when day appeared, it was necessary to part; and notwithstanding all he said, and even what he did, to prove the contrary, there was, on his part, as much necessity for it, as want of inclination. At the instant of parting, for a last adieu, I delivered him the key of this happy mansion: I had it for you alone, said I, and it is fit you should be the master of it; it is but right the high priest should dispose of the temple. By this artifice, I anticipated any reflections which might arise in his mind relative to the propriety of a villa, which is ever matter of suspicion. I know him so well, that I'm certain he will never make use on't but for me; and if I should have a fancy to go there without him, I have another key. He by all means wou'd make an appointment for another day; but I as yet love him too much, to wear him out soon; the true maxim is, not give into excess, but with those one wishes to be rid of. This he is a stranger to; but, happily for him, I know for us both.

I perceive it is now three in the morning, and that I have wrote a volume, though I intended but a short letter. Such are the charms of confidential friendship: it is that confidential friendship that renders you the object I love most; but indeed the Chevalier is the object that pleases me most.

From ----, Aug. 12, 17 --.

20th letter

Les Liaisons dangereuses

LA MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL AU VICOMTE DE VALMONT

Ah! fripon, vous me cajolez, de peur que je ne me moque de vous! Allons, je vous fais grâce : vous m'écrivez tant de folies, qu'il faut bien que je vous pardonne la sagesse où vous tient votre Présidente. Je ne crois pas que mon Chevalier eût autant d'indulgence que moi ; il serait homme à ne pas approuver notre renouvellement de bail, et à ne rien trouver de plaisant dans votre folle idée. J'en ai pourtant bien ri, et j'étais vraiment fâchée d'être obligée d'en rire toute seule. Si vous eussiez été là, je ne sais où m'aurait menée cette gaieté : mais j'ai eu le temps de la réflexion et je me suis armée de sévérité. Ce n'est pas que je refuse pour toujours ; mais je diffère, et j'ai raison. J'y mettrais peut-être de la vanité, et, une fois piquée au jeu, on ne sait plus où l'on s'arrête. Je serais femme à vous enchaîner de nouveau, à vous faire oublier votre Présidente ; et si j'allais, moi indigne, vous dégoûter de la vertu, voyez quel scandale ! Pour éviter ce danger, voici mes conditions.

Aussitôt que vous aurez eu votre belle Dévote, que vous pourrez m'en fournir une preuve, venez, et je suis à vous. Mais vous n'ignorez pas que dans les affaires importantes, on ne reçoit de preuves que par écrit. Par cet arrangement, d'une part, je deviendrai une récompense au lieu d'être une consolation ; et cette idée me plaît davantage ; de l'autre votre succès en sera plus piquant, en devenant lui-même un moyen d'infidélité. Venez donc, venez au plus tôt m'apporter le gage de votre triomphe : semblable à nos preux Chevaliers qui venaient déposer aux pieds de leurs Dames les fruits brillants de leur victoire. Sérieusement, je suis curieuse de savoir ce que peut écrire une Prude après un tel moment, et quel voile elle met sur ses discours, après n'en avoir plus laissé sur sa personne. C'est à vous de voir si je me mets à un prix trop haut ; mais je vous prévient qu'il n'y a rien à rabattre. Jusque-là, mon cher Vicomte, vous trouverez bon que je reste fidèle à mon Chevalier, et que je m'amuse à le rendre heureux, malgré le petit chagrin que cela vous cause.

Cependant si j'avais moins de mœurs, je crois qu'il aurait dans ce moment, un rival dangereux ; c'est la petite Volanges. Je raffole de cet enfant : c'est une vraie passion. Ou je me trompe, ou elle deviendra une de nos femmes les plus à la mode. Je vois son petit cœur se développer, et c'est un spectacle ravissant. Elle aime déjà son Danceny avec fureur ; mais elle n'en sait encore rien. Lui-même, quoique très amoureux, a encore la timidité de son âge, et n'ose pas trop le lui apprendre. Tous deux sont en adoration vis-à-vis de moi. La petite surtout a grande envie de me dire son secret ; particulièrement depuis quelques jours je l'en vois vraiment oppressée et je lui aurais rendu un grand service de l'aider un peu : **mais je n'oublie pas que c'est un enfant, et je ne veux pas me compromettre.**¹² Danceny m'a parlé un peu plus clairement ; mais, pour lui, mon parti est pris, **je ne veux pas l'entendre**⁴⁶. Quant à la petite, je suis souvent tentée d'en faire mon élève ; c'est un service que j'ai envie de rendre à Gercourt. Il me laisse du temps, puisque le voilà en Corse jusqu'au mois d'Octobre. J'ai dans l'idée que j'emploierai ce temps-là, et que nous lui donnerons une femme toute formée, au lieu de son innocente Pensionnaire. Quelle est donc en effet l'insolente sécurité de cet homme, qui ose dormir tranquille, tandis qu'une femme, qui a à se plaindre de lui, ne s'est pas encore vengée ? Tenez, si la petite était ici dans ce moment, je ne sais ce que je ne lui dirais pas.

Adieu, Vicomte ; bonsoir et bon succès : mais, pour Dieu, avancez donc. Songez que si vous n'avez pas cette femme, les autres rougiront de vous avoir eu.

*De... ce 20 août 17**.*

Dangerous Connections

The MARCHIONESS DE MERTEUIL to VISCOUNT VALMONT.

So, knave, you begin to wheedle, lest I should laugh at you! Well, I forgive you. You say so many ridiculous things, that I must pardon you, the trammels you are kept in by your Presidente; however, my Chevalier would be apt not to be so indulgent, and not to approve the renewal of our contract; neither would he find any thing very entertaining in your foolish whim. I laughed, however, exceedingly at it, and was truly sorry I was obliged to laugh alone. Had you been here, I don't know how far my good humour might have led me; but reflection came to my aid, and I armed myself with severity. It is not that I have determined to break off for ever; but I am resolved to delay for some time, and I have my reasons. Perhaps some vanity might arise in the case, and *that* once roused, one does not know whither it may lead. I should be inclined to enslave you again, and oblige you to give up your Presidente; but if a person of my unworthiness should give you a disgust for virtue itself, in a human shape, what a scandal! To avoid this danger, these are my stipulations.

As soon as you have obtain'd your lovely devotee, and that you can produce your proofs, come, I am yours. But I suppose it unnecessary to inform you that, in important matters, none but written proofs are admitted. By this arrangement I shall, on the one hand, become a reward instead of a consolation, and this idea pleases me most: on the other hand, your success will be more brilliant, by becoming in the same moment the cause of an infidelity. Come then, come speedily, and bring the pledge of your triumph; like our valiant knights of old, who deposited, at their ladies' feet, the trophies of their victories. I am really curious to know what a prude can say after such an adventure; what covering she can give her words after having uncovered her person. You are to judge whether I rate myself too high; but I must assure you beforehand, I will abate nothing. Till then, my dear Viscount, you must not be angry that I should be constant to my Chevalier; and that I should amuse myself in making him happy, although it may give you a little uneasiness.

If I was not so strict a moralist, I believe at this instant he would have a most dangerous rival in the little Volanges. I am bewitched with this little girl: it is a real passion. I am much mistaken, or she will be one day or other one of our most fashionable women. I can see her little heart expanding; and it is a most ravishing sight! – She already loves her Danceny to

distraction, yet knows nothing of it. And he, though deeply smitten, has that youthful timidity, that frightens him from declaring his passion. They are both in a state of mutual adoration before me: the girl has a great mind to disburden her heart, especially for some days past; and I should have done her immense service in assisting her a little; **but she is yet a child, and I must not commit myself.** ¹² Danceny has spoke plainer; but **I will have nothing to do with him.** ⁴⁶ As to the girl, I am often tempted to make her my pupil; it is a piece of service I'm inclined to do Gercourt. He gives me time enough, as he must remain in Corsica until October. I have in contemplation to employ that time effectually, and to give him a well-trained wife instead of an innocent convent pensioner. The insolent security of this man is surprising, who dares sleep quietly whilst a woman he has used ill is unrevenged! --If the little thing was now here, I do not know what I might say to her.

Adieu, Viscount – good night, and good success; but, for God's sake, dispatch. --Remember, if you let this woman slip, the others will blush at having been unconnected with you.

Aug. 20, 17 --.

81st letter

Les Liaisons dangereuses

LA MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL AU VICOMTE DE VALMONT

Que vos craintes me causent de pitié! Combien elles me prouvent ma supériorité sur vous ! et vous voulez m'enseigner, me conduire ? Ah ! mon pauvre Valmont, quelle distance il y a encore de vous à moi ! Non, tout l'orgueil de votre sexe ne suffirait pas pour remplir l'intervalle qui nous sépare. Parce que vous ne pourriez exécuter mes projets, vous les jugez impossible ! Être orgueilleux et faible, il te sied bien de vouloir calculer mes moyens et juger de mes ressources ! Au vrai, Vicomte, vos conseils m'ont donné de l'humeur, et je ne puis vous le cacher.

Que pour masquer votre incroyable gaucherie auprès de votre Présidente, vous m'étaliez comme un triomphe d'avoir déconcerté n moment cette femme timide et qui vous aime, j'y consens ; d'en avoir obtenu un regard, un seul regard, je souris et vous le passe. Que sentant, malgré vous, le peu de valeur de votre conduite, vous espérez la dérober à mon attention, en me flattant de l'effort sublime de rapprocher **deux enfants qui, tous deux, brûlent de se**

voir, et qui, soit dit en passant, doivent à moi seule l'ardeur de ce désir ⁶⁸; je veux bien encore. Qu'enfin vous vous autorisiez de ces actions d'éclat, pour me dire d'un ton doctoral, qu'*il vaut mieux employer son temps à exécuter ses projets qu'à les raconter* ; cette vanité ne me nuit pas, et je la pardonne. Mais que vous puissiez croire que j'aie besoin de votre prudence, que je m'égarerais en ne déférant pas à vos avis, que je dois leur sacrifier un plaisir, une fantaisie : en vérité, Vicomte, **c'est aussi vous trop enorgueillir de la confiance que je veux bien avoir en vous !** ⁵

Et qu'avez-vous donc fait, que je n'aie surpassé mille fois ? Vous avez séduit, perdu même beaucoup de femmes : mais quelles difficultés avez-vous eues à vaincre ? quels obstacles à surmonter ? où est le mérite qui soit véritablement à vous ? Une belle figure, pur effet du hasard ; des grâces, que l'usage donne presque toujours, de l'esprit à la vérité, mais auquel du jargon suppléerait au besoin ; **une impudence assez louable, mais peut-être uniquement due à la facilité de vos premiers succès** ⁴⁸ ; **si je ne me trompe, voilà tous vos moyens** ⁵⁰ : car, pour la célébrité que vous avez pu acquérir, vous n'exigerez pas, je crois, que je compte pour beaucoup l'art de faire naître ou de saisir l'occasion d'un scandale.

Quant à la prudence, à la finesse, je ne parle pas de moi : mais quelle femme n'en aurait pas plus que vous ? Eh ! votre Présidente vous mène comme un enfant.

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 combien encore ne devrions-nous pas vous surpasser, par la nécessité où nous sommes d'en faire un continuel usage !

Supposons, j'y consens, que vous mettiez autant d'adresse à nous vaincre, que nous à nous défendre ou à céder, vous conviendrez au moins, qu'elle vous devient inutile après le succès. Uniquement occupé de votre nouveau goût, vous vous y livrez sans crainte, sans réserve : ce n'est pas à vous que sa durée importe.

En effet, ces liens réciproquement donnés et reçus, pour parler le jargon de l'amour, vous seul pouvez, à votre choix, les resserrer ou les rompre ⁶³ : heureuses encore, si dans

votre légèreté, préférant le mystère à l'éclat, vous vous contentez d'un abandon humiliant, et ne faites pas de l'idole de la veille la victime du lendemain !

Mais qu'une femme infortunée sente la première le poids de sa chaîne, quels risques n'a-t-elle pas à courir, si elle tente de s'y soustraire, si elle ose seulement la soulever ? Ce n'est qu'en tremblant qu'elle essaie d'éloigner d'elle l'homme que son cœur repousse avec effort.

S'obstine-t-il à rester, ce qu'elle accordait à l'amour, il faut le livrer à la crainte :

Ses bras s'ouvrent encor, quand son cœur est fermé. ^{16&64}

Sa prudence doit dénouer avec adresse, ces mêmes liens que vous auriez rompus. A la merci de son ennemi, elle est sans ressource, s'il est sans générosité ; et comment en espérer de lui, lorsque, si quelquefois on le loue d'en avoir, jamais pourtant on ne le blâme d'en manquer ?

Sans doute, vous ne nierez pas ces vérités que leur évidence a rendues triviales. Si cependant vous m'avez vue, disposant des événements et des opinions, faire de ces hommes si redoutables le jouet de mes caprices ou de mes fantaisies ; ôter aux uns la volonté, aux autres la puissance de me nuire ; si **j'ai su tour à tour, et suivant mes goûts mobiles, attacher à ma suite ou rejeter loin de moi** ²⁰

Ces Tyrans détrônés devenus mes esclaves* ;

*** On ne sait si ce vers, ainsi que celui qui se trouve plus haut, Ses bras s'ouvrent encor, quand son cœur est fermé, sont des citations d'Ouvrages peu connus ; ou s'ils font partie de la prose de Mme de Merteuil. Ce qui le ferait croire, c'est la multitude de fautes de ce genre qui se trouvent dans toutes les Lettres de cette correspondance. Celles du Chevalier Danceny sont les seules qui en soient exemptes : peut-être que, comme il s'occupait quelquefois de Poésie, son oreille plus exercée lui faisait éviter plus facilement ce défaut.** ¹⁷

si, au milieu de ces révolutions fréquentes, ma réputation s'est pourtant conservée pure ; n'avez-vous pas dû en conclure que, née pour venger mon sexe et maîtriser le vôtre, **j'avais su me créer des moyens inconnus jusqu'à moi ?** ¹⁹

Ah ! gardez vos conseils et vos craintes pour ces femmes à délire, et qui se disent à *sentiments* ; dont l'imagination exaltée ferait croire que la nature a placé leurs sens dans leur

tête ; qui, n'ayant jamais réfléchi, confondent sans cesse l'amour et l'Amant ; qui, dans leur folle illusion, croient que celui-là seul avec qui elles ont cherché le plaisir en est l'unique dépositaire ; et, vraies superstitieuses, ont pour le Prêtre, le respect et la foi qui n'est dû qu'à la Divinité.

Craignez encore pour celles qui, plus vaines que prudentes, ne savent pas au besoin consentir à se faire quitter.

Tremblez surtout pour ces femmes actives dans leur oisiveté, que vous nommez *sensibles*, et dont l'amour s'empare si facilement et avec tant de puissance ; qui sentent le besoin de s'en occuper encore, même lorsqu'elles n'en jouissent pas ; et s'abandonnant sans réserve à la fermentation de leurs idées, enfantent par elles ces Lettres si douces, mais si dangereuses à écrire ; et ne craignent pas de confier ces preuves de leur faiblesse à l'objet qui les cause : imprudentes, qui, dans leur Amant actuel, ne savent pas voir leur ennemi futur.

Mais moi, qu'ai-je de commun avec ces femmes inconsidérées ? quand m'avez-vous vue m'écarter des règles que je me suis prescrites, et manquer à mes principes ? je dis mes principes, et je le dis à dessein : car ils ne sont pas, comme ceux des autres femmes, donnés au hasard, reçus sans examen et suivis par habitude, ils sont le fruit de mes profondes réflexions ; je les ai créés, et **je puis dire que je suis mon ouvrage.**²¹

Entrée dans le monde dans le temps où, fille encore, j'étais vouée par état au silence et à l'inaction, j'ai su en profiter pour observer et réfléchir. Tandis qu'on me croyait étourdie ou distraite, écoutant peu à la vérité les discours qu'on s'empressait à me tenir, je recueillais avec soin ceux qu'on cherchait à me cacher.

Cette utile curiosité, en servant à m'instruire, m'apprit encore à dissimuler ; forcée souvent de cacher les objets de mon attention aux yeux de ceux qui m'entouraient, j'essayai de guider les miens à mon gré ; j'obtins dès lors de prendre à volonté ce regard distrait que vous avez loué si souvent. Encouragée par ce premier succès, je tâchai de régler de même les divers mouvements de ma figure. Ressentais-je quelque chagrin, **je m'étudiais à prendre l'air de la sérénité,**¹⁵ même celui de la joie ; j'ai porté le zèle jusqu'à me causer des douleurs volontaires, pour chercher pendant ce temps l'expression du plaisir. Je me suis travaillée avec le même soin et plus de peine, pour réprimer les symptômes d'une joie inattendue. C'est ainsi

que j'ai su prendre, sur ma physionomie, cette puissance dont je vous ai vu quelquefois si étonné.

J'étais bien jeune encore, et presque sans intérêt : mais je n'avais à moi que ma pensée, et je m'indignais qu'on pût me la ravir ou me la surprendre contre ma volonté. **Munie de ces premières armes, j'en essayai l'usage : non contente de ne plus me laisser pénétrer**³¹, je m'amusais à me montrer sous des formes différentes ; sûre de mes gestes, j'observais mes discours ; je réglais les uns et les autres, suivant les circonstances, ou même seulement suivant mes fantaisies : **dès ce moment, ma façon de penser fut pour moi seule**⁵¹, et je ne montrai plus que celle qu'il m'était utile de laisser voir.

Ce travail sur moi-même avait fixé mon attention sur l'expression des figures et le caractère des physionomies ; et j'y gagnai ce coup d'œil pénétrant, auquel l'expérience m'a pourtant appris à ne pas me fier entièrement ; mais qui, en tout, m'a rarement trompée.

Je n'avais pas quinze ans, je possédais déjà les talents auxquels la plus grande partie de nos Politiques doivent leur réputation, et je ne me trouvais encore qu'aux premiers éléments de la science que je voulais acquérir.

Vous jugez bien que, comme toutes les jeunes filles, je cherchais à devenir l'amour et ses plaisirs : mais n'ayant jamais été au Couvent, n'ayant point de bonne amie, et surveillée par une mère vigilante, je n'avais que des idées vagues et que je ne pouvais fixer ; la nature même, dont assurément je n'ai eu qu'à me louer depuis, ne me donnait encore aucun indice. On eût dit qu'elle travaillait en silence à perfectionner son ouvrage. Ma tête seule fermentait ; je ne désirais pas de jouir, je voulais savoir ; le désir de m'instruire m'en suggéra les moyens.

Je sentis que le seul homme avec qui je pouvais parler sur cet objet, sans me compromettre, était mon Confesseur. Aussitôt je pris mon parti ; je surmontai ma petite honte ; et me vantant d'une faute que je n'avais pas commise, je m'accusai d'avoir fait *tout ce que font les femmes*. Ce fut mon expression ; mais en parlant ainsi je ne savais en vérité, quelle idée j'exprimais. Mon espoir ne fut ni tout à fait trompé, ni entièrement rempli ; la crainte de me trahir m'empêchait de m'éclairer : mais le bon Père me fit le mal si grand, que j'en conclus que le plaisir devait être extrême ; et au désir de le connaître, succéda celui de le goûter.

Je ne sais où ce désir m'aurait conduite ; et alors dénuée d'expérience, peut-être une seule occasion m'eût perdue : **heureusement pour moi, ma mère m'annonça peu de jours après**

que j'allais me marier⁵⁷ ; sur-le-champ la certitude de savoir éteignit ma curiosité, et j'arrivai vierge entre les bras de M. de Merteuil.

J'attendais avec sécurité le moment qui devait m'instruire, et j'eus besoin de réflexion pour montrer de l'embarras et de la crainte. **Cette première nuit, dont on se fait pour l'ordinaire une idée si cruelle ou si douce, ne me présentait qu'une occasion d'expérience : douleur et plaisir, j'observai tout exactement, et ne voyais dans ces diverses sensations, que des faits à recueillir et à méditer.**⁴⁰

Ce genre d'étude parvint bientôt à me plaire : mais fidèle à mes principes, et sentant, peut-être par instinct, que nul ne devait être plus loin de ma confiance que mon mari, je résolus, par cela seul que j'étais sensible, de me montrer impassible à ses yeux. Cette froideur apparente fut par la suite le fondement inébranlable de son aveugle confiance ; j'y joignis, par une seconde réflexion, l'air d'étourderie qu'autorisait mon âge ; et jamais il ne me jugea plus enfant que dans les moments où je le jouais avec plus d'audace,

Cependant, je l'avouerai, je me laissai d'abord entraîner par le tourbillon du monde, et je me livrai tout entière à ses distractions futiles. Mais au bout de quelques mois, M. de Merteuil m'ayant menée à sa triste campagne, la crainte de l'ennui fit revenir le goût de l'étude ; **et ne m'y trouvant entourée que de gens dont la distance avec moi me mettait à l'abri de tout soupçon**⁶, j'en profitai pour donner un champ plus vaste à mes expériences. Ce fut là, surtout, que je m'assurai que l'amour, que l'on nous vante comme la cause de nos plaisirs, n'en est plus que le prétexte.

La maladie de M. de Merteuil vint interrompre de si douces occupations ; il fallut le suivre à la Ville, où il venait chercher des secours. Il mourut, comme vous savez, peu de temps après ; et quoique, à tout prendre, je n'eusse pas à me plaindre de lui, **je n'en sentis pas moins vivement le prix de la liberté**⁶⁰ qu'allait me donner mon veuvage, et je me promis bien d'en profiter.

Ma mère comptait que j'entrerais au Couvent, ou reviendrais vivre avec elle. Je refusai l'un et l'autre parti ; et tout ce que j'accordai à la décence, fut de retourner dans cette même campagne, où il me restait bien encore quelques observations à faire.

Je les fortifiai par le secours de la lecture : mais ne croyez pas qu'elle fût toute du genre que vous la supposez. **J'étudiai nos mœurs dans les Romans ; nos opinions dans les Philosophes ; je cherchai même dans les Moralistes les plus sévères ce qu'ils exigeaient de nous**⁶⁵, et je m'assurai ainsi de ce qu'on pouvait faire, de ce qu'on devait penser, et de ce qu'il fallait paraître. Une fois fixée sur ces trois objets, le dernier seul présentait quelques difficultés dans son exécution ; j'espérai les vaincre et j'en méditai les moyens.

Je commençais à m'ennuyer de mes plaisirs rustiques, trop peu variés pour ma tête active ; je sentais un besoin de coquetterie qui me raccommoda avec l'amour ; non pour le ressentir à la vérité, mais pour l'inspirer et le feindre. 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.

Un an se passa dans ces occupations différentes. Mon deuil me permettant alors de reparaître, je revins à la Ville avec mes grands projets ; je ne m'attendais pas au premier obstacle que j'y rencontrai.

Cette longue solitude, cette austère retraite, avaient jeté sur moi un vernis de prudence qui effrayait nos plus agréables ; ils se tenaient à l'écart, et me laissaient livrée à une foule d'ennuyeux, qui tous prétendaient à ma main. L'embarras n'était pas de les refuser mais plusieurs de ces refus déplaisaient à ma famille, et je perdais dans ces tracasseries intérieures le temps dont je m'étais promis un si charmant usage. Je fus donc obligée, pour rappeler les uns et éloigner les autres, d'afficher quelques inconséquences, et d'employer à nuire à ma réputation le soin que je comptais mettre à la conserver. Je réussis facilement, comme vous pouvez croire. Mais n'étant emportée par aucune passion, je ne fis que ce que je jugeai nécessaire, et mesurai avec prudence les doses de mon étourderie.

Dès que j'eus touché le but que je voulais atteindre, je revins sur mes pas, et fis honneur de mon amendement à quelques-unes de ces femmes qui, dans l'impuissance d'avoir des prétentions à l'agrément, se rejettent sur celles du mérite et de la vertu. Ce fut un coup de partie qui me valut plus que je n'avais espéré. Ces reconnaissantes Duègnes s'établirent mes apologistes, et leur zèle aveugle, pour ce qu'elles appelaient leur ouvrage, fut porté au point qu'au moindre propos qu'on se permettait sur moi, tout le parti prude criait au scandale et à

l'injure. Le même moyen me valut encore le suffrage de nos femmes à rétentions, qui, persuadées que je renonçais à courir la même carrière qu'elles, me choisirent pour l'objet de leurs éloges, toutes les fois qu'elles voulaient prouver qu'elles ne médisaient pas de tout le monde.

Cependant ma conduite précédente avait ramené les Amants ; **et pour me ménager entre eux et mes infidèles protectrices,**⁶² je me montrai comme une femme sensible, mais difficile, à qui l'excès de sa délicatesse fournissait des armes contre l'amour.

Alors je commençai à déployer sur le grand Théâtre, les talents que je m'étais donnés. Mon premier soin fut d'acquérir le renom d'invincible. Pour y parvenir, les hommes qui ne me plaisaient point furent toujours les seuls dont j'eus l'air d'accepter les hommages. Je les employais utilement à me procurer les honneurs de la résistance, tandis que je me livrais sans crainte à l'Amant préféré. Mais, celui-là, ma feinte timidité ne lui a jamais permis de me suivre dans le monde ; et les regards du cercle ont été, ainsi, toujours fixés sur l'Amant malheureux.

Vous savez combien je me décide vite : c'est pour avoir observé que ce sont presque toujours les soins antérieurs qui livrent le secret des femmes. Quoi qu'on puisse faire, le ton n'est jamais le même, avant ou après le succès. Cette différence n'échappe point à l'observateur attentif et j'ai trouvé moins dangereux de me tromper dans le choix, que de le laisser pénétrer. Je gagne encore par là d'ôter **les vraisemblances, sur lesquelles seules on peut nous juger**⁶⁶.

Ces précautions et celle de ne jamais écrire, de ne délivrer jamais aucune preuve de ma défaite, pouvaient paraître excessives, et ne m'ont jamais paru suffisantes. Descendue dans mon cœur, j'y ai étudié celui des autres. J'y ai vu qu'il n'est personne qui n'y conserve un secret qu'il lui importe qui ne soit point dévoilé : vérité que l'antiquité paraît avoir mieux connue que nous, et dont l'histoire de Samson pourrait n'être qu'un ingénieux emblème. Nouvelle Dalila, j'ai toujours, comme elle, employé ma puissance à surprendre ce secret important. Hé ! de combien de nos Samsons modernes, ne tiens-je pas la chevelure sous le ciseau ! Et ceux-là, j'ai cessé de les craindre ; ce sont les seuls que je me sois permis d'humilier quelquefois. Plus souple avec les autres, l'art de les rendre infidèles pour éviter de leur paraître volage, une feinte amitié, une apparente confiance, quelques procédés généreux,

l'idée flatteuse et que chacun conserve d'avoir été mon seul Amant, m'ont obtenu leur discrétion. Enfin, quand ces moyens m'ont manqué, j'ai su, prévoyant mes ruptures, étouffer d'avance, sous le ridicule ou la calomnie, la confiance que ces hommes dangereux auraient pu obtenir.

Ce que je vous dis là, vous me le voyez pratiquer sans cesse ; et vous doutez de ma prudence ! Hé bien ! rappelez-vous le temps où vous me rendîtes vos premiers soins : jamais hommage ne me flatta autant : je vous désirais avant de vous avoir vu. Séduite par votre réputation, il me semblait que vous manquiez à ma gloire ; **je brûlais de vous combattre corps à corps**³⁶.

C'est le seul de mes goûts qui ait jamais pris un moment d'empire sur moi. Cependant, si vous eussiez voulu me perdre, quels moyens eussiez-vous trouvés ? de vains discours qui ne laissent aucune trace après eux, que votre réputation même eût aidé à rendre suspects, et une suite de faits sans vraisemblance, dont le récit sincère aurait l'air d'un Roman mal tissu. A la vérité, je vous ai depuis livré tous mes secrets : mais vous savez quels intérêts nous unissent, et si de nous deux c'est moi qu'on doit taxer d'imprudence*.

* On saura dans la suite, Lettre 152, non pas le secret de M. de Valment, mais à peu près de quel genre il était ; et le Lecteur sentira qu'on n'a pas pu l'éclaircir davantage sur cet objet.

Puisque je suis en train de vous rendre compte, je veux le faire exactement. Je vous entends d'ici me dire que je suis au moins à la merci de ma Femme de chambre ; en effet, si elle n'a pas le secret de mes sentiments, elle a celui de mes actions. Quand vous m'en parlâtes jadis, je vous répondis seulement que j'étais sûre d'elle ; et la preuve que cette réponse suffit alors à votre tranquillité, c'est que vous lui avez confié depuis, et pour votre compte, des secrets assez dangereux. Mais à présent que Prévan vous donne de l'ombrage, et que la tête vous en tourne, je me doute bien que vous ne me croyez plus sur ma parole. Il faut donc vous édifier.

Premièrement, cette fille est ma sœur de lait, et ce lien qui ne nous en paraît pas un, n'est pas sans force pour les gens de cet état : de plus, j'ai son secret, et mieux encore ; victime d'une folie de l'amour, elle était perdue si je ne l'eusse sauvée. Ses parents, tout hérissés d'honneur, ne voulaient pas moins que la faire enfermer. Ils s'adressèrent à moi. Je vis, d'un coup d'œil, combien leur courroux pouvait m'être utile. Je le secondai, et sollicitai l'ordre, que j'obtins. Puis, passant tout à coup au parti de la clémence auquel j'amenai ses parents, et profitant de mon crédit auprès du vieux Ministre, je les fis tous consentir à me laisser dépositaire de cet

ordre, et maîtresse d'en arrêter ou demander l'exécution, suivant que je jugerais du mérite de la conduite future de cette fille. Elle sait donc que j'ai son sort entre les mains ; et quand, par impossible, ces moyens puissants ne l'arrêteraient point, n'est-il pas évident que sa conduite dévoilée et sa punition authentique ôteraient bientôt toute créance à ses discours ?

A ces précautions que j'appelle fondamentales, s'en joignent mille autres, ou locales, ou d'occasion, que la réflexion et l'habitude font trouver au besoin ; dont le détail serait minutieux, mais dont la pratique est importante, et qu'il faut vous donner la peine de recueillir dans l'ensemble de ma conduite, si vous voulez parvenir à les connaître.

Mais de prétendre que je me sois donné tant de soins pour n'en pas retirer de fruits ; qu'après m'être autant élevée au-dessus des autres femmes par mes travaux pénibles, je consente à ramper comme elles dans ma marche, entre l'imprudence et la timidité ; que surtout je pusse redouter un homme au point de ne plus voir mon salut que dans la fuite ? Non, Vicomte, jamais. Il faut vaincre ou périr. Quant à Prévan, je veux l'avoir et je l'aurai ; **il veut le dire, et il ne le dira pas**³⁰ : en deux mots, voilà notre Roman. Adieu.

*De... ce 20 septembre 17**.*

Dangerous Connections

The MARCHIONESS DE MERTEUIL to the VISCOUNT DE VALMONT

How your fears raise my compassion! How much they convince me of my superiority over you! So you want to teach me how to conduct myself! Ah, my poor Valmont! what a distance there is still between you and me! No; all the pride of your sex would not be sufficient to fill up the interval that is between us. Because you are not able to execute my schemes, you look upon them as impossible. It well becomes you, who are both proud and weak, to attempt to decide on my measures, and give your opinion of my resources. Upon my word, Viscount, your advice has put me out of temper. I cannot conceal it.

That to hide your incredible awkwardness with your Presidente, you should display as a triumph the having disconcerted for a moment this weak woman who loves you, I am not displeased. That you should have obtained from her a look, I smile, and pass over. That feeling, in spite of you, the insignificancy of your conduct, you should hope to deceive my attention, by flattering me with the sublime effort you have made to bring together **two children, who are eager to see each other, and who, I will take upon me to say, are**

indebted to me only for this eagerness;⁶⁸ that I will also pass over. That, lastly, you should plume yourself on those brilliant acts, to tell me in a majestic tone, that *it is better employ one's time in executing their projects than in relating them*; that vanity hurts me not; I forgive it. But that you should take upon you to imagine I stand in need of your prudence; that I should go astray, if I did not pay a proper regard to your advice; that I ought to sacrifice a whim, or a pleasure, to it: upon my word, Viscount, **that would be raising your pride too much for the confidence which I have condescended to place in you.**⁵

What have you then done, that I have not surpassed by a million of degrees? You have seduced, ruined several women: but what difficulties had you to encounter? What obstacles to surmount? Where is the merit that may be truly called your's? A handsome figure, the effect of mere chance; a gracefulness, which custom generally gives; some wit, it's true, but which nonsense would upon occasion supply as well; **a tolerable share of impudence, which is solely owing to the facility of your first successes.**⁴⁸ **Those, I believe, are all your abilities, if I am not mistaken;**⁵⁰ for as to the celebrity which you have acquired, you will not insist, I presume, that I should set any great value on the art of publishing or seizing an opportunity of scandal.

As to your prudence and cunning, I do not speak of myself, but where is the woman that has not more of it than you? Your very Presidente leads you like a babe.

Believe me, Viscount, one seldom acquires the qualities one thinks unnecessary. As you engage without danger, you should act without precaution. As for you men, your defeats are only a success the less. In this unequal struggle, our good fortune is not to be losers; and your misfortune, not to be gainers. When I would even grant you equal talents with us, how much more must we surpass you by the necessity we are under of employing them continually?

Let us suppose, that you make use of as much address to overcome us, as we do to defend ourselves, or to surrender; you will, at least, agree with me, it becomes useless after you succeed. Entirely taken up with some new inclination, you give way to it without fear, without reserve; its duration is a matter of consequence to you.

And really **those reciprocal attachments, given and received, to speak in the love cant, you alone have it in your power to keep or break**⁶³. Happy yet do the women think

themselves, when in your fickleness you prefer secrecy to scandal, or are satisfied with a mortifying abandonment, and that you do not make the idol of to-day the victim of to-morrow.

But if an unfortunate woman should first feel the weight of her chains, what risks does she not run if she attempts to extricate herself from them, if she should dare to struggle against them? She trembling strives to put away the man her heart detests. **If he persists, what was granted to love must be given to fear; her arms are open, while her heart is shut;**^{16&64} her prudence should untie with dexterity those same bonds you would have broken. She is, without resource, at the mercy of her enemy, if he is incapable of generosity, which is seldom to be met with in him; for if he is sometimes applauded for possessing it, he is never blamed for wanting it.

You will not, doubtless, deny those self-evident propositions. If, however, you have seen me disposing of opinions and events; subjecting those formidable men to my whims and fancies; taking from the one the will, and from the other the power of annoying me. **If I have discovered the secret, according to my roving taste, to detach the one, and reject the other,**²⁰ **those dethroned tyrants becoming my slaves;**¹⁷ if in the midst of those frequent revolutions, my reputation has been still preserved unsullied; should you not from thence have concluded, that, born to revenge my sex and command your's, **I found out means unknown to any that went before me.**¹⁹

Ah, keep your advice and your fears for those infatuated women, who call themselves sentimental; whose exalted imaginations would make one believe, that Nature had placed their senses in their heads; who, having never reflected, blend incessantly the lover with love; who, possessed with that ridiculous illusion, believe, that he alone with whom they have sought pleasure is the sole trustee of it, and, true to enthusiasm, have the same respect and faith for the priest that is due to the divinity only.

Reserve your fears for those who, more vain than prudent, do not know when to consent to break off.

But tremble for those active, yet idle women, whom you call *sentimental*, on whom love so easily and powerfully takes possession; who feel the necessity of being taken up with it, even

when they don't enjoy it; and, giving themselves up without reserve to the fermentation of their ideas, bring forth those soft but dangerous letters, and do not dread confiding in the object that causes them these proofs of their weakness; imprudent creatures! who in their actual lover cannot see their future enemy.

But what have I to do in common with those inconsiderate women? When have you seen me depart from the rules I have laid down to myself, and abandon my own principles? I say, my own principles, and I speak it with energy, for they are not like those of other women, dealt out by chance, received without scrutiny, and followed through custom; they are the proofs of my profound reflections; I have given them existence, and **I can call them my own work.**²¹

Introduced into the world whilst yet a girl, I was devoted by my situation to silence and inaction; this time I made use of for reflection and observation. Looked upon as thoughtless and heedless, paying little attention to the discourses that were held out to me, I carefully laid up those that were meant to be concealed from me.

This useful curiosity served me in the double capacity of instruction and dissimulation. Being often obliged to hide the objects of my attention from the eyes of those who surrounded me, I endeavoured to guide my own at my will. I then learnt to take up at pleasure that dissipated air which you have so often praised. Encouraged by those first successes, I endeavoured to regulate in the same manner the different motions of my person. Did I feel any chagrin, **I endeavoured to put on an air of serenity**¹⁵, and even an affected cheerfulness; carried my zeal so far, that I used to put myself to voluntary pain; and tried my temper, by seeming to express a satisfaction; laboured with the same care and trouble to repress the sudden tumult of unexpected joy. It is thus that I gained that ascendancy over my countenance which has so often astonished you.

I was yet very young and unconcerned, but still reflected. My thoughts were my own, and I was exasperated to have them either surprised or drawn from me against my will. **Provided with such arms, I immediately began to try their utility. Not satisfied with the closeness of my character**³¹, I amused myself with assuming different ones. Confident of my actions, I studied my words; I regulated the one and the other according to circumstances, and

sometimes according to whim. **From that moment I became selfish**⁵¹; and no longer shewed any desire, but what I thought useful to me.

This labour had so far fixed my attention on the characters of the physiognomy, and the expression of the countenance, that I acquired the penetrating glance, which experience, however, has taught me not to place an entire confidence in, but which has so seldom deceived me.

I had scarce attained my fifteenth year, when I was mistress of those talents to which the greatest part of our female politicians owe their reputation, and had only attained the first rudiments of the science I was so anxious to acquire.

You may well imagine, that like all other young girls, I wanted to be acquainted with love and pleasure: but never having been in a convent, having no confidant, and being moreover strictly watched by a vigilant mother, I had only vague ideas. Nature even, which certainly I have had since every reason to be satisfied with, had not yet given me any indication. I may say, she silently wrought to perfect her work. My head alone fermented. I did not wish for enjoyment; I wanted knowledge: my strong propensity for instruction suggested the means.

I was sensible, the only man I could apply to on this occasion without danger was my confessor. As soon as I was determined, I got the better of my bashfulness. I accused myself of a fault I had not committed, and declared I had done *all that women do*. Those were the exact words: but when I spoke thus, I really had no idea of what I expressed. My expectations were neither entirely satisfied, nor altogether disappointed; the dread of discovering myself prevented my information: but the good father made the crime so heinous, that I concluded the pleasure must be excessive; and the desire of tasting it succeeded that of knowing it.

I don't know how far this desire might have carried me; being then totally unexperienced, the first opportunity would have probably ruined me: **but fortunately a few days after my mother informed me that I was to be married**⁵⁷. Immediately the certainty of coming to the knowledge of every thing stifled my curiosity, and I came a virgin to Mr. De Merteuil's arms.

I waited with unconcern the period that was to resolve my doubts; and I had occasion for reflection, to assume a little fear and embarrassment. **This first night, which generally fills the mind with so much joy or apprehension, offered me only an opportunity of**

experience, pleasure, and pain. I observed every thing with the utmost exactitude, and those different sensations furnished matter for reflection⁴⁰.

This kind of study soon began to be pleasing: but faithful to my principles, and knowing, as it were, by instinct, that no one ought to be less in my confidence than my husband, I determined, for no other reason than because I had my feeling, to appear to him impassible. This affected coldness laid the foundation for that blind confidence which he ever after placed in me: and in consequence of more reflection, I threw in an air of dissipation over my behaviour, to which my youth gave a sanction; and I never appeared more childish than when I praised him most profusely.

Yet, I must own, at first I suffered myself to be hurried away by the bustle of the world, and gave myself up entirely to its most trifling dissipations. After a few months M. De Merteuil having brought me to his dreary country house, to avoid the dulness of a rural life, I again resumed my studies; **and, being surrounded by people whose inferiority sheltered me from suspicion**⁶, I gave myself a loose in order to improve my experience. It was then I was ascertained that love, which is represented as the first cause of all our pleasure, is at most but the pretence.

M. de Merteuil's sickness interrupted those pleasing occupations. I was obliged to accompany him to town, where he went for advice. He died a short time after, as you know; and though, to take all in all, I had no reason to complain of him, nevertheless **I was very sensibly affected with the liberty my widowhood gave me,**⁶⁰ which had so pleasing a prospect.

My mother imagined that I would go into a convent, or would go back to live with her: I refused both one and the other; the only sacrifice I made to decency was to return to the country, where I had yet some observations to make.

I strengthened them by reading, but don't imagine that it was all of that kind you suppose: **I studied my morals in romances, my opinions amongst the philosophers, and even sought amongst our most severe moralists, what was required of us**⁶⁵. – Thus I was ascertained of what one might do, how one ought to think, and the character one should assume. Thus fixed on those three objects, the last only offered some difficulties in the execution: I hoped to conquer them; I ruminated on the means.

I began to be disgusted with my rustic pleasures; they were not sufficiently variegated for my active mind, and felt the necessity of coquetry to reconcile me to love; not really to be sensible of it, but to feign it, and inspire it in others. In vain I have been told, and had read, that this passion was not to be feigned. I saw clearly, that to acquire it, it was sufficient to blend the spirit of an author with the talent of a comedian. I practised those two characters, and perhaps with some success; but, instead of courting the vain applause of the theatre, I determined to turn what so many others sacrificed to vanity, to my own happiness.

A year was spent in those different employments. My mourning being expired, I returned to town with my grand projects, but did not expect the first obstacle which fell in my way.

The austere retreat and long solitude I had been accustomed to, had given me such an air of prudery as frightened our prettiest fellows, and left me a prey to a croud of tiresome gallants, who all made pretensions to my person; the difficulty was not to refuse them; but several of those refusals were not agreeable to my family: I lost in those domestic broils, the time which I flattered myself to make so charming a use. I was obliged then to recall the one, and disperse the others, to be guilty of some frivolities, and to take the same pains to hurt my reputation that I had taken to preserve it. In this I easily succeeded, as you may very well imagine; but, not being swayed by any passion, I only did what I judged necessary, and dealt out prudently some little acts of volatility.

As soon as I had accomplished my aim, I stopped short, gave the credit of my reformation to some women, who not having any pretensions to beauty or attractions, wrapt themselves up in merit and virtue. This resolution was of great importance, and turned out better than I could have expected; those grateful duennas became my apologists, and their blind zeal for what they called their own work, was carried to such a length, that upon the least conversation that was held about me, the whole prude party exclaimed shame and scandal! The same means acquired me also the good opinion of our women of talents, who, convinced that I did not pursue the same objects they did, chose me for the subject of their praise, whenever they asserted they did not scandalize every body.

However, my former conduct brought back the lovers; **to keep the balance even between them and my new female friends**⁶², I exhibited myself as a woman not averse to love, but difficult, and whom the excess of delicacy rendered superior to love.

Then I began to display upon the Grand Theatre the talents I had acquired: my first care was to acquire the name of invincible; in order to obtain it, the men who were not pleasing to me were the only ones whose addresses I seemed to accept. I employed them usefully in procuring me the honours of resistance, whilst I gave myself up without dread to the favoured lover; but my assumed timidity never permitted him to appear with me in public company, whose attention was always thus drawn off to the unfortunate lover.

You know how expeditious I am in my decisions; this proceeds from my observation, that it is always the preparatory steps which betray women's secrets. Let one do what they will, the tone is never the same before as after success. The difference does not escape the attentive observer; and I have found it always less dangerous to be mistaken in my choice, than to suffer myself to be seen through; I moreover gain by this conduct, to remove **probabilities on which only a judgment may be formed**⁶⁶.

Those precautions, and that of never corresponding, to give any proof of my defeat, may appear satisfactory; however, I never thought them sufficient. Examining my own heart, I studied that of others; then I found, there is no person whatever who has not a secret that it is important should not be revealed; an established truth of which antiquity seems to have been more sensible than we are, and of which, perhaps, the history of Samson may have been an ingenious emblem. Like another Dalilah, I always employed my power in discovering this important secret. Ah! how many of our modern Samsons do I not hold by the hair under my scissars! Those I have no dread of; they are the only ones that I sometimes take a pleasure in mortifying. More pliant with others, the art of making them fickle, to avoid appearing inconstant. A feigned friendship, an apparent confidence, some generous dealings, the flattering idea that each was possessed with of being my only lover, has secured discretion; in short, when all those means have failed, I have known how to stifle beforehand (foreseeing my rapture) under the cloak of ridicule and calumny, the credit those dangerous men might obtain.

What I now tell you, you have often seen me put in practice; and yet you call my prudence in question! Don't you recollect, when you first began your courtship to me? I never was more flattered; I sighed for you before I saw you. Captivated by your reputation, you seemed to be wanting to my glory; **I burned with the desire of encountering you face to face**³⁶; it was the only one of my inclinations that ever took a moment's ascendancy over me; yet, had you

been inclined to ruin me, what means had you in your power? Idle conversations that leave no traces after them, that your reputation even would have rendered suspicious, and a set of facts, without probability, the sincere recital of which would have had the appearance of a romance badly assimilated. It is true, you have since been in possession of all my secrets; but you are sensible how our interests are united, and which of us two ought to be taxed with imprudence.

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Since I am in the humour of giving you an account of myself, I will do it with the utmost exactitude. – I think I hear you say I'm at least at the mercy of my chambermaid! Truly, if she is not in the secret of my sentiments, she is at least in that of my actions. When you spoke to me on this subject formerly, I only answered you, I was sure of her; the proof this answer was then sufficient to make you easy, is, you have since confided in her, and for your own account; but now Prevan gives you umbrage, that your head is turned, I doubt much you'll not take my word: you must, then, be edified.

First, this girl is my foster-sister; this tye, which appears nothing to us, has a great influence with people of her condition: moreover, I am in possession of her secrets; she is the victim of a love intrigue, and would have been ruined if I had not saved her. Her parents, armed at all points with sentiments of honour, wanted to have her shut up: they applied to me about it; I instantly saw how useful their resentment might be to me, and seconded their intentions; solicited the order from court, which I obtained; then suddenly, preferring clemency, brought her parents round, employing my credit with the old minister of state, and prevailed on them to depute me the trustee in this business, to stop or demand the execution of it, according as I should think the behaviour of the girl would deserve. She knows, then, her fate rests in my hands; and if, which is impossible, those powerful motives would not prevent, is it not evident, that her conduct being laid open, and her punishment authenticated, it would soon wipe away all credit to her tale.

Add to all these precautions, which I call fundamental ones, a thousand others, either local or eventual, that reflection and habitude would produce, if needful; the detail of which would be too minute, but the practice very important, and which you must take the trouble to collect in the whole of my conduct, if you want to arrive at the knowledge of them.

But to pretend that I, who have taken so much pains, should not receive any benefit, after having raised myself so much above other women by my assiduous labours; -- that I should

consent to creep, like them, between imprudence and timidity; but, above all, I should dread a man so far as to find my salvation only in flight. No, Viscount; I must conquer or perish. As to Prevan, I must and will have him. **He will tell, you say: but he shall not tell**³⁰. This, in a few words, is our romance.

Sept. 20, 17 --.

*Hereafter will be seen, in the 152d letter, not Mr. de Valmont's secret, but pretty nearly of what kind it was; and the reader will perceive, that we could throw no more light on that subject.

85th letter

Les Liaisons dangereuses

LA MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL AU VICOMTE DE VALMONT

Enfin vous serez tranquille et surtout vous me rendrez justice⁵⁴. Ecoutez, et ne me confondez plus avec les autres femmes. J'ai mis à fin mon aventure avec Prévan ; *à fin !* entendez-vous bien ce que cela veut dire ? A présent vous allez juger qui de lui ou de moi pourra se vanter. Le récit ne sera pas si plaisant que l'action : aussi ne serait-il pas juste que, tandis que vous n'avez fait que raisonner bien ou mal sur cette affaire, il vous en revînt autant de plaisir qu'à moi, qui y donnais mon temps et ma peine.

Cependant, si vous avez quelque grand coup à faire, si vous devez tenter quelque entreprise où ce Rival dangereux vous paraisse à craindre, arrivez. Il vous laisse le champ libre, au moins pour quelque temps ; peut-être même ne se relèvera-t-il jamais du coup que je lui ai porté.

Que vous êtes heureux de m'avoir pour amie ! Je suis pour vous une Fée bienfaisante. Vous languissez loin de la Beauté qui vous engage ; je dis un mot, et vous vous retrouvez auprès d'elle. Vous voulez vous venger d'une femme qui vous nuit ; je vous marque l'endroit où vous devez frapper et la livre à votre discrétion. **Enfin, pour écarter de la lice un concurrent redoutable, c'est encore moi que vous invoquez**⁷⁰, et je vous exauce. En vérité, si vous ne passez pas votre vie à me remercier, c'est que vous êtes un ingrat. Je reviens à mon aventure et la reprends d'origine.

Le rendez-vous, donné si haut, à la sortie de l'Opéra* fut entendu comme je l'avais espéré.

*Voyez la Lettre 74.

Prévan s'y rendit ; et quand la Maréchale lui dit obligeamment qu'elle se félicitait de le voir deux fois de suite à ses jours, il eut soin de répondre que depuis Mardi soir il avait défait mille arrangements, pour pouvoir ainsi disposer de cette soirée. *A bon entendeur, salut !* Comme je voulais pourtant savoir, avec plus de certitude, si j'étais ou non le véritable objet de cet empressement flatteur, je voulus forcer le soupirant nouveau de choisir entre moi et son goût dominant. Je déclarai que je ne jouerais point ; en effet, il trouva, de son côté, mille prétextes pour ne pas jouer ; et mon premier triomphe fut sur le lansquenet.

Je m'emparai de l'Evêque de *** pour ma conversation ; je le choisis à cause de sa liaison avec le héros du jour, à qui je voulais donner toute facilité de m'aborder. J'étais bien aise aussi d'avoir un témoin respectable qui pût, au besoin, déposer de ma conduite et de mes discours. Cet arrangement réussit.

Après les propos vagues et d'usage, Prévan s'étant bientôt rendu maître de la conversation, prit tour à tour différents tons, pour essayer celui qui pourrait me plaire. Je refusai celui du sentiment, comme n'y croyant pas ; j'arrêtai par mon sérieux sa gaieté qui me parut trop légère pour un début ; **il se rabattit sur la délicate amitié ; et ce fut sous ce drapeau banal, que nous commençâmes notre attaque réciproque.**³⁷

Au moment du souper, l'Evêque ne descendait pas ; Prévan me donna donc la main, et se trouva naturellement placé à table à côté de moi. Il faut être juste ; il soutint avec beaucoup d'adresse notre conversation particulière, en ne paraissant s'occuper que de la conversation générale, dont il eut l'air de faire tous les frais. Au dessert, on parla d'une Pièce nouvelle qu'on devait donner le Lundi suivant aux Français. Je témoignai quelques regrets de n'avoir pas ma loge ; il m'offrit la sienne que je refusai d'abord, comme cela se pratique : à quoi il répondit assez plaisamment que je ne l'entendais pas, qu'à coup sûr il ne ferait pas le sacrifice de sa loge à quelqu'un qu'il ne connaissait pas, mais qu'il m'avertissait seulement que Mme la Maréchale en disposerait. Elle se prêta à cette plaisanterie, et j'acceptai.

Remonté au salon, il demanda, comme vous pouvez croire, une place dans cette loge ; et comme la Maréchale, qui le traite avec beaucoup de bonté, la lui promit *s'il était sage*, il en prit l'occasion d'une de ces conversations à double entente, pour lesquelles vous m'avez

vanté son talent. En effet, s'étant mis à ses genoux, comme un enfant soumis, disait-il, sous prétexte de lui demander ses avis et d'implorer sa raison, il dit beaucoup de choses flatteuses et assez tendres, dont il m'était facile de me faire l'application. Plusieurs personnes ne s'étant pas remises au jeu l'après-souper, la conversation fut plus générale et moins intéressante : mais nos yeux parlèrent beaucoup. Je dis nos yeux : je devrais dire les siens ; car les miens n'eurent qu'un langage, celui de la surprise. Il dut penser que je m'étonnais et m'occupais excessivement de l'effet prodigieux qu'il faisait sur moi. Je crois que je le laissai fort satisfait ; je n'étais pas moins contente.

Le Lundi suivant, je fus aux Français, comme nous en étions convenus. Malgré notre curiosité littéraire, je ne puis vous rien dire du Spectacle, sinon que Prévan a un talent merveilleux pour la cajolerie, et que la Pièce est tombée : voilà tout ce que j'y ai appris. Je voyais avec peine finir cette soirée, qui réellement me plaisait beaucoup ; et pour la prolonger, j'offris à la Maréchale de venir souper chez moi : ce qui me fournit le prétexte de le proposer à l'aimable Cajoleur, qui ne demanda que le temps de courir, pour se dégager, jusque chez les Comtesses de P****. Ce nom me rendit toute ma colère : je vis clairement qu'il allait commencer les confidences : **je me rappelai vos sages conseils et me promis bien... de poursuivre l'aventure ; sûre que je le guérirais de cette dangereuse indiscretion.**⁴⁴

Etranger dans ma société, qui ce soir-là était peu nombreuse, il me devait les soins d'usage ; aussi, quand on alla souper, m'offrit-il la main. J'eus la malice, en l'acceptant, de mettre dans la mienne un léger frémissement, et d'avoir, pendant ma marche, les yeux baissés et la respiration haute. J'avais l'air de pressentir ma défaite, et de redouter mon vainqueur. Il le remarqua à merveille ; aussi le traître changea-t-il sur-le-champ de ton et de maintien. Il était galant, il devint tendre. Ce n'est pas que les propos ne fussent à peu près les mêmes ; la circonstance y forçait : mais son regard, devenu moins vif, était plus caressant ; l'inflexion de sa voix plus douce ; son sourire n'était plus celui de la finesse, mais du contentement. Enfin dans ses discours, éteignant peu à peu le feu de la saillie, l'esprit fit place à la délicatesse. Je vous le demande qu'eussiez-vous fait de mieux ?

De mon côté, **je devins rêveuse, à tel point qu'on fut forcé de s'en apercevoir**²⁶, et quand on m'en fit le reproche, j'eus l'adresse de m'en défendre maladroitement et de jeter sur Prévan un coup d'œil prompt, mais timide et déconcerté, et propre à lui faire croire que toute ma crainte était qu'il ne devinât la cause de mon trouble.

Après souper, je profitai du temps où la bonne Maréchale contait une de ces histoires qu'elle conte toujours, pour me placer sur mon Ottomane, dans cet abandon que donne une tendre rêverie. Je n'étais pas fâchée que Prévan me vît ainsi ; il m'honora, en effet, d'une attention toute particulière. Vous jugez bien que mes timides regards n'osaient chercher les yeux de mon vainqueur : mais dirigés vers lui d'une manière plus humble, ils m'apprirent bientôt que j'obtenais l'effet que je voulais produire. Il fallait encore lui persuader que je le partageais : aussi, quand la Maréchale annonça qu'elle allait se retirer, je m'écriai d'une voix molle et tendre : « Ah Dieu ! j'étais si bien là ! » Je me levai pourtant : mais avant de me séparer d'elle, je lui demandai ses projets, pour avoir un prétexte de dire les miens et de faire savoir que je resterais chez moi le surlendemain. Là-dessus tout le monde sépara.

Alors je me mis à réfléchir. Je ne doutais pas que Prévan ne profitât de l'espèce de rendez-vous que je venais de lui donner ; qu'il n'y vînt d'assez bonne heure pour me trouver seule, et que l'attaque ne fût vive ; mais **j'étais bien sûre aussi, d'après ma réputation, qu'il ne me traiterait pas avec cette légèreté que, pour peu qu'on ait d'usage, on n'emploie qu'avec les femmes à aventures ou, celles qui n'ont aucune expérience ;**²³ et je voyais mon succès certain s'il prononçait le mot d'amour, s'il avait la prétention, surtout, de l'obtenir de moi.

Qu'il est commode d'avoir affaire à vous autres *gens à principes* ! quelquefois un brouillon d'Amoureux vous déconcerte par sa timidité, ou vous embarrasse par ses fougues transports ; c'est une fièvre qui, comme l'autre, a ses frissons et son ardeur, et quelquefois varie dans ses symptômes. Mais votre marche réglée se devine si facilement ! L'arrivée, le maintien, le ton, les discours, je savais tout dès la veille. Je ne vous rendrai donc pas notre conversation que vous suppléerez aisément. Observez seulement que, dans ma feinte défense, je l'aidais de tout mon pouvoir : embarras, pour lui donner le temps de parler ; mauvaises raisons, pour être combattues ; crainte et méfiance, pour ramener les protestations ; et ce refrain perpétuel de sa part, *je ne vous demande qu'un mot* ; et ce silence de la mienne, qui semble ne le laisser attendre que pour le faire désirer davantage ; au travers de tout cela, une main cent fois prise, qui se retire toujours et ne se refuse jamais. On passerait ainsi tout un jour ; nous y passâmes une mortelle heure : nous y serions peut-être encore si nous n'avions entendu entrer un carrosse dans ma cour. Cet heureux contretemps rendit, comme de raison, ses instances plus vives ; et moi, voyant le moment arrivé, où j'étais à l'abri de toute surprise, après m'être préparée par un long soupir, j'accordai le mot précieux. On annonça, et peu de temps après, j'eus un cercle assez nombreux.

Prévan me demanda de venir le lendemain matin, et j'y consentis : mais soigneuse de me défendre, j'ordonnai à ma Femme de chambre de rester tout le temps de cette visite dans **ma chambre à coucher, d'où vous savez qu'on voit tout ce qui se passe dans mon cabinet de toilette, et ce fut là que je le recus. Libres dans notre conversation**²⁷, et ayant tous deux le même désir, nous fûmes bientôt d'accord : mais il fallait se défaire de ce spectateur importun ; c'était où je l'attendais.

Alors, lui faisant à mon gré le tableau de ma vie intérieure, je lui persuadai aisément **que nous ne trouverions jamais un moment de liberté**⁵⁹ ; **et qu'il fallait regarder comme une espèce de miracle, celle dont nous avons joui hier**⁵³, **qui même laisserait encore des dangers trop grands pour m'y exposer**¹, puisque à tout moment on pouvait entrer dans mon salon. **Je ne manquai pas d'ajouter que tous ces usages s'étaient établis, parce que, jusqu'à ce jour, ils ne m'avaient jamais contrariée**⁵⁸ ; et j'insistai en même temps sur l'impossibilité de les changer, sans me compromettre aux yeux de mes Gens. Il essaya de s'attrister, de rendre de l'humeur, de me dire que j'avais peu d'amour ; et vous devinez combien tout cela me touchait ! Mais voulant frapper le coup décisif, j'appelai les larmes à mon secours. Ce fut exactement le *Zaire, vous pleurez*. Cet empire qu'il se crut sur moi, et l'espoir qu'il en conçut de me perdre à son gré, lui tinrent lieu de tout l'amour d'Orosmane.

Ce coup de théâtre passé, nous revînmes aux arrangements. Au défaut du jour, nous nous occupâmes de la nuit : mais mon Suisse devenait un obstacle insurmontable, et je ne permettais pas qu'on essayât de le gagner. Il me proposa la petite porte de mon jardin : mais je l'avais prévu, et j'y créai un chien qui, tranquille et silencieux le jour, était un vrai démon la nuit. La facilité avec laquelle j'entraï dans tous ces détails était bien propre à l'enhardir ; aussi vint-il à me proposer l'expédient le plus ridicule, et ce fut celui que j'acceptai.

D'abord, son Domestique était sûr comme lui-même : en cela il ne trompait guère, l'un l'était bien autant que l'autre. J'aurais un grand souper chez moi ; il y serait, il prendrait son temps pour sortir seul. L'adroit confident appellerait la voiture, ouvrirait la portière, et lui Prévan, au lieu de monter, s'esquiverait adroitement. Son cocher ne pouvait s'en apercevoir en aucune façon ; ainsi sorti pour tout le monde, et cependant resté chez moi, il s'agissait de savoir s'il pourrait parvenir à mon appartement. J'avoue que d'abord, mon embarras fut de trouver,

contre ce projet, d'assez mauvaises raisons pour qu'il pût avoir l'air de les détruire ; il y répondit par des exemples. A l'entendre, rien n'était plus ordinaire que ce moyen ; lui-même s'en était beaucoup servi ; c'était même celui dont il faisait le plus d'usage, comme le moins dangereux.

Subjuguée par ces autorités irrécusables, je convins avec candeur, que j'avais bien un escalier dérobé qui conduisait très près de mon boudoir ; que je pouvais y laisser la clef, et qu'il lui serait possible de s'y enfermer, et d'attendre, sans beaucoup de risques, que mes Femmes fussent retirées ; et puis, pour donner plus de vraisemblance à mon consentement, le moment d'après je ne voulais plus, je ne revenais à consentir qu'à condition d'une soumission parfaite, d'une sagesse... Ah ! quelle sagesse ! Enfin je voulais bien lui prouver mon amour, mais non pas satisfaire le sien.

La sortie, dont j'oubliais de vous parler, devait se faire par la petite porte du jardin : il ne s'agissait que d'attendre le point du jour ; le Cerbère ne dirait plus mot. Pas une âme ne passe à cette heure-là, et les gens sont dans le plus fort du sommeil. Si vous vous étonnez de ce tas de mauvais raisonnements, c'est que vous oubliez notre situation réciproque. Qu'avions-nous besoin d'en faire de meilleurs ? Il ne demandait pas mieux que tout cela se sût, et moi, j'étais bien sûre qu'on ne le saurait pas. Le jour fixé fut au surlendemain.

Remarquez que voilà une affaire arrangée, et que personne n'a encore vu Prévan dans ma société. Je le rencontre à souper chez une de mes amies, il lui offre sa loge pour une pièce nouvelle, et j'y accepte une place. J'invite cette femme à souper, pendant le Spectacle et devant Prévan ; je ne puis presque pas me dispenser de lui proposer d'en être. Il accepte et me fait, deux jours après, une visite que l'usage exige. Il vient, à la vérité, me voir le lendemain matin : mais, **outre que les visites du matin ne marquent plus, il ne tient qu'à moi de trouver celle-ci trop leste ; et je le remets en effet dans la classe des gens moins liés avec moi, par une invitation écrite, pour un souper de cérémonie. Je puis bien dire, comme**
Annette : Mais voilà tout, pourtant !²⁸

Le jour fatal arrivé, ce jour où je devais perdre ma vertu et ma réputation, je donnai mes instructions à ma fidèle Victoire, et elle les exécuta comme vous le verrez bientôt.

Cependant le soir vint. J'avais déjà beaucoup de monde chez moi, quand on y annonça Prévan. Je le reçus avec une politesse marquée, qui constatait mon peu de liaison avec lui ; et

je le mis à la partie de la Maréchale, comme étant celle par qui j'avais fait cette connaissance.

La soirée ne produisit rien qu'un très petit billet, que le discret Amoureux trouva moyen

de me remettre, et que j'ai brûlé suivant ma coutume.²² Il m'y annonçait que je pouvais compter sur lui, et ce mot essentiel était entouré de tous les mots parasites, d'amour, de bonheur, etc., qui ne manquent jamais de se trouver à pareille fête.

A minuit, les parties étant finies, je proposai une courte macédoine*. J'avais le double projet de favoriser l'évasion de Prévan, et en même temps de la faire remarquer ; ce qui ne pouvait pas manquer d'arriver, vu sa réputation de Joueur. J'étais bien aise aussi qu'on pût se rappeler, au besoin, que je n'avais pas été pressée de rester seule.

*Quelques personnes ignorent peut-être qu'une macédoine est un assemblage de plusieurs jeux de hasard, parmi lesquels chaque Coupeur a droit de choisir lorsque c'est à lui à tenir la main. C'est une des inventions du siècle.

Le jeu dura plus que je n'avais pensé. Le Diable me tentait, et je succombai au désir d'aller consoler l'impatient prisonnier. Je m'acheminai ainsi à ma perte, quand je réfléchis qu'une fois rendue tout à fait, je n'aurais plus sur lui, l'empire de le tenir dans le costume de décence nécessaire à mes projets. J'eus la force de résister. Je rebroussai chemin, et revins, non sans humeur, reprendre place à ce jeu éternel. Il finit pourtant, et chacun s'en alla. Pour moi, je sonnai mes femmes, je me déshabillai fort vite, et les renvoyai de même.

Me voyez-vous, Vicomte, dans ma toilette légère, marchant d'un pas timide et circonspect, et d'une main mal assurée ouvrir la porte à mon vainqueur ? Il m'aperçut, l'éclair n'est pas plus prompt. Que vous dirais-je ? je fus vaincue, tout à fait vaincue, avant d'avoir pu dire un mot pour l'arrêter ou me défendre. Il voulut ensuite prendre une situation plus commode et plus convenable aux circonstances. Il maudissait sa parure, qui, disait-il, l'éloignait de moi, il voulait me combattre à armes égales : mais mon extrême timidité s'opposa à ce projet, et mes tendres caresses ne lui en laissèrent pas le temps. Il s'occupa d'autre chose.

Ses droits étaient doublés, et ses prétentions revinrent : mais alors : « Ecoutez-moi, lui dis-je ; vous aurez jusqu'ici un assez agréable récit à faire aux deux Comtesses de P***, et à mille autres : mais je suis curieuse de savoir comment vous raconterez la fin de l'aventure. » En parlant ainsi, je sonnais de toutes mes forces. Pour le coup, j'eus mon tour, et mon action fut plus vive que sa parole. Il n'avait encore que balbutié, quand j'entendis Victoire accourir, et

appeler *les Gens* qu'elle avait gardés chez elle, comme je le lui avais ordonné. Là, prenant mon ton de Reine, et élevant la voix : « Sortez, Monsieur, continuai-je, et ne reparaissez jamais devant moi. » Là-dessus, la foule de mes gens entra.

Le pauvre Prévan perdit la tête, et croyant voir un guet-apens dans ce qui n'était au fond qu'une plaisanterie, il se jeta sur son épée. Mal lui en prit : car mon Valet de chambre, brave et vigoureux, le saisit au corps et le terrassa. J'eus, je l'avoue, une frayeur mortelle. Je criai qu'on arrêtât, et ordonnai qu'on laissât sa retraite libre, en s'assurant seulement qu'il sortît de chez moi. Mes gens m'obéirent : mais la rumeur était grande parmi eux ; **ils s'indignaient qu'on eût osé manquer à leur vertueuse Maîtresse**²⁹. Tous accompagnèrent le malheureux Chevalier, avec bruit et scandale, comme je le souhaitais. La seule Victoire resta, et nous nous occupâmes pendant ce temps à réparer le désordre de mon lit.

Mes gens remontèrent toujours en tumulte ; et moi, *encore tout émue*, je leur demandai par quel bonheur ils s'étaient encore trouvés levés ; et Victoire me raconta qu'elle avait donné à souper à deux de ses amies, qu'on avait veillé chez elle, et enfin tout ce dont nous étions convenues ensemble. Je les remerciai tous, et les fis retirer, en ordonnant pourtant à l'un d'eux d'aller sur-le-champ chercher mon Médecin. Il me parut que j'étais autorisée à craindre l'effet de *mon saisissement mortel* ; et c'était un moyen sûr de donner du cours et de la célébrité à cette nouvelle.

Il vint en effet, me plaignit beaucoup, et ne m'ordonna que du repos. Moi, j'ordonnai de plus à Victoire d'aller le matin de bonne heure bavarder dans le voisinage.

Tout a si bien réussi, qu'avant midi, et aussitôt qu'il a été jour chez moi, ma dévote Voisine était déjà au chevet de mon lit, pour savoir la vérité et les détails de cette horrible aventure. J'ai été obligée de me désoler avec elle, pendant une heure, sur la corruption du siècle. Un moment après, j'ai reçu de la Maréchale le billet que je joins ici. Enfin, avant cinq heures, j'ai vu arriver, à mon grand étonnement, M...*. Il venait, m'a-t-il dit, me faire ses excuses, de ce qu'un Officier de son corps avait pu me manquer à ce point. Il ne l'avait appris qu'à dîner chez la Maréchale, et avait sur-le-champ envoyé ordre à Prévan de se rendre en prison. J'ai demandé grâce, et il me l'a refusée. Alors j'ai pensé que, comme complice, il fallait m'exécuter de mon côté, et garder au moins de rigides arrêts. J'ai fait fermer ma porte, et dire que j'étais incommodée.

*Le Commandant du Corps dans lequel M. de Prévan servait.

C'est à ma solitude que vous devez cette longue Lettre. J'en écrirai une à Mme de Volanges, dont sûrement elle fera lecture publique et où vous verrez cette histoire telle qu'il faut la raconter. J'oubliais de vous dire que Belleruche est outré, et veut absolument se battre avec Prévan. Le pauvre garçon ! heureusement j'aurai le temps de calmer sa tête. En attendant, je vais reposer la mienne, qui est fatiguée d'écrire. Adieu, Vicomte.

*Du Château de... ce 25 septembre 17** , au soir.*

Dangerous Connections

MARCHIONESS DE MERTEUIL to VISCOUNT DE VALMONT.

At length you will be satisfied, and do me justice⁵⁴; no longer blend me with the rest of womankind: I have at last put an end to my adventure with Prevan, and you shall judge which of the two has a right to boast. The recital will not be so amusing as the action; neither would it be just, whilst you have done nothing but argue well or ill on this matter, you should enjoy as much pleasure as me, who employed my time and care in this business.

But if you have any great affair in hand, any enterprize wherein this dangerous rival is your competitor, return; he has left you a clear stage, at least for some time; and perhaps will never recover the blow I have given him.

What a happy man you are, to have me for a friend! I am your good genius. You languish in absence from the beauty that possesses your heart; I speak the word, and instantly you are with her: you wish to be revenged of a mischievous woman: I point out the place where you are to strike, and deliver her up to you: again, **to set aside a formidable competitor, you still invoke me**⁷⁰, and I grant your petition. Upon my word, if you don't employ the remainder of your days in demonstrating your gratitude, you are a base man: but to return to my adventure, and its origin. The rendezvous given out so loud at coming out of the opera* was heard, as I expected. Prevan was there, and when the Marechale told him obligingly, that she was happy to see him, twice running, on her public day, he took care to reply, that since Tuesday he had got rid of a thousand appointments, to have it in his power to wait upon her this evening; *a word to the wise*: however, as I was determined to be certain whether or not I was the true object of this flattering eagerness, I was determined to oblige my new admirer, to make a

choice between me and his reigning passion. I declared I would not play, and he made a thousand pretences not to play: thus my first triumph was over Lansquenet.

*See letter the 74th.

I engrossed the bishop of ---- for my conversation; chose him on account of his relationship with the hero of the adventure, for whom I wished to smooth the way to make his approaches: was, moreover, glad to have a respectable witness, who could upon occasion answer for my conduct and conversation: this arrangement succeeded.

After the customary vague chat, Prevan having soon made himself master of the conversation, engaged upon different subjects, to endeavour to find out that which was most agreeable to me. The sentimental I rejected, as not worthy of credit. I stopped, by my serious air, his gaiety, which seemed too volatile for an opening: **then he returned to delicate friendship; and this was the subject that engaged us**³⁷.

The bishop did not come down to supper; Prevan gave me his hand, and consequently placed himself at table by me: I must be just; he kept up our private conversation with great address, as if he was only taken up with the general conversation, to which he seemed all attention. At the desert, a new piece was mentioned that was to be played the Monday following at the French Comedy. --- I expressed some regret at not being provided with a box; he offered me this, which I refused, as usual: to which he replied, with great good humour, that I did not understand him, for, certainly, he would not offer his lodge to a person he did not know; he only meant to inform me that Madame la Marechale had the disposal of it; she acquiesced to this piece of humour, and I accepted the invitation. Being returned to the saloon, he begged, as you may suppose, a seat in this box; and as the Marechale, who treats him very familiarly, promised it to him if he behaved himself well, he took the opportunity of one of those double entendre conversations, for which you so profusely praise him, and throwing himself at her knees as a naughty child, under pretence of begging her advice and opinion, he said a great many tender and flattering things, which it was easy for me to apply to myself. Many of the company not having returned to play after supper, the conversation became more general and less interesting, but our eyes spoke a great deal – I should say his, for mine had one language only, that of surprise; he must have imagined that I was astonished, and amazingly taken up with the prodigious impression he had made on me. I believe I left him pretty well satisfied; and I was no less contented myself.

The Monday following I went to the French Comedy, as was agreed: notwithstanding your literary curiosity, I cannot give you any account of the representation, and can only tell you, that Prevan has an admirable talent for flattery, and that the piece was hooted. I was somewhat troubled to see an evening so near an end, from which I promis'd myself so much pleasure, and, in order to prolong it, I requested the Marechale to sup with me, which gave me an opportunity to invite the lovely flatterer; he only begged time to disengage himself with the Countesses de P -----. *This name raised my indignation; I saw plainly he was beginning to make them his confidants; **I called to mind your prudent advice, and determined --- to pursue the adventure, as I was certain it would cure him of this dangerous indiscretion.** ⁴⁴

*See letter the 70th.

Being a stranger in my company, which was that night very small, he paid me the usual compliments, and when we went to supper, offered me his hand – I was wickered enough, when I accepted it, to affect a light tremour, and, as I walked, to cast my eyes downwards, accompanied with a difficulty of respiration – assumed the appearance of foreseeing my defeat, and to dread my conqueror; he instantly remarked it, and the traitor immediately changed his tone and behaviour: he was polite before, but now became all tenderness; -- not but the conversation was pretty much the same, -- the circumstances required it; but his look was not so lively, yet more flattering; the tone of his voice was softer; his smile was not that of art but satisfaction; and his discourse gradually falling from his sallies, wit gave way to delicacy. Pray, good Sir, what could you have done more?

On my side, **I began to grow thoughtful to such a degree that it was taken notice of** ²⁶; and when I was reproached with it, I had the address to defend myself so awkwardly, and to cast a quick, timid, and disconcerted glance at Prevan, to make him imagine that all my fear was lest he should guess at the cause of my confusion.

After supper, I took the opportunity, whilst the good Marechale was telling one of those stories she had repeated a hundred times before, to place myself upon my sopha, in that kind of lassitude which a tender reverie brings on. I was not sorry Prevan should see me thus; and he really did me the honour of a most particular, attention. You may very well imagine my timid eyes did not dare lift themselves up to my conqueror, but being directed towards him in

a more humble manner, they soon informed me I had obtained my end: but still it was necessary to persuade him I also shared it, and as the Marechale said it was time to retire, I exclaimed in a soft and tender tone, "Oh, good God, I was so happy there!" However, I rose; but before we parted, I asked her how she intended to dispose of herself, to have an opportunity of saying, I intended to stay at home the day after to-morrow; on which we all parted.

Then I sat down to reflect; I had no doubt but Prevan would improve the kind of rendezvous I had just given, that he would come time enough to find me alone, and the attack would be carried on with spirit; **but I was certain that, reputation apart, he would not behave with that kind of familiarity which no well-bred person ever permits himself, only with intriguing or unexperienced women;**²³ and I did not doubt of my success, if he once let slip the word love, or if he even made any pretension to draw it from me.

How convenient it is to be connected with you men of principle! Sometimes the quarrels of lovers disconcert through timidity, or embarrass by its violent transports; it is a kind of fever which has its hot and cold fits, and sometimes varies its symptoms; but your regular progressions are easily seen through; the first salutation, the deportment, the ton, the conversation, I knew all the evening before: I shall not, then, give you an account of the conversation, which you will readily conceive; only observe, that in my feigned defence I helped him all in my power; embarrassments to give him time to speak, bad arguments to be discussed, fears and diffidence to bring on protestations, the perpetual requisition from him *I beg but one word*, that silence on my part which only seemed to make him wish for it more; and besides all this, a hand often squeezed, always drawn back, and never refused; thus a whole day would have passed, and we should have passed another in this frivolity, perhaps would have been still engaged in the same, if we had not heard a coach coming into my court. This happy mischance made his solicitations more pressing, and when I found myself safe from all surprize, after having breathed a long sigh, I granted the precious word. Soon after company came in.

Prevan requested to visit me the morning following, to which I consented; being careful of myself, I ordered my waiting maid to stay during the whole time of this **visit in my bed chamber, from whence, you know, one may see every thing that passes in my dressing room. Our conversation was easy**²⁷, and both having the same desires, we were soon

agreed; it was necessary to get rid of this troublesome spectator; that was where I waited for him.

Then giving him an account of my domestic life, **I easily persuaded him we should never find a favourable opportunity**⁵⁹, **and he must look upon it a kind of miracle that which he had yesterday**⁵³, **and was attended with such dangerous consequences as might expose me,**¹ as there was every instant company coming into the saloon. **I did not fail to add, those were long established customs in my family, which, until then, had never been varied,**⁵⁸ and at the same time insisted on the impossibility of altering them, as they would expose me to the reflections of my servants. He endeavoured to affect grief, to be out of humour, to tell me I had very little love: you may guess what an impression that made on me. Being determined to strike the decisive blow, I called tears to my assistance. It was the real scene in *Zara, You weep*. The ascendant he thought he had gained over me, and the hope he conceived of ruining me in his own way, supplied him with all the love of Orosmane.

This theatrical scene being over, we returned to the settling our measures. No probability of success in the day, our thoughts were taken up with the night; but my porter was an insurmountable obstacle, and I could not agree to any attempt to corrupt him: he then proposed the small door of my garden; that I had foreseen. I pretended a dog there, that was quiet and silent in the day time, but a mere devil at night. The facility with which I gave into all his schemes served to encourage him, and he soon proposed the most ridiculous expedient, which was the one I accepted.

First, he assured me his domestic was as secret as himself; there he did not deceive me, for one was as secret as the other: I was to give a public supper, he would be of the party, would take his opportunity to slip out alone, his dextrous confidant would call his carriage, open the door, and he, instead of getting in, would slip aside; thus, having disappeared to every body, yet being in my house, the question was, how he should get into my apartment? I must own, that at first my embarrassment was to find out reasons against the project, to have the appearance of destroying it. He answered them by proofs; nothing was more common than this method, he had often made use of it; it was even the one he practised most, as being the least dangerous.

Being convinced by those unanswerable authorities, I candidly owned I had a back stairs that led very near to my private closet; I could leave the key in the door, and he possibly might shut himself up in it, to wait there without danger till my women were retired; then, to give more probability to my consent, the moment afterwards I refused, then again consented, only upon condition of the most perfect submission and good behaviour. To sum up all, I wanted to prove my affection, but not to satisfy his.

His departure in the morning, which I had forgot to mention, was settled to be through the little gate in the garden; as he was to go off by day light, the Cerberus would not speak a word; not a soul passed at that hour, and my people were all to be in a profound sleep. If you are astonished at this heap of nonsense, you must forget our situation: what business had we for better arguments? All that he required was that the business should be known, and I was very certain it never should: the day after was fixed for the execution.

Observe, here is an affair settled, and no one has ever yet seen Prevan in my company; he offers his box for a new piece, I accept of a place in it; I invite this woman to supper during the performance, in Prevan's presence; I can scarcely dispense proposing to him to make one; he accepts my offer; two days afterwards makes me a ceremonial visit;--- he comes, it is true, to visit me the day following, in the morning; **but besides, as the morning visits are no longer exceptionable, it belongs to me to judge of this, and I account it trifling.**²⁸

The fatal day being come, the day, on which I was to lose my virtue and reputation, I gave my instructions to my faithful Victoire, and she executed them to admiration.

When evening came I had a good deal of company; Prevan was announced; I received him with singular politeness, a proof of my slender acquaintance with him; I placed him with the Marechale's party, as it was in her company I had first been acquainted with him: **the evening produced nothing but a little note which the discreet lover found means to convey to me, and was burned, according to custom:**²² he informed me, I might depend upon him; it was embellished with all the parasitical phrases of love, happiness, &c. which are never wanting upon such occasions.

At midnight, the parties being all finished, I proposed a short macedoine.* In this project I first had in view to favour Prevan's evasion, and at the same time to make it remarkable, which could not fail to happen, considering his reputation as a gamester; I was also glad, if

there should hereafter be occasion, it might be remembered I was left alone. The game lasted longer than I had imagined; the devil tempted me; I gave way to my desire, to console the impatient prisoner. I was thus proceeding to my ruin, when I reflected, if I once surrendered, I should abandon the power of keeping him within the necessary bounds of decency for my projects: I had strength enough to resist, and returned not in a very good humour to my place at this abominable game; at last it was finished, and every one departed: I rung for my women, undressed myself expeditiously, and sent them away.

*Several persons, perhaps, do not know that a macedoine is a collection of games at hazard, in which each person who cuts the cards has a right to chuse when he holds the hand: it is one of the inventions of the age.

Only think now, Viscount, you see me in my light robe, approaching with a circumspect timid pace, and trembling hand, opening the door to my conqueror. The moment he perceived me, he flew like lightning. What shall I say? I was overcome, totally overcome, before I could speak a word to stop him or defend myself. Afterwards he wanted to take a more commodious situation, and more adapted to our circumstances. He cursed his dress as an obstacle to his complete bliss. He would engage with equal arms; but my extreme timidity opposed his desire, and my tender caresses did not give him time. He was employed in other matters.

His rights were doubled; his pretensions revived: then "Harkee," said I, "so far you have a tolerable pretty story for the two Countesses de P -----, and a thousand others: but I have a great curiosity to know how you will relate the end of this adventure." Then ringing with all my strength, I had my turn, my action was quicker than his speech. He scarcely stammered out a few words, when I heard Victoire calling all my people that she had kept together in her apartment, as I had ordered her; then assuming the tone of a queen, and raising my voice, "Walk out, Sir," said I, "and never dare appear again in my presence." On which all my servants crowded in.

Poor Prevan was distracted, and imagined murder was intended, when in reality it was nothing but a joke, seized his sword; he was mistaken, for my valet-de-chambre, a resolute lusty fellow, grasped him round the body, and soon brought him down. I own, I was very much terrified, ordered them not to use him ill, but let him retire quietly, only to take care he was put out of the house. My servants obeyed my orders: there was a great bustle among them; **they were enraged to the highest degree, any one should dare to insult their**

virtuous mistress²⁹; they all accompanied the unfortunate Chevalier, with all the noise and scandal I could wish, Victoire alone remained with me, and we repaired the disorder the bed had suffered.

My people returned tumultuously, and I, *still in great emotion*, desired to know by what good fortune they happened to be all up. Victoire said, she had given a supper to two of her friends; that they had sat up in her apartment; and, in short, every thing as had been agreed on. I thanked them all, desired them to retire, directing one of them to go immediately for my physician. I thought I was authorised to guard against the effects of this *dreadful shock*; this was the surest means to give it currency, as well as celebrity.

He came, pitied me much, and prescribed repose. I moreover ordered Victoire to go about the neighbourhood in the morning early to spread the news.

Every thing succeeded so well, that before noon, as soon as my doors were open, my devout neighbour was at my bed's head, to know the truth and the circumstances of this horrible adventure. I was obliged to lament with her a whole hour the corruption of the age. Soon after, I received the enclosed note from the Marechale, and before five, to my great astonishment, M----- * waited on me, to make his excuses, as he said, that an officer of his corps should be guilty of such an offence. He was informed of it at dinner at the Marechale's, and immediately sent an order to Prevan, putting him under arrest. I requested he might be forgiven, which he refused. I thought, as an accomplice, I should also be punished, and keep within doors; I ordered my gate to be shut, and to let every one know I was indisposed.

*The commandant of the corps in which Prevan served.

It is to this solitude you are indebted for so long a letter. I shall write one to Madame de Volanges, which she will certainly read publicly, where you will see this transaction as it must be related.

I forgot to tell you, that Belleruche is outrageous, and absolutely determined to fight Prevan. Poor fellow! But I shall have time to cool his brain. In the mean time, I will go to repose my own, which is much fatigued by writing. Adieu, Viscount!

Sept. 25, 17—

113th letter

Les Liaisons dangereuses

LA MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL AU VICOMTE DE VALMONT

Je crois devoir vous prévenir, Vicomte, qu'on commence à s'occuper de vous à Paris; qu'on y remarque votre absence et que déjà on en devine la cause. J'étais hier à un souper fort nombreux ; 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. Si vous m'en croyez, vous ne laisserez pas prendre consistance à ces bruits dangereux, et vous viendrez sur-le-champ les détruire par votre présence.

Songez que si une fois vous laissez perdre l'idée qu'on ne vous résiste pas, vous éprouverez bientôt qu'on vous résistera en effet plus facilement ; que vos rivaux vont aussi perdre de leur respect pour vous, et oser vous combattre : car lequel d'entre eux ne se croit pas plus fort que la vertu ? Songez surtout que dans la multitude des femmes que vous avez affichées, toutes celles que vous n'avez pas eues vont tenter de détromper le Public, tandis que les autres s'efforceront de l'abuser. Enfin, il faut vous attendre à être apprécié peut-être autant au-dessous de votre valeur, que vous l'avez été au-dessus jusqu'à présent.

Revenez donc, Vicomte, et ne sacrifiez pas votre réputation à un caprice puéril. Vous avez fait tout ce que nous voulions de la petite Volanges ; et pour votre Présidente, ce ne sera pas apparemment en restant à dix lieues d'elle, que vous vous en passerez la fantaisie. Croyez-vous qu'elle ira vous chercher ? Peut-être ne songe-t-elle déjà plus à vous, ou ne s'en occupe-t-elle encore que pour se féliciter de vous avoir humilié. Au moins ici, pourrez-vous vous trouver quelque occasion de reparaître avec éclat, et vous en avez besoin ; et quand vous vous obstineriez à votre ridicule aventure, je ne vois pas que votre retour y puisse rien... ; au contraire.

En effet, si votre Présidente *vous adore*, comme vous l'avez tant dit et si peu prouvé, son unique consolation, son seul plaisir, doivent être à présent de parler de vous, de savoir ce que vous faites, ce que vous dites, ce que vous pensez, et jusqu'à la moindre des choses qui vous intéressent. Ces misères-là prennent du prix, en raison des privations qu'on éprouve. Ce sont les miettes de pain tombantes de la table du riche : celui-ci les dédaigne ; mais le pauvre les

recueille avidement et s'en nourrit. Or, la pauvre Présidente reçoit à présent toutes ces miettes-là ; et plus elle en aura, moins elle sera pressée de se livrer à l'appétit du reste.

De plus, **depuis que vous connaissez sa Confidente, vous ne doutez pas que chaque Lettre d'elle ne contienne au moins un petit sermon, et tout ce qu'elle croit propre à corroborer sa sagesse et fortifier sa vertu***. **Pourquoi donc laisser à l'une des ressources pour se défendre, et à l'autre pour vous nuire ?**

*** On ne s'avise jamais de tout ! Comédie.**¹⁸

Ce n'est pas que je sois du tout de votre avis sur la perte que vous croyez avoir faite au changement de Confidente. D'abord, Mme de Volanges vous hait, et la haine est toujours plus clairvoyante et plus ingénieuse que l'amitié. Toute la vertu de votre vieille tante ne l'engagera pas à médire un seul instant de son cher neveu ; car la vertu a aussi ses faiblesses. Ensuite vos craintes portent sur une remarque absolument fausse.

Il n'est pas vrai que *plus les femmes vieillissent, et plus elle deviennent rêches et sévères*. C'est de quarante à cinquante ans que le désespoir de voir leur figure se flétrir, la rage de se sentir obligées d'abandonner des prétentions et des plaisirs auxquels elles tiennent encore, rendent presque toutes les femmes bégueules et acariâtres. Il leur faut ce long intervalle pour faire en entier ce grand sacrifice : mais dès qu'il est consommé, toutes se partagent en deux classes.

La plus nombreuse, celle des femmes qui n'ont eu pour elles que leur figure et leur jeunesse, tombe dans une imbécile apathie,¹⁰ et n'en sort plus que pour le jeu et pour quelques pratiques de dévotion ; celle-là est toujours ennuyeuse, souvent grondeuse, quelquefois un peu tracassière, mais rarement méchante. **On ne peut pas dire non plus que ces femmes soient ou ne soient pas sévères : sans idées et sans existence**⁹, elles répètent, sans le comprendre et indifféremment, tout ce qu'elles entendent dire, et restent par elles-mêmes absolument nulles.

L'autre classe, beaucoup plus rare, mais véritablement précieuse, est celle des femmes qui, ayant eu un caractère et n'ayant pas négligé de nourrir leur raison, savent se créer une existence, quand celle de la nature leur manque ; et prennent le parti de mettre à leur esprit les parures qu'elles employaient avant pour leur figure. Celles-ci ont pour l'ordinaire le jugement

très sain, et l'esprit à la fois solide, gai et gracieux. Elles remplacent les charmes séduisants par l'attachante bonté, et encore par l'enjouement dont le charme augmente en proportion de l'âge : c'est ainsi qu'elles parviennent en quelque sorte à se rapprocher de la jeunesse en s'en faisant aimer. Mais alors, loin d'être, comme vous le dite, *rêches et sévères*, l'habitude de l'indulgence, leurs longues réflexions sur la faiblesse humaine, et surtout les souvenirs de leur jeunesse, par lesquels seuls elles tiennent encore à la vie, les placeraient plutôt, peut-être trop près de la facilité.

Ce que je peux vous dire enfin, c'est qu'ayant toujours recherché les vieilles femmes, dont j'ai reconnu de bonne heure l'utilité des suffrages, j'ai rencontré plusieurs d'entre elles auprès de qui l'inclination me ramenait autant que l'intérêt. Je m'arrête là ; car à présent que vous vous enflammez si vite et si moralement, j'aurais peur que vous ne devinssiez subitement amoureux de votre vieille tante, et que vous ne vous enterrassiez avec elle dans le tombeau où vous vivez déjà depuis si longtemps. Je reviens donc.

Malgré l'enchantement où vous me paraissez être de votre petite écolière, je ne peux pas croire qu'elle entre pour quelque chose dans vos projets. Vous l'avez trouvée sous la main, vous l'avez prise : à la bonne heure ! mais ce ne peut pas être là un goût, 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* ; je vous l'envoie pour que vous en jugiez. Voyez donc que quand elle parle de vous, c'est toujours *M. de Valmont* ; que toutes ses idées, même celles que vous lui faites naître, n'aboutissent jamais qu'à Danceny ; **et lui, elle ne l'appelle pas Monsieur, c'est bien toujours Danceny seulement**³². Par là, elle le distingue de tous les autres ; et même en se livrant à vous, elle ne se familiarise qu'avec lui. Si une telle conquête vous paraît *séduisante*, si les plaisirs qu'elle donne vous *attachent*, assurément vous êtes modeste et peu difficile. Que vous la gardiez, j'y consens ; cela entre même dans mes projets. Mais il me semble que cela ne vaut pas de se déranger un quart d'heure ; qu'il faudrait aussi avoir quelque empire, **et ne lui permettre, par exemple, de se rapprocher de Danceny, qu'après le lui avoir fait un peu plus oublier.**³³

* Voyez la Lettre 109.

Avant de cesser de m'occuper de vous, pour venir à moi⁵⁶, je veux encore vous dire que ce moyen de maladie que vous m'annoncez vouloir prendre, est bien connu et bien usé. 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. Je vais encore en tenter un, et courir une nouvelle aventure. Je conviens qu'elle n'aura pas le mérite de la difficulté ; mais au moins sera-ce une distraction, et je m'ennuie à périr.

Je ne sais pourquoi, depuis l'aventure de Prévan, Belleroche m'est devenu insupportable. Il a tellement redoublé d'attention, de tendresse, de *vénération*, que je n'y peux plus tenir. Sa colère, dans le premier moment, m'avait paru plaisante ; il a pourtant bien fallu la calmer, car c'eût été me compromettre que de le laisser faire : et il n'y avait pas moyen de lui faire entendre raison. J'ai donc pris le parti de lui montrer plus d'amour, pour en venir à bout plus facilement : mais lui, a pris cela au sérieux ; et depuis ce temps il m'excède par son enchantement éternel. **Je remarque surtout l'insultante confiance qu'il prend en moi, et la**

sécurité avec laquelle il me regarde comme à lui pour toujours.⁴¹ J'en suis vraiment humiliée. Il me prise donc bien peu, s'il croit valoir assez pour me fixer ! Ne me disait-il pas dernièrement que je n'aurais jamais aimé un autre que lui ? Oh ! pour le coup, j'ai eu besoin de toute ma prudence, pour ne pas le détromper sur-le-champ, en lui disant ce qui en était. Voilà, certes, un plaisant Monsieur, pour avoir un droit exclusif ! Je conviens qu'il est bien fait et d'une assez belle figure : mais, à tout prendre, ce n'est, au fait, qu'un Manœuvre d'amour. Enfin le moment est venu, il faut nous séparer.

J'essaie déjà depuis quinze jours, et j'ai employé, tour à tour, la froideur, le caprice, l'humeur, les querelles ; mais le tenace personnage ne quitte pas prise ainsi : il faut donc prendre un parti plus violent, en conséquence je l'emmène à ma campagne. Nous partons après-demain. Il n'y aura avec nous que quelques personnes désintéressées et peu clairvoyantes, et nous y aurons presque autant de liberté que si nous y étions seuls. Là, je le surchargerai à tel point, d'amour et de caresses, nous y vivrons si bien l'un pour l'autre uniquement, que je parie bien qu'il désirera plus que moi la fin de ce voyage, dont il se fait un si grand bonheur ; et s'il n'en revient pas plus ennuyé de moi que je ne le suis de lui, dites, j'y consens, que je n'en sais pas plus que vous.

Le prétexte de cette espèce de retraite est de m'occuper sérieusement de mon grand procès, qui en effet se jugera enfin au commencement de l'hiver. J'en suis bien aise ; car il est

vraiment désagréable d'avoir ainsi toute sa fortune en l'air. Ce n'est pas que je sois inquiète de l'événement ; d'abord j'ai raison, tous mes Avocats me l'assurent ; et quand je ne l'aurais pas ! je serais donc bien maladroite, si je ne savais pas gagner un procès, où je n'ai pour adversaires que des mineurs encore en bas âge, et leur vieux tuteur ! Comme il ne faut pourtant rien négliger dans une Affaire si importante, j'aurai effectivement avec moi deux Avocats. Ce voyage ne vous paraît-il pas gai ? cependant s'il me fait gagner mon procès et perdre Belleruche, je ne regretterai pas mon temps.

A présent, Vicomte, devinez le successeur ; je vous le donne en cent. Mais bon ! ne sais-je pas que vous ne devinez jamais rien ? hé bien, c'est Danceny. Vous êtes étonné, n'est-ce pas ? car enfin je ne suis pas encore réduite à l'éducation des enfants ! Mais celui-ci mérite d'être excepté ; il n'a que les grâces de la jeunesse, et non de la frivolité. Sa grande réserve dans le cercle est très propre à éloigner tous les soupçons, et on ne l'en trouve que plus aimable, quand il se livre, dans le tête-à-tête. Ce n'est pas que j'en aie déjà eu avec lui pour mon compte, je ne suis encore que sa confidente ; mais sous ce voile de l'amitié, je crois lui voir un goût très vif pour moi, et je sens que j'en prends beaucoup pour lui. Ce serait bien dommage que tant d'esprit et de délicatesse allassent se sacrifier et s'abrutir auprès de cette petite imbécile de Volanges ! J'espère qu'il se trompe en croyant l'aimer : elle est si loin de le mériter ! **Ce n'est pas que je sois jalouse d'elle**⁴² ; mais c'est que ce serait un meurtre ; et je veux en sauver Danceny. Je vous prie donc, Vicomte, de mettre vos soins à ce qu'il ne puisse se rapprocher de *sa Cécile* (comme il a encore la mauvaise habitude de la nommer). Un premier goût a toujours plus d'empire qu'on ne croit et je ne serais sûre de rien s'il la revoyait à présent ; surtout pendant mon absence. A mon retour, je me charge de tout et j'en réponds. J'ai bien songé à emmener le jeune homme avec moi : mais j'en ai fait le sacrifice à ma prudence ordinaire ; et puis, j'aurais craint qu'il ne s'aperçût de quelque chose entre Belleruche et moi, et je serais au désespoir qu'il eût la moindre idée de ce qui se passe. Je veux au moins m'offrir à son imagination, pure et sans tache ; telle enfin qu'il faudrait être, pour être vraiment digne de lui.

*Paris ce 15 octobre 17**.*

Dangerous Connections

MARCHIONESS DE MERTEUIL to the VISCOUNT DE VALMONT

I think it time to inform you, Viscount, the world begin to talk of you. Your absence from Paris is remarked, and the cause guessed. I was yesterday at a public supper, which was very numerous; where it was positively asserted, you was detained in a village by an unfortunate romantic amour. Joy was instantly visible on the countenance of all those envious of your successes, and of all the women you have neglected. Believe me, you should not suffer such dangerous reports to gain ground, and should immediately return to destroy them by your presence.

Remember, if you once lose the reputation of irresistible, you will soon more readily find resistance; your rivals will lose the respect they had for you, and will dare you; for is there one amongst them who does not think himself more powerful than virtue? But, above all, remember, among the number of women you have held up to public view, all those you have not had, will attempt to undeceive the public, whilst the others will use every means to abuse it. To sum up all, you must expect to be rated, perhaps, as much beneath your value, as you have hitherto been above it.

Return then, Viscount, and no longer sacrifice your reputation to a puerile whim. You have done all we wanted with the little Volanges; and as for your Presidente, it is not very probable you will do your business with her at ten leagues distance. Do you imagine she will go after you? Perhaps she no longer thinks of you, or thinks of you only to felicitate herself for having humbled you. But here you would find some opportunity of appearing with eclat, and you really want it. If even you should continue obstinate in your ridiculous adventure, I can't see how your return would hurt you – on the contrary.

For if your Presidente *adores you*, as you have so often told me, but never yet proved, her only consolation, her sole pleasure, ought now to be to speak of you, to know what you do, what you say, what you think, even the most trifling matter about you. Those wretched fooleries are of some consequence, according to the privations that are experienced. They are the crumbs falling from the table of the rich man, which he despises; but which the poor one collects with avidity, and feeds on. So the poor Presidente at present receives those crumbs; and the more she has of them, she will be less greedy for the rest. **Moreover, as you know her confidant, there is no doubt but every letter contains a little exhortation to corroborate her prudence, and strengthen her virtue.**¹⁸ Why will you then leave resources to the one for her defence, and power to the other to hurt you.

Not that I am in the least of your opinion on the loss you think you sustain by the change of confidant; for M. de Volanges detests you, and hatred is always more ingenious and clear sighted than friendship. Your old aunt's virtue will never permit her to slander her dear nephew, for virtue has its foibles. Again, your fears lead you into an error. It is not true, that *the older women grow, the more morose and severe they are*. It is from forty to fifty that grief for faded beauties rage, to be forced to abandon pretensions and pleasures to which the mind is still attached, make almost all women peevish and ridiculous. It is necessary they should have this long interval to prepare for this great sacrifice: but when it is once compleated, they divide into two classes.

The most numerous, which are those who never possessed any thing but youth and beauty, fall into a weak apathy¹⁰, from which they never recover but for play and a few practical devotions; that class is always tiresome, often morose, sometimes marplots, but rarely mischievous. **It is not easy to determine whether those women are or are not severe; without ideas, or in a manner without existence**⁹, they repeat indifferently, and without comprehending, every thing they hear; and are, as to themselves, *non entities*.

The other class, much more uncommon, but truly valuable, are those of good disposition, who having cultivated their minds, can create themselves an existence, when nature fails; and can, when the embellishments of the outward figure are useless, place them to their minds. Those women have most commonly a sound judgment, and a mind replete with solidity, good humour, and kindness. – They replace the seducing charms with attractive goodness and cheerfulness, whose charms increase with their years. Thus they may be said in some shape to renew their age, by gaining the affections of the youthful part of society. But far from being what you call *morose and severe*; the habits of indulgence, the long reflections on human nature, but especially the remembrance of youth, by which alone they have a relish for life, would rather make them too condescending.

I can aver, having always cultivated an intimacy with old women, of whose good opinion I saw early the advantage, I have known several who I frequented as much from inclination as interest. I shall stop here; for I dread you should fall in love with your old aunt, you are so apt to be inflamed suddenly and morally, and bury yourself with her in the tomb you have so long dwelt in.

But to return. Although you seem enraptured with your little scholar, I fancy she has no share in your projects. You found her ready to your hand, and took her: be it so. But that cannot be called taste. It is not even, properly speaking, an enjoyment; you possess her person only. Not to mention her heart, which I suppose does not give you the least uneasiness, you don't even engage her imagination. I cannot tell whether you have observed it, but I have a proof of it in the last letter she wrote me: I send it you, that you may be convinced. Observe, always when she mentions you, it is *M. de Valmont* ; all her ideas, even those you raise, terminate in Danceny; **she does not call him Monsieur, but plain Danceny**³². Thus she distinguishes him from all others: and even giving herself up to you, she familiarises herself only with him. If such a conquest has any thing *bewitching* , if the pleasures you receive are so *attaching* , you are certainly modest, and not difficult to please. Keep her; I agree to it; it is even a part of my scheme: but I really think it should not discompose you in the least. You should also have some ascendant over her, **and not suffer her to draw near Danceny, until he is a little worn out of her memory**³³.

Before I think of your coming to me⁵⁶, I must tell you this pretended sickness is an exploded common trick. On my word, Viscount, you lack invention! I am also guilty of repetitions sometimes, as you shall hear: but I endeavour to amuse by the circumstances; and success justifies me. I am going to attempt another adventure. I will agree, it has not the merit of difficulty; but it will be a distraction at least, for time lies very heavy on my hands.

I cannot account for the reason, but since Prevan's affair, Belleruche is become insupportable to me. He has redoubled his attention, tenderness, and *veneration* , to so violent a degree, I can hold out no longer. His wrath at the time was pleasant enough; but it was necessary to check it, otherwise I must have committed myself; there was no making him listen to reason. I resolved to shew him more affection, to bring him round more easily; he has taken it so seriously, that ever since he puts me out of all patience with his eternal charms. **I moreover take notice of his insulting confidence, for he really looks on me as his property.**⁴¹ I am really humbled. He holds me cheap, indeed, if he thinks himself capable of fixing me. He had the assurance to tell me lately, I never should have loved any other but him. Then, indeed, I lost all patience, and was obliged to call my prudence in aid, not to undeceive him instantly, by telling how matters stood. He is certainly a pretty fellow, to aspire to an exclusive right! I

will allow, he is well made, and a tolerable person: but take him all in all, he is only a manoeuvrer in love. The time is come, we must part.

I have endeavoured at it this fortnight past. I have, by turns, treated him with coolness, capriciousness, bad humour, quarrelled even; all in vain: the tenacious creature will not quit his hold. I must, then, use some violence; for this purpose I take him with me to the country. We set out the day after to-morrow. We shall only have some people of no consequence, and not very discerning, and shall be almost as much at liberty as if we were alone. There I shall so overload him with love and fondness, we shall so live for each other only, that he will wish to see the end of this journey, which is now his greatest bliss, more than I shall; and if he does not return more tired of me than I shall be of him, I consent you may say, you know more of the matter than I do.

The pretence for this retreat is, I want seriously to employ my time in preparing for my great law suit, that is to be decided the beginning of winter, which pleases me much; for it is really very disagreeable to have one's fortune in suspense. Not that I am uneasy about the issue; for, first, I have right on my side, as all my lawyers assure me; ---if it even was not the case, I should be very unskilful, indeed, if I could not gain a suit against minors of tender years, and their old guardian: however, as nothing must be omitted in a business of such consequence, I shall have two lawyers with me. Will not this be a sprightly jaunt? If I gain my cause, and lose Belleruche, I shall not regret the time.

Now, Viscount, I will give you a hundred guesses before you name his successor; I forget though, you never guess any thing ---Why, Danceny. You are astonished; for I am not yet reduced to the education of children. This one, however, deserves an exception in his favour. He has the graces of youth, but not its frivolousness. His reserve in a circle is well adapted to banish all manner of suspicion, and he is the more amiable when in a tête-à-tête; not that I yet have had one with him on my own account. I am only his confidant: but under this mask of friendship, I think I see a strong inclination for me, and I already feel a violent one for him. It would be pity so much wit and delicacy should be sacrificed and stupefied with that little idiot Volanges. I hope he deceives himself in thinking he loves her; she is so far from deserving him. **Not that I have the least tincture of jealousy:**⁴² but it would be murder; and I wish to save Danceny. I therefore beg, Viscount, you will use your endeavours that he may not come near his Cecilia, as he has got the disagreeable custom of calling her. A first liking

has always an inconceivable power. If he was not to see her, I could not be certain of any thing, especially during my absence. At my return, I shall take every thing on myself, and will answer for the success.

I had some notion of taking the young man with me; but sacrificed my inclination to my usual prudence: moreover, I mould have been apprehensive he might make some observations on Belleruche and me; an idea even of such a thing would distract me; as I wish to offer myself immaculate to his imagination: such as one should be to be worthy of him.

Paris, Oct. 15, 17--.

127th letter

Les Liaisons dangereuses

LA MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL AU VICOMTE DE VALMONT

Si je n'ai pas répondu, Vicomte, à votre Lettre du 19, ce n'est pas que je n'en aie eu le temps; c'est tout simplement qu'elle m'a donné de l'humeur, **et que je ne lui ai pas trouvé le sens commun.**⁷ J'avais donc cru n'avoir rien de mieux à faire que de la laisser dans l'oubli ; mais puisque vous revenez sur elle, **que vous paraissez tenir aux idées qu'elle contient**⁸, et que vous prenez mon silence pour un consentement, il faut vous dire clairement mon avis.

J'ai pu avoir quelquefois la prétention de remplacer à moi seule tout un sérail ; mais il ne m'a jamais convenu d'en faire partie. Je croyais que vous saviez cela. Au moins, à présent, que vous ne pouvez plus l'ignorer, vous jugerez facilement combien votre proposition a dû me paraître ridicule. Qui, moi ! je sacrifierais un goût, et encore un goût nouveau, pour m'occuper de vous ? Et pour m'en occuper comment ? en attendant à mon tour, et en esclave soumise, les sublimes faveurs de votre *Hautesse*. Quand, par exemple, vous voudrez vous distraire un moment de *ce charme inconnu que l'adorable, la céleste* Mme de Tourvel, vous a fait seule éprouver ou quand vous craindrez de compromettre, auprès de *l'attachante Cécile*, l'idée supérieure que vous êtes bien aise qu'elle conserve de vous : alors descendant jusqu'à moi, vous y viendrez chercher des plaisirs, moins vifs à la vérité, mais sans conséquence ; et vos précieuses bontés, quoique un peu rares, suffiront de reste à mon bonheur !

Certes, vous êtes riche en bonne opinion de vous-même : mais apparemment je ne le suis pas en modestie ; car j'ai beau me regarder, je ne peux pas me trouver déçue jusque-là. C'est peut-être un tort que j'ai ; mais je vous préviens que j'en ai beaucoup d'autres encore.

J'ai surtout celui de croire que *l'écolier, le doucereux* Danceny, uniquement occupé de moi, me sacrifiant, sans s'en faire un mérite, une première passion, avant même qu'elle ait été satisfaite, et m'aimant enfin comme on aime à son âge, pourrait, malgré ses vingt ans, travailler plus efficacement que vous à mon bonheur et à mes plaisirs. Je me permettrai même d'ajouter que, s'il me venait en fantaisie de lui donner un adjoint, ce ne serait pas vous, au moins pour le moment.

Et par quelles raisons, m'allez-vous demander ? Mais d'abord il pourrait fort bien n'y en avoir aucune : car le caprice qui vous ferait préférer, peut également vous faire exclure. Je veux pourtant bien, par politesse, vous motiver mon avis. Il me semble que vous auriez trop de sacrifices à me faire ; et moi, au lieu d'en avoir la reconnaissance que vous ne manqueriez pas d'en attendre, je serais capable de croire que vous m'en devriez encore ! Vous voyez bien, qu'aussi éloignés l'un de l'autre par notre façon de penser, nous ne pouvons nous rapprocher d'aucune manière ; et je crains qu'il ne me faille beaucoup de temps, mais beaucoup, avant de changer de sentiment. Quand je serai corrigée, je vous promets de vous avertir. Jusque-là, croyez-moi, faites d'autres arrangements, et gardez vos baisers ; vous avez tant à les placer mieux !...

Adieu, comme autrefois, dites-vous ? Mais autrefois, ce me semble, vous faisiez un peu plus de cas de moi ; vous ne m'aviez pas destinée tout à fait aux troisièmes rôles ; et surtout vous vouliez bien attendre que j'eusse dit oui, avant d'être sûr de mon consentement. Trouvez donc bon qu'au lieu de vous dire aussi, adieu comme autrefois, je vous dise, adieu comme à présent.

Votre servante, Monsieur le Vicomte.

*Paris, ce 8 novembre 17**.*

Dangerous Connections

The MARCHIONESS DE MERTEUIL to the VISCOUNT DE VALMONT.

It was not for want of time, that I did not answer your letter of the 19th, Viscount, but plainly because it put me out of temper, **and did not contain a single syllable of common sense**⁷. I

thought it then the best way to leave it in oblivion—but since you seem fond of this production, and the sublime ideas it contains,⁸ that you construe my silence into consent, it is necessary you should have my opinion explicitly.

I may have heretofore formed the design of singly performing the functions of a whole seraglio; but it never entered my head to become only a part of one; this I thought you knew, now, that you cannot plead ignorance, you may readily conceive how ridiculous your proposition must appear to me. Should I sacrifice an inclination, and a new one, for you? And in what manner, pray? Why, waiting for my turn, like a submissive slave, the sublime favours of your *highness*. When for example, you was inclined to relax for a moment from *that unknown charm* that the *adorable, the celestial* M. de Tourvel only had made you feel; -- or when you dread to risk with the *engaging Cecilia*, the superior idea you wished her to preserve for you;---then condescending to stoop to me, you will seek pleasures less violent, but of not much consequence, and your inestimable bounty, though scarce, must fill the measure of my felicity. Certainly you stand high in your own opinion; and my modesty nor my glass have yet prevailed on me to think I am sunk so low. This may be owing to my wrong way of thinking; but I beg you will be persuaded I have more imaginations of the same kind.

One especially, which is, that *Danceney, the school-boy, the whiner*, totally taken up with me, sacrificing, without making a merit of it, his first love, even before it was enjoyed, and loving me to that excess that is usual with those at his age, may contribute more to my happiness and pleasure than you---I will even take the liberty to add, that if I had the inclination to give him a partner, it should not be you, at least now.

Perhaps you'll ask me why? Probably I should be at a loss for a reason; for the same whim that would give you the preference, might also exclude you. However, politeness requires I should inform you of my motive --- I think you must make too many sacrifices; and instead of being grateful, as you certainly would expect, I should be inclined to think you still owed me more --You must therefore be sensible, our manner of thinking being so opposite, we can by no means unite: I fear it will be some time, nay a great while, before I change my opinion.

When that happens, I promise to give you notice;---Until then, let me advise you to take some other measures, and keep your kisses for those to whom they will be more agreeable.

You say *adieu, as formerly!* but formerly, if I remember, you set a greater value on me than to appoint me entirely to the third characters; and was content to wait until I answered in the affirmative, before you was certain of my consent: don't be angry then, if instead of saying *adieu, as formerly,* I say *adieu, as at present.*

Your servant, Viscount.

The castle of ----, Oct. 31, 17---

134th letter

Les Liaisons dangereuses

LA MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL AU VICOMTE DE VALMONT

En vérité, Vicomte, vous êtes bien comme les enfants, devant qui il ne faut rien dire et à qui on ne peut rien montrer qu'ils ne veuillent s'en emparer aussitôt ! Une simple idée qui me vient, à laquelle même je vous avertis que je ne veux pas m'arrêter, parce que je vous en parle, vous en abusez pour y ramener mon attention ; pour m'y fixer, quand je cherche à m'en distraire ; et me faire, en quelque sorte, partager malgré moi vos désirs étourdis ! Est-il donc généreux à vous de me laisser supporter seule tout le fardeau de la prudence ? Je vous le redis, et me le répète plus souvent encore, l'arrangement que vous me proposez est réellement impossible. Quand vous y mettriez toute la générosité que vous me montrez en ce moment, croyez-vous donc que je n'aie pas aussi ma délicatesse, et que je veuille accepter des sacrifices qui nuiraient à votre bonheur ?

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. Qu'est-ce, par exemple, que ce subterfuge dont vous vous servez vis-à-vis de vous-même (car je vous crois sincère avec moi), qui vous fait rapporter à l'envie d'observer le désir que vous ne pouvez ni cacher ni combattre, de garder cette femme ? Ne dirait-on pas que jamais vous n'en avez rendu une autre heureuse, parfaitement heureuse ? Ah ! si vous en doutez, vous avez bien peu de mémoire ! Mais non, ce n'est pas cela. Tout simplement votre cœur abuse votre esprit, et le fait se payer de mauvaises raisons : **mais moi, qui ai un grand intérêt à ne pas m'y tromper, je ne suis pas si facile à contenter.**²

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. En effet, ce n'est plus l'adorable, la céleste Mme de Tourvel : mais c'est *une femme étonnante, une femme délicate et sensible*, et cela, à l'exclusion de toutes les autres ; *une femme rare enfin*, et telle qu'on n'en rencontrerait pas une seconde. Il en est de même de ce charme inconnu qui n'est pas *le plus fort*. Hé bien ! soit : mais puisque vous ne l'aviez jamais trouvé jusque-là, il est bien à croire que vous ne le trouveriez pas davantage à l'avenir, et la perte que vous feriez n'en serait pas moins irréparable. Ou ce sont là, Vicomte, des symptômes assurés d'amour, ou il faut renoncer à en trouver aucun.

Soyez assuré, que pour cette fois, je vous parle sans humeur. Je me suis promis de n'en plus prendre ; j'ai trop bien reconnu qu'elle pouvait devenir un piège dangereux. Croyez-moi, ne soyons qu'amis, et restons-en là. **Sachez-moi gré seulement de mon courage à me défendre : oui, de mon courage**⁷¹ ; car il en faut quelquefois, même pour ne pas prendre un parti qu'on sent être mauvais.

Ce n'est donc plus que pour vous ramener à mon avis par persuasion, que je vais répondre à la demande que vous me faites sur les sacrifices que j'exigerais et que vous ne pourriez pas faire. Je me sers à dessein de ce mot *exiger*, parce que je suis sûre que, dans un moment, vous m'allez, en effet, trouver trop exigeante : mais tant mieux ! Loin de me fâcher de vos refus, je vous en remercierai. Tenez, ce n'est pas avec vous que je veux dissimuler, j'en ai peut-être besoin.

J'exigerais donc, voyez la cruauté ! que cette rare, cette étonnante Mme de Tourvel ne fût plus pour vous qu'une femme ordinaire, une femme telle qu'elle est seulement : car il ne faut pas s'y tromper ; ce charme qu'on croit trouver dans les autres, c'est en nous qu'il existe ; et c'est l'amour seul qui embellit tant l'objet aimé. Ce que je vous demande là, tout impossible que cela soit, **vous feriez peut-être bien l'effort de me le promettre**⁴⁷, de me le jurer même ; mais, je l'avoue, je n'en croirais pas de vains discours. Je ne pourrais être persuadée que par l'ensemble de votre conduite.

Ce n'est pas tout encore, je serais capricieuse. Ce sacrifice de la petite Cécile, que vous m'offrez de si bonne grâce, je ne m'en soucierais pas du tout. Je vous demanderais, au

contraire, de continuer ce pénible service, jusqu'à nouvel ordre de ma part ; soit que j'aimasse à abuser ainsi de mon empire ; soit que, plus indulgente ou plus juste, il me suffît de disposer de vos sentiments, sans vouloir contrarier vos plaisirs. Quoi qu'il en soit, je voudrais être obéie ; et mes ordres seraient bien rigoureux !

Il est vrai qu'alors je me croirais obligée de vous remercier ; que sait-on ? peut-être même de vous récompenser.³⁸

Sûrement, par exemple, j'abrégerais une absence qui me deviendrait insupportable. Je vous reverrais enfin, Vicomte, et je vous reverrais... comment ?... Mais vous vous souvenez que ceci n'est plus qu'une conversation, un simple récit d'un projet impossible, et je ne veux pas l'oublier toute seule...

Savez-vous que mon procès m'inquiète un peu ? J'ai voulu enfin connaître au juste quels étaient mes moyens ; mes Avocats me citent bien quelques Lois, et surtout beaucoup d'*autorités*, comme ils les appellent : mais je n'y vois pas autant de raison et de justice. J'en suis presque à regretter d'avoir refusé l'accommodement. Cependant je me rassure, en songeant que le Procureur est adroit, l'Avocat éloquent, et la Plaideuse jolie. Si ces trois moyens devaient ne plus valoir, il faudrait changer tout le train des affaires, et que deviendrait le respect pour les anciens usages ?

Ce procès est actuellement la seule chose qui me retienne ici. Celui de Belleruche est fini : hors de Cour, dépens compensés. Il en est à regretter le bal de ce soir ; c'est bien le regret d'un désœuvré ! Je lui rendrai sa liberté entière à mon retour à la Ville. Je lui fais ce douloureux sacrifice, et je m'en console par la générosité qu'il y trouve.

Adieu, Vicomte, écrivez-moi souvent : le détail de vos plaisirs me dédommagera au moins en partie des ennuis que j'éprouve.

*Paris, ce 21 novembre 17**.*

Dangerous Connections

MARCHIONESS DE MERTEUIL to the VISCOUNT DE VALMONT.

Upon my word, Viscount, you are exactly like the children, before whom one cannot speak a word, nor show a thing but they must have it immediately. Because I just mention an idea that came into my head, which I even told you I was not fixed on, you abuse my intention, and want to tie me down, at the time I endeavour to forget it, and force me in a manner to share your thoughtless desires. Are you not very ungenerous to make me bear the whole burthen of

prudential care? I must again repeat, and it frequently occurs to me, the method you propose is impossible. When you would even throw in all the generosity you mention, do you imagine I am divested of my delicacies, and I would accept sacrifices prejudicial to your happiness?

My dear Viscount, you certainly deceive yourself in the sentiment that attaches you to M. de Tourvel. It is love, or such a passion never had existence. You deny it in a hundred shapes; but you prove it in a thousand. What means, for example, the subterfuge you use against yourself, for I believe you sincere with me, that makes you relate so circumstantially the desire you can neither conceal nor combat, of keeping this woman? Would not one imagine, you never had made any other happy, perfectly happy? Ah! if you doubt it, your memory is very bad; but that is not the case. To speak plainly, your heart imposes on your understanding, and pays it off with bad arguments: **but I, who am so strongly interested not to be deceived, am not so easily blinded**².

Thus, as I remarked, your politeness made you carefully suppress every word you thought would displease me, I could not help observing, perhaps, without taking notice of it; nevertheless you preserved the same ideas. It is no longer the adorable, the celestial Madame de Tourvel, but *an astonishing woman, a delicate sentimental woman*, even to the exclusion of all others; *a wonderful woman*, such as *a second could not be found*. The same way with your unknown charm, which is not *the strongest*. Well; be it so: but since you never found it out till then, it is much to be apprehended you will never meet it again; the loss would be irreparable. Those, Viscount, are sure symptoms of love, or we must renounce the hope of ever finding it. You may be assured I am not out of temper now; and have made a promise, I will not be so any more: I foresee it might become a dangerous snare. Take my word for it, we had better remain as we are, in friendship. **Be thankful for my resolution in defending myself**⁷¹; for sometimes one must have it, not to take a step that may be attended with bad consequences.

It is only to persuade you to be of my opinion, I answer the demand you make, on the sacrifices I would exact, and you could not make. I designedly use the word exact, because immediately you will think me too exacting --- so much the better: far from being angry with you refusal, I shall thank you for it. Observe, I will not dissemble with you; perhaps I have occasion for it.

First I would exact – take notice of the cruelty! that this same rare, this astonishing Madame de Tourvel, should be no more to you than any other woman; that is, a mere woman: for you must not deceive yourself; this charm, that you believe is found in others, exists in us, and it is love only embellishes the beloved object so much. What I now require, although so impossible for you to grant, **you would not hesitate to promise**⁴⁷, nay, even to swear; but I own I would not believe you the more. I could not be convinced, but by the whole tenor of your conduct.

That is not all; I should be whimsical, perhaps; the sacrifice you so politely offer me of the little Cecilia, does not give me the least uneasiness: on the contrary, I should require you to continue this toilsome duty until farther orders. Whether I should like thus to abuse my power, or whether more indulgent, or more reasonable, it would satisfy me to dispose of your sentiments without thwarting your pleasures. I would, however, be obeyed, and my commands would be very severe.

Certainly I should think myself obliged to thank you, and, who knows? perhaps to reward you.³⁸

As for instance, I might shorten an absence, which would be insupportable to me. I should at length see you again, Viscount; and see you again---How?---Remember this is only a conversation, a plain narrative of an impossible scheme. I must not be the only one to forget it.

I must tell you my lawsuit begins to make me a little uneasy. I was determined to know exactly what my pretensions were. My lawyers have quoted me some laws, and a great many *authorities*, as they call them; but I can't perceive so much reason and justice in them. I am almost afraid I did wrong to refuse the compromise; however, I begin to be encouraged, when I consider my attorney is skilful, my lawyer eloquent, and the plaintiff handsome. If those reasons were to be no longer valid, the course of business must be altered; then what would become of the respect for old customs? This lawsuit is actually the only thing keeps me here. That of Bellerocche is finished; the indictment quashed, each party to bear their own costs: he even is regretting not to be at the ball to-night; the regret of a man out of employment. I shall set him free at my return to town. In making this grievous sacrifice, I am consoled by the generosity he finds in it.

Adieu, Viscount! write to me often. The particulars of your amusements will make me amends partly for the dulness I suffer.

Castle of ----, Nov. 11, 17---

141st letter

Les Liaisons dangereuses

LA MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL AU VICOMTE DE VALMONT

Mon Dieu! Vicomte, que vous me gênez par votre obstination ! Que vous importe mon silence ? croyez-vous, si je le garde, que ce soit faute de raisons pour me défendre. Ah ! plutôt à Dieu ! Mais non, c'est seulement qu'il m'en coûte de vous les dire.

Parlez-moi vrai ; vous faites-vous illusion à vous-même, ou cherchez-vous à me tromper ? la différence entre vos discours et vos actions ne me laisse de choix qu'entre ces deux sentiments : lequel est le véritable ? Que voulez-vous donc que je vous dise, quand moi-même je ne sais que penser ?

Vous paraissez vous faire un grand mérite de votre dernière scène avec la Présidente ; mais qu'est-ce donc qu'elle prouve pour votre système, ou contre le mien ? Assurément je ne vous ai jamais dit que vous aimiez assez cette femme pour ne la pas tromper, pour n'en pas saisir toutes les occasions qui vous paraîtraient agréables ou faciles ; je ne doutais même pas qu'il ne vous fût à peu près égal de satisfaire avec une autre, avec la première venue, jusqu'aux désirs que celle-ci seule aurait fait naître ; et je ne suis pas surprise que, pour un libertinage d'esprit qu'on aurait tort de vous disputer, vous ayez fait une fois par projet, ce que vous aviez fait mille autres par occasion. Qui ne sait que c'est là le simple courant du monde, et votre usage à tous, tant que vous êtes, depuis le scélérat jusqu'aux *espèces* ? Celui qui s'en abstient aujourd'hui passe pour romanesque ; et ce n'est pas là, je crois le défaut que je vous reproche.

Mais ce que j'ai dit, ce que j'ai pensé, ce que je pense encore, c'est que vous n'en avez pas moins de l'amour pour votre Présidente ; non pas, à la vérité, de l'amour bien pur ni bien tendre, mais de celui que vous pouvez avoir ; de celui, par exemple, qui fait trouver à une femme les agréments ou les qualités qu'elle n'a pas ; qui la place dans une classe à part, et met toutes les autres en second ordre ; que vous tient encore attaché à elle, même alors que vous l'outragez ; tel enfin que je conçois qu'un Sultan peut le ressentir pour sa Sultane

favorite, ce qui ne l'empêche pas de lui préférer souvent une simple Odalisque. Ma comparaison me paraît d'autant plus juste que, comme lui, jamais vous n'êtes ni l'Amant ni l'ami d'une femme ; mais toujours son tyran ou son esclave. Aussi suis-je bien sûre que vous vous êtes bien humilié, bien avili, pour rentrer en grâce avec ce bel objet ! et trop heureux d'y être parvenu, dès que vous croyez le moment arrivé d'obtenir votre pardon, vous me quittez *pour ce grand événement*.

Encore dans votre dernière Lettre, si vous ne m'y parlez pas de cette femme uniquement, c'est que vous ne voulez m'y rien dire *de vos grandes affaires* ; elles vous semblent si importantes, que le silence que vous gardez à ce sujet vous semble une punition pour moi. Et c'est après ces mille preuves de votre préférence décidée pour une autre, que vous me demandez tranquillement s'il y a encore *quelque intérêt commun entre vous et moi* ! Prenez-y garde, Vicomte ! si une fois je réponds, ma réponse sera irrévocable ; et craindre de la faire en ce moment, c'est peut-être déjà en dire trop. Aussi je n'en veux absolument plus parler.

Tout ce que je peux faire, c'est de vous raconter une histoire. **Peut-être n'aurez-vous pas le temps de la lire, ou celui d'y faire assez attention pour la bien entendre ? libre à vous**³⁴.

Ce ne sera, au pis-aller, qu'une histoire de perdue.

Un homme de ma connaissance s'était empêtré, comme vous, d'une femme qui lui faisait peu d'honneur. Il avait bien, par intervalle, le bon esprit de sentir que, tôt ou tard, cette aventure lui ferait tort : mais quoiqu'il en rougît, il n'avait pas le courage de rompre. Son embarras était d'autant plus grand, qu'il s'était vanté à ses amis d'être entièrement libre ; et qu'il n'ignorait pas que le ridicule qu'on a, augmente toujours en proportion qu'on s'en défend. Il passait ainsi sa vie, ne cessant de faire des sottises, et ne cessant de dire après : *Ce n'est pas ma faute*. Cet homme avait une amie qui fut tentée un moment de le livrer au Public en cet état d'ivresse, et de rendre ainsi son ridicule ineffaçable : mais pourtant, plus généreuse que maligne, ou peut-être encore par quelque autre motif, elle voulut tenter un dernier moyen, pour être, à tout événement, dans le cas de dire, comme son ami : *Ce n'est pas ma faute*. Elle lui fit donc parvenir sans aucun autre avis, la Lettre qui suit, comme un remède dont l'usage pourrait être utile à son mal.

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

« 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 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 : mais 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. »

De vous dire, Vicomte, l'effet de cette dernière tentative, et ce qui s'en est suivi, ce n'est pas le moment : mais je vous promets de vous le dire dans ma première Lettre. Vous y trouverez aussi mon *ultimatum* sur le renouvellement du traité que vous me proposez. Jusque-là, adieu tout simplement...

A propos, je vous remercie de vos détails sur la petite Volanges ; c'est un article à réserver jusqu'au lendemain du mariage, pour la Gazette de médisance. En attendant, je vous fais mon compliment de condoléance sur la perte de votre postérité. Bonsoir, Vicomte.

*Paris, ce 3 décembre 17**, au soir.*

Dangerous Connections

The MARCHIONESS DE MERTEUIL to the VISCOUNT DE VALMONT

Good God, Viscount! How troublesome you are with your obstinacy! What matters my silence to you? Do you believe it is for want of reasons I am silent? Ah! would to God! But no, it is only because it would be painful to tell them to you.

Speak truth, do you deceive yourself, or do you mean to deceive me? The difference between your discourse and actions, leaves in doubt which I am to give credit to. What shall I say to you then, when I even do not know what to think?

You seem to make a great merit of your last scene with the Presidente; but what does that prove in support of your system, or against mine? I never certainly told you, your love for this woman was so violent as not be capable of deceiving her, or prevent you from enjoying every opportunity that appeared agreeable and easy to you. I never even doubted but it would be equally the same to you, to satisfy, with any other, the first that offered, the desires she would raise. I am not at all surprised, that from a libertinism of mind, which it would be wrong to contend with you, you have once done designedly, what you have a thousand times done occasionally—Don't we well know this is the way of the world, and the practice of you all? and whoever acts otherwise is looked on as a simpleton --- I think I don't charge you with this defect.

What I have said, what I have thought, what I still think, is, you are nevertheless in love with your Presidente: not if you will with a pure and tender passion, but of that kind of which you are capable; for example, of that kind which makes you discover in a woman, charms and qualities she has not: which ranks her in a class by herself, and still links you to her even while you insult her—Such, in a word, as a Sultan has for a favourite Sultana; that does not prevent him from often giving the preference to a plain Odalisk. My comparison appears to me the more just, as, like him, you never are the lover or friend of a woman, but always her tyrant or her slave. And I am very certain, you very much humbled and debased yourself very much, to get into favour again with this fine object! Happy in your success, as soon as you think the moment arrived to obtain your pardon, you leave me *for this grand event*.

Even in your last letter, the reason you give for not entertaining me solely with this woman is, because you will not tell me any thing of your *grand affairs*; they are of so much importance, that your silence on that subject is to be my punishment: and after giving me such strong proofs of a decided preference for another, you coolly ask me whether *we have a mutual interest!* Have a care, Viscount; if I once answer you, my answer shall be irrevocable: and to be in suspense, is perhaps saying too much; I will therefore now say no more of that matter.

I have nothing more to say, but to tell you a trifling story; **perhaps you will not have leisure to read it, or to give so much attention to it as to understand it properly?**³⁴ At worst, it will be only a tale thrown away.

A man of my acquaintance, like you, was entangled with a woman, who did him very little credit; he had sense enough, at times, to perceive, this adventure would hurt him one time or other --- Although he was ashamed of it, yet he had not the resolution to break off—His embarrassment was greater, as he had frequently boasted to his friends, he was entirely at liberty; and was not insensible, the more he apologised, the more the ridicule increased--- Thus, he spent his time incessantly in foolery, and constantly saying, *it is not my fault*. This man had a friend, who was one time very near giving him up in his frenzy to incredible ridicule: but yet, being more generous than malicious, or perhaps from some other motive, she resolved, as a last effort, to try a method to be able, at least, with her friend, to say, *it is not my fault*. She therefore sent him, without farther ceremony, the following letter, as a remedy for his disorder.

“One tires of every thing, my angel! It is a law of nature; it is not my fault.”

“If, then, I am tired of a connection that has entirely taken me up four long months, it is not my fault.”

“If, for example, I had just as much love as you had virtue, and that’s saying a great deal, it is not at all surprising that one should end with the other; it is not my fault.”

“It follows, then, that for some time past, I have deceived you; but your unmerciful affection in some measure forced me to it! It is not my fault.”

“Now a woman I love to distraction, insists I must sacrifice you: it is not my fault.”

“I am sensible here is a fine field for reproaches; but if nature has only granted men constancy, whilst it gives obstinacy to women, it is not my fault.”

“Take my advice, chuse another lover, as I have another mistress—The advice is good; if you think otherwise, it is not my fault.”

“Farewell, my angel! I took you with pleasure, I part you without regret; perhaps I shall return to you; it is the way of the world; it is not my fault.”

This is not the time to tell you, Viscount, the effect of this last effort, and its consequences; but I promise to give it you in my next letter; you will then receive also my ultimatum on renewing the treaty you propose. Until when, adieu.

Now I think on it, receive my thanks for your particular account of the little Volanges; that article will keep till the day after her wedding, for the scandalous gazette. I condole with you, however, on the loss of your progeny. Good night, Viscount.

Nov. 24, 17--. Castle of ---.

152nd letter

Les Liaisons dangereuses

LA MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL AU VICOMTE DE VALMONT

Prenez donc garde, Vicomte, et ménagez davantage mon extrême timidité ! Comment voulez-vous que je supporte l'idée accablante d'encourir votre indignation, et surtout que je ne succombe pas à la crainte de votre vengeance ? d'autant que, comme vous savez, si vous me faisiez une noirceur, il me serait impossible de vous la rendre. J'aurais beau parler, votre existence n'en serait ni moins brillante ni moins paisible. Au fait, qu'auriez-vous à redouter ? d'être obligé de partir, si on vous en laissait le temps. Mais ne vit-on pas chez l'Etranger comme ici ? et à tout prendre, pourvu que la Cour de France vous laissât tranquille à celle où vous vous fixeriez, ce ne serait pour vous que changer le lieu de vos triomphes. Après avoir tenté de vous rendre votre sang-froid par ces considérations morales, revenons à nos affaires.

Savez-vous, Vicomte, pourquoi je ne me suis jamais remariée ?³⁵ Ce n'est assurément

pas faute d'avoir trouvé assez de partis avantageux³ ; c'est uniquement pour que personne n'ait le droit de trouver à redire à mes actions. Ce n'est même pas que j'aie craint de ne pouvoir plus faire mes volontés, car j'aurais bien toujours fini par là : mais c'est qu'il m'aurait gêné que quelqu'un eût eu seulement le droit de s'en plaindre ; c'est qu'enfin je ne voulais tromper que pour mon plaisir, et non par nécessité. Et voilà que vous m'écrivez la Lettre la plus maritale qu'il soit possible de voir ! Vous ne m'y parlez que de torts de mon côté, et de grâces du vôtre ! Mais comment donc peut-on manquer à celui à qui on ne doit rien ? Je ne saurais le concevoir !

Voyons ; de quoi s'agit-il tant ? Vous avez trouvé Danceny chez moi, et cela vous a

déplu ? à la bonne heure : ¹¹ mais qu'avez-vous pu en conclure ? ou que c'était l'effet du hasard, comme je vous le disais, ou celui de ma volonté, comme je ne vous le disais pas. Dans le premier cas, votre Lettre est injuste ; dans le second, elle est ridicule : c'était bien la peine d'écrire ! **Mais vous êtes jaloux, et la jalousie ne raisonne pas. Hé bien ! je vais raisonner pour vous.** ¹⁴

Ou vous avez un rival, ou vous n'en avez pas. Si vous en avez un, il faut plaire pour lui être préféré ; si vous n'en avez pas, il faut encore plaire pour éviter d'en avoir. Dans tous les cas, c'est la même conduite à tenir : **ainsi, pourquoi vous tourmenter ? pourquoi, surtout, me tourmenter moi-même !** ⁵⁵ Ne savez-vous donc plus être le plus aimable ? et n'êtes-vous plus sûr de vos succès ? Allons donc, Vicomte, vous vous faites tort. Mais, ce n'est pas cela ; c'est qu'à vos yeux, je ne vaudrais pas que vous vous donniez tant de peine. Vous désirez moins mes bontés, que vous ne voulez abuser de votre empire. Allez, vous êtes un ingrat. Voilà bien, je crois, du sentiment ! et pour peu que je continuasse, cette Lettre pourrait devenir fort tendre : mais vous ne le méritez pas.

Vous ne méritez pas davantage que je me justifie. Pour vous punir de vos soupçons, vous les garderez : ainsi, sur l'époque de mon retour, comme sur les visites de Danceny, je ne vous dirai rien. Vous vous êtes donné bien de la peine pour vous en instruire, n'est-il pas vrai ? Hé bien ! en êtes-vous plus avancé ? **Je souhaite que vous y ayez trouvé beaucoup de plaisir ; quant à moi, cela n'a pas nui au mien** ⁴³ .

Tout ce que je peux donc répondre à votre menaçante Lettre, c'est qu'elle n'a eu ni le don de me plaire, ni le pouvoir de m'intimider ; et que pour le moment, je suis on ne peut pas moins disposée à vous accorder vos demandes.

Au vrai, vous accepter tel que vous vous montrez aujourd'hui, ce serait vous faire une infidélité réelle. Ce ne serait pas là renouer avec mon ancien Amant ; ce serait en prendre un nouveau, et qui ne vaut pas l'autre à beaucoup près. Je n'ai pas assez oublié le premier pour m'y tromper ainsi. Le Valmont que j'aimais était charmant. Je veux bien convenir même que je n'ai pas rencontré d'homme plus aimable. Ah ! je vous en prie, Vicomte, si vous le retrouvez, amenez-le-moi, celui-là sera toujours bien reçu.

Prévenez-le cependant que, dans aucun cas, ce ne serait ni pour aujourd'hui ni pour demain. Son *Menechme* lui a fait un peu tort ; et en me pressant trop, je craindrais de m'y tromper. Ou bien, peut-être ai-je donné parole à Danceney pour ces deux jours-là ? Et votre Lettre m'a appris que vous ne plaisantiez pas, quand on manquait à sa parole. Vous voyez donc qu'il faut attendre.

Mais que vous importe ? vous vous vengerez toujours bien de votre rival. Il ne fera pas pis à votre Maîtresse que vous ferez à la sienne, et après tout, une femme n'en vaut-elle pas une autre ? ce sont vos principes. Celle même qui serait *tendre et sensible, qui n'existerait que pour vous et qui mourrait enfin d'amour et de regret*, n'en serait pas moins sacrifiée à la première fantaisie, à la crainte d'être plaisanté un moment ; et vous voulez qu'on se gêne ? Ah ! cela n'est pas juste.

Adieu, Vicomte ; redevenez donc aimable. Tenez, je ne demande pas mieux que de vous trouver charmant ; et dès j'en serai sûre, je m'engage à vous le prouver. En vérité, je suis trop bonne.

*Paris, ce 4 décembre 17**.*

Dangerous Connections

The MARCHIONESS DE MERTEUIL to the VISCOUNT DE VALMONT.

Take care, Viscount; have a little more regard for my extreme timidity. How do you think I can support the unsufferable idea of your indignation; but especially that I do not sink under the terror of your vengeance? particularly as you know, if you defamed me, it would be impossible for me to return the compliment. In vain should I babble; your existence would nevertheless be brilliant and peaceful: for what would you have to dread? Only to be under the necessity of retiring if you had an opportunity. But could one not live in a foreign country as well as here? And to sum up all, provided the court of France would let you be quiet in the one you chuse to settle in, it would be only changing the field of your victories. After endeavouring to bring you back to your *sang froid* by these moral considerations, let us resume our own affairs.

You do not know, Viscount, the reasons I never married again.³⁵ **It was not, I assure you,**
for want of several advantageous matches being offered to me;³ it was solely that no one should have a right to control me. It was not even a dread of not being able to pursue my inclinations, for certainly, at all events, that I should have done: but it would have pained me if

any one should even have a right to complain. On the whole, it was that I would not wish to deceive but for my own pleasure, and not through necessity. And behold you write me the most matrimonial letter it is possible to conceive! You tell me of the injuries I have committed, and the favours you have granted! I cannot conceive how it is possible to be indebted to one where nothing is due.

Now for the business. You found Danceny at my house, and you was displeased; be it so: ¹¹

but what conclusion do you draw from thence? Why, that it was the effect of chance, as I told you, or of my inclination, which I did not tell you. In the first instance, your letter is wrong; in the second, ridiculous. It was well worth the trouble of writing! **But you are jealous, and jealousy never debates. Well, I will argue for you.** ¹⁴

You have a rival, or you have not. If you have a rival, you must please, to obtain the preference over him; and if you have none, you must still please, to avoid having one. In all cases the same invariable conduct must be observed. **Why, then, will you torment yourself?—And why torment me?** ⁵⁵ Have you, then, lost the secret of being the most amiable? And are you no longer certain of your success? Come, come, Viscount, you do yourself injustice. But that is not the case, for I will not, even in your mind, have you give yourself so much uneasiness. You wish less for my condescension, than an opportunity of abusing your power. Fie! you are very ungrateful! I think this is tolerably sentimental; and was I to continue any time, this letter might become very tender: but you don't deserve it.

Neither do you deserve I should enter farther in my justification. To punish you for your suspicions, you shall keep them; so that I shall make no reply as to the time of my return, or Danceny's visits. You have taken great trouble to be informed of them, most certainly: and pray what progress have you made by it? **I hope you received great pleasure from your enquiries; as to mine, it has not been in the least detrimental to them.** ⁴³

All I can say, then, to your threatening letter is this—it has neither the gift of pleasing, nor power to intimidate me; and that at this present time I am not in the least disposed to grant your request.

And, indeed, to receive you, as you exhibit yourself now, would be a downright act of infidelity: it would not be a renewal with my former lover; it would be taking a new one, many degrees

inferior to him. I have not so soon forgot the first, to be deceived. The Valmont I loved was a charming fellow. I will even own, I never met a more amiable man. I beg, Viscount, if you find him, to bring him to me, he will be always well received.

Acquaint him, however, that it cannot by any means be either to-day or to-morrow. His Menæchmus has done him some harm, and was I in too much haste, I should dread a deception; or, perhaps, I have given my word to Danceny for those two days: moreover, your letter informs me you do not jest; when one breaks their word, therefore, you see you must wait.

That is, however, of very little consequence, as you can always be revenged on your rival. He will not treat your mistress worse than you will his; and after all, is not one woman as good as another? These are your own principles. Even she who should be *tender and sensible, who existed only for you, who was dying of love and grief*, would nevertheless be sacrificed to the first whim, or the dread of being ridiculed for a moment; and yet you would have one constrain themselves! Ah! that is not reasonable.

Adieu, Viscount! become once more amiable. It is the utmost of my wishes to find you charming as ever. When I am certain of it, I engage to prove it to you—indeed, I am too good natured.

Paris, Dec. 4, 17—.