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**Reading machines: Fiction, femininity, automaton in *ancien régime*
France**

Liu, Catherine, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1994

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**READING MACHINES: FICTION, FEMININITY, AUTOMATON
IN ANCIEN RÉGIME FRANCE**

by

CATHERINE LIU

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York**

1994

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Abstract

READING MACHINES: FICTION, FEMININITY, AUTOMATON
IN ANCIEN RÉGIME FRANCE

by Catherine Liu

Adviser: Professor Nancy K. Miller

This dissertation examines the ways in which the automaton is a figure for various problems of difference in the novel of *ancien régime* France. In the midst of this work, I have tried to demonstrate that the figuration of difference itself is shaped and formed by the ways in which sexual difference is represented in the work of Lafayette, Graffigny, La Mettrie, Rousseau and Laclos. I examine sexual difference in its relationship to classical *technology* as it is represented by the automaton. The automaton is a very specific sort of machine: singular, precious and aristocratic, it embodies an existence defined and limited by the parameters of its mechanics. Its limitations serve to illustrate the constraints of convention and the demands of *bienséance* that are so carefully respected in La Princesse de Clèves and so harshly criticized by Graffigny and Rousseau. The *ancien régime's* fascination with these objects can be read as a fascination for the ways in which automata mirrored and replicated something about the conditions of worldly existence. Worldliness is the rubric under which I investigate the novel and the automaton together. The novel was the form in which the tensions of worldly life were most carefully represented: the conflicts of external exigencies, internalized injunctions and passion were nowhere

more carefully examined, especially insofar as they shaped the lives of women who wrote and read these early modern fictions. The early modern novel represents a certain kind of feminine initiation.

In the midst of this literary study, the career of Jacques Vaucanson, the great automaton maker and engineer is explored in some detail: as a historical figure, his success in mid-century Paris seems to be an exemplary one. The formation of early modern science and the seductions of worldly Parisian life play equally important roles in his career. He crosses paths with an extraordinary eighteenth-century woman, Thérèse des Hayes, the wife of Vaucanson's patron. Her story sheds a different kind of light on the various fictional narratives: its tragic and triumphant dimensions both exceeds and supports the fictional accounts of feminine destinies.

Finally, this work attempts to show that writing produces mechanical or machine-like effects. When we take into account both feminist, psychoanalytic and deconstructive strategies of literary criticism, we can show that a text functions in a mechanical way and can be read as such. Meanings are produced and reproduced, function independently and autonomously of any authorial intentionality: this is the automaton-effect of linguistic production. If linguistic conventions and social conventions, we can re-evaluate our ideas of social conventionality and take into account the problems of textual formation and subject formation.

Sexual difference as a linguistic effect is one of the by-products of textual machines: it is inexorable and arbitrary at the same time. The way in which sexual difference is represented can be described as *conventional*. This conventional

difference can be devastating in its effects and consequences. In the fictions I examine, women as representatives of the feminine, seem to take the blame for the toll that sexual difference takes. The *ancien régime* writers that I read in this dissertation demonstrate uncanny insight into this state of affairs. The strategies that they describe in their work seem to be signs of an early modernism. The ways in which they avoid and confront the question of sexual difference, textual autonomy and mechanical reproduction of the human anticipate the ideological limitations of our own *post*-modernism.

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Introduction

Écrire, c'est produire une marque qui constituera une sorte de machine à son tour productrice, que ma disparition future n'empêchera pas principalement de fonctionner et de donner, de se donner à lire et à réécrire.

Jacques Derrida

Part I

To introduce is to prepare the way, to set the scene as well as to - introduce - "intro-duire" to guide and lead into. In order to lead my reader, and prepare the way for the work to follow, I find that I must tell a story that describes the history of an apprenticeship in all its phases of idealization, disillusionment, repudiation and affirmation, although not always in that order. In 1983, I was an undergraduate at Yale University, entering my third year of study, well on my way to completing the requirements in the major of my choice, Literature, a department theoretical in its outlook, situated intellectually and literally between English, Comparative Literature and French.

In 1983, I was registered to take Paul de Man's course, "Reading and Rhetoric" required for completion of the literature major. Paul de Man died before he could give that course, before I could take it. I had not taken de Man's seminar on Rousseau that was offered the year before. I knew nothing

of de Man nor his reputation. Barbara Johnson was called upon to replace de Man that year and it was she who taught us on the first day of class that the most problematic word in the course title was the word "and." The only access that I had to de Man's work was through the teaching of his faithful disciples and through the reading of his texts. His disciples I found intimidating in their almost sectarian devotion to his work and memory. His texts I found infuriating. I was very young and very impatient with uncertainty. Psychoanalytic theory also interested me, but its ambiguities and complexities were daunting. At the same time, I was receiving, or giving myself an education in feminism. Feminism offered certain ideological certainties that were more familiar to an adolescent who had grown up in a family very much involved, for some reason I have yet to fully grasp, in the vicissitudes of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

In New York City, while I received my own sentimental education, I came to re-evaluate my unquestioning idealism about the possibilities opened up by feminism and feminist criticism. Over the course of my graduate school years, I became less and less certain about the efficacy of feminist strategies and more devoted to psychoanalytic and theoretical problems. Then I took a course with Nancy K. Miller, whose work and teaching inspired me to reconsider my reconsideration of feminist criticism. The eighteenth-century and *ancien régime* discourses were opened up to me in the course of my studies with her and it seemed possible again, to assume a feminist position that was neither essentialist nor essentializing. This was of the utmost importance to me.

I found that there was work to be done in order to elaborate upon the relationship between the work of psychoanalytic theory on the question of femininity (and its representations) and the work of eighteenth-century writers who were preoccupied with similar problems. This eventually turned into the site of my dissertation: I took on the study of the automaton and sexual difference in the novel, from Lafayette to Laclos. In the process of researching and writing, I discovered that reading for the machine and reading machines was in fact, something that I had inherited from my de Manian education that I resisted and repressed for almost ten years. The work that follows is, in a sense, a work of mourning. The more I wrote, the more I discovered the training that I received at Yale emerging, a training for which now, very much belatedly, I am grateful. I never did get to take a class from Paul de Man and I believed for years, that this made no difference. Now, too late, I know that it did, unfortunately, and I am only beginning to understand its significance.

At the present time, the questions and problems raised by deconstruction's commitment to radical uncertainty interest me far more than dogmas or ideological agendas although I insist on pursuing the question of sexual difference and its representations. Today, the work of Derrida and de Man is criticized for being reactionary and insular, cryptic and unknowable - ahistorical. Psychoanalytic theory has come under similar attack. The critics of deconstruction and psychoanalysis subscribe to certainty, be it historical or ideological. Its critics seem to know what is wrong with the world and how to

fix it. Theory as I was taught it, and as I have come to understand it, questions the very way we know by examining the way we read and write: what theory assails is certainty itself, the certainties of "bonne conscience" or good faith.

The work that follows is a convergence of the three great influences of 1983: feminism, psychoanalysis, and unexpectedly, for no one less than the writer, deconstruction. I have attempted to explore the model of writing machine and machines as writing. Writing, for Derrida, is the production of a mark that works, that is, produces, despite the absence and disappearance of the writer, the maker of that mark. There is nothing more machine-like, nothing more automatic, than the functioning of writing itself. Writing is always the anticipation of a disappearance at the same time that it is the address of an absence. My appreciation of de Man's work has come too late. I am filled with regret and sadness, but I suppose I will always be a student, in one way or another, of the ironic master.

There is also the problem of his writings from 1941-1942, discovered post-humously, that seems inexcusable, writing for which he himself, offered no confessions or excuses. His writings at twenty-two, however, do not mitigate the importance of his work today because de Man's writing is a work that does not allow room for any kind of fanaticism, intellectual or political. At twenty-two, I too believed that there were answers to all the questions and questions to all the answers. De Man's tragedy was that he seemed to have

found, if for a moment only, a principle of certainty in anti-Semitism and Nazism. The tragedy of dogmatism in my own life has to do with my parents' sympathies for the Chinese Cultural Revolution which offered answers for all questions as it scapegoated and persecuted in an almost arbitrary manner, individuals and groups for their supposed bourgeois, Western or intellectual tendencies.

De Man and Derrida never offered any easy answers, only difficult questions. Miller's work has also been a work of questions and questioning. Theoretical criticism offers a challenge to the ways in which we know, and the ways in which we know difference, in order to insist upon identity as a question and femininity a question mark. It is as a question that Freud left the problem of femininity: what does woman want? His inability to give a satisfactory answer can be understood as a fortuitous failure. That he puzzled over this problem allows us to take up the puzzle. It was with enigmas and formulae that Lacan addressed the Freudian problem. I found that this question left its mark on the discourses of the *ancien régime*. This mark is the point of departure: it is in the process of inquiring after difference that I hope to approach the automaton and its cultural and discursive significance in *ancien régime* France.

Andreas Huyssens's "The Vamp, the Virgin and the Machine" covers in much less space, some of the problematics that I want to address in the chapters to follow. He is interested in the ways in which woman and machine

are represented in Fritz Lang's Metropolis. He oversimplifies the situation by describing woman as "other." The other of "man" is depending upon the situation, either nature *or* technology. The absurd quandary that this kind of dualistic thinking leads us to is that woman can be identified with either the natural or the technological, or any force that is perceived by "man" as overwhelming and alien. Huyssens offers a reading of woman as other that completely neglects the notion of "difference." How the other differs is completely taken for granted.

I want to avoid this kind of dualistic thinking: women-other, woman-technology, woman-nature, etc. I intend to show, in the work that follows, that femininity in the system of sexual difference is that which poses a question to knowing as such. Femininity or what Huyssens calls "woman," can be located on the side of both technology *and*, nature, thus upsetting the order of difference itself. Huyssens's assertions that Metropolis is about the fear of woman's sexuality only serves to further essentialize dualistic structures. I hope to upset them.

Part II

In the second part of this introduction, I would like to present some ideas about the literary and linguistic configurations around the automaton or *l'automate* in order to demonstrate that it served to formulate *ancien régime* ideas of difference as such. In examining the ways in which La Bruyère and Rousseau uses the image of the automaton to criticize and describe the

behavior of others, I would like to set the scene for the discussions of the automaton that take place in the following chapters. La Bruyère's "le sot est automate" was such a powerful image, that it still resonates, almost a century later, in Laclos's novel when Valmont describes those around him as useless automata. Rousseau's paranoid vision of persecuting "êtres mécaniques" provides us with an image of others as diabolical figures machinating the downfall of an innocent victim. The significance of this paranoid vision will become clearer when we explore the way in which Rousseau is responsible for the demise of an innocent victim of his own, Marion.

The Petit Robert defines the *automate* as first of all (in its archaic sense): "Toute machine animée par un mécanisme intérieur." The example of its archaic usage is a citation from Descartes, "Une montre ou autre automate, c'est-à-dire machine qui se meut de soi-même." The secondary definition is defined as a current one and includes a mention of Vaucanson: "Appareil mû par un mécanisme intérieur et imitant les mouvements d'un être vivant. *Les automates de Vaucanson*." The tertiary definition of *automate* is a figurative one, "Homme qui agit comme une machine, sans liberté." What follows is a quote from La Bruyère, "Le sot est automate, il est machine, il est ressort" (267).¹ The proper name of Jacques Vaucanson the great *mécanicien* of the eighteenth-century, has become attached to the denotation of *automate*.

The first two definitions of the term deal with questions of interiority and

¹Les Caractères. ed. Marcel Jouhandeau. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.

concealment: a machine or an apparatus with an interior mechanism that is disguised or hidden. The interior is the space of the mechanism: the secondary definition tells us this because what is visible or exterior about the mechanism is meant to imitate living being, in movement and by proxy, in form. The automaton then is a deception machine, a machine in which the mechanism is hidden so that the secret of its autonomy is always concealed in order that the illusion of magical or unaccountable animation is produced. The automaton imitates in form and gesture the living being which it is not, but must pretend to be, by hiding its secret and in a sense, keeping up appearances. Its secret has to do with mechanism. The Jaquet-Droz automaton, a child-like writer plays with the paradox of resemblance as deception. It is still in functioning order and "preserved" at the Musée de Neuchâtel: this automaton is able to write the sentence, "Je ne pense pas, donc ne suis-je point?". The Jaquet-Droz automaton addresses itself, in an act of simulated writing directly to the question of being as formulated by the Cartesian *cogito*. The writer-automaton simulates nothing less than self-consciousness as it is manifested by the effects of a writing that is divorced from thinking. Its writing, a simulation of writing, asks a question about its being, "am I not?" and transforms the Cartesian statement into an ironic question. What is the difference?

"Le sot est automate" describes a man who acts like a machine. The man who acts like a machine is a "sot."

Le sot est automate, il est machine, il est ressort, le poids l'emporte, le

fait mouvoir et toujours, et dans le même sens, et avec la même égalité; qui l'a vu une fois l'a vu dans tous les instants et dans toutes les périodes de sa vie; c'est tout au plus le boeuf qui meugle, ou la merle qui siffle; il est fixé et déterminé par sa nature et j'ose dire par son espèce. Ce qui paraît le moins en lui, c'est son âme, elle n'agit point, elle ne s'exerce point, elle se repose (210).

Like the machine, he is subject to the laws of mechanics and his actions are circumscribed by weights and springs. To be governed by the laws of mechanics is compared to being fixed and determined by one's nature and one's species. In La Bruyère's conception, this is a terrible fate: it means that one is easily recognized by others for what one cannot help but be, "un sot" a steer or a blackbird. The "sot" is he who is least capable of dissimulation or spontaneity and complexity; "qui l'a vu une fois" knows what he is about. La Bruyère's work offers us numerous examples of the metaphoric use of mechanics and machinery in a description of human limitations.

For La Bruyère, there are many subtle distinctions to be made between the different categories of ridiculous men: there is for instance, the example of a gifted man who is trapped in the practice and perfection of a singular and specific art or science. This sort of person is like an idiot-savant; his extreme specialization is the sign of a significant lack and is not worthy of the title of "homme d'esprit." He too is compared to a machine, or more specifically to a "machine démontée."

Appellerai-je homme d'esprit celui qui, borné et renfermé dans quelque art, out même dans une certaine science qu'il exerce dans une grande perfection, ne montre hors de là ni jugement, ni mémoire, ni vivacité, ni moeurs, ni conduite; qui ne m'entend pas, qui ne pense point, qui s'énonce mal; un musicien, par exemple, qui après m'avoir enchanté par ses accords, semble s'être remis avec son luth dans un même étui, ou n'être plus sans cet instrument qu'une machine démontée, à qui il manque quelque chose, et dont il n'est pas permis de rien attendre? (288).

As if he were attached to his instrument, as if he *were* an instrument, the moment, he stops playing, it is as if he were put away in a case, like his "luth." When he is not playing his instrument, he is like a machine that has been taken apart. Like the "sot" he is also missing something crucial; he is another one "à qui il manque quelque chose." This "quelque chose" is more precisely described here: this kind of limited person displays no judgment, memory, vivacity or manners. The sorts of things he is missing are the sorts of things that would make a man appear intelligent and sociable, "un homme de bien." La Bruyère's "homme de bien," his "homme sage" are all characters that are preeminently social and sociable; they are what we call in English "good company." They are virtuous and intelligent: but their virtue and their intelligence are mostly exercised in social spheres. They are distinguished by their pliability and more

importantly, their ability to articulate themselves in language with spontaneity, precision, seduction and wit.

The courtier is the other character that La Bruyère consistently denigrates in terms of mechanical being, machines and automata.

Les roues, les ressorts, les mouvements sont cachés; rien ne paraît d'une montre que son aiguille, qui insensiblement s'avance et achève son tour: image du courtisan, d'autant plus parfaite qu'après avoir fait assez de chemin, il revient souvent au même point d'où il est parti (176).

The perfect courtier functions by means of his secrets: in this image that which is most internal to the courtier is mechanism. He encases nothing but gears and springs. The inner workings of the courtier are carefully concealed in order that any visible movement seems perfectly effortless and magical. The courtier, like the hand on the watch often only returns to where he began. The arrangement of appearances, the production of deception, this is what occupies La Bruyère in throughout Les Caractères. Two tendencies, two distinct attitudes are evident in the metaphors of mechanism that he uses: the first one is the automaton compared with the limited, foolish, stupid man, the second is mechanism compared with the dissimulations, the *machinations* of the hypocrite. The courtier is the one whose ambitions must never be seen just as the automaton is the mechanical object whose inner workings are always hidden. The courtier pretends to be disinterested: the automaton imitates the movements of living beings. The automaton is a figure for the distance between

surface and interior, appearance and passion, sentiment and the expression of such sentiment. It is a figure that reminds us that there can and does exist a disturbing disjunction and a devastating difference between internal workings and external appearances, between *être* and *paraître*.

Rousseau is struck by a different sort of disjunction or difference when he describes the "si peu de proportion entre les diverse combinaisons de ma destinée et les sentiments habituels de bien ou mal être dont elles m'ont affecté" when he meditates upon the state of his soul at the opening of the Eighth Promenade of Les Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire (1776-1777). The "si peu de proportion" between his worldly condition and his habitual sentiments is turned into a relationship of complete inversion when Rousseau reaches the conclusion that he has been able to find peace, tranquillity, even happiness precisely when his worldly condition is precarious, when he is persecuted and betrayed. What Rousseau describes is on the one hand, an exegesis of masochism and on the other, a radical overturning of all systems of equivalence between inner experience and external conditions. The "si peu de proportion" becomes absolute contradiction in Rousseau's mathematics. For when all went well in his world, when he was free of a single enemy, he remembers that, "Heureux en apparence, je n'avais pas un sentiment qui pût soutenir l'épreuve de la réflexion et dans lequel je pusse vraiment me

complaire." (1:1075)² Something is amiss in this scene of ostensible prosperity, "Que me manquait-il donc pour être heureux; je l'ignore; mais je sais que je ne l'étais pas." Rousseau admits to having found the greatest internal tranquillity and peace of mind when external conditions were the most hostile. What is missing during the moments of his prosperity is precisely the senseless, persecutory conspiracy that he imagines himself surrounded by at the time of the writing of the Rêveries. Rousseau describes his persecutors as "des êtres mécaniques" in the Eighth Promenade; he refers to an insufficiency at the level of being that make his persecutors like machines or automata - so like them in fact, that they are no longer human. The Rêveries are normally read as lyrical meditations on nature: but they are also the description of a recurrent paranoia. In the Eighth Promenade, Rousseau declares he has had to renounce all hope of ever finding one single sympathetic man outside of the conspiracy that surrounds him. It is renunciation that has allowed him to find happiness in having been betrayed and unjustly persecuted and judged, that has allowed him to abandon the hope of establishing a relationship of proportionality and equivalence between his internal sentiments and his material state.

The renunciation of all hope takes place as the result of a dramatic search that yields nothing.

Je voulus forcer mes persécuteurs à s'expliquer avec moi; ils n'avaient

²Page numbers refer to J.J. Rousseau's Oeuvres complètes ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, published by Gallimard, [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 1959.

garde....Cependant j'espérais toujours; je me disais: un aveuglement si stupide, une si absurde prévention ne saurait gagner tout le genre humain. Il y a des hommes de sens qui ne partagent pas ce délire; il y a des âmes justes qui détestent la fourberie et les traitres. Cherchons, je trouverai peut-être enfin un homme, si je le trouve ils sont confondus. J'ai cherché vainement, je ne l'ai point trouvé (1:1076-1077).

One man was all Rousseau needed to break the league of conspirators and this one man cannot be found: "quand après avoir vainement cherché *un homme* il fallut éteindre enfin ma lanterne et m'écrier: il n'y en a plus" (1:1077:emphasis added). Rousseau seems to be the last man on earth for all others are involved in the conspiracy against him and have lost the qualities by which he could recognize them as human, as men, similar to him: they have become "des êtres mécaniques." Rousseau finds tranquillity, calm and even happiness by means of affirming a new relationship of inverse proportions, in "cet état affreux." It is only when his external circumstances are horrible then, that he has been able to find internal peace.

Rousseau calls up the figure of the mechanical being to describe the absolute way in which he is alienated from those around him.

...[J]e commençai à me voir seul sur la terre, et je compris que mes contemporains n'étaient par rapport a moi que des êtres mécaniques qui n'agissaient que par impulsions et dont je ne pouvais calculer l'action que par les lois du mouvement. Quelques intention, quelque passion que

j'eusse pu supposer dans leurs âmes, elles n'auraient jamais expliqué leur conduite à mon égard d'une façon que je pusse entendre. C'est ainsi que leurs dispositions intérieures cessèrent d'être quelque chose pour moi; je ne vis plus en eux que des masses différemment mues, dépourvues à mon égard de toute moralité (1:1077).

These *êtres mécaniques* are like La Bruyère's *sot* insofar as their actions are overdetermined by the movement of weights and springs, that is, by the laws of mechanics rather than a sense of morality. The mechanical being here, like the *automate* and the *machine démontée* of La Bruyère figures lack, but specifically a lack on an essential level, that is, on the level of being. What the mechanical being implies is its opposite, human being, governed by qualities such as memory, vivacity, manners and morality. In short, something is missing in being mechanical that is essential to the make up of human being. In La Bruyère's description, the *automate* is used to describe a very specific form of a stupidity or foolishness: the stupid man acts according to his "nature," a kind of innate programming that constricts all of his movements and makes them predictable and undistinguished. In Rousseau's case, the *êtres mécaniques* take on an entirely malignant quality: they embody a moral deficiency. The *sot* is too easily read, the *être mécanique*, unreadable. Rousseau's paranoid vision of a world populated by mechanical beings is actually more related to the machinations of La Bruyère's courtier. The immobilized and foolish beings who act in completely predictable ways are not persecutory and hostile. Rousseau's

"êtres mécaniques," are more like La Bruyère's courtier, they are dissimulated and difficult to read.

Part III

In the course of this work, I would like to show the different ways in which the automaton as machine figures difference. This figuration of difference has something to do with sexual difference as it is represented in the work of Lafayette, Graffigny, La Mettrie, Rousseau and Laclos. In the midst of this literary study, I think it is important that we situate the automaton's importance as a cultural artifact and read for it as such. Therefore, I have taken the time out to explore in some detail the career of Jacques Vaucanson. The question of the Jaquet-Droz automaton "ne suis-je point?" is a question that addresses itself to self-consciousness, self-observation and self-knowledge. These are all problems that become especially crucial when it comes to the development of the early novel and its formulation and formation of the feminine subject.

Chapter One

"From Masks to Machines: *Bienséances* and Sexual Difference in Lafayette's Fiction"

"Bienséance est le masque des vices."
La Nouvelle Héloïse

From Masks to Masquerade

Mask and machine are figures for the kinds of dissimulation necessary for survival in the social sphere of *mondanité*. My reading of the system of *ancien régime* social conventions is derived in large part, from Derrida's reading of the supplement and the supplementarity of writing in "l'Essai sur l'Origine des Langues." "Le supplément s'ajoute, il est un surplus, une plénitude enrichissant une autre plénitude, le *comble* de la présence. Il cumule et accumule la présence. C'est ainsi que l'art, la *technè*, l'image, la représentation, la convention, etc., viennent en supplément de la nature..." (1967:208). Derrida equates "l'art, la *technè*, l'image, la représentation," all of these different forms of supplementarity and figures for writing with "la convention." How can we understand the complexities of convention or *bienséance* in relationship to supplementarity and writing?

What mask and machine figure is the submission of the subject to convention itself. In Terrible Sociability (1993), Susan Winnett uses the image of masking to describe the mastery of *mondanité* in *ancien régime* France:

It follows that the successful mondain must first master the ground rules of sociability in order to fit in, then he must develop a persona that stands out without calling attention to itself, without, however, revealing anything about the person behind the mask of manner. In other words, worldly success involves creating for oneself an original version of a conventional mask (19).

Mondanité is therefore mastered through a kind of constant dissimulation and vigilance - to distinguish oneself through the creation of a perfectly refined "conventional mask." This was the primary activity of the aristocrat and courtier: how to blend in and distinguish oneself at the same time in the labyrinth of worldliness was a task that required tireless attention, infinite subtleties. This is a kind of constant self-production, a constant writing of the self accompanied by a constant self-correction, or rewriting. The problem is how to write oneself according to the laws of *bienséance* while distinguishing oneself as singular and "original" at the same time? How is this kind of ambition performed in different ways by men and women?

The automaton can be described as a masked machine, a mechanical object whose efficacy depends on the concealment of its mechanics. The automaton of the eighteenth-century was also an aristocratic object: it was particular and exceptional and dissimulated. The mechanism of the eighteenth-century automaton had to be as assiduously concealed as the motivations of

courtiers. In L'Automate et ses mobiles (1980)¹, Jean Claude Beaune describes them in the following manner,

Plus encore qu'ancêtres des automates modernes, les admirables créations du XVIIIe siècle semblent *un aboutissement, une fin*. Leur sophistication les rend vulnérables et, quelle que soit leur subtilité, ou plutôt *à cause de cette subtilité*, ils demeurent des objets précieux, à tous les sens de ce terme. Objets aristocratiques, que les révolutionnaires reconnaîtront pour tels, qu'ils détruiront et disperseront comme des symboles de l'Ancien Régime. (Pendant que Louis XVI, artisan dérisoire, forgeait des serrures, Marie-Antoinette s'amusait avec la joueuse de tympanon de Roentgen et Kintzing) (245).

The eighteenth-century automaton, painted and dressed in silks like the aristocrats who owned them, was a luxury object and a curiosity whose prestige waned with the advent of the Industrial Age. Beaune emphasizes the fact that automata are precious objects - and he underscores the different resonances of the term "precious" in this context. Their singularity as machines made them as fragile as the world that they came to represent. Their subtleties were lost as industrialization demanded that mechanical objects be useful,

¹This book is one of the only contemporary studies of the automaton that is not purely a work of connoisseurship. The scope of Beaune's text is primarily philosophical and is a contribution to the traditional fields of history of ideas and history of science. Unfortunately, it is almost too ambitious and at times, Beaune simply makes too many claims for the automaton and seems to overburden it as such with significance. This seems, however, a function of the author's ambitious attempt to cover a field that has been neglected.

replacable and not so entertaining. The greatest engineers of the classical era such as Ctesibios and Heron of Alexandria spent most of their time fashioning mechanical toys and other objects of wonder. The automata of the eighteenth-century did indeed represent the end of a certain attitude toward machines and the mechanical that was inherited from Antiquity. The demise of this attitude towards the mechanical must be read as another sign of the advent of modernity.

Alfred Chapuis begins his study, *Automata*², with an examination of early automata, the articulated statues of antiquity and the articulated masks of tribal cultures. Chapuis is one of the automaton's most famous historians; his approach is that of gentleman connoisseur. Jean-Claude Beaune describes the mask as the first "technological" object to be fabricated by human beings. Beaune follows Lévi-Strauss's idea that the "technique" of a society can be analyzed in a systemic manner.³ The mask occurs as a sign of a culture's *technique* and is interpreted by both Chapuis and Beaune as a predecessor of

²First published in French in 1928; the English translation was published in 1958.

³"Technique" as such poses problems, however that Heidegger examined in order to allow for a restitution of its relationship with *technè*, a term that Heidegger always understood in terms of *epistemè*, or systems of knowing as such. Samuel Weber has shown in his 1989 essay, "Upsetting the Set Up: Remarks on Heidegger's Questing after Technics" that the English term technology is "at once too narrow and too theoretical" as a translation for the German, *Technik*, which is must closer to the French *technique*. Weber suggests using the English term *technics* in translations of Heidegger in order to emphasize the nature of its relation with *technè*. Weber writes, "the knowledge that is technics is not addressed as making or producing particular things, but rather as 'the unlocking of beings as such'" (1980).

the automaton.

Chapuis's anthropological analysis of masks can be turned upon the European scene to describe the dialectic of masking in aristocratic and bourgeois circles during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

Among all peoples and at all times false faces and painted masks made of various materials have been used as disguises. In ancient times it was an essential part of the actor's costume....The mask, however, had a deeper significance. By means of it, man wished to change and transform himself. The metamorphosis, which among primitive peoples, assumes a religious and mystic character, can have widely different ends. Masks are often closely connected with ceremonies of initiation and of secret societies....The wearer of the mask, while concealing his true individuality, identified himself with what he represents, believing that he possesses magic power (1958:25).

The participant in worldliness also conceals "his true individuality" while at the same time identifying himself with "what he represents" which is the order of conventional behavior itself. The different players on the scene of worldiness each attempted a certain kind of self-transformation in order to satisfy the exigencies of *bienséance*, a system of conventions that governed appearances. The subject of *bienséance* had to accomplish three things at the same time: he or she had to appear natural, satisfy the rules of decorum and reveal fundamental beauty. In this way, any sense of individuality was thoroughly

subject to the constraints of convention and decorum. The virtuosic feat that had to be accomplished while subjecting oneself to such strict limitations was to appear at all times as if it all came *naturally*.

In the works of fiction that will be examined, masks and masking play an essential role in the successful or failed initiation of characters into the *monde* as a secret society. In his essay on La Bruyère, Barthes describes the *monde* of the seventeenth-century writer as being distinguished by "clôture." It is to closed and exclusive pockets of the world that every initiate must gain entry by submitting to forms and conventions. Foucault described the organization of the eighteenth-century "world" in the following way in his essay, "Un Si Cruel Savoir"⁴, "Le 'monde' est aussi une secte; ou plutôt, les sociétés secrètes, à la fin du siècle, ont maintenu le rôle que la hierarchie du monde et ses mystères faciles avaient joué depuis le début de l'âge classique" (1962:599). The secrets of this world are often the secret revealed in fiction: these novels that are concerned with the rites of initiation into such sects are called novels of manners. In a sense, every novel that we will deal with is a novel of manners insofar as each one deals with the problem of keeping up appearances.

Chapuis's formulation that the mask conceals its wearer's "true individuality" implies a very specific and twentieth-century construction of identity that we also find evidence of in Henri Coulet's brief analysis of

⁴Critique July 1962, tome XVIII, no. 182.

bienséance in his Le roman avant la révolution (1968). "[La bienséance] ramène l'individu à sa fonction sociale en réprimant en lui tout ce qui est particularité de caractère et de sentiment..." (Coulet 254). The wearing of the mask and the assumption of the codes of *bienséance* implies a sacrifice of "true individuality" and "particularité" in order to gain admission into the secret societies of the eighteenth-century "world." What that sacrifice entails, where the truth of that "true individuality" lies for the feminine initiate is what will be of interest to us in this study.

Femininity has been described (in the Lacanian schema) as the subject position that masks a lack or an inconsistency in masculine sexuality itself. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan puts it in the following way in her essay "The Sexual Masquerade":

Female sexuality--not necessarily correlated with gender--is a masquerade not only because s/he can disguise her desire, can fake it, can cover her body with cosmetics and jewels and make of *it* a phallus, but also because her masquerade hides a fact--that masculine sexuality is a tenuous matter. Things do not work so easily between man and woman, or between any sexual partners for that matter...(1991:71).

Femininity is a kind of masking of the difficulty, if not the impossibility of a "functional" sexual relation. The feminine subject can be understood as the initiate par excellence because her entry on the scene of the sexual difference requires the donning of a mask, the assumption of femininity itself as a

propitiating disguise. She sacrifices something in order to be able to identify with something else: the transformatory powers of sexual difference that will somehow secure her a magical identity. What the subject's "true individuality" is that has been sacrificed is brought into question in the psychoanalytic version of the masquerade. The entry of the speaking subject into language is an initiation into masquerade.

The mask was of course abstracted in the context of *ancien régime* and as such, it was often not visible, but in its very invisibility, it functioned as a secret sign of an aristocratic sociability that allowed its wearer to circulate in a limited and elite world. *Bienséance* required that all members of good society wear one and that they organize their features and their language in ways that would be "agréable" to the eyes and ears of the other. We could understand the mask as the congealed gaze of the other itself, frozen on the face of the subject. In the seventeenth-century, *bienséance* was refined to high degrees of sophistication: it was an unwritten and therefore all the more secret code that regulated the social existence of aristocrats. In Beaune's account of masks and masking, the mask elaborates the

organisation du capital symbolique d'une culture, sur les relations entre fonctions sociales (dont la fête est l'indice et l'exacerbation), enfin sur le cosmos dans sa totalité agissante, sa genèse et son apocalypse. Le masque est la clé de l'encyclopédie de la culture, il est une fenêtre ouverte sur 'l'automate social'; il devient le miroir du monde (29).

By the eighteenth century in France, *bienséance* had become a kind of cultural capital in and of itself, and the people who controlled its circulation were mostly aristocratic women who presided over "la fête" and other sites of social interaction. Parisian society had become infinitely more complex and the more ignorant, aspiring initiates there were, seeking the keys to the magical kingdom of aristocratic acceptance, the more powerful were those who possessed knowledge of the codes.

Masquerade and Sexual Difference

Erica Harth in Cartesian Women (1992) reminds us, however, that in 1666, when Louis XIV created the Académie Royale des Sciences, he established the conditions for a power struggle between the *académie* and the *salon* from which the salon would emerge stripped of much of its authority in matters philosophical and scientific (Harth 134). The *académie* and the *salon* were segregated by sex. Women were not allowed in the Academy, which was a site of specialized knowledge, but they continued to exercise enormous power and influence in society, especially in questions of style and form, into the eighteenth-century. Hence Fontenelle's Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes is addressed to the quick-witted and fashionable Marquise, a worldly woman to whom the subtleties of the new science can be explained in a whimsical, vulgarized, but entertaining manner. In the seventeenth century, science still had to make itself fashionable, had to pass itself off as *agréable* in the eyes of a powerful other, who happens to be in this case, a powerful and

fashionable woman. In Fontenelle's own words, "J'ai mis dans ces *Entretiens une Femme que l'on instruit, et qui n'a jamais ouï parler de ces choses-là. J'ai crû que cette fiction me serviroit et à rendre l'ouvrage plu susceptible d'agrément, et à encourager les Dames par l'exemple d'une Femme...*" (5-6). The disparate elements of an aristocratic public unfamiliar with the models of scientific thought were condensed into the fictional Marquise's intelligent ignorance. Fontenelle understood that the new sciences needed converts. "The image of the spectator in both the *Entretiens* and the preface organizes a public that will 'buy' the new philosophy" (Harth 144). Erica Harth emphasizes the fact that at no point was Fontenelle interested in representing the education of the Marquise; it was enough that she be persuaded with the utmost gentility, that the insights of the new science, the Copernican revolution in short, were worthy of attention.

At the end of the nineteenth century, science was to address itself directly once again to a woman: psychoanalysis evolved out of seventeenth-century science. The fashionable woman had become a tortured, upper middle class hysteric by the name of Dora. Freud's discoveries of the unconscious, his innovation of dream interpretation, in short, his founding of psychoanalysis itself was based in many ways on the "entretiens" he was having with hysterics. Hysteria gave Freud a kind of insight into the functioning of the human psyche which had previously been described in works of the imagination, fiction and art, but had never been articulated in a scientific

manner. Dora was not as compliant an interlocutor as the Marquise, but then the truths of Freud's science were much harder to bear than the truths of Fontenelle's. Femininity has played a strange role in the evolution of what has become known as the modern sciences, but Lacanian innovations in psychoanalytic theory have provided us with the vocabulary by which we might address the strangeness of its role.

In the early history of psychoanalysis, Joan Rivière used masquerade as an analogy for what she called "womanliness" in her classic essay of 1929, "Womanliness as Masquerade"⁵. In it, Rivière actually refuses to differentiate between masquerade and womanliness, implying in no uncertain terms that the two are equivalent. In the following reading of Rivière's essay, I try to pay close attention to Rivière's language in order to try to reconstruct an image of what kind of subjectivity masquerades womanliness or what womanliness masquerades from the author's collapsing of figurative language into literality, in the much cited passage, "The reader may now ask how I define womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference, whether radical or superficial. They are the same thing" (38).

Rivière describes in this essay the case of an intellectual woman who dons the mask of womanliness in order to avoid the anxiety of occupying a

⁵This essay was originally published in The International Journal of Psychoanalysis in 1929 and reprinted in Formations of Fantasy, edited by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (1986). All citations are from the 1986 republication of the essay.

"phallic" position: she did a great deal of public speaking and would find herself afterwards compulsively flirting with men, usually of the father-figure mold, in order to seduce them and/or gain their recognition or approval. Femininity or what Rivière calls "womanliness" is encrypted in this woman: "the capacity for womanliness was there in this woman..."(38). There somewhere inside of her was a capacity that could be externalized in the form of a mask that was worn in order to avoid anxiety and avert disaster. Womanliness, in Rivière's schema, was also be used "as a primary mode of sexual enjoyment." Womanliness, functions as a supplemental characteristic of women: they can possess *or not* a capacity for it. Womanliness is not constitutive of the subject then, but is rather prosthetic, detachable, *supplementary*.

A capacity for womanliness is "in there," somewhere in the female subject and it can be activated and worn like a mask at the same time. It is difficult to understand how this idea could function as Rivière's justification for her earlier statement, "they [masquerade and womanliness] are the same thing." In fact, what has happened here is that womanliness is differentiated from the subject by virtue of its encrypted nature ("in there" in the subject) and because it can be used ("as a device for avoiding anxiety" and not a device for "sexual enjoyment." This still leaves a huge gap in Rivière's logic that from this, womanliness is equated with masquerade. Womanliness is a potentiality, an open-ness to a certain kind of subjective instability that is described as masquerade. Rivière does concede that this potentiality could be divorced from

gender when she comments that "a similar mechanism" can be found in homosexual men.

The collapsing of womanliness into masquerade seems to be a *mise-en-abîme* of Rivière's logic that is certainly interesting in its own linguistic instability. Lacan understood sexual identification as the advent of the figurative in language itself; Rivière, in collapsing womanliness into masquerade, is in a sense attempting to resolve an oppositional relation between two terms in order to hastily reconcile the contradictions inherent in sexual identity itself. Hence her recourse to an "in there" that could contain the subject's capacity for womanliness while simultaneously implying that the "in there" was not all that there was as far as the subject was concerned. There is a remainder, a leftover: the subject is a container for womanliness, but womanliness is not all there is.

Rivière's womanliness thus calls into being interiority: the "in there" of the female subject. The development of the eighteenth-century novel is very much dependent upon a privileging of interiority and especially the interiority of women: much of what happens in the early novels happened precisely "in there in this woman." Myra Jehlen, in "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism" (1981) argued that the constitution of the "inner life" as feminine is a fiction upon which the eighteenth-century novel like Richardson's Pamela depends.⁶

⁶The relationship between the construction of interiority and sexual difference is obliquely illustrated in an essay by Thomas A. King about homosexual behavior in eighteenth-century England. In his essay "Performing Akimbo: Queer Pride and

In the European aristocratic world, masks first of all mask themselves. The invisible mask of sociability is worn at all times in order to indicate that its wearer understands the order and hierarchies of the social scene and agrees to participate in them. The mask is a sign of sociability and a machine of dialectics at the same time: "Le dialogue du mobile et de l'immobile s'ouvre, par le masque, à l'intérieur de la pensée technique" (Beaune 29). The mask initiates dialogues between opposites and as such it initiates its wearer into the codes of sexual difference. Because it hides the face like a shell containing the living and vulnerable part of the crustacean, it also calls into being an entire complex of notions of interiority in order to account for what the mask hides or protects. It is the mask that produces the true individual, the part of the subject that the mask cannot account for.

Authenticity, according to the metaphysicians, lies on the side of the ineffable, invisible soul that is always being veiled and unveiled. Rousseau's idealization of a interiority as fixed authenticity is taken up by the Romantics in the next century. At the same time, however, the violent inconsistencies and often irreconcilable contradictions in his own work, especially when he is testifying to his inner life, seems to betray the stability of any such interiority.

Epistemological Prejudice" 1994), King shows that when Shaftesbury privileges interiority, he identifies homosexual behavior with aristocratic styles and attributes to the former all the excesses and lacks of the latter. Superficiality and changeability, that is a lack of interiority was the sign of a dangerous sexual indifference. The effeminate aristocrat, like the homosexual lacks the "depth" and stolidity of the male and was therefore highly suspect, suspect of confusing the difference between the sexes. Thus a lack of interiority seems to upset the order of difference itself.

The Inside and the Outside

If we follow Beaune's idea that the mask is one of the first technological objects, we could speculate that *technique* and the construction of interiority, (the invisible inside as opposed to a visible exterior) are coupled in a tangled relationship of interdependence. The mask implies two contradictory orders of knowledge (inside and outside, soul and body, true and false, reality and appearance) which are nevertheless inseparable. The mask, in calling into being an interior space, seems to indicate there is a residue of the subject that is invisible and unrepresentable, a terrible leftover that is always left out of representations of the self in the social order. Insofar as the mask is a lexicon for this unrepresentable leftover, it functions as a sign of the subject's entry into language itself, because language delineates the field of representation from which something of the subject is always excluded. As a topology, the mask functions more like a Moebius strip than a simple plane⁷.

The crisis of modernity has been described as a crisis of dichotomies: an unsettling of the system that has kept interior distinct from exterior, subject

⁷The Lacanian revision of models of consciousness took psychoanalysis into topology, as Roudinesco describes in Jacques Lacan and Co. (1990):

The field of topology retained the whole of Lacan's attention: he never hesitated to blacken reams of paper to teach his audience the elements of his doctrine as transcribed in topological figures.

The Moebius strip with neither front nor back side, offers the image of the subject of the unconscious, just as the torus or air chamber designates the hole, the lack or abyss, that is a constitutive site which nonetheless does not exist. (560-561)

from object, masculine from feminine. One of the conditions of this crisis lies in our relation with *technique*. Alice Jardine, in her feminist reading of contemporary theory, interprets Roland Barthes's fascination and discomfiture with the camera as indicative of an "instantaneous slippage between subject and object....It is almost as if technique as concept and practice, has turned Man into an Object-Woman" (Gynesis 75). In Jardine's version of modernity, the new spaces opened up by technique lead philosophy to a projection of 'spirit-in-matter' as *automaton*.

....Could it be that the end result of the history of technique, here incarnated by Man's *pour-soi*, is the creation of an *automaton*, a kind of 'spirit-in-matter'? Could this be the phantasmatic, utopian end point not only of all technical progress but of philosophy itself? A kind of sacred materiality that can communicate nothing detached from itself? A kind of 'pregnant matter,' as Derrida might put it? So closely associated with Western notions of God, this 'spirit-in-matter' is terrifying, *unnameable*; it can engender itself; it has no need of a mother or father. It is beyond the representation that Man has always presented himself with and controlled. It is, in its essence, an indistinctness between the inside and the outside, between original boundaries and spaces. To think this indistinctness in the twentieth century has been to think a crisis of indescribable proportions, to throw all of the Big Dichotomies into question: for if the exterior is interior, then the interior is also exterior;

Man's soul is outside of him-self; history is but the exterior of his own no longer interior imagination (76).

What I would like to focus on is the phantasmatic qualities of this spirit-in-matter as it was represented by the figure of the automaton as cultural object, literary figure and philosophical problem in eighteenth-century France.⁸ The automaton as the masked machine is read here as a signifier of the eighteenth-century, a moment when the *technique* of Antiquity, constituted as Heidegger reminds us, of both *technè* and *poiesis*, transited to the *technique* of modernity. For Jardine, the problem of 'spirit-in-matter' is closely related to issues of gender: she sees in the philosophical and technological drive to lodge spirit in matter a kind of continued domination of femininity as represented by *physis*. The automaton is a "phantasmatic and utopian" moment of technology. The problem of "spirit-in-matter" is one initiated by the Cartesian *cogito* and its relation to the beast-machine. La Mettrie's eighteenth-century innovation on the Cartesian system collapsed the difference between man and machine, anticipating by two hundred years the crisis of the "Big Dichotomies." Jardine's discussion of the technological drive seems to imply that the automaton has something to do with an attempt to resolve the contradictions of sexual difference: the automaton in this scheme is a figure of "the end of history," a term which at the moment when Gynesis was published (1985) had a great

⁸The term *phantasm* will be used henceforth to designate a fantasy on the level of the unconscious. Fantasy exists on the conscious level.

deal of currency. The feminist position which Jardine takes vis-à-vis the rhetoric of "the end of history" as well as post-modernism is one that seeks to recuperate a problematic of sexual difference in the midst of collapsing dichotomies. The collapse of the structures of binary opposition was not as complete as hoped for. As the theoretical dust is settling, the question of femininity and its representations still remain a problem of immense complexity.

Worldliness and the Automaton

The automaton was an object of fascination for fashionable Parisian society who remembered Louis XIV's fondness for the mechanical curiosities. The automaton as object of connoisseurship has spawned studies of a purely appreciative nature. As an object, it can be collected and engenders specialized, aristocratic knowledge. Thomas King notes that during the seventeenth century, British aristocrats like Thomas Howard, the Earl Arundel, the Duke of Buckingham and Charles I cultivated a refinement of sensibility and collected curiosities and rarities as "amateur scientists and antiquarians." They were called virtuosi and harshly criticized by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. King writes,

Shaftesbury's criticism of typical virtuosi was based on what he considered to be their lack of depth: the virtuosi were insubstantial because they lacked interiority....By rereading aristocratic arbitrariness as lacking being, bourgeois consciousness guaranteed identity by securing the consistency and continuity of the subject's actions (34).

Among the most prized possessions of the virtuosi were "mechanical contrivances or toys," such as "artificial grottoes" and "speaking statues" or what we might call automata.

The automaton was an object whose movements were severely limited and designed to amuse and please: it mimed its aristocratic admirers who strove to achieve a perfected courtliness that was exemplified by being distinguished in one's adherence to the rules of *bienséance*. The French Court's imitation of Italian courtliness arose out of an admiration for Italy's Renaissance and the image of the ideal courtier, especially Castiglione's, that arose at that time. In The Novel of Worldliness (1969), Brooks writes, "The Renaissance attached a new value to man's non-metaphysical earthly presence, to a cultivation of his worldly being, and to the self, the individual personality in its interplay with other personalities within the human community" (44).

It was precisely this cultivation of secular and "worldly being" that would come under attack by Rousseau during the next century; by the eighteenth century, worldliness had become decadent, increasingly oppressive and dogmatic. The critique of this decadent worldliness was made in the name of a spontaneous, naturalized authenticity. In Rousseau's critique of aristocratic forms, authenticity always falls on the side of the invisible and the unexpressed. Artifice was denigrated as oppressive, "non-natural" in dangerous ways. For Rousseau, the mask was always a lie, and that which remained invisible, inside, inexpressible was that which was good and true. In "Discours sur les

sciences et les arts," he writes, "Qu'il serait doux de vivre parmi nous, si la contenance extérieure était toujours l'image de dispositions du coeur." For Rousseau, the non-correspondence between the inside (le coeur) and the outside (la contenance) is the root of all unhappiness and evil. His writing can be seen as a kind of endless unmasking, an endless, ceaseless attempt to make the outside correspond with the inside. "Le vide se creuse derrière les surfaces mensongères" (Starobinski 1). The interior is impoverished by the flatness and the falseness of the exterior and *horror vacui* becomes at this point a love of the truth itself, because to strip away the mask would be to banish the void and restore the plenitude of subjectivity.

Rousseau's notion of interiority as authenticity is an innovation which can actually be taken as a sign of his modernity. As a description of subjectivity, it assumes that there are two parts: a masked self and a true self. The anxiety produced by this split is the anxiety that psychoanalysis addresses, but psychoanalytic theory is also one of the few places in contemporary discourse where the Rousseauian bind is thoroughly reworked. Rousseau initiated the dialogue about the "split" by pointing out the difference, the "fêlure" between the countenance and the heart; psychoanalysis would not have been possible without this step. However, instead of embarking on a search for the true or authentic self, Lacan, as the consummate theorist of psychoanalysis, insists on the impossibility of any total unmasking, any complete transference. In fact, Lacan describes subjectivity as a mask itself:

what it masks is its own incoherence and substantive division. Most recently, Slavoj Žižek takes Lacan's theories of the divided subject one step further, bringing them into direct confrontation with the Rousseauian order that in the contemporary world has become naturalized as "common wisdom" (that what is most "true" about the subject is that which remains most invisible and unrepresented)

...a mask is never simply 'just a mask' since it determines the actual place we occupy in the intersubjective symbolic network; what is effectively false and null is our 'inner distance' from the mask we wear (the social role we play), our 'true self' hidden beneath it. The path to an authentic subjective position runs therefore 'from the outside inward': first, we pretend to be something, we just act as if we are that, until step by step, we actually become it--it is not difficult to recognize in the paradox the Pascalian logic of "custom" ("act as if you believe and belief will come by itself"). The performative dimension at work here consists of the symbolic efficiency of the "mask": wearing a mask actually *makes us* what we feign to be....[T]he only authenticity at our disposal is that of impersonation, of taking our act (posture) seriously (1992:34).

Žižek elaborates upon the radicality of the Lacanian subject position, one in which motivation is no longer from inside outward (as in the bourgeois, Rousseauian model, the heart shapes the countenance), but from outside inward (the countenance might very well shape the heart). In light of this,

femininity as masquerade can no longer be read as an aberration: it is subjectivity par excellence. The subject puts on a mask of femininity and acts "like" a woman: in doing so, she stages a deception by "telling" the truth. In Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, Freud analyzes a joke that Lacan and later, Žižek, pick up on:

Two Jews met in a railway carriage at a station in Galicia. 'Where are you going?' asked one, 'To Cracow,' was the answer. 'What a liar you are!' broke out the other. 'If you say you're going to Cracow, you want me to believe you're going to Lemberg. But I know that in fact you're going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me?'...[T]he powerful technical method of absurdity is here linked with another technique, representation by the opposite for, according to the uncontradicted assertion of the first Jew, the second is lying when he tells the truth and is telling the truth by means of a lie (SE 115).⁹

What these jokes "attack" Freud tells us, "is our certainty of our knowledge itself," The mask of femininity, analyzed in a similar way, calls into question the very notions of subjectivity and sexual difference itself. For if the appearance of deception or duplicity has something to do with the truth of femininity, then the case of femininity offers us a kind of epistemological opening, whereby the very nature of knowing is called into question.

⁹All citations of Freud refer to the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974.

This reversal of the structure of authenticity allows us to see how according to Zizek in Looking Awry,

we effectively *become* something by pretending that we *already are* that.

To grasp the dialectic of this movement, we have to take into account the crucial fact that this 'outside' is never simply a 'mask' we wear in public but is rather the symbolic order itself. By 'pretending to be something' by acting as if we were something, we assume a certain place in the intersubjective symbolic network, and it is this external place that defines our true position....The final deception is that social appearance is deceitful, for in the social-symbolic reality things ultimately *are* precisely what they *pretend* to be (1991:74).

Zizek addresses himself directly to feminism in his most recent work by pleading the cause of an anti-humanist feminism that redefines femininity, not as masculinity's normative partner, but as subjectivity itself. The feminine is privileged by Zizek not because it re-installs authenticity in the human, but precisely because it does not. Thus we might offer a Zizekian re-reading of the Rivière essay in which we could extrapolate that if there is no difference between femininity qua womanliness and masquerade, and femininity is subjectivity par excellence, then subjectivity is nothing more or less than masquerade itself.

The codes of *bienséance* and life at the Court can be defined precisely as a very specific form of the Zizekian "intersubjective symbolic network" and

it is in this space that the protagonists of Lafayette's fiction negotiated the possibility of femininity while the author constructed a complex representation of femininity and its vicissitudes. The *princesse de Clèves* was taught early on by her mother that in the Court, or the symbolic order par excellence, things are not what they seem: but implicit in this lesson is a respect for appearances themselves that the *princesse* is never able to abandon. Madame de Chartres may teach her daughter what Žižek calls the "final deception," that social appearances deceive, but she teaches her at the same time that how things are not what they appear is *not* at all a straightforward affair. The case of the *duc d'Orléans's* lover who appeared to be virtuous because she mourned her husband's death while she was mourning the *duc* can be seen as an illustration of Žižek's paradox, "in the social-symbolic reality, things *are* precisely what they *pretend* to be."

The Fiction of Lafayette or Three Women

In the fiction of Lafayette, subjectivity has not yet become a problem of authenticity. The symbolic order is literally and figuratively King. None of Lafayette's characters is anxious about representing a true self: the mask of *bienséance* may at times be difficult to wear, but there is no possibility of taking it off. Lafayette is a consummate, aristocratic insider who explored the ways in which the feminine subject could navigate the treacherous and shifting terrain of a life lived completely in the gaze of society. Her characters circulate endlessly in the symbolic order: they are first and foremost proper names, each

occupying a fixed place in the network (duc d'Anjou, brother of the King, Marie Stuart, la reine dauphine, hated by the duchesse de Valentinois, the King's powerful and much feared mistress.) As proper names, they exist almost in a purely performative medium and act out their belief in the aristocratic social order. Thus, the aristocratic subject exists in the Pascalian condition: s/he acts the belief and therefore believes.

In Literary Fortifications (1984), Joan DeJean emphasizes that, "The modern novel was born in 1678, just as Louis XIV's reign veered into the domain of a superhuman, all controlling system" (11). The system was never questioned under the Sun King. DeJean draws important analogies between military history and aesthetic history by undertaking a study of Vauban and the cultural significance of his fortifications. The fortification becomes a "war-machine that functioned on such a superhuman scale that it gave birth to a myth of a system of defenses so perfect that it could make France, like its king, an impregnable fortress" (DeJean 25). For DeJean, the perfected system of defenses defended an emptiness "at the center of the fortress," a "secret which must be protected and about which silence must be maintained" (12). The fortress functions like a container which, like the mask, demarcates an inside from an outside, an external "appearance" from an internal "reality." Rousseau, as the bourgeois critic of aristocratic codifications, begins his critique by privileging the internal reality against what Thomas King called the aristocrat's "lack of being": the emptiness of the inside thus becomes an

aristocratic problem; the bourgeois subject is bursting with a plenitude of interiority that must be represented. This plenitude might be said to consist of nothing less than the bourgeois subject's anxiety about the legitimacy of his/her position within the system and his/her critique of that system. The more anxiety, the more subjective plenitude.

In Lafayette's society, it is important to remark that there are no outsiders, no one whose position is symbolically uncertain: everyone is an aristocrat, well-born, well-bred, with differing fortunes and differing relations to the king and his court, but basically homogeneous. Despite the fact that her heroines are guaranteed a prestigious name, endowed with beauty and a fortune, their existence is nevertheless very precarious. The narrow range of behavior permitted by *bienséance* had to be observed at all times: the masking of the self was considered not only proper, but absolutely necessary as a defensive system against disorderliness and chaos. In this world, *bienséance* ordered the conduct of individuals according to their social functions. Coulet, as we saw, described *bienséance* as an imperative to repress all subjective particularity and sentiment. The subject under the regime of *bienséance* occupies its symbolic position; the symbolic requirements of this position take precedence over all other considerations, Coulet writes, "...chacun est tenu par son rang et sa naissance à une certaine conduite" (1:259). The masks of *bienséance* protect the worldly subject from nothing less than his or her own "particularity." In Fictions of Feminine Desire (1982), Peggy Kamuf sees the

structure of *bienséance*, in which something of the subject or character is always hidden, as providing an organizing principle for Lafayette's production of fiction.

Peripheral characters appear only in their manifest roles as members of Henri II's court, while the central characters....are each represented at the juncture of their courtly exteriors with what is hidden, denied or silenced by that appearance. This last element of the novel constitutes no doubt its most important innovation of fictional technique, for it requires the intervention of a narrator who has no logical way of knowing what lies behind the various masks (67-68).

The knowledge of what lies behind the mask or the ability to see through the lie of the mask is the privileged fiction constructed by Lafayette's writing. The "illogical" is fiction itself - the fiction of a narrator who knows precisely what lies behind the masks as well as how masks are capable of lies.

DeJean describes the classical novel as the construction of surfaces:

The dazzling surfaces of the artistic creations that serve as models for the Sun King's age constitute a brilliant machine for controlling all readers, for keeping them in the dark, for discouraging them from asking questions about the identity of the master artist who surrounds them with 'dorures' to protect his monstrous invisibility (70).

DeJean's novel is a machine of surfaces then, designed to hide the authorial presence, the presence of the master. The classical novel, according to DeJean,

limits the reader's access as rigorously as a Vauban fortress itself. The characters in the novel are also always attempting to limit and control what others may see and interpret of their behavior. The strictly codified world of aristocratic sociability can be interpreted as literal and metaphorical defense mechanisms. Vauban's fortresses, however, were meant to fortify France, but ended up becoming places from which it was possible to expand the frontiers for the glory of the King. The social defense structures also had an offensive aspect that brought them into the realms of desire and ambition.

The male characters of Lafayette's world are caught in a constant struggle between the drive of ambition and the desire for passion. The male characters are always confronting the possibility of being able to move to another, more prestigious place in the social hierarchy or symbolic order, often through their alliances with women. Coulet isolates two orders of meaning and two spheres of action in Lafayette's world: *l'ambition* and *la galanterie*. Unfortunately, Coulet's account fails to take into account the difference between the feminine and masculine subject's relation to the two orders or spheres. La Princesse de Clèves (1678), La Princesse de Montpensier (1662) and La Comtesse de Tende (published post-humously in 1724), the heroines fall in love with men who are ambitious *and* gallant. The duc de Nemours has designs upon the the hand of the Queen of England, the duc de Guise happily accepts the preference that Madame, the King's sister, shows him, and the prince de Navarre takes an interest in the princesse de Neufchâtel simply

because she is the best match in the court. In all three cases, the heroines are at times seized with jealousy because of their lovers' ambition. The other woman in this case is not even another woman, it is merely another position in the symbolic network, the hierarchy of courtly and worldly life. All three men make a great deal out of the fact that they would renounce their ambitions for their passion and all three women accept this renunciation as the ultimate sign of love and courtliness, but also command the men, in the style of the lady of courtly love, to submit to the imperatives of ambition as an arduous task to perform for the lady herself.

The problem for the feminine subject is that Passion intervenes as a kind of affectual cataclysm that threatens her very mastery of her social function and symbolic position. Passion disturbs the smooth surfaces of the decorous mask and manifests itself in the form of slips, mistakes and lapses of attention.¹⁰ (These are also the signs by which the Freudian unconscious makes itself known.) After being approached by Nemours during a brief, unobserved moment between the comings and goings of the Reine Dauphine and the King and his mistress, Madame de Clèves avoids her would be lover and begins to follow the King. "Comme il y avait beaucoup de monde, elle

¹⁰Sylvère Lotringer identifies Passion with Difference. "La Différence ne cesse, fondamentalement de faire entendre face à la Règle la revendication irrépressible de l'individu" (1970:300). The irreducibility of this Passion produces only a temporary disturbance in the world of what Lotringer calls the "Règle." The princesse de Clèves's retreat from society is a mark of Difference that does not indicate a break with or in social convention.

s'embarrassa dans sa robe et fit un faux pas: elle se servit de ce prétexte pour sortir d'un lieu où elle n'avait pas la force de demeurer et, feignant de ne se pouvoir soutenir, elle s'en alla chez elle" (Lafayette 135).¹¹ Henri Coulet points to this moment of the novel as confirmation of Freud's observations on "les echecs et les lapsus involontaires" (Coulet 1:258).

In Madame de Clèves's *faux pas*, Lafayette's fiction takes on the task of representing the interventions of the unconscious and the discontinuity of the will. Although the princesse consciously wants to leave the room in order to avoid Nemours, her unconscious desire, which is to stay near the man she loves trips her up in her dress, *elle s'embarrassa dans sa robe* and becomes tangled, "s'embarrassa" (in the figurative and literal senses of the verb *s'embarrasser*) in the conflicted field of her unconscious desire and intentional motivation. She recovers quickly and uses her *faux pas* as a pretext for leaving the scene altogether. The *faux pas* is rich with meaning here. Like the term *s'embarrasser*, it too resonates on the double registers of the figurative and the literal. The princesse trips on her dress and produces a lapsus which sets a whole game of signifiers into play. Her fast recovery and her use of the misstep or *faux pas* as a pretext for retreating from her social function: "feignant de ne se pouvoir soustenir, elle s'en alla chez elle..." is a foreshadowing of how fast on her feet the princesse can actually be when it comes to transforming a slip

¹¹All citations from La Princesse de Clèves refer to the Garnier-Flammarion version of the novel published in 1966.

into an acceptable reason in the order of *bienséance* to absent herself entirely from the scene. The *faux pas* is also significant for another reason. In The Heroine's Text (1980), Nancy K. Miller underscores that for the heroine, "The danger of the dangerous relation is dependent on the logic of the faux-pas: in the politics of seduction, once proved generally to be enough. Thus the rule of female experience in male-authored fiction is the drama of a single misstep..." (x). The "logic of the faux-pas" is a kind of structure that recurs in the novels that we will be examining: irremediable mistake distinguishes the structure of feminine experience from male experience. Exculpation is the prerogative of men. One single misstep is all that is needed for her to fall out of favor or into danger. What distinguishes the princesse de Clèves from her fictional cohorts, is that she manages to recover from this mis-step: her recovery is a virtuosic feat of dissimulation.

If the princesse de Montpensier or the comtesse de Tende suffer the consequences of a transgression of the limits of proscribed feminine behavior because of the intervention of a fatal passion, the limits themselves are never questioned as such. The princesse de Clèves is the one who manages to escape the net: she heads for a kind of sublimation that offers her, neither perfect freedom, nor happiness, but a kind of veiled and enigmatic existence. Rather than trying to find in the acting out of a passion the means of escape from the confinement of *bienséance*, the princesse uses *bienséance* itself to dissimulate her dissimulation of the passion that Nemours has inspired in her.

After the death of her husband and M. de Nemours's declaration of love, she buys herself time with *bienséance* itself in order to reflect upon her future. "Enfin, pour se donner quelque calme, elle pensa qu'il n'était point encore nécessaire qu'elle se fit la violence de prendre des résolutions; la bienséance lui donnait un temps considérable à se déterminer; mais elle résolut de demeurer ferme à n'avoir aucun commerce avec M. de Nemours" (177). She is able to use the order of *bienséance* itself to arrive at her final decision. This strategy was already described by Madame de Chartres in her long discourse about the history of the duchesse de Valentinois. At the end of the story about the conflict between Madame d'Étampes and the duchess, Madame de Chartres adds an enigmatic footnote on the death of the duc d'Orléans.

....M. le duc d'Orléans mourut, à Farmoutier, d'une espèce de maladie contagieuse. Il aimait une des plus belles femmes de la cour et en était aimé. Je ne vous la nommerai pas, parce qu'elle a même caché avec tant de soin la passion qu'elle avait pour ce prince qu'elle a mérité que l'on conserve sa réputation. Le hasard fit qu'elle reçut la nouvelle de la mort de son mari le même jour qu'elle apprit celle de M. d'Orléans; de sorte qu'elle eut ce prétexte pour cacher sa véritable affliction, sans avoir la peine de se contraindre (59).

This story could be read as a kind of oblique confession on the part of Madame de Chartres: for if the duc d'Orléans' lover was so successful at keeping her liaison with the duc a secret, how would Madame de Chartres have been privy

to this knowledge, if she were not the subject at hand? The lady's grief is not dissimulated, it is true grief and yet there is deception at work here as well. This logic, of an appearance that functions both as deception and truth, is similar to the logic in Freud's analysis of the joke about the two Jews of Galicia.

What is important for us about this story is precisely the manner in which this secretive lady was able to use the pretext of her husband's death to express her grief over her lover's demise. She is thus spared the pain of forcing herself to act as if she were not in mourning: the nameless woman and the *princesse de Clèves* both use the rules of *bienséance* which surround the comportment of a widow after her husband's death in order to find a space of safety where expression and reflection upon the experiences of the heart may take place. In the case of the *duc d'Orléan's* mistress, the heart and the countenance do correspond, but a level of deception still exists: her grief is expressed, made external and displayed. This very display, however, is a deception in and of itself. The coincidence between her husband's and her lover's death permit her the luxury of not having to hide her "affliction." The death of the *prince de Clèves* permits the *princesse* to retreat from the world and hence from Nemours without transgressing the order of *bienséance* so that she can make a terrifyingly difficult decision.

What is so disturbing about the outcome of this narrative is that the *princesse* acts in an absolutely uncanny way: she imposes upon herself the

austerity of virtue. What is outside "la contenance" or the face she presents to Nemours or the reply that she gives him, is not made to correspond with the inside ("le coeur"), namely the love and passion which she bears for him. Her love for Nemours actually leads her to a performance of austerity through which eventually she is able to immolate her passion. This is Zizekian subject position: her truth is motivated from outside inward.

She affirms one of the few acts that she is allowed as a feminine subject: this form of feminine refusal is close to what Zizek has called "symbolic suicide." This act of refusal transforms the princesse into something that Lacan has illustrated by drawing upon descriptions of Antigone's position in the Sophoclean drama. In The Sublime Object of Ideology (1989), Zizek describes Antigone's dilemma.

In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the figure with which we can identify is her sister Ismene - kind, considerate, sensitive, prepared to give way and compromise, pathetic, 'human,' in contrast to Antigone who goes to the limit, who 'doesn't give way on her desire' (Lacan) and becomes, in this persistence in the 'death drive', in the being-towards-death, frighteningly ruthless, excepted from the circle of everyday feelings and considerations, passions and fears. In other words, it is Antigone who evokes in us, pathetic, everyday compassionate creatures, the question, 'What does she really want?', the question which precludes any identification with her (1989:117).

Zizek's reading of the refusal possible from the feminine position is faithful to Lacan's reading of Antigone, a myth that functions as the feminine counterpart to Oedipus. Antigone's refusal to obey Creon is an instance of radical femininity as pure positivity, arrived at through a Nietzschean double negation: she will not not bury her brothers according to Creon's injunction.

Antigone's act is nothing less than suicidal: it differs from an active intervention (action) in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent). In Enjoy Your Symptom! (1992), Zizek continues to ponder the significance of Antigone's refusal, following Lacan's obsession with Oedipus' daughter:

the act is not simply something I 'accomplish'-after an act, I'm literally not the same as before. In this sense we could say that the subject 'undergoes' the act...rather than 'accomplishes it' it: in it, the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not), i.e., the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse, aphanisis of the subject. Which is why every act worthy of the name is 'mad' in the sense of radical *unaccountability*: by means of it, I put at stake everything, including myself, my symbolic identity...its final outcome is ultimately insignificant, strictly secondary in its relation to the NO! of the pure act (1992:44).

This pure "NO!" is the no of the princesse de Clèves. What Zizek has described above can be used as a description of the rigors which she undergoes as a result of this "NO!" The eclipsing of the self is allegorized in Lafayette's narrative as the violent and transformatory illness which allows the princesse

to arrive at her act. What had seemed impossible before the illness, namely refusing the attentions of Nemours, becomes possible as a result of this retreat from life. "Cette vue si longue et si prochaine de la mort fit paraître à Mme de Clèves les choses de cette vie de cet oeil si différent dont on les voit dans la santé" (179). The princesse is irrevocably transformed by her "NO!": she is the agent par excellence. She undergoes a radical transformation which allows her to enact her complete retreat from the court and all realms of sociability. She is able to make herself entirely unaccountable. It is the radicality of this retreat that Rousseau finds so seductive in the next century. The princesse's act haunts him as it will haunt his contemporaries.

Madame de Chartres tells her daughter upon the latter's entry into courtly life, "Si vous jugez sur les apparences en ce lieu-ci...vous serez souvent trompée; ce qui paraît n'est presque jamais la vérité" (56). What the princesse discovers for herself, however, after heeding the words of her mother, is that that which is not appearance, that which is hidden, is no more stable as a quantity of truth. Nemours's passion for her concealed and then revealed does not make it more true. The princesse's own passion for him, concealed from herself and then revealed does not necessarily lead her to privilege it as an instance of authenticity. This insight is reached because of the "NO!," the act by which the princesse overturns the dialectic of inside/outside, appearance/truth on its head.

Lafayette's princesse de Montpensier, the princesse de Clèves's less

fortunate fictional precursor, also trips up and makes many mistakes from which she can never recover, but her lover is also the least faithful of the three male characters. During a masked ballet, she mistakes the duc d'Anjou for the duc de Guise and thus exposes her lover and herself to the wrath of a powerful, rejected suitor. This mistake, as it turns out, is only secondary. It actually resonates with what turns out to be the princesse de Montpensier's primal mistake: the giving in to her desire for the duc de Guise from the very beginning. The duc de Guise's faithlessness proves as violent as his passion. Both the duc d'Anjou and the duc de Guise are dressed as Moors and before the ballet is to begin, the duc de Guise, without his mask on, speaks a few words to the princesse de Montpensier. The unfortunate princesse notices that her jealous husband has seen this and in the hopes of throwing him off track, speaks to the masked duc d'Anjou as if he were the duc de Guise and orders him to be more attentive to Madame that night, assuring him at the same time that she would not be jealous. The duc d'Anjou is furious but manages to dissimulate his jealous rage and his fury. In order to deflect the attention of a jealous husband, the princesse de Montpensier has only managed to attract attention to herself. The action of this scene takes place in the exchange of gazes: as Lacan reminds us, the eye has "an appetite" and "*invidia* vient de *videre*" (1973:105). The princesse tries to control what the eye of the other sees because this eye is hungry for knowledge, but she only manages to attract another gaze, this one just as envious and dangerous.

For Claudine Herrmann, the key metaphor of the novella is the image of the *princesse de Montpensier* sitting on a boat between two men who are fishing for salmon. Tired of being on the hunt with her husband, she has set out in a boat in order to see a salmon caught in a net. According to Herrmann, in a footnote to the text in the 1979 *Éditions des Femmes* version of the novella, the *princesse* will find herself caught in a net as well. She is caught in one way or another by her relations with the *duc de Guise*, the *duc d'Anjou* and her husband. She finds herself in a net made of gazes. The *duc de Chabanes*, her smitten confidante whom she treats with a lightness worthy of Sacher-Masoch's heroine, Wanda, dies during the persecution of the Huguenots. Like the *princesse de Clèves*, she too falls into a long illness caused by a shock on her nerves. She too recovers, but there is no transformatory encounter with death. She recovers only to realize that she has been abandoned by the fickle *duc de Guise*.

From behind his mask, the *duc d'Anjou* saw her, but she could not see the traits which would have distinguished him from the *duc de Guise*. When the face is covered, it is masked. The mask is the gaze without a face, pure scopic drive which refuses to give up its nakedness to any other gaze. The *princesse de Montpensier* is fixed by a gaze from a faceless mask which she mis-takes as the mask of her lover. To be masked is to be face-less. In the scene in which the *princesse* speaks to the masked *duc d'Anjou*, it is the man who wears the mask. In this century of the baroque mask, masculinity in the aristocratic realm

was still amicably related to the masquerade because the virtuosity of the courtier was deemed an admirable accomplishment.

What the princesse de Montpensier exposes is precisely her own face, the source of the word which will betray not only herself, but the identity of her lover as well, although she does not address him by name: "N'ayez ce soir des yeux que pour Madame, lui dit-elle,; je n'en serai point jalouse, je vous l'ordonne, on m'observe, ne m'approchez plus" (18)¹². "On m'observe" is the feminine enunciation. Watched by her husband, the princess seeks to elude his gaze, only to fall under observation by the duc d'Anjou. The duc d'Anjou immediately recognizes the fact that he has been mistaken for the duc de Guise because of the reference to Madame. "N'ayez des yeux que pour Madame." This order is given to throw the husband off track, but it leads the duc d'Anjou to the truth. There is only one person to whom the princesse would address such an imperative - the duc de Guise. If the duc de Guise were to have eyes only for Madame, it would be in order to dissimulate the relation between himself and the princesse de Montpensier. In giving this order, the princesse exposes her desire and her complicity with her lover. The duc d'Anjou plots the duc de Guise's downfall from that moment onward. The princesse's mistake exposes her lover to the wrath of the king's brother who promises to punish the duc de Guise's "temerity." Lafayette based this narrative on the life of the

¹²All citations of La Princesse de Montpensier and La Comtesse de Tende refer to Lafayette's Romans et nouvelles ed. Émile Magne. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961.

historical duc d'Anjou who was involved in incestuous relations with his sister. The historical duc d'Anjou, upon ascension to the throne as Henri III, orders the assassination of the duc de Guise. We could say then that the duc d'Anjou becomes the agent of the princesse's unconscious and retroactive aggression against her soon to be unfaithful lover. Herrmann's pessimism does not allow for the fact that the princesse's mistake has an unconscious and efficacious dimension. Her recklessness is the flip side of the princesse de Clèves's restraint and her ability to dissimulate.

One could say that one of the comtesse de Tende's great failings is her refusal to dissimulate, for instead of pretending to receive her husband's attentions and feign an affection for him, she rejects him during the height of her passion for the prince de Navarre and thereby inspires her husband's everlasting enmity. Herrmann points out that it is of the utmost importance that the contesse is of Italian origin (born mademoiselle de Strozzi): "Madame de Lafayette a choisi une Italienne pour pouvoir montrer une femme passionnée et spontanée ce qui était probablement introuvable à la cour de France" (1971:n186). The comtesse strays so far from the confines of *bienséances* of passion itself that she cannot be French. Her anomalous behavior is attributed to nationality.

This short narrative allegorizes with great economy the problematic that, according to Henri Coulet, dominates courtly life: the subject is caught between the lure of "l'ambition" or "le prestige extérieur" and "la galanterie" or "la

passion intérieure" (Coulet 1:259). The Prince de Navarre is a man of ambition: he takes an interest in the princesse de Neufchâtel because she could "faire la fortune d'un homme comme lui." In a purely calculating manner, he seeks to attach himself to her without being in love with her. It is not a small irony that through this ambition, he is exposed to the company of the comtesse de Tende, who inspires in him a violent passion. "Il ne s'y abandonna pas d'abord; il vit les obstacles que ces sentiments partagés entre l'amour et l'ambition apporteraient à son dessein..." (162). He enters into a *galanterie*, an affair of the heart. His passion eventually becomes an obstacle to his ambition; in the case of the comtesse however, passion endangers her very position in the world and in the end, is absolutely fatal to her.

The dichotomy *ambition/galanterie* functions for the male subject, but the female heroine is trapped in the sphere of *galanterie* alone. In this realm, she must not allow herself to display any signs that she may be experiencing the intensity of passion. *Bienséance* does not allow it. The display, the sign of the passion in the story of the comtesse de Tende takes place in the body of the comtesse herself: she finds herself pregnant with the prince de Navarre's child. The prince de Navarre has gone through with his marriage -- he has acted in the sphere of ambition; he has enjoyed a violent passion for a woman who reciprocated his love. He dies in battle. The comtesse however, lives on and bears on her body the sign of her illicit passion. She confesses to her husband that she is pregnant by her lover, is disgraced by him and dies discreetly a few

days after having given birth, fortunately, to a stillborn child.

In a certain sense, what Lafayette has worked out in these narratives, la Princesse de Clèves and la Comtesse de Tende (and even in to some extent, Henriette d'Angleterre) is a lucid appraisal of what Nancy K. Miller calls in The Heroine's Text a dystopic terrain of femininity. Lafayette's female heroine must negotiate the problematic of ambition in ways vastly different from her lover. If the princesse de Clèves is the most evolved of these heroines, she is also the one who is most aware of the limitations of the feminine position. The male subject always has a few more moves than his female counterpart: he can move outside the realm of *galanterie*. Nancy K. Miller brings up Freud in the context of the problem of ambition and sexual difference in her essay "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction" (1981). Miller reads Freud's 1908 essay "The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming" and emphasizes this particular passage, "In young women erotic wishes dominate the phantasies *almost exclusively*, for their ambition is *generally comprised* in their erotic longings; in young men egoistic and ambitious wishes assert themselves plainly enough alongside their erotic desires" (47-48) (Miller's emphasis). Miller imagines that it is possible that there are texts in which the possibility of a feminine fantasy of power and ambition was inscribed "within another economy. In this economy, egoistic desires would assert themselves practically alongside erotic ones. The repressed content, I think, would be, not erotic impulses, but an impulse to power..." (41). This opens up the reading of

the princesse de Clèves's renunciation of consummation as the ultimate power move, whereby she produces a successful example of perfect inimitability, thus fulfilling the most precious of classical ambitions.

In the following century, Crébillon, Duclos and Laclos represent libertines whose ambitions have all to do with scoring victories in the field of *galanterie*. Eighteenth-century libertines like Versac and Valmont, make of *galanterie* their sole ambition and we shall see that this collapsing of the seventeenth-century spheres of *galanterie* and *ambition* would produce situations as dangerous as those faced by Lafayette's heroines. The feminine subject is constantly threatened by a disaster similar to the one that Rivière's twentieth century analysand sought to avert with her masquerade of femininity. What separates these women from catastrophe is often only a single step, one *faux pas*. Henri Coulet describes the state of emergency in this way, "Dès lors on comprend que la curiosité soit à l'affût de ce qui peut être deviné sous le masque, et que la dissimulation soit sans cesse en état d'alerte; elle s'expose aux erreurs de manoeuvre et aux échecs..."(260). The characters in Lafayette's world are all in a constant state of alert and under constant surveillance: the system of bienséance puts all of its subjects in a vigilant mode against betraying themselves. Curiosity here is the motive behind the relentless surveillance under which the subject of worldliness lived.

In the end, all of Lafayette's female heroines betray themselves in one way or another: the princesse de Clèves betrays her passion to the duc de

Nemours by giving him signs of her concern for his well-being and jealousy about his liaisons with other women. The princesse de Montpensier exposes herself in the same way to the duc de Guise and likewise the contesse de Tende with the Prince de Navarre. The princesse de Clèves is distinguished once again in this case by her confession to her husband; against the imperative of masking the self, she exposes her secret to the one person she should have been most careful to keep it from. According to Coulet, she has rejected the lies and hypocrisies of *bienséance* in order to sacrifice herself to sincerity, but Coulet tends to forget that her "sincerity" with her husband is merely a strategy to protect herself from an affair with Nemours. I believe, however, that the princesse's rejection of lies and hypocrisies of *bienséance* is a strategic move to protect herself from the trap laid for women in the form of an engagement in a relationship of *galanterie* exclusive of *ambition*.

Criticizing Worldliness

By the next century, the masks of sociability and *bienséance* were being worn with greater discomfiture and the novelists of the eighteenth-century began to make of this dilemma an object of representation. In the first place, good society was infinitely more complex in the eighteenth-century as the power of the aristocracy waned. Paris became increasingly a more cosmopolitan and heterogeneous city. The aristocratic man evolved into the *petit-maître* as his actual power in the world diminished: the *petit-maître* can be defined as an aristocrat whose sphere of influence was increasingly

circumscribed. *Galanterie* and questions of style were the only places where the *petit-maître* could act on his will to power. In matters of taste and form, the *petit-maître* had unquestioned rule. The *petit-maître* anticipated the nineteenth century dandy's ultra-refinement and obsession with all things superficial.

The aristocratic codes of behavior were becoming more and more ossified under the Regency. Peter Brooks demonstrates in The Novel of Worldliness that, by the beginning of the eighteenth-century, the practice of worldliness had become increasingly dogmatic; it began to take on "the hard-headed absolutism of tone, the cynical authority, and the sharp judgment that we found in the narrative voices of Crébillon and Duclos and in the formulations of a master worldling like Versac" (62). It is to the *petit-maître's* pedantry and ossification of manners that Peter Brooks refers in his description of the increasingly dogmatic tone of eighteenth-century *bienséances*.

In Le Masque et la parole: le langage de l'amour au XVIIIe siècle (1973), Philip Stewart offers one of the classic prefeminist readings of the images and rhetoric of masking in eighteenth-century French literature. Often Stewart's descriptions of the conflicts of the eighteenth-century situation are homologous with certain contradictions in his own text: in this book, Stewart seems to struggle with the insights produced by the application of structure and signifier to literary studies while still privileging a kind of cult of pathos. The image of mechanism arises in this text to illustrate the infernal and arbitrary functioning of language and convention.

Le langage est souvent un pur mécanisme: comme dans toute politesse....on se sert des formules d'usage parce qu'il sied bien de les avoir remplies. De même pour le langage d'amour...Le mot dans ce contexte est vidé de son contenu littéral...divorce entre signifiant et signifié, où le signifié normal n'a plus de valeur communicative et même peut-être plus d'existence réelle (102).

The divorcing of the signifier and the signified is a serious matter for Stewart who imagines elsewhere in this text that this relationship can be described as a normative one ("le signifié normal"). Stewart's image of an "abnormal," non-communicative language of pure mechanism is important because the pure mechanicity of language describes an autonomy of the signifying system, a kind of pure codification, which functions without human intentionality - these are the workings of the empty formulas of signifying systems. This is precisely the sort of linguistic formation that de Man is interested in reading and interpreting. The de Manian reading of text *as machine* can be interpreted as one in which language as signifying system is the most mechanical of all systems, functioning as it does autonomously of conscious psychic motivation. This is one of the many faces of the automaton, a coded, self-moving machine, that is autonomous of intentionality.

Social codification seems to refer to linguistic codifications. The increasing rigidity of social codification in Paris existed simultaneously with the increasing inmixing of heterogeneous elements in what was once a

homogeneous aristocratic world. Stewart writes, "Dès la Régence, il s'établit à Paris une vie mondaine composée en partie d'anciens habitants de Versailles mais aussi de robins et de bourgeois plus ou moins riches dont les manières sont calquées sur celles de la haute aristocratie..." (61-62). Brooks comments on the same changes taking place in Paris at this time, "The purity of society was indeed threatened by adventurers, upstarts, gatecrashers, and by a new criticism of social institutions" (Brooks 8). If the "robins" and the "bourgeois" were slavishly imitating the worldly ways of the aristocracy, they were at the same time producing in writing an impassioned attack on those forms and practices. For Sylvère Lotringer, refusal of society and integration into society make up the "double seuil de la forme romanesque" (1970:301). Rousseau is one of the writers on the side of refusal, but his Confessions also describe a desire for and a trajectory of integration. He is the exemplary bourgeois critic of aristocratic hypocrisies, but there are novelists like Graffigny and Riccoboni who anticipated his critiques in their fiction.

As worldliness came into question, the mask became more and more difficult to wear,

Le masque qui démange et, parfois, refuse de coller à la peau, et la société qui ne se permet jamais de le démettre -- ne serait-ce que pour reprendre haleine -- cherche aussi délibérément, à trahir son jeu manifestant ainsi les marques, sinon d'une mauvaise foi, au moins d'un profond malaise (Stewart 122).

Stewart's account of the malaise of worldliness affirms the possibility of unmasked existence, pure spontaneity, a Rousseauist utopia of unmediated authenticity contained by a "true self." Stewart also follows Rousseau's tendency to criticize worldliness as a function of the superficiality and frivolity of the worldly woman. In Stewart's account, the falseness and hypocrisy of masking is given to the female subject and it is the world-weary male subject who suffers the alienation and uneasiness produced by sociable dissimulation.

The following description of masking vices is very gender specific: "Il faut trouver un masque convenable aux vices qu'on a; ainsi une femme dévorée par la passion joue souvent à être prude" (83). The woman wears the mask of a virtue that she lacks. The countenance and the heart are here hopelessly out of alignment. It is of the utmost significance that this image of masking is a feminine one, especially one which describes a woman struggling with passion. The mask of the prude is appropriate to the passionate woman because the prude is her opposite extreme. The mask then functions as compensation, or even over-compensation for the vices that it hid.

The image with which Stewart illustrates the eighteenth-century's "nostalgia for the natural" is also decidedly feminine. In describing Marivaux's fantasy of a kind of supple spontaneity, Stewart reminds us, that in the most hardened master of worldliness, there is a nostalgia for "authentic" love, "un amour qui ne soit pas fait de conventions, mais de mouvements, spontanés et transparents. Chez Marivaux, on trouve souvent l'évocation poétique, voire

extatique, de la jeune fille naturelle qui, n'avait besoin de rien apprendre sur l'amour, n'a jamais mis de masque'" (118). The face of the inexperienced young girl becomes the way out of the dilemmas of worldliness. This natural young girl, untouched by artifice soothes world weariness. Her image is significant because more than anything else, it sets itself up in contrast to the figure of the worldly woman, the woman who has worn masks to dissimulate her passions, her sorrows and in Stewart's account, her vices. Stewart follows Rousseau not only in unconsciously accepting the Utopian realm of perfect transparence as a possibility (in the figure of the young girl), but also in gendering the figure of worldliness and masking as feminine. The innocent young girl who loves in a perfectly natural way, is the double of the masked woman, devoured by passion and always somehow guilty. The girl's movements are all "spontaneous" and "transparent" to others while the worldly woman's every gesture is studied dissimulation. The worldly woman, a Marquise de Merteuil, is used as an image to illustrate the hypocrisies of worldliness while the hypocrisies of a Versac or Valmont are omitted in Stewart's account. "Le désir de trouver parmi tant de masques un visage franc et spontané qui réjouisse l'âme comme une bouffée d'air frais et envoie la comédie au diable, est comme un contre-courant qui s'exprime d'un bout du siècle à l'autre" (121).

This desire originates from a masculine subject who is searching the masks for the face of a young and innocent girl. This alienated and jaded

person is the one who is nostalgic for true and real love; he literally finds himself at odds with language itself. "Le langage est devenu un système de faux signes. Au lieu de lier les hommes, il les isole, car il sert non à leur révéler leurs vérités, mais à les cacher" (120). Stewart seems to believe in a language of "true" signs and he quotes Marivaux to prove that even this most worldly of authors believed in an authentic and hidden self that would be exposed one day. For Derrida, the belief in a language of "true signs" is always accompanied by a denigration of written language in favor of the spoken word. The discourse of a belief in true signs resists the idea that there is no fixed and authentic self to be found, that the signifier and signified are arbitrarily matched and that even their divorce is not so dramatic, that signifying systems are codified in a way autonomous of the speaking subject, and finally that language is not transparent and by its very nature allows us only partial and imperfect communication and representation and in this, it does isolate one speaking subject from another. The eighteenth-century fantasy of mitigating this isolation takes place by means of a rejuvenating feminine figure of vulnerability and inexperience.

The reaction, most often characterized as bourgeois, against hyper-codification and neo-preciosity of the aristocratic world under and after the Regency takes place as a valorization of sensibility and at the same time, at least in the case of Rousseau, as a kind of re-affirmation of sexual difference and sexual distance. In "Lettre à d'Alembert" (1758), Rousseau's reply to

d'Alembert takes on both the problem of Parisian sociability and the necessity of segregating the sexes. Rousseau's text blossoms into a monstrous vision of first, how worldliness and the frequentation of the sexes will destroy the moral fiber of any society and second, how the theater would destroy the very fabric of Genevan society itself. By the end of the text, Rousseau opens up a space in which he can paint a picture of a Utopic social event, a ball which would be reminiscent of pastoral festivals. At these balls, young unmarried people would dance with one another under the watchful and loving gaze of their parents. This kind of supervised encounter is reminiscent of the surveillance of *Émile* and *Sophie* as well as the chaperoning of *Saint-Preux* and *Julie*. In this transparent medium of the Genevan ball, people would appear as they really were, stripped naked of all pretense and all artifice. Under these conditions would the sexes meet and mate because the dance would be forbidden to all those already coupled off in marriage. This event would be appropriate entertainment for the populace of Geneva.

According to Rousseau, the theater as spectacle of worldliness is an aristocratic and feminizing space. In this unhealthy, enclosed environment, men are corrupted by the domination of women. Rousseau not only criticizes the theater here, but all of its Parisian adjuncts. What Rousseau hopes to preserve against the corrupting influence of the Parisian theater and its concomitant institutions is sexual difference itself. He goes on at length about the unhealthiness of too much contact between the sexes. In the atmosphere

created by theaters, men have too much commerce with women, become contaminated as it were by their femininity, and are actually transformed into women. The theater then destroys sexual difference itself and in doing so, makes impossible "normal" heterosexual relations. What Rousseau prescribes to maintain "healthy" relations between the sexes are forms that are strictly homosocial. "...[L]e goût de la chasse, commun à tous les Genevois, réunissant fréquemment les hommes, leur donnaient occasion de former entre eux des sociétés de table, des parties de campagne, et enfin des liaisons d'amitié" (193).¹³ On the other hand, women and girls have their own sex-segregated groups.

Les femmes et les filles, de leur côté, se rassemblent par sociétés, tantôt chez l'une, tantôt chez l'autre. L'objet de cette réunion est un petit jeu de commerce, un goûter, et, comme on peut bien croire, un intarissable babill. Les hommes, sans être fort sévèrement exclus de ces sociétés, s'y mêlent assez rarement...(194).

The rusticated pleasures and innocence of Genevan society have to do then, with the segregation of the sexes. What is guaranteed by bourgeois simplicity is sexual difference. Rousseau refers to Antiquity in order to strengthen his arguments for the virtues of sexual segregation. Among the Ancients, Rousseau insists, men were actually stronger than the men of

¹³All citations of "Lettre à d'Alembert" refer to the Garnier-Flammarion edition of this text, 1967.

Rousseau's time, although they were physically smaller. This was because they did not frequent women. The "intarisssable babil," that powerful current of nonsensical feminine sound can also have a terribly pernicious and debilitating effect upon men.¹⁴

Suivons les indications de la Nature, consultons le bien de la société: nous trouverons que les deux sexes doivent se rassembler quelquefois, et vivre ordinairement séparés. Je l'ai dit tantôt par rapport aux femmes, je le dis maintenant par rapport aux hommes. Ils se sentent autant et plus qu'elles de leur trop intime commerce; elles n'y perdent que leurs mœurs, et nous y perdons à la fois notre manière de vivre et notre constitution: car ce sexe plus faible, hors d'état de prendre notre manière de vivre trop pénible pour lui, nous force de prendre la sienne trop molle pour nous, et ne voulant plus souffrir de séparation, faute de pouvoir de se rendre hommes, les femmes nous rendent femmes (195-196).

What men lose exceeds what women lose in the frequentation of the sexes. When the sexes have too much contact, there is an inevitable female usurpation of power. What Rousseau wants to remedy is this usurpation. The asymmetrical nature of sexual difference allows us to account for this disparity. Women only lose their morals: men lose something different "notre manière de

¹⁴ Rousseau's description of femininity as a debilitating contagion anticipates the memoirs of a famous paranoid schizophrenic, the president Schreber, whose body was every day being feminized by special rays. Babble, nonsense also plagues Schreber who cannot escape from the hum of incomprehensible words and fragmented voices.

vivre et notre constitution." In this schema, men have much more to lose in the effacement of sexual difference. Women remain feminine because they cannot become masculine: what they can do, however, and this power arises from precisely what they lack (*faute de pouvoir de se rendre hommes*), is to make men women. The trope of lack and the problem of castration function together in exceedingly complex ways here: the feminine position, the place where castration is inscribed, where lack dwells, is also the place from which sexual difference is deployed. Samuel Weber writes in his introduction to *Memoirs of my Mental Illness* (1988) that castration "marks the differential relationship making possible, and structuring the articulation of gender identity" (xliv). The problem in Rousseau's version of sexual difference is that this mark, this "*faute de pouvoir*," insofar as it is localizable with the women, is also what allows them to make men women, leading to a collapse of the differential relationship. The structure of gender identity is constantly threatened by contact between the sexes because it would seem that their proximity in Rousseau's account, would produce an inevitable relationship of mimesis in which the men end up becoming women because the women cannot become men. It is precisely their "softness," their inability to withstand the harshness of the masculine "*manière de vivre*" that allows them to make the men resemble them. This is the power of the weak. Femininity is contagious, masculinity is not because women cannot share men's physical activities that are impossible for them to perform, whereas men can accommodate themselves to a soft, effeminizing life by

allowing themselves to frequent women and their salons. Rousseau is trying to warn his peers against the pernicious power of femininity that is allowed to come into contact with masculinity in order to weaken and distort it. According to Rousseau, there is a power of the weak against the strong, the soft against hard that must be controlled by strictly sexual segregation.

Difference and sexual difference are assumed by the subject upon entry into the symbolic order, the order that arises out of the Name-of-the-Father, the symbolic *effect* par excellence. In Lettre à d'Alembert, Rousseau's father appears during the anecdote recounted as a footnote, describing the spontaneous midnight dance of regiment of Saint-Gervais.

Mon père, en m'embrassant, fut saisi d'un tressaillement que je crois sentir et partager encore. Jean-Jacques, me disait-il, aime ton pays. Vois-tu ces bons Genevois; ils sont tous amis, ils sont tous frères; la joie et la concorde règne au milieu d'eux. Tu es Genevois: tu verras un jour d'autre peuples; mais quand tu voyagerais autant que ton père, tu ne trouveras jamais leur pareil (248).

This scene of Genevan authenticity is designated as inimitable by the words of Jean-Jacques's father and it inspires in Rousseau visions of martial festivals, frugal and austere, that would be fitting for the virile citizens of the bourgeois republic. Rousseau is named here, "Tu es Genevois," by the father and he identifies with this name. The scene of authenticity, the regiment of Saint-Gervais, spontaneously rousing itself to a drunken military dance is opposed to

the scenes of aristocratic sociability in which only "acting" or dissimulation was possible. Dissimulation is effeminizing just as womanliness is masquerade. We could extrapolate a "manliness" from this formula that would be free of artifice, genuine and unmasked (the virile dance of the regiment of Saint Gervais which was in the beginning an all-male affair), but always at risk of being contaminated by the influence of femininity (a "softness" that can make men women).

What was at stake for Rousseau in this debate with d'Alembert (and by proxy with Voltaire and the other *philosophes* who were reconciled to aristocratic interaction as a space of sophistication and refinement) was a defense of the values of the "basse ville," his origins, but more importantly, his father's neighborhood, Saint Gervais. The father is unnamed, but the neighborhood is. The Genevan aristocracy lived on the other side of the Rhône and had always discreetly looked to the French aristocracy for not only models of behavior, but also protection when seriously challenged by the bourgeois Republicans. Rousseau's grandfather had once occupied a house in the "haute ville," but the Rousseau family had seen a decline in its fortunes and Jean-Jacques's father lived with his family on the "wrong" side of the Rhône. The regiment of Saint-Gervais appears in Lettre à d'Alembert as defenders of Rousseau's identification with a paternal signifier, embodied by the decidedly plebian neighborhood of Saint-Gervais.

The fragility of Rousseau's identification with the population of the

"wrong" side of the Rhône gives his text an intensity which only rises in pitch. The theater and its emasculating adjuncts become more and more powerful, more and more all-threatening, until by the end of the letter, before the beginning of the pastoral reverie on the innocent Genevan balls, Rousseau prophesies the downfall of the very Republic itself if a theater is allowed to set itself up in his precious hometown. The threat to sexual difference, the threat to the bourgeois city he loves, only become more and more monstrous to Rousseau, until he imagines the corrupt actors (comédiens) taking over the city and destroying the Genevan republic itself with their irresistible licentiousness and its nefarious cabals.

Bientôt les comédiens, sûrs de l'impunité, la procureront encore à leurs imitateurs; c'est par eux qu'aura commencé le désordre, mais on ne voit plus où il pourra s'arrêter. Les femmes, la jeunesse, les riches, les gens oisifs, tout sera pour eux, tout favorisera leur licence: chacun, cherchant à les satisfaire, croira travailler pour ses plaisirs. Quel homme osera s'opposer à ce torrent, si ce n'est peut-être quelque ancien pasteur rigide qu'on n'écouterait point, et dont le sens et la gravité passeront pour pédanterie chez une jeunesse inconsidérée? Enfin pour peu qu'ils joignent d'art et de manège à leurs succès, je ne leur donne pas trente ans pour être les arbitres de l'État. On verra les aspirants aux charges briguer leur faveur pour obtenir les suffrages; les élections se feront dans les loges des actrices, et les chefs d'un peuple libre seront les créatures d'une

bande d'histrions (229).

The influence of the actors is described as torrential, similar in quality to the all-powerful "softness" of the women who can make men like themselves. There is also in this passage, the same principle of mimesis: the actors (the soft, the torrent) will make everyone like themselves. The only thing rigid that stands in their way is the preaching of a country pastor who will try to resist the torrent with his "sense and gravity." His teaching, deemed pedantry, however, will be swept away as well. In thirty years, the actors will have successfully conspired to take over the state.

What Rousseau condemns in the theater is its falseness: the falseness of the theater is the falseness of worldliness itself. Peter Brooks writes,

Méré [one of the great seventeenth-century aristocratic arbiters of taste and convention] considered the successful courtier to be essentially an actor playing a role agreeable to others and like the eighteenth-century novelists, he sees as a necessary corollary the ability to penetrate appearances to find out what forces animate society and its members (1969:55).

The actor, like the courtier, is condemned by Rousseau as a character who plays nothing but roles, has no authenticity. The actor represents for Rousseau all the falseness and corruption of Parisian society, a corrosive sort of corruption against which Geneva must be defended. Stewart's description of the social man also emphasizes the analogical relation between acting and

sociability, "L'homme social est un être dédoublé, il a un dehors scénique et un dedans caché, inaccessible au spectateur" (Stewart 79). For Rousseau, this hidden interior is highly suspect. The Rousseauian and bourgeois imperative for total transparency is a reaction against precisely this kind of doubled being produced by masking: the visible exterior is false because it does not reveal everything, namely, it conceals the inaccessible interior.

The actor and the courtier are masquerading subjects: their duplicitous nature aligns them with "womanliness" or femininity. The actor, the courtier and the woman hide something, while performing something else. That which is hidden is imagined by Rousseau to be powerful, uncontrollable, eventually capable of destroying sexual difference itself: it is charged with ambivalence and designates lack as such. I call it castration here in order to deploy the full significance of the term. What the mask of femininity hides is a "nothing," a charged "nothing," communicable and powerful: a torrential nothingness that has transformatory powers. Schreber is threatened precisely by this torrential nothingness in the form of rays with the power to slowly unman him by producing changes in his body and producing visions of how voluptuous it would be to be made love to as a woman.

This Rousseauian model of consciousness, that the authentic being of "man" is an interiority that must triumph over false exteriors, that this would be the achievement of a kind of utopic transparency, is precisely what Lacan addresses with a topological model that is related to the Moebius strip: the

torus contains a void and is a shape constituted by its lack. There is no privileged surface on the Moebius strip or the torus, no ineffable, invisible area that must be made visible. The torus as a model is constituted by the void that gives it shape: the "secret" (nothingness, castration) that the Rousseauian model wants to overcome is constitutive of being itself.

What the *princesse de Clèves* renounces is the fantasy of a perfect coincidence of love and obligation, countenance and heart. What is renounced is not only the perfect match, but especially its representation: this makes of the case of the *princesse*, a kind of successful analysis *avant la lettre*. According to Peggy Kamuf, however, the *princesse* is trapped in a maternal fantasy, remains a product of it, never overcomes it by following her desire (that is described as "the cleft of difference" between the mother and child). The ending of the novel seems to produce pairs of opposing readings: it is both a tale of a successful analysis as renunciation and, at the same time, it is a tale of the failure of a woman to differentiate herself from her mother's fantasy of who she should be. It is a heroic tale of a woman's ability to transform herself into something else and escape from court life: it is the tragic tale of a woman who does not give herself to love. The uncanny pairing of opposing readings makes clear that it is above all ambivalence that structures the end of this novel. What Lafayette demonstrates in her fiction with a terryfying lucidity is not only the difficulty, but the impossibility of a relation between the sexes. There is no space in which it is possible to establish a relationship of perfect,

harmonious reciprocity between the sexes.

In Lettre à d'Alembert, Rousseau tries to construct just such a space in Geneva for the facilitation of the courtship of young Genevans. The sexes, while segregated by "common sense," are brought together under specific conditions so that "seduction" and marriages might be brought off smoothly under the bourgeois parents' watchful eye. It is a space in which the unmarried members of both sexes, having been kept apart, are brought together again and in this space of the Genevan ball, Rousseau imagines the "innocence" of courtship can be maintained. This ideal space can also be understood as an attempt to resolve the contradictions and difficulties in the bourgeois structuration of gender identity and the sexual relation: sexual identity is homosocial (segregation of the sexes, the all-male dance of Saint-Gervais), but it must produce a (hetero)sexual relation (marriage). What guarantees the proper functioning of this complicated affair will be for Rousseau a place in which contact between the sexes is as strictly coded as it is in the salons: the codes however, will no longer be the ones governing the aristocratic order, rather, they will be formed according to the rustic Genevan festivals. These "bals solennels et périodiques, ouverts indistinctement à toute la jeunesse à marier" would be presided over by a magistrate: the Law itself would be a witness to the mating ritual of the young Genevans.

Rousseau reproduces in the ball, something reminiscent of the dancing regiment of Saint-Gervais, a spectacle to which he and his father were

witnesses. It is the site of highly supervised contact between the sexes that does not lead to emasculation. Sexual difference is guaranteed and reinforced, instead of eroded. For Lafayette, however, the negotiation of the sexual relation does not lead to construction of such a fantasy space. The asymmetry of sexual difference in Lafayette's world can be understood in terms of the sexes' different relationships with the two spheres of activity: *ambition* and *galanterie*. The female protagonists of Lafayette's fiction must face the fact that *ambition*, the attraction of a higher place in the symbolic order, is always dividing their lovers' attention from the sphere of *galanterie*. The *princesse de Clèves* makes of dissimulation a fortress that protects her from the betrayal structured into the sexual relation itself. Between an aristocratic fortress of dissimulation and a bourgeois fantasy of transparent sexual relations, the mask arises as an ambivalent image of the automaton, that masked machine. As an image of masking and machines, the automaton figures something complicated about sexual difference and textual production under the *ancien régime*.

Chapter Two

"Graffigny and the Question of Style"

Françoise de Graffigny's Lettres d'une péruvienne was published in 1747, the same year as La Mettrie's L'Homme-machine. It is, however, more than the temporal coincidence of their publication dates that brings these two texts together. In the next two chapters, we will explore the possibility of establishing a relationship between these two texts that is based on their attempts to account for difference: the first in the context of fiction, the second in the context of philosophy. While Graffigny's text addresses the writing of cultural differences (between Peru and Spain and Peru and Europe), it is also an account of sexual difference (between Zilia and Aza and Zilia and Déterville). As Elizabeth MacArthur demonstrates in her essay "Devious Narratives: Refusal of Closure in Two Eighteenth-Century Epistolary Novels" (1987), closure is one way of fixing a heroine -- in marriage -- and securing a sort of knowledge about the nature of sexual difference. By not marrying off her heroine, Graffigny leaves the question of sexual difference open to question in a certain sense: for alone in the world, writing and observing the world, Zilia is left in a state of privileged and successful in-difference. She has a country property, enough money to live on and a good library. Graffigny's novel refuses the traditional closures of feminine destiny: this has been recognized as a component of its radicality.

I propose that we read La Mettrie's L'Homme-machine with Graffigny's novel because this philosophical treatise has to do with a radical enquiry into the nature of difference as well. If the kind of difference that preoccupies La Mettrie is not explicitly sexual difference, the question of woman does arise in this meditation on Enlightenment revisions of ideas of absolute, metaphysical differences between human organisms and animals and human organisms and machines. Although it is obvious that La Mettrie's *l'homme* universalizes the human organism as masculine, *machine*, the second half of the hyphenated title raises the question of difference, if not sexual difference. The machine for La Mettrie, is a speculative model, one that is only going to help us understand what man is. By putting *l'homme* and *machine* together, La Mettrie is already juxtaposing masculine and feminine nouns. The feminine as difference occurs in La Mettrie's system as machine, something infinitely complex and ultimately unknowable, but above all, comparable to man. It is by means of such a comparison that any understanding of man as opposed to machine or woman is to be understood at all. In this way, difference is both affirmed and questioned at the same time: this is one of the important epistemological moments in what is called early modernity.

The question of style

From the outset, Graffigny's fiction sets out to directly address the problem of representing feminine experience through what we might describe as a simulacrum of writing. The knotting of the *quipos* is a strange and complex

conceit of representation and self-representation. Nancy K. Miller in the chapter "The Knot, the Letter and the Book" (1988) writes, "...Graffigny reconstructs the question of woman's identity as a problem of figuration. Put another way, the Enlightenment allegory of cultural difference is no less a feminist fable of sexual identity in *language*" (135). Graffigny's text does try to figure in knots, a practice of writing of letters that will eventually become a book. In the process, the problem of sexual difference is narrativized. Therefore, cultural and sexual difference are to be understood as functions of language and literary forms: allegories become fables as cultural difference is compared with the construction of sexual identity.

It is widely recognized Graffigny's novel is permeated with explicitly linguistic preoccupations. For Isabelle Landy-Houillon¹, "Le dénouement...conclut dans le même sens ce roman de la communication et confirme l'importance des préoccupations linguistiques..." (49). In the "Avertissement" to the novel itself, there is an explicit warning to the reader about the "fautes de grammaire" and the unfamiliar style of the fictional author of the letters to follow. The "Avertissement" pleads for a kind of indulgence for a style that will be "inconnu" to the novel's readers. That Zilia's style, the style of the Peruvian, is preserved intact in its authenticity is the fiction upon which this novel turns. In fact, despite such excessively metaphorical turns of phrase

¹Introduction to Lettres Portugaises, Lettres d'une péruvienne et autres romans par lettres. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1983.

as "Que l'arbre de la vertu, mon cher Aza, répande à jamais son ombre sur la famille du pieux citoyen qui a reçu sous ma fenêtre le mystérieux tissu de mes pensées, et qui l'a remis dans tes mains!" (Letter II), Zilia's style is, in fact, not so unrecognizable. It is the style of passionate epistolary sincerity, inherited from the Portuguese nun, Mariane, and privileged by the classical era in some sense as the style of ardent authenticity.

It is with a digression on style that I hope to open a discussion of Lettres d'une péruvienne. In an "Ouverture de ce Recueil" that introduces Lacan's Écrits (1976), Lacan quotes the eighteenth century naturalist, Georges Louis Leclerc, self-made comte de Buffon, "Le style, c'est l'homme-même." Judith Miller reminds us of the circumstances of this statement². Buffon makes this statement as he addresses the Académie Française in 1753 upon his initiation into that body. He had been a member of the Académie Royale des Sciences since 1733 and he was certainly a master of style. His address is an enormously stylish performance of courtliness: he flatters the members of the Académie by describing them as masters of style, his teachers in fact, who taught him what style was. Ironically, it was Buffon's style that was to come under attack after the Revolution: "Revolutionaries judged his style pompous and aristocratic, while natural historians sought increasingly to dissociate themselves from the tainted world of literature. Interestingly, Buffon was

²Judith Miller's article is published as "Style is the Man Himself" in Lacan and the Subject of Language, ed. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan.

attacked for being a *coquet*, language usually reserved for women" (Schiebinger 154). Schiebinger goes to remark upon the fact that the style of aristocratic sociability in which Buffon was schooled was viewed as increasingly feminine and unscientific.

In his address before the Academy, Buffon offers a lesson on style: real eloquence is very different from natural facility. Buffon describes those who possess natural facility but no style in the following manner³:

Ces hommes sentent vivement, s'affectent de même, le marquent fortement au dehors; et par une impression *purement mécanique*, ils transmettent aux autres leur enthousiasme et leurs affections. C'est le corps qui parle au corps; tous le mouvements, tous les signes concourent et servent également (2: emphasis added).

He who lacks style is mechanical: the mechanical is the lack of all style. The eloquent, but stylistically deficient man allows his feelings and his affects to mark the surface (the outside) of his person and body in a purely mechanical, that is unmediated, and direct manner, which "tous les mouvements, tous les signes concourent and servent également." This writing of the inside upon the outside takes place in a vivid way that is without nuance or differentiation, in a kind of formless confusion: the marks and the signs are uncontrolled and uncontrollable, and they are interchangeable for one another. Movements are

³All citations from Buffon refer to Chefs d'oeuvre littéraires de Buffon. Paris: Garnier-Frère, 1864.

confused with signs themselves. The man without style lets the inside (consisting of affects, impressions and feelings) imprint the outside (of the body or face) in a completely chaotic fashion. Style, on the other hand, implies the opposite of such pure mechanism.

Style is that which is essential to the work, the writer: it constitutes the identity of the author. Buffon continues, "le style ne peut donc ni s'enlever, ni se transporter, ni s'altérer..." It is the greatness of style that has elevated the Académiciens above everyone else: it is also style that will make them immortal. According to Buffon, only works that are well written will become immortal: even the "novelty" of real discoveries do not guarantee survival of the poorly written text.⁴ Style is a product of "real eloquence" which has nothing to do with natural facility. These men of natural eloquence are nothing more than passive transmitters, more sensitive than average perhaps, but unable to mark their expressions in such a way that will differentiate them from the expressions of others. The metaphor "purement mécanique" signifies an absence in the "man of natural eloquence." The mechanical for La Mettrie, as we shall see, refers to an autonomous and enormously complex system that functioned outside of the conscious will of the organism, but for Buffon, the mechanical refers to a kind of banal simplicity, a non-literary automatism of naive spontaneity.

⁴This is disproved by the fact that Linnaeus's system of natural classification has survived as more accurate than Buffon's well-crafted phrases despite what Schiebinger calls Linnaeus's "clumsy Latin and rhymed verse" (154).

In "le style c'est l'homme-même," Buffon constructs what Lacan calls "un fantôme du grand homme." In his lectures and his prose, Lacan distinguished himself by means of a style that would mark him as radically different from other psychoanalytic theorists. Many resist Lacanian theory because of his unbearably difficult and elliptical style. It must be with irony that Lacan should open Écrits with a quote from a writer who was being initiated into an institutional body whereas Lacan's own unorthodox style and practice lead to his "excommunication" from the IPA (International Psychoanalytic Association.) He cites Buffon in order to comment ironically that it is no longer so simple to make of man such "une référence si certaine" (9) and in this way, he launches Écrits as a commentary on questions of the referentiality of man that have been inherited from the Enlightenment.

In the "Avertissement" of Lettres d'une péruvienne, the fictitious editor has been careful to preserve untouched the uniqueness of Zilia's style, "Il est facile de voir, par la singularité du style, que nous avons été très scrupuleux à ne rien ôter de cet esprit naturel qui règne dans cet ouvrage" (4)⁵. Thus it is the singularity of Zilia's style that guarantees the singularity of her identity: in her writing the "esprit naturel" that distinguish her from other writers is evident in her style. To modify her style would be to modify her "self." In this sense, Graffigny is following Buffon's notion of style: "le style, c'est Zilia, elle-

⁵All citations from Lettres d'une péruvienne refer to the 1993 MLA edition edited by Nancy K. Miller and Joan DeJean.

même." To change Zilia's style is to change Zilia herself. According to Nancy K. Miller, Graffigny poses the question of feminine identity as one of figuration. Style is one of the ways through which feminine identity is figured in fiction.

In this novel, however, Zilia's writing style undergoes a gradual, but undeniable transformation: she begins the letters in one style and ends them in another. After studying French, Zilia's "style se modifie en conséquence et renonce aux hypocoristiques les plus exotiques pour s'en tenir au monotone «Mon cher Aza». Les périphrases naïves pour désigner, soit les choses connues dont elle ne sait pas le nom «étranger», soit les choses inconnues dont il n'existe pas d'équivalent indigène, disparaissent également pour faire place au mot propre" (Landy-Houillon 47). Zilia's style reflects her growing linguistic knowledge and mastery, until she can be said to have developed a style of her own.

Like Graffigny, La Mettrie feels it necessary to explain the terms upon which he wants L'Homme-Machine to be read. The belated "Avertissement" to L'Homme-Machine appears as the "Discours préliminaire" (1751) that serves as both a warning and a preparing of the way for what came before it. The *philosophe* tries explicate his materialist position and to prove that philosophy was not inimical to either morality or religion and that philosophy was incapable of destroying the social fabric, no matter how radical its ideas. La Mettrie is pleading the cause for a radical Enlightenment position on the inherent moral neutrality of philosophical truth, which he reminds us is not concerned with

Good and Evil, but not against the establishment of such categories either. "Le Philosophe a pour objet ce qui lui paroît vrai, ou faux, abstraction faite de toutes conséquence..."(13).

Reason is the *philosophe's* style: eloquence, however, can be used both for and against reason. In fact, in the discourse of priests, La Mettrie shows that eloquence can be used in place of reason to convince people of apocryphal truths. If he reasons as a *philosophe*, he is not doing so to convince others that they are in error: "toute l'Eloquence de Ciceron" would not be enough for this task. "Quant à la communication, ou si l'on veut, à la contagion que l'on craint, je ne la crois pas possible" (23). A *philosophe* deals in reason and speculative truths: he is not a proselytizer. Rhetoric and eloquence can simulate reason, but philosophy can give order and reason to the eloquent, as in the case of Cicero. Truth however, is impotent when it comes to "communication" both linguistically and organically. La Mettrie defends the right to philosophical reason by divesting it of all power vis-à-vis faith or belief. Truth, in this version of things, is neutral and has no powers of persuasion.

Eloquence is a kind of style, as we have seen; it is in fact, the style of truth, but not the truth itself. For La Mettrie, eloquence in the style of priests is more persuasive than a philosopher's truth. This is paying a back-handed compliment to religion. For Buffon, the man of natural facility can be eloquent without style, in a purely mechanical way: true style, however, is absolutely necessary to the immortality of truth itself. The eloquent man's lack of style

makes him purely mechanical. In the midst of defending his reasoning as innocuous against the attack of theologians, La Mettrie offers at the same time, arguments for the possibility that atheists could be virtuous and that the soul could be considered less than immortal. These two speculative truths would hardly be considered neutral. By not taking a moral or religious position, La Mettrie takes the most radical one of all: that of the *philosophe*, the rational skeptic. While Buffon has been admitted to the rank of Immortal, La Mettrie exhorts his fellow *philosophes* who are persecuted for their reason and their reasoning to aspire to a different kind of immortality.

Mais ne peut-on chercher l'immortalité, sans se perdre?...Auteurs à qui la plus flatteuse vengeance ne suffit point, je veux dire l'applaudissement de l'Europe éclairée, voulez-vous faire impunément des Ouvrages immortels? Pensez tout haut, mais cachez-vous. Que la Postérité soit votre seul point de vue....Ecrivez, comme si vous étiez seul dans l'Univers, ou comme si vous n'aviez rien à craindre de la jalousie et des préjugés des hommes; ou vous manquerez le but (La Mettrie 46-47).

To write from the point of view of the future, to write as if one were alone in the world is to precisely reject the approbation of the present. This kind of immortality is opposed to the "Immortality" of those who belong to the Academy, who have the approbation and recognition of the king. The courtier-style of Buffon, the very worldliness of his style of flattery, contradict in a very precise way La Mettrie's exhortation. The extra-temporal space of solitude is

one that is constituted in the Age of Reason as a space of heroism and authenticity. It is also a space outside of the court, the salon, the social spheres where careers are actually made and destroyed. This is the space of writing itself and to occupy this space is to be more than a stylist, it is to be a writer. It is to this space that Graffigny's Zilia would like to gain admission.

Could Buffon's formulation be simply revised for women, "le style c'est la femme-même"? I would have to say no for, first of all, the rather literal-minded reason that the style to which the immortals of the Academy had supposedly acceded was not available to women. Women were radically excluded from just such groups: "dans une société qui lui refuse la condition d'écrivain, l'élite intellectuelle féminine trouve dans la pratique épistolaire un compromis entre l'effacement propre à son sexe et la disposition qu'il a à dire «les plus tendres sentiments du coeur»" (Landy-Houillon 19). To write letters was to avoid what Landy-Houillon refers to as "effacement."

What Buffon declares with the full force of his speaking and spoken presence has to do with the fantasy of the great man and this is a fantasy of greatness from which women are excluded. In her essay, "Style is the Man Himself," Judith Miller focuses on Lacan's revision or lengthening of Buffon's classical formulation, "Le style est l'homme à qui on s'adresse": Lacan inserts the Other into Buffon's phrase.⁶ In the case of Lettres d'une péruvienne, this

⁶Miller goes on to situate style in relation to *objet a*, the Lacanian cause of desire, the gaze and the stuff of immortality.

new formulation emphasizing the object of address, is particularly applicable. Style is the man to whom Zilia's letters are almost all addressed. Style is Aza, the repository of all of Zilia's ideas of sensibility, propriety and authenticity. Landy-Houillon describes Aza's lessons to Zilia as having to do with "sincérité dépourvue d'artifice" (49). This is still what Zilia hopes to achieve in her letter writing: the style of sincerity. The letters are written from Zilia to Aza, but the style is generated from Aza to Zilia; it is by her style that we know that Zilia and her addressee are not French, that they are different from those around them. She remains faithful to the unfaithful Aza who has converted to the Christian faith (in order to be more like those around him). Julia Douthwaite emphasizes Zilia's non-conversion to Catholicism in contrast her acceptance of European dress and the ideas of the *philosophes* as a form of resistance to total assimilation. It is on religious grounds that Zilia resists European ways because she cannot betray what Aza has so easily given up - the Peruvian cult of the authenticity.

While she conforms to French codes of language and dress and professes faith in the teachings of French *philosophes*, her religion remains inviolable. Zilia initially honors Catholicism by calling it a variation on 'natural law,' but a priest's condescending disparagement of her own cult--especially its acceptance of incest--incites her to adopt a more critical stance. Contrasting the priest's self-righteousness and lofty principles with the casual immorality practiced by his parishioners,

the Peruvian concludes by firmly resolving never to convert...
(Douthwaite 119).

Zilia remains faithful to the unfaithful but no longer infidel Aza because she never abandons the "Peruvian" discourse of sincerity even though her letter writing style loses its strange and flowery metaphors. She remains faithful, but without faith; and thereby maintains a radical difference from those around her.

Buffon, on the other hand, wants his style to blend in. He recognizes the greatness of the style of the Academy as a gesture of appreciation for the Academy's recognition of *his* own style: Judith Miller emphasizes the way in which this recognition comes from the Other and calls this a "game of mirrors." Style is constructed in order to attract the recognition of others who possess it. In the mirror games of Graffigny's novel, Zilia's style fails to keep Aza faithful, but by a strange detour, it manages to reach Déterville and is recognized by him. It is he who fully appreciates her "singularity." As a writer of letters, Zilia is a peculiar heroine whose ambitions are doubled, in Nancy K. Miller's argument, as both erotic and ambitious: that is, she is driven to distinguish herself as singular as both woman *and* writer. Miller argues that Zilia's predicament is an allegory of the coming of age of a woman writer in the age of reason. She makes of Zilia's foreign-ness, her Peruvian identity a figure for femininity itself. The "Avertissement" exhorts the readers not to give into the popular prejudice to scorn that which does not resemble what they already know and recognize. This exhortation is in fact a demand to recognize

style where it has not been recognized before and if we are to follow Nancy K. Miller in her transposition of Peruvian-ness into sexual identity, the style which is pleaded for in the "Avertissement" is not the style of Peruvians, but the style of sexual difference. Nancy K. Miller gives Judith Miller's "game of mirrors" a feminist angle when she writes that the canon "retains what it knows how to read only when it recognizes its own language" (1988:132). It is Graffigny's posterity that in fact ceases to recognize her style and relegates her novel to an obscurity out of which it has only recently emerged.

Nancy K. Miller makes a case for the recognizability or unrecognizability of this style as a question of sexual difference and canon formation. The obscurity into which Graffigny's novel fell during the nineteenth century would seem to support the argument that the style of this novel became somehow unacceptable, but, in fact, Zilia's style was recognized at the moment of the novel's publication. The style of femininity dominated a literary genre in early and mid-eighteenth century France: fiction and especially epistolary fiction. Letter writing was a kind of consolation prize for women who were losing a certain amount of social prestige. The marginal and unruly genre of the epistolary novel was given over to women by forces for and against women. "Mais tous--même les anti-féministes--s'accordent à reconnaître que les femmes, autodidactes ou non, sont particulièrement douées pour l'art de la correspondance" (Landy-Houillon 18). The writing of sentiment was what women were left with, Sévigné even constructed a "cogito sensible" in order

to describe this different order of being and feeling. The heroine of sensibility came to replace the cold inscrutability of the passionate and virtuous woman of Lafayette's fiction as the major feminine protagonist. As the domain of the novel slipped away from women, this very sensibility would be attacked as a corrupt and clichéd sentimentality.⁷

Knotting the Love Letter

Lettres d'une péruvienne allegorizes Zilia's writing as the knotting of *quipos*: this is the allegory of a woman writing; she writes in a form unrecognizable and unreadable to those around her to a man who does not write ("knot") back to her. In order to make herself understood, she has to work on translation. In the fiction of Graffigny's text, Zilia's first letters are translated from knots: she has "written" them in *quipos* to Aza in their native Peruvian language. These knots are reminiscent of the ones that Lacan spent a great deal of time tying and untying. Towards the end of his life, he would often lose himself in the complexities of the Borromean knots that fascinated him. In the seminar "Encore" he talks of knots as well as love letters in the context of a discussion of femininity.⁸ In this seminar, Lacan talks about fabric as image for substance itself. When the fabric is worn to the thread, the weave

⁷This is the course of events described by Janet Todd in Sensibility: an Introduction (1986).

⁸The knot also occurs in the Seminar of 25 January 1975 published in Ornicar? 3 and translated in the collection of essays edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, Feminine Sexuality (1982).

becomes obvious. Lacan is interested in the weave that is made up entirely of the Borromean knots. Zilia's knots are like woven love letters: her love letters could be fabric in their sheer density. As the exemplary subject of femininity that is figured in Graffigny's discourse, she writes knots and weaves letters.

The "Introduction Historique" to 1752 version of the novel informs us that the *quipos*

leur tenaient lieu de notre art d'écrire. Des cordons de coton ou de boyau, auxquels d'autres cordons de différentes couleurs étaient attachés, leur rappelaient, par des noeuds placés de distance en distance, les choses dont ils voulaient se ressouvenir. Ils leur servaient, d'annales, de codes, de rituels, etc (13).

The *quipos* take the place of writing: they are an equivalent to writing, but there is something obscure about this fictionalized lexical system: it is not phonetic. We have only to think of Zilia's surprise upon learning the letters of the French language and her difficulty with distinguishing the differences between them and the differences between the sounds that they each represent. Knots are not letters: Zilia's surprise betrays the absence of all such signifying units in Peruvian. The system of *quipos* is not phonological, nor is it inscriptive. Out of this Enlightenment parable of anthropological understanding, could we speculate that it was Zilia's innocence of an alphabet that would make her innocent of mirrors as well, so that she would take her reflection in the mirror as a kindred sister, another princess of the sun, coming to greet her

in France? This naïveté of mirrors and mirror-images seems related to linguistic naïveté.

The fictional Peruvians are missing much that Europeans take for granted: in matters of science, the Peruvian nation "était encore dans l'enfance à cet égard; mais elle était dans la force de son bonheur." This childhood is a magical state of plenitude, from which nothing essential was missing and over which happiness reigned. The Peruvian world, being innocent of writing, is the space of what Derrida has called "la pleine parole" in De la Grammatologie (1967). One of the ideas that Derrida introduces in this text can be very easily applied to Graffigny's novel: Derrida proves that Lévi-Strauss is never more ethnocentric than when he describes a non-Western culture as lacking writing. It is from this ethnocentric attribution of a lack that all other ethnocentric fables follow. What Derrida examines so painstakingly in Claude Lévi-Strauss's work is the Enlightenment (particularly the Rousseauist) notion of writing as corrupting supplement to the full presence and innocence of the spoken word. Derrida takes apart the anthropological myth of illiterate innocence by demonstrating that the Nambikwarans, in Lévi-Strauss's account, do possess an idea of inscription and thus a form of writing that may not be recognizable to the ethnographer.

Derrida shows in "La Violence de la Lettre: de Lévi-Strauss à Rousseau", that Lévi-Strauss's notion of the "goodness" of the Nambikwarans was directly predicated upon their ignorance of writing and the systems of difference and

exploitation that writing brings with it. Derrida quotes Lévi-Strauss on the Nambikwarans,

On devine chez tous une immense gentillesse, une profonde insouciance, une naïve et charmante satisfaction animale, et, rassemblant ces sentiments divers, quelque chose comme l'expression la plus émouvante et la plus véridique de la tendresse humaine (Lévi-Strauss in Derrida 171).

Free from writing and science, Lévi-Strauss's Nambikwarans like Graffigny's Peruvians, enjoy a special kind of unspoiled happiness: in fact, they enjoy a special way of being altogether. Douthwaite points out that Graffigny's descriptions of the Golden Age of the Inca derived from Garcilaso de la Vega's popular account of Incan civilization Histoire des Incas (1539), (which was republished in French during the eighteenth century with great success), but she leaves out the bloody internecine conflicts and inter-subjective cruelties in a culture that she wants to be harmonious and Utopic until the Spanish invasion. The idealized version of the Golden Age of the Inca resembles Lévi-Strauss's perspective on the Nambikwarans: in both cases, there seems to be a harmony between the sexes and a "naïve et charmante satisfaction animale" that distinguish Europeans from non-Europeans.

The attribution of lack of writing to a society is for Derrida the ethnocentric gesture par excellence because it is based upon the most limited, ethnocentric notion of what writing is and could be.

A l'expression de 'société sans écriture' ne répondrait donc aucune réalité ni aucun concept. Cette expression relève de l'onirisme ethnocentrique, de l'écriture. Le mépris de l'écriture s'accomode fort de cet ethnocentrisme....Par un seul et même geste, on méprise l'écriture (alphabétique) instrument servile d'une parole rêvant sa plénitude et sa présence à soi, et l'on refuse la dignité d'écriture aux signes non alphabétique (161).

Implied in the false claim that the Nambikwarans are a society without writing is the idea that writing is servile to the spoken word. According to Graffigny, the Peruvians also lack writing: the *quipos* "leur tenaient lieu de l'écriture," the *quipos* stand in for writing, where writing is not, but they are not writing as such. The strange thing is, however, that Zilia's knotted letters are translatable into French. The *quipos* then *are* a form of writing that is nevertheless innocent of writing, a kind of non-inscriptive, non-alphabetic writing that remains somehow authentic to the spoken word. Peruvian "writing," at least, in Graffigny's version, seems to guarantee a greater level of inter-subjective authenticity. Derrida shows, with a precision that will be difficult to reproduce at length, how for Lévi-Strauss, follower of Rousseau, that lack of writing in the case of the Nambikwarans guaranteed for them a kind of presence to themselves ("une communauté immédiatement présente à elle-même) and that in such a conception of writing, "L'écriture y [in Tristes Tropiques] est définie la condition de l'*inauthenticité sociale*" (197). It is this kind of inauthenticity

that Zilia finds so reprehensible in the French: it is this inauthenticity that she tries to represent in *quipos*, that is in a system of "non-writing" to her lover Aza, who can nevertheless "read" her knots. This critique of French manners is evidence that it is possible, as Nancy K. Miller has argued, for *le roman sentimental* to be at the same time a novel of manners; Graffigny's novel certainly functions as both at the same time. For Zilia, Aza has stood for authenticity; she has been able to launch a critique of French manners because he had her educated according to a different system. Finding him unfaithful, she continues to live by the ethics of authenticity that he taught her and remains skeptical of French institutions, including the institution of marriage.

Graffigny cites Garcilaso de la Vega in her description of the *quipos*. *Quipos* were used to maintain mathematical records and keep track of harvests, rituals and the population. She is the one who transforms this system of record-keeping into writing. Graffigny's footnote to Zilia's first letter gives a detailed historical knowledge of the accounting and counting function of *quipos*,

Les quapas, ou les quipos leur [les Péruviens] tenaient lieu d'écrire. Des cordons de coton ou de boyau, auxquels d'autres cordons de différentes couleurs étaient attachés, leur rappelaient, par des noeuds placés de distance en distance, les choses dont ils voulaient se ressouvenir. Ils leur servaient d'annales, de codes, de rituels (Letter I).

This is slightly different from the description of *quipos* in the "Introduction Historique" published in the 1752 edition. In the "Introduction," the knot-

making system is described as an equivalent of writing for the Peruvians.⁹ In any case, it would seem that with Graffigny's fictional *quipos*, it is the distance between the knots that seem to function as lexical difference. The *quipos'* tactile nature and spatial configuration might have allowed them to be "read" with the hands and the eyes. Like Ariadne's thread, they might be used even when the eyes fail. They are not traces or inscriptions, but have three dimensions.

"Graffigny's text thus lends mimetic representational value to a medium that was essentially an arithmetic system of recording. Thanks to its scientific trappings, the Lettres d'une Péruvienne long enjoyed popularity as a source book on Peru, inspiring (and deceiving) later writers on Peruvian customs" (Douthwaite 136 n74). Graffigny's distortion and deceptions are interesting to us, however, insofar as they can tell us something about her ideas about writing. The *quipos* were made up of

[u]n grand nombre de petits cordons de différentes couleurs, dont les Indiens se servaient, au défaut de l'écriture, pour faire le paiement des troupes et le dénombrement du peuple. Quelques auteurs prétendent qu'ils s'en servaient aussi pour transmettre à la postérité les actions mémorables de leurs Incas (Graffigny Letter I n11).

Keeping records and accounts of great actions and communicating them to

⁹In 1752, Graffigny emphasizes the similarity between *quipos* and writing, contradicting in a certain sense, the 1747 version of *quipos* of the note to Letter I where the system of knotting "ten[ait] lieu d'écrire" for the Peruvians.

posterity allow Graffigny's version of *quipos* to function as a signifying medium "au défaut de l'écriture." In Graffigny's fiction, counting and accounts are transformed into writing and love letters by means of *quipos*. "Les finances, les comptes, les tributs, toutes les affaires, toutes les combinaisons étaient aussi aisément traités avec les *quipos* qu'ils auraient put l'être par l'usage de l'écriture" (13-14). Writing and exchanging love letters can be understood as a kind of bookkeeping, a balancing of books, as well as a sort of counting and accounting. Most importantly, writing love letters is a way of recounting and setting the record straight for posterity. This is of vital importance to writing women, for whom all other avenues of representation and self-representation were closed.

Debts of love between men and women are difficult to repay, as Valmont and Merteuil will find in the process of their deal making. Zilia's letters, like the Lettres portugaises (1669), are an account and an accounting of being wronged in love: it is by writing that the writer tries to settle accounts. Unfortunately, it seems that men and women practice different methods of bookkeeping (as Madame de Rosemonde is to warn the Présidente de Tourvel, the economy of desire and pleasure differs radically for men and women). In the Lettres portugaises, Mariane's last letter settles her debts with her addressee; she returns his presents, his portraits and the bracelets that he has given her along with his letters except for the last two which she resolves to read over and over again in order to remind herself of how her passion has been repaid by

such an unfaithful man. In Peggy Kamuf's reading of Lettres portugaises, she cites Mariane's last letter as a kind of settling of accounts. Mariane writes that being so young and always surrounded by disagreeable men, it was easy for her to be seduced by her lover's compliments which she believed put her in his debt because, according to her, "Il me semblait que je vous devais les charmes et la beauté que vous me trouviez et dont vous me faisiez apercevoir" (95).¹⁰ For Kamuf, Mariane cuts herself off from this system of exchange, "To break with this economy is to clear the way for another, one in which her woman's worth cannot be calculated in the terms of another's inflated discourse. Canceling the debt, Mariana concludes that the *chevalier*, took very little risk within the closure of the limited society which is the convent" (65). The problem with Zilia's situation is that the story does not end with the settlement of accounts with Aza. In fact, Déterville is the man whose style, the style of sentimentality, loyalty and authenticity become Zilia's. Style is not Aza, it is Déterville, a detour which becomes the final destination.

Déterville, the French aristocrat is a detour on the way to writing: he teaches Zilia her first words in French, his own name, the name of the country to which she is being brought, France. He also teaches her the phrases that Zilia repeats without knowing what she is saying, "oui, je vous aime," "je vous promets d'être à vous." Déterville has set a trap for Zilia: she says what he

¹⁰This citation refers to Lettres Portugaises, Lettres d'une péruvienne et autres romans d'amour par lettres. Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1983.

wants her to say, but with no consciousness of the meaning of such words. "L'éthique de la parole est le leurre de la présence maîtrisée. Comme la bricole, le leurre désigne d'abord un stratagème de chasseur..." (Derrida 1967: 201-202). What Déterville manages to lure into his trap is his own desire: his own desire for "la parole pleine," the full presence of Zilia's speech produces a ventriloquizing subject, an automaton, taught, or "programmed" to repeat words that are meaningless to it, meaningful only to its interlocutor. This automaton is the subject of absence, of "la parole vide," the subject of the trap. It presents to us an Other animated by our words. Derrida proposes an ethic that would address the trap of the *parole pleine* upon which he elaborates in the following manner, "Reconnaître l'écriture dans la parole, c'est-à-dire la différence et l'absence de la parole, c'est commencer à penser le leurre. Il n'y a pas d'éthique sans présence *de l'autre* mais aussi et par conséquent sans absence, dissimulation, détour, différence, écriture" (202). The presence of the other is announced by dissimulation, detour, writing. There is no ethic without this deferred and different other.

Déterville is only taken in for a time by the spectacle of Zilia parroting to him the words of love that he wants to hear from her. What Zilia utters is nonsense to her and meaningful to him: more intersubjectively wise than he perhaps wants to be, he finally abandons the game and lets Zilia learn to speak French so that she will know what she is saying and writing when she addresses him. This bad language lesson is Zilia's first detour on the way to the

French language. She utters her first words in French completely absent to her own speech. She does arrive, however, at mastery, despite being led into a trap: the trap however becomes the destination as she and Déterville find themselves bound to each other by debts of desire and friendship. Aza turns out to be an alibi for Zilia's sentimental education.

The relationship between love, writing and accounting in Lettres d'une péruvienne is fully evident in Letter XLVII: in this letter, Déterville writes to Céline upon his return to Paris from Malta in order to inform her of the latest developments with Zilia after she has learned of Aza's infidelity. Déterville expresses in the most violent terms, his unhappiness about Zilia's decision not to replace Aza with another in her heart. She, like Déterville in fact, can only love one person and he should understand this better than anyone else, having been himself a paragon of fidelity. The problem is, however, that Déterville can only love her and she can only love Aza. Déterville is overcome by the situation, "Ma chère soeur, que mon sort est cruel! Quelle est l'économie de ces âmes péruviennes?" (Letter XLII). Peruvian economy as we have seen is actually Déterville's economy: it is the economy of one for one with no possibility of replacements or substitutions. It is an ideal and implacable economy where the supplement, like the replacement has no place.¹¹ The double bind of this ethic of non-replacement goes as follows: if Zilia were to take him as her new lover

¹¹In the economy of the libertine, all women are equivalent and metonymical stand-ins for one another. The woman, for the libertine, is that which most replaceable.

and husband, Aza's replacement, she would be in fact betraying the Peruvian/Détervillean economy and her relationship of identity to that economy. This is one of two important double binds in which Zilia finds herself knotted: coming from a society innocent of writing, science and exploitation, she assumes writing as her primary and most cherished activity. She becomes a writer and, in doing so, becomes less "Peruvian." The "singularity of her style" however is what will free her from this bind: her style is the style of presence and a critical sensibility. (What Graffigny is able to do within this novel is to use the style of the *roman sentimental* in order to set up a critique of worldliness that one would only find in a novel of manners.)

Déterville is unhappy with the payment that his ardent passion receives from Zilia: the currencies of friendship and passion are not really commensurable. He is also plagued by the image of Zilia one day offering her passion to someone else, "Combien je serai malheureux si Zilia, qui ne paie le plus ardent amour que par le simple sentiment d'une amitié tranquille, parvient enfin à oublier l'infidèle Aza, et brûle un jour pour un autre que moi!" (192). Déterville is badly paid for not only his passion, but also for his efforts on Zilia's behalf, his devotion, his love and his fidelity. In the Peruvian/Détervillean economy, however, it would be venal to ask for correct payment: to the Peruvians, the system of exchange called money is perhaps what is most foreign of all.

Among the European things that Zilia cannot immediately identify are

money and the European systems of exchange. It is obvious that Zilia is greatly in Déterville's debt, but she will never be called to account. Like good aristocrats, they are both too delicate to be good at this kind of romantic accounting. The idealism of this economy is based most importantly on the forgetting of debts. (This certainly would not be a surprising fantasy to find inscribed in the work of a debt-ridden writer like Graffigny who was constantly at the mercy of her patrons and lived in a state of genteel poverty until the popular success of this novel was able to help her settle accounts of her own).

Despite the fact that *quipos* were used to keep accounts and that they are used to calculate payment of the army's salary, Graffigny later suppresses this aspect of Peru in order that Zilia will remain innocent of money. Zilia seems to have had no idea of the notion of exchange before coming into contact with Europeans. Her financial naïveté is further accentuated by her outrage that in France writers have to sell their ideas. Zilia herself has knotted prodigious amounts, enough to make up half a book: but her knots are somehow very different from the writing and the books of the Europeans. Her knots record not so much knowledge as sentiment and the expression of such sentiment takes place with a naturalness and an ease that does not exist when sentiment is expressed in anything but love letters. Peruvian is the language of presence (and "la parole pleine"), and *quipos* the non-writing that most effectively transmits that presence: when she writes in French, she begins to assume the style of that language and although her writing is still expressive, Graffigny

manages to produce an evolution of restraint in the style of Zilia's letters. What Zilia manages to translate, however, from *quipos* to writing is authenticity.

This subtle evolution of style is perhaps, one of the most important "events" that the novel is able to describe. In Zilia's first letter she describes the process of recording the story of Aza's and her love for one another,

A mesure que je travaillais, l'entreprise me paraissait moins difficile: de moment en moment, cet amas innombrable de cordons devenait sous mes doigts une peinture fidèle de nos actions et de nos sentiments, comme il était autrefois l'interprète de nos pensées, pendant les longues intervalles que nous passions sans nous voir (Letter I).

From a confused mass of countless cords, Zilia is able to paint a faithful picture of her and her lover's sentiments. She is knotting, writing, even painting immediacy. It is in the temple, hard at work at the *quipos* the morning that she is taken prisoner by the Spanish. She is interrupted, all alone at her "writing." (Seeking solitude, like other writers, she wants to take advantage of the morning silence of the temple in order to render "immortelle l'histoire de notre amour et de notre bonheur" (Letter I).

The limits of writing

Nancy K. Miller calls Graffigny's heroine ambitious. Ambition here has to do with this ambiguous activity of knotting that eventually becomes writing. Zilia serves her apprenticeship to writing with *quipos*, but transforms writing through her uniquely Peruvian style, the style of presence and authenticity. At

the very outset of the novel, Zilia takes it upon herself to give an account of her love, to paint the true and the immortal picture of her lovers and her acts and feelings. She has decided that she is going to be the author of Aza's and her love story. She is a writer in *quipos*, so she is not going to write books: there are no such thing as books of *quipos*, but she is going to keep records in a signifying system that embodies pure presence. She is, however, on her way to authorship: it is a violent passage, one during which she is plucked from her home and brought to a land of foreigners, but she manages to arrive at writing in the end. She has regained the solitude of the early morning in the temple in the form of a country house with a good library in France.

Interrupted at her *quipos* by the Spanish sack of the temple in which she has lived her entire virginal life, she is kidnapped, but manages to keep the precious *quipos* with her. They begin to function for her as life line, they are the only things that connect her to another person, the Other, Aza:

ces noeuds qui frappent mes sens, semble donner plus de réalité à mes pensées; la sorte de ressemblance que j'imagine qu'ils ont avec les paroles me fait une illusion qui trompe ma douleur: je crois te parler, te dire que je t'aime, t'assurer de mes vœux, de ma tendresse; cette douce erreur est mon bien et ma vie (Letter IV).

The *quipos* have a resemblance to words, but are not words. The *quipos* allow Zilia to express sentiments and record actions, but not necessarily in words. She captures sentiments and records actions in knots. The knots are close

enough however, to words that they can be translated into French. The *quipos* produce a "douce erreur" in their resemblance to "les paroles": this illusory effect produced by the knots is on the order of the Derridean supplement, close to, but not "les paroles," they produce what Derrida calls "auto-affection" the process by which the writer produces effects and affect upon and in the self during the process of writing. Derrida uses this term to describe the relationship between Rousseau's writing and his compulsive onanism and describes that both processes are about creating the effect of presence in the absence of the Other.

Zilia begins her project of recording the story of her love for Aza, and his love for her as a supplement to their relationship; it is an additional activity, outside of seeing him, speaking with him and being with him, that ties her more closely to her betrothed: this supplemental activity can be easily understood in terms that Derrida uses to describe Rousseau's work. "Le supplément s'ajoute, il est un surplus, une plénitude enrichissante une autre plénitude, le comble de la présence. il cumule et accumule la présence" (208). Zilia is seeking to accumulate Aza's present-ness; his presence is hoarded in her *quipos*. The supplemental cumulative presence of Aza becomes all that she possesses of her lover, however, when she is finally separated from him: this separation is a violent tearing away, a kidnapping. Knotting the *quipos* fully assumes the Derridean status of writing because it emerges as result of an interruption in presence that takes place as a violent absence, from which the urgency of

writing emerges,

quand la parole échoue à protéger la présence, l'écriture devient nécessaire. Elle doit d'urgence s'ajouter au verbe....l'écriture s'y ajoute, s'y adjoint comme une image ou une représentation ...C'est l'addition d'une technique, c'est une sorte de ruse artificielle et artificieuse pour rendre la parole présente lorsqu'elle est en vérité absente...(1971:207-208).

The knotting of the *quipos* is already about the absence of Aza, but it is when Zilia is torn from the temple, doubly absented from Aza that the writing really begins. Zilia's letters to Aza can be interpreted as supplementary to the primary, absent text, the monumental and violently interrupted and unwritten one that was to have immortalized the story of their love. Zilia's letters are representations of the failure of the "parole" and they are a constant invocation and evocation of the absent lover. For Zilia, they produce a sweet and unsatisfying illusion, a ghostly presence. She uses the *quipos* to call up the absent one. They are a ruse and a technique; the *quipos* are a figure of writing itself.

The paradoxical nature of this knotting that resembles writing but is not writing, this figurative writing, can perhaps be further clarified by a brief look at the part of Lacan's seminar Encore (1975) that is called "Ronds de ficelle." "Ronds de ficelle" comes toward the end of the seminar that was held between 1972 and 1973, that is, relatively late in Lacan's career and five years after the

events of May 1968 during a period of time in Lacan's work when he was becoming more and more preoccupied with what the historian of psychoanalysis Elisabeth Roudinesco has called the "hyperlogical" theoretical approach of the mathemes. Lacan explains at the beginning of "Ronds de ficelle" that

La formalisation mathématique est notre but, notre idéal. Pourquoi? -- parce que seule elle est mathème, c'est-à-dire capable de se transmettre intégralement. La formalisation mathématique, c'est de l'écrit, mais qui ne subsiste que si j'emploie à le présenter la langue dont j'use....nulle formalisation de la langue n'est transmissible sans l'usage de la langue elle-même (1975:108).

Mathematical formalization is of writing, but it is not writing. It is only transmissible within the use of language itself. The mathemes are a complex Lacanian system which it will not be our project to explore in depth. "Ronds de ficelle" offers us, in addition to Derrida's, a theoretical perspective on a system that is an approximation of writing, but is nevertheless, a not-writing.

Lacan wanted his mathemes to support the core of his teaching and the quintessentially psychoanalytic insight: "que je parle sans le savoir. Je parle avec mon corps, et ceci sans le savoir. Je dis donc toujours plus que je n'en sais" (1975:108). This is one version of the contemporary revision of the *cogito* whose contradictions permitted La Mettrie to challenge its coherence on the basis of the involuntary nature of reflexes and other functions of the

organism. La Mettrie believed that reason would provide complete explanations for these functions and those operations and to a great degree, modern science has come up with answers.

I always say more than I know: no longer is saying commensurable with knowing. In the Derridean ethic, this kind of saying more than one knows implicates the trap, the "leurre" that is implied in the spoken word. "Le style, c'est l'homme-même" says more than it knows. It says in addition, "Le style, c'est l'homme à qui on s'adresse." As we saw earlier in the case of La Princesse de Clèves, the classical novel, we find intimations of the unconscious, the more than we know. It is the princesse's body that speaks the more than she knows when she trips over her skirt: Zilia's "unconscious" is not so elegantly sketched out in Lettres d'une Péruvienne. The sentimentality of Graffigny's epistolary novel tries to guarantee that this heroine's interior life is completely transparent to her as well as to her readers.

Zilia is enormously sure of herself and she seems to know what she "says" just as she seems to know what she wants. Despite the fact that she has led an isolated life as a virgin in the temple of the Sun, she seems astonishingly little in need of a sentimental education. Her confidence and steadfastness can be attributed to her high rank among Peruvians: she has the self-assuredness of an aristocrat and the moral outlook of a bourgeois. Her critique of worldly society, however, is firmly rooted in the outsider's view, the view of the bourgeois that Rousseau would elaborate upon with great

vehemence in the future. The critique is the critique of social inauthenticity, of which writing as we saw was one of the conditions. By the the mid-eighteenth century, French aristocratic behavior had already been greatly influenced by a bourgeois sensibility and this influence mostly manifested itself in the eighteenth century cult of sentimentality, but aristocratic practices would be subject to ever harsher attacks throughout the century, culminating in the critique to end all critiques, the Revolution itself.

The emptiness of social forms and the hypocrisy of social behaviors is described in Letter XXXII of Graffigny's novel and this description culminates in a reference to dolls and marionettes and obliquely to automata. The French are doll-like beings with an impoverished inner life, they act in a completely externally motivated manner. (By the French here, we are meant to understand the worldly aristocrats that Zilia meets through Déterville and his family).

Tels à peu près que certains jouets de leur enfance, imitation informe des êtres pensants, ils ont du poids aux yeux, de la légèreté au tact; la surface colorée, un intérieur informe; un prix apparent, aucune valeur réelle. Aussi ne sont-ils guère estimés par les autres nations, que comme les jolies bagatelles le sont dans la société. Heureuse la nation qui n'a que la nature pour guide, la vérité pour principe, et la vertu pour premier mobile (Letter XXXII).

The French have perfected the art of not appearing what they are: this description of the falseness of social beings echoes Madame de Chartres's

warnings to her daughter about life at court, but the difference between the moral landscapes of La Princesse de Clèves and Graffigny's novel is that there is a utopia of virtue in the eighteenth century work. There is a happy nation over which "nature," "truth" and "virtue" rule: exotic Peru. The French, in comparison, are imitations of thinking beings, that is human beings: their appearance is pure deception. The doll and the marionette, as variations upon the automaton, become figures for inauthenticity and, specifically here, the dissimulations of worldliness. Graffigny's dolls manage to look heavy and substantial to the eye but are light when actually handled: they are truly virtuosic objects of deception. Their surfaces are seductive, but their interiors are hopelessly deficient in both form and content. Zilia emphasizes the emphasis of feminine comportment and the demand for an appearance of virtue without an education in virtue. Women are trapped in the world of appearances, "Règler les mouvements du corps, arranger ceux du visage, composer l'extérieur, sont les points essentiels de l'éducation. C'est sur les attitudes plus ou moins gênants de leurs filles que les parents se glorifient de les avoir bien élevées" (Letter XXXIV).

Graffigny's critique of the social forms of worldliness ironically inherits a great deal from seventeenth century writers like Fénelon who wanted a moral reform of the aristocracy in order to close its ranks to those bourgeois who imitated the manners of the aristocracy and were admitted into the salons of the précieuses. Carolyn Lougee in her historical study of the significance of the

debates concerning women in and around the seventeenth century salon, Le Paradis des Femmes (1976), shows how it was anti-feminists like Fénelon and Aubignac who wanted to stop the mixing of bourgeois and aristocrats in the salons of the *précieuses*. These women believed that culture and refinement and the adoption of worldly manners earned a person entry into elite circles no matter what his or her social class. In seventeenth-century France, women were the dominant arbiters of taste in the salons and determined the parameters of social refinement. Lougee argues that those who were against the mixing of classes were against the worldliness of the *précieuses* and accused them of moral deficiencies. "There was widespread agreement that the salons were merely elegant brothels. Women bartered their bodies for social advancement" (Lougee 79). The salons then were scandalous places where women could act on erotic and ambitious desires and where refined and ambitious bourgeois mixed with nobles. Graffigny would agree with Fénelon on the moral depravity of the worldly environment: her proposed reformation would be based upon a credo of virtue based on sensibility and sentimentality.

Lougee reminds us that Nicolas Boileau described in his satires a nobility in moral decay: for him the bourgeois was the virtuous one who should stay away from aristocratic practices. For Boileau, the bourgeois who imitated the *mondain* was only compromising himself: virtue was the property of the "roturier." When we see Zilia's critique of worldly society in the context of seventeenth century predecessors, we come to understand that Graffigny had

set her heroine up as a bourgeois critic of unethical worldliness and that her "solid virtue" was based on bourgeois principles. On the other hand, Déterville's moral steadfastness has to do with the fact that he seems to be a member of the oldest part of the French aristocracy, the *noblesse d'épée* which had seen its power progressively undermined during the changes which took place in the constitution of the aristocracy under Louis XIV's regime of ennoblements. Déterville is a soldier, not a courtier; he is a man of action and integrity and this is actually consistent with the most conservative of seventeenth century views on social hierarchy.

The seventeenth-century critiques of worldliness which influenced Graffigny's critique are both for class stratification and anti-feminist, that is anti-salon in nature. For Graffigny, the realm of feminine virtue however, does not lie in marriage. Aubignac was especially enthusiastic about the moral corrections provided for women by marriage. Zilia will not run a salon, nor will she get married: she has no worldly ambition, but she will be the arbiter of behavior and taste in her household. She will preside over her dominion in much the same way as Rousseau's Julie presides over Clarens. This leaves Graffigny right in the middle of the scenarios envisioned by seventeenth century feminists and anti-feminists in their debate about the role of women. The *précieuses* according to Lougee were for marriages of convenience and extra-marital affairs and an active life in society for intelligent, engaging aristocratic women; the anti-feminists, bourgeois and noble alike, saw marriage as the only destination

of the virtuous woman. Graffigny's Zilia tries to avoid both society and marriage; this eighteenth century variation on feminine destiny offers the heroine the company of her suitor Déterville, but as a sublimated lover, a friend in a situation that would seem to safeguard both of them from the denatured passion of jealousy, a passion based on the exchangeability of one love for another.

Tied to the Other

Lacan's Borromean knots are illustrations of how the subject is tied both to the other and the system of signification at the same time and in such a way that if one of the connections is broken, the other undoes itself as well. Zilia's knots keep her tied to Aza and when she runs out of them, she continues to loop one letter into another, one letter after another, even writing to him in a language he cannot understand. The reception of the letters seems to be from the first unimportant to their being written. When she is writing Letter XXX to Aza, he is on his way to France. Zilia writes letters to Aza in order to write; it would be imprecise and too simplifying to say that Zilia writes for herself. She writes letters to an impossible Other, but her letters always arrive at their destination in the strictly Lacanian sense of arrival. For Lacan, a letter always arrives at its destination because it is not addressed to a discreet Other, it is aimed at the signifying network, the Symbolic Order itself. In Graffigny's novel as in Lettres portugaises, it is not important if the letters are received because the letters are a chain, connected to each other like the *ronds de ficelle*,

assuring a relationship with the Other by means of a connection to the symbolic order. When a woman writes, no one can predict how her letters will be received. She writes for the sake of writing then because her addressees are not receiving her letters, or receiving them unsympathetically.

At the end of the seminar "Ronds de Ficelle," Lacan explains in his typically elliptical way that his long exposition on knots and knotting has something to do with the *objet a*. Although it is not my intention to embark on a digression on the *objet a*, the way in which Lacan arrives there is of interest to us in terms of Graffigny's heroine and Graffigny's novel. Pourquoi ai-je fait intervenir dans l'ancien temps le noeud borroméen? C'était pour traduire la formule *je te demande - quoi - de refuser - quoi? - ce que je t'offre - pourquoi? - parce que ce n'est pas ça - ça, vous savez ce que c'est, c'est l'objet a*. (Lacan 114). In both the letters of Mariane and Zilia, a structure is set up by which what they offer in their letters, their love, their souls, attempts to contain the "everything" that they want to give their respective lovers, addressees of the letters that must be refused, "return to sender." The everything that is offered is not that important thing, the *objet a*, "de l'objet qui viendrait satisfaire la jouissance -- laquelle serait alors la *Lustbefriedigung* supposée" (114). The absolute terms of Zilia's offer (she gives everything of herself forever to Aza) is here *objet a*: this is the style of Zilia's love. Everything, however, is never enough.

In Letter XXXIV, Zilia is most vehemently critical of French attitudes

towards women (this is where Graffigny is widely recognized as giving voice to her most feminist ideas). The Peruvian compares the French treatment of women with Peruvian ones. It is here most obvious that Graffigny's Peru is nothing more or less than a fictional Utopia of refined sensibility in which the rule of "nature" as repository of transcendent virtue is guaranteed. Lougee has remarked that the seventeenth century *précieuse* believed that women were morally superior because of their physical weakness and frailty and should be respected as such. In this letter Zilia echoes such views,

Si je n'étais assurée que bientôt tu pourras en juger par toi-même, oserais-je te peindre des contrastes que la simplicité de nos esprits peut à peine concevoir? Docile aux notions de la nature, notre génie ne va pas au-delà; nous avons trouvé que la force et le courage dans un sexe indiquaient qu'il devait être le soutien et le défenseur de l'autre; nos lois y sont conformes. Ici, loin de compatir à la faiblesse des femmes, celles du peuple, accablées du travail, n'en sont soulagées ni par les lois, ni par leurs maris; celles d'un rang plus élevé, jouets de la séduction ou de la méchanceté des hommes, n'ont, pour se dédommager de leurs perfidies, que les dehors d'un respect purement imaginaire, toujours suivi de la plus mordante satire (Letter XXXIII).

I cite this letter at length in order first, to show that this fictional Peru is a Utopia of femininity in which the weaker sex is by law dispensed of hard labor. Secondly, I would like to emphasize the fact that Zilia addresses Aza as one

who would share her critical assessment of French, since he, as Peruvian, belongs to a society in which women are accorded due respect. Zilia attempts to knit or knot a complicity with Aza that would unite the two of them, male and female, in a perfect relationship of love and respect. Harmony between the sexes exists in the non-European culture. The lack of respect offered to French women of the upper classes makes them "jouets de séduction." In relations between the sexes, women are party to an extremely bad deal. In exchange for the perfidies of men, they are compensated with the appearance of respect that conceals what always follows -- the greatest contempt.

Peru is a place free of such contradictions in attitudes towards women: virtue is guaranteed by a respect for "nature." Despite all this, Aza trades in Peruvian virtue for Christian piety whereas Zilia remains faithful to being "Peruvian": this asymmetry is typical of the structure of betrayal. What is unusual is that Zilia's remains faithfully attached to a vaguely incestuous union. Zilia writes to Déterville that "Cet Aza, l'objet de tant d'amour, n'est plus le même Aza que je vous ai peint avec de couleurs si tendres" (Letter XXXVII). The Aza that she meets is no longer the Aza that she described, the Aza that she addressed. The object of so much love does not live up to his representational and interlocutory reputation.

Le cruel Aza n'a conservé, de la candeur de nos moeurs que le respect pour la vérité, dont il fait un si funeste usage. Séduit par les charmes d'une jeune Espagnole, prêt à s'unir avec elle, il n'a consenti à venir en

France que pour se dégager de la foi qu'il m'avait jurée, que pour ne me laisser aucun doute sur ses sentiments...(Letter XXXVIII).

Aza has finally shown himself to be not only radically different from what Zilia imagined him to be, but from Zilia herself. Happy to convert to Christianity, he also rejects what Zilia has to offer: he answers the demand of the *ronds de ficelle* that Lacan describes as, *je te demande de refuser ce que je t'offre parce que ce n'est pas ça*. What Zilia has to offer is in her own absolute terms, her heart, her self, her life, "...c'est en vain qu'il me rend à moi-même, mon coeur est à lui; il y sera jusqu'à la mort. Ma vie lui appartient, qu'il me la ravisse et qu'il m'aime..." (Letter XXXV). But her heart, her self, her life are exactly what Aza has no use of because he has already broken his word and extricated himself from his promise. What Zilia offers is her belief in the power of promises.

Zilia writes Aza a chain of letters, hoping to secure him to her. Lacan describes the *rond de ficelle* as representative of the unity of One: the *rond de ficelle* is also a link in a chain, a thing that encloses a hole and defines a specific absence. When Aza in Paris, the letters to him cease, the chain is broken. Zilia's aspirations as a writer of letters are a set up: a set up for the other's treason. Constituting her heroine as a woman possessing "both an erotic and an ambitious wish" in the words of Nancy K. Miller, Graffigny shows that the greatest privilege of authorship has to do with the ability to go wrong. Zilia's mistake in thinking Aza different from what he revealed himself

to be does not prove to be fatal. Graffigny thus tries to construct a narrative in which the significance of the *faux pas* (a single, fatal mistake) is revised for the heroine. Zilia has immediate recourse to the faithful Détéville, who waits in the wings, or on Malta to return and play the role of friend. The regime of virtue and sensibility are triumphant at the end. This novel represents the triumph of sensibility and a life outside of worldliness and worldly practices. The fate of the doll-like courtier, the automaton as worldly, artificial person is avoided and the inner life is affirmed in a thoroughly respectable setting where Zilia has regained the solitude that she sought that morning in Peru when she found refuge in the stillness of temple, only to be so violently torn from the space of writing. The restitution of her Incan treasures restores to her the possibility of narrating her story: alone.

Chapter Thre

"L'Homme-Machine: La Mettrie's Machine at Work"

The Soul and the Machine

A discussion of La Mettrie will allow us to understand Graffigny's novel as playing a role in the triumph of a certain kind of secular inner life based on the cultivation of sensibility rather than faith. In my reading of La Mettrie's L'Homme Machine (1747), I would like to argue that the author constructs man's relationship to his body through metaphor and that the figuration of the human body as machine is at the heart of La Mettrie's materialism. The *homme-machine* is not the automaton, but the automaton is an incarnation of the man-machine. La Mettrie's argues for the machine as a figure for understanding the human organism. By the seventeenth century, the principles of morphological resemblances upon which late medieval and Renaissance medicine depended in conceiving of the human organism had been replaced by a greater degree of abstraction. Conceptions of the body and its functions became increasingly complex.

In the field of history of philosophy, Ann Thomson warns against taking La Mettrie's text too literally (367). She argues that La Mettrie was not proposing to either construct a mechanical man or take apart the human organism like a machine. "Au lieu donc de décrire un homme mécanique, il veut

simplement démontrer la possibilité d'expliquer l'être humain par la seule matière. Pour le reste, il ne s'agit nullement de prétendre construire un modèle de cet être matériel, d'en démonter les ressorts" (375). Would it not be possible to conceive a reading that would take into account the fact that La Mettrie did in fact try to describe a mechanical "man" while at the same time arguing for the possibility of explaining human beings by means of "la seule matière?" It seems that Thomson may go too far in arguing for this kind of purely metaphorical reading of the concept of the *homme-machine*. Although La Mettrie does not go into great detail in his description of mechanical man, using for the most part mechanics as an illustrative metaphor, he does understand the body as machine. Eighteenth-century chemistry did not give him the tools to generate a different model. According to La Mettrie, the brain is "un ressort principal de toute la Machine, qui a une influence visible sur tous les autres, et même paroît avoir été fait le premier....Le corps n'est qu'un horloge" (105).¹ In a sense, by locating the brain as the "ressort principal," La Mettrie is trying to show that the l'homme-machine is in some sense, "démontable."

From a literary point of view, one can appreciate Thomson's efforts to emphasize the figurative aspects of La Mettrie's text. Nevertheless, if

¹All citations of L'Homme-machine are taken from La Mettrie's Oeuvres Philosophiques published by the Libraire Arthème Fayard, 1987. This is the most recent re-edition of the only edition of his Oeuvres Philosophiques that was published during La Mettrie's lifetime in 1751 in London. L'Homme-machine was published by Elie Luzac in Leiden in 1748 and immediately banned. Aram Vartanian published a critical edition of this text in 1961 in the form of L'Homme-machine: a study in the origins of an idea.

"l'homme-machine" is to be understood as *only* metaphorical, this does not prevent us from considering the attempts of eighteenth-century engineers like Jacques Vaucanson to construct replicas of the human and animal organisms as incompatible with La Mettrie's project. In fact, La Mettrie's uses a comparison of Vaucanson's automata to illustrate the different levels of complexity that can exist when comparing the human organism with simpler organisms like animals:

...s'il a fallu plus d'art à Vaucanson pour faire son *Fluteur*, que pour son *Canard*, il eût dû en employer encore davantage pour faire un *Parleur*; Machine qui ne peut plus être regardée comme impossible, surtout entre les mains d'un nouveau Prométhée.....Je ne me trompe point; le corps humain est une horloge, mais immense, et construite avec tant d'artifice et d'habileté, que si la roue qui sert à marquer ses secondes vient à s'arrêter; celle des minutes tourne et va toujours son train...(109-110).

If La Mettrie hails Vaucanson's accomplishments - the construction of three elaborate automata, two android musicians and one duck - as being "Promethean," he must see some value and importance in constructing mechanical replicas of organisms. That Vaucanson succeeded so well in creating mechanical wonders that imitated human and animal organism seems to prove La Mettrie's point that organisms are governed by very complex laws, like the laws of mechanics, that can be studied and discovered. The revealing of this secret is like the human acquisition of fire: for La Mettrie, the

possibilities presented by replicating human and animal organisms in automata are prodigious. Vaucanson's success proves above all, that while different levels of complexity define the range of animals and human beings, animal and human organism exist nevertheless on a continuum.

S'il [La Mettrie] utilise des arguments différents, son but reste le même: une explication purement matérielle des facultés intellectuelles en rapprochant l'homme de l'animal. Voilà ce qui compte, et non pas la «thèse de l'homme-machine» qui d'ailleurs n'est pas une thèse mais une métaphore (Thomson 369).

If Thomson's attempt to differentiate "la «thèse de l'homme-machine»" from the metaphor of the "l'homme-machine" seems confusing, this may be a result of the fact that the eighteenth-century thinker couched his thesis in metaphorical terms, as in, for example "le corps est une horloge."

L'Homme-Machine is primarily preoccupied with dispelling metaphysical notions of the relationship between soul and body by means of a discussion of the involuntary functioning of the nervous system. La Mettrie's insight into involuntary functions are garnered from very basic biological research that was being done in the eighteenth century by scientists like Haller to whom L'Homme Machine is dedicated. Haller was not appreciative of being cited in highly flattering terms in a text considered to be entirely heretical, but we have here an example of the mischief that La Mettrie did not hesitate to make. (He knew Haller to be a devout man; he also sincerely admired his work.) He wanted to

show that the refusal to compare man to animal/machine is a refusal of an analogical relationship and is pious and has no basis in empirical evidence. La Mettrie tries to prove by means of involuntary movement, that the body can function in the absence of the "soul" and that there must be something inherent in the mechanical functioning of the anatomy of the organism itself that causes its movements. For La Mettrie, it was necessary to understand that scientists could study the organism, the source of its movements and ailments and in doing so take it apart like a very complicated machine. The refusal to compare man and machine has recourse to absolute difference while the bringing together of man and machine takes place as a rhetorical gesture of comparison. Man can be like a machine and a machine can be like a man. In this kind of comparison, a relationship of analogical rather than absolute difference is established between what man (or human is) from what "he" is not.

By using the machine as a model of the human, La Mettrie establishes an analogy between organism and machine in order to theorize, justify and call for the continuation of scientific investigation and he disposes of the question of Cartesian dualism by insisting upon the continuity, that is the undifferentiability of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. For La Mettrie, the rejection of this Cartesian idea was a condition of being an enlightened thinker. According to Aram Vartanian, in his study La Mettrie's L'Homme Machine: Studies in the Origins of an idea (1960)

La Mettrie's originality lies in his offering the correlation between mental and physiological states as empirically sufficient to validate the *homme machine* as a comprehensive psychological theory....The degree of truth claimed for the man-machine concept turns out on examination to be hypothetical. It expresses a *modus cognoscendi* designed to promote scientific inquiry, rather than any ultimate knowledge about the nature of things (14).

In addition, the Cartesian system can be differentiated from La Mettrie's in one additional way: Descartes's theories do not function as hypotheses and are almost completely useless in terms of modern science whereas the hypothetical analogy of "l'homme-machine" is still one that preoccupies us today. Descartes's system, however, set the parameters for La Mettrie's. In a sense the eighteenth-century *philosophe* is fighting an unfair battle with his predecessor because he is armed with the newest discoveries of the young science of biology of which Descartes was not aware.

La Mettrie's L'Homme-machine emerges from a tradition of diagnostic medicine in post-Renaissance Europe that was intimately connected to the practice of physiognomy. Physiognomy posited an invisible interiority that was always imprinting itself on a visible exterior. By the sixteenth century, according to Jean-Jacques Courtine and Claudine Haroche in their work, physiognomy demonstrated an increasingly sharp awareness that "man" was divided in two, "il [l'homme] est tout à la fois invisible et visible, homme

intérieur et homme extérieur." (42-43) Physiognomy, as it was derived from the Ancients via the Arabs in sixteenth century Europe, was an attempt to establish a relationship between the soul and the body that would render the two transparent to one another by means of a master code. Renaissance physiognomists believed that the soul "wrote" on the body, or rather imprinted its traces on the organism's surfaces. These traces were like writing insofar as they were decipherable to the initiated and almost infinite in their various combinations.

La physiognomie antique fait ainsi du rapport entre l'âme et le corps une relation entre le dedans et le dehors, le profond et le superficiel, l'occulte et le manifeste, le moral et le physique, le contenu et le contenant, la passion et la chair, la cause et l'effet. L'homme possède deux faces, dont l'une échappe au regard: la physiognomie veut y suppléer en tissant un réseau serré d'équivalences entre le détail des surfaces et les profondeurs occultes du corps. La science des passions est une science de l'invisible (42).

According to Courtine and Haroche, the study of physiognomy was obsessed with preventing the possibility of dissimulation and deception that was created by distance between the visible and the invisible parts of man. Physiognomy was an art of unveiling the other and reading his face as if it were an open book, of decrypting the signs of his interiority that were imprinted upon the surfaces of the body. It was more and more necessary to read the face of the

other because the practice of disciplining and homogenizing the expressions of the face and body became more and more widespread between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries (17-18). In the intrigues of court life, a system of reading the surfaces of the other was absolutely. Louis XIV consulted his doctor Marin Cureau de la Chambre about his choice of courtiers because Cureau was a famed physiognomist.

In an environment where civility and *bienséance* were obeyed in the arrangement of the countenance and every gesture of the body, it was all the more necessary to be able to dissect the character of courtiers and other members of the court by means of traits that the individuals in question could not control. During the *l'âge classique* an ambivalent formation arose around the problem of comportment: on the one hand, there was the desire for transparence as manifested by a renewed interest in physiognomy and treatises on physiognomy and, on the other hand, there was an obsession with codification of behavior as manifested in the growing numbers of manuals on the rules of civility (Courtine and Haroche 36).

It has been discussed in a number of places, by a number of thinkers from Norbert Elias to Michel Foucault, that the codes governing human social behavior became increasingly internalized in post-Medieval Europe and that the discipline of the self was all the more stringent for this internalization. Elias quotes Lafayette's La Princesse de Clèves in his The Civilizing Process (1939) as an example of internalization of discipline. The prince de Clèves, upon

learning of his wife's love for another man, decides to trust to her conscience the regulation of her actions, "De l'humeur dont vous êtes, en vous laissant votre liberté, je vous donne des bornes plus étroites que je ne pourrais vous en prescrire" (Lafayette 128). What is guaranteed here, is the internalized nature of prescriptions and prohibitions. Elias emphasizes that in fact greater liberty between the sexes evolved in the court societies of Europe, there emerged an increasingly refined degree of self-discipline in those circles (Elias 184-185). The practice of self-discipline became increasingly the subject of treatises, pamphlets and books: the written word became the place where the secrets of this self-discipline might be learned.² The discourses and descriptions of interiority and authenticity took on a greater and greater charge as discipline became more and more internalized.

It is also by means of texts like Erasmus's De civilitate morum that a stage in the civilizing process is marked. As social proscriptions were "communicated" through writing, they were also increasingly internalized: what went on inside the body, feelings "mouvements," organic functions (excretions and secretions) had to be increasingly controlled. "La figure humaine, entre le XVIe et le XVIIIe siècle, s'autonomise et se rationalise: dans le même temps elle devient plus intérieur, se socialisant et s'individualisant à la fois" (Courtine and Haroche 53). This process of autonomization and rationalization of the self can

²Roger Chartier has described in his Lecteurs et lectures dans la France d'ancien régime (1987) the role manuals of civility played in pre-revolutionary France.

be figured by mechanization and the automaton is the result of such a mechanics of the self.

La Mettrie set out to found the representation of interiority upon anatomy rather than metaphysics. This interiority was the space that La Mettrie sought to represent by means of an image of immensely complex machinery. In the following passage from L'Homme-machine, La Mettrie argues his point with characteristic irony,

L'expérience et l'observation doivent donc seules nous guider ici. Elles se trouvent sans nombre dans les Fastes de Medecins, qui ont été Philosophes, et non dans le Philosophes, qui n'ont pas été Médecins. Ceux-ci ont parcouru, ont éclairé le Labyrinthe de l'Homme; ils nous ont seuls dévoilé ces ressorts cachés sous des enveloppes, qui dérobent à nos yeux tant de merveilles (66).

La Mettrie continues to argue against the fanaticism of theologians who, without any kind of experience or observation, try to speculate on the nature of the human in total ignorance of the "Mécanisme des Corps." Doctors (médecins) who are philosophers are the best guides in the labyrinth of the organism; theologians, fanatics have gotten lost in it. This Dedalic image of the interior of the body illustrates its awe-inspiring complexity, its secrecy and obscurity. If the interior of the body is a labyrinth however, it is one that can be mastered by the médecin/philosophe. This labyrinth-machine that is man is "si composée, qu'il est impossible de s'en faire d'abord une idée claire, et

conséquemment de la définir" (66). La Mettrie continues to use images of enormous complexity in order to illustrate the relationship between the *medecin/philosophe* and the space he sets out to explore. The metaphysicians who sought to arrive at an idea of the human organism on the "ailes de l'Esprit" failed. La Mettrie insists that it is only by means of the organs of the body that one can reach, not at the essence of man's nature, but only, cautiously and modestly, "le plus grand degré de probabilité sur ce sujet" (66). We are exhorted in this project to take up the "bâton de l'expérience" for to be blind, "et croire pouvoir se passer de ce bâton, c'est le comble de l'aveuglement" (67). The wings of the spirit have left metaphysicians stranded in ignorance. There will be no flying for science, only a kind of feeling one's way through unknown terrain with the help of the "bâton": groping, we shall arrive at a model of greatest probability. It is only by assuming blindness and relying on experience through experimentation that the very earthbound *medecin/philosophe* feels his way through the labyrinth of biology and anatomy.

In order to prove the power of anatomy to determine the state of one's mind or soul, the *philosophe* uses the example of sexual difference to prove that a difference in the construction of the body produces a difference in character. In trying to construct a more or less scientific proof, La Mettrie falls into one the most ideologically charged areas of his day: the absolute and inequitable assymetry of sexual difference. "Nous pensons, et même nous ne sommes honnêtes Gens, que comme nous gais, tout braves; tout dépend de la

manière dont notre Machine est montée" (71). Extreme hunger and pregnancy are two corporeal states that La Mettrie describes as having character deforming powers.

L'Ame suit les progrès du corps, comme ceux de l'Éducation. Dans le beau sexe, l'Ame suit encore la délicatesse du tempérament: de là cette tendresse, cette affection, ces sentiments vis plutôt fondés sur la passion, que sur la raison....L'Homme, au contraire, dont le cerveau et les nerfs participent de la fermeté de tous les solides, a l'esprit ainsi que les traits du visage, plus nerveux: l'Éducation, dont manquent les femmes, ajoute encore de nouveaux degrés de force à son ame. Avec de tels secours de la Nature et de l'art, comment ne seroit-il pas plus reconnoissant, plus généreux, plus constant en amitié, plus ferme dans l'adversité? (71-72).

The soul is influenced both by the body and by "Éducation" thus accounting for the difference in men and women. Women who are deprived of education have greater strength of soul: their souls follow the delicacy of their temperament and make them more susceptible to passion and less susceptible to the influence of reason. The quality of male nerves and the male brain is different from female nerves and brain: this accounts for the difference in facial traits. This account of sexual difference does leave open the possibility that with education, women would become more like men. What they would give up in the process, of course, is their superiority in the realm of the soul. (Graffigny's

Zilia is a highly educated princess who maintains her ethical superiority.) It seems that the philosophe senses that there might be cause for contention in his version of difference: "Qui joint les graces de l'esprit et du corps à presque tous les sentiments du coeur les plus tendres et les plus délicats, ne doit point nous envier une double force, qui ne semble avoir été donnée à l'Homme; l'une, que pour se mieux pénétrer des attraits de la beauté; l'autre, que pour mieux servir à ses plaisirs" (72). Women who are in possession of all the sentiments of the heart should not envy men a "double force" which enables them to appreciate and please women. Anatomy certainly is destiny in this account and the "double force" as a source of contention seems to refer to man's physical or phallic power: one area of this is located in *scopic drive*, the other is *erotic*. This "double force" is a perfectly libertine euphemism that does not take into account that perhaps what women might envy in men is not this double force of female appreciation, but something else altogether: the aforementioned "Éducation" and the powers of representation that come with it. Even La Mettrie seems to indicate that *sentimental superiority* may not be adequate compensation for Education "dont manquent les femmes." As we saw in Graffigny's novel, it is difficult to calculate equitable exchange rates in the economy of sexual difference. Zilia desperately wants an education and gets one: she sees the lack of education in French women as a shameful situation that can be repaired. She herself was educated by order of her fiancé, who wanted to make her a worthy companion, but she exceeds the bounds the

education he ordered for her when she is exiled in France and continues to educate herself. For La Mettrie, the lack of education in women seems to be an unquestioned fact of nature, like an anatomical deficiency. We would have to conclude that the *philosophe* is basically offering a conservative albeit ironic account of the nature of forms of sexual difference even as he offers a radical account of the human organism.

While La Mettrie seeks to establish the machine as the primary metaphor to account for the complexity of the organism, he also questions the nature of the human will. Sexuality occurs again here when he offers an example of the involuntary nature of certain sexual activities. (L'Homme-Machine poses questions about the nature of human will or *volonté* in such a way that we already find in this Enlightenment text the paths that would lead in the following two centuries to the discovery of the unconscious on the one hand and the regime of biological determinism on the other.) La Mettrie argues that the non-supremacy of the will is a result of the inseparability of *corps* and *esprit*. The body is subject to a myriad of conditions that also have a direct and powerful effect upon the will of the mind:

C'est en vain qu'on se récrie sur l'empire de la Volonté. Pour un ordre qu'elle donne, elle subit cent fois le joug. Et quelle merveille que le corps obéisse dans l'état sain, puisqu'un torrent de sang et d'esprits vient l'y forcer; la volonté aiant pour Ministres une légion invisible de fluides plus vifs que l'Eclair, et toujours prêts à le servir! Mais comme c'est par les

Nerfs que son pouvoir s'exerce, c'est aussi par eux qu'il est arrêté. La meilleure volonté d'un Amant épuisé, les plus violents désirs lui rendront-ils sa vigueur perdue? Hélas! non; et elle en sera la première punie, parce que, posées certaines circonstances, il n'est pas dans sa puissance de ne pas vouloir du plaisir (La Mettrie 103-104).

The failure of the will is best proven by the example of impotence, a biological failure that seems to indicate that there is a disjunction between what the mind wants and what the body can perform. This disjunction is evidence of the way in which the will must submit to the "yoke" of bodily influences. The will has as its "ministers" a legion of invisible fluids, but its dominion does not extend to the nerves, which will defy it: the will here is personified as a king whose omnipotence turns into impotence when defied. The will of the mind is neither completely autonomous nor completely masterful. La Mettrie leaves the human organism (which in this case, is decidedly male) and the human will (personified here as an ineffectual ruler) in a complicated, if not delicate situation.

The Soul and the Double

Otto Rank, in his text The Double: a Psychoanalytic Study,³ demonstrates that in animistic systems and religious thinking, the soul, like the shadow and mirror reflection plays the role of the double. The double he goes on to show, functions as the ego's (or what Rank calls the self's) prophylactic

³First published in German in 1914: citations refer to 1989 republication of this text, translated by Harry Tucker, Jr.

against the possibility of absolute death:

Primitive narcissism feels itself primarily threatened by the ineluctable destruction of the self. Very clear evidence of the truth of this observation is shown by the choice, as the most primitive concept of the soul, of an image as closely similar as possible to the physical self, hence *a true double*. The idea of death, therefore, is denied by a duplication of the self incorporated in the shadow or reflected image (82: emphasis added).

The Cartesian description of the soul is both abstract and primitive in that the soul is not described as an image, but nevertheless corresponds with each part of the physical body. According to Rank, the soul became more and more "immaterial" as human beings became more experienced with death. The immaterial nature of the soul seemed to function as a guarantee of the immortality of the self against the threat of death as "everlasting annihilation." When La Mettrie argues for a radical materialism, he is arguing against this idea of the immaterial and immortal soul as a guarantee against death. The resistance against La Mettrie's insights which are in a sense, no more and no less, the insights of modern science, can thus be understood as directly proportional to the intensity of the ego's denial of its destructibility.

According to Lacan, the double as mirror image is the *Gestalt* that calls the "je" or "I" of the primordial subject into being. The infant recognizes its image in the mirror and from that moment on, identifies with a mirage of its

own autonomy: this sets the scene for the subject's subsequent lifelong experience of a discordance between the self and its composite of identifications with so-called reality. The way for alienation is prepared for the human subject even before its entry upon the socius: in fact the difficulty of any entry onto the social scene is only a remembrance of the primordial disjunctions of mirror stage identifications.

C'est que la forme totale du corps par quoi le sujet devance dans un mirage la maturation de sa puissance, ne lui est donnée que comme *Gestalt*, c'est-à-dire dans une extériorité, mais où certes cette forme est-elle plus constituante que constituée, mais où surtout elle lui apparaît dans un relief de stature qui la fige et sous une symétrie qui l'inverse, en opposition à la turbulence de mouvements dont il s'éprouve l'animer (Lacan 1966:95).

From the passage quoted above, we can understand why Žižek insists that subjectivity is motivated and constituted from the outside, from the exteriority of the *Gestalt* as such.

According to the Cartesian system, the intervention of the soul upon the body is actually localisable within the body, neither in the heart nor the brain, but in that famous gland lodged deeply within the brain. The reasons that lead Descartes to believe that this gland was the seat of the soul are of interest because they have to do with the question of doubling.

l'âme ne peut avoir en tout le corps aucun autre lien que cette glande où

elle exerce immédiatement ses fonctions...je considère que les autres parties de notre cerveau sont toutes doubles, comme aussi nous avons deux yeux, deux mains, deux oreilles, et enfin tous les organes de nos sens extérieurs sont doubles, et que d'autant que nous n'avons qu'une seule et simple pensée d'une même chose en même temps, il faut nécessairement qu'il y ait quelque lieu où les deux images qui viennent par les deux yeux, où les deux autres impressions qui viennent d'un seul objet par les doubles organes des autres, se puissent assembler en une avant qu'elles parviennent à l'âme, afin qu'elles ne lui représentent pas deux objets au lieu d'un...il n'y a aucun autre endroit dans le corps où elles puissent ainsi être unies, sinon ensuite de ce qu'elles le sont en cette glande (Article 32 Les Passion de l'âme).

According to Descartes, all the organs of our exterior senses are double, but our thoughts are singular: somewhere the doubled impressions of our sense organs must be integrated with one another so that the soul would receive unique instead of binary messages from the senses. The Cartesian gland is like a central control system, integrating and synthesizing for the soul. This little gland is also the site of fierce battles for power waged by the "esprits animaux" against the soul: these two forces struggle for dominance over the human organism. This gland which is so deeply lodged within the body is distinguished by its radical singularity. The gland is the processor of the lowest grades of sensations. It has been installed in the brain by Descartes as a means of

resolving the contradictions of the human will (the struggle between "esprits animaux" and ethical inhibitions): the gland allows the soul to remain the privileged double of man. The Cartesian descriptions of the operations of this organ resemble in uncanny ways the functioning of technological gadgets designed to route and reroute information and keep the flow of stimulus unimpeded by breakdowns. The gland has another important feature that is not contradictory with its role as mediator: it is also singularly responsive to language, or *la parole*, "la glande semble avoir été joint par la nature à chacune de nos pensées dès le commencement de notre vie, on les peut toutefois joindre à d'autres par habitude, ainsi que l'expérience fait voir aux paroles qui excitent des mouvements en la glande..." (Article 49).

The gland reacts to force and changes in its directionality: language operates upon it like a force. As a singular organ, the gland synthesizes messages received from our sensory organs that exist as two: but more than that, it mediates between our higher and lower instincts; it thus guarantees a certain kind of continuity and coherence in the topography of the will. It is in the struggles that take place in this gland with the passions of the body that the soul must strengthen itself.

La Mettrie almost disposes entirely of the soul in the following passage from L'Homme-machine

Mais puis que toutes les facultés de l'Ame dépendent tellement de la propre Organisation du Cerveau et de tout le Corps, qu'elles ne sont

visiblement que cette Organisation même....Car enfin quand l'Homme seul auroit reçu en partage la Loi Naturelle, en seroit-il moins une Machine?...L'Ame n'est donc qu'un vain terme dont on n'a point d'idée, et dont un bon Esprit ne doit se servir que pour nommer la partie qui pense en nous (98).

The soul is simply the organization of the body and the body is for all this no less a machine. The body does not need to be whole in order to function according to laws that La Mettrie admits to being still obscure to the eighteenth-century anatomists. The fact that there is involuntary nervous movement after death or dismemberment in animals is proof enough for the *philosophe* that the body functions according to innate laws, that the soul that supposedly presides over the organism and endows it with life is not a motivating principle, a death defying double, but only the organization of the organism itself. La Mettrie tried to concede something to the soul in order to avoid the radical outcome of his arguments. What he hoped to accomplish however, was to come to a description of the language of sensations and the will that would reduce the material of being to an understandable model.

La Mettrie argues that "Les divers États de l'Ame sont donc toujours corrélatifs à ceux du corps" (73). This is an important refinement of the Cartesian formulation, "Que l'âme est unie à toutes les parties du corps conjointement." La Mettrie rejects Cartesian dualism in which it is possible for psychological ideas to exist without a body and his statement also contradicts

the physiognomic notion of the body as a site of inscription, imprinted with the writing of the soul; the *medecin/philosophe* asserts the dependency of the soul upon the states of the body. In the physiognomist's system, the soul is a kind of autonomous agency. La Mettrie's notion of the soul, on the other hand, is systemic and synthetic: "Mais puis que toutes les facultés de l'Ame dépendent tellment de la propre Organisation du Cerveau et de tout le Corps, qu'elles ne sont visiblement ue cette Organisation même...." It is then that he goes on to name the soul as the part of us that thinks.

This part of the organism is not necessary for the functioning of the body and its other parts: for La Mettrie, this can be proven by "expériences" that demonstrate that movement exists in the organism after death, that is after the evacuation of the soul. The following is one of the most vivid of the examples given,

Le Chancelier Bacon, Auteur du premier ordre, parle, dans son *Histoire de la vie et de la mort* d'un homme convaincu de trahison qu'on ouvrit vivant, pour en arracher le coeur et le jeter au feu: ce muscle sauta d'abord à la hauteur perpendiculaire d'un pié et demi; mais ensuite perdant ses forces, à chaque reprise, toujours moins haut, pendant 7 ou 8 minutes (99).

The leaping heart, separated from the traitor's body, is proof of the fact that the organs in some uncanny way have a life of their own; that is, something intrinsic to the organ is in operation in the palpitating muscle.

The proofs that La Mettrie offers us of the autonomy of the body are fascinating illustrations of early biological experiments. La Mettrie describes how the bodies of animals palpitate after death, the colder the animal, (snakes, lizards and turtles), the longer the palpitations. Muscles separated from the body continue to contract when poked or prodded. The decapitated "Coq d'Inde" that continues to run around until it walks, headless, into a wall is another of La Mettrie's examples of the body's innate ability to move itself. The other series of examples that La Mettrie offered, to prove that the organism contained an innate force, have to do with what contemporary biology calls the involuntary movement, or reflexes. "N'est-ce pas machinalement que le corps se retire, frappé de terreur à l'aspect d'un précipice inattendu?" (101). These and other movements such as the contractions and expansion of the muscles in the penis are examples of involuntary activity in the body that escape the regime of the part in us that thinks, that is, soul.

After listing examples of post-humous nervous activity, La Mettrie concludes, "Voilà beaucoup plus de faits qu'il n'en faut, pour prouver d'une manière incontestable que chaque petit fibre, ou partie des corps organisés, se meut par un principe qui lui est propre, et dont l'action ne dépend point des nerfs, comme les *mouvements volontaires*...(100: emphasis added). There is then, involuntary movement that does not depend upon the nerves: each part of the body is able to move according to a principle internal to itself. This involuntary movement is observable only after death in the organism; reflexive

movement is cited by La Mettrie as an example of the autonomy of body parts.

An analogical relationship can be established between La Mettrie's voluntary and involuntary activities and the psychoanalytic differentiation between consciousness and unconsciousness. The unconscious gesture escapes and exceeds conscious willing. The movement away from a conception of the soul as double of the human is certainly a vital moment in the genesis of modern thought and especially modern science and in fact prepared the way for the advent of the subject of psychoanalysis. In Diderot and Descartes (1953), his study of materialism and the relationship between the eighteenth-century *philosophes* and Descartes, Aram Vartanian argues that the continuity between Descartes and La Mettrie is just as important as the break that La Mettrie made with dualist metaphysics. La Mettrie, in Vartanian's view, was setting the scene for the continuation of work in the sphere of mechanistic physiology that was opened up originally by Descartes.

By locating the soul as merely one part of the human, La Mettrie brings it closer to a conception of what modern philosophers and psychoanalysts would call consciousness. His exploration of involuntary functions anticipates an inquiry into the unconscious, or that which, belonging to the organism and its activities, nevertheless exceeds its will and consciousness. In the case of the eighteenth-century *philosophe*, the prestige of the *cogito* is tarnished by the mechanical nature of bodily functions; in the case of psychoanalytic theory, the mastery of the ego or the self is severely limited by the intervention of a

completely different order of knowledge.

The privileging of the machine as analogical double to the human permits La Mettrie to speculate further upon the nature of the body's functions. He suggests the idea of a "force innée" to explain biological autonomy. This force is an "abstraction faite des Veines, des Artères, des Nerfs, en un mot de l'Organisation de tout le corps; et que ar conséquent chaque partie contient en si des ressorts plus ou moins vifs selon le besoin qu'elles en avoient" (101). All these "ressorts" together make up the human machine. This abstraction is already a small step towards what we understand today as a nervous system. The privileged site of thought and motivation produced by La Mettrie's system is no longer a gland, but the brain, the "origin" of the nerves. Just as La Mettrie derived his ideas about the non-essential nature of the soul from the palpitations of corpses, he derives his insight into the nervous organization of the human body through the involuntary reflexes.

Entrons dans quelque détail de ces ressorts de la Machine humaine. Tous les mouvements vitaux, animaux, naturels, et automatiques se font par leur action. N'est-ce pas *machinalement* que le corps se retire, frappé de terreur a l'aspect d'un précipice inattendu? que les paupières se baissent à la menace d'un coup...? (101).

Breathing is also mentioned in this list of involuntary activities, ending with a mention of the male sex that reaches an erection in a child who is nevertheless unable to make use of it. In The Case of California (1991), Laurence Rickels,

a contemporary psychoanalytic theorist, describes breathing as the unconscious activity par excellence. Breathing demands in the newborn infant, a level of aggressivity necessary for its continued, extra-uterine survival.

Right away, at birth, aggression emerges in the effort to master (via identification and projection) the traumatic state of helplessness which birth introduces. Two functions, breathing and sucking, are instantly animated and charged with two chores or drives: either live under terrestrial conditions or restore the features of intrauterine life (193).

Breathing is one of functions of the body that is performed in a machine-like manner: it also arises out of aggression, out of a need to assume the will to survive against the pull of the death drive. Consciousness has little to do with this world; consciousness arises at another time altogether.

La Mettrie tries to show that the involuntary functions of the human organism challenge the ways in which his contemporaries had conceived of the body and its functions. The presence of involuntary nervous functions in the human body are proof enough for the philosophe of the continuity between animals and human beings. The use of the machine as a figure for the complexity of the human body allows for the kind of early comparative anatomy that La Mettrie describes to be conceptually justified. In his breaking down of absolute differences between human organisms, animal organisms and machines, La Mettrie leaves one difference intact, that of the difference between the sexes. The sexes, he demonstrates, are different because of their

anatomy, but their nerves are different because of women's lack of education. Rather than suggesting a reparation of such a lack, La Mettrie speculates ironically that women are compensated for it because men have been endowed with special gifts to admire and appreciate the fair and less educated sex.

Chapter 4

"Making it in Eighteenth Century Paris: the Cases of
of Jacques Vaucanson and Thérèse des Hayes"

In examining the life of Jacques Vaucanson as a detour from and entry into fiction, I am proposing that we read the life of this automaton maker in a way that speaks to literature, that opens up the possibilities of understanding the contexts of literary arrivals in mid-eighteenth century France. In a specifically eighteenth-century context, the story of Vaucanson's arrival encompasses the formation of modern science in its relationship to *technique*. In "Upsetting the Set Up: Remarks on Heidegger's Questing After Technics," (1989) Samuel Weber, emphasizes Heidegger's reversal of traditional notions of causality: "science, [Heidegger] argues, depends both in its principle as in its practice upon *Technik*, rather than the other way round, as is generally thought" (981). In mid-eighteenth century France, modern science was in its infancy and the Antique relationship between *poiesis* and *art* to *technè* that Heidegger seeks to emphasize in "The Question of Technology," is not yet fully obscured; this relationship is in fact, framed in an interesting way at this particular moment. Heidegger's reading of *technè* and technology¹ radically

¹Samuel Weber has discussed the problems of translation around Heidegger's use of the term "Technik" in English versions of The Question of Technology. Weber suggests the use of the term technics instead of technology. Weber argues,

...with regard to the German [Technik], the English word [technology]

revises the chrono-logical and therefore sequential order of the history of science, "Chronologically speaking modern physical science begins in the seventeenth century. In contrast, machine-power technology develops only in the second half of the eighteenth century. But modern technology, which for chronological reckoning is the later, is, from the point of view of the essence holding sway within it, the historically earlier" (Heidegger 22).

This study of the automaton takes place in precisely the gap between the birth of modern physical science and the advent of machine-power technology. What Vaucanson's career spans in itself is the passage from automaton to automation, from singular, autonomous machine as precious object of curiosity and fascination to mechanical principle and the interlocking, multiple machines of industry. This transitional period is described by Beaune in the following manner, "L'automate est déplacé de ses fonctions analytiques qui continuent sans lui: l'automate disparaît *en tant que modèle et objet solitaires pour qualifier la forme du travail en milieu industriel*" (256). According to Beaune, the automaton is a crucial step in the development of industrialization, "Avant de songer à automatiser le travail manuel, il faut concevoir *la représentation mécanique des membres de l'homme*. L'expérience de la motricité est alors décisive" (257). Before one can conceive of industrialization or automation, one

seems both too narrow and too theoretical. Too narrow, in excluding the meanings technique, craft, skill; and at the same time too theoretical, in suggesting that the knowledge involved is a form of applied science (1989:980-981).

must be able to conceive of the notion that the movements of human limbs can be mechanically represented. This mechanical representation is precisely what Vaucanson achieves with his automata with their articulated fingers and tongues.

Vaucanson makes a name with his automata and a fortune as an innovator in the French textile industry, in the service of the King. It is through his mechanical prowess, and not his learnedness, that Vaucanson seeks to penetrate the sanctum of the Académie Royale des Sciences and to receive what Buffon describes so well, *recognition*. The way into the Académie for Vaucanson is not a simple one; first of all, it is fraught with financial difficulties, for the very first "anatomies mouvantes" that Vaucanson sought to build were prohibitively expensive. Secondly, the "mécanicien" was considered inferior to the "géomètre" during a period of time when physics was considered the highest form of science.

Vaucanson's automata functioned as objects of scientific inquiry and popular curiosity *at the same time* although historians of science, when trying to establish his importance, like to emphasize the former at the expense of the latter. It is my contention that what is interesting about his career is precisely the co-existence of science and curiosity. They are both linked to the question of *technique*. *Technique* describes both the skill of the craftsman and the bringing forth of objects into existence by means of artisanal skill. The automata that Vaucanson constructed and displayed for profit were not the

"anatomies mouvantes" that, according to Doyon and Liaigre, he wanted to produce early in his career for scientific interest. The automata were far more spectacular than "anatomies mouvantes." They were constructed to entertain and profit their creator. The Flute Player and the Drummer were literally representations of entertainers as musicians. The automaton-duck was more ambiguous because with its mechanism exposed, it was closer to the "anatomies mouvantes," but it, like the other two, was first admired by good society and only thereafter recognized by the Académie.

The automaton and the career of one of the most famous fabricators of automata are read here as figures that crystallize a certain Enlightenment moment when "les arts et techniques" was not yet dominated by the forces of industry. According to Beaune,

L'automate-porteur-de-son-principe-de-mouvement radicalise la machine géométrique -- donne aux mouvements réels schématisés l'appendice d'une liberté quasi infinie. L'automate à cames de Vaucanson ou Jaquet-Droz permet enfin d'envisager les mouvements s'enchaînant et se reproduisant à l'infini, ou presque; on l'a vu, c'est à cet instant historique qu'il semble pourtant disparaître. La superposition du corps de connaissances et de pratiques automatiques au corps humain cesse d'être valide, n'est plus, en tout cas, explicitement revendiquée comme telle (257).

It seems that by incarnating or "schematizing" the possibility of infinite,

geometrically determined movement, the automaton as singular, mechanical object engineered its own obsolescence. As we saw in chapter one, the automaton of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is an "aristocratic" machine, singular and "precious" in every sense of the term and emblematic of the *ancien régime*. For Beaune, the eighteenth-century automaton is an early technological object whose relationship with craftsmanship and artisanal skill is still apparent; it was at the same time, poised to disappear.

According to Benjamin, history can be read for moments of crystallization because historical time is not the time of linearity and progress, it is rather, the time of repetition and allegory. To read repetition in history is to read history as containing within it kernels of the present, the present that consistently escapes us. Benjamin criticizes historicism in the name of historical materialism because of historicism's inability to read the present in the past: historicism's linear notion of time and its construction of events as isolated singularities on the march of progress is one that inherits the Enlightenment's own construction of time, space and knowledge.

The Truth of Appearances

Vaucanson's automaton duck was supposed to be a "perfect" imitation of a duck's digestive processes: this perfect imitation was meant to disprove a view held by powerful members of the medical establishment that digestion took place as a result of grinding or "trituration." The automaton duck contained a ruse, but the model that it represented of digestion was closer to

the truth than the one that it sought to disprove. In Vaucanson's letter to the Abbé Desfontaines, he presents a brief description of the three automata that he had constructed: the duck, the flute player and the figure playing both a drum and fife or flageolet. His description of the duck allows us to understand that his intention in constructing this particular automata is to demonstrate in a didactic way that mechanics was very capable of imitating and accurately recreating anatomy. Doyon and Liaigre, the authors of the copiously researched Vaucanson biography, Jacques Vaucanson: Mécanicien de génie (1966) allude to the fact that the integrity of Vaucanson's imitation was less than perfect: the automaton duck, it was discovered did not "copy" the digestive processes as much as it created a reasonable simulation of them.² Nevertheless, the automaton played a part in an intense debate on the nature of digestion that was taking place between doctors, anatomists and surgeons of the time. Vaucanson was opposed to (ironically) a mechanistic model of digestion then popular among the doctors like Hecquet (a court physician protected by the Prince de Condé and former doctor of the Port-Royal who published Traité de la digestion et des maladies de l'estomac suivant le système de la trituration et

²I use the terms to copy or imitate as designating a certain kind of replication that does not pretend to replace or pass for an original. The copy or the imitation seeks to establish a relationship with the original by means of a certain fidelity to it. To simulate describes an aspiration to supplant the original by means of a ruse. In Deleuze's essay, La logique de sens (1969) and especially in the chapter, "Platon et le simulacre," he argues for the overturning of the privileges of the original and sees in the simulacrum the repudiation of Platonism and a celebration of a different order of truth and knowledge. I am indebted to this essay for my reading of simulacrum.

du broiement in 1711). Vaucanson became what Doyon and Liaigre call a "théoricien de la digestion" by critiquing Hecquet's mechanistic description of digestion as a process during which food is crushed and ground in the stomach.

C'est donc contre cette thèse intolérante, contre cet appel exclusif à des meules, des pressoirs ou des scies imaginaires, contre l'homme devenu doyen de la Faculté. médecin de la Charité, et une des plus hautes autorités médicales du temps, que Vaucanson s'est élevé en fait, en publiant son texte apparemment anodin (Doyon and Liaigre 127).

This controversial duck that was a part of a polemic launched against the specious speculations of the past contained in its mechanism, however, what Doyon and Liaigre call, "une supercherie." In Vaucanson's letter to the Abbé Desfontaines, he describes in some detail the mechanisms of his automaton duck, "dans lequel [il] représente le mécanisme des viscères destinées aux fonctions du boire, du manger, et de la digestion...le jeu de toutes les parties nécessaires à ces actions y est exactement imité..." (19).³ Vaucanson is explicit about the fact that the automaton-duck not only imitates the mechanical movements of the animal (its wings are exact replicas of the bird's bone structure), but that the duck's process of digestion is perfectly "copied,"

³Citations of Vaucanson's letter to the Abbé Desfontaines refer to the pamphlet, Le Mécanisme du Flûteur Automate published by Éditions des Archives Contemporaines in conjunction with the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers in 1985. This pamphlet includes Vaucanson's paper on the Flute-Player that was presented before the Academie Royale des Sciences as well as his letter to the Abbé Desfontaines written in 1738. Both these texts were published by Jacques Guérin and sold at the Hôtel de Longueville where the automata were first displayed.

[Le canard] allonge son cou pour aller prendre du grain dans la main, il l'avale, le digère, et le rend par les voyes ordinaires tout digéré; tous les gestes d'un Canard qui avale avec précipitation, et qui redouble de vitesse dans le mouvement de son gosier, pour faire passer son manger jusques dans l'estomac, y sont copiés d'après nature: l'aliment y est digéré comme dans les vrais animaux, par dissolution, et non par trituration, comme le prétendent plusieurs physiciens; mais c'est ce que je me réserve à traiter et à faire voir dans l'occasion. La matière digérée dans l'estomac est conduite par des tuyaux, comme dans l'animal par ses boyaux, jusqu'à l'anus, où il y a un sphincter qui en permet la sortie.

Je ne prétends pas donner cette digestion pour une digestion parfaite, capable de faire du sang et des parties nourricières pour l'entretien de l'animal; on aurait mauvaise grace, je crois, à me faire ce reproche. Je ne prétends qu'imiter la mécanique de cette action en trois choses, qui sont 1) d'avaler le grain; 2) de le macérer, cuire ou dissoudre; 3) de le faire sortir dans un changement sensible (Vaucanson 19).

The "supercherie," the ruse of the automaton-duck, was that the excremental material it succeeded in expelling had nothing to do with the seeds it had swallowed. The excremental material was prepared in advance and located in hidden container in the posterior of the mechanical animal. Doyon and Liaigre attribute Vaucanson's delay in introducing the automaton-duck to the public to

the artifice, the aspect "truqué" of the automaton. The fascination with mechanical models of anatomy, "les anatomies mouvantes" was so powerful at this period, however, with figures like François Quesnay and Nicolas Le Cat competing with projects to reproduce the circulatory system that Vaucanson seemed to have decided that the risk of exhibiting an automaton which was deceptive in its pretensions was worth the risk.

Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History"⁴ opens with a parable of a "trick" automaton. Benjamin tells the enigmatic story about the success of an automaton chess-player (that was based most likely on von Kempelen's chess player that was exhibited in Europe in the beginning of the nineteenth century).

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical

⁴"Theses on the Philosophy of History" was completed in the spring of 1940, before Benjamin's suicide and was first published in Neue Rundschau in 1950. The English translation that I cite is found in the collection of essays, Illuminations, translated by Harry Zohn and published by Schocken Books, 1969.

materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight (Benjamin 253).

In this allegory, the automaton/puppet is called 'historical materialism' and it contains a secret trick: theology. Theology is the expert chess player that has to be kept out of sight. The automaton is dressed "in Turkish garb," Orientalized: its enigmatic mastery is based on a deception, its secret contained within it and concealed by a "system of mirrors." Historical materialism wins every time, because of an elaborately rigged game: this is an ironic and ambivalent illustration of Benjamin's own methodology, a kind of Marxist historical materialism that relies on a reading of Messianic time in order to understand historical moments as unrecuperable flashes. What Benjamin's automaton defeats at the chess board is the historicism that he polemicizes against in this fragmentary essay. In the end, however, historicism can accuse Benjamin's automaton of cheap tricks with mirrors that hide the dwarf of theology. What Benjamin might say in order to defend himself against such accusations is the following: the illusionistic qualities of the automaton do not mitigate in any way historical materialism's claims on truth which have more validity than historicism's attempts at homogenizing the past and neglecting its impact upon the present.

Following the work of Paul de Man, Cynthia Chase demonstrates in "Models of Narrative: Mechanical Doll, Exploding Machine" (1984) that reading

the Kleist stories, "Über das Marionnettentheater" and "Unwahrscheinliche Wahrhaftigkeiten" about machines, marionettes and dancing bears, leads her to conclude that "truth and appearance of truth, *Wahrheit* and *Wahrscheinlichkeit*, do not necessarily coincide" (63). This disjunction between truth and the appearance of truth should remind us of the dilemma of the Princesse de Clèves whose fictional life was so filled with dissimulations and simulations that in the end, the truth of her desire seemed to become pure appearance. There is a trick to Benjamin's chess player automaton: it contains a secret and it cheats, just like Vaucanson's automaton duck. Nevertheless, it, like the duck, has a privileged claim on truth of history.

Vaucanson's automaton duck and Benjamin's automaton of historical materialism have in common the fact that each contraption contains a trick, but that despite this trick, these automata have a better claim on representing truth. Jean-Claude Beaune followed Claire Salomon-Bayet's lead in L'Automate et ses mobiles when he discusses the automaton duck. In L'institution de la science et l'expérience du vivant (1978), Salomon-Bayet gives the mechanistic theory of the eighteenth century credit for providing science with the living being as an object and a model by means of metaphor and symbol.

Tout se passe comme si le mécanisme en tant que système était mis en échec dans les sciences de la vie parce qu'il rend l'expérience impossible...Mais cette mise en échec est aussi un succès: la théorie mécaniste, parce qu'elle se donne pour objet le modèle, le symbole et la

métaphore, rend possible la constitution du vivant comme objet de science positive, expérimentale, limitée... (Salomon-Bayet 182-183 in Beaune 237).

Vaucanson's model of digestion is an imperfect one at best, pure *supercherie* at worst, but it nevertheless opens up the inquiry into digestion as a chemical process rather than a mechanical one. According to Beaune, "*C'est lorsque Vaucanson truque qu'il est le plus savant -- une caricature du savant d'autrefois. L'automate, devenue feinte expérimentale, nourrit, en perdant ses prétentions universelles, -- autres que la convention de langue - un esprit d'enquête nouveau...*" (237). Even when trickery is involved, the spirit of inquiry is nourished by the seeds a mechanical duck swallows. There is a tricky relationship between truths and appearances of truths in the stories and histories that circulate around all of Vaucanson's automata.

When we look at Vaucanson's story through the distorting lens of Benjaminian allegory, we come up with a rather complicated history. I believe that exploring the secret of Jacques Vaucanson's success will allow us to understand the interaction of forces in conflict and collusion in mid-eighteenth-century Paris. The story crystallizes something about the nature of money and fame, science and spectacle, nascent capitalism and the despotism of kings. Vaucanson eventually becomes *inspecteur des manufactures de soie* in the royal employ. He transforms the textile industry with his innovations and was admitted into the Académie Royale des Sciences so that Condorcet would write

his "Éloge" upon his death. His last home and studio, the Hôtel de Mortagne, became the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers. He made it with his famous automata, three pieces of complex machinery that attracted the attention of *le monde*. The Encyclopédie's entries, "Automaton" and "Androïde" are devoted almost entirely to his work.

Automaton

Traditional studies of the automaton invariably begin with reference to antiquity, to notions of beginning and origins. Many of these studies are works of connoisseurship of curiosities in which one finds occasionally some gestures of conceptualization. In Chapuis and Gélis's study, Le Monde des Automates, (1928) the authors speculate on a mimetic drive that motivates human beings to pinch bits of clay into anthropomorphic forms and then to make the bits of clay imitate human gestures.

...il semble que le besoin de rendre la vie et son mouvement ait toujours préoccupé l'esprit de l'homme....Peut-être même, dès l'instant où l'être humain façonna naïvement l'argile ou dégrossit le tronc d'arbre pour en faire une idole, eut-il l'idée de lui faire imiter quelques-uns de ses propres gestes (3).

The articulated statues and toys of the Egyptians are related to the articulated masks of tribal cultures in which animism still plays a dominant role in mediating relations between human beings and their environments. From these descriptions, one can see that the articulated statue functioned as a repository

of godhead (the statue of Anubis with an articulated jaw). The statues were meant to inspire awe and fear. According to Chapuis and Gélis, articulated statues of servants and porters that were buried with their master in order to accompany him on his journey to the underworld constituted another category of automata (Chapuis and Gélis 8-9).

The animation of inanimate objects has to do with the sacred and mediating the relationship between the dead and the living: automata also have something to do with service and enslavement (forced labor being at the Czech root of the word robot.) Chapuis and Gélis as well as Sablière cite the following passage from Aristotle's Politica:

Si chaque instrument pouvait sur un ordre donné ou même pressenti travailler de lui-même comme les statues de Dédale ou les trépieds de Vulcain qui se rendaient seuls aux réunions des dieux, si les navettes tissaient toutes seules, si l'archet [le plectre] jouait tout seul de la cithare; les entrepreneurs se passeraient d'ouvriers et les maîtres d'esclaves (Chapuis and Gélis 9).

The idea is that if an object moved according to the will of masters, the intervention of slaves to do the master's bidding would no longer be necessary. While the sacred aspect of animated statues and objects has been more or less lost to us, the notion of automata as objects of diversion (in the form of toys) and utility that are meant to perform tasks that the human being is incapable of (in the form of constructed slaves, robots) has remained with us.

Derek de Solla Price, in his article "Automata and the Origins of Mechanism and Mechanistic Philosophy" (1964) goes further than Chapuis when he speculates that, "We suggest that some strong innate urge toward mechanistic explanation led to the making of automata, and that from automata has evolved much of our technology, particularly the part embracing fine mechanism and scientific instrumentation" (10). This "innate urge" recalls Chapuis' and Gélis' speculations about early man, naively fashioning images in clay. In one way or another, all histories of automata try to "naturalize" the drive for imitation. In Chapuis' Automates: Machines Automatiques et Machinisme (1928), the author tries to answer the question "Pourquoi l'homme a-t-il construit des automates?" His answer goes as follows,

Les figures articulées primitives furent, pensons-nous, une des premières manifestations de l'art. L'homme, en imitant la nature, chercha à reproduire le mouvement. Ce mouvement fut un plaisir à ses yeux (quand il ne lui inspira pas la crainte) et la représentation artificielle de la vie devint très tôt un divertissement populaire (12-13).

As an illustration of how the "artificial" representation of life became a source of popular entertainment, Chapuis refers to a photograph of a carving of a processional mask from Bali that was constructed with an articulated jaw. It is not my project here to critique the fairly obvious ethnocentrism of Machine Age Europe, nor the naïveté of Modernist ideas of history of technology or anthropology. What is of interest to me in the passage cited above is the

invocation of art *and* diversion in an account of the automaton's origins. The problem of art's relationship to technology is articulated by Heidegger as a relationship between *technè* and *poiesis*. It is this relationship that allows us to understand technology as not merely utilitarian: "*technè* is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Technè* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poietic" (Heidegger 13). If the automaton duck and the mechanistic philosophy behind it were able to enter into a polemic on the nature of digestion and the formation of "les sciences de la vie" in eighteenth-century France, the duck itself was also an object of curiosity and amusement for an increasingly demanding public. Vaucanson's automata provided pleasure for their viewers, a pleasure for which they were willing to pay. On September 8, 1739, Françoise de Graffigny, still fresh from the excitement of her recent arrival in the capital, describes the activities of the day to her correspondant, Devaux (affectionately known as Pan Pan who remained behind at the court of Lorraine).

Je fus hier matin à la Bibliothèque du roi avec Md. D.C., son Suisse et V....J'y vis encore de ces visages dont je sais comme l'abbé de Grecour, l'abbé Du Renal, le petit Clairo [Clairault] avec qui j'ai fait connaissance sur le bien que j'en entends dire. Tu vas me demander qui c'est. C'est un jeune homme qui est si bon mathématicien qu'il est entré à l'Académie à dix-sept ans....J'ai vu beaucoup de manuscrits rongés de

rats, qui auroient transporté un savant et qui ne m'ont rien fait du tout. Nous avons été au flûteur, qui m'a fait bien du plaisir (Graffigny Correspondance 2:146).

The "flûteur" referred to without much explanation is Vaucanson's automaton that was on display at that moment at the Hôtel de Longueville. Graffigny does not hesitate to describe herself as a "non-savant," someone whom a lot of dusty books could not move to transports of joy, but she does go on to note, in her light-hearted record of her day's activities, that she was perfectly able to derive pleasure from the spectacle of the "flûteur." She seems to have been thoroughly entertained by Vaucanson's automaton: Vaucanson remains in her world, was introduced to her some time thereafter. There is mention of Vaucanson again in her correspondance as she tries, unsuccessfully, to convince him to go to Prussia when Frederick II offers him a position in his court in 1740.

The Utility of Curiosity

The automaton was an object of amusement and diversion. Vaucanson charged admission to "concerts" at the Hôtel de Longueville where his automata were on display and gave concerts. In fact, the great engineer or *mécanicien* began his career by travelling to country fairs and showing his wares.⁵ He was able to arrive at fame and fortune because his automata

⁵In his Confessions, Rousseau relates how he too briefly harbored ambitions of making a fortune by travelling with and displaying a "fontaine d'Héron" (named after Heron of Alexandria, the great engineer of antiquity). His hopes were dashed, after the

entertained, that is amused and produced pleasure for his public. The way to success for this engineer was through the spectacle and the spectacular. His success is also testimony to the fact that it was possible for a talented man of humble origins to win a place in Parisian society, in Royal Academies and finally, in the history of the Enlightenment itself. As Carolyn Lougee demonstrated in Le Paradis des Femmes (1976), the admission of talented men of humble origins into good society was one of the causes taken up by the *précieuses* of the previous century. It was the salon women of the seventeenth century who first initiated the move toward increasing social mobility in Parisian circles.

Vaucanson's path to success is very much smoothed over in Condorcet's "Éloge de Vaucanson." In Condorcet's version of Vaucanson's biography, the *mécanicien* makes seamless progress from Grenoble to Lyon to Paris. His story is the story of undeniable genius that cannot be impeded on its path toward recognition and approbation. Doyon and Liaigre tell a different, that is, more detailed story about the difficulties of Vaucanson's arrival. Condorcet is not a biographer after all, he is writing an "Éloge." What is interesting however, is that the "Éloge" is treated as fact in Vaucanson's biography published by the Musée des Arts et Métiers in the form of a pamphlet, "Jacques Vaucanson." Condorcet describes Vaucanson's inspiration and his seamless passage from the provinces to Paris,

fountain was broken and he was unable to repair it.

Il quitta...la province pour venir à Paris, et vit avec une joie qui est difficile de se peindre, que la machine de la Samaritaine était précisément celle qu'il avait imaginée à Lyon; cette conformité lui apprit, ce qu'il ignorait encore, que son goût pour la mécanique était accompagné de quelque talent; et il s'y livra avec toute l'ardeur qu'une juste espérance de succès peut ajouter à une grande passion (11:206-207).

Condorcet conjures up a hostile uncle, opposed to Vaucanson's pursuit of his métier and "qui lui a trouvé des idées extravagantes" to add some adversity in this narrative. What Condorcet does not fail to comment upon is the nature of the "grand monde" of Paris. This was a world "avide de nouveauté." What Vaucanson will do to win the approval of this world, is to set up his automata as spectacle and spectacular. Their "performances" could be witnessed by a public that was willing to pay the price of admission.

In their article, "The Motives of Jacques de Vaucanson [sic]" (1979), David M. Fryer and John C. Marshall not only ascribe to Vaucanson an aristocratic particle (they seem, in this instance to follow Condorcet's lead), but also scientific and theoretical ambitions that are supposed to undo the impression that Vaucanson's automata were made to entertain or amuse a public. They cite an 1832 article in which a D. Brewster writes on the subject of the 18th century engineers, Henri Maillardet, Pierre and Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz and Vaucanson, "'Ingenious and beautiful as all these pieces of mechanism are, and surprising as their effects appear even to scientific

spectators, the principal object of their inventions was to astonish and amuse the public'" (in Fryer and Marshall 257). Astonishing and amusing the public are not the goals of true scientists. They revise Brewster's judgment of Vaucanson and rehabilitate him by showing that, in fact, his motivations were entirely scientific. They argue that "early gadgets and machines" (included in this category are the inventions of Heron of Alexandria up to eighteenth century automata) are neither "'trivial toys'" nor "'immediately useful inventions,'" but rather simulacra and as such, they are models of mechanistic explanation.⁶ Vaucanson's description of the mechanism of the Flute Player was delivered as a "Mémoire" before the Académie Royale des Sciences, translated into English, and later published as a pamphlet that was sold in both Paris and London where the automata were displayed at the Long Room of the London Opera House. Fryer and Marshall point out that "Vaucanson's seemingly 'objective description' is really a hypothesis concerning "the mode of operation of man plus flute....Vaucanson clearly regards his automaton as a test of the principles he has formulated" (259-260). The Flute Player imitated through a complex system of articulated tongue and fingers, air pumps and gears the breath and movements of a human flute player. It seems irrefutable that Vaucanson was possessed of both scientific interests and ambitions, but what to do with the

⁶What is astonishing about the Fryer and Marshall article is that they call Maillardet, the Jaquet-Droz and Vaucanson "psychologists" and attribute to their automata a behaviorist tendency. Despite the anachronism of such a description, we saw earlier in the materialist philosophy of La Mettrie, strands of thought that did anticipate both psychological and behaviorist notions of human being.

fact that the automata were also put on display in order to earn him a living and make him a profit?

Condorcet was able to recognize the ways in which Vaucanson was able to play to and satisfy the appetite of the *grand monde* for novelty and entertainment. For Condorcet, Vaucanson's ability to attract the interest of a lay public did not in any way mitigate his scientific achievements. While Fryer and Marshall establish without a doubt Vaucanson's scientificity, they do not question the idea that the spectacle, the construction of objects to astonish and amuse is somehow contradictory with an agenda of scientific inquiry. The difference between *curiosité* (a quality that amused, entertained because of novelty) and *utilité* (a quality that had to do with the accumulation of knowledge, the application of which serves science) was not quite so absolute in the eighteenth-century. As its entry in Encyclopédie affirms, *curiosité* "est le désir qui anime [l'homme] à étendre ses connoissances, soit pour élever son esprit aux grandes vérités, soit pour se rendre utile à ses concitoyens" (in Benhamou⁷ 99 and Encyclopédie 4:578). When Beaune argues that "Le mérite de Vaucanson, c'est d'avoir, avec plus ou moins de succès mais obstination, opéré le déplacement d'intérêt et de méthode qui fait passer de l'automate-curiosité à la machine-outil" (259), he too emphasizes the fact that Vaucanson's achievements did not merely function on the level of the curiosity.

⁷Cited in Reed Benhamou's essay, "From Curiosité to Utilité: the Automaton in Eighteenth Century France" (1987), published in Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture vol. 17, 1987.

The *utilité* of the "machine-outil" offers Vaucanson a more legitimate place in the history of technology and the progress of industry.

Curiosity is on the side of amusement and astonishment: it is what produces pleasure in excess of knowledge. In D'Alembert's "Discours préliminaire" (1751), the author's defense of curiosity and the curious belies the fact that curiosity was still in need of defense. D'Alembert argues precisely, with the Encyclopédie's definition, that the curious can evolve into the useful. According to d'Alembert, curiosity is supplementary to an eighteenth-century notion of usefulness and necessity. That which is curious provides pleasure and offers the Enlightenment thinker consolation as he encounters obstacles in his meditation on the nature of the "vaste univers":

L'esprit accoutumé à la méditation, et avide d'en tirer quelque fruit, a dû trouver alors une espèce de ressource dans la découverte des propriétés des corps uniquement curieuse, découverte qui ne connaît point de bornes. En effet, si un grand nombre de connaissances agréables suffisait pour consoler de la privation d'une vérité utile, on pourrait dire que l'étude de la Nature, quand elle nous refuse le nécessaire, fournit du moins, avec profusion à nos plaisirs: c'est une espèce de superflu qui supplée, quoique très imparfaitement, à ce qui nous manque (84).

The curious here is the purveyor of pleasure, in excess of utility and necessity that and it serves to supplement a lack. The supplementarity of the curious

recalls Derrida's reading of the supplement in Rousseau. "Le supplément s'ajoute, il est un surplus, une plénitude enrichissante une autre plénitude..." (Derrida 1967:208). Derrida's reading opens the way to an understanding of supplementarity as that which is produced by systems of thinking in which thought is believed to be autonomous from language and writing secondary to speech. The notion of the supplement can also be read as something related to femininity insofar as femininity occupies a secondary position vis-à-vis masculinity and is nevertheless its support, its symptomatic backdrop. That which is curious, like that which is feminine, is considered non-essential and supplemental. Derrida has shown however, that there is something dangerous about this superfluous excess. The supplement (writing) can distort and destroy that which it supplements (the spoken word).

The supplement is according to Derrida, "L'addition d'une technique, c'est une sorte de ruse artificielle et artificieuse pour rendre la parole présente lorsqu'elle est en vérité absente. C'est une violence faite à la destinée naturelle de la langue" (1967:207). Rousseau's supplement has something to do with d'Alembert's: the supplement arises at a moment when there is a kind of failure. Derrida writes that for Rousseau, "Le supplément supplée. Il ne s'ajoute que pour remplacer. Il intervient ou s'insinue *à-la-place-de*; s'il comble, c'est comme on comble un vide" (1967:208). There must be an emptiness, a lacuna, a void that the supplement must fill. An empty place occurs in D'Alembert's text when thinking fails the thinker. The discoveries made available by curiosity

seem infinite as opposed to the useful truths which are limited by nature and difficult to come by. In place of a useful truth, a curious truth occurs to the thinker in order to console him in his frustration. The danger of the supplement of curiosity is that it can throw the thinker completely off the track of useful truths, offering itself up as a replacement for scientific meditation. Its pleasures can pull the thinker away from the original object of his thoughts. Curiosity sidetracks.

The pleasures of curiosity, according to D'Alembert, compensate the "esprit accoutumé à la méditation" for a failure to produce useful and necessary knowledge; in short, it is a kind of consolation prize to the "esprit" for having reached a limit of reflection.

....dans l'ordre de nos besoins et des objets de nos passions, le plaisir tient une des premières places, et la curiosité est un besoin pour qui sait penser, surtout lorsque ce désir inquiet est animé par une sorte de dépit de ne pouvoir entièrement se satisfaire. Un autre motif sert à nous soutenir dans un pareil travail; si l'utilité n'en est pas l'objet, elle peut en être au moins le prétexte. Il nous suffit d'avoir trouvé quelquefois un avantage réel dans certaines connaissances, où d'abord nous ne l'avions pas soupçonné, pour nous autoriser à regarder toutes les recherches de pure curiosité, comme pouvant nous être utiles. Voilà l'origine et la cause des progrès de cette vaste science, appelée en général Physique ou étude de la Nature, qui comprend tant de parties différentes (d'Alembert

84).

Curiosity is now addressed as a need that exists outside of the desire for useful knowledge: it is a kind of pleasure principle that supplements thinking when the thinker is unable to completely satisfy himself. When one is pursuing a line of thought out of curiosity, for the pleasure of it, *utilité* becomes a *pretext*.⁸ Curiosity can also produce usefulness and this production of usefulness constitutes the origins of a certain kind of scientific progress. The sidetrack of *curiosité* can lead us to the main road of *utilité*. This is why the thinker is permitted to follow his curiosity when he cannot completely satisfy himself.⁹ *Curiosité* slides into, even produces *utilité*, but curiosity is still secondary and supplemental in relationship to a scientific drive for knowledge.

In her preface to the 1985 re-publication of Vaucanson's memoir, presented before the Académie Royale des Sciences in 1738, Catherine Cardinal tries to account for the popularity of Vaucanson's automata, "La fascination qu'ils exercèrent sur les foules par leur aspect magique, sur *les savants* et *les curieux* par leurs complications techniques, explique leur

⁸See discussion of pretexts in Chapter 5: in this discussion, it becomes obvious that friendship functions as a pretext for the pursuit of love and love as a pretext for the pursuit of erotic pleasures.

⁹It seems important to remark here that Rousseau referred to his compulsive onanism as "ce dangereux supplément" that preserved his virginity while threatening his vigor. It seems that the pleasures of D'Alembert's curiosity also play an ambivalent, two-sided role. They compensate the thinker when he is frustrated, but they can completely lead him astray.

persistante célébrité" (vi: emphasis added).¹⁰ Here, curiosity has to do with dilettantism: it has to do with the spectacular and the false. The *savant's* appreciation is contrasted with the ignorant pleasure of the curious in order to illustrate the breadth of the automata's appeal. Cardinal continues,

En construisant des automates, Jacques Vaucanson ne voulait pas seulement créer des oeuvres qui étonnaient par leurs complications, qui suscitaient *la curiosité des badauds*. Son dessein était beaucoup plus ambitieux. S'aidant de son talent dans le domaine de la mécanique et de ses connaissances en anatomie, il désirait créer des êtres artificiels, des 'anatomies mouvantes.' Ces anatomies devaient reproduire, le plus fidèlement possible, les organes et les fonctions de l'être humain ou de l'animal. Leur véritable but n'était pas de divertir mais d'instruire et de favoriser les progrès de la médecine (vii-viii: emphasis added).

Curiosity is described as a quality of gawkers, the "badauds" who stop and stare at the spectacles of the street. The "véritable but" of Vaucanson's automata is pedagogical -- any form of pleasure that they might inspire is denigrated. In order to inscribe Vaucanson's automata in a history of the progress of science, Cardinal has to describe them as transcending their status as objects of curiosity. This pleasure, the pleasure of the "badaud" is precisely

¹⁰Le Mécanisme du Flûteur Automate. Paris: Éditions des Archives Contemporaines, 1985.

the pleasure about which Graffigny wrote ("Nous avons été au flûteur, qui m'a fait bien du plaisir.") Cardinal attributes to the automata a "true" scientific ambition. In this description, science has nothing to do with diversion and the pleasures of curiosity do not lead to scientific progress; d'Alembert's curiosity has lost most of its prestige. According to Cardinal, curiosity is the primary domain of "des badauds."

The three automata for which Vaucanson is famous were exhibited throughout Europe as curiosities that embodied the power of mechanics. One of the ambitions of eighteenth-century mechanics the imitation of the complexity of living beings. The denigration of curiosity in relationship to science is a kind of twentieth century historical revisionism. The eighteenth-century automaton should be understood as a curiosity, a marvelous toy, an object of amusement and diversion, an object of entertainment. The eighteenth century imagined that as a mechanical model of the human body, the automaton could also serve our understanding of human anatomy and be potentially useful to science. No automaton maker was more successful at or insistent about gaining recognition for his automata as objects of science as Vaucanson who was able to earn the approbation of the Académie Royale des Sciences.

Vaucanson is a figure whose life and work bridges the distance between curiosity and utility (between *automate-curiosité* and *machine-outil*). This is Reed Benahmou's thesis in, "From *Curiosité* to *Utilité*: the Automaton in 18th

Century France." What looks like an opposition (curiosity vs. utility) actually collapses in the eighteenth-century context: the transitional moment that Vaucanson lived allowed for a brief synthesis of the two qualities. By the twentieth century, the confusion between curiosity and utility became something to be denied. Reed Benhamou describes the automaton as a potentially powerful model for the human; models were almost always supposed to serve a didactic function. "To develop a model that replicated vital human functions would increase medical competence; but it would even solve complex physico-technical problems. In an age largely convinced that the human body was an exceptionally intricate machine, the challenge of replicating that machinery was irresistible" (Benhamou 101). Earlier in Benhamou's essay, the author argues for the illustrative function of the automaton: the automaton served as a metaphor for human folly (as in La Bruyère's "le sot est automate"). As both metaphor and model, both curious and potentially useful, the automaton is a privileged object of the Enlightenment that was both curious and scientific.

Ainsi, au milieu de ces discussions au cours desquelles s'élaborait la pensée scientifique moderne, les 'anatomies mouvantes' étaient devenues entre les mains de Quesnay et Le Cat des auxiliaires de la science. En d'autres termes, le recours à des modèles mécaniques ne relevait plus seulement de l'enseignement mais de la découverte (Doyon and Liaigre 123).

The model was endowed with not only a didactic power, it could actually lead to new discoveries, to new knowledge that could be added to the cumulative bank of knowledge that the Encyclopédie represented. The automaton evolved out of a drive for knowledge that was embodied by the "anatomies mouvantes" about which Le Cat and Quesnay dreamed. Doyon and Liaigre demonstrate, however, that Vaucanson planned and completed his automata (objects of curiosity *and* science) because of economic exigencies and worldly as well as scientific ambitions.

Vaucanson

In 1738, Jacques Vaucanson, an obscure, but gifted young provincial, from a petit-bourgeois family of Grenoble, attracted the attention of the Parisian aristocracy and *literati* with his automaton, a flute-player, which was capable of playing twelve airs on the "flute traversière." The flute player was based upon the sculpture by Antoine Coysevox, "Berger jouant de la flute" (1709). In the pedestal was lodged a wood cylinder, 56 centimeters in diameter and 86 centimeters long which served as a "program" for the entire mechanism. The cylinder was carved to set off, while rotating, fifteen different levers which controlled the movements of the Flute Player's articulated tongue, fingers and the reservoirs of air.

In 1741, three short and eventful years later, after having obtained the recognition of the Académie Royale des Sciences through his judicious use of his worldly contacts and alliances, Vaucanson became, by command of the

King, Louis XV, "inspecteur des manufactures de soie." He was hired by the far-seeing Minister of Commerce Orry, as a government official and servant of industry at a salary of six thousand livres year (Doyon and Liaigre 143-145). The French government was hoping to restructure silk production in Lyon and southeastern France in order to compete with the silk industry of Piedmont. An exhaustive biography was written by Doyon and Liaigre titled Jacques Vaucanson: Mécanicien de Génie (1956). Perhaps because his biographers wanted to compensate for the relative obscurity of their subject, they praise Vaucanson as "le plus grand mécanicien français de tous les temps." Doyon and Liaigre do not fail to include anecdotes of inimitable childhood precocity and undaunted commitment. Despite such hyperbole, his biographers detail with great precision, the peculiarities of, and many failures in Vaucanson's career.

One way in which we can begin to grasp the measure of Vaucanson's significance is to consider the fate of his home and workshop, the Hôtel de Mortagne, where most of his innovations in the silk textile industry were fabricated, located on what is today the rue de Charonne. After his death, Louis XVI, bought the Hôtel from the Chevalier de Ham, Vaucanson's landlord and declared the site on August 2, 1783, "un dépôt public des modèles des machines principalement utilisées dans les arts et les fabriques" (23).¹¹ The

¹¹Jacques Vaucanson, pamphlet published by the Musée National des Techniques, 1983.

decree also stipulated that Vaucanson's collection of tooling machines would eventually be supplemented by the purchase of the latest machines used in England and Holland (two countries who had outpaced France in industrial development and foreign trade, in short in the major areas of capitalist activity), in order that French artisans might take instruction from them. In addition, "un dépôt de cette espèce encouragea ceux qui se sentent du goût pour l'invention des machines; il excitera les capitalistes à former des speculations sur le produit des machines nouvelles." Vandermonde of the Académie des Sciences was named the director. During the disorder of the last years of Louis XVI's rule, the Hotel de Mortagne lost most of its funding and Vandermonde lost much of his enthusiasm for the upkeep of the place. Vandermonde later became involved in the revolution and was one of the principal founders of the Comité du Salut Public. After the fall of the *ancien régime*, the revolutionary government was persuaded to take an interest in the creation of a Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers. Vandermonde's successor, Claude-Pierre Molard obtained the official decree on October 10, 1794 for the creation of the Conservatoire. In 1798, the former abbey of Saint Martin des Champs was declared the site of the new Conservatoire and the move from the Hotel de Mortagne began in 1800. Molard, who was also active during revolution, presided over the move (25). Thus Vaucanson's workshop, the Hôtel de Mortagne was the original site of today's Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers located on the rue Saint Martin on the site of the former abbey of Saint-Martin-des-Champs.

Vaucanson was born in Grenoble to a family of humble origins on February 24, 1709. His father, who died during his childhood, was a maître gantier. The young Vaucanson began his education with the Jesuits in Grenoble and little is known about his childhood aside from the usual anecdotes about precocious signs of his future expertise. In 1725, we find that Vaucanson has been accepted as a novice with the Minimes of Lyon. There was a scandal involving automata Vaucanson had constructed in secret and which the Superior ordered destroyed. Vaucanson was released from his vows, but did not give up all hope of entering the Church one day, with the primary hope, according to Doyon and Liaigre of elevating his social status.

After a few years spent in Paris (1728-1731) that remain largely undocumented, it seems that Vaucanson travelled the north and west of France, displaying automata of his own fabrication for a living. He described one of them in the following manner: it was "une machine de physique dans laquelle est (sic) plusieurs automates et sont imités les fonctions naturelles de plusieurs animaux par le mouvement du feu, de l'air et de l'eau" (cited in Doyon and Liaigre 18). In Rouen, he may have met the soon to be famous surgeon, Le Cat who was very interested in the construction of artificial human anatomies and according to some accounts, it is here that Vaucanson studied human anatomy and first conceived the ambition of constructing the "anatomies mouvantes." In 1732, during a stop at Tours, Vaucanson met Jean Colvée, a wealthy monk at the collégiale Saint-Martin who was inspired by the young

man's talents. He agreed to finance Vaucanson's next automaton with a sum of 2,400 pounds. The contract signed between the two of them in 1733 provided Vaucanson with financial help for his "besoins journaliers pendant le temps de la construction." Doyon and Liaigre gathered their information about the abbey's dealings with Vaucanson from Colvée's personal papers, deposited with Madame de Savigny, Vaucanson's daughter, upon his death in 1750.

En cas d'insuffisance de la somme, Vaucanson devait la parfaire. Le remboursement de la somme avancée serait effectué, à Colvée, par prélèvement des deux tiers des premières recettes. Ensuite il toucherait, pendant six mois, quatre sols par livre (soit 20%) sur les résultats des représentations, à moins que ce laps de temps n'ait pas suffi au remboursement du principal de la somme avancée. Il était stipulé, en outre, que la machine finie ou non, resterait le gage des sommes due par Vaucanson à Colvée. Ce dernier se réservait le droit de retirer des mains des ouvriers les parties de la machine, ou la machine tout entière, en quelque lieu qu'elle se trouvât (in Doyon and Liaigre 21).

Colvée worked out a hard deal: his investment seemed sure to pay off in one form or another because he controlled the means of production and had bought Vaucanson's expertise and labor at the same time. For the impoverished young man, however, the infusion of 2,400 pounds meant that he no longer had to display his automata on the road. He had found a way to assure his livelihood and install himself in Paris with a considerable sum of money. He chose to live

on the Left Bank, on the rue du Four, right next to the "foire Saint Germain" where it is assumed he displayed his first automata from the northern tours. In an act of pure extravagance and ambition, he rented as his studio, one of the rooms of Hotel de Longueville, rue St. Thomas du Louvre. This magnificent building was destroyed in 1833 during the construction of the Carrousel.

A little time later, Vaucanson is found as a guest of M. de la Poupelinière, a great patron of the arts and sciences and one of the greatest libertines of his time. Voltaire frequented La Poupelinière, as did Rameau and many other distinguished figures of the time. Vaucanson was here initiated into the life of Parisian *mondanité*. Doyon and Liaigre write, "Le milieu était frivole, peu propice à un travail suivi. Jacques Vaucanson au milieu des 'délices de l'Isle enchantée,' dût négliger l'automate qu'il s'était engagé à construire" (Doyon et Liaigre 25). Colvée, worried about his investment, traveled to Paris to find that the 2,400 pounds had been spent and that another 2,400 pounds were needed for the completion of the project. Colvée and Vaucanson signed another agreement whereby Colvée would be reimbursed for his investment by the revenue produced by the automaton under construction and that if more funds were needed for its completion, Vaucanson was to be responsible for procuring them.

Of course Vaucanson was to need more money and Colvée was foolish enough to lend it to him. It was not until 1742, well after Vaucanson had achieved financial stability that he was to repay Colvée in full. According to his

biographers, the belated payment of this debt reveals something about Vaucanson's character. His

mauvaise foi est donc manifeste, et l'on comprend pourquoi, malgré ses difficultés financières, il a pu mener grand train. Ne savons-nous pas que des 1735, il portait épée et habits à fleurs, faisant déjà figure de gentilhomme! Il estimait sans doute nécessaire d'employer à se pousser dans le monde une partie de l'argent qu'il avait emprunté pour ses automates (Doyon and Liaigre 26-27).

The carrying of a sword and the wearing of flowered suits and jackets were the signs of Vaucanson's worldly ambition; it was obviously important for him to cut a fashionable figure in the capital.

Certainly the distractions of Parisian society were not to be underestimated. Vaucanson was from the very beginning an ambitious young man whose commitment to science and mechanics seemed to be determined by his financial needs and his desire for recognition. Doyon and Liaigre recount that it was only after falling gravely ill in 1735, from an anal fistula, that Vaucanson decided to construct the long awaited automaton in order to remedy his near disastrous financial situation. It seems that shortly after having made the decision to take up work on the automaton, he left La Poupelière's "atmosphere de frivolité et de dissipation" (Doyon and Liaigre 29) and was received in the home of Jean Marguin, a bourgeois of Paris, from whom he received the sum of 3,000 pounds in return for half of the profits which

Vaucanson's automaton would make. Doyon and Liaigre call this agreement Draconian and see in it the signs of Vaucanson's desperate need for money. Between Colvée and the bourgeois, Marguin, he seems to have been willing to give up all of his rights to his creations in order to finance their production. We shall see that when his symbolic position in the world was more assured, Vaucanson would try to escape every obligation that he had contracted. Before the completion of the Flute Player, Vaucanson would borrow another 3,000 pounds from Marguin. In February of 1738, the Flute Player was completed. According to Doyon and Liaigre, Vaucanson showed his automaton at the Foire Saint-Germain for fifty louis a day for eight days before the opening of the exposition at the Hotel de Longueville without Marguin's knowledge in order to turn a tidy profit for himself.

On February 11, 1738, the first demonstration of the flutist took place at the Hotel de Longueville. The reception from the Academie des Sciences was initially very cold. The price of a ticket was three pounds, or the weekly salary of a female laborer. During the month of April, 1738, there were 1806 tickets sold during a period of 23-24 days. Spectators were received in groups of ten to fifteen at a time and Vaucanson himself would give an introduction to the performance and the twelve airs in the repertoire of the Flute Player would be played. From the 11th of February to the 30th of May, 1738, the Flute Player grossed 17,000 pounds (Doyon and Liaigre 33-34). The abbé Desfontaines who also frequented the table of La Poupelinière became one of Vaucanson's

greatest publicists and wrote about the Flute Player in highly laudatory terms in his journal, Observations sur les écrits modernes on March 30, 1738.

C'est sans doute la connaissance de l'anatomie de l'homme et surtout de la névrologie qui a guidé l'auteur dans sa mécanique....Il est assez vraisemblable qu'étant parvenu dans un peu avancé à ce haut degré de perfection dans les mécaniques, il [Vaucanson] ait réservé à lui seul de pouvoir donner dans la suite au public quelque chose de plus parfait et de plus surprenant. Que n'a-t-on lieu d'en attendre?...(in Doyon and Liaigre 51).

The Mercure de France was more reserved in its appraisal of Vaucanson's achievement, but in the years that follow, both Voltaire¹² and La Mettrie¹³ describe the "mécanicien" as a Promethean character. These two Enlightenment figures recognized in "The Flute Player" an important sign of the power of scientific progress. If it was a spectacular object of science, an object given over to entertainment, diversion and amusement, all the better. According to Doyon and Liaigre, "Il faut avouer que la réussite de ce Flûteur, qui imitait si bien tous les mouvements d'un homme dans ce qu'ils avaient de plus

¹²See Voltaire's De la nature de l'homme.

Le hardi Vaucanson, rival de Prométhée,
Semblait, de la nature imitant les ressorts,
Prendre le feu des cieux pour animer les corps,
Pour moi, loin des cités, sur les bords du Parnasse
Je suivais la nature et cherchais la sagesse.

¹³See Chapter 2 and discussion of La Mettrie. La Mettrie describes Vaucanson as "un nouveau Prométhée" in L'Homme-Machine.

difficiles, apportait apparemment beaucoup d'eau au moulin de la philosophie matérialiste dont Voltaire, ne l'oublions pas, fut, malgré ses déclarations, un adepte fervent" (56).

Vaucanson did not pay Marguin's percentage regularly. As one can imagine, the young "mécanicien" began to realize that he had cut a bad deal with the bourgeois. Marguin appealed to the court of Châtelet to name a trustee for the Marguin-Vaucanson association. Vaucanson, feeling the pressure of this legal procedure, turned to a higher authority. He sought the help of the King and his Council in blocking Marguin's legal procedures against him.

Jacques Vaucanson, s'étant appliqué dès sa jeunesse aux sciences, a consommé pour s'y perfectionner le peu de fortune qu'il tenait de ses pères. C'est dans cet état d'épuisement qu'il sentit l'impossibilité de mettre fin à des anatomies mouvantes qu'il avait commencées et qu'il songea à tirer du secours du produit de quelques machines capables d'exciter *la curiosité* du public, qu'il conçut le dessein de faire une statue jouant de flûte traversière avec embouchure et par l'action des doigts.

Il y travailla en effet et avec le peu qui lui restait et les emprunts qu'il a été obligé de faire, il est parvenu à finir cette machine dont le public connaît le succès, mais il en tirerait peu d'avantage si Sa Majesté ne le mettait à couvert d'un de ses créanciers; c'est le sieur Marguin qui, sous *prétexte* d'aimer les arts et les sciences et après avoir attiré le suppliant chez lui, a fait passer au suppliant deux actes aussi illicites

qu'onéreux....Il est aisé de sentir combien ces clauses sont odieuses. Le sieur Marguin, moyennant 6 000 livres dont partie en logement et nourriture, veut absorber le produit d'une machine qui a coûté plus de 12 000 livres au suppliant qui, d'ailleurs, y a consacré ses talents et un travail assidu de plus de deux ans. Cependant, le sieur Marguin, pour soutenir son injustice, vient de le faire assigner au Châtelet de Paris, par exploit du 17 avril. Mais le suppliant espère que Sa Majesté, protectrice des Sciences et des Arts, ne permettra pas qu'il soit exposé à des poursuites, qui, en consumant son temps et les secours qu'il peut tirer de sa machine, l'empêcheraient de suivre ses travaux et de se rendre *utile* au public et qu'il plaise à Sa Majesté, de lui pourvoir... (in Doyon and Liaigre 34-35: emphasis mine).

Vaucanson testifies to "le peu de fortune" that he had from his fathers, in order to justify the fact that he was unable to complete his "anatomies mouvantes," which were supposed to be (like those of Le Cat's) of purely scientific interest. In his impoverishment, however, it was necessary for him to use his abilities to inspire the *curiosity* of the public in order to make a living. Only with His Majesty's help can he hope to make himself useful to the public. The Flute Player was born out of the financial distress of a young man who would have liked to have been able to devote himself completely to science. He only went into debt in order to finance this project and is lured into a trap by Marguin who, under the *pretext* of being a patron of the arts and sciences,

engages in a financial relationship with Vaucanson. According to Vaucanson's version of things, Marguin uses the arts and sciences as a cover up for his real, venal motive - profit and exploitation. He attracts and seduces the young man into his home under false pretenses: Vaucanson describes himself as being manipulated into accepting "deux actes aussi illicites qu'onéreux...." These financial agreements, here take on a sexual tone. From the luring of the young man into his home, to the forcing upon him of transactions that were illicit and unpleasant, Marguin appears mostly as an immoral seducer who attracted Vaucanson with a pretext, his false love for the arts and sciences.

The melodramatic tone of this appeal worked. Vaucanson was able to flatter the King, Louis XV, "Sa Majesté," "protectrice des Sciences et des Arts" as a real patron of the arts and sciences, in sharp contrast to Marguin who is a venal man, an inauthentic person, some one who travesties a love for the arts and sciences and who in the end loves nothing but profiting from a young man's talents, naïveté and financial distress. As Heidegger reminds us, "Pure science, we proclaim, is 'disinterested'" (167). The conditions for such disinterestedness, however, must be provided and it is to the King himself that Vaucanson makes an appeal for help. Proclamations are made for science as 'disinterested,' but in the quotation marks surrounding the term, we find a certain amount of irony. Heidegger also emphasizes the nature of pure science's claims to "disinterestedness" as pure proclamation, pure speech act.

In the end, the King was willing to give his tacit approval at least, to a

suspension of the case that Marguin had brought against Vaucanson. This decision bought precious time for Vaucanson. The judgment of the King's Council sent the two plaintiffs to the lieutenant Hérault, Councillor of the State: Marguin still hoped that ordinary jurisdiction would rule in his favor because he found all his agreements in order. Vaucanson hoped for a special dispensation. The details of how Vaucanson was able to eventually reach new agreements with both Marguin and Colvée are too laborious to recount here; suffice it to say that both gave up their rights to future profits made by the automata and both stated that they would be satisfied with the repayment with interest, of the loans made to Vaucanson.

In his appeal to the King and his Council, Vaucanson paints a picture of himself as a young man wholly devoted to science as a means of improving his fortune. By revealing that he was poor, Vaucanson turns what might have been an object of shame (his poverty and humble origins) into a point of strength. He had to attract the *curiosity* of the public with his automata and he became successful at doing so, but he wants to move onto science. The transition from science to curiosity seems perfectly smooth and not scandalous at all. Science was closer to the spectacular in early modern France: scientific achievements and practices were not so tightly segregated from entertainment and "divertissement." It is clear that making scientific projects diverting was not perceived as a degradation of the scientific endeavor. Entertaining the public could be accepted as a necessary passage for a talented, ambitious man

without means. His financial distress and his need to attract the attention of the public set the scene for royal intervention. The King can reward talent and punish venality. The King is the true protector of the arts and sciences.

In the eighteenth century, science could amaze and divert, much as art could. This of course, brings us back Heidegger's insistence on the Greek relationship between the *technè* of technology and the *technè* of art. Therefore "techniques" in mid-eighteenth-century France is much closer to the German word "Technik" than it is to our contemporary and common English translation of the term, technology. Science seems to encompass both "arts et techniques" in eighteenth-century France. "Techniques" implies "craft and skill" on the part of a subject; technology does not. Vaucanson's approach to science was shaped by his mastery of "technique." His technique was both technical and rhetorical: in both areas, he proved himself skillful.

I have lingered upon the many details of this period of Vaucanson's career in order to illustrate some of the conditions of production around the early career of the "plus grand mécanicien français." The ways in which Vaucanson was able to extricate himself from very complicated financial agreements and constant financial difficulties should reveal something to us about the conditions of doing business, science and "making it" in science in mid-eighteenth-century France. While he did all three, Vaucanson was also relentlessly worldly in his ambitions and managed from very early on, to attach himself to the La Poupelinière salon and in the words of Doyon and Liaigre

"mener grand train."¹⁴

It seems evident that Vaucanson's appeal to the King and his Council was efficacious because it was done in the name of science. Royal intervention helps free the young man from his obligations to his bourgeois investors. It seems that it is his devotion to science that elevates Vaucanson outside laws that govern bourgeois transactions. After Vaucanson's death, Louis XVI's makes the Hotel de Mortagne a place that is supposed to inspire capitalists to invest in innovation and thus encourage technical progress, "'Un dépôt public de cette espèce encouragea ceux qui se sentent du goût pour l'invention des machines; il excitera les capitalistes à former des spéculations sur le produit des machines nouvelles..." (in the pamphlet Jacques Vaucanson 23). The young Vaucanson, however, benefitted from an anti-capitalist, feudal system of Royal intervention that certainly discouraged the French bourgeoisie from speculating and investing in the production of new machines like their British and Dutch counterparts precisely because their interests were not guaranteed under French law as long as a Royal dispensation could be provided for ambitious young men.

After having disentangled himself from his relationships with his investors in what appeared to be an honorable way, Vaucanson now focussed

¹⁴Françoise de Graffigny, in a letter to Devaux. expresses her great eagerness for the duchesse de Richelieu to introduce her to La Poupelinière and his wife. They had a great reputation for being entertaining, charming, etc. (Graffigny Correspondance 2:29)

on gaining the recognition of the Académie Royale des Sciences which was not kindly disposed to mechanics, passing as it was through a period of great idealism about abstract geometry. Vaucanson was in a social milieu which allowed him to dream of acceptance by this body and in April of 1738, M. de Fleury, the head of the Académie, ordered members to attend a performance of the automata at the Hotel de Longueville. On April 30, 1738, Vaucanson presented before the Academie, the "Mémoire descriptif" of his Flute Player automaton. Three days later, the secretary of the Académie at the time, Fontenelle, drew up the much desired letter of approbation (Doyon and Liaigre 41). In 1746, he was accepted as a member of the Académie itself.

After becoming the "inspecteur royale des manufactures de soie," Vaucanson made a number of improvements in the manufacture of silk. One of his first responsibilities was the imposition of governmental reforms of the industry that led to the 1745 strikes of textile workers in Lyon, the greatest strikes that the *ancien régime* was to know. In his "Éloge de Vaucanson," Condorcet describes Vaucanson's accomplishments in the manufacture of silk as exemplary of technical innovation by an engineer in the service of industry, "Un mécanicien est celui qui tantôt applique aux machines un moteur nouveau, tantôt leur fait exécuter des opérations qu'on était obligé, avant lui, de confier à l'intelligence des hommes, on sait obtenir d'une machine des produits plus abondants et plus parfaits" (Condorcet III:212-213). What an engineer can do is substitute machine operations for the exercise of human intelligence: this

leads to an improvement in the speed of production and the quality of the product. This substitution of mechanical operation for human intelligence is the principle of early automation. Technological innovation has to do with finding ways of using the least amount of energy to produce the greatest amount of product. Vaucanson's innovations also had to do with improving the quality of silk produced by the French textile industry: his inventions, like the "moulin à organsiner" which produced silk organza, functioned by means of an "endless chain" in order to increase the uniformity of the fabric. Vaucanson would have to invent a machine that would produce this "chaine sans fin." According to Condorcet,

M. de Vaucanson [sic] croyait que le tirage de soie ne pouvait se bien faire que dans de grandes fabriques...tout ce qui dans les art en approche la perfectionne, tout ce qui peut être donné à bas prix, ne s'exécute que dans les fabriques en grand, parce que c'est là seulement qu'on peut réunir tout ce qui est nécessaire pour la perfection et pour l'économie, le choix des matières, la bonté des instruments, l'usage des machines, l'intelligence dans ceux qui président aux travaux, l'épargne dans l'emploi des forces motrices, des combustibles, des ingrédients nécessaires pour la préparation, enfin la distribution du travail, qui fixant chaque ouvrier à une simple opération qu'il répète constamment, le met en état de faire mieux en moins de temps...(III:219-220).

Vaucanson's early assembly line notions of production certainly contributed to

the decline of the power of "maître-ouvriers" in the production of silk in Lyon. The workers in large factories would be assigned simple tasks: this is the beginning of the fragmentation of labor that Marx would write about in the following century. Vaucanson and his partner, Montessuy had to enforce administrative reforms of silk production (the 1744 rulings) that re-established a hierarchy between the small producers and the "maîtres-marchands fabricants." In 1737, the small producers were able to gain a certain amount of autonomy and in 1744, they saw their hard won rights taken away. The strikes began in August 1744, were violent and violently suppressed. The leader, Marichauder was condemned to be hanged in March of 1745. The King gave him amnesty the following day.

Ainsi se terminait, sur une mesure de clémence royale, le plus important mouvement de grève qu'ai connu l'ancien régime....On a trop souvent dit que les causes de cette grève furent surtout la crainte des ouvriers de voir adopter les nouveaux métiers automatiques de Vaucanson qui allaient les faire mourir de famine et les réduire au chômage: rien n'est plus faux. La vindicte populaire ne s'est acharnée sur Vaucanson et Montessuy qu'en tant qu'instigateurs et réalisateurs des règlements de 1744 (Doyon and Liaigre 202-203).

The great strikes of Lyon did not, then have anything to do with workers' resistance to Vaucanson's innovations: they had to do with the imposition of regulations, unfavorable to their interest by the new "inspecteur." Vaucanson

proved himself loyal to the will of the State and spent the rest of his life in its service. There were great failures as well as successes in the course of this career. The struggling young man, devoted to the pursuit of scientific truth, becomes a servant of the State and his commitment to science falls by the wayside. His reputation for being able to extract the highest fees for all of his services was to be mentioned, albeit in laudatory terms, during the course of Condorcet's "Éloge."

Madame de La Poupelinière/Thérèse des Hayes

It is important to supplement this brief biography of Vaucanson with an account of a series of events that occurred around the milieu of Le Riche de La Poupelinière. These events have the flavor of a novel of mid-century. As we have seen, however, supplements can be potentially dangerous because they can deform or change that which they seek to supplement. This account of a young woman's story of success and failure might change Vaucanson's story insofar as it enriches our understanding of the difference between "making it" in mid-century Paris for a talented young man and a gifted young woman. In this story, there is a wealthy libertine who is fond of Opera girls, giving lavish parties and not marrying. There is an attractive, intelligent young woman without any means, who turns out to be not so helpless after all, simply too hubristic. There is a marriage, an adulterous affair and an unhappy ending. This story could be told as one that narrates the destruction of a resourceful, passionate woman who was not simply a victim like the hapless Justine, nor

a cold-hearted villainess like the ruthless Juliette. What we know about this heroine, we cull from a series of supposedly cold, hard facts. La Poupelinière was a farmer general whose devotion to the arts of theater, dance and music was only amplified by his passion for the countless actresses and girls of the Opera. Grimm, Voltaire, Buffon, the duc de Richelieu, the Maréchale de Saxe as well as important government officials like Bertin and Hérault, significantly, the judge ordered to preside over Vaucanson's case, frequented his salons. Most importantly of all, Rameau was a fixture in La Poupelinière's circle and presided over it in a position of great respect.

Around 1734, the heroine of this tale, Thérèse des Hayes was "sold" by her mother, the actress Mimi Dancourt to La Poupelinière ("[elle] fut pratiquement vendue par sa mère à la Poupelinière" (Doyon and Liaigre 44). Despite having been *practically* sold by her mother to the libertine, she was, as Doyon and Liaigre describe her "une femme savante, à la mode de son temps" (44). The young woman prospered somehow in La Poupelinière's world; she was a student of Rameau's, and her interest in the sciences and philosophy earned her Voltaire's respect. Des Hayes remained a great ally of Rameau's and passionately took his side in the debate between Rameau and Rousseau. In 1737, Thérèse des Hayes found herself pregnant. La Poupelinière was not inclined to marry her, so des Hayes had her brother, the secretary of the cardinal de Tencin appeal to Tencin's sister, Madame de Tencin to take up her cause. Madame de Tencin was able to persuade the Minister de Fleury to come

to Thérèse's aid. The Minister threatened La Poupeliniere with the loss of his farms during the renewal of his contracts and in this way forced the libertine to take des Hayes as his wife. In October 1737, the two were married. At this time, Vaucanson was already a regular guest in the La Poupelinière household. We find, in a footnote to the Graffigny correspondance the following account of Françoise-Catherine-Thérèse Des Hayes, "Elle anima pendant dix ans le salon de son mari à Passy et à Paris, amis en 1748, sa liaison avec le duc de Richelieu amènera son mari de se séparer d'elle" (2:31). During the time that Graffigny was employed by the duchesse de Richelieu, she felt excluded from and eager to enter the Parisian social whirl. The writer was constantly trying to find ways for the duchess to introduce her to La Poupelinière and his wife who only enhanced her husband's already great reputation for entertaining and running a house and salon where the arts were honored and celebrated (2:29).

In his Mémoires, Marmontel attributes to Vaucanson a major role in Madame de la Poupelinière's fall from grace. While she presided over the salon of her husband, Madame de la Poupelinière was courted by "les plus fameux séducteurs de Paris" (Doyon and Liaigre 223). Less cautious than Madame de Clèves and more ambitious than the Peruvian princess, Zilia, Thérèse seems to have accepted the duc de Richelieu as her lover in 1744. The following is an account of Thérèse's fall from grace according to Doyon and Liaigre:

La Poupelinière, jaloux, fit surveiller sa femme. Ayant eu confirmation de son infortune, le mari trompé corrigea si violemment son épouse infidèle

qu'elle alla se plaindre à la police: un procès-verbal relatant les brutalités de son mari fut dressé le 24 avril 1746. A la suite de cette aventure, le fermier général cloîtra sa femme. le galant duc, désolé de ne plus pouvoir rencontrer sa maîtresse, s'avisa qu'une chambre de l'immeuble voisin devait correspondre avec le cabinet de musique de Mme de La Poupelinière. il fit louer l'appartement par un de ses gens et faire, dans le mur, une ouverture qui eut issue dans la cheminée de la chambre de sa belle....Grâce à cet ingénieux stratagème, Mme de La Poupelinière pouvait recevoir son amant en toute quiétude. Mais la jalousie du fermier générale n'avait pas désarmé. Le 26 novembre 1747, profitant de l'absence de sa femme, accompagné de Ballot de Sauvot et de Vaucanson, fidèles habitués de sa maison, il se rendit dans l'appartement de Mme de La Poupelinière pour passer une inspection de règle...(Marmontel 223).

In Marmontel's version of the discovery of the duc de Richelieu's secret door, Vaucanson is given a buffoonish role, admiring the work of the hinges and springs of the secret door, while La Poupelinière grows more and more furious about the entire situation. The three men enter the rooms of Madame de la Poupelinière and Ballot notices "by induction" that even though the weather was cold, there were not ashes in the fireplace. Vaucanson is the one who notices that the back of the chimney is mounted on hinges and that the back of the chimney is actually a very well-fitted door, whose hinges are barely

visible. Marmontel reconstructs the following dialogue between an awe-struck Vaucanson and an irate La Poupelinière:

Ah!! Monsieur, s'écria-t-il, en se tournant vers La Poupelinière, le bel ouvrage que je vois là! et l'excellent ouvrier que celui qui l'a fait! Cette plaque est mobile, elle s'ouvre, mais la charnière en est d'une délicatesse...! non il n'y a point de tabatière mieux travaillée....Quoi, Monsieur! dit La Poupelinière en pâissant,. Vous êtes sûr que cette plaque s'ouvre? Vraiment j'en suis sûr, je le vois dit Vaucanson, ravi d'admiration et d'aise. Rien n'est plus merveilleux--Eh! que me fait votre merveille. Il s'agit bien d'admirer--Ah! Monsieur. De tels ouvriers sont fort rares, j'ai de bons assurément, mais je n'en ai pas un qui...--Laissons là vos ouvriers, interrompit La Poupelinière, et qu'on m'en appelle un qui fasse sauter cette plaque.--C'est dommage, dit Vaucanson, de briser un chef-d'oeuvre aussi parfait que celui-là. (Marmontel 233)

In what is undoubtedly a much embellished story of discovery, Vaucanson as an engineer, is overcome with admiration of the chef-d'oeuvre that is the hidden door. For La Poupelinière, the door is merely a sign that the sequestered wife has a means of communication with the outside world and that this means of communication can only be an indication of her infidelity. In Marmontel's story, the comedic effect is produced by a radical disjunction between Vaucanson's and La Poupelinière's perspectives: the engineer is blind to the door's significance in an economy of desire and the husband cannot see the

door's mechanical perfection. While Vaucanson admires the door's craftsmanship, La Poupelinière is outraged by its very existence. What this anecdote does is satirize the blindness of both men, their helplessness in fact before a sign that begs to be read, but one that can only be read partially by each one.

Of course, the reader joins the narrator in a conspiracy of insider knowledge: what the reader knows is that the door is both marvelous *and* an outrage. "Que me fait votre merveille?" asks La Poupelinière, and one could answer that the "merveille" blinds La Poupelinière, offers him only a partial view of itself, in the same way that the door blinds Vaucanson with its perfection. In Marmontel's little story, an Enlightenment parable is being told and blindness satirized: the narrator is the savviest reader of the door. This door is broken, despite its mechanical perfection in order to satisfy the jealousy of the cuckolded husband. Marmontel describes Vaucanson as "ravi d'admiration et d'aise," "la charnière en est d'une délicatesse...!" It is more perfect than any snuff box. This rhetoric illustrates a kind of "ravisement" of the *mécanicien* by the mechanical. Its perfection is framed in terms of feminine hyperbole: "la charnière en est d'une délicatesse." The marvelous qualities have to do with the fact that it is a contraption so well made as to be able to fool the untrained eye, "la jointure en était presque imperceptible." Mechanical marvels exist as radically singular objects.

When La Poupelinière calls for some one to break down the door,

Vaucanson expresses regret that such a singular masterpiece should be destroyed. In this story, what La Poupelinière wants to break is the machine of deception: he wants the contraption to give up its secret and the only way that he can extract any certain knowledge from this machine of duplicity, is through its destruction. The men in this story do not look to the woman for evidence of her desire and her infidelity, but rather to the space in which she inhabits: the cold, clean hearth betrays her. The absence of ashes in the fireplace is noticed and read as significant: this significant lack requires a closer look. The closer look reveals a hinged door, a contraption, a machine that is evidence of illicit communication between the rooms of the wife and the rooms of another. The story of the hinged door in the back of the fireplace became notorious and popular verse were composed in its honor.

Vous êtes avertis
 Qu'on fait fabriquer à Paris
 En perçant la maison
 Fonds de cheminée à ressort,
 Où l'amant peut passer le corps
 Sans que personne le devine.
 On pourra voir la machine
 Chez certain fermier général

 Chez Madame de la P...
 Qui s'en est servi la première.
 (D'Estrée 94 in Doyon and Liaigre 224)

For the duc de Richelieu, this incident enhanced his reputation as a "galant homme"; for Madame de La Poupelinière, it proved quite fatal. Her husband was afraid to confront the duc and banished his wife from his homes. She lived on for a few more years, "assez misérablement, de la pension que lui

faisait son mari. Elle mourut, en 1752, d'un tumeur au sein qui aurait été causé par les brutalités du jaloux" (223). The "machine" here is a contraption that allows for a lover to pass into his beloved's quarters: it provides for a way of foiling the interdictions of a jealous and brutal husband. The ingenuity of the ruse serves as proof the duc's ardor and power: its significance for the woman involved is quite different. It was not a door that allowed her to escape her confinement: it served to procure the duc the pleasure of visiting his mistress, it did not serve to help the wife escape a brutal husband. The tumor that grows in her breast is the indelible mark left by her husband's violence and cruelty.

As in so many tales of libertinage, the duc's glory is paid for by the woman's destruction, but this story is not necessarily a completely dystopic one. Nancy K. Miller, in The Heroine's Text, demonstrates that there were two fates reserved for heroines of the eighteenth-century novel: marriage or death. Marriage or what Miller more specifically calls, "the heroine's integration into society" (xi) is the euphoric feminine destiny, "death in the flower of her youth" (xi) the description of the dysphoric one. Thérèse des Hayes's story can be read as both "euphoric" and "dysphoric," depending upon the way in which it is framed: the story could end with Thérèse's marriage to the libertine, her rapid ascent from her precarious status as a young woman "practically sold" to the farmer-general to her triumphant adornment of his salon and home. Her story would thus be read as a story of feminine ascent to power, along the lines of novels like Pamela or La Vie de Marianne: her use of Madame de Tencin's

position to engineer the marriage demonstrates that she was fully aware of how to mobilize the resources that were available to her in order to survive in the world of the libertine.

Having risen so far, however, she did not become more cautious and was in fact reckless twice over in her affair with the duc de Richelieu, the gallant husband of Madame de Graffigny's unhappy employer. Thérèse des Hayes, it seems, was a passionate and ambitious woman. If we extend the frame of her story to her disgrace and "miserable" death, Thérèse des Hayes, becomes another victim of the double standard of sexual comportment that doomed a passionate woman to either a sterile life of nun-like renunciation, or a disordered life of ignominious self-indulgence. Thérèse's fate is doubled and ambivalent, for she is both a triumphant and defeated heroine. The marriage that she is able to so ingeniously make with a wealthy libertine, almost her master, as she is almost his slave, is finally the death of her. Femininity is like a hinge ("d'une délicatesse") upon which the truth of interpretation turns: hence its relationship to the ambivalence of knowledge itself. Thérèse's story confounds the certainty of singular interpretations; her life falls into and exceeds the limits of literary representations of feminine destiny. It is a life that begs to be read.

Like her husband's faithful Vaucanson, des Hayes was able to rise in class in mid-eighteenth-century Paris. Des Hayes, however, was able to wager everything on a love affair; she died the death of a disgraced woman, punished

for being ambitious *and* desiring. Vaucanson continued to work hard, married his daughter to an aristocrat and died the death of a respected bourgeois, a full member of an increasingly powerful class. Des Hayes dies a miserable death; it is almost an operatic death of a tragic heroine who has completely lost her position in the social order. Des Hayes seems just as conniving as a Madame de Merteuil *and* just as passionately naïve as a Madame de Tourvel. The machine in Vaucanson's career becomes a means to earn a living and achieve recognition for his accomplishments: the "cheminée à ressort," a small mechanical marvel, becomes for des Hayes, a sign of her entrapment, her passion and the excess of enjoyment that would be her doom, but not her lover's. The machine demonstrates the radical asymmetry of the sexual relation: for the man it is a means of arrival, "un moyen de parvenir" and an escape hatch all at the same time. For the woman, it is one more door to desire, that once opened and entered, shuts her in forever in a world where as Miller puts it, "The danger of the dangerous relation is dependent upon the logic of the faux pas: in the politics of seduction, once generally proves to be enough. Thus the rule of female experience in male-authored fiction is the drama of a single misstep..." (x). In the case of the princesse de Clèves, we saw that she was able to use her literal misstep as a pretense for avoiding the next step.

Science

Lacan reminds us that "il y a quelque chose dans le statut de l'objet de la science, qui ne nous paraît pas elucidé depuis que la science est née" (Lacan

1966:863). This enunciation has something to do with Heidegger's ideas about the relationship between science and technics. There is something about the origins of science that remains obscure: Heidegger approaches this obscurity in one way, Lacan in another. Neither of them take for granted what the truth of science might be. For Lacan, the subject of psychoanalysis was the subject of science: this subject's incoherency, the nature of the split in the formation of this subject have to do with the advent of the subject of science as Descartes announced it with his *cogito*.

The automaton as a model of the human is Cartesian. The Cartesian machine is differentiated from the Leibnizian or Pascalian machine by Jean-Claude Beaune in the following manner: the Cartesian automaton ("l'homme-machine" or "l'animal-machine") is first and foremost theoretical and a model for biology and medicine. The Leibnizian automaton, on the other hand, is the calculating machine: it is the one whose non-anthropomorphic shell frees it from dissimulation of its mechanism. The Cartesian automaton is the machine that we are interested in. It presents itself as a model for and a model of human being and it is very much related to the so-called birth of modern science.

En tant que machine 'particulière,' l'automate suggère l'assimilation artificielle de la liberté du vivant à l'autonomie du mécanique (principe du mouvement interne à la machine). L'anthropomorphisme irréductible, la ruse, le leurre de l'automate prennent nouvelle signification philosophique: machine par excès, l'automate modèle du vivant,

n'élimine pas la vie; il la condense et la dissimule....*La machine cartésienne s'avance masquée*: l'anthropomorphisme est sa 'couverture' - ce qui veut dire que le déclenchement énergétique de la machine ou l'acte de construction échappe au pur mécanisme et suggèrent la téléologie vitale dont elle précède (171).

We could take Beaune's idea of the "artificial assimilation of the freedom of the living to the autonomy of the mechanical" one step further and speculate that the freedom of the living as it was conceived in the eighteenth century was actually formed by the notion of mechanical autonomy. In this way, the human being is never more free than when he or she achieves a machine-like autonomy. According to Beaune, the Cartesian automaton as a model of life is always performing the operations of condensation, dissimulation and masquerade. Its very anthropomorphism is a sign of its deceptive nature. The automaton is not gendered here as much as it represents a non-gendered and auto-engendering state of being that would be what Slavoj Žižek has described as the monstrous *cogito*.

To what does Lacan refer when he addresses an obscurity that appeared at the birth of modern science? The question itself opens up a space for discussion about the formation of early modern science. As we saw, science had a closer relationship to curiosity than it will admit to today; science was more open about providing a kind of unaccountable pleasure. In the case of Jacques Vaucanson, science almost functioned as an alibi for the automaton's

existence. Science and scientific interest guaranteed its creator, Vaucanson, "un moyen de parvenir," the King's sympathy, recognition from the Académie Royale des Sciences. It was on the grounds of being wholly devoted to science that the young Vaucanson appealed to the King and his Council to rule in his favor in the case that was brought against him.

For Thérèse des Hayes, marriage was her only means of arrival: science served for the ambitious young man of obscure origins what marriage does for the ambitious young woman. Her destiny and her destination were however radically different from his. His destiny was in some way bound up with hers: a faithful guest at their house, Vaucanson, (at least according to Marmontel), accompanies La Poupelinière on the fatal search of his wife's quarters. Thérèse des Hayes's fireplace had a false back that was actually a trapdoor: this is, to a jealous husband and his cohorts a sign of her infidelity. For their contemporaries, it was a sign of the duc de Richelieu's gallantry; for us, as post-modern readers, the final deception is that the door can be read as simply one thing or the other. The door is a machine of deception, a machine that deceives everyone who uses it into believing that there is a singular significance for this contraption. This door is like the door to a crypt -- and at the same time a door to enjoyment -- to Thérèse's reckless enjoyment under the surveillance of a violent and jealous husband. The associations between the hinged door and the sex of a woman are too obvious and too crude to pursue in detail here. I am trying to address how machines change notions of difference and

representation when they occur in literature and history, especially when they occur, hidden away as the ingeniously constructed false back of a fireplace in the music rooms of a sequestered eighteenth-century wife. Thérèse des Hayes's story provides us with a new perspective on the fact that one of the figures that Derrida uses to designate "différance" is "la brisure": a break or joint that reveals itself to the suspicious eye as the sign of a woman's desire.

Coda

What follows is a theoretical exegesis on the *parvenu* in *ancien régime* France in its relationship to the subject formation in general. The *parvenu* is a figure who does not completely belong in the closed world of good society and is also at the same time, a sign of an opening in that world. This opening will create the opportunity for Vaucanson to succeed with his automata in mid-eighteenth century France and is a sign of the fact that the aristocratic world was accepting outsiders on the basis of talent, promise and performance. As the closed world opened itself to outsiders, it also opened itself to critique. The very notion of initiation however, into a closed society has some resonance with the way in which Lacan's describes the initiation of the infant to subjectivity.

The Parvenu and the Mirror Stage

Zília is not exactly a *parvenu*: her outsider status is more absolute. She does not aspire to belong, she aspires to observe. After her introduction to society in the form of Déterville's family, she rarely misrecognizes what goes on in society, Unlike the *parvenu*, she possesses an impressive pedigree, a "princesse de sang," albeit Peruvian. Her natural aristocratic bearing makes her able to negotiate Parisian society with an amazing self-assurance. The *parvenu* is described as a person who has not mastered the practices of an elite society in which he finds himself and to which he aspires to belong. By the

seventeenth century, the homogeneity of French society began to be disrupted by the system of ennoblements that was instituted by Louis XIV. The *noblesse d'épée* found itself losing power to the *noblesse de robe* who were often wealthy financier and farmer generals. *Parvenus* abounded in greater number in the eighteenth century and talented young men from the provinces like Jacques Vaucanson and Jean-Jacques Rousseau arrived in Paris in order to seek their fortunes and prove their talents. The salons and Parisian society were, in general, good to both of them. One rose in his field and was eventually admitted to the Académie Royale des Sciences and the employment of the king. The other rejected his worldly ambitions and tried to exile himself from society: success dogged him, however. Rousseau has left us some of the most trenchant and ambivalent critiques of worldly practices in mid-eighteenth century. Vaucanson left only one text, a description of the functioning of his mechanical duck and Flute Player. The stories of both of these men illustrate how it was possible to *parvenir*, to arrive in their lifetimes, at a kind of fame and recognition. The possibility of this kind of arrival is one of the marks of the advent of modernity.

The infant of Lacan's mirror stage is always in a state of misrecognition before his or her own reflection: it is by misidentifying itself with a "mirage" of corporeal consistency and mastery, that the infant assumes its place as a subject. This encounter with its reflection is always premature, something for which the infant is never prepared, something for which the infant cannot be

prepared. The infant of the mirror stage is the *parvenu* of subjectivity itself. The *parvenu* is described in the eighteenth century, as a person who rises too quickly in the social strata to a position whose manners and style he or she has not yet mastered. The infant of the mirror stage is the primordial *parvenu*: it too arrives precipitously at identification with a subjective position which it cannot master. The uncanny resemblance of the *parvenu* and the infant recognizing itself in the mirror has to do with the commemoration of primordial identification structuring all subsequent rituals of initiation.

The definition of *parvenu* implies not so much an ethical deficiency as a social and stylistic one and is dated 1721¹: "Personne qui s'est élevée à une condition supérieure sans en acquérir les manières, le ton, le savoir-vivre." Instead of lacking "les manières, le ton, le savoir-vivre," the infant of the mirror stage lacks motor coordination: despite this however, it arrives at nothing less than a primordial identification with a mirage of its maturity. This mirage is the *imago* that finally establishes the relationship between the organism and its reality. This relationship is conditioned by "une insuffisance organique" that is a result of the "prématuration spécifique de la naissance" in the case of human beings. The specific prematurity produces the temporal dialectic of the mirror

¹By the end of the nineteenth century, Proust's Charlie Morel epitomized the ruthlessness of those talented young men whose lack of scruples and charisma had earned themselves a position in aristocratic society as well as the title of *arriviste*. The entry for *arriviste* in the *Petit Robert* dates the term at 1893 and defines an *arriviste* as "Personne dénuée de scrupules qui veut arriver, réussir dans le monde par n'importe quel moyen."

stage that Lacan describes as

un drame dont la poussée interne se précipite de l'insuffisance à l'anticipation - et qui pour le sujet pris au leurre de l'identification spatiale, machine les fantasmes qui se succèdent d'une image morcelée du corps à une forme que nous appellerons orthopédique de sa totalité, - et à l'armure enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante, qui va marquer de sa structure rigide tout son développement mentale (1966:97).

From insufficiency to anticipation, the subject travels a temporal dialectic of belatedness and precipitation. Spatial identification is a lure, a trap: in fact, the crystallization of the primordial subject takes place as a primal misrecognition that it struggles to correct for the rest of its life. The *parvenu* is one who achieves an equally precipitous social mobility: what the *parvenu* lacks is merely a more sophisticated form of motor coordination. He is as little a master of the tone, the manners, the *savoir-vivre*, in short the style, of the class in which he finds himself as the infant is of its body.

The primordial subject is handicapped from the very beginning and lured by an impossible identification; it arrives at an image of its own totality only by means of an orthopedic device. Lacan writes in "Le stade du miroir",

L'assomption jubilatoire de son image spéculaire par l'être encore plongé dans l'impuissance motrice et la dépendance du nourrissage qu'est le petit homme à ce stade *infans*, nous paraîtra dès lors manifester en une situation exemplaire la matrice symbolique où le *je* se précipite en une

forme primordiale, avant qu'il ne s'objective dans la dialectique de l'identification à l'autre et que le langage ne lui restitue dans l'universel fonction sa fonction de sujet (1966:94).

This primordial "je" that crystallizes for the infant or the "petit homme" at this point, prepares the way to language². It should be emphasized that the primordial subject is a "petit homme." The "petite femme" is as yet undifferentiated from him and yet it would be more accurate to say that the primordial subject is feminine, is in fact, precisely the "petite femme" because she is the one in front of the phantasmatic mirror, the scapegoat of primordial narcissism and also the one who pays the highest price for its resistance to representation.

When Rousseau renounced worldly ambitions and tried to resort to copying music to make his living, he was trying to assume a complete autonomy that escapes the *parvenu* and the primordial subject. The *parvenu* and the infant cannot stand on their own. A *Gestalt* precipitates the assumption of subjective initiation: the "je" or I takes hold in front of the mirror.

The uninitiated subject of eighteenth century worldliness must have viewed the smooth and polished surfaces of his contemporaries as the pure opposition to his own unbearable lack of self-control and mastery. Rousseau represents the painful position in which his failure to master the smooth surfaces of

²The way to language has been questioned by Heidegger in ways different from, but not necessarily incompatible with the Lacanian system.

worldliness leave him. He is constantly committing grave errors in judgment during worldly situations. His attempts at wit fall flat with a resounding thud and in the ensuing silence that they seem to inevitably cause, he is forced to assimilate the full effects of his awkwardness.

The subject cannot escape its fate as the one that identifies or aspires; the subject comes into being in a moment of jubilant identification (primary narcissism) only to experience the failure of that identification. Rousseau represents this failure as well as his attempts to escape it in dramatic and tragic renunciatory gestures. The Confessions are in a way, an instance of virtuous journal keeping and self-observation. The discordance that Rousseau was to describe so vividly between private and social selves has something to do with Lacan's mirror stage which is temporally situated at that primordial moment that precedes the subject's entry into any kind of social space at all: "...le point important est que cette forme situe l'instance du *moi*, dès avant sa détermination sociale, dans une ligne de fiction, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu..." (1966:94). The "ligne de fiction" determines the path by which subjectivity fails at all points to establish itself as anything else but fiction. *Cogito* is only one form of this fiction. The "je" arises, is motivated and constituted by a *Gestalt*, that is by something from the outside in. This sets the scene for the alienation, for the anguish of misrecognition that gnaws away at the speaking subject. It is here that the automaton occurs for Lacan as more than simply a double, but a self-constituting *Gestalt*.

Ainsi cette *Gestalt* dont la prégnance doit être considérée comme liée à l'espèce, bien que son style moteur soit encore méconnaissable, -- par ces deux aspects de son apparition symbolise la permanence mentale du *je* en même temps qu'elle préfigure sa destination aliénante; elle est grosse encore des correspondances qui unissent le *je* à la statue où l'homme se projette comme aux fantômes qui le dominant, à l'automate enfin où dans un rapport ambigu tend à s'achever le monde de sa fabrication (1966:95).

From statue to phantom to automaton, the reflection in the mirror becomes one of the infant's stepping stones on the path toward subjectivity. The automaton is one of the figures of the *parvenu* mastering the practices of *savoir faire*.

Chapter 5

"Machinations: Reading the Automaton in Rousseau and Laclos"

MACHINAL, ALE, AUX adj. (1731) Qui est fait sans intervention de la volonté, de l'intelligence, comme par une machine. V. Automatique, inconscient, instinctif, involontaire, irréfléchi, mécanique, réflexe. *Un geste machinal. Réactions machinales.*

MACHINATION n.f. (XIIIe; de machiner) Ensemble de menées secrètes, plus ou moins déloyales. V. Agissement, complot, conspiration intrigue, manoeuvre, ruse. *Ténébreuses, diaboliques machinations. Ourdir une machination.*

MACHINER V. TR. (XIIIe; lat. machinari, de machina) *Vielli*. Former en secret (des desseins, des combinaisons malhonnêtes, illicites). V. Comploter, manigancer, ourdir, tramer; machination. *Machiner un complot, une trahison.* V. Conspirer, intriguer. *Machiner la perte de qqn. (Petit Robert)*

Excuses - An Introduction

In this chapter, I shall examine the relationship between machines and machinations and how both figure difference as it is represented in the literary work. In a certain sense, we shall travel the distance between La Bruyère, ("le sot est automate") and Rousseau ("des êtres mécaniques"). The conspiratorial, the secret plot "plus ou moins déloyales," hatched illicitly in an inner circle has something to do with the invisible, unspeakably complex and hidden mechanism of any marvelous machine, including Vaucanson's automata.

It will not be surprising that the novel upon which these reflections turn is Laclos's Liaisons dangereuses (1782): a text in which the fictional representation of the machination seems to have reached a limit of malign complexity. The entire *ancien régime* conflict between *paraître* and *être*

culminates here. Victor Tausk, in his essay, "The Influencing Machine" (1933), was able to extrapolate from the case of one of his patients, a certain Nataljia A., that the implacable functioning of a complex machine was related to the development of paranoid schizophrenia.¹ The machine, in the form of the *êtres mécaniques*, appears in Rousseau's Rêveries as a function his growing paranoia: he becomes increasingly certain of the virulence of the cabals and conspiracies by which he believes himself surrounded. Before I embark upon a closer reading of Laclos, I will turn my attention briefly to the work of Rousseau in order to better understand how the image of the machine and the idea of the *machinal* interact with one another. The definition of "machinal" refers us to the unconscious, the involuntary, the gesture that is not governed by the will:

¹In this extraordinary case study, Tausk was able to demonstrate that in cases of schizophrenia where the patient suffers from auditory and visual hallucinations as well as strange physical sensations, like being penetrated by electricity, there is somewhere, entangled in the schizophrenic's world, an influencing machine from which these foreign sensations emanate. These sensations Tausk argues, are related to genital sensations and he reminds us that Freud declared that when machines occur in dreams, they almost always represent the genitals. Manipulating the machine is akin to manipulating one's genitals. Tausk points out however, that often in these machine dreams, the machine takes on an increasing complexity so that the dreamer will be intellectually distracted and genital sensations subside. In the case of Nataljia A., the patient declared that an influencing machine located in Berlin and manipulated by her rejected suitor was the source of her troubles: the machine kept changing however, and during the course of the treatment, it became simpler and simpler, more and more primitive. Tausk declared that at first, the machine was a double for the patient herself, but that as the patient regressed deeper and deeper into schizophrenia, her relationship with her body changed in such a way that she reached an infantile state in which she was no longer able to differentiate different parts of her body. The simplification of the influencing machine reflected this. Nataljia A. in fact became her genitals, or was no longer able to differentiate between a "self" and a "a part" of the body.

"qui est fait sans intervention de la volonté." Rousseau produces a complicated discourse around the *machinal* and its effects of which we will attempt a close reading.

Les rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire describes a spiralling movement that takes Rousseau in and out of a state that psychoanalysts might identify as paranoia. The text has been more commonly read as one of the great pieces of lyrical writing on the contemplation of nature and the self, but it is at the same time, one of the great testimonials to an ever intensifying paranoia. A machine crushes Rousseau's fingers in the Fourth Promenade and in the Seventh, intrudes upon Rousseau noisily at the moment when he is imagining himself very much alone in the Swiss Alps, as a kind of land-bound Christopher Columbus. The buzz and hum of machinery are a dim background noise of tropological formations that haunt the writer, like the mutterings of a conspiracy.

In this chapter, I hope to show that what is interesting is not the empirical problematics raised by the thematic formulation of machines *and* literature or even the representational problems raised by machines *in* literature; I would like to focus on a hermeneutic disruption that occurs when we read literature for its mechanical or machine-like qualities. No one has read text as machine as effectively as Paul de Man and his virtuosity at overturning traditional literary, critical questions like, "What does it mean?" for deconstructive questions like "How does it mean?" has led to a great re-

evaluation of literary production itself. It seems at this moment, however, that the lessons of deconstruction are being actively forgotten while deconstruction is itself often declared "dead." One of the ways in which I seek to re-activate, if not re-animate a deconstructive paradigm is to ask the question, "How does it work?" in relationship to sexual difference and fiction. This question is also the question of psychoanalytic theory, that inquires, not after the signification of sexual difference, but rather how sexual difference functions in the formation of the subject and its concomitant relationship to fantasy (and therefore, reality).

In traditional literary studies, one thinks of nothing so far from literature as the machine and if literature engages with the machine, one imagines that it is to simply represent its inhumanity. In de Man's reading of Rousseau's Rêveries, however, it is the mechanistic nature of literary formations that is underscored. Geoffroy Bennington in "Aberrations: de Man (and) the Machine" (1989) reads de Man as a machine-like critic who "reads like a machine....[H]is readings are machines." (215) In Allegories of Reading (1979), de Man demonstrates that Rousseau's texts produce a shift from the analogy of text as body to the problem of text as machine. De Man points to the fact that Rousseau confesses in order to excuse himself: excuses are Rousseau's exemplary textual production.

For de Man, the almost compulsive nature of excuse production in Rousseau is compared with the functioning of a machine. The incident for

which Rousseau is still excusing himself, many years after the writing of the Confessions, the incident that Rousseau claims inspired his need to "come clean" as it were, is of course the series of lies that he tells about Madame de Vercellis's pink and silver ribbon that was found in his possession after her death. Rousseau's excuse for having falsely accused Marion is entirely involved with his internal disposition at the time of the lie. Overwhelmed by shame, he blurts out the first name that comes to his lips. This name happens to be that of Marion's because Marion was very much on his mind. When the ribbon is found in Rousseau's possession, "On voulut savoir où je l'avais pris. Je me trouble, je balbutie, et enfin je dis en rougissant que c'est Marion qui me l'a donné." (1:84) This stuttered proper name is the first time that Marion appears in the text of the Confessions. Who is Marion? Marion is the one from whom Rousseau would like to have received the ribbon and the one for whom the ribbon is intended. He steals the ribbon to give to her as a sign of his affection, but under interrogation, he blurts out her name because it is so much on his mind already. For him, Marion is already metonymically linked to the ribbon. The metonymical relationship is established by means of desire. As we shall see, this kind of lie is for Rousseau, "un effet machinal"; he cannot help himself, he is overcome by emotion, in this case shame, and so he lies despite himself. This automatic lie ("un effet machinal") is confessed only to be excused because the confession should demonstrate that the lie was the result of an unconscious effect, and not Rousseau's intention ("qui est fait sans

intervention de la volonté"). How could Rousseau really be responsible for something over which he had no control?

Rousseau lies in this way on another occasion, overcome by emotion and it is also around women and the subject of women. He describes the incident in the Fourth Promenade. A woman, pregnant herself asks him a pregnant question at dinner about whether or not he has had any children himself. The pregnant question gives birth to a lie. Rousseau denies that he has, even though he knows that a trap has been set for him. "Je répondis en rougissant que je n'avais pas eu ce bonheur" (1:1035). This kind of lying despite himself is accompanied by a blush. The blush is like a physical index that points to the lie. In this case, no one seems to be fooled. Rousseau imagines that everyone at dinner knows about his failed fatherhood.

What Rousseau does not excuse himself for the abandonment of his children after he relates this incident: what he needs to explain is why he lied.

Il est donc certain que ne ni mon jugement ni ma volonté de dictèrent ma réponse et qu'elle fut *l'effet machinal* de mon embarras. Autrefois je n'avais point cet embarras et je faisais l'aveu de mes fautes avec plus de franchise que de honnêteté, parce que je ne doutais pas qu'on ne vit ce qui les rachetait et que je sentais au dedans de moi; mais l'oeil de la malignité me navre et me déconcerte; en devenant plus malheureux je suis devenu plus timide et jamais je n'ai menti que par timidité (1:1035: emphasis added).

This "effet machinal" takes over and intervenes where his reason and his will fail him. Who is speaking this lie then when Rousseau stutters the name Marion? Who is responsible for the utterance, the blurted name? It would seem that some kind of linguistic force intervenes when Rousseau is overwhelmed by emotion. The name seems to speak itself. "Marion," the name and the word, the linguistic unit, is floating in Rousseau's consciousness and lands on his lips when a disconcerting question that implies some kind of guilt is posed. "Elle était présente à ma pensée, je m'excusai sur le premier objet qui s'offrit" (1:86). Marion as a name offers itself up to Rousseau and he avails himself of it in order that he might excuse himself by it. (There is a viscosity to this act of stuttering or blurring; it is like an untimely ejaculation "je *m'excusai sur le premier objet qui s'offrit.*") In this case, Rousseau does not speak so much as he is spoken, or as Lacan might put it, "ça parle."²

The lie about his having children is a denial, "Je répondis en rougissant jusqu'aux yeux que je n'avais pas eu ce bonheur....On s'attendait à cette négative, on la provoquait même pour jouir du plaisir de m'avoir fait mentir"

²"Marion" as pure signifier is what speaks through Rousseau. Lacan's version of how exactly *it* as signifying system and effects of signification come to "speak" is outlined in the following,

Cette passion du signifiant dès lors devient une dimension nouvelle de la condition humaine en tant que ce n'est pas seulement l'homme qui parle, mais que dans l'homme et par l'homme *ça parle*, que sa nature devient tissée par des effets où se retrouvent la structure du langage dont il devient la matière, et que par là résonne en lui, au-delà de tout ce qu'a pu concevoir la psychologie des idées, la relation de la parole (1966:688-689).

(1:1034), but according to Rousseau, one that under different circumstances, would not have taken place. This lie is a negation -- just as the false accusation about Marion is an implied negation, "I did not take the ribbon, Marion did."³ In Rousseau's version of his lie about his children, it is obvious that no one is taken in by his lie; his interlocutors already seem to know the truth. There are certain conditions for truthfulness that were not fulfilled. Lies intervene as an automatic effect, Rousseau lies *machinalement*: when he lies he is most machine-like, overwhelmed with emotion and unable to reason. He is in fact, never more innocent than when he utters this kind of automatic lie. Another kind of agency takes over, the blunt force of linguistic functions themselves. "Marion" offers itself up to him as an object and a lie forms itself on his lips as a result of his shame.

In his quest to fulfill the "devise," *vitam vero impendenti*, Rousseau contemplates his lifelong service to truth and finds that it was precisely the incident with Marion that inspired in him the great horror of lying. The truth to which Rousseau has no problem confessing is that he had formed a fantasy around Marion, a fantasy in which the ribbon played no small part. "Je l'accusai d'avoir fait ce que je voulais faire et de m'avoir donné le ruban parce que mon intention était de le lui donner" (1:86). This statement can be read as an

³This is called "dénégation," the French translation of the Freudian term, *Verneinung* or in English, negation. It is by means of a negation that one acquires knowledge of the unconscious -- this often leads to the scandalous psychoanalytic interpretation of "no" as "yes."

avowal--a negation that avows. It is a confession, in fact, if we read the nouns and pronouns as a series of substitutions. Rousseau substitutes Marion for himself: all the shifters are displaced and in what would have been the truthful statement, "J'ai volé le ruban afin de le lui donner" becomes, "Elle a volé le ruban afin de me le donner." Marion replaces Rousseau as the agent and Rousseau replaces Marion as the indirect object. The ribbon stays in place, like a hinge around which the shifters, subjects and objects turn. It is also the ribbon that calls Marion's name to Rousseau's lips when he was asked how he had it in his possession to begin with.

These substitutions take place automatically, that is without the intervention of Rousseau's will or reason. For de Man, Rousseau's excuses take on the machine-like aspect of linguistic production. ("Je m'excusai sur le premier objet qui s'offrit.") "By saying that the excuse is not only a fiction but also a machine one adds to the connotation of referential detachment, of gratuitous improvisation, that of the implacable repetition of the pre-ordained pattern" (1979:294). The excuse, however, is also a displacement, an automatic displacement of agency; Rousseau admits that he accused Marion of doing what he wanted to do, steal the ribbon so that it could become an exchange of the sign of love or desire between them. In accusing her of doing something that he had intended to do (giving the ribbon as a sign of desire), he allows her to share, if not his desire, then his guilt. He implicates her as the object of his desire. When he is found with the ribbon, he is caught, red-handed

in his desire. Rousseau admits to wanting to offer the ribbon to Marion, he describes her as pretty, with the coloring of a girl from the mountains, but he does not testify to a desire for Marion, he only confesses to a fantasy--that *she* should be the one who offers *him* the ribbon.

What Rousseau denies is any malicious intent in this matter. This categorical disavowal resonates like the involuntary denial that he utters when asked directly if he had had any children. In fact, the negation of malicious intent is supposed to excuse the lie itself.

J'ai procédé rondement dans celle [la confession] que je viens de faire, et l'on ne trouvera surement pas que j'ai ici pallié la noirceur de mon forfait. Mais je ne remplirais pas le but de ce livre si ne j'exposais en même temps mes dispositions intérieures, et que je craignisse de m'excuser en ce qui est conforme à la vérité. Jamais la méchanceté ne fut plus loin de moi que dans ce cruel moment, et lorsque je chargeai cette malheureuse fille, il est bizarre mais il est vrai que mon amitié pour elle en fut la cause (1:86).

Rousseau has confessed, but he has more to tell us: he has not told us the entire truth of the matter. The truth that has gone so far unsaid is the truth of his inner disposition; it is the truth of his intentionality. He denies intention of doing Marion harm and justifies this disavowal by describing his "dispositions intérieures" as friendly. The *friendship* that he had for Marion was the real cause of his wrongful accusation. This friendship is truly "bizarre." In these

Confessions, Rousseau confesses or admits that he has done something terribly wrong, but then proceeds to excuse himself of all wrong doing by appealing to his inner, hidden dispositions that were, in fact, based on a bizarre friendship. What makes the friendship so bizarre is that it is not at all friendly: one does not accuse one's friends of crimes that one has committed, given the opportunity, one occasionally accuses one's enemies of such things. What Rousseau describes between Marion and himself does not appear to be a relationship of friendship: it seems by all accounts to have been a relationship of inarticulated and unreciprocated desire.

The object of desire is the one thing that is powerful enough to elicit the ambivalence that produces a false accusation: in this way, it is like an enemy. In Rousseau's case, a false accusation is thus tantamount to a confession of desire. Desire or love is what is passively denied in this confession. Friendship is what is offered in its place. (We shall see that this becomes the *Présidente de Tourvel's* strategy vis-à-vis Valmont.) Malicious intent is completely disavowed and what is offered in its place is rather extreme: total sacrifice.

Ce mensonge, qui fut un grand crime en lui-même en dut être un plus grand encore par ses effets que j'ai toujours ignorés, mais que le remord m'a fait supposer aussi cruels qu'il était possible. Cependant à ne consulter que la disposition où j'étais en le faisant, ce mensonge ne fut qu'un fruit de la mauvaise honte et bien loin qu'il partit d'une intention de nuire à celle qui en fut la victime, je puis jurer à la face du ciel qu'à

l'instant même où cette honte invincible me l'arrachoit j'aurois donné tout mon sang avec joye pour en détourner l'effet sur moi seul (1:1023).

His willingness to sacrifice himself for the victim does not make him take back the false accusation which would have indeed turned the full punishment on him, in place of Marion. He insists upon the lie even after further questioning and a direct confrontation with his so-called friend, Marion. "Rousseau can convey his 'inner feeling' to us only if we take, as we say his *word* for it, whereas the evidence for his theft is, at least in theory, literally available" (de Man 1979:280). That which is radically unverifiable is this kind of excuse that appeals to an inner feeling or disposition ("dispositions intérieures"). "Someone's sentiments are accessible only through the medium of mimicry, or gestures that require deciphering and function as a language" (1979:281). Words are the only access we have to the inner sentiments of the other; there is no other form of empirical verification. Rousseau uses the blush in both instances of automatic lying as evidence of the validity of his excuses. Blushes are, therefore, the mark of a shame and embarrassment and the concomitant lack of self-control that should exonerate this liar of his lies. If we are to follow Austin's speech act theory that differentiates the constative from the performative, we will find that an excuse is precisely a place where the two forms of speech acts are confused. The excuse as constative statement however, cannot be confirmed through empirical evidence as in the case of Austin's example for the constative, "the cat is on the mat." We can look to

see if a cat is indeed on the mat, or not. We cannot verify that Rousseau had no intention of doing Marion harm. Rousseau's excuses "work" when we "take him at his word" and the performative that follows will then make sense ("je puis jurer à la face du ciel..." etc.)

Stealing and confessing, de Man reminds us, are two different kinds of acts. One doesn't need language to steal and confessing is a purely linguistic act. We can verify that something is stolen and we can verify that someone confessed: the excuse however is unverifiable, relying as it does on representing an inner disposition. It is "verbal in its utterance, in its effect and in its authority: its purpose is not to state but to convince, itself an 'inner' process to which only words can bear witness" (1979:280). The excuse is a strange linguistic operation (being both performative and constative at the same time). It is as bizarre as the friendship that Rousseau bears for Marion. What is censored is desire. Rousseau almost refuses the word altogether in his confession. He only supplements this confession with more excuses, recounted in the Fourth Promenade. He states that "on ne pouvait la voir sans l'aimer;" but this is barely an avowal. One could not see her without loving her: that is everyone who saw her loved her. Rousseau certainly saw her and so we must count him among those who loved her. Her charms however, do not save her from calumny. The universal love that she is supposed to be capable of inspiring fails her in the face of Rousseau's obstinate accusations.

The ribbon represents not only desire however, but reciprocity and

symmetry of desire ("reciprocity...,as we know from Julie, is for Rousseau the very condition of love" (1979:283). For de Man, it is because the de Vercellis household is dominated by an atmosphere of "intrigue and suspicion" that "the phantasy of this symmetrical reciprocity is experienced as interdict, its figure, the ribbon, has to be stolen and the agent of this transgression has to be susceptible of being substituted" (1979:283). From a different point of view however, a psychoanalytic point of view as well as a feminist one, the asymmetry of the sexual difference is always disguised by a fantasy of perfect reciprocity in *love* relations. How can "the phantasy of symmetrical reciprocity" be experienced as an interdict when the absence of reciprocity or symmetry in love is one of the conditions of sexual difference? Rousseau is the only subject of this experience and the only subject of the fantasy of reciprocity. There is no evidence that his desire for Marion was reciprocated at all, so the accusation launched at Marion, a non-reciprocating object of desire is also an accusation that is launched against the lack of reciprocity in this situation. (Rousseau wanted Marion to have stolen the ribbon to offer to him because he has stolen it to give to her.) The interdiction that de Man attributes to the household remains external to the relationship of desire. This implies that if the interdiction were not there, reciprocity between the two young people would be possible. My reading of this situation draws a different conclusion: the external interdiction is there in order to conceal the inherent impossibility of reciprocation or symmetry in the sexual relation and in all relations of sexual difference.

Sandy Petrey emphasizes a failure to read "Marion" in his commentary on de Man's and de Man's critics (Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michael in this case) readings of this episode. In Petrey's reading of de Man, the utterance Marion becomes a "nothing," a void. "De Man reads the end of language's responsibility for descriptive accuracy and intentional expression as its total liberation from everything except itself. Because Rousseau 'was saying nothing at all,' for de Man he wasn't doing anything at all either. His locution had not illocutionary value" (Petrey 154). Petrey goes on to show that Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michael do not necessarily differ with de Man on this point: "De Man's mistake is to think that the sound 'Marion' remains a signifier even when emptied of all meaning....De Man recognizes that the accidental emission of the sound 'Marion' is not a speech act..., but he fails to recognize that it's not language either. What reduces the signifier to noise and the speech act to an accident is the absence of intention" (Knapp and Michael 23 in Petrey 157). In de Man's reading of the emptiness of "Marion," the nothingness still signifies: what it signifies has to do with the nature of language as system autonomous of human intention. This leaves open a space for a psychoanalytic account of intentionality. What the language philosophers Knapp and Michael are almost comically incapable of accounting for are the gaps that exist in intentionality itself. They read the "absence of intentionality" as insignificant. I have to insist that this absence is not pure absence: this absence signifies desire.

The difference between "Marion" and a noise like "ugh" is enormous not just because, as Petrey points out, the utterance "Marion" carries with it a heavy illocutionary weight that has immediate and disastrous consequences on the young woman who bears this name, but also because "Marion" functions as an avowal, a confession of Rousseau's desire for the woman herself. Sexual difference is linguistically determined: what Knapp and Michael would like to do is efface difference altogether here. Because of their understanding of "intention," what Rousseau said when he uttered the sound "Marion" was nothing more significant than noise. For de Man, this non-signifying "Marion" signifies something out of its nothingness. What I would like to propose is that Rousseau's "Marion" is a cry, perhaps nonsensical, but certainly significant, that signifies, like Freud's slip of the tongue, the presence of the unconscious and the devastating effects on the adolescent Jean-Jacques of inarticulate desire and sexual difference.

On the question of sexual difference, it would seem that we would be wise not to take de Man at *his* word, for he does not address this form of difference at all. Despite the fact that Rousseau is the less trusted of the two in the household, his accusations carry a heavy weight because he is accusing a woman of initiating an amorous relationship by a gift. Stealing may be the same kind of crime for both sexes, but the giving of a ribbon is different when a woman is the giver and not the receiver. This violates all rules of decorous behavior and *bienséance*: a young man may offer a young girl a ribbon in a

gesture of gallantry, as a token of his love, but a girl cannot initiate this kind of giving. In Les égarements du coeur et de l'esprit, all of Madame de Lursay's intelligence and finesse are deployed in order to disguise the fact that she is seducing the narrator. Madame de Merteuil in Les liaisons dangereuses also describes in detail the lengths to which a woman must go to conceal any kind of initiatory step she might take in the course of a seduction.

Rousseau seems to have an inkling of the greater gravity of his accusation against the young woman. There is also an implication that having cast such grave aspersions upon her character, he has in fact destroyed it. This young woman was described initially by Rousseau as a "bonne fille, sage, et d'une fidélité à toute épreuve" (1:84).

J'ignore ce que devint cette victime de ma calomnie; mais il n'y a pas d'apparence qu'elle ait après cela trouvé facilement à se bien placer. Elle emportait une imputation cruelle à son honneur de toutes manières. Le vol n'était qu'une bagatelle, mais enfin c'était un vol, et qui pis est, employé à séduire un jeune garçon; enfin le mesonge et l'obstination ne laissaient rien à espérer de celle en qui tant de vices étaient réunis....Qui sait, à son age, où le découragement de l'innocence avilie a pu la porter (1:85).

In this way Rousseau imagines that his slander might have such a powerful effect upon Marion, that he would have made her guilty as well. Marion would then share his guilt and his misfortune: if he cannot make her share his desire,

then in falsely accusing her, he can at least make her share his misery. In his later life, Rousseau experiences himself more and more as a victim of false accusations and feels powerless to defend himself, like the innocent Marion, made guilty by others. In Rousseau's later fantasies of persecution, he tries to make himself into Marion, the falsely accused victim of his own slander. Long after the Marion incident, Rousseau continues to try to approach Marion and create reciprocity with her by imagining himself the victim of endless false accusations.

In Laclos's Liaisons dangereuses, the letter that precipitates the break between Valmont and Tourvel and eventually, Valmont and Merteuil is the one in which Valmont disavows any responsibility in his relationship to Tourvel. "Ce n'est pas ma faute," the vicomte is instructed to write by his co-conspirator, Merteuil. Valmont is instructed by Merteuil to take the extreme "no excuses" position of a libertine. In the end, however, somebody has to take the blame for the things that have gone wrong: that somebody turns out to be Merteuil. Marion takes the blame for Rousseau and Merteuil takes the blame for Valmont. In Laclos' novel, the only innocent women are the ones who either do not play in the arena of desire or those who are entirely destroyed by desire. It seems rather difficult for women to profit from their innocence: and once accused, it seems equally impossible for women to defend themselves. There is something inherently inexcusable about the way in which femininity works and we will examine Laclos's text in greater detail to discover how inexcusability and

femininity are often automatically related.

What de Man does manage to do with Rousseau is demonstrate how the automatic is figured and how the text as body analogy becomes a relationship between text and machine.

By saying that the excuse is not only a fiction but also a machine one adds to the connotation of referential detachment, of gratuitous improvisation, that of the implacable repetition of a preordained pattern....The machine is like the grammar of the text when it is isolated from its rhetoric, the merely formal element without which no text can be generated. There can be no use of language which is not, within a certain perspective thus radically formal, i.e. mechanical...(de Man 1979:294).

The purely formal aspect of a text is always marked by sexual difference, which is both arbitrary and ruthless in its hyper-linguistic formation. Marion is not just any name, nor is it merely a noise, it is the name of a young woman from whom Rousseau would like to have received a ribbon. The question posed by the pregnant woman having to do with paternity is also marked by sexual difference. Rousseau seems especially disconcerted when he is confronted with the mechanics of sexual relations. It is here that agency fails him and linguistic mechanics intervenes most actively. He lies, automatically, and violates his motto *vitam vero impendenti*. It is possible to apply de Man's ideas of the radical formalism of language to the question of sexual difference.

Sexual difference as produced in and by texts, is radically formal and even grammatical, but this does not mean anything beyond that. It should not lead us to conclude that there is a space of freedom beyond the grammatical confines of sexual difference where people could be just people. There is no existence beyond the parameters of gender and sexual difference is inscribed as arbitrary and lexical. The radical incommensurability of the sexes is linguistically inscribed everywhere we look and read, but so far, in de Man, Rousseau and Laclos, women have seemed to take the blame for this incommensurability.

More Excuses

The Fourth Promenade is, in many a ways, a text primarily interested in making more excuses about the Marion episode. The meditation on the possibility of ethical lying allows Rousseau to recount the anecdotes of the young Fazy and the careless Pleince, two young playmates - friends even - for whom Rousseau lied. These anecdotes are recounted as a way of convincing the reader of Rousseau's virtue: Rousseau wants to prove that he is able to lie for the good of others. In the course of the Fourth Promenade, Rousseau tries to differentiate between various kinds of truth and different kinds of lies. In the cases of both Fazy and Pleince, Rousseau tells lies to protect his friends and participates in cover-ups because he lies to protect his friends who are in fact guilty of having done him bodily harm.

De Man brings these stories of mutilation into play with metaphors of

writing, "Writing always includes the moment of dispossession in favor of the arbitrary power play of the signifier and from the point of view of the subject, this can only be experienced as a dismemberment, a beheading or a castration" (1979:296).⁴ Every writer is "cut off" eventually from his/her text: every text functions independently and autonomously of its author's intentions. There is then, always something about writing, in writing that exceeds the "intervention de la volonté;" that is, something about writing itself is of the order of the *machinal*. The case of Fazy is especially interesting because it involves a dangerous, mutilating machine. Rousseau and his cousin Fazy are playing in the Fazy family factory that produces printed fabrics or calicos.

Un jour, j'étais à l'étendage dans la chambre de la calandre et j'en regardais les rouleaux de fonte: leur luisant flattoit ma vue, je fus tenté d'y poser mes doigts et je les promenais avec plaisir sur le licé du cylindre, quand le jeune Fazy s'étant mis dans la roue lui donna un demiquart de tour se adroitement qu'il n'y prit que le bout de mes deux plus longs doigts; mais c'en fut assez pour qu'ils fussent écrasés par le bout et que les deux ongles y restassent. Je fis un cri perçant, Fazy détourne à l'instant la roue, m'embrasse et me conjure d'appaiser mes cris, ajoutant qu'il était perdu (1:1036).

Rousseau keeps Fazy's secret so well that twenty years later no one knows

⁴For Freud in Moses and Monotheism, committing a murder is compared to mutilating a text. Covering up the act is what is most important and most difficult in both cases.

why his two fingers were scarred. Now, it seems, according to de Man at least, in the chain reaction produced by testimony, it is Fazy's turn to confess and excuse himself. Rousseau succeeds in getting two of his fingers crushed in a place where fabric, not paper is printed: printing fabric with patterns and printing paper with words are similar operations. In fact, there is something about pattern printing that should recall for us de Man's description of referential detachment in language in general and making excuses in particular. The excuses that are not only fictions, but also machines produce the linguistic effect of "gratuitous improvisation, that of the implacable repetition of a preordained pattern...." This is the pattern produced by machine-like operations and it is a pattern that is printed on fabric by the machine owned by the young Fazy's family. Machines produce patterns and run in the family.

There is a seductive shine to a cylinder, it is in fact, so seductive, that it inspires Rousseau to run his fingers over it until his cousin sets the machine in motion. The mutilation here takes place because of a certain ignorance about machines and their functions. Fazy may not have intended to crush Rousseau's fingers, but his operating the machine produced just such an effect. Rousseau may not have intended to hurt Marion by mechanically uttering her name in a false accusation, but his enunciation produces just such a deleterious effect. In the case of Fazy, however, Rousseau, the victim this time, protects the one who has done him bodily harm by suppressing the truth.

The conclusion of the Fourth Promenade is at best, inconclusive.

Rousseau is dissatisfied himself with his erratic system of differentiating harmless lies from damaging truths. He comes back to his motto that he has sought to live by, often not completely successfully. There is something difficult about avoiding all lies: the truth does not offer itself up so simply at every occasion. There are times when the truth seems impossible altogether.

Quand la stérilité de ma conversation me forçait d'y suppléer par d'innocentes fictions, j'avais tort, parce qu'il ne faut point pour amuser autrui s'avilir soi-même; et quand entraîné par le plaisir d'écrire j'ajoutais à des choses réelles des ornements inventés j'avois plus de tort parce qu'orner la vérité par des fables c'est en effet la défigurer (1:1038).

Fictions can supplement the sterility of truthfulness and fabulations are like ornaments that decorate an austere veracity. The truth, then is always under threat of being deformed, disfigured as such, in conversation and in writing. The truth is then, a kind of unstable and austere backdrop that one is always tempted to decorate or ornament with a gaudy lie. The truth does not exclude the possibility of supplementarity or ornamentation: it seems to in fact invite it. It is always under threat of contamination. Lying takes the form of a purely linguistic operation: it is supplementarity, embellishment, etc. If Rousseau is trying to secure a stable entity of truth immune to the linguistic operations of lying, then he does not seem to succeed. Rousseau is aware of a failure and what does he do, but make more excuses? "Jamais la fausseté ne dicta mes mensonges, ils sont tous venus de faiblesse, mais cela m'excuse très mal. Avec

une âme foible on peut tout au plus se garantir du vice, c'est être arrogant et téméraire d'oser professer de grandes vertus" (1:1039). A kind of congenital weakness, inherent to Rousseau, is the excuse for all excuses; but even this is not a good excuse. Finally, Rousseau is able to turn all the bad excuses into a positivity wrested out of pure negativity; Rousseau is finally able to "perform modesty" in his writing, precisely because he cannot and does not profess to the great virtues.

Mistakes

In *The Heroine's Text*, Nancy K. Miller demonstrates that in *Les liaisons dangereuses*, Merteuil and Tourvel are exemplary cases of femininity in a dystopic narrative: they have something crucial in common. They share a common wish or fantasy: they want to prove that they are not like other women. "The mistake that the two women make--like all tragic heroines--is to believe that they are different from other women and that because they are different, they will be exceptions to the rules of a (fictional) feminine destiny" (1980:147). Once again, we are in the realm of fictionally plotted feminine destinies that are determined and shaped by a single mistake for which there is no reparation. This seems to be the nature of the feminine condition: a single mistake is all that is necessary to destroy the consistency of the feminine subject. The two women differ only in the ways in which they seek to distinguish themselves from other women: one hopes to by her machinations and the other by means of an exemplary virtue. What happens to both of them,

however, is similar to the fate of Rousseau's Marion; they are both betrayed and in a sense destroyed by a man who cannot be their lover and is not their friend.

One of the crucial problems around which this novel turns is the possibility or impossibility of friendship between the sexes. Discourses on friendship abound in the triangle of Valmont, Tourvel and Merteuil. Derrida has glossed friendship for us in "The Politics of Friendship." In this brief essay, he cites Montaigne citing Aristotle, "O my friends, there is no friend" and in doing so reflects upon the contradictory nature of the apostrophe "O my friends" and the statement, "there is no friend." Derrida goes on to discuss the problems of response and responsibility. Friendship, according to Derrida is the idea in the name of which we must declare, that there is no friend.

But, if there is no friend at present, then precisely let us make it so that there will be friendships from now on, friendships that are 'the most perfect of their kind.' Here is what I am calling you to, answer me, it is our responsibility. Friendship is never a given in the present; it belongs to the experience of waiting, of promise, or of commitment. Its discourse is that of prayer and at issue there is that which responsibility opens to the future (1988:636).⁵

Friendship is always anticipatory, virtual - "not a given." It is, in Austin's terms,

⁵This essay is translated by Gabriel Motzkin and appears in the Journal of Philosophy, vol. 85 no. 11, November, 1988.

a performative because it is a promise offered and accepted. For Derrida, friendship is in a sense, always a response to the Other, an answer that has to do with responsibility. This responsibility is a delicate affair because friendship, as a Kantian Idea, must maintain an uneasy truce, "an unstable equilibrium" between *love* and *respect*. Love is the modality of attraction and fusion, respect keeps things away from each other and operates on the modality of distancing and separation. Friendship also implies reciprocity, equality and *fraternity*. Derrida concedes that women are traditionally excluded from the realm of friendship. He describes the exclusion of women from the realm of friendship as a double one: in the "great ethico-politic-philosophical discourses on friendship," there is "on the one hand, the exclusion of friendship between women and, on other hand, the exclusion of friendship between a man and a woman" (1988:642). What kind of relationships can women have if they are excluded from the realm of friendship then? Women, it will become clear, are restricted to the order of the master/slave relationship that the enlightened friendship of the republic wants to replace.

As we saw in the case of Rousseau and Marion, there is no reciprocity, no love or respect, merely a relationship of thwarted desire sublimated into a "bizarre" friendship that is no friendship at all. The desire, love or attraction dominates the scene between Rousseau and his object so much so that there arises nothing but confusion between Marion and himself. It is crucial to remember however, that Marion ends up taking the blame for and with

Rousseau. Rousseau was therefore not very successful at maintaining the terms of friendship with the young woman despite the fact that earlier in his life, he proved himself capable of sacrifices in the name of friendship with both Pleince and Fazy.

Friends

Both Merteuil and Tourvel try to be "friends" with Valmont. This is perhaps their common mistake. The rhetoric around the friendships that the two women offer him however, is radically different, Tourvel offers Valmont a kind of sublimated and "sentimentalized" friendship in the tradition of friendship that Graffigny's Zilia offers Déterville. Merteuil assumes a kind of complicity between Valmont and herself that is based on her possession of one of his secrets, but that is also founded on a complicitous outlook on the world. Valmont and Merteuil vacillate between self-consciously ventriloquating discourses of chivalry and gallantry and a rhetoric of "virile" friendship that is shared by warriors. The confusion between "amitié" and "amour" echoes and repeats a similar confusion of the implied terms of such relations that exist in La Nouvelle Héloïse (1761). Friendship between men and women in both Graffigny's and Rousseau's novel is supposed to act as an insurance policy against betrayal. Julie writes to Saint-Preux, "je pourrais te croire amant volage mais non pas ami trompeur" (Letter XXXV). Friendship is a more tranquil relationship than love and Zilia promises Déterville that it provides its own satisfactions, "Renoncez aux sentiments tumultueux, destructeurs,

imperceptibles de notre être; venez apprendre à connaître les plaisirs innocents et durables, venez en jouir avec moi, dans mes sentiments tout ce qui peut vous dédommager de l'amour" (Letter XLI).

In Les liaisons dangereuses, however, friendship's promises are not kept, despite their constant invocation. Valmont calls Merteuil "ma belle amie" to invoke both her beauty and desirability and his respect for her. With Tourvel, he rejects all of her offers of friendship as being inadequate to the passion that he feels for her, but then, during the final phase of the seduction, contradicts himself and uses the friendship that Tourvel has offered as a way of convincing her to allow further correspondance between them. She falls into the trap set for her because she, like Zilia and Julie, believes it possible to substitute friendship for love or desire. Like Rousseau, who replaces his desire for Marion with a bizarre friendship, Tourvel wants to offer friendship and respect in the place of love and desire. This linguistic substitution is what opens the way for her seduction. The confusion between friendship and desire (or "amitié" and "amour") has catastrophic consequences for Tourvel. The cynicism of the libertine lies in the fact that he allows himself to use such terms, while understanding them not so much as empty, but as pretexts, or excuses as it were for the pursuit of other things (that fall in the realm of the sexual or erotic and have nothing to do with friendship at all). Tourvel to Valmont.

Quittez donc ce langage que je ne puis ni ne veux entendre; renoncez à un sentiment qui m'offense et m'effraie....Ce sentiment est-il donc le

seul que vous puissiez connaître, et l'amour aura-t-il ce tort de plus à mes yeux, d'exclure l'amitié?...En vous offrant mon amitié, Monsieur, je vous donne tout ce qui est à moi, tout ce dont je puis disposer. Que pouvez-vous désirer davantage? Pour me livrer à ce sentiment si doux, si bien fait pour mon coeur, je n'attends que votre aveu; et la parole, que j'exige de vous que cette amitié suffira à votre bonheur....Si comme vous le dites, vous êtes revenu de vos erreurs, n'aimeriez-vous pas mieux être l'objet de l'amitié d'une femme honnête, que celui des remords d'une femme coupable?... (Letter LXVII).

The problem is that there is an answer to Tourvel's rhetorical final question and it is not in the negative: in Valmont's libertine logic, he would, in fact, prefer to be an object of remorse for a guilty woman because he is at the very least, highly skeptical of and not very susceptible to the discourse of sentimentalized friendship. The code of friendship which Tourvel seeks to invent between them would contain a sort of distancing respect that Zilia promises Déterville. Déterville, is however a hero of sensibility and the discourse of sensibility is just one among many that Valmont is able to cite in his games of seduction. The consistency of Valmont's discourse lies in its absolute inconsistency; what remains constant is his absolute, hard-edged cynicism about absolute meanings. He and Merteuil are masters of "referential detachment" and "gratuitous improvisation." They engage in the "implacable repetition of a preordained pattern" because they possess an aristocratic and by the

eighteenth-century, a cynical respect for forms.

Valmont does have an enormous respect, however, for the power of words. When he replies in categorical terms that he will not be Tourvel's friend, he understands that what he is engaged in is an important "dispute de mots" that will move him closer to victory. He explains to Merteuil that he has strategically insisted on another title, that of lover. He also explains that he simulated a great disorder in the reasoning of this demand so that he could better "peindre le sentiment" (Letter LXX). He thus knows how to manipulate written language, especially in the form of carefully penned letters, to produce effects that are completely divorced from psychic motivations or his "dispositions intérieures."

It is in the name of friendship that Madame de Volanges offers Tourvel an early warning about Valmont.

Je n'ai jamais douté, ma jeune et belle amie, ni de l'amitié que vous avez pour moi, ni de l'intérêt sincère que vous prenez à tout ce qui me regarde. Ce n'est pas pour éclaircir ce point, que j'espère convenu à jamais entre nous, que je répons à votre réponse: mais je ne crois pas pouvoir me dispenser de causer avec vous au sujet de Valmont (Letter IX).

Volanges is responding to Tourvel's mention of Valmont in her letter. This response is one born out of responsibility (Derrida reminds us in "The Politics of Friendship" that the two words, response and responsibility share the same

Latin root *respondere* that is made up *re* and *spondere* "to pledge, promise, warrant"). It is Madame de Volanges' responsibility as a friend, therefore, to respond to a name in her friend's letter. ("Je ne m'attendais pas, je l'avoue, à trouver jamais ce nom-là dans vos lettres.") The occurrence of the name itself signifies danger. Volanges must respond to the name by communicating something to her friend about the man who bears the name. Tourvel lives in a world where she is ignorant of Valmont's reputation, where she does not understand the danger that his name signifies for women. Volanges is trying to teach Tourvel how to read Valmont.

Vous ne connaissez pas cet homme; où auriez-vous pris l'idée de l'âme d'un libertin? Vous me parlez de sa rare candeur: oh! oui; la candeur de Valmont doit être en effet très rare. Encore plus faux et dangereux qu'il n'est aimable et séduisant, jamais, depuis sa plus grande jeunesse, il n'a fait un pas ou dit une parole sans avoir un projet, et jamais il n'eut un projet qui ne fût criminel. Mon amie, vous me connaissez; vous savez si, de vertus que je tâche de'acquérir, l'indulgence n'est pas celle que je chéris le plus. Aussi, si Valmont était entraîné par des passions fougueuses; si, comme mille autres, il était séduit par les erreurs de son âge, blâmant sa conduite je plaindrais sa personne, et j'attendrais, en silence, le temps où un retour heureux lui rendrait l'estime des gens honnêtes. Mais Valmont n'est pas cela: sa conduite est le résultat de ses principes. Il sait calculer tout ce qu'un homme peut se permettre

d'honneurs sans se compromettre; et pour être cruel et méchant sans danger, il a choisi les femmes pour victimes (Letter IX).

As a friend, Volanges describes to Tourvel the kind of man that Valmont is in order that Tourvel may know him. He is, according to this description, absolutely false and absolutely conniving. This portrait is painted in the ninth letter of the novel; Volanges has condemned Valmont in absolute certainty as a false creature, a relentlessly calculating manipulator and victimizer of women and Valmont proves Volanges right throughout the course of the narrative.

Volanges's warning does not alter in the slightest Tourvel's readings or interpretations of Valmont's letters; she continues to take him at his word. As de Man demonstrated, there is no way of proving testimony to internal dispositions. Valmont and Merteuil both understand the power of this linguistic instability and exploit it to its fullest when dealing with those who are unaware of the possibility of calculating testimony in order to shape one's version of things in a conventionally and socially acceptable way. Volanges understands this cynical strategy of Valmont's, but her disclosure of it is useless to her friend.

Why does Volanges's letter not completely destroy all interest in him on the part of the reader and on the part of Tourvel? The proof of her description is affirmed by Valmont's letter to Merteuil (Letter LXX) in which he describes the content of his letter to Tourvel as being motivated purely by strategy rather than by sentiment ("il n'a fait un pas ou dit une parole sans avoir un projet....")

The answer, we would have to say lies somewhere in the limitations of friendship (amitié) in relationship to love (amour). Tourvel already loves. The most compelling of truths told in friendship have no power against love's lies of convenience. No one understood or represented this better than Proust, but Laclos can be said to be his predecessor insofar as they both wrote novels of manners that contained within them, impossible love stories. Tourvel, like Marcel and Swann possess in advance the signs of the beloved's perfidy, the beloved's unworthiness, but like Marcel, like Swann, the progress of her love is unmitigated. In Proust et les signes (1970), Deleuze describes in a compelling manner, how Proust understood the truths of friendship as having to do with the truths of philosophy. He opposed the truth of desire and of art to the truths that grew out of philosophy and reciprocity. The truth of desire and of art, is of an entirely different order; it is always arrived at in an untimely fashion, both too early and too late and it is almost always painful. In the Proustian order, truth always has something to do with jealousy and suffering. Friendship is that which would protect us from jealousy and suffering, but friendship is powerless in the face of love. Volanges offers up the truth of Valmont to Tourvel in friendship, but friendship's truth turn out to be useless. Volanges's truth arrives too early and too late. Tourvel as woman seduced is transformed into the quintessential lover, for the truth of Valmont's unworthiness as object of her love always arrives at the wrong time.

When Merteuil accuses Valmont of only being able to function as either

a slave or tyrant in relationship to a woman, it is deep into the novel, after he has seduced Tourvel and is demanding the fulfillment of his contractual agreement with Merteuil. There is endless confusion in the correspondance between Valmont and Tourvel and Valmont and Merteuil about the boundary between love and friendship. Merteuil eventually denies the possibility of either relationship with a man such as he. She "reads" him for being in love with Tourvel, insofar as he can be in love with any woman. She tells him of what kind of love he is capable: his love is neither pure nor tender, but it allows him to

trouver à une femme les agréments ou les qualités qu'elle n'a pas: qui la place dans une classe à part, et met toutes les autres en second ordre; qui vous tient encore attaché, même alors que vous l'outragez; tel que je conçois qu'un sultan peut le ressentir pour sa sultane favorite, ce qui ne l'empêche pas de lui préférer souvent une simple odalisque. Ma comparaison me paraît d'autant plus juste que, comme lui, jamais vous n'êtes ni l'amant ni l'ami d'une femme, mais toujours son tyran ou son esclave (Lettre CXLI).

The master/slave relationship in which Valmont finds himself trapped is precisely the kind of relationship that friendship wants to supplant and replace. Friendship is only possible between equals and as Derrida points out, is the relationship of the republic. This is precisely the politics of friendship for Derrida (it is no coincidence that Laclos' novel, which does describe certain failures of

friendship was written during the last years of the *ancien régime*). Merteuil blames Valmont for being unable to have either friendship or love for a woman because he knows only the despotism of the master/slave relationship. In insisting on Merteuil's capitulation, Valmont only proves her to be correct, he is despotic in his demands upon women. The problem is that Marquise is blinded by her insight once again. She fails to see the way in which Valmont fails *her* as both friend and lover. She is blind to the implications of her own insight with regard to herself, because if Valmont is incapable of either love or friendship with a woman, then the basis of her relationship with him is completely undermined as well. The possibility/impossibility of friendship between men and women in the novel turns on this kind of confusion: what is friendship (*amitié*) and how is it differentiated from love (*amour*) when it comes to men and women?

Valmont machinates his seduction of Tourvel on the linguistic confusion between *amitié* and *amour*: he refuses the title of friend only to demand the rights of friendship when he sees Tourvel avoiding him. "Cette amitié précieuse, dont sans doute vous m'avez cru digne, puisque vous avec bien voulu me l'offrir, qu'ai-je donc fait pour l'avoir perdue depuis?...En effet, n'est-ce pas dans le sein de mon amie que j'ai déposé le secret de mon coeur?" (Letter LXXVII). For Valmont, it is obvious, that *amitié* is nothing but a functional *pretext* that allows him to appeal to Tourvel for more opportunities to speak to her of his *amour*. With Merteuil, he shares his famous insight that "femme qui

consent à parler d'amour, finit bientôt par en prendre." (Letter LXXVI) Friendship is thus a pretext for a pretext; for in Merteuil's system, love is nothing but a pretext for sexual enjoyment. Pretexts are empty of meaning: they are linguistic placeholders for other terms. The pretext can be compared to both the excuse and the lie. The pretext of friendship between men and women covers up a sexual or erotic relationship (as in the case of Prévau's courtship of Merteuil during which she dismisses his discussion of "délicate amitié" as empty conventionality, a "banal flag" under which they embark upon their campaign against each other (Letter LXXXV). This "délicate amitié" does not refer to either love or respect, but only to a cool mutual respect for conventionality, for the ossified codes of *bienséance*. Merteuil views the friendship that Prévau offers her with irony: Tourvel takes Valmont at his word.

Friendship then, refers most of the time, in Valmont's and Merteuil's system to pure appearance and convention, but the category of friendship is especially empty in the case of women. This is nowhere more obvious than in Valmont's recounting of Prévau's triumph over "les inséparables." These three beautiful young women were objects of admiration because they seemed in the eyes of the public to be friends with one another. Their friendship is perceived as being so powerful, that it overshadows all other relationships in their lives. What Prévau demonstrates through his elaborate machinations, his plots hatched in secret, is that their friendship, like their loves is false, thus proving

that women are incapable of friendship *and* love. At the end of the little narrative, Prévan and the three women's lovers pledge each other friendship ("on se jura amitié sans réserve") and the women, the false friends are destroyed.

Derrida cites Nietzsche's exclusion of women from the realm of friendship in order to elaborate upon his reading of Aristotle's "O my friends, there is no friend." For Derrida, the formulation of this exclusion is crucial to the status of friendship. Friendship, it seems, is not available to anyone. It is always only a virtuality, a promise of things to come.

'Deshalb ist das Weib noch nicht der Freundschaft fähig: es kennt nur die Liebe.' One must underscore here the 'not yet', because it also extends to man (*Mann*), but first of all and once again to the 'brother' of Zarathustra as to the future of a question, an appeal or a promise, a cry or a prayer. It does so in the performative mode of the apostrophe. There is as yet no friendship, no one has yet begun to think friendship. Nevertheless, in the experience of a sort of bereaved anticipation, we can already name the friendship that we have not yet encountered. We can already think that we do not yet have access to it. May we be able to do it....' Woman is not yet capable of friendship. But tell me, men, who among you is capable of friendship?...There is camaraderie: may there be friendship!...But since woman has not yet acceded to friendship because she remains--and that is love--either 'slave' or 'tyrant,' the

friendship to come continues to mean for Zarathustra: liberty, equality, fraternity. In short the model of a republic (1988:643).

If the answer to Zarathustra's question, "who among you is capable of friendship?" is no one, if like Aristotle by way of Montaigne, we must concede that "O my friends, there is no friend," then can we not conclude that because of the absence of friendship, we are all in a sense women not yet capable of engaging upon such relationships? This would seem one way to extricate ourselves from Derrida's, Zarathustra's, Montaigne's and Aristotle's brutal system of segregation. It seems more likely that the friendship of the philosophers is founded precisely on the exclusion of women and slaves from its realm. We can "know" friendship insofar as we can know that there are those who are incapable of it. This in fact, is how Merteuil approaches and reproaches Valmont.

Women have only love or hate at their disposal: men have friends and enemies. In the Derridean/Nietzschean version, it is women who are confined to the domain of the tyrant/slave, that is why they are excluded from the republic. In his essay on La Bruyère, Barthes emphasizes the *clôture* of the aristocratic/bourgeois world: outside of this world is the peasant, the worker and the pauper who only exist in Laclos' and La Bruyère's texts as objects of charity and as signifiers of the "outside." What is excluded from representation, the subjugation of the weak in relationship to the strong in *ancien régime* France erupts in the center of the novel as relationships of despotism between

men and women. This novel, however, does not function as a critique of such power relations: it only seems to push them to their limit. For if Merteuil is allowed to be critical of Valmont's despotism and slavishness, she seems ultimately to be punished for such insights.

When she rebels at the idea of becoming Valmont's slave, his favorite odalisque and accepting him as her master, she destroys the possibility of any further illusions about their conspiratorial "friendship." Friendship is just one of many terms, like love that is emptied of meaning for the co-conspirators: Merteuil and Valmont are masters of machinating with terms that are invested with meaning by others and devoid of meaning for them. Their machinations, are primarily linguistic. It is when they seek to re-invest these terms with meaning between themselves that their machinations begin to malfunction.

Machination

The machine effect of language occurs when linguistic utterances or locutions do not correspond to conscious psychic motivation: this is Rousseau's "effet machinal." When the speaker or writer is capable of consciously manipulating the disjunction between the psychic motivation and the linguistic utterance, then machinations become possible. Nowhere is this manipulation better illustrated in Laclos' novel than in Letter LXXXI in which Merteuil describes the history of her self-education. Merteuil's machinations have to do with sexual enjoyment and sexual identity: what she machinates most effectively is the construction of her self - "je suis mon propre ouvrage." What

Merteuil learns is to never say or show what she is thinking or how she is feeling.

Peter Brooks's understanding of machination and mechanization in this novel has to do with Valmont's and Merteuil's mastery of the codes of fictionally represented worldliness in their handling of the erotic situation.

As we follow their complicity and witness the flawless evolution of their schemes, we become aware of the degree to which the system and code of an earlier novel of worldliness has been purified and refined into a perfect mechanism which they perfectly understand and govern....The erotic is in fact the domain in which the drive to dominance, power and freedom operates most flawlessly....To regard someone as a purely erotic object is to reduce his psychology to the most mechanical and simplified elements, to make an already rigid code of psychological signs still more mechanistic. Indeed, to reduce social relations to erotic relations, human behavior to erotic comportment, as Valmont and the Marquise continually try to do, is to operate an important *mechanization* of social laws and human existence (1969:176-177).

For Brooks, mechanization has to do with reduction and simplification and these qualities in turn are associated with erotic relations ("social relations become erotic relations, human behavior...erotic comportment"). There is however, nothing reduced or simple about erotic relations or comportment. Brooks uses the metaphor of mechanization to describe processes of simplification or

"dehumanization;" mechanization is about simplification or the removal of "human" qualities. And yet, what is so anti-social or inhuman about purely erotic relations? What is it about the erotic that calls up the machine? Psychoanalysis teaches us that genitals like machines, require a certain amount of manipulation.

An image of the machine occurs in this novel in direct relationship to sexual experience and feminine sexual initiation: Merteuil denigrates Cécile as "une machine à plaisir." Valmont describes the company at Madame de Rosemonde's chateau as automata when, in a fit of despair, he writes to Merteuil after he has discovered that the Présidente has abruptly left the chateau and returned to Paris. He closes his letter to Merteuil describing his fury and frustration at finding himself thwarted.

Adieu ma belle amie; s'il vous vient quelque idée heureuse, quelque moyen de hâter la marche, faites-m'en part. J'ai éprouvé plus d'une fois combien *votre amitié* pouvait être utile; je l'éprouve encore en ce moment; car je me sens plus calme depuis que je vous écris; au moins je parle à quelqu'un qui m'entend, et non aux *automates* près de qui je végète depuis ce matin. En vérité, plus je vis, et plus je suis tenté de croire qu'il n'y a que vous et moi dans le monde qui valions quelque chose (Letter C: emphasis mine).

In this particular context, what the others at the chateau are ignorant of make them seem like automata to Valmont: only his *friend*, the Marquise can be of

help to him. Valmont has not been able to predict this turn of events, and he must hide his distress from the others around him. What distinguishes Valmont and Merteuil from the *automates* is their shared knowledge and understanding, both linguistic and sexual. This greater understanding is what makes them useful to each other (it is a sign of their *friendship*) and at the same time more worthy of the others that they must deal with. An *automate* is some one deprived of understanding; in this case, Madame de Volanges, Madame de Rosemonde and Cécile fall into this *category of radical incomprehension*. It is at the moment of his failure to predict the Présidente's departure that Valmont avails himself of the most obvious kind of self-aggrandizement in which he includes Merteuil - "je suis tenté de croire qu'il n'y a que vous et moi dans le monde qui valions quelque chose."

It is between this letter and Merteuil's reply (Letter CXI), that the full breadth of her *machinations* is revealed. These *machinations* have to do with suppressing the truth and lying in order to secure what she wants above all else: revenge on Gercourt. When Madame de Volanges finds herself worrying about her daughter and wanting to soften her position on the question of her marriage, contemplating even letting Cécile marry the one that she loves, Merteuil preaches to her an austere virtue and advises her to remain firm in her position. Merteuil then writes to Cécile a letter in which she mixes truth and falsehood into a powerful concoction of pure manipulation. The letter is a lesson in deception: Merteuil wants to teach Cécile what it is to *machinate*. She

advises her first of all, to continue her relationship with Valmont because it will help her conceal her continued love for Danceny from her mother. It will also allow her to satisfy her curiosity while appearing virtuous to her lover. Merteuil also tells Cécile that her mother is hoping to trap her into a confession of her love for Danceny and advises her to lie about this when confronted by a mother who in fact was having second thoughts about her daughter's happiness. As a post-script, Merteuil gives her some affectionate advice about writing that outlines the basic strategy of machination: never write what one is thinking, always write what the other wants to hear, especially when that other is one's lover. This is the description of the loss of innocence--in language. This linguistic initiation comes at the moment of sexual initiation. Just in case Cécile should apply this technique to her letters to Merteuil, the marquise assures her that between them, there is no necessity of employing such a strategy.

In her reply to Valmont's letter, Merteuil professes concern with Cécile: she dismisses his intrigue with Tourvel as not her affair. With Valmont, Merteuil takes the breathtakingly hard-edged tone that always seems to indicate that she is speaking more truthfully than not. She wants the corruption of Cécile, but beyond that she is no longer interested in the girl:

Elle dénote, surtout, une faiblesse de caractère presque toujours incurable et qui s'oppose à tout; de sorte que, tandis que nous nous occuperions à former cette petite fille l'intrigue, nous n'en ferions qu'une femme facile. Or je connais rien de si plat que cette facilité de bêtise, qui

si rend sans savoir ni comment ni pourquoi, uniquement parce qu'on l'attaque et qu'elle ne sait pas résister. Ces sortes de femmes ne sont absolument que des *machines à plaisir*. Vous me direz qu'il n'y a qu'à n'en faire que cela, et que c'est assez pour nos projets. A la bonne heure! mais n'oublions que de ces machines-là, tout le monde parvient bientôt à en connaître *les ressorts et les moteurs*; ainsi que pour se servir de celle-ci sans danger, il faut se dépêcher, s'arrêter de bonne heure, et la *briser* ensuite (Letter 106: emphasis added).

This particularly brutal assessment of Cécile seems to corroborate Brooks' reading of mechanization of relations as reduction to erotic object. Cécile is too simple to be a fellow *intrigante*: as such she is nothing more than a pleasure machine. The metaphor of the machine when used in this way, points to some crucial lack (as in La Bruyère's "le sot est automate")--a lack of intelligence and knowledge and a weakness of character that makes the girl sexually available for producing pleasure.

Cécile does not even know why or how she is giving into Valmont: she has lost her virginity, but she has not lost her ignorance. This exasperates the Marquise. The problem is that without a will of her own, a sexually initiated Cécile functions like a machine that can be controlled by anyone who knows how to manipulate "les ressorts et les moteurs." This means that she must be destroyed and this task will be left to the husband. The sexuality of the young woman is set into motion by Valmont and Merteuil only to be destroyed in the

form of a miserable marriage. Merteuil sees Cécile as purely instrumental. The instrumentality is here related to the instrumentality of machines. Using people as if they were instruments or tools is one other aspect of *machiner*. The heart of Merteuil's *machination* is the conspiracy to destroy Cécile's virginity and to revenge herself upon Gercourt, who has placed the utmost importance on having a wife who is fresh out of the convent and sexually uninitiated. Merteuil's jealousy is the primary motivation behind her plans to "*machiner la perte de quelqu'un.*"

Merteuil and Tourvel differ on a crucial point that has every thing to do with writing, reading and machines: one *machines*, the other does not. Tourvel always reads signs and letters literally; she also writes without consciousness that there may be a difference between what she writes "means" and what her writing does. We could say that she does not grasp the performative aspect of language. In Austin's terms, she does not "do things with words." Words only do things to her. Janie Vanpée, however, remarks on the fact that Tourvel reads the final letter of rupture (CXLI) correctly.

Whether the *Présidente* attends to the meaning of the clichés or simply to their forms does not matter, for the letter's form, its very conventionality, is itself its meaning, and allows her, unlike Valmont, to see the truth about him and herself....The constative, or cognitive function of the letter--what it says repeatedly about the hypocritical conventions...between the sexes--coincides with its performative

function--what it does as it hides another truth behind a veil of clichés [the truth of Valmont's love]. Yet paradoxically, the letter's performative function illustrates its constative function only at the expense of contradicting it. That the *Présidente* does not necessarily know this does not matter for it to affect her reading of the letter. Thus, her interpretation is erroneous and yet correct at one and the same time. She is right to interpret the letter as a sign of Valmont's hypocrisy; she is wrong to identify so literally the conventional roles of male and female with Valmont and her (Vanpée 106).

Her literal readings do however, lead her to get it right--whether or not it was Valmont's intention to break with her, the letter was sent. The speech-act has been performed. We can consider this another case when intentionality does not make a difference on the perlocutionary effects of the speech-act. "*Marion*" is Rousseau's non-intentional utterance and "*ce n'est pas ma faute*" is Valmont's. In the end, *Tourvel* insists upon receiving the letter, even if Valmont tries to take it back. What Vanpée calls "a veil of clichés" is often times no more false than what it conceals, for true love is more often than not, the most clichéd term of all.

Tourvel's inability to machinate or see through the machinations of others has something to do with her virtue as a woman. *Merteuil*, on the other hand, is the one who plays with language and appearances: she plays with and manipulates with all three of Austin's exemplary performative speech acts, "A

wager, a marriage and a declaration of war furnish a reasonable spectrum of the scope and impact of performative language" (Petrey 8). Merteuil places a bet with Valmont and offers herself as the reward. She later declares war on him. She does not have the power to marry or unmarry anyone, but she does conspire to make a mockery of Gercourt's marriage. Trapped, like Tourvel in the immobility and passivity of the feminine position, she learns to watch, to observe others and herself. When she takes action, it is also calculated to produce an effect of one sort or another: she has perfected the manipulation of perlocutionary effects. Her primary activity can be said to be linguistic. She is always reading and writing. She writes to Valmont in order to enlist him in her machinations; she writes perfectly phrased letters of deceit to Madame de Volanges to influence her decisions about her daughter. She knows the style of virtue can be divorced from its content. Nancy K. Miller has shown that Merteuil's fate is bound up with her ambition as a writer of her own "scripts":

She forgets that her plot is only part of a master plot not of her own writing, that she is a heroine--a woman with a taste for letters--and not an author after all. She can write her own script, but only to a point....Laclos punishes this witty scribe by publishing her letters. The history of her private life and not the fiction she was planning to write, Valmont's *Memoirs*: 'Ou vos Mémoires, car je veux qu'ils soient imprimés un jour, et je me charge de les écrire' (13). The memoirs she would have written for her lover in the end write her; no longer her own

'ouvrage' as she styled herself, but the pretext of M.C....De L..'s 'Ouvrage.' Merteuil fails to understand that she is a heroine and not an author because despite her ability to exploit the laws of difference, she fails to take their measure (1980:136-137).

For Miller, Merteuil as the heroine confuses herself with Laclos, the author. If there is a kind of complicity between Merteuil and Laclos, it is in the fact that it mirrors the complicity between Merteuil and Valmont: in both relationships however, there is a kind of radical assymetry that exacts a price on the woman. As Miller demonstrates, Merteuil styles herself as the author of her drama: not taking in the difference between author and heroine is also a mirroring of not taking in the difference between the sexes. Valmont is the agency of her punishment for her hubristic *in*-difference.

Merteuil's ambitions are not simply erotic, although there is enough of that as well, they are authorial. As we have seen, ambition is a dangerous quality for a woman. The relationship of the sexual with the textual is obvious in her autobiographical letter LXXXI in which she declares that the first mysterious codes that she deciphers and is subsequently able to manipulate are sexual ones. If Valmont and Merteuil are libertines, it is because they play with language in a way that none of the other letter writers of the novel do: this is of course most obvious in the scandalous Letter XLVIII written by Valmont on Emilie's back. The *double-entendres* in this letter are meant to insult Tourvel's literal readings; her complete inability to read between the lines or perceive that

words and phrases can have double meanings leaves her blind to the fact that language can be a thing to be played with, manipulated like a machine when one writes things one does not "think" or "mean."

In playing with language, assuming styles and discarding them depending upon the circumstances, the libertines throw the "meaning" of all words and phrases into question. This is why the novel ends with unsettling epistemological and hermeneutic uncertainty. No one, not the reader, not Valmont himself or the unfortunate Présidente will ever "know" if Valmont meant what he wrote or wrote what he meant to his beloved. Only Merteuil seems to "know" with some certainty, has read Valmont with any amount of confidence. Merteuil declares that Valmont was so clever that he was able to fool himself; by writing to the Présidente what he thought were mere lies about his love for her, he was actually telling her the truth. Being so accustomed to lying *automatically*, however, in the course of seduction, Valmont takes his own lies and suppressions of the truth at face value as it were; he forgets that the truth can often appear as a deceptive truth.⁶ He thinks that he is the master of his truth, but his deception turns into self-deception.

How reliable is Merteuil's knowledge, however? How can we trust her

⁶As in the case of Freud's jokes about the two Jews from Galicia discussed in the first chapter: one asks the other where he is going and the second one replies Cracow which the questioner reads as an ostensible lie, meant to throw him off track, so that he would think his interlocutor was going to Lemberg when he is in reality going to Cracow. Valmont's declarations of love to Tourvel are meant to be lies, but actually become the truth, at least in the eyes of Merteuil, who like the first Jew, knows how to read the intended lie as an inadvertent truth.

reading, when by the end of the novel, she has made fatal errors, lost her face, her fortune and above all, her carefully cultivated reputation? She is, nevertheless, the one that notices that something in his own epistolary production escapes Valmont. When he becomes inscrutable to himself, it is Merteuil who "reads" him successfully, just as she and Valmont "read" the blindness and ignorance of others. Merteuil focuses on certain phrases that Valmont uses to describe the two other women, she mocks the fact that he describes the "*adorable*" and "*céleste*" Tourvel as possessing "*un charme inconnu*." She quotes him derisively as having written that Cécile was *attachante*. Instead of reading Merteuil's reading as a sign of love or jealousy, Valmont responds by insisting that such descriptions are empty turns of phrase, that they are meaning-less insofar as they are completely contextual, that is without any referentiality. "Mais ne savez-vous pas que ces mots, plus souvent pris au hasard que par réflexion, expriment moins le cas que l'on fait de la personne que la situation dans laquelle on se trouve quand on en parle? (Letter CXXIX). He uses empty phrases to praise Tourvel and Cécile, but he forgets questions of protocol and form with regard to Merteuil. This confusion must finally lead us to conclude that Valmont forgets to treat Merteuil "like a lady." He also forgets to read her as carefully as he might. Her anger escapes his usual perspicacity and he falls into confused self-defense.

In the end, no one reads Merteuil: her co-conspirator falls short of the task, for if he had read her more carefully, he might have seen in her fit of

pique, the sign of her own desire and her lack of control of her discourse. Instead, Valmont defends his use of language by referring to the emptiness of forms--because it is precisely forms that he forgets with the Marquise. It becomes clear then, that despite the fact that forms are empty, they are essential in negotiating relations between the sexes. Responding to her anger that he has assumed her consent before he actually attained it, he responds, "Je sais fort bien que l'usage a introduit dans ce cas, un doute respectueux: mais vous savez aussi que ce n'est qu'une forme, un simple protocole; et j'étais, ce me semble, autorisé à croire que ces précautions minutieuses n'étaient plus nécessaires entre nous" (Letter CXXIX). So careful about matters of form and protocol in other places, in his seduction of Tourvel for instance, he "forgets" to take such precautions with Merteuil. His forgetting here is fatal, for the forgetting of forms and protocols damages his relationship with Merteuil beyond repair.

For Merteuil, Valmont has become the dupe of his own subterfuges. "Qu'est-ce, par exemple, que ce subterfuge dont vous vous servez vis-à-vis vous-même (car je vous crois sincère avec moi), qui vous fait rapporter à l'envie d'observer le désir que vous ne pouvez ni cacher ni combattre, de garder cette femme?" (Letter CXXXIV). It is precisely in the words that the Vicomte has omitted that the Marquise reads the signs of his love for Tourvel. In conclusion, Merteuil argues, she and Valmont should remain just friends "ne soyons qu'amis." Friendship, however, is a tricky business between the two of them.

Immediately following this offer of friendship, Merteuil presents what seems at first glance to be a conjectural description of the sacrifice that she would demand of Valmont, if they were to become more than friends. The Marquise formulates a demand in the conditional, "j'exigerais donc, voyez donc la cruauté! que cette étonnante Mme de Tourvel ne fût plus pour vous qu'une femme ordinaire, une femme telle qu'elle est seulement" (Letter CXXXIV). What she demands is that Valmont no longer love Tourvel. In the classic fashion of the lady of courtly love, she demands of her knight an impossible task that must be accomplished before her favors are made available. They have at this point, abandoned the pretenses of friendship and reverted back to a master/slave relationship.

Valmont thinks that this demand is a simple one to fulfill because he does not believe he loves Tourvel. He treats Tourvel badly and sleeps with Emilie, his erst-while writing table. He offers these actions as the signs of his lack of love to the exacting lady. "Je persiste, ma belle amie; non je ne suis point amoureux; et ce n'est pas ma faute si les circonstances me forcent d'en jouer le rôle" (Letter CXXXVII). Valmont is still role playing: what he offers Merteuil is supposed to be the real thing. It is also the first instance that we see the dangerous "ce n'est pas ma faute" that is meant to exonerate a man of responsibility and destroy a woman.

It is to this letter that Merteuil responds with the discourse on Valmont's master/slave relationship with women and then tells the allegory of a man who

makes a fool of himself over a woman. She even includes the letter that must be sent in order to break off with the unworthy object. The "ce n'est pas ma faute" recurs as the refrain in this letter of rupture, dictated by a worldly woman of the story. Valmont takes his cue, reading Merteuil badly again, not seeing that the course of action that she is offering him is irreversible. He dutifully recopies "ce n'est pas ma faute" and sends this missive to Tourvel, not realizing that Merteuil has turned his own words against Tourvel and himself. Merteuil was the original recipient of Valmont's "ce n'est pas ma faute" message; she re-routes it to Tourvel. Valmont thus allows Merteuil to write his memoirs and script his life, at least for a moment and she does so with flair, dictating to him an insulting letter using a turn of phrase that he has tried to use on her. Valmont cites himself via Merteuil without even realizing it.

Empty forms may be pure signification but in matters of seduction, to neglect them is fatal. In neglecting them with Merteuil, Valmont has taken the first (unconscious) step in declaring that the impossibility of their love will turn their relationship into war. Forgetting protocol is assuming that there is some substantive, unmediated relationship possible: Valmont seems to be having a Rousseauian moment when he argues for the non-essential nature of empty forms and "précautions minutieuses." At this point, he seems to believe in the possibility of a relationship stripped bare of form or protocol, those ornamental, supplementary precautions and pretexts. The lesson of what happens between Merteuil and Valmont after this exchange of letters reveals that their

relationship was purely formal and that recourse to an idealized extra-formal space does nothing but expose the insubstantiality of the relations as such. In the world of the *princesse de Clèves*, no such breach of protocol would be contemplated. In *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Wolmar tells Saint-Preux that "Bienséance est le masque des vices" (Part V Letter VI). When the mask is removed between the sexes in Laclos's fiction, what is revealed is not so much the face of vice as the face of the enemy.

In this novel, playing with language is associated with libertinage, moral turpitude. Puns, double entendres and linguistic games are akin to sexual manipulation and erotic mastery. Awareness of the performative aspect of linguistic interchange or language games brings the reader into a kind of libertine complicity with the co-conspirators, the ones who are machinating. This is the fundamental ambivalence of this text: whose side is the reader on? It is an issue that even a reading for irony cannot resolve with any amount of certainty. Traditional readings of Laclos attribute to him a kind of biographical resentment of the aristocracy and see in this novel a condemnation of the decadence of aristocratic mores. This kind of reading may be valid up to a certain degree, but there is a great deal more uncertainty about where the lines are drawn in this web of complicity than even Laclos perhaps ever intended. Authorial intentionality has to be ruled out as a category for interpretation in my reading of this text: what we are left with is the triumph of ambiguity embodied by Madame de Rosemonde's distant, worldly, ailing and saddened point of

view.

Ce n'est pas ma faute

If this is the cynical motto of Laclos's lover, it is one written for him: when he utters it, he is unconsciously citing himself. We saw in the case of Marion, that Rousseau was not very good at taking the blame when it came to desire. In fact, by accusing Marion of stealing the ribbon, he was in fact, uttering this very lie, "ce n'est pas ma faute." Then in confessing to the false accusation and describing the extreme inner confusion and shame that he was suffering from, he once again makes excuses, "ce n'est pas ma faute." In the structure of sexual difference, it would seem that laying blame has something to do with the masculine and taking the blame, something to do with the feminine. Merteuil is the one who, more than anyone takes the blame in Les liaisons dangereuses for creating a great deal of the danger. She does nothing more than "machiner la perte" of more than one character, but she ends up being the danger unmasked. Danceny puts it to Madame de Rosemonde in the following manner, "J'ai cru de plus que c'était rendre service à la société que de démasquer une femme aussi réellement dangereuse que l'est Mme de Merteuil, et qui, comme vous pouvez le voir, est la seule, la véritable cause de tout ce qui s'est passé entre M. de Valmont et moi" (Letter CLXIX). Merteuil takes the blame for everything that has happened between Danceny and Valmont. In addition, another letter published by Danceny also proves that she is to blame in the matter of Prévan. Prévan, a man who in the story of "les

inséparables" is devious and destructive as Merteuil is rehabilitated into society.

Disculpation would seem to be one option of the masculine that the feminine subject cannot hope to share. In the case of the feminine subject, it takes only one false step to precipitate psychic and material disasters upon oneself. In a certain sense, femininity is all about resistance and immobility: action of any sort is unseemly. When Valmont seduces Tourvel, he hopes to dislodge her from her immobility. When he copies Merteuil's letter and addresses it to the object of his love, he is reducing her to immobility again. A woman seduced and abandoned has no possibility of complaint: there is no tribunal to which she can complain against her lover. There is no recourse to a third party (with the exception of Rosemonde who acts as Tourvel's confidant). When Tourvel receives the letter from Valmont, she merely forwards it to Rosemonde, with a brief note attached, "Ce n'est plus le temps de se plaindre, il n'y a plus qu'à souffrir" (Letter CXLIII). Later, Volanges suppresses the delirious letter that Tourvel dictates; this is a complaint against Valmont and a confession at the same time. As such, it is a letter "qui en effet ne s'adresse à personne pour s'adresser à trop de monde...j'ai jugé que cette lettre ne devait être rendu à personne" (Letter CLX). A woman can blame no one but herself.

In Valmont's world, there is an *a priori* "ce n'est pas ma faute" guarantee against responsibility. A complaint to the lover himself would be nonsensical, because he is not bound by any sort of accountability. "On s'ennuie de tout,

mon ange, c'est une loi de la nature; ce n'est pas ma faute." (Letter CXLI) This is the tyrannical nature of Valmont's relationship with women: as with any tyrant, he is guaranteed radical non-accountability. There is no law higher than himself or his will. It is curious that he only cites the discourse of non-accountability, however; the letter has been written for him. It writes him. "Ce n'est pas ma faute" is the disavowal of responsibility for the lack of reciprocity in love.

In her reading of Laclos' novel, Susan Winnett offers an interpretation of "ce n'est pas ma faute" that runs directly counter to mine. For Winnett, "ce n'est pas ma faute" is the feminine utterance of the woman or the slave. "It is no woman's fault when she succumbs to the ways of the world" (Winnett 90). I would have to insist however, women are blamed for succumbing to the ways of the world, even when there is no other way to go. It is always a woman's fault. We have only to consider the "real" life case of Thérèse des Hayes. She takes all the blame for her adulterous affair with the duc de Richelieu. She has no choice at all.

This is the double bind of femininity that Laclos tries, in his treatises on the education of women, to bypass with the idea of the "femme naturelle." Cécile's sexual initiation at the hands of Valmont is an excellent example of this double bind: the girl tries to call for help. Valmont restrains her and warns her, "Que voulez-vous faire...., vous perdre pour toujours: Qu'on vienne, et que m'importe? à qui persuaderez-vous que je ne sois pas ici de votre aveu?"

(Letter XCVI). If Cécile rings for help, she is only implicating herself, for Valmont, the incident discovered will have no consequences, it will be Cécile's fault. Winnett sees Tourvel's taking the blame as a rupture in the history of "feminine disavowal." She puts it in the following way, "To Tourvel's last coherent utterance, she refuses to add her signature to the chain letter of feminine disavowal. To the extent that she consciously entered into the chain of epistolarity, succumbing to enact in the world the plots of her imagination, it is indeed her fault" (91). Winnett blames Tourvel as well. Tourvel may take the blame, but like Cécile, she has no choice. No one is going to share the responsibility with her. She merely affirms the only position left to her. What Winnett wants to praise as an act of feminine heroism is only a by-product of total entrapment.

In her final letter, the one without an addressee, addressed to no one and everyone at the same time, Winnett sees an unveiling of the contradictions that social codification tries to conceal. Winnett, fails however, to understand that these contradictions have to do with femininity's double bind under the régime of *bienséances* and appearances. Femininity in this order, is always at risk of being at fault. First of all, a woman must be natural to inspire love (as in the case of Tourvel with Valmont), but her naturalness also leads her to a certain fatal naïveté with regard to codes and their manipulation, thus leaving her vulnerable to the libertine that knows how to change discourses. She knows only one discourse, that of the heart; she knows only one modality, that of

sincerity. This is a dangerous state of vulnerability: it is easy for her to succumb, if not to the ways of the world, then at least to the seduction of a skillful libertine.

Merteuil, on the other hand, seeks to defend herself with an education. She is at fault, however, for knowing too much. Her fate is sealed by a surfeit of worldly knowledge. She is as far from the natural as possible. She is undone by her mastery of shifting codes and discourses. The delirium that the double bind produces is the delirium of Tourvel's last letter, the only letter without an addressee that seems to be addressed to the symbolic order itself (here in this particular context, the symbolic order is embodied as *le monde*, the realm of all signification);

it demonstrates the arbitrariness even of the grammatical and syntactically connections that tie together the laws, maxims, and logic that have brought her to desire nothing but death. The letter is too boldly enlightened to be sent or received. It remains unanswered and stands for everything for which *le monde* has no resources. The response of the novel on behalf of *le monde* can only be a reassertion of its strictest forms (93).

Grammatical and syntactical arbitrariness is the sign of linguistic mechanization or the machine-like quality of codification. The system may have a life of its own, but what it also produces is death for the subject. The brutal codification that is referred to in this novel has to do with the suffocating system of

aristocratic manners under the *ancien régime*: the overturning of such a system has to be violent and is called revolution. Revolution, however, produces machines and contraptions of its very own. In the case of the French Revolution, the guillotine serves as the radical truncator of *ancien régime* worldliness. Laclos's aristocrats were already losing their heads insofar as they experienced the "dispossession of writing" and found themselves victims of a game in which they believed that they were the masters. This language game of form and protocol has everything to do with what de Man called "the arbitrary power play of the signifier" which can "only be experienced as a dismemberment, a beheading or a castration." (de Man 296). If we follow de Man's version of things, writers are always doomed to lose their heads.

When Tourvel loses hers, it is in her final letter, addressed to everyone and no one. Tourvel finally allows herself to reproach Valmont, that is, to blame him for what has happened. "Auteur de mes fautes, quel droit as-tu de les punir?" (Letter CLXI). She vacillates wildly however, from recriminations to self-recriminations, from addressing Valmont, to addressing her husband, from pushing Valmont away to caressing him with words of tenderness. Tourvel's loss of reason produces a kind of unintelligibility that is at the same time, an expression of desperation, attenuation, passion and enjoyment or *jouissance* in the purest Lacanian sense of the term. Tourvel loses control over language: writing becomes pure expressivity of this *jouissance* that is indeed beyond the pleasure principle. She is lost in her words, and the object of address shifts at

all times: this is the letter to end all letters. If Valmont is written by the letter that Merteuil virtually dictates to him, Tourvel is undone by a letter in which she is too implicated as author and subject of *jouissance*. She reveals too much of her enjoyment and her suffering in this letter for it to be sent to anyone in particular, addressing Valmont, her husband and her friends. Her enjoyment bursts through all the recriminations and self-recriminations;

Je ne me trompe pas; c'est lui que je revois. O mon aimable ami! reçois-moi dans tes bras; cache-moi dans ton sein: oui, c'est toi, c'est bien toi! Quelle illusion funeste m'avait fait te méconnaître? Combien j'ai souffert de ton absence! Ne nous séparons plus, ne nous séparons jamais. Laisse-moi respirer. Sens mon coeur, comme il palpite! Ah! ce n'est plus de crainte, c'est la douce émotion de l'amour (Letter CLXI).

The lover that she wants to embrace turns into a monster again as he rejects her caresses and refuses her his gaze. It is Tourvel's cry of anguish and enjoyment that disrupts the order of manners and *bienséance*. This letter cannot be sent, because it has already arrived at its destination, the order of appearances itself. Even though she calls her lover, "mon aimable ami," it is obvious from the rest of the apostrophe and imperatives that the relationship is erotic. She eroticizes her friend, who in turning away from her, becomes a monster. She blames herself for her suffering and finds no recourse or consolation. She does not so much die as she disappears into this letter, into her devastating *jouissance*, that enjoyment and the anguish that accompanies

it. This is obviously not only a situation produced by the *moeurs* of the ancien régime, but seems to be one of the conditions of enjoyment itself as it is inscribed in a signifying system.

Two Faces of Femininity

"Ce n'est pas ma faute" becomes Valmont's motto as he seeks to put the blame on Merteuil. "Indeed, before he dies, in a parting gesture of male solidarity, Valmont puts into Danceny's hands proof of Merteuil's *machinations* and it is this post-humous weapon that wins the war" (Miller 1980:145: emphasis added). Valmont may duel with Danceny, but his real opponent is Merteuil: by giving him the letters, he gives him proof of the Marquise's guilt and by proxy, his own innocence in the affair of Cécile. This is how Valmont "wins." He is liberated of accountability and responsibility: "ce n'est pas ma faute." Merteuil made him do the things he did, made him seduce Cécile and abandon Tourvel. Danceny publishes two letters: one to avenge himself and Valmont and the other to disculpate Prévan (ce n'était pas sa faute non plus). Merteuil is thus exposed to universal condemnation. She alone remains guilty at the novel's dénouement. Her machinations, that "ensemble de menées secrètes, plus ou moins déloyales" that are "ténébreuses" and "diaboliques" are exposed. She has built herself to machinate, her entire identity is formed on her ability to keep the secret of her experiences to herself, with one crucial exception. She has chosen Valmont as a witness to her self-creation ("je suis mon propre ouvrage"), but he proves unworthy witness, mainly because he

does not read her letters as well as she does his.

If her machinations tend toward vengeance ("je suis née pour venger mon sexe"), the actual victims of her secret plots and her ruses seem to be women more than men (Gercourt never suffers the destruction of Cécile and Prévan is rehabilitated. Even Valmont triumphs against her in the end, because he seems to have the last word.) By destroying other women, by defining them, circumscribing them, calling them by turns prudes and "machines à plaisir," she proves the validity of her self-knowledge and reaffirms her difference from the rest of women. She discovers that love is a pretext for sex and that love's rhetoric, love's gestures, love's gazes and glances can be fabricated and simulated.

Everything is form, protocol, precaution for Merteuil in matters of love because love itself is pure pretext for enjoyment. Enjoyment, however, is mastered through pretext. This is why pretexts need always to be taken care of. Form, protocol and precaution are precisely what Valmont forgets to fulfill in trying to seduce her. If love's language is the final machine of pleasure, there is no way of by-passing the pretext to get to the text: one must always pass through the form, protocol and precaution. This discovery allows her to perform sexual difference while keeping secret her powerful in-difference. In the end, however, she is, despite all of her mastery, all of her self-consciousness, betrayed by a man. Merteuil, like Manon and most femme fatales, proves most

dangerous to herself.⁷

In the Letter LXXXI, Merteuil describes her process of self-mastery as one that was based upon never showing how she felt: she put on masks of immobility so that her face would never express her experience. She is the ultimate un-natural woman. What Merteuil learns is to adopt the posture of the most famous of hysterical symptoms: frigidity. This is her grand achievement and her greatest weapon. With the adoption of this symptom, she is able to better observe the world around her. As the ultimate hysteric who has accomplished a hysterical conversion on her own body, she is unreadable. "The term sexual 'masquerade' comes from an article written by the psychoanalyst Joan Rivière's article and refers to a woman taking herself for a man disguised as a woman and thus masquerading as a castrated woman" (Ragland-Sullivan 1991:49). This description would seem to fit, uncannily, the Marquise de Merteuil as well. Her castration, the loss of the eye at the end of the novel, is only testimony to her phallic power that must be contained: she does not only lose her fortune and her beauty, she must lose an organ. She must be deprived of an eye so that her body will be marked by a physical and visible lack.

Merteuil's autobiographical sketch in Letter LXXXI is first of all, a literary conceit, a story within a novel. Rickels reminds us that "From Pamela onward,

⁷In King Vidor's film, Gilda, Rita Hayworth does a musical number that compares the forces of natural catastrophes with a dangerous woman's power. Difference is represented as catastrophic and catastrophes have everything to do with castration; in "Put the Blame on Mame," catastrophe is nothing less than a woman's responsibility.

hysteria was dictated to women by literature which thus doubled as semiological reserve of female sexuality's representation of repression" (1991:188). This assumption of frigidity is first and foremost, a literary moment, a metaphor for feminine subjectivity. Merteuil describes her self-conscious repression of sexual sensation as the performance that gave her power over her husband. Sexual experience in the case of Merteuil is not so much a field of the repressed, as it is a powerful secret, the representation of which she controls in an absolute manner, through gazes, gesture and words. "In the closed system of *mondanité*, women achieve authority only through secrecy and retain it only as long as both authority and secrecy are shrouded in silence" (Winnett 77). Merteuil becomes her "*propre ouvrage*," a sexual autodidact who has secretly rewritten a feminine education. The publication and dissemination of her pedagogical methods would destroy her power. Hers is a knowledge that cannot be shared with other women, it can only be used against them. This is the knowledge of the slave and it is her awareness of the consequences of master/slave relations that gives her a privileged and fatal perspective.

What does she know that the other women of the novel do not know? She knows how to play with words *and* she knows something about sexual enjoyment and the way that it shapes sexual difference. The coincidence of two orders of knowledge--one sexual, the other linguistic--is not serendipitous. When Merteuil writes to Cécile that one should never write what one thinks,

she has learned this imperative to disjunction from her sexual lessons: a woman should never show how she feels - there can be no transparent, linguistic representation of the self, only differently modulated versions of it, presented for the other's enjoyment. Merteuil lives by this code, except it seems, in her correspondance with Valmont, where she permits herself to write what she thinks. Her skepticism about relationships of Rousseauian transparency is one of the factors that prevent her from consummating the deal with Valmont. Merteuil understands what psychoanalytic theory starts to articulate in the work of Lacanians, "It is difficult to see that the major function of language is not to find answers, communicate, or provide information, but to project narcissism, protect egos, mask *jouissance*, negotiate desire" (Ragland-Sullivan 1991:69).

Merteuil's absolute cynicism can be read as an extreme form of Madame de Rosemonde's worldly skepticism, for both of these women understand that there is a fundamental inequity and irreparable assymetry in relations between the sexes. Rosemonde, like Volanges, takes on the role of offering a warning to Tourvel, but in this case, she is not describing the character of one singularly dangerous man, she is making a statement on the irremediability of sexual difference.

Hé! quelle femme vraiment délicate et sensible n'a pas trouvé l'infortune dans ce même sentiment qui lui promettait tant de bonheur! Les hommes savent-ils apprécier la femme qu'ils possèdent? Ce n'est pas que

plusieurs ne soient honnêtes dans leur procédés et constants dans leur affection: mais, parmi ceux-là combien peu savent encore se mettre à l'unisson de notre coeur! Ne croyez pas, ma chère enfant, que leur amour soit semblable au nôtre....L'homme jouit du bonheur qu'il ressent, et la femme de celui qu'elle procure. Cette différence, si essentielle et si peu remarquée, influe pourtant, d'une manière bien sensible, sur la totalité de leur conduite respective (Letter CXXX).

There is no harmony, no "unisson" that the sexes are able to produce. Men and women "enjoy" differently. Women enjoy through the enjoyment of the other, whereas men are able to enjoy for enjoyment's sake. For Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, the sexual masquerade has to do with "the charade of the happy couple" which is at the same time "the social bond *par excellence*" (1991:58). This is the charade that Rosemonde wants to warn Tourvel about: the woman's role in this charade is always an uncomfortable one. To believe in the charade is to be betrayed by it. Rosemonde calls such fantasies of coupled happiness "[des] idées chimériques." The "déraison" of Tourvel's enjoyment, however, is as impervious to these warnings as they were to Volanges's counsel. She enjoys inspite of the radical non-reciprocity of the sexual relation.

Merteuil wants to enjoy while refusing to be the dupe of such a charade and yet her powers are limited insofar as she cannot escape the charade. She has to play her role of satiated and perfectly happy lover with Bellerocche and Danceny. Nevertheless, Vartanian reads her character as a threat to the stability

of sexual difference itself.

The mental image evoked, then, by the Marquise de Merteuil may be compared to that of a man's head on a woman's body, or, if one prefers, of a creature with a feminine figure and a masculine soul; and it must have been this perverse and frightening combination, even more than her *méchanceté*, machinations, or sensuality, that filled Laclos' contemporaries with the sensation of fascinated horror, of prurient loathing, which they were unable to define exactly, and which continues until now to make its impression (1963:176).

I would argue here that it is precisely her confusion of sexual difference that allows Merteuil to machinate, that makes her capable of ambitious intrigues. Vartanian describes a Medusoid monster who paralyzes the gaze by fascinating it: this is the image of castration that produces the uncanny effect of fascinated horror. Merteuil as a figure that machinates the codes of sexual difference is castrated and castrating: she represents a problem that touches the essential part of masculinity. Masculinity is that which has to be radically differentiated from femininity. Merteuil represents a woman who is not so different from a man, whose pleasures, whose logic, whose reason, whose ambitions are not so easily differentiated from masculine ones. In Ragland-Sullivan's reading of sexual difference, she emphasizes that the role of the feminine is to precisely hide the fact "that masculine sexuality is a tenuous matter" (1991:71). This is the masquerade of femininity: femininity has to orchestrate a constant cover-

up. What Merteuil does by becoming conscious of her masquerade and making herself its master, is to disrupt the order of sexual difference. Her punishment at the end of the novel re-installs the primacy of sexual difference. "In the *dénouement* that follows, the proper role of each side is re-affirmed with a vengeance" (Vartanian 1963:180).

Merteuil and Tourvel represent two faces of femininity: the first represents the instability of difference and its limits, the second, almost unexpectedly, the *jouissance*, the enjoyment beyond pleasure that is the realm of the mystic. Merteuil, like the hysteric of whom she is a worthy ancestor, asks the question, am I woman or man - or what exactly is sexual difference in its essence? The answer that she seems to come up with in Letter LXXXI has to do with social prescriptions. They are stricter with regard to women so a woman must educate herself more thoroughly and control herself more conscientiously than a man, because her enjoyment, her will to power are not really that different from his. This is a complicated formulation, for Merteuil does not affirm absolute difference or indifference, but something more unstable. She understands however, that the instability of sexual difference has created a hostile atmosphere between the sexes, thus she states, "je suis née pour venger mon sexe." This vengeance, while not feminist, is political. Merteuil does something to disturb the ideology of maximum difference producing minimal effects: she overturns this logic to show that sexual difference is a case where, to paraphrase, Ragland-Sullivan, minimal differences

give rise to maximal effects. Tourvel's problem with sexual difference is different but homologous to Merteuil's. She, too disturbs the ideology of difference: to do so, she approaches enjoyment with the abandon of a mystic. When she gives into Valmont's seduction, she gives everything to him and devotes her entire existence to his happiness, that is her *jouissance*. Whereas Merteuil presents us with a feminine figure whose difference from men seems purely contingent and socially and ideologically formed, Tourvel represents absolute difference, the possibility of surrender to pure enjoyment and suffering at the same time: this is her "charme inconnu." In both cases the two women have successfully differentiated themselves from all other women and have therefore posed a challenge to the way in which men "know" women--but they disappear into the abyss that divides the sexes.

What is language then, but the machine that produces sexual difference and enforces its parameters on its subjects? Language is the ur-code, the code from which all codes derive their power, including the code of manners and *bienséance*. Language produces difference automatically, like clock-work irrespective of subjective anomalies and particularities. Like any machine, language breaks down at certain points: but the breakdowns do not mitigate the effects of its operations. As we have seen, femininity poses a challenge to the way in which we know: it threatens at all times to disrupt a certain epistemological order. The eighteenth-century novel and psychoanalytic theory are concerned with representations of sexual difference, the price it exacts and

the aberrations that are formulated. Despite the fact that we can read Laclos's novel as anachronistic with regard to the state of contemporary sexual relations, the code of sexual difference has not been overturned by any revolution, including the sexual one. The machine of sexual, the machine that produces difference can be anthropomorphized as an automaton, an uncanny replica of the human form whose autonomy and cool surfaces allegorize something about the enigmatic nature of difference as the post-Enlightenment world understands it: both charming, seductive, soulless and dangerous, the automaton meets at the crossroad of the Other, a machine-like reflection of the subject: an ambivalent sign of progress and regress and the fascination and confusion that even science as well as fiction can produce.

The problem for Merteuil and Tourvel has to do with distinguishing themselves from all other women and keeping this a secret at the same time; to remain like all other women is to be condemned to the constant possibility of betrayal, because, as we have seen, in the male economy of desire, all women are interchangeable, substitutable for one another. All women are metonymical stand-ins for other women. When Merteuil plays an entire seraglio for her master of the night, she is enacting an ur-feminine position. The *princesse de Clèves* and Zilia try to elude the terrifying bind of infinite substitutability by securing a kind of feminine sublimation that is purely fictional. The *princesse's* enigmatic self-denial did not however, serve as a model that could be followed by most of her fictional successors. Zilia strives

to establish with Déterville, a friendship between the sexes, a non-amorous relationship between a man and a woman that exists beyond master/slave logic. If women know only love, as Zarathustra said, they, like Tourvel, have to learn how quickly love turns into hate: excluded from the realm of friendship, they learn like Merteuil, that they sometimes only have recourse to declarations of war.

Conclusion

In the catalogue of the massive exhibition at the Grand Palais called "L'âme au corps" (1993-1994), Bruno Jacomy's contribution is called "Les machines qui voulaient singer l'homme." It is an essay concerned primarily with automata and Vaucanson's in particular. According to the title of the article, Jacomy assumes a certain knowledge of what machines want: machines want to "ape" men. In a world where machines aspire to be men, there will one day appear a machine that will pass as human. This is primarily a problem of "passing." The skeptical thinker of "Discours de la méthode" looks out of a window and asks, how am I to know that the people I see passing by on the street, are not underneath their cloaks and hats, actually automata? "L'âme au corps" is an exhibition that commemorates the bicentennial of three major French institutions, the Louvre, the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle and the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers. What the exhibition and the catalogue try to establish is not only a certain relationship between the development of modern science and modern art, but also a continuous relationship between Diderot and Freud. I had no knowledge that this exhibition was going to take place when I began this project; I was encouraged to find that some aspects of my thesis were supported by lines of thought pursued by

the essayists and curators of the exhibition. The problems of sexual difference and linguistic representation were central to my thesis, however, and they were more or less marginal to the project of the bicentennial exhibition.

Part II

In the director's cut of Ridley Scott's 1981 classic, Bladerunner¹, the questions of sexual difference and technological difference are played out together. This film inaugurated a whole new aesthetic in science fiction that was to be identified as "cyberpunk." The technology it imaged and imagined has been superseded by the possibilities of virtual reality and cyberspace, but it is of enduring interest to me because of its rigorous exploration of Cartesianism and its *film noir* psychologism. A *film noir* sensibility permeates this film as the presence of a certain style: a style of clothing, a style of lighting, etc. Deckard, played by Harrison Ford, is the hero-protagonist. (Read in his name an Anglicization of Descartes.) As he engages upon the unsavory job of retiring replicants, Deckard seems to be asking Descartes's question in reverse, "How am I to know that underneath the hats and cloaks of the replicants I am 'retiring,' they are not really human and not all that different from myself?"

¹Bladerunner is the film adaptation of Phillip K. Dick's science fiction novel Do Androids dream of Electric Sheep? In Dick's novel, Deckard is an unhappily married, struggling policeman, unable to move off world, that is off pollution ravaged Earth to one of the planetary colonies. He is engaged in the extermination of renegade "replicants" or sophisticated androids created to perform work that human beings no longer want to engage in. The world of the novel is much more sordid and debased than the stylish world of Scott's film.

The setting of the film is Los Angeles, the year 2019. In this polyglot city, Deckard is forced to "retire" or "execute" a group of renegade replicants. The difference between "retirement" and "execution" pivots on the problem that the film does not entirely resolve: have the replicants in some way acceded to a certain kind of subjectivity that would render them "human," that would make them objects of Rousseauian pity and identification? If they were indeed human, Deckard would have to think of himself as a killer. The uncertainty about the other (here the replicants) leads in the end to a terrifying uncertainty about the self (Deckard). "Am I or am I not a murderer?" This question leads to another question, "Am I or am I not human myself?" If Deckard has moral qualms, the police chief has none: for him, the replicants are "skin jobs," slave labor for off-world colonies. He is played as a racist cum corrupt bureaucrat who threatens Deckard in order to get him to take on the job.

In order to track down the renegade replicants, Deckard has to figure out "what they want." This question echoes Freud's query, "Was will das Weib?" The answer to the first question guarantees the apprehension and destruction of the outlaw replicants. By asking such a question, Deckard has to turn analyst for a moment. What he discovers in the end is that the replicants have returned to earth in search of their creator, Tyrell of Tyrell Corporation, who has programmed his top of the line androids with a four year lifespan: built-in obsolescence. What they want turns out to be not so different from what anyone human might want: to possess memories of their own, to live a little

longer, to be remembered as having experienced something unique. The answer to Deckard's question (What do the replicants want?) makes him retroactively a killer in some sense, a hunter and a predator at least. Answers that change the nature of the one who questions, that is the psychoanalytic structure of questioning. The psychoanalytic question, "Was will das Weib" is never answered satisfactorily by psychoanalysis. The hysteric, it turns out, is much more elusive prey than the replicant.

Deckard has succeeded in "retiring" a female replicant by the time he understands that he is love with one. As in almost every *film noir*, the hero is morally compromised *before* he falls in love with a mysterious woman. Deckard falls in love with Rachel, a replicant played by Sean Young. She learns (through Deckard's test for replicants) that she is in fact not human. Like any successful analysand, Rachel learns something about herself that is difficult to accept: she is not who she thought she was. Deckard is the one who leads her to this self-knowledge.

In the director's cut, Deckard's own status as human being is left in some uncertainty. What he gains by his love for Rachel is anxiety. Deckard has a recurring dream of a unicorn running through a forest. The last shot of the film is of Rachel's high heel crushing an origami unicorn as Deckard and Rachel flee his apartment. Gaff, the dandyish detective who speaks a guttural urban dialect that is a mixture of French, German, Spanish, Cantonese and English has been folding origami figures throughout the film. We have to assume that

this final unicorn signifies Gaff's presence. He has been sent out to "retire" the last of the replicants, Rachel (and perhaps Deckard himself). This origami unicorn is usually read as a sign of the fact that Deckard's dream, like Rachel's memories, are nothing but implants as well.

The difference between replicants and human beings breaks down in the film: but sexual difference remains intact. The unicorn is a symbol of courtly love, an animal associated with feminine virginity and the impossibility of the sexual relation. According to Lacan, courtly love mediates the impossibility of the sexual relation by staging a fantasy in which the obstacles between the lady and her knight are imposed by convention or the lady herself (in contrast to the "reality" of the situation in which the obstacles are inherent in the relation itself).

Deckard may or may not be a replicant: despite this, he "loves" Rachel. It is when he acts on his love for this woman/replicant that he himself becomes something else, a criminal. By refusing to kill her, by trying to escape with her, Deckard incriminates himself with regard to the law. He has submitted to passion -- that force, which according to Rousseau, denatures natural pity and serves only women. Rachel's initial ignorant complicity with Tyrell Corporation mirrors Deckard's own resigned acceptance of his job as Bladerunner, police enforcer. When Deckard follows Rachel into criminality -- by "dropping out" she has become nothing more than a renegade replicant, ready for early retirement - - he is finally able to refuse his own unsavory role in the enforcement of the

Law. They escape into uncertainty -- for it is unsure at the end of the director's cut whether or not Deckard is human and how long Rachel has to live. Perhaps it was this uncertainty that was unacceptable to the Hollywood studio. Ridley Scott was forced to release the film with a "happier ending." In the studio cut of the film, the last shots we see are of the couple safely enclosed in a hovercraft, skimming over an idyllic, natural landscape (with no signs of the technological sprawl of L.A. in sight, not even high tension wires or suburban tract housing), accompanied by a voice-over of Deckard reassuring us that Rachel was a "special" model of Nexus 6 and that therefore, she had no termination date. In the director's cut, there is no escape from the city: we are left only with Gaff's raspy, haunting question, "It's too bad she won't live, but then again, who does?"

In the film, the infernal Corporation and the cynical Law function set out to subjugate and destroy the organic and cyborganic life that it creates and controls. By falling in love with Rachel and following her into criminality, Deckard confronts the fact that he is a resigned gun-for-hire and refuses to continue performing his job.

What we forget, when we pursue our daily life, is that our human universe is nothing but an embodiment of the radically inhuman "abstract negativity," of the abyss we experience when we face the "night of the world." And what is the *act* if not the moment when the subject who is its bearer suspends the network of symbolic fictions which serve as a

support to his daily life and confronts again the radical negativity upon which they are founded? (Zizek 1992:53).

The woman points the way to this act of refusal: this why Zizek insists that man must follow her. The way of the feminine points toward a radical uncertainty that exposes the despotic and inhuman nature of "reality" itself, whether this "reality" is shaped by *ancien régime* conventions and *bienséances* or post-modern protocols and double-binds. What the two different versions of the film represent are two different ways of dealing with the "night of the world." In the director's cut, Deckard and Rachel flee together into a couple, formation. Whether and how they get away is entirely uncertain. The studio cut of the film offers the idea of the couple as successful escape hatch from the ethical contradictions of our associations with the Law and the Corporation.

Part III

There is something distinctly unnatural about femininity, despite millennia of Earth Goddesses and ideological maneuvering to position woman in an intimate relationship with nature as such. I have wanted to emphasize this, not in order to appeal to some idea of an essential femininity that is either unrepresentable or in need of more representation. When femininity is identified as unnatural, however, it generally assumes a criminal mien. Femininity is never "unnatural" with impunity. It is Derrida who underscores the role of "pitié naturelle" in Rousseau's work and the ways in which it works as a defense against women: "si la pitié est naturelle, ce qui nous porte à nous identifier à

autrui est un mouvement inné, l'amour en revanche, la passion amoureuse n'a rien de naturel" (Derrida 1967:249). The domain of "unnatural" love and passion is the domain of women: excluded from the possibilities of philosophical friendship, they know only the tyranny and abjection of passion. Therefore, "la pitié protège l'homme (*homo*) de sa destruction par la fureur de la femme.... La passion amoureuse est donc la perversion de la pitié naturelle....Ce qu'il y a de culturel et d'historique dans l'amour est au service de la féminité: fait pour asservir l'homme à la femme" (1967:249-250).

For Rousseau, women are guilty of artificiality, and of ruses and of stratagems designed to alienate men from their true natures. Despite the fact that the dichotomy man/culture vs. woman/nature is reversed in the Rousseauian schema as man/nature vs. woman/culture, the absolute nature of sexual difference remains intact. This is why turning oppositions on their heads always remains an exercise in futility. What psychoanalysis introduces into all these binary oppositions is a third term, that of the phallus as signifier. It is by means of the phallic signifier that Lacanian psychoanalysis takes on the problem of lack and castration: we can understand Rousseau's defensive systems against women are meant to protect men from lack. There is a natural plenitude in men that women want to destroy by means of "la passion amoureuse." According to Jacques-Alain Miller, to admit to love is to admit to lack, "I love" means "I lack." To want to be loved back, "to want the beloved to be loving, is to castrate him" (1994:10-11). If Rousseau wants to defend

men against love, he wants to defend them from castration. To accept love is to adopt a posture of vulnerability before a woman who can stand in as agent of castration, bearer of the wrath of a primal, almost forgotten father.

In the preceding chapters, I have examined the ways in which eighteenth-century fictions represent love and sexual difference. All of these novels are preoccupied with the ways men and women "love" differently. This difference is difficult to account for, impossible to avoid and has catastrophic consequences. We have seen that it is most often women who take the blame for the asymmetry of love and its disastrous effects. There is another kind of difference at play today, whose origins can be analyzed as far back as the seventeenth century: the difference between the human and the technological/scientific replica of the human. The eighteenth century understood this replica as a machine: the automaton. A harbinger of scientific progress and an image of hypocrisy and inauthenticity, it always already presents to us fictions of being, lack, desire and difference that beg to be written and demand to be read.

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