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THREE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS:
CONTRAVENING AUTHORITY

Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin (1681-1749)
Marguerite Jeanne-Cordier (Rose de Launay), Baronne
de Staal (1684-1750)
Stéphanie Félicité-Ducrest de St. Aubin, Comtesse de
Genlis, Marquise de Sillery (1746-1830)

by

MARGERY A. CRUMPACKER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
French in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
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MARGERY A. CRUMPACKER

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Date

6/24/97
Date

Renie Waldinger
Chair of Examining Committee

Renie Waldinger
Executive Officer

Renie Waldinger

Alex Sroczynski

Richard A. Banks
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

THREE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS
CONTRAVENING AUTHORITY

by

Margery A. Crumpacker

Adviser: Professor Renée Waldinger

The intellectual currents of the eighteenth-century galvanized women to a consciousness of unimagined possibilities. Although those of royal birth took full advantage of the disintegrating bonds of traditional authority, the marginal aristocrats remained mired in the old conventions. Women of talent therefore turned to writing in the novel and memoir genres not only to exercise creativity but as a means of transmuting disappointed hopes into a concept of partial victory.

The Introduction to this dissertation outlines the variables that informed society's changing perceptions of women's role throughout the century and questions why works by three accomplished women authors of the period failed to survive. Chapter I traces the deformed destiny of Mme de Tencin from her brash abrogation of religious vows, through the turbulent Regency and the early years of Louis XV, her unsuccessful endeavor to find fulfillment in the attainment

by her brother of the post of Prime Minister, and her eventual relative serenity as an author of gothic tales of the perils of virtuous love. Chapter II discloses, across the elegant pages of her Mémoires, the ambiguities inherent in the vision of Mme de Staal which led to her conversion from precocious pensionnaire in a convent to the demeaning role of lady's maid to the arrogant Duchesse du Maine and her hopeless efforts to escape her servitude. Chapter III seeks to unveil the mutations in her attitude toward the role of women Mme de Genlis exhibited in the face of traditional authority in several of her plays, nouvelles, romans and treatises, which reveal a will, intelligence and flexibility that enabled her to overcome almost every impediment but those attached to lasting fame.

The Conclusion places these women in the context of their times and suggests that by their talents they deserve a more enduring place in literary history, and that the barriers they so valiantly sought to overcome retain their relevance today.

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This dissertation could not have been undertaken without the impetus of Prof. Renée Waldinger, to whom I am indebted for stimulating my interest in the topic, guiding the research and channeling my thinking toward a more accurate assessment of the concept of authority in the eighteenth century.

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Finally, in remembrance of things past, I give thanks to my late sister, Mary Jean Hall, for her lively provocation to "Just write it!"

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	.....	1-20
<u>Chapter I</u>	<u>Madame de Tencin</u>	
Part 1	.....	21-49
	Dilemma of Mme de Tencin	
Part 2	.....	49-62
	Conventual Vows and Rebel Daughter	
Part 3	.....	62-141
	Social and Political Science	
Part 4	.....	141-159
	Liberation through Literature	
<u>Chapter II</u>	<u>Madame de Staal</u>	
Part 1	.....	160-178
	Ambiance: Personality and Authority	
Part 2	.....	179-194
	Era: Social and Literary	
Part 3	.....	194-242
	Memoirs: A Personal Testimony	
Part 4	.....	243-248
	Appraisal: Public View and Self-Assessment	
<u>Chapter III</u>	<u>Madame de Genlis</u>	
Part 1	.....	249-261
	Ambition: From Chateau to Court	
Part 2	.....	261-278
	Palais-Royal: Theater, Education, Society	
Part 3	.....	278-296
	Bellechasse: Pedagogy and Apprentice Writer	
Part 4	.....	296-323
	Novelist, Critic, and a New Order	
<u>Chapter IV</u>		
	<u>Conclusion</u>	324-337
	
<u>Works Consulted</u>	.....	338-344

Introduction

This dissertation is intended to add another dimension to the current scholarly efforts of feminist literary historians to incorporate the writings of "our" 18th Century "foremothers into existent literary canon" (Douthwaite 5).¹ It will examine the lives and works of three minor women writers of the century who were intelligent, educated, and who met with some literary success, to learn how they were personally diminished by the social and political restrictions placed on women of their day.

Madelyn Gutwirth in The Twilight of the Goddesses speaks of a female "omnipresence, not only at Court, as Queens, courtiers and ostentatious mistresses to kings, but in literary arts" dating back to Marie de France in the 12th Century (Gutwirth xv).² By the 18th Century, women played an ever more important role in society and politics, wielded great influence and took pride in their learning and contributions. Yet, by the 19th Century their productive lives were virtually forgotten. In recent years a wealth of publications have traced the failed

¹ Julia V. Douthwaite, Exotic Women (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

² Madelyn Gutwirth, The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP 1992).

attempts to enfranchise women during the French Revolution when they fought side by side with men and hopes were high. The question remains, then, as to why they were unable to rid themselves of their shackles and acquire political equality during the century of the Enlightenment.

Some glimmerings may be found in Rebel Daughters, a series of essays edited and published by Sara Melzer and Leslie Rabine in 1992, following a conference at UCLA in 1989 commemorating the 200th anniversary of the momentous march to Versailles on October 5, 1789 by 7,000 marketwomen.³ The "promptings that motivated" these early feminists to speak out, Melzer and Rabine maintain, "can sharpen (both men's and) women's current perceptions" (Melzer, Rabine 3-4). Gutwirth undoubtedly agrees as she specifically addresses the "battle for lucidity across the gender barrier" (Gutwirth xxi) which we must admit, continues even on the brink of the 21st Century.

Melzer and Rabine suggest that the most famous patrimony of the French Revolution, "the institutionalization of the doctrine of the Universal Rights of Man", implicitly demarcated "man" as ungendered and universal and "woman" as gendered and excluded, a decisive factor. Although women had been politically subordinate to men since the inception of feudalism, this was the first time in Western history that they had been eliminated from such a grandiose conceptual framework. Women

³ Sara Melzer and Leslie Rabine, Rebel Daughters (Berkeley: UP of California, 1992).

were excluded from the rights to liberty, equality and fraternity by way of a complicated cultural phenomenon which the essays examine in the light of new research tools (Melzer, Rabine 3-6).

In an essay on "graphic politics," for example, Joan Landes discusses iconography as a means used by men to appease women while simultaneously undermining their political progress, and cites the substitution of graphic representations of a seductive Goddess Liberty for the body politic of the decapitated king. Landes also includes a reproduction of the Débandement de l'armée anti-constitutionnelle, a royalist lampoon of 1792 depicting the marginal revolutionary Théroigne de Méricourt as a general poised before her sans culotte troops of aristocratic revolutionaries (including Madame de Genlis, one of the writers selected for my dissertation) bearing pikes topped with sausages, the "phallic spoils of war", and kneeling bottoms-up in front of a cowardly counter-revolutionary army. The connotation is that royalist opposition to the revolution was fed by a growing fear of the voracious appetites of women (Melzer, Rabine 21-22).

Joan Wallach Scott examines in another essay how the "abstraction of a genderless individual endowed with natural rights" impelled women "to protest exclusion to political rights as unjust, (and) a violation of the founding principles of the republic" (Melzer, Rabine 102). Protest frequently took the form of militant activity. Darlene Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite put the frosting on the cake by pointing out that essentially The

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen left indeterminate the significance of women as "citoyennes" since the Constitution of 1791 denied them active rights and that of 1793 democratic citizenship (Melzer, Rabine 79).

Although the more educated women sought freedom less obtrusively by means of pamphlets, brochures and secret societies, armed brigades forced the issue. In addition to the March on Versailles, two other major instances of militant activity by women accelerated their ultimate repression: (1) armed processions in the spring and summer of 1792, including notably, a harangue by Théroigne de Méricourt at the Place Louis XIII in which she sought to encourage women to overcome their faintheartedness. "We have a right to honor and glory and can die for our land as well as men!" she admonished, to the consternation of members of the Convention (Albistur, Armogathe 227-228);⁴ and (2) organized insurgency by the women of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, founded in May of 1793 by Pauline Léon who led a deputation to the General Assembly with a petition demanding women's right to bear arms, citizenship and access to "civic virtues" (Melzer, Rabine 88). The Legislative Assembly waffled, then suppressed the strident militant discourses with a demeaning redefinition of women's role, characterizing them as by nature weak and incapable, and denying them any public responsibilities.

⁴ Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, "La Question féminine au siècle des lumières," Histoire du féminisme: du moyen âge à nos Jours (Paris: Editions des Femmes, 1977) 173-206.

At about the same time, in the fall of 1793, at her trial Marie-Antoinette was accused of usurping the King's powers, collusion with Austria and incest, and went to her death on October 16. Germaine de Staël in Reflections on the Trial of the Queen, written from exile in Switzerland, asserted that the (presumably false) accusations were "of a sort to spoil all women's reputations" (Gutwirth 300-301). Gutwirth adds that in the wake of the Queen's execution, women were put to death "as if they were free agents and political men."

The fate of Olympe de Gouges, an aspiring free thinking playwright concerned also with alleviating basic public cruelties: infant mortality, the tyranny of marriage, the rights of unwed mothers and illegitimate children, the need for shelters for the elderly and training for the unemployed - was sealed in 1791 when she published her Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizeness (dedicated to Marie-Antoinette), a bold appeal to women to speak up for their rights in the face of male despotism. She pleaded pregnancy to forestall execution, to no avail; accused of monarchical sympathies and fomenting civil war, she went to the scaffold on November 3, 1793 (Gutwirth 303).

Manon Roland, a third ill-fated revolutionary heroine, inspired by reading Plutarch, enveloped the contradictions of her politico-domestic nature in conformist trappings and accepted as a heroic sacrifice to public virtue marriage to Roland de la Platière. During the Revolution she and her husband organized a salon for Girondin political allies during which she sat silently

knitting in the background. Upon the departure of her guests, however, she plotted political strategy with her husband, and composed his speeches and correspondence. This clandestine collaboration aroused the suspicions of the Montagnard Danton and her usurpation of male prerogatives led her to the guillotine three days after Olympe de Gouges (Gutwirth 303).

Women made limited gains in private law during the Revolutionary period: rights of succession, the right to jointly dispose of common property with their husbands, the right to legal divorce and some educational reforms. The great revolutionaries, however, followers of Rousseau, who believed that women should be confined to the domestic sphere, were what Albistur and Armogathe call "neurotic misogynists" who saw forces of destruction in all women who sought to change their condition. Caught in the grips of social transformation, these men calmed their anxieties by reverting to the traditions of the previous generation (Albistur, Armogathe 236).

A look backward may deepen our understanding as well of why women of the 18th century were unable to free themselves from their fetters and acquire political equality. To find answers we must try to see how the women of the century reacted to the subordinate positions in which they found themselves. A number of important studies of major women writers have shed some light on the way women viewed their condition. One of these is Exotic Women (1992) in which Julia Douthwaite introduces the exotic heroine, using as one of her examples Françoise Graffigny's Zilia

of the Lettres d'une Péruvienne in juxtaposition with Usbek's harem wives in Montesquieu's Lettres Persanes, to create a paradigm for the contrast between the female and male author's representation of the ideological differences between French and foreign women as perceived by members of a Eurocentric culture. In reality, Douthwaite suggests, the entry of the exotic "Other" heroine into the female author's text is a device to convey to the reader the very real conflicts French women endured in their relations with patriarchal authority - suitor, priest, male colonist or father figure (Douthwaite 1-21).

Elisabeth Badinter's Emilie, Emilie. L'Ambition féminine au XVIIIème siècle (1983), presents the psychological underpinnings of the dichotomy exhibited by the pull of love, the lure of the world and the traditional role assigned to women on the one hand and the impulsion toward autonomy, creativity and the need for immortality on the other in the lives of Gabrielle Emilie le Tonnelier de Bréteuil (Mme du Châtelet 1706-1749) and Louise Tardieu d'Esclavelles (Mme d'Epainay 1726-1783).⁵ Born into the privileged classes with the means to acquire learning and culture, and the independence of mind, fervor and precocity necessary to satisfy incipient ambition, each spent a lifetime struggling in separate ways against personal and social obstacles to preserve intellectual integrity in a society that denigrated the "femme savante" and flattered the courtesan.

⁵ Elisabeth Badinter, "L'Emancipation de Louise," Emilie, Emilie (Paris: Flammarion, 1983) 398-413.

Despite the high regard each had for her own obvious gifts, ultimately both had to contend with the fact that they lacked the exceptional qualities of genius, imputing this deficiency to an inadequate education, the manners of the time and an absence of total commitment to a cause, rather than to natural ability. Dependence upon affections of the heart appears to have been a stumbling block for both. During the four year period of Voltaire's infidelities, for example, Mme du Châtelet ceased writing altogether. Needless to say, Voltaire's productive genius was by no means impaired by emotional attachments. Time and experience muted romantic zeal into ambition for a noble cause in the two writers. In the last months of her life, Mme du Châtelet, with a fatal premonition, worked assiduously to complete a translation and commentary of Newton's Principia Mathematica for the edification of posterity rather than rush to the side of her lover, Saint-Lambert. Mme d'Epinau, with a similar presentiment, overcame the loneliness of her prolonged separation from Grimm and travailed over inconceivable odds to bring to a conclusion Les Conversations d'Emilie intended to point the way to autonomy to her granddaughter's generation of women.

The psychological conflict between ambition and "bonheur" cited in the history of both Mme de Châtelet and Mme d'Epinau underscores the dualistic vision of humankind in the 18th century. Because of his greater physical strength, society endowed man with a greater reasoning capability, while the lesser

physical capacity of woman led it to cast her in the role of auxiliary from whom man obtained the vitality to master the world. Ambition in a woman was criticized, and obligated her to conceal her natural inclinations (Badinter 29).

In the relatively free climate of the century, however, the role of women underwent serious scrutiny, and many looked for ways to rebel against inequality. The questioning influence of the "philosophes" offered encouragement; Montesquieu, for instance, in letter 38 of the Lettres Persanes sanctified the application of natural law to women thus nullifying the justification for their subjection to men. Nevertheless their legal status remained relatively unchanged from 1715-1789 (Fauchéry 173).⁶ Arranged marriages favored the concentration of power in the husband. In cases of adultery the woman could be shaved, veiled and confined to a monastery; she could not acquire property without her husband's consent, and rarely participated in local or royal assemblies. Unmarried mothers could be banished or put to death (Albuster, Armogathe 173-74).

Women also lacked the education necessary to play a role in society on an equal footing with men. Convents were a favored educational resource, but the nuns frequently had only a superficial education. The nobility often resorted to governesses for individual instruction or invited dancing and music masters into the home where there was generally more

⁶ Pierre Fauchery, La Destinée féminine dans le roman européen du XVIIIème siècle: 1713-1807 (Paris: Diss. U Paris, 1970. Armand Colin, 1972).

dancing than reading in the curriculum. In addition, the spirit of devotion declined, and because of the need to finance careers for sons, young girls, with no other option, were often coerced into conventual life without any consideration of religious obligations (Abensour 66; 276-278).⁷

Noble women were in the best position to take advantage of the spirit of the times and enjoyed an enlarged role at court forming the elite of public opinion. Their voices were to be heard in the writings of the men of letters, in the intrigues at Versailles and at the salons of Paris. They intervened in the nomination of ministers and provincial administrators and became the arbiters of elegance, organizers of celebrations, dispensers of wisdom, mothers, sisters, confidantes and devoted friends. Their marriages were open-ended, with little intimacy, and infidelity was masked by the code of propriety or bienséance (Absensour 72-78; 87-88).

The richest and most intelligent women opened salons where men like Fontenelle, Marivaux, Montesquieu and Voltaire flaunted submission to the mistress of the house whereas in reality they came to meet their peers. The truly ambitious hostess, affirms Badinter, understood that it was an illusion to imagine she was partaking in any real glory; the salon did not compensate for her desire to play her own role (Badinter 36-37).

⁷ Léon Abensour, La Femme et le féminisme avant la Révolution (Geneva: Slatkin, 1977).

At the beginning of the century the aristocracy and men of letters and politics took pleasure in the "esprit de préciosité" which was "de règle" at the Court of Sceaux "où trône la Duchesse du Maine, (qui) donne ... la première place aux amuseurs et le Voltaire qui y est choyé, adulé, n'est pas le Voltaire des lettres philosophiques, mais l'auteur et dramaturge et le romancier" (Abensour 315-18). Mme de Staal, a lady in waiting to the Duchess and one of the three writers to be examined in my dissertation, paints a vivid portrait of the frivolous life at this miniature Versailles during the Regency and early reign of Louis XV in her Mémoires.

In the 1730's and '40's the salon of the eminent intriguer Mme de Tencin provided a lively but non-pedantic atmosphere for literary discussion, and formed a link to the philosophic salons of the second half of the century. At the end of the century when the political salons of Mesdames Necker and Roland disappeared, and the revolutionary salons left center stage, this form of social life went into decline. By the time Mme de Genlis opened her salon during the Empire, interest in the genre had faded. Nevertheless, the salons of the 18th century provided a valuable service. The admiration, respect and contacts provided by the indulgent mistresses helped advance careers; and a growing interest in literature and science on the part of these women inspired them to advise the men of letters how to reshape their language so that their doctrines would be more acceptable and less boring to the men of the world who tried

to understand them. They set the tone for clarity and ordered composition and simplified complicated thought, providing an example for the century (Abensour 321-323).

To understand why women were unable to rid themselves of their shackles and acquire political equality, it is not enough to study French laws and the organization of French society, which gave women no power and very little protection. In this dissertation I will look at the writings of the following three minor female writers who were well-known in the 18th century, and show how they reacted to the impediments that confronted women, preventing their full development and growth as well as their rightful place in society: Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin (1681-1749), Marguerite-Jean Cordier (Rose de Launay), Baronne de Staal (1684-1750) and Stéphanie Félicité-Ducrest de St. Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis and Marquise de Sillery (1740-1830).

Mme de Tencin's life spanned three royal reigns. Her formative years under Louis XIV spent at the Convent of Montfleury near Grenoble, which she entered at the age of 8 (Coynart 70),⁸ at the instance of her parents for whom her loss of liberty was of less concern than the cost of a dowry (Etienne iv),⁹ show her in a power struggle with patriarchal authority.

⁸ Charles de Coynart, Les Guérin de Tencin (Paris: Hachette, 1910).

⁹ MFs. Etienne, Notice, "Madame de Tencin," Oeuvres complètes de Mesdames de Lafayette, de Tencin et de Fontaine, vols. 1-5 (Paris: P.A. Moutardier, 1825) 1:i-lxv+.

Although conventual regulations were conveniently liberal, the seclusion suffocated her ardent nature and she renounced her vows immediately after taking them, a process that required 14 years spent charming the clergy and thwarting her father's spies until in Paris in 1712, she received a dispensation from the Pope (Saint-Simon n. 3, 1351; n. 6, 1352).¹⁰

In the face of the tyranny of propriety in a society to which virtue and debauchery laid equal claim, the "defrocked nun" (Sartori 474)¹¹ employed intelligence, ingenuity and contacts from her sister, wife of the Comte de Veyle (Saint-Simon n. 1, 1351; n. 11, 1352), to inveigle her way into Parisian high society, even to the circle of the Regent at the Palais-Royal who himself dismissed her from a tryst because he couldn't tolerate women who conducted business in the boudoir (Etienne xxji); all with the single-minded purpose of securing for her brother, the Abbé Pierre Guérin de Tencin, the post of Prime Minister - which she may have coveted for herself (Herold 3).¹² During this second period she gave birth to the illegitimate Jean d'Alembert, the famed mathematician, whom she abandoned on the steps of a

¹⁰ Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon, Mémoires: 1718-1721, ed. Yves Coirault, vol. 7 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) 7:507-13; 7:1350-55.

¹¹ Eva Marie Sartori and Dorothy Wayne Zimmerman, "Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin," French Women Writers: a Bio-Bibliographical Source Book (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1991) 473-83.

¹² Christopher J. Herold, "The Unscrupulous Nun: Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin;" "A Window and a Fireplace: Madame de Launay de Staal," Love in Five Temperaments (London: H. Hamilton, 1961) 3-51; 103-162.

church, became mistress to the wily Foreign Minister, Guillaume Dubois, who helped her make a fortune in the Law debacle and, following the suicide of an ex-lover in her home, went to the Bastille where she was Voltaire's neighbor. "We were," he wrote to her sister, "like Pyramus and Thisbe, but we did not kiss as they did, through a cleft in the wall" (Brandes 158).¹³

The third period can be dated from 1730, when upon Mme de Tencin's return to Paris from exile imposed by Cardinal de Fleury for jansenist activities "unbecoming to her sex" (Sartori 478), she opened a salon and began writing four romanesque novels depicting tormented passion vis-à-vis social convention. Frederick Green suggests that the Comte de Comminge (1735), a stark and melancholy tale of ill-fated love, ushered in the era of sensibility in French fiction (Green 158).¹⁴ Others have claimed that Les Malheurs de l'amour (laced with incidents of ambition, avarice, death, illegitimacy, misunderstandings and betrayals) most closely resemble Mme de Tencin's own life (Etienne ij) and reveal a veiled criticism of social institutions such as the weakness of conventual education and the disastrous consequences of forced marriages that prevent the heroine from

¹³ Georg Brandes, Voltaire, trans. Otto Krugar and Pierce Butler (1930; New York: Frederick Ungar Pub. Co., 1964).

¹⁴ Frederick D. Green, French Novelists, Manners and Ideas from the Renaissance to the Revolution (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964).

making reasonable choices (O'Driscoll 230).¹⁵ In sharp contrast to historical accounts of the author's life, her heroines are impeccably virtuous.

Mme de Staal's reaction to adversity was more compliant. Her Mémoires depict stoic resignation throughout her career as lady in waiting to the domineering Duchess of Maine, Anne-Bénédicte de Bourbon, granddaughter of the great Condé, who "s'attache définitivement Mlle Delaunay, de qui elle reconnaît la valeur et le dévouement, en la mariant au baron de Staal" (Vailliot 287).¹⁶ She lingers longingly over her memories of childhood when she reigned over the hearts and minds of the Dames de Grioux, Abbesses of the Abbaye de Saint Sauveur d'Evreux in Normandy, and received all the instruction and books they could provide the intellectually gifted "pensionnaire". Descartes' "Recherche de la Vérité" instilled in her a passion for geometry and abstract reasoning that she tried to incorporate into daily life to the point of having her hair cut short so that she could arrange it more quickly and have more time to read (Mémoires 20-27).¹⁷ When in her 20's she was obliged to earn a living, she silently acquiesced to the intervention of her mother's old employer at Versailles, the Duchesse de Ventadour, who contrived

¹⁵ Sally O'Driscoll, "Les Malheurs de l'amour," Rethinking Realism: Early Women Novelists in England and France (Diss. New York: City University, 1991) 232-241.

¹⁶ René Vailliot, Avec Mme du Châtelet. 1734-1749 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1988).

¹⁷ MFs. Barrière, ed., Mémoires, by Madame de Staal Delaunay (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1846).

to secure her a post at the court of Sceaux. "Je vis ma perte dans cet événement et...que le caractère indébile de femme de chambre ne laissait plus de retour à ma fortune. Cependant, il n'y avait plus de moyen à reculer...it fallait subir le joug" (Mémoires 73).

The Mémoires recount with a nostalgic freshness and ironic realism the duties and deceptions of Mme de Staal's subaltern rank at the giddy court presided over by the imperious, egocentric and insomniac Duchess to whom she often had to spend whole nights reading. The voice saddens with time as efforts to free herself through marriage or a return to a convent are frustrated by fate or the machinations of the Duchess. Yet the notable cast of characters who cross the threshold of Sceaux provide an unending source of interest and information for any study of the era.

The imperturbable composure and bravery exhibited by Mme de Staal, which she describes with modesty, at the time of her harrowing interrogation by the "intendant" of police during her detention in the Bastille following the failure of the Cellamare plot conceived by the Duchess to unseat the Regent, if true, situates her among the ranks of the exceptional women of the century who deserved more recognition than society was prepared to offer. One can only decry Diderot's contention in "Sur les Femmes" that Mme de Staal, as all women, possessed "un organe susceptible de spasmes terribles" that prompted a fit of hysteria when she was told that the Duchess had confessed all:

"...elle (Mme de Staal) pleure, elle se roule à terre, elle s'écrie: "Ah! ma pauvre maîtresse est devenue folle!" (Diderot 952).¹⁸

In her "Réflexions Préliminaires" preceding the essay De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française, Mme de Genlis roundly denounces a journalist who observed that women authors deserved no respect because by this choice they had recanted their sex and renounced all their rights. A journalist, she retorts, should possess good taste and savoir faire - qualities women have in abundance. Hercules, in defeating the Amazons, she continues, treated the latter with great honor; modern journalists have neither his club nor his generosity. The superiority of male writers over their female counterparts, she charges, is due less to inferior physical composition than a defective education. A woman such as herself who has written only moral and useful books for 35 years, she continues complacently, is in a position to know; she deserves "estime" and need no longer fear criticism (de Genlis De L'Influence des femmes xxix, xxxij, xxxiv).¹⁹

This essay which restates in the early 19th century the gender question of the 18th reflects the unchanging status of women. It was published in 1811, 11 years after Mme de Genlis

¹⁸ Denis Diderot, "Sur les femmes," Oeuvres, ed. André Bailly (Paris: Gallimard, 1951) 949-958.

¹⁹ Comtesse Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, De l'Influence des femmes sur la littérature française comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs (Paris: Maradan, 1811).

had returned to France from 9 years of exile where she was shunned by royalist and republican émigrés despite a career as the first women tutor to the royal children, because of her connections with the Jacobin Duc d'Orléans (Philippe d'Egalité) who in 1793 voted for the execution of Louis XVI. In a long life that extended from Louis XV to the Restoration of Louis Philippe, her erstwhile pupil, Mme de Genlis wrote a myriad of short stories, manuals and almanacs in addition to 84 books on pedagogy, plays and historical novels, plus 10 volumes of Mémoires which Alice Laborde maintains comprise her most valuable claim to fame (Laborde 248).²⁰ At the time of her death in 1830 she was engaged in correcting the Encyclopédie, whose contributors Voltaire and Rousseau she had previously attacked for their deism and republican ideas in Les Dîners du Baron d'Holbach (Naudin 178-181).²¹ The Mémoires paint a grand fresco of pre- and post-revolutionary aristocratic life as the most gifted men of the century pass through its pages while the episodic narrative uncovers the unusual strength, determination, intelligence - and vanity - that enabled the imperturbable author to prevail with unflinching optimism over the most agonizing losses of family, friends and country. Forced into exile along with some of the royal children during the early Revolution she lost all of her

²⁰ Alice M. Laborde, L'Oeuvre de Madame de Genlis (Paris: Editions A.G. Nizet, 1966).

²¹ Marie Naudin, "Stéphanie-Félicité, Comtesse de Genlis (1746-1830)," French Women Writers: a Bio-Bibliographical Source Book (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1991) 178-187.

wealth but saved her life, which was not the case for her husband, the Marquis de Sillery, who was executed in 1793 with the Duc d'Orléans. Her newly acquired "poverty" forced her to write to survive financially, a true accomplishment at the time for a woman who had theretofore depended on patronage for her sustenance. Still, and in spite of the popularity her books enjoyed to the mid-19th century, and the modernity of her educational doctrines which included mathematics, foreign languages, practical law for women, and public education for all, thus emphasizing the whole person, her work today is mostly ignored, and we must ask why?

In addition to what has heretofore been suggested, women's progress toward autonomy in the 18th century suffered as well from the absence of a written code to which they could adhere with any confidence. Despite the increase in freedom the upper class educated women enjoyed, there existed no clear feminine ideology to which even the most enlightened could turn (Badinter 30). This lacuna appears markedly in the unfolding careers of these three women. Each tiptoed through a tangled forest of prejudice and opportunity, and yet two of the women became well-known writers. Their books were popular; their readers obviously responded to the topics they raised. The third, Mme de Staal-Delaunay, wrote her Mémoires, which clearly document the barriers limiting an intelligent woman. An examination of the works of all three will bring into sharper focus the contradictions inherent in the problems of gender,

nature and social consciousness in which they were engaged, and will allow us to identify the strategies each used to circumvent government, religious and moral authority as well as the personal handicaps of the female author. It will also provide useful data for a reappraisal of their accomplishments.

Chapter IClaudine-Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin (1681-1749)

Part 1

The Dilemma of Madame de Tencin

The Washington Post of August 13, 1995 carried an article by Stacy Schiff describing the fall-out she experienced upon finishing her four year labor on a new biography of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The biographer, she states, not only assumes the difficult task of assigning shape and texture to the muddle of existence but when the magic dust has settled and the work is completed there remains the problem of disengaging oneself from the subject matter. Ms. Schiff admits to a period of mourning for her absent "unpredictable roommate", who in reality smoked too much, and "deceived and ducked".

Although this presentation is not an undertaking of that magnitude a feeling of similar intimacy is hard to evoke with respect to Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin (1682-1749) who, by reason of most historic accounts, was more duplicitous than Saint-Exupéry. After reading numerous critical commentaries and articles, several biographies and her four novels, I am not troubled by the haunting scent of faded perfume. It is indeed as difficult to conjure up Claudine-Alexandrine's physiognomy as it is her personality for a veil of uncertainty surrounds her that is absent from either Madame de Staal de Launay or Madame de Genlis. There are several reasons for the dilemma of Mme de Tencin, not the least of which is the fact that she left no

memoirs. "Il est fâcheux qu'elle n'a pas écrit des Mémoires," stated Etienne in 1825 in his historic and literary Notice to her works, "...dans le cas où elle aurait été sincère...on y trouverait tous les genres possibles de scandale...une histoire secrète de la Régence ainsi que de la première partie du règne de Louis XV...ils prouveraient que la corruption des moeurs ne vient pas des idées philosophiques...c'est l'hypocrisie qui les (hommes) avait conduits" (Etienne iij).²² "Quel dommage," reiterated Vaillot 150 years later in 1974, "qu'une femme qui a tant vécu, avec tant de passion, de clairvoyance et de cynisme, n'ait pas écrit tout simplement ses mémoires!" "Quelles pages tour à tour réalistes, violentes, spirituelles, subversives, scandaleuses!" (Vaillot 334).²³ "Vains regrets!". She was not a Saint-Simon nor a Duclos, he adds. No, but neither do her novels contain their cynicism. The reader of today would be well served with a more human portrait of the flesh and blood woman than is available. As it stands, Mme de Tencin is remembered more for her scandalous conduct and the role she enjoyed as "présidente" of a salon than for her writings.

Secondly, references to her in anthologies have been for the most part superficial, with the exception of Henri Coulet, who presents a longer than customary and interesting

²² M. Etienne, Notice, "Madame de Tencin," Oeuvres Complètes de Mesdames de Lafayette, de Tencin et de Fontaine, vol. 4 (Paris: P. A. Moutardier, 1825) lxx, lxxviiij-lxxx, iiiij.

²³ René Vaillot, Qui Etaiient Madame de Tencin...et le Cardinal? (Paris: Le Pavillon, 1974).

analysis of an "apocryphal" fifth novel some critics attribute to her. Her full-length biographers, male and consequently probably prone to some bias, have generally concurred (and repeated ad infinitum), that she was "belle", with an "esprit vif", but more emphatically perhaps that she was an "intrigante, ambitieuse, froide, insensible" - while only reluctantly conceding her generosity and devotion as a friend whose loyal coterie remained faithful to death. There is scant material available to offer in rebuttal. Research uncovers a paucity of information reflecting her outward appearance, much less an analysis of the operating mechanism for her behaviour. Vaillot provides a limited description, that of her apparel at the ceremony of her profession of vows on November 25, 1698 when at 16 years of age she appeared "grande et belle", all grown up in the "costume séyant des dominicaines: de la robe noire, qui s'ouvrait sur le devant et descendit à mi-jambes, débordait l'habit blanc doublé et bordé d'hermine" (Vaillot 29).

The Goncourts, who were otherwise rarely at a loss for adjectives, after describing her prodigious activity, bold and supple mind, fertile imagination, resourcefulness, etc. see her as "une petite femme frêle, à la mine d'oiseau" (Goncourt 289).²⁴ Saint-Simon, for whom she had no redeeming qualities, speaks briefly of Madame de Tencin and her sister, Mme de Ferriol, as "toutes deux belles et fort aimables," but hurriedly

²⁴ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, La Femme au XVIIIème siècle (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1887).

rushes to judgment of Claudine's spirit "d'intrigue et de débauche", (Saint-Simon 508).²⁵ A quote from Duclos in the same text is scarcely corrective: "Elle était très jolie étant jeune, et conserva dans l'âge avancé tous les agréments de l'esprit. Elle plaisait à ceux-mêmes qui n'ignoraient rien de ses aventures" (Saint-Simon 1352, n. 6). Speaking of her in later life as a salon hostess Marmontel is even mundane: "She was a woman of profound sense, but her good-natured and simple exterior made her look more like the housekeeper than the mistress of the house" (Stryiński 333).²⁶

A glimpse of her charm but with more stress on her elegant wardrobe comes from Verier, private secretary to the wily Foreign Minister Dubois, Madame de Tencin's most politically influential lover, who describes one of the first secret nocturnal visits she made to Dubois' private apartments at Versailles (or Meudon), and brings some life to "la belle visiteuse". She wore an English-style hooded cloak of a handsome camel cloth held with a silk cord and lined with blue taffeta "bordered" with a ribbon of the same color of lovers, he says. The clever lady lifted her hood as a screen to avoid recognition by the reflection of candlelight on her face. However, Verier saw her perfectly: her pretty little face, the slits of her large

²⁵ Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon, Mémoires 1718-1721, ed. Yves Coirault, vol. 7 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) 507-13; Notes: 1350-55.

²⁶ Casimir Stryiński, The Eighteenth Century, trans. H. N. Dickinson (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916?) 333-335.

bold eyes, the beautiful gown embroidered with gold ribbons hidden by the folds of the cloak (Vaillot 150-151).

A lost portrait, "Déjeuner au chocolat donné et servi par Mme de Tencin" about which Sareil found a notation at the Bibliothèque de Lyon probably dates from an early salon in 1714 in her first apartment on the Rue Saint Honoré (Masson claims it was by poet and painter, Jacques Autreau, and dates from around 1710; Masson, 176-177).²⁷ The costumes of the three guests, Fontenelle in a blond wig, light trousers and a gold jacket; the mathematician Saurin all in black, and LaMotte in a red outercoat make a striking contrast with Mme de Tencin in a simple morning gown and whose only distinctive features are two "accroche-coeurs," escaping from a nondescript bonnet (Masson Note Iconographique IV: 297). The only existing portrait, according to Sareil, is a work presumed to be by a nephew of Mignard, which portrays a more attractive than beautiful Madame de Tencin; it corresponds, he adds, to Boisjourdain's comments: "Elle était grande, avait le cou long et bien fait, la bouche un peu grande mais fraîche; sa gorge était peu sensible, et ses yeux étaient plus spirituels qu'agréables, mais l'ensemble de sa personne faisait une assez belle femme qu'animait une âme vive et un esprit distingué".²⁸ There is more "élan vital" here than

²⁷ Pierre-Maurice Masson, Madame de Tencin (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1967; Geneva: Slatkine, 1970).

²⁸ Boisjourdain, Mélanges historiques, satiriques et anecdotiques (Paris: Chèvre et Chanson, 1807) 11, 32.

elsewhere, but what color were her hair and eyes? (Sareil 45-46, n. 15).²⁹

Masson, who sometimes lets escape the fact that there was more to Mme de Tencin than the characteristic "intrigante", mentions the other side of the coin, and suggests her true self is to be found in "des volumes" of letters she acknowledges writing, and in particular, those to the Duc de Richelieu.³⁰ If we could read them all, Masson says, the woman who wrote them would emerge with quivering sensitivity, with all the fervour of her mind, and the fever of passion which overworked her nerves and wore out her body. Her correspondence resembled her life, many sided, diverse, and agitated. It is a witness to her flexibility for she was capable of being modest, or displaying offended sorrow, contained emotion, trite deference, scope, resonance, proper tenderness, plaintive astonishment, finesse, intellectual gallantry, affectation, coquetry and amusement, in a concise, exact and bouncy French (Masson 220-221). Masson includes only a few of these letters in his appendix. Others, he apologizes, appear in rare editions which are difficult to obtain, or are badly edited (Masson 262).

Time also distances us from Madame de Tencin: three centuries have elapsed since Claudine-Alexandrine took her vows at the Convent of Montfleury near Grenoble in 1698 under the

²⁹ Jean Sareil, Les Tencin: Histoire d'une famille au XVIIIème siècle (Geneva: Droz, 1971).

³⁰ Qtg. Lettres de Mme de Tencin à M. de Richelieu, vol. 1, in-12 (Paris: Léopold Collin, 1806).

authoritative regime of Louis XIV (where "bienséance" took precedence over self-realization), and the perspective of the 1990's with Internet holding the entire world in thrall. The political and social perplexities are equally complex, but widely divergent. Although their gains have been tenuous and incomplete women have overcome many of the problems vis-à-vis authority that faced women of the 18th century, and they tend to view themselves as autonomous individuals, capable of personal life choices. What is needed to better understand the forces that shaped the personality of Madame de Tencin may then be a new biography by a 20th/21st century feminist critic applying contemporary approaches and modern techniques to analyze her choices in the face of authority.

Hints of such an undertaking are found in "Gender and the Rise of the Novel" in which Elissa Gelfand and Margaret Switten provide a tantalizing starting point in a résumé of a course in gender and the development of modern fiction at Mount Holyoke College in the Spring of 1987.³¹ The "wellspring" for the course was what Georges May in Le Dilemme du roman termed the cultural debate surrounding the 18th century French novel.³² For May, they note, "the eighteenth century novel was shaped by conflicting forces of conservative literary prejudices and

³¹ Elissa Gelfand and Margaret Switten, "Gender and the Rise of the Novel," French Review, 61.1-3 (1987-88): 443-453.

³² George Claude May, Le Dilemme du roman au XVIIIème siècle: Etude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique (1715-1761) (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963) 204-245.

progressive social ideologies; its enemies and proponents...tended to align themselves...with classical values supported by Church and State, or with Enlightenment bourgeois and contestatory ones....(O)pposing literary and social codes...brought to bear on the novel's representation of human experience made its "dilemma" at once aesthetic and moral." Of central importance was the code centered on gender comportment, both in society and the "imaginative world of texts," complicated by the influence exercised by a female elite of educated, aristocratic women who as "salonnières," rulers, patrons and novelists made enormous strides toward self-determination (Gelfand and Switten 443). The preeminent role of love in the 18th century novel (most were by women) is the primary reason that feminist ideas are linked to its evolution. The configuration then of novel-gender-love which comprised the aesthetic/moral complex of the century became the focus of the Mount Holyoke course. The course then faced the formidable task of applying 20th century tools to interpret the themes and forms employed by 18th century women in the context of their society.

Madame de Tencin's novel Mémoires du comte de Comminge was incorporated into the study and, interestingly, it was one of several 18th century women's novels which had to be photocopied for the students from editions found only at the Bibliothèque Nationale because of their unavailability in modern teaching editions (Gelfand, Switten 447). In the aforementioned novel, the idealized and tragic love for his social peer, Adélaïde, is

recounted by the Comte de Comminge, a well-born male narrator, who was, exceptionally, created by a female author. The heroine, however, speaks only briefly on her own behalf at the end of a complicated plot. Gelfand and Switten maintain that the novel therefore shows an unusual form of female rebellion which coincided with the 18th century woman writer's use of the novel "to form original reactions to gender prescriptions and subtle reactions to male presentations of the theme of love." While they warn against the temptation of modern feminism to fall into the trap of being over-critical of a system three centuries old, Gelfand and Switten conclude that 18th century novels by women writers should be edited, brought into the educational canon and placed alongside the novels of their male counterparts so that a proper judgment can be made as to their true value. These conclusions further imply the desirability of a new biography of Mme de Tencin.

Alice Parker also reminds us of this need as she delves even deeper into the concept of gender marking as it applies to 18th century women's novels and Madame de Tencin in particular, by examining the 18th century social admonition that forced women to "enter into the masquerade of femininity" in order to be accepted as normal in a society where men only could be themselves (Parker 65-66).³³ Parker affirms that Madame de Tencin found herself in a "double bind" when she was chastened

³³ Alice Parker, "Madame de Tencin and the Mascarade of Female Impersonation," Eighteenth Century Life, 9.2 (1985): 65-78.

for infiltrating male domains; although she manoeuvred to renounce her vows and leave the convent of Montfleury, the final abjuration took many years, and irreparably besmirched her reputation; nor was she later able to play a political role on her own behalf, but rather was forced to continue manoeuvring by using the masquerade of femininity to procure goals for others, namely her brother, the Abbé Pierre Guérin de Tencin. It was only under the cover of her novels that she could free herself to express personal attitudes in a round-about manner.

Parker emphasizes the fact that in conformity with her understanding of the puzzling question of gender and sexual identity, Madame de Tencin was very aware of the "codes and images that engender identity" but in her novels was able to twist and turn them for her own purposes within "conventional trappings." One of her accomplishments was to equate virtue and autonomy rather than the conventional code of virtue and virginity (Parker 70). The abuses of authority stemming from the "slavedealing" mentality of the patriarchal system develop in her novels in a way to recode and reinterpret the "text" of the world (Parker 72). An oft-quoted example is found in Le Siège de Calais where the romantic adventure of Madame Granson and the Comte de Canaple begins where in most novels of the time it ends. A case of mistaken identity thrusts them innocently (Madame Granson thinks the man is her husband and the Comte is totally unaware of the woman's identity) into the same bed in an unlit

room, an event that horrifies each but eventually leads to a true emotional involvement at the end of the novel.

Parker also upgrades the definition of "intrigante". Instead of having a derogative association, she says, the word "is...merely an epithet for a woman who acquires too much political power" (Parker 67). In a new biography written by a woman, a clearer understanding of this meaning could well change the current attitude toward the "defrocked nun" - to her advantage. As previously stated, the male appraisal of Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin proverbially characterizes her as an "intrigante", and the connotation is derogatory, implying scheming ambition, cold-heartedness, self-interest, and the use of any means no matter how crass to obtain questionable goals. For Duclos she was the consummate conniver: "...on ne peut pas avoir plus d'esprit; elle avait toujours celui de la personne à qui elle avait affaire....Le génie des plus habiles intrigantes s'éclipsait devant celui de la Tencin" (Saint-Simon 1352, n. 6). Her reputation was the same at court: In a letter of July, 1729 to the Cardinal de Polignac, discrediting her brother the Abbé, Cardinal de Fleury simultaneously refers to Mme de Tencin as "la plus intrigante créature du monde" (Saint-Simon, 1352-1353, n. 10).

Parker concludes her essay by stating, as did Gelfand and Switten, that Madame de Tencin's fiction should be re-edited and re-evaluated in order, she adds, to deconstruct the patrilineal exclusionary pattern of male impersonators of female

psychology (i.e. Marivaux's La Vie de Marianne) and brought into the literary canon (Parker 76).

A last factor that distances Madame de Tencin from today's reader is the tendency of her biographers to explain away the lack of informative material regarding her character by means of code quotes, or crisp little epigrams that take her out of the realm of reality. One frequently cited example is an ostensible reply to her long-time friend, Fontenelle, a leading figure in the literary and scientific world of Paris, and a "salonnier" for many of his 100 years. Gay and witty, he had an even temperament, believing that tranquility was the key to happiness as spelled out in his treatise Du Bonheur. Madame de Tencin supposedly quipped while pointing to his breast: "It is not a heart that you keep here, but brains like those in your head." (Tilley 422, quoting the Abbé Trublet's Mémoires 116).³⁴ This quotation may denote either a dearth of available research material on Mme de Tencin or an effort to demean her. In any case today the phrase has lost something of its pungency.

A second repartee is another exchange between Mme de Tencin and Fontenelle, presumably when he failed to understand some "inane verses" heard in her salon and asked that they be read again: "Why you great imbecile!," cried Madame de Tencin, "do you not see that it is only nonsense?" "It so resembles," replied Fontenelle, "all the verses I hear read and sung here, it

³⁴ Arthur M. Tilley, The Decline of the Age of Louis XIV, or French Literature 1687-1715 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1929; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968) 290-291; 422-423.

is not astonishing that I made a mistake" (Stryienski 333-334).

A plethora of similar rejoinders permeate the commentaries and lead to questions about their veracity. Shortly before her own death, Madame de Tencin is quoted as advising Mme Geoffrin: "... not (to) discourage people, even though nine people out of ten will not take an atom of trouble for you, the tenth may become a useful friend." Foreseeing that the salon of Mme Geoffrin would replace her own, she posed to friends the rhetorical question: "Do you know what Mme Geoffrin comes here for? She comes to see what she can pick up out of my inventory" (Stryienski 334).

One must chip away at these little congealed maxims that cloud our understanding of Mme de Tencin in order to assess properly the struggles she faced, and understand how and why the solutions she employed demonstrated a determined, perhaps unconscious, pursuit of self-identification. At face value, the above quotations seem to validate Alice Parker's postulate that Mme de Tencin was a victim of the 18th century "phallogocentric tradition," or the rules empowering men to the detriment of the fulfillment of women, and hints at her potential to enlist female transgression in her favor. In her writings, however, Mme de Tencin, while taking some new liberties, carefully avoids criticism of the whole social scheme of things, being more concerned, according to Parker, "with getting a generous slice of the cake than in changing the recipe" (Parker 74).

As noted above, four major biographies of the Guérin de Tencin family have been written by men in the 20th century: Masson, Pierre-Maurice. Madame de Tencin (1682-1749). (Paris: Hachette, 1909; Geneva: Slatkine, 1970). (2) Coynart, Charles de. Les Guérin de Tencin. (Paris: Hachette, 1910). (3) Sareil, Jean. Les Tencin: Histoire d'une famille au XVIIIème siècle. (Geneva: Droz, 1969; 1971); and (4) Vaillot, René. Qui Etaient Mme de Tencin...et le Cardinal? (Paris: Le Pavillon, 1974). Eva Marie Sartori in her recent biographic article on Madame de Tencin states that Pierre-Maurice Masson's 1909 biography (the first chronologically of the four 20th century biographies) still remains the best today (her bibliography does not include Vaillot's 1974 biography) because he gives her literary work greater attention than do the others, albeit he considers it "unrealistic," "dry," and lacking "the shiver of personal temperament or character" (Sartori 126).³⁵ Masson's comments on Mme de Tencin's novels will be discussed in Part IV of this dissertation. The absence of any in-depth literary analysis by critics as a whole leads Sartori to speculate as well on the need for a new biography assessing Madame de Tencin's life and the extent of her political and literary influence (Sartori 480).

³⁵ Eva Martin Sartori and Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman, "Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin," French Women Writers, a Bio-Bibliographical Source Book (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1991) 473-783. Quoting Pierre-Maurice Masson, Une Vie de femme au XVIIIème siècle: Madame de Tencin (1682-1749), 3rd ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1910; Geneva: Slatkine, 1970) 179.

Together the four biographies present a comprehensive historical account of the rise and fall of the Guérin de Tencin family fortunes dating from the 15th century to and including the death of the Cardinal Pierre Guérin de Tencin, l'Archevêque de Lyon, on March 2, 1767, at the age of 79, 18 years after his sister, Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin, died on December 8, 1749 at the age of 67. To situate Mme de Tencin in her time, before proceeding to an exploration of the weapons she used to contravene authority in the course of her life, some introductory commentary by her most recent biographers, Sareil and Vaillot, seems appropriate. While the former prefers to judge her on her reputation as schemer and hostess primarily in the context of her brother's career, and the latter strives for the human, the private, the unexpected detail, both endeavor to revitalize the period and ancillary personages rather than rehabilitate Mme de Tencin by a meticulous examination of her literary accomplishments.

Annotated by 24 pages of bibliography with references to many unedited manuscripts, Sareil's book took seven years to complete because of a conscientious undertaking to research a considerable assortment of public and private documents and correspondence scattered among libraries and official archives of England, France and Germany. One would be therefore hard put to refute the authenticity of his documentation, and it appears to be the best factual account of Mme de Tencin's life available. The histories of Mme de Tencin and of the Abbé cannot be

separated, maintains Sareil, since the former's rise in the ecclesiastical hierarchy is incomprehensible without keeping in mind his sister's continual efforts to assist him, and her history has no meaning without his success. In the interests of this dissertation, however, it is the life of Mme de Tencin "qui l'emporte;" she was, in effect, more ambitious and tenacious than her brother, and her struggles bore the literary fruit which has attracted a renewed interest today while few remember the brother's diatribes against jansenism. Sareil's biography provides also invaluable information and insight into how Claudine-Alexandrine coped with the impediments society placed before her as her multiple ambitions prompted her to react on diverse occasions, presumably unconsciously, to break new paths.

The Tencins played a vital role in all of the affairs of their time between 1715-1750, with the exception of the military domain: court intrigues, religious disturbances, financial debacles, diplomatic negotiations, literary quarrels, academic elections, romantic adventures and legal proceedings. Although the political efficacy of their comportment and the cavalier way they treated their "victims" seem questionable to us, to a large extent they conformed to the society in which they lived, and their actions, says Sareil, should not be judged by 20th century prejudices. The events which shaped the Tencins form the center piece of Sareil's work and he traces with painstaking detail the sordid manipulations, the bribery and the flattery involved in papal positioning, anti-jansenist

shenanigans, battles won and lost in love and war and the unflinching determination exhibited by the Abbé and Claudine-Alexandrine to obtain political and religious advancement by whatever means society offered; and their final wistful renunciation in the face of failure to obtain the coveted, but ever illusive goal of Prime Minister for the Abbé (Sareil 9-11).

In the midst of this myriad of activities Madame de Tencin's literary career receives short shrift. To the biographer, the salon constituted her greatest contribution, and he attributes her predisposition to psychological analysis and "jeux d'esprit" in her novels to her role as hostess. As demonstrative of the casualness with which she treated the prejudices of her time he quotes from Les Malheurs de l'amour: "... (Pourquoi) cette noblesse est-elle tant estimée? C'est... que son origine est presque toujours estimable; d'ailleurs il a fallu quelques distinctions parmi les hommes; celle-là était la plus facile" (Sareil 236, citing Malheurs de l'amour IV:251).

Sareil devotes merely three pages to the novels in the chapter "Le Salon de Mme de Tencin", which emphasizes the star-quality and intelligence that enabled Mme de Tencin to win over the most prominent scientific and literary minds of the time, thus effacing the unsavory events of her past political, religious and personal life (Sareil 236). The flattering comments by loyal lifelong friends are treated with some scepticism; those of Marivaux, for example, who transformed Mme de Tencin into Mme Dorsin in La Vie de Marianne, are an "embellissement

systematique" of Claudine-Alexandrine's true character, but also provided Marivaux with a political advantage. There is a sharp contrast, notes Sareil, between the "marvelous creature tenderly described by the moral visionary" (Marivaux) and the monster of Saint-Simon (Sareil 236-239). Sareil sides with the latter, the source for most historians who denigrated Mme de Tencin.

Mme de Tencin's four novels, according to Sareil (there was a fifth called "apocryphal" of which only Henri Coulet believes she may well have been the author, which will be discussed momentarily), give the impression of a romantic prolongation of conversations held in her drawing room whereby the cast of characters acted out abstract questions debated at the famed Tuesdays. The Comte de Comminge, Sareil claims, expands on the question of which of the two, man or woman, is capable of the greater love, and of the two, who is capable of the greater sacrifice? The web of amorous intrigue in Le Siège de Calais has been held to be the result of a wager by Mme de Tencin that she could write a more interesting yet decent novel than was customary by commencing the tale where other authors had ended it: in the bedroom (Sareil 241).

All four novels, claims Sareil perfunctorily, fall neatly into the tradition of the classic feminist novel with their commonality of content: brevity of recital, historical fantasy, purely amorous intrigue, multiplicity of episodes having little rapport with the principal subject, chilly style and firm exposition of characters. With what appears to be a reluctant

afterthought, he grants her an "interesting place in imaginative literature" if only because of the violence of sentiments expressed and the control exercised over the narrative.

Otherwise, the melancholy characters destined for suffering, the medieval decor, the convents and the unavoidability of the fatal consequences of love remain strictly within the form inevitable to any author born in the 17th century (Sareil 241).

Although Sareil's critique would be deemed sexist in today's world, it is understandable that he was struck, as the modern reader must be, with the "remarkable fact" that none of Mme de Tencin's fictional works display any overt autobiographical elements, or if there are any such transpositions they are unrecognizable. (Both Masson and Decottignies found such transpositions, as will be seen later; and of course Sareil predates Alice Parker.) Even the "tableaux" of the convents are conventual replicas of the genre, he continues, and include no personal details of Claudine-Alexandrine's long sojourn at Montfleury (Sareil 241-242).

Mme de Tencin's novels would be termed extremely chaste to today's reader, he concludes - her heroines epitomize the most noble degree of virtue - but they were considered licentious in the 18th century, and Sareil claims she was wise not to sign her name as author to stories containing the problematics of love since the prejudice against women authors at the time was already great, and she had been the subject of enough malicious gossip on other accounts not to wish to attract more attention (Sareil 240-

242). Madame de Genlis, novelist of the late 18th and early 19th centuries and whose life and works will constitute the third chapter of this dissertation, found the daring scene between Canaple and Mme de Granson in Le Siège "...révoltante...mais cette idée grossière qui offrait quelque chose de neuf, fit le succès de cet ouvrage d'ailleurs très médiocre..." (Genlis De l'Influence des femmes 277).³⁶ "Revoltant" might truly be applicable to an uncharacteristically lascivious vaudeville, La Chronique scandaleuse du genre humain, that rumormongers accused Mme de Tencin of having written at the instigation of Cardinal Dubois, who wished to lead the Regent into greater debauchery. It was a pastiche of voluptuous scenes reminiscent of Greek and Roman courtesans' lavish orgies thought capable of reawakening the sluggish senses of the prince (Etienne lxxxij). No copies remain of this piece and Sareil emphasizes that there is no reason to believe that Mme de Tencin would have demeaned herself nor risked her reputation to write such a scurrilous divertissement (Sareil 57).

Vaillot adds other insights into Mme de Tencin's work and states that the legend that she collaborated with her nephews Pont-de-Veyle and d'Argental is written-off today; she didn't care much for d'Argental nor his wife and it would be unimaginable for Pont-de-Veyle to write about such harrowing grief, he says. Vaillot nevertheless concurs with Sareil

³⁶ Stéphanie-Félicité, Comtesse de Genlis, De l'Influence des femmes sur la littérature française comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs (Paris: Maradan, 1811). Cited at p. 18.

concerning Mme de Tencin's decision to remain anonymous, but not for the same reason; rather because "une femme de condition" does not write, or if she does, she does not reveal the fact. He notes, though, that her novels, far removed in subject matter from the crises she herself traversed, were written during periods of relative calm in her life, when she was able to take refuge in fancy: The Mémoires du comte de Comminge, were completed in 1735 at the height of her disagreement with the Cardinal de Fleury who objected to her overstepping the bounds of female decorum by meddling in the political quarrels between the constitutionalists and the jansenists; more particularly he condemned her entertaining clandestinely in her home ultramontane bishops. The Siège de Calais, states Vailliot, falls close upon her return to grace with Fleury and the promotion of the Abbé to the cardinalate in 1739. Les Malheurs de l'amour were written in 1747 after a serious illness; and, finally, the Anecdotes de la cour et du règne d'Edouard II, roi d'Angleterre, a confusing muddle of abstract intrigues, according to Vailliot, foreshadowed the fatigue of her final days (Vailliot 334); she was able to complete only the first two parts before her death in 1749. Mme Elie de Beaumont, the wife of a famous lawyer of Calais, finished the novel which was published in 1767 (Sareil 239).

Vailliot devotes seven pages to the novels of Mme de Tencin, and with a more favorable opinion than Sareil, states that they exalt great and true love: that with a look or a word each partner can guess the sincerity and virtue of the other, and

would rather lose his life than the esteem of his opposite (Vaillot 334). It is equally perplexing to him that Mme de Tencin could write "so eloquently" about sublimely dedicated love when in her own personal life she was capable of carrying on numerous love affairs simultaneously, almost casually. Possibly, he suggests, she was attempting to win the the good graces of posterity in her novels or hoped to mislead her future readers because of the mystery surrounding the dedications to Siège de Calais and Les Malheurs de l'amour, i.e.: "Je n'écris que pour vous, je ne désire des succès que pour vous en faire hommage, vous êtes l'univers pour moi." (Malheurs). Did Mme de Tencin think posterity would absolve her of her successive love affairs knowing that in her heart she pictured a sublime and faithful love of absolute sacrifice? asks Vaillot (334). It may have been that she wished to disconcert historians. Vaillot expresses perplexity at the dedication since Mme de Tencin had no lover to whom she was faithful (Vaillot 335); while Sareil simply dismisses the inscriptions as mere rhetoric to allay suspicion as to her authorship. Anyhow, he (Sareil) adds, Madame was too old at the time of writing them for anyone to take them seriously! (Sareil 241).

Vaillot's conclusion is that Mme de Tencin's novels of "uncompromising virtue" translate an unsatisfied romantic ideal. From a critical standpoint, he maintains that they suffer from a lack of the realism that is found in her correspondence such as the series of improbable exterior events designed either to

separate or draw the lovers together, thus enhancing their suffering or magnifying their loyalty. In Le Siège the King and Queen of England liberate six hostages because three lovers among them, believing they had lost their opposite lovers offered themselves as a sacrifice (Vaillot 335). He reaffirms Sareil's supposition that to accomplish the above, Mme de Tencin drew upon the traditional props, and added a few: marriages imposed by fathers, sequestration in dungeons or towers, evasions, sojourns in convents, duels, sudden illnesses, disguises, accidental meetings and all the accessories required to alternate hope and grief. Grief dominates in the last analysis, he says, and many tears are shed under the pen of this woman so frequently accused of insensitivity to the feelings of others (Vaillot 335). Despite these excesses Vaillot acknowledges the justice of tone and emotion in her novels, although he finds nothing original in the plotting of the narrative. Nor does she describe objectively, he claims, the lives of her characters as is the case in modern writing; the narrator is at the beginning the principal character but "passes the baton to the next in line who recounts his own personal adventures." In the labyrinth of her "romans de tiroirs," or series of adventures grafted on to each other, he concludes, Mme de Tencin less frequently loses her way than does, say, her friend Marivaux (Vaillot 335-336).

He also has greater admiration than Sareil for her style which he asserts ranked her among the best of the feminine novelists of her day because of its flowing quality; it was

natural, precise, transparent, with some convoluted sentences terminating with the graceful flourish of the salon-style (Vaillot 336).

In presenting a brief synopsis of the Mémoires du Comte de Comminge, generally accepted as the best of Mme de Tencin's novels, Vaillot compares it to Romeo and Juliet since it recounts the birth and death of an irresistible star-crossed pair of lovers. The Comte the Comminge and Adélaïde de Lussan have already fallen in love before they learn they belong to the same family, but to two branches separated by an hereditary hatred. To prevent the marriage, the father of the comte sequesters his son in a tower and prohibits his release until he is assured that Adélaïde has contracted another marriage. The originality (there is some, after all) of this plot lies in the fact that the "blackmail" is not perpetrated by the father of the young girl but by the father of the young man. Adélaïde, in an effort to liberate the count from the tower, makes the noblest of sacrifices by marrying the most odious of suitors, the Marquis de Bénavidès, imagining that the pain this marriage will bring to her will somehow concretize for the comte the faithfulness of her love for him. The lovers are therefore condemned to a strange manner of suffering, and a solitary insupportable accommodation (Vaillot 336-337). Jean Decottignies, whose reading of the Mémoires du Comte de Comminge will be examined in Part IV of this chapter, shows that the novel, rather than exalting the triumph of religion over love as critics generally claim, was in reality

sacrilegious since Adélaïde's marriage to Benavidès exalted her love for someone other than her husband.

With less prejudice and more praise than Sareil, Vaillot notes that for the Abbé Prévost, Mme de Tencin's first novel was very well written despite a bizarre conclusion which he found unreal because the couple's passion does not come across as extraordinary enough to warrant the unexpected final catastrophe (Vaillot 337-338).³⁷ For Grimm, however, the scene of the comte's recognition of the dying Adélaïde, the object of so many regrets and tears, if not plausible, was very moving.³⁸ Vaillot also states that the novel was so well appreciated in the 18th century that in 1764 Baculard d'Arnaud adapted from it a three-act play Les Amants malheureux ou le comte de Comminge, which placed the novel among the precursors of the pre-romantic gothic novel. It remained among best sellers until around 1830 for it responded to the romantic aspiration of suffering love and the search by the bourgeoisie for a moral order in the 19th century (Vaillot 338).

There has been some discussion among critics as to whether or not a fifth novel, Histoire d'une religieuse écrite par elle-même, is attributable to Mme de Tencin. Coulet claims

³⁷ Quoting Prévost, Le Pour et le Contre, Art. 103.

³⁸ Grimm, Diderot, Reynal, Meister, etc., Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique, vol. 6 (Paris: Garnier, 1878) 133-134.

it was given by her to the Abbé Trublet who passed it on to the Bibliothèque universelle des Romans where it was published in 1786 (Coulet II:261).³⁹ Vachon, however, questions why the Abbé waited so long to have it published - which occurred after his own death.⁴⁰ Sartori, on the other hand, acknowledges the possibility that the Histoire is the work of Mme de Tencin but cautions that neither Sareil nor Decottignies accepted it as such, after painstaking research (Sartori 476). Nonetheless, Coulet found in it biographical elements reminiscent of Mme de Tencin's youth, and more importantly, the simplicity of form, tone of melancholy, lucidity, precision and discretion of the analysis of sentiment, although characteristic of the "somber" genre fashionable at the time, resemble Mme de Tencin's other books (Coulet II:261).

Comparing this novel to O'Driscoll's judgment on Les Malheurs de l'amour, I lean toward Coulet's view of Mme de Tencin as the probable author. In Malheurs, O'Driscoll states that the heroine, Pauline, is entangled in a patriarchal system by which her mother conspires to thwart her daughter's desire to marry the man she loves by attempting to coerce her into an arranged marriage based on property and wealth. The dénouement following this system is constrained to be tragic for Pauline retires to a

³⁹ Henri Coulet, "Roman Sentimental;" "Histoire d'une religieuse écrite par elle-même (vers 1730?), Le roman jusqu'à la Revolution, vols. 2-3 (NY: McGraw Hill; Armand Colin, 1967) II:261-265; III:379-382.

⁴⁰ Marie-Françoise Vachon, Les Romans de Mme de Tencin (Diss. New York: Columbia UP, 1975).

convent because she has been forced into the role of reactive object instead of fulfilling herself as active subject. Goals are defeated in this story because women follow the established order of modesty and do not tell the men of their choice that they love them.⁴¹

In a similar vein Isidore, the young heroine of Histoire, colludes with her aunt's (the mother figure) choice of the rich and vain Don Pedro as a marriage partner over the poor and worthy Don Antonio whom she prefers, for her conventual education has made her incapable of seeing the world as it is and consequently of overriding her aunt's decision and making a decisive choice for her own benefit. Because Don Antonio is too timid to express his feelings and shower her with the praise to which she believes her wealth entitles her, she tries to provoke his jealousy by submitting to her aunt's wedding preparations. The dénouement is once again tragic for Don Antonio, believing he is rejected, returns to his regiment without speaking out. Shortly thereafter he is killed in battle and on the eve of his death in a letter to Isidore, belatedly confesses his love. Griefstricken, Isidore turns over her inheritance to her best friend and abandons the world to enter a military hospital administered by nuns where she hopes to consecrate her life "au service de ces glorieuses victimes de l'amour de la patrie, du nombre desquelles avait été mon amant" (Coulet II:265). Like the

⁴¹ Sally O'Driscoll, Rethinking Realism: Early Women Novelists in England and France (Diss. New York: City U, 1991) 232-241.

Comte de Comminge who, blaming himself upon learning of Adélaïde's death, entombs himself alive among the Trappists, Isidore, holding herself responsible for Don Antonio's death because she failed to tell him of her love, seeks penance by making her own life a living death. Yet, as Coulet states, all of Mme de Tencin's characters demonstrate a similar ambivalence for they are placed in situations demanding they love what they hate and hate what they love. They are never at peace with themselves for they dare not be happy. They can neither accept nor renounce love; when they make a sacrifice for their passion, it is in reality an inversion of arrogance and becomes a punishment (Coulet I:380-381). With a stretch of the imagination, it can be conjectured that Isidore, who takes pleasure in putting Don Antonio to the test for egotistical reasons and to reassure herself of her own worth, is Mme de Tencin in disguise who also seeks by any means to subvert her own vulnerability and miscomprehension of love.

Wasting time in trifling activities and petty trickery was an outgrowth of the poor education girls received in convents which prepared them only for life in a restricted social setting. Whether the author of the Histoire was Mme de Tencin or someone else, Isidore's swipe at the gender prescription of the period which ignored the real educational needs of young girls reveals a smouldering resentment that may have been at the heart of Mme de Tencin's obsessive ambition: "Je me suis aperçu qu'on ne s'était attaché qu'à l'écorce de ce qu'on appelait mon éducation...et que

je n'eusses pas eu, comme ceux d'un autre sexe, une raison à éclairer un esprit à régler, et un caractère à conduire....(J)'y ai trouvé quelques unes de ces filles respectables qu'ont immolé à l'époux leur coeur et leur volonté..." (Vachon 142-143).

Part 2

Conventual Vows and Rebel Daughter

Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin's dexterity in countervailing authority probably had its source in both family proclivity and in the natural reaction of a volatile nature to the injustice of compulsory residence at a convent during her formative years. The Guérin de Tencin family was composed of ambitious men who rose from humble origins in the 16th century and were appointed to the minor nobility in the 17th. Antoine de Tencin, Claudine's father, who belonged to the noblesse de robe, inherited the office of counsellor to the Parliament of Grenoble upon his father's resignation in 1674. In the same year he built a grand "hôtel" with two floors, and large living rooms, a chapel, courts, terraces and an orange grove. In 1684 he bought the post of "président à mortier" at the Parliament, indicating some prosperity (Sareil 13-14). In 1692 Louis XIV appointed him first president of the Senate of Chambéry, a post which he later lost after the Peace of Ruyswick when the Duke of Savoy reestablished himself in Savoy. In 1704, after defeating the Duke, Louis XIV once more appointed Tencin to the Senate; however, the appointment met strong opposition from the Maréchal

de Tessé, commander of the French troops, who in a letter to the Minister of War stated: "M. de Tencin est totalement gouverné par sa femme qui est une cabaleuse intéressée, fausse comme du cuivre jaune....Je ne lui connais d'autre qualité que d'être mère de deux jolies filles" (Sareil 15).⁴² The implications of the influence of a scheming mother on the mind of an impressionable daughter are self-evident.

When Antoine de Tencin died in 1705, his eldest son, François, became President of the Senate of Chambéry in accordance with ancien régime custom (Sareil 15). François was born on February 16, 1676, and from birth enjoyed the distinction accorded the oldest son of a large family. With the Treaty of Utrecht (1713-1715), the French left Savoy for good and in 1717 François became honorary president of the Parliament of Grenoble (Sareil 18). One of his three sons, Jean-Louis, later Bailiff de Tencin, special Ambassador to Malta from the Holy See, was a trusted colleague of his uncle the Abbé Pierre and a close friend of Benoît XIV when the latter was elected Pope in the 1740's.

Marie Angélique, the oldest daughter, was born on August 21, 1674. Thanks to the intervention of a religious aunt she was preserved from taking vows in the convent in which she had been placed; and in 1696 married Augustin de Ferriol, "receveur général" of Dauphiné, 24 years her senior, and the couple moved to Paris. Her two sons were Pont-de-Veyle, author

⁴² Citing "Tessé à Chamillard", 9/11/1703. Qtg. Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon, Mémoires, ed. Boisisle (Paris: Hachette, 1879-1930) XXXVII:3.

of comedies, and d'Argental, Voltaire's good friend. Although Augustin remained in the shadows of his wife's brilliant parisian salon, his brother, Charles, was of an adventuresome spirit and became Ambassador of France at Constantinople, bringing home to his sister-in-law's house from the Far East the celebrated Mlle Aïssé (Sareil 18). Pretty, witty and with a classical culture, including Greek, Marie Angélique was sought after and had had several influential lovers before an openly accepted liaison with the Marshal d'Huxelles which lasted until his death in 1730 (Sareil 19-20).

The second daughter, Marie-Françoise, born on July 13, 1678, married the Comte de Grolée in 1703. She was the least obtrusive of the sisters although she was just as pretty and intelligent. Since she lived for the most part in a château in the country away from the limelight, she was able to avoid public scandal. She also outlived her siblings (Sareil 20-22).

Pierre, the youngest son, born on August 16, 1679, was destined for a religious career and sent to the Seminary of Saint-Magloire in Paris at a young age. His education was limited to theology in which he became an authority and "a political churchman", a man of the 18th century, or a Christian rationalist who detested atheists, protestants and jansenists. Since his goal was to succeed in the church, his thinking remained orthodox and he observed a strict piety even amidst court splendor (Sareil 22). According to Masson he was "doux, insinuant, faux comme un

jeton, ignorant comme un prédicateur,"⁴³ and spiteful, without generosity, scornful and hasty, but had a handsome face with regular features (Masson 15-16). In 1700 the Bishop of Grenoble sent him to Rome to participate in the election of a new pope where he distinguished himself by the art of persuasion. His ingratiating manner earned him the important title to the Abbey of Vézelay in 1702. In 1705 he received a doctorate from the Sorbonne and was elected a delegate to the general assembly of the clergy for the diocese of Grenoble which placed him among important members of the ecclesiastical world. Nevertheless, his career slowed down and he bought the offices of mayor and governor at Vézelay. Immersed in municipal affairs he displayed a fierce obstination in instituting law suits to recover what he considered his due, and no ordinary citizen could prevail against him (Sareil 22-25).

The last daughter, sacrificed to her elders, was to give a new vitality to the family ambition by throwing herself, with Pierre in tow, into the conquest of power (Sareil 25). Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin, born on April 27, 1682, was sent to the Dominican Convent of Montfleury near Grenoble in 1690 in the hope that she would acclimate to the cloistered life. Her parents, less sensitive with age, had perhaps hoped for another son to make a career in the army. The atmosphere at home may have been stifling, in the company of a solemn, pious father and

⁴³ Quoting Le Président Hénault, Mémoires, vol. 1 in-8 (Paris: Dentau, 1855) 393-394.

a vain and egotistical mother, for the recalcitrant and vital Claudine-Alexandrine (Vailliot 24). According to the Registre du Greffe de Grenoble, she took her vows at the age of 15 and a few months, despite her great resistance to her parents' wishes. The day following the ceremony Claudine-Alexandrine petitioned through a notary to have her vows annulled on the grounds that she had been coerced into the cloistered life, for which she had no calling.

The Président de Tencin in confining his daughter to a convent acted in conformity with the practice of the ancien régime (as was the case with his son François) which condoned such behavior to prevent the youngest daughter from making a claim on the family inheritance and so dispersing it among too many children. In the official documents, however, he is characterized as a tyrant who caused all the members of his family to tremble. It should be noted, says Sareil, that in order for his daughter to make the claim that she had been coerced against her will to take vows, she had to invoke her inability to resist parental authority (Sareil 28). This may seem strange if we recall that the Marshal de Tessé had written that Antoine de Tencin was under the total domination of his wife when he sought appointment as President of the Senate of Chambéry! It is difficult to know just what was the conduct of the father and other family members at the time Claudine-Alexandrine sought abrogation of her vows. Her older sisters, Mme de Ferriol and Mme de Grolée, appear to have avoided conflict

with their father and at the time Claudine-Alexandrine left the convent other family members, including the Abbé, did all they could to prevent her from gaining her ultimate liberty and claim her inheritance. Mme de Ferriol supposedly took her sister's side, but in truth betrayed her (Sareil 29). By a strange coincidence, Mme de Tencin showed no resentment against those responsible for her captivity, and made no overt allusions to those years in the convent either in her correspondence or her literary works. To the contrary, her greatest wish appeared to be to assist her family's climb toward success (Sareil 29).

The Convent of Montfleury had a reputation for lax discipline. The young women who attended, belonging to the local nobility, lived very comfortably and received guests of both sexes in the parlors and interior rooms of the convent. In fine weather with their guests they could be seen promenading along the open terraces on high behind which were grassy knolls hidden from inquisitive eyes (Vaillot 20-21). Claudine-Alexandrine was adored and the nuns responding to her need for unsatisfied maternal love, taught her manners, speech and music, all the amenities of behavior that prepared young women for the social world to which they would return. The convent parlor was her first salon and attracted by her charms her sisters, brothers and cousins all came to visit. She developed a predilection for being consequential and liked to dominate an assembly, according to Vaillot, prefiguring her behavior in the world that later would drain her vitality and vitiate her pride (Vaillot 24-25). A

crisis occurred when her brother François married and she attended the sumptuous ceremony at which all of the nobility of Grenoble were present. In 1696, when she was 14 her sister, Marie Angélique, her only family comforter, also married and went off to Paris. She tried to make her father understand that she didn't want to take the veil, but he was adamant, whereupon she fell into despair, and her revolt began. She asked M. de Flacourt, a friend sent by Mme de Ferriol, to throw her over the balcony, and when he confided the incident to an aunt, he was forbidden to return to the convent (Vaillot 24-26). Mme de Charconnes who was in charge of Claudine-Alexandrine's education tried also to comfort her by assuring her that if she obeyed her father's wishes, after taking her vows she would be permitted to leave the convent each year to go to a spa. In truth, it appears she was teaching her student hypocrisy rather than devotion (Vaillot 26-27). Instead of rebelling, however, Claudine-Alexandrine began a long-term campaign of subterfuge. She acted submissively, but became detached (Vaillot 29-30).

The pressure that her parents exerted by promises of leniency if she obeyed their wishes, alternating with threats of confinement in a more severe convent in the country if she should refuse, eventually convinced the judges who later heard her case that her vows had not been taken freely (Sareil 30-31). According to her dossier in the Registre du Greffe in Grenoble, family members overwhelmed her with advice; her own letters were intercepted, and she was unable to distinguish between comrades,

servants, and spies. Her father's frequent visits drove her to tears with the result that she frequently took emetics which dispensed her from Church services (Sareil 31).⁴⁴ To have refused to take her vows would have caused a scandal, and since as yet she lacked sufficient bravura, she took them in November, 1698. The following day Maître Clavière, a notary from Domène, demanded to see her and before two witnesses she registered a protest against the violence that was done to her (Vaillot 29; Sareil 32). No one knows exactly how she arranged this drama. Who helped her? Her young cousin, Boffin d'Argenson? Her confessor from Grenoble, P. Vuiron? There are no records to indicate the identity of the personage involved for certain, but Vaillot suggests some other simple and good spiritual director who was captivated by her charms but remains anonymous, advised her in advance what procedures she should follow (Vaillot 30-31).

There was no philosophic debate behind this revolt; the young girls at Montfleury did not generally enter the convent because of a religious calling; religion was simply a social attitude in that century, similar to the love of money. Furthermore, Claudine-Alexandrine eluded as much as possible religious duties as a result of her "sicknesses", which allowed her to isolate herself and substitute other books for the breviary (Vaillot 31-32). She blamed her action on no other person, claiming that she was acting on her own initiative - even

⁴⁴ Quoting Registre du Greffe de l'Officialité de Grenoble, Archives d'Isère, Série G.

at the tender age of 15! Her protest was renewed in accord with the covenants of the Council of Trent in 1702 and every five years until 1712, when she was finally able to provide the brief required by the Ecclesiastical Court of Rome, have it adjudged valid and executed to confirm the final abrogation of her vows. Sareil maintains she left the Convent for extended periods from 1698 onward, but had to await her father's death in 1705 before she could proceed with her case. There is little known of her life between these dates.

Sareil also takes Mme de Tencin to task for deforming the truth in giving inexact reasons for her behavior. For instance, she claimed it was her illnesses, comprised of violent attacks of vapors verging on apoplexy, which caused extreme melancholy and endangered her life, and not conventual life that prevented her from finding salvation in the convent. "On ne pouvait choisir une maison qui eût plus d'attrait pour engager une jeune fille. La suppliante s'estime bien malheureuse de n'avoir pu s'accoutumer dans une communauté aussi remplie de bons exemples que composée de tant de filles également distinguées," the official documents quote her as saying (Sareil 32).⁴⁵ Her gentleness, Sareil claims, was hypocritical; in reality she employed the same coldness that later would allow her to remove every obstacle obstructing the path toward a chosen goal. This is a harsh judgment in view of the fact that Claudine-Alexandrine had spent almost ten years at Montfleury against her will before

⁴⁵ Quoting Archives d'Isère, Serie G.

taking her vows; a good deal of determination would be required for any person who wished to be successful in bringing about change under the circumstances. Nevertheless, Sareil calls her defense cunningly contrived and lacking emotional appeal. He may be correct, but from a distance of three centuries, it would appear that she had little alternative if she wished to get on with her life; in any event, it is evident that the survival skills she learned during her first major confrontation with authority served her well when she came up against other critical instances of domination.

The official documents state also that Claudine-Alexandrine never left the convent until after her father's death in 1705; to the contrary, later enemies proclaimed that she left when she became pregnant earlier than that. Vaillot adds that she was accused of having twins (Vaillot 33). Sareil, however, maintains that such unconfirmed communications from talebearers who wrote years after the event should not be taken seriously; furthermore, it is unlikely that Claudine-Alexandrine would have done anything to damage her cause before it was won (Sareil 34). This is a plausible explanation.

Bad health was her justification for leaving the convent in 1705. She apparently remained with her mother for six months before becoming ill, and after a visit to the spa at Aix she returned to Monfleury at the insistence of her mother. Seven months later she left the convent definitively: first returning home, and then sojourning once again at Aix with a young "pious"

girl, ostensibly a spy. Afterwards she went to the Convent of Sainte-Claire d'Annonay where the prioress was a relative of the Ferriols and it was she who acted as chaperone for Claudine-Alexandrine on her trips to Paris. She was probably at Montfleury in 1706 for Vaillot makes mention of a letter written in June of that year to P.J. Maniquet, her "maître de philosophie," in which she speaks of Descartes with a high level of intellectual sophistication, mixed with astronomy. The letter is also of interest because it shows her orientation toward the world: "Je place ambition après l'amour: elle n'est pas si près du coeur que le premier," she wrote at age 24, before cynicism acquired during her early Parisian period, caused her to reverse the order of the two traits (Vaillot 33).

Commissioners working on her case showed some surprise at the lapse of time between her departure from Montfleury and the final request to the Pope to authorize the annulation of her vows. The process was a complicated one, requiring a petition denouncing the constraints to the Court of Rome, followed by a Papal Brief which had to be confirmed by an ecclesiastical tribunal whose judges then were to verify the petitioner's allegations. If recognized as fully justified, the brief could accordingly be published and enforced (Sareil 34). Without the consent of her family, no one dared assist Claudine-Alexandrine, and it was not until 1708 when she made a trip to Lyon that she found a banker willing to submit her request to Rome. Unfortunately, the banker recounted the events to a certain

Philippon, an assistant to M. de Ferriol, and the latter instructed him to "amuse" his client. Two years later in Lyon, Mme de Tencin again renewed her tentative with no better results. She remained with her mother until September 1710, travelling between her home, Aix and the Couvent des Clarisses in Annonay until 1711 when she accompanied the abbess to Paris. It was only at this time she learned of the Ferriol's part in preventing her petition from being sent to Rome (Sareil 34-35).

The family finally wearied of their role, and the day following her arrival in Paris, Claudine-Alexandrine visited Dubourg, a banker with the Roman court, who took the necessary steps that resulted in her receipt of the papal brief on December 2, 1711. When the Abbess of Annonay left Paris in June 1712, Mme de Tencin retired to the community of young women of the Union Chrétienne at the Convent of Saint-Chaumont in Paris. Once again she pleaded illness (the "suppliante" had rheumatism) (Vaillot 35); this time to avoid appearing before the official convocation of judges in Grenoble (Sareil 36). Her friends, M. de Flacourt and Mme de Charconnes, as well as Mme de Ferriol witnessed on her behalf that she never had had a natural vocation to be a nun, but was coerced by her father (Vaillot 36). On November 5, 1712, the papal brief was executed and the judgment rendered her vows nul: "... (N)ous...l'avons mis en même état qu'elle était avant l'émission d'iceaux, à elle permis de rentrer dans le siècle et de disposer de sa personne ainsi qu'elle avisera" (Vaillot 36). Claudine-Alexandrine was no longer

officially or legally a nun and became merely Mme de Tencin. She was as autonomous as a woman of the privileged class could be at 30 years of age in 1712 (Vaillot 36-37).

It is incomprehensible, according to Sareil, that the clever and energetic Mme de Tencin of later years lacked the means to outwit surveillants and allowed so much time to lapse before obtaining the coveted abrogation. He suggests that the provisional liberty she enjoyed upon her father's death was so exceptional that she hesitated to risk losing it by opposing her family, when future victory seemed assured (Sareil 36). My view is that those long years represented a period of adaptation to the variables of an unknown world. Undoubtedly this was also a period of coming to grips with undiscovered facets of her personality.

Many romantic escapades were attributed to Claudine-Alexandrine while her case was pending. Duclos, French historiographer ⁴⁶ (7), claims she first learned the art of seduction at Montfleury and charmed her spiritual advisor, who unwittingly fell in love with her, into seeking the information, documentation and the notary needed to make a formal protest (Sareil 36-37). Although enemies claimed the papal brief was never executed, prompting the application to Mme de Tencin of the pseudonym "la nonne défroquée," during the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV, religion was taken too seriously to allow for

⁴⁶ Charles Duclos, Les Confessions du comte de***, pref. Laurent Versini (Paris: Editions Desjonquères, 1992) 7-14; 99-107.

such an oversight. Today, it is known that the papal brief was published. The Duc de Luynes, a good friend of the Abbé de Tencin, indicated in his Journal that Mme de Tencin had obtained dispensation from her vows "à condition de ne jamais se marier," but this limitation was not incorporated into the decision of the judges (Sareil 38-39, no 13).⁴⁷ Nonetheless, she never married.

Part 3

Social and Political Science

Mme de Tencin's permanent entry into Paris was obscure and for the first several years it is not known whether she lived in the Convent of Saint-Chaumont, with her brother or with Mme de Ferriol, according to Sareil (Sareil 39). Masson, writing at the beginning of the 20th century, states that she did indeed live with her brother (Masson 16). However that may be, her first social successes were obtained in her sister's salon.

Mme de Tencin faced the crumbling edifice of Louis XIV's authority with a battery of assets. She was pretty, energetic, charming, intelligent, self-assured, conniving and adventuresome. Still, the enterprise she had been engaged upon in having her ecclesiastical vows abrogated was of little moment compared to what awaited her in the "petits appartements" of the Regent at the Palais Royal and the anti-chambers of Versailles under Louis XV. Yet, her resolve had been sorely tested. Now she

⁴⁷ Qtg. Albert, duc de Luynes, 5/12/1749, Mémoires sur la cour de Louis XV (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1860) X:46.

was thirty years old, and, consumed with a feverish ardor to make up for lost time (Masson 17), confronted her newly won freedom with eager optimism. To start with, she had gained some financial security. As early as 1711, her sister gave her a portion of her inheritance and in a letter to the inspector of finances Desmarets wrote: "Mme de Ferriol ayant à déposer en faveur de sa soeur d'une somme de trente mille livres en billets de subsistance (extraordinaire de guerre), elle supplie Monseigneur d'accorder un ordre pour convertir ces billets en rente viagère sur l'Hôtel de Ville" (Sareil 40; Vaillot 42, n. 4).⁴⁸ Mme de Tencin now became financially comfortable. Members of the nobility engaged in financial speculations and solicited ministers for money in an effort to enrich themselves quickly even before the emergence of John Law! But for Mme de Tencin to have sufficient funds to invest, her full share of the family inheritance must have been given to her. (Sareil 44-45).

Most biographers begin their treatment of Mme de Tencin's coming of age in Paris by an enumeration of her real and supposed love affairs. An amorous liaison provided the quickest and perhaps only way open to an ambitious women of the early 18th century to climb the social hierarchy and gain control over circumstances otherwise disadvantageous to women. Later in life Mme de Tencin's admonition to the young Marmontel before he had gained success with Bélisaire and the Contes moraux gives some

⁴⁸ "Lettre autographe inédite," Archives Nationales, G 7.583.

inkling of the tone of the times: "Faire des amies plutôt que des amis; au moyen des femmes, on fait tout ce qu'on veut des hommes, et puisqu'ils sont les uns trop dissipés, les autres trop préoccupés de leurs intérêts pesonnels pour ne pas négliger les vôtres, au lieu que les femmes y pensent, ne fût-ce que par oisiveté,..." (Etienne lxxij).

Mme de Tencin found a mixed society at Mme de Ferriol's in 1712. The home overflowed with family life (including her sister's sons, Pont-de-Veyle and d'Argental, and their friends, and Mlle Aissé, "la belle Circassienne," whom the Comte de Ferriol had bought at Constantinople and boarded at his sister-in-law's) (Masson 18), as well as a composition of picturesque celebrities or those on their way up. She was still wearing a veil and was tonsured, but clear-sighted and atuned to the nuances of her environment, very rapidly outstripped her sister in the fashionable circle (Vaillot 39). Mme de Ferriol had already begun the third of her romantic adventures which had included the Marquis de Torcy, famous diplomat and grand nephew of Colbert, Desmarets, "contrôleur général de finance," and had not yet settled down with her long-time companion, the Marshal d'Huxelles, who was her husband's age (Masson 15).

One of the first of many lovers attributed to Mme de Tencin was Lord Bolingbroke, who as Secretary of State spent 10 days in France in 1712 to negotiate with Torcy, his French counterpart, in the hope that England could procure some

advantage for its help in rehabilitating an economically and financially exhausted France.

He had been preceded by Mathieu Prior, poet and unofficial ambassador to France, who introduced him (Bolingbroke) to Mme de Ferriol's salon. Torcy was said to have dispatched Mme de Tencin to Bolingbroke to obtain confidential documents, but Sareil states that Bolingbroke's brief visit was too heavily scheduled for him to fall prey to Mme de Tencin's seductions at this time (He also had two other mistresses in Paris.) (Sareil 41-42; 46-47).

It is more likely that Mme de Tencin was first the mistress of Prior. With tongue in cheek, Vaillot claims that in 1713 Mme de Tencin made her first conquest, Fontenelle, Secretary of the Academy of Science, member of the French Academy. She had been attracted by his clear mind, his intellectual renown, a reputation for friendship and his vast understanding of the world. Most biographers disbelieve a liaison between the two, however, given Fontenelle's age (56 years) when they met, but they remained intimate friends for all of Mme de Tencin's life. Vaillot assembles a cast of important characters in a fictional rendition of reality at a reception held at the Ferriol's where Fontenelle was in attendance. Among other guests was Prior, a youthful 50. Mme de Tencin, curious about men of whom she had seen few, according to Vaillot, was captivated by his imagination, vivacity and perfect knowledge of French (Vaillot 42-54). Prior also had the advantage of being able to assist in

the advancement of her brother Pierre. The latter had recently received the title of the Abbey of Abondance in Savoy as a gift from Louis XIV, but there was the possibility it would fall once again to the Duke of Savoy. Both Prior and Bolingbroke were able to exert English influence in the matter. In a letter from Prior to Bolingbroke dated October 17, 1712, the former stated that he had written to the Duke who promised to secure the Abbey for the brother (Sareil 43-44) "qui ne me paraît pas valoir la corde" (Masson 19). Significant to the relationship between Mme de Tencin and Prior is another letter the latter wrote to Bolingbroke in which he referred to gifts Bolingbroke had requested he distribute to some aristocratic Parisian lady friends Bolingbroke had met during his 1712 visit, and apologized for having given the "eau de miel" intended for the Duchesse de Noailles to his "religieuse défroquée" (Sareil 43, n. 7).⁴⁹ And in a letter from Bolingbroke to Sir Thomas Hammer in January, 1713, the former asked for some details about Prior's private life because of rumors that "la nonne défroquée" had supplanted "la fille aux cheveux châtain" (Masson 18). Two years after her departure from the convent then, the friend of Fontenelle became the mistress of an English diplomat, and assumed the amorous and political ambiguity that would continue to pursue her (Vaillot 56-57).

By 1714, rich as well as flirtatious, Mme de Tencin leased from the nuns of the Convent of Conception an apartment on

⁴⁹ Quoting Masson 20.

the Rue Saint-Honoré where she could entertain friends as she wished, and in the following August contracted for the whole house (Sareil 45). Vaillot maintains that Mme de Tencin rented this apartment in April of 1717, just after she discovered she was pregnant in the middle of her affair with Destouches-Canon, a lieutenant general in the artillery who gained some notoriety for his close attachment to Fénelon, and to whom she may have been sincerely attached. As these divergent dates indicate, there is sometimes a discrepancy in the chronology of Mme de Tencin's activities due to lack of precise evidence one way or another. These discrepancies can lead to an alteration in our perception of her character. If she rented her apartment in 1717, as suggested by Vaillot, her intentions were altogether different than had she rented it in 1714.

Sareil reports that the extremely brief liaison between Mme de Tencin and Philippe d'Orléans (based on a contemporary song) occurred sometime between 1713 and 1714 before the latter became Regent. The omniscient Fontenelle was said to have arranged their meeting. The anecdote, attributed to Duclos, that Philippe d'Orléans peremptorily dismissed Mme de Tencin from his boudoir because he didn't like "les putains" who talked of business "entre deux draps" (Sareil 44) underscores Mme de Tencin's naïveté in confounding a trip down the primrose path with true affection; and her sincere if overzealous attempt to politicize the event was foolhardy. Sareil suggests the story was trumped up during the Regency to reassure the public that the

Regent's governmental policies were immune to the influence of women. Mme de Tencin's unsuccessful encounter with the Regent did not prevent her from becoming a member of the select group that attended private supper parties at the Palais Royal, however, where she was able to make other useful contacts (Sareil 44). Political lampoonists soon had reason to chant happily that she had "tombé du Maître au Valet," when news got about of her heretofore secret liaison with Guillaume Dubois, the Regent's tutor. After Dubois was made Prime Minister her "private life" suddenly became public (Masson 24).

Paul de Musset, whose chapter on Mme de Tencin in Femmes de la Régence was written off by Sareil as fantasy, suggests that she was unsophisticated still when Fontenelle introduced her to Philippe d'Orléans, and thinking him to be of as ardent a nature as she, took his galantry for tenderness. She was, de Musset states, still generous in her opinions of others and her goal was honest. She had surmised the weak prince would be easy to rule but misunderstood the Protean character that made Philippe unable to attach himself to anyone. Her dream of having the country owe peace and happiness to her, therefore, was quickly dissipated by the prince's deceitfulness, and according to de Musset, it was subsequent to this event that she became a conniver (de Musset 270).⁵⁰ De Musset's appraisal of Mme de Tencin's attitude toward the Prince seems reasonable when one

⁵⁰ Paul de Musset, Femmes de la Régence (Paris: Charpentier, Libraire-Editeur, 1848).

remembers she was a young woman fresh from 22 years of cloistered life when she met the Regent, and was eager to experience life to the fullest, as well as make a mark on society.

Mme de Tencin's brief romantic involvement with Bolingbroke most likely occurred in 1715 before the death of Louis XIV, when the Elector of Hanover became George I, and the Whig Stanhope, in power in Parliament, replaced Mathieu Prior with Lord Stair who conferred secretly with Dubois over the case of the Stuart Pretender, Jacques III. Lord Bolingbroke, accused of treason, took refuge in France in April; he met Mme de Tencin at Mme de Ferriol's soon after and their liaison commenced in July (Vailliot 74-75). That the tenor of their relationship had changed in character is evidenced by a letter Bolingbroke wrote to Jacques III, exiled to Bar-le-Duc, France. Since, as Sareil asserts, a politician involved with Mme de Tencin would not be able to limit his love affair merely to pleasure, it is not surprising that in this letter Bolingbroke referred to the ambition and political skill of the woman with whom "depuis quelque temps," he was "en relation," and who tried to learn to what extent he was involved with the Pretender. She went so far, Bolingbroke continued, as to discuss the prospect of a marriage between one of the daughters of Philippe d'Orléans and the Pretender, a chimera which caused Bolingbroke to smile. In the same letter he referred to her liaisons with Philippe d'Orléans and with Dubois (not yet Minister of Foreign Affairs), the latter left unnamed (Sareil 50-52). Soon Bolingbroke called her "sa

reine" and wrote to Mme de Ferriol asking her to "l'assurer (Mme de Tencin) dans tous ses états, elle n'a pas un sujet plus fidèle et plus dévoué que je le suis" (Masson, 20, quoting letter of June 3, 1715). In view of the fact that relations between France and England were in a state of flux at this period, Mme de Tencin's political proposition concerning Philippe's daughter and Jacques III could not be taken seriously, but it is likely that Dubois, not yet an ally of England, already had a finger in the pie as even then she had an influence over him. Her intention was perhaps not truly serious, but she took any available opportunity to make an ally, says Sareil. The letter gives an early indication of Mme de Tencin's increasing political finesse although her suggestion was merely talk and came to nothing after the death of the King (Sareil 52).

At this juncture in her career, Mme de Tencin is frequently referred to as a femme fatale, half siren, half spy by crafty statesmen who hoped to use her to suit their causes. Sareil finds this a degrading role, for he claims Mme de Tencin would never have been so imprudent as to give secrets to Bolingbroke. For the rest of the century however she was accused of spying, and Dubois of being in the pay of England, each time it became necessary to condemn a political adversary. A courteous letter from Jacques III to her brother in 1742, however, does not represent someone who feels betrayed: "Je vous prie de lui (Mme de Tencin) faire bien des compliments de ma part, car, quoique je ne l'aie jamais vue, je connais bien son

mérite et son bon coeur envers moi." By this time the Jacobites had failed in their mission to regain the throne, says Sareil, but through faults of their own and not as a result of Mme de Tencin's duplicity (Sareil 53).

Mme de Tencin's genius for intrigue reached its apogee when she began her clandestine affair with Dubois (1656-1723), the brilliant son of an apothecary, tutor to the Regent, Minister of Foreign Affairs (1718), Archbishop of Cambrai (1720), and Cardinal and Prime Minister (1722), whom history remembers particularly for forging the Quadruple Alliance with the help of England in an effort to secure peace in Europe. A commonality of interests probably brought the two lovers together, as he was her senior by many years and had a reputation for being a profligate. She confided in him the dissatisfactions of her unhappy youth and brought a joy of living to the self-made often humiliated man of 58 who needed it. Together they sought revenge by exploiting events, and the false superiority of the rich and famous (Vaillot 70). Although Dubois was reputed to be ugly (Sareil 48), Vaillot states that he had an agreeable face with expressive eyes and a malicious smile. Because of his debauchery, his contemporaries treated Dubois with contempt for moving foreign policy away from the designs of Louis XIV. Like Mazarin, he succeeded less by means of his own talents (of which he did have many) than by his ability to profit from the weaknesses of his adversaries. With patience and dissimulation he turned the merits of the latter into flaws. He was motivated to win at any

cost; any defeat was provisional, if shameful. Obstinate and flexible, he was not above employing petty means to obtain great results. His passion for work and power enabled him to remain strong and gain infinite victories. He despised others and expected the same scorn from them, but learned to serve Philippe with such devotion that the Regent could not do without him. In fact, this devotion was based on the self-interest of each party (Sareil 47-49). Dubois and Mme de Tencin together were part of the cabal that plotted secretly the coup of 1715 in which Philippe d'Orléans usurped the Regency from the Duke du Maine, the legitimized son of Mme de Maintenon, a day after the King's death. Mme de Tencin was suddenly propelled to power as Dubois was named a Counselor of the Church, and her brother, the Abbé de Tencin, through her new position of influence, was made Grand Vicar of Sens. At this time, the liaison was openly acknowledged and Mme de Tencin settled in Dubois' home as hostess (Vaillot 79).

During the same period it is probable that Mme de Tencin also engaged in an affair with Marc-René d'Argenson, lieutenant of police, who knew everything that happened day or night in Paris (Vaillot 72). D'Argenson was Garde des Sceaux during the Regency, and was brought to Dubois' house for supper by the accommodating Fontenelle. Contrary to Vaillot, Sareil states the record is unclear as to the true relationship between d'Argenson, a forbidding figure, and Mme de Tencin (Sareil 54). Concurrently with the above, Rémond, another artisan of the

concert with the English who furnished secret information to Dubois, has been included in her list of what Vailliot calls lovers by the week or by the month (Vailliot 73).

According to Sareil, Mme de Tencin probably did not anticipate the political fortune that was to befall her "sickly little abbé" Dubois when their liaison began; and felt no qualms in pursuing other liaisons simultaneously. It was doubtless her wish that the affair remain secret, Sareil maintains. Little is known of their relationship and the exact influence exercised on Dubois by Mme de Tencin during the long periods he spent at The Hague or London, since, although both were letter writers, no correspondence between the two remains. Their attachment must have lacked genuine feelings, according to Sareil, since in each ambition took precedence over any other passion (Sareil 47-50). However, it is also quite possible that her other liaisons were employed to gain informational advantages for Dubois as it was customary in the 18th century to conduct business in this manner.

The place of the Chevalier Destouches in the vortex of Mme de Tencin's actual or "soi-disant" lovers is determinative not because of any scandal caused by their alliance (no one spoke of it), but because the son born of their union became the famous d'Alembert. At the time of his birth in 1717 and for many years afterward it remained a secret. A half a century later, in fact, the Marquise de Créquy asserted in her Mémoires that this relationship (Destouches and Mme de Tencin) was unfounded and was an invention of the encyclopédistes who wished to raise up the

famed geometer to the status of nobility by attaching him to the coattails of the Abbé Pierre de Tencin who thundered against the jansenists, the philosophers and impiety in all its forms. The "philosophes" began, the Marquise continues, by asserting that d'Alembert was the son of Madame de Tencin and her brother, but good sense and public modesty found this revolting, so the father was changed to Destouches (Créquy I:317-318).⁵¹

The consensus is, according to Sareil, that Destouches was d'Alembert's father, and this is all he is remembered for. Sareil mentions an anonymous tract affirming that Destouches wished to marry Claudine-Alexandrine, but that her irregular status would have provoked Parliament to nullify any such marriage contract. It could easily have been Claudine-Alexandrine herself who used her influence at court to have Destouches sent on a foreign mission to Santa Domingo in June, 1717 when she learned of her pregnancy, just so he would not be able to interfere with her plans to send the child to the Enfants Trouvés. In any event, d'Alembert was born on November 17, 1717, and Mme de Tencin immediately had the infant abandoned on the steps of the chapel of St. Jean-le-Rond from which fortunately he was delivered by a compassionate passer-by (Sareil 54-55).

⁵¹ Marquise de Créquy, Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy: 1710-1803, vols. 1 and 3 (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1867) 1:316-318.

Vaillot provides a lively synopsis of the chain of events.⁵² He states that for the first time in her life Mme de Tencin enjoyed the favors of a lover totally devoid of self-interest or ambition, that she was attracted simply by his charm and sincerity. According to Vaillot, she met Destouches at her sister's home in 1716 while Dubois was engaged in political matters out of the country; and moved into her new apartment when she found she was pregnant (Vaillot 80-90).

Destouches, upon his return from Santo Domingo six months later was able to locate the child and undertook to see that he was raised properly. Sareil is harshly critical of Mme de Tencin for exhibiting a disconcerting absence of heart for she had nothing further to do with her son, and even omitted him entirely from her will. Ambition had destroyed all sensibility, leaving her with the capacity only for friendship and hatred! The infant was an obstacle to her ambitions for her brother and an unseemly reminder that she was after all a prelate's sister (Sareil 55).

Many details concerning d'Alembert are missing Sareil claims, and since in the context of the times numerous families

⁵² According to Vaillot, Mme de Tencin settled down with a "femme de chambre" and a lackey in her new apartment on the Rue St. Honoré in April of 1717. Dr. Molin, a court physician to the King, was in attendance when her time came. The baby was immediately given to the lackey who was to transport it to the nearest home for found infants, and it was he who left it on the steps of Saint-Jean-le-Rond. While he hid himself in the shadows of the church, he heard women's voices, and the name of Marie de Rocou - who is listed on the baptismal certificate as "marraine" (88-89). Masson states that the act of baptism was sworn to on the night of November 17, 1717 (122).

sacrificed the happiness of legitimate offsprings, Claudine-Alexandrine's casual disposition of her illegitimate son was not unusual. A code of silence was observed with respect to the child which lasted for many years (Sareil 55). It was d'Alembert himself who took pleasure in claiming his irregular situation in the face of family indifference, and the affair thus gained notoriety later in the century. Still, Sareil accuses Mme de Tencin of accepting the most vile role, that of coldness and disdain instead of reconciling herself with her illustrious offspring (Sareil 54-57). From the more compassionate Vaillot, we learn that Destouches was in despair when he first saw his sickly son and after an assiduous search was fortunate to find Mme Rousseau, the wife of a glazier, who agreed to raise the child, and with whom he lived for most of the next 50 years. When the boy was 5, Destouches had him put in a pension; at 7, his father brought Mme de Tencin to see him but she wanted to leave immediately and never saw her son again, we are told. When d'Alembert was 9, his father died, leaving him an annual pension of 1200 livres which forced him to live modestly, even when he became famous. In a letter of October 11, 1753 to Mme du Deffand, d'Alembert makes only a brief reference to his mother: "La place que je tiens dans le monde n'est pas grande, et je travaille tous les jours à la rétrécir...le moyen d'en être heureux est de ne se trouver sur le chemin de personne....M. de Maurepas et Mme de Tencin m'ont appris à me passer de place, de fortune et de considération" (Vaillot 92). Vaillot concludes by stating that

one can never be absolutely sure Destouches was d'Alembert's father, since Mme de Tencin had so many lovers at the time of his conception. Voltaire went so far as to claim the child resembled Fontenelle! (Vaillot 90-91). It is impossible to make a firm judgment today, but it is interesting to note that neither Sareil nor Vaillot has suggested the possibility that Destouches may have abandoned Mme de Tencin when he learned of her pregnancy.

According to Sareil, many of Mme de Tencin's friendships remained just that, and he claims there is no proof that men such as the Abbé Louvois, Fontenelle, Law, LaMotte and her nephew d'Argental were ever lovers, despite satiric songs and rumors. He also discards the charge of incest stating that although Claudine-Alexandrine led a dissolute life, her brother's name was never connected specifically with any romantic involvement, or his enemies would have covered him with scorn. The Abbé must simply have regarded his sister's aberrations with mild complacency. His letters from Rome to Mme de Tencin indicate nothing beyond a lively affection, a sharing of common interests and a certain dependence upon her active and adroit mind. She in turn, Sareil continues, guided the career of the Abbé de Tencin, the only man intelligent enough to succeed, flexible enough to accept her advice and honest enough not to reject her once he had achieved his goal. Still, the brother and sister were haunted by false accusations and pursued by satiric tunesmiths both of which harmed them more than their true faults

and afforded the public a despicable image never effaced (Sareil 57-58).

The Tencins entered the political arena through the system of Law (Sareil 59). Handsome, elegant and luxury-loving, surpassing his teachers in algebra and mental arithmetic, Law had gained enormous sums in gambling. In Amsterdam he had studied banking and in Italy had talked of money to princes and financiers with exceptional verbal talent (Vaillot 95-96). Banished from England following a duel in which he killed a man and from France in 1708 for his gambling proficiency (during the visit he had greatly impressed the Duke d'Orléans and Dubois), he returned to France upon the death of Louis XIV in 1715 assured that conflict between political opponents would culminate in the Duc d'Orléans becoming Regent and that his financial script would ransom a stagnant financial situation (Vaillot 97-98). Law's strategy was based on his belief that precious metal was a cumbersome and outmoded form of exchange in an evolving mercantile economy and should be replaced with the more flexible paper currency. Commercial activity, he felt, depended on the circulation of money and the infusion of printed bank notes would energize the population and instill confidence in the French economy depleted by wars, taxes and financial mismanagement. Despite his prodigality and flamboyant temperament, he did not

seek personal aggrandizement so much as the rebuilding of the country to ensure the wealth and happiness of the people.

Law convinced the Regent, Dubois and the economic council of the validity of his concept and in 1716 was elected director of a new state bank which he helped underwrite with his own money (Vaillot 98-101). An offshoot of the bank was the India Company, commonly known as Mississippi, an artificial source of rich resources, whose stock guaranteed the bank notes.⁵³ The bank initially prospered when paper currency became the official medium of exchange, but the prospect of easy riches eventually caused a frenzy of buying and selling of lands and houses as everyone sought a share in the new venture - and uncontrollable inflation.

Vaillot states that Mme de Tencin saw immediately the advantages to be had through association with Law and sought him out through his wife to whom she introduced the Abbé, always dominated by self interest as well as religious affairs. Both Tencins liked to gamble so they flattered Mme Law and immersed themselves in the Law system in the hope of advancing their careers (Vaillot 99-100). In order for Law to subdue rival financiers and competing nobles seeking exorbitant prices, he aspired to become "Contrôleur général des finances" and secure his influence over the Regent and the government; this goal required that he become a French citizen and a Catholic. Letters

⁵³ Jacques Bainville, Histoire de France (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1924) 238-239.

of naturalization were easy to procure, but a Presbyterian, Law faced a sticky religious problem. The public could view renunciation of his faith as based solely on self-interest. Dubois had the solution: The Abbé de Tencin, brother of his mistress, already an accomplice in the secret negotiations to unite the East and West India Companies, was available to cooperate in any scheme Dubois might suggest. On September 17, 1719, at a quiet ceremony away from the clamor of Paris, at Melun, the Abbé "converted" Law, who forthwith gave a great banquet and ball for a bevy of dukes and duchesses (Sareil 62-63). Vaillot questions why the Tencins with all their intelligence did not suspect the menace of danger, but they lightly dismissed the accusation that they were being highly paid for this favor (Vaillot 115). For an acerbic but enlightening exposé of the Tencins, their characteristic greed and ambition and participation in this transaction, see Saint-Simon 506-510; and notes at 1250-1355. This censure is all the more striking for Vaillot claims Law had won over Saint-Simon (Vaillot 99).

On January 5, 1720, Law was named Contrôleur général des finances (Gaxotte 47)⁵⁴ only to fall into disgrace four months later when it was learned that the land of honey and gold in America on which Law's bank was based was comprised of swamps and shacks. When the banknotes fell in value and fortunes were lost as quickly as they had been gained, lampoonists hastily

⁵⁴ Pierre Gaxotte, Le Siècle de Louis XV (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1933).

designated the Abbé de Tencin the Primate of Louisiana (Vaillot 112, 116). The English had also helped the collapse of the system by pushing inflation, but Law had equalled their tricks by buying his own stock to make prices rise (Vaillot 117).

Before the collapse, however, as one of Law's principal consultants, the Abbé had been charged with the task of administering funds to pay off sums due by prisoners held for debt as well as grant a large amount of financial assistance to the "Hôtel de dieu," the "Enfants trouvés" and the "Hôpital général" (Vaillot 114). Although he was never accused legally, when the public condemned him for profiteering from his responsibilities, he was not able to prove his innocence. It was later thought likely that he amassed a considerable sum of money through the system inasmuch as he was always able to provide large sums of money to advance his fortune (Sareil 64-65).

The Archives of Isère indicate that Mme de Tencin for her part set up a short-term trading company on November 28, 1719 in partnership with family members and friends from Grenoble and Paris including Mme de Ferriol, the Président François de Tencin, the Président Hénault, the Comte de Hoym and even Destouches, who contributed considerable sums for a period of three months; the date of dissolution was February 2, 1720 when the system was at its highest point. Apparently Mme de Tencin and her associates had an inkling of the calamity which was about to occur and sold out for an appreciable gain. Vaillot suggests Mme de Tencin who invested most of the money in the venture must have received a

gift from Law to have had such a sum available (Vaillot 116). Although the collapse of the system may have caused some loss to Mme de Tencin (Vaillot states that d'Argenson and Dubois had warned her in advance to seek reimbursement (117), she was henceforth able to live a well-off if not luxurious existence (Sareil 65-66). She was said to have tripled her fortune and bought a carriage with three glass windows and two black horses. Mme de Ferriol did not fare as well, nor did her friend the Comte de Hoym, about whom more will be stated below.

To prevent trouble with England Dubois had hoped to constrain Spain and Austria to enter the Quadruple Alliance of 1717, and Mme de Tencin aided in his success by pressing the rights of the Regent through a little clique of friends and allies who met in her home for discussions of literature, philosophy and politics. In this way, her salon came into existence (Vaillot 102-03). Members of her clique appear to have been influential in uncovering (by leaking incriminatory evidence to Dubois) the Cellamare plot of 1718 to dethrone Philippe d'Orléans, organized by the Duke and Duchesse de Maine at the Court of Sceaux, which failed, but resulted in the incarceration in the Bastille of Mme de Staal de Launay (the subject of Chapter II of this dissertation) (Vaillot 111-112).

The Law debacle did not leave Mme de Tencin and the Abbé with a bad conscience; but their dubious conduct once again worked against them, preventing them from playing the great roles to which they believed they were destined (Sareil 78).

To complicate matters, a further incident sullied their reputations. In 1719 the Abbé had become embroiled in a lawsuit involving the priory of Sainte Marie-Madeleine de Merlou (in the Diocese of Beauvais). When the beneficiary of the Abbey died in 1717, the Abbé de Tencin claimed it was dependent upon the Abbey de Vézelay which he held in "bénéfice", and therefore was his to dispose of; he made his claim based on a law dating back to 1537. In truth he took the property in the name of his nephew, Jean-Louis, whom he claimed was a "clerc tonsuré". However, this was merely a "prêt-nom" used for diversionary tactics for at the time his nephew was not a cleric but a captain in the dragoons. In 1719, the Abbé's claim was contested by the Abbé Veyssière, secretary to the Chancellor Aguesseau, which gave him sufficient influence to win the ensuing case. During the course of the trial the Abbé de Tencin came under suspicion of the crime of "confidence", meaning, under canon law, that he was suspected of taking moneys that did not belong to him. Proper papers showing his legal possession were never produced, and the Abbé lost the case on appeal and was fined, a humiliating circumstance because the fine for the crime of "confidence" was generally inflicted in dishonest proceedings only. Tencin's enemies had one more episode in their armory of censure against "le convertisseur" of Law. A fortuitous circumstance, however, rescued Tencin from his uncomfortable situation. The Pope Clement XI died in March of 1721 and Dubois cunningly dispatched Tencin to Rome with the Cardinal de Bissy as a member of the French delegation to the

conclave to elect a new pope (Sareil 71-78). His purpose was not all altruistic, for he counted on Tencin's manipulative and persuasive powers to obtain the cardinalate for himself. The Abbé, however, was unable to forget easily the humiliation he had suffered in the Merlou matter for as late as 1723 he wrote to his sister from Rome numerous letters reaffirming his probity and honor and expressing the hope that the King would one day come to his rescue. Mme de Tencin was engaged in other matters which appear to have taken precedence because for once she showed prudence and did not encourage him to pursue the Merlou matter (Sareil 78).

The successful conclusion by Dubois of the Quadruple Alliance with England, Spain and Austria had led to his appointment as Archbishop of Cambrai in March, 1720, despite his shameful reputation and the Regent's doubts. His next ambition was to secure a bargaining position with the Pope by promising in exchange for the cardinalate that the French Church would crush the jansenists once and for all in accord with the Bulle Unigenitus of September, 1713. Tencin, with his authoritative demeanor, pliability and discretion worked diligently behind the scenes in Rome buying and selling promises to and from the new Pope Innocent XIII, who, after demurring as long as possible, acquiesced, and the Archbishop of Cambrai, who was anything but a man of religious faith, was anointed Cardinal amid much pomp and celebration on July 16, 1721, to the consternation of Tencin's enemies. The "chapeau" of Dubois was said to have cost 8 million

livres to the French Treasury (Vaillot 133). Although Tencin did not draft the actual document by which the Pope promised the cardinalate in exchange for the papacy, Tencin had used it to intimidate him and as a reward for himself awaited from Dubois a lucrative bishopric. Unofficially he held the post of "Chargé d'Affaires" through August 22, 1722 when Dubois was appointed Prime Minister. The history of these dubious negotiations in combination with the lost case of Merlou and the accusation of confidence served to seal the fate of the "Convertisseur" as a clever prelate quick to employ immoral means to succeed (Sareil 79-94). After procuring the cardinalate for Dubois, the Abbé became restive in Rome and wrote his sister that he yearned for the contentment of private life, which complaint drew the following reproach: "Je ne conçois pas qu'un homme puisse vouloir en être nul, quand il peut être quelque chose" (Vaillot 135). The determined ambition Mme de Tencin demonstrated on behalf of her brother (whose own ambition occasionally faltered) reveals a certain virility which encouraged her critics to regard her with derision. It may well be that Mme de Tencin secretly coveted for herself the goal for which she fought so fiercely to obtain for her brother. Herold claims that she pursued glory by boudoir intrigues, used puppets in roles requiring heroes, and asserted her splendid vitality by catering to sordid vice, and then counters with the rhetorical question we are asking here: What other ways were open to a male soul in a female body? "When one cannot choose one's tools, one must use those one has"

(Herold 5).⁵⁵ This appears as one of the few defensive statements by critics on Mme de Tencin's behalf.

While Dubois was maneuvering the Quadruple Alliance, Mme de Tencin was busily dispersing her talents shrewdly in Paris. Acting as Dubois' mistress in public and proffering advice, she maintained contact with Fontenelle and LaMotte, and simultaneously concentrated her political interests on the Swiss Schaub, Ambassador of England to France, and the Count de Hoym, representative of Polish Saxony to France. It is uncertain whether Mme de Tencin, at the suggestion of Dubois, sought to penetrate English secrets through Schaub or whether the latter hoped to gain greater insight into Dubois' game through her. Sareil reaffirms that it was common practice to accuse a woman of the "cliché de trahison" the moment she became involved in foreign affairs, and the simple desire for friendship was ruled out as naïve (Sareil 96).

Hoym was a wealthy cultivated "bibliophile" from Dresden, accepted into the best Parisian society during the years 1714-1717 during which time he met Mme de Tencin and her circle. He was her ardent admirer but there is apparently no consensus as to whether or not he was her lover. (Masson calls him a dissatisfied admirer.) His letters seem to denote great persistence in the face of repeated rebuffs on a sentimental level but, when away from Paris he corresponded with her in

⁵⁵ Christopher J. Herold, "The Unscrupulous Nun: Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin (1682-1749)," Love in Five Temperaments (London: H. Hamilton, 1961) 3-51. Cited at p. 14.

perfect French, a talent that was highly appreciated among European diplomats - and her elegant responses were intended to be read and admired in her salon: "De quoi vous avisez-vous, Monsieur, d'être allemand et de vivre dans votre pays? Croyez-moi, corrigez-vous et revenez à Paris. La lettre que vous m'avez fait l'honneur de m'écrire est un nouvel engagement pour vous....Pourquoi...écrire si bien? Il aurait été mille fois plus galant de me convaincre que j'avais tort quand je soutenais contre vous que les hommes l'emportaient sur les dames, même pour le style..." (Sareil 96).⁵⁶ In 1720 Hoym was named Chargé d'Affaires for Saxony and Poland under Auguste II and through gifts given by Poland toward the elevation of Dubois to Cardinal at Rome, and the friendship of Schaub and Mme de Tencin, he hoped to secure information about France and Spain that might be useful to the emperor. Dubois compensated Hoym as well for money lost during the Law debacle so that the latter was able to rent a private home in which to display his paintings and books. Mme de Tencin called him "le grand" or "le dégoûté", and Schaub "le petit", while she was known as "la femme de Schaub" in this intimate circle. It is uncertain whether or not Mme de Tencin was the mistress of either, but mutual interests held them together while Dubois was alive. Vaillot asserts that she was the mistress of both (Vaillot 103).

⁵⁶ Qtg. Pierre-Maurice Masson, Madame de Tencin (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1909) 265.

The three, Schaub, Hoym and Mme de Tencin, collaborated at Dubois' behest to prevent others from influencing the Regent (Sareil 99-100). To counteract the hostility of those who opposed him, Dubois had other teams in Paris. One member was Nocé, one of the Regent's profligate companions, appointed by Dubois to keep the Regent in line each time Philippe succumbed to Spanish influence which threatened the Foreign Minister's delicate diplomacy. Nocé was a tall, eccentric nobleman, independent, proud and satiric with a disdain for women. He profited from his acquaintance with Mme de Tencin and she apparently reciprocated (Vaillot 102) for Vaillot states that Walpole later claimed Mme de Tencin became the mistress of Nocé in order to spy on him (Vaillot 154), and then reported to Dubois all of the wicked things that Nocé said about him. Nocé was eventually exiled and when later pardoned never forgave Mme de Tencin.

Mme de Tencin and Dubois also distanced the King from his old governor, the Marshal de Villeroy. They succeeded in arranging his exile, but were unable to do the same with the King's old tutor, the Bishop of Fréjus, Fleury. Although Sareil maintains the relationship between Mme de Tencin and Dubois was one of mutual ambition only, Vaillot believes she was sincerely attached to Dubois because of his character and culture, his interest in literature and his freedom of judgement. She and Rémond, one of the king's "courtiers" responsible for introducing visiting ambassadors (and a great admirer of Mlle Delaunay, the subject of Chapter II of this dissertation), even encouraged him

to compose daily mémoires, and after his appointment as Prime Minister, with the help of Fontenelle she secured his admittance to the French Academy for the prestige it carried (Vaillot 157).

Among her other myriad activities at this time, Mme de Tencin wrote assiduously to Dubois on behalf of her brother who required money to maintain his lavish lifestyle in Rome. Although the Abbé was already rich, like all of the members of his family, he was greedy and never hesitated to demand reimbursement for his efforts. Mme de Tencin showed the same trait when she wrote to Marc-Pierre d'Argenson (the 26 year old son of the Garde des Sceaux), lieutenant of police as had been his father, and with whom she seems to have been on intimate terms, on behalf of some shady businessmen, imprisoned for passing illegal banknotes, to seek help for members of her family who were upset with new measures restricting the production of wood and ironworks in their factory in Savoy. "Je vous en prie, mon cher petit, de vouloir vous adoucir pour les sieurs Besson et Vernet; une personne pour qui je m'intéresse m'a demandé d'écrire en leur faveur...". By 1723 she was using her charms everywhere: at the Palais-Royal, Choisy, the Court at Chantilly, with the Duke de Bourbon, and at Sceaux. She went so far as to warn Dubois that a princely league, made up of the Regent's son, the Duke de Bourbon, and his beautiful mistress, Mme de Prie, were caballing against the Regent and himself (Vaillot 158).

In Rome, however, the impatient Abbé de Tencin became despondent while Dubois delayed in rewarding his efforts with a

bishopric. At the same time, by assisting the Pretender Jacques III to receive his promised pension from the King, the Abbé sought the former's vote for his own nomination to become cardinal. He spoke openly about this desire in letters to his sister, and when he expressed discouragement, she took charge and entreated Dubois in his favor. In 1723, the Archbishop of Fréjus, Fleury, appeared as a new candidate for the cardinalate, which dimmed once more the Abbé's hopes, but he astutely got on the bandwagon on Fleury's behalf. Mme de Tencin continued to press Dubois. Her letters have been lost but her name is mentioned frequently in the correspondence between Tencin and Dubois as a magnet around which each tries to soften his demands or criticisms. The Abbé ignored altogether the impropriety of the relationship between his sister and a cardinal. In fact, he quotes a jest by the Pope in a letter to the latter discussing Dubois' failing health: "...puisque votre soeur aime si fort le cardinal, je ne souffrirai plus qu'elle m'embrasse," pretending as well that the relationship between Dubois and the ex-nun was merely one of strong friendship (Sareil 110-111). Dubois was truly in failing health at this time which only drove him into a frenzy of work that aggravated his condition. Mme de Tencin continued to counsel him, for example, about the need to distance from the Regent courtiers such as the Marshal Belle-Isle and the Cardinal de Rohan. On August 1, 1723, Belle-Isle was sent to the Bastille and Rohan and others exiled. A few days later an abscess in Dubois' bladder burst while he was reviewing troops at Meudon

and he was immediately sent to bed. Mme de Tencin made numerous trips to his bedside at Meudon, and although she was the only woman in attendance she stalwartly witnessed his tirades and physical ablutions. Following an operation which worsened his condition, the Prime Minister expired on August 10 (Vaillot 161, 163). It was claimed that Mme de Tencin only felt bitterness for this irreparable failure. The Regent immediately recalled his friend, Nocé, whose first desire was to have Mme de Tencin sent to the Salpêtrière, Destouches to the Petites-Maisons and Rémond to the gallows, and so advised the Regent (Vaillot 164). None of this occurred and the Regent appointed the able and intelligent Morville to succeed Dubois in the Office of Foreign Affairs (Vaillot 165).

Four months later, on December 2, 1723, the Regent also died suddenly of apoplexy. The Duke de Bourbon, who, along with his mistress, Mme de Prie, had little sympathy for the Tencins, was named Prime Minister by the King on the advice of Fleury, the Bishop of Fréjus. Mme de Tencin, now 42, and a well established political animal, was influential in many domains. She understood the fact that the strongest man at Court was Fleury, a patient, modest man of 70 who shunned honors and as yet had little following. Mme de Tencin tried by flattery to gain him to the cause of her brother to obtain the cardinalate because of the respect with which he was regarded in Rome and by the Pope, by helping Fleury as well. With the good offices of Schaub, who was an ally of Mme de Prie, and Fontenelle's connections with

Morville, she was able to neutralize any opposition. Her diligence led her even so far as to embroider the ornaments for the clerical robe of the influential Roman Cardinal Gualterio (Sareil 117).

In 1724 Tencin wrote his sister that the Pope was disenchanted with Fleury and was not going to make him a cardinal. Mme de Tencin confided these unfavorable rumors to Fleury so that he might thwart them (Sareil 117).⁵⁷ In a letter of May to his sister, the Abbé fell into a mode of self-criticism, blaming himself for his own ineptitude and mediocrity, and told her she had placed too much hope in his meager talents. According to Sareil, Claudine-Alexandrine had the sturdier character, yet it was easier for her to operate on behalf of some one other than herself from the comfort of her Parisian salon than for him to maintain optimism in the isolation of Rome (Sareil 118). Her courage appears never to have faltered during these years, and frequently it was only her determination that lifted her brother's morale at moments of discouragement. Sareil raises the possibility that the Abbé may have purposefully employed his complaints to his sister as a means to goad her into further action (Sareil 118).

In March of 1724, Pope Innocent XIII died and Fontenelle and Mme de Tencin persuaded Morville to give 42,000 livres to Tencin so that he could participate in the conclave to

⁵⁷ Qtg. the Cardinal de Tencin to Mme de Tencin 4/1724, Hénault, 323-325.

choose a new Pope. The Prime Minister decided to give him some reward for his efforts, and at last on May 8, 1724, the Abbé was made Archbishop of Embrun (Vaillot 167). Tencin was then able to leave his post at Rome gracefully to the Cardinal de Polignac and depart. He took the oath of office on Christmas day in Paris (Sareil 125-29), where at Morville's request he was given a chair at the assembly of the clergy. He then abandoned his policy of conciliation between jansenists and constitutionalists (those who favored strict adherence to the Bulle Unigenitus), settled in a home near Claudine-Alexandrine, and began a campaign of flattery to curry Fleury's favor (Vaillot 168-69).

Mme de Tencin's life took a different turn during this period which demanded all of her coping skills. The most memorable event was occasioned by her liaison with Charles de la Fresnay, member of the Grand Conseil, whom she met in 1722 while looking for a banker to oversee the exchange of money to be sent to her brother in Rome. La Fresnay was able to arrange the rate of exchange so that the Abbé lost no money. It is quite possible that Mme de Tencin loved La Fresnay who was a tall, handsome, pleasure-loving widower, the opposite of Dubois. In truth, however, La Fresnay was a wretched banker, treating banking as a gamble. He had some strange financial dealings with Mme de Tencin and in 1724 transferred a bond to her to derail his creditors and his wife's family (his wife had died after 18 months of marriage). Shortly thereafter, he formed a short-term trading company in which he invested stock from the India Company

in collaboration with a shady speculator, the Count de Flohr. A third party, known as La Grye, was to hold the capital in the desk of an office rented for the purpose. The business turned nasty and according to his adversary in the court proceedings that ensued La Fresnay played an ugly role. After losing capital he wished to withdraw from the company; Flohr accused him of breaking their contract and demanded a note be signed enabling him to continue speculating. The crux of the sad affair was that securities and money disappeared from the office desk in September of 1724, while La Fresnay went off to visit Mme de Tencin on some of her business at Ablon, near Fontainebleau. La Grye informed the police of the theft; upon his return, La Fresnay asked La Grye to sign a paper indicating that the securities belonged to him (La Fresnay). This permitted La Fresnay to sue La Grye for repayment of the lost money. The outcome showed evidence of a swindle but no one could learn whether La Grye was conned and La Fresnay sought double recompense or whether La Fresnay was involved with rogues. Finally, the case was thrown out of court leaving La Fresnay with the expenses which made of him a ruined man forced to resort to expedients (Sareil 137-139).

Mme de Tencin felt responsible because she had invited La Fresnay to Ablon on the day of the robbery, despite his assurances that he had the numbers of the stock certificates so they were useless to the robber, and the matter was forgotten. Her worries were transmitted to her brother in April of 1724: "Il

est arrivé un malheur à La Fresnay dont je suis désespérée. On lui a volé quatre-vingts actions chez un agent de change et dix mille francs en espèces...ce qu'il y a de plus cruel pour moi, c'est que je suis la cause innocente de ce vol. J'étais à Ablon où il vint me trouver...et ce fut justement (ce jour-là) que ses actions furent volées..." (Vailliot 170; note 4). His financial situation caused her anxiety because he owed money to both her and her brother for funds sent to Rome for which they had not been reimbursed. The liaison obviously deteriorated despite La Fresnay's attempts to hold on but the final break took at least a year. As Sareil reminds us, Mme de Tencin was not the sort to let anyone burden her. There was even a rumor that La Fresnay wished to marry her, but if that were true, she would hardly have accepted. Yet, she hesitated breaking definitively because of her desire to recuperate the money he owed (Sareil 139; 144).

La Fresnay began to cause jealous scenes at Mme de Tencin's home to which she at first reacted with an air of offended dignity and then complaints of despair and bitterness. He accused her of betraying him with others, and although there is no way of knowing if his accusations had any basis in fact, as he was in an increasingly deranged state of mind, he seemed incapable of understanding that her drifting away was due in large part to his insolvency. In his eyes, she was at fault because she was fickle. In September of 1725, La Fresnay imprudently transferred to Mme de Tencin a nonguaranteed annuity contract, and when he wished to reclaim it, she insisted on being

reimbursed beforehand. Later in court, she would give an accounting of the debts and credits between them. With time, the frightening scenes compelled her to refuse further deposits, and she sought counsel. La Fresnay countered with attacks accusing Mme de Tencin of betrayal, treachery and the intent to kill him. She was forced to have her servants remain with her when he came to her home, and as was usual with her in stressful circumstances, she became ill (Sareil 137-156).

The matter approached its climax in February of 1726 when La Fresnay wrote a will, and gave it to the lawyer of the Grand Conseil for him to deposit with a notary who was to read it to his creditors upon his death, which he apparently believed was imminent. On April 6, at 11:00 A.M. La Fresnay went to Mme de Tencin's home in a state of mental distraction, found her in the company of her sister, Mme de Grolée, her nephew Jean-Louis, Knight of Malta, the Abbé Veyret, chaplain to her brother, and the Abbé Gallande of the Sorbonne. After several minutes he asked permission to write a letter in an adjoining study, and upon Claudine-Alexandrine's consent, left the room. A few moments later, a shot was heard, and the Abbé Veyret rushed into the study to find La Fresnay expiring on the sofa, a pistol near his right hand. Pandemonium broke loose as Mme de Tencin, her sister and Jean-Louis escaped to another part of the house; the Abbé Veyret locked the door of the room where La Fresnay lay pending an inquest by the Grand Conseil. The Abbé de Tencin who lived nearby was notified, and he called his lawyer who summoned

the public prosecutor of the Grand Conseil. Surgeons and commissioners arrived post haste and made prompt dispositions for an autopsy and burial. A special coffin was made for La Fresnay because of his size and by 4:00 A.M. he was buried with the utmost secrecy at the Cemetery of Saint-Roch in his parish, and the commissioners immediately sealed his apartment.

The Grand Conseil considered the death irresponsible and voluntary due to madness, and closed their inquiry. Legally, they were competent to handle such a matter for one of their own members. However, when news of La Fresnay's death spread the following day, the rival court of the Châtelet, claimed the case fell within its jurisdiction, reopened an inquiry and interrogated Mme de Tencin. The Duke de Bourbon, then Regent, allowed the investigation to continue under civil law and La Fresnay's will, when read on April 9, was found to contain the following malicious fabrication: "Sur l'avis et les menaces que m'a fait depuis longtemps Mme de Tencin de m'assassiner ou de me faire assassiner, et que j'ai même cru qu'elle exécuterait...sur ce qu'elle m'emprunta un de mes pistolets de poche que j'ai eu le courage de lui donner...et que son caractère la rend capable des plus grands crimes," following which he listed the obligations he had given to her and called her "...une scélérate qui m'a dit qu'elle ne me rendrait rien, que c'était le moindre paiement qu'elle pût recevoir pour avoir couché avec moi, etc...." (Vailliot 175). It was decidedly a document of an unbalanced mind but the Châtelet, seeking legal success rather than justice,

arrested Mme de Tencin at midnight and took her to the Châtelet where she was questioned for seven hours. The Abbé de Tencin interceded and was able to have her transferred to the Bastille which was more comfortable and allowed her the comfort of her servants. In this circumstance the public believed Mme de Tencin was innocent and there appeared to be little reason for the Duke de Bourbon to permit the imprisonment. La Fresnay's accusation passed into the public domain, however, including his claim that she had refused to repay him money and had betrayed him with, among others, Fontenelle and her nephew d'Argental, with whom she had, he said, "le même commerce qu'avec moi. Cette infâme a couché avec moi pendant quatre ans, au vu et au su de tous ses domestiques, d'une partie de ses parents et amis..." (Sareil 149, qtg. Coynart 242). La Fresnay's document ended with the request that Mme de Tencin be confined to a convent as a penance for her sins.

These half truths (there was no love lost between Mme de Tencin and her nephew d'Argental, and Fontenelle at the time was considered too old and cold to have been a valid rival) caused a scandal that mesmerized the Court and Paris alike and caused Mme de Tencin's already tainted reputation to sink to rock bottom (Sareil 150). The Châtelet ignored a letter attached to La Fresnay's will indicating his intent to commit suicide as well as a copy of a letter written by Mme de Tencin on October 2, 1725 to the banker Cottin, a friend of La Fresnay's, expressing her distress at the turn their relationship had taken: "Votre ami et

moi ne pouvons plus penser l'un pour l'autre comme nous avons pensé. Quand la tendresse a été altérée jusqu'à un certain point, elle ne peut revenir comme elle a été....(J)e dois à moi-même finir un commerce où je n'ai trouvé depuis plusieurs mois que des amertumes et des sujets de désespoir...Il m'a mis dans la nécessité de faire un effort pour m'arracher des sentiments qui faisaient le malheur de ma vie et qui en devraient faire le bonheur....(Ses) emportements m'ont exposée à ce qu'il y a de plus terrible, et qu'il a eu des soupçons de ma conduite dont mon caractère devait m'épargner la honte" (Vaillot 181). The criminal police felt sustained by the enemies of Dubois, despite Mme de Tencin's innocence, and despite the written testimony of friends such as the lawyer Barbier and the President Bouhier who confirmed her innocence. At last on June 8, 1726, a communiqué from the King's council found her innocent of murder and on July 3rd Fresnay's testament was annulled and his possessions confiscated. When released from the Bastille, Mme de Tencin, in a state of exhaustion, retreated to Passy (Vaillot 183-84).

In her defense, Sareil claims she was not a thief, and although cynical, not common, and would not have sold her favors for money since she had had other occasions through Law and Dubois to enrich herself. Nevertheless, she returned no money to La Fresnay and there was no proof that she had not shot her ex-lover, which was less a sign of innocence than of cleverness. Naturally, the "chansonniers" could not let such a scandal pass unnoticed:

"Tu diras sans doute, âme noire,
 Qu'il se tua,
 Sans examen je veux le croire,
 Que fait cela?
 Si même par ta rapacité
 Il s'extermine
 C'est toujours dans la vérité
 Ta main qui l'assassine" (Sareil 151).⁵⁸

One of Mme de Tencin's neighbors at the Bastille was Voltaire, who upon his liberation, wrote to Mme de Ferriol: "Ayez la bonté même d'assurer Mme de Tencin qu'une de mes plus grandes peines à la Bastille a été de savoir qu'elle y fût. Nous étions comme Pyrame et Thisbe. Il n'y avait qu'un mur qui nous séparât mais nous ne nous baisions point par la fente de la cloison" (Sareil 152).⁵⁹

At Passy she was surrounded by faithful friends. "La femme de salon, qui est son meilleur titre de gloire," says Sareil, "serait née des infortunes de la femme galante" (Sareil 154). Sareil's contention is contestable since it places her literary contribution in a state of limbo. Late 20th century critics prefer to find in the work of Mme de Tencin some glimmerings of social rebellion which modernizes her thinking. As a postscriptum to the La Fresnay matter, Mme de Tencin,

⁵⁸ Qtg. E. Raunié, Chansonier historique du XVIIIème siècle (Paris: Quantin, 1881) V:III-122.

⁵⁹ Quoting Voltaire's Correspondance, ed. Besterman (Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1953) II:24. See also Correspondance de Voltaire. Dec. 1704-Dec. 1738, ed. Théodore Besterman (Paris: Gallimard, 1977) vol. I:194, "Lettre à Marie-Angélique Guérin de Tencin, Comtesse d'Argental et à Charlotte-Elisabeth Aïssé, 7 mai 1726," 199-200.

however, in 1733, served a writ upon the family of La Fresnay's deceased wife, who were overlords of the Ile de Ré, demanding the payment of 95,000 livres. After six years of relentless pursuit, in 1743 she was awarded the barony of the Ile de Ré worth 66,000 livres. She was henceforth legally a baroness (Sareil 154).

In the spring of 1727 an amelioration in her health brought Mme de Tencin back to the Rue St. Honoré where she was better able to devote herself to her brother's elevation. The matter of La Fresnay had marked an absurd ending to her haste to catch up with time and enjoy a liberty denied in her childhood (Vaillot 187).

From this period on, Mme de Tencin's romantic intrigues were replaced with other interests. Although her relationship with her doctor, Astruc, seems to have developed into more than a close friendship, it is thought to have been the only liaison she maintained and it lasted until her death, causing no stigma. While old friends continued to be welcome guests at her home, the diplomats who had frequented her salon during the time of Dubois gave way to ecclesiastical partisans of the Bulle Unigenitus (Sareil 155).

The resilient Tencins, indifferent to the court of public opinion, were still able to rise above circumstances and make a bid for power (Sareil 156). At the height of the La Fresnay fiasco, in April of 1726, the King had forced the resignation of the Duke de Bourbon as Prime Minister and exiled Mme de Prie, his mistress, to Normandy. Fleury was appointed

head of the government and in September of the same year named Cardinal. His goal was to maintain peace and end all religious quarrels. Although he was modest and patient, those who refused to comply with his pressure tactics suffered the consequences. Understanding the political implications of jansenism, he undertook an action to thwart them and decided to strike against a bishop in the provinces through an ecumenical council. His victim was Jean Soanen, Bishop of Senez, who had stood up against the Bulle Unigenitus in 1717 and had spoken before Louis XIV several times. His diocese belonged to the province of Embrun and, choosing it as the site of the future council, Fleury offered the presidency to Tencin who had the requisite adroitness, energy, arrogance, courage and flexibility. In addition, Tencin was an authoritative figure who would not encroach on privileges. The only risk his appointment posed was the possible distress of the parliamentarians still shocked by his connections with Law and Dubois (Sareil 159-160). Tencin saw in this office the possibility to enhance his campaign to become a cardinal and to have past mistakes erased from memory; he had forgotten that the saintly Soanen had earlier spoken out against the system of Law. The public, on the other hand, understood the irony of the "Convertisseur" of Law placed in a position to condemn a saint (Vaillot 190-91). In 1727 Soanen published a pastoral instruction which amounted to a final profession of faith and included numerous reasons for opposition to the Bulle Unigenitus and the establishment of councils requiring bishops to

submit to the Bulle or be deposed. This instruction was the point of departure for the Council of Embrun which opened on August 16, 1727. Inasmuch as Soanen's stand opposed the authority of Pope Benôit XIII to cleanse the church, and he had no powerful family ties, he was an easy target for Cardinal de Fleury's actions against the jansenists (Sareil 158-60).

The atmosphere of the council was one of religious conviction and the 18th century spirit of questioning, a mix of hypocrisy and gullibility with the verdict decided in advance (Sareil 165). Soanen was 80 years old at the time and friends told him not to attend the conference, but he was determined and set forth his mission by issuing a statement that the council was not legally competent to judge matters concerning the Bulle which was of interest to the whole church. He wrote to the King, arguing that the bishops were not qualified to judge but never received an answer. During the opening discourse Tencin went on the attack and the discriminatory measures against Soanen began. Bishops wouldn't take communion with him; his messenger was arrested, his defense memoranda confiscated and the pastoral instruction condemned as erroneous and seditious. In response, Soanen stood up in court and condemned the judges and accused Tencin of simony in the old Merlou matter and claimed the civil law could not judge canonical matters. Tencin refuted the accusation and the court disregarded Soanen's complaints. The latter had become a martyr and on September 19, 1727, was relieved of his episcopal functions and by a "lettre de cachet"

from the King on October 2 was banished to the distant Abbaye de Chaise Dieu in Auvergne, a somber and solitary location (Vaillot 193-200). Although the King and Pope ratified the findings of the council, and deemed it a success, the jansenists in France reproached Tencin for his past misdemeanors and his ambition to become cardinal (Sareil 173). And while Fleury desired to wipe out the jansenist heresy, in light of the passionate discourse that ensued after the Council of Embrun, he was reluctant to convene another (Sareil 173-176). Fifty lawyers wrote a memo responding to the Council of Embrun and 12 bishops wrote to the King. The King replied with several letters but took no action and Fleury exiled the bishops to their dioceses. By this time jansenism appeared as an opposing political party, but its position was weakening. A weekly newspaper, "Les Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques", revealed the intense political activity of Mme de Tencin during the convocation of the council in favor of the constitutionalists and included all the details of the proceedings as they took place (Vaillot 205). Bishops and archbishops were accused of going to her home to conspire. Fleury became disturbed and had the engravers and authors of the paper jailed in the Bastille (Vaillot 206).

Concerned as well over the public outcry following the conclusion of the Council of Embrun, Fleury began to view the Abbé de Tencin with evermore disfavor. In order to become cardinal, Tencin had to have the backing of the King, Fleury, the Pope and the assurance of an appointment by someone with the

privilege to name a cardinal when a vacancy occurred. Jacques III, the Catholic Stuart Pretender who was under the Pope's protection in Rome, and was a friend of the Abbé's, had this privilege. Tencin had received the King's backing in 1728, but because of his many enemies, including the Cardinal Polignac, currently Ambassador to Rome, and Chauvelin, the French Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Fleury vacillated in his final endorsement. Persistent rumors, copies of secret correspondence mailed anonymously to intermediaries, tales of cash payments and parliamentary quarrels over the Bulle Unigenitus, personal animosities and favoritism among the courtiers, caused Tencin to walk a thorny path. By the middle of 1729 two other cardinals were appointed to vacancies ahead of him, and Fleury referred to Tencin as an "ambitieux prélat" in a letter to Polignac in July 1729, who applied "les moyens condamnables" to procure the nomination of Jacques III, such as printing a letter he had received from Fleury chastising him for imprudently agitating the jansenists, and thereupon sending the letter to the Pope, "une témérité très répréhensible" (Sareil 198-200).

Fleury's wrath was not confined to the Abbé alone. The letter to Polignac contained a diatribe against Mme de Tencin as well: "Il a une soeur religieuse défroquée qui n'est pas moins décriée que lui, et qui est la plus intrigante créature du monde; elle tient des assemblées à Paris très illicites...il n'y a rien dont elle ne se mêle....Elle a été l'espionne du feu roi d'Angleterre Georges....mais j'ai résisté à toutes les

sollicitations de la renvoyer, quoique je suis informé de ses intrigues" (Sareil, 199-200; Vailliot 210).⁶⁰ Of course, it frequently suited Fleury to pretend to believe false facts. A subsequent letter from Fleury incriminated Mme de Tencin to an even greater degree and provides clear evidence of just what she was as an ambitious woman, in the first half of 18th century France, with no clear political recourse, was up against. "... (S) a maison est ouverte à beaucoup d'étrangers, à des évêques, à des prêtres... et à des gens de toutes sortes d'espèces.... Elle a persuadé à des sots que si son frère était une fois cardinal, il serait sûrement premier ministre, après ma mort pourtant.... Quoiqu'une vision aussi insensée ne puisse être crue que de quelque Iroquois nouvellement débarqué d'Amérique, elle ne laisse pas de s'en servir pour intimider les uns ou encourager les autres à s'attacher à son frère ou à elle...." (Sareil 204-205).⁶¹ Fleury wanted to reduce Mme de Tencin to silence for his own political popularity and had her home spied on day and night. The Abbé de St. Pierre, LaMotte, Fontenelle, the Président Tencin, etc. continued their daily visits while at night the police agents saw disguised bishops enter her house. Fleury was particularly angry because the rumors emanating from her salon concerned the Abbé's aspiration to succeed him (Vailliot 212).

⁶⁰ Sareil qtg. Fleury to Polignac, 27/7/1729, Aff. Et. Rome, 702, fo. 70. Vailliot cites Sareil with this letter emanating from Windsor Lib. S.P. 130.

⁶¹ Qtg. Lettre Inédite, 13/10/1729, Aff. Et. Rome, 702, fo. 185.

Tencin was obliged to rescind his candidacy and accept defeat. When the Pope died and Clement XII was elected in 1730 he avoided any steps to assist the constitutionalists so that his religious policy might be deemed sincere and that he might not compromise his position even further (Vaillot 207-212).

In Paris, Mme de Tencin ignored the surveillance exercised over her and in order to stir up zeal for her brother's anti-jansenist stance, continued to hold clandestine meetings for the prelates who opposed new measures of appeasement inaugurated by Fleury (Sareil 208).

On June 1, 1730, however, and in order to avoid the shock of a "lettre de cachet", the Lieutenant of Police Hérault delivered to Mme de Tencin an order received from Maurepas on behalf of Fleury: "Le roi, n'ayant pas lieu d'être content de quelques liaisons qu'entretient Mme de Tencin, S.M. m'ordonne de vous écrire de l'avertir qu'elle ferait sagement de se retirer d'elle-même et sans éclat de Paris, et de s'en éloigner incessamment, au moins de quinze à vingt lieues et plus si elle le juge à propos..." (Vaillot 213). Like others of an ardent nature, says Sareil, guided only by emotion, Mme de Tencin became ill and wrote to Fleury requesting his permission to recover at Mme de Ferriol's home at Ablon (Sareil 208-209): "Quelque tort, Monseigneur, que pût faire à ma santé, à mes affaires, à ma réputation, l'ordre reçu de votre part, ce n'était pas ce qui me touchait le plus: pénétrée de vos bontés pour moi, ma douleur la plus vive était de me voir détruite dans l'esprit de V.M., de mon

bienfaiteur; de me sentir frappée d'un si rude coup, par la même main dont j'avais reçu tant de grâces et qui me doit être si cher" (Vaillot 214). She spared no subtleties to exculpate herself.

Fleury accepted her offer, providing she avoided contact with all bishops, and assured her that the matter would remain secret if she would follow his orders. Fleury's reply was unbelievably polite, if one keeps in mind his scathing letter to Polignac about Mme de Tencin. According to Sareil, he nourished an affinity towards the Tencins as people of value despite his criticism of their tactless and troublesome activity (Sareil 209). In a letter of thanks to Fleury on June 10, Mme de Tencin once again tried to justify herself by assuring him that although she had received many of the most distinguished people of Paris at her home (in her sick bed, according to Vaillot 215), she would furnish him a list so that he could strike off those that were offensive to him. The bishops were friends of her brother, she said, who came to pay their respects. She had great affection for her brother, and regretted he had incurred the disfavor of Fleury for whom he had the greatest esteem. Under these circumstances she would not hesitate to abide by the conditions demanded for her sojourn at Ablon (Sareil 209).⁶²

In his subsequent reply Fleury stated that he did not require a list but merely the prudence due to her sex: "Il ne

⁶² Qtg. Mme de Tencin to Fleury 10/6/1730, Mémoires et Documents, France, 1267. fos. 8-13.

suffit point d'avoir de l'esprit et d'être de bonne compagnie, et la prudence demande qu'on ne se mêle, et surtout une personne de votre sexe, que des choses qui sont de sa sphère" (Vaillot 215). In Vaillot's opinion Fleury saw through her elegant letter of submission. If Fleury had been alive today, he might be accused of sexual harassment. However, in the 18th century an elegant letter was Mme de Tencin's only defense against governmental authority and sexism for which no legal recourse was available to her; but Fleury ended his reply by discreetly reminding her that while he wished no harm to her brother, any future demand for favors should come through ministerial channels (Sareil 210). Mme de Tencin then had an attack of "mal de foie". As was the case way back at Montfleury when her father refused her request to leave the convent; or apparently whenever her will was overruled by a male authority figure, whether family member, prince, lover, rogue or ruler, Mme de Tencin retreated to her sick bed. Because of her illness her family appealed to the Government which relented and, in October, Maurepas wrote to the lieutenant of police to notify Mme de Tencin that she could return to Paris. Wishing to profit from Fleury's benevolence, she immediately wrote to him and asked him to establish a rule of conduct for her so that she avoid displeasing him in the future. At this point an impatient Fleury reminded her that it was enough for her to remain within the bounds imposed by her sex, and Mme de Tencin ceased a correspondence that no longer had any reason for being (Sareil 210). Nonetheless, this warning was serious

enough to prevent her from engaging further in political or religious matters and she began to consecrate her energy on literature which she had heretofore cultivated only as an amateur (Sareil 210). A period of obscurity followed for both the Tencins as the Abbé went into semi-retirement in his diocese and Claudine-Alexandrine into her writing chamber (Sareil 213).

When the King of Poland died in 1733, France entered a war to establish Louis XV's father-in-law, Stanislas Leczinski, on the throne; at the end of hostilities in 1736, Stanislas was compensated not with the throne, but with the Duchy of Lorraine which was to revert to France at his death. The period of religious calm that prevailed during the war prompted the Abbé de Tencin to initiate a reconciliation with Fleury; and through the offices of an unknown third party and because of Fleury's progressive disenchantment with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chauvelin, the negotiations succeeded, and in 1736 Fleury invited Tencin to Paris. Tencin had begun to doubt himself as evidenced by four letters to Mme de Tencin in which he complained of his lack of talent. In her replies, Mme de Tencin merely grumbled and begged him to return (Sareil 249-250). By the end of the year, Fleury had renewed his friendly relations with Mme de Tencin who felt confident enough to send him a New Year's card and he inquired of the archbishop about her health (Sareil 250).

In February of 1736, Chauvelin was exiled and the Abbé was once more granted printing rights for his diatribes against the jansenists, his major preoccupation. Again he put his sights

on the cardinalate and in cooperation with Mme de Tencin began negotiations with Jacques III and the Pope seeking a nomination. He also secretly harbored thoughts of securing the aging Fleury's job should the cardinal die soon as his age suggested. Both the Abbé and Mme de Tencin therefore surrounded Fleury with all matter of attention and concern. A letter of March, 1738 from Mme de Tencin to the Cardinal offers a remedy for an illness: although "Votre Eminence va me traiter de folle enfant, au moins d'indiscreète," she suggests two glasses of "eau de rhubarbe et ensuite le chocolat avec du pain," for "une débilité" of the stomach (Sareil, 256-257).⁶³

Sareil states that in his opinion the need for movement and intellectual activity motivated the Tencins more than ambition even and propelled them toward machiavellian solutions in their path toward power. They ultimately failed in their pursuits through an excess of subtlety before their position was assured (Sareil 264-265). With little sense of delicacy Mme de Tencin through the anonymity of a third party, offered the representative at Versailles of Jacques III, O'Bryen, money to obtain the cardinal's hat, supposedly as recompense for future service. The shocked Jacques III refused to allow O'Bryen to accept (Sareil 258). Others were promoted before the Abbé and it was not until Fleury's grave illness in February of 1738, that, despite hesitations due to his knowledge that Tencin hoped to

⁶³ Qtg. 22/3/1738 Alfred Morrison, Catalogue of autographic letters (London: Strangeways, 1883-1894) VI:241.

succeed him, and the King's antipathy toward the prelate, he began to favor Tencin's promotion (Sareil 261). Through patience, Fleury's hatred of Chauvelin and the jansenists, and flattery, Tencin at last received his cardinal's hat from the King on March 3, 1739. Happily for his state of mind, and perhaps to avoid ruffling the feathers of his enemies, the new cardinal was dispatched to Rome forthwith to negotiate with the Pope the privilege for Stanislas over the churches of Lorraine where his arrival was heralded in July, 1739. The public accepted tranquilly his promotion even if many at Court feared him as a replacement for Fleury (Sareil 271). Clement XII died in February of 1740 and Tencin's tenure in Rome coincided with the conclave for the election of his old friend Lambertini as the new pope, Benoît XIV. Henceforth the two worked in cooperation to avoid friction between the Ecclesiastical Courts of Rome and Paris (Sareil 290). On September 18 of the same year, Fleury rewarded Tencin with a magnificent gift, the Archbishopric of Lyon, one of the richest dioceses (Sareil 288-289).

The Emperor of Austria, Charles VI, died without a male heir in 1740 and the greed of all who wished to profit from the weakness of Marie-Thérèse, the young Austrian princess, incited the War of the Austrian Succession. Frederick II of Prussia, the most ambitious monarch, started things off by invading Silesia. The Cardinal de Fleury, who was almost 90, tried to resist war; he mistrusted Frederick II as an ally since he was both Protestant and a free thinker. The Pope remained neutral (Sareil

291-292). Tencin, upon completing his work in Rome and wishing to avoid any initiative that could be misconstrued as ambition, asked for a three month leave to visit his new diocese in Lyon.

In the interim, Mme de Tencin, while lingering in the shadows, plotted at Paris to strengthen her brother's bonds with the Ministry. Concerned with the question of who, Cardinal de Fleury or the favorites, Mme de Mailly, and her sister Mme de Vintimille, would have more influence with the King, she intrigued to be on the winning side while not alienating the other (Sareil 295). By 1741, through her untiring efforts the Cardinal de Tencin had sufficient partisans who paved the way for his entry into the ministry (Sareil 297).

During this period the Cardinal de Fleury sought to have the Archduke of Bavaria elevated to Emperor of Germany thus removing from the Hapsbourgs their ancient title. Austria began to organize a defense. French troops took Prague and the Archduke of Bavaria was crowned Emperor but the situation was unstable. Prussia, out of the picture, remained inactive. When Austria attacked France, the French troops retreated (Sareil 297-298). In November 1741, Voltaire and Mme de Châtelet paid a visit to Mme de Tencin and a friendship developed between the two women. It may be that they were drawn together by common intellectual interests. While Mme de Tencin and Voltaire met several times without establishing any real lasting bonds, yet Voltaire sent her a polite note: "Je ne suis de l'avis de Mme de Châtelet sur les monades, mais j'en suis entièrement sur tout ce qu'elle pense

et qu'elle dit de vous. L'amitié que vous avez l'une pour l'autre sera le passeport de ma lettre, et fera recevoir avec bonté mes hommages dans la foule brillante de ceux qui vous sont adressées" (Sareil 298, n. 14).⁶⁴

Benoît XIV, who took pride in his knowledge of literature, also sought the approval of the guests at Mme de Tencin's salon by sending her in January of 1741 his portrait to put on display; they entered into a correspondence which she in turn relayed to the Cardinal de Fleury in order to avoid the accusation of corresponding with a foreign sovereign without permission (and to show the Cardinal what good terms her family maintained with the Pope): "...mon coeur rend à Votre Sainteté un hommage...celui de ma tendresse, de ma soumission et de mon zèle, sentiments dans lesquels je ne la cède pas même à mon frère....Avant que votre nom pût être mis au nombre de ceux qui ont illustré la tiare, vous teniez le premier rang parmi les savants les plus illustres; votre affabilité, Saint-Père, votre bonté, votre fidélité dans l'amitié, qui vous a fait de tendres amis de ceux qui sont devenus vos enfants, mes vœux, plaçaient depuis longtemps Votre Sainteté sur le trône de Saint-Pierre. J'étais votre fille spirituelle avant que vous fussiez le père

⁶⁴ Qtg. 4/1/1742 Voltaire's Corresp. XI:1. See also Voltaire, #1582, "A Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin. 4 avril 1742." Correspondance. Jan. 1739-Dec. 1748, vol. II, ed. Théodore Besterman (Paris: Gallimard, 1977) 609-610.

commun des fidèles..." (Sareil 299, n. 16).⁶⁵ The interest of this letter lies in the marks of respect it employs for traditional religious values, surprising today when one reflects on the alleged absence of moral considerations in Mme de Tencin's personal life. Yet religion meant orthodox comportement in the early 18th century, rather than ethical conduct and this letter was apparently written in the spirit of the times.

In July 1742, despite illness, Mme de Tencin visited her brother the Cardinal in Lyon, and took leave of the Cardinal de Fleury by letter. It had been twenty years since she had been to Versailles and the Prime Minister did not receive women at his home at Issy (Sareil 304). Shortly after her visit, Fleury sent an insinuating letter to the Cardinal de Tencin in which, in unctuous terms, he asked whether the Cardinal might be interested in becoming the P.M.'s successor, although the King's approval would first have to be obtained. Suspicious of the sincerity of Fleury's letter, Tencin declined, pretexting his lack of talent for diplomatic matters. Fleury's reply indicated the matter had been placed in abeyance but requested the utmost secrecy (Sareil 306-307). In August 1742, the Cardinal de Fleury advised Tencin that he had been chosen as a member of the Council of State along with the Comte d'Argenson. Although Tencin was disappointed at not being the sole recipient of the position, he went to Paris in

⁶⁵ Qtg. Masson, 277, "Lettre de Mme de Tencin au pape pour le remercier de son portrait qu'il lui avait envoyé," of January 1742, Mélanges historiques, satiriques et anecdotiques de Boisjournain, 3 vols. in-8 (Paris: Chèvre 1807) 2:45-6.

September, at his sister's urging (Masson 93), determined to remain inconspicuous, acclimate himself to the diplomatic milieu and please Fleury. As Cardinal he had the privilege over his colleagues of sitting on the right hand of the King (Sareil 308). Mme de Tencin sent him as a counselor the young Mably (noteworthy for his publication of Parallèle des romains et des français) from her salon (Sareil 311). The court gossip held Tencin as the likely successor to Fleury, and although Mme de Tencin did not appear at court it was assumed that she guided his conduct. Of course he never did become Prime Minister which left some unanswered questions: Was her advice always judicious? Was the dogmatic Mably the best person to prepare the Cardinal to confront other members of the Council? Tencin did everything possible to be accepted at Court by the Cardinal de Fleury and to overcome the hostility of the long-time inhabitants. For his part Fleury attended meetings of the Council less and less (Sareil 312).

The complicated situation of the King's mistresses in 1742 afforded Mme de Tencin a fresh opportunity to express her talent for intrigue. The King fell in love with the imperious and pretty Mme de la Tournelle, a widow and the youngest of the five Nesle sisters with all of whom he had attachments at one time or another. Mme de la Tournelle insisted that Mme de Mailly, her sister and predecessor, be deposed as primary mistress before she would receive the King. (Another sister, Mme de Vintimille had shared the King with Mme de Mailly, but died in

childbirth.) In order to secure her position as the official favorite, Mme de la Tournelle had to break the power of her fiercest enemy, Maurepas, the Secretary of State, who spied on her and wanted her removed to a convent. To assist her she enlisted the aid of her uncle, Louis François Armand du Plessis, the Marshal Duke de Richelieu (1696-1788), grand nephew of the great Cardinal, and the model libertine of the 18th century. With the Duke's help, she hoped to push the phlegmatic King toward the great destiny she had in mind for him.

Mme de Tencin immediately saw a new opportunity to press her brother's case. Richelieu was the personage the most representative of his century, the gifted roué, and irreparably inconstant. He was intelligent, had artistic tastes and was a member of the French Academy; he also had military prowess and political ambitions (Sareil 314). It is probable that he had been one of Mme de Tencin's lovers despite the difference in their ages, as she had a knack for retaining former lovers as friends. She and the Duc de Richelieu shared common interests; both had had many affairs, were ambitious, scheming and impelled to intervene in diverse areas to make their power felt (Sareil 315). Since Richelieu had the confidence of his niece, the new favorite, he was in a position to overcome the King's distaste for the Tencins. If this occurred, it was possible the King might accept the dying Fleury's suggestion and appoint the Cardinal de Tencin Prime Minister (Sareil 316). If the Cardinal de Tencin were Prime Minister, Richelieu would in turn become a great

military commander. Mme de Tencin hardly knew Mme de Tournelle but as she also considered Maurepas the principal obstacle to her brother's fortune, she took her part, and through Richelieu hoped to gain her confidence and defeat Maurepas.

Her program of action was laid out in a series of letters to Richelieu which paint in minute detail a portrait of the affairs at court, interspersed with advice: Maurepas was going to Issy to discuss with Fleury the return of the King's previous mistress, Mme de Mailly; Richelieu was warned to avoid quarreling with Fleury who blamed him for upsetting the hierarchy of the King's seraglio; just as Mme de la Tournelle appeared to be solidly in place, enemies sought to put her at odds with Richelieu; Richelieu, who was away with the army, should therefore return as quickly as possible and reconcile with Fleury (Sareil 312-315).

Mme de la Tournelle, meanwhile, sought to assure her position with the King by being officially appointed a duchess with a home, clothes, servants and gambling money provided by the King (Sareil 317). Lamponists immediately began to circulate in Paris satiric verses striking the King and the five Nesle sisters with the same accusation of incest as had been levelled against the Tencins (Sareil 316). Mme de Tencin at the same time began corresponding with Mme de la Tournelle and suggested to her that she arrange a reunion of the Council of State at Choisy so that the King might show Cardinal Tencin his gardens and provide him the opportunity to chat with the monarch. Mme de la Tournelle

initially found Mme de Tencin's ways obtrusive and did not respond to her show of friendship (Sareil 318).

A multitude of tasks suited Mme de Tencin who was occupied simultaneously with her literary activities, one of which was the job of securing a chair in the French Academy for Marivaux. His greatest competitor was Voltaire and as the latter had many enemies, Mme de Tencin attempted to prevent his protectors from acting on his behalf. She refused a visit from him and worried about his growing intimacy with Fleury and Frederick II, and his old friendship with the Duke de Richelieu (Sareil 320). By subtle persuasion she began an attack on Voltaire in her letters to Richelieu; saying that her bishops (serviteurs de Dieu) "m'ont dit que je ne pouvais trop vous représenter qu'il ne convenait pas à un homme comme vous de protéger un athée; que vous aviez la réputation de parler toujours de la religion comme il convenait, et que si vous faisiez recevoir Voltaire à l'Académie, on dirait qu'il vous a perverti" (Sareil 321-322; n. 32).⁶⁶ She also warned the Duke that the adversaries of Voltaire would blame the King more than Mme de la Tournelle and he would be faced with the criticisms of the faithful. She wanted Richelieu to remain neutral, thus depriving Voltaire of his only true support. In December 1742,

⁶⁶ Mme de Tencin to Richelieu, 10/12/1742, Corres. du cardinal de Tencin, Ministre d'état, et de Madame de Tencin, sa soeur, avec le duc de Richelieu (Paris: 1790). Or, Correspondance des Tencin avec Richelieu, 27. Bibl. Victor Cousin Fonds Richelieu 64, Correspondance du cardinal de Tencin, Ministre d'état et de Madame de Tencin, sa soeur avec le duc de Richelieu (Paris: 1790).

she advised him that Marivaux had been unanimously elected (Sareil 321).

When the Cardinal de Fleury became ill at the end of 1742, the Council of Ministers assembled at Cardinal de Tencin's home, and Mme de Tencin wrote to Richelieu her fear that Maurepas had in mind swaying the King against her brother because of his devouring ambition; in addition, she was disturbed by the obvious coldness of the King toward the latter (Sareil 323). In January 1743, d'Argenson was appointed Secretary of War which was a defeat for Tencin who had been thought to be on the brink of great fortune. Scheming factions surrounded Fleury and when he died at the end of the month, the King unexpectedly announced that he would govern alone with the assistance of the Secretaries of State and the Council of Ministers (Sareil 323). The King still did not like Tencin and was weary of Mme de Tencin's continual intrigues, claiming she gave him goose bumps (Sareil 325; n. 51).⁶⁷

Both the Tencins had paid the price for old mistakes and their reputations continued to suffer: The annulation of Claudine's vows, the Merlou matter, Law, La Fresnay, the Council of Embrun, the money spent to become a cardinal - all of this helped to prevent the Cardinal from attaining his most cherished goal (Sareil, 325). He remained at Versailles as a minister without portfolio, and with no definite function, an equivocal

⁶⁷ 12/2/1750. Marquis René d'Argenson, Journal et Mémoires, ed. E.J.B. Rathery (Paris: Jules Vve Renouard, 1859) VI:142.

situation for one of his ambition. Louis XV ignored him almost totally, and responded to his memoranda only in writing (Sareil 333). Mme de Tencin as well suffered from her brother's plight.

In 1743 the War of Austrian Succession continued with rivalry among the generals and undisciplined troops. To the Secretaries of State, Maurepas, Orry and Amelot, the war was a burden while d'Argenson wished it to continue. Tencin and Richelieu likewise favored the fighting as a political policy for prestige, and criticized the decisions of the ministers and the indecision of Louis XV. Mme de Tencin and her political aids did what little they could to fulfill her hope of seeing the ministry of Maurepas overturned (Sareil 334). The dilatory French war policy as a whole disgusted her for its lack of foresight. Sareil notes that Court documents of the period show a disconcerting egotism among all of the Ministers; they chose victory or defeat according to which result would advance a career. Dissatisfied, the Cardinal de Tencin wanted to return to Lyon to be more useful but feared the unhappiness his departure would cause his sister (Sareil 334-336).

While Mme de Genlis found Mme de Tencin's letters to Richelieu "ennuyeuses" and claimed they "font peu d'honneur à son caractère" because they lacked "absolument ce tact de convenance," expressive of good manners (Genlis De l'Influence des femmes 277-278), Masson claimed that the letters reveal the image of the "femme frémissante" she truly was (Masson 220). Both Sareil and Genlis, who agree in principle, are less generous than

Masson, contending that the letters portray Mme de Tencin as the accomplished "intrigante" for which history has remembered her. In light of this negative perception, in Mme de Tencin's defense, it is worth reiterating Parker's contention that any woman who acquired political power in the 18th century was dubbed "intrigante" as there was no parallel for the social and literary gains women made (Parker 67). Although Sartori, another modern, aligns herself with Genlis and Sareil by her claim that the Richelieu letters reveal a total absence of scruple, and an incapacity for objective observation, she does nonetheless credit Mme de Tencin with displaying in them keen psychological insight (Sartori 476). My inclination is to side with Masson whose more empathetic commentary implies that Mme de Tencin had a right to play a personal and vital role in public affairs, a fact commonly accepted in our late 20th century. However, her vision of society was perverted at the outset by the restrictive circumstances of her birth as the third daughter of five children born to an affluent family whose primary concern was the division of inheritance among sons. Too, the times in which she lived worked to her disadvantage. First, the limitations of the narrow and faulty conventual education she received at Montfleury, and her parents' insistence that she submit to their will and take her vows against her own personal desires, announced a distorted view of the world, and second, the hypocritical social ambiance which frustrated the attainment by young women of autonomous selfhood suffocated any potential for growth. The very society which

thwarted natural growth of a young girl then became the harshest critic of what its system produced. In its eyes the renunciation of religious vows by Mme de Tencin was a heretical act. As a consequence, any behavior that had overtones of the extraordinary was ever afterward maliciously converted to a "cause célèbre," making it impossible for Mme de Tencin to rehabilitate herself. The role of sister to a prelate only exacerbated her situation. The anathema attached by society to women who overstepped traditional bounds is metaphorically illustrated by the Cardinal de Fleury's order of 1730 banishing Mme de Tencin from Paris for political interference unsuitable to her sex.

There is a general agreement that the letters of Mme de Tencin to Richelieu were colorful and reveal some of her versatility. They indicate that in the real world of the court she employed the same manipulative strategy that she had learned as a child. Sareil says she seemed to come alive in the environment of subterranean machinations. For example, to preserve secrecy, she applied obscure coded references to Court personages and events, many of which are undecipherable today, and devised unusual schemes to destroy the ministers whom she detested, i.e. she wrote anonymous letters to Mme de la Tournelle, one of which she asked Richelieu to have mailed from Frankfurt so as to appear to have been written by a German courtier to a representative of a prince in France in the hope that it would be opened by members of the post in order that Louis XV would be informed about what foreigners thought of his

ministers. Her "machiavelism" became so ingrained it prevented her from apprehending how unlikely it would be that anyone would think of giving an important job to someone who had such a quixotic sister (Sareil 336-337). Even Mme de la Tournelle was critical of her in a letter to Richelieu: "Le cardinal de Tencin...a une soeur qui lui fait grand tort. Elle ne se cache pas assez, malgré tout son esprit, pour ne pas montrer l'envie qu'elle a d'être quelque chose. Elle intrigue et cabale partout....elle ambitionne les affaires étrangères pour lui, et Dieu sait comme elle se mêlerait de tout, s'il était placé là!" (Sareil 336-337; note 53).⁶⁸

When Richelieu hinted that the faults of the King were due to a poor education and the harmful influence of Fleury but that his nature was fundamentally good and he was capable of moving in the right direction with the help of Mme de la Tournelle and himself, Mme de Tencin displayed more perception concerning the King's psychology: "Je suis charmée que vous soyez d'avis, mon cher duc, que le roi ouvrira les yeux mais que sera trop tard...s'il les ouvre jamais, qu'il n'en fera ni plus ni moins. Il faudrait une détermination et il n'en aura dans aucun temps" (Sareil 337-338, n. 54).⁶⁹

Gradually, Mme de la Tournelle consolidated her position and put her natural indolence and secretiveness to good

⁶⁸ Qtg. 3/11/1743, L.F. Faur, Vie privée du maréchal de Richelieu (Paris: 1790) III:208.

⁶⁹ 30/9/1743, Faur, III:300.

use. Mme de Tencin wrote Richelieu that La Tournelle was too proud to solicit the King for favors; however her patience paid off for she became the official favorite and was consecrated Duchesse de Châteauroux. The morose and impassive King richly endowed her and she was in a position to have Richelieu made "Gentilhomme de la Chambre du Roi," a post which put him in daily contact with the King to whom he became a trustworthy link. Mme de Tencin, however, with her usual perspicacity, sensed that the King was leaning toward devotion; should that happen, she told Richelieu, the Duchesse de Châteauroux would be thrown into the fire (Sareil 339). Toward the end of 1743 Richelieu recommended to Mme de Châteauroux that she encourage the King to lead his troops in the next campaign. Mme de Tencin had already explained to the Duke how politically advantageous this move would be: "Ce n'est pas qu'entre nous il soit en état de commander une compagnie de grénadiers: mais sa présence fera beaucoup; le peuple aime son roi par habitude...les troupes feront mieux leur devoir..." (Sareil 340; n. 66).⁷⁰

By February of 1744, with an unexpected show of energy, Mme de Châteauroux announced to Richelieu that the King would participate in the next campaign against Austria. She now had a goal: serve the glory of the King, and make him an image of Louix XIV. At the same time, the foreign ministers, who hoped to gain Prussia's entry into the war, informally called upon Voltaire, Frederick II's friend, with the intent to have him

⁷⁰ 24/7/1743, Faur, III:290.

unofficially visit the monarch to give him to understand that France would be interested in an alliance (Sareil 351-352). In order to maintain secrecy, Voltaire, pretending to be persecuted by the Comte de Mirepoix, set off for Prussia. Mme de Châtelet confided the mission to Mme de Tencin who repeated it to Richelieu, begging him not to betray her confidence. It was Mme de Tencin's hope that the mission would not succeed, not because of any hatred for Voltaire or hostility toward an alliance with Prussia which might help her brother and the war party, but for fear of the glory that might flow to the Secretaries of State Maurepas and Amelot to the disadvantage of the Cardinal de Tencin. She hinted to Mme de Châtelet that Voltaire might better detach himself from the Secretaries of State and consult Richelieu, who first had had the idea of the mission, or else address himself directly to the king, or even to herself. This effort of manipulation, says Sareil, is indicative of the violence of Mme de Tencin's political passion (Sareil 353).

Mme de Châtelet, in an about-face, remained insensible to the solicitations of Mme de Tencin and wrote Voltaire to abandon Richelieu, his old friend, and confide in Maurepas. Several days later, despondent at receiving no word from Voltaire for too long a time, a frantic Mme de Châtelet advised Mme de Tencin she was going to Brussels to meet him. "... (elle est) plus perdue d'amour que tous les romans ensemble," Mme de Tencin informed Richelieu fearful that Mme de Châtelet would push her lover into the coterie of the Secretaries of State. "La du

Châtelet est si folle qu'il n'y a pas moyen de commercer avec elle...elle m'a tenu en plusieurs occasions des discours qui me font juger que Voltaire et elle se sont livrés au Maurepas" (Sareil 354; 355, n. 12).⁷¹

In March 1744 Louis XV declared war on England, in the hope of impressing upon Frederick the seriousness of France's intent to place the Pretender Jacques III on the English throne. Mme de Châteauroux and Richelieu once again advised Mme de Tencin that Louis would lead his army in the next campaign. The Duchess was at the height of her power, yet it was learned that the King had "cast an eye" on her younger sister, Mme de Flavacourt (Sareil 357). This news disturbed Mme de Tencin for Mme de Flavacourt had turned to the Queen as her confidante in the matter; Mme de Tencin learned also that Mme de Flavacourt wrote daily to the King, addressing her letters to the valet de chambre, which led her to complain to Richelieu that she was unable to secure copies of the correspondence (Sareil 361). All of this decided Mme de Châteauroux on the necessity of accompanying the King rather than remaining absent from him for five months.

As the rivalries flourished at Court, Mme de Tencin's correspondence with Richelieu became more frequent. She offered him money for his campaign, warned him against endangering his own interests by an excess of zeal in forcing on the King her brother, who desired only to please and be useful to the monarch;

⁷¹ Qtg. 26/1/1744, Corres. des Tencin avec Richelieu, 265.

her brother would be happy simply to be Superintendent of the postal service. Sareil adds that although the Cardinal de Tencin appeared modest in his demands, his correspondence with Mme de Tencin indicates that he didn't hesitate to make use of his sister's power (Sareil 359).

Mme de Châteauroux, while waiting impatiently to join the King, finally expressed appreciation to Richelieu for the friendship extended by Mme de Tencin on her behalf, and this news delighted Mme de Tencin, who realizing its importance for her brother, began corresponding directly with the Duchess, as well as anonymously. She was by now quite confident of her own literary talent; and recounted to Richelieu a story she found interesting: the King wrote a "pretty" letter to Mme de Lauraguais (one of Mme de Châteauroux's sisters) who nonchalantly passed it along to Mme de Tencin's nephew Pont-de-Veyle to answer; the latter who was equally lazy, gave the task to his aunt who was enchanted to write to the King even as an intermediary. She told Richelieu her only regret was that Mme de Châteauroux didn't commission her to do the same (Sareil 360, n. 32).⁷²

Not only did both Mme de Châteauroux and Mme de Tencin fear Maurepas and seek his downfall, but Mme de Tencin also began to suspect d'Argenson's grip on the King, and worried that he might bring his brother into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and dominate the Council. For her part, the Duchesse de

⁷² 21/5/1744, Corres. des Tencin avec Richelieu, 309.

Châteauroux's apprehension over Mme de Flavacourt's relationship with the King determined her to meet him in the army despite the opposition of his ministers to such a decision because of the scandal it would cause. In early June therefore the favorite, her ladies in waiting and her sister, Mme de Lauraguais, set off for Lille. Although their arrival at camp displeased those who sought to effect the King's religious conversion, the rendez-vous with him was a jubilant one and the couple made no attempt to hide their love. With her renewed confidence Mme de Châteauroux began to take an interest in politics and wrote to Mme de Tencin that the King wished the Cardinal to remain on the Council and not leave Paris for Lyon, which was news that delighted Mme de Tencin (Sareil 363).

Political activities did not prevent Mme de Tencin from entering into the preparation of the festivities for the Dauphin's marriage to the Spanish infanta. Richelieu was in charge and commissioned Voltaire to prepare the musical intermission. The result was "La Princesse de Navarre," for which Rameau wrote the music. Mme de Tencin acted as intermediary between Richelieu and Voltaire and went so far as to ask the former for money for Voltaire following his complaints to her nephew d'Argental that it would be his last opportunity to receive a royal recompense for favors performed, referring to his negotiations with Frederick as the "bagatelles d'une autre espèce." Mme de Tencin was hopeful that the divertissement would succeed more for the sake of Richelieu than for Voltaire

although her relationship with Voltaire was friendly at this time (Sareil 364).

Louis and Mme de Châteauroux left Lille for Metz when the Archduke Charles of Austria crossed the Rhine and invaded Alsace and Frederick entered the war earlier than planned. The lovers settled down with no concern for public opinion when on August 8, the King unexpectedly became ill. His condition worsened and by the 12th he was feared near death. Richelieu who did not believe his illness was fatal and the two sisters remained at his bedside. However, the King's jesuit confessor was called in by those interested in converting the King, and sought every opportunity to provoke the favorite. Before the Bishop of Soissons would agree to take the King's confession, he and other enemies of the Duchess ordered Mme de Châteauroux and her sister to leave immediately. On the 14th the Bishop gave the Extreme Unction and announced that the King had demanded pardon for the scandal and his bad example. Mme de Châteauroux and her women were commanded to leave the city (Sareil 365).

Mme de Châteauroux and her sister left Metz amidst a hooting crowd and proceeded to nearby Bar-le-Duc. She wrote to Richelieu that it was her belief that the King would miss her as his health returned and asked that he have the Cardinal de Tencin speak to the King in her favor. Once again she spoke with appreciation of Mme de Tencin's marks of friendship. Although the Duchess wished to write to the King, she feared as did Richelieu and Mme de Tencin, the consequences of the wrath of her

enemies. On August 18th the Queen arrived just as the King's condition began to improve. As did his libido. By the time he returned to Paris in November after the campaign of Fribourg he was no more pious than before his illness and was ready to renew his relationship with the Duchess (Sareil 368-371).

While the Duchesse de Châteauroux awaited the King's request for her to return to Versailles, she continued to correspond with Mme de Tencin. Finally, at the end of November the King had Maurepas deliver a note to Mme de Châteauroux asking her to return to Versailles. A note to Richelieu from Mme de Tencin describes the radiant happiness of Mme de Châteauroux after her reconciliation with the King and his promise to exile some of her enemies, although Maurepas was not among them. In the same letter, however, Mme de Tencin expresses dismay that the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs had gone to the Marquis d'Argenson, brother of the Comte d'Argenson, Minister of War: "...je n'en attends présentement aucun fruit que le plaisir d'être aimée d'une aimable femme...car il n'y a plus rien à faire pour mon frère. Voilà les Affaires étrangères données à d'Argenson l'aîné et voilà par conséquent le gouvernement entre les mains des deux frères,...ils ont si grand intérêt à être unis qu'il n'y a pas lieu de croire qu'ils se désunissent" (Sareil 374, n. 34).⁷³

⁷³ Mme de Tencin to Richelieu, 24/11/1744, Bibl. Victor-Cousin, Fonds Richelieu, 69 fo. 104.

The happiness of the reunited lovers was brief; Mme de Châteauroux suddenly fell ill in her country house at Puteau and her doctor feared for her life. Aware of the seriousness of the situation, he had had her make a will appointing her sister Mme de Lauraguais sole legatee. On December 1, the King was grave and quiet, and on December 2 d'Argenson informed Richelieu of his alarm. The young woman suffered terribly from headaches, convulsions and delirium and on December 8, 1744, she died. She was 27 years of age. The death was suspect and Maurepas was thought to have poisoned her, but no one could produce any foundation for this accusation. The King despaired, particularly for not having been able to right the wrongs done to his mistress. His grief was brief, however, for in February, 1745, he met Mme de Pompadour (Sareil 375-376).

The death of Mme de Châteauroux meant the end of the great political designs of the Tencins. They no longer had the force, flexibility or courage to forge new relationships. From this time on they continued what they had started, but their efforts were rarely fruitful as their reputation for scheming remained in the mind of the public. In truth, a greater role in events was attributed to them than they actually played (Sareil 377).

In December of 1744 Mme de Tencin was still busy with elections to the Academy and succeeded with the Abbé Girard, the illustrious grammarian (Sareil 377), but failed in her opposition to the Abbé Bernis. In May 1745 she arranged the

marriage between the daughter of Astruc and Silhouette who became Contrôleur général des finances (Sareil 378). She also kept in contact with the financier Paris-Montmartel who had helped in the financial restoration of France after the collapse of the Law system, and who possessed large sums in all the major European banks (Vaillot 319).

In early 1745, the choice of a successor to Mme de Châteauroux was an important matter at court. Jeanne Antoinette de Poisson, whose mother had been mistress of Paris-Montmartel, and who was a frequent guest in Mme de Tencin's salon, had become the wife of Guillaume LeNormand who bought for her the Château d'Etioles and entertained Fontenelle, Crébillon, Montesquieu and Voltaire. The King saw her while hunting in a nearby forest and was captivated. Through his valet de chambre, their cousin Binet, Mme de Poisson and Mme LeNormand d'Etiole gained entrance to Versailles, and Mme de Pompadour settled there definitively in 1745 (Vaillot 319-321). It was rumored that Mme de Tencin played a role in this intrigue but Sareil notes that she no longer participated in any of the royal celebrations at Versailles, and could hardly have given any advice to anyone. In addition, her friend Richelieu had favored the actress Mimi Dancourt; and Mme de Pompadour who was never known to be ungrateful would have given some recompense to Mme de Tencin had the latter had a part in the new favorite's elevation. This did not happen (Sareil 379). Actually, as soon as Mme d'Etiole became the favorite all contact between the two women ceased. Although Mme de Tencin and

Richelieu continued to correspond, there are no copies of their letters on record and for all practical purposes, as of this time, Mme de Tencin's name disappeared from the political scene. In fact, outside of literary circles, there is little further mention of her (Sareil, 380).

At the beginning of 1745 Voltaire, on good terms with the Tencins, was in the habit of dining with one or the other, and it is known that he brought the corrections of his tragedy Mahomet to show them; at last he had been elected to the Academy! Mme de Tencin continued to protect men of letters, some of whose works, printed clandestinely, were sheltered at her home as well as at Mme Geoffrin's (Sareil 387).

In February, she became seriously ill with a pulmonary or bladder problem (Vailliot 323), but by June, with the air of Passy and exercise, she recovered. She continued to occupy herself with the entry into the Academy of men who were representatives or political allies of her brother, such as the Abbé de la Ville, who was backed by the Marquis d'Argenson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and one of her "bêtes", Charles Duclos. In early 1747, the King dismissed d'Argenson, weakening the position of Tencin, who was close to the latter, and rumor had it that Mme de Tencin worked intensely to gain some control over Mme de Pompadour for the elevation of her brother to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There was, however, still little possibility for her to have influenced Mme de Pompadour. At the same time the Cardinal de Tencin sought a leave of absence from

the King's Council to spend time in his diocese in Lyon while the King was away leading the army (Sareil 388-390).

In late 1748 Mme de Tencin moved to the Rue Vivienne for a reason that is not entirely clear. (Vaillot says she won the lottery in 1747 and then moved.) The Rue Vivienne was near the center of Paris and the Palais-Royal; and the Cardinal bought a new mansion nearby (Vaillot 323-324). What little is known of her last activities is gained from her correspondence with Montesquieu. She appears to have travelled back and forth between Paris and Passy, complaining of ill health while still entertaining friends and maintaining her salon. The editor of Piron's works claims at the last she could no longer walk and had to be carried, to which Masson adds that her end was pitiful - she could not leave her chair and was barely able to speak. Yet contemporaries said she conserved her intelligence and energy until she died (Sareil 394). The conclusion can be drawn that it was the recollection of her continuous confrontations with authority in one form or another that at last weakened her resistance and carried her off.

Her letters to Montesquieu portray her as a sincere, loyal and helpful friend. Although political news impassioned her less than before as time passed (she did mention to him the disgrace of Maurepas whom she had once hated, but only to express disillusionment at how quickly people at Court are forgotten), she took a great interest in literary events: mentioning an anticipated visit by Crébillon to read Catilina, the near failure

of Voltaire's Sémiramis, which pleased her, Saurin's attempt to have his tragedy Ciménophis played as late as the September before her death in December, 1749, and her advice to Fontenelle not to present his comedies, the same counsel as given to him in another salon. In January of 1749 she had written with apprehension to Montesquieu: "Ne voulez-vous pas me dire quand vous reviendrez? Songez que je suis vieille et pardessus cela infirme et que je n'ai point de temps à perdre pour jouir de la douceur de votre société et de votre amitié" (Vaillot 330).

Montesquieu, whom she called the "petit Romain" in homage to his Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des romains et de leur décadence, had long appreciated her intelligence and loyalty. He was a sober and discreet friend, and in 1742 had refused to reveal her identity as the author of Mémoires du comte de Comminge and Le Siège de Calais. Another point they had in common was his respect for traditional religion (his sister was a nun) although as an historian and a politician, he was unable to accept a supernatural interference in human affairs, and his free expression of opinions brought him into conflict with theologians (Vaillot 312-313). At the end of 1746 he had completed L'Esprit des lois, which was first published in 1748 in Geneva with many modifications made by the editor Jacob Vernet (Vaillot 313-315). Montesquieu mailed a copy to Mme de Tencin who wrote to him expressing her appreciation: "J'ai le seul exemplaire qui soit encore dans Paris; si je voudrais le prêter à tous ceux qui me le demandent, il ne me reviendrait

qu'en morceaux..." (Vaillot 315).⁷⁴ Montesquieu's friends flooded her salon which proved, she wrote to him, that her friendship was more sound than that of his "beautiful" ladies (Vaillot 515).

Following the early success of L'Esprit des lois, out of friendship and respect, Mme de Tencin generously had printed 500 copies of the "errata" Montesquieu had produced to correct his badly printed first edition. She had these distributed free of charge to be included in the volumes not yet printed (Sareil 394-395; Vaillot 316). In this way she helped to circulate L'Esprit des lois, and gave Montesquieu a detailed account of its reception, as well as of the complaints she made to the Jesuits for their criticisms, and other criticisms which could be useful in future editions. In sum, she acted as intermediary between the author and editors relaying to the latter the myriad of corrections required for the first edition and saw to it that they were appropriately incorporated (Sareil 396-397).

This was her last important activity - a race against her last impediment - time - before she fell mortally ill in November of 1749 (Sareil 396). At the end of May she had gone to Passy where the air was fresher and the silence restful. Marivaux, Marmontel, Helvétius and Richelieu were among regular guests, and in mid-summer Montesquieu finally arrived. In the fall, upon her return to Paris, her health quickly began to deteriorate. The Cardinal and Mme de Grolée watched as she

⁷⁴ Qtg. Mme de Tencin to Montesquieu, 2 Dec., 1748.

simply wore out. All her past had resurfaced, says Vaillot: Montfleury, the love affairs, political and religious skirmishes, Dubois, the Bastille, exile, and the death of the Duchess de Châteauroux. She eventually succumbed to bronchial pneumonia or influenza after a ten-day fever on December 8, 1749 (Vaillot 330-331), and was buried at Saint-Eustache. Montesquieu, leaving the burial with his friend, the Abbé de Guasco, said to him: "Maintenant, vous pouvez écrire à votre frère que Mme de Tencin est l'auteur des Mémoires du comte de Comminge et du Siège du Calais. M. Fontenelle et moi sommes les seuls à posséder le secret" (Vaillot 331).

Even her death could not pass without some scandal. Her sole legatee was the Cardinal, but the sum available provided merely for the payment of a few individual bequests. Her doctor, and companion/lover of many years, Astruc, although rich on his own account, received (or took) her personal possessions. Vaillot questions how a woman of her perception could remain friends for 20 years with a man so cunning, vain and wicked. He was originally from Languedoc, and like La Fresnay, tall and strongly built. He had a remarkable memory and was a linguist of repute, had studied medicine at Montpellier, taught at Toulouse and migrated to Paris where he found his way to the faculty of medicine, became physician to Louis XV and a professor at the royal college. Unfortunately, he had exalted ideas of his knowledge of medicine, which was purely theoretical for he had had no practical application in the art. He preferred to write

and was known for composing meticulous articles on useless subjects in perfect latin. His pedantism and vanity made him a subject of ridicule. Worst of all he was avaricious. It would appear that he took advantage of Mme de Tencin's weakened will during her last illness for no family document was ever found to refute the charges that he stole her inheritance (Vaillot 324-332). Mme de Tencin left nothing to her nephews, Pont-de-Veyle and d'Argental, nor, of course, to d'Alembert, all of whom were in need (Sareil 397).

Unlike at other momentous occasions in her life, there were few satiric songs commemorating her death. Mme de Pompadour concluded that enough of them had been already written: "Il y a des vers sur le Cardinal de Tencin et sa soeur, gare si l'on se remet à en faire" (Sareil 397, n. 41).⁷⁵ Nor were there many eulogies, i.e. Mme du Deffand's comment was wry: "Mme de Tencin vient de mourir comme elle a vécu; elle ne laisse rien à ceux à qui l'honneur, l'amitié, et l'humanité exigeaient qu'elle fût du bien, et elle donne tout ce qu'elle avait à Astruc" (Sareil 397).⁷⁶ Pope Benoît XIV's letter of condolences to his good friend the Cardinal de Tencin ends on a note of buffoonery: "Nous la regrettons, ayant toujours constaté que sans nous connaître personnellement, elle parlait très favorablement de notre

⁷⁵ Dec. 1749. Qtg Marquis Maurice d'Argenson, Autour d'un Ministre de Louis XV (Paris: Messein, 1923) 275.

⁷⁶ Qtg. Mme du Deffand to Maupertuis, 16/12/1749, Fernand Caussy, "Lettres à Maupertuis," Le Correspondant (1908) CCXXXIII: 45.

personne...et...elle portait les autres à suivre son exemple....Si vous en êtes l'héritier, comme vraisemblablement ce doit être, souvenez-vous que la bonne défunte nous envoyait des almanachs de Paris à l'occasion du jour de l'an et que l'héritage transmet avec les charges" (Sareil 398, n. 45).⁷⁷ Even the opening words of Marivaux's eulogy have a perfunctory ring to them: "Mme de Tencin n'est plus. La longue habitude de la voir qui m'avait lié à elle n'a pu se rompre sans beaucoup de sensibilité de ma part;..." (Sareil 397-398, n. 44).⁷⁸

The most moving tribute Sareil rightly states was that of the physician and naturalist Réaumur to Tremblay, two scholars who were not among Mme de Tencin's closest friends while she was alive, but the first of whom appears to have truly felt her loss: "C'est des plus grandes et des cruelles pertes que je puisse faire et (de) celles qui sont irréparables. Où trouver une autre amie qui aît tout ce qu'on peut désirer soit par rapport aux qualités de coeur, soit par rapport à celles de l'esprit. Elle n'était précisément occupée du matin au soir que de ce qui pouvait être avantageux ou agréable à ses amis..." (Sareil 398, n. 46).⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Qtg. 31/12/49, Emile de Heeckeren, Correspondance de Benoît XIV (Paris: Plont, 1912) I:536.

⁷⁸ Marivaux to Mme de Verteillac. 14/12/1749. S. Berard, Isographie des hommes célèbres.

⁷⁹ René-Antoine Ferchaut de Réaumur, Correspondance avec Tremblay, ed. Maurice Tremblay (Genève: Georget et Cie., 1943) 333. See also Vaillot 320 qtg. Réaumur, Correspondance avec Abraham Tremblay (Genève: Georget et Cie., 1943) "Lettre du 19 août 1749."

Of her closest friends, Marivaux's lack of warmth is the most difficult to justify. Years earlier he had described Madame de Tencin as steadfast, courageous and resolute, a master of any situation, one of those noble and dignified souls who resist every human adversity, recover all of their strength when others lose theirs, afflicted but never destroyed (La Vie de Marianne 227-228).

It is regrettable that the men of talent who called Mme de Tencin's salon home, and the brother for whom she sacrificed so much, were to such an extent preoccupied with establishing for posterity each his own self-worth, as to make it virtually impossible for her literary and social contributions to her time to be accurately judged. As the century wore on and climaxed in revolution, it became ever more fashionable to condemn any woman who tried to accomplish something beyond the norm.

Part 4

Liberation through Literature

Sareil and other biographers have suggested that Mme de Tencin turned from politics, religion and romantic intrigues to literature as a result of Cardinal de Fleury's decree of 1730 ordering that she cease meddling in public affairs. This marked a turning point in her life and induced her to shift allegiance from princes, politicians and bishops to scholars and literary artists who would pose no threat to her position. If true,

external authority once again forced Mme de Tencin to reassess her options, or find a way around it.

Singularly, states Sareil, the same woman who was severely criticized for her public behavior enjoyed in her second career as a salon hostess and author flattering acclaim (242). One can only conjecture to what extent writing novels liberated Mme de Tencin from the manacles of the mighty. F.C. Green observed that "no one is quite so sentimental as the confirmed libertine, and the example of this renegade nun...lends colour to the generalization" (157). This is one reaction to the dichotomy exhibited by the contrast between Mme de Tencin's life and her art, and foreshadows her eventual success in the latter endeavor. Oddly, her novels describe in exquisite detail the variations of sensibility in virtuous heroines (and in some heroes as well), while the woman Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin was until recent years uniformly berated for her lack of sensitivity.

Early critics disclaimed any relevance between Mme de Tencin's own experiences and the characters and events she created because of the gap between the two. Modern analyses have attempted to overcome the difficulty in several ways. In his chapter "Le Roman Féminin," Vier sidesteps the association of art to life and states simply that instances of social satire in women's novels of the period were negligible as were the great questions of business, politics, war and religious faith.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Jacques Vier, Histoire de la littérature française: XVIII^{ème} siècle. vol. 2 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970) 580-605.

Novels by women were restricted to the exploration of sentiment, love and family relationships primarily in terms of the "lieux communs" of the 17th century. Vestiges of préciosité, chevalerie, and pathetic or gripping elements of baroque offered patterns for imitation (584, 587, 592). Like her predecessors and peers, Mme de Tencin worked within the limits of the accepted formula and avoided satire; but she set herself apart by converting the tools of the trade to new and more liberating purposes. Parker contends that the "modes and voices she appears to have rejected in her life appear in her fiction" (69). A case in point is the masquerade of cross-dressing which appears in the Comte de Comminge, the Siège de Calais and Les Malheurs de l'amour. As far as I know, Mme de Tencin did not herself engage in cross-dressing, although she was otherwise criticized for her extravagant conduct; yet in these novels cross-dressing is an emblem connoting freedom of behavior for her heroines: Adélaïde, who, disguised as a monk, enters a monastery; Pauline, who after paying her lover's bail, assumes a disguise to follow him to Germany; and Mme de Granson, who in male costume, makes her way into the enemy camp. Cross-dressing, according to Parker, defied gender and enabled heroines to change their identity and subvert the conventional role ascribed to women without causing a scandal (69-70). How much this may have been rather romanesque convention remains debatable. Parker's reading is plausible, but brings to mind Mme de Genlis, who, later in the 18th century, cites in her memoirs her own experiences of cross-dressing during the early

years of her marriage and claims she indulged in the masquerade simply for the innocent joy of mystification.

Like Vier, Coulet notices the goal of women's novels in the 18th century as the examination of sentiment over manners and society's unwritten rules (II, 379). This limited scope makes any readings which attempt to relate Mme de Tencin's life to her writing arbitrary since no memoirs are available to corroborate or deny them. Yet the desire to accord art to life persists. For example, it is tempting to make an analogy between Coulet's statement that the characters in Mme de Tencin's novels blame their unhappy destiny on coincidences of fate deriving from a sensitive nature (379), and an intent by Mme de Tencin to excuse her own political failures and emotional defeats. Passion is dangerous apparently in or out of novels. Mlle de Gloucester in Anecdotes understands the devastating consequences of an incomprehensible force before which she is helpless - her unremitting love for the inconstant Gaveston. "Par une fatalité dont elle gémissait, ... (Mlle de Gloucester) avait une inclination pour Gaveston dont elle ne pouvait triompher." Inasmuch as Mme de Tencin manifests little illusion as to the permanence of requited love in her novels, one can easily make the leap to its transitoriness in her own life. Beyond the existence of a defect of nature, powerful outside forces also disturb the permanence of love (380) (which forces often have their source in the misuse of authority suggested by Cardinal de Fleury's decree).

Mme de Tencin's great heart was praised by her friends, but generosity can be overly discriminating, according to Coulet, and can erect insurmountable barriers to communication and happiness. The good hearted Eugénie's (Malheurs) destiny was permanently darkened by her inflexible refusal to accept the man she loved, La Valette, as her husband, even though he had been proven innocent of amorous dallying, and the less than virtuous Blanchefort, whom she married on the rebound, had died (381). Does Mme de Tencin use this episode to purge herself of the mistakes of her own stress filled life? Did her novels propose to effect a catharsis and relieve her of grief and regret? Or were they written as a form of self-inflicted punishment? Coulet states that hindsight makes clear to the personages in her novels the causes of earlier errors (381). One can contend that the author was gifted with the same clarity.

From another viewpoint, Eva Sartori examines the modern transfer of interest in Mme de Tencin's novels from the meticulous analysis of sentiment to extrinsic power relations between protagonists and lovers, and those around them (476-477). An example she cites is the ultimate power invested in Mme de Granson who, masquerading as a man in the final pages of Siège, seeks retribution for her guilt at loving M. de Canaple by penetrating the English camp to sacrifice herself in his place as one of the six bourgeois hostages claimed by the English King to compensate for his liberation of Calais. By this selfless act of sacrifice Mme de Granson proves the nobility of her character and

is esteemed above the knights about her; her public declaration appeals to the English Queen who then convinces the King to release the prisoners for reasons of love (478).⁸¹ So it is that in the final episode morality and decorum prevail in accord with the authoritarian conventions of bienséance. (It may be recalled that Mme de Granson and M. de Canaple had a dramatic and unexpected encounter in the early pages of the novel which had to be explained away eventually.) While Mme de Tencin's strategy to elevate the status of women is ingenuous, she must count on the use of subterfuge in the novels to reach her goal just as she had done in real life situations, as witnessed by her correspondence with Richelieu. The emphasis on the purity of Mme de Granson's character unveils another instance of Mme de Tencin presumably seeking to atone for her own errors.

Sartori also suggests that in the Siège, novel à tiroirs, the simultaneous exploration of three parallel romances filled with misunderstandings among lovers concerning who truly loves whom, mistaken identities, unfounded suspicions, and surprises such as an anonymous baby left on a doorstep gave Mme de Tencin room to break the "aesthetic barriers" (478-479). However, it is by way of a moral claim that she imparted prolific signals of alarm to innocent young women while simultaneously avoiding ruffling the feathers of the authoritarian proponents of propriety that is of interest here.

⁸¹ See also Vachon 69, note 34 qtg. Pierre Fauchery, La Destinée féminine dans le roman européen du XVIIIème siècle: 1713-1807 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972) 573.

While he wrote at the turn of the century, critics continue to commend Pierre Maurice Masson's biography of Mme de Tencin, and according to Sartori, he is the only biographer to present more than a superficial view of her work. Masson states essentially that it is a vain quest to seek the cynical and bold woman in the dry and correct pages of her novels, that the author undertook to create a work of art and, only on another level, to liquidate her past, and regain respect (232). Yet Masson, too, is unable to refrain from seeking allusions to her life in his reading of her work. One example refers to her continuing hostility toward the men whom she held responsible for the failure of her ambitions for her brother: "...ces ministres plus attentifs à mettre dans les places ceux qui conviennent à leur politique que ceux qui conviendraient aux places" (Anecdotes 469-470);⁸² another underscores her own methods in the subterfuge exhibited by Hippolyte, the jailer's daughter who through her desire to seduce Barbason intercepts, reads and reseals his letters, reminiscent of Mme de Tencin's machinations to help Mme de Châteauroux gain power over the King (Malheurs 408). And in Siège (206-208) there is the episode where Mlle de Roye, secretly married to d'Arondel, gives birth clandestinely to a child who is then abandoned on a street corner, which has overtones of Mme de Tencin's own past, although in the novel

⁸² The titles and page numbers of individual works cited by Masson refer to Oeuvres de Mmes de Fontaine et de Tencin (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1864) 1 vol. in-8, not available for this dissertation.

Chalons believes that Mlle de Mailly, the woman he loves, was seduced by d'Arondel and is the mother. The romanesque birth is enshrouded in mistaken identities; however, the rightful mother is eventually acknowledged, which was not the case with Mme de Tencin.

Masson also describes characters who he believes possess characteristics patterned after those of Mme de Tencin, i.e., the vindictive Mme Boulai (Siège 203-204) who "maîtresse de ses goûts et de ses sentiments, n'a que ceux qui lui sont utiles," or Isabelle, Edouard II's queen in Anecdotes (432), "fière, ambitieuse et douce, bonne même quand son intérêt le demandait," which Masson cites as examples of memory surfacing; they are quite convincing; yet the modern reader may hesitate to accept this implication of self-obsessiveness.

In the conventual theme, as well, although an inevitable piece of machinery in novels of the period, Masson has discovered certain images which appear drawn from memory: descriptions of parents who force the youngest and poorest daughters to be buried alive in cloisters (Siège 252); who dream of the world "with envy, desire and regret" (Malheurs 398), and where wealth bestows privilege and unhappiness reigns, "faute de pouvoir faire des sacrifices continuels de la raison et du bon sens" (Siège 253). Most often, Mme de Tencin uses the convent as the "lieu" of the birth of love and the refuge of broken hearts, and its parlors, the surrounding shadowy parks, the silent chapel add a theatrical backdrop to the tragedy taking place (Masson

136). Masson's early view is persuasive until one examines the contributions of later feminist critics; according to Sartori the conventual theme (and the dungeon) is a polarizing metaphor for the restrictive power of reason employed to manipulate human nature (girls in the convent) versus the open road signifying adventure and freedom (freedom of choice to love) (479-480) (Masson 130-138). Such a vision conforms to the theme of this dissertation, the exploration of the means women writers employed to respond to authority. In Parker's view, by centering on the plight of victims in her novels rather than on their oppressors, Mme de Tencin brought to light the detrimental consequences to physical and psychic well-being of repression (71). This is revealed in the adventures of Pauline and Eugénie who in Malheurs are launched from the convent into the world where they are betrayed more through naiveté due to an unrealistic attitude born of limited awareness than by heedless lovers whom their innocence actually misleads. Disillusioned, they return to the refuge of the convent and lives consumed with regret.

In light of Sartori's and Parker's analyses, one can easily assume that Mme de Tencin actually paved the way for modern psychology, and her novels are something other than stylistic stories told in a conventional manner. Siège becomes more than a contemporary morality tale in a fantastical historic setting; it exalts the unrecognized power of women. Malheurs details the tragedy of unfulfilled destinies, and Anecdotes exposes the heartbreak imbedded in the vanity of a frivolous

society. These novels also are compensatory accomplishments of a misunderstood woman's odyssey as she responded to the obstacles existing authority placed in her path.

Masson concluded that there is no personal imprint or temperamental quiver in Mme de Tencin's characters and that the formulas she utilized are abstract and applicable to any situation: an unhappy lover finding his mistress in the hands of a man she doesn't love, a passionate girl subjugated by paternal authority to choose a husband, a jealous mother whose love toward her daughter changes to hate (150-156), and that these tales describe rather than resolve moral conflict (170-172), with the result that the insights appear in the form of polished maxims. Although Masson carefully analyzed the mechanism of sentiment, the barren imagery of the personages and landscapes, the somber tonality and the pure and fluid style of Mme de Tencin's novels, he lacked the instruments to enable him to delve into what he called the "unexplored states of soul" embodied in the contrived ambiance of the convent (140). His intuition, however, prefigured Jean Decottignies' Mémoires du comte de Comminge (1960), a valuable discerning study of feminine protest.⁸³ In the novels of Mme de Tencin, Decottignies found a witness to the conditions and hopes of 18th century women, and she wrote what he defines as "insurrectional novels". Mme de Tencin's salon, frequented by literary talents such as the Abbé de Saint-Pierre,

⁸³ Jean Decottignies, Mémoires du comte de Comminge (Lille: R. Giard, 1969).

Charles Duclos and Montesquieu who were proponents of the equality of the sexes, provided an appropriate setting for her success as a writer concerned with the contemporary status of women and their impoverishment because of social prejudice. There the most recent successful books were the subject of fervent debate and it is likely that Mme de Tencin sought to imitate the authors among her circle she most admired, such as Marivaux and Fontenelle. Years of Parisian life had perfected her psychological understanding and strengthened her spirit, readying her for a new challenge (32-36).

Her chef d'oeuvre, the Comte de Comminge intimates social protest in its opening pages with the image of the malicious, irascible and obsessive father, M. de Comminge, who, upon learning that his son the Comte has fallen in love with a hated cousin's daughter, Adélaïde de Lussan, and to hide his identity, has burned papers that would have permitted M. de Comminge to despoil his cousin's inheritance, flies into a rage and almost kills his son, but then exiles him instead. Critics have suggested Mme de Tencin transferred her personal animosity at parental authority to this character (23) (Vachon 38).⁸⁴ The

⁸⁴ For a concise analysis of Les Malheurs de l'amour, Le siège de Calais, Anecdotes de la cour d'Angleterre et le règne d'Edouard II and the apocryphal Histoire d'une religieuse écrite par elle-même, see Vachon, Marie-Françoise. Les Romans de Mme de Tencin. Diss. NY: Columbia UP, 1975. According to Vachon, Mme de Tencin's novels reflect the perilous revolt of unhappy characters against parental authority, in contrast to those of the 17th century who submitted to it. The authority of husbands is real in her novels, but more subtly treated. They are generally mere objects under her pen. The feminist aspect is apparent in her cynical image of men. In Malheurs, Barbason is an egotist; in

unhappy love affair between the young Comte and Adélaïde, with the blackmail of Adélaïde by the Comte's mother which forces her to marry a repulsive man in order to free her lover from a tower in the Pyrénées, is the outcome of the barbarous acts of parental authority. Once the drama is set in motion, the tyrannical father disappears from the scene (63).

Despotic behavior mirrors a society in which young people who fall in love spontaneously confront difficulties because they come into conflict with society's rules regarding duty and parental authority, no matter how arbitrary they prove to be. Passion is considered a vestige of chivalry, impure and condemned as a disruptive force undermining the institution of marriage and its goal to multiply the human race. The literature that drew pity to the unhappy predicament of lovers was "insurrectional" since it was viewed as a source of moral corruption.⁸⁵

Mme de Tencin uses the insurrectional novel to denounce abusive tyranny. In Malheurs, the more experienced Eugénie assumes the role of mother and tries to warn the impetuous Pauline of the dangers of succumbing to her feelings for Barbason: "Je voudrai que le coeur se tût toujours; mais je

Anecdotes, Gaveston takes an unscrupulous advantage of Mlle de Gloucester's love for him. M. de Granson in Siège is vain and foolish. The women in Mme de Tencin's novels, according to Vachon, are the only ones who truly know how to love, and they are generally victims of the same masculine egotism and cruelty.

⁸⁵ Decottignies provides an illuminating discourse on the subversive techniques churchmen used to undermine the natural inclinations of the young (57).

crains qu'il ne se mêle un jour de vos affaires plus qu'il ne faudrait" (58, n. 23).⁸⁶ Society's distorted view, says Decottignies, led lovers to be treated as criminals. This is in contrast to Sartori's comment that heroines of Mme de Tencin's novels, inhibited by parental authority and social usage, could only express their will in the choice of a lover (477).

In Malheurs, Pauline's mother is the authoritarian figure, hence the agent of destruction; while professing that her daughter's happiness comes before her own, upon her husband's death, she marries the Marquis de N..., originally sleighted for Pauline, and seeks to send Pauline to a convent to divest her of her inheritance (61).

In Comminge, the mother is the instrument of family tyranny because to appease the father she coerces Adélaïde to contract an unhappy marriage and her only act of affection toward her son is a promise to keep him informed about Adélaïde's activities (63-64).

Also in Comminge the husband assumes the guise of the cruel tyrant by marrying knowing that he is detested. Out of jealousy and a desire for vengeance Bénévidès later confines Adélaïde to a tower after he surprises an innocent rendez-vous between the lovers, although Adélaïde loyally weeps for her wounded husband, injured by the Comte. Decottignies like Parker establishes that Mme de Tencin supports the plight of the

⁸⁶ Decottignies' references are to Mme de Tencin's Oeuvres, (Amsterdam, 1947) I:41-42.

victims; but what is of particular interest is that she refrains from offering remedies for social injustice (as had been her custom in the political arena). This may have been the consequence of an artistic device, or perhaps because she was unable to imagine how to effect a cure and wished to avoid setting herself up for additional criticism. There is also the possibility that she believed that any modifications she might advance would be useless. This is apparent by Adélaïde's negative response to the Comte's plea that they break with the institution of marriage altogether: "Et pourquoi nous assujettir...à la tyrannie de nos parents, laissez-les se haïr puisqu'ils le veulent, et allons dans quelque coin du monde..." (70, n. 52). The virtuous Adélaïde shuns the thought. "Que m'osez-vous proposer...voulez-vous me faire repentir des sentiments que j'ai pour vous..." (71, n. 53). According to Decottignies she is as yet unable to effect a rupture with society's notion of feminine propriety and modesty (71). Her marriage, however, indicates a personal (and not a tyrannical family's) choice: "...(I)l faut me marier, et depuis que je sçais que c'est le seul moïen de délivrer Monsieur votre fils..." (79), and so acquiesces to the Comte's mother's blackmail. Unfortunately, she will now have less freedom to dispose of herself for she selects the disagreeable Bénévidès as a husband to prevent the Comte from becoming jealous, and in the 18th century any marriage was legally and morally binding (72). According to Decottignies, this marriage constitutes a betrayal

for Adélaïde had taken a vow to love only the Comte and contracted it under false pretences. Rash acts, committed in the name of love, lead to her continued unhappiness.

Nevertheless, in the final episode, she appears to have gained her full independence, when, after her husband's death, she escapes from the tower and enters the Trappist monastery disguised as a monk to be near her lover. Yet, even in this instance, Mme de Tencin does not let love conquer all in this life, for the Comte remains unaware of Adélaïde's presence until her deathbed confession. Decottignies suggests conventional morality seems to obtain in the end since Adélaïde is penalized for braving the authority of the institution of marriage; yet this is debatable for in truth she did not deserve the punishment meted out by Bénevidès for she had remained faithful to her marriage vows in word and deed. It is only in the tomb that she will be united with the Comte, which Decottignies also terms a sacrilege (82-84). On the eve of the 21st century, however, the modern reader might disagree inasmuch as Adélaïde was a widow at her death and, according to today's mores, would doubtless have been buried near family members rather than beside the cruel Bénevidès, had she so desired. She certainly would not be expected to be interred with an abusive husband.

For Decottignies, the conventual theme was used by Mme de Tencin as a mere happenstance, an obstacle or as a resolution to the intrigue. For Pauline in Malheurs, it was something to be overcome once she understood the source: "... (L)'envie de rendre

son frère un plus grand seigneur avait engagé son père et mère à la (Pauline) faire élever dans un cloître où l'on voulait qu'elle se fût religieuse" (86-87, n. 5). This sounds like a replay of Mme de Tencin's own experience. Decottignies asserts that Pauline's misfortunes do not arise from this circumstance but from her mother's duplicity, her own impetuosity, a limited education and social prejudice. Yet, it appears clear that these factors are collateral and disclose a parallel between Pauline and Mme de Tencin's vision of her own life. Pauline's initial confinement to a convent by parental authority (and duplicity), an education that ignored appropriate instruction for the practical world, social prejudices relative to a suitable marriage partner speak of Mme de Tencin's probable vision of her own circumstances.

Decottignies and other critics have contended that Mme de Tencin avoided portraying convents as prisons. They were rather a last option for irreversible circumstances. Pauline and Adélaïde had no alternative, but to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in the world or seek refuge in a religious home. Whether it was a profane passion or not that drove them matters little. Decottignies characterizes this retreat as an insurrectional act; yet in the interest of this dissertation it represents their only hope for safe haven in the face of a world in which the power of authority was annihilating.

Decottignies sets forth an interesting analysis of the role of anti-feminism in the relationships between lovers in Mme

de Tencin's novels. His point of departure is P. Bourdaloue's Sermon sur l'impureté which castigates women for the inconstance and weakness which had led to the degradation of morals.⁸⁷ Rather than arouse the hostility of men toward women as it was intended, this sermon increased the desire of women for liberty and they mounted a counter-attack. The Comte de Comminge is a less than perfect lover. Although not wicked, he is weak, inconstant and cowardly; he forgets his resolutions and is unfaithful to his principles. His trials debilitate him, making him unworthy of the virtuous Adélaïde. When in her presence he is full of confidence; when absent, as when he learns of her proposed marriage, he disputes her faithfulness: "Elle n'a jamais connu mon coeur: elle a jugé de moi comme des autres hommes, voilà ce qui me perd." (106, n. 18; 74). He is disrespectful when he suspects she loves another and while promising not to contact her when she is married, he plots to meet her. His comportment therefore expresses justifiable feminine grievances that Mme de Tencin employs as a discreet indictment (107, n. 26; 111). Adélaïde's love on the other hand is constant, undemanding and enduring. It is more authentic since less dependent on personal satisfaction. She is ultimately more devoted to the Comte's happiness than he to her's.

Decottignies' sympathetic study of Mme de Tencin's perception and understanding of the restrictions placed on the

⁸⁷ Louis Bourdeloue, "Sur l'impureté," "Sur les divertissements du monde," "Sur le mariage," Oeuvres: Sermons, ed. Deserz (Paris: 1837) I:285.

lives of 18th century women may have had its origin in the evolving women's movement of the mid-20th century and the newly advanced principle that women should have political, economic and social rights equal to those of men. His contributions and those made by the other critics cited in this section, will, hopefully, increase the understanding of the modern reader who may have a desire to examine the novels of Mme de Tencin. It is not enough to probe her life for the negative conclusions early critics have drawn about her public persona; the facts are incomplete, and the positive conclusion is that her brief and precise novels still retain useful information applicable in a modern context.

The contradiction between a realistic and wistful approach to a life 250 years old, or the conflict between character and time, present an insoluble dilemma. The incompatibility between the legendary Mme de Tencin who sought frenetically the fulfillment of ambition in a century when the shackles of authority had not yet loosened, and the heroines of her novels who wrestled with a choice between virtue and autonomy in their encounters with authority, in the last analysis, remains troublesome.

In a less heroic and bellicose century, said Masson, the valiant, domineering, implacable Mme de Tencin would have lived up to her potential rather than dissipating her talents in dubious flirtations and petty intrigues. The inspid, vain and superficial epoch in which she lived offered her merely the role of a courtesan to which she resigned herself less than

gracefully. In reality, her character was superior to her life, but in the midst of a frivolous generation, she appeared as a failed Amazon (Masson 251-252).

This appraisal still holds but downplays the enduring legacy of her novels, an astute evaluation of the harsh inequities agents of the authoritarian structure inflicted on women in the 18th century.

Chapter II

Marquerite Jeanne Cordier (Rose de Launay)
Baronne de Staal (1684-1750)

Part 1

The Ambiance: Personality and Authority

A chapter on Madame de Staal de Launay fits neatly between Madame de Tencin and Madame de Genlis; her personality, if less tempestuous than the other two, was more deeply moving. Rather than brave the forces of authority that impeded her progress toward self-fulfillment, she accommodated herself to them, with only sporadic if ever fruitless, bouts of rebellion. By her own account Madame de Staal did not seek the limelight. What prominence she attained came by way of a confluence of circumstances. It also appears unlikely that she nourished dreams of posthumous glory. If as a young girl she did, such dreams vanished quickly when she entered the service of the self-centered Duchesse du Maine. Then, with outward grace, she accepted her inevitable fate. "Je vis ma perte dans cet événement, et je sentis que le caractère indélébile de femme de chambre ne laissait plus de retour à ma fortune, cependant il n'y avait pas moyen de reculer. Je ne pouvais ni démentir les démarches que j'avais faites pour être à Madame la Duchesse du

Maine, ni insister sur les conditions avec une personne comme elle....Il fallait subir le joug" (Mémoires 73).⁸⁸ And endure it she did, with style and wit, albeit inevitable disillusionment which she dosed with acerbity, for almost forty years. Throughout it all, the splendor and heartbreak, she managed to maintain intact her integrity, self-respect and the regard of those with whom she came into contact.

The sense of intimacy obscured by the protracted social and political ambitions of Madame de Tencin looms with a pensive piquancy from the pages of Madame de Staal's Mémoires, her sole literary contribution to the annals of 18th century literature, if one discounts La Mode, a slight molièresque comedy she wrote as an interlude for one of the Grandes Nuits at Sceaux. The style and tone characteristic of women of that century, said Sainte-Beuve, properly began with this vibrant autobiographical epic. Mme de Staal represented the pre-Rousseau class of writers bred on La Bruyère, whose Caractères, they read in their youth (Sainte-Beuve Portraits of the 18th Century 57-58),⁸⁹ along with Fontenelle's La Pluralité des mondes and Descartes' La Recherche

⁸⁸ MFs. Barrière, notice, Mémoires, by Madame de Staal Delaunay (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1846) 6-16.

⁸⁹ C. A. Sainte-Beuve, Portraits of the 18th Century, Historic and Literary, trans. Katherine P. Wormsley (NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905).

de la vérité (Sainte-Beuve Portraits littéraires 895-896;898).⁹⁰

The Mémoires may be accused of withholding much by way of detail and presenting only half-truths, but the sentiments expressed are felt to be authentic and the reader can find justifiable Mme de Staal's reply to a friend who accused her of telling everything: "Je ne me suis peinte qu'en buste," (Sainte-Beuve Portraits littéraires 899). Accurate judgment, a universal view of the world, lack of self-aggrandizement, and the ability to step outside herself to note her own foibles and view others impartially, made of her relentless observations on reality a catalogue of sincere appreciations (Sainte-Beuve Portraits littéraires 900). The Mémoires ring true, although in its time the book may have come under attack for reasons connected with the memoir genre itself.

History, according to Richard Aldington is a delusive science composed of interesting fiction and laboriously gathered unexciting facts.⁹¹ Memoirs, if not history, may be literature and have all the inaccuracies of human nature. They can, nevertheless, reveal personality, and provide interest, if only by way of the twiddle-twaddle of generations that have long since

⁹⁰ C.A. Sainte-Beuve, "Mémoires de Madame de Staal-Delaunay," Oeuvres. Fin des portraits littéraires: Portraits des femmes, vol. 2, ed., Maxime Leroy (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) II:895-908; II:1471.

⁹¹ Richard Aldington, introd., The Private life of the Marshal Duke of Richelieu (1696-1788), by Louis François de Plessis, Duc de Richelieu, trans. F.S. Flint (New York: Brentano's, 1927) 1-4.

crumbled to dust, i.e. Saint-Simon (Richelieu 1-2). The Mémoires of Mme de Staal do offer personality and interest, and more than twiddle-twaddle, the search of a mind to find peace in humiliating circumstances rendered more agonizing by the capricious behavior of a vain autocrat.

Memoirs cannot always be assumed to be authentic, continued Aldington, for like confessions, they are seldom perfectly candid and are often colored by personal feelings of hatred and friendship or by the author's desire to cut an aimiable figure for the benefit of posterity. They may contain vivid first hand information or tidbits of gossip passed off as fact; they may be contaminated by anxious relatives, or altered by a suspicious authority; they may be unabashedly specious or a compilation from sources attributed to an eminent dead person (Richelieu 3-4). Christopher Herold hinted at such a mind set when he claimed Mme de Staal's portrait of the Duchesse du Maine was "nailed down by a vindictive chambermaid" (Herold 120).⁹² Fontenelle, who was 98 years old at the time of publication, echoed these sentiments: "I feel sorry for her," he said, "this is written with agreeable elegance, but it was not worth writing at all" (Lombardini vi).⁹³ Fortunately, as Lombardini notes,

⁹² Christopher J. Herold, "A Window and a Fireplace. Madame de Launay de Staäl," Love in Five Temperaments (London: H. Hamilton, 1961) 103-162.

⁹³ S.H. Lombardini, Rival French Courts (London: John Murray, 1913).

"Posterity has not sided with Fontenelle," (Lombardini vi), and I find Herold's criticism simply contentious.

There is very little in Mme de Staal's Mémoires to invite skepticism; and nothing in them or in critical commentaries to refute any of Aldington's assumptions, or to justify them. The only vindication of their authenticity comes by way of the reader's intuition. Sainte-Beuve sensed this when he cited Mme de Staal's assertion: "Le vrai est comme il peut, et n'a de mérite que d'être ce qu'il est" (Sainte-Beuve Portraits littéraires 900). With this in mind, it can be said that Madame de Staal in her Mémoires attempted to set forth the truthful expression of the unfolding pattern of a flawed but vital life, and that Sainte-Beuve's claim that they are authentic because "ils vont comme la vie, en s'attristant," can be taken as a valid attestation to that fact (Sainte-Beuve Portraits littéraires 900).

The modern reader will still encounter, emerging from the pages of the Mémoires, a clear gaze, valiant heart and lustrous soul and an independent mind cloaked in a tantalizing prose. Although the pitiless attitude is sometimes disheartening, and the unembellished style at times can appear parched and empty, the attentive reader cannot fail to perceive that the author is communicating a personal state of non-resistance to the perversities of life, and that the fluent and seemingly effortless phrases conceal in truth an invincible force (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 61).

Grimm praised Madame de Staal's prose as on a slightly lower plane than that of Voltaire, while the critic Villemain (1790-1870) who, from 1840-1844 was Minister of Public Instruction, condemned her satirical sketches for the "soubrette bias" they evidenced. Saint-Beuve refuted this assessment when he observed that the implication of mockery was unmerited because her early education had been serious and solid (Sainte-Beuve Portraits littéraires 901). Additionally, it can be surmised that this education and Mme de Staal's simple direct expressions were refined through the many-colored prism of impressions received from her subsequent contact with the Duchesse du Maine and the Court of Sceaux which provided a rich soil for the harvesting of dry and clipped but moving prose.

To understand Mme de Staal and her evolution as a memorialist and as a person, one must first examine the quixotic phenomenon that was the Duchesse du Maine. M.FS. Barrière refers to a fitting description of the Duchess written by Mme de Staal and published by La Harpe in 1801: "Sa plaisanterie est noble, fine, et légère; sa mémoire est prodigieuse; elle parle avec éloquence, mais avec trop de véhémence et de prolixité. On n'a point de conversation avec elle; elle ne soucit point d'être entendue; il lui suffit d'être écoutée; aussi n'a-t-elle aucune connaissance de l'esprit, des talents, des défauts et des ridicules de ceux qui l'entourent" (Mémoires 8).⁹⁴ Both

⁹⁴ M.FS. Barrière in Avant-Propos, Mémoires de Madame de Staal, 6-16.

complimentary and critical, Mme de Staal in a few well chosen words captures in a nutshell the essential egoism of her royal governor.

Anne-Louise-Bénédicte de Bourbon (1676-1753) was the daughter of Henri Jules de Bourbon, known as M. Le Prince, son of the Grand Condé. He was a courageous man, possessed a noble soul, but lacked the passion for war of his father. Magnificent, tender, gallant, he had a clever and lively mind, which with age weakened. In his failing years, believing himself a hound of the hunt he was known to bark like a dog when on a hunting party. At the same time he envisioned himself as already dead (Mémoires 7).

His daughter, very small and dwarf-like, had blond hair and beautiful eyes; she was lively and very graceful. Yet she inherited from her father an uneven temperament, possessed a haughty air, and behaved with lack of restraint in her relationship with King Louis XIV, showed little respect for her father and was inconsiderate of her husband, the Duc du Maine, whom she defied vehemently at every opportunity. She brooked no opposition. Her tastes were elegant, but expensive, and she lavished millions on her extravagant "Grandes Nuits" at the small kingdom of Sceaux (Mémoires 10-11).

Her husband, the Duc du Maine, the eldest of the bastard sons of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan, was 22 in 1692 when he married Anne-Louise Bénédicte. Mme de Maintenon was his surrogate mother and he had been trained in the ideals of Saint-Cyr. He was intelligent, had a gift for language, and possessed

gentleness and charm. A clubbed foot added to a natural shyness, however, prevented him from ever becoming fully independent. His ideas remained limited by the restrictive condition of his noble birth; the Duchess too, although bold and imperious, was obliged by birth to confine her dreams to the bounds of her small realm. When she married the Duc, there was as yet no Court of Sceaux but the Duchess bided her time doing whatever she pleased in the interim (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 26-27).

In the summer of 1699 M. de Malezieu, an ex-tutor to the Duc du Maine, who was to play such an influential role in the life at Sceaux, and about whom Mme de Staal said: "His decisions were as infallible as were those of Pythagoras among his disciples," (Stryiński 330)⁹⁵ invited the Duchess to visit his country house at Chatenay. He arranged a romantic fairyland for her with unexpected surprises at every turn. Enthusiastic guests even were transformed into satyrs, nymphs and shepherdesses for her enjoyment. His brilliant hospitality with games, fêtes and fireworks honored and so delighted the Duchess that she decided to buy the whole valley.⁹⁶ As it turned out, Malezieu's

⁹⁵ Casimir Stryiński, The Eighteenth Century, trans. H. N. Dickinson (NY: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1916?) 330-331.

⁹⁶ The description of this first visit is given by the Abbé Genest in a letter addressed to Mlle de Scudéry and develops the original idea of the play of pastorals which later comprised the center of existence of the Duchesse du Maine. Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 30.

experience as director of entertainment of his own royal court served him in good stead when he went to Sceaux (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 30-31).

In 1700 the Duc du Maine purchased the estate where Sceaux was to be constructed for 900,000 livres. The grounds had earlier belonged to Colbert and had been enriched by Le Nôtre, Girardon and Pierre Pueget, the sculptor. When the Duc du Maine acquired the land, he embellished the valley, park and canals (Mémoires 6-8). The Duchess now had the perfect setting for her royal playground.

At Sceaux Malezieu, called "Le Curé" or "Euclid," (Mémoires 10) combined the roles of secretary and savant (Stryiński 330). He was well-educated, knew mathematics, literature, Greek and Latin, improvised verses, planned theatricals and took care of business. As a member of the Academy of Science and the French Academy he was lauded by Fontenelle for his robust and fiery temperament. Voltaire claimed he translated into French tragedies by Sophocles and by Euripides on the spot before her Serene Highness (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 28). In Madame de Staal's opinion, he was self-important, demonstrative, ceremonious, lacking both discernment and heart (Mémoires 29). Nevertheless, for twenty-five years, by dint of constant invention and activity, he put his talents to full use in the frivolous atmosphere of Sceaux (Sainte Beuve Portraits 18th Century 29).

Malezieu gained entrance to the hallowed enclave for the singular academician, the Abbé Genest, who took up the role of poet and buffoon. Previously, he had been a pedler, prisoner, copyist, tutor, and secretary to the Duc de Nevers and managed the stables of the Duc de Nemours wearing his cassock; he had won prizes for his clever poetry composed with ease, and was a favorite of the Dauphin's tutors. Eventually, after participating in a conference on physics, he set himself the task of putting Descartes into verse. He had a stupendous nose which became a target for jokes and made his name the subject of an anagram by the Duc and Duchesse du Maine: Charles Genest - "Eh, c'est large nez" (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 32-33).

Intellectually the Duchess was a professed Cartesian and conformed herself to the fundamentals of the Church as outlined in the Catechism. Her brother, M. le Duc, had had La Bruyère as tutor and this influence aroused in her a thirst for knowledge. She read Descartes, Virgil, Terence, Sophocles and Euripides in the original; in fact, she studied everything, including the telescope and microscope, in a haphazard fashion, without gaining any real understanding. Despite a quick mind and vast knowledge, her inability to concentrate on any one subject prevented her from gaining in-depth knowledge in a particular field, and she escaped deeper problems by making her new court into a scene from the Arabian Nights (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 23-25). The contradictions between her distinctive qualities are once more summed up by Mme de Staal in this sketch:

"Madame la Duchesse du Maine est faite pour faire dire d'elle sans blesser la vérité, beaucoup de bien et beaucoup de mal; elle a de la hauteur sans fierté, le goût de la dépense, sans générosité, de la religion sans piété, une grande opinion d'elle-même sans mépris pour les autres, beaucoup de connaissances sans beaucoup de savoir, et tous les empressements de l'amitié sans en avoir les sentiments" (Mémoires 15).

The Duchesse du Maine was also totally ignorant in the realm of domestic economy and generally of French public and foreign affairs. She believed only in her birthright, the privileges peculiar to her rank and class and her divine position as a lesser goddess as she masqueraded through life in many disguises and the valley of Sceaux bowed deeply before the "Sylvain of Chatenay" and the "Nymph of Aulnay," whom the Abbé Genest, referred to as "Our Lady of Sceaux" (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 23-25; 31). Under her aegis Sceaux became a magic circle closed to the realities of the outside world; thought was "a futile plaything and words used for the pleasure of hearing them" (Lombardini viii-ix; Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 32). To advance her causes, the duchess surrounded herself with and relied on a select group of a few trusted assistants and set them to work in a frenzy of activity, day and night, composing and recreating madrigals, rondeaux, ballads, pastorals and playlets which deprived her of time for sleep and reflection. This noisy and agitated lifestyle more often than not showed an absence of good taste which did not in the least

disturb her, provided she played the leading role in her fêtes and in the lives of her troop of attendants (Sainte Beuve Portraits 18th Century 33-34). She basked in the glow of the flattery that compared her to great queens who loved knowledge, and the adulation of prominent men who sent her chivalrous verses, as did the first President of Parliament who signed off as the Emperor of Hindustan.

The closing years of Louis XIV's reign saw the crumbling of absolutism and tradition and the opening of new vistas of adventure (Lombardini viii), but the divine valley lent a deaf ear to the tolling of the bell outside its impervious confines. The aging King, influenced by Mme de Maintenon, imposed outdated tastes on the young, and court etiquette at Versailles had become austere and ceremonial. The countryside of Sceaux offered a more relaxed and free atmosphere.

The Grandes Nuits of Sceaux were at their height during the disastrous years of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1716) when the celebrations became notorious for their extravagance. The premature deaths of the heirs to the throne during these years prompted Louis XIV to legitimize the bastard princes; had his Will been followed, and the Duc du Maine established in his role as educator to the young King Louis XV and commander of the palace troops, he would have had the greatest influence during the Regency. Unfortunately, the virtuous and pious Duc, who was a cultivated man with an enlightened mind, preferred the quiet life of study, and had

neither the ambition nor the energy to prevail over the active and enterprising Prince d'Orléans who also had the advantage of a legitimate birth (Genlis De l'Influence des femmes 246).⁹⁷

Also, the reputation of the Duchess came under attack on moral grounds for her actual or potential liaisons. The agreeable and clever Cardinal (Melchior) de Polignac (1661-1742) was the favored target of scurrilous verse. He was the author of the Latin poem "Anti-Lucrèce" which expounded his principles of theology and morality and sought to refute the new materialism! (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 35-37). Later he played an important role with the Duchess in the Cellamare Conspiracy for which he was exiled to his abbey d'Anchin. Sareil says that he was vain, false and chimeric with "only the skin of a great man," but possessed great charm (Sareil 119). The Duc du Maine translated some of his verses into song which drew the irritated response from his wife: "You will wake up some fine morning and find yourself in the French Academy, and M. d'Orléans Regent of the Kingdom" (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 38). This, of course, proved prophetic.

In 1714, just before the Regency was inaugurated, the Duchesse du Maine, in a selfish mode of factitious patriotism attempted to secure a party in Parliament to shore up support for the Duc du Maine in the event of difficulties arising from his "legitimized" status, by summoning a group of peers to Sceaux.

⁹⁷ Mme de Genlis, De l'Influence des femmes sur la littérature française comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs (Paris: Maradan, 1811).

She flew into a fit of rage when she met with some opposition and shocked her audience by threatening to throw the kingdom into the fire rather than let it be torn from the hands of the rightful successors (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 38-39). This outburst presaged an overzealous and clumsy entry into the political arena.

The fêtes of Sceaux came to a standstill with the aborted Conspiracy of Cellamare instigated by the Duchess. Louis XIV's will which provided for the succession of the legitimized princes had been nullified upon his death in 1715. Parliament who supported the Duc d'Orléans made the latter Regent in contravention of the Will. The Duchesse du Maine, the soul of the party hostile to the Regent, was the prime contact for the participants in the Cellamare Conspiracy (Abensour, Léon 95).⁹⁸ Unable to have her husband's rights preserved, the outraged Duchess, seething "beneath the flowers" of her mythological paradise (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 39), entered into a plot with the Spanish Ambassador to mount a campaign to overthrow the Regent. Her machinations misfired, and she was arrested in 1718 and imprisoned in the Château of Dijon, and the Duc du Maine was sent to Doullens in Picardy. They were not liberated until 1720.

The Duchesse felt no mortification when faced with the reality of imprisonment. Upon her return to Sceaux, she had

⁹⁸ Léon Abensour, La Femme et le féminisme avant la Révolution (Geneva: Slatkin, 1977).

learned nothing (Lombardini viii), and resumed the comedy of her life as shepherdess and goddess with the same pride, self-absorption, illusion and frantic activity as in the past. "Hers is an elect soul;" wrote Voltaire in 1752, "she will love comedy to her latest moment, and when she falls ill, I advise you to administer some fine play to her instead of Extreme-unction" (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 39). From her birth to her death at age 77, the Duchesse du Maine embodied the philosophic precept that a man or woman who, after their birth did not experience resistance in the world about them, would in the end persuade themselves that the world was a part of themselves and their own body. The Court of Sceaux never ceased to function according to just such precept under the proprietorship of this queen. Any other will than her own appeared to her as an insult and a brazen infraction of natural law (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 40).

Over the course of the years after the failed plot life at Sceaux resumed its fitful pace. Voltaire continued to be a memorable guest and sometimes succored the Duchesse's nocturnal anxiety. In 1746 he sought asylum at the chateau where she concealed him for two months in a secluded apartment with closed shutters. Here he began to write several of his "Contes," including Zadig, which he hastened to read aloud to the Duchess during the long empty nights. Despite the demand for wit and

intellect, nothing else of real value to the world of literature was inspired at Sceaux. Guests still came to the enchanted vale to pay homage to Her Serene Highness and to rival among themselves to amuse her (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 46-47). Mme de Genlis states, however, that at times some guests became bored with the facetious repartees which the uninvited called "les galères de l'esprit" because one was always expected to be amusing, a tiring obligation. The beaux esprits at Sceaux overdid flattery to the point of the ridiculous. The Duchess really did not even have a pretty face, Mme de Genlis asserts, and she was deformed, yet verses written in her honor spoke only of her beauty and the love she inspired. One day, as she rose from her dressing table, a poet among the company said to her that she had surpassed all the feats of Alexander in courage by turning away from her mirror (Genlis De l'Influence des femmes 248).

For Sainte-Beuve the moral side of the eccentricities and absurdities of the Court of Sceaux was its most memorable aspect and he concluded his essay on the Duchess with this appreciation: "If you wish to study in a perfect specimen, and as if under the microscope, the dainty egotism, the fantastic and coquettish despotism of a princess of the blood in the olden time, and the artless impossibility in which she lives of conceiving any other existence in the world than her own, go to Sceaux; there you will see these gross defects in miniature, just as we see goldfish moving in the sunshine in a transparent bowl"

(Sainte Beuve Portraits 18th Century 47; Lombardini xi). Mme de Staal lived in the goldfish bowl. By the time she had spent 36 years there cynicism bordering on pessimism was generally tempered with philosophic resignation. In a letter to Mme du Deffand in 1747, she almost attained Sainte-Beuve's detachment. Rather than make herself miserable by efforts to avoid life's inconveniences, she wrote her friend, she prefers not to quarrel with them. It is best to take the times, people and everything as one finds them. She no longer makes any specific wishes, except to join Mme du Deffand at St. Joseph's, if only she were wise enough to renounce the "pomp and vanities of this world." Nevertheless, even then she fears she would repent taking the veil; better to face up to her unchangeable situation since she is not rich enough to board in a convent on any other terms.⁹⁹

A number of Mme de Staal's letters to Mme du Deffand in which there is a question of the latter's pending visit to Sceaux, emphasized repeatedly that the Duchesse du Maine was never at peace until every room in the chateau was filled, no matter how or by whom. "The desire to be surrounded increases," Mme de Staal wrote in September 1747, "and I foresee that if you have an apartment and do not fill it, there will be great regret for what you lose, no matter what it is. Great people, by dint of expanding themselves, become so thin one can see daylight

⁹⁹ The Unpublished Correspondence of Madame du Deffand, trans. Mrs. Meeke, vol. 1 (London: A.K. Newman & Co., 1810) LXI:222-225.

through them; it is a fine study to contemplate them; I know nothing that brings one more surely back to philosophy."¹⁰⁰

The crowning achievement of Mme de Staal's Mémoires, according to Sainte-Beuve, is the totality of the finely hewn portrait Mme de Staal painted of her superior. Several quotations from this portrait have been cited earlier in this chapter; an enumeration of additional elements may serve to complete the picture the reader may form and lead to a better understanding of what, for want of a better term, I call the "cataleptic" attitude of Mme de Staal vis-a-vis her life-long employer. Mme de Staal ascribes, among other attributes, the following qualities to the Duchess in her portrait: The provision of ideas the Duchess received during childhood served as her unalterable lifetime rules; all further examination was impossible to her mind. She believed in herself just as she believed in God and Descartes. Her mirror raised no doubt to her as to the beauty of her face; it had no weight against the judgment of those who decided that she was beautiful. Her vanity was unreflecting. Intercourse with her is slavery; her tyranny is undisguised; she never deigns to color it with an appearance of friendship. She says, ingenuously, that she has the misfortune not to be able to do without persons for whom she cares nothing at all. And she proves it. She hears with

¹⁰⁰ The Duchesse's physical sparseness, of course, refers to her eager but anxious compulsion to collect myriad friends while displaying emotional bankruptcy in maintaining them. It is a metaphor for a flimsy and unconvincing point of view.

indifference the death of those who, if they kept her waiting for a quarter of an hour for a walk or a game of cards, would make her weep (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 48-49). After years of faithful servitude under this remarkable despot, Mme de Staal is to be excused for using the terms "tyranny" and "slavery." If we should wonder at her outspoken assessment of the Duchess, it is worth noting that the Mémoires did not appear until 1755 - three years after the death of the Duchesse du Maine and five years after Mme de Staal's own death. The guess is worth venturing that, in view of Mme de Staal's skill in the art of camouflage of which she made ample use in the Bastille, at the time of the composition of the Mémoires (which were most probably written within a year or two of the final events recounted therein), she may well have determined upon a secure cache in which to conceal her manuscript - perhaps at Gennevilliers, the home she sometimes shared with the Baron, far from the probing mind of the Duchess. She may even have prearranged its posthumous publication. The state of her mind as she wrote is open to speculation, for it would appear that no one has undertaken to uncover pertinent facts. Whatever the circumstances, one can only marvel at the candor of her less than adulatory tribute to her employer.

Part 2

The Era: Social and Literary.

The Duchesse du Maine's complete self-confidence did not derive from personal accomplishment, nor was it a characteristic peculiar to one individual. Abensour - who called Mme de Staal by the rather elevated title of "reader" to the Duchesse du Maine - speaking of women and feminism before the Revolution - provides an interesting account of the code that allowed all blood princesses - those that ranked third after the Queen and the Royal Princesses - to behave with so little consideration toward others. Birth alone conferred on them arrogance which included the desire to stir things up by inciting rivalries among members of their entourage. Jealous of prerogatives and titles, they were consumed, as a class, with the need to protect the potential rights of their sons and husbands to the throne. In imitation of the royal court they kept around them a numerous band of women from whom they demanded respect for their superior status (Abensour 87). The lesser noblewomen aspired to posts at the important courts, and when all of the positions of "dame d'honneur" or "dame d'atour" were filled, new

posts were created for favored candidates. Once in place, it was difficult to dislodge an occupant. Maintaining one's position was also a formidable task in view of the warfare that rivals engaged in. It is little wonder that Mme de Staal, for example, refused her first job offer in the household of the Duchesse de la Ferté upon learning that Louisan, the chief "dame d'honneur," had taken a dislike to her probably just because of the Duchess's obvious preference for her. Nor is it surprising that Mme de Staal repeatedly sought to remove herself from the circle of court women at Sceaux who treated her with malevolent disdain. Her eventual marriage to the Baron de Staal, which the Duchesse du Maine assured her would improve her status among the other women of the Court, made scant difference. The Duchess herself continued to show the same marks of esteem to others in the household who in the past had pulled rank on Mme de Staal by selecting them instead of the bride to accompany her in her carriage for attendance at royal ceremonies. This led Mme de Staal to the distasteful conclusion that when one has once been considered an inferior, one is always an inferior (Mémoires 238).

Generally, the lesser noblewomen enjoyed at Sceaux as elsewhere a central role; they comprised a milieu of intrigue and followed a complicated form of etiquette, even with respect to secret influence peddling. Male courtiers depended on their zealous aid to receive social advantages and effect political coups. The Duchesse du Maine in turn turned to trusted servants such as Mme de Staal, her chamberwoman, to perform research

duties in the course of advancing her dubious schemes in connection with the Cellamare Conspiracy. The possible deleterious outcome on these women of her personal ambitions mattered little or not at all to her. Opportunistic, she took advantage of any circumstance to further her own interests. For example, following Mme de Staal's release from the Bastille, upon learning of the loyal services of the latter's servant, Rondel, without blinking, she hired her away from Mme de Staal to work as her own "femme de garde-robe."

Before her involvement in revolutions, the objective of the Duchess had been to lift the spirits of herself and her guests at Sceaux by distractions rather than to instruct them in anyway whatsoever, and she valued those who could amuse, such as the youthful Voltaire when he was a budding novelist and playwright (Abensour 318). His first prose stories of 1714-1716 were written for the Court of Sceaux. The Duchess who always sought the prime roles, played Mélinade in Le Crocheur borgne (Vaillot Avec Mme du Châtelet 287).¹⁰¹

The capacity for distraction had a dark side, as the Goncourts noted in their examination of the frivolous life of aristocratic women in the 18th century. These women may have set the tone and taste for exquisite manners, unrestrained gallantry and great liberty of thought and movement, but all of this led to

¹⁰¹ René Vaillot, Avec Mme du Châtelet. 1734-1749 (Oxford Voltaire Foundation, 1988).

an "intoxication of the mind" (Goncourt 100).¹⁰² Following the endless rounds of dissipation and the search for pleasure, their energy flagged and they succumbed to the wretched malady of ennui, "...ce principe de mort...qui apporte à l'âme de la France...un si singulier désenchantement de son courage et de son initiative" (Goncourt 311). Boredom was everywhere and women suffered particularly because their hearts had no fixed point of reference either in family life or in civic affairs. As an antidote to worldly amusements, they took refuge in the solitude of reading, only to return to the world with an even greater frenzy of activity.¹⁰³ The dominant passion of the Duchesse du Maine, affirmed Mme de Staal, was "la passion de la multitude," a point that the Goncourts also address. They noted that she hated herself and others as did many women of her time because she/they lacked an inner core of strength. While she made of everything a spectacle, she was consumed with a sense of solitude, alone or in a crowd (Goncourt 313). The arts of communication, negotiation and public relations were otherwise defined in the 18th century than in the 20th, with its obsession

¹⁰² Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, La Femme au XVIIIème siècle (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1887).

¹⁰³ Tilley states that Mme de Lambert in L'Education des filles condemned as immodest the passion women of the 18th century exhibited for unusual branches of knowledge. To illustrate, their attendance at Carré's lectures on mathematics was enthusiastic. The anatomist Duvernay told the guests at Sceaux that Mme de Staal knew the human body better than any girl in France which suggests that she had read his works. Arthur Tilley, The Decline of the Age of Louis XIV or French Literature (1687-1715) (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1929; rpt. Barnes & Noble, 1968) 240-241.

with psychotherapy. The Duchess never worried about the demands she made upon members of her household, but her careless and unthinking habits had alarming consequences for her associates, particularly Mme de Staal, whose exceptional merit she did recognize. She gave little more than fleeting attention to the pursuit of happiness of her trusted servant; and for years, before the scales fell from her eyes, Mme de Staal continued to fall victim to the vain promises of her mistress.

It is curious to speculate that these frivolous women of the 18th century so busily occupied with gowns, suppers, balls, visits, trinkets, games, and - even - pet monkeys, could experience what two centuries later Sartre would call "le néant," and the Goncourts termed the "sleep of death" (Goncourt 313). Mme de Staal, with all of her education, was not immune to this plague. A growing acerbity of mind is most manifest in her later letters to Mme du Deffand in which an astringent style has replaced the earlier dry tone. These letters show a deterioration of Mme de Staal's élan vital, and lacking the piquancy of the Mémoires, give further evidence of a life grown sad and sadder. In letter LXIV of September 24, 1747, Mme de Staal, continuing on the topic of her friend's pending visit, forewarns Mme du Deffand that although the Duchess has given assurances that Mme du Deffand will have an apartment at Sceaux, she must not plan to absent herself frequently during her visit for it would be a bad example for any guest "to have a will of her own in a palace." She must resign herself to "enact the

automaton" for several hours a day (Deffand 231-232). Mme de Staal thus transfers to Mme du Deffand her own coded reflex.

When Mme de Staal reports the death of the Duchesse d'Estrées at Sceaux to Mme du Deffand in early October 1747, she states that the day after the funeral sorrow was banished from the chateau and the Duchesse du Maine hurried her waiting lady off to join a hunting party. Mme du Deffand had apparently expressed concern in an earlier letter for the Duchesse's lack of regrets for a person for whom she had professed a great regard over the years, to which Mme de Staal repeats the Duchesse's response: "Vanity renders us anxious to keep up an intimacy with many people whom we really dislike," and then adds that it is foolish for Mme du Deffand to make the death of the Duchesse d'Estrées the constant subject of her letters (Deffand 248-250). This is only one example of the Duchesse's incapacity for friendship and her compulsive need to blot out intrusive ennui.

The gradual degradation of Mme de Staal's zest for life was comprehended by Mme du Deffand who, in fact, was one of the century's most vociferous representatives of the malady of ennui. To escape its ravages she immersed herself in both literature and nocturnal gamboling until her death at age 84. In a letter to the Duchesse de Choiseul, whose opinion she sought concerning a new minister, she made this telling statement: "I remember how often I heard the late Mme de Staal say: 'I am delighted to make new acquaintances; I always hope they will be worth more than the old ones; I am at least certain they cannot be worse.'" Mme de

Choiseul replied with some tartness that she was far from thinking as Mme de Staal did, which seemed horrible to her, that she was not dissatisfied with any of her acquaintances and was enchanted with her friends (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 269).¹⁰⁴

I have found no information to indicate Mme de Staal's motivation for setting down her life and times in memoir form. It is pure conjecture to suggest she sought emotional catharsis when her marriage to the Baron de Staal failed to bring the freedom from bondage she envisaged because it should have placed her under the obligation to share her duties. Her Mémoires terminate with this event followed by a brief account of the death of the Duc du Maine after a year of inexpressable suffering during which the Duchess demonstrated selfless devotion in caring for him. Mme de Staal had more than one reason to regret the loss of a man "digne de beaucoup d'estime." The passing of the Duc also meant that the last of all her hopes of good fortune collapsed, and she recognized that her marriage had merely served to "resserrer la chaîne que j'avais prétendu relâcher" (Mémoires 239). These two events occurred in 1735-36 and Mme de Staal lived for 14 more years. The marriage did not prevent the Duchess from prohibiting

¹⁰⁴ It was perhaps chiefly the various characterizations found in Mme de Staal's correspondence with Mme du Deffand that prompted René Vaillot to refer to her as "la spirituelle vipère," (Vaillot Avec Mme du Châtelet 291) and Jean Orioux to depict her as malicious and amusing, simultaneously cruel and clever (Jean Orioux, Jean, Voltaire, Paris: Flammarion, 1966. 318). The bitterness projecting from these letters written three years before her death contrasts sharply with the axiomatic observations found in the Mémoires.

her servant from spending military leave with her husband, despite his repeated requests, and reneging on her firm promises beforehand that once married Mme de Staal's situation would improve. Ultimately, Mme de Staal entered into the marriage with great trepidation and the deceptive experiences that followed lead us to assume it was an unhappy union. However, there is no extant writing as far as I know to show that this was necessarily the case. Mme de Staal died in 1750 at Gennevilliers, the country cottage belonging to her husband. The Baron was ostensibly living at this time, but we don't know where he was nor what had become of him. The numerous letters from Mme de Staal to Mme du Deffand in 1747 indicate that eleven years after her marriage she remained more than ever bound by her service to the Duchess but make no mention of her husband. To the reader seeking a satisfactory closure to her adventures - and to her servitude - this is a disappointment.

Emotional catharsis cannot entirely explain the writing of the Mémoires, however, and inasmuch as the desire for posthumous glory has already been discounted, we must continue to ask ourselves what then prompted them? To preserve feelings and reputations, perhaps, they appeared posthumously. It may also be that Mme de Staal sought solace (or could it have been revenge at last?) through the presentation of a social critique of which the Mémoires on a certain level may be. A clearer understanding of her motives may emerge from a glance at some of English Showalter's comments regarding the preference feminist authors at

the beginning of the 18th century showed for memoirs. In a desire to reject the excesses of the 17th century novel, Showalter states that it was thought that greater realism could be obtained through the use of the first person narrative in rendering a romantic tale (Showalter 18-19).¹⁰⁵ By presenting a confession or an apology for his life the narrator could hope to gain the confidence of the reader, and with a smoke screen divulge covert purposes and suppressed disappointments (Showalter 262-263). Focussing on himself as an abstract moral entity, the narrator would then be able to portray the perennial struggle of the individual to gain a foothold in a monolithic society. The author would therefore appear as a victim from whom society exacts a heavy price. His experience would subsequently develop the theme of the loss of innocence. Tragic circumstances are exactly what Mme de Staal had to endure when she emerged from the security of the convent where her every wish had been granted. Virtually penniless and untrained in a profession, she was obliged to seek a way to impose herself on the outside world. This is how she later described the dichotomy her mind exhibited: "J'ai été traitée dans mon enfance en personne de distinction; et par la suite je découvris que je n'étais rien, et que rien dans le monde ne m'appartenait. Mon âme, n'ayant pas pris d'abord le pli que lui devait donner la mauvaise fortune, a toujours résisté

¹⁰⁵ English Showalter, Jr., The Evolution of the French Novel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972).

à l'abaissement et à la sujétion où je me suis trouvée; c'est la l'origine du malheur de ma vie" (Mémoires 17).

Showalter argues that the point of view of an impersonal society was represented in the memoir genre by an authority figure whose voice expresses the traditional view of society in opposition to that of the narrator (Showalter 26). This authority figure becomes a miscreant, and of course in the Mémoires of Mme de Staal, the authority villain incarnate is the Duchesse du Maine. Since France in the early eighteenth century was ruled by an "enlightened" aristocracy, the nobility to which the Duchess belonged, set the tone for certain principles of behavior. According to Showalter, through the abrasive contact with the authority figure, the hero (or heroine) of novels, or the narrator/narratrice of memoirs, gradually learned resignation and acceptance and relinquished personal desires, even rights, in order to conform to a certain moral code (Showalter 268). In the realm of marriage the authoritarian system exerted its influence as well, for the proper choice of a marriage partner could devolve upon the designated "ruler". The hero or heroine who fell in love, therefore ran the risk of embarking on a collision course with authority. To avoid conflict, he/she generally responded by acquiescing to the established code with a cynical attitude. Most renounced the pursuit of happiness and conformed. In a sense they exhibited a form of heroism by joining the correct amount of submission to an equal amount of opposition in order to obtain a modicum of peace. This balancing act of

submission and opposition was chosen by Mme de Staal; she accommodated herself to the whims of her lovers, the Marquis de Silly and the Chevalier de Ménil, as well as to authoritarian figures such as the Duchesse du Maine, showing a willingness to do favors and services for both categories in an attempt to win them to her point of view. Her bittersweet attachment to her first love, the dashing Marquis de Silly who was 12-14 years her senior, survived her deception at realizing her feelings were not reciprocated. Nonetheless, his genuine admiration which developed into a deep and abiding friendship led her, hopelessly, to sublimate her own feelings to become his adviser in business as well as affairs of the heart until his dying day. The fickle Chevalier de Ménil, whose protestations of everlasting love when the two were confined in the Bastille, encouraged her to let down her guard, and later write: "Je ne désirais plus d'autre liberté que celle dont je jouissais. Il ne me semblait pas qu'il y eût d'autre monde que l'enceinte de nos murs. C'est le seul temps heureux que j'aie passé dans ma vie" (Mémoires 177). Ménil, however, forgot his avowal when free and fell in love with a rather ordinary cousin from Anjou for whom he eventually sought the favor of Mme de Staal. Thus, the pragmatic first person narrator of the memoir genre could speak quite forcefully against society's rules while simultaneously admitting to their validity. As a result he was able to survive as a whole person although his faith in the societal organism that almost broke him was destroyed (Showalter 271-72). In just such a way, Mme de Staal

speaks forcefully against her situation but in order to survive, conforms. Yet she loses faith in the system responsible for her failure.

The travail of the narrator in the Mémoires of Mme de Staal therefore clearly embodies this conflict between the heroine and society. Mme de Staal acknowledges throughout her discourse to the failure of her life and seeks to gain the confidence of the reader by offering an apology for her behavior. For example, she reveals secret motives and hidden frustrations while stepping outside herself to methodically examine herself in the abstract as the victim from whom society, in the person of the impersonal authority figures of the Duchess de Maine and others whose voices express the traditional view of society, exact a price, i.e., when the Duchesse du Maine at last confessed to the Regent her part in the Cellamare Conspiracy and was about to be released from her fortress prison, the commissioner of police M. Leblanc visited Mme de Staal in the Bastille to tell her she no longer had any reason to keep secret her own involvement in the affair. With unusual sang froid, Mme de Staal responded that if the Duchesse du Maine had informed the Regent and his officers of everything that had occurred, that should be sufficient since the Duchess knew better than anyone else what concerned her; and being herself, Mme de Staal, ignorant in the matter, she could add nothing further. Here she acts the victim who seeks to justify her role as an underling with limited responsibility. When Leblanc, who rebuked her for her assurance

and threatened to prolong her imprisonment - a suggestion that she told him was anything but odious to her - shows surprise at her reply, and asks her if someone had given her her horoscope, she answers with the same coolness: "L'horoscope de quelqu'un qui naît dans une si mauvaise fortune que la mienne se fait tout seul;...on sait qu'on sera malheureux, n'importe de quelle façon" (Mémoires 185). Again, it is the resigned victim who speaks in the interest of survival.

A kind of precursor authority figure may be found in the person of the Duchesse de la Ferté, for it is by her interference that the will of the narratrice is initially worn down and mollified to fit the mold of the employment awaiting her at the aristocratic Court of Sceaux. In each and every instance of rebellion, the narratrice eventually renounces desires and rights to conform to the moral code established for her caste. As an illustration, when Mme de Staal first escapes from Sceaux to the Carmelite convent, the established order in the person of the prioress, whom she begs to immediately accept her into the convent, quickly rebuffs her by telling her that her worldly occupations and the speed with which she has made her decision make her an unfit candidate for the rigors of conventual life. As a consequence, Mme de Staal is impelled to renounce her projected escape to some form of happiness, and return to Sceaux. On the second attempt to enter a convent, she revisits her old home turf at St. Louis in Rouen where she is received with unrestrained enthusiasm by those who remember her. Within a

short time, however, she becomes convinced of the folly of her design to find peace and solitude in these "petits Etats monarchiques" (Mémoires 228) where political intrigues similar to those that made court life at Sceaux unbearable wreak the same havoc. Once again she keeps her promise to the Duchess and returns unhappily to Sceaux.

Mme de Staal's choice of marriage partners more than once also leads her on a collision course with authority. The Duchesse du Maine bitterly opposed Mme de Staal's personal desire to marry the Chevalier de Ménil to whom she lost her heart when both were incarcerated in the Bastille. It matters little that by the time the Duchess becomes cognizant of her ex-femme de chambre's attachment, the Chevalier has behaved cavalierly and his heart has proved inconstant. The Duchess of Maine subverts as well an arrangement by well-wishing friends to bring together the widower Dacier and Mme de Staal, a marriage which would have enriched her financially, intellectually and socially, if not sentimentally. Unfortunately, poor Dacier died abruptly and the Duchess was shamed into a rare expression of guilt at the financial loss Mme de Staal incurred through her delaying tactics. With each deception, Mme de Staal's cynicism increased until, finally, as other marriage prospects proved unacceptable, she abdicated the pursuit of happiness and reconciled herself to an accommodation with the authority figure through a marriage arranged by the Duchess to the Baron de Staal, a lieutenant in the Duc du Maine's regiment and "homme de condition," who agreed

to the marriage with the stipulation that he be made a commander of the regiment. While confessing to the reader her misgivings in each instance, ultimately Mme de Staal assents to the validity of the commands of the ruler. She survives each onslaught against her integrity but her faith in the societal organism has faltered, reinforcing her observation in the aforementioned letter to Mme de Deffand of September 1747 that "great people" , by expanding themselves, become so transparent that they drive mere mortals to ruminate on the delights of philosophy (Deffand LXI:222-225).

Although the true motivation for the Mémoires remains illusive, Mme de Staal oftentimes seems to be presenting a case for the philosophy of determinism prevalent in the 18th century. Her well-reasoned intentions are doomed to failure. Unfortunately she ignores premonitory omens that are obvious. One of the most significant instances is her admission to a sense of foreboding upon finding her free agency initially violated when she is drawn unwillingly but powerless into royal service by the sinuous tentacles of the Duchesse de la Ferté. Sinking into despair at repeated and wearysome visits to Versailles and Sceaux while a tantalizing but immaterial job offer hovers over the horizon for a year, she sees her fate begin to spin definitively out of her control, but is helpless to rebel.

Mme de Staal was not positioned to sight the faint glimmerings of individual freedom that were flickering outside of the gates of Sceaux. Between 1711 when she joined forces with

the Duchesse du Maine and until her death in 1750, the social hierarchy remained outwardly about the same. During the Regency, however, men of law, finance and letters began to join the ranks of the aristocracy, a fact that signalled pending change. From the 1730's onward, power started to decentralize and adherence to the old legal formalities softened. Royal prerogatives accorded to bloodlines however continued to obscure the early rumblings of liberty (Showalter 282-285). Matriarchal dominion and trivial pursuits at Sceaux proceeded throughout the period almost unchanged until the Duchesse du Maine died. Voltaire who carried on a voluminous correspondence with Mme du Deffand between 1732 and 1775, writing to her from Potsdam in 1751, contrasted the serfdom of the Duchesse du Maine with what he initially believed was a new freedom to think, write and say what he chose in the territory of a king who had won five battles. "Do you know you were slaves at Sceaux and Anet?" he asks rhetorically. "Yes, slaves when compared to the real liberty one enjoys at Potsdam" (Deffand 246). Mme de Staal did not live long enough to enjoy even the illusion of freedom that deceived Voltaire.

Part 3

The Mémoires: A Personal Testimony

When the Duchesse du Maine hired Mme de Staal as a lady's maid, she took into her service a person equal intellectually, morally, spiritually and culturally to the members of the most distinguished society of her day (Sainte-

Beuve Portraits 18th Century 41). Her intelligence enabled Mme de Staal to produce for posterity her Mémoires, the most intimate and accurate depiction available of the authoritative character of her mistress and a timeless evocation of an intriguing by-gone era. Saint-Beuve who nick-named Mme de Staal "La Bruyère de Sceaux," noted in the latter half of the 19th century that she had never received the recognition as a true moralist to which she was entitled. He saw in her an image of La Bruyère because of her capacity to view the totality of things, most particularly the Duchesse du Maine, and convey them with a discretion that transcends time. Mme de Staal exemplified Sainte-Beuve's assertion by the indelible traits of character she ascribed to the Duchesse du Maine: "...(P)ersonne n'a jamais parlé avec plus de justesse, de netteté et de rapidité, ni d'une manière plus noble et plus naturelle. Son esprit n'emploie ni tours, ni figures, ni rien de tout ce qui s'appellent invention. Frappé vivement des objets, il les rend comme la glace d'un miroir les réfléchit, sans ajouter, sans omettre, sans rien changer" (Mémoires 89), wrote Mme de Staal of her first meeting with the Duchess. Unless, of course, that person were the author of the Mémoires, who speaks with equal clarity and accuracy.

Mme de Staal describes the mode of life at Sceaux with humor as well as cynicism. The litany of caprices, ambitions, pompous buffoonery, and fantastic fêtes captivates as much by the sparse evocations of the glamorous life it derides as by the accents of torment and boredom it emphasizes: the sleepless

nights of the femme de chambre reading to the insomniac Princess, days spent composing trifling verses, anagrams, pastorals and interludes, or, under the direction of her mistress, conspiratorial letters to persons of doubtful character to foment a revolution (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 44). Following her release from an heroic imprisonment of a year and a half in the Bastille, which Mme de Staal experienced as a sort of liberation from bondage, she was ordered peremptorily by the Duchess to return to Sceaux. She complied with mixed emotions. She had been able to awaken in the hearts of the administrative police and fellow prisoners an adoration similar to that which she had known in her days at the convent St. Louis in Rouen where she had reigned as a little queen, the cherished pensionnaire of the good Mesdames de Grieu. Now, according to a statement from her mistress, her constancy, loyalty, and determination to preserve what remained of the reputations of the Duchess and all those involved in the conspiracy during this incarceration were to be rewarded with an elevation in rank and added prestige. As it turned out, Mme de Staal received a promotion of sorts to lady in waiting to the Duchess for which the only mark of distinction seems to have been a room with a window and a fireplace (Mémoires 203). Nevertheless, she accommodated herself as best she could following the failed conspiracy when "Dream and delirium" enveloped Sceaux anew with the old cloaks of fantasy (Sainte-Beuve Portraits 18th Century 43-44).

The Mémoires provide an abundant selection of defining moments in the first twenty-five years of Mme de Staal's servitude at Sceaux during which the bonds of authority, with an assist from fate, impeded her progress toward the fulfillment of her dreams. A cursory perusal of the events of her life during these years will reveal some of the more significant examples.

It has been generally thought that Marguerite-Jeanne Cordier Delaunay, Baroness de Staal, was born in 1693.¹⁰⁶ Sainte-Beuve claimed her birth date was August 30, 1684, by reason of historical references in the Mémoires, since Mme de Staal gives no indication of the date herself. Herold says she was 26 years old before she learned the world did not revolve around her which puts him in agreement (106-107). If 1684 is correct, it would mean that Mme de Staal was 27 years old when she entered the service of the Duchesse du Maine in 1711 and her character, already formed, could not have been altered by her new mode of life, only inhibited (Sainte-Beuve Portraits Littéraires 898).

¹⁰⁶According to the Universal Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography and Mythology. Vol. 2, I-Z, ed. Joseph Thomas (Phil.: Lippincott, AMS Ed. 1972) 2234, she was born in Paris in 1693. Tilley says she was 18 in 1711 when she first went to Sceaux where she was considered a "prodigy of learning" (241). Barrière's Avant-Propos to Mme de Staal's Mémoires, follows this date. Other critics, however, have claimed that the year of her birth was 1684. Lombardini goes along with the earlier date (x-x1). See also Sainte-Beuve in text.

Before she was two years old she and her mother entered the Abbaye de Saint Sauveur d'Evreux in Normandy, which may have been similar to the provincial convents described by Abensour where the nuns conserved the spirit of dedication and charity, and were zealous in caring for and teaching the poor and unfortunate at a minimal charge (Abensour 275-276). In addition to a brief reference to her mother's death in a convent shortly after Mme de Staal's release from the Bastille (concerning which she expresses the regret that she was at last, belatedly, in a position to help her financially (Mémoires 210), little more is said in the Mémoires about her mother beyond the fact that she had been Governess to the daughter of the Duchesse de Ventadour until she realized her piety was incompatible with life at Court. No more detail is given of her father, an impecunious painter who for an unknown reason set out for England shortly before Mme de Staal's birth. His family name was "Launai," converted by his wife to Delaunay and conveyed in that form upon their daughter,¹⁰⁷ who was thereafter frequently referred to as Mlle Delaunay among friends and acquaintances and simply Delaunay by the Duchesse du Maine.

The two Abbesses de Grieu who administered the Abbaye de Saint-Sauveur were noble ladies (one was the sister of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld) and loved Mlle Delaunay for her intelligence and charm. She was a precocious child and the sisters eagerly

¹⁰⁷ Universal Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography and Mythology 16.

responded to her unflagging curiosity, and taught her everything they possibly could of sacred and secular history. Moreover, they gave her a rational turn of mind (Herold 106-107). A first change in direction in the young girl's life occurred when the Mesdames de Grieu found themselves involved in a quarrel between Louis XIV and the Holy See concerning the rights of abbesses to be nominated to "Urbanist" convents. Awaiting the issue of the matter, they took possession of the Priory of Saint-Louis at Rouen, and adopted Mlle Delaunay who went with them (Lombardini 3-4). She ruled over the little state as a queen, persuaded that everything was created just for her. The sisters continued to indulge her slightest whim, but as she later said, they tried to protect her against vanity. They also restricted her passion for reading which, it was thought, would endanger her health. This deprivation only increased her thirst for knowledge. As her religious ardor faded she turned to sentimental novels, until she became aware of an excessive reaction to the impressions they aroused, and stopped reading them (Mémoires 21).

At 13 years of age, a fellow-pensionnaire, Mlle de Silly, introduced her to La Recherche de la vérité by Descartes, which imbued her with a passion for abstract ideas that she attempted to verify in everyday life. When philosophy began to undermine her faith, she put it aside until she was able to digest it. In questions of a doubtful nature, she says in the Mémoires (23; 26-27), she learned early on to decide against her own inclinations.

From the lure of philosophy, she turned to mathematics, especially geometry, which taught her that "Le meilleur moyen de calmer les troubles de l'esprit n'est pas de combattre l'objet qui les cause, mais de lui en présenter d'autres qui le détournent et l'éloignent insensiblement de celui-là" (Mémoires 27). This was a life-preserving maxim that served Mme de Staal well in times of crisis. It saved her when in her early teens she developed a passion for M. Brunel, a lawyer and man of discriminating tastes who visited the convent. She was attracted by his impressive fund of knowledge, only to be disturbed when she learned that he had had a mistress (Mémoires 25). M. Brunel remained a close friend however and later offered her financial assistance in Paris (which she refused because it would have degraded her to accept Mémoires 50). His early death caused her great suffering. The same maxim surely served to calm her spirits when the strong attachment the Mesdames de Grieu felt for her aroused jealousy among some of the young nuns who eventually helped prepare a petition to the Archbishop of Rouen for the dissolution of Saint-Louis. The matter was resolved when the ladies de Grieu presented an accounting of their expenditures, resigned from the financial administration of the convent but remained on the premises at their own expense, and assumed responsibility for Mlle Delaunay. For the first time in her life Mlle Delaunay became aware of the precarious nature of her circumstances. Her friend Mlle de Silly left the convent at this time and she became acquainted with M. de Rey, a friend of the

abbesses, who offered her money. She refused the offer because he was married. She also contemplated becoming a nun but changed her mind, fearing such a commitment. Meanwhile, disdainful of the usual occupations of young women, music, dancing and the harpsichord, she once again showed a preference for novels which evoked the passions. Putting what she learned into practice, she discovered in M. de Rey the object of her second romantic infatuation. He had the habit of returning with her on foot from Rouen to the convent, walking along the far side of the square. She states that her love for him diminished when he began to lead her across the diagonal of the square and she calculated the difference between the sum of the two sides of the square and its diagonal with reference to his affection. The study of geometry, as already stated, had many advantages; Mlle Delaunay determined that it produced more solid judgments than passion, since the latter lessened in intensity when one finally could see its object for what it truly was. The truth one seeks, she mused, disappears just as one believes it to have been seized (Mémoires 28).

Her serious and rational mind preserved her from unfortunate emotional entanglements until at age 21 she visited Mlle de Silly at her family's chateau, and fell in love with the young Marquis de Silly, the latter's brother, an army officer who had been a prisoner at Blenheim in 1704. He was handsome, worldly and courteous with a nobility of spirit which compensated for an air of aloofness and self-absorption. He paid little

attention to Mlle Delaunay until one day while walking in the park by the chateau he overheard a conversation between the two young women in which they said some uncomplimentary things about him. His pride ruffled, he became more sociable and flattered Mlle Delaunay with attention. By a clever conceit she arranged a private walk with the Marquis but, disarmed by his presence, and attempting to mask her emotions, she engaged him in a discussion of astronomy (Lombardini 111; Mémoires 33). Although a man of the world and senior in age, he was captivated by her intelligence and an enduring friendship was sealed by this event. To her great anguish, Mlle Delaunay learned that it was to be just that, a devoted friendship, and nothing more. In a heart rending account in the Mémoires she describes, with a sort of geometric pathos, the departure of the Marquis de Silly for Court at the end of summer and her sense of the loss of love which grew in proportion to the distance that separated them. This scene of the awakening of love followed by shattering deception is one of the most moving of the Mémoires (34-37) .

The Marquis de Silly, unaware of the pain he had caused Mlle Delaunay, would continue to play a great role in her life until his own death in 1727 under the tragic circumstance of suicide which she refuses to discuss in any detail (Mémoires 226). Over the years he wrote her many affectionate brotherly letters, full of advice and counsel, and when she went to Paris to seek employment and was short of funds, he offered financial assistance. Again, fearing the loss of dignity, she declined to

accept the offer. The Marquis de Silly was undoubtedly the one real love of Mlle Delaunay's life and it is curious that he never seems to have recognized the depth of her feelings for him; yet unflinchingly took a sincere interest in her welfare. It is with a clear conscience therefore that he could write to her: "Ah!, how I should hate the man who could be evil enough to deceive you!" (Mémoires 37). Mlle Delaunay forgives and forgets in an act of self-justification which reminds one of Showalter's narratrice seeking to justify her behavior by forgiving and continuing to love the man who fails to love her. She only gingerly admits that she has kept all of his letters.

In 1710, one of the de Grieu sisters died and the other could no longer afford to pay for Mlle Delaunay's upkeep at St. Louis as well as that of her niece. It was then that Mlle Delaunay learned that the Marquis de Silly had anonymously offered to pay her board and room. Her refusal is cloaked in one of the many inexpugnable observations that add insight to her personality, sense to her philosophy, and provide a better understanding of why she was unable to seize the opportunities for fulfillment that from time to time came her way. "It is only our actions that degrade us," she muses in this instance. And we simultaneously admire and pity her (Mémoires 47-48).

Following several weeks spent with relatives of a friend Mlle Delaunay left for Paris with the Demoiselles de Neuville with just enough money for a brief stay in furnished rooms at the tiny Hotel de Châtillon, and several letters of

recommendation for employment as a governess. One immediately feels her humiliation and pain at the task of going from door to door begging protection from unknown people, and subjecting herself to their cold disdain. Yet, she does have social contacts, for M. Brunel (see page 40), in Paris at the same time, brings his friend Fontenelle to her rooms. This encounter is all the more pleasurable because she has read his annual Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences. Two letters from the Marquis de Silly provide solace during her period of orientation to Paris, the first full of sound advice concerning her choice of friends, and the cautionary reminder to speak and act simply without making a show of her knowledge in order to be charming. The letter offended her because the Marquis seemed to believe that she would seek to please anyone other than himself (Mémoires 50-51).

When the second sister de Grieu came to Paris with her niece and moved in with her brother, Mlle Delaunay joined them. While there she received a visit from her own sister Henriette (Mémoires 50-51), whom she had met only once before at Rouen when the marks of respect she received vexed Henriette and kept them apart. It was only when Mlle Delaunay fell from her pedestal that her sister sought to befriend her. At the time, Mlle Delaunay had just sufficient funds to pay for a quarterly pension when Mme de Grieu suggested she move with her to the Convent of Présentation. Meanwhile, Henriette, who was a lady's maid to the Duchesse de la Ferté, painted for the latter such an amiable portrait of the

prodigious talents of Mlle Delaunay that the Duchess, intrigued, passed it on to her sister, Mme de Ventadour, at Versailles. Together they decided that Mlle Delaunay should be placed in the Convent of Jouarre with the Rohan girls while the Court awaited the birth of the Dauphine's child to whom they determined between them she would be placed as governess. This fortuitous eventuality did not materialize and for the next year Mlle Delaunay learned what it meant to be discovered at Versailles but recovered by no one.

In borrowed clothes she went for her first interview at Versailles which took place in the boudoir of the Duchesse de la Ferté, after a long day of waiting, in a tiny room in a lofty garret to which she had to be carried at the last because she had almost fainted from exhaustion after climbing endless flights of stairs. The capricious Duchess immediately asked her to write a letter to Desmarets, the "Contrôler général" of finance, without disclosing the subject matter; the letter nevertheless was deemed perfect. The Duchess then precipitously took her prospective employment applicant on a whirlwind tour of the palace, where she met several noble personages, saw Louis XIV dine alone, Louis XV in his cradle, and met briefly many members of the nobility. During one of many visits on the following day she was ordered to discuss religion with the Duchesse de Noailles, and eventually became such an object of curiosity she felt like a monkey at a fair (Mémoires 104-105). The third day the Duchesse de la Ferté took Mlle Delaunay to Sceaux where she was first examined by

Malezieu and then introduced briefly to the Duchesse du Maine, who only absent-mindedly acknowledged her presence. No one was willing to pay her room and board at Jouarre; and when the Duchesse de la Ferté offered the only chair to the Abbé Vertot, who had been one of Mlle Delaunay's devotées at Saint-Louis when she reigned supreme, only to leave her standing, Mlle Delaunay was unable to accept such humiliation and fled the scene to shed tears of shame in private. Sadder and wiser she returned after a week to the Convent of the Présentation hoping never to return to either Versailles or Sceaux.

Over the next months, however, Mlle Delaunay was obliged to make several return trips to Sceaux with the Duchesse de la Ferté to be interviewed by diverse personages. These visits resulted in no firm employment offer. Meanwhile, she had exhausted her resources and ultimately had to borrow money for her room and board from M. Brunel. Eventually the Duchesse de la Ferté offered her a position in her own household, which she declined because of the antagonism of Louisan, the first chambermaid. In time word got out that one of the chamberwomen at Sceaux had retired. To avenge herself for Mlle Delaunay's slight the Duchesse de la Ferté set about to back her for this subaltern post at Sceaux. Aware that her dazzling image was on the decline, Mlle Delaunay acceded to the pressure of the Duchess: "Je la suivis avec la contenance d'un captif vaincu" (Mémoires 73). Once at Sceaux, the Duchesse de la Ferté repudiated her.

Mlle Delaunay was installed with another chambermaid in a cold, dark, low ceilinged airless mezzanine where one had to grope one's way. Her first contacts with the Duchesse du Maine were disastrous; sincerity and good will did not compensate for her lack of knowledge, dexterity and good eye sight, she states. She had received an education in mathematics, science, anatomy, etc. at St. Louis but sadly lacked training in practical household arts. In reality, she was totally unprepared for the type of life she was to lead. Presented with a shirt to sew she joined the elbow to the shoulder; when the Duchess asked for a glass of water, she poured water on her dress; she picked up a powder box by the lid and a purse by the bottom, spilling the contents of both. Unaccustomed to the habits of servants she became the object of their aversion, and despair caused her to shut herself up in her cavern to read (Mémoires 74). Mlle Delaunay refers to her inability to perform basic tasks as clumsiness; she gives no indication that her "balourdises" were the result of the total lack of practical education she had had at the convent. (We will have to wait until Chapter III and Madame de Genlis to learn about educational reforms for girls that included such subjects as household management.) The Duchess who never said a word to her had tolerated with patience her clumsiness, but complained about her gloomy countenance (Mémoires 76). Filled with despondency at her hard existence, Mlle Delaunay developed a distaste for life and contemplated suicide; she wrote a passionate letter confessing her love to the

Marquis de Silly, but tore it up and threw it away before sending it. Fortunately her rational mind took hold and she prepared to examine her options (Mémoires 85).

An incident occurred, however, which changed her situation. In 1713 Paris was abuzz with accounts of a Mlle Testard who received nightly visits from a poltergeist. To the consternation of the Duchesse du Maine Fontenelle readily accepted the tales as factual. She asked Mlle Delaunay to write him a letter rebuking him for his credulity. The letter so delighted Fontenelle that he read it aloud to his guests who, in turn, asked for copies which they then circulated in Paris. Mlle Delaunay became an object of curiosity and respect which flattered her immensely. It was at this time that she was elevated to what Herold called a "glorified lady's maid with no special function." The Duchesse de la Ferté even forgot her grudge (Herold 116-117).

This early example of patience and resignation in the face of insufferable circumstances under an unaccustomed yoke of authority worked to Mlle Delaunay's advantage and seemed to augur well for her future. New people sought her out and she made numerous friends. M. de Valincourt, administrative assistant to the Duc du Maine's brother, the Comte de Toulouse, wished to meet her, as well as the Cardinal de Polignac, although up to this time the Duc du Maine was the only member of the aristocratic class whom she really believed valued merit. This new respect consoled Mlle Delaunay for "l'invincible dédain qu'ont les grands

pour ceux dont la condition leur est si inférieure" (Mémoires 89). The Duchesse du Maine, for her part, now took more notice of her chambermaid, even deigned to speak to her and sought out her replies which caused Mlle. Delaunay to feel affection for her mistress. Her relationship with the Duchess at this time took a positive turn.

The taste for pleasure at Sceaux reached its pinnacle as France's economy slumped. The Duchess assumed the role of the small but tiny Queen Bee (with a sting) of the secret Order of the Mouche à Miel, a courtly literary organization with laws and statutes, and the nights at the château were resplendent with a constant array of ballets, operas, charades, games and poetry (Mémoires 10-14; Herold 120-121). The Mémoires do not treat the amusements at Sceaux with satire. Mlle Delaunay appears to have taken them as seriously as her vision of reality would allow, which meant that they all fell within what she considered the guidelines for a job as a femme de chambre.

The upshot was that Mlle Delaunay cooperated with Malezieu on the composition of theatrical and musical fêtes, although the lady's maid says she was too timid to act in them (Mémoires 90). Of two comedies she wrote, "La Mode" and "L'Engouement", the former is still available in an adaptation by Frantz Funck-Brentano in the 1931 Librairie Théâtrale edition of plays.¹⁰⁸ Brentano acclaimed it as a chef-d'oeuvre but the

¹⁰⁸ Marguerite Jeanne (Cordier de Launay), baronne de Staal, "La Mode; comédie en un acte", adap. Frantz Funck-Brentano (Paris: Librairie théâtrale, 1931) 5-38.

direct realism of the portrait of morals alarmed the audience when it was played at the Comédie Française in the 18th century and it did not meet with success. Today it appears as a frothy one-act parlor play with twelve trifling scenes focussing on the indecision of a giddy countess as to whether or not to permit the signing of a marriage contract between her 17 year old daughter Julie and her 24 year old "prétendant" Ornac. A young provincial baron just arrived in Paris, Ornac not only does not gamble, drink or incur debts, but his conversation is plainly honest and lacks dazzling wit, which dismays the countess. Worst of all he appears to be in love with Julie, a ridiculous breach of the marriage code. Julie also comes under her mother's fire for her obsession with reading about Roman history and a lack of interest in fashion and twiddle-twaddle. The action speeds up when an unexpected bit of gossip links the honest suitor with a dancer from the Paris opera which delights the countess, elevates the young man in her estimation and encourages her to reconsider the marriage. The gossip turns out to be a case of mistaken identity as unbeknownst to the countess the Ornac of the Opera is in truth the cousin of Ornac the Baron, so all ends well for the lovers who with the arrival of the notary in the last scene are set to sign the marriage contract. Two farcical incidents, one concerning an operation on the hysterical countess's dog Zinzali, and the other on the bilious Acaste's marriage proposal to the Marquise, are probably added to titilate jaded appetites. "Marry him," advises the authoritarian countess, "that is the surest

cure for his overzealous pursuit of you." The lovers in La Mode are more fortunate than Mme de Staal; they are able to outwit the less than brilliant calculations of the countess, something Mme de Staal was, unfortunately, unable to carry off in the real dramas of her life.

The glorious idyll at Sceaux came to an end with what Mme de Staal calls "une grande affaire politique" (Mémoires 91-92). Since her marriage, the Duchesse du Maine had been concerned with the elevation of her husband and children to a rank equal to her own, and felt they should enjoy all the honors due the blood princes. With the unexpected deaths of the natural successor princes to the throne of Louis XIV, she imagined the succession falling to her family. As his health declined in the summer of 1715, the question of an heir to the King became uppermost in people's minds. There was an unspoken fear that the young Louis XV might not survive until his majority; and interested parties sought to learn what dispositions the old King had made in his will. According to Mme de Staal, as a precaution, the Duchess du Maine pressed the Duc to speak with Mme de Maintenon to secure his posts as educator to the prince and commander of the palace guard. The Duc didn't think this was necessary. A veil of secrecy shrouded the contents of the will nonetheless, and Mme de Maintenon eluded any conversations on the matter. When the King, who mistrusted the Duc d'Orléans, the blood prince next in line

of succession, died on September 1, 1715 and his will was read, it was learned that he had conferred ruling power on the Council of the Regency with the Duc d'Orléans as President, and the Duc du Maine and his brother the Comte de Toulouse as full members. The next day, however, as mentioned earlier, Philippe d'Orléans called upon Parliament to declare the Will void, to put aside the Council of the Regency and give him full authority as Regent. Parliament complied. The Duchess did not fully understand at first that the Duc d'Orléans was on the verge of usurping all the power of the Regency, but sensing potential difficulties for her husband, attempted to ingratiate herself with d'Orléans and his party of nobles through secret intrigues. Notwithstanding, one of Philippe's first steps was to cancel the Duc's position as commander of the household troops (Mémoires 91-92).

The Duc and Duchess tried to bear up under the unexpected disappointment and the Duchess spoke to Mlle Delaunay about her concerns, strengthening the latter's affection for her and encouraging her unreserved devotion to the needs of her mistress. "Les simples apparences de l'estime et de l'amitié, surtout de la part des grands, ne manquent guère de nous séduire," she explained by way of an excuse that seems to reflect Showalter's contention that the narrator in the memoir genre sought to gain the confidence of the reader in order to make excuses for his/her behavior. In reality, the Duchesse's new reliance on Mlle Delaunay meant that the latter's work became more onerous (Mémoires 96) as she passed many more "nuits

blanches" reading to the Duchess, engaged in research to substantiate support for the Duc. "Je pris un véritable attachement pour ma princesse; et je me dévouais avec d'autant moins de réserve au soin de lui plaire, qu'il n'exigeait rien de moi qui ne fût parfaitement d'accord avec l'estime que je voulais d'elle," she says with what appears to be affection (or politics for posterity?) (Mémoires 96).

When the Duc and Duchesse moved to the Tuileries in order to be closer to Court, Mlle Delaunay found herself lodged in a low-ceilinged recess between the two large rooms reserved for the other women, with neither light nor warmth. She later told the Abbé de Chaulieu that with a window and a fireplace she would no longer feel the need to please people (Mémoires 99).

The months at the Tuileries were marked by libertine gatherings at the Temple, says Herold, who found it hard to believe that Mlle Delaunay, who was a frequent guest, refrained from taking part in the carefree amatory merriment. She ruled as an empress over the Abbé de Chaulieu, a devoted admirer who wrote gallant verses and insinuating letters to her. While she refused to accept money from him, she didn't hesitate to use his carriage (Herold 121-122).¹⁰⁹ Bernard in his introduction to the Recueil

¹⁰⁹ Guillaume Amfrie de Chaulieu (1636-1730) was a welcome figure in Paris society for whom he composed light verses. He was a graduate in humanities of the University of Paris and possessed wit and charm. A collection of his songs entitled "Divertissements de Sceaux" was written for the Duchesse de Maine and her friends. As an abbot he had a large income which enabled him to indulge his tastes, and when blind and gouty he developed as lively a passion for Mlle Delaunay as was possible for a man

des lettres de Mlle Delaunay, ¹¹⁰ says that Mme de Staal carried the letters from Chaulieu with her to the Bastille where they helped her mask her collusion in the Cellamare Conspiracy because they contained only marks of affection and were written in the script of a schoolboy due to Chaulieu's blindness (Mémoires 131). I am in agreement with Bernard that these letters communicate an appealing youthful freshness of emotion, expressed with an exceptionally refined tenderness, and urbane forbearance in the face of romantic competition. In his letters Chaulieu makes numerous references to his carriage and its availability for Mlle Delaunay's use. He seems to wish to put her needs before his desires whatever her feelings toward him (Recueil II:x; II:275-373).

The Mémoires (203) indicate that Mme de Staal sent for the Abbé's carriage to take her to Sceaux upon her release from the Bastille in February 1720. Unfortunately, Chaulieu was then too ill to appreciate her liberation and died three weeks later.

of 80 (Tilley 146-148). The amorous friendship ended when she was sent to the Bastille on December 29, 1718.

Herold relies upon the Mémoires de Madame de Staal...suivis des lettres de Mme de Staal à Mme le Marquise du Deffand et des lettres de Chaulieu à Mlle Delaunay, 2 vols. (Paris: Lemerre, 1877), for his information on Chaulieu. This is a different edition from that which I consulted at the Bibliothèque Nationale. See footnote 23.

¹¹⁰ Recueil des lettres de Mlle Delaunai (Mme de Staal) au chevalier de Ménil, au Marquis de Silly et à M. d'Héricourt auxquelles on a joint celles de M. de Chaulieu à Mademoiselle de Launai, et le portrait de Mme la duchesse de Maine (Paris: Bernard, Libraire de l'École Polytechnique, Quai des Augustins, près de la rue Gît-le-Cour, Porte cochère No. 31, au Ier. An IX).

Henceforth no one would be able to fill the place left empty by this trustworthy friend who had undertaken the rare duty of spreading joy in her life, she sadly remarks.

The Marquis de Silly attended these parties at the Tuileries, also as did Rémond, the courtly diplomat, scholar and philosopher who had gained favor with Dubois and Mme de Tencin. Rémond also courted Mlle Delaunay, and Vaillot says that the letters he wrote to her, although inconclusive as to the extent of their relationship, were sentimental and delicate (Vaillot Madame de Tencin et le Cardinal 103-104). While she was flattered by the attentions of the courtiers, Mlle Delaunay claimed that she neither loved nor deceived (Mémoires 100). She sought independence (if she could not capture the heart of Silly).¹¹¹

The carefree days at the Tuileries came to an end when the Regent appointed a special commission to determine the specific rights of the legitimized and blood princes. As Mlle Delaunay tells it, a war broke out between the two factions with M. le Duc, the Duchesse's brother, involved in a plan to divide

¹¹¹ The Marquis de Silly was at this time as always involved with one or another woman of distinguished rank, but was almost equally as unlucky in love as Mlle Delaunay. He wrote many letters to his friend seeking advice. On one occasion she became the confidante of his current heart throb, and acceded to his wishes by writing the letter severing the relationship. He sought her guidance as well about disseminating derogatory verses he had composed concerning this mistress. Silly preserved most of the letters he wrote to Mlle Delaunay after her release from prison, and upon his death in 1717 willed them to her (Recueil I:lviiij; II:197-195). We know from Mlle Delaunay's statement to that effect in the Mémoires that she kept at least two of Silly's early letters to her "next to her heart" (50-52).

the wealth of the Condé family among his aunts and himself. The Duchess was moreover forced to sign away more than one-half of her goods. This and the formation of the Regent's commission provoked her to engage in laborious research on the question of legitimacy and succession with the help of her friends Polignac, Malezieu and Davisart. This is the enterprise that constrained Mlle Delaunay to pass long nights leafing through aging volumes of jurisprudence and legal scholarship piled high on the bed of the Duchess. At last the long and complicated memorandum on the legal rights of the "légitimés" was completed (Mémoires 102-107). Although Parliament voiced some opposition, Philippe revoked an edict of 1714 granting the legitimized princes rights of succession to the crown. The Maines lost their case, therefore; despite best efforts, the Duc no longer was entitled to equal rank with the blood princes.

The grief and humiliation of this loss drove the Duchess to seek the support of Philippe V of Spain, Louis XIV's grandson, for her husband's cause. She sent the reluctant Mlle Delaunay to the provinces to confer with Père Tournemine, an old admirer. "Je n'avais nul droit de représentation auprès de son altesse; l'aveugle obéissance était mon seul partage. J'obéis donc," she lamented about her undertaking as secret informant. The journey resulted in the Baron de Walef, a person of quality, poet and bel esprit, joining forces with the Duchess. Mlle Delaunay was directed by the Duchess to persuade him to meet secretly with the Cardinal Alberoni, Spanish Prime Minister, who,

as discreetly as possible, was to use his influence on Philippe V to back the stipulations of Louis XIV's will. All correspondence from the Baron was to be addressed to Mlle Delaunay and was to contain ostensibly items of general interest with secret messages spelled out between the lines in white ink. Silently the prescient Mlle Delaunay viewed with dismay her impotence in a matter she feared could be easily mishandled by charlatans, and escalate out of control (Mémoires 108-110), but there was nothing she could do in the face of the agitated state of mind of the Duchess.

Two great noblemen, the Comte de Laval and M. de Pompadour, also joined the cabal and established liaisons with the Prince de Cellamare, the Spanish Ambassador at the French Court, with whom the Duchess met clandestinely at the Arsenal under cover of night. The goal was now expanded to encourage the Spanish King to renounce the Quadruple Alliance, the proud handiwork of Dubois and the Regent, and call the Etats Généraux to constrict the latter's power. The Duchess prepared a memo to which Laval and Pompadour added promises of the support of many whom Mlle Delaunay claims were ignorant of the whole matter. The Duchess agreed to these inclusions, not because of weakness, Mlle Delaunay maintains, but because of her inability to concentrate on more than one thing at a time. The Prince Cellamare wanted a copy of the memo and, as Mlle Delaunay recounts it, the original which should have been burned, fell into the hands of Malezieu who misplaced it instead of burning it as everyone thought he had

done. The Duchess merely laughed when she was warned by Mlle Delaunay of the possibility that she could go to prison (Mémoires 111-112).

In her frustration, Mlle Delaunay contemplated anew how to extricate herself from an untenable situation. Fatigue and worry prevented her from responding to the Duchesse's call one evening for which she was reprimanded; she gave the testy reply that she had such little talent for her job that the Duchess could not have made a poorer selection. At the Duchesse's irritated reproaches, Mlle Delaunay withdrew and prepared to leave an employment which she could no longer tolerate if she didn't have the support of her mistress. She conferred with her friend M. de Valincourt about her desire to enter a convent and asked Mme de Chambonnas, the dame d'honneur, to transmit her resignation to the Duchess. Cardinal Polignac, to whom she wrote a letter, was sent by the Duchess to persuade her to negotiate with her employer who, Polignac assured her, did not want her to leave and would give her a better job. Mlle Delaunay met with the Duchess following this conversation, and fell to her knees in her presence; the Duchess was pleased and the rift was mended. The victory of power and prestige over simple equity and good sense prevailed once more to the detriment of Mlle Delaunay's future repose.

Not to be so easily deterred, however, Mlle Delaunay conferred again with Valincourt about terminating her employment; this time she had in mind a business marriage to an unnamed party

who was to buy the post of Receveur général de finance. The matter had to be approved by the Duc de Noailles, Secretary of Finance. Mlle Delaunay's luck by this time was running low for late one night news came to the chateau that Noailles had been replaced by M. d'Argenson who had no knowledge of the whole affair and that was the end of it (Mémoires 114-116).

Fate and not the Duchess had stepped in to deter Mlle Delaunay just as irrevocably as the Cellamare Conspiracy would dash all her hopes for a definitive release from captivity. The Duchess hired the Abbé Brigaut, another spy with a taste for intrigue and money, to join her Spanish scheme, but the Duc du Maine began to fear suspicion would fall upon him because of the people with whom his wife was conniving. The Regent's agents already had wind of the Duchesse's activities when in 1717 Parliament divested the Duc du Maine of his title of supervisor of the King's education. The Maines were then obliged to give up their apartment at the Tuileries and move to the Hôtel de Toulouse. The Duchess sent Mlle Delaunay to Sceaux to burn suspect papers; while there she discovered that Malezieu had misplaced the memorandum; and her anxiety that the plot would be uncovered mounted. When the Duchess returned to Sceaux in her usual thoughtless way she threw herself into another chimerical machination to establish the English Pretender, exiled in France, on the English throne in order to dislodge the Regent (Herold 125). Mlle Delaunay was dispatched to Paris to meet with the Comte de Laval whose conversation, she wrote, was full of mumbo-

jumbo, and carried letters to M. de Pompadour to be burned in her presence (Mémoires 119-120).

The Regent, Dubois and d'Argenson waited patiently for the right moment to confound the plotters. The conspiracy was badly contrived; Alberoni behaved like a novice and Cellamare may have been in cahoots with the French Court (Herold 126-127). It is clear that the Duchess was engaged in a risky business, beyond the capabilities of the "Nymph of Aulnay." One has only to remember the ease with which the Regent had Louis XIV's Will revoked to understand what powerful resources were at his disposal. We know also from Chapter I that Dubois had spies in every corner of France assigned to keep him advised about any rumblings in Spain. One wonders how the Duchess contemplated putting the Pretender on the throne of England when she lacked any sort of armed forces.

On December 8, 1718, a young man named Portocarrero was given papers by M. de Pompadour to take secretly to Spain concealed in the double trunk of his carriage. A secretary of the Spanish Ambassador was late for a rendez-vous with one of the procuress Fillon's girls and excused himself by mentioning dispatches he had had to prepare for Portocarrero. This information passed from Fillon to the Regent and Portocarrero was stopped at Poitiers, and his papers seized; he was subsequently freed and immediately sent messengers to Prince Cellamare, Laval and the Abbé Brigaut. It took sixteen hours for the Regent to react. The conspirators, meanwhile, had time to scurry to cover

their traces. The Abbé Brigaut quickly disposed of his papers in a cassette which he placed in a strong box and handed to the Chevalier de Ménil who asked no questions. Ménil burned what papers appeared to him suspicious and turned over the empty cassette to the authorities. On December 9th Valincourt advised Mlle Delaunay that the Spanish Embassy had been invaded (Mémoires 122-123) by the King's troops.¹¹² She was stricken with terror but pretended surprise.

The alarm sounded at a party at the domicile of the Duchesse du Maine and as Mlle Delaunay had feared, everyone was plunged into an abyss when the facts were uncovered, notwithstanding the fact that the Duchess acted as if nothing had happened and continued her games. She confided to Mlle Delaunay in private her fear of being arrested when it was learned that M. de Pompadour, the Abbé Brigaut and Alberoni had been taken to the Bastille, along with the Chevalier de Ménil who had incurred Police Commissioner Leblanc's anger for not disclosing he had burned papers the Abbé had given him. The Abbé Brigaut confessed to the names of all of the conspirators and three weeks later on December 29, at 6:00 A.M. three of the King's guards entered Mlle Delaunay's room. The Duchess had already been taken away with two of her dames d'honneur and sent to a fortress in Dijon, and the Duc to Picardy. Mlle Delaunay was desolate, in good part because

¹¹² The most complete account of the events leading up to the Conspiracy of Cellamare and its discovery and fallout are to be found in S. H. Lombardini, Rival French Courts (London: John Murray, 1913).

her desire to accompany the Duchess to her place of imprisonment had been shattered. The lost memo of Malezieu (comprising a letter from the King of Spain to the King of France) was found in his writing desk and he was taken to the Bastille. By 7:00 P.M. Mlle Delaunay found herself there as well, confined to a large room with sooty walls, a straw chair, two stones for firewood and a wall candle (Mémoires 128-133).

Over 60 pages of the Mémoires are devoted to Mlle Delaunay's subsequent imprisonment of one year and a half. The composure and dignity she exhibited in these harrowing circumstances offer a tribute to the women of her generation, celebrated generally for their flightiness. She had the good fortune to have as official inquisitor the King's lieutenant M. de Maisonrouge, an honest, open, compassionate jailer, whose good graces she immediately secured with her nimble mind, equanimity and lack of pretention (Mémoires 137). Her genius for adaptation to her harsh environment gives living proof of the flexibility that enabled her on many occasions to come to terms with the power of authority, both social and civil. In the beginning Maisonrouge calmed her fears by assuring Mlle Delaunay that even if the Duchesse du Maine were guilty of wrongdoing, she was not, for she had only obeyed instructions. Quick to defend the Duchess, Mlle Delaunay replied that she was sure there was no evidence to condemn her mistress and for that reason alone neither of them should be incarcerated. "Je lui dis...qu'étant persuadée qu'on ne trouverait rien contre Madame la Duchesse du

Maine, je ne pouvais appréhender que ses fautes rejaillissent sur moi; que si elle en eût fait ou j'eusse participé, je ne me croirais pas disculpée par des commandements auxquels on ne doit jamais se soumettre" (Mémoires 137-138). At no other time is the fierceness of Mlle Delaunay's loyalty to the Duchess as unshakable as during the period of the Cellamare Conspiracy. Such blind devotion where affairs of state are concerned, and particularly a project which Mlle Delaunay had believed from its inception was delusory, leads the modern reader to conclude that the "ennui" from which many women of the century suffered could have been assuaged had they been permitted to train for productive employment or develop the expertise to participate in civic affairs.

The Bastille became quite a livable environment for Mlle Delaunay. Rondel, her femme de chambre, provided her with company, advice and solace. M. de Valincourt, historiographer to the King, demonstrated the depth of his friendship by bringing money, writing paper and furniture to her room and offered to provide anything else she might need. In truth, she found in the Bastille an unaccustomed sense of freedom: "J'y trouvais même plus de liberté que je n'en avais perdue...en prison l'on ne fait pas sa volonté, mais aussi l'on n'y fait point celle d'autrui, c'est au moins la moitié du gagné." The lack of means to satisfy desires, moreover, stifles them, she adds. "Il n'est pas de même dans la servitude: tout s'y offre et se refuse en même temps à nos souhaits." Contrary to her experience at

Sceaux, in prison she found to her great comfort that one is exempt from all subjection, duties and social demands, "...à tout prendre, c'est peut-être le lieu où l'on est plus libre" (Mémoires 142-43). For this brief period, in an eery sort of way, Mlle Delaunay was able to find happiness by it may be said, entering through the back gate. She came to believe that it would endure. With her return to servitude upon her release from prison, however, her deception was all the more painful.

The interrogation by the garde des sceaux, M. Leblanc, several weeks after her arrival demanded greater mental agility from Mlle Delaunay than had that of the kindly Maisonrouge. Leblanc questioned her at length about her lifestyle, citing the great confidence the Duchesse du Maine had in her, inquired about her duties during the nights she spent reading to the Duchess and what they discussed; was she not her secretary since it was known that she had correspondence with the royal library and there were in evidence letters she had written to an Abbé? And surely Mlle Delaunay must have been the person who tore up a paper found in the Duchesse's room. Mlle Delaunay's replies attest again to her quick intelligence and aplomb. She merely read to the Duchess on those nights to bring on sleep, she replied calmly; they spoke substantially on the subject matters of the books, and if there were any other conversations, they were on diverse topics which she could no longer recall. She had never had the title of secretary, she merely ordered books from time to time, and the letters to the Abbé only concerned his proposed services for the

Duchess when she wrote her memorandum on the ranks of the princes and which she found him unqualified to complete; that she never occupied herself with things that were out of her sphere of duty and, finally, she had not torn up any paper (Mémoires 140-141). The reader may be as surprised as was Mlle Delaunay that the interrogation was not more inflammatory. Nevertheless, the commissioner left her room quietly, silenced perhaps by her disarmingly simple and loyal responses. The only further interrogation would not take place until a year and a half later, shortly before her release.

Good will and the desire to make the best of a bad situation, to the extent that it was within her power to do so, led Mlle Delaunay to religious devotion while in the Bastille, to which she attributed her tranquillity. The Mémoires tell us she wrote a commentary on Ecclésiastiques which she sent to Maisonrouge after her release. Nothing I have read indicates whether or not this document has been preserved.

Her second great romantic involvement was born, blossomed and withered in the Bastille and provides revealing evidence of her enduring optimism and naïveté, as well as the most interesting portion of her incarceration. Maisonrouge, who kept his love for her to himself until she left the Bastille, and about whom she said: "C'est le seul homme dont j'aie cru être véritablement aimée, quoiqu'il me soit arrivée, comme à toute femme, d'en trouver plusieurs qui m'avaient marqué des sentiments" (Mémoires 140), was her unwitting accomplice. The

Chevalier de Mênil, handsome, but below her in intelligence and character (Herold 144), lived across the hall in the Bastille. Bernard indicates that Mlle Delaunay was predisposed in his favor because of his generous act of burning the papers and the Regent's opinion that he was a "très galant homme" (Receuil viij-x). Maisonrouge brought them together, arranged that they exchange poems, praised each to the other in the intimacy of their own cells and after suggesting they correspond, introduced them as he unlocked their doors and each stood on the threshold of his cell. Later he contrived for them to take tea in Mlle Delaunay's room and on subsequent occasions neglected to lock their doors when he made his rounds. One night Mênil entered Mlle Delaunay's cell alone. The visit was repeated and a mutual passion born. At age 36, Mlle Delaunay thought that at last she had found happiness. "... (J)'étais vivement touchée des sentiments qu'on venait de me montrer; je vis un libérateur qui venait briser les chaînes de ma servitude, m'affranchir de cette captivité plus contraire à ma façon d'être que celle que je subissais alors, en combler mon bonheur en associant sa vie à la mienne....Je ne savais pas alors qu'il (souverain bien de la passion) n'existe point dans le monde; (Mémoires 157). At this juncture in the Mémoires Mlle Delaunay hints at another failure to fulfill herself, this time in the personage of a lover (rather than an employer) mal choisi. Mênil made an investment which ran counter to the future of their liaison and although he changed his mind at her behest, her suspicions were aroused as to

his intentions (Recueil I:219; 220). As time passed, she would twist each instance of impending defeat into the inevitable portion of her destiny, a philosophy - as stated earlier - which accorded with the determinism so hotly debated in the 18th century.

The couple exchanged a multitude of letters, in which for lack of a better occupation, they examined in detail the evolution of their ardor. Ménil persuaded Mlle Delaunay to disregard her initial scruples about the difference in their positions and reassured her it was her character and not solitude that drew him to her. She, in turn, was subjugated by her first reciprocal attachment and the character, conduct, reputation, age and judgment of Ménil altogether quieted her misgivings. Their greatest problem was to disguise their liaison from their jailkeepers (Recueil viij-x). Their trysts passed unnoticed until one night, M. Leblanc, seeking to interrogate Ménil, found his room empty and discovered him with Mlle Delaunay. For a penance the chevalier was sent to a damp room in a distant tower and Mlle Delaunay fell into despondency during his absence. She wrote to him about the violence of their separation which emphasizes how they should be united and exhorts Ménil to find enough satisfaction in their love to "fool the fate that persecutes us" (Receuil I:71). At other times she weakens perceptibly: "... (P)rivée de ce que j'aime dans ces lieux où tout me rappelle les plus cruels souvenirs, où chaque instant de ma journée qui était remplie de quelque chose qui avait rapport à

lui, se trouve vuide et ne me laisse voir qu'un abîme de douleur où je m'enfonce de plus en plus" (Recueil I:154-155). The strain of captivity causes her hopes to rise and plummet with the light and darkness of the days, as well as her faith and disbelief in Ménil's true feelings, which she fears will endure only within prison walls. Eventually, the generous Maisonrouge, foregoing his own interests as usual, vowed to find a way to relieve her despair if she could assure him she had a future with Ménil (Mémoires 165), while the the governor of the Bastille reproached her for the irregularity of her conduct. She attempted to excuse herself by claiming the problem was with her living quarters. Rondel, her femme de chambre could vouch for her, she said, and assure him that she had always had mixed visitors without causing a scandal. The governor threatened to put her in a dungeon, but did not. This conflagration subsided: with the helping hand of Maisonrouge, and the influence of the Duc de Richelieu, incarcerated in the Bastille on other charges, the governor was convinced to make an accommodation. Mlle Delaunay was temporarily transferred to a different location and her cell redecorated and filled with furniture provided by the Duc de Maine's business manager, M. de Valincourt; again she and Rondel took up their routine of embroidery, reading, writing and raising families of cats. The rules were bent to allow Ménil to return to the same quarter, and the liaison continued.

A year or so after the collapse of the conspiracy the Regent began to tire of his role of despot. He had declared war

on Spain, tightened his alliance with England and humbled the princes. To save face, he still had to receive an admission of guilt from each of his prisoners (Herold 137-38). The latter were divided into three groups, each group was then permitted to meet in another member's room. All of them took turns dining with the governor, who was instructed to treat the prisoners with clemency.

Mlle Delaunay and Ménil resumed corresponding about their love although they had greater freedom to see each other. She felt more secure as evidenced by her letters: "... (V)u l'incertitude des événements je ne trouverai rien de préférable, quant à présent, à la vie que nous mènerions ici, si nous obtenions l'entière liberté de nous voir ";... "Je n'ai jamais tant aimé la liberté que depuis que je sais quel usage j'en pourrais faire" (Recueil I: 282; 295). I agree with Bernard's assessment that Mlle Delaunay's letters to Ménil exhibit an unconscious and appealing richness resulting probably from the limited boundaries of their captivity, which provoked her to express in ever varied forms the tumult of emotions she experienced at finding what she believed was true love in an environment uncondusive to such a treasure. As restrictions were eased, Mlle Delaunay received guests in her room freely. Assured of the rightness and firmness of Ménil's intentions, she took little notice when he showed her for her diversion a "ridiculous" letter from a young lady cousin who lived near him in Anjou. Had

she listened more carefully to the small inner voice, she may have saved herself much heartache.

After five months in Dijon, the Duchesse du Maine, through the influence of her mother, had been transferred for a change of atmosphere to a new prison constructed for her use at Chalons, where she found no more distractions than before. "Que M. le Duc juge de mes peines par mes plaisirs," she wrote (Mémoires 180). Her distress increased when she learned that M. de Malezieu was to be put on trial at the Conciergerie because of the infamous letter. When her health began to suffer, the Regent had her moved to a vast estate nearer Paris. Convinced that she had not committed any crime against the King or against the state, her mother urged her to make a full confession to the Regent to procure her freedom. The Duchess wanted to be assured her accomplices had confessed first so as not to harm them, says the ever-faithful Mlle Delaunay, whose appraisal of her mistress's public conduct throughout the Cellamare affair continues to sound sincere. The Regent, to justify his conduct and avoid the accusation of martyring someone of Mme du Maine's status, resolved not to liberate any of the responsible conspirators unless each avowed his participation. He advised the Duchess that she would obtain complete freedom at Sceaux and that of her adherents if she wrote a confession which would be for his eyes alone (Mémoires 183). Upon being told that Laval and Malezieu had confessed, she wrote a detailed declaration to assure the Regent of her sincerity and simultaneously wrote a

letter to her mother enunciating the reasons that prompted her to acquiesce with the Regent's demands, and requesting her mother to make certain, in the interests of the other parties and her own honor, that the Regent abide by his promise (Mémoires 183-184). The Regent allowed her to return to Sceaux but restricted her freedom of movement to the estate, which was the initial breach of his agreement.

At the end of 1719, M. Leblanc visited Mlle Delaunay in prison and once more tried to trip her up. Although the Duchess had made no mention of her old femme de chambre in her declaration, he insinuated that the Duchess had claimed she was cognizant of all that had transpired. With her usual lucidity, Mlle Delaunay quickly replied that she could not believe that the Duchess found her so well-informed. In addition, she asked what could she add to the declaration, if the Duchess had already told her all of those things of which she was ignorant. This interview has already been touched upon earlier in this chapter. The abashed Leblanc left her promising to return with orders from the Duchess that she respond to all questions asked. Mlle Delaunay's sang-froid in parlaying with members of civil authority is all the more surprising when one considers her abject submission when confronted with the personal demands of the Duchess. Because of her refusal to make a confession, she remained in the Bastille longer than most of the other prisoners with the exception of Malezieu.

Ménil was freed with other prisoners on January 5, 1720 and exiled to Anjou for three months. He appeared only mildly saddened at leaving Mlle Delaunay although he professed some sorrow that she had to remain. Following a dinner with the Governor, the remaining prisoners were confined to their rooms the day of Ménil's departure. Mlle Delaunay's melancholy left her indifferent to this restriction. She states that she felt like the donkey in the fable: "qui n'avait volé de foin que la largeur de sa langue, et qui fut dévoué pour les autres animaux plus coupables, mais plus fort que lui" (Mémoires 187). This dry consideration is another example of her ability to step outside herself and make a detached, if ironic, observation on her predicament. The governor came to her room to question her and expressed astonishment and admiration at her fortitude in the midst of unending misfortune (Mémoires 188).

Maisonrouge showed sincere compassion for the pain she endured at Ménil's departure. Her affliction was even more intense because she and Ménil would be unable to communicate, and she had a presentiment that the fresh air of freedom would quickly disperse the sentiments she had thought were profound. When she received no word she believed he had forgotten her, until Maisonrouge, who was in a position to receive communications from him, promised to act as intermediary correspondent between the lovers. Nonetheless, the letters from Ménil and his visit to Maisonrouge at the end of his exile only feebly masked a change of heart (Mémoires 188-89).

The public took sides against the Duchess when she regained Sceaux; the Regent had read her confession to his council despite his earlier promise and aroused indignation. Mlle Delaunay staunchly defended her mistress against the charge that she had given her loyal adherents over to the police and maintained that in truth the Duchess would have sacrificed her own freedom for theirs if it had been possible; that she had been misled by those whom she had the least reason to mistrust (Mémoires 191). It remains to be answered why Mlle Delaunay manifested such determination to shield the Duchess during this difficult period, when as a permanent member of the household of Sceaux, she continuously sought release from her servitude.

In a letter from Sceaux in the Spring of 1720, the Duchess enjoined Mlle Delaunay to make a confession using her own declaration as a model. "Je vous aime et vous estime plus que jamais et tout ce que vous avez fait ne m'a point surprise....Vous recevrez des marques de mon amitié, telles que vous les méritez...", she wrote (Mémoires 193), and Mlle Delaunay placed faith in these vague promises, which as was customary with her Serene Highness, would come to naught. The Duchess also pleaded her cause with the Regent (as well as that of Laval and Malezieu) explaining that Mlle Delaunay had only followed orders. The Regent however insisted that Mlle Delaunay's ridiculous heroism not dispense her from making a confession (Mémoires 193-94). After much shilly-shallying and her claim that the only declaration she had ever seen was in novels (Mémoires 195), Mlle

Delaunay wrote to M. Leblanc asking him to specify what exactly was to be understood by a declaration (Mémoires 196).

These communications led Mlle Delaunay to believe she would be released soon from the Bastille, and certain that the Regent would not allow her to return to Sceaux, she took steps to enter the convent of the Présentation (where Mme de Grieu still lived), which would give her the opportunity to meet with Ménil and learn of his plans. He had returned to Paris and a letter to her transmitted through Maisonrouge aroused her suspicions. A new tone and style were alarming (Mémoires 186-98).

When the Duchess sent a card in late spring ordering Mlle Delaunay to make a declaration, she at last complied with a long memorandum which she admitted lacked sincerity and dealt with inconsequential matters for the most part (Mémoires 198-202). Her plan to retreat to the convent upon her release misfired since the Duchess had made known that she wanted her to return to Sceaux.

Shortly thereafter, Maisonrouge, simultaneously joyful and saddened, brought to her an order freeing her from the Bastille, which left her with mixed emotions; she was equally eager to see the Duchess while reluctant to return to the detested captivity at Sceaux, and disinclined to leave the Bastille with its cherished reminders of happiness. In early June, force of habit propelled her to Sceaux where she found the Duchess taking a walk. The latter expressed pleasure at her return, embraced her briefly and continued on her way

accompanied by her ladies of honor. Deluded another time, Mlle Delaunay, who had anticipated a more energetic welcome, was led to a room with a window and a fireplace, a recompense that portended, she thought, the fulfillment of the Duchesse's other promises.

The Duchess did not have as yet the liberty to invite many guests, but she continued either to play cards all night as was her custom or oblige Mlle Delaunay to stay up and read aloud to her. The repetition of this tiresome occupation soon awakened her maid-servant's yearning for the tranquillity of prison life (Mémoires 204). What was also tedious was the fact that the Duchess recounted in detail all of the adventures of her imprisonment but barely questioned Mlle Delaunay about her own, and soon forgot her pledge to reward the latter for her loyal service (Herold 145).

Within a few days Mlle Delaunay journeyed to Paris to pick up her belongings at the Bastille, and to keep a rendez-vous with Ménil at the Présentation. The meeting was far from satisfactory. Instead of responding with a joy equal to her own, Ménil appeared embarrassed, spoke of financial difficulties and his obligation to make a trip to Switzerland to contact a former mistress, wife of the French Ambassador to the thirteen cantons. The scales fell from Mlle Delaunay's eyes and she felt she had stumbled into an abyss for building hopes on a vain illusion (Mémoires 205-206). It is difficult to gauge Menil's true feelings. He lacked the courage to be forthright about their

relationship and may have loved her. Despite her initial deception, she continued to correspond with Ménil, wrote him letters of hope and others accusing him of deceit and unworthiness. Her love persisted but she was consumed with "une infinité de réflexions qui ne sont combattues par rien, qui forment en moi un dégoût du monde dont je ne reviendrais jamais" (Recueil II:8-9). As time passes she suggests they sever their relationship; yet she does nothing, and several months elapse before she writes in despair: "La compagnie des arbres vaut mieux que celle des tisons" (Recueil II:79). It was 1722 before her letters appear to have ceased altogether; when in response to a complaint from Ménil that he has had no news of her, she exhorts him once more to speak frankly, for reason does not permit her to sacrifice herself to sentiments that aren't returned, and his pride should not sanction the expression of false emotions which can only cause unhappiness to someone he should not wish to injure (Recueil II:105). Like the period of mourning following a death, these letters range from initial dismay and disbelief to final resigned acceptance. As Mlle Delaunay states in one of them, the discourse between the old lovers has evaporated like a stream which no longer has a source. Ménil's betrayal meant that Mlle Delaunay's last dream of happiness vanished with the recognition that Ménil too (like the Marquis de Silly) was attracted more by rank than intelligence.

The pace at Sceaux gradually quickened, and with the exception of Polignac, old friends, including Malezieu, returned.

Mlle Delaunay was received with enthusiasm because of her admirable conduct in prison. Despite her disenchantment with Ménil, she gave evidence of having as her goal release from servitude through the saving grace of marriage.

Upon the death of Anne Dacier, celebrated translator of Homer, the Duchess de la Ferté proposed that Mlle Delaunay marry André Dacier, her philologist husband, for the security such a situation would provide. Mlle Delaunay responded favorably: "L'amour insurmontable de la liberté et du repos me faisait désirer depuis longtemps tout ce qui me pouvait procurer l'un et l'autre" (Mémoires 212). Dacier, who was desolate without his devoted wife of 40 years, agreed to the marriage, to Mlle Delaunay's astonishment, and provided a memorandum of his assets. The stumbling block was the Duchesse du Maine whose approval was deemed essential. The Duchess responded with fury: she would not accept anything that would distance Mlle Delaunay from her. Mlle Delaunay, with what seems like a perverse sense of decorum, decided she could not contravene the wishes of her mistress for reasons of propriety, and because she feared the loss of a recompense for her years of service. When the pathway toward freedom infrequently opened up, it would appear that a temperamental quirk induced her to rationalize her way out of even the most advantageous of circumstances.

In the case of M. Dacier, she says, the opportunity was not attractive enough to blot out her attachment for Ménil, who by this time, had developed a new passion for the cousin in

Anjou. They still met from time to time and while Ménénil's emotions fluctuated from regret to interest, Mlle Delaunay, knowing he was shallow, grasped at any straw to rekindle the passion that had died in the Bastille. The Duchess had forbidden visits to the chateau by Ménénil and ignored Mlle Delaunay's wishes on the subject. When she feared losing Mlle Delaunay to Dacier, however, she changed her tactics, asserting that she had always hoped for a successful conclusion to her relationship with Ménénil, but circumstances had prevented her from working toward that end. She then made the unexpected and vain suggestion that Ménénil occupy an apartment at Sceaux, and be placed in the Duc's regiment. Mlle Delaunay claims once again that she fell into her mistress's trap (Mémoires 213). She did not follow-up on an apartment for Ménénil, but she subjected herself to the Duchesse's demands concerning Dacier.

For his part, her friend Valincourt encouraged her to accept Dacier's proposal for the independence it would bring, and Dacier himself solicited the consent of the Duc and Duchesse du Maine as well as that of others; the Duchess, however, took Mlle Delaunay aside and spoke of the grief this marriage would cause her. Dacier's fortune was "peu de chose," she insisted; "... (J)e puis faire et ferais beaucoup plus pour vous si vous me faites ce sacrifice." Poor Mlle Delaunay again capitulated. "Madame," she responded, "...je me suis donné à vous et je ne m'y vendrai pas; votre altesse peut disposer de moi comme il lui plaira..." (Mémoires 215). With a show of dignity and composure, character

and intelligence, Mlle Delaunay could stand up to almost anyone...but the Duchesse du Maine. The reason for this is not always clear.

As her Mémoires approach their conclusion, one must again ask what hypnotic power the Duchess possessed that forced Mlle Delaunay to succumb to her charm when she was aware that she was the object of manipulation. The Duchess never repaid her as far as we know (the Mémoires end in 1736 shortly after Mme de Staal's marriage) with any monetary recompense, and it would appear she never became an official dame d'honneur. For a time after her liberation from the Bastille, the Duchess did multiply her attentions; she included Mlle Delaunay on her outings, admitted her to her parties, and treated her as she did her dames d'honneur, but this celebration did not last. Even Valincourt was angry at Mlle Delaunay's milktoast attitude in the face of the Duchesse's disapproval of her marriage to Dacier and as much as told her she had played into her hands (Mémoires 215). The question became moot in any event for Dacier died unexpectedly two days after Mlle Delaunay had her last interview with him. She missed his friendship and respect as well as the opportunity to free herself.

When Ménil invited her to dinner in Paris, it was to seek her approval of his cousin from Anjou. To Mlle Delaunay her rival appeared large but well built, and somewhat attractive, if provincial in manner; following the encounter she tried to erase the sad memory of her attachment from her mind. The Marquis de

Silly, attracted anew by the luster Mlle Delaunay had acquired at the Bastille, revived their friendship with letters and visits. He too solicited her advice concerning his emotional involvements to which she complied gracefully although with hidden despair. She briefly considered the possibility of marrying the Lieutenant of Police Maisonrouge because of his galant character and love of her, but he died within a year of her release from the Bastille. This loss marked the destruction of all her marital dreams. She became world-weary and sought out Valincourt to discuss the possibility of retiring to a convent. The Countess de Brissac offered her carriage to accompany her to the Carmelite convent, and fearing to tell the Duchess of her plans, Mlle Delaunay counted upon the Countess to perform the task. This was not necessary for the prioress, astonished at her desire to enter the convent immediately, dissuaded her on the grounds that she needed greater reflexion to determine whether she had a true calling. The effort expended on this enterprise was so debilitating that Mlle Delaunay renounced repeating it. Ultimately what had swayed her to take these steps had been the unexpected ardor of an unnamed military officer in the chateau to whom, out of curiosity and idleness, she became attached. The attachment became another tyranny which horrified her and from which she sought escape. She attributes to the unnamed lover nobility of feeling, courage and integrity, but also vanity and vulgarity, and, more importantly, his failure to offer marriage impelled her to feel the need to break with him (Mémoires 224-25).

Following the Carmelite debacle, Mlle Delaunay says she spent several years alternating between painful options, never at peace with herself. Many of her closest friends died: the Marquis de Silly, Mme de Grieu and her niece, Mme Réal, and M. de Valincourt, to mention several (Mémoires 226). To put an end to her anxiety she decided to retire to the old Convent of Saint Louis at Rouen. With an unusual show of perseverance, she obtained from the Duchess permission to visit the convent with the promise she would return in six weeks. She also triumphed over the persuasive power of the unknown lover who was still a part of her life at Sceaux. When Saint-Louis failed to present the refuge she had hoped she returned to Sceaux and the displeasure of the Duchess who redoubled her efforts to bind Mlle Delaunay to her (Mémoires 227-28).

Eventually the Duchess sought to learn the reasons for Mlle Delaunay's discontent, and the latter responded by alleging her equivocal position in the household. She was no longer femme de chambre and had no status among the dames d'honneur. The Duchess then decided to select a husband for Mlle Delaunay, which she claimed would establish her fortune and put her on an equal footing with the other women. The result was the arranged marriage to the Baron de Staal touched upon earlier. As indicated, this marriage, instead of setting Mlle Delaunay free, bonded her in conclusive serfdom to the Duchesse du Maine.

Mlle Delaunay agreed to the intervention of the Duchess in this instance, initially, she claims, because she believed the

exploration of potential candidates would take time, and if no prospect proved advantageous enough, she could back out. However, in the actual occurrence, this proved impossible. A rendez-vous was arranged with the Baron in the home of Mme de Surl. He appeared pleased with her and later when she and Mme de Surl were invited to his home at Gennevilliers, she was gratified with his calm, open manner, and the quiet demeanor that indicated merit, and found his two daughters most hospitable; the simple overall country atmosphere was a tableau from the golden age. It was only later that she repented her "blindness", upon discovering that the Baron de Staal's property belonged to his children and his greatest asset was that he was a man of quality. As she reflected upon the disadvantages of such a match, fear overtook her and she became ill. She endeavored to speak to the Duchess of her misgivings and present the difficulties the match would pose, particularly that of sharing her time between two households. The Duchess, eager to conclude the marriage quickly, was inflexible, and assured Mlle Delaunay that there were no insurmountable difficulties. Although Mlle Delaunay was overcome with despair, the marriage contract was signed. "La victime liée et ornée fut conduit tristement à l'autel par Mme Chambonnas, dame d'honneur de Madame la Duchesse du Maine" (Mémoires 235-36). The will of the Duchess had prevailed on the most significant occasion of the life of Mlle Delaunay, as it would continue to prevail in all areas of the life of Mme de Staal.

Part 4

Appraisal: Public View and Self-Assessment

Among the three women examined in this dissertation, Mme de Staal appears on the surface to have lived in the least propitious circumstances for defying the odds and ridding herself of the shackles of authority. She was little concerned with laws and the organization of French society in her search for autonomy; she had no political goal for herself, nor did she seek literary or social notoriety. There is sparse evidence in the Mémoires that she was troubled by matters of gender and power of the male elite. Contrary to Mme de Châtelet, for example, she does not appear to have been occupied with the contradictions between ambition and bonheur. In fact, her appraisal of Mme du Châtelet's intellectual pretensions was anything but indulgent. During a visit to Anet by Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet in August of 1747, she complained to Mme du Deffand that the couple spent their days secluded in their rooms instead of joining the amusements of the other guests. One was writing about high sounding adventures and the other a commentary on Newton, "des non-valeurs dans une société, où leurs doctes écrits ne sont d'aucun rapport," she commented with some acerbity (Deffand 199-200; Vaillot, Avec Mme de Châtelet 291). Stinging memories of

youth may have had a bearing on this attitude for it was then that the Marquis de Silly admonished her in a letter he wrote to her upon her arrival in Paris to concentrate on her reputation for judgment rather than on her intellect as she attempted to make her way in the world (Mémoires 50-51). In turn Vaillot suggests that it may have been just because of her intelligence that she was never able to rise above the position of femme de chambre (Vaillot, Avec Mme de Châtelet 292). Did the Duchess harbor rancor or jealousy with respect to her suiivante? We cannot know.

Whatever the reason, Mme de Staal was unable to free herself from the fetters of the subordinate position she held for most of her life, a situation which she speedily discerned and desecrates at every turn in the Mémoires. She was personally diminished by the restrictions placed upon women of her time, from the very moment she commenced her search for employment: "C'était se voir étrangement réduite, pour quelqu'un qui avait vécu comme j'avais fait, d'aller mendier de porte en porte la protection des gens à qui j'étais inconnue, subir leur examen et leurs froids dédains. Je ne tirai rien de ce pénible exercice, et je cessai d'y avoir recours" (Mémoires 50). She did not lack self-esteem, as would be claimed today, for she had been raised in an atmosphere that exalted her abilities. Nevertheless, it was a restricted and protected environment that made no claim to prepare young girls to face the reversals of fortune that lay beyond the walls of the convent.

Although the Duchesse du Maine, because of her position, enjoyed the freedom of most aristocratic 18th century women, no feminine ideology or written code to which the financially impoverished enlightened could turn for instruction and guidance was in place. The Mémoires clearly document the barriers that limited the progress of women such as Mme de Staal and bring into sharp relief the paradox of her condition when she discovered that merit and hard work did not provide the key to the fulfillment of desires.

The practical remedies she envisioned to surmount the impediments that obstructed development and growth were also restricted, traditional and inadequate for the life that lay ahead: Love, arranged marriage and children, possibly a position as governess, or the convent. Personal integrity precluded her concentrating on less honorable solutions, and, moreover, led to disillusionment.

Sainte-Beuve, with just a tinge of male chauvinism, said that if Mme de Staal had read her memoirs in the third quarter of the 19th century she would not have complained so much of her destiny. She may not have succeeded in winning the love she desired, her youth was not perfect and she suffered (as has everyone, he adds), but she had the satisfaction of a thinking mind, the knack of observation and the talent, language and taste to convey what she saw. Is that enough to make a life successful? In Sainte-Beuve's 19th century her words still formed a part of French thought, and her noble conduct during the Cellamare

Conspiracy had earned her what appeared an immortal place in history which even hardbitten politicians could envy (Sainte-Beuve Portraits littéraires 906-907). Not so today; the Cellamare Conspiracy had little effect on French policy in 1720 and has now lost all relevance, and literary history covering the epoch has pretty much forgotten Mme de Staal's noble conduct.

What brief posthumous triumph she enjoyed, however, between 1755 and the time of Sainte-Beuve, was bought at a personal cost. Mme de Staal did not in her lifetime find the social fulfillment she sought, nor that which her entry as a wonder child into the royal court of Sceaux seemed to portend. Nor was she able to fulfill the literary promise of her fascinating Mémoires. In fact, her last literary contribution, her correspondence with Mme du Deffand, reveals what Sainte-Beuve calls an existence without pleasure and a progressively greater depth of sorrow masked with ironic cheerfulness. The arrival of spring itself was not enough to lift the blanket of her despondency. She even wearied of its flowers and spoke of her impatience for the return of the snow and wind of winter (Sainte-Beuve Portraits littéraires 906-907).

Within several years of her release from the Bastille Mme de Staal met Mme du Deffand at Sceaux, and was captivated by her graphic word portraits of her friends. In imitation, she composed her own "caractère" or "Portrait de l'Auteur," of which a paraphrase follows: Contrary to prejudice that those without birth and means lack a good education, hers had been excellent

for it taught virtuous principles, noble thinking and rules of proper conduct. Her primary extravagance was the desire to act with reason; yet she could never overcome a quick temper which frequently brought forth the anger of those she associated with.

Despite her shortcomings, she gained a reputation for wit, discretion and firmness on two separate occasions which raised her above her humble condition and made her slightly vain.

She filled her life with serious occupations to fortify her judgment rather than her intellect but she was not able to sustain one viewpoint above its opposite, which meant she rarely argued.

She read enormously but learned only enough to understand what was being discussed and enough not to speak at the wrong time. She followed duty at the expense of her own tastes. She did not allow herself to become complacent and therefore could not tolerate it in others.

Above all, her dominant passion was her love of liberty, which was unfortunate since she spent most of her life in captivity. Consequently, her situation was always insupportable despite the unexpected pleasant things it now and then provided.

She was ever sensitive to friendship but the virtue and merit of her friends took on greater importance than their feelings for her. She was indulgent when they failed her, provided they did not fail themselves (Memoires 225-226).

This self-portrait, with its expression of a strong sense of duty, intimations of conciliation, tolerant affection for friends, and the suggestion of self-deprecation substantiates the spirit of compromise etched indelibly in the mind of this 18th woman who lacked lineage and wealth. She is to be admired for the sense of self-worth that emerges from the proud voice of one who has earned, despite severe obstacles, a creditable reputation. There is without a doubt an undercurrent of frustrated revolt and irony in the assertion of the love of liberty and the subsequent interminable subjection but not enough to make of Mme de Staal a pioneer. The positive seems to be overshadowed by a sense of hopelessness that reverses the outcome of events.

The lack of a clearly defined goal is missing from this portrait and from the pages of the Mémoires. Dissatisfaction leads to abortive attempts to implement change, but does battle with despair and gives way to accommodation. One puts down the Mémoires with the feeling that Mme de Staal had a dream but not a vision, and lacked the spine which would have enabled her to assess her circumstances with more hope, and chart a practical achievable course of action. Her self-portrait ignores the quality of perseverance, which may have been missing in her temperament. For this she is not to be condemned for she simply followed in the path of her peers. But because she had literary and artistic talents, it is a pity.

Chapter III

Stéphanie Félicité-Ducrest de St. Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis (1746-1830)

Part I

Ambition: From Chateau to Court

Elizabeth Badinter in her introduction to Emilie, Emilie states that ambition, as customarily interpreted in all civilizations, is a masculine passion. In eighteenth-century France the desire for glory, fortune, honor and power was deemed incompatible with the female condition which required that women preserve a modest and passive demeanor in accordance with the principles of bienséance. Ambition, necessitating moral risk and the possibility of failure, was a lofty intellectual conundrum beyond the ken of women, who by nature are too timid and weak to possess sufficient combativeness and energy; their natural role, it was held, was to charm by their graces. By an unwritten code only male members of the privileged classes who had the time and resources to become learned and cultivated could qualify. Yet, the ambitious women of the privileged class called into question issues of gender and power (Badinter 29).¹¹³ This deviation from the norm, and most importantly, an inexorable ambition to achieve

¹¹³ Elizabeth Badinter, "L'Ambition féminine au XVIIIème siècle," Emilie, Emilie (Paris: Flammarion, 1933) 8-30; 352-415; 412-413.

something lasting, was bound to come into conflict with the traditional concept of authority.

Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis (1746-1830) who wrote over 100 books, 8 volumes of memoirs and a myriad of tracts and treatises in her lifetime is a case in point. Possessing both male ambition and female charm she moved from the chateaux of the country nobility in Burgundy to the palaces of kings, acquiring along the way the esteem of the intellectual circles of Oxford and of the élite bourgeoisie of Hamburg and Berlin, and as a returning émigrée, the benevolence of Napoleon. Nature had endowed her with all of the gifts necessary to seize the many opportunities that the fecund eighteenth century could offer (Wyndham, 21-22).¹¹⁴ Beauty, charm and a superior intellect enabled her to skirt with considerable ease the rugged crags of male authority to create a persona of stature. With all of this, she personified the unsavory dictum that the inferiority of women was what Badinter terms "a prejudice inherited from ancient times" (Badinter 30), was harshly judged and struggled fiercely to maintain her literary integrity.

Two centuries later, although she has received renewed attention from feminist writers, her ambition and achievements have been largely overlooked. The question begs to be answered: Why, with her talent, energy, determination and ambition, the extensive number of books she wrote, and the popularity she

¹¹⁴ Violet Levenson Wyndham, Madame de Genlis: A Biography, (London: Deutsch, 1958).

enjoyed during and beyond her lifetime, has Mme de Genlis been forgotten in the 20th century? Partly perhaps because despite the flexibility that enabled her to change allegiances with the times, the major themes of her discourse remain rigidly fixed in the mores of the 17th century although her writings show a complex nature able to articulate the often contradictory positions of the Monarchy, Empire and Restoration. The very vastness of her enterprise may also have contributed to the failure of her work to endure. Her ceaseless reiteration of the same moral problems stemming from her need to produce writings to make a living, and her obsession to revitalize what she considered social dissolution, becomes wearisome, particularly to the blasé modern reader.

In his Preface to Jean Harmand's A Keeper of the Royal Secrets, published in 1913, Emile Faguet, with pertinence, refers to Stendhal's judgment of Mme de Genlis as a woman of infinite wit, but that wit is absent from her books, which are "glazed with the hypocrisy of the salons". For Faguet, her method of composition was at fault for it lacked consistency, substance and tautness; instead of allowing her writing time to jell, she treated her books like her royal pupils and never permitted them to relax.¹¹⁵ Dobson, on the other hand, who expresses a male point of view not always indulgent toward Mme de Genlis, denounces her for a "crafty caution (which) lurks behind her

¹¹⁵ Jean Harmand, A Keeper of Royal Secrets, being the private and political life of Madame de Genlis (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1913) v-x.

candor" and an ever present awareness of the "dress circle". Had she been less ambitious for social success, less satisfied with praise, poorer and not so prominently placed, he muses somewhat callously, she might have left an enduring name (Dobson 205-207).¹¹⁶ While Stendhal's judgment is somewhat grudging and Dobson's is unfair, both disregard the influence on her work of the true hardships that Mme de Genlis had to endure as an émigrée, but which she glossed over in her Memoirs.

Nevertheless the above criticisms may contain a grain of truth, as far as they go; yet, a more modern evaluation by Alice Laborde suggests that the analyses of Mme de Genlis's books have been generally superficial and her deprecators were more concerned with her courtly conduct than her literary contributions. She holds that Mme de Genlis's writing is rich, diverse and oftentimes original; that she could visualize, manage and assemble with extraordinary energy, and that she introduced fresh ideas on original subjects in a brisk and eloquent style. Ultimately, Laborde claims, Mme de Genlis was herself partly responsible for drawing malice to herself as retribution for the scorn she lavished on powerful personages who did not share her moral and literary views.¹¹⁷

After reading several of her novels, treatises and other commentaries, one can infer that the multiple facets of Mme

¹¹⁶ Austin Dobson, Four French Women (London: Chalto et Windus, 1893) 106-207.

¹¹⁷ Alice M. Laborde, L'Oeuvre de Madame de Genlis (Paris: Editions Nizet, 1966) 7-9; 229-235.

de Genlis's personality, the tumultuous arena of her activity and the prodigiousness of her accomplishments make a hard and fast answer as to why her work has been dismissed next to impossible, particularly within the bounds of this chapter.

Ultimately, Laborde's statement that there is much to admire in Mme de Genlis's work is sustainable. Her most celebrated educational manual, Adèle et Théodore, composed of a series of letters linked by a novelistic plot, provides an imaginative approach to the serious subject of the proper education for children which is still under debate today. Mademoiselle de Clermont, probably her best known novel, is a precisely written, neatly contrived portrait of a failed romance, presented in a convincing historic setting of the ancien régime, and moves rapidly to a surprise conclusion. What appears to be the only theatrical piece from her early days at the Palais-Royal to have passed the test of time, L'Enfant gâté, is a fresh and natural if somewhat cynical representation of jealousy, greed and virtue among several young girls of the lower and upper classes, and expresses in simple language a moral lesson. Of less interest perhaps is one of her early nouvelles, Le Jupon vert, a simplistic and anachronistic theme scene demonstrating the rather banal moral premise that piety, charity and virtuous conduct are the surest ways to a man's heart.

Most of Mme de Genlis's novels and short stories are extremely well-crafted, although the numerous incursions into the texts by the third person narrator uttering complacent

moralizations can divert the reader's attention and subvert the continuity of the subject matter. While the novels frequently have interesting story-lines, the polemic tracts, on the other hand, are less tightly constructed and exhibit more personal antagonism than true analyses. For example, in De L'influence des femmes sur la littérature française comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs (1811), which purports to extol the talents of women throughout French history, Mme de Genlis is not impartial. She dismisses Mme de Tencin's artistic abilities altogether as the product of an "intrigante" and leads one to wonder if she had actually read anything but the critics' appraisals. Genlis's diatribes against journalists, whom she accuses in the same treatise of lacking savoir-faire, frequently are as querulous as the remarks of her opponents, and thus miss the mark of critical detachment. In her favor, however, it should be reemphasized that she wrote speedily and constantly, and was often faced with the specter of journalistic deadlines which may have accounted for the perfunctory observations she was now and again prone to make.

Mme de Genlis's Memoirs are perhaps her most fascinating achievement for they contain a panoramic view and incisive word portraits of most of the important literary, artistic, political and social figures of the 18th and early 19th centuries, much of which is eloquently written while other portions are either purposefully vague or composed in such haste as to contain chronological discrepancies and structural

awkwardness. The central character, however, the author, retains her eternal mystery throughout, and emerges much like one of the heroines of her novels: abstract, intangible, with few frailties and many good intentions; prevented from achieving total fulfillment by the winds of fortune or the imponderables of the authoritarian hierarchy.

Mme de Genlis artfully sidesteps in the Memoirs any allusion to romantic involvements following her marriage. When she is obliged to refer to the Duc de Chartres, it is always as "that unfortunate prince." (In a rare and innocuous portrait of the Duc in which she describes him as merely one among a group of attendants at a gathering held during her early weeks at the Palais-Royal, she emphasizes the dignity and elegance of his bearing, his kindness of heart, talent and comprehension while downplaying his dissolute appearance, reputation as a libertine and the slander to which he was continually exposed.) Her husband, whom she never fails to address with the utmost respect, is simply the apparently bloodless "M. de Genlis". History has yet to render a final verdict as to whether or not the beautiful Pamela Seymour and Hermine Compton, two young ladies the Duc de Chartres imported from England to Bellechasse to help his sons learn English, were in fact the natural daughters of the Duc and Mme de Genlis. There was ample gossip at the time to support this position, but birth certificates have never been located.

Mme de la Tour du Pin refutes the charge categorically in her Memoirs (Tour du Pin 1971).¹¹⁸ She refers to Mme de Genlis as "a strange acquaintance" she made in 1789 (actually she was a friend of Mme de Valence, Mme de Genlis's daughter Pulchérie). Based on Lady Jeringham, Mme de la Tour du Pin's aunt's, account, Mme de Genlis did have an illegitimate daughter, Hermine, whom she did not like and turned over to Mme de Valence to educate as a preparatory exercise for her own children. Hermine, continues Mme de la Tour du Pin, was said to have later married a stockbroker named Collard and one of her many daughters was the mother of the infamous Mme Laforge (1816-1856) who killed her husband and was pardoned after 12 years of hard labor. Mme de la Tour du Pin was a visitor at Bellechasse when Mme de Genlis was in charge and speaks of the frugal meals that were served and of the girls adding water to extend their soup (Tour du Pin 100-103). Mme de Genlis had turned down a salary of 20,000 livres from the Duc d'Orléans when she became "gouverneur" of the princes, but had a reputation for exaggerated frugality.

A cursory glance at the evolution of the young Stéphanie-Félicité, Comtesse de Genlis and Marquise de Sillery's character as events and contact with those in authority transformed its contours will be followed by an examination of

¹¹⁸ Memoirs of Madame de la Tour du Pin, trans. Felice Harcourt, introd. Peter Gay (NY: McCall Publishing Co., 1971) 100-103.

some of her lesser known works in an effort to extract from them concepts of the traditional attitudes toward authority and the way in which they reflected on her thinking and writing. It is to be hoped that this endeavor will enlarge the modern's reader's perception of Mme de Genlis as a writer and personality.

From infancy Stéphanie-Félicité Du Crest de St. Aubin comported herself as a person of consequence. The freedom she enjoyed almost as an only child (a younger brother was sent to a Paris boarding school) growing up in a dilapidated chateau on the banks of the Loire provided the perfect environment to develop emotional and intellectual autonomy and taught her to accept as natural her dominion over the people and forces around her. It is not surprising, then, to learn that even as a young girl she filled the time not spent roaming the countryside with her pious music tutor, Mlle de Mars, teaching catechism to the young village boys who came to play in the pond on the grounds of the chateau. Such freedom as she enjoyed was won at a price. Her major authority figures were a frivolous mother, who exercised scant parental discipline; and an elegant father who spent the major part of his time in Paris or elsewhere attempting to replenish the fortune he had hopelessly squandered. The lack of parental restraint permitted Stéphanie-Félicité to establish her own rules and develop her unique individuality while she absorbed a love of nature from the world around her and glimmerings of what she called a knowledge of the heart that enabled her to yield and reform her positions when thrown into contact with

grand and imposing personages. She would later have little difficulty distinguishing herself from the other aristocratic women at the Palais-Royal whose boredom impelled them to search frenetically for meaning to their lives by indulging in worldly dissipations.

At 7 years of age Mme de Genlis was introduced to the harpsichord and the aptitude she quickly displayed for music proved profitable when a few years later she and her mother, financially embarrassed, were rewarded with shelter, nourishment and a luxurious life style in some of the greatest residences in and around Paris, such as l'Etiole belonging to M. Le Normand, Mme de Pompadour's husband, or the estate of the illustrious fermier-général de la Popelinière situated at Passy. The incessant praises she received fed her vanity and instilled in her a taste for glory, she claims in the Memoirs. With a growing determination to succeed she began to practice her music as much as 7-12 hours a day, taking up a variety of instruments, and became a virtuoso. By the age of 15, however, she was overcome with a feeling of inferiority at the realization of how foolish it was to enter the grand monde unless one were on an equal footing with those who ordered it, and she perceived that invitations to dinners and balls were sent merely so she would display her talents.

Fortunately this parasitic existence was of short duration for at the age of 17 she married the aristocratic and well-connected Charles Bruslart, Comte de Genlis, a 27 year old

naval captain who fell in love with her upon seeing her photograph. A happy marriage did not smother ambition, but afforded the opportunity to develop latent literary interests, for the Genlis chateau in Picardy contained a vast library which Mme de Genlis and her new husband undertook to read through together. Eventually, this advantageous marriage was responsible for her introduction to the court at Versailles and her fateful meeting with Philippe, the Duc de Chartres, leading to a liaison which would last twenty years, until she fled France with his daughter, Princess Adélaïde, at the outbreak of the French Revolution. "You will have an extraordinary destiny," her husband's aunt Mme de Puisieux once told her. And it was as if destiny itself suddenly replaced the traditional authority figures of family, king and country when Mme de Genlis, as an unwilling émigré, left France for Tournay, Belgium in 1793. Is it any wonder that her understanding of the role of women vis-à-vis authority underwent assorted metamorphoses?

Living independently from her husband after establishing herself at the convent of Bellechasse in the early 1780's as tutor to the Duc de Chartres' children, Mme de Genlis' commentary on the role of women in her 1790 Discours sur la suppression des couvents des religieuses et de l'éducation publique des femmes is disingenuous. The education of women should be geared to eradicate personal ambition, she asserts, in order to develop "une noble ambition pour son mari et ses enfants...et cultiver sa sensibilité de telle sorte qu'elle ne

trouve des jouissances de l'orgueil que dans le succès de ceux qu'elle aime" (Badinter 358). In most of her writings, Mme de Genlis cautions women to submit to the authority of parents, husbands, kings and popes and this dichotomy between word and deed is just what has led critics to charge her with hypocrisy.¹¹⁹

The Discours had a wider import, however. While stressing the role of wife and homemaker for women, it simply followed in the tradition of Fénelon, Mme de Maintenon and Rousseau. Nevertheless, Mme de Genlis now championed as well a broader educational curriculum for girls and advocated the establishment of a model school with a program including not only household and social arts but courses in modern management skills, law and legal procedures so that women would be knowledgeable enough to handle their own business affairs (Badinter 395). This leads to the inference that Mme de Genlis was not only an innovator, but was bold enough to speak up publicly despite what the reactions of the authorities might be.

The torch of authority was something Mme de Genlis herself enjoyed brandishing. Ellen Moers terms "the climax of power" the moment in 1782 when Mme de Genlis's title changed from "la gouvernante" to "le gouverneur" following her official appointment by the Duc de Chartres to the sole responsibility of educating his sons. Absolute despotism reigned under the "Genlis

¹¹⁹ Badinter qtg. Mme de Genlis, Discours sur la suppression des couvents des religieuses et de l'éducation publique des femmes 26.

matriarchy," says Moers.¹²⁰ The first duty was obedience and extended to all of those who surrounded her, which led the kindly Chevalier Bernard de Bonnard, who had been sub-governor for four years, to immediately resign, because he could not obey a woman (Harmand 128).

Part 2

Palais Royal: Theater, Education and Society

During the years 1771-1779 while Mme de Genlis was lady in waiting to the Duchess of Chartres and her husband was Captain of the Duke's guard, attendance at amateur theatricals was de rigueur at the Palais-Royal. Her interest in the theater dated from childhood at St. Aubin where her mother had a theater constructed on the grounds of the chateau and cast her daughter in the starring roles of such plays as Voltaire's Zaïre and Regnard's Folies amoureuses. In time, while singing and dancing in the grand salons of Paris, Mme de Genlis began composing her own proverbs, the acting out of which was a favored pastime among the élite. Her wit (and beauty) soon caught the attention of such notables as Buffon, La Harpe, d'Alembert and Marmontel, and led to appearances in what were known as society comedies and tragedies then the rage.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Ellen Moers, "Educating Heroism: Gouverneur to Governor," Literary Women (NY: Anchor Books, 1977) 322-347.

¹²¹ Lester Gilbert Krakeur, "Le Théâtre de Mme de Genlis," Modern Language Review 35.3 (1940):185-92.

It was during her tenure at the Palais-Royal that she began to write short plays with moral themes which were presented before court audiences and attracted great acclaim. Her two daughters, Pulchérie and Caroline, the elder of whom was 12 in 1775 when L'Enfant gâté was written, performed in the starring roles. In 1779 these plays were published as the Théâtre à l'usage des jeunes personnes (renamed Théâtre d'éducation by Mme de Genlis in 1828). They were written, Mme de Genlis says in the Memoirs, before she gave up rouge at the age of 30 and left the Palais-Royal to consecrate herself to pedagogy. Each play with its moral purpose brings into focus a conflict with an authoritarian personality or principle. L'Enfant gâté, indicative of the genre, is the only one appearing in the modern anthology, Théâtre du XVIIIème siècle.¹²² In his Notice, Truchet blames the lack of interest in the theatrical pieces of Mme de Genlis in the 20th century on the title of the 4-volume compilation stating that it probably puts off readers by its implication of insipidity (Théâtre 1508-1509). Harmand in Mme de Genlis: Sa Vie intime et poétique,¹²³ written at the beginning of the 20th century, says Truchet, was shocked by the plays and found them too caustic to be edifying to young people; he feared they might even be harmful because they spoke of things of which

¹²² Théâtre du XVIIIème Siècle, pref. Jacques Truchet, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) II:943-969; II:1506-1509.

¹²³ Jean Harmand, Mme de Genlis: Sa Vie intime et poétique. (Paris: 1912). Only Harmand's Keeper of Royal Secrets of 1913 appears in the Bibliography as his only work available to me.

young girls should be ignorant.¹²⁴ At the time of publication, however, the Théâtre d'éducation achieved great celebrity. No less than Catherine of Russia had it translated. Grimm, in his correspondence of July 1779, praised all seven plays of the first volume which included L'Enfant gâté, found them ingenuous, fresh and a clever and valuable addition to the new educational theories gaining ground at the time. He approved of the realism of the portrayal of feelings of young people and was far from being alarmed at the subject matter which he felt expressed the charm of innocence.¹²⁵ The word "love" was never mentioned in these plays which had only female characters. Violent passions were also omitted as were descriptions of vice; hence the faults portrayed were correctible. Grimm's approval, says Truchet, proves just how different the idea of innocence in the young retrogressed between the 18th and the early 20th centuries. The 18th century was much more open. For the modern reader, the fact

¹²⁴ Truchet refers to plays that may have appeared in one of the later volumes of the four-volume set of Théâtre de l'éducation rather than the ones Grimm mentions in his correspondence of July 1789. Harmand, says Truchet, was specifically critical of only Cécile, a satire on convents, and Du Vrai sage, neither of which are included in Grimm's Correspondance littéraire. Harmand, in any event, according to Truchet, reproached Mme de Genlis for having her characters speak of things of which young girls should be ignorant (Théâtre 1508).

¹²⁵ Grimm gives a brief synopsis of each of the other six plays: Agar dans le désert, or how God rewards maternal patience, submission, courage and virtue; La Belle et la bête, a tale of a simple young girl who accustoms herself to goodness and virtue in a physically displeasing individual; Les flocons; L'Isle heureuse; La Curieuse; and Les Dangers du monde complete the selections. Théâtre à l'usage de jeunes personnes. 12:275, etc.

that there is a moral theme at all to a play such as L'Enfant gâté may appear sophomoric; however, its compact construction and psychological acuity make it worth re-examining.

The action is engaged when Mélanide, a rich young widow, attempts to impose a broader educational curriculum than she had enjoyed in a convent on her niece and only heir, Lucie (along with Toinette, a young orphan child of a deceased servant whom Mélanide has taken under her wing), by entrusting her training in music and drawing to a tutor, Dorine. A conflict ensues when the avaricious and deceitful Dorine, whose only goal is to see Lucie married to a wealthy man which will secure her own economic future, encourages her pupil's natural indolence (Toinette, by contrast industrious and talented, is immune to Dorine's scheming ways) by flattery while simultaneously lauding her talents to Mélanide who is too busy with her role in mondaine society to take notice of Lucie's true situation. The problem is resolved upon Toinette's discovery of a letter vilifying Lucie written by Dorine to a friend, which she immediately shows to Mélanide, who, upon being made aware of Dorine's duplicity, fires her. Meanwhile, Lucie's eyes have been opened after she overhears a conversation among a group of young women who in her presence praised her mediocre performance on the harpsichord, but behind her back mocked her lack of talent. She has now learned about the dangers of flattery and repents of her laziness, all of which augurs well for her future well-being.

L'Enfant gâté exposes the disturbing fact that people in authority are not always right, exemplified by the lucid but slightly careless Mélanide who makes the mistake of turning over responsibility for tutoring Lucie to a governess. From Mme de Genlis's viewpoint, as spelled out in particularity in her manual Adèle et Théodore, parents (or guardians, as the case may be) should themselves undertake the responsibility of educating their children. Truchet, writing in 1974, uncovered a more cruel dimension to this play than appears on the surface. It depicts the reality of a harsh universe, he contends, personified by (1) the impoverished world of the governess Dorine and the young orphan girl raised for charity, and (2) the dismal condition of women in general. The poor are here reduced to dependency, and the rich are haunted by futility. In fact these impediments to freedom represent the restrictive shackles of the authoritarian hierarchy of the century which in spite of the opening up of minds failed to clear women's paths of the undergrowth of centuries, which hobbled prospects to a richer and freer life.

Transcending the protagonists of the play, continues Truchet, there also looms the haunting specter of the author who is both the spoiled heroine and her scheming tutor, for Mme de Genlis in her life had played both roles: the talented and idolized child and the poor adolescent relation who had to sing and play for her supper. This children's play contains hard lessons, he reiterates (Théâtre 1509). This is substantiated by Mme de Genlis's Memoirs which make it clear that she had little

more autonomy within the gilded walls of the Palais-Royal (where strict codes of etiquette limited any freedom of expression that might lead to individual fulfillment) than as a child prodigy in the private homes of Paris. Wounded pride, financial insecurity and futility were part and parcel of her own emotional baggage. The girl with a superior mind born into poverty, exemplified by the character of Toinette, in this context takes on a new meaning for if anything she suffers, as did Mme de Genlis, more profoundly in a society proverbially disinterested in the possibility of educating women to live up to their own potential (Théâtre 1508-1509). This was not the only time Mme de Genlis was to write on the dilemma of women or the difficulties they faced in finding ways and means to occupy their time and minds in a milieu which looked upon women only in terms of their subservient position vis-à-vis their husbands. It traverses most of her writings, including her nouvelles, which will be examined later.

Less original than the Théâtre d'éducation, was Mme de Genlis's 1781 Théâtre de la société, according to Krakeur. Addressed rather to parents than children, it generally falls into the genre of elegant and light hearted superficial tableaux of every day events which had been popular for more than 30 years at the time it was published. The intent to teach a moral lesson remains, but the pace is more rapid and the intrigues more highly developed. These plays, all resembling one another, generally portray the strategies employed by a rejected lover to marry the young woman he loves in the face of the machinations of a wicked

rival, who in the dénouement is repulsed. According to Krakeur the best of these is the Mère rivale whose dramatic interest lies in the psychological interplay between a mother and daughter both in love with the same man (Krakeur 189). Célanie, a widow, and her daughter Aglaë, each love the Chevalier de Valcourt, who, while courting Célanie, secretly loves Aglaë. Mélite, the jealous rival, uncovers the secret, double crosses the lovers and informs Célanie who denounces her daughter's ungratefulness. Until her betrayal, Célanie's exercise of authority over her daughter appears to have been benign and her daughter submissive; however, when deceived, although furious, she agrees to the marriage between the young lovers, while threatening to depart from the scene and turn her parental rights over to the perfidious Mélite whom Aglaë has chosen as confidante. This is an unusual turn of events for renunciation by an authority figure rarely occurs in the writings of the three women under discussion. Mme de Genlis's abiding affection for young people, a number of whom she employed as live-in companions throughout her life, may have lent itself to the mother's rather lackadaisical renunciation of the authoritarian posture. This mother may also have been endowed with more compassion than is often the case with authority figures in 18th century literature.

The dénouement of Mère rivale is a happy one in any event for Aglaë offers to marry the Marquis d'Hervey who ultimately repairs the situation and everyone is reconciled. Krakeur opposes the idea that the mother was very sorrowful at

her betrayal for he states that Mme de Genlis was unable to develop depth of feeling in her characters and only lightly touches upon the emotions that tore Célanie apart. Yet it is clear by the action that when the power of the maternal authority figure is disputed the mother's personal humiliation, pride and jealousy separate her from her daughter. Feelings are not examined in depth (probably because the audience was unable to sustain its concentration for more than a few moments at a time) but acted out. Krakeur, however, rightly underscores Mme de Genlis's special capacity to transmit in capsule form the essential aspects of the life, customs, and vices and virtues of the ancien régime even though he finds her personages devoid of skin and bones, but expects too much of such social comedies if he seeks depth. Mme de Genlis was certainly cognizant of the dark side of frivolity but her familiarity with court society prompted her rather to exploit its artificiality than bring to light its underside. This aspect of her plays comes across with winsomeness, vivacity and optimism which, if times and society stood still, would transcend the centuries that separate us from her. Krakeur, writing in the first half of the 20th century, expresses a conservative point of view when he censures the superficiality and lack of depth Mme de Genlis exhibits, citing this as a reason for the oblivion into which her society plays have fallen. At the close of the 20th century, for modern viewers the flippant portrayal of life and death situations on television sit-coms is equally frivolous and ephemeral but fills

what is probably an identical need, the kind which does not alter over time. It is not so much lack of depth that has cast Mme de Genlis's plays into oblivion, but changes in taste and the forum in which they are presented.

Mme de Genlis was aware as well of two other problems of her times which today continue to be held responsible for the dissolution of society: the lack of family life with its bonding of members, and the custom of mothers confiding children to others rather than taking responsibility themselves for their upbringing. Traditional authority rationale of the 18th century paid lip service to the family structure and obedience to parents but tacitly approved of the varied aberrations of its members.

Le Théâtre d'éducation, uncovers some of the social ills of this society which are attributable to authoritarian hierarchy. Without analyzing in detail these plays, it is enough to cite the moral focus of several of them: La Colombe critiques the follies of a form of education which has as its goal the capacity to glitter in a salon, yet because of its inanity, really smothers the natural instincts of childhood and leads to egotism, imitation and hypocrisy. (In other instances, such as in L'Enfant gâté, this type of education leads to burn-out and the inability to usefully occupy oneself, according to Mme de Genlis, who saw its follies.) Since children are given servants at a young age they assume they are superior to the lower classes whom they command, and the servants, in turn, spoil them (Krakeur 190). In her own life, however, Mme de Genlis's closest childhood

companion had been her servant/tutor Mlle Mars, and she was devastated when they had to part. Under the Restoration, writing in her Memoirs, Mme de Genlis expresses regret at frequently yielding to public opinion in her early works (referring specifically to Adèle et Théodore). It is not wise, she states, to permit children to attend balls and the theater as this poses a danger to the imagination, leading to an abandonment of reason for the snares of seduction.¹²⁶ Reading between the lines, there are, as frequently in the Memoirs, hints of regret for the errors of her own youth. If she had possessed more austere principles, she continues, her works may have been less useful to men of the world, but she would have done her duty and they would have had more enduring value (Memoirs VII:98). This is a surprise self-critique by such a confident writer whose vast production alone infers a desire for immortality. Yet, as the Goncourts proclaim, the society of the ancien régime was governed by Salic Law; and disappointed parents who preferred sons to daughters sought to press girls into adulthood as rapidly as possible in order to dispose of them through marriage (Goncourt 5). Mme de Genlis followed tradition with a grain of salt.

The dire consequences of the social system exploited in her plays were visible in the artificiality of the salon, with its worldly visits and hypocritical flattery. The thoughtless

¹²⁶ This sidelight is in direct contrast to Mme de Genlis's theory of education expressed in Adèle et Théodore where acting in the theater is praised as a proper teaching vehicle because it develops the memory and instills self-confidence while providing amusement for children.

women of the world were overly sensitive, obsessed with rules of etiquette and pretended to possess philosophic and scientific knowledge. The pitiful consequences of such attitudes are examined in La Bonne mère, Les Ennemies dangereuses and Les Dangers du monde. Other plays of the genre such as L'Intrigante, Les Faux-amis, Cécile ou le sacrifice de l'amitié, etc. attack such undesirable personages or traditions as intrigantes, duels, and the seduction of a country girl by a libertine who places her at the Opera to conceal her from her parents, or in a convent. Throughout these pieces, Mme de Genlis advocates obedience to the authority figure, generally the family, as the most important virtue to be learned, and this obedience extends to the selection of a marriage partner (Le Magistrat, La Belle et la bête, La Bonne mère, etc.) (Krakeur 189-190). It is interesting to see how in some of her works heroines make personal choices which are in accord with authority while simultaneously satisfying their own wishes. For example, the beneficial results of maternal obedience are praised in Les Flocons where two pretty young girls look into a mirror and discover that they are unexpectedly ugly. A fairy offers them two vials of liquid to drink: the rose colored one will make their ugliness disappear while the white will purify their characters. They deliberate briefly but make an independent decision based on the virtuous inclination not to disappoint their mother, and choose the second vial; whereupon, much to their surprise, their mother assures them that they are pretty

once again. An independent decision by the heroine also succeeds in a nouvelle. Nourmahal possesses une âme sensible, great charm, talent and generosity (she also speaks several languages fluently) which qualify her to be what Mme de Genlis under the rubric Femmes in the Dictionnaire des étiquettes terms a good negotiator. So well endowed but desiring glory through useful acts rather than the ennui of indolence, she successfully contracts for her father's release from prison, marries the sultan of the empire and persuades him to let her take over the reins of government which she manipulates brilliantly for the benefit of her subjects for 24 hours; whereupon she willingly descends the throne to return to the foyer, the focal point of happiness for women, never again to venture into the public arena, and thus, unlike her creator, Mme de Genlis, preserves herself from criticism (Genlis Dictionnaire I:221-225).¹²⁷ This tale clearly demonstrates, if taken seriously, that Mme de Genlis was ambivalent about the role of women.

Despite its shortcomings which she tries to circumvent, Mme de Genlis consistently defends the society of the ancien régime for its sense of order, taste and civilized behaviour. The Dictionnaire des étiquettes (1818), which over-all comprises a eulogy of the manners and morals of the society of the royals and

¹²⁷ Genlis, Mme de. Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour, des usages du monde, des amusements, des modes, des moeurs, etc. des français depuis la mort de Louis XIII jusqu'à nos jours ou l'esprit des étiquettes et de visages anciens, comparés au modernes, 3 vols. (Paris: P. Mongie Aîné, 1818).

a condemnation of that of the bourgeoisie, deplores the changing political, social and economic environment of post-revolutionary France, while disclosing a longing for the happier circumstances of by-gone days. The terms she selects to define are introduced by the habitual diatribe against the philosophes for whom she says reputation counted more than the glory of the nation. Under the rubric Acier the Revolution is said to have occurred not because of discontent but because of frivolity, wretched conduct and the desire for change instigated by the heretical doctrines of the aforementioned who, under Affectation, are reproved for corrupting morals under the guise of the language of sensibilité, which in effect merely masked their egotism and created a climate of falsification (which Mme de Genlis hoped to alter). Her undeviating respect for authority is emphasized under Indépendance where she states that young men if animated (as they once were apparently) by a noble ambition and elevated soul need not concern themselves overmuch with the restrictions of parental authority. In the early 19th century, however, under Néologisms we learn that young people no longer listen to their elders. Once urbane and bouyant the French have become insurgent and are divided by political dissension. Conversations in the old salons were an agreeable relaxation. Today, there is only argument, bitterness and endless debate. Her loosely descriptive and largely critical but colorful delineation of the social ambiance of the Restoration is remarkable for the similarity it bears to the present time.

A great magnificence reigned, she writes under Amusements, in the homes of the princes and aristocrats of the last century. Guests enthusiastically donned costumes and performed in amateur theatricals, musicals, proverbs, charades and quixotic games. Today, it is fashionable to affect fatigue at such activities and people pretend to yearn for the countryside. Yet they swarm to the assemblies. Under the old spirit of Etiquette the individual was expected to conform to specific standards of good taste with grace and reserve as a matter of ethics. If this was hypocrisy, she states, it was preferable to the vulgarity that destroys the charm of present social relations. It is worth noting that while Mme de Genlis's composition of a dictionary, no matter how much she tries, barely resembles that of the authors of the Encyclopédie, it has no similarity whatsoever with the Petit Larousse. Yet contrasting historical and social portraits, combined with her astute observations on the behavior of the variety of individuals perambulating on the everchanging sociological platform she erects, still interest those searching for answers to the important questions of governmental and family authority that beset the twentieth century.

Her reverence for the golden days showed no diminution from the Revolution to the Restoration. With the fall of the Bastille onward, the position she held at Court enabled her to experience first hand the conflict between the nobility and the crown which grew throughout the 18th century after the death of

Louis XIV, when the concept of the prince as the source of all political and civil power came into question (see Abensour 69-131 speaking of Montesquieu and the fluctuating prerogatives of the nobility). Close to home was the enduring opposition between the Duc de Chartres and Louis XVI in whose interest it was to maintain the Orléans branch of the royal family (Chartres became Duc d'Orléans in 1785) in a state of idleness, for by a quirk of fate the Duc could become King. Claude Manceron discusses the evolution of the hostility between the King and the Duc d'Orléans in detail.¹²⁸ Mme de Genlis laments in her Memoirs the consequences of the rivalry on the "unfortunate Prince's" fortunes, which dated from 1778 and led to his liberal and anti-aristocratic ideas (and to the sobriquet "Philippe-Egalité"), his appointment as deputy to the Etats-Général in 1789, and eventually to his execution.

Throughout the Memoirs Mme de Genlis seeks persistently to disculpate herself from the charge of political activity on behalf of the Duc. She was always monarchical, she claims, and friendly to the royal family, as the contents of her works clearly indicate. Yet she was placed in the awkward position of appearing to seesaw between two factions. She insists that her only interest in revolutionary ideas had been her hatred of despotism, the rules of hunting and the lettres de cachet. She

¹²⁸ Claude Manceron, Le Vent d'Amérique. 1778-1782: L'Echec de Necker et la Victoire de Yorktown, vol. 2, Les Hommes de la liberté (Paris: Editions Laffont, 1974) II:27-48.

declares firmly that the Duc never sought her advice in matters of state; she conferred with him on only one occasion about politics which was in June of 1791 following the King's return from Varennes when the Duc asked her to compose a brief declaring he would not accept the regency if it were offered as rumored. This was a period of utmost confusion in Mme de Genlis's personal life as well as in France as a whole. It marked the end of her role as tutor at Bellechasse; her ties with the Duc d'Orléans were broken soon thereafter and she became an émigré, which altered the course of her life. It is difficult therefore to determine where truth ends and falsehood begins in her narrative of the troubled days of the early Revolution.

Related to her adherence to the society of the ancien régime was the growing belief that the superiority of birth (with respect to the nobility) was a convention proceeding from an heroic act at some point in the ancient past, and that true superiority arises from education and talent. Mme de Genlis inclines generally toward superiority of birth for it presupposes a reasoned choice and an advantageous marriage partner. However, in the Théâtre d'éducation this logic was applied to all classes: the farmer, the bourgeois and the gentleman. Everywhere obedience and therefore arranged marriages, remains the first rule of order. Naudin notes that wise parents also preferred that newlyweds live with the bride's parents (Naudin 182). Mme de Genlis, in the early years of her own marriage, resided for extended periods with Mme de Puisieux, her husband's aunt and

wife of a former Foreign Minister, with whom she developed an emotional bond. She speaks in her Memoirs of this attachment with nostalgia, moralizing on the duty of young people to be amiable in all circumstances. They are only happy, she concludes, when they are docile, modest and performing their principal duty which is to diffuse gaiety and joy in the family circle (Memoirs I:263). Many of the tragic events of her life could have been avoided, she avers, had she followed the counsel of Mme de Puisieux who was like a mother to her, instead of abandoning her for the Palais-Royal.

Both in her plays and novels Mme de Genlis paints images and incidents drawn from personal experiences which the Memoirs chronicle and explicate. For example, her knowledge of the peasant classes was deepened in the early years of her marriage when she and her husband, in masquerade, made midnight sallies to village taverns in the vicinity of the chateau of Genlis. She also took part in the annual presentation of a crown of roses to the most virtuous peasant girl of the village, an incident later transformed into the comedy Rosière de Salency which Krakeur notes demonstrates the ease with which the country nobility mixed with the peasants. (By contrast, the bourgeoisie of the cities looked upon their aristocratic neighbors as haughty.) Le Vrai sage and La Lingère develop these distinctions (Krakeur 191-192). The true sage, says Genlis, never disparages the rights of birth or rank, but each class should be educated

differently.¹²⁹ Her belief in the preservation of the prerogatives of class is spelled out in Adèle et Théodore, where the Baron and Baronne d'Almane tailor their educational program to the station their children will occupy in adult life. "We are only noble when we stay in our place, says the Baronne d'Almane" (Adèle et Théodore I:26), which appears to underscore Mme de Genlis's predilection for an ordered society.

Part 3

Bellechasse: Moral Pedagogy and Apprentice Writer

Early in her career Mme de Genlis gained lasting acclaim for her pedagogical manual, Adèle et Théodore, ou Lettres sur l'éducation, published in 1782, shortly after she set up school at the pavilion at Bellechasse and became governess to the 11-month old twin daughters of the Duc and Duchesse de Chartres. In the letters that comprise the work, Merlant claims she condemns the sentimental affectation of women in society which she believed led to imaginative excesses (exaltation was the province of men). She praises rather a reasoned approach to life (Merlant 293-294).¹³⁰ This is an appropriate assessment of

¹²⁹ Krakeur cites seven Biblical tales that Mme de Genlis turned into plays which precede the original plays in Théâtre de l'éducation, among which the most important were: La Veuve de Sérepta which commends the rustic life over that of luxury; and La Mort d'Adam, portraying the moral torment of Adam, who, born for immortality, fears his grandsons will revile him when it is their turn to die.

¹³⁰ Joachim Merlant, "Le Roman d'analyse de 1804 à 1830," Le Roman personnel de Rousseau à Fénelon (Geneva: Slatkin rpt., 1970) 293-296.

only one facet of this book. The fear of the deceptions of unrestrained imagination may have been an outgrowth of Mme de Genlis's penchant for creating fictional conversations while speaking aloud to herself years earlier in the solitude of St. Aubin, a habit, she states in the Memoirs, she carried into adulthood, and which caused her some misgivings. Sainte-Beuve (Lundis 96-98) and Harmand (133) reinforce this idea by suggesting that so much of Mme de Genlis's childhood was spent in the artificial world of playacting where she starred in ever more sophisticated roles that her natural behavior was stunted leading to a confusion between reality and fantasy. However, in the Memoirs, Mme de Genlis, attributes her creative talent to these romanesque monologues, and merely decries the unfortunate effects of what she calls her "romantic temperament" on her personal destiny.

In the majority of the over 40 letters of Adèle et Théodore, the Baroness d'Almane (who, in the Preface, LaHarpe is quoted as calling a glorified self-portrait of the author), while on a four-year pedagogical expedition to Italy reports to her cousin, the Viscomtesse de Limours (who has two children of her own), on the progress of the study schedule she and the Baron have formulated for their children, Adèle and Théodore, ages 6 and 7. Although the agenda differs according to sex and the station in life each will occupy, the overall goal is to encourage a sincere interest in useful activities, both physical and mental, designed to develop the whole person (character,

intellect, reason and talent) so as to enable each to correctly read the map of life and travel it safely, contributing to its betterment along the way.

This is a replica of the regime Mme de Genlis imposed on her pupils at Bellechasse interlaced with exemplary as well as slightly tainted models of behavior and tales of heroic stoicism and passionate folly. Moers gives an interesting aperçu of this "self-improvement" book and its companion piece Les Veillées du château (1784) (Moers 322-347), both early works which secured Mme de Genlis's reputation.

The modern aspect of the curriculum is the inclusion of living languages which are to be learned through direct conversations in Italian, English and German with servants, gardeners and valets de chambre who speak only in their native tongues. Similarly, the Almane chateau in Languedoc replicates Bellechasse and, to develop the skills of observation and memory, is furnished with tapestries woven with portraits of Roman emperors and empresses, medallions above the doors bearing their names and birth and death dates, fire screens embossed with the Kings of France, a dining room converted into a mythological gallery and stairwells covered with portable maps.

In the plan set up for Adèle, the charms of character and intelligence are vaunted to eclipse worldly vanity so as to provide a recourse against boredom. To the traditional instruction in music, dancing, drawing and the social graces are added reading, and enough history, geography and literature to

enable Adèle to converse on any subject and counsel her husband when she enters into the dependent life of marriage. Her anticipated submissive role requires as well a thorough knowledge of all the household arts, and animal husbandry, botany, gardening, gymnastics, writing, the art of conversation, and sufficient economics and law to replace her husband as citizen should the need arise.

As history proves that a good education can eradicate vices, the Baroness holds that correct ideas of good and evil can be learned. The teacher needs only to create situations in which her pupils experience temptation; these should be repeated until reason is strengthened; the habit of doing good once fortified then becomes automatic (A&T I:26). The theater also has a role to play in developing principle; it can paint faults, rather than odious people, in a group setting, and capture the imaginations of the young; and through repetition moral lessons become engraved on their memory. Mme de Genlis maintained that she was the first to include amusements like the theater in the curriculum, which she believed not only helped improve memory, but pronunciation, and enabled pupils to acquire grace and lose awkwardness.

The burden of cultivating the whole person rests upon the parents, who in Adèle et Théodore take their role as authority figures seriously. Despite Rousseau's contention that children are "born good" and society corrupts them (see Merlant 294-294; Naudin 181; Théâtre 1507), Mme de Genlis was of the

opinion that children come into the world with human frailties, and left to their own devices become vindictive. To escape boredom they seek violent action. However, they are also born sensible, and therefore are pliable. Although she strongly condemned the religious tenets of the philosophes, Jean Harmand states in the above-referred to Keeper of Royal Secrets, that her educational philosophy was inspired by Rousseau's Emile, which she altered to conform to the tastes of her class and time (Harmand 127-130). The letters in Adèle et Théodore discourse on her belief that vice could be supplanted by wisdom, enthusiasm, judgment and virtue, and by training in patience, prudence, industry and reason. Armed with these qualities one could be happy in the great world or in solitude (A&T I:16).

Through the years Mme de Genlis wrote numerous nouvelles, whose exact dates of composition I have been unable to ascertain. Several were bound together in 1844 with Mademoiselle de Clermont and a preface by "Mme Tastu".¹³¹ Inasmuch as there are apparently no extant commentaries on these tales, I will seek to uncover some of the ways in which the personages created by Mme de Genlis react to traditional authority figures. As in her earlier works, the themes evolve around a moral premise. The first, La Princesse des Ursins, recounts how ambition and the

¹³¹ Stéphanie-Félicité Genlis, Mademoiselle de Clermont. (includes several nouvelles), ed. Mme Tastu (Paris: Didier, 1844).

desire to dominate corrupt the heroine's esteem for her lover and fail to take her where she wants to go because she neglects the importance of obedience to royal will. Once a courageous warrior but weakened by indolent court life, Philippe V of Spain has turned his power over to his mistress, the Princesse des Ursins, who, when he is widowed, thirsts to become queen in the image of Mme de Maintenon. Mme de Genlis, narrator and moral arbiter, intrudes here to remind the reader that kings do not marry mistresses whom they cannot respect, and Philippe will look elsewhere for a consort. The cunning Abbé Alberoni retouches a photo of the beautiful Elisabeth of Parma to make her ugly, to the joy of the Princesse des Ursins, who envisions a powerless queen. This is the single instance which shows the Princesse wise enough to follow Mme de Genlis's dictum (given in the last paragraph of the story) to conceal intellect when seeking success in love, and she warns Alberoni not to praise Elisabeth's intelligence when he shows the King her picture for fear of intimidating him. "L'esprit ne séduit les princes que lorsqu'on a l'art de le voiler sous l'apparence de la frivolité ou d'une simplicité parfaite" (Clermont 84). When Alberoni, who has the photo returned to its original form, presents it to Philippe, the love-smitten King agrees to make Elisabeth his wife. Complications over a misplaced marriage contract alert Elisabeth to the existence of a scheming rival. (Mme de Genlis obviously condemns the Princesse for her failure to deal honestly with respect to this contract.) After the marriage, which as a result

takes place by proxy, Philippe sends the Princesse des Ursins on ahead to the new Queen as his most faithful emissary.

Elisabeth, however, mistrusts the messenger, asserts authority in the King's name and arrests and banishes the Princesse. Upon Philippe's arrival he is so charmed by Elisabeth's obedience and submission, he seconds her order of banishment.

The Princesse des Ursins failed in her endeavor, says Mme de Genlis, because she did not truly love the King, for if she had, she would have understood his weaknesses and supported his love. Obedience and submission to traditional authority win out in this story which attempts to prove that virtue conquers all. Untempered ambition in women has hazardous consequences, for "...l'ambition, comme toute les passions, se repose sur des chimères, quand elle ne peut s'appuyer sur un fondement solide" (Clermont 85). Unfortunately, the ambition of the Princesse knows no bounds. Mme de Genlis, mistress of a prince, has a final word of admonishment for heroes and princes as well. They should arm themselves against designing women who may dupe them. Mme de Genlis, as usual, is an innocent bystander.

Although Mme de Genlis's vixens rarely rest unscathed in male domains, they are more interesting than her virtuous heroines, affirms Birkett (see "Madame Genlis, The New Man and the Old Eve," above), for they don't worry about compromising with authority (180). Birkett obviously hasn't read the nouvelles which present some virtuous heroines who do not suffer martyrdom because of compromise.

Mlle de Lezey in Traît de la vie de Henri IV, whose fiancé is Agrippa d'Aubigné, poet and close friend of King Henri IV, is one of the more fortunate. This short sketch, intended primarily to exalt the King's humanity and assure him of immortality, presents a virtuous heroine who successfully takes a stand against her oppressor, her authoritarian tutor, M. de la Rochefoucauld, who has someone other than the outlaw d'Aubigné in mind as her husband. Mlle de Lezey writes secretly to Henri in reply to his letter extolling d'Aubigné, but fears her letter will be intercepted, as was his to her, by her tutor. She is worried because "elle connaissait enfin que le jeunesse ne saurait prévoir les conséquences affreuses qui peuvent résulter d'une seule faute contre le devoir" (Clermont 202). This is a reminder by Mme de Genlis the pedagogue that obedience to paternal authority figures is the first duty of the young. However, when the King, who is after all the highest ranking authority figure, invites everyone (d'Aubigné, his rival and de la Rochefoucauld included) to a country banquet where fraternal love, Eros and reason are reconciled, the story ends happily.

Les Hermites des Marais Pontins is a short tribute to the exemplary generosity of the young Duchesse de Chartres and was begun, so the author states, in 1776, while Mme de Genlis was a lady in waiting. At that time she was still in good favor with the Duchess. It tells of two penniless hermits to whom the Duchess, without revealing her identity, gave alms while on a trip to Italy. Royal authority, because of its ability to commit

generous acts, receives an accolade in this short story while virtue continues to reap its just reward.

Le Mari instituteur, a pastiche of The Taming of the Shrew, develops the theme of the greatness of true love as a teacher. The responsibility for establishing equilibrium in the household of a newly married couple falls on the husband, Hippolyte de Valrive, who in addition to his position as scion of an illustrious family betokens Mme de Genlis's credo that true superiority derives from education and talent. He seeks to please rather than dominate. When he learns that his bride becomes a "little dragon" when crossed, he employs his excellent qualities to correct the deficiencies of her undisciplined upbringing by shocking her with violent outbursts of his own. His reply to her reproaches denotes his agenda: "Je me convertirai quand mon joli prédicateur m'aura prouvé qu'il est possible de vaincre la colère." After the servants resign because they are the objects of endless tantrums, the newlyweds make a wager to learn self-control. Hippolyte's astute actions earn Laure's respect and for the first time in her life she takes up cooking. By example and flattery Hippolyte succeeds in teaching her patience and the joy of training new servants herself; in a short time the young marrieds are admired as a joyful united couple for whom "le devoir, confondu avec le sentiment, fait une vertu de l'amour, où la gloire devient le prix du bonheur." Mme de Genlis hastens to interject that even a frivolous and superficial society venerates a happily married couple. She makes it clear, however, that

Hippolyte is the representative of marital authority. He forms his wife's heart by imitating her, as an example of her unreasonable behavior, then continues her education by selecting her reading materials, chooses her friends and monitors her conversations. It is under his auspices that Laure learns management skills, how to check prices, bargain and balance her budget, all facets of home economics dear to the heart of Mme de Genlis, the pedagogue, who believes that the ideal wife should seek fulfillment in domesticity where she reigns supreme. It is the husband who possesses greater judgment and so the role of teacher is natural to him. However, it is essential that he too receive the proper education so that he will employ love instead of severity in the lessons he teaches his wife. A mother can only begin to educate a daughter, affirms Mme de Genlis; the husband must complete the task.

Les Prétentions d'une femme satirizes the overweening pride and prudery of Mme de Nelfort, a widow of 33 who joins to sound judgment radiant beauty and the infinite tact acquired by contact with the world. Madame de Genlis sets her up for a fall because of her prejudice against the libertine but charming 25 year old Chevalier de Lugi whom she meets upon her arrival at her cousin, the President's chateau, in Normandy. To avoid his company, she decides to leave. The Chevalier, who has made a wager with the President that he can win her heart by compelling her to commit an imprudence which she will try to correct and in so doing will recognize his worth, forestalls Mme de Nelfort's

departure by planning one of his own first. Her remorse impels her to tearfully entreat the Chevalier to remain, while she agrees to do the same. The stage is thus set for the marriage that will inevitably occur because of the Chevalier's respectful attentions which overcome all of her resistance. Although criticized by some, the Chevalier behaves with such propriety that Mme de Nelfort is deemed responsible for his reformation, and so confirms Mme de Genlis's moral that a happy wife gains respect. Still, it is the Chevalier who controls the Mme de Nelfort's destiny for his strategem of seduction is authoritarian and provides another example of what Birkett, speaking rather of Mme de Genlis's novels, calls the active subject, while Mme de Nelfort is the passive object (Birkett 150-151).

Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder in Le Jupou vert which eulogizes the qualities of mercy, sacrifice and virtue. M. Molten, a wealthy businessman of Breslau, recounts to Valcourt, his young French visitor, why his wife Ida wore an old patched green woolen skirt to his birthday celebration. Years earlier Ida was a servant in a café in Berlin when Molten was attracted by her act of mercy in giving her Sunday skirt to a pregnant woman who came into beg alms. When Ida was fired for this act of charity, Molten found her a place to live. Eventually Molten married Ida with the proviso that she wear at his birthday each year the old worn green skirt in which he met her to remind her of the grace of poverty and the act of charity that had brought them together. While the modern reader may understandably fault

the exploitation of the leit-motif of virtue in Mme de Genlis's stories such as Le Jupon vert, the fact that she could capitalize on the subject matter herein in the superficial society of her day gives pause to reflect. Love has changed the destiny of many young women, Molten tells Valcourt, but Ida is one of the few who owe their fortune to virtue. This may have been true in the 18th century, but the concept is too maudlin to ring a bell today.

In the last paragraph Mme de Genlis reaffirms the legitimacy of marital authority noted in Le Mari instituteur. Molten polishes Ida's mind, selects her books and the company she keeps in order that she may become a wife in whom he takes pride: a gentle, cherished and attentive homemaker and a companion whom he can consult on any question of interest. Molten's greatest desire, says Mme de Genlis, is to have a happy home and she, the least likely of donors, provides him with one. But what about Ida, one is tempted to ask? What does she want? Apparently she is satisfied to take her place in Mme de Genlis's album of ideal if unlikely women. The slightness of the subject matter leads one to believe this was a morality tale designed for children in whom the governess hoped to instill qualities of charity, poverty and virtue.

The exercise, or lack thereof, of parental authority that emerges from Les Réunions de la famille has modern overtones. Quite similar to any contemporary critique of the social scene, Mme de Genlis interposes at the outset her regret that the generations no longer live together in one home (as it

has been stated 17th-18th century parents hoped would be the case). With this caveat in mind, she reintroduces the concept of family values as the basis for true social tranquility. Three generations reside in the same household: Grandmother Lisbe, the Count and Countess and their daughter-in-law, Isménie, a bride of 18 months, whose husband, Charles, has already succumbed to the charms of a viscountess on whose estate near Versailles he is staying.

Rather than get upset and call Charles to account the women hide their feelings behind a demeanor of gentility. The wise and charming Grandmother Lisbe is the spokesperson for Mme de Genlis's thoughts on the situation of Charles' philandering. Isménie's virtuous love will mature her reason and perfect her character, she says. Young men like Charles confuse pleasure and happiness, but Charles truly loves Isménie and will soon forget his passing fancy. It would be foolhardy to get angry for it is not wise to prove men wrong and embarrass them. Grandmother Lisbe speaks with a great knowledge of the world, interjects Mme de Genlis, and had always sacrificed pride to family peace. It is interesting to note how these women accept the 18th century code of behavior without wincing. It would appear they are truly shackled by the rules of bienséance for no one even bothers to ask Isménie for her thoughts on Charles' delinquent behavior in the first place.

The gentle approach of committing small acts of love to bring Charles back to the fold, however, proves judicious when

each family member, in confidence, makes a financial sacrifice to pay off his gambling debts. As the plot unravels, the women will be reimbursed for at a New Year's family reunion, the Count confesses that he has paid Murville, Charles' debtor, in advance to gamble with Charles to teach him a lesson. When the Count offers to return to Charles his carriage and horses for a New Year's gift, Charles refuses, saying he will no longer be leaving home except in the company of Ism nie. Charles appears stupefied and penitent at the evidence of familial love exhibited by his parents, grandmother and wife. The tale ends on a note of gaiety for Charles has been restored to his family by means of the persuasive arts of love. Mme de Genlis, with the words of Grandmother Lisbe, expresses the wise conclusion that it is imprudent to exercise authority when children at the age of independence leave home, it being the better part of valor to lure them back with marks of affection and benevolence, proving that sentiment and gratitude forge the strongest family ties.

In Mme de Genlis's imaginative universe the outcome of each of these stories is preordained because the women unselfishly submit themselves to the unwritten law of obedience to masculine or social dominance. In this instance there is no question of the suffering newlywed Ism nie asserting her individual rights or bemoaning a fate established by male superiority.

If it were not for the chivalric concept of wager upon which the tale is constructed, Lindane et Valmire could quite

reasonably date from the 1920's. There is something very 20th century in the disjointed dialogue and dislocated behavior of the personages. Few game rules appear to govern the actions of the characters as each moves from one environment to another without any apparent motivation other than whim; time appears to be an irrelevant concept insofar as daily activities are concerned. The only pattern of behavior that endures is a vague code of friendship which is only obvious because it serves as a pivot on which the action is built.

The moral Mme de Genlis showcases is the intrinsic merit of honorable love as opposed to the imprudence of passion. The beautiful, wealthy, intelligent, virtuous and sought-after Lindane desires to be loved excessively and with great show, says Mme de Genlis. One evening in the company of Valmire and Gercour she bemoans the glorious lost chivalric tradition and the dethronement of women. She challenges the inflamed Valmire, who has heatedly allowed that he would execute the most bizarre deed to secure the heart of the woman he loves, to prove his constancy by leaving France for three years, sending no word until his return, whereupon she will marry him. The impetuous Valmire takes up the gauntlet and leaves the country.

Mme de Genlis who held that passion was an illusion, interferes to say that Lindane did not really love Valmire but merely fantasized about his passion and the glory that would be hers when rumor of his heroic sacrifice spread. Gercour, the third member of the trio, does not believe that great proof is

consistent with true love which, he says, behaves with more delicacy. He is incapable of great passion but has a lively mind, grace and gentleness, and a provocative manner of speaking. Too lazy to be inconstant he attaches himself to the woman he sees the most frequently. During Valmire's absence this is Lindane. At the end of three years a comfortable, tranquil romance has established itself between Gercour and Lindane, pursuing its serene course with no formal committment.

Obviously Gercour is the reasonable marriage partner Mme de Genlis has in mind for Lindane. The anxious Lindane is therefore greatly relieved and her worry dissolves when a nervous Valmire tells her at their first interview upon his return that he has been married for two years. Shortly thereafter Gercour and Lindane marry.

The choice is right, says Mme de Genlis in conclusion, for the hotheaded Valmire brings grief to his wife while Gercour's uniform temper causes Lindane neither fear nor jealousy. The best form of love is that which resembles a pleasant and tender friendship, for no passion could endure three years, while reasoned thought leads to the happy medium or what Naudin calls Mme de Genlis's juste milieu (183).

In the last of these nouvelles, Nourmahal or Le Règne de vingt-quatre heures, Mme de Genlis portrays the unexpected triumph of the customarily shaky alliance of ambition and virtue. The Indian Sultan Geangir marries the beautiful and talented young Nourmahal who comes to his court to beg the release from

prison of her father. Finding the habitual amusements at court tedious Nourmahal hopes to make an illustrious name for herself with one dazzling act. She keeps her strategy hidden until the favorable moment after a magnificent banquet when the Sultan, softened, promises to carry out her greatest wish, and then advances her plan to reign in his stead for twenty-four hours. Mme de Genlis appears to have created a fictionalized version of her own character and the romantic aspirations she harbored with respect to the Duc de Chartres during her early years at the Palais-Royal in the character of the clever Nourmahal. To overcome the Sultan's momentary hesitation that a woman ruler might make an error of judgment, Nourmahal points up to him her intelligence and nobility of character and promises not to abuse her power but to validate his love. "To reign an instant but to love forever is woman's most glorious destiny," exults the Sultana/Mme de Genlis.

This is an interesting departure from Mme de Genlis's typical treatment of women as homemakers and perhaps demonstrates her growing faith in the power of the pen.

The conciliatory Geangir hoists the Sultana's flag above the palace and her authority becomes law. Her achievements are immense and strike one as resulting from the superior qualities of extreme sensitivity, sacrificial devotion, spiritual force and will power which Mme de Genlis ascribes to women in her essay De l'Influence des femmes sur la littérature française. Nourmahal makes the most of every moment; she concludes a peace

treaty with Persia, lays the foundation for a pagoda and a bridge, frees unjustly charged prisoners, distributes alms, delivers an eloquent speech, mints a coin with her profile on one side and the Sultan's on the other, and convenes a meeting of ministers to enact laws to improve the condition of women. The realization of the last two articles of business bespeak a latent feminism on the part of Mme de Genlis and appears to contradict her customary argument that those women are happiest who seek fulfillment in the domestic sphere. A tale placed in the exotic environment of India surely gave her more latitude to express herself sincerely and avoid criticism than did eighteenth-century France.

On the other hand, she may be implying that some, not all women, should play a more active public role, but it would appear that even they should return home. Nourmahal therefore turns traditional and declines to accept the Sultan's invitation to share the throne because of insufficient strength and "retra, pour toujours dans l'intérieur du séreil" following her day of glory. She will never again interfere, says Mme de Genlis, in affairs of state and so will make no enemies or be the object of reversals of fortune, and will evermore conserve the luster and purity of her fame by giving herself to friendship and her taste for the arts. Nourmahal's destiny may represent Mme de Genlis's dreamworld, but after her brilliant accomplishments, a retreat can be seen as a loss to the Indian province, and depressing for Nourmahal.

Although this heroine may be more virtuous than her male counterparts, Mme de Genlis lets the latter retain the power because of physical strength, combativeness and a thick skin.

Part 4

Novelist, Critic and a New Order

Mademoiselle de Clermont, published in 1802 by Maradan, was the first of a series of historical novels Mme de Genlis wrote upon her return to France from exile.¹³² Often called her chef d'oeuvre, it depicts the ruin of an aristocratic woman confined within the artificial authoritarian boundaries of a royal court. Its reputation was justified, for concisely written within the framework of a well-knit plot and a rapid tempo, it fulfills the promise of Mme de Genlis's early literary works. To claim it as autobiographical would be an exaggeration but the flashes of resentment Mlle de Clermont displays at the dénouement when she fully understands the restrictions placed on her freedom may well mirror the author's personal experience.

Some notion of the social context in which Mademoiselle de Clermont was written should broaden our understanding of the author's dilemma when faced with the changing structure of the authoritarian boundaries of post-revolutionary society. Finding her fortune dilapidated on her return to France, Mme de Genlis

¹³² Stéphanie-Félicité Genlis, Mademoiselle de Clermont: suivie de nouvelles, Notice littéraire, Mme A. Tastu (Paris: Blin-Leprieur, Didier; NY: Roe Lockwood and Son, 1844). Mademoiselle de Clermont comprises 71 pages in this volume.

wrote out of financial need; yet her thinking had been formed by the social standards of her years as lady in waiting at the Palais-Royal and the ethical principles required as "gouverneur" to the Orléans children at Bellechasse, whereas the society for whom she now produced was in a state of upheaval. She saw this as a new opportunity to expand her moral themes (Laborde 229-235). Merlant states that the question posed by Mademoiselle de Clermont is whether or not marrying below one's station is permissible (Merlant 295). This theme is combined with that of the evil consequences of a misalliance contracted within the rigidly structured authoritarian society of the 17th century court. As one of her better known tales it can be used as a critique of the role of aristocratic women generally in court society. In the author's scheme of things, one cannot marry below one's station with impunity, and the ultimate death of the hero proves the point, or as Merlant suggests, obviates the necessity of presenting a categorical answer.

It should be noted that although all of Mme de Genlis's historical novels are rooted in an historical setting, they do not necessarily contain actual but rather events which Mme de Genlis encountered in her reading and which she linked by imagined adventures. If the last episode describing the hero's death is a tragic occurrence, the artificiality of the mechanism by which it is portrayed fails to arouse the pity of true tragedy. Laborde claims it is precisely this tragic element that is missing from Mme de Genlis's works as a whole, and constitutes

another reason for the failure of her work to survive (229-235).

While engaged in writing Mademoiselle de Clermont and her other novels of the following years, Mme de Genlis was living at the Arsenal, her first stable residence in nine years, under the patronage of Napoleon who also provided her a pension of 6,000 francs, with the proviso that she send him biweekly articles on topics of her choice. Following a long literary apprenticeship in exile, this stability enabled Mme de Genlis to undertake her work with new zest. Her talent flourished and in Mademoiselle de Clermont the psychological play of the birth of passion is treated with greater delicacy and the composition with a new assurance than was characteristic of her earlier work. It is only in the final act that the reader is presented with the author's traditional opposition to the consequences of passion, the birth of which Naudin says she blamed on illusions resulting from the reading of too many novels. By carefully devising scenes and exploring problems faced by men and women of history, her denunciation has a greater impact than if she were writing about ordinary individuals, and does not offend credulity. As a classicist, Mme de Genlis sought harmony and equilibrium to the tales she told in a clear, precise and simple style. The well-constructed plot of Mademoiselle de Clermont holds the reader's interest from the beginning as it builds to its unexpected climax.

As in her early educational writings, Mme de Genlis, avoids explicit rules to get her moral point across; first she

sets the scene, then hints at the lesson to be learned and completes her exposé with a case history. We are warned early on that the hero and heroine are unequal in rank since Mlle de Clermont is a blood princess while M. de Melun is merely a noble duke. It was tacitly understood that class boundaries were not to be crossed with impunity in the social scheme of things in the 17th-18th century, so the reader is alerted to an impending danger. The dénouement reveals the inevitable harm caused to the protagonists themselves when, despite their inequality of birth, they accede to the attractions of passion and ignore the rules of hierarchy at work in their society.

Birkett contends that Mme de Genlis's "historical function" was the "preservation of the ideological hegemony of the aristocracy." Her historical novels (of the genre of Mademoiselle de Clermont) attempt to elucidate and rehabilitate such ideological codes of a vanished race in terms understandable to the reactionary forces under the Consulate (150). Albistur and Douthwaite make clear in their discussions of legal restrictions and gender power, however, how impossible it was for Mme de Genlis to provide a milieu for her heroines in which they would have the freedom to choose careers and obtain the vote. The promise of full citizenship for women that the Revolution had held out in its early years died under the Directory and the Consulate (see Albistur 213-238; Douthwaite 1-21). Napoleon, however, aspired personally to acquire a gloss of the old aristocratic 17th century French culture of which Mme de Genlis

was a fascinating proponent, and he eagerly sought to learn all that she had to convey. Merlant adds that the classic and conservative mind of Mme de Genlis coincided with his desire to revive feelings that could lead once again to a government established on authority (Merlant 292-293). This sounds plausible.

In her Memoirs, Mme de Genlis disavows giving any advice to her patron directly, yet her letters to him of which she provides samples indicate the contrary; again Merlant finds it worth repeating that her opposition to the growing cosmopolitanism in France was so great that she pressed Napoleon to put an end to the expense of sending painters and musicians to Italy to study and train. Her feeling was so intense about this issue that she attempted to inspire him with a purely French ideal by praising the artistic products of her own countrymen. Napoleon was for a time an enthusiastic consumer of her early historical novels and is said to have shed tears over La Duchesse de la Vallière, published in 1804. By the time Madame de Maintenon appeared in 1806, however, it was so successful and public admiration for the aristocratic doctrines of the 17th century ran so high that bookdealers were prohibited from selling copies of the illustrations from the "seditious" work. Napoleon suddenly feared a political resurrection of the ancien régime which he hastened to quell. His manifestation of authority did not dampen his ardor for the talents of Mme de Genlis and in 1812 he appointed her inspector of the elementary schools of her

district. Early indications of his fall from power precluded her occupying this post (see Merlant and Naudin).

In her Notice to Mademoiselle de Clermont written 14 years after the death of Mme de Genlis Mme Tastu calls the novel an accomplishment great enough to assure the author a lasting place in great French literature (Mademoiselle de Clermont 8). Unfortunately, history has not borne out her prediction. If at all, Mme de Genlis is remembered as tutor to the Orléans children, not as a writer. Yet the statement in the Preface that this novel presents a tableau of a touching passion thwarted by the shackles of royal authority is still valid. Modern feminists may bemoan Mademoiselle de Clermont's reversion to despicable compromise when initially she demonstrates all the earmarks of confident independence, yet generally heroines of the 17th century were timid rather than bold.¹³³ Birkett seemingly ignores this tradition when she cajoles such compromise, and claims Mme de Genlis's heroines are blinded by self-deception (150). It is a disappointment to watch Mlle de Clermont at the end of her story helplessly turn over her newly acquired dignity as a wife to her brother while her husband lies dying in his apartment. This form of renunciation brought on by despair is also characteristic of the Duchesse de la Vallière, where the

¹³³ Madame de Genlis, The Duchesse de la Vallière, trans., 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1840). See Preface.

heroine empowers her lover Louis XIV to determine her selfhood for ten years before she can extricate herself from his grasp. By then, replaced in Louis's affections by the wily Mme de Montespan, her only hope to acquire self-identity at all is to confine herself as a nun and pray for it in the hereafter. Rather than compromise, it would seem Mme de Genlis's heroines, limited by their historical context, find few alternatives to the control of traditional authority.

Whether or not Mme de Genlis consciously sought to establish an enduring agreement concerning women's status by inducing them to surrender their autonomy to men to preserve political and social order, as Birkett argues, is unclear for she doesn't hesitate to castigate her male critics who treat women, writers in particular, irreverently.¹³⁴ It is indeed difficult to impute all of this to Mademoiselle de Clermont who assumes an unusually powerful stance to overcome passion, and only yields when her victory, assured by marriage, is overturned by strange and suspicious circumstances. Yet her case serves as another example of Mme de Genlis's rather ambiguous attitude toward the condition of women.

Mlle de Clermont was endowed by nature with the most excellent gifts: royal birth, perfect beauty, a keen and thoughtful mind, and character, and at the age of 20 she was

¹³⁴ See Stéphanie Félicité de Genlis, "Réflexions préliminaires," De l'Influence des femmes sur la littérature française comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs (Paris: Maradan, 1811).

received at Chantilly with great acclamation. There she met the young and distinguished Duc de Melun whose seriousness raised him above others of his age given to gallantry. Mlle de Clermont's initial interest was heightened by the knowledge that her brother, Monsieur le Duc, whose character, age and position placed him in a position to dominate, looked upon Melun with high regard. This is a telling statement and forewarns the reader that Monsieur is to play a fateful role in the drama. Due to her station, Mlle de Clermont must take the initiative in any exchange with Melun, to which she applies considerable ruse. After feigning a sprained ankle which relieves her of attendance at royal balls, she exchanges vows of everlasting love in a tête-à-tête with Melun.

Meanwhile M. le Duc is negotiating a royal marriage for his sister which incites Melun to take a leave of absence from Chantilly. In this way, Mme de Genlis readies M. le Duc for emergence as the transgressive authority figure. When word circulates that Melun is to marry someone in Languedoc, M. le Duc presses Mlle de Clermont to further the match. Instead, she presents Melun with a gold bracelet inscribed with the phrase "Jusqu'au tombeau" similar to her own which bears the words "Pour toujours". A distraught Melun leaves again, for England, and in his absence M. le Duc's marriage arrangements seemingly have been put on hold.

Two years elapse and Mlle de Clermont and Melun are reunited at Chantilly where the princess assures Melun that at

age 22 and an orphan, her brother's authority is only nominal and she can dispose of herself at will. They wed in secret. However, their bliss turns tragic when the King comes to Chantilly for the hunt. A ruthless command by M. le Duc separates the carriage of Mile de Clermont from Melun who sets off on a path alone to join the hunting party. Accidentally he is run down by a deer and the panic-stricken Mlle de Clermont must give her carriage up as a hearse to transport her grievously wounded husband to the chateau.

It is at this point that the rigid code of royal protocol begins to constrict the behavior of the once joyful now tragic heroine as she learns that her return to the chateau has been postponed until midnight so that the carriage will arrive after the king has gone to bed and she will not be forced to appear before him: "... (J)e ne suis qu'une vile esclave," she cries out tearfully, "jouet éternel d'une odieuse représentation... je dois cacher des sentiments les plus naturels... je dois assister à des fêtes, je dois sourire quand je me meurs.... Ce rang envié n'est qu'un rôle fatigant ou barbare qui nous impose, jusqu'au tombeau, les plus douloureux sacrifices et la loi honteuse d'une constante dissimulation!" This outburst not only expresses the frustration of Mlle de Clermont but surely reflects that of Mme de Genlis during her term at the Palais-Royal which in the Memoirs she says was the most unhappy of her life; or it may reflect the fear she experienced when her association with Philippe-Egalité led to the opening of her salon

at Bellechasse to republican girondins. In both instances authoritarian strictures hindered her fulfillment.

Mlle de Clermont's early assertion of independence was unrealistic and temporary. When her carriage reaches the chateau at midnight the Duc forces her into a private room despite her request to see Melun. He refuses to respond to her questions and flies into a rage when she discloses her marriage. Her courage faltering, Mlle de Clermont begs for leniency and the Duc's tone softens as he senses his power: "... (L)aissez-vous guider par moi...et...vous pourrez tout espérer." Reassured, the trusting Mlle de Clermont passively retires. Her hopes are dashed when without any explanation the Duc commands her to spend the following day with the King. The anguished Princess dutifully yields, apparently unable to stand up to the bonds of the rigid code of bienséance or the strength of her brother's authority. Mme de Genlis cuts down to size her brave show of independence to demonstrate the catastrophic consequences of a misalliance. And when the King departs, and Mlle de Clermont, trembling and praying, at last climbs the stairs to Melun's room at midnight, engulfed by a terrible silence, she is unable to find the key to his door. It is only the following morning the truth she fears is revealed when Melun's valet hands her the timeworn note bearing the words "Pour toujours," to which a dying hand has added"... (A) dieu, n'oubliez point celui qui vous aima jusqu'au tombeau" (Clermont 71).

Upon a closer reading, it does not appear that unbridled passion was responsible after all for the disastrous conclusion of Mademoiselle de Clermont for Melun and the Princess's romantic relationship was built on respect and the longevity of their love. Their happiness was obstructed primarily by an arbitrary act of authority inasmuch Melun would not have been fatally wounded if Monsieur le Duc had not interfered and sent him off alone. In 1802 under the Consulate when, as stated above, the inroads to freedom made by women during the Revolution were blocked by the Napoleonic Code, Mme de Genlis appears to have balanced as to the degree of freedom she could prudently permit her heroine.

Modern critics like Birkett justly condemn Mme de Genlis for her complicity with traditional authority by affirming she "place(s) the mask of consensus on the face of repression" (Birkett 151). One can counter, however, that Mme de Genlis herself rises above these heroines for she retained her individuality in the face of all manner of hardship and was able to fine-tune her pedagogical and writing skills while living on the cutting edge of power with the grave responsibility of educating the royal children to fit the mold of sovereignty that awaited them. From the account of the Marquise de Créquy, under the Chevalier de Bonnard, Mme de Genlis's predecessor, the education of the children of the Duc de Chartres had made little progress. The oldest, the Duc de Valois, was awkward and treacherous, says the Marquise, and Mlle Adélaïde, his sister,

"une méchante pleureuse". The Duc de Montpensier acted the fool and it was only the little Comte de Beaujolais who showed some real intelligence, while none of them told the truth. The Marquisé was equally skeptical of Mme de Genlis's chances for obtaining greater success, inasmuch as she was self-educated and early poverty had made her avaricious.¹³⁵ Yet through great discipline and enormous energy Mme de Genlis attained her goal and imparted a well-rounded education to eight children, one of whom became a king, and acquired the love and devotion of the others. Talent and personal charm brought Mme de Genlis to the attention of those influential enough to allow her to exploit her ambition. If she had reckoned on overcoming authority through intelligence alone, her means of livelihood in the society of the Louis XV and XVI, the Empire and the Restoration in which she sought to survive would have been placed in jeopardy.

From 1789 the authoritarian structure began to crumble as the Revolution got underway and many women, hopeful of an improved status, took a public stand. Their optimism proved shortlived for the buckling of class barriers did not include

¹³⁵ Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créguy: 1710-à-1803, vols. I and III (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1867) I:316-318; III:337-343.

those of gender. Men were even more reluctant to accede to their demands (See Albistur/Armogathe, 13).¹³⁶

Although protected by the prerogatives of privilege from suffering the humiliations and ill-treatment of the lower class women who invaded the National Assembly or demanded civil rights in the market place, Mme de Genlis through her association with the Duc de Chartres, was thrust into a personal battle to preserve her own rights. The Duchesse d'Orléans reclaimed her authority over the royal children at the outbreak of the Revolution and sought to remove them from the pernicious influence of their "gouverneur" and regain parental authority. A combination of two factors was at the core of her changed attitude toward Mme de Genlis: a) a close friend from among her attendants informed her, apparently for the first time, of the liaison between the Duc and Mme de Genlis, and b) Philippe's association with the Republican cause for which the Duchess . . . blamed Mme de Genlis, just as she blamed her for usurping the affection of her children. In her Memoirs, Mme de Genlis gives an account of the rupture and attempts to exonerate herself. She has been accused of being too self-righteous to be sincere in this effort, yet when all was said and done she retained the friendship of the Duc who separated from his wife officially, in great part over the plight of the poor Princess Adélaïde who became ill each time her beloved governess sought to resign from

¹³⁶ Maîté Albistur, Daniel Armogathe, "La Question féminine au siècle des lumières," Histoire du féminisme: du moyen âge à nos jours (Paris: Editions des Femmes, 1977) 13.

her job. As Mme de Genlis refrains, however, in the Memoirs from discussing in detail her relationship with the Duc, the reader can only guess as to the true source of the trouble.¹³⁷ In any event, this quarrel marked the end of Mme de Genlis's tenure as "gouverneur" at Bellechasse; although it should have resulted in her liberation from the shackles of servitude to the Orléans family, with the loss of position came the loss of security and eventually led her, along with the Princess Adélaïde, on a journey into exile in Belgium, Switzerland and Germany, where she was repudiated by émigrés and republicans alike.

Since it was said to have brought tears to the eyes of Napoleon, and with Mademoiselle de Clermont assured Mme de Genlis's reputation as a novelist when she returned from exile, I will examine the role of royal authority in the guise of the "evils of an unfortunate attachment" or "the pernicious influence of a faulty passion" as it emerges from the tale of La Duchesse de la Vallière, published in 1804. In the early pages Mme de Genlis speaks premonitorily of "ungrateful oblivion" into which had fallen the generations who had passed through the old gothic halls of the ancestral chateau of Mlle de la Vallière's family

¹³⁷ Adding to the growing distance between the Orléans family and Mme de Genlis was the Duc's appointment in 1788 of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos as his private secretary. Laclos, whose influence overshadowed that of Mme de Genlis, was instrumental in furthering the Duc's republican leanings. Mme de Genlis skips mention of him except to excoriate Les Liaisons dangereuses.

where she had spent her childhood with her mother and father, the Marquise and Marquis de St. Remi, cultivating virtue and learning the principles of the holy scriptures (Vallièrè I:1,6).¹³⁸

Repenting the "deplorable slavery and cruel tyranny" of the "breach of the sacred bonds of duty" (Vallièrè I:2), at the end of Volume I, Mme de la Vallièrè, fearing the same fate will befall her because of the lack of ambition she has demonstrated as mistress to the young Louis XIV, shuts herself up in the Hotel Biron, the superb Parisian mansion love had embellished on her account, and says to herself: "Here am I among the despicable class of proud and sordid females, whom impartial history has forever stamped with the badge of infamy" (Vallièrè I:240). Mme de Genlis has attempted to redeem her for the tragic story of her rise and fall is far from sordid. Volume I introduces the reader to a virtuous and beautiful young girl of 19, who, in spite of receiving a chaplet of coral from Father Anselmo and a crystal cross from her dying mother to preserve her piety, falls from grace to what she considers "the depths of degradation" due to an illusory belief, derived from reading the novels of Mlle de Scudéry, that a king's sentiments are as pure as her own. Volume II analyzes the intense emotional torment she endures to overcome passion, twice abandons Louis XIV and the glitter of the court only to be coerced into returning, and at last finds absolution within the narrow confines of a Carmelite convent.

¹³⁸ Mme de Genlis, La Duchesse de la Vallièrè, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1804).

Mlle de la Vallière had been raised to reason correctly. She read only devotional books, the history of France, several odes of Malherbe and the tragedies of Corneille. The uniform system of morality apprehended in these readings enabled her to avoid erroneous judgments and to appropriate noble sentiments. Symbolic of Mme de Genlis's methodology she also cultivated characteristics of utility, generosity and charity.

At her mother's death, an orphan, Mlle de la Vallière was obliged to flee the tranquillity, safety and happiness of the virtuous dictatorship of familial authority at the chateau for the snares of the wicked world for her mother, who had left her daughter impoverished, had arranged for her to become one of the maids of honor to Madame Henrietta of England, sister-in-law to King Louis XIV. In depicting the heart-broken sorrow experienced by Mlle de la Vallière as she crosses the drawbridge of the chateau and enters upon the unknown with regret and trepidation, comparing her departure from innocence to a journey into exile in a foreign land, the third-person narrator, Mme de Genlis, may be reliving her own sentiments when as an émigré she passed from France to Belgium at the authoritarian command of the Duc de Chartres (Vallière I:31-34). Mlle de la Vallière spends the first night of her journey at Tours where her eyes fall on a newspaper article conveying the courage, magnanimity and goodness of the young King; in the drawing room Louis's gaze, from a full-length portrait, with its expression of dignity and sweetness strikes her with awe fostering the belief that it mirrors her own

temperament. When she is first introduced to the King at Saint-Germain, his greatness of mind convinces her of his virtue and generosity. Of all the nobles who make up the splendid court, the King's presence is the only one that can appease her loneliness. With this tableau, Mme de Genlis sews the seeds of the passion she so abhors.

To keep abreast of the conversations in Madame's circle, Mlle de la Vallière reads the novels of Mlle de Scudéry, and while recognizing what Mme de Genlis terms the falseness of the idea that "a tender passion was an...invincible sentiment," she can find no antidote therein for a romantic preference contrary to duty since "real love could not be overcome" (Vallièrre I:74). She was hypnotized by these novels, in part responsible for her later yielding to the King's diligent pursuit. Her mistake, she says to herself, was to equate the King's state of mind with her own virtuous intent.

At a ball at Fontainebleau the King overhears her favorable comments about his dancing, and is captivated by her wit and charm. During an excursion to Vincennes in a rustic pavilion the King finds her seeking refuge from a storm, declares his passion and presents Mlle de la Vallière with a bouquet of lilies as evidence of the innocence and respect of his love. On another occasion he scales the roof of the palace and, eluding her chaperone, enters her room to insist once more on the purity of his sentiments. Following a fête at Versailles in her honor, and to combat her "inclination," to preserve "sound morality,"

Mlle de la Vallière flees Paris, but the King recalls her with the announcement that he wants to "establish" her. When her pious friend, the Countess of Thémine, persuades her to reflect at the Convent of Chaillot, the King arrives precipitously on horseback and angrily denounces Mme de Thémine for rendering him a tyrant and leads Mlle de la Vallière back to Paris like a victim, while renewing his vow to respect her principles. She resists the King for a year but fearful that his passion will lead to his death, she capitulates at last, and sinks into what she and Mme de Genlis consider the "abyss of dishonor". Love loses its charms and she recognizes how illusory was her conviction of the purity of the King's friendship.

The second volume details her supreme effort through religious fervor and faith in the ideals of her childhood to break the bonds of royal authority and find peace of mind in a convent. It is a labor of 10 years, during which she bears the King children and, despairing ceaselessly, learns that "sovereigns may confer rank and bestow riches; but neither rank nor riches can redeem virtue" (La Vallière I:239). Her torment increases with his haughty complaints about her wounded virtue since he wants the Court to see her happy. "Princes in love as well as in friendship, when irritated, naturally assume a tone of superiority. Then we perceive that our sentiments of equality are illusory," opines sagely the third person narrator, Mme de Genlis, or Mlle de la Vallière, who has learned through adversity

that when kings are suitors they lose nothing of their authoritarian behavior.

As the tale wends to a close, the King's passion cools and he succumbs to the enchanting gaze of a stranger, the dissimulating Mme de Montespan, who has pretended to be Mlle de la Vallière's friend. Burning with jealousy and wounded pride, the latter can do no more than look on at her rival's success before the Court. Actually she is saved by divine succor which leads her at age 28 and still beautiful to renounce the world and its disquieting glamor. Louis, appalled at her decision to enter a convent, makes a last visit to the Hotel de Biron, despoiled of its riches by Mlle de la Vallière, who lives as a nun. Her apartment is a cell with a coffin bed, straw chair, wooden table with a crucifix, a skull, a lamp and the Gospels. "(Is) (it) in a place like this that the most interesting of women would pass the remainder of her days!...and I have been the cause!" The King cries out and asks if she wants him to suffer remorse for having been the most un pitying of tyrants. Mlle de la Vallière fails to provide a cogent answer.

It is interesting to note how frequently Louis is referred to as a tyrant by Mme de Genlis. Despite all her reverence for the code of bienséance of the ancien régime, unconsciously she senses the fundamental injustice it personifies, and in the person of Mlle de la Vallière, seeks an innocuous means of expressing it. Louis XIV may berate the women whom he has wronged, but he is incapable of taking their

condemnations seriously. Is he not after all the "Sun King," who derives his authority from on high? Who can truly oppose his will with impunity? Calling himself a tyrant is a mere rhetorical gesture.

In dedicating herself to a divine calling, Mlle de la Vallière reaffirms Mme de Genlis's persistent theme that religion affords the only defense against despair. Reason alone can triumph over passion but not allay the pain the sacrifice entails. It is only through divine inspiration that the soul can rise above the corruption of the material world and contemplate purer visions. As La Duchesse de la Vallière expounds so insistently, a system of true faith is the only consolation the weak can apply to gainsay the encroachments imposed by the strong.¹³⁹

Among the discourses Mme de Genlis wrote on subjects of deep concern to her, of particular note because it deals with the

¹³⁹ Instances of an ever more profound reliance on religious faith are clearly expressed by Mme de Genlis in her Memoirs, particularly III:159-162 with reference to the death of her eldest daughter, Pulchérie, at age 21, in childbirth, and the composition of "La Religion considérée comme l'unique base du bonheur et de la véritable philosophie, ouvrage pour servir à l'éducation des enfants de S.A.R. Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans, et dans lequel on explique et l'on réfute les principes des prétendus philosophes modernes;" which Grimm, in his Correspondance of April 1787, criticized as an unsuccessful attempt by the author to explain abstract concepts beyond her skill. During her exile from France, Mme de Genlis was severely afflicted on other occasions which demanded more than ordinary faith, particularly when she prepared to depart from the Princess Adélaïde in the middle of the night without telling her pupil of her intent. Book IV.

question of the reasons for the authority male writers wielded over their female counterparts is De l'Influence des femmes sur la littérature française comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs, published in 1811.¹⁴⁰ The discourse comprises a series of portraits of queens, princesses and authors who have been guardians of literature from Radegonde, wife of Clotaire I, to the date of writing. Each sketch includes biographical items which serve as linchpins joining anecdotes to critical comments which Mme de Genlis avers with unimpeachable assurance and sometimes grudging tartness. The subjectivity of her remarks frequently detracts from their credibility and challenges the durability of the enterprise. In the vignette entitled "La Duchesse du Maine," reflecting on the excessive flattery of the courtiers at Sceaux, she expresses undue dismay at LaMothe's request to the duchess for "un baiser sur la bouche," calling it a bizarre gallantry, lacking dignity. The Duchess was deficient in taste, she continues, a defect of all women with a mania for wit (Littérature 248-49). She then attacks Mme de Tencin for the appalling theme of Le Siège de Calais and lumping her other books together, dismisses them as ordinary. Given Mme de Tencin's association with low class people and the dubious means she employed to gain her ends it is not surprising, concludes Mme de Genlis, that her novels lack nobility of sentiment (Littérature 277-278). The obsolescence of these sometimes petty assessments

¹⁴⁰ Mme de Genlis, "Réflexions préliminaires," "Duchesse de Maine," De l'Influence des femmes sur la littérature française (Paris: Maradan, 1811) ijiii-xxxv, 244-250.

denotes an absence of historical perspective incommensurate with Mme de Genlis's abilities and perhaps adds to the reasons her work has not been of lasting value.

The introductory "Réflexions préliminaires," a lengthy essay upholding the case for women writers in the face of the disparagement to which they were subjected by the male hierarchy, is more objective and purposeful. Granting that women have not to date written anything comparable to the works of Bossuet, Pascal, Corneille, Racine and Molière, Mme de Genlis's models of invention, she contends that the unfortunate predicament has as its source the poor education women receive rather than a physical or mental deficiency. In fact, women possess imagination, sensitivity and greatness of soul, the very qualities of genius. Over the course of history they have, by their actions, particularly in the recent revolution, shown themselves the models of sublime heroism.

Mme de Genlis ridicules the premise that to achieve greatness one must write a good tragedy or epic poem and alludes to the number of kings, captains and statesman who are renowned. It is possible to excel in an art form only when it is cultivated in the nation and class into which one is born, she says, and women have not had the opportunity to be nourished by Greek and Latin studies as have young men who, upon learning the rules of versification, dream of making a place for themselves in the theater. Nonetheless, mothers of families or nuns have the power to feel and admire, and had they been bred under different

circumstances, they could well have written tragedies as well as men for both sexes are equal morally. To preserve their precedence, men, who, to the exclusion of women, single out other men on whom to bestow literary honors, often choose mediocrity. This thought provides Mme de Genlis the opportunity to take to task d'Alembert whom she chastens for his anti-religious and -monarchical bias.

To the allegation that women do not possess sufficient energy to create great literature she argues that women have already demonstrated their strength of will, perseverance and the capacity to sacrifice to reach their goals, citing religious martyrs of past centuries. Moreover women have received special training to succeed in society which has equipped them with a delicacy of expression most beneficial to literary composition where the power to suggest the most elusive feelings rather than to verbalize them creates an aura of mystery and charm. While she avoids mentioning that their monologues are the creation of the famous tragic poets, she cites Orosmane, Bajazet and Phèdre as examples of women who by dint of restraint and reticence were able to profoundly move their audience.

Mme de Genlis backs off at attributing to women the power to govern or mingle in politics, but forcefully rejects the contemporary male argument that if they had the freedom to write, they would learn to despise household duties. In a well-organized home household chores require only an hour of time or a morning at the most, she responds! In truth, there are few

laborious authors in a century where literary men lead dissolute lives. The breakdown of the family does not result from sedentary occupations, she maintains, but the aimless social activities women engage in. The cultivation of a special talent is a precious resource in adversity and the most agreeable of pastimes in all other circumstances. Only those with an aptitude in a particular sphere should have private lessons, however; society, for instance, is overloaded with pretentious women writers. Those women with superior minds, though, should have their memories stretched and learn scholarly languages which will put them at an advantage should they decide to become writers.

In all events, aspiring women writers must learn the rules governing the writing life and not rush to appear in print until their work reveals a profound respect for religion and principles of morality. Following the above advice, Mme de Genlis takes up in detail the appropriate response women writers ought to make to skeptical critics. They should avoid anger, and only reply at all and with delicacy to those who have falsified the facts in their work. The writer should shun irony so as not to be victimized. She must behave with nobility and decorum. Because of their keen observation women make good critics of imaginative works, but should not indulge in mockery at which only Voltaire was successful. Serious criticism must avoid ill-will or engaging in offensive language. Similar to polite conversation, criticism is to be urbane and graceful. A journalist must be able to contradict, criticize and convince

without offense or pedantism. Good taste, sincerity and principles would then foster self-respect and preserve self-interest. In whatever vein she chooses to write, Mme de Genlis returns irrevocably to the 17th century code of bienséance and the theme of religion.

In every society form outshines content and manners count more than processes, she continues. It is not the criticism that wounds, but the manner in which it is presented. After 35 years of a writing career, Mme de Genlis states that she has been the subject of some good criticism which has pleased her but she nevertheless believes that consideration should be accorded to all women writers by the men in the profession. (The claim has generally been that much of the criticism that plagued her was due to her own self-righteous and satiric remonstrances against others, primarily the philosophes; but unfavorable assessments always appeared to her the result of jealousy.) In response to a recent article in which it was claimed that women do not deserve respect and renounce their sex and rights when they become authors, she recoils at the absolutism of the pronouncement and resurrects the shades of Mesdames de Graffigny, de la Fayette and de Lambert whose charm and talent gave them no reason to abjure their sex.

As could be expected, according to Mme de Genlis, in the last analysis, a woman who writes only moral and useful books successfully deserves all the consideration due her sex and the honors ascribed to worthy writers. In the century of Louis XIV,

when manners were more austere, many women authors from all classes wrote in every genre. Men of letters not only did not rail against them but were happy to show them off and treated them with great esteem. There was no rivalry between men and women for it was understood that uncontested superiority is always humble and strength generous.

From 1811 until a quiet death during her sleep on December 31, 1830, Mme de Genlis wrote prolifically, with energy and determination, adjusting her themes to the times. I have touched upon only a few examples of her vast production. In the 19th century her novels continued to generate enthusiasm as indicated by George Sand's claim that the social doctrines of Les Batailles (1816) influenced the evolution of her thought. Mme de Genlis's books were eventually overlooked until the mid-20th century when feminist writers began to re-examine minor 18th century women authors. Among the critics Birkett, in 1988 presented a probing analysis of Mme de Genlis's political sentiments relative to the meritocracy depicted in Les Parvenus (1824), among other works, and in 1996 Yaël Schlick developed the diverse attitudes of Mme de Genlis and Mme de Staël concerning women writers in "Beyond the Boundaries: Staël, Genlis, and the Impossible 'Femme Célèbre'" which relies on Mme de Genlis's De

l'Influence des femmes, etc. and three of her short stories for its commentary on the tribulations of women authors."¹⁴¹

Mme de Genlis's ambition continued unabating until the last. Book VII of her Memoirs (Naudin refers to 10 volumes while I found only 8 which I believe comprise the whole) elaborates on her grandiose design to invalidate the Encyclopédie by rewriting Diderot and revising other articles for which she sought the assistance of the Austrian and Prussian governments and the papal nuncio with a plan to disburse the profits to charitable institutions. This dream was not to be realized; times changed and interest in the enterprise flagged as it did in the philosophes. Mme de Genlis was more fortunate to see her erstwhile protégé, the young Duc de Chartres, now the Duc d'Orléans, crowned king of the French following the July Revolution of 1830. According to Lamartine she had communicated great intelligence, many principles and extreme prudence to her old pupil as well as her own "plasticity", which served him well (Lamartine, 159).¹⁴² According to De Perron, she passed on to Louis Philippe the liberal education inspired by "l'esprit des Lumières", (Dictionnaire historique 208-209), which may not have

¹⁴¹ Yaël Schlick, "Beyond the Boundaries: Staël, Genlis and the Impossible 'Femme Célèbre,'" Symposium 50:1 (Spring 1996): 50-63.

¹⁴² Alphonse de Lamartine, History of the Girondists, or Personal Memoir of the Patriots of the French Revolution, trans. H. T. Hyde, vol. 2 (London: George Ball & Sons, 1892) Book XXVII.

entirely pleased her had she known it.¹⁴³ Laborde, Krakeur and Merlant have each found the writings of Mme de Genlis valuable, while Naudin laments that a careful and inclusive analysis of her novels has not been done nor a comprehensive edition of her works published. I am in agreement and would hope that the proper forum for the reinvention of Mme de Genlis would one day be provided so that her ideas on education and the limitations of effective authority could be re-evaluated in light of contemporary values.

¹⁴³ Albert Soboul, Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française, sous la direction scientifique de Jean-René Suratteau et François Gendron; M. Castillon dePerron, "Chartres Louis-Philippe, dit Egalité-fils, duc de" from Louis-Philippe et la Révolution française (1984. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989) 208-209.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

The high-octane environment of France in the eighteenth century had varied reverberations. Philippe Ariès and Yves Castan in "Figures of Modernity: Political and Private Life" have captured its essence in a panorama of the changing mentalités of the individual in his relationship to family, society and the State in the early modern period commencing in 1800. Their study reveals sources of changing attitudes toward the concept of authority relevant to the difficulties Mesdames Tencin, Staal and Genlis encountered.¹⁴⁴

Although feudal beliefs in loyalty and homage remained deeply engrained as the century opened, increasing wealth had brought with it a new self-consciousness as the individual sought to gain approval or arouse the envy of others; an expanded view of the world, induced by the increased flow of books, and alterations in the contours of religion gave birth to a probing of one's conscience; and, lastly, the family with an authoritarian overseer who maintained its integrity became a nucleus offering refuge from the outside world. Still, the "social space" occupied by the individual continued to follow a

¹⁴⁴ Arthur Goldhammer, trans. "Figures of Modernity: Politics and Private Life," by Yves Castan, introd. Philippe Ariès Passions of the Renaissance, ed. Roger Chartier, vol. 3, A History of Private Life, eds. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1989) 1-67.

pattern inaugurated at the State level. All of this affected the lives of the above women.

This influence was part of a boomerang effect in the system of justice which began to intervene more frequently in matters once left to communities. When Louis XIV had put his "intendants" on the public payroll in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, he created a private enclave, which gradually abandoned a large segment of the population to frustration and the need to manufacture new avenues of privilege. This brought into question the established boundaries of authority personified by royal majesty. At every level of society the word "superior", whether husband, master, priest, officer, magistrat or lord, represented existential power and invoked appreciation, affection, and even fear at the thought of its deprivation.

Inasmuch as it was inconceivable for each individual to have a personal association with the King or any of his superior satellites, one was commended for venerating one's nearest patron; a woman's first allegiance was to her husband, and a servant was beholden to his master. To appeal to a higher authority transgressed known limits. Whether wife or valet, each was as duty-bound to a superior as was the Duke of Orléans to the King, and each could be excused from responsibility on the same grounds. Respect for immediate authority authenticated fealty to the more distant power.

As the unwritten law of obedience remained unassailable, singular aberrations brought on atypical reactions in some situations that began to wear away at the base of the hierarchy. Flaws in the judicial system prevented many individuals from sustaining the boundaries of privacy, as the family, parish, community and patron who once offered protection gave in to coercive forces that were not readily understood.

Above it all, the King stood as a model commanding subordinates who were too weak to be contenders for power but strong enough to be instruments of his will, and who were granted certain privileges. Although the individual's civil liberty was supposedly ensured by the King's authority, in reality the latter's power extended to the private sector and reinforced the authority of the immediate "superior" to control the work, leisure, property, position and even body of his subordinate. The rationale governing this policy was the need to preserve order and protect the weak. In the last analysis, the archetype for supreme authority was God and his dominance over all earthlings, which postponed any considerations of individual rights.

A peaceful accommodation between public and private authority, however, was not to be achieved in the eighteenth century and, like the State, the family unit began to disintegrate on the eve of the Revolution. Tolerance toward women and children had declined and it was considered bad taste for parents to rear their own offspring, who as in the past were

educated at boarding schools and convents, where the learning they received was inadequate for the rigors of a revolutionary society. As the century declined, even the new theater of sentiment and the taste for nature and moralistic paintings were unable to stem the tide and a civil uprising failed to do away with authoritarian boundaries. As Benjamin Constant put it just before the Restoration, the people had desired to be freed from the misuses of authority, but the regimes which followed the Revolution fell short of understanding that they were far from wanting authority over private life to be an expurgated edition of royal supremacy (see Ariès and Castan 1-67).

The above factors converged to cast their shadow over Mme de Tencin, Mme de Staal and Mme de Genlis, whose lives spanned the century and beyond. Each was, therefore, constrained in one way or another, by the changing events of her time, and struggled to defy or comply with the bounds of a particular form of authority as each saw fit.

Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin was a child of the ancien régime and reflected life on the cusp between two eras. If her traces are undefinable, it may be for this reason. Like others of her time, her first ardent wish was to escape; but exactly to what is unclear. What we know of her life gives the impression of an endless search but the direction is clouded by thoughtless activity. Once liberated from the strictures of conventual life, she appears to have followed no clearly

established program toward self-fulfillment, either by choice or circumstance. As could be expected from someone coming of age at the beginning of the eighteenth century, she operated on several levels, excelled as a coquette and a hostess, almost triumphed in politics, and left a distinct imprint on literature. With each experience she grew.

If, at the last, we remain puzzled as to Mme de Tencin's inner motivation, the answer may be found in the Second Rêve, "Etats des Femmes dans la Société," which the Abbé Barthelmi states was written by Mme de Tencin under the watchful eye of Voltaire.¹⁴⁵ However much truth there is to this statement, the author puts forward a candid appraisal of the aristocratic women of the period as overheard by a male bystander at a brilliant gathering of "gens d'esprit."

Bored with conversations about husbands' privileged positions, illustrious family backgrounds and affairs, the "reasonable" spokeswoman takes her companions to task for posing as no more than charming flowers content to be cast slavishly with their indolent husbands into extravagant idleness, when they have a more noble destiny. The author/Mme de Tencin does not go so far as to suggest that these frivolous women seek careers in the modern sense, but rather that they would better serve themselves and others if they rose above the weaknesses of their

¹⁴⁵ Abbé Louis Barthelmi, Notice, Mémoires secrets de Madame de Tencin, ses tendres liaisons avec Ganganelli, ou l'heureuse découverte relativement à d'Alembert, 2 parts (Paris: 1792) 2:13-17.

masculine counterparts, "ce tourbillon d'hommes inappliqués qui se reproduisent journellement autour de nous." If they comported themselves with greater modesty and sought pleasure within the family circle, they would wield more power over society because of the infrequency of their public appearances, she concludes.

This is a more cynical Mme de Tencin than the creator of the Adélaïde, who sacrificed her life to love in a Trappist monastery, and of Mme Granson who saved the bourgeois of Calais. Perhaps it is the real Mme de Tencin who lived with remorse over her own youthful aberrations when she too succumbed to "des perfides adorations," as an "object public d'un culte qui nous déshonore." That she passed most of her mature life in a state of semi-disgrace has already been discussed. What we do not know for sure is on whom or what she personally placed the responsibility for her plight. In the apocryphal novel cited in Chapter I, Vie d'une religieuse, the implication is the inadequacy of education for girls, but since we cannot know for certain who wrote this book, it would be hasty to assert this as the basis of Mme de Tencin's assessment of her own failures. However, the same form of inadequacy is attacked in the second Rêve.

The bystander at the gathering takes up the argument of the spokesperson, and condemns crowds at magnificent galas as the purveyors of vice; he chides the assembly of women, the heart and soul of society, for not employing their unique qualities for its amelioration, rather than passing the time of their lives in

a useless effort to improve upon their beauty to the neglect of their minds. Beauty is a worthless commodity if not supported by a noble soul. Both interlocutors reach the identical conclusion which gives special force to the argument that Mme de Tencin appears to be putting forth.

The author attributes the plea expressed in this selection to "un Socrate déguisé" which sounds more like Voltaire than Mme de Tencin. If this Rêve is, indeed, from Mme de Tencin's pen, it is aptly titled because of the utter impossibility of such a fantasy being realized in the world of fact in that turbulent century. It also remained a dream for it is highly unlikely that Mme de Tencin, who did not acknowledge authorship of any of her books, would have dared speak as openly to anyone, much less to the prestigious religious and literary guests who peopled her salon.

From the moment she took steps to renounce her conventual vows, Mme de Tencin's life took on the outlines of the type of exceptional occurrence with its demand for an abnormal reaction about which Ariès and Castan were thinking when they spoke of the unwritten law of obedience.

"Staal, von (Marguerite Jeanne Cordier) Baroness, an accomplished French writer," is the only member of this trio to have the distinct honor of being remembered principally for her literary talent. Her work is recognized in the 1972 Universal Pronouncing Dictionary as "Remarkable for the elegance of (its)

style" (2232), a more commendable "one-liner" than critical sources have attached to either Mme de Tencin or Mme de Genlis.

The least aggressive of the three women, Mme de Staal was also the most lauded for her noble conduct. One reason for her humility and flexibility was the lack of financial resources at her disposal which locked her into her post as lady's maid at the Court of Sceaux for all of her adult life. Moral fortitude, as well as intelligence and her sister's networking helped get her there in the first place, with a little assistance from Descartes for whose philosophy she had developed a passion in her formative years. Her later performance at Sceaux may be looked upon as a persistent if futile attempt to validate the four essential precepts of his method: 1) accept nothing as true unless it causes no doubt; 2) divide every difficulty into parcels to be examined separately; 3) begin with the most simple and proceed to the complex; and 4) spell out everything carefully until nothing is left out.¹⁴⁶ When permitted to act on her own initiative, Mme de Staal speaks in her Memoirs of turning to reason as a guide, but Descartes' method apparently failed to take into account the chaotic intrusion of an external force as powerful as that of the Duchesse du Maine, who was privileged to enter her servant's social space at will.

¹⁴⁶ Daniele Bos, Robert Horville, and Bernard Lecherbonnier, "Les Ambitions de la pensée," La Littérature et les idées, vol. 4 Littérature et langages (Paris: Editions Fernand Nathan, 1974) 63-67.

As it unfolded, Mme de Staal's life demonstrated that following reason does not necessarily lead to happiness. The two great loves of her life, who Sainte-Beuve found unworthy of her devotion, degenerated into demanding friendships, and other potential marriage partners of her choice disappeared into the mists of the Sceaux valley along with employment prospects. One cannot help wishing for her sake that she had been less analytical and more forceful.

Another circumstance which impeded her search for fulfillment was the impossible situation of not being able to lift herself above the status of servant in the eyes of the Duchesse du Maine. Critics have been equally patronizing, as indicated by Tilley's statement that Cartesian philosophy proliferated to the servant class in the eighteenth century, and he cites Brunetière's reference to Mlle Delaunay as an example. In the summer of 1707 Mlle Delaunay made an unsuccessful trip to the Silly chateau to visit the Marquis but when her vehicle lost its way, she was forced to spend the night in a tavern in a room separated by only a thin partition from a group of soldiers. Her sole comfort against fear, according to her Memoirs and Brunetière's account, was that the soldiers spent the long hours arguing about the antipodes and the shape of the earth (Tilly 441). This episode which in truth occurred before she was a servant at the Court of Sceaux is indicative of Brunetière's bias. The Duchesse du Maine's prejudice had other origins.

Madame du Maine had an ally in Mme de Lambert, who shared the modern's taste for Descartes, but who felt no quails at siding with the Duchesse to oppose Mlle Delaunay's projected marriage to the widowed husband of the celebrated Homeric translator, Mme Dacier. "Que ferez-vous d'un homme tout hérissé de grec?" she rejoined when Mlle Delaunay sought her counsel (Tilly 349). As a friend of both Mme Dacier and Valincourt, Mlle Delaunay was invited by the latter in the spring of 1716 to a rendezvous to bring to terms the "Ancien" Mme Dacier and the "Modern" LaMotte. "We drank to the health of Homer, and all went off well," assessed the proverbial peacemaker Delaunay (Mémoires 211-216; Tilly 349). The boundaries of Mlle Delaunay's zone of privacy at Sceaux were still open at that time to easy invasion by royal authority, in line with the analysis by Ariès and Castan discussed above. It was only after her release from the Bastille in 1720 that Mlle Delaunay was able to assess the full impact of her habit of docile submission. By then, although the century was beginning to undergo a change of attitude, she was too hardened by experience to transgress the unwritten law of obedience.

Sainte-Beuve was just twenty-one in 1825 when he wrote a bitter diatribe against Mme de Genlis for publishing her Memoirs during her lifetime. He denounced them as a flimsy fabrication, written with the presumption of an authority figure whose thoughts carried weight in the public debate. There is

nothing in them, says Sainte-Beuve, to indicate even a flicker of patriotism or any partnership with the calamities of her century. In stark contrast, Mme Roland and Mme de Staël had received from nature the gift of a viril mind equipping them for political roles. Mme de Genlis, to the contrary, possessed only a talent for elegance and superficiality enabling her to teach rules of conduct, enumerate agreeable diversions, perhaps express fleeting sentiments of the heart, or relate a few memories of a vanished society (Sainte-Beuve Premiers Lundis 94-104). The only lasting renown which she might expect would be for a few pages of Adèle et Théodore devoted to pedagogy, and Mlle de Clermont. (Sainte-Beuve fails to say anything further about Mlle de Clermont, the 1802 historical novel of the tragic consequences of a misalliance discussed in Chapter III, and generally considered Mme de Genlis's chef-d'oeuvre.)

Mme de Genlis responds indirectly to Sainte-Beuve in Book VIII of her Memoirs, shortly before noting the receipt of anonymous letters following publication of the early volumes:

"In politics and the social order, what seems real and definite is often nothing; written constitutions belong only to nations oppressed or given over to the dominion of Sophists; they are feeble, varying and ignorant. True constitutions live in the heart; they are composed of morality, tradition, manners, sentiments and particularly of honour and our country" (Memoirs VIII:7-8).

These are the words of an interested observer of the political scene if not a participant. Mme de Genlis claimed she was unqualified to partake of the pugnacious debate over governmental policy during the Restoration. The vehemence of the new class of peers offended her ideas of the sanctity and reasonableness of mannerly behavior. This did not mean that she lacked mettle. Book VIII which constitutes an evaluation of her life and place in post-Revolutionary society is interspersed with political judgments. She had anticipated the disastrous consequences of Napoleon's Russian campaign, was distressed by the assassinations of the Duc d'Enghien and the Duc de Berry and the repercussions that followed. She was also a long-time friend of Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, and knew François René de Chateaubriand when both men were Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Yet, as inferred in the above quotation, Mme de Genlis believed that the basic goal of society, the happiness of its citizens, could only be obtained through the exaltation of piety and this is where she placed her trust. Apprehensive that the new spirit of tolerance would lead to the demise of religion, she was troubled by the liberal policies of the Chamber of Deputies for the permissiveness it gave to free speech. Nothing goes well when one speaks ill of the government, she admonished, and believed the King would undermine the infrastructure of society by allowing the public authority to voice complaints.

As a traditionalist, theoretically at least, she could not overcome her love of order, personified by the monarchy,

church and the unwritten law of obedience to the rules of class. In practice, however, she was a pragmatist who reacted to difficulties with a positive course of action. In her correspondence with Napoleon, she suggested he reinfuse the public treasury by organizing public celebrations for the benefit of the poor, to be funded by the merchant class; and backed a minister to Louis XVIII who favored the construction of public baths on the Seine, which she thought would flatter the lower classes and stimulate construction, thus filling the public coffers.

The same positive approach invigorated her pedagogy as she instructed her royal pupils by placing them in authentic learning situations, such as factories and shipyards, to acquaint them with the world about them. Her life was a cauldron of possibilities, people, change and expedients. As in her early married life she travelled with relatives and friends tirelessly between chateaux and palaces, so upon her return from exile she moved from apartment to apartment in Paris with different companions and an accoutrement of dried flowers, lacquerwork, harpsichords, violins, notebooks and a collection of half-finished manuscripts.

She lived with style and art, surrounded by an extended family of devoted children and grandchildren, to whom she sought to pass on her love of music and literature. Her work, she believed, had been significant to religion, education and morals. In her Memoirs, when she reflects on the past, she unfailingly

credits the "divine words" for granting her strength and serenity to withstand the hostility and injustice of which she felt she had received more than her share. She had, she insists, merely wanted to please. Thoughtless and ill-considered actions brought on most of her sorrows and misfortunes, and were the result of her own imprudence. Had she to do it over, Mme de Genlis concludes, there is scarcely anything except her literary efforts that she would repeat, but from her works no more than ten pages would be expunged.

Not one of these women received when young an education worthy of her talents, or adequate to the tasks that lay ahead in a society ever more mindful of the individual's desire for freedom. Those who stepped over the crumbling barriers of authority left unheeded the voices of three striking harbingers of change.

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