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THE ATTITUDE OF CRUELTY IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH FICTION

by

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Introduction

As its title indicates, this study is concerned with cruelty, not as a subject matter of the works examined, but as a literary attitude that steadily developed in the second half of the eighteenth century. We have restricted our inquiry to the attitude of cruelty displayed in the aristocratic libertine hero, a constant figure in the literature of the time. For the heroes of the 1730's and the 1740's, this attitude may be defined as the willingness to use others in order to amuse oneself and to enhance one's reputation in society. It is based upon the profound indifference for the feelings of other individuals and for their dignity as human beings that is, as we shall see, an essential feature of the aristocratic world.

Among those writers whose works show the attitude of cruelty, Crébillon fils, Laclos, and Sade are the most important. The characters created by these novelists, as well as those created by other novelists we shall discuss, are, for the most part, members of the upper classes of society, either by birth or by the acquisition of great wealth. Cruelty is, initially, an aristocratic pastime, a luxury, that develops from the boredom and restlessness felt by those who are virtually imprisoned in an extremely restrictive social setting. The only outlet for the energy of ambitious individuals in this society is the cultivation of cruelty in the salon and in the boudoir, conversation and love-making being the only two acceptable occupations for a nobleman. Cruelty in both cases depends upon the power of the word, for, in the salon, it is the ability to be quick-witted, mocking, and vicious, rather than the display of great knowledge, that is respected, while, in the boudoir, the ability to amuse and to impress the intended "victim" with tales of past con-

quests is indispensable and, at times, even more important than physical prowess.

Cruelty is an accepted fact of social existence for the nobleman. In practical results, it rarely aims, at first, at anything more than the loss of public esteem for the victim. Yet, even in the early libertine hero, there is a hint of real enjoyment in the spectacle afforded by the suffering of one's fellow man. A change in attitude from a willingness to hurt others to a desire and even a need to see them suffer becomes more pronounced as the century wears on. Cruelty, instead of being the adjunct of pleasure, replaces it as the aim of libertinism. The desire to dominate others becomes less the means by which the libertine wins the approval and respect of others than the sign that, as far as he is concerned, their opinions are no longer relevant, that the pure exercise of power is the only thing that really matters.

It is by the practice of cruel libertinism that the libertine hero comes to define his existence and to judge its worth. Although thoughts of pure physical brutality or any overt attack upon the social system generally remain in the background until the Marquis de Sade comes on the scene, the results of the libertine's cruelty are increasingly more serious and often entail the death or at least the eternal disgrace of the victim. By the time that Laclos writes Les Liaisons dangereuses in 1782, we are no longer dealing with cruelty as an aristocratic pastime, but as the basic principle of a philosophy of libertinism.

We cannot see the development towards a philosophy of libertinism as a result of changes in the social situation of the libertine, for, although Sade in his novel Aline et Valcour seems to predict the need for libertinism to adapt to the coming downfall of the aristocracy, the

structure of eighteenth-century society did not change significantly until the Revolution. What did change was the libertine's attitude towards society and his idea of the individual's place in it. He becomes a critical observer of the world around him and feels himself to be influenced by the "philosophical spirit" (or, rather, what he and the rest of the educated public often took to be such), which was becoming popularized. He regards himself, however erroneously, as a "philosophe," and his actions are tied to his philosophical positions.[1]

The identification of the libertine with the "philosophe" is found in so many eighteenth-century novels and critical works that it quickly becomes a cliché. We shall see that such a view often is expounded by self-appointed guardians of traditional morality, especially the sentimental novelists, in spite of the fact that they, too, were deeply influenced by certain popularized philosophical notions. A link between libertinism and philosophy does exist, however, especially in the later years of the century, as we shall also study. What particularly interests us is the way in which libertinism, imitating philosophy, combines two strong currents of eighteenth-century thought--rationalism and eroticism. The essential, but at first glance unexpected, connection between these two elements is, in fact, one of the most important aspects of the works of the writers to be examined, and that which sets them in the same perspective for us. It is the blending of rationalism and eroticism that produces the philosophy of cruel libertinism.

Rationalism played a great role in the thought of the eighteenth century, but it was an applied rationalism. Men had faith in reason as a way to solve their problems, independently of authority or revelation. The universe, its laws, and the way in which these laws affected every

facet of human experience could be, and were being, explained, thanks to men like Newton, Buffon, La Mettrie, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot. A great sense of liberation enlivened the thought of the time, and the curiosity with which men looked at the world around them was at first colored with a feeling of confidence in the goodness of the natural order of things. The cliché of "l'harmonie universelle" was quickly adopted.

Man, being a part of nature, was also a part of this harmony. The world of passions might give novelists like Prévost, for example, some uneasiness, but there is always at bottom the belief that man's heart is innocent and pure, and that to be good, we need only follow our natural instincts. Even Montesquieu, for whom virtue had to be learned and who believed that we need reflection to keep away the rash acts of thoughtless greed and selfishness, was persuaded that "les hommes étaient nés pour être vertueux, et que la justice est une qualité qui leur est aussi propre que l'existence."[2] He also believed that virtue is rewarded by making the just man "chéri des Dieux" (p. 41). The universe wants man to be happy, and his happiness lies in submitting to the universal harmony, i.e., in being virtuous. An attendant belief to this one was that the wrongdoer, the one who goes against the natural order of things, finds within himself only dissatisfaction and unhappiness. See, for example, the article "Bien" in the Encyclopédie.

Rationalism was the great tool by which man was made to understand these ideas. Everyone, even those far outside the "philosophe" group, was influenced by this faith in rationalism. A refusal to believe in the mystery of natural forces and a desire to know, to learn became simultaneous characteristics of such an enlightened people. To grasp reality and become master of it seemed to be a reasonable goal.

Optimism and, above all, an acceptance of the need for men to cooperate with one another for their mutual benefit might seem to be the natural consequences of such beliefs as those just outlined. However, the libertine heroes begin to say "no" to cooperation and to the concept of universal harmony. They refuse to submit to it, because to do so would make them the agents, the instruments of the universal order, or Providence, or whatever name one gives to the forces that control our lives. They would disappear as individuals and be swallowed up in the general order of things.

One can trace a line of development from the Versac of Crébillon fils to the heroes of Sade, passing by the Merteuil and Valmont of Laclos, showing a steady and increasingly intense preoccupation with setting oneself above the mass of men by going against the concept of cooperation and dedication to the general will.[3] What all these heroes have in common is a need to say "no" to the dissolution of the self that they perceive more and more clearly behind the concept of universal harmony. This protest expands, as time passes, into an anger directed at nature itself. The heroes we shall be studying seek to become masters of their own destinies and of the destinies of others as well, as a way of proving to themselves, to those around them and even to nature, if possible, that they are not ineffective and insignificant beings.

In view of this attitude, the libertine's quest for mastery in eroticism takes on a philosophical as well as a social significance. Love, for those who do not know it, may very easily be seen as a dissolution of the self. It is a giving of oneself to another, or, ideally, a merging with the other to form a new being. But who will

guarantee that this alteration is not the annihilation, rather than the extension or growth, of self? This is precisely what the characters we shall be discussing fear. What better way, then, to assert the self than to burst apart the myth of love, hitherto presented as the most incomprehensible of all natural forces and, therefore, the symbol of man's powerlessness? Love must be shown to be not at all a mysterious force requiring the giving up of ourselves in spite of ourselves, but a natural physiological force "dont il avait plu à la vanité des hommes de faire une vertu."[4] If love is reduced to love-making, the self is no longer in danger. But just realizing that we need not be the slave of the myth does not make us any less the slave of nature, that is, of the physical force called sexual drive, which we share with all other animals. We must not only understand love by reason, we must control it. This is, as the libertine sees it, the link between rationalism and eroticism, this last being the psychological approach to sexual drive with the aim of mastering it.

We shall begin our study with an examination of cruelty in the world of Crébillon fils. Love, here, is an intellectual exercise in which the spinning of the web seems to give as much pleasure as the victory itself. The libertine's overriding desire to distinguish himself in erotic situations demands a cynical egoism and a distant approach to others. We see a distrust of emotion, which is thought to be nothing but weakness. Only intellectually superior beings can really be in control of passion, the enemy of the self. A deep indifference towards others is necessary; one must be above all free and untouched. Actual cruelty--the conscious hurting or humiliation of others--is not, as we

have stated, the principle aim of Crébillon's libertines, but it is a useful tool to establish one's superiority, and one must not shrink from it. Cruelty lies latent in the indifference of these characters, even if it only occasionally rears its head.

But, as anger grows and social success becomes too small a goal to satisfy the libertine, cruelty becomes a more integral part of his methods. He comes to disregard all aspects of a conquest, save the intellectual pleasure of submitting another person to his will. There is a new seriousness to cruelty, which becomes a measure of the libertine's strength. There is also a certain feeling of defensiveness in the libertine's attitude of cruelty, which only adds to his anger. Characters like the Marquise de Merteuil feel that the gift of reason, which should have been man's tool of freedom, is, in a way, just the opposite: a reminder of his subordinate position in the universe. Man is a dependent creature, not a creative one. He may have learned to unravel many of the mysteries of the universe, but explaining does not equal controlling. All he has achieved is an understanding of his powerlessness. The libertine "philosophes" are enraged and humiliated by this state of things.

In the years that separate the works of Crébillon fils from those of the Marquis de Sade, the concept that nature is basically good and suffices to man's happiness begins to be reexamined. Doubts as to the goodness of the natural order can be seen in the works of the true "philosophes" as well. The Chevalier de Jaucourt, for example, writes in the Encyclopédie: "Je commence à craindre que la nature n'ait mis dans l'homme quelque pente à l'inhumanité."[5] There is no doubting this for the Marquis de Sade. His characters' cruelty stems as much from a

conscious philosophical choice to rival and even outdo nature in its evil as from a belief that they are, in this way, following the true path of human nature. Cruelty, for Sade, is the most basic element of man's character and, in any situation, social or natural (usually seen as opposites in the eighteenth century), it will inevitably come violently to the surface. For Sade, cruelty poses philosophical and social problems for man, not dreamed of by his more conservative predecessors.

Notes to the introduction:

[1] It is interesting to note that when the most famous libertine of all, Casanova, was arrested by the Inquisition in Venice, in 1755, among the books found on his bedtable and confiscated by the police were; not only licentious works like Le Portier des Chartreux, but also Le Militaire philosophe, a compendium of contemporary philosophical thought that circulated in manuscript form until its publication in 1768. See Casanova's Escape from the Leads, an Excerpt from the Memoirs, trans. Arthur Machen (New York: Knopf, 1929), pp. 29-30. On Le Militaire philosophe, see Ira Wade, The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophic Ideas in France from 1700 to 1750 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press; London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1938), pp. 45-64.

[2] Montesquieu, Les Lettres persanes (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964), pp. 36-37. The following quote is identified in the text.

[3] The Marianne of Marivaux also rose above the masses, but, unlike the pessimistic libertine hero, she did it naturally, by instinct. She had a special destiny. For her, there was no conflict between saying "yes" to universal harmony and asserting the self. Marianne's aim is to participate, the libertine's, to conquer.

[4] Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, Oeuvres, ed. Pierre Lièvre (Paris: Le Divan, 1929), I, 18.

[5] "Cruauté," L'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers (1751-76; rpt. New York: Readex Microprint Corp., 1969), I, 844. This article is directly inspired, at times word for word, by Montaigne's essay "De la cruauté," but its message, as we shall see, takes on a special eighteenth-century significance, in view of the new discoveries that were being made about human nature and its role in the universe.

Chapter I : Cruelty in the world of Crébillon fils

Part I: A society that breeds cruelty[1]

The characters that populate the works of Crébillon fils are drawn exclusively from the aristocracy of his day. As inheritors of a high and privileged position in society, they lead comfortable lives, but in contrast to their forebears who had taken on many legislative and judicial duties as a condition of their rank, the eighteenth-century nobility had ceased almost entirely to rule or to serve any useful purpose as a class. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his The Old Régime and the French Revolution, makes very clear the changed nature of the French nobility by pointedly using the word "caste" rather than "aristocracy" to describe it.[2] The members of this caste lived and prospered on vested rights, which they held on to more tightly than ever before as their very existence as a group seemed more and more to become a "meaningless anachronism" (Tocqueville, p. 30).

The noblemen were, however, as proud as they were idle. Lest anyone doubt their separate and privileged status, they scornfully refused to become involved with administrative functions, "hitherto the token and mainstay of [their] power" (Tocqueville, p. 49), but now taken over by an upstart middle class whom the aristocracy resented and considered unworthy of its attention. Drawing their prestige and superiority around them as a protective cloak, the noblemen were interested only in maintaining their rights and leading the showy but mostly powerless lives of Court members, dedicated to polite and cultivated sociability, and little else. "Never," says Tocquville, "had the gap between the middle class and the nobility been so great" (p. 89), and never had the nobleman

felt a stronger need to cling to his position and to present himself primarily as a member of a certain group, rather than as an individual, in order to protect his way of life against intruders and reformers. It is not, then, unreasonable to see the world of the élite as a prison, as luxurious as it may have been. Not only did its members have to lock others out, but in order to keep their class "watertight," as Tocqueville terms it (p. 77), they had to lock themselves in.

This exclusive, prison-like quality is one of the major characteristics of Crébillon fils' perceptive recreation of the aristocratic milieu. His characters, as we see them in the novel Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit and in the dialogues La Nuit et le moment and Le Hasard du coin du feu, are totally defined by the society they live in.[3] They pass their lives within protective, but confining walls--salons, dining rooms, carriages, theaters, or, at most, an enclosed garden. The dialogues take place entirely in a closed-off room, the boudoir, from which, as in Racinian theater, the outside world is completely shut out. Even the servants, who are outsiders, have no real existence for the nobility. Cidalise, in La Nuit, refuses her maid Justine an identity of her own, referring to her as "les gens de son espèce" (N15). Célie, in Le Hasard, imperiously quiets her servant La Tour with: "Que vous êtes impatientants, vous autres, avec vos raisons" (H94), when he tries to have an opinion on even an insignificant matter. Such non-beings are expelled from the scene before the action begins.

But, even within the confines of this isolated world, the characters, in spite of their great wealth, are not free. They are the victims of a necessary boredom, the result of their forced separation from the rest

of society. Having shed the last traces of its feudal responsibilities and duties towards other segments of society, the nobility is mired in inactivity and left to fall back upon its authority as an ancient institution to justify its privileged position, or rather to prove that it needs no justification at all. Its legitimacy is and should be unquestioned, and the individuals who make it up, recognized as the guardians of tradition and the embodiment of the natural superiority that the class, as a whole, represents.

The characters presented by Crébillon seem convinced of their personal merit as noblemen and of the rightness of their way of life, complete and perfect by nature. Any attempt at change or self-improvement would be a sign of doubt, and, therefore, a betrayal of the nobleman's position; even strong emotions and serious reflection are to be avoided, as if they, too, involved a lack of dignity, an admission that self-sufficiency and omniscience are not natural attributes of the nobility. One must not put a chink in the myth and suggest that the difference between ordinary men and aristocrats can be erased by virtue or by mental effort. There is something very bourgeois about thinking. According to Versac, the libertine of Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit: "[l]es gens du bon ton laissent au vulgaire, et le soin de penser, et la crainte de penser faux . . . rien n'est plus indécent à un homme du bon ton que de passer pour savant" (E161). In the same way, "rien n'est plus ignoble à une femme que d'être vertueuse" (E161), for virtue, whether it be defined as chastity or as fidelity in love, is too weighty a matter to occupy a noblewoman. Amorous exploits and witty conversation are, in fact, the only pastimes deemed fitting for the aristocracy, and, to admit of no compromise, the affairs must be casual

and the talk superficial.

The noblemen are forced, then, to devote themselves to triviality and to present it as an ideal way of life. But boredom hangs heavily over them. Unlike Racinian exclusiveness, theirs is totally undramatic. There is no progression towards a climax, no resolution of shattering conflicts in Crébillon's world. There is only sameness and repetition. Although the characters might prefer to think of themselves as unique, they tend to fall necessarily into two categories: men are libertines, women are coquettes. One may be more or less successful as a libertine, more or less open in one's flirtation, but the differences are in degree, not kind. Nothing is accomplished in the dialogues; what we see is one instance in a series of instances that are always the same and in which the end is known from the beginning. The stories that Clitandre tells of other conquests in La Nuit are similar to the one that he is acting out with Cidalise, which will, in its turn, become a story in his next tête-à-tête. Cidalise knows that Clitandre desires her particularly "pour avoir une aventure singulière à raconter" (N69). She also knows that it is boredom alone that usually provokes an affair: "j'ai plus d'une raison de penser que je ne vous inspire pas d'amour. Mais vous êtes désoeuvré, seul avec moi la nuit . . ." (N68-69). Although he knows this is true, Clitandre must obviously choose moments in which the conversation is more general to agree, in order not to spoil his evening by forcing Cidalise to apply his words to her own situation. But, in spite of Clitandre's good timing and charming manner and Cidalise's willful blindness, his frank and blasé cynicism still surprises: "On est dans le monde, on s'y ennuie, on voit des femmes qui, de leur côté ne s'y amusent guère: on est jeune; la vanité se joint au désoeuvrement.

Si avoir une femme n'est pas toujours un plaisir, du moins c'est toujours une sorte d'occupation" (N96).

Clitandre often returns to the same idea, always showing us that behind the constant activity of seduction and conquest are an unchanging emptiness of soul and an ennui that sometimes overcomes him in the midst of his pleasures. Even Célie, the most unthinking character in the dialogues, recognizes that love affairs are important chiefly to keep bordeom at bay. Pressed to explain why she chose a very unattractive man as a lover, she randomly draws several reasons from the confusion of her mind, especially stressing her fear of idleness. She was, she says, determined by "ce vuide affreux qui succède à une passion, et si pénible pour quelqu'un qui vient d'en goûter les charmes: son assiduité; sa patience; l'ennui du désoeuvrement . . ." (H106).

There are no rebels in this society. The characters feel as if they have no choice. Versac tells us: "Sûr que je ne pourrais, sans me perdre, vouloir résister au torrent, je le suivis. Je sacrifiai tout au frivole . . ." (E156). In order to do so, he has had to do violence to his natural character, condemning himself, as he says, to the steady torment of self-disguise. He is explaining his way of life to the reader and to the young Meilcour, for only an outsider or an uninitiated youth would need an explanation; all those within Versac's aristocratic circle know that the strict demands made upon the individual by society must be met. As one critic has said, these people attach "primary or even exclusive importance to ordered social existence."[4] Such order is all they know and outside of it, as far as they are concerned, is nothingness.

Seeking to cheat boredom by creating ties to others, as individuals,

is unthinkable, for although love-making is the main occupation of this society and the word "love" is on everyone's lips, neither it nor even sincere friendship can exist in reality. There are several reasons for this. In the first place, each nobleman is more or less the dupe of the pretensions of his class: he believes in the myth of the nobility, and so inwardly endorses the careless and superficial existence he leads. Showing to another person the least emotion or need is a weakness, a mark of vulnerability. Courting friendship is interpreted as servility and greeted with scorn, or, at best, insulting condescension. Versac specifically counsels Meilcour to keep an air of confident and mocking aloofness in his dealings with others, for "le trop grand désir de leur plaire suppose le besoin qu'on en a," and such a need is an embarrassment: "C'est avouer que nous croyons qu'un homme nous est supérieur, que d'être timide devant lui" (E155). The noble creed of self-sufficiency demands that each individual guard a little space around himself as inviolable. Friendship is an invasion of this space, but love, which gives to another person the power to complete us, destroys it. Love is the humiliation of the self, as understood by the nobility, for it makes a mockery of self-sufficiency.

Secondly, love is also a threat to the social order. The nobleman owes his first and only allegiance to the society that protects him. Other people are important only as members of the group, never as individuals. There is an interesting description of the nobleman's idea of social obligations in Vivant Denon's Point de lendemain, which, although written in 1777, expresses perfectly the attitude of Crébillon's characters. Mme de T*** has explained to the hero "qu'il n'y avait d'engagement (philosophiquement parlant) que ceux que l'on contractait

avec le public, en lui laissant pénétrer nos secrets . . ." She continues: "Si des raisons . . . nous forçaient à nous séparer demain, notre bonheur, ignoré de toute la nature, ne nous laisserait, par exemple, aucun lien à dénouer . . ."[5] It has become a habit for the people of this world to feel no sense of responsibility towards other human beings and to choose acquaintances and lovers as they might choose a book to read from the shelves of their libraries. They barely think of liking the person they pick. For them, love, as the older Meilcour describes it, is "une sorte de commerce" that is frequently entered into "même sans goût" (E15). Love affairs sometimes resemble business arrangements: "Comme on s'est pris sans s'aimer," says Clitandre, "on se sépare sans se haïr, et l'on retire du moins, du faible goût que l'on s'est mutuellement inspiré, l'avantage d'être toujours prêts à s'obliger" (N18). In any case, even if the nobility were able to imagine a different kind of love, most of its members would lack the discipline needed to develop it. They are far too accustomed to seek relief from boredom in variety.

Since the individual sees in the preservation of society his own safety, he is necessarily and automatically drawn into an alliance with those who share his position. He becomes, as in the natural course of things and more unconsciously than not, a slave to the way things are. He spontaneously participates in the effort to destroy the power of love. He seeks to "le réduire au simple, et prouver que les faveurs ne [sont] que du plaisir," as Denon's hero puts it.[6] Old moral values, such as those cherished by the Marquise in Le Hasard, are termed "les préjugés les plus gothiques" (H110) by Célie, who believes it is time to throw out these "idées adoptées, peut-être sans beaucoup d'examen" (H110)

and find other principles "un peu moins gourmés, et un peu plus analogues à la nature" (H111).

Crébillon's characters find, however, that one of the best ways to burst apart the myth of love in fact is to glorify it in words. Love, in its new form, may be more physical and less durable than the old kind, but, according to Célie, it is not any less wonderful. It usually strikes suddenly, in the form of a "coup de foudre," "ce mouvement dont la cause nous est inconnue, et qui nous entraîne avec une violence à laquelle on voudrait vainement résister, vers l'objet, qui nous enchante" (H92). A woman's dignity and honor are in no way damaged by her succumbing to love, which is stronger than she is. This is true even if she finds later that she has been wrong, an event which is not at all uncommon since, unfortunately, "les effets de la passion tiennent du genre de la passion même" (H92). To describe love as temporary, but mysteriously overwhelming is to provide an excuse to give in to it without sacrificing the appearance of decency. Repetition destroys romantic illusions more effectively than theories do.

To protect even further their good name, women have invented two fictions to draw on: "la sensibilité" and "le moment." Women are a prey to their emotions; this drawback is put forward as the mark of their sex. It is a great weakness, but what makes it almost impossible to overcome, is the fact that it is often hidden. A woman may believe that she is strong enough to resist all temptation, but, if so, she has rashly forgotten "le moment," which is generously described by the Duc de Clerval as:

Une certaine disposition des sens aussi

> imprévue qu'elle est involontaire, qu'une femme peut voiler, mais qui, si elle est aperçue, ou sentie par quelqu'un qui ait intérêt d'en profiter, la met dans le danger du monde le plus grand d'être un peu plus complaisante qu'elle ne croyait ni devoir, ni pouvoir l'être (H103).

Women are usually undeceived too late. "Hélas!" cries Cidalise, "j'ignorais, ou plutôt je cherchais à ignorer la force et la nature du goût qui m'entraînait vers vous, et peut-être en aurais-je triomphé, si vous n'eussiez pas cherché à me séduire" (N75). Célie admits to having been similarly overpowered by "une faiblesse qui était si peu faite pour moi, et que, par cette raison, je n'ai pas assez craint [sic] " (H116).

Men, by a tacit agreement between the sexes which benefits them both, subscribe to this hypocrisy, although they sometimes, as we have seen, give vent to their cynicism. At one point, the Duc regrets the fact that a woman cannot openly instruct a man as to the best method of winning her favors: "les deux sexes y gagneraient également" (H103). But there is generally enough understanding between them so that the battle of the sexes becomes the ballet of the sexes in most cases.

It is the society as a whole that benefits most from this arrangement, for it has found a way to gain complete control over the individual, taking from him the possibility of love and imposing upon him a strict guide to behavior. In Crébillon's world, there is no motive for action, no other subject of conversation than love-making. "L'amour seul préside ici" (E11). The indiviudual's position is one of extreme vulnerability which belies his claim to self-sufficiency. He needs the protection of the group. The loss of his reputation, beyond which lurks the threat of exclusion, is a constant

worry. Feeling himself under the steady scrutiny of the rest of society, "le Public," he must be especially careful not to choose or drop a lover without its approval. "C'est une tyrannie de sa part peut-être;" says Clitandre, "mais enfin il veut que ce qui nous paraît aimable lui plaise, et ne nous pardonne pas d'attacher un certain prix à ce qu'il ne juge point à propos d'estimer" (N61). Nothing can be hidden; there is no privacy in this society. Everything one says and does, even in one's most private moments, will become known. We saw that Cidalise places no faith in Clitandre's discretion, and he himself has already learned many interesting things about her from Eraste, her former lover. All bits of information gathered from such accounts as these quickly become public property and help form a judgment issued by "le Public" upon which reputations are based.

The Public can be a menacing group for the individual whose actions are in question. But the victim easily becomes oppressor in his turn, as attention shifts to a new target. Acquaintances change constantly from foe to ally, from ally to foe as the conversation moves from one victim to the next. On such unsteady ground as this, the safest course is to trust no one, to work hard at projecting a favorable image, and to divert attention from oneself when threatened. This is the strategy of Mme de Lursay, who, more intelligent than most of her peers, is nonetheless forced, like them, to live with hypocrisy and fear of exposure. Knowing that she is no match for Versac, whose anger she has provoked, she feels in constant danger in his presence. "Jamais la conversation ne tournait vers la médisance que, craignant d'en devenir l'objet, elle ne fît son possible pour

la déranger" (E96). Versac has discovered the secret mainspring of this society: fear. Everyone, even the dissolute and seemingly shameless Mme de Senanges, has secrets that would ruin him if divulged: "Mme de Senanges, toute étourdie qu'elle était, connaissait Versac, et n'os[ait] pas le défier sur l'indiscrétion . . ." (E94). Célie, the heroine of Le Hasard, as immodest and blind to her own faults as Mme de Senanges, also lives in fear of discovery, according to the Marquise: "elle tâche . . . de masquer l'âme qu'elle a, de celle qu'il serait beau d'avoir" (H97).

The individual's reaction to his precarious position in society is, most often, determined for him, rather than by him. He is too vain to judge properly of his own worth and, in addition, too used to a world in which shallowness is the rule and frivolity and lack of discipline dissolve the will, to have either the energy or the desire to form a definite plan of action. Bored, eager to be admired for his wit and charms, but constantly checked by others with the same pretensions, he is filled with resentment and a vague sense of malice. Newcomers to this world attract particular attention, for no one can be allowed to escape the iron-grip of society. Meilcour, like so many before him, is turned into a roué "moins . . . encore par lui-même, que par des personnes intéressés à lui corrompre le coeur, et l'esprit" (E11). It is a jealous desire to keep Meilcour from developing into a true individual, someone beyond the control of the group, that causes these people to be "intéressées." All libertines have similar stories to tell. Clitandre, for example, declares that "ce fut d'abord malgré moi, et par la fantaisie de quelques femmes qui alors donnaient le ton, que je devins à la mode" (N97). The Duc, also, must

thank, for his education, a certain lady who had "le bon esprit de ne pas laisser cela dépendre de moi" (H99).

This feeling of ill-will is not directed exclusively towards newcomers or any one else in particular; it is more general than that. Individuals, as we have seen, have no real existence for each other; each one considers those around him less as human beings than as obstacles to his happiness or as stepping-stones to success. Malicious gossip serves the double purpose of calling attention to one's brilliant and caustic wit and of taking from others their chance to shine by holding them up as objects of ridicule. The respect accorded to those who excel in maligning others inflates their feeling of self-esteem. In his "Traité de morale," as Versac terms the worldly advice he gives Meilcour, he describes the prevailing tone of good society: "c'est plus à la façon de médire qu'à toute autre chose, que l'on reconnaît ceux qui possèdent le bon ton. Elle ne saurait être ni trop cruelle, ni trop précieuse" (E160).

The typical social gathering of this urbane and sophisticated nobility has been labeled a "savage contest" which always seems to be "on the verge of explosion."[7] Yet, most of the participants, however savage they may wish to be, strike rather blindly at whatever object catches their attention. Like Mme de Senanges, who is given by the narrator as typical of her social class (E87), they often seem more catty than truly malevolent, because of the mindless and careless aspect of their malice. Compared to Versac's well-aimed and vicious insults, their remarks seem almost harmless. When Versac mentions that Pranzi is to dine with "la vieille Mme de ***," Mme de Senanges cries out, "Ah, mon Dieu . . . Est-il vrai, Pranzi? Quelle horreur!

Mme de ***! Mais cela a cent ans!" Versac picks up this pointless bit of insolence and turns it into a cruel barb aimed directly at Mme de Lursay, who is, to her shame, one of Pranzi's former conquests: "Il est vrai, Madame . . . mais cela ne lui fait rien . . . ce que je sais et quelques autres aussi, c'est que vers cinquante ans on ne lui déplaît pas" (E92). But if Versac is effective where others fail, it is because of the "pénétration," "justesse," and "finesse" of his mind (E157), not because his intentions are any more cruel than those of other aspirants to worldly fame. All members of this society share the same disregard for the feelings of others and the same willingness to hurt them, if it is necessary to their plans.

One critic calls the world of Les Egarements "une société parée de douce cruauté" and "un milieu qui se complaît dans une aimable cruauté."[8] He does not explain how cruelty can be likable, but perhaps what he means is that there is no danger here of cruelty becoming too destructive. People know that individual reputations can be lost without doing harm to the social structure. In fact, not only is cruelty safe, but it plays the part of a cohesive social force. It eases the frustrations and pressures of a repressive society, permitting people to ignore the obscure position they occupy and to see themselves as perceptive and clever wits. They are allowed to believe that other people fear them. With an air of cruel mockery, "on se distingue parce qu'on se fait craindre" (E160). The momentary purging of the bile in malicious gossip creates further hostility and mistrust. In this way, one is kept, if not satisfied, at least busy. As we have seen, these people have neither the energy nor the imagination to go further in cruelty than a superficial malice, which comes easily and

naturally to them. It is a lack of depth, rather than any moral repugnance to wrongdoing, that keeps their cruelty "civilized" and "safe."

Part II: The Libertine[9]

The libertine is the central figure in most of Crébillon's novels and dialogues, as he is in all eighteenth-century works that display the attitude of cruelty. A successful rake like Versac foreshadows in many ways such later libertines as Laclos' Valmont, and is, like him, a product of the society described above. In his study on Crébillon fils, Clifton Cherpack raises the question of why this writer, who had so much in common with Laclos, did not himself write a Liaisons dangereuses.[10] But heroes like Versac have a long way to go before they become Valmonts. Versac's theories are a reaction to his surroundings and an attempt to fashion a way of life designed to bring him the most happiness possible, given his circumstances. He is cruel because he accepts "the way things are." The cruelty of Laclos' characters represents a desire to overturn the existing order of things; their actions are a struggle against "the way things are" rather than a sign of conformity to it.

Crébillon's libertines are intelligent, self-disciplined and alert, but they are not profound or original thinkers. Versac tells Meilcour that "un homme de notre rang, et de votre âge, ne doit avoir pour objet que de rendre son nom célèbre" (E153). He never questions this goal. Far from being a romantic figure undermining the system with his disruptive ideas, he and others of his sort are the height of pragmatism and conservatism. Like that of any nobleman, the liber-

tine's main interest is preserving the society that he knows so well. If, in accordance with the tacit rules of love-making mentioned above, it is necessary to swear love in order to make a conquest, he will do so (unless, as in the Duc de Clerval's case, it is against his own interest for a specific reason). It is a matter of good etiquette to hide one's cynicism at the proper moment. Clitandre says to Cidalise all the flattering and passionate things "que suggère l'amour reconnaissant, ou que dicte quelquefois la nécessité d'être poli" (N84). Crébillon's heroes detest impropriety and vulgarity. "Les plaisirs gagnent toujours à être ennoblis" (H102).

The libertine is a product of his society in more ways than one. His inability to trust others, cynicism about love, and excessive vanity, as well as his conservatism, are characteristics that he shares with those around him. But, if like them, he is not able to see very far beyond the limits of his small world, he does, unlike them, see very clearly within it. He has one special quality that sets him apart from most of his contemporaries and allows him to be measured against the cruel libertines to come. This is his ability to analyze rationally the workings of the society around him coupled with a reliance upon reason to guide his steps.

The libertine's intelligence permits him to profit from his study of society, as we have already seen in the case of Versac. His power rests on his ability to ferret out the secrets of others, and, at the same time, to remain, himself, a complete mystery, so that he may wield the knowledge he possesses without fear of reprisal. Knowledge is power.[11] This is Versac's principal message to Meilcour: "il faut . . . que vous joigniez à l'art de tromper les autres, celui de les

pénétrer" (E153). The libertine must never make a mistake. Versac's unveiling of himself to Meilcour, a potential rival, may seem to be just that, especially as his own explanation of his motives seems doubtful: "mon amitié pour vous ne m'a pas permis de vous tromper longtemps, et le besoin que vous avez d'être instruit m'a contraint de vous montrer que je sais penser, et réfléchir" (E151). But Versac is not contradicting his own theories by this action. In order to hurt Mme de Lursay, which is his most important project at the moment, he must take Meilcour away from her and send him on to Mme de Senanges. By becoming Meilcour's tutor and benevolent friend, he hopes to gain dominance over the younger man, so that he may control him completely. In any case, he knows that Meilcour is not at all able yet to make use of the information he gives him.[12]

But the ability to reason is a very mixed blessing for the libertine, for it enables him to see many ugly and unsettling truths. Versac, Clitandre, and the Duc all feel a measure of contempt for the world they are obliged to live in. They see the boredom, hypocrisy, and especially the insignificance of their way of life which forces them to adopt "ces opinions absurdes qui font honte à l'esprit et ce maintien affecté qui gâte et contraint la figure" (E152). Speaking of his past affairs, Clitandre says, "Comment voulez-vous qu'avec ce qu'on a à faire dans le monde, des gens que le hasard, le caprice, des circonstances ont unis quelques moments, se souviennent de ce qui les a intéressés si peu?" (N8). Clitandre's world is made up of totally forgettable and obscure beings.

The libertine feels himself in danger of sinking into the obscurity that is the lot of ordinary men, and works to avoid this from happening.

He studies and perfects "la science du monde," as contemptible as it may be, for "sans elle, les avantages que nous avons reçus de la nature, loin de nous tirer de l'obscurité, tournent souvent contre nous" (E150). If, then, reason is the source of the libertine's dissatisfaction, it is also the weapon he uses to improve his position. The dual role that reason plays in the make-up of Crébillon's libertines will continue to be important throughout the eighteenth century. Versac's unhappiness is already evidence that, as Chester, a later hero of Crébillon, will realize, "les funestes lumières" cost more in happiness than they are perhaps worth.[13] Yet it is reason that is, and always will be, chosen to defend the self against the threat of obscurity.

The libertine must not allow himself to be swayed by his emotions. He puts his intelligence at the service of his libertinism, whatever the consequences to others. His punishment of Mme de Lursay, who had delayed a conquest of his for three days, is certainly not commensurate with the crime, for he has decided to ruin what might have been the most important episode of her life. ("[C]e qu'on croit la dernière fantaisie d'une femme," the narrator tells us, "est bien souvent sa première passion" [E29]). But even the slightest attempt to oppose his will must be unhesitatingly quashed as a threat to his supremacy.

There is something chilling about the fact that viciousness and intelligence are not always at odds with one another, let alone mutually exclusive. Mme de Senanges is just as malicious as Versac, yet we can scorn her or laugh at her, while Versac is particularly repellant to the reader. One critic remarks that "Versac's most dangerous vice is . . . a disease of the heart and mind which can and does affect every area of human communication."[14] This disease does,

in fact, bar all human communication, and Versac encourages it, but it is only partially self-inflicted since, as we have seen, emotion, attachment, and compassion are considered by the whole society as weaknesses. Reason, on the other hand, is strength and self-possession. The two--reason and emotion--are thought to be irreconcilable elements by all libertines, and, in fact, by the eighteenth century in general. It has been remarked that the title Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit refers to the two separate domains that exist in man and the need never to confuse them.[15] Clearsightedness is consistently linked by the libertine to lack of emotion. "Elle m'inspirait trop peu d'amour . . . pour qu'elle pût me tromper sur ses mouvements," says Clitandre (N137).

To achieve the power and the recognition that will set him above the crowd, the libertine works to distinguish himself as a master of the erotic moment. In this society, intellectual superiority is nothing if it is not used to make oneself admired by conquering the opposite sex and shutting out all competition from one's own. More alert than his fellow nobles, the libertine also clearly understands how important it is, for his own protection as much as for that of society, that he defeat the power of love. In effect, he reduces love to love-making and uses his power in this art to create fear, which he welcomes as a sign of his invulnerability. He uses the very thing--love--that could prove the downfall of the self in order to affirm and glorify it instead.

Versac has established himself as the most feared and, at the same time, the most desired man in his society. Women create rumors to link his name with theirs, but, as he says, many of them "ne sont bonnes

qu'à ruiner, et lorsque . . . ce n'est pas cette idée qui détermine, il ne faut pas permettre qu'elles se fassent une réputation à nos dépens" (E94). In the "Traité de morale," he makes it clear that women are the key to worldly success; to make one's name respected, it is necessary to "paraître n'avoir dans tout ce qu'on fait que les femmes en vue . . . [c]e n'est qu'en paraissant soumis à tout ce qu'elles veulent, qu'on parvient à les dominer" (E153). Unfortunately, the reader never learns the subtleties of love-making from Versac, since, for lack of time, he is not able to treat this important subject in any detail.

* * *

It is in the dialogues of Crébillon fils--Le Hasard du coin du feu and especially La Nuit et le moment--that we see the libertine in action and the mechanics of the cruel science of eroticism. In presenting Clitandre and the Duc de Clerval, Crébillon does not dwell on the dark side of the libertine's nature. In the first place, both men are "on stage," where they must appear submissive to the woman's will. But it is also true that Crébillon intends to amuse us, and himself as well. He particularly enjoyed La Nuit, which he called his "chef-d'oeuvre."[16] But, although Crébillon was tolerant, he was not,as we have seen, untruthful or blind to the traits that these heroes share with Versac: the clear-sighted contempt of the world, the desire not to be counted as one of the common herd, and the practical decision to use reason to make the best of their situation. Clitandre, comparing himself to a lesser libertine, takes pleasure in the fact that "l'on fait de ma façon de penser un autre

cas que de la sienne" (N62), and he stresses that his superiority is not based on his "agréments," for, on that point, the other "peut l'emporter sur moi." Rather, he is proud because he feels that he is, in a sense, his own creation, as the Marquise de Merteuil will brag a bit later on.

As La Nuit effectively makes clear by placing Clitandre's victory mid-way through the dialogue, and as many critics have noted,[17] love-making is not, in itself, important. The real triumph is in the future when the libertine will retell the story. "[L]a vanité," asks Clitandre, "serait-elle satisfaite d'un triomphe qu'on ignorerait?" (N52). "Raconter" is a key concept for the libertine. Through repetition, Clitandre's stories become thoroughly familiar to the hearers and take on the air of indisputable fact. As the hero of the tale, he becomes a figure of authority, and, by setting out his victory in plain terms, he proves his ability to control his environment. In this society, "language is directed to a demonstration of social control, and social control both employs and is expressed by this language, which demonstrates that reality has been transmuted into a psychological and social system of which one is perfectly the master."[18] The stories that Clitandre tells Cidalise are part of his seduction of her, for they prove to her his worth and excite her curiosity and desire.[19] Each story is more unusual than the one before. The less important his partner becomes and the more he is able to use her simply as a proof of his dexterity, the greater his victory is.

The libertine's manipulation of the woman depends on his ability to conquer her physically while, at the same time, he uses language to create an emotional distance between them.[20] Emile Henriot speaks

of "la délicieuse pirouette," that is, verbal pirouette, of Crébillon's characters. Another critic, Peter Conroy, mentions their "verbal swordplay."[21] The style of the first few pages of La Nuit, which sets the tone of the relationship between the two characters, is a combination of these two elements. Polite, yet always guarded, they circle around one another verbally like two fencers about to duel, sounding each other out:

> Clitandre: Voudriez-vous bien me dire pourquoi vous avez été si étonnée de me voir chez vous ce soir? . . .
> Cidalise: Voudriez-vous bien . . . me faire la grâce de me dire pourquoi vous croyez m'incommoder tant aujourd'hui? (N4) . . . .
>
> Cidalise: Quoi! réellement, Clitandre, vous n'avez de rendez-vous avec personne?
> Clitandre: Quoi! dans le vrai, je ne vous empêche pas de voir Eraste? (N5)

Clitandre, in these first pages, never satisfies Cidalise with direct answers. When she pretends to know that he has been the lover of the four women visiting her, he replies that "il y aurait à moi de la sottise à vous soutenir que je n'ai eu aucune d'elles; mais il y aurait assurément plus que de l'indiscrétion à dire que je les ai eues toutes" (N8). He has told her just enough to whet her curiosity, but refuses to commit himself any further until he is sure he will be rewarded for his trouble.

Conroy, referring to another work, talks of the "precarious equilibrium" of the speaker,[22] who tries to shield himself and, at the same time, keep the other person on the defensive. When Cidalise chides Clitandre by telling him that his former mistress, Célimène, complains that "vous lui faites les injustices du monde les plus

criantes" (N10), Clitandre turns the tables by quoting her former lover Eraste, who, he says, believes that "à votre humeur près . . . vous êtes assez bonne femme et que vous ne manquez absolument pas de principes" (N11).

The initial wariness is maintained throughout the dialogue, even as the two shift to a tone of confidences, as the next step in Clitandre's march to victory. The confidences, far from bringing them closer together, introduce a libertine mood and also act, as we mentioned above, as a kind of aphrodisiac for Cidalise. In addition, Clitandre consistently refuses to use language in a personal way. Even, or rather especially, when declaring love, he relies on:

> ces galanteries vagues qui ne signifient que ce qu'on veut; que la passion, ou la vanité d'une femme, interprètent comme elle a besoin qu'elles le soient, et qu'un homme réduit aisément à la valeur qu'il leur donne lui-même, lorsqu'il lui devient de quelqu'importance qu'elle cesse de s'y tromper. (H113)

Cherpack has said that Clitandre is a man whom "one can never imagine weeping, or laughing, or running,"[23] and, indeed, he does seem to be emptied of all real emotion, like Versac's ideal of the libertine, who coldly and instantly turns himself into whatever sort of man he is required to become by the situation: "tendre avec la délicate, sensuel avec la voluptueuse, galant avec la coquette" (E157). He is a chameleon, dashingly amorous, before and after his victory, as he tells of his adventures, but easily becoming, at the proper moment, the inflamed lover, using no less than four superlatives as he reveals to "la plus aimable femme du monde" "la passion la plus vive qui fût

jamais" (N68). His passion rises to Racinian heights, as he reproaches Cidalise for having "la cruauté d'ajouter au mépris dont vous payez ma tendresse" (N70) by doubting his sincerity, for the legitimacy of their love is proved by "l'ancienneté de notre liaison" (N77).

Like Versac, Clitandre has completely shut himself off from all human communication, and Crébillon does not even permit the readers to consider him with anything but the same cynical detachment that he feels towards those around him. Just at the critical moment, during which Clitandre will perhaps feel something of a more sincere, or at least more spontaneous nature, we are cut off from him, as the narrator, who has until now been silent except for a few stage directions, steps in. In an amused, but highly ironic tone, he analyzes the proceedings for us, concluding, as if with a shrug of his shoulders, that, after all, "il fallait bien que de façon ou d'autre cela finît" (N83-84). Irony, as one critic said, has no friends.[24] So little do Cidalise and Clitandre matter as individuals that the narrator invites us to finish the scene in any way we choose, if his way does not seem fitting or "commode" to our manner of thinking.

Totally controlling his own movements is not enough for the libertine. He must prove himself "master of external reality . . . make the world move according to [his] manipulation of its laws," as Peter Brooks has said of Versac.[25] Clitandre seeks to remove all that is irrational or seemingly gratuitous from his surroundings. When Araminte wants the candle put out, he refuses even so simple a request because "cela ne me parut qu'un caprice: je ne les aime pas . . ." (29-30). In spite of the frequent appearance of the word, "le hasard" is as big a myth as "la sensibilité fatale de la femme." Clitandre

twice ironically ascribes the obviously premeditated events that led to his affair with Araminte to chance: "Le hasard nous fit passer par un petit bosquet assez obscur. Par le même hasard, nous étions insensiblement séparés de la compagnie . . . (N27; emphasis added). Even when, as with the Duc de Clerval, the libertine is unprepared, he manages to be firmly back in control by the end of the evening. Because Célie's character and way of thinking contain nothing unknown to him, he is able to free himself of her unwanted affection. We can already see that, when the time of the final separation arrives, Célie will be convinced that it is a result of her decision alone.

The Duc manipulates Célie's moods as if she were a machine, so that she almost becomes a creation of his. Such dehumanization of one's partner is the mark of the libertine's success. Others, in general, are regarded as knowable quantities that can be reduced to a few basic traits. The libertine very often speaks of a person in the plural: "ces sortes de femmes sont . . ." (N36), "ces sortes d'espèces dont . . ." (N34), "ces sortes d'amants qui . . ." (N95). Man, for these basically cold and dispassionate lovers, is "a machine which reacts purely mechanically as the proper buttons are pushed from the outside."[26] Perceptive people are already drawing this lesson from "la philosophie moderne" long before the publication of La Mettrie's L'Homme machine in 1748. Here is Clitandre's interpretation of the dawning "esprit philosophique:" "[la philosophie] nous a . . . appris à connaître les motifs de nos actions, et à ne plus croire que nous agissons au hasard. . ." (N17). Love, we now know, is nothing more than "un mouvement des sens" (N18). The result of this knowledge has been a healthy change in manners: "si l'on se dit encore qu'on

s'aime, c'est bien moins parce qu'on le croit, que parce que c'est une façon plus polie de se demander réciproquement ce dont on sent qu'on a besoin" (N18). "L'amour-goût" is perhaps yet another one of this society's myths, for according to Clitandre's description, erotic moments are simply a necessity for the well-functioning machine.

Such statements may or may not reflect Clitandre's true beliefs: "peut-être aussi est-ce moins ma façon de penser . . . que celle qu'il semble que quelques personnes ont aujourd'hui" (N19). However, these ideas are useful to him and, in his affairs, he acts as if he does believe them. He is not, of course, incapable of letting himself be caught in a momentary surprise of the senses: "elle me fit des agaceries . . . tout le mépris, qu'en ce moment même elle m'inspirait, ne m'empêcha pas d'y répondre" (N90). Were it not for the fact that he recognizes such lapses for what they are, and consents to them, he might, at such times, be thought of as a machine himself. But, like Meilcour with his "commode métaphysique" (E187), Clitandre never confuses the realm of the senses with that of the heart. Clear-headed, he always draws from his affairs some useful information about the nature of the human machine and very often conducts "experiments" with this aim in mind. Cidalise remarks that experiments of this sort are "le goût d'aujourd'hui" (N143). Sometimes, as in the case of Araminte, they are a direct result of the boredom he feels with his partner. "Ne sachant plus que faire de cette grosse femme-là . . . je me divertis à chercher si elle était en effet aussi singulièrement tendre qu'elle se croyait obligée de le paraître" (N38). However, in Clitandre's last and most interesting conquest, which he undertakes mainly to settle an old

score with the woman's lover, the experiment becomes, in the end, a purely intellectual adventure.

The story of Luscinde represents the first step away from the totally practical-minded libertine towards the Valmonts of the future. Clitandre enjoys his power over Luscinde for itself. He feels almost an esthetic appreciation for his achievement, and speaks of his tale's "grande beauté" (N141). He shows a sense of style, for he wants his victory to be pure. Not only must Luscinde submit to him, she must, like Mme de Tourvel, give herself freely: "quoique je n'eusse pas besoin de lire dans ses yeux pour m'instruire de ses dispositions . . . je voulais . . . que rien ne manquât à mon triomphe. . ." (N125). He makes her fall in love and then out of love with him. She is truly like a machine with no will of her own, for Clitandre not only determines her actions, but actually creates her emotions.

After several victories, Clitandre's desires are gone, but he must commit one more "noirceur" which he excuses as "scientific:" "[i]l me prit envie de voir s'il est vrai que la machine l'emporte sur le sentiment, autant que bien des gens le prétendent" (N144). Love has not only been "de-mythicized" and reduced to love-making, but, on Clitandre's part, it has almost been "de-sensualized" as well. Clitandre is excited by the idea of succeeding, an idea that "me parut à moi-même si singulière et si peu faite pour réussir, moi ne voulant employer ni menaces, ni violences . . ." (N141). One is reminded of Valmont here, creating his own difficulties to make the challenge more worthy of him.[27]

Henriot has said that Crébillon "a tracé le premier essai, 45 ans avant Laclos, d'une aventure digne des Liaisons, l'intention de nuire

et la méchanceté en moins."[28] It is true that Clitandre is not cruel in the sense that his actions are designed primarily to cause pain and suffering to others. Henri Armand notes the lack of interest, on the part of Crébillon's libertines, in causing humiliation to their victims: "La satisfaction qu'ils trouvent dans la rupture n'est pas celle qu'on éprouve à piétiner l'orgueil d'un adversaire, mais la satisfaction d'une mission accomplie, d'une oeuvre bien réalisée."[29] By and large, libertines like Clitandre and the Duc de Clerval prefer easy conquests to challenging ones, for although success in the latter case is very flattering it is not always certain: "il y aurait, quelquefois, trop à perdre pour nous" (H105). The Duc is particularly mild. If he is cruel to Célie, it is because he is forced to be. His treatment of her, the narrator tells us, is not really "barbare" because "ce n'est pas gratuitement" that he acts (H114).

Clitandre himself says, "[N]ous quittons ordinairement une femme sans chercher à l'humilier, à moins cependant que notre vanité ne soit intéressée à le faire" (N34). Explaining why he chose not to use force with Julie, who has refused to see him again, he remarks: "La chose du monde que j'ai toujours le plus détestée, et qui est en effet la plus indigne d'un honnête homme, est de remporter sur les femmes de ces triomphes qui les humilient" (N110). But it is also worth noting that this last statement is followed immediately by a sentence that begins: "Sûr de la vaincre . . . " It is this certainty coupled with a desire not to soil his reputation by having to resort to violence, more than any feeling of benevolence, that persuades him to forbear. If Clitandre is generous, it is, as he said, because his "vanité" is not in any way slighted by his being so.

It is true also that any attitude, such as Clitandre's, that permits one to cause fear or suffering knowingly and to be indifferent to it may be said to be cruel, even if such pain is not one's aim. Clitandre is certainly aware of the fear he causes Luscinde. He mentions it several times and plays upon it, apparently enjoying himself very much. "[E]lle chercha, mais vainement, à me dérober la peur que je lui faisais . . ." (N122). He torments her in the presence of her servants by "l'appelant Marquise le plus familièrement du monde et . . . lui serrant de toutes mes forces la main que je lui tenais" (N122). If Clitandre causes, in fact, only momentary fear and suffering, it is rather because the women he deals with are not very susceptible to emotional crises, than because he wishes to be gentle with them. As we see, he is quite willing to humiliate Luscinde when it becomes necessary.

Ernest Sturm, in a discussion of Crébillon fils, suggests, at one point, that his heroes' libertinism is characterized by a healthy and honest desire to do away with the false, romantic notion of "amour-passion." These "libertins éclairés" are, in effect, "dénonciateur[s] de mythes."[30] But the idea that theirs is a "libertinage joyeux" which somehow (inexplicably, evidently, since the critic does not show how) "se perd . . . cédant la place à une volonté cruelle de domination" that is the mark of such later heroes as Chester (Les Heureux Orphelins) and Alcibiade (Les Lettres athéniennes)[31] is belied by a close examination of these earlier characters. We have tried to make clear that, behind their indifference to others and their willingness to exploit them, lie the seeds that will develop into the cruelty of later libertines. Most significant, perhaps, is their deep cynicism

which prohibits them from establishing any kind of moral foundation to stand upon in order to prevent the growth of the attitude of cruelty. As Cherpack has said, these characters can find no "solid moral 'point d'appui' " on which to base their conduct.[32] We can see flashes of the cruelty to come in sentiments like the following. Versac, we are told, although incapable of loving Hortense, would however have liked to win her heart:

> sans chercher à le rendre heureux [le coeur de Mlle de Théville] , il aurait voulu se le soumettre. Comme on ne lui avait jamais résisté que par coquetterie, il voulait, une fois du moins, s'amuser du spectacle d'une jeune personne vaincue sans le savoir, étonnée de ses premiers soupirs, tout entière à son amour quand elle croit le combattre encore, qui ne respire, ne pense, n'agit que pour son amant, et pour qui rien n'est plaisir, peine et devoir, que tout ce qui tient à sa passion. (E104-05; emphasis added)[33]

The reason that cruelty does not play as important a role in Crébillon's brand of libertinism as it will later on is that, for all their boredom and restlessness, his heroes are basically comfortable with the existing order of things. Their struggle is directed mainly at enhancing their position in society, and not so much, as is the case with Valmont, Merteuil, and, even later on, the heroes of Sade, at changing what they see as their insignificant position in the universe. The struggle of these latter heroes is against Nature itself. Crébillon's characters do not question the universal order, and, in fact, seem to accept the existence of certain standard notions of right and wrong. Only the truly superficial members of this society, Célie, for example, dismiss without thought moral "principes," such as those of the Marquise, as "préjugés." "[C]eux qui pensent," Versac

says, "se livrent souvent . . . aux erreurs qu'intérieurement ils condamnent le plus" (E152). The libertine makes a practical decision to ignore the teachings of morality: "le monde et [la morale] ne s'accordent pas toujours . . . Il vaut mieux . . . prendre les erreurs de son siècle, ou du moins s'y plier, que d'y montrer des vertus qui y paraîtraient étrangères . . ." (E159). The cynicism he feels is, initially, self-induced. In Versac's case, at least, doubts persist; the impossibility of banishing totally his feelings of self-degradation attests to this (see E150, 152, 156, for example). Clitandre, at one point, remarks: "Nous ne nous en apercevons peut-être pas; mais à quelque point que ce qu'on appelle moeurs et principes soit discrédité, nous en voulons encore" (N133). Libertines often feel contempt and disdain towards the women who have given in to their seduction.

For Crébillon's libertine, vice and cruelty are necessary to succeed in society, but they must be learned. Like Meilcour, one must be initiated to vice. These libertines do not think of doubting, as later ones will, the goodness of the natural order, and so do not feel angered, or betrayed, by nature. The early libertine, in short, carries with him the idea that he, and not nature, is in the wrong. A man is not brought around to his natural innocence, "rendu à lui-même," as Crébillon says (E11), until he is free from the artificial constraints of society. It may be that the title, Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit, refers not only, as we have stated, to Meilcour's mistakes, but also to Versac's error, the error that the accomplished libertine commits by cutting himself irretrievably off from the voice of morality.

The cruelty of Crébillon's heroes does not, then, rest on a "philosophical" position, as will be the case for later heroes. The Marquise de Merteuil prides herself on being a "philosophe," as we will see, but when Meilcour calls Versac a "philosophe," he simply means that "Versac sait penser" (E151).[34] Versac and Clitandre lack the sense of outrage that fills Valmont and Merteuil. They also lack the desire to learn any more about the universe than is necessary for them to be successful, and the desire to experience anything more than the erotic pleasure they already know. "Décalées vers les régions d'un érotisme léger, les initiations d'Ariane, si importantes dans le discours érotique du dix-huitième siècle, ne sont plus pour nous que de l'ordre du jeu."[35] In contrast, the later idea of "un pur savoir et un désir sans sujet" leads libertines to explore "les formes réellement transgressives de l'érotisme."[36]

Notes to Chapter I:

[1] Quotations from the works of Crébillon fils will be identified in the text. Editions used are:

Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit, in Romanciers du XVIII[e] siècle, introd. René Etiemble (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), II, 5-188.

Crébillon, Le Hasard du coin du feu, dialogue moral, in Oeuvres complètes (1777; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), II, 91-120.

Crébillon, La Nuit et le moment, ou les matines de Cythère, in Oeuvres, éd. Pierre Lièvre, Vol. I (Paris: Le Divan, 1929), 1-150.

After the quotation, the work will be identified by E, H, or N, respectively; the page number will follow immediately.

[2] Alexis de Tocqueville, The Old Régime and the French Revolution, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), p. 86. The following quotations from this book are identified in the text.

[3] Since Crébillon's dialogues are less well known than his novel, a brief summary of them will perhaps be helpful. La Nuit et le moment concerns the seduction and defeat of Cidalise by Clitandre. The scene is the boudoir of Cidalise. Le Hasard du coin du feu takes place in the boudoir of Célie, a friend of the Marquise, who is visiting her. The Duc de Clerval arrives and is soon left alone with Célie, because the Marquise (who is Clerval's mistress) is unexpectedly called away. Célie tries to seduce Clerval, who is at first unwilling, but who then turns his uneasiness into a victory, not only by enjoying his "defeat," but also by transforming Célie into a sort of robot, whom he can make use of and then dismiss at will, without fear that his infidelity will be discovered.

[4] Peter Brooks, The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 4.

[5] Dominique Vivant Denon, Point de lendemain, in Romanciers du XVIII[e] siècle, introd. René Etiemble (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), II, 394.

[6] Denon, II, 394.

[7] Brooks, p. 28.

[8] Ernest Sturm, Crébillon fils et le libertinage au dix-huitième siècle (Paris: Nizet, 1970), p. 35 & p. 66, respectively.

[9] According to John Spink, French Free Thought from Gassendi to Voltaire (London: Athlone Press-Univ. of London, 1960), p. 4, a libertine, in the seventeenth-century sense of the word, was "first and foremost, a man who refused to accept current beliefs and desired to free himself, especially from the bonds of Christian doctrine." However, since free

living was popularly believed to follow upon the heels of free-thinking, the two soon became linked. By Crébillon's time, the original meaning had been forgotten, and a libertine was simply a man of dissolute ways.

[10] Clifton Cherpack, An Essay on Crébillon fils (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 175ff.

[11] Brooks, Ch. I, especially pp. 16-24.

[12] It is also not impossible that Versac, who has been "depuis dix ans" (E72) the leader of society, may be thinking of a successor, whom he would naturally want to choose and develop. When a powerful man begins to fade, it is soothing to his vanity to discover and present a new idol, before others do.

[13] Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, Oeuvres complètes (1777; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), II, 43.

[14] Peter V; Conroy, Jr., Crébillon fils: Techniques of the Novel, Vol. 99 of Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, ed. Theodore Besterman (Banbury, Oxfordshire: The Voltaire Foundation, Thorpe Mandeville House, 1972), p. 115.

[15] Conroy, p. 129.

[16] Octave Uzanne, "Notice sur la vie et les oeuvres de Crébillon fils," in Contes dialogués de Crébillon fils, censeur royal, by Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (Paris: A. Quantin, 1879), p. lxxxi.

[17] For example, Cherpack, p. 33; Brooks, p. 40; Emile Henriot, introd., Lettres de la marquise de M*** au comte de R*** , by Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (Paris: Au cercle du livre précieux, 1959), p. xv.

[18] Brooks, p. 29.

[19] In an episode of Le Sopha, published just a few years after the dialogues were written, Mazulim, in spite of the fact that he is nearly impotent, is the most sought-after man in Agra, simply because of the way he presents himself and the stories about him that, with his encouragement, circulate in society.

[20] Georges May, Le Dilemme du roman au XVIII^{e} siècle: Etude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique, 1715-1761 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963), p. 240, does not agree that the libertine manipulates the partner. In libertinism, he writes, the woman may be considered a "partenaire égale." Yet, although Cidalise cooperates and seems to want no closer a relationship than does Clitandre, I do not think she and Clitandre are equally in control of the situation. Women, Crébillon makes clear, cannot fully understand the power of the word. Célie also tells a story about a past affair, but, unlike Clitandre, she is made to look foolish. Women are invariably chained to the concrete and never see further than the present moment. "Les transports d'un amant sont la preuve la plus réelle qu'elles aient de ce qu'elles valent," according

to Clitandre (N96). A woman is one who "se refuse à la réflexion" (E159). When Clitandre remarks that his century is "délicieux à considérer un peu philosophiquement," Cidalise is quick to reply, "Faisons dans cet instant ce que ce siècle paraît faire toujours; ne réfléchissons point" (N37). In this dialogue, it is Clitandre who controls, while Cidalise, letting herself be manipulated, merely reacts in a way suited to one of her social class and time.

[21] Emile Henriot, Les Livres du second rayon, irréguliers et libertins (Paris: Le Livre, 1925), p. 176n; Conroy, p. 205.

[22] Conroy, p. 205.

[23] Cherpack, p. 150.

[24] Henriot, Les Livres du second rayon, p. 174.

[25] Brooks, p. 29.

[26] Cherpack, p. 20.

[27] Divorcing the erotic moment from the senses is not, here, a totally practical matter. We saw here the beginnings of the idea that Sade will develop that erotic pleasure can be derived from intellectual as well as sensual stimuli. We have mentioned the erotic effect of Clitandre's stories on Cidalise. There is also one other point in La Nuit at which Clitandre briefly mentions the existence of a pleasure that is not tied to the physical world. Speaking of Célimène, he says that she feels "une sorte de volupté qui n'existe, à la vérité, que dans ses idées, mais qui lui fait peut-être éprouver quelque chose de plus délicat que ce qui ne part que des sens" (N94).

[28] Henriot, Les Livres du second rayon, p. 176.

[29] Henri Armand, "Le Libertinage dans l'oeuvre de Crébillon fils," Diss. Emory Univ. 1970, p. 90.

[30] Sturm, p, 102 and p. 88, respectively.

[31] Sturm, p. 80 and p. 102, respectively.

[32] Cherpack, p. 158.

[33] The cruelty of these early libertines is even more striking in an episode from Le Sopha. Mazulim and Nassès conspire to share Zuleika, insult her in a shocking manner, and then blackmail her into accepting an arrangement whereby she is forced to receive their attentions whenever they see fit. According to Cherpack, "Mazulim and Nassès are a little like men who seek out a prostitute's services and then beat her half to death in righteous disgust" (p. 70).

[34] It is interesting to note, however, that Mme de Senanges is called "une de ces femmes philosophes" (E87), meaning that she is

totally without moral decency. The word "philosophe" is already identified in the popular mind with morally corrupt and cruel behavior.

[35] Michel Foucault, "Un si cruel savoir," Critique, 18 (1962), p. 610.

[36] Foucault, p. 610-11.

Chapter II: The developing attitude of cruelty

Part I: The two types of libertine: the "galant" and the "cynique"

A deepening in the libertine's attitude of cruelty is evident in the years between Crébillon and Laclos. During these years, a new relationship between man and nature was being worked out by eighteenth-century thinkers and, as Marcel Ruff has noted, serious attention was beginning to be paid to the darker side of man's character: if there was no more actual cruelty than in previous centuries, there was, at least, much more talk about it.[1] The following two chapters will trace the development, within the mind of the libertine, from the feeling that he is wrong when he opposes the existing moral order, of which he acknowledges the validity, even while choosing not to obey its laws, to the feeling that perhaps he is right, or at least justified, in opposing it. He even begins to wonder whether any action can be called right or wrong as he comes to doubt the ability of reason to work independently of desires and emotions put into the individual by nature.

Rather than accept the limits of man's rational powers, the libertine, whose superiority over others is based upon his ability to reason, reacts with anger and fear to what he considers to be the threat to his integrity posed by his own desires. Crébillon's heroes had been happy to prove the effectiveness of the self by no more than a show of virility, but by Laclos' time, the libertine is no longer so easily satisfied. The power of the self must be shown to be as great as the power of nature. The predisposition to cruelty that the liber-

tine hero brings with him into the second half of the century becomes a more serious matter. As we will see, cruelty, as exercised in his special field of mastery in eroticism, comes to represent for the libertine his ability to control his environment; it is a protest, a way of proving that his existence counts and that he is not an insignificant being.

The libertine succeeds only partially. He has not found the happiness he had imagined would be his once he had mastered the art of loving. Uneasiness, resentment, and anger are his lot. Inferior libertines are not as unfortunate. One can imagine the mediocre roués like Pranzi of Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit one day retiring from the social whirl quite content to have made a name for themselves and to be able finally to lay down the burden of libertinism. Other gallants, especially in later novels, abjure their errors, reform, and find love.

For the cynical and intelligent libertine, however, nagging feelings of emptiness and of anger persist. He begins to doubt whether love, or any desire, can be explained at all. In addition, in spite of the growing fear of desire, all libertines from Crébillon's frivolous heroes to Sade's deadly serious ones, are haunted by a remote, yet still present desire for some greater meaning than the self at the very same time that they are fighting stubbornly what they see as the annihilation of the self. Failure to understand clearly, much less resolve, this conflict adds to the anger they feel. Desires for vengeance gradually emerge, first against mankind, whose false moral systems make either liars or blind fools of those who espouse them, and, more importantly, against nature, which does not provide for man's

happiness, which, in fact, furnishes him with desires for knowledge and for meaning, but not with the means to satisfy them.

The world of Crébillon's libertine had been small and manageable. Cruelty held a predominantly social function and the most intelligent libertines, in a pragmatic decision, used it when necessary as a tool for advancement. Later libertines have to make decisions on larger issues. There is, in novels that treat the subject of libertinism after about 1740, a steady merging of the libertine and the philosophical trends of thought. There is also a growing identification between libertinism and cruelty, the latter becoming less and less just a means by which one gains prestige, and more and more the libertine's idea of a gesture of self-expression.

In order to make cruelty a means of self-expression, the libertine must first try to define his goals. With a libertine like Versac, we are really dealing with three separate characters. The outer or "social" self wears the constant mask of the foppish yet dangerous libertine. The inner, thinking self plans and directs the steps necessary for success and keeps well hidden as he watches the other move up the rungs of the social ladder. There is, finally, lurking somewhere in the depths of this inner self, an even more secret one, which Versac glimpses only occasionally, but which he sees as his true self--the moral being, who condemns the other two, but most especially the thinking self for consenting to live a lie. This split is the cause of Versac's unhappiness, and he is aware of it. It is the problem of all libertines. Clitandre also refuses to live his own life; "il se regarde vivre," as Sartre would say. He exists indirectly, through the image of himself that he presents in his stock of anecdotes

about his past affairs. He must manipulate himself, his outer self, at all times, in order to continue to seduce successfully the woman of the moment. The libertine begins to see his main task as the resolution of the problem of the divided inner self. He needs to live in accordance with a set of rules that will give some kind of unity and purpose to his life.

The libertine's preoccupation with the problem of the self and his attempt to solve it by creating a philosophy of libertinism are significant in two ways. First, we can see that the "esprit philosophique" which, as Ira Wade has shown,[2] had been growing in intellectual circles since the turn of the century, especially by means of secretly circulating manuscripts, was now becoming popularized and was judged, at least by novelists, to have an important effect on the thinking of ordinary people who were not part of the élite group of "philosophes." Second, novelists were beginning to stress the problems of their heroes <u>as individuals</u>. It is true, as F.C. Green has said, that contemporary opinion "was not yet prepared to sacrifice society to the ego,"[3] but there was at least a willingness, and even a necessity if the novelist wished to give a realistic portrait of his times,[4] to discuss and examine the personal problems of the individual in society.

In the eighteenth century, starting even in the 1730's, the story of the novel's hero or heroine is very often the story of the effort to solve the problems of the individual destiny in a morally and socially restrictive environment.[5] This is especially true of the cynical and aristocratic libertine, who, as we have seen, exists in an extremely closed and conservative world, yet feels the callings of an individual destiny more acutely than do others around him.

His problem lies in deciding to what degree he, as an individual, is the result of the position he occupies in society and to what degree he is the result of his own personal physical and psychological make-up. Just how much does he, or do any of us, owe to society and how much do we owe to ourselves?

In studying the development of the attitude of cruelty, it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of libertines, as we did, in effect, in the first chapter. These are the libertine "galant" and the libertine "cynique." They represent the two sides to the development of the libertine hero in the eighteenth century.[6] The first are the descendants of Pranzi, who let himself be drawn into the fashionable cruelty of "le beau monde" as a matter of the natural course of things. He is the unthinking would-be "homme à la mode." The "cynique," on the other hand, is the descendant of Versac, and we have already tried to sketch the pattern of development of these libertines who try to choose their own way of life. It is this type of libertine whose increasingly "philosophical" orientation leads the way to the methodical cruelty of the heroes of Laclos and Sade.

The Casanova-type "galants" follow a road that leads to victimization, not so much of the women they seek to submit to their will, but of themselves. By abandoning themselves to the current of the times and disdaining to make use of their own reason as a guide to behavior, they leave themselves without resources against the slow but inevitable disintegration of their individuality. They finally have no personality, no separate identity of their own, and can be said to exist only as a reflection in the eyes of others, like the characters in Sartre's Huis clos. Taken from Paris, they would slip into nothing-

ness; the "galant" can say with Garcin, "Je leur ai laissé ma vie entre les mains."[7] One heroine, the Margot of Fougeret de Monbron's Margot la ravaudeuse, a "fille d'Opéra" and, by virtue of her profession, quite competent to judge the libertines of Parisian society, considers the highest goal of the majority of them to be "le sot désir de faire parler de soi . . . En effet, il semble que nous donnions l'être à nos Amants. Tel qui aurait toujours été confondu et comme anéanti dans la foule, dès qu'il est attaché à notre char, il n'est plus permis de l'ignorer: c'est un homme à la mode."[8]

Norman Brown has said that "those for whom not to be seen is nonexistence are not alive, and the kind of existence they seek, the immortality they seek, is spectral; to be seen is the ambition of ghosts, and to be remembered the ambition of the dead."[9] This remark aptly describes many libertine heroes of the eighteenth century.[10] The inner self is totally relinquished in favor of the outer "social" self, and the "galant," unlike the relatively clear-eyed "cynique," is not even aware of the loss, or at least, does not seem to be. We see an example of the final result of this abdication of self in the hero of J.-B. Louvet's Les Amours du chevalier de Faublas (1787-89). This novel, over eight hundred pages long, gives us the account of two years in the life of the precocious Faublas (he is just sixteen at the start of the novel), and one cannot imagine a more invisible hero than this Chevalier. The main story is that of Faublas and Sophie, the fourteen year old girl he loves, marries, loses, and finds again. In the meantime, Faublas has a series of affairs, which usually end unhappily for the poor women who fall in love with him. With the exception of Sophie, who is as pale a character as her husband, the mistresses of Faublas far

outshine him, as in the case of the Comtesse de Lignolle and especially the Marquise de B***, whose passion, generosity, and strength of will make the reader admire and feel for her, and whose love for the hero gives unity and meaning to her life. Faublas, on the other hand, seems to have no personality of his own at all, assuming a new one at each moment as circumstances change. In the presence of the Countess, "j'oubliais Sophie et, dans mon égarement, j'allais jusqu'à former des voeux contraires à notre réunion,"[11] while a few pages later, alone now, he exclaims, "O ma Sophie! . . . vous étiez encore celle que je préférais" (II,1026).

The Chevalier, incapable of controlling his emotions, believes himself to be sincere in every situation. Always in an abnormally impressionable state of mind, he shifts from triumphant exaltation, as when he thinks the Marquise is going to have his baby, to thoughts of suicide, as when he contemplates the unhappiness and difficulties he causes his mistresses. "J'aurai coûté la vie à toutes celles qui m'auront aimé!" he thinks with horror. He can come to only one conclusion: "Prévenons leur trépas par le mien ...par un suicide!" (II,964). He is saved from death by the unexpected arrival of Mme de Lignolle: "Doucement serré dans ses bras, pouvais-je encore songer à m'endormir d'un éternel sommeil?" (II,967). Faublas finally does cause the death of two women, one of whom commits suicide. But this hero is as capable of great generosity as he is of great callousness. For example, he saves an impoverished lawyer from misery. "O plaisirs ineffables que l'on goûte à faire une bonne action!" he cries at this happy moment (II,793).

The generosity and cruelty of Faublas are, however, two different manifestations of the same problem: the absence of character. Both are

equally mindless and dependent upon circumstances exterior to the hero. He never acts, but only reacts. He adapts to his surroundings in order to find the most comfortable position for himself, naturally following that course of conduct which brings him the most pleasure with the least amount of difficulty for the moment. His generosity is selfishness; he is kind because it makes him feel satisfied with himself. Not uncharacteristically, he gets carried away, imagining his future acts of generosity. It is not enough to be the cause of charity; he and his dear Sophie will go in person to savor the horrible sight of starving people in order to feel even more satisfied with themselves: "un jour nous monterons ensemble dans les greniers, nous pénétrerons dans les réduits du pauvre. Là, nous saurons découvrir la misère qui se cache, prévenir ses pénibles aveux, . . . calmer les douleurs par les consolations" (II, 793). Only a thin line separates this generosity from cruelty. The author himself is aware of the ambiguous character of Faublas' compassion and, in a humorous moment of questionable taste, has his hero rebuke himself for dwelling too long on the gratitude he expects to receive from these poor people, especially "les pauvres veuves [et] les filles délaissées" (II, 794).

Faublas is the ultimate libertine "galant." He prides himself on being generous, something that most earlier libertines "galants," like Pranzi, would never do. But, in fact, the only difference between them is that by 1787 it has become, by an evolution of ideas that we shall come back to in more detail later on, more fashionable to be sentimental than to be cruel. The basic trait of the libertine "galant," in 1787 as in 1740, is the total submission of his personal identity to a false and finally unsatisfactory "social" self. During

the course of his story, Faublas adopts ten different disguises under eight different names on at least thirteen different occasions. In seven of these transformations, he wears feminine clothing. As one critic remarks, Faublas "n'existe plus en dehors de sès déguisements; il y perd son identité, et le sentiment de celle des autres." The same critic sees in these constant changes "une frénétique évasion du moi."[12] By the end of the novel, Faublas, disoriented and disheartened by so many unhappy adventures, becomes subject to fits of madness during which he relives the various crises he has passed through.

If the fate of the libertine "cynique" also has traces of madness in it, as in the case of Sade's heroes and even, to the extent that their fanaticism alienates them from all other aspects of life, in the case of Laclos' heroes, it is at least a madness with much "method in't." This type of libertine increasingly realizes that libertinism involves a deeper question than just being successful socially, that it is, finally, one of self-expression. The "cynique" refuses to let go of himself, to let others decide who he is. Yet, both the "cynique" and the "galant" are, as we have seen, crippled in their outlook by the society that has formed them. Their excessive vanity, inability to love, and deep-seated mistrust and basic lack of respect for others mark them all. In addition, the "cynique," in spite of his desire to create a new, independent self, has come to depend on this society; it is the only way of life he knows and he is, at bottom, unable and even unwilling to let go of the old ways. But, at least, the "cynique" tries to make a choice, unlike the lazy "galant," who constantly lies to himself by seeing himself only as a victim of circumstances. "[J]amais ne n'ai séduit," says Faublas, "je me suis

trouvé toujours entraîné . . ." (II, 1144). If he causes unhappiness to others, it is not his fault. "Il suffit qu'une femme me distingue et m'intéresse, pour qu'aussitôt les hommes, le hasard et le sort lui déclarent une guerre cruelle" (II, 964).

It is interesting, however, to take note of the changes that occur in the libertine "galant" from Pranzi to Faublas, alongside of those in the libertine "cynique," in spite of the blindness and what sometimes appears to be the moral cowardice that characterize him, for he is, in a way, the mirror of his times. In this aristocratic society, which, in its basic form, changes little until the Revolution, [13] and in which "le bon ton" reigned, the "galant," by a kind of osmotic process, naturally reflects the attitudes and opinions of those around him. Wishing always to be modern, he is brought, almost unconsciously, to develop in the shadow of the libertine "cynique." He becomes cynical himself in order to have "l'air comme il faut," and even slowly assumes more and more of a "philosophical" attitude towards life. In 1757, the critic of L'Année littéraire quotes an author who complains that "nos petits maîtres ont une philosophie à part" and then adds, in his own words: "cette philosophie à la mode . . . il faut en mettre partout; c'est la manie du jour . . ." [14] But, by the 1760's, the "galant," unable to hold out against the rising tide of sentimentalism, usually capitulates, recognizes his errors, and reforms.

* * *

Before we consider more closely this dual development, it is necessary to say first a word about the novel in general in the period that stretches between the composition of Crébillon's early

works and the publication of Laclos' Les Liaisons dangereuses in 1782. The authors who, in this period, attempt to present and analyze libertinism generally lack, on the one hand, both the artistry and the insight of Crébillon and, on the other, his impartiality. With regard to the first point, it must be said that most of their works are not successful artistically. They are interesting and instructive in that they bear out the truth of Crébillon's observations, showing the tensions, fears, and emptiness of being behind the charm and sophistication of upper class society and in that they occasionally point to important new developments in the libertine state of mind. But few manage to hold the reader's interest on their own merits. They contain not so much analyses of libertinism, but rather what had become clichés about libertinism. According to one critic, novelists borrow only situations from Crébillon; they "ne font que nommer les sentiments que leur maître analysait."[15] In addition, most were not, as we said, impartial observers. Some authors seem simply frivolous, even opportunistic, as in the case of the short novel Mademoiselle Javotte, attributed to Paul Baret or Barrett,[16] which tells the pointless tale of a "coiffeuse" turned courtesan, offers as its climax a hectic scene, Javotte's downfall, in which three of her six lovers unexpectedly arrive to see her on the same night, and ends abruptly with the heroine's unconvincing repentance and death in the "hôpital."

But considering only those writers who seem to be guided by more sincere literary aims, there appears to have been much confusion in these years between literary and moral ideas in the novel. According to Georges May, by 1760, novelists, critics, and audience were in general agreement as to the need and desirability of the novelist's

assuming a moral position and delivering a "sermon laïc."[17] This made for a uniformity harmful to the creative spirit and a misguided approach to literature that resulted in the devitalization and the sterility of the French novel in general from 1760 to 1790. Novelists aimed too much at portraying goodness (which was held to be synonomous with happiness) and not enough at telling truths; "l'utile et l'agréable" reigned as a literary rule in the strictest and most prosaic sense. Those writers who held themselves aloof from the trend towards moralism, before as well as after 1760, produced a better novel. Crébillon, for example, may sincerely have wanted to unmask and censure libertines like Versac in Les Egarements, as I believe he did, but he went far beyond the moral usefulness ideal. He was too much of an artist to deliver sermons or to betray his characters' consistency by sudden and psychologically unbelievable conversions to "moral decency." He was able to provide a penetrating examination of the aristocratic libertine mind. There seems to be, before Laclos, no important continuer of Crébillon in this regard, except, as we shall see, himself.

As moralism and literature merged, the curiosity about and the taste for psychological examination and analysis suffered or became matters of rote. Conclusions were reached beforehand; human beings were put into categories of good and bad. A tone of self-complacency and even of self-righteousness was not uncommon. This was especially true since reflection and reasoned behavior came almost to be seen as unimportant. "La voix du coeur," receiving its inspiration directly, spontaneously from nature, became the rule (and the excuse) for all human behavior. Almost reluctantly, libertines were also pictured as obeying the impulses of nature. Novelists refused to accept the issue

of libertinism as one of choosing a way of life, as a reasoned approach to the problem of existence. What seemed to be willful moral waywardness was usually, in reality, a defect in organization that prevented true morality from entering the soul of the libertine. This is the outsider's, the moralist's view of the libertine "cynique."

Most libertines, however, were not considered to be deformed in this manner. Most had merely associated themselves with these monsters and imitated their increasingly cruel behavior because they had been led astray by a permissive education, bad examples, and false worldly prejudices. These salvageable libertines will repent and reform if they can be separated from harmful influences. The libertine "galant" is usually made to see the light or at least to die in remorse.

The character of the libertine is, then, in general, simplistically drawn in the novel after Crébillon. The result is that the chronicle of libertinism that we get is often superficial and the reasons for the developing attitude of cruelty in libertinism are seen only dimly. It is as if the novelists manage to avoid the issue at the same time that they speak of it. The critic Fréron, who was the guiding spirit of the review L'Année littéraire for many years, is typical of the attitude of those for whom moral standards take precedence over esthetic ones in judging literature. He is on a crusade against immorality, roundly condemning those writers who make light of libertinism and often praising works that even he admits are mediocre for their moral fervor. "Lorsque le but d'un Roman est de nous inspirer l'honnêteté," he writes, "fut-il médiocre, il mérite une sorte d'indulgence."[18] Blinded by his zeal, he often misses the point. He is, for example, much harder on Le Hasard du coin du feu than he is on Les Heureux Orphelins, both by Crébillon fils. Yet the character of the cynical Chester is far blacker than

that of the amiable Duc de Clerval. But what is important for Fréron is that there are no scabrous scenes in Les Heureux Orphelins. Anything that hints of the boudoir must be properly "gazé," as Fréron frequently says. He calls Le Hasard indecent and labels it a "misérable production."[19] To such minds, libertinism is permissible as subject matter only when it is shown to be wrong and ugly, and those who adopt it vile corruptors or, at best, slaves of "le bon ton" who must eventually come to their senses.

* * *

Jean-François de Bastide, the author of many popular, but mediocre novels, is in total agreement with those who count moralizing among the most important tasks of the novelist. His 1749 novel, Les Confessions d'un fat, is, however, necessary for us to consider, since it offers a striking example of the increasing awareness of the cruelty inherent in libertinism and shows it to be tied to the awakening problem of the self. Antoine Adam has said of this novel that "dans la tradition qui mène des Egarements aux Liaisons dangereuses, Les Confessions d'un fat marquent une étape que les historiens auraient tort de négliger. Une étape qui nous mènerait même jusqu'à Sade."[20] The novel tells the story of the worldly education of a young nobleman, as so many novels do in the eighteenth century. The Marquis de Flanval is led, by his own weakness in the face of the many bad examples provided by society, to the worst excesses of libertinism. But the novel ends with his firm renunciation of these evil ways when he finds true love in the arms of the beautiful and virtuous Mlle de Prangé, whom he marries, with whom he lives happily ever after.

A member of the nobility, Flanval breathes in cruelty with the air around him, but it is not refined, does not become an essential part of his outlook until after he becomes a full-fledged member of polite society. He then becomes as proficient as any at the sort of specious reasoning on life and love common at the time. This is seen when we compare the episodes of the story that take place before his worldly education with those that come after. Flanval's first liaison, for example, is with Fanchon, a maid in his mother's house. She is a likable character, honest and intelligent, who falls truly in love with the hero. But Flanval soon tires of her and writes a heartless letter to break off. He is not ashamed: "Les gens de qualité croient honorer les femmes qu'ils déshonorent . . . ils les offensent, parce qu'ils se flattent d'effacer par là le tort qu'ils croient s'être fait."[21] This feeling of having been wronged is particularly strong when the girl, like Fanchon, is a member of the servant class. Whatever brief feelings of regret he experiences upon receiving an eloquent but desperate letter from Fanchon disappear when she leaves the house shortly after. He relates quite casually that she died two months later "de douleur et d'amour" (I,21).

The cruelty of Flanval towards Fanchon is of an "innocent" type in that it was undertaken only by necessity--the "necessity" that a young "homme du monde" feels to be free and unattached, according to the same social rules that we saw at work in Crébillon's world. The callousness was not foreseen or plotted by the hero. Until he tired of Fanchon, he had no thought but to live for the pleasure that they shared. He thought only of her: "je ne voulais plaire qu'à Fanchon" (I, 10). It was, after all, Fanchon's fault if she did not understand

the rules and died.

At this period in his life, Flanval is still awed by women in general. He dreams of love and is filled with respect for the opposite sex. But after several lessons in the way of the world, he learns the proper attitude to have with regard to pretty women. The first time he meets Mme de Galeas, a young and attractive coquette, for example, it takes him only a few moments to realize that "[j]e commençais à prendre une sorte d'intérêt à cette femme, non pas un intérêt de coeur . . . ce qu'elle m'inspirait n'était pas même une envie sérieuse d'avoir un commerce avec elle. C'était, si je ne me trompe, un simple désir de me la soumettre" (I, 80). In Bastide, we see that relationships between the sexes are, as they were in Crébillon, contests in which to prove one's superiority over others, regardless of the cost. Love, the existence of which is consistently denied by Bastide's characters, is as great a threat to them as it was to Crébillon's noblemen. But there is an important new element here which is the desire to humiliate the other, the desire, it seems, to take vengeance immediately, even before the relationship has begun, before one's desires have had a chance to become aroused.[22] Love is no longer a humiliation simply and strictly within a social context, that is, for the threat it presents to one's social position and the scorn it provokes in one's peers. It is now feared <u>in itself</u>, for the physical desires that may become too powerful a force for the individual to cope with. We see this clearly in the Galeas episode. She pouts and feigns indifference towards the hero because she (wrongly) believes that Flanval is using her to make another woman jealous. Shaken by this unexpected contretemps, Flanval suddenly finds himself falling in love with her.

But his immediate reaction is to deny this fact and seek vengeance against her for having dared to inspire him with "de vains et de honteux désirs" (I, 91). Hortense, one of Flanval's educators, had long before told the hero that love does not exist, and that those who worship at this "Autel déserté" become "la Fable des personnes d'une certaine façon" (I, 42). But it is certainly not of this social censure that Flanval is thinking when he spends the entire night preparing "mille projets de vengeance" (I, 90) against Mme de Galeas, for nothing public has taken place between them and no one need ever know of his desires. Rather, he is humiliated by the brief victory that desire had gained over him.

This shame in the face of desire that Flanval feels unable to control leads him to stamp out all traces of tenderness and even of the amicability that Crébillon's heroes sought to maintain. Flanval launches his libertine career with the aim of being as cruel as he possibly can be to all women. He will become "le Tyran de [leur] sexe" (I, 48). When he says that his conduct with women will be based on the idea that "la nature ne les avait faites que pour servir à mes plaisirs" (I, 45), we can only assume that his pleasure is cruelty. With the exception of the first two women he becomes involved with, at a time before he has learned to be afraid of love, Flanval tends to pick women that he cannot help but despise. Mme de Santal, for example, is chosen because her contemptible character "me parut . . . propre à former le mien à la méchanceté" (I, 50). When she refuses to give in as quickly as he thinks she ought to and, in fact, adopts an air "de la plus suprême dignité," he is convinced that "elle voulut m'humilier" and decides on the spot "de la perdre" (I, 50). Thus, their affair begins with plans

of vengeance and no thought at all of pleasure, much less love. When Flanval finally brings her to the point of giving in to him, he enjoys the spectacle of the desire shining in her eyes, but as soon as he feels his own desires becoming aroused, this scene "ne m'amusait plus . . . et je quittai Madame de Santal dans la crainte que l'intérêt de ses sens ne passât totalement dans les miens, et que je ne m'avilisse jusqu'à lui accorder des faveurs . . ." (I, 70).

Flanval continues to see Mme de Santal with the idea of ruining her publicly. He becomes increasingly angry as he observes her insincerity, her outward show of virtue, even imagining himself to be the "Dom-Quichote [sic] de ceux qu'elle avait trompés" (I, 92). She, in the meantime, is plotting his public disgrace, but Flanval, in his role as narrator, jumps ahead in time in order to assure us that he will have the final victory: "Haïe, abandonnée, bafouée de toute la terre, on va la voir tomber dans cet état de dégradation, où l'on fait horreur au libertin même, et où la mort devient un bien" (I, 74). When she finally does act by spreading the rumor that she has scorned Flanval and brought him to a state of despair, his vengeance is swift. The cruelty he has always displayed towards Mme de Santal becomes physical as well as psychological, and the insolence and violence that characterize the scene make us think more of Sade than of Crébillon. Knowing Flanval's reputation for "méchanceté," Mme de Santal is afraid to refuse an invitation to visit his "petite maison." As Flanval arrives to escort her there, he describes his feelings upon seeing her; the hatred bubbling up inside him pours out in invectives:

> Qu'on se figure tout ce que la laideur
> naturelle peut ajouter aux ravages de la

> débauche, et tout ce que la haine et le mépris peuvent ajouter encore à un composé aussi hideux. Voilà le spectre qui se préparait à me combler de ses faveurs. Quelle glace, grands Dieux, coula dans mes vaines à son aspect! Quel dégoût, quel effroi! non, je ne vis jamais rien de si rebutant, j'aurais mieux aimé mille fois subir le sort des monstres de l'Asie, que de recouvrir à jamais par elle les facultés qu'ils regrettent, si j'en avais été privé comme eux. (II, 11-12)

When they arrive at his hideaway, a pretty young girl is brought to Flanval, who begins to make love to her in front of Mme de Santal. She watches as "nous nous fîmes mille petites malices que nous assaisonnâmes des termes les plus tendres et les moins chrétiens" (II, 13). She complains, but, at that moment, four of his friends, former lovers of Mme de Santal, enter the room, singing lewd songs and insulting her. "Les choses ainsi disposées, nous épuisâmes sur ces deux femmes, tout ce qu'on peut imaginer de plus sensibles plaisirs et de plus affreux tourments; l'une fut traitée un peu mieux que la plus belle Princesse, et l'autre beaucoup plus mal que la plus décrépite catin" (II,14). Mme de Santal is finally sent home with a torrent of abuse, "une brouette pour carrosse, un poliçon pour laquais, une lanterne pour flambeau" (II, 14).[23]

Bastide's hero has transformed the mere willingness of Crébillon's heroes to see their partners in love-making suffer into the wish, even the need to see them suffer. Antoine Adam has noted that Bastide's libertine "se plaît à voir que le désir défigure le visage de la femme réduite à merci."[24] But he is not yet the reflective, self-willed libertine who relies more on his own standard of success than on those of society. Flanval feels completely satisfied only when the story of

Santal's humiliation is known throughout Paris and "le Public" has recognized and approved of this victory over himself. Similarly, in an episode that faintly foreshadows Valmont's seduction of Mme de Tourvel, [25] Flanval, ashamed of having taken an unusually long time to conquer the virtuous Marquise de T***, sees as the major benefit of her "réduction totale" the "rétablissement de ma réputation" (II, 46). Such exhibitionism is an attempt to demonstrate to all and so to reinforce in his own mind, the integrity of his own personality, as symbolized by his sexual forcefulness and skill.

But Flanval makes no attempt at all to read into his own heart and mind, in spite of his boast that "il n'y a peut-être que moi qui pense . . . je réfléchis, je doute, j'examine" (I, 99-100). He floats along very much ruled by his impulses, reacting spontaneously at the moment of desire with an anger and sometimes even a repulsion that cannot, as we have seen, be fully explained as a result of social pressure. The disgust disappears when the conquest he makes is taken as a tribute to his cold-hearted superiority over others and to his emotional invincibility, as when Mme de Galeas rewards him for having crushed Santal, and strikes most forcefully when these same things are put in doubt or are not clear. But the hero himself discerns no pattern in his reactions and does not consciously acknowledge the needs of his inner self. Unable to define clearly the problem, he naturally fails to devise a coherent plan of action. His ambitions, resting on such a shallow and shadowy base, remain modest in comparison to those of later heroes, and his viciousness is, in the long run, purposeless and ineffective. The Marquise de T*** escapes his trap and when he leaves her forever, he feels only "cette sorte de regret qu'on éprouve, quand on quitte une

femme dont on voit qu'on est aimé, qu'on a aimée soi-même, et dont on n'a point joui" (II, 51-52).

Frivolous by his inability or his refusal to follow the dictates of his reason, Flanval is a libertine "galant" who, in spite of his ferocity, stands outside the line of development that leads from Versac to Valmont, for these "cyniques" strive always to be fully conscious of the import of their actions. To show the libertine as misguided and confused is, of course, just what Bastide wanted to do. Dignifying libertinism by making it seem the result of a deliberate course of action would have defeated his purpose. Flanval symbolizes the ordinary man, with a naturally good and compassionate heart who must distort his personality and ignore his instinctive leaning to virtue in order to be a libertine. This was also, as we have seen, Versac's problem. But things have changed since 1736. There is a new tone of urgency in libertinism, a loss of the comfort with which Versac, in spite of his moral misgivings, settled into his role. The example of Flanval attests to the libertine's growing concern that libertinism involves a sort of squandering of one's identity, a necessary dissipation of one's energy in a cause that is not one's own and tramples down individual worth instead of rewarding it. But Bastide, although sensing all this, finally ignores the problem by offering a solution that sidesteps the issue instead of addressing it. He declares the problem of self-expression to be a false one, the result of the mistaken notions of a corrupt society, and invites the erring libertine back into the fold. By identifying libertinism so exclusively with moral waywardness, he simplifies matters to the point of silliness, as when he has the licentious Hortense, overwhelmed by a feeling of shame, reproach herself "d'avoir été si facile" (I, 39) as to have listened to Flanval's proposals of true love. The

Inversion of moral values, parodied here, will, in fact, be an important element in the "cynique's" make-up, but with a seriousness of purpose that Bastide would never have understood.

Bastide asks the libertine to go backwards, to adopt solutions that Versac had already rejected as unsatisfying. He and his reformed hero assume certain moral notions--especially the fact of man's natural goodness--that Versac thought impractical and that newer libertines are beginning to regard as illusory. The new Flanval invests love with a miraculous healing power that libertines scoff at. He sees libertinism as a form of nihilism, a dead end, whereas some libertines see in it the point of departure towards a new kind of morality, especially looking to the modern spirit of philosophy to bolster their ideas. The idea of a "new" morality seems absurd to Bastide, and he particularly detests the new and, according to him, false philosophical spirit that seems to be taking hold in "le beau monde," treating it as a sickness. Flanval describes himself as having been "tout aussi fat qu'on l'est aujourd'hui, et tout aussi Philosophe qu'on fait semblant de l'être" (I, 4). Without actually seeing philosophy as the cause of libertinism, he notices the similarities between the two unnatural types, "le fat" and "le faux philosophe:" "il en coûte à tous deux pour secouer le joug de la nature et de la raison; et ce n'est pas assurément sans beaucoup de violence que l'un et l'autre parviennent à ce degré d'impudence . . . qui est sans contredit le chef-d'oeuvre de la fausse gloire" (I, 3). Both are totally selfish, and the philosopher is especially marked by a somber misanthropy.[26]

Bastide blames both the "philosophe" and the "fat" for rejecting the heart and heeding only the false arguments of the mind. If the

suddenness of his hero's conversion seems to us to be contrived and unconvincing, this same quality is proof, for Bastide, of its validity, for morality is an affair of the heart, not the mind. Flanval's return to morality must be a dramatic revelation, the work of a special moment, in which he is suddenly able to recognize the path of truth and happiness. In contrast, the unenlightened Mme de Galeas is doomed to misery for having sacrificed "les plus doux sentiments du coeur aux plus dangereuses illusions de l'esprit" (I, 105).

The libertines "cyniques" make the same separation between the heart and the mind, as we have seen, but they reverse the roles: it is the heart that is treacherous. It is a persistent tendency of both the traditionalists and the libertines in the eighteenth-century novel from Crébillon's time to Sade's to divide human experience into these two distinct realms--that of the heart and that of the mind, "le coeur et l'esprit." René Etiemble notes that "la formule traîne partout" between 1725 and 1750,[27] and it continues to do so throughout the century. Each faction claims "la raison" to be on its side, equating it with emotion on the one hand and with the rational power of the mind on the other. Each group imagines, also, that it is, in this manner, making a philosophical stand. It became increasingly difficult, in fact, <u>not</u> to become a "philosophe." Although the term is usually used pejoratively by traditionalists, they adopt it themselves, purified, of course, of its former attachments.[28] But both the heart-directed "philosophes" (the anti-"philosophistes," as Fréron says) and the head-directed libertines "cyniques" are distorters of the true philosophical spirit, which makes, in fact, no such artificial division in man.

Part II: Libertinism and "philosophie"[29]

There was, in truth, good reason for the traditionalists to link libertinism with philosophy. According to one historian of the philosophical movement in the eighteenth century, the public, always fearing to fall prey to boredom, "ce mal terrible qui la guettait constamment" avidly read novels, "et ceux qui avaient alors le plus de vogue étaient généralement très licencieux d'abord, et philosophiques par surcroît."[30] The same critic goes further and states that in the early years of the spread of the new ideas, before the "philosophes" had gathered themselves into a strong and recognized force, that is, in the 1740's and 1750's, libertine novels became a kind of mouthpiece for the philosophical movement, preparing the reading public for the "philosophe's" boldness of thought and rebellious attitude towards existing authorities, by their stress on the more audacious philosophical ideas and by their clandestine status, which made their acquisition difficult and often expensive, but also tempting. The libertine writers were "comme les valets de l'armée encyclopédique et préparaient la voie aux vrais soldats."[31] They were, in fact, persecuted far more often than the "philosophes" themselves. The latter, except for a brief period of harassment in 1748-49, shortly after the first philosophical works appeared, were in general left alone by the sympathetic Directeur de la Librairie, Lamoignon de Malesherbes, during his time in office from 1750 to 1763, although it became harder for him to be quite so tolerant after about 1758 when the enemies of the new spirit, at the Sorbonne, in the Parlement, and around the Queen at Court, became aroused by its increasing popularity and strength.

According to the bibliography that Daniel Mornet has drawn up of novels and stories published in the eighteenth century, there were four times as many new works published in the "roman et conte licencieux" category between 1741 and 1760 as in the period 1761 to 1780, and in the years from 1745 to 1751, the production of this type of novel was, by far, at its highest level.[32] In one type of work common at this time, the adventures of a licentious young lady, usually of lower class origin, are traced from childhood to maturity. These heroines are obviously not worldly libertines, such as we have examined so far, nor are they "philosophes" (although one heroine especially enjoys reading "les romans de MM Lametterie [sic], Diderot et Crébillon"),[33] but they hold a very modern outlook on life and love that borrowed much from the philosophical ideas then beginning to be known; in this way, they helped to popularize such ideas, but even more to create a new attitude in the society as a whole. It will be clear, for example, that the growth of the attitude of cruelty adopted by worldly libertines owes a strong debt to both the ideas and the temperament exemplified by such heroines, even though, in the process of borrowing, distortion of intentions and ideas was the result. It will also be seen that those who thought of themselves as defenders of the old moral values accepted many of the new assumptions on human nature seen in these works, a situation that sometimes leads them into self-contradictions. It is remarkable that they do not seem to notice such contradictions and continue to undermine the very foundations that these old values stand upon.

A main characteristic of the tales of these wayward heroines is that love is "dépoétisé" and "réduit déjà à la pure sexualité."[34] The

fact that they usually start with childhood is significant. By pausing just long enough in the early years to show us that the sexual instinct is already active at this time in life, the authors emphasize its innocence and naturalness. We are seeing the individual before society's prejudices (a favorite word at the time) have had a chance to influence him. In many of these novels, which sometimes seem to have been written by formula, the young heroine is made to witness the sexual activities of others. Two reactions are immediately seen: a strong, sometimes, desperate desire to feel what the participants must be feeling and a desire to understand what is happening. These are the proper human reactions; there is no timidity or fear.[35]

The healthy sexual instinct is especially aggressive, and, if repressed or left unsatisfied, can lead to violence. Margot "la ravaudeuse," for example, who is so poor that she must share one bed with her parents, so completely gives herself over to her natural feelings as she watches them that, elated and frustrated all at once, she cries, "J'aurais volontiers battu ma mère, tant je lui enviais les délices qu'elle goûtait."[36] Frustration was also the lot of Julie, the heroine of Les Egarements de Julie.[37] Having been the entranced observer of the love-making of her neighbor Sophie and a young man, but being too young herself to imitate them, she is forced to try to find some relief in unusual ways, first with Sophie, and then, almost in desperation, with a little boy who is one of her relatives. These attempts are, in the first case, only partially successful and, in the second, a complete failure.

These examples show that sexual energy must and will find an outlet. Not one of these heroines believes it is possible or wise to

leave desires unattended to past the age of thirteen or fourteen. Chastity, of course, does not fit into this scheme of things. The figure of the debauched priest is a cliché in these works. Frère Alexis, Margot's lover, is also the procurer for his fellow priests: "il avait trouvé le secret d'être utile à la société, et encore plus à son couvent." To abstain sexually is to "demander l'impossible et contrecarrer les intentions de la nature."[38]

Chastity is, then, rejected as unhealthy and even as incompatible with the well-being of the state. One heroine, Thérèse, "la belle Alsacienne," considers herself to be something of a philanthropist. Fidelity to one man, let alone chastity, is a social injustice: "une femme ne peut être fidèlement attachée à un seul homme qu'aux dépens du bonheur d'une infinité d'autres . . . Faut-il laisser endurer des maux réels pour opérer un bien imaginaire? La raison du plus grand nombre ne devrait-elle pas prévaloir?" [39] Conventional morality, based on religion, is so irreconcilable with such views, so inconsistent with what is evidently the truth of human nature, that it must be wrong. Here is the spirit of the age applied to morality: things must be weighed on a human scale. Happiness here and now is man's goal. The burden of proof has shifted to the Divinity. Man no longer has to prove himself worthy of God; God has to prove Himself relevant to man.[40]

This total inversion of the moral order was not seen as such at the time. God was not challenged as the creator of the universe. In fact, it is the idea that He is responsible for having given man desires that seems to legitimize them. How could God not approve of what He Himself created? Julie the "égarée" looks upon the love-making of two birds

in her garden as a symbol; even the tiniest insects are brought to the necessity "de se reproduire par l'appétit du plaisir, qui est naturel à tous les Etres." It was surely not God, but man, who invented rules that prevent one from finding satisfaction with "le premier venu." These rules must, in fact, have been the work of "des voluptueux qui eussent senti que le plus ardent désir est ordinairement enfant de la contrainte."[41] Thus, virtue, which usually entails the shunning of physical pleasure, does not lose its place in this reversed moral order, but finds one suited to the new state of things: sharpening the delight experienced in finally giving in.

What the stories of heroines like Thérèse "la belle Alsacienne," Julie, and Margot seem to establish is that the only correct motive for action, on man's part, is the idea of his own pleasure.[42] Many contemporary critics saw this belief as an excuse that only barely disguised a desire to indulge in debauchery.[43] There is, however, one popular novel of the period, at least, that seriously tries to give a philosophical basis to the theory that man does and should seek to secure the greatest amount of pleasure possible from his environment. Thérèse philosophe (1748) is important to consider for several reasons. First, it develops in systematic fashion the ideas that are found scattered and only cursorily presented in other libertine novels of the time. It also ties these ideas in solidly with the most up-to-date arguments of the philosophic movement. If, as many critics believe, the author of this work is the Marquis d'Argens, its philosophical credentials are established.[44] According to Georges May, Mornet places d'Argens immediately after Voltaire and Montesquieu among "les maîtres de l'esprit nouveau" between 1715 and 1748.[45] But we may also note that

the source of the philosophical part of this novel has been identified as the Examen de la religion, a deistic work which is notable for being "so complete, so concisely expressed, [and] so representative" an example of contemporary philosophical propaganda.[46] Finally, Thérèse philosophe is important as an admirable demonstration of what was then seen as the practical applicability of philosophical theory. It built a bridge between the world of intellectual speculation and that of the more immediate concerns of the individual's role in society. It gave definite conclusions and provided the kind of arguments that could and would be seized upon and repeated in many later novels.

It is impossible to determine the exact influence that Thérèse philosophe may have had on such novels, but its popularity would seem to have been assured by its mixture of easy-to-read philosophy and extreme licentiousness, which borders on pornography. It is, in fact, said to have been "très défendu, mais aussi fort recherché."[47] Whatever its role, it stands as a reliable guide to the way in which libertine and philosophical trends of thought were linked and simultaneously developed in the minds of many members of the educated public.

Ira Wade has pointed out the five fundamental ideas of deistic beliefs, that are carefully set forth in the Examen de la religion: the necessity of studying religion; the ability of man to reach valid conclusions about it by reasoning; the uselessness of revelation; the irrelevance of cult and the obscurity of religious dogma; and the incompatibility of Christian morality with a true morality based on social considerations.[48] Thérèse philosophe develops along the same lines as the Examen, but the novel shifts the emphasis from a discussion of purely abstract ideas to a study of the practical consequences of

those ideas.

Thérèse, like other heroines of the libertine novel, has an early sexual awakening and, as with the others, the physical impulses she receives are accompanied by a strong curiosity. Her own body and those of her childhood companions become the objects of experiments in a "libertinage innocent,"[49] which is primarily a quest for knowledge. A convent education which begins when Thérèse is eleven years old, soon teaches her that such behavior and all sexual activity in general are sinful: "La Nature couvrira bientôt cette partie d'un vilain poil, tel que celui qui sert de couverture aux bêtes féroces, pour marquer, par cette punition, que la honte, l'obscurité et l'oubli doivent être son partage" (p. 21). Thérèse resolves never to marry; the struggle must constantly be waged against her natural penchants, and the result is a general physical and spiritual debilitation.

Torn by two passions, "l'amour de Dieu et celui du plaisir de la chair" (pp. 23-24), she reasons as well as she can and comes to certain conclusions. Thérèse's intellectual development always procedes in connection with her sexual development; each section of the story corresponds to a new advance in both domains. In fact, the form of the story--relations of events interrupted by long sections of philosophizing--as well as its didacticism immediately recall Sade's La Philosophie dans le boudoir.[50] In this case, Thérèse's only tools are her own feelings; the rightness of her thoughts (they will later be borne out by events and by the reflections of more experienced thinkers) proves the natural ability of man for arriving at the truth of things without the help of divine revelation.

What Thérèse decides is that men's actions are determined by im-

pulses put into them by God. Free will is an illusion. Reason itself operates only within the boundaries set for it by our individual passions and appetites, which we are not free to choose. This is true to such an extent that it may even be said that "nous ne sommes pas libres de penser de telle ou telle manière" (p. 27). What determines our passions are our environment (known to us only by the intermediary of our five senses) and, even more importantly, our physiological make-up: "L'arrangement des organes, les dispositions des fibres, un certain mouvement des liqueurs . . ." (p.28). The ability of education to modify our personality is very limited. To suppose that man can act independently of these determining factors by raising himself above them is to deny what makes him human, to say, in effect, that he is the equal of God.[51]

It is, nevertheless, necessary to rely upon our reasoning powers as a guide in discovering what our penchants are and in creating for ourselves a code of behavior that will not thwart them and thus cause our unhappiness. Falling prey to prejudices is especially to be avoided, for this may lead to disastrous results for the individual. The principal characters of the novel's next two sections demonstrate this. The first episode is the story of le père Dirrag, spiritual director of the young Eradice. (The names are anagrams for le père Girard and Mlle Cadière, who were involved in a true scandal, in which the priest was accused of having seduced the young girl.) Thérèse is a witness to the scene, which both she and the victim take to be a spiritual exercise preparing Eradice for sainthood. Le père Dirrag is as much a victim of injurious superstition as Thérèse had been in the convent. His natural sexual urges, raised to a feverish pitch by

forced abstention, lead him to become a hypocrite and a vile seducer. Thérèse, reacting spontaneously to what she has seen, masturbates, but since she has already partially freed herself from her old prejudices, this is a liberating experience for her. She again reasons that anything so naturally called forth and so easily remedied cannot be immoral.

Having innocently recounted the episode to Mme C, a friend of her mother with whom she is staying, she is directed by her to l'abbé T, Mme C's lover and an enlightened libertine. T is the complete opposite of Dirrag. He approaches sexual matters intelligently, seeking to establish a code of conduct that will not contradict nature. Thérèse finds in the abbé a mentor and, through direct conversations with him and by eavesdropping upon him and Mme C, she completes her education. Morality, she learns, is a private matter; each individual has to consult his own tastes, which are determined by his physical organization. It is men who have invented the idea of sin--a nonsensical idea since it is by God's will that we are what we are. To believe in sin is to believe that God erred in creating us. It is, therefore, impossible to be sinful, to do moral evil. We may do physical harm to others, but "le mal physique qui nuit aux uns sert au bonheur des autres . . . tout est bien" (p.81). Good and evil are relative notions, important for society, but meaningless with respect to the Divinity. The abbé T develops these ideas, stressing especially the human origin of religion and dogma, the absurdity of equating honor with obedience to the chimerical rules of religious cult, and the harm that religion does society by rejecting sensual pleasure and advocating chastity.

T also reasserts the strict determinism all beings are subject to, but he just as firmly preaches the necessity of keeping one's own

pleasures legal with respect to society. If there is no absolute evil, there is social evil, so that in the final analysis, morality becomes more than just a private affair in practical considerations. This is not hypocrisy or even just a matter of being prudent; we must respect society mainly because our greater personal happiness depends upon it: "l'homme par la multiplicité de ses besoins, ne peut être heureux sans le concours d'une infinité d'autres personnes" (p. 149). Reason and nature show us this; we need only listen to them to obviate any contradictions that might arise between personal desires and the general welfare of society, although in special cases where the desires know no reason, punishment is legitimate.[52]

Thérèse's education is now complete; she is intellectually and sexually at ease. But to reinforce the idea that diversity is the rule of nature, that each man's pleasure is normal for him, as odd as it may seem to others, we are given one last section in which Thérèse hears the story of Bois-Laurier, a former prostitute, now an "honest woman," with whom our heroine goes to live after her mother's death. Thanks to a physical abnormality that would seem to be an intolerable obstacle to one in her profession--an impenetrable membrane that safeguards her virginity-- Bois-Laurier has become a "specialist" in catering to those with unusual sexual preferences. She describes some of them to Thérèse. Although they are all harmless, they are forerunners of the sadistic and masochistic pleasures that Sade will later justify on much the same ground as does the author of Thérèse. There is, for example, M le président de ***, who liked to have Bois-Laurier's mother gently spank her daughter as he watched, or another old gentleman, whose pleasure consisted in fondling the young girl and threatening to whip her with a birch rod, as he chased her around the room. Others

involved third parties in their pleasures. The question of unwilling participants or of harming one or more individuals, which would hardly constitute a threat to the social order, is not addressed by the author.

Thérèse ultimately goes off to live with a count, who falls in love with her. She finally agrees to become his mistress, although they are careful to avoid having children, as this would openly defy the prevailing social order. Before leaving us, Thérèse puts the finishing touches on her theories of the individual's position respecting others. Each of us must seek pleasure in his own way. Our motives for action may be reduced to "l'amour-propre, le plaisir à espérer, ou le déplaisir à éviter" (p. 162). Nothing else matters, and, therefore, even feelings of charity and love are determined by selfish motives. If the Count loves Thérèse, it is because he feels pleasure in doing so; she owes him no debt of gratitude. If one is charitable, it is because he feels more comfortable in giving money than in continuing to feel the displeasure excited in him by the sight of others suffering, or even simply because he wishes to hear himself called "homme charitable" (p. 154). We are, as Sade will later insist, irremediably alone in our experience of life.

In spite of its satirical purpose in attacking the Christian religion and its lack of delicacy, Thérèse philosophe makes a serious attempt to define goodness and evil, and suggests the need for a new code of conduct, the first step of which would be to recognize the essential role played by sexuality in the normal functioning of the human machine. We are asked to rid ourselves of old prejudices in order to let nature speak directly to us. We would then be forced to reject the

Cartesian dualism between matter and spirit, that is, to acknowledge the interdependence of those two aspects of life, and to adopt a conduct that would ensure the physical and mental health of each being.[53]

The ideas of Thérèse were very much in the air after 1750, but they were inevitably, or so it seems in retrospect, distorted and taken out of context. For it is not only the ideas, but the manner in which they were expressed that is important; it is the spirit of Thérèse that was misunderstood. The novel blends in a significant way the erotic and intellectual sides of human existence, a characteristic it shares with many other serious works of its time. Aram Vartanian, in an article on "Erotisme et philosophie chez Diderot," states that, although eroticism and rationalism would seem, by their very nature, to be intrinsically opposed to one another, they are intimately connected in eighteenth-century thought and that "cette étrange et unique synthèse de deux tendances si dissemblables reste un de caractères les plus marquants . . . de la culture intellectuelle de l'époque."[54] Considering just Diderot, Vartanian shows how, especially in Les Bijoux indiscrets and Le Rêve de d'Alembert, the erotic element contributed in an essential way to the formulation of the philosophical thought.

Les Bijoux and Thérèse are not, perhaps, works of great literary value, yet each shows that for two true "philosophes," Diderot and d'Argens (assuming the latter is the author of Thérèse), a frankly erotic outline not only was judged appropriate to serve as a vehicle for philosophical ideas, but became inseparable from the ideas expressed. Intellectual and sexual energy complement each other; one is the natural partner of the other and it is felt to be man's right

and destiny to expend both freely and joyfully. Vartanian points out, as we have have already seen, that the word "libertinage" meant both "les moeurs relâchées et la hardiesse philosophique" in the eighteenth century.[55] One often comes across the word "fermentation" to describe both the intellectual and sexual explosions of the time. Duclos, for example, speaks of the "fermentation universelle de la raison,"[56] while Julie the "égarée" notices the "fermentation générale" which brings all beings to seek pleasure. It was not considered unusual to "philosoph[er] lubriquement," as Julie says.[57]

Although the idea of tying philosophical thoughts to a libertine work, especially in order to attack organized religion, was not an invention of the eighteenth century,[58] the "philosophes" were interested in more than just undermining religion. They present a new view of human nature, in which the erotic impulses are dynamically involved in the thought processes. Erotic impulse is tied to intellectual impulse both symbolically, by its natural aggressiveness in seeking satisfaction, and literally, as seen in the case of Thérèse, in whom the sexual instinct actually guides reason along the path to truth. Along with this belief in the erotic impulse as a kind of "garant de la vérité,"[59] is a feeling of hope, a faith that wherever this path of investigation leads, it will be good for man. It is on a note of confident expectation that both Thérèse and Les Bijoux indiscrets conclude.[60] The key assumption behind such an expectation is that, in man, mind and body, the thinking part and the sexually active part, will work in harmony for the individual's happiness and for that of man in general, for all human beings are so similar to one another in

organization that they must all have the same goals. Any opposition to the general good, coming from the perversion of natural impulses by the anti-natural forces of religion, can be overcome by a little reflection.

The idea of nature speaking directly through man's heart had an extraordinary success in the eighteenth-century novel, but the philosophical faith behind this idea degenerated, lowering it to the level of a cliché. No one wondered what goodness consisted in anymore. "La morale," as May has noted, became a "mot de passe," meaning anything that an individual felt would make him happy and so nothing at all.[61] But, most importantly, the feeling for the natural balance between the forces of the mind and body was totally misunderstood. The individual was no longer seen as an integrated whole; the Cartesian idea of separate parts reigned, and it seemed that the new philosophy favored an abdication of spirit and reason to body. The critic of L'Année littéraire declared that "les nouveaux philosophes s'appliquent principalement à rapprocher l'homme de la bête . . . et c'est sur cette ressemblance qu'ils fondent toute leur morale."[62]

With the harmony between mind and body, the key to Thérèse's philosophy lost, the solution to the obviously anti-social possibilities of the morality expressed in that novel is groundless. At best, seeking one's personal happiness in the general welfare could be seen as social utilitarianism. Acceptance of the idea of an individually determined morality, a "whatever is, is justified" attitude, but not of the faith that sees a state of harmony between nature's forces, led to a moral and social dilemma. Debauchery, cruelty, any excess, in fact, which was deemed necessary to one's happiness (the new rule of conduct) carried

its own justification with it. Although Sade is willing to accept the consequences for society, the eighteenth century before Sade was timid, and steadfastly retained its decided predilection for an ordered and elegant social life. This was as true of the libertines as of the other members of aristocratic society. As we have seen, unleashed desire was a frightening idea to all, a threat not only to the social order, but, more deeply, to the individual who gave himself over to his desires. Some principle--the emotional power of the heart or the rational power of the mind--had to be chosen to conquer the body: it is the philosophically false choice between the heart and the mind that we have already touched upon in the last section.

But, whichever choice was made, the consequences of the new beliefs could not be escaped. The cry for individualism meant an acceptance of good and evil, kindness and cruelty alike. The libertine "cynique" chooses the path of cruelty, but not even the sentimentalist, whom we shall study first, could ignore its existence. Although the sentimental hero clings to his hope in God, he lives in a world that operates as if blind force and not the designs of a benevolent being controlled it, and, although he proclaims that only the good know peace, while the cruel suffer inwardly, aberrant and even depraved actions are tolerantly viewed. Such opposing tendencies lead to some confusion; the soul is sometimes pictured as a spiritual force leading man to virtue and religion, and sometimes as matter, moral actions becoming dependent upon biological forces beyond the individual's control. But the influences of philosophical thought seem to be the stronger, if not fully acknowledged force at work here. Perhaps the voice of God reaches the virtuous, who are presented as almost saintly, but far more common

are the ordinary mortals, whose weaknesses, irrational behavior, and outright cruelty are quasi-justified in most sentimental novels.

In the sentimental novel, then, there is not only the recognition that cruelty, as well as kindness, exists within the natural order of things, but there is also an increasing indulgence for all types of human action. Cruelty, usually perceived as the outward manifestation of physical disorder and most often identified with a dissolute, debauched way of life, plays an important, even a necessary, part in the world of the sentimental novel.[63]

Notes to Chapter II:

[1] Marcel Ruff, L'Esprit du mal et l'esthétique baudelairienne (Paris: Armand Colin, 1955), p. 17.

[2] Ira Wade, The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophic Ideas in France from 1700 to 1750 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press; London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1938).

[3] Frederick Charles Green, French Novelists, Manners and Ideas from the Renaissance to the Revolution (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1928), p. 206.

[4] Many critics have pointed out the trend towards realism in the eighteenth-century novel. See, for example, the books and articles of F.C. Green, especially his La Peinture des moeurs de la bonne société dans le roman français de 1715 à 1761 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1924). Georges May in Le Dilemme du roman au XVIII[e] siècle (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963), p. 49, notes that in the eighteenth century the readers are, for the first time, invited to "reconnaître le cadre de leur propre existence."

[5] See English Showalter, Jr., The Evolution of the French Novel, 1641 to 1782 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), Pt. V, pp. 262-387, where it is shown that the problem of the individual against society was the most important novelistic theme of the late eighteenth century. The development of the theme from discontent to open revolt, from Manon Lescaut to Les Liaisons dangereuses, is traced.

[6] The two words, "galant" and "cynique," come from Henri Coulet, Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution, I (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), 387, but I borrow only the words and not the interpretation attached to them by this critic. For him, the "cynique" group is limited to those heroines who come from the lowest class of society and whose lives are characterized by "une basse débauche" and a tendency towards aggressive and harsh social criticism (p. 389). The "galant" trend, the inspirers of which are Crébillon and Montesquieu, is marked by a much lighter "scepticisme moral" and social satire usually coupled with a strong "gaîté du récit." The chef-d'oeuvre of this type of novel, according to Coulet, is Diderot's Les Bijoux indiscrets (p. 387). Coulet leaves outside of either classification the more obscene libertine novels, such as Thérèse philosophe, as well as those whose authors treat the subject from a strictly moralistic or sentimental point of view. The criteria used in this paper for classifying libertines as "galant" or "cynique" are different from Coulet's and will be explained above. But it is good to state here that I am interested mainly in the aristocratic libertine and that my definitions depend upon the libertine's mental attitude, rather than the outward form his libertinism takes. Thus, I place Crébillon's heroes at the head of the "cynique" group, unlike Coulet, who nonetheless notices a certain "amère profondeur" in the works of this writer (p. 387).

[7] Jean-Paul Sartre, Huis clos (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 81. See Philip Stewart, Le Masque et la parole (Paris: Corti, 1973), p. 80, who points out that, in this society, "[ê]tre, c'est être aux yeux des autres."

[8] Jean-Louis Fougeret de Monbron, Margot la ravaudeuse [1750] (Paris: Pauvert, 1958), p. 105.

[9] Norman O. Brown, Love's Body (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 99.

[10] One character, "le méchant," from the play of the same name by J.-B.-L. Gresset [1747] speaks these lines: "On épuise bientôt une société;/ On sait tout votre esprit, vous n'êtes plus fêté./ Quand vous n'êtes plus neuf, il faut une autre scène/ Et d'autres spectateurs . . .," in Eighteenth-Century Plays, ed. Clarence D. Brenner and Nolan A. Goodyear, The Century Modern Lang. Series, ed. Kenneth McKenzie (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1927), p. 335.

[11] Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvray, Les Amours du chevalier de Faublas, in Romanciers du XVIII[e] siècle, introd. René Etiemble (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), II, 1017. Following references to this work are identified in the body of the text.

[12] Coulet, I, 452. Disguises involving a change of sex are very common in tales that recount the adventures of "galants." This fact shows how far such libertines are from the "cyniques," whose aim in dominating the other sex is precisely to define their own sense of being, to prove their manhood.

[13] We already noted this in the previous chapter when we compared the characters of Crébillon fils, writing in the 1730's, to those of Vivant Denon in 1777: see Ch. 1, notes 5 and 6. See also Showalter, p. 334: "The structure of society in 1780 was essentially the same as it had been in 1730."

[14] L'Année Littéraire (Amsterdam and Paris: Lambert, 1757), I, 121.

[15] Servais Etienne, Le Genre romanesque en France depuis l'apparition de la Nouvelle Héloïse jusqu'aux approches de la Révolution (Paris: Armand Colin, 1922), p. 91.

[16] [Paul Barrett], Mademoiselle Javotte, ouvrage moral écrit par elle-même et publié par une de ses amies, introd. et notes de Jean Hervez (Paris: Tchou, 1967). This work, first published in 1757, had at least six editions in the eighteenth century.

[17] May, p. 4. Rétif, Laclos, and Sade are seen here as the only French writers after 1760 whose novels do not lead into "des voies sans issues." See also Daniel Mornet who, in his edition of Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse (Paris: Hachette, 1925), points out the identification made between moral and literary aims by both theoreticians and practitioners of the novel after 1760, I, 287-90; he also looks at the public taste for "la vertu" in the novel, I, 247-63.

[18] L'Année Littéraire (1763; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1966), X, 177.

[19] L'Année Littéraire (1763), X, 501.

[20] Antoine Adam, "Au temps de Crébillon," in Studi in onore di Italo Siciliano, Archivum Romanicum, Biblioteca, Ser. I, Vol. 86, Pt. 1 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1966), p. 5.

[21] [Jean-François de Bastide], Les Confessions d'un fat (n.p.: n.p., 1749), I, 16. All page references, given in the text, are to this edition.

[22] See J. Robert Loy, "Love/Vengeance in the Late Eighteenth-Century French Novel," Esprit Créateur, 3 (1963), 157-66, who explains the "mutation of love into vengeance" (p. 158), showing examples from the 1770's and on. Here, we see the same development taking place as early as 1749.

[23] Such cruel punishment seems to be a favorite pastime with libertines. In La Morlière's Les Lauriers ecclésiastiques, ou campagnes de l'abbé T [1748] (1777; rpt. Brussels, Gay et Douce, 1882), p. 132, the hero and a friend treat the former's cheating mistress "un peu plus mal que la dernière des créatures" and promise to spread the news of her shame all around Paris. Both Bastide and La Morlière seem to be imitating Crébillon, in his episode in the Sopha concerning Mazulim and Nassès (see Ch. 1, note 33 above), but the later two heroes are far more vicious.

[24] Adam, p. 5.

[25] Both couples meet in the country château of a mutual acquaintance, both libertines are spurred on by the difficulty of the enterprise and are forced to pay homage to the lady's virtue. There is, in both cases, a former mistress who, writing to the libertine from Paris, is able to judge correctly the extent of the impression made by such virtue. Each libertine feels, in spite of himself, a certain sincerity as he makes his protestation of love to the victim, who, weakened by love, agrees to write to the hero.

[26] This comparison is made in 1749. By 1757, Bastide has discovered a much closer link between "philosophie" and "fatuité." In Les Choses comme il faut les voir, not a novel but a satirical review of various social types, he defines a "philosophe" as "un impertinent qui cache un malhonnête homme . . . Le moins mal intentionné a toujours des motifs choquants pour notre vanité . . . Ils cherchent à jouer un premier rôle sur la scène du grand monde: abus étrange de la coquetterie et de la fatuité; car ce sont les prétendus oracles du bon ton qui ont érigé en prodiges cette espèce de monstres," quoted in L'Année Littéraire (Amsterdam and Paris: Lambert, 1757), VI, 188-89. By 1757, it had become a cliché to see no difference between "philosophie" and libertinism. For the image of the "philosophe" as "un homme qui ne se refuse rien," see Jean Fabre, ed., Le Neveu de Rameau, by Denis Diderot (Geneva: Droz, 1963), pp. 123-25. The definition just quoted is given by the Dictionnaire de l'Académie (1740). See also Herbert

Dieckmann, Le Philosophe: Texts and Interpretations, Washington Univ. Studies in Lang. and Lit., NS18 (Saint-Louis: Washington Univ. Press, 1948).

[27] René Etiemble, "Préface," in Romanciers du XVIII[e] siècle, II, xii.

[28] According to one novelist, "Il n'y a point d'auteur qui ne se pique de faire d'un Roman un ouvrage philosophique, point d'auteur, si mince qu'il soit, qui ne se pique lui-même d'être un Philosophe. . . Ne point penser comme le commun des hommes, dire que l'on secoue le joug des préjugés, ne croire à rien, c'est être Philosophe," in the anonymous novel La Philosophe par amour, quoted by L'Année Littéraire (1765; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1966), XII, 381. Yet, many writers, like the one just quoted, announce their serious intentions by making this word appear in the title; there are, to name just a few, Les Amants philosophes, ou le triomphe de la raison (1755) by Mlle Brohon, La Paysanne philosophe, ou les aventures de Mme la comtesse de *** (1761) by Mme Robert, Clairval philosophe, ou la force des passions (1765) by Durosoi, and Les Lettres d'un philosophe sensible (1769) publiées par M de la Croix.

[29] When we speak of "philosophie," here and throughout this study, we mean the particular brand of philosophy developed by eighteenth-century French thinkers as a whole, the most striking feature of which is the attempt to apply reason to experience, reversing the deductive rationalism of Descartes. The "philosophe," says Henry Steele Commager, "was interested chiefly in those truths which might be useful, here and now . . . Where the philosopher constructed systems, the Philosophe formulated programs," quoted by Herbert Mitgang, "A Commager Festival," rev. of The Empire of Reason, New York Times, 7 June 1977, p. 33, col. 4. See also Roland Mortier, Clartés et ombres du siècle des lumières (Geneva: Droz, 1969), pp.114-24.

[30] J.-P. Belin, Le Mouvement philosophique de 1748 à 1789 (1913; rpt. New York, Burt Franklin, n.d.), p. 40.

[31] Belin, p. 41.

[32] Mornet, I, 356-57 and 380. This is also mentioned by May, p.61.

[33] Mademoiselle Javotte, p. 63.

[34] May, p. 61. It should be noted that, according to May, this trend towards the unidealized presentation of love, which stresses especially the erotic side, and which had been growing since 1715, had less to do with the specific social and intellectual developments of the eighteenth century than with the attempt on the part of the novel's apologists, whether by conscious design or by reaction to adverse criticism, to carve out a special area, that of the depiction of real life, that would be the novel's justification as a literary genre. It is, however, just those social and intellectual developments that May speaks of, that we stress. Besides the obvious fact that being realistic requires taking into account and making use of such developments, there is another reason to study them: the exaggeration and

distortion of reality represented by the increasing depiction of cruelty in eroticism cannot be explained solely by esthetic reasons.

[35] Voltaire also points out the child's lack of inhibition about sexual matters. Cunégonde, who has just witnesses the "leçon de physique expérimentale" given by Pangloss to the maid, is "toute agitée, toute pensive, toute remplie du désir d'être savante, songeant qu'elle pourrait bien être la raison suffisante du jeune Candide, qui pouvait aussi être la sienne," Romans et contes, ed. René Pomeau (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), p. 180.

[36] Fougeret de Monbron, p. 6. This recalls Diderot's "natural" man who, if left to develop without education according to nature's will, "tordrait le col à son père et coucherait avec sa mère," Oeuvres romanesques, ed. H. Bénac (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 479.

[37] [Jacques-Antoine-René Perrin], Les Egarements de Julie (Amsterdam and Paris: Hocheraau, 1755).

[38] Fougeret de Monbron, p. 56 and p. 11, respectively.

[39] Telle mère, telle fille, ou la belle Alsacienne (sometimes attributed to either Claude Villaret or Antoine Bret), introd. B. de Villeneuve (Paris: Tchou, 1968), p. 114. This work, published in 1745, had many editions in the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries. It is more commonly known under the title of Les Galanteries de Thérèse.

[40] For example, one later heroine constantly challenges the "Etre infini" to prove himself useful to man: "Si tu veux que je croie à ta grandeur, fais qu'auparavant je croie à tes bontés," [Barnabé Farmian Durosoi], Clairval philosophe, ou la force des passions (La Haie: n.p., 1765), II, 7-8.

[41] [Perrin], II, 82-83.

[42] Barry Ivker, "Towards a Definition of Libertinism in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction," in Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, Vol. 73 (Geneva: Institut et musée Voltaire, Les Delices, 1970), pp. 221-39, sees this idea as the backbone of libertine writing in this century.

[43] As might be expected, Fréron and his continuers at the Année Littéraire favorably review many works by now forgotten writers who held this opinion. To name only a few: Les Lettres semi-philosophiques du chevalier de *** au comte de *** (Paris and Amsterdam: Lambert, 1757), I, 121-28; La Confidence philosophique by a Swiss pastor Vernes (1771 and 1776; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1966), XVIII, 325-28 and XXIII, 654-61, respectively; Le Comte de Valmont, ou les égarements de la raison by l'abbé Gérard (1774; rpt. 1966), XXI, 230-37; Le Philosophe catéchiste, ou entretiens sur la religion entre le comte de *** et le chevalier de *** by l'abbé Pey (1780; rpt. 1966), XXVII, 391-96.

[44] Antoine-Alexandre Barbier, Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes, 3rd ed. (Paris: Daffis, 1872), IV, 708-09, mentions both d'Argens and a

Certain de Montigny, "commissaire des guerres," but leans towards the latter. Most critics now accept d'Argens as the author.

[45] May, p. 40.

[46] The source is identified by Barbier, IV, 708-09. The quotation is from Wade, p. 158.

[47] Belin, p. 43.

[48] Wade, p. 162.

[49] [Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens], Thérèse philosophe (La Haie: n.p., 186-), p. 19. All references, identified in the text, are to this edition. A brief résumé of this novel may also be found in Ivker, pp. 231-34.

[50] May, p. 61, also notes this.

[51] These arguments may be found on pp. 23-29. They call to mind the works of other "philosophes," especially those of La Mettrie and Diderot.

[52] These ideas are found, principally, on pp. 69-83 and 88-100.

[53] This is one of the major problems of eighteenth-century philosophy. It is taken up by both Diderot and Sade, who use arguments similar to the ones expressed here.

[54] Aram Vartanian, "Erotisme et philosophie chez Diderot," Association des Etudes Françaises. Cahiers , No. 13 (1961), p. 372.

[55] Vartanian, p. 371.

[56] Quoted in Belin, p. 22.

[57] [Perrin], II, 82. Diderot, of course, said, "Mes pensées ce sont mes catins," Oeuvres romanesques, p. 395.

[58] Ivker, p. 226, points out that "eighteenth-century libertine fiction rarely goes beyond the philosophic ideas" of such seventeenth-century works as Milot's L'Escole des filles (1655), l'abbé Barrin's Vénus dans le cloître (1683), and especially Chorier's Le Meursius français, ou l'académie des dames (1680). These works, little known today, were apparently still read in the eighteenth century.

[59] Vartanian, p. 376.

[60] We should mention, in this connection, La Mettrie, who was very active in the years from 1745 until his death in 1751 and who integrates, to at least as great an extent as Diderot and d'Argens, the erotic element into his philosophical thought. His works, especially the buoyant L'Art de jouir, proclaim the need to raise the erotic impulse

to the important place it deserves to have in human life.

[61] May, pp. 250-51. See also Etienne, p. 17: "la vertu ne sera plus synonyme d'effort sur soi, mais de complaisance."

[62] Given as an excerpt from l'abbé Pey's Le Philosophe catéchiste (see above, note 43) in L'Année Littéraire, XXVII, 393. The author of a short work entitled Cléon, ou le petit-maître, esprit fort (n.p.: n.p., 1757), p. 38, has his hero exclaim: "Qui sait jouir sait tout. Les animaux sont nos philosophes à cet égard."

[63] We will consider under the heading of sentimental novel those works whose characters appear designed to show that it is the heart which is the principal force behind all human action, i.e., that it is the interpreter of the voice of nature. The sentimental novelist's aim is to show virtue (identified with love and sensibility) as leading the fortunate few to inner happiness and peace, even though they may become the victims, physically, of the cruel.

Chapter III: The heart and the mind

Part I: Cruelty in the sentimental novel

Although the trend began as early as the 1730's, as, for example, in Crébillon's Les Lettres de la marquise de M*** au comte de R*** (1732), it was in the second half of the century that the great wave of sentimentalism swept over the novel.[1] For the "cynique," sentimentalists are victims of an illusion. Love does not exist, and even if it did, it would, with constancy and virtue, be "nos ennemis les plus épouvantables," as one of Bastide's characters put it.[2] But it was not the same for the less principled libertines, the "galants," who are cynical and cruel only because they are weak. Already in 1749, libertines like Flanval are giving in to the sentimentalist's vision of happiness. But after 1760 especially, when for all but the most die-hard "petites maîtresses" and "les dames de l'avant-dernier bel-air," the newest "bon ton" was to love one's husband, the countryside and "les délices du sentiment,"[3] the "galants" become less complacent about their black deeds and often have to fight off uneasy feelings at the moment of treachery.

Earlier, Pranzi-type libertines took delight in their cruelty. The hero of a short work called La Brochure à la mode is typical of this attitude. The scene is the boudoir of a Présidente, whom the hero, the Marquis, is trying to seduce. Just as in the case of Crébillon's Clitandre and Cidalise, in La Nuit et le moment, success is achieved by mixing physical advances with a few philosophical reflections and the recital of past conquests. For the Marquis, all virtue is a sham and all estimable women, "bégueules."[4] Believing that a certain coquette

is trying to humiliate him, he makes her fall truly in love with him and then abandons her. Inconsolable, she retires to the country, never to be seen again in Paris. When the Présidente protests that "cela s'appelle outrer la cruauté" (p. 115), he replies that she deserved it and that, in any case, this episode has greatly enhanced his reputation. Even when the earlier libertine "galant" did not wish to be cruel, he saw nothing particularly serious in the pain he caused. When Duclos' Comte de *** learns that an English mistress of his has committed suicide, he is very troubled. As Faublas would do, he immediately accuses himself "cent fois de barbarie,"[5] but, unlike Faublas, he returns to his pleasures "par raison." He may have had cause to be sad, he admits, but seriousness is a "maladie," which he had contracted in England. But he will soon be cured: "l'air et le commerce de France sont les meilleurs remèdes contre cette maladie" (II, 247).

The "galant," after about 1760, will not consider libertinism, even temporarily, as a normal state. He almost always is made to become a man of sentiment, after having reached the lowest level of debauchery under the influences of bad examples. Sometimes, as in the case of the Chevalier de Faublas, excessive sensitivity is evident from the start, but has just been channeled in the wrong direction; more commonly, sentiment has been stifled by false philosophy. In a novel called Le Libertin devenu vertueux, for example, the weak comte D*** allows his friends to witness a humiliating scene between him and his sobbing mistress, an older woman who has generously sacrificed most of her fortune for the hero and who now sees she is losing him. He is so moved and ashamed that he cannot speak. The friends suddenly show

themselves, crying, "Eh bien . . . qu'avez-vous? vous ne dites plus rien! c'est bien dommage, car c'était fort joli."[6] The Count is only temporarily repentant, but every incident of debauchery, crime, or cruelty leaves its mark on him. He continues in his evil ways, not "par raison," but because he puts off thinking. The philosophical attitude that libertines adopt, and especially their rejection of religion, is based on "le goût pour le libertinage, et sur la prétention de jouer un rôle dans le monde" (I, 39). True philosophy, he will learn, is based on sentiment and love.

Though the sentimentalist accepted happiness as the proper aim of human action and the individual as the final judge of his own happiness, he feared the sexual part of man's character. Not being able to ignore this side of human nature, he had to demonstrate, quite simply, that virtue is happiness and vice is misery. This had also been Thérèse's aim, but here virtue is a denial of sexuality. It is the transformation of desire into the ability to feel for others-- generosity, charity, and, above all, love--while vice is unrestrained desire--libertinism and cruelty. For the sentimentalist, moral virtue, happiness and love merge into one. The undiluted force of desire is the enemy and, in fact, in spite of uncontrollable outbursts of emotion and fits of passion, never has the intention of love been purer, less sensual, than in the sentimental novel. The outbursts, whether of grief or of rapture, are often frenzied. One hero, who believes his loved one has died, cries, "O vous que j'aime! ô vous que j'idolâtre! je n'ai pu vivre sans vous! vivre sans Célide! ô Dieu! . . . ô mort que j'implore! . . ." [7] The joy of another hero (by the same author) is just as wildly expressed: "Elle m'aime! St.-Lis! sens-tu?..,Je ne puis, je me meurs...Se peut-il! ...Je succombe..."[8] Love is described as "un sentiment magique,

impérieux, désordonné, qui pénètre, brûle, dévore, absorbe la raison, éveille l'âme, l'enivre de jouissances..."[9] Lovers who tell their stories warn the reader that they are incapable of putting order and style into such burning confessions: "Je rendrai [mes idées] telles qu'elles naîtront et se succéderont en moi . . ."[10]

Yet, for all this verbal disorder, these love-struck heroes are not tempted to overpass the bounds of conventional morality. As Mornet has noted, "ce n'est pas une morale nouvelle qu'on puise à des sources inconnues mais la morale même des sources antiques et familières."[11] Love somehow guarantees that their emotions are always virtuous, that desire will be purified and directed only towards the loved one. It gives order to life. A young heroine feels within herself the stirrings of desire, just as the licentious heroines mentioned above did: "Il s'était élevé du fond de mon coeur un orage terrible qui portait le désordre dans mon esprit et le trouble dans tous mes sens . . . c'était une espèce d'aliénation."[12] But here, the heroine will not become the victim of her senses. She and her lover are predestined for one another; her future is secure, even though she does not yet know it. It is the same for her lover: "Tu habites dans mon coeur, depuis le moment que ma sensibilité développée en a désiré l'objet," he tells her (I, 17). Desire without a special object, on the other hand, is an "ivresse dangereuse," a "frénésie qui conduit au crime."[13] For most of us, our passions in their natural state before corrupting influences reach them, "conservant un juste équilibre entr'elles, n'ont que le degré de force qui leur convient pour devenir des instruments de félicité" (I, 13). Sentimental heroes are afraid of desire. In love, they look for and need order and security. Only then can their

senses speak safely.[14]

Although religion is ostensibly the guide of many sentimental heroes and heroines, it was the "philosophes" and not true Christian moralists who held man's happiness here and now to be our rightful goal in life. The influence of religion was declining; it was clearly the individual's turn to set the rules. The inversion of the moral order, which we mentioned before and which puts man's happiness above obedience to God, was not a clear philosophical decision, but, as in all that the sentimentalists took from modern philosophy, an unconscious borrowing. It is always obvious in sentimental novels. One young heroine, who believes herself pious, speaks to God as if He were her lover, who is now far away: "Qu'importe? si cette illusion peut remplir le vide de mon coeur, le ciel en serait-il offensé? Non, Sainville; s'il mit en moi des passions, peuvent-elles rester oisives? Il leur faut un aliment: en les trompant, je les amuse, et je me rends heureuse."[15]

If, for his own happiness, the sentimental hero needs to love and be virtuous, it is undeniable that there are others who find only hardness and cruelty in their hearts. But, although one can detest cruelty, one cannot really hate the cruel individual, for like any other individual, he has not chosed his character. Contemporary scientific thought indicated that personalities are dependent upon biological and environmental factors; man's lack of responsibility for what he is was generally accepted, at least tacitly, in the sentimental novel: "Pauvres humains, dont les qualités morales dépendent des aliments qui vous nourissent . . . dont les jugements, les volontés, le génie, les vertus mêmes, peut-être, sont assujettis aux combinaisons si

diverses des éléments qui composent l'air que vous respirez."[16]

Virtue and vice, generosity and cruelty have to do with man's physical organization. One is the result of internal order, the other of disorder, in the human machine. An ordinary man "dont la tête n'est pas fortement organisée, dans lequel la nature n'a point, en le formant, laissé la trace d'un grand caractère" (I, 68) is easily corrupted, and rare is the individual who can resist and can "déterminer les fibres de sa volonté à mouvoir suivant une direction régulière" (I, 95) without constant help from an environment in which virtue is the rule. Libertines "galants" are such ordinary men as these who have been misled. Real cruelty, on the other hand, exists only in those who "[ont] reçu de la nature une âme incapable de s'élever jamais" (II, 24). They are "insensibles," men who are unable to love and who desire wildly, without purpose. They live in disorder, and, therefore, they seek happiness in vain. True cruelty, although, it is out of the ordinary, exists and it is natural. It plays an important part in the sentimental novel, threatening virtue wherever it appears and, surprisingly, often crushing it completely. It sometimes seems that the virtuous have been created just to suffer at the hands of the cruel libertine.

A good example of this vision of cruelty can be seen in the novel Pauline, of the Victim of the Heart by Contant d'Orville.[17] This is an epistolary novel, almost all the letters addressed by the heroine to her friend and former governess, the Baroness de Fréville. Pauline falls in love with the handsome and libertine Count de Castelli and, believing his promise to give up his loose ways and dissolute friends, she marries him. On her wedding night, Pauline discovers that Castelli

has written to two of his mistresses, claiming to have married only for money. Mme Destournelles, one of the two, stabs the Count that night in a fit of jealous rage. It is only the first of many trials for Pauline. Her husband recovers, and promptly becomes the most perfidious and vicious of creatures, a virtual slave to the will of his forceful mistress, Destournelles. The mildest of his crimes is that he never ceases to be unfaithful. Unreasonably jealous, he locks Pauline up in a "dark and loathsome place" (I, 93). He kills her beloved tutor in a duel, plans to murder her with poison, gambles away almost all of her money and jewels, declares, when faced with the choice of saving Pauline or his child about to be born: "give me but a son, we have no want of women" (I, 198), and, when he finds he has a daughter instead, abandons both mother and child on the spot. He also plots an elopement with his brother's fiancée and attempts the rape of Sophie, Pauline's maid and companion, whom he has kidnapped.

Castelli has periodic returns to sincere repentance and virtue, and he always finds a forgiving Pauline who pays his debts, obtains official pardons, and cares for him when he is sick or wounded. Pauline finally is murdered, but by Destournelles acting alone. Castelli, who had retourned to virtue a short time before, grieves for a few weeks and then returns to his old ways, moving again in a "vortex of folly, vice, and dissipation" (II, 223). Destournelles drowns on her way to England.

Religion is Pauline's apparent guide and consolation through all her troubles, but the moral significance of the story runs counter to religious ideas of good and evil. Castelli is seen much less as an evildoer, than as a victim of his own nature, which is beyond his control. He

is continually excused by Pauline, who sees him as an innocent "slave to [his] passions" (I, 201). Once or twice, she ventures to call his character estimable, claiming he is only weak: "youth, education, and modern dissipation make him what he is" (I, 160), but, although she sometimes lets herself be swayed by the flattering thought that this time, Castelli has really changed, far more often, she recognizes the truth, that a permanent return to virtue is impossible; his crimes do not arise from an "effervescence" of passion that reason can in time conquer: "no spark of virtue will ever rekindle in his heart" (II, 92). He simply was not made for virtue. Castelli himself says, "I have been from my earliest youth the abject slave of violent and uncontrollable passions" (II, 20).

Pauline recognizes no external rule--society's orders or even divine grace--which may help the individual to alter his conduct. Although she believes in God, she never prays, but just submits. Within the individual, she sees no rule but the voice of the heart, whether it be for good or for evil. "How does ungovernable passion debase the mind of man, and place him beneath the brute" (I, 242), and just like the brute, man is not responsible for what he is. It is the same for Pauline herself: "The heart of your friend will ever be the guide of her actions" (I, 248), she tells Fréville, and still later, after having been the victim of still more deception and black plots, she repeats that "my heart dictates, and I obey its laws" (II, 155).

Sophie, Pauline's virtuous companion, claims, after Pauline's death, that vice must necessarily lose in the end and that, specifically, remorse is inevitable for the wicked, for if this were not true "the benign influence of gentle virtue would lose its sway over mankind" (II, 215). Destournelles herself tells Pauline that "vice will

ever stand appalled in the presence of virtue" (I, 236), but this is spoken hypocritically and Sophie's reasoning is not borne out by the facts. Destournelles perishes, but unrepentant, and, just as in the case of Mme de Merteuil, whom she vaguely foreshadows, her punishment, although fitting, is sudden and purely accidental; it is not the result of her evildoing.

Although it is true that Pauline's only happy moments come when she speaks of her love for her child and her husband, and that Castelli is miserable in his vice and truly happy during his rare returns to virtue, when his love for Pauline is reawakened, virtue does not triumph. The death of Destournelles does not change Pauline's fate. The meaning of her life is further mocked by Castelli's inability to reform, even outwardly. The ending of this story is reminiscent of those of Sade's Aline et Valcour and especially his Les Infortunes de la vertu: the virtuous are praised and pitied, and the vicious unfulfilled or reformed, but the actual outcome leaves the good no confirmation of their beliefs and no real cause for hope. A strong comparison could be made between Aline or Justine and Pauline, although Contant d'Orville cannot be suspected of a desire to sabotage the moral order.

The comparison between the Sadian world and that of the sentimental hero may be pushed one step further. In both, virtue is passive and pleased to dwell on its unhappiness, while cruelty is assertive. Sophie admits that, had she not been taught otherwise, her experience of the world would have led her to believe that "the poor and the humble [that is, the virtuous] were abject slaves, destined to bow with submissive lowliness to every whim of the rich and powerful [who are

generally wicked], that caprice, pride, and vanity might dictate, and that daring to resist them is a crime of so heinous a nature, as to demand a severe punishment" (II, 130). Moreover, the cruel are strong and mentally superior to the good. Mme Destournelles has made a science of wickedness. Just as Merteuil will do, she "knew how to conceal every emotion that [she] wished not to appear" in order to deceive others and attain her goals (I, 235). She controls others, but promises to "punish the woman who has dared to penetrate and read her soul" (II, 207). The cruel scornfully reject limits set to their power, while the virtuous meekly "subscribe to [the] Almighty will" (I, 204).

Such a vision is not far removed from that of Sade, who holds that by their willingness to suffer the weak affirm the universal law which states that "la différence de la force et de la faiblesse établie par la nature prouve évidemment qu'elle a soumis une espèce d'homme à l'autre, aussi essentiellement qu'elle a soumis les animaux à tous."[18] Pauline's obstinate refusal to leave Castelli and make a new life for herself, in spite of the earnest entreaties of Castelli himself and of a priest, l'abbé Trothier, is as irritating as the weakness of Sade's heroine, Mme de Blamont in Aline et Valcour, who, brought to her deathbed by the evil plots of her husband, is still prepared to sacrifice her daughter Aline to the will of this monstrous man: "Le dernier conseil que j'ai à te donner," she says to Aline, "est d'obéir à ton père, et de te livrer aveuglément à celui qu'il te donne" (V, 378). It is not possible to feel much sympathy for her or for Pauline, both of whom welcome suffering with open arms. Their virtue, ineffectual and totally accidental, stemming from instinct rather than from any choice based upon principles, is unattractive when compared to the intellectual

superiority of their enemies.

Although other heroines do not always have to face quite so many trials as this one and are not always permanently defeated by vice, Pauline is not atypical. Novels in the second half of the century are filled with cruel husbands and cruel suitors, who recognize no limits to their desires. In these novels, cruelty is, in fact, as vital a part of the natural order of things as it is for Sade. But virtue, although it suffers, does so only outwardly. Feelings of self-righteousness and inner peace abound. Castelli and his brothers, driven by inner demons, are the cause of the misery. Castelli has several predecessors and many followers in the novel. The heroine of L'Histoire de Mme de Montglas (1755), for example, is beset by the cruelties of a tyrannical husband. She is confined to a "chambre obscure"[19] at his whim and is forced to welcome into her home and treat with kindness his mistress, Sylvia, who is eventually turned out for trying to murder the heroine (her life spared only by the efforts of the virtuous Montglas). Many injustices later, Mme de Montglas, thinking herself a widow, prepares to marry the noble Sombreval, who had himself been tormented at the hands of evil enemies, but the plans are destroyed by the sudden appearance of M de Montglas, who kills Sombreval only to be killed in his turn by a servant. Mme de Montglas becomes a nun, firmly convinced that the world is no place for the virtuous, filled, as it is, with nothing but "des séductions, des meurtres, des hypocrisies, des incestes, des parricides, des faussaires, des pères barbares, des fils dénaturés, des frères ennemis, des amis perfides, des amants infidèles . . ." (VII, 29).

Especially after 1760, virtue suffers so often and so gravely that Daniel Mornet, in his study of the French novel of this period,

adds another category to his bibliography for 1761 to 1780 to accommodate such novels as Pauline: "romans sombres."[20] Fate seems to pick its victims at random among the virtuous. In Le Mariage (1769), Julie d'Arnonville finds a gentle husband in her fiancé, while her equally virtuous friend Sophie marries the cruel Comte de ***, who submits her to every possible humiliation and finally wounds her with a pistol.[21]

Ermance, one of Baculard d'Arnaud's perfect heroines, is forced to marry the cruel Daramant by her equally cruel father. Like Pauline, she is "la malheureuse victime du devoir" and almost joyfully accepts the life of misery and suffering she sees before her: "il est pour des malheureux des satisfactions que les plus fortunés ne connaissent pas. Qu'il y a de douceur à pouvoir gémir sans contrainte, à trouver un coeur qui s'ouvre à nos larmes, et qui y mêle les siennes! c'est peut-être la plus touchante des voluptés; l'union des peines est bien supérieure à celle des plaisirs!"[22] Daramant flies from one emotional extreme to the other, and finally kills his own friend whom he unjustly suspected of having seduced Ermance. The faithful wife falsely accuses herself of adultery to prevent the disgrace of her husband. She is locked in a convent and freed only when Daramant makes a deathbed confession. It is too late for happiness. Ermance becomes a nun and dies shortly afterward, following to the grave the man she had always loved, Lormenil, who has died of grief.

These cruel husbands who are the victims of internal disorder are pitied, but not hated, by the suffering victims. They are miserable in their vice, and totally helpless. One husband, Milford, who goes so far as to banish his wife to the provinces and to claim that she has

died in order to marry his new love, is, in fact, almost sympathetically portrayed: "Quelle furie, quel Démon a donc empoisonné l'âme de mon époux?" asks the brave Fanéli, who never stops loving him and who consents to pass as dead.[23] At one point, Milfort, so blinded by his passion, even exclaims, as any virtuous heroine might, "Ames froids, coeurs indifférents, vous ne serez jamais peut-être aussi malheureux que je le fus, jamais vous n'aurez mes plaisirs" (II, 69). In novels such as this, cruelty, although it is deplored and condemned, is, in fact, shown to be the complement of virtue: both are the results of internal movements that can be neither changed nor ignored. They are opposites, but, just as darkness is known only by its opposite light, each one needs the other to be defined, to have any meaning.

Cruelty is not confined to monstrous husbands. Women also represent the forces of evil. Mme de Saint-Val in L'Histoire de Mme de Montglas, jealous of Sombreval's previous attentions to her daughter, had enlisted the aid of her brother (whom she could persuade only by giving in to his incestuous desires) in accusing Sombreval of kidnapping her daughter and killing her husband. Sombreval is cleared when Mme de Saint-Val commits suicide, after having killed her brother. The wretched Léonore of Les Mémoires du Comte de Baneston (1755), for no other reason than to satisfy an uncontrollable urge to shatter the happiness of others, lures the basically virtuous Baneston away from his family, sparing the abandonned wife no suffering or humiliation. Léonore confesses on her deathbed to the murder of the wife, the son, and also the governess "dont les regards la gênaient."[24] Baneston is left to become a recluse, sadly pondering the wickedness and

folly of miserable humanity.

There are many Léonores in the fiction of this period. Mme Riccoboni's Histoire de M. le Marquis de Cressy (1758)[25] again shows virtue succumbing to the forces of evil as the innocent but unloved wife of the Marquis becomes the victim of Hortense de Berneil, who manages to enchant Cressy for a short while. She acts, not from love, but from a desire to dominate, to submit another to her will. The Marquis quickly tires of her, but it is too late. Mme de Cressy kills herself and dies in the arms of her miserable husband, who lives on, the rest of his days poisoned by remorse. The horrible, but powerful Comtesse de Losan of Rose, ou les effets de la haine, de l'amour et de l'amitié (1764),[26] one of those novels that Mornet includes in the somber category, is another example of a truly vicious person who stops at no crime to thwart the happiness of virtue.

Novels after 1750 frequently have at least one treacherous libertine who uses the standard methods of kidnapping and false marriage to corrupt and betray the innocence of a young heroine, usually an orphan who not uncommonly turns out to be a countess or marquise. Many have secret hideaways to which they bring their pretty victims, a castle defended by a drawbridge or "un lieu qui sert tous les jours d'autel aux sacrifices honteux du séxagenaire, qui accoûtumé à se nourrir du sang de l'opprimé, foule aux pieds les devoirs les plus sacrés."[27] The libertine father of Clarice in La Nouvelle Clarice (1767) locks her in an isolated room, from which her cries cannot be heard, for having refused to marry her half-brother.[28]

So common and so expected are horrors such as these, and so superficially are they generally treated, that cruelty becomes truly banal,

and depraved beings seem an unfortunate but, after all, normal part of society. The vicious, preyed upon by dark passions, can no more help being cruel than the virtuous can help loving. Passions are unconquerable, natural forces; men must listen to their instincts. Under the influence of philosophical thinking, eighteenth-century man had, in effect, done away with the devil, and with the Christian God as well. The traditional line of demarcation between vice and virtue had been obscured. Thomas Carlyle describes the moral atmosphere of the decades that preceded the French Revolution in these terms: "Then how 'sweet' are the manners; vice 'losing all its deformity,' becoming decent . . . becoming almost a kind of 'sweet' virtue!"[29] He is speaking of what he calls the philosophism of the age, which sentimentalists ostensibly reject, but, as we have seen, these latter share with the "philosophes" the belief that man is the child of nature and ask, with them, "For what imaginable purpose was man made if not to be 'happy'?" (p. 26). The answer is, for none; it is only natural for him to seek happiness in whatever way nature suggests to him.

We have mentioned the early 1760's as the point at which the trend towards sentimentalism seems to have first taken hold of the novel in a dramatic way. It has become commonplace to see as the major influence behind this trend Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse, which was immensely popular with the reading public of the eighteenth century and which some authors openly claimed as their guide.[30] The influence of Rousseau blends with that of the "philosophes" in the novel after 1760. Whether or not eighteenth-century novelists understood Rousseau is a subject that has been debated by many critics. According to Daniel Mornet, "[à]l'ordinaire on a compris Rousseau, et il n'a rien manqué,

pour écrire comme lui, que le génie ou le talent."[31] Servais Etienne, however, disagrees. He sums up Rousseau's influence in this way: "Puisqu'on ne perd pas irrémédiablement la vertu pour s'en être écarté, commençons par les écarts et nous verrons après."[32] F.C. Green also sees a superficial adoption of Rousseau's ideas and speaks of the "delicious suffering" and the "orgy of emotional self-flagellation" of later characters.[33] Writers were, I believe, selective in what they took from Rousseau. By the example of Julie, they of course confirmed their belief in the supremacy of virtue and in the primacy of the heart as the true guide to morality. There is, also, in both Rousseau and in those that are influenced by him, the same ambiguity towards desire, which is at once viewed sympathetically (when it is the source of true love) and feared as a threat of disorder, internal as well as external. The social order, however cruel it may be to lovers, can be breached only at the risk of bringing great unhappiness and suffering upon them. Some form of ordered existence must be found to counter this threat.

This much Rousseau and his followers have in common, but, on the whole, the lessons of La Nouvelle Héloïse were distorted according to the needs of the ordinary sentimental novelists, who cared more about showing virtue beset by exterior forces of cruelty than about delving into the recesses of the naturally virtuous heart and examining its ascension to true greatness. As we have said, there was very little struggle within the souls of most sentimental heroines. Novelists, therefore, tended to seize upon the less essential aspects of Julie's story, concentrating upon the initial but finally less impo rtant problems of the two lovers, especially that of the cruel parent who opposes their happiness. The Baron d'Etanges is not cruel in the sense that he enjoys or is indifferent to the pain he causes his

daughter. Future cruel parents become much more important to the story, which centers on this obstacle to the happiness of two virtuous, but socially unequal lovers. The ferocity of such parents grows with their importance.

Later novelists, in short, stress the outer, more banal struggle between the individual who loves and a disapproving society, often symbolized by a cruel parent, while Rousseau shows us the heroic inward battle of his heroine. For Julie, desire is the agent, the catalyst, that propels her into the special world of "la sensibilité." She is separated, in a radical way, from those people, like Wolmar, who are guided by reason alone. Wolmar understands many things, but Julie understands the essential things.[34] He is alone, empty, static, while she is in harmony with the universe. "C'est dans cette délicatesse qui survit toujours au véritable amour," she writes to Saint-Preux, "plutôt que dans les subtiles distinctions de M. de Wolmar, qu'il faut chercher la raison de cette élévation d'âme et de cette force intérieure que nous éprouvons l'un près de l'autre. . ."[35]

Julie knows, as ordinary people cannot, that the individual is a fragment of the greater whole and that love alone, with its pain and suffering which lift us out of our everyday selves, can teach us this. Although love and desire are not victorious in the usual sense, they have done their work. Julie's experiences have made her into a special individual, wiser and greater than before. In the struggle between love and duty that raged within her, neither one wins, but neither loses. Love has been transformed from an egotistical passion which seeks fulfillment in one other person into a feeling of openness, of communion with all of nature. Her sense of duty has been

transferred from the narrow, uncomprehending society of ordinary men to a higher order of things, based upon a personal vision, which she lives out at Clarens and to which all other things--love and friendship--are finally subordinated. By uniting Saint-Preux and Claire, Julie, who functions in a god-like way in her little society and whose special powers and influence over the lives of those close to her are acknowledged by all, would have ensured the continuation of her vision after her death: "C'est dans ce chaste lien que vous pourrez sans distractions et sans craintes vous occuper des soins que je vous laisse, et après lesquels vous ne serez plus en peine de dire quel bien vous aurez fait ici-bas" (p. 565).[36]

Thanks to Rousseau, sentimental heroes and heroines after Julie realize that some inner change takes place in those who love, but they seem more often content to congratulate themselves on their ability to feel than to struggle against the pain it inevitably brings. They dwell on this pain, glory in it. While the full meaning of Julie's struggle comes slowly and only long after she has given in to Saint-Preux, later heroines automatically and all at once move to the level of superior being. In this way, the order of La Nouvelle Héloïse is, in a sense, reversed: what should be the climax comes at the outset and the rest of the novel is spent stressing the cruelty of parents or some other external problem, and flirting with the moment of physical pleasure, the giving in to which often becomes, for all the virtuous intentions of sentimental lovers, the crucial question of the story.

The asceticism that marks Julie's character gradually changes to its opposite, indulgence. According to Rousseau's heroine, "Plus on

a le coeur tendre et l'imagination vive, plus on doit éviter ce qui tend à les émouvoir" (p. 531). Yet, after Julie, sensibility and emotion are enjoyed in a kind of safe libertinism, safe for the individual, who disguises desire behind sentiment (but a sentiment "tout de flamme")[37] and safe for the social order, since it is mostly a libertinism of the mind. Lovers who do finally give in are presented sympathetically, one of the favorite refrains of the time being that the conventional way of forming a marriage is nothing but a "vil marché, où le plus offrant l'emporte."[38] Yet none lightly flaunt society, and those who transgress its rules suffer remorse and feel as if they had lost their virtue.[39]

Having no great development of character to depict, sentimental novelists depend, as we have seen, upon outside threats to happy and virtuous lovers: the bad example, which can sway the basically good, but weak young man, or the naturally vicious being, who from jealousy or pure cruelty, thwarts virtue. The cruelty of the weak young men (never of women, who are always either totally good or totally vicious, and so totally unbelievable) is often sympathetically portrayed, as in the case of Dolbreuse. They are the victims of passion that has been mishandled, as opposed to passion that represents an internal defect of organization, as in the case of Castelli.

Sometimes, it is difficult, however, to decide just which category a hero falls into. We have mentioned one such case, the Milfort of Imbert's Les Egarements de l'amour, who, everyone agrees, "n'[est] point né avec un coeur féroce,"[40] but who is so altered by passion as to become inaccessible to the voice of virtue. He laments, in the manner of Faublas, that other victim of uncontrollable sensibility, that "j'ai rendu malheureux, tout ce qui m'aime, tout ce qui fut cher à

mon coeur," (II, 306), but he also admits, as he dies, that he does not feel true repentance and would have done the same things, given a second chance.

In addition to these types of cruelty, there is now also a third type, that of the parent who, for social reasons, opposes the choice made by his child. While the cruelty of such parents is not necessarily dictated to them by a defect in their physical organization, as in the case of the innately cruel, they seem to be equally willing to inflict pain on the virtuous. It is usually pointed out that they do not love their children, and their vehemence, inflexibility, and perhaps enjoyment in causing pain are stressed. One angry father, M de Vaudreuil, in Les Amours de Lucile et de Doligny, whose hard-heartedness has earned him the hatred of all his vassals, locks his son in a dark cell and even puts him in chains for a while. His mother and his sister are not permitted to see him, and when he falls ill, his father refuses to send a doctor to him.

In another example, Mme de Berville, in Léonard's La Nouvelle Clementine, who has always been cold towards her children and totally uninterested in their education, rejects as a son-in-law her daughter Henriette's choice, the virtuous but poor Seligny. Succumbing to the stress of being put into a convent against her will, Henriette begins to lose her reason, whereupon her mother has her loaded with chains in an asylum--yet another dark cell, in which the heroine is given a bed of straw to sleep on and only hard bread and water to sustain her energy. Both Henriette and Doligny die, and both monstrous parents are, apparently, unrepentant.

Part II: The cruelty of the libertine "cynique"

The keywords of the sentimental hero's character are suffering and sacrifice. Life is determined by forces that he cannot control. He accepts what he is and his aims are modest, in a very "bourgeois" way. Henri Coulet says of Mme Riccoboni's characters that "[l]'inquiétude qui leur est commune avec tant de personnages du dix-huitième siècle ne demande pas l'apaisement impossible à un objet infini; elle trouverait à se calmer dans les joies de la sensibilité, d'une vie calme et sage réunissant l'amour et l'amitié."[41] There was, as Mornet notes, no true "mal du siècle" in the late eighteenth century. It appeared occasionally, especially in the characters of Léonard or Loaisel de Tréogate, but it was never very deep. It pushed them, not towards "la révolte et le désespoir de vivre," but towards the shores "d'une Cythère qui n'est plus libertine mais qui reste voluptueuse et sensuelle violemment."[42] The sentimental hero wants only a bit of order in his life, a feeling that he is safe so that he may dwell at leisure on his own delicacy of being.

Order is the gift of God to man. There are those who fight the human condition, the champions of cruelty and of disorder, but it almost seems, to the sentimentalist, that the cruel were put on earth just so that the example of their inner misery would serve as a reminder to the rest of us to welcome the sensibility of our hearts that invites us to love and to be humble and generous. Sensibility means suffering, but the suffering inflicted upon the gentle is necessary and beneficial: "Vivre sans peine n'est pas un état d'homme; vivre ainsi c'est être mort. Celui qui pourrait tout sans être Dieu serait une

misérable créature; il serait privé du plaisir de désirer; toute autre privation serait plus supportable."[43] These words of Julie's are echoed throughout the rest of the century. Insensitivity, says one character, "n'annonce que de la stupidité ou quelque chose au-dessus de notre nature. Personne ne voudrait être stupide; qui osera prétendre à être presque Dieu? Nous sommes hommes; ne veuillons être rien de plus."[44]

For Julie, inner contentment is finally stifling. Her thoughts, quoted above, lead her to the confession that she is "trop heureuse; le bonheur m'ennuie" (p. 528). After becoming a saint, which is also a way to fight the human condition, there is nothing more to do on earth. Man carries with him everywhere the seeds of his own unhappiness. But sentimental heroes and heroines after Julie are not generally brave enough or perceptive enough to make this statement in a serious way. Their stories always center on their struggle with the outer forces of disorder, which play an essential role by giving the heroes the opportunity to shine. The pain inflicted by the cruel usually touches the victim on a superficial level.

The sentimental hero is unassertive; he does not define his own character so much as he lets it be defined for him. All the paeans to individual sensibility notwithstanding, there really is nothing individual in his personality. He follows a predetermined path of behavior; the same phrases, the same situations are encountered again and again in these novels. Individuality is not prized at all,[45] and, in fact, must be suppressed in favor of social stability. All believed, or wished to believe, as Showalter puts it, that "copious displays of sentimentality would somehow reconcile man and society."[46]

Emotion is a big pool where Love especially, but also Friend-

ship, Generosity, Humility, Religion (even Civic Duty!), in short, all the elements of Virtue are found. Differences are dissolved in this pool. The sentimental hero can barely wait to shed his own personality and merge his being with that of his loved one and, by extension, that of all lovers, and ultimately, with God. Even as far back as 1749, Bastide's hero Flanval, who felt at first some scruples about marrying Mlle de Prangé (since he had been the lover of Mme de Prangé), decided at last that he had nothing to worry about: "le Ciel ne pouvait avoir fait une seule loi qui pût rendre un honnête homme malheureux."[47] Gradually, this feeling of the participation of the self in the designs of Providence becomes total. It is then a question of the abdication of the self. Our intellectual faculties, which normally define the self and distinguish between it and the outside world through the intermediary of our five senses, learn through love to "se passer du commerce des sens, et à se détacher de tout ce qu'il y a de terrestre autour d'elles."[48] Love, in fact, is a little like dying. "Perdre son amante, c'est mourir," remarks Mornet, ". . . La retrouver, c'est mourir encore."[49] Love has been called an apprenticeship to death, in that it seeks a continuity of being of which death is the ultimate expression.[50]

The sentimental hero, however, sees love as a haven against the ugly world of desire. More than one heroine rebukes her suitor for having shown signs of desire with a statement such as "je ne crois pas votre coeur complice de vos sens."[51] It is not surprising that the libertine "galant" joins the trend towards sentimentalism. As we have seen in the case of Flanval, a feeling of humiliation in the face of desire weighed upon him. He jealously guarded his sense of dignity, which, he felt, desire somehow eroded.[52] But, if sexuality calls into question the

feeling of self, love, which substitutes a vision of continuity between beings, seems to do away with this problem. It requires a willingness to believe, a small leap of faith, which can easily be made by the "galant," whose essentially passive nature lends itself to all the changing moods and opinions of the society around him.

The libertine "cynique" cannot make this leap of faith; he cannot relinquish the power he exerts over others, by which he measures his self-integrity. Who can say positively that the effect of love will be to enhance rather than to destroy the self? Love is clearly a loss of control over one's own emotions; it is the humiliation of self. To glorify it , to make it seem the magic answer to one's problems, is the last resort of the weak. The heroine of a strange book, Durosoi's Clairval philosophe, who prides herself on being a sensitive soul, but also on having principles founded upon modern philosophy, has defined the lack of power of the individual as the major source of his unhappiness. Like the sentimental heroine, she seeks happiness in love, yet, like the "cynique," it is not really communion with the other, a new sense of self that she wants, but the affirmation of her personal power in choosing to love, in creating her own meaning in the universe: "L'âme, toujours occupé de rendre le moins malheureux qu'elle peut le prisonnier qu'elle anime, le dédommage des maux accidentels qui l'assiègent, en lui offrant des biens qu'il ne peut tenir que d'elle. Le jeune coeur qui ne se sent maître de rien dans l'univers, que de se donner, et d'agréer un autre lui-même, se livre avec ardeur à cet unique moyen d'exercer la liberté qui lui est disputée pour le reste."[53]

But depending on love is a very uncertain method for Clairval. A person can no more stop himself from loving, she admits, than an arrow

can stop itself in mid-air (I, 65). She often chooses lovers unworthy of her; others are torn from her by unavoidable separations or death. She sometimes has no one at all to love, becoming, in that case, a prey to a "vide affreux" (II, 5) and an overabundance of sensibility, which, for lack of an object to adore, consumes her: "jusqu'à mes soupirs étouffés avaient plus de force que les cris de la volupté n'en ont pour les autres" (II, 26). She can find no happiness with her husband, a cruel monster worse than Castelli.[54] After causing her much misery, he finally dies, and the heroine, forsaken by her only daughter, retires to the countryside. She refuses to marry again, but, finding a perfect lover, she lives happily ever after with only her new idol and the innocent and virtuous peasants of the neighborhood for companionship.

The problem with Clairval's solution, as an acute observer such as the "cynique" clearly sees, is that one cannot choose just when or whom to love. Clairval, as much as the libertine "galant" or the sentimental hero that he turns into, lets herself depend on forces that are not within her control. According to the sentimentalists, to fight those forces is to fight the human condition: "Qui osera prétendre à être presque Dieu?"[55] The "cynique" must dare because it is unbearable for him to submit to the natural order, in which man seems to count for so little. According to one critic, the lesson to de drawn from the experience of the libertine "galant" Faublas, but which might be the same for Clairval, is that "la nature en elle-même n'est pas un principe dynamique de conduite et d'unité pour l'individu."[56]

In the "cynique's" eyes, the converted libertine hero has been

duped. By giving in to the illusion of love, he is evading the problem of self-identity as much as ever, and in spite of his illusions, he has not solved the problem of desire, which is the real threat to the self. As we have seen, the sentimentalist is often haunted by desire, which colors many of his outbursts of sensibility, so much so that, at times, the tone of the sentimental novel is brought quite close to that of the libertine novel. The deluge of tears and emotion that characterizes the sentimental novel has been described as "une impudeur près de laquelle la licence n'était que de la réserve."[57]

One virtuous hero, who combines the "beauté d'Adonis et la force d'Hercule" and who spends hours with his beautiful Rose in rapturous contemplation of their deep sensibility, ironically sermonizes on the dishonesty of coquetry, comparing it unfavorably with the outright sexual enjoyment of the "fille débauchée:" "il y a une sorte de bonne foi dans ce honteux commerce; mais l'avide coquette veut tout et ne donne rien, c'est l'avarice sordide de l'amour."[58] Most virtuous heroines, however, are interesting to their adorers at least as much for their tantalizing and seductive beauty as for their moral qualities. It has been remarked that "it does not take much effort to transform the detailed analysis of a Crébillon fils or the sentimental analysis of countless authors into an analysis of sexual behavior."[59]

The "cynique" tries to be more honest with himself. The sentimentalist's challenge to the libertine is to reform or to be counted as a deformed monster. The libertine answers with his own personal philosophy that is shaped by the same influences we have seen at work on his adversaries, especially those of the "philosophes." In fact,

the sentimentalist's view of man in relationship to nature has much in common with that of the "cynique." Both felt the individual to be the product of natural forces that form his particular personality and both saw as inevitable each person's single-minded pursuit of physical and mental well-being, whatever that might entail. But, while the sentimentalist assumed, without further ado, that one's well-being would naturally coincide with the practice of virtue, the "cynique" identified himself more closely with the ideas of the materialist thinkers of the day, for which he would have had to look no further than books like Thérèse philosophe. The modern philosophers had shown him that desire is the voice of nature. But, although the "cynique" adopts an unromantic view of the sexual instinct and sees, as did Thérèse, the diversity, the constant changes to which all matter is subject, as well as the link between the vigorous forces of the intellect and those of the senses, he is not at ease with his new knowledge.

In this age of enlightenment,[60] man may have been able to explain many secrets in such areas as astronomy, economics, justice, law, and to impose order where, before, chaos seemed to reign, but he has not been able to explain his own nature. The "cynique" felt irritated by the limits set upon his power and insulted by the state of disorder and ignorance in which he saw himself. While Thérèse saw the merging, or interaction, of instinct and reason as part of nature's plan to lead man to happiness, hailing the desire to know as the way in which he could participate in the burgeoning forces of nature, the "cynique," failing to grasp or to accept the essential idea of the balance of these forces, agreed with the sentimentalist in viewing passion as "funeste." Desire, far from being a "garant de la vérité,"[61] is, in fact, the enemy of the self. Thérèse had particularly stressed

the machine-like reactions of the body and the illusory nature of free will. We do not desire or stop desiring at will, nor do we have the power to decide when to transform desire into love, which, even if we admit its existence, still represents control of the self by outside forces. The "cynique" chooses, therefore, to use the power of his intellect to work, not with, but against desire, to conquer this last unexplained mystery of the natural world.

Crébillon's Versac, by becoming master of the erotic moment, had already pitted his rational powers against the forces of desire. The aristocratic spirit, which feeds on the idea of the mystique of the nobility, is alone reason to oppose any attempt to reduce man to a machine, or to accept theories that make the nobleman indistinguishable from others. This spirit continues to be inseparable from eighteenth-century libertinism. Since Versac's time, however, libertinism has changed in another way. It is now generally pictured as a serious matter, with far deeper consequences for its victims.

Versac felt confidence in his ability to resist the power of desire. In addition, he had been sure of the existence of order in the universe itself. This made him condemn his own actions as wrong in the name of traditional morality, but, on the other hand, it was, in a sense, a reassuring thought, enabling him to regard his libertinism as an expedient solution to practical problems without worrying about larger issues. In the end, however, Versac's own worldliness coupled with the influence of popularized philosophical ideas weakened and all but destroyed this occasionally disagreeable but very convenient outlook. The libertine's world was no longer a privileged spot in the universe, a niche where somehow it was possible to suspend the ordinary

standards of morality. Now, the libertine is no longer sure if he can trust himself, if he can successfully confront his own passions, which he sees as the determining factors behind all actions. He begins to believe that if, according to Christian theology, man is the servant of God, he is, under materialistic determinsim, the slave of nature.

The libertine's main task is to disprove this frightening idea by having some effect, as an individual, on the world around him. The sentimental hero, as we have seen, not only was at one with himself, but also almost always wished to live in accordance with society's rules, even though that society generally misunderstood and opposed his sensitive nature. His fear of disorder and of the cruelty that can result from giving too much freedom to individual passions, even his own, led him to accept "le jugement du public, qui pour être des préjugés, n'en sont pas moins respectables."[62] The libertine, however, wages a double battle. He has, first of all, no deep-seated respect for worldly opinion, and, more and more, considers any form of society to be a gathering of the weak, who seek to protect themselves from the natural forces of disorder. This, of course, is the opinion of most of Sade's heroes. But the seeds of such an attitude exist in Versac's contempt for the foolish fops and coquettes that make up his society, and begin to develop even before Laclos' Valmont, as we shall see in examining Crébillon's libertine Chester, the hero of Les Heureux Orphelins (1754).

We can also see in Chester the other, inner struggle of the libertine who begins to feel the need to take a stand against nature itself, as it makes its power felt within each individual, by opposing

the internal disorder of the passions. The libertine is pulled in two directions. Chester would like to shatter the artificial security of individuals who place all their faith in the social order and yet, he would not want to destroy that order itself, even if he were powerful enough to do so. He does not want to become hismelf a victim of the forces that would then be released. Besides, Chester is not yet so different from Versac and Clitandre as to despise the glory and admiration enjoyed by a masterful libertine in the aristocratic society to which he belongs. His goal is to create a modified disorder, to replace nature, to lock it out of his world, where he alone creates and destroys other beings, while remaining emotionally above the fray. Chester writes to his friend and mentor:

> Si tous les hommes pouvaient savoir comme nous, mon cher Duc, à quel point une véritable passion les soumet et les avilit! de combien de choses qui, lorsqu'ils pensent comme nous, ne dépendent que d'eux, elle les fait dépendre, il n'y en a pas qui ne préférât au bonheur toujours assez douteux [de] régner sur un coeur, par le sentiment, le plaisir singulier et flatteur, de régler une âme comme on le veut, de ne la déterminer que par ses ordres, d'y faire naître tour à tour les mouvements les plus opposés; et du sein de son indifférence, de la faire mouvoir comme une machine dont on conduit les ressorts, et à laquelle on ordonne à son gré, le repos ou le mouvement.[63]

* * *

As we have previously noted, it is rare to find in the novel before Laclos the "cynique's" self-portrait. Chester is an exception. Les Heureux Orphelins, written in 1754, is an unfinished and somewhat disjointed novel, the first part of which is a translation, done with

"considerable fidelity," of Mrs. Heywood's Fortunate Foundlings.[64] Fortunately for us, Crébillon soon abandons this story, which centers on the adventures of Lucie, who, with her brother Edouard, has been adopted and raised by the generous Rutland. But Rutland falls in love with Lucie and, losing control of his emotions one day, he attempts to use force with her. He immediately regrets this lapse, but Lucie, her virtue alarmed, runs away and finds a position as a shopgirl, which she is soon forced to leave because of an unpleasant encounter with an impudent fop. She leaves London for Bristol, where she meets the Duchess of Suffolk, whose service she enters. The second part of the novel is the Duchess' account of her seduction by Chester, who turns out to be the same young man that had annoyed Lucie. The last two sections go back over the same events recounted by Mme de Suffolk, but this time it is Chester's version, as told to his friend in France in letters that had been intercepted. The Duchess, it is discovered, had been only one of three victims chosen by Chester to be undone simultaneously.[65] The novel ends abruptly, before Chester can tell us how he succeeded in conquering the last victim, although it is clear that her defeat in inevitable. We are never sure of the fate of Mme de Suffolk or of Lucie, whom we have by this time totally forgotten.

Chester is unusual because he is a libertine hero who is permitted to remain unrepentant and unpunished for his base deeds. The moral issue is present, but it is, for the most part, unobtrusive.[66] Crébillon is more interested in explaining to us the workings of Chester's mind; the successive views we get ot him--first in Lucie's eyes, the outsider's view of a fop who could be any ordinary "galant," then as he is seen by the virtuous victim, a respectable suitor until he proves

to be a scoundrel, and finally as he sees himself, a "philosophe" engaged in the pursuit of knowledge--amount to a clever unfolding of his character and manage to convey something of the many-sided complexity of the events as they might take place in real life.

Chester, as he reveals himself to us, enjoys the power and prestige which have resulted from his carefully executed series of social manoeuvres. But, for him libertinism also has the larger goal of enabling him to believe in himself, since he feels he can believe in nothing else. The world may see in him a dissolute man, but libertinism for Chester is anything but pure debauchery. "Dissolute" comes from the same root as "to dissolve." A dissolute life would be the breaking up, the disintegration of the sense of self, which is so essential to Chester; it would be yielding to the nihilism which characterizes earlier "galants" and the "filles du monde," who had many "philosophical" thoughts but no real convictions or sense of dignity. "Tout agréable, tout attrayant que paraisse notre état," says Margot "la ravaudeuse," "il n'en est ni de plus humiliant, ni de plus cruel."[67]

On the contrary, Chester is not even content, as was Versac, to rely on the general rule that knowledge is power. Versac and certainly Clitandre and the Duc de Clerval planned as they went along, being confident that their insights into human behavior and their ability to keep their true character unknown would see them through any situation. Chester, however, leaves nothing to chance. He decides he must have a Master Plan immediately upon his return to London from Paris, where he had been educated: "Je médite de grandes choses. Je veux que toute l'Angleterre change de face entre mes mains, et être enfin pour elle un autre Henri VIII" (II, 9).

When he decides to seduce the three women, Buttington, a Pranzi-type admirer of his, tries to dissuade him by assuring him that "de mémoire d'homme on n'avait en Angleterre imaginé rien de pareil à ce qu'[il] voulai[t]tenter" (II, 10). But, of course, his project was chosen specifically for its difficulty. It is stressed that Mme de Suffolk is the most beautiful and the most virtuous woman in London, that Mme de Rindsey, the prude, is known to be insensible to love, and that Mme de Pembroock, the coquette, is more easily flirted with than conquered.

The difficulty is enhanced by Chester's need to disguise himself totally, to hide what he is as carefully as Versac had to do. But, with Chester, there are two important differences. First, the problem of the divided inner self--the "moral" self and the "thinking" self--is beginning to be resolved. The need to present a false appearance can no longer be condemned from the standpoint of tradiitonal morality, since the libertine has rejected it and is in the process of creating a new morality. The libertine is learning to rely only on himself for rules of conduct. The inner, moral self is now the supreme authority, and can counsel the social self to take just those steps that before it had really opposed in the name of an outside authority. It is a reversal of the moral order, but a conscious one. The sentimental hero had also put self-gratification before obedience to God, yet he never admitted, perhaps never realized, it. But for the "cynique," to search for one's pleasure in obedience is, as we have seen, to cooperate in the annihilation of the self; to be humble, kind, and good is to efface oneself and disappear as an effective force. In any case, moral goodness, always associated in the eighteenth century with order, both personal and social, is beginning to be seen

as a myth by the "cynique." Desire and other passions, the motivating forces behind all human action, are reckless, not ordered drives.

There is another change in Chester, stemming from the first. Versac created the image of the dangerous libertine fop. Although he carefully hid the serious side of his nature, he openly concerned himself with the conquest of the sophisticated women of his society, whom he just as openly despised. Chester, however, assumes a modest and serious demeanor, speaking respectfully of women and flowing with "sentiment" and "discrétion" (II, 9). The desire to appear honest in order to triumph over virtue is not, of course, a new idea. There are many instances of it, both before and after the example of Chester. Flanval pretends to reform in order to seduce a virtuous woman, and many cruel libertines of the sentimental novel do the same, but these libertines do not specifically seek out opportunities to confront virtue and often lose patience with the need to disguise themselves.[68]

Although Chester's disguise is also dictated by circumstances (in this case, the English national character--or as Chester says, their particular "fatuité générale" [II, 9], which is diametrically opposed to that of the French), he purposely singles out Mme de Suffolk, who is far more important than the other two women, and, secure in the knowledge of the rightness of his libertine philosophy, he especially enjoys the duplicity that marks his conduct towards her and the spectacle of her dying virtue. The libertine "cynique" after Chester is especially attracted to goodness, as though by a powerful force, but in order to destroy it. The libertine diabolically imitates virtue and gains the confidence of the intended victim before striking.

With Chester, the tacit agreement that once prevailed between the "cynique" and the women he seduced no longer exists. A desire to crush the opponent, formulated even before knowing her, replaces it.

Chester's vision of life is one of continuous vengeance, and he leaves to his intelligence and to his dispassionate nature, which ensures his superiority over others, the task of carrying it out; what appears to the emotional Mme de Suffolk to be a triumph of dissimulation on her part, is no less than an open acknowledgement of love to the clear-sighted Chester: "rien de ce qui se passait dans son âme, quelque secrètement qu'il s'y passât, ne m'était pourtant échappé" (II, 12). Yet, the cruelty of Chester, it must be stressed, is only a first step towards that of later "cyniques." Although he views himself as a "philosophe," at times, his philosophy seems to be no deeper than that of Versac, whose main concern was his "gloire," and who simply wanted to carve out a secure place for himself in society. At other times, even Chester's cynicism seems to waiver. In spite of his misanthropy, for example, he can still speak of "les vraiment bons Anglais" (II, 8) who scorn him (the implication being that they are right to do so), and, in spite of his desire to destroy nature's arbitrary rule and replace it with his own, he can still wonder if nature is not, after all, "toujours plus sage que nous," if it is not able to teach man to be happy by showing him how to avoid making "un objet de passion, de ce que la nature . . . a voulu sans doute qui ne fût qu'un plaisir" (II, 18).

At the same time, it is true that Chester, unlike Versac, who never saw beyond his little world, is often troubled by the feeling of his own littleness in the scheme of things. He compares the seriousness of

purpose and dignity of the libertine to those same qualities as seen in the diplomat and the great statesman so often that he seems to be reassuring himself.[69] He worries also whether he has been deceiving himself about the effectiveness of his own ability to reason. A libertine should be modest, he believes, for "il y a bien loin encore des lumières que les hommes croient avoir acquises à la véritable philosophe [sic]: et je ne sais si ce ne serait pas penser trop bien d'eux, que de croire qu'ils puissent jamais y parvenir" (II, 17). He even fears that reason cannot correct nature, that it is really powerless; it sharpens our ability to judge our own weaknesses, but it is unable to do anything about them, thus making us even more miserable than we were when we lived in ignorance. What have these "funestes lumières" and "le plaisir de la vengeance" done for us, he asks his friend: "en avons-nous moins été tous deux emportés par nos désirs, et moins dupes et martyres de notre vanité? . . . nous n'avons donc pas été raisonnables, et sûrement, nous n'avons pas été heureux" (II, 43). Perhaps, although he does not seriously entertain such a thought, there is even such a thing as love. "Nous nous croyons philosophes", but it might well be in vain that we seek to fit to this passion "une philosophie dont elle n'est peut-être pas susceptible" (II, 43).

Chester shares such doubts as these with later "cyniques," but his discontent is mild when compared to the anger and frustration of the Marquise de Merteuil, for example, who cannot even formulate them without being outraged at what she sees as nature's indifference, perhaps even its hostility, towards man. Chester represents a link between Versac and Merteuil in that he tends to blame nature, with its contradictory decrees concerning man, and not society alone, for the dissatisfaction

we feel within ourselves.[70] We want knowledge, but are given insufficient powers of reason. We want to be happy, but are refused not only the reality of happiness, but, because of our "funestes lumières," even the illusion of it.

But Chester is able to control his anger, and this moderation prevents him from turning into the monster that Merteuil is. He occasionally feels pity for Mme de Suffolk, whose honesty stops him from being "aussi barbare que notre indifférence et notre vanité voudraient que nous le fussions" (II, 56), although such feelings do not stop him from envisioning this love affair, as he would any other, as an opportunity to humiliate and destroy her. Chester also manages to keep a certain sense of humor, even at his own expense, something that would be impossible for later libertines. In short, Chester is able to keep a certain distance between himself and his victims, yet without relinquishing all his ties to humanity. The difficulty of conquering Mme de Suffolk's virtue often amuses, rather than insults him: "mes désirs, affaiblis par la dignité de son maintien étaient plutôt pour moi, un amusement, qu'un supplice" (II, 12).

Such a dispassionate state of mind is just what the protagonists of Laclos and Sade aspire to. Yet, paradoxically, the more important the goal becomes, the less attainable it is. Equanimity gives way to rage. The angry and insulted Merteuil tries to replace her heart with her head, and succeeds only in creating a new passion, more destructive than love. She and her fellow conspirator seek in the refinement of cruelty a means to defeat the humiliating voice of nature by refusing to become a slave to their own sexuality. They triumph over nature by exploiting others, the way it does (as they see it) to all. With Merteuil, we are at the outer limits of human power, one step behind the would-be god-heroes of Sade.

Notes to Chapter III:

[1] According to Daniel Mornet's bibliography in his edition of Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse (Paris: Hachette, 1925), there were 18 new works in the sentimental novel category from 1741 to 1760, but there were so many new ones from 1761 to 1780 (118 in all) that several different types are distinguished: for example, "romans sentimentaux," "romans d'intrigue sentimentaux," "romans moralisants et sentimentaux, prétendus traduits ou imités de l'anglais . . .," etc. See I, 354-55, 361-63, 365-66, respectively.

[2] [Jean-François de Bastide], Les confessions d'un fat (n.p.: n.p., 1749), I, 53-54.

[3] Mornet, I, 256.

[4] [Michel Marescot] La Brochure à la mode (London and Paris: Duchesne, 1755), p. 117. The following quotation, identified in the text, is from this edition.

[5] Charles Pinot Duclos, Les Confessions du comte de ***, in Romanciers du XVIII[e] siècle, introd. René Etiemble (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), II, 247. The following quotations, identified in the text, are from this edition.

[6] [Louis Domairon], Le Libertin devenu vertueux, ou mémoires du comte D*** (London and Liège: F.J. Dosoer, 1777), I, 27. The following quotation, identified in the text, is from this edition.

[7] Mlle Motte, Célide, ou l'histoire de la marquise de Bléville, quoted in L'Année Littéraire (1775; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1966), XXII, 505.

[8] Mlle Motte, Lettres du marquis de Sézannes au comte de Saint-Lis [1777], quoted in Mornet, I, 277-78.

[9] Mlle de Saint-Léger, dame de Colleville, Lettres du chevalier de Saint-Alme et de Mademoiselle de Melcourt [1781], quoted in Mornet, I, 277.

[10] Joseph-Marie Loaisel de Tréogate, Dolbreuse ou l'homme du siècle (Amsterdam and Paris: Bélin, 1783), I, 5.

[11] Mornet, I, 255.

[12] Jean Tesson de Laguerie, Les Amours de Lucile et de Doligny, ou lettres de deux amants (Paris: Le Jay, 1769), I, 2. The following quotation, identified in the text, is from this edition.

[13] Loaisel de Tréogate, I, 13. The following quotation is identified in the text.

[14] Examples showing this need for order as the most basic characteristic of the sentimental hero can be taken from many novels. The critic of L'Année Littéraire, for example, tells us that virtue, as it is seen in l'abbé Gérard's Le Comte de Valmont, ou les égarements de la raison, "en entretenant l'ordre dans nos pensées, nos sentiments, et nos actions, nous prouve le bien inestimable d'être toujours d'accord avec

nous-mêmes . . ." (1774; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1966), XXI, 233. Loaisel de Tréogate's Dolbreuse says: "je sentis que l'amour de l'ordre, était la source du contentement," (II,83). Rousseau's Julie, whom we shall examine later, shares the need for order with other sentimental heroes. At the moment of sudden insight that takes place in the church during her marriage, she is "pénétrée d'un vif sentiment du danger dont j'étais délivrée, et de l'état d'honneur et de surêté où je me sentais rétablie," Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p. 262.

[15] Nicolas Germain Léonard, Oeuvres diverses de Mr. Léonard (Liège: F.J. Desoer, 1777), p. 152.

[16] Loaisel de Tréogate, I, 135. The following quotations, identified in the text, are from this edition.

[17] [André-Guillaume Contant d'Orville], Pauline, or the Victim of the Heart (London: Minerva Press, 1794). No translator is given for the English edition of this novel, which was first published in 1766 as Le Mariage du siècle. All quotations, identified in the text, are from this English edition.

[18] Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, édition définitive, IV (Paris: Au cercle du livre précieux, 1966), 205. The following quote, identified in the text, is from this edition.

[19] L'Histoire de Mme de Montglas, ou consolation pour les religieuses qui le sont malgré elles, attributed to De Carné. This quotation and the following one (identified in the text) are from the review in L'Année Littéraire (Amsterdam and Paris: Lambert, 1755), VII, 21.

[20] Mornet, I, 366-67.

[21] Le Mariage, par M. C***, reviewed in L'Année Littéraire (1769; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1966), XVI, 512-14.

[22] François-Thomas-Marie de Baculard d'Arnaud, Les Epreuves du sentiment (Paris: Moutard, 1781), V, 14 and V,33-34, respectively.

[23] [Barthélemi Imbert], Les Egarements de l'amour, ou lettres de Fanéli et de Milfort (Amsterdam: n.p., 1776), I,121. The following quotation, identified in the text, is from this edition.

[24] This is the comment of the critic of L'Année Littéraire in his review of Les Mémoires du comte de Baneston, écrits par le chevalier de de Forceville (anon.) (Amsterdam and Paris: Lambert, 1755), III, 230.

[25] Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, L'Histoire de M.le Marquis de Cressy (Amsterdam and Paris: Humblot, 1772).

[26] [Jean-Auguste Julien, dit Desboulmiers], Rose, ou les effets de la haine, de l'amour et de l'amitié, 2 vols. (Paris: Robin, 1765).

[27] This is the description of the hideaway of the old libertine, Dartagnac, in La Champenoise, ou mémoires de Mme la Marquise de ***, écrits par elle-même (anon), given in L'Année Littéraire (Amsterdam and Paris: Lambert, 1758), VIII, 241.

[28] Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, La Nouvelle Clarice, histoire véritable, 2 vols. (Lyon: Pierre Bruyset Ponthus, 1775).

[29] Thomas Carlyle, The French Revolution, a History (New York: The Modern Library, 1934), p. 25. The following quotation, identified in the text, is from this edition.

[30] See especially Mornet, I, 237-302, who examines this success and traces the influence of La Nouvelle Héloïse on the eighteenth-century novel. Loaisel de Tréogate, in his novel Dolbreuse, mentions many times his hero's debt to Rousseau, and dedicates seven pages to the description of a pilgrimmage made to his tomb undertaken by the hero and his wife (II, 132-38). It is recognized, though, that Rousseau's work was as much the result of an already existing taste for "les délices du sentiment" as it was the inspiration of future works. See Mornet, I, 49-58 on "le roman sentimental et passionné" before Rousseau, and also Georges May, Le Dilemme du roman au XVIII^{e} siècle (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963).

[31] Mornet, I, 271.

[32] Servais Etienne, Le Genre romanesque en France depuis l'apparition de la Nouvelle Héloïse jusqu'aux approches de la Révolution (Paris: Armand Colin, 1922), p. 270.

[33] Frederick Charles Green, French Novelists, Manners and Ideas from the Renaissance to the Revolution (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1928), p. 206.

[34] Peter Brooks, The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 155.

[35] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse (Paris: Garnier- Flammarion, 1967), p. 524. All quotations, identified in the text, are from this edition.

[36] Julie's aim in planning this marriage seems to be to create, for all three, a privileged state of being, which "confondrait tellement nos intérêts" (p. 526) that they would no longer be said to exist as separate beings, but there is also something cruel in the way that Julie seeks to take over the lives of her cousin and her former lover. She is, to a certain extent, using her cousin as a kind of pawn. Claire would serve as a substitute Julie, creating an indissoluble link between the two lovers that would not have been possible otherwise: "N'est-ce pas Julie que je vous donne?" she asks, adding that this union is the only way "de nous réunir sans danger" (p. 510). There is even the hint of a much more mundane concern; Claire's presence as Saint-Preux' wife would have been a constant safeguard against succumbing to temptation, which, Julie

admits, still threatened her virtue (p. 564).

[37] Léonard, p. 246.

[38] Léonard, p. 251. See also Paul Van Tieghem, "Les Droits de l'amour et l'union libre dans le roman français et allemand (1760-1790)," Neophilologus 12 (1927), 96-103.

[39] The only exception I found to this is in [Barnabé Farmian Durosoi], Clairval philosophe, ou la force des passions (La Haie: n.p., 1765), a novel which is a constant reminder of how close the libertine and the sentimental novel really are. Both accept as moral law the judgment of the individual, which can only be based on the evidence of the five senses. Clairval claims to be an "âme sensible" but would be considered far too bold by most others in this category. She declares that love (which for her is suspiciously close to lust) has nothing to do with conjugal faith: "cette union qu'on nomme sacré, est un acte attentatoire à la liberté, le premier bien de l'homme" (I, 256). Accordingly, the promise of marital fidelity, especially when given under constraint, is "nulle de toute nullité" (I, 47).

[40] [Imbert], II, 147. The following quotation, identified in the text, is from this edition.

[41] Henri Coulet, Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution, I (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), I, 384.

[42] Mornet, I, 281.

[43] Rousseau, p. 528. Following quotation is identified in the text.

[44] Les Effets des passions, ou mémoires de M de Floricourt (anon.), quoted in L'Année Littéraire (1768; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1966), XV, 407.

[45] English Showalter, Jr., The Evolution of the French Novel, 1641 to 1782 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 173 gives as the reason for the lack of originality in the eighteenth-century novel a purely esthetic consideration: imitation is prized above originality because of the lingering classical ideas that there is an ideal formula for each literary genre and that creation is simply a matter of applying the rules.

[46] Showalter, p. 335.

[47] [Bastide], II, 124.

[48] Loaisel de Tréogate, I, 85.

[49] Mornet, I, 277. See the quotations given on p. 97 above, illustrating this.

[50] Georges Bataille, L'Erotisme (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1957), p. 31.

[51] Laguerie, I, 177.

[52] Bataille remarks that "le passage de l'état normal à celui de désir érotique suppose en nous la dissolution relative de l'être constitué dan l'ordre discontinu" (i.e., the everyday world, beyond which we cannot see), p. 24.

[53] [Durosoi], II, 139-40. The following quotations, identified in the text, are drawn from the same edition.

[54] One of his blackest deeds is to call Clairval to him when he believes he is dying to beg for her care and help. She arrives and stays with him until he is well. Upon recovering, M de Clairval suddenly disappears with his wife's jewels, leaving her alone, about to give birth, far from home, with no money. She is turned out of the inn to have her baby in the woods. Unassisted and almost starved to death, she survives, but the baby dies. She forgives her husband because "l'homme [ne peut pas] vaincre le pouvoir des mouvements innés qui le dominent" (I, 8).

[55] See above, note 44.

[56] Coulet, I, 452.

[57] Jean Giraudoux, "Choderlos de Laclos," in Littérature (1941; rpt. Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 52.

[58] [Desboulmiers], I, 12 and I, 22, respectively.

[59] Barry Ivker, "Towards a Definition of Libertinism in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction," in Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century Vol, 73 (Geneva: Institut et musée Voltaire, Les Délices, 1970), p. 228.

[60] Roland Mortier, Clartés et ombres du siècle des lumières (Geneva: Droz, 1969), p. 114, points out that the men of this century clearly saw their age this way and deliberately adopted such epithets as "siècle philosophique" and "siècle des lumières."

[61] Aram Vartanian, "Erotisme et Philosophie chez Diderot," Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises. Cahiers, No. 13 (1961), p. 376.

[62] [Desboulmiers], I, 39.

[63] Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, Oeuvres complètes (1777; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), II, 16. All quotations from Les Heureux Orphelins are identified in the text and refer to this edition.

[64] Clifton Cherpack, An Essay on Crébillon fils (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1962), p. 93.

[65] The intricate plans of Chester remind the reader of the care-

fully spun webs of Laclos' heroes. This particular one to seduce three women at the same time resembles that of the dangerous libertine Prévan, who nevertheless falls victim to the even more dangerous Merteuil.

66 We know that Chester is wrong because he sometimes voices doubts about his beliefs and admits that he is not truly happy, and, for all the eighteenth century, Crébillon included, unhappiness is a sign of vice and happiness a sign of virtue. But, it also seems, at times, that Crébillon is almost aftaid that his disapproval of Chester's theories will not be recognized. Then the moralist in him (the Crébillon of the Lettres de la Duchesse de ... au Duc de ...) takes over. At one point (II, 18), Crébillon seems to usurp Chester's place as narrator. It is hard to understand otherwise how a man who declares that "il y a des voluptés délicates, des plaisirs fins, qui ne sont pas pour tout le monde, et que je ne suis pas surpris qu'un homme qui . . . . ne saurait s'élever au-dessus de ses sens, ne conçoive pas" (II, 20), could also claim that his aim in writing is to be useful to others by showing them "les minuties de leurs erreurs" (II, 18).

67 Jean-Louis Fougeret de Monbron, Margot la ravaudeuse (Paris: Pauvert, 1958), p. 36.

68 One example, after Chester, but almost a decade before Valmont, concerns the libertine Lord Derby, who, trying to seduce the heroine of Les Mémoires de Mademoiselle de Sternheim, publiés par M. Wieland [1773], seizes the moment in which she is visiting a poor family that she has saved from misery, to distribute alms to the poor in order to impress her with his virtue. Reviewed in L'Année Littéraire (1773; rpt.Geneva: Slatkine, 1966), XX, 65-69.

69 Chester is, in his outlook, very much like the next (and last) libertine of Crébillon fils, Alcibiade of Les Lettres athéniennes, who actually uses his mastery in eroticism to attain great political power.

70 According to Cherpack, p. 175, the Lettres athéniennes and Les Heureux Orphelins "are the novels in which the 'mythology' of intelligence and eroticism is brought out in ways most strikingly reminiscent of Les Liaisons dangereuses."

Chapter IV: Laclos: The Intellectual rebellion

It has been said that Les Liaisons dangereuses is a godless novel.[1] This is perhaps the reason that the image of cruelty presented in it is so unsettling. The protagonists are not possessed by demons, but seem to choose the path of cruelty rationally. They are not involved in the metaphysical struggle of challenging God's power in the universe; they simply do not acknowledge it, at least within their corner of the world, which is all they are consciously concerned with. It is true that they are painfully aware of certain natural limits to their powers. Nature humiliates them by creating for them a sexual drive that threatens to enslave their will. But nature is felt to be more of an ensemble of biological factors that all men share as members of a species rather than the agent or symbol of a deity whose will stands against that of the individual. Sade's heroes will move back and forth between these two views, but the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont are not fully conscious of the metaphysical aspect of their struggle and so are basically closer, on this point, to Crébillon's Versac than to Sade's libertines.

The atheism of Valmont, for example, is "comfortable."[2] He sometimes supposes the existence of a God, but more to gloat over the inability of "des secours étrangers" to change Mme de Tourvel's fate,[3] or to mock religious practices, as when he maliciously asks the poor people he has just helped to "prier Dieu pour le succès de mes projets" (XXI, 45) than to challenge God's power directly. He tries to make a dupe of God, rather than to set himself up as His antagonist.[4] He "uses" God--in the shape of le père Anselme--to gain entry to Mme de

Tourvel's home in much the same way that he uses Danceny to get the key to Cécile's room. His victory in both cases is all the more "piquant" for having had someone to fool.

It is, therefore, misleading to label Laclos' heroes satanic, even though there are elements of satanism in their struggle and even though it is clear that within their own world, they mean to be the only deities. In this, they are very similar to any of the eighteenth-century seducers we have looked at, whether "galant" or "cynique." Marcel Ruff, who disagrees, has stated that the eighteenth century is marked by the double and closely linked development of satanism and illuminism, both arising from "la prise de conscience du mal:" "le vertige du mal est partout," he believes, invading also the realm of eroticism.[5] He recalls Cazotte's devil in Le Diable amoureux, who takes the shape of the beautiful Biondetta in order to entrap the hero Alvare (p. 61). But Cazotte's story is an exception, even for himself.[6] His few other productions, such as La Patte du chat (1741), are more typical examples of the lighthearted, fairy-tale quality that the French preferred in their tales of the unreal. As for human seducers, Faublas, for example, who also indulges in disguises at times, the tone is more often burlesque than satanic.

Even the more serious seducers of the eighteenth century fail to evoke the image of Satan. Although Ruff notes that in the second half of the century, "la vogue du gothique se répand" (p. 37), it would seem that, if French writers imitated this style at all, it was in the sentimental novel, with its almost morbid taste for suffering, rather than in the portrayal of the libertine "cynique." But even the cruel monster of the sentimental novel, with his uncontrollable fits of

passion and evil ways, is completely free of satanic influences. As we have seen, his cruelty usually is traceable to a biological cause. If he is sullied by unspeakable crimes, this is not the mark of a man doomed by supernatural forces, but the result of some internal physical disorder. In the case of the worldly-minded "cynique's" tale, the air of mystery and enchantment found in the Gothic novel is totally absent. The "cynique" is concerned only with human nature. Chester, in Les Heureux Orphelins, was already sure of the rightness of his philosophical conclusions on this subject and, with Laclos' heroes, the "cynique," as we have just noted, has come to be comfortable with the idea of his cruelty. It is, in fact, precisely this comfort that causes the reader's discomfort: cruelty seems so natural a course of action.

Merteuil's cruelty, then, like Versac's, is oriented exclusively towards human ends. The two heroes are similar in many ways. Like her predecessor, Merteuil chooses her victims on apparently flimsy grounds and exacts scathing revenge for the slightest offenses. Compare, for example, Versac's treatment of Mme de Lursay in Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit with Merteuil's punishment of the libertine Prévan, who is ruined for having made a rash statement that, as Valmont points out, Merteuil could have punished simply by ignoring his advances and making him look foolish. But such mild retaliation is unthinkable; Valmont's lack of understanding of her need to crush Prévan and his lack of faith in her ability to do so provoke the famous letter LXXXI, in which she contemptuously rejects Valmont's advice and goes on to reveal to him, apparently for the first time, the depth and intensity of her character.

In Gercourt's case, again, the intended punishment appears to be totally disproportionate to the crime. In fact, to judge by Merteuil's usual methods, one may assume that, far from having been hurt by Gercourt, she had probably been on the point of dismissing him, when he surprised her by acting first. Moreover, as the "editor" of these letters tells us, this episode "n'avait rien que d'ordinaire" (II, 10n) and had, in any case, taken place a long while ago. It had certainly been forgotten by the public, or more likely, considering Merteuil's reputation as a prude, had never even been known.

This last remark--that her affair with Gercourt was probably unknown--points up the essential difference between Mme de Merteuil and Versac. Behind the seemingly random character of his ruthless behavior, Versac is sending out clear signals to all onlookers that he is a dangerous man. His cruelty adapts itself to the general system of tacit agreements, described earlier, whose function it is to hold together aristocratic society. His private opinions of society are his personal secret, but such secrets matter little as long as he continues to go along with the system by letting others know, by his actions, exactly where they stand. Merteuil's ruthlessness, on the other hand, works in secret; she is cruel in spite of the fact that she must appear virtuous. Here, actions as well as private opinions are surrounded by a veil of total secrecy. Her viciousness serves no social purpose.

It has been objected that Merteuil's need for secrecy stems from the fact that she is a woman: since society demands purity of morals from a woman, Merteuil has to hide her misconduct.[7] Yet, as we have seen, what society really demands from a woman is cooperation. In

fact, she is expected not to be pure and, although she must not forget to pay lip service to the ideal of the virtuous woman, her behavior is always an open secret. Merteuil's behavior, however, is a real secret.

We have already noted the breakdown of the system of tacit agreements between the "cynique" and the women he seduces (or, in Merteuil's case, the men she seduces) with Crébillon's Chester in Les Heureux Orphelins. Earlier, women knew what the libertine was, even if they consented to forget it for the moment, and similarly, the libertine easily saw through the myths of "le moment" and "la sensibilité." Complicity between the sexes was well established. One critic goes so far as to refuse to speak of seduction and to label the sexual manoeuvres on both sides as "les pas d'une danse rituelle."[8] By Chester's time, the libertine needs to create a victim and finally, with Merteuil and Valmont, the intellectual rebellion against "the way things are" is complete and only a master-slave relationship will do. There is no bond between the Marquise and her victims, who have no idea at all what sort of woman they are dealing with; the duplicity is total. If Versac looked down on the fools he was forced to live with, he felt obliged, nonetheless, to cooperate. But there is no note of submissiveness in the Marquise's character; she recognizes no restraints on her will, and feels no kniship with others, whom she totally despises.[9]

From Versac's time to Merteuil's, there has been, in other words, a steady deterioration, within the mind of the libertine, of the idea of human specialness. The feeling of the natural dignity of man, still a factor for Crébillon's heroes, slowly dissolves and is replaced by one

of general contempt for those not strong enough to earn the right to be respected. In Les Egarements, the figure of the mysterious "inconnue," Hortense de Théville, suggested the reality of a natural innocence in man, an innate moral sense that he is able to uncover in himself by taking refuge from the corruption of society in self-contemplation. There is no such character in Laclos' novel. Instead of innocence, we have the ignorance of Cécile de Volanges, which is neither attractive nor suggestive of a morally superior plane of existence.[10] In fact, far from being innocent, man's ignorance is tainted by a tendency towards duplicity. Education and social graces cover it up, but never change it. Valmont's famous remark about supposedly honest men makes this point: "tous également scélérats dans leurs projets, ce qu'ils mettent de faiblesse dans l'exécution, ils l'appellent probité" (LXVI, 134).

Valmont's statement could easily have been made by any of Sade's libertines, and if there are no self-deceiving Danceny-type characters illustrating this theme in the works of the Marquis, it is because he is more interested in philosophizing than in exploring human psychology. Sade sometimes allows unswerving innocence to exist, but this is his way of engineering an easy victory for his ideas: he sets up straw men in order to knock them down. Laclos' Cécile and Sade's Justine (in Les Infortunes de la vertu and in its expanded version, Les Malheurs de la vertu) both demonstrate that the idea of man's natural innocence is unfounded, but by opposite routes: what Laclos shows by means of a realistic treatment, Sade establishes satirically. Justine's obstinate refusal to change in the face of all that has happened to her destroys the reader's belief in the reality of her innocence. The contrived ending

showing Juliette's sudden conversion only strengthens this disbelief, for, if anything, Juliette should have been confirmed in her life of crime by the example of Justine's death.

* * *

Although the rebellion of Laclos' heroes is disquieting in its consequences, it is easy to be fascinated by these characters, as many critics have been. Jean-Luc Seylaz points out that man has always felt a certain attraction to the great evil-doer, as if recognizing in him a part of his own nature.[11] Artistic works that play upon the theme of evil may even allow him to work off this tendency harmlessly. The cruelty of Les Liaisons dangereuses, by the very fact that if seems gratuitous, achieves a purity which represents an artistic and psychological ideal. Seylaz compares this "méchancté pour la méchanceté" to the later ideal of "l'art pour l'art" (p. 102).

Although there are, as we have said, reservations to be made about the idea that Laclos' heroes are meant to represent beings of mythical proportions, dedicated to the idea of evil for evil's sake, it is true that cruelty is the outstanding characteristic of Merteuil's personality and that, in creating her, the author struck a responsive chord in his audience. Seylaz believes that Laclos gave form to "l'image glorieuse dans laquelle [la société] voulait se reconnaître" (p. 124). Yet a basic question remains unanswered: why should the image of greatness, of human determination and achievement, for a whole section of society (for a whole age, Seylaz implies) take the shape of a cancerous cruelty directed at all other beings, at society in general, yet at no one and nothing in particular?

It will be our task here to examine the reasons for the growing pessimism and to describe the libertine's response to it, his formulation of an ethic of cruelty. The first step towards an attitude of cruelty has been described above, in Chapter II, as the misreading by the educated public of the aims of contemporary philosophy. There was a general belief that the biologically oriented view of man seriously challenged the traditional idea of human sovereignty on earth. Of more immediate concern to many was the fear that the new "animal-like" man would no longer feel the need to control passions that might interfere with orderly social life. In Chapter III, we described the reaction to the frightening idea of unleashed desire: the need to demonstrate that man could rely on, and, in fact, was meant to rely on special human qualities of heart or mind in order to conquer the brute in him.

It is not surprising that the public misinterpreted the intentions of the "philosophes." In the war of propaganda engaged in by traditionalists and by converts to the new ideas, exaggeration was the order of the day. False notions were hard to dispel, since people seemed to have preferred their philosophy in capsulated form: clichés, catchwords, and phrases that were attractive without being hard to understand. As one social historian points out, even when the prestige of "la philosophie" was at its highest point, people who frequented the salons depended on "enlightened" discussions for their information, few of them actually taking the trouble to read the "gros tomes de l'Encyclopédie."[12] In any case, the few serious philosophical works which squarely faced the moral problems that did, after all, exist behind the exaggerations were not readily available.[13]

Any reader of eighteenth-century novels, both sentimental and libertine, is, as we have seen, witness to the general penchant for philosophical jargon and to the extent to which a popularly-conceived brand of materialism made its way into the public mind. By the time of the publication of D'Holbach's Le Système de la nature in 1770, "la philosophie encyclopédique" had so won over cultivated opinion that no one was truly shocked by the book's strong statements.[14] From about the mid-1770's, in fact, the basic tenets of the new philosophy were no longer debated; having been accepted, they were judged to be too tame, and discussions in the salons were given over to applying the acquired beliefs to political and economic questions.[15] According to J.H. Brumfitt, it is probably correct to say that "the average educated man's map of his intellectual universe was more completely redrawn in the eighteenth century than in any similar period before or since."[16] The fact that many of his conclusions were based on distortions of philosophical ideas does not rob them of their importance, for it is sometimes true that the original meaning of ideas is less significant in shaping opinions and influencing actions than what was generally thought to be their meaning.

The aristocratic "cynique" was also influenced by the ideas that were in the air and that were more or less forced upon any serious-minded individual of the day. But it would be wrong to think that the ideas of the "cynique" represented a complete distortion of contemporary philosophical ideas, for there had also been great changes within the philosophical movement as it developed during the second half of the century. We find, in fact, many ideas common to both Mme de Merteuil's philosophy and that, for example, of Le Système de la

nature. But, more significantly, the libertine "cynique" and the "philosophe" are drawn closer than ever before by their attitude; they share, in many ways, a common outlook, characterized especially by a blend of pessimism about human nature and, in spite of this, a determination to overcome the obstacles, to act to improve their lot.

The similarities in attitude do not, of course, result in a common plan of action. In order to understand the libertine's philosophy of cruelty, it is necessary to consider one other essential factor in his make-up, which is the particularly cynical and pessimistic nature of the aristocratic personality. It is the combination of these two elements--the influence of "la philosophie" and the burden of the aristocratic personality (which we shall examine first)--that is at the base of the libertine's attitude of cruelty.

We have already seen the cynical atmosphere of aristocratic society in Crébillon's works. One critic, Peter Brooks, in his Novel of Worldliness, goes back to the seventeenth century to trace to its source the triple legacy of pessimism, cynicism, and elitism left to the nobility of the eighteenth century by their forbears.[17] The seventeenth-century reaction to pessimism about human nature was one of discretion and caution. It was especially important to deny expression to any unforeseen and potentially uncontrollable elements in man's character in order to ensure that the proper functioning of society not be interfered with or disturbed in any way. Brooks examines the attempt made by seventeenth-century writers to define and fix all human psychological types by perfecting the art of portraiture, to make reality manageable by establishing fixed formulas covering all possibilities. Another critic has pointed out that the aim of the

practical study of human nature in the seventeenth century was to make raw experience "safe" by filtering it through the medium of language.[18] Foremost in importance was the need to bury in silence one's unsocial tendencies, to stamp out or neutralize nature's imperfections. Such an attitude reflects "a strong sense of passivity, a refusal of energy, a resolution determined . . . by a desire to give up."[19]

Brooks especially stresses the continuance of the cautious, conservative side of the aristocratic nature in the eighteenth century, where we find the same desire and need to encompass all reality within fixed categories.[20] The libertine still tries to subject all human emotions and actions to the clear, cold light of analysis, but an important change has taken place. In the seventeenth century, the analyzer did not exempt himself from the common treatment, that is, he controlled his own behavior for the same reason that he desired to control the behavior of others: the safeguarding of society. In the eighteenth century, however, the self begins to work more and more for its own sake. The art of portraiture becomes a weapon used to obtain secrets and to wield power. The emergence of the modern idea of self, noted by many as first having come into its own as an important force in literature's presentation of the individual in the eighteenth century, is behind the hardening attitude of the libertine hero.

In analyzing Versac, we defined his main problem as that of the divided inner self. He was, in his more reflective moments, torn between his desire for worldly success and his disgust at having to disobey moral standards that would otherwise have stood in his way. Merteuil seems to have solved this problem. She has rejected old moral notions and has also placed herself above the society in which

she lives; she feels no need to apologize for her dedication to cruelty. She is rebellious to the end: "quand j'ai à me plaindre de quelqu'un," her last letter reads, "je ne le persifle pas; je fais mieux: je me venge" (CLIX, 366). The rest of the book, like a musical coda, brings the work to a formal close; it tells of the Marquise's disgrace, but, since we never hear her voice accept defeat, it is unable to change the image of untamed defiance that we associate with her.

This new sense of self has often been hailed by critics as a liberating force for the individual. One analysis condemns the seventeenth-century aim of splitting the personality into two parts, the social self and the hidden real self. This unnatural and unacceptable constraint, practiced in the name of stability, and the defeatist attitude it betokens, are contrasted with the image of self in Les Liaisons dangereuses; here, "erotic man" finally merges with "societal man" in a bold proclamation of the rights of the individual.[21] Seylaz,also, admires in Merteuil's behavior a symbol of human freedom: "Elle offre une espèce de plénitude soutenue; elle est comme un état naturel; elle a quelque chose de souverainement libre."[22] These views seem to be at odds with Brooks' observation that the "disillusioned lucidity" of the seventeenth century not only continues into the eighteenth, but takes on an even more pessimistic and cynical edge as time passes.[23]

It can, however, be shown that a disillusioned outlook is not incompatible with an energetic plan of action, if one is willing to recognize that behind the proclamation of self seen in such characters as Merteuil, there is more of an attitude of defensiveness than any newly found feeling of confidence and hope in human freedom. Merteuil's words and actions betray again and again a feeling that there is no

inherent dignity in the simple fact of human existence: an individual is "cela," an "espèce," a "machine à plaisir" unless he has been able to create some kind of personal order from the chaos of the natural state of things. The Marquise's declaration that she is her own creation (LXXXI, 175) is not an idle boast. Her repeated insistence on the importance, not just of success, but of originality, is significant because, while success may sometimes be the result of luck or of plodding persistence, success based on originality cannot be called accidental. It is unique. The successful person has, in that case, created something like a work of art, something that would have been impossible without that particular individual.

The Marquise's search for originality is anything but leisurely; the iron-willed single-mindedness of her pursuit, the swiftness with which she acts, the elements of bravado and mockery in her personality indicate either a superhuman self-assurance, as Seylaz believes ("[t]oute vengeance, toute cruauté," he writes, "impliquent au fond une affirmation de soi."[24]), or, as we believe, just the opposite: a calculated attempt to manufacture a stong self-image, stemming from a fear of forces greater than the self. Her stress on actions and results is not the natural tendency of an almost god-like "volonté de puissance" (p. 104), but the sign of a need to provide proof of her strength.

The combination of a pessimistic outlook with the will to carry on is part of Merteuil's aristocratic heritage, but each element of this seemingly contradictory state of mind is greatly influenced by contemporary philosophical thought. It would be pointless and, in any case, probably impossible to attempt to pick out specific works as the libertine's philosophical sources and to indicate exactly which ideas within those works he made use of. But Merteuil's basic beliefs--

her refusal to believe in man's natural dignity, her fear of the chaos of natural forces, and her desperate search for order and stability-- are clearly adaptations of philosophical ideas.

One can, for example, easily misconstrue La Mettrie's "man-machine" ideas to mean that man is nothing more than nature's robot entirely without any will of his own, although the "philosophe" did not mean this at all.[25] The phrase was certainly popular in the eighteenth century, especially after 1760, when Palissot's spoof of La Mettrie in Les Philosophes brought much notoriety to his works, although not much in-depth study of them.[26] The fear of chaos is also the echo of a philosophical idea. The belief that all matter is subject to an unending cycle of creation and destruction is a cliché in the eighteenth century, even for those who, unlike the "cynique," set aside a special, stable place within the system for individual souls. Even the critic of L'Année Littéraire, for example, while praising a work entitled La Nature dévoilée, ou théorie de la nature (1772), speaks of a "principe actif" in nature, which is "sans cesse occupé à dissoudre une partie des corps pour fournir à l'entretien et à l'accroissement des autres, à détruire ses propres ouvrages pour en former de nouveaux avec leurs débris."[27] Finally, the reliance upon reason to sort out the confusion and establish in its place a self-created order is a philosophical idea that, one could say, was as much distorted by "philosophes" like Helvétius as it was by libertines like Merteuil.

More interesting, however, than distorted adaptations of philosophical ideas, is a growing similarity in attitude between the libertine and the "philosophe" which did not exist before and which therefore

marks a significant change from that attitude described above, in Chapter II, as characterizing the works of "philosophes" like Diderot and La Mettrie. Specifically, there is a turning away from the optimistic idea of a basic harmony between body and spirit, a quasi-religious feeling of confidence in man's ability to find happiness by relying solely on nature's guidance. Reason no longer is seen as working in mysterious, almost mystical harmony with our bodily needs and desires. A harsher, more narrowly materialistic interpretation of man's position in the universe is generally adopted, one which does not so much separate body and spirit as flatly deny the existence of purely spiritual qualities in men.

The result of the new attitude is that man becomes the slave rather than the partner of the natural forces that determine his behavior and thought. Our life, declares D'Holbach, is "une ligne que la nature nous ordonne de décrire à la surface de la terre, sans jamais pouvoir nous écarter un instant."[28] To be free in any real sense of the word, "il faudrait que [l'homme] fût tout seul plus fort que la nature entière, ou il faudrait qu'il fût hors de cette nature . . ." (p. 276). Human freedom and dignity, were they possible, would be artificially created qualities, since they would require us to step outside the role given to us by nature. To be free, man would have to work against, not with nature. One sees the similarity to the outlook of Merteuil, who has so successfully transformed herself from a "natural" woman that, as Valmont tells her, it is only by "les mille et mille caprices qui gouvernent la tête d'une femme . . .[que] vous tenez encore à votre sexe" (LXXVI, 154).

The great difference between the "philosophe" and the libertine is

that the first chooses submissiveness and a policy of benevolence, while the other chooses rebellion and a policy of cruelty. In each case, however, the decision is somewhat arbitrary; it is really a matter of opinion and of personal taste whether the individual, a totally amoral being cast into the world without choice and "programmed" to seek only his own well-being finds it better for himself to work with or against others. Given the influence of the aristocratic outlook on the libertine, it is not surprising that he rejects D'Holbach's system which, at bottom, is nothing but social utilitarianism.

Pierre Naville, the biographer of D'Holbach, compares the Baron's deep-seated pessimism to the "religiosité naturelle" of Diderot, who once wrote that his friend "se tue de lire l'histoire . . . il y apprend à mépriser et à haïr de plus en plus ses semblables."[29] But the pessimism that marks the writings of this "philosophe" during the 1770's is accompanied by a strongly activist attitude that keeps the author from slipping into a melancholy or bitterly misanthropic tone. The same blend of pessimism and positive thinking is apparent in the other philosophical "scandal" of the decade, Helvétius' De l'homme, published in 1772.[30] This strange kind of pessimism that ends in a plan of action rather than defeatist silence or impotent ranting is equally characteristic of Merteuil. The reason for both the pessimism and the determination to fight back is perhaps to be found in the tendency to accept too literally one of the basic ideas of the new "philosophie", which is the refusal to see any mystery at all in the workings of the universe. One critic, speaking of D'Holbach, remarks, "ce n'est pas lui qui a pressenti le dynamisme des énergies mystérieuses ni l'évolutionnisme."[31] The same may be said for Helvétius, who believes that the true "philosophe"

"s'arrête où l'observation lui manque."[32] Only the visible world is real.

The rejection of a spiritual dimension is double-edged. It makes man a prisoner of the matter that he is composed of: "il ne peut même par la pensée en soritr," according to D'Holbach (SI,2). He can judge the truth of things only by what he can touch, see, hear, feel, or smell. On the other hand, what else does man need? There may be things he does not as yet understand, but, since all reality is represented by physical entities, he can hope, one day, to explain everything in nature, by dint of observation, experimentation, and reasoning. Helvétius believes he has already found the one true priniciple of the science of morality in "la sensibilité physique:" it is senseless to search for the unknown in unfathomable places when his solution explains so much and is "un fait avoué de tous." The final proof is that "l'idée en est claire, la notion distincte, l'expression nette, et qu'enfin nulle erreur ne peut se mêler à la simplicité d'un tel axiome" (H XII, 153). Such an attitude may be scientifically superficial and frivolous, as well as poetically barren,[33] but it makes action possible.

Action is the central aim of the eighteenth-century "philosophes." They wanted above all to "do something," to have an effect on the world around them, to provoke change rather than to elaborate abstract systems. Their "intense practicality," as one critic calls it, is the reason that some modern thinkers accuse them of intellectual vulgarity and refuse to admit them to the ranks of the "real" philosophers.[34] But, even if we are willing to accept the solution of social problems as a legitimate aim of philosophy, it must be agreed that "philosophes"

such as D'Holbach and Helvétius were led astray by their exaggerated confidence in the powers of observation and reason (and perhaps also by their strong desire to discredit and outdo the enemy, organized religion, whose interest lay in maintaining the status quo).

Ironically, in their rush to solve problems, both these writers find themselves having to make up for a lack of observable facts by indulging in abstract theorizing. In reading Helvétius, for example, one is especially struck by the absence of any serious attempt to remain within the limits of a strict sensationalist philosophy. Despite his belief that each man is more or less trapped by his own individual perceptions, unable to judge accurately opinions that differ from his own ("L'esprit est, si j'ose le dire, une corde qui ne frémit qu'à l'unisson."[35]) and, therefore, to appreciate experiences other than his own, he never hesitates to seek universal truths or to describe with perfect self-assurance important developments in the history of mankind, such as "la formation des premières sociétés" (H X, 37).

The tendency to preach reform by arguing from abstractions has been called naive. D'Holbach, says one critic, is one of those "âmes fortes et saines" characterized by "une intrépidité d'esprit que rien n'arrête. Pour eux, tout est clair et uni, ou à peu près, et là où ils soupçonnent quelque bas-fond insondable, ils se détournent et poursuivent fièrement leur chemin."[36] The road followed by D'Holbach and by Helvétius leads to social utilitarianism, each having established that society is natural and useful to man and that, this being the case, "il serait contraire à la Nature, que des êtres, animés sans cesse du désir de se conserver et de se rendre heureux, se reprochassent ou s'unissent les uns aux autres pour travailler à leur destruction ou

à leur malheur réciproque."[37] Helvétius goes one frightening step further than the basic appeal to reason. Given the absolute malleability of the human mind, it is theoretically possible (although, he points out, impossible for France as it was then governed) to create through education a new kind of man: "S'il est un art d'exciter en nous des passions fortes [and he believes there is]; s'il y a des moyens faciles de remplir la mémoire d'un jeune homme d'une certaine espèce d'idées et d'objets [and he believes there are]; il est, en conséquence, des méthodes sûres pour former des hommes de génie" (E II, 376).

"Le refus du tragique" that Philip Stewart notices in eighteenth-century theorists of love[38] was also, as we saw, shared by its "philosophes." But unlike the "philosophe," the libertine cannot take refuge in the abstract. His pessimism makes itself felt as a personal crisis. It arises from an unreasoned, but strongly felt lack of confidence in the ability of the self to maintain a distinct and permanent identity, and it is magnified by the nature of the society the libertine is forced to live in. Others are seen only as enemies, as threats to whatever personal stability the libertine feels. Merteuil's uneasiness in this regard is striking. The reader is surprised by the vehemence with which she seeks vengeance against the members of the society she is part of, especially as there seems to be no reason for it.[39]

Confirmed in her beliefs by the time she is fifteen years old, she cannot have been influenced by the bitterness of disappointed love or by the humiliation of being a woman in a libertine society. She seems, in fact, to have had rather an easy life: she had no complaints to make about a husband who at least satisfied her curiosity, took no notice of her educational pleasures, and even died early to leave her

her own master at a very young age. These considerations make the reader seek another reason for her rebellion than anger at social inequality, although this undoubtedly plays a part.

Merteuil's fear and anger seem to stem basically from an instinctive recognition of the fragile nature of her sense of self: "J'étais bien jeune encore . . . je n'avais à moi que ma pensée, et je m'indignais qu'on pût me la ravir ou me la surprendre contre ma volonté. . . Non contente de ne plus me laisser pénétrer, je m'amusais à me montrer sous des formes différentes. . . dès ce moment, ma façon de penser fut pour moi seule, et je ne montrai plus que celle qu'il m'était utile de laisser voir" (LXXXI, 175). Without evoking the image of an existential anguish "avant la lettre," it seems correct to say that the undefinable origins and goals of Merteuil's angry inquietude have a very modern touch to them. Her mood betrays a tenseness that is foreign to earlier libertines, who are more detached, cooler, and therefore less cruel.

It is evident from the passage just quoted that the Marquise equates self and thought, which alone has the ability to draw the line between the individual and other bits of organized matter. We exist as individuals only in so far as we think. This is the belief that Merteuil clings to, and it is confidence in her ability to reason that gives her courage to confront her fears. But, although this is a confidence that has a long tradition in France, and one which is accepted as an obvious fact by Merteuil, it has been shaken by the re-evaluation of man undertaken by the "philosophes." The idea of a divinely ordered universe, in which reason is given to man to enable him to perceive the order and his place in it, has lost its credibility. The act of

thinking, which materialists describe as the comparison of past and present sense impressions, is no longer seen as independent of material conditions; consequently, the self, which is nothing more than the accumulation of these temporary sensations plus the memory of past sensations, has no really permanent existence.[40] The self is accidental, having no central principle of being.

The libertine "cynique" needs to prove that, in this world of perpetually changing forms of matter, personal stability is not an illusion and that he has within himself the power to be something other than the passive recipient of nature's orders. It is not a question of reverting to the seventeenth-century belief in a static self, which, as Ernst Cassirer has said, experiences passion as a disturbance of the soul resulting from its union with the body.[41] Passion and desire have come to be seen as original properties of living matter and as the force behind all operations of the mind. Man, says Helvétius, exists only from one desire to the next. Desires constitute "le mouvement de l'âme; privée de désirs, elle est stagnante. Il faut désirer pour agir, et agir pour être heureux" (H XI, 79). Merteuil acknowledges the importance of physical desires, of "cet entier abandon de soi-meme, ce délire de la volupté, où le plaisir s'épure par son excès . . ." (IV, 15). She repeatedly asserts that, in her choice of profession, she has let herself be guided by the voice of nature: "Ne vous souvient-il plus," she asks Valmont, "que l'amour est, comme la médecine, l'art d'aider à la nature?" (X, 25).

Merteuil refuses to accept emotion as anything more than a fleeting sense impression. She is like the "philosophes" in that they also, as Rousseau put it, "n'admettent pour vrai que ce qu'ils peuvent expliquer

et font de leur intelligence la mesure des possibles."[42] She believes in what she can feel: desire, which leads to the union of the sexes, followed by a feeling of satiety, which leads to the need for change. She concludes that physical impulses and boredom are the motives of human action, and she decides to make use of this knowledge, for, like the "philosophes" again, she believes that it is better to act than to hesitate and permit oneself to become the victim of natural forces, which are never at rest.

The Marquise tries to silence the chaos of physical forces by destroying their intrusion into human life in the form of chance. In spite of her praise of the "entier abandon de soi-même," she never gives herself to a lover without first having orchestrated the movements on both sides, as in the case of her evening with the Chevalier Belleroche (X, 26-28). She substitutes her own order for nature's disorder, but imitates the natural disorder so well that the Chevalier, whose desires she creates and controls, never suspects the truth: "Tour à tour enfant et raisonnable, folâtre et sensible, quelquefois même libertine, je me plaisais à le considérer comme un sultan au milieu de son sérail, dont j'étais tour à tour les favorites différentes" (X, 28).

Order and speed are the ways she defeats desire and boredom. She admires the ability to impose one's own conditions on nature to such an extent that, sometimes, she gives in, even when she is not attracted to a suitor, simply because he knew how to wage "une attaque vive et bien faite, où tout se succède avec ordre, quoiqu'avec rapidité" (X, 25). Cooperation is never, of course, a duty for Merteuil. She grants it, and when, as in Prévan's case, a would-be lover tries to force it upon her, she not only refuses, but destroys the presumptuous

fool.

If Merteuil is not afraid of desire in itself, being confident that she can organize and control the physical impulses she feels, she is, however, always on guard against the possibility that desire, in a different form, will gain control of her mind, take over her thoughts. We have seen this happen to the "galant" turned man of sentiment. Sentimentalists call upon emotion, especially love, to be the organizer of the various sensations they feel. It becomes a kind of substitute soul, the unifying principle of their lives.[43] But Merteuil denies sentiment any essential value. Love, for her, is disguised desire in its most treacherous form. The individual who abandons himself to the power of his senses begins to create illusions about the nature of the pleasure he is experiencing and to see as its cause what is only its instrument: "Gardez vos conseils et vos craintes pour ces femmes à délire, et qui se disent 'à sentiments,' dont l'imagination exaltée ferait croire que la nature a placé leurs sens dans leur tête; qui, n'ayant jamais réfléchi, confondent sans cesse l'amour et l'amant" (LXXXI, 174).

The danger of love is that, although it is a mere trick of the senses, it creates the impression that all else is false and empty. It robs the victim of his thoughts and makes him feel that he somehow ceases to exist at the moments when other matters occupy him, even though just the opposite is true. In this weakened state, he can be led into actions that expose him to his enemies, as in the case of those foolish women who, "s'abandonnant sans réserve à la fermentation de leurs idées, enfantent par elles ces lettres brûlantes, si douces, mais si dangereuses à écrire" (LXXXI, 174).

Merteuil pities such women above all others because they give physical proof of the defeat of self and permit their innermost thoughts to become public property.[44] They have forgotten, or never knew, that there are no halfway measures in life. Either the individual is constantly aware that his purpose in life is to be his own "ouvrage," as Merteuil says (LXXXI, 175), or he becomes the tool of those around him. It is because these women let love steal away their existence from them ("s'empare . . . de toute l'existence") that they "sentent le besoin de s'en occuper encore, même alors qu'elle n'en jouissent pas" (LXXXI, 174). It is no wonder that the Marquise is alarmed and accuses Valmont of acting "sans principes" (X, 25) when he declares, almost as soon as he meets Mme de Tourvel, that "auprès d'elle, je n'ai pas besoin de jouir pour être heureux" (VI, 19). "Vous . . . n'êtes plus vous" (X, 25) is the Marquise's reaction. Valmont has begun to accept sentiment as reality.

There is one brief, but important, moment in which Merteuil does seem to express a belief in the power of love. She declares that the inevitable and interminable cycle of pleasure followed by aversion is a "loi de la nature, que l'amour seul peut changer" (CXXXI, 311). Her philosophical convictions are not able, it seems, to do away completely with the powerful myth of love. But, in spite of, or rather because of this admission, she is more adamant than ever in her refusal to change her system, for, if love does exist, the great question remains: "de l'amour, en a-t-on quand on veut?" (311).[45] The individual is mocked and humiliated by nature, which fills his head with visions of happiness, but constantly proves to him the impossibility of realizing them.

Merteuil wishes not to believe in love, but doubts remain and anger her, and it is perhaps this uncertainty that makes the need she feels to deny love's existence so insistent. In the passage just quoted, Merteuil concludes that, if nature has arranged matters so that love usually exists only on one side, at least the unloving partner is not left merely with the insipid "satisfaction" of having been the instrument of pleasure; he adds the satisfaction of deceiving, "ce qui fait equilibre, et tout s'arrange " (CXXXI, 311). The confidence with which Merteuil deceives all around her is based on her superior knowledge of the workings of her small world.[46] She creates an empire which, although limited, is under her complete control, and, within her empire, love has been declared nonexistent. Any hint, not only of love, but of any kind of spontaneous warmth or emotion, is carefully suppressed in her own letters, and scorned as a sign of weakness in those of others. Those who do not know how to control their emotions are natural victims. Mme de Tourvel betrays herself at every turn. Thus, praising Valmont for his charity to the poor, she is carried away and "fait, sans s'en douter, l'éloge de ce qu'elle aime" (XXIII, 48). She is defeated even before she understands that she is being attacked.

Neither Merteuil nor Valmont ever misses an opportunity to ridicule real emotion. It is not simply from lack of sensitivity that Merteuil refers to the possibility of reviving her affair with Valmont as a "renouvellement de bail" (XX, 41), or that she wishes to make the defeat of the Présidente a condition of their reunion so that his success will be "plus piquant, en devenant lui-même un moyen d'infidélité" (XX, 42). Her constant aim is to degrade human experience by describing it in the most cynical terms possible.[47] The ironic de-

tachment of libertines like Versac has become a passion for cruel irony with Merteuil and Valmont. The Marquise, for example, recounting a "discours sentimental" made to Belleroche, in which she apologized "d'avoir pu un instant voiler mon coeur à tes regards," notes that the Chevalier solemnly sealed her pardon on the very same divan that she and Valmont had used when "vous et moi scellâmes si gaiement et de la même manière" their eternal separation (X, 27).

Another of the countless examples of this type of cruelty is Valmont's letter of double-entendres written to Mme de Tourvel from the bed of the courtesane Emilie. ("Jamais je n'eus tant de plaisir en vous écrivant," [XLVIII, 101].) Prévan, the libertine who becomes Merteuil's victim, is a twin brother to Valmont. One of his favorite pastimes is to surround himself with informed observers and then to trick his victim into telling her story in double-entendres. The Comtesse de P*** , for example, "tout en se croyant bien fine, et ayant l'air en effet, pour tout ce qui n'était pas instruit, de tenir une conversation générale, nous raconta dans le plus grand détail . . . tout ce qui s'était passé entre eux" (LXXVI, 154). This crulety on the level of the language often seems pointless or incomplete since the victim will never be aware of the ridicule he is made to suffer, but the pleasure derived by those "in the know" serves as a steady means of encouragement to them and as a confirmation of their principles.

We have seen, however, that, according to the libertine, the really successful self cannot be content merely to pity the unknowing or to describe past victories, no matter how incisively or mockingly. The libertine must always look forward towards the uncreated future. The critic Jacques Faurie, in his analysis of Valmont, has pointed out

the difference between thought as contemplation and thought as action, defining it as "une certaine attitude de la conscience. Lorsque les données de la conscience sont retenues pour elles-mêmes, c'est contemplation. Mais si elles n'intéressent pas en soi, si elles ne sont considérées qu'en tant que signes ou moyens déstinés à obtenir une certaine fin, c'est action."[48] It is, of course, the second kind of thought towards which the libertine strives. To see the effect of his thought at work is to see proof of the new order continuously created by his independent self. André Malraux has called Valmont and Merteuil the first modern heroes in literature because they are the first to understand that purposeful existence is an act of self-creation.[49]

The ultimate aim of the libertine is, then, to erase the difference between thought and action, to turn one into the other, to re-form the world according to his own design. It is not enough, as it was for Versac, to provoke fear and admiration in others. The libertine needs to exercise real control over actions and over opinions that influence actions. In other words, the "cynique's" power depends upon the lack of power of others. His greatest challenge is to create love. If he can show this powerful force to be no more mysterious than a magician's trick, the result of a series of expert manoeuvres which create strong but totally false impressions in the mind of the victim, he has robbed nature of its ability to humiliate man.

Merteuil must enjoy above all others, letters such as Danceny's declaration of love, in which he innocently and ironically tries to ease her "guilt" by dispelling the "illusion" that she could have been stronger than love: "l'amour véritable ne permet pas . . . de méditer et de réfléchir: il nous distrait de nos pensées par nos

sentiments; son empire n'est jamais plus fort que quand il nous est inconnu, et c'est dans l'ombre et le silence, qu'il nous entoure de liens qu'il est également impossible d'apercevoir et de rompre" (CXLVIII, 346). The more elegantly he praises and wonders at the mysterious ways of love, the more he unwittingly attests the Marquise's power and his own nothingness. He has been made to play the fool.

According to André Malraux, eroticism exists "dès qu'aux amours physiques . . . se mêle l'idée d'une contrainte."[50] In Les Liaisons dangereuses, constraint is purposely pushed all the way to cruelty, which had been latent in aristocratic heroes since Crébillon's time, but which emerges now, since it constitutes the most immediately felt and most visible sign of power over others. It consists principally in enjoying the spectacle of their dehumanization, since, for the libertine, it is the exercise of will-power that distinguishes humanity from other forms of matter.

Merteuil is masterful in the art of creating different "truths" for different people. By supplying, in her letters, false information or half-truths specifically tailored for each correspondent, she is able to sever that person's tie with reality and become for him "comme la Divinité, recevant les voeux opposés des aveugles mortels, et ne changeant rien à mes décrets immuables" (LXIII, 126). In the case of Mme de Volanges and Cécile, her decree is that the marriage with Gercourt take place. By forcing each to adopt exactly opposite opinions, she leads both to the same plan of action. She convinces the mother that, love being dangerous and sure to bring unhappiness, a marriage with Gercourt is the most sensible thing. At the same time, by ignoring the subject of love, she makes it clear to the daughter that only

pleasure counts and that a marriage of convenience to a man like Gercourt would give her the freedom to do as she pleases.

The result here, as with all her victims, is that actions are based on false opinions created by Merteuil and are therefore bound to miscarry. All the prudence of Mme de Volanges, all the trust of Cécile (just as, in her most spectacular success, all the audacity and charm of Prévan) are rendered powerless, since it is Merteuil who controls their thoughts. The one who controls thought controls reality. Ironically, she is not lying completely in either letter CIV to the mother or CV to the daughter when she speaks of love and of pleasure, but the whole truth is reserved for the following letter CVI to Valmont, in which she states plainly her true and vicious purpose: to debauch Cécile ("faisons-en, de concert, le désespoir de sa mère et de Gercourt," [248]) and then to abandon her, for the safest thing with "ces machines-là" is to "se dépêcher, s'arrêter de bonne heure, et de la briser ensuite" (249).

The cruelty of Laclos' libertines never takes the form of direct physical torture, the very idea of which would shock them, but it aims at producing a state of internal confusion and disorder that has strong physical effects. Sade's Président de Blamont in his Aline et Valcour remarks that, while it is good to possess one's victim, it is delectable to " [la] saisir dans les pleurs."[51] Valmont's victory over Mme de Tourvel shows a similar delight in the physical proofs of power, from the first time he feels "son coeur battre plus vite" and sees "l'aimable rougeur" (VI, 18) on her cheeks to the last moment of resistance, when he describes in detail, with obvious pleasure, her deteriorating physical strength. Her weakness is the sign of his

success, and it is upon this evidence that he bases the tactical decisions which bring victory: "le maintien mal assuré, la respiration haute, la contraction de tous les muscles, les bras tremblants et à demi élevés, tout me prouvait assez que l'effet avait été tel que j'avais voulu le produire" (CXXV, 296). Again, at the critical moment, which leads directly to his triumph, it is because, "je sentais son coeur palpiter avec violence; j'observais l'altération de sa figure: je voyais surtout les larmes la suffoquer, et ne couler cependant que rares et pénibles" that he knows he can make his move: "ce ne fut qu'alors que je pris le parti de feindre de m'éloigner," certain she would call him back (CXXV, 298).

Merteuil also places great importance on physical appearance as a symbol of power, although, because, she is a woman and must be more circumspect, she stresses self-control. Her technique is the inverse of Valmont's: she creates the impression of inner turmoil to lull her opponent into a false sense of security. She creates the image of love "non pour le ressentir à la vérité, mais pour l'inspirer et le feindre" (LXXXI, 177). The description of her affair with Prévan shows it to consist mostly of a series of poses: at one moment, she is careful to keep "les yeux baissés et la respiration haute. J'avais l'air de pressentir ma défaite, et de redouter mon vainqueur" (LXXXV, 191) and, at another, "j'appelai les larmes à mon secours" (L93).

Merteuil's victory over Prévan, who is suddenly forced to recognize his true position, is more devastating in its cruelty than that of Valmont over Mme de Tourvel (at least until the Marquise takes over and decides finally to complete the Présidente's humiliation). She

reduces her lovers to total powerlessness; in effect, she emasculates them by robbing them of that which they prize most: control, which for them is synonymous with virility. Cruelty not only proves to the libertine that he has succeeded in declaring his independence from the insulting rule of chaotic forces, but also that he has not isolated himself within an imaginary realm of impotent ideas; it is his link with the real, that is to say, the physical world. The attitude of cruelty remains intact even when Merteuil enjoys her victories quietly as she is often forced to do. But in that case, the correspondence with Valmont and the letters which she receives from her victims serve as physical proof of her power; the admiring respect she is paid by both her knowing accomplice and the fools she conquers substitutes for that special, but rare, moment of triumph, such as she experiences with Prévan.

Merteuil is far superior to her fellow conspirator in the art of cruelty. She possesses, in the first place, a greater ability to fuse thought and action into one. Valmont complains at one point that their plans for Cécile are certain to fail; Danceny, content to admire his love without possessing her, needs to be awakened to desire and action by some kind of obstacle in his path: "Que faire à présent?" asks Valmont, ". . .je n'y vois pas de remède" (LVIII, 117). Merteuil, on the other hand, enthusiastically accepts this challenge to her power: "ce qu'il a dit, je le ferai" (LXIII, 124); the desire to prod Danceny into action ("de le tirer de son indolence, ou de m'en venger," [124]; the two motives are one and the same for Merteuil) occupies her mind completely, giving her no rest until she has settled on a plan of action. But once this is done, she is carefree, totally confident that once a victory exists in her mind, it exists also, from that very moment,

in fact. "Tel on nous raconte que le Maréchal de Saxe, après avoir fait les dispositions d'une bataille pour le lendemain, s'endormit d'un sommeil tranquille" (124).

Merteuil understands perfectly Valmont's weakness: "c'est dommage qu'avec tant de talent pour les projets, vous en ayez si peu pour l'exécution" (CXLVI, 340). His inferiority is due specifically to his inability to understand and master the art of thought control. Perhaps it is, as Merteuil suggest, the public approval given to male libertines and the ease with which they are allowed to operate that lull them into mediocrity ("on acquiert rarement les qualités dont on peut se passer," [LXXXI, 173]), but, in any case, Valmont, as the Marquise is fond of pointing out, is not "inventif" (CXIII, 267). He sometimes adapts himself cleverly to the circumstances and has, as a result, an amusing story to tell, as in the case of his adventure with the Vicomtesse de M*** (LXXI, 143-47), but he is usually so concerned with creating and overcoming obstacles that he fails to penetrate and understand the enemy. When, contrary to his expectations, the Présidente suddenly leaves the château of Mme de Rosemonde, he can only say, "il faut renoncer à connaître les femmes" (C, 230). The easy successes he usually meets with have created a self-confident and casual attitude that prevents him from becoming as profound as Merteuil, who has been, almost since childhood, sensitive to the needs of her inner self.

Valmont's victories have also sheltered him from what Merteuil sees as the "real" world: she has become an intensely practical planner, while he remains a dreamer, in spite of his cynicism and callousness. She never allows herself to become obsessed by any one project, realizing that the only creation that counts is that of the self, but

Valmont, who feels the thrill of creation for the first time, has come to depend upon the idea of himself as God, receiving the boundless adoration of his victim. (He has nurtured this image throughout his attack; see, for example, VI, 18; XXIII, 51; XCVI, 214.) Even if Valmont is incapable of loving Mme de Tourvel in the ordinary sense of the word, he has permitted love to steal away his existence. He himself raises (and then rejects) the possibility that "je puisse dépendre en quelque manière de l'esclave que je me serais asservie; que je n'aie pas en moi seul la plénitude de mon bonheur . . ." (CXXV, 293).

Merteuil has been too humiliated by the obvious hold that Mme de Tourvel has over Valmont not to profit from the weakness that he permits her to see. It is clear to her that his inverted sentimentalism makes him unequal to the challenge that he had set himself and she takes advantage of this, playing upon his vanity, just as she played upon Mme de Volange's sense of motherly duty. She is able to do so because, for Valmont, thought and self are not one; he looks outside himself for guidance.

It is, ironically, by pointing this out that she gains total control over him and makes him believe that his best interest lies in destroying his own creation. In the three letters in which she sets the trap for him, CXXXI, CXXXIV, and CXLI, she constantly invokes the image of what a true libertine ought to be and harps on his failure to be "conséquent," to turn his thoughts into action. She writes at first subtly, mentioning "des sacrifices que sûrement vous ne pourriez ou ne voudriez pas faire" (CXXXI, 312), and then directly, almost tauntingly, although she is careful not to anger him. She propses the sacrifice of the Présidente, but "je n'en croirais pas de vains discours. Je ne pourrais être

persuadée que par l'ensemble de votre conduite" (CXXXIV, 319). In the next letter, she lets him see that she has practically abandoned all hope in him. Either he is fooling himself or her: "la différence entre vos discours et vos actions ne me laisse pas de choix qu'entre ces deux sentiments" (CXLI, 332). She offers coldly, and clearly as the last sign of her concern, the letter to be sent to Mme de Tourvel.

The letter Merteuil composes for the Présidente is the cruelest of all. With it, she destroys her greatest enemy, love, by destroying the two beings who had fallen under its power. By convincing Mme de Tourvel that this cruel Valmont is the real one, she forces her to believe that she has been living a lie, that love is an illusion. "La funeste vérité m'éclaire," the Présidente writes to Mme de Rosemonde (CXLIII, 336). Merteuil has, of course, merely replaced one illusion with another, for the new Valmont is her own invention. Neither Merteuil nor the reader knows whether love exists or whether, as the Marquise says, "ce charme qu'on croit trouver dans les autres, c'est en nous qu'il existe" (CXXXIV, 319), but, if she can make others believe this proposition and act accordingly, it is as good as true.

The letter to Mme de Tourvel is inspired not only by the hatred and jealousy she feels for her rival, but also by the scorn she has come to feel for Valmont. The cheap clichés it contains could easily have been written by the most superficial "galant" of the day; they are, as Peter Brooks points out, nothing more than a parody of Merteuil's libertine philosophy. The failure of Valmont to sense this justifies her opinion of him.[52] Merteuil particularly enjoys her victory over Valmont, who had been taken away from her by her enemy. By the end of the novel, she has

manipulated him to such a degree that he has become far less a force in his own right than a sort of battleground for the forces represented by her and Mme de Tourvel. Although the modern reader is less than captivated by the character of the Présidente, it is probably true, to judge by the seriousness with which the public and the reviewers greeted other sentimental, Rousseau-type heroines of the day, that Laclos meant to provide in her the Marquise's match in dramatic interest and in intensity of character.[53] The pity one feels for the tortured but always dignified and virtuous Tourvel plays against the terror evoked by Merteuil: the reader is sent back and forth from the cruel machinations of one to the torment of the other.

Laclos refuses to give a solution; each side destroys the other, for if Merteuil has succeeded in crushing her enemy, she herself has also been deeply affected by what has taken place. Her victory is soured by the fact that she cannot recapture Valmont on her own terms; she has succeeded in making his sense of loss and regret over Mme de Tourvel futile, but she cannot erase it. Fearing that it is she, and not the Présidente, who has become "une femme ordinaire" for Valmont (CXXXIV, 319), the Marquise is furious and absolutely refuses to win him back through cajolery or artful manoeuvering. Rather than help him save face, she cruelly reveals her manipulation of him and provokes the series of events that leads to her downfall.

It has sometimes been suggested that the real target of Laclos' indignation is neither the wickedness of Merteuil nor the evil effects of unchecked sensibility, but the immoral society that fosters them.[54] It is true that Prévan and Valmont are welcomed to all the best salons and that is is the staid and totally conventional Mme de Volanges who

(inadvertently) starts the seduction of Valmont off on the right path by giving Mme de Tourvel the idea of having him followed (IX, 24), an action that not only clears Valmont of suspicion as to the motive of his stay in the country, but also presents him to the Présidente as a kind and generous friend of humanity. We know also by a letter from Laclos to Mme Riccoboni, that the author wished to appeal to a public sense of outrage to punish evil-doers who, like Merteuil, operate well within the limits of the law.[55] He compares his character to Molière's Tartuffe, who is equally safe from a legal point of view and is only brought to his well-deserved fate by the anger of a just king, the representative of honest society. In the absence of a morally outraged society, Laclos had to call upon outside forces to complete the Marquise's disgrace.[56]

Merteuil is fully aware of the need to remain within the law and, even more, to appear to obey the social codes of her class. She disguises herself as a prude and does not hesitate to dispose of her enemies or potential rivals by publicizing their faults and crying, "On ne peut plus voir cette femme-là" (LXXIV, 151). But it is not only her sense of irony that leads her to ruin others by invoking the very same rules of decency that she secretly flaunts, for if Merteuil rebels intellectually against the laws of nature and the social conventions men have set up to cope with them, she retains a strongly conservative and pragmatic attitude towards political and social realities. Obviously, Merteuil needs to protect the existing system, since it is only if others believe in it and fear to upset it that she can penetrate their motives and control them. But, aside from this, there is no indication in any of her letters that she even imagines the possibility of disrupting, much

less destroying, ordinary social life.

It is perhaps the conservatism of Merteuil, which many critics have stressed,[57] that provides the best argument for seeing in Laclos' novel a condemnation of condemnation of contemporary society. In the view of one critic, in fact, Merteuil is the innocent victim of her environment: "Mme de Merteuil is no more a monster than [Marivaux'] Marianne; she is the perfect product of her society, the best fitted to survive under the laws she was forced to live by."[58]

Laclos is, however, as far from preaching social revolution as are his characters. If the cry for individual freedom was beginning to be heard in the eighteenth century, the freedom sought was limited. Individualism took the shape of a Machiavelian sense of getting the most out of existing conditions. As Martin Turnell has said, the typical eighteenth-century hero does not probe his inner soul and ask himself what kind of individual he is, but rather wonders, "How must I act in order to...?"[59] The problem of absolute freedom for the individual, his right to disregard totally the law and the rights of others, to inflict upon them, if he chooses, unlimited pain and suffering, is not discussed in the novel before the Marquis de Sade,[60] and even he, we shall see, concerns himself with the eighteenth-century ideal of "sociabilité."

Notes to Chapter IV:

[1] V.H. Debidour says, in Le Miroir transparent, that is is one of a small number of works that "analysent impitoyablement l'homme en le constituant vraiment hors de toute référence à Dieu," quoted by Yves Le Hir, introd., Les Liaisons dangereuses, by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos (Paris: Garnier, 1961), p. xiii.

[2] This has been pointed out by other critics. See, for example, Jean-Luc Seylaz, Les Liaisons dangereuses et la création romanesque chez Laclos (Geneva: Droz; Paris: Minard, 1965), pp. 111-12, and Ronald Grimsley, "Don Juanism in Les Liaisons dangereuses," in his From Montesquieu to Laclos: Studies in the French Enlightenment (Geneva: Droz, 1974), pp. 151-52.

[3] Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, Les Liaisons dangereuses (Paris: Garnier, 1961), XXIII, 51. All future quotations will be identified in the text by letter, indicated by a Roman numeral, and page number.

[4] It is, however, an exaggeration to say, as Seylaz does, that "Valmont est libre de préoccupations religieuses" and to claim that any comparison with Don Juan is basically untenable, p. 111. Valmont and especially Merteuil are beginning to feel the sort of vengeful atheism of Don Juan which is developed "philosophically" by Sadian libertines.

[5] Marcel Ruff, L'Esprit du mal et l'esthétique baudelairienne (Pairs: Armand Colin, 1955), p. 60 and p. 61, respectively. The following quotations from this work are identified in the text. For the opposite opinion, see, for example, Martin Turnell, The Novel in France (1951; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Librairies Press, 1972), p.67, who believes that nothing is more absurd than "to pretend that [Laclos' libertines] have anything to do with the childish 'satanism' of the next century or to introduce confusing concepts like 'le mal.'"

[6] Some critics, like René Etiemble, refuse to see satanic elements even in this story. Calling it a "conte anondin," Etiemble states that "ceux-là se trompent du tout au tout qui déchiffrent en filigrane dans Le Diable amoureux, tout un sens ésotérique (pourquoi pas sotériologique!)," in introd., Romanciers du XVIII[e] siècle (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), II, xxi. For the opposite view, see Bettina Knapp, Dream and Image (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston Pub. Co., 1977), Chapter IV, pp. 103-27.

[7] Grimsley, p. 155.

[8] Philip Stewart, Le Masque et la parole (Paris: Corti, 1973), p. 152n. Although we agree with this critic that, in the works of Crébillon, the libertine does not generally challenge established social codes, we do not agree that there is no seduction. Crébillon's early libertines are not satisfied with merely taking part in a social ritual; they seek to exert total control over their partners by means of seduction. Clitandre in La Nuit et le moment, especially in the Luscinde episode, and Clerval

in Le Hasard du coin du feu succeed admirably.

[9] Some critics, for example, Grimsley, p. 155 and Turnell, pp. 69ff, see Merteuil, at least in part, as a defender of the rights of women in a kind of war between the sexes. But this view is supported only by a few brief statements in letter LXXXI, especially the declaration that she was "née pour venger mon sexe," p. 174. The Marquise is obviously angry that she has been denied the freedom of action given to men and, at the same time, proud that she has been able to overcome such obstacles, but her actions give no indication that she feels any stronger bond with women than she does with men. She is a "loner," and, as we shall see, lonliness is, for her, one of the few incontrovertible facts of human existence and the basis upon which her philosophy of life is built.

[10] According to Seylaz, p. 93, the characters of Cécile and Danceny were meant to contradict the "croyance traditionnelle en l'innocence et en la pureté des êtres jeunes." We discussed in Chapter II, above, the idea of the libertine novelists that children are amoral, if not naturally corrupt, beings.

[11] See Seylaz, Part II, Chapter 2, "Une mythologie fascinante," pp. 99-120. The following quotations from this work are identified in the text.

[12] Roger Picard, Les Salons littéraires et la société francaise, 1610-1789 (New York: Brentano's, 1943), p. 159. J.-P. Belin, Le Mouvement philosophique de 1748 à 1789 (1913; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, n.d.), p. 224 and p. 217, respecitvely, quotes Grimm as saying that "tout est aujourd'hui philosophe, philosophique, et philosophie en France," but also that the "livres de pure philosophie passaient . . . presque inaperçus."

[13] This is the case with Diderot's more daring works, which were generally not published until long after his death. His Dr. Bordeu in Le Rêve de d'Alembert, for example, is not at all at ease with the implications of his belief that "tout ce qui est ne peut être ni contre nature ni hors de nature," Oeuvres philosophiques (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. 380. He would not, he declares, publicly greet any man "suspecté de pratiquer ma doctrine" (p. 378).

[14] This is the belief of René Hubert, D'Holbach et ses amis (Paris: André Delpeuch, 1928), p. 83.

[15] See Belin, Chapter 12, pp. 289-98. Elsewhere, Belim quotes Métra as saying that, by the 1780's, "on traitait Voltaire de bigot parce qu'il n'était pas athée" (p. 339).

[16] J.H. Brumfitt, The French Enlightenment (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1972), p. 12.

[17] Peter Brooks, The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 44-93.

[18] Louise K. Horowitz, "Love and Language: A Study of the Classical French Moralist Writers," Diss. City Univ. of New York 1973, p. 197. This dissertation has been published under the same title by the Ohio State Univ. Press, 1977, but the published book was unavailable to us.

[19] Horowitz, p. 198.

[20] See Chapter I, above, in which we noted the tendency of earlier libertines to describe others according to the groups they fall into: "ces sortes d'amants qui. . ," etc.

[21] Horowitz, p. 202.

[22] Seylaz, p. 102.

[23] Brooks, p. 67.

[24] Seylaz, p. 106. The following quotation from this work is identified in the text.

[25] Brumfitt, p. 111, that "despite the title of his best known work [La Mettrie] was one of the main initiators away from the mechanical sciences towards the biological ones." See Aram Vartanian, ed., La Mettrie's L'Homme machine: A Study in the Origins of an Idea (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1960), in which the "philosophe's" vitalist theories are discussed.

[26] Pointed out by John Falvey, ed., Discours sur le bonheur, by Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Vol. 134 of Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, ed. Theodore Besterman (Banbury, Oxfordshire: The Voltaire Foundation, Thorpe Mandeville House, 1975), p. 102n.

[27] L'Année Littéraire (1772; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1966), XIX, 516-17.

[28] Paul-Henri Thiry d'Holbach, Le Système de la nature, nouvelle éd. avec des notes et des corrections par Diderot, ed. Yvon Belaval (1821; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966), I, 225. Future references to this work will be identified in the text by the letter S, followed by volume and page number.

[29] Quoted in Pierre Naville, Paul Thiry d'Holbach et la philosophie scientifique au XVIII[e] siècle (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 51. The description of Diderot is found on p. 61.

[30] There are, of course, important differences between the opinions of Helvétius and D'Holbach. D'Holbach's pessimism, for example, stems from the vision of incessant movement which is the rule of nature and which makes any kind of permanence (inner stability of character or even outer stability of situation) impossible. Helvétius' materialism does not dwell as much on this idea. The pessimism comes from the author's reduction of all human beings to carbon copies of one another. He firmly refuses to allow for the existence in the individual (those

within the "normal" range at least) of any kind of innate superiority, or even inferiority. Nothing in us is unique, for better or for worse. D'Holbach specifically rejects this idea. See, for example, La Morale universelle (1776; rpt. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1970), I, 11n and III, 53-54.

[31] Hubert, p. 75.

[32] Claude Adrien Helvétius, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Yvon Belaval (1795; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1969), VII, 163. Future references to De l'homme, taken from this edition, will be identified in the text by the letter H followed by volume and page numbers.

[33] Goethe said of Le Système de la nature that "its sad, atheistic twilight seemed to cast a veil over the beauty of the earth and rob the heaven of stars," quoted in Max Pearson Cushing, Baron d'Holbach: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Radicalism in France (1914; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), p. 58.

[34] Reginald James White, The Anti-Philosophers: A Study of the Philosophes in Eighteenth-Century France (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), p. 9. The modern thinker he refers to is Michael Oakeshott, who expresses the opinion in Experience and its Modes (1933).

[35] Claude Adrien Helvétius, Oeuvres (Paris: Briand, l'an 2 de la République [1793]), I, 135. Future references to De l'esprit will be identified in the text by the letter E followed by volume and page numbers of this edition.

[36] Jules Soury, quoted in Cushing, p. 65.

[37] D'Holbach, La Morale universelle, I, 70.

[38] Stewart, p. 25.

[39] Jean Giraudoux, in speaking of the "besogne vengeresse" of both Merteuil and Valmont, remarks that "un plus grand poète nous aurait laissé sentir qui ils vengent; Laclos ne l'a peut-être pas su," "Choderlos de Laclos," in his Littérature (1941; rpt. Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 65.

[40] Jean A. Perkins, The Concept of Self in the French Enlightenment (Geneva: Droz, 1969), p. 48.

[41] Ernst Cassirer, La Philosophie des lumières, trans. Pierre Quillet (Paris: Fayard, 1970), p. 128.

[42] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Les Confessions, ed. B. Gagnebin et M. Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), I, 327.

[43] Perkins, pp. 48-49.

[44] Mme de Tourvel is just such a woman, according to Merteuil. "La tendre dévote doit beaucoup écrire: car que ferait-elle quand elle est

seule? Elle n'a sûrement pas le bon esprit de se distraire" (CXXXI, 312). Merteuil places great importance on having Valmont send her the Présidente's first love letter. It would be the symbol of her power over all that she stands for.

[45] See J. Robert Loy, "Love/Vengeance in the Late Eighteenth-Century French Novel," Esprit Créateur 3 (1963), 157-66, where the importance of this question in the minds of the libertines is stressed: "the vengeance of which Merteuil and Sade and others speak so often is . . . a vengeance on the state of nature which makes such a question possible" (p. 163).

[46] See Brooks' analysis of Laclos' novel, pp. 172-218.

[47] Many critics have noted this in Laclos' libertines. See, for example, Brooks, p. 190 and p. 191, respectively, where he mentions Valmont's "sadistic need to degrade" and his perpetual "recourse to travesty;" Turnell, pp.63-64; Seylaz, p. 95.

[48] Jacques Faurie, Essai sur la séduction (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), p. 17. Most critics note the difference between the aggressiveness of the evil-doers and the passiveness of the victims, according to Peter Brooks, p. 173.

[49] André Malraux, "Laclos et les Liaisons dangereuses," (1939), rpt. in Le Triange noir (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 45.

[50] Malraux, p. 44.

[51] Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, édition définitive, V (Paris: Au cercle du livre précieux, 1966), 353.

[52] Brooks, pp. 201-02.

[53] Le comte de Tilly gave an example of the contemporary view of Mme de Tourvel when he said that she is "adorable, et a fait verser bien des larmes à la jeunesse des deux sexes," quoted in Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Maurice Allem (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 709. Modern critics differ in their opinions. Seylaz, p. 147, believes that Laclos succeeded in his portait of Mme de Tourvel, but Turnell, p. 63, sees in her (and in Mme de Rosemonde, both representatives of "true virtue") "stereotyped concepts [which] are not adequate to the weight of the emotions they are intended to convey." One recent interpretation seems to me to be erroneous in ascribing to Laclos the aim of presenting Mme de Tourvel as the symbol of a weak-willed victim of the emotions, motivated by a soul-destroying need for some sort of outside confirmation of her existence, whether it be through religion or love. By exchanging the worship of God for that of Valmont, Tourvel "n'aurait fait que changer de maître," Madeleine Therrien, Les Liaisons dangereuses: une interprétation psychologique (Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1973), p. 152. To give only one objection, Mme de Tourvel, before loving Valmont, was at ease and, although religious, the opposite of a fanatic.

[54] For example, English Showalter, Jr., The Evolution of the French Novel, 1641 to 1782 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 344, or Turnell, p. 66.

[55] Laclos, Oeuvres complètes, pp. 696-97.

[56] The public's humiliating treatment of Merteuil at the Comédie Italienne, described by Mme de Volanges (CLXXIII, 390-91), is not the result of moral outrage. As Brooks, p. 210, and others have pointed out, Prévan, who is applauded, is certainly worth no more than either of the two main libertines. In addition, even the representatives of honest society, Mme de Rosemonde and Danceny, work to cover up the full extent of Merteuil's evil, rather than to risk further social disturbances by exposing it.

[57] Especially Brooks, pp. 183-88, and Laurent Versini, Laclos et la tradition: Essai sur les sources et la technique des Liaisons dangereuses (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968), pp. 187-205, in which he examines the novel in the light of the seventeenth-century tradition of "honnêteté:" "Laclos, ouvert aux leçons de la philosophie nouvelle, comme à celles de la tradition, tente une synthèse qui permette à la puissance du moi . . . de s'exprimer dans le cadre de l'honnêteté, le dernier mot devant rester à la sociabilité" (p. 203).

[58] Showalter, p. 334.

[59] Turnell, p. 54.

[60] The thinker who, at times, comes closest to Sade's ideas on the individual is Diderot; at one point, when discussing the conflict between the special individual and society, he proposes a special morality for the genius, one that "pourrait bien être au rebours de la morale usuelle," quoted in Yvon Belaval, L'Esthétique sans paradoxe de Diderot (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), p. 68.

Chapter V: The Marquis de Sade

As a novelist of libertinism, Sade differs most from his predecessors in that, for him, cruelty is divorced from the notion of seduction.[1] Scenes of debauchery often begin with a clear statement of the libertine's intentions and an immediate undressing of the victim and victimizer. Here, for example, is the method of the Grand Duke Léopold, whom Juliette meets during her stay in Florence: "s'approchant des quatre filles, il leur déclare ses intentions . . . [puis il] les fit aussitôt mettre nues par son agent." Turning to Juliette and her companion, he asks: "Belles dames . . . voudriez-vous bien imiter ces demoiselles, et vous déshabiller de même?"[2] If a major characteristic of eighteenth-century cruel eroticism is its psychological manipulation of the victim, then Sade's depiction of sexual scenes is anything but erotic.[3] In a complete reversal of past libertine ideals, Sade refuses to see physical possession as the ultimate aim of libertinism. Bodies count for very little here. If resistance by the victim is prized at all, it is simply because physical signs of distress--tears, entreaties, screams--stimulate the libertine by activating "le fluide électrique" upon which all pleasure depends. When the libertine observes the effects of his threats and his cruelty on the victim, "la répercussion, plus active sur nous, détermine bien plus énergiquement et bien plus promptement alors les esprits animaux à la direction qui leur est nécessaire pour la volupté" (Phil III, 528). The victim in Sade has lost all moral dimension; the libertine's treatment of him is reduced to pure brutality.

Sade, in other words, refuses to play the social game engaged in by his predecessors. Elaborate efforts to disguise one's true character,

such as those made by the Marquise de Merteuil, are almost totally neglected by Sadian libertines, even when their social position would seem to demand discretion. This is true in novels that are written in the traditional vein, such as Aline et Valcour, in which the characters are supposed to be believable, as well as in the more daring works, such as Juliette, in which the libertines are relatively unconcerned with the problem of exposure, whether they are society matrons or the Pope. This is the case, for example, of Mme de Saint-Ange. As unlikely as it seems in view of the staggering number of lovers she has had (in itself unbelievable), this utterly debauched monster-heroine proclaims: "On me croit sage dans mes sociétés" (Phil III, 412). Sade pays little heed to the tenet of "la vraisemblance" in both the presentation of his master libertines and in the details of their cruelty.[4]

From this point of view, the author of La Nouvelle Justine would not seem to be comparable to the novelists of "worldliness" (to borrow Brooks' phrase) whom we have studied in the preceding chapters and in whose work "primary or even exclusive importance [is given] to ordered social existence."[5] Yet the works of Sade and of these writers share much common ground. With regard to the libertine genre in general, Sade did not, as we shall see, disdain to borrow an occasional libertine situation, nor did he scorn the usual libertine arguments against conventional morality.[6]

But Sadian libertines have a much closer link to the heroes of the more specifically "worldly" libertine novelists, with whom they share the conviction that libertinism somehow holds the key to a great power. Even with Crébillon, libertinism began to take the shape of a philosophy of life, such as Sade would develop. There is certainly present in the

earlier heroes a strong warring spirit that seeks, through the application of intellectual powers to eroticism, to assert the supremacy of the self. Versac, like Valmont, believes that "conquérir est notre destin,"[7] and, for both, the difficulty of the enterprise greatly enhances the victory. The desire to prove himself is what incites Clitandre to create obstacles that he then overcomes in his cruel conquest of Luscinde in La Nuit et le moment, while Valmont feels so strongly the need for an enemy to conquer, that he disdains easy victories and places primary importance on the degree of difficulty facing him. One of the greatest frustrations of the Sadian libertine is the absence of any real enemy, a situation created by his own misanthropy, which prevents him from dignifying the victim with the title of foe, and, even more, by his atheism, which obliterates the most important enemy of all. "Je suis au désespoir de ne trouver jamais que le préjugé, au lieu du crime que je désire et que je ne rencontre nulle part," declares Clairwil (Jul II, 54).

In the preceding chapters, we have seen that it is the intellectualizing of love-making (which turns the partner into a victim) that is at the base of the libertine's attitude of cruelty. It has also been stressed that this penchant for cruelty is not simply a natural by-product of aristocratic society, but, more and more, a conscious response the libertine makes to what he sees as the necessity of choosing between "le coeur et l'esprit." Yet, as the mere practice of libertinism becomes a philosophy of libertinism, the essential mystery of the nature of eroticism remains unexplained. What exactly is the libertine out to conquer? Crébillon's worldly "philosophes" settle, at times uneasily, for the social status accorded a master seducer, but, increasingly, the

libertine becomes aware that, behind the power struggle during which sexuality and cruelty are seen to be so closely related, there is some important truth for man to discover. Not only is there a growing feeling that submitting to one's own sexual drives as well as to those of the partner, without consenting to and controlling them, is a humiliating defeat, but there is also a greater interest in the erotic act itself, a desire to exploit that special moment.

It must, of course, be kept in mind that Sade was removed from the literary and intellectual life of his times, and that, his physical imprisonment aiding, he was also mentally confined within "les limites étroites de la perversité," as Gaëtan Picon notes.[8] These factors naturally produced strange combinations of eighteenth-century ideas and sensibilities, but it is precisely because Sade accepted and admitted his perversity, and, in an intellectual provocation, held it up to others as a model of behavior, that he is most important. He sometimes succeeds in eliciting a feeling of complicity in the unwilling reader and, at that moment, Maurice Blanchot's comments on Sadian thought come to mind: "elle nous montre qu'entre l'homme normal qui enferme l'homme sadique dans une impasse et le sadique qui fait de cette impasse une issue, c'est celui-ci qui en sait le plus long sur la vérité et la logique de sa situation . . ."[9] For the same reason, the "sadique" has much to tell us about the eighteenth-century libertines who came before him and with whom he shares a preoccupation with the great mystery of eroticism.

A second point to make about the relationship between Sade and his predecessors concerns the importance of the social order for the libertine. If we accept Peter Brooks' statement quoted above, we

must conclude that Sade's novels may also be qualified as "worldly." Even within the private world of sadism, scenes of debauchery, no matter how cruel, are carefully ordered according to a strict social hierarchy, and, as Roland Barthes has noted, there is in Sade a "volonté d'identifier le bonheur à un espace fini et organisé."[10] There is another, very important similarity between Sadian society and that of the aristocratic libertine: the power of the word. It is, again, Barthes, who writes that, within Sadian society, it is the power of speech that, alone, distinguishes between the libertine and the victim.[11]

In much the same way, the earlier libertine relied upon the power of the word as the key to establishing his personal power. For Versac, the word is the fabricator of myths, which are the secret of his control over others. It is not the truth, but what is said to be the truth that matters. Versac dominates the conversation of the social gathering in Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit, just as one imagines he does that of the boudoir. In La Nuit et le moment, as we noted in Chapter I, Clitandre is able to seduce Cidalise by the mere recital of his past actions, and in Le Sopha, Mazulim, who is almost impotent in reality, is the most feared libertine in Agra, because people believe the stories that circulate about him. Not only is the word the symbol of the libertine's power, but, as we see, also an instrument of seduction. This double function is equally apparent in Sade, except that it is the libertine himself who is seduced and inflamed with each new recitation of his own principles of debauchery. In both cases, also, it is only within the particular society to which the libertine belongs that the rules apply.

Sade did not, however, ignore the "real" society outside his own;

it occupies an important place in his work. His private world exists, in part, only because he wants to create an "anti-world" in which the values and ideals of ordinary society are destroyed and which has meaning only in so far as the acts committed within it are felt by the libertine to be transgressions. But in his less radical novels, Aline et Valcour, for example, Sade turns back to that society outside in order to present his own view of it, one in which cruelty plays an essential part, since, according to Sade, it is the most basic human quality. We see that, if Sade refuses to play the social game, that is, to accept the validity of "socialized" cruelty, as Crébillon and Laclos did, he did not think it unimportant to study cruelty in society.

Sade is, at once, very different from, and very much like, his predecessors. In studying cruel libertinism in his novels, we must first take note of the fact that his concerns are similar to those of his contemporaries, who had already begun the exploration of areas declared taboo by religious and temporal authorities. The great task of the eighteenth century was, as its own thinkers saw it, nothing less than the redefinition of human nature, a task made necessary by the loss of the mythical proportion granted human existence according to the divine scheme of things. Sade's works contain the same uneasy moral reevaluation that marks the work of his libertine predecessors. His methods of exploration are, however, very different. While they begin by observing reality in order to reach certain conclusions about human nature, Sade, as a "philosophe," begins by examining human nature and then constructs an imaginary society that best provides a means of expression for what is deepest and truest in us.

We shall begin our study with a look at Sade's opinion of his

predecessors,[12] and a comparison of their aim of presenting "socialized" cruelty with the Marquis' emphasis on the base of pure cruelty in each human being. We shall then examine more closely Sade's idea of human nature. He thought of himself as a "philosophe" in the tradition of the Baron d'Holbach, whose work he greatly admired. To understand more thoroughly his view of cruelty as inherent in human nature, and to examine to what extent this view may be considered a logical extension of certain trends in Enlightenment philosophy, which, as we have seen, influenced other libertine writers, we shall briefly compare Sade to Diderot, the "philosophe" who, according to one critic, "est, de tous les grands philosophes du siècle, celui qui s'approche le plus des audaces du marquis." [13] It is especially the way in which both authors blend the rational and erotic aspects of their thought in order to produce a very personal philosophy that affords the basis of comparison.

Finally, we shall examine Sade's view of contemporary society, as he pictures it in his most successful traditional novel, Aline et Valcour, which, as Jean Fabre notes, Sade believed to be his "chef-d'oeuvre." Fabre also states that this novel deserves special attention because in in, Sade is "fidèle à lui-même, mais aussi bien libéré de lui-même par son parti-pris de décence et son pouvoir de romancier."[14] It is in this work, we shall see, that Sade may be said to have added a final note to the worldly novelists' presentation of the philosophy of cruel libertinism.

* * *

In Idée sur les romans, Sade is very clear about his desire to separate himself from past libertine writers. He despised "les ennuyeuses conversations des ruelles" as much as he did "les fastidieuses lan-

gueurs de l'amour" (Idée X, 12). He is especially harsh on Rétif and on Crébillon fils, accusing the latter of flattering vice and crushing virtue. He also dislikes what he sees as Crébillon's intellectual dishonesty, his "trahison de la nature" (Idée X, 22). Sade was sincere here. He disdains Crébillon for hiding certain basic truths about human nature behind the fancy speeches of silly fops.

Like Crébillon, Sade believes that the erotic moment is a special one, a kind of moment of truth during which two beings engage in a fierce power struggle. Both writers illustrate this fundamental eighteenth-century attitude. But they are looking for different things. For Crébillon, it owes its specialness to the psychological truths it reveals: at this moment, ordinary precautions are likely to be neglected. Restraints are forgotten and cracks appear in the social mask. Both partners are potentially vulnerable, but the winner will be the one who is able to control the other's mind by remaining in complete control of himself. Crébillon chooses this moment to show the true nature of the social mechanism. Sade, however, chooses the erotic moment to show the true nature of the human mechanism.

For Sade, social cruelty, what one might call "localized" cruelty, misses the point. He is interested in exposing ultimate human motivation, to show it as it operates in its purest form, without reference to a particular social setting. To the old arguments, evoked by Crébillon fils in the preface of Les Egarements, of whether the artist should portray man as he should be or, as Crébillon believes, man as he is, Sade adds a new note. He will show man as he can be, "tel qu'il peut être, tel que doivent le rendre les modifications du vice, et toutes

les secousses des passions" (Idée X, 12), man uninhibited by local customs and developed to the full extent of his natural inclinations. Sade's aim is to destroy the myths built up around man's nature that result from the unnatural social situation he usually finds himself in.

Sade did, however, single out for comment, the novels of certain libertine writers who seemed to him to be more willing than most to face the facts of human existence. One of these is d'Argens' Thérèse philosophe.[15] It was perhaps from this novel, which Sade considered to have been written by a fellow "philosophe," that he took the idea for one of the scenes in La Nouvelle Justine. In Thérèse, a dissolute priest le père Dirrag, sexually abuses Mlle Eradice, whose confessor his is. He takes advantage of the girl's naiveté by convincing her that the physical sensations involved are trials she must pass through on her way to purification and sainthood. In La Nouvelle Justine, the innocent heroine also permits herself to be assaulted by the priest to whom she makes confession, Dom Severino, superior of the abbey of Sainte-Marie-des Bois. Both episodes are meant to be provocative by showing sacrilege committed by a member of the sect and by establishing the stupidity of religious fervor which is so easily duped, but Sade's handling of d'Argens' libertine anecdote illustrates the manner in which he wished to transform the libertine novel.

In Thérèse, the reader's main impression is that the episode is one of social commentary, mixed with a large dose of "gaillardise." The author wishes to demonstrate that, for any man with a strong sexual nature, the priesthood must eventually lead to unhappiness and possibly to crime. Religion is wrong not to allow any outlet for desires, since desire is natural and chastity is not. The anecdotal nature of the

incident is preserved by the tongue-in-cheek manner in which it is presented (d'Argens insists that the two were made for each other, since Eradice had a need to believe and Dirrag had a need to convince) and the lighthearted way in which it ends (Eradice, enlightened as to the true nature of her confessor by a young and handsome priest, rewards the latter by granting freely what Dirrag had stolen). In Thérèse, the scabrous details are meant as simple entertainment; they exist side by side with serious intent.

In La Nouvelle Justine, Sade is not primarily concerned with social criticism,[16] but rather with the depiction of pure passion, the passions being, for Sade, "des éléments irréductibles," which can be combined or opposed to others.[17] Dom Severino and Justine represent pure states of being. The priest is not pushed to extrer action by repression as is le père Dirrag. On the contrary, he represents the pure force of eroticism. In the same way, Justine is pictured less as a victim of society, which makes young girls the slaves of religious faith, than as the incarnation of religious faith. These are not real characters, but as Alice Laborde points out, "des signes 'authentiques' de l'homme."[18]

It is in the interest of truth that religious fervor be presented as the natural victim of a superior force. That is why Sade particularly streeses Justine's unbelievable blindness and submissiveness in the face of the almost undisguised ferocity of the priest. An indecently dressed boy attends Severino, and "Justine en eût conçu quelque soupçon, si elle l'eût observé" (NJ VI, 305). The priest is involved in homosexual acts with the boy during the confession, yet Justine hears nothing: "si [elle] eût été moins aveuglée . . . assurément elle eût cessé d'être dupe" (VI, 306). Made to take off her clothes and

kneel before the statue of the Virgin, while the priest abuses her and even bares himself to her, and then commanded to follow him without dressing herself, Justine is "un peu inquiète" (VI, 309). The scene in La Nouvelle Justine is not, as in Thérèse, a detachable anecdote, but a scene of preparation: Severino does not complete the attack here and his cruelty is held in check; Justine has not yet gone through the symbolic labyrinth of tunnels, staircases, and ladders that will take her away from the everyday world to that special place that is Sade's private world of cruelty.

Le père Dirrag is certainly not a hero in d'Argens' novel, and he would not be considered one by Sade either, since he is a villain by circumstance, not choice. Severino, on the contrary, turns out to be a "philosophe," as are all of Sade's main libertines. Cruelty is his passion, but also his choice. With the heroes of Laclos and with those of the "cynique" tradition in general, Sade's libertines seem to choose the head over the heart. Le Président de Blamont, in Aline et Valcour, never ceases to say, "il n'est point d'organe plus faux [que le coeur], on en fait ce qu'on veut. . ." (AV IV, 98).

Sade's libertines continue Merteuil's lead in stressing the degradation of human existence, but they push it to the extreme pessimistic limit, at which others do not count at all; they show us, in retrospect, that Laclos' heroes had reached the last stage of cynicism that society could tolerate. It is not quite accurate to say of Sade's characters that they are "cyniques," since the libertine "cynique" is a social being. Cruel as Merteuil is, her cruelty is a means to an end, and that end is attainable within the social framework. She is not cruel simply in order to stimulate the sexual drive, and the sexual drive does not

automatically lead to the desire to be cruel. With Sade, there is nothing but desire. His libertines dream of creating a perpetual motion machine of debauchery and evil. They do not create misery in search of pleasure or fame, creating misery is their pleasure. Sensation and philosophy are one in Sade; we come to pure, as opposed to social, cruelty.

We had already begun to get an idea of this purity of evil in Les Liaisons dangereuses, where the reader is never really sure why Merteuil is so bent on vengeance, what exactly she is seeking. One had the impression that society was becoming too small for her, that she wanted some sort of deeper recognition of her existence.[19] The reign of "l'esprit" was degenerating into a passion as troublesome as that of "le coeur." In Sade, the paradox is completed: the distinction between head and heart has clouded over. In fact, a comparison with the sentimental novel is possible, since, in both cases, the reader may wonder to what extent philosophy acts as a justification for a basically irrational choice. Does philosophy serve passion; does passion serve philosophy?[20] It is never clear. If love is idealized in the sentimental novel, it is possible to say that Sade does the same for hate. As Maurice Blanchot has said, Sadian thought is always tied to "des puissances irrationnelles."[21] We have already remarked, in Chapter III, upon the similarities between Sade's world and that of a sentimental novel like Pauline, or the Victim of the Heart, which could easily have been called Les Infortunes de la vertu.

One might even say that cruelty, for the Sadian libertine, is indicative of a superior form of sensitivity, but one that is turned inward to the only important reality: one's own desires. "Il y a . . .

un excès dans la sensibilité qui avoisine l'insensibilité," Sade remarks in a note to Aline et Valcour, ". . . une foule de délits naissent de ces excès, et ne sont que les résultats très singuliers de ce dernier periode de la sensibilité" (AV V, 255n). His heroine Léonore continues Sade's reasoning, explaining that cruelty is often the property of beings who are deeply "susceptibles d'émotions," that, in fact, "ce qu'on prend en [ces âmes fortes] pour de l'insouciance ou de la cruauté, n'est qu'une manière, à elles seules connue, de sentir plus vivement que les autres' (AV V, 260). The "sadique," like the sentimentalist, listens to the pulse of nature within himself, not attempting to overcome it, which would be impossible, but to obey it. Successful libertines in Sade have only to submit to their fate and, very often, the difference between the libertine and the victim, between Juliette and Justine, for example, is one of attitude; these two heroines could have shared the same fate, if Justine, like her sister, knew how to find satisfaction in giving and receiving pain instead of trying to deny the power of cruelty.[22]

We can now see that Sade was less interested in observing "reality" than in detailing his own personal vision of a higher reality. Yet Sade believed that he was speaking for all men and that he was contributing to the study of human nature as a "philosophe."[23] He saw himself as a continuer of the serious trends in literature and in "philosophie," the two being inseparable. It is true that he started from basic materialist principles. He thought D'Holbach's Le Système de la nature a very important book and took it as his guide. He praised La Mettrie, who, according to Lester Crocker, developed the first theory of nihilism in the eighteenth century."[24] Many critics have

traced Sade's philosophical ideas to their sources in the eighteenth century.[25] But, although Sade always sought to make use of their materialist principles, underlying them are his contentions that cruelty is the single most important natural quality in man and that human cruelty is the image of nature's cruelty to man. Nature holds man powerless by keeping him ignorant of his essence, and the libertine imitates this by the arbitrary, but always cruel manner in which he treats his victim. As a sign of nature's approval, cruelty is rewarded and virtue punished. Sade's idea that nature "approves" of the libertine's actions betrays the element of irrationality in his thought. A more "scientific" explanation would be that cruelty succeeds (rather than is rewarded) because it works with instead of against nature's orders. Sade offers both explanations on different occasions.

There are, of course, strains of pessimistic thought running throughout the Enlightenment period. In Candide, for example, a work to which Sade's "conte philosophique," Les Infortunes de la vertu has been compared,[26] the good Anabaptist is drowned while the cruel sailor who had arbitrarily caused his death is saved. Yet, we have seen that Sade's elaboration of cruelty as a philosophy leaves the path of strict rationalism and so cannot really be compared to Voltaire's methods. The particular way in which rationalism and eroticism--the two tendencies that characterize so well the different intellectual currents of eighteenth-century thought--are linked in Sade calls to mind, instead, another of his philosophical predecessors, Diderot, in whose thought also the erotic element not only contributes greatly to the formulation of a personal philosophy, but leads to a flirtation with a kind of "sadisme bon enfant," as Raymond Jean has

said.[27] As Jean's phrase indicates, there is in Diderot's work a final rejection of evil, which is why the exploration of man's cruelty remains at the embryonic stage. It is, nevertheless, true that, more than with any other predecessor of Sade, novelist or "philosophe," there is here a similarity of (erotic) vision which makes both of them take seriously into account the problem of man's cruelty as an essential rather than socially determined part of his nature. It is, perhaps, by a comparison between Diderot and Sade that one can best see the extent of the "natural" link between materialistic philosophy and cruelty, both of which, as we shall see, emanate from a vision of constant expense of energy.[28]

* * *

The works of Diderot and Sade, along with those of others of their time, must be seen in the perspective of a battle, as a reaction against the feudal concept of the universe according to which, as it was thought, man, obedient lamb of the Lord, relies totally upon ecclesiastical authority and abandons all that may be called curiosity and originality to bend himself to orthodox teachings. Materialism is their point of departure in their attempt to redefine human nature. Aram Vartanian has made clear that a basic part of materialism such as it was understood by Diderot was the liberation of man's instincts sexual or otherwise.[29] The "philosophe" was to examine, explore, and expose, to transform ideas into action. Vartanian compares the intellectual vitality of the era to the liberation of the sexual élan; both have the same origin: curiosity at last freed. "Philosophie" means the rejection of all limits to human knowledge.

Besides Diderot, with whom Vartanian deals exclusively, it is perhaps Sade who most displays the tendency to associate intimately the great vitality and excitement of both intellectual and sexual "fermentation" (to use a favorite eighteenth-century word). Both Diderot's man and Sade's man feel at the base of their being a life force and both refuse to shut themselves out of regions that were once the special domain of the Church (and also the State).[30]

This reexamination is at the heart of both Diderot's and Sade's work. For both, the human personality is, in large measure, explained by physical causes, including even those inclinations seen as aberrant. Such a view can easily lead to a tendency to free man from all responsibility for his actions, a temptation to which many succumbed. In the sentimental novel, aggression and outright cruelty are often seen as morally inoffensive. Sade and, at times, Diderot share this view. "L'origine de nos passions," says a character in Aline et Valcour, "et par conséquent, la cause de tous nos travers, dépendent uniquement de notre constitution physique, et la différence entre l'honnête homme et le scélérat se démontrerait par l'anatomie, si cette science était ce qu'elle doit être" (AV IV, 323).

Perversion is part of the natural order, which is the point brought out by Dr. Bordeu in Diderot's Le Rêve de d'Alembert when he speaks of monsters.[31] In La Suite de l'entretien, he extends the idea to the moral world, allowing his theorizing on sexual matters to reach almost Sadian proportions as he explains the necessity of accepting any and all personal tastes as natural: "tout ce qui est ne peut être ni contre nature ni hors de nature" (Rêve, p. 380). Another Sadian note to Bordeu's statements is that, for the Doctor, it is the absence of

sexual activity, rather than sexual perversion, which is the strangest natural phenomenon, for, he continues, "je n'en excepte pas même la chasteté et la continence volontaires qui seraient les premiers des crimes contre la nature, si l'on pouvait pécher contre nature" (Rêve, p. 380).

But the important thing is not so much that Diderot and Sade meet on this ground of philosophical justification for perverse acts, which, after all, is implicit in the works of so many others. It is not even that they had the courage to say daring things so bluntly. It is rather that, owing to a very personal and dynamic interpretation of eighteenth-century materialism, both writers come to see each man, not only as the result of natural forces, but as a small-scale reproduction of the interplay of the vital energies that make up these forces. It is, in other words, not so much the facts of materialism, as the vision that is based upon these facts that is important in studying the affinity between Diderot and Sade.

Materialism means flux, a constant formation and reformation of matter. "Le monde commence et finit sans cesse; il est à chaque instant à son commencement et à sa fin" (Rêve, p. 300). The universe is expenditure of energy. It is this vision that Diderot and Sade place at the center of their respective philosophies. The individual is seen as an image of the universe in miniature, as a microcosm whose actions (tending naturally, for the most part, towards constructive ends in Diderot and towards destructive ones in Sade) reproduce the characteristic movements of the whole. Each man is a recreation of the universal drama.

Such an interpretation of materialism leads to a vision of life as a series of "shocks," the shocks that are caused by the movement of

the molecules that are the material carrying the life forces. The objects we see around us, our own bodies, are temporary shapes forced upon these moving molecules by certain laws of attraction that are, for Diderot and Sade, not completely known. It follows from such a vision that violence and cyclical movement are part of the life process. The ideas of incessant circular motion and of confrontation of forces have important esthetic and philosophical implications for both of these authors, and, for both, the esthetic and the philosophical blend together in such a way that, in order to arrive at a true picture of the philosophy of either writer, it is necessary to consider these aspects of their work together.[32]

The purpose of literature, for both Diderot and Sade, is to move the reader strongly, almost violently. They disdain "escapist" literature; neither one aims at pleasing the reader in the sense of making him comfortable by amusing him or even of flattering his taste for morbidity, as is done, for example, in the Gothic novel[33] or, at times, in the sentimental novel. They seek, rather, to confront the reader and, especially in the case of Sade, to shock him, causing him almost a physical discomfort. Sade himself mentions Diderot in this context in Idée sur les romans: "nos âmes se déchirent, et l'ouvrage nous ayant excessivement émus, ayant comme disait Diderot, 'ensanglanté nos coeurs au revers' doit indubitablement produire l'intérêt, qui seul assure des lauriers" (X, 13). Good literature awakens the readers' critical faculties. Laborde describes the effect of Sade's works on the reader as similar to those that the arguments of the libertine have on the victim: "Nous sommes aveuglés par la forme donnée au message comme la victime du libertin est paralysée par le décor et la manière

de parler de celui-ci avant qu'il ne s'attaque à elle physiquement."[34] But the reader is not, of course, the victim, and while the victim's paralysis if followed only by his death, the reader enters a second phase, that of rethinking.

Shock and rethinking are Diderot's methods, too. We may recall, for example, Rameau's nephew, whom Diderot describes as a "grain de levain qui fermente . . [et] fait sortir la vérité."[35] Arthur Wilson calls "literary device" the eroticism mixed with mocking humor that constitutes, in part, Diderot's sadism.[36] Other critics have picked out examples of sadistic moments in his work. Raymond Jean takes note, for example of the embarrassment of the priest in Jacques le fataliste, when Jacques and Suzon maliciously prepare to make love in front of him, and of that of the "aumonier" in the Supplément au voyage de Bougainville, who tries to justify himself in front of Orou, the Tahitian. The lesson is that ordinary moral notions are absurd; the reader, who shares these notions with the embarrassed character, is mocked along with him.[37]

But the specifically Sadian aspect of Diderot's thought is not the fact that he takes pleasure in his characters' discomfort. The victim in Sade, as we mentioned earlier, is a mere object with no moralife. He can suffer physical, but no mental, cruelty. This is not the case for Diderot. In Le Rêve, Diderot is particularly cruel to D'Alembert, especially in the scene of his erotic transport, since, in reality, D'Alembert was just the opposite of a passionate man. But the very fact that Diderot can mock his friend in this way shows that D'Alembert is an individual, that he has a sense of his own dignity, and that Diderot is aware of this.

It is rather the fact that both Diderot and Sade try to put the reader into a moral dilemma that draws them together. They try to involve the reader personally in the action and shock him with his own complicity. Towards the end of the long introduction of Les 120 Journées de Sodome, Sade mockingly addresses the reader in familiar terms: "c'est maintenant, ami lecteur, qu'il faut disposer ton coeur et ton esprit au récit le plus impur qui ait jamais été fait depuis que le monde existe . . . Sans doute, beaucoup de tous les écarts que tu vas voir peints te déplairont, on le sait, mais il s'en trouvera quelques-uns qui t'échaufferont au point de te coûter du f....., et voilà ce qu'il nous faut" (120J XIII, 60-61). Similarly, although much more gently, Mlle de l'Espinasse in Le Rêve, who may be seen as the reader's substitute since, with us, she is hearing the Doctor's theories for the first time, is teased by him and embarrassed by his remarks.[38] At one point, she can only continue "en se couvrant les yeux" (Rêve, p. 379). Yet, she is caught by her own curiosity and keeps asking questions, just as we keep turning the page.

There is, however, a more significant comparison to be made between Diderot and Sade concerning the manner in which they tend to incorporate into their works, on the level of the writing itself, their vision of the movement of molecules, although each one clearly stamps his writing with his own particular inner experience of the universal drama. In Sade, the theory of the cyclical nature of universal movement is imitated in the structure of his works, which usually consist of scenes of debauchery alternating with philosophical tirades.[39] In Diderot, also, the intellectual idea of incessant movement is translated into an esthetic method. The lack of concern for direct

linear development of the story is seen especially in Jacques le fataliste, but it is true in other works also. In Le Rêve, Diderot says: "Je vous disais...mais cela va nous écarter de notre première discussion," to which D'Alembert replies: "Qu'est-ce que cela fait? Nous y reviendrons, ou nous n'y reviendrons pas" (Rêve, p. 268).

The feeling of movement is seen also in the construction of the characters themselves in that their sense of being is not rigidly and exclusively tied to their outer form. They are as mobile, at times, as the masses of molecules they are composed of. Their energy sometimes seems to take on a liquid form in order to bypass the limits of their physical being. They actually become pure expense of energy. In effect, in any scene of debauchery, in which there are always a large number of people involved, the participants lose their individuality to form a whole. There are no uninvolved spectators, no unused energy, no part of any body that is left out. The libertine, the victim, and the helpers become indistinguishable from one another. The moment of crisis is often simultaneous. All exist to the same rhythm; there are no boundaries between them.

There is the same fluidity of being in Diderot's Le Neveu de Rameau. The nephew does not tell stories; he becomes other people: a seducer (p. 412), a violinist (p. 415), a music teacher (p. 423). But there is one particularly interesting episode. After a long speech on music, in which Rameau seduces himself with words in much the same way the Sadian libertine does, he enters a private world and becomes transformed. He is not only another being; he is a multitude of beings. "Moi" describes him for us: "c'est une jeune fille . . .là, il est prêtre, il est roi, il est tyran . . . il est esclave" (p. 468). He is not only the actors of the opera he is "performing,"

but he becomes "tout un orchestre, tout un théâtre lyrique" (p. 469). The movement of the episode is almost sexual: "il commençait à entrer en passion . . . il continuait, saisi d'une espèce d'aliénation d'esprit, d'un enthousiasme . . . il répétait avec une . . . chaleur incroyable . . . écumant de la bouche . . . [et finalement il était] épuisé de fatigue" (pp. 468-69). "Moi" notes in the same sentence in which he mentions the nephew's ability to capture "l'unité du tout," that he was also able to "s'empar[er] de nos âmes, et les ten[ir] suspendues" (p. 469). Everyone else in the café and outside on the streets is suddenly involved in Rameau's private world, until finally, that world represents all Nature, "un temple . . . des oiseaux . . . des eaux . . . un orage, une tempête, la plainte de ceux qui vont périr, mêlée au sifflement des vents, au fracas du tonnerre; c'était la nuit avec ses ténèbres, c'était l'ombre et le silence . . ." (p. 469). When the spell is broken (when, in Sade, "la figure se rompt") everyone goes back to his own little world, and the "real" world of distinct beings comes back to life.

For both Diderot and Sade, as Vartanian said of Diderot, the erotic impulse is a "garant de la vérité."[40] It remains for us to see what link exists between erotic energy and cruelty, and whether this link is inevitable or, again, a matter of personal vision. The view of life as constant expense of energy leads both Diderot and Sade to an admiration of those beings who are aggressive and especially those who exploit and control this energy. Diderot's criticism of the nephew is precisely that his energy runs away with him. For that reason, he does not quite succeed in the episode just mentioned in capturing the essential unity of matter. "Moi," as he watches the nephew, is

aware of his admiration and, in fact, was able to feel pity for him. There was a distance between them that Rameau could not overcome.

Energy carries with it a responsibility to oneself, and it is only the being who can control his impulses who escapes being enslaved by them. It is only to "l'être tranquille et froid qu'il appartient de dire cela est vrai, cela est bon, cela est beau" (Rêve, p. 359). In the same manner, it is the philosophical practice of debauchery that Sade's libertines stress. Passions need philosophy; evil "n'est vraiment délicieux que quand on le combine et le savoure" (AV V, 14). If the libertine fails to do this, he resembles "l'âne qui broute l'herbe fine d'une prairie verte, sans distinguer le simple précieux du jonc sauvage" (AV V, 280). In other words, sensitivity is valued only if, by coming under the influence of a great control, it can be "depersonalized." Rampant sensitivity, such as that which characterized the sentimental hero, is undesirable. The libertine must kill conscience, the seat of localized moral notions, for the sake of true universal consciousness, so that he may, like Rimbaud, claim, "Je est un autre."

For Diderot, such unity of character is admirable in the great criminal, as well as the great saint. The nephew admires the "renégat d'Avignon" precisely because he disdained ordinary treachery and went all the way to perfection in crime by the gratuitous accusation that doomed his "friend" (N p. 458-62). The vengeance of Mme de la Pommeraye achieves a strange kind of beauty because it was not "souillée d'aucun motif d'intérêt" (JF p. 651). One of the lessons Juliette teaches us is also that the perfect crime is the one that has no motive and may be said to depend purely on the whim of the criminal.

It would seem that the pure expense of energy lifts one above good and evil and, therefore, has nothing to do with kindness or cruelty. Yet, both Diderot and Sade keep returning to the concepts of virtue and vice. Sade, of course, chooses to transgress the laws of men. But Diderot almost always chooses virtue, in spite of his momentary attraction to Mme de la Pommeraye and other great evil-doers. "Je connais telle action," "Moi" tells the nephew, "que je voudrais avoir faite pour tout ce que je possède. C'est un sublime ouvrage que Mahomet, j'aimerais mieux avoir réhabilité la mémoire des Calas" (N p. 431-32). Diderot finally dissociates the concepts of erotic energy and great cruelty, while, for Sade they are inextricably tied.

The reason for this divergence is that each one completes in a very special and personal way the vision of incessant movement and expense of energy that is at the base of their particular brand of materialism. Sade sees in the movement of molecules only an indifferent coming and going of particles, an idea that is intolerable for the human mind because it is proof that the universe is unconcerned with man's existence, that it is deaf to human entreaty. In Aline et Valcour, the characters often note that "[le] ciel . . .s'embarrassant toujours assez peu du voeu des hommes, ne les sacrifie pas moins, malgré leurs inutiles prières, à tout ce que lui inspire la bizarrerie de ses caprices" (AV IV, 180). In other works, like Juliette, which are more radical and more typically "sadiques," the story imitates the purposelessness of life by ending abruptly. The conclusion of Juliette almost catches the hypnotized reader off guard. There is no reason, it seems, for it to stop. The heroine's death is mentioned, but it does not occur until ten years after the novel ends, and the story could have been carried

to any point in between.

The only pleasure the libertine knows is that of the moment, which is repeated as often as possible, and which he would like to see endlessly repeated. It is this momentary pleasure which imitates nature's movements exactly. But it is a moment of triumph as well as of pleasure. As it has been planned and organized by the libertine and brought into existence only by his decision, it represents a refusal on his part to conform passively to an outside force superior to his own, that of nature. The libertine has, of course, given himself the pleasure of obeying the dictates of his sensual nature, but he has done so intelligently and coldly, while even nature itself is condemned to act blindly. As Simone de Beauvoir has remarked, what the libertine demands from the practice of cruelty is that it reveal to him "his own existence as . . . consciousness and freedom."[41] The libertine's pleasure in cruelty is, we see, based on two contradictory ideas, first, that the individual exists only as a result of his natural impulses, and, secondly, that he is a totally independent being, separate from and at cross purposes, with nature. It may be Sade's anger at the smallness of the individual, his inability to commit a crime of universal proportion, that leads him to seek an enemy in nature and so to arrive at this self-contradictory position.

Sade's work is filled with contradictions. But this fact is unimportant, since any act, any opinion that results in the freeing of molecules, that is, in destruction, is good (although erotic action is particularly prized for its violence). If disorder or destruction is achieved by criminals who hold opposite views to explain their actions, both opinions are deemed valid. It is the result that counts.

In Aline et Valcour, two characters, the rich libertine Blamont and the gypsy leader Brigandos, think that theft is permissible, but they reach their conclusions by exactly opposite arguments. According to Brigandos, nature created us all as equals. We all have the right to all things; there is no private property. Theft is permitted to restore the lost equality (or, more accurately, there is no such thing as theft) (AV V, 120-21). According to Blamont, nature did not create us as equals. The strong have a right to all they can get honestly or otherwise. Theft is permitted to restore the law of the jungle, which society has interrupted. If society is built on injustice, "Qu'importe, profitons-en et taisons-nous" (AV IV, 131).

If we turn to Diderot, we see that he has a vision directly counter to that of Sade. He sees in the movement of matter the proof of a kind of universal love. This is what he explains in Le Rêve, where we find the idea that each molecule in the universe is endowed with sensitivity and seeks instinctively to unite with other molecules for the express purpose of creating new beings.[42] A universal creative force rules matter and is the essential ingredient in human psychology. Although his view is the antithesis of Sade's, it operates in a similar fashion. With Sade, a moral idea--that of crimes against the individual and society--is behind the libertine's enjoyment and the esthetic pleasure he feels in being a creator. With Diderot, the moral and the esthetic are also inseparable. The poetic image of universal love takes a social and moral shape in the inhabitants of Tahiti in the Supplément, whose sexual relations resemble, by their spontaneity and fecudity, the movement of the molecules in Le Rêve.

If the movement of nature is mirrored in human sexuality for both

Diderot and Sade, it leads the latter to the conclusion that human attempts to create stability in this world of constant movement are futile, while, for the former, the disorder of the natural movement is only the appearance, not the reality of things. Matter does tend towards an end, even if it is not a direct movement and even though that end is not specifically defined. Reproduction is, therefore, the highest duty of man and the most satisfying, since it reaffirms his belief in the meaning of life. We have ended, with Sade, at universal indifference and, with Diderot, at altruism.

There are obvious objections that could be made to each one, but they become powerless against each artist's personal convictions. Sade, for example, refuses against all reason to entertain the idea that the very fact that human beings have consciousness might indeed qualify them as special. He resolutely refuses to explore the matter, even though, or rather because, to distinguish between one type of matter and another, would be to create a possible basis for brotherhood. Diderot, on the other hand (at least in his extreme moods), grants life, or sensitivity, to all matter. This is necessary for his theory of universal love. It would be more reasonable to assume that, when particles of a marble statue--to use the example he gives in Le Rêve--become incorporated into a living organism, it is that the living being draws what it needs from nonliving matter and brings it to life through certain chemical changes, rather than to grant "inert" sensitivity to the statue. Although other scientists of his time distinguished carefully between sensitivity and movement ("irritabilité"), Diderot "dédaigne ces détails."[43]

Because of his personal view of materialism, Diderot is able to

rejoin the main trends of Enlightenment thought, which stands on the side of progress. But this is not the case with Sade. His ideal of an existence made up of spontaneous, yet controlled, acts of cruelty, which have no necessary connection to one another, glorifies the moment, and would lose its significance if it were linked to the idea of progress. Libertinism cannot be subordinated to anything, without losing its meaning. It is in this manner that Sade breaks through the impasse in which Laclos' heroes found themselves, but he does so only at the price of the destruction of ordinary social life. Like the cruelty of past heroes, that of Sadian libertines is based on the idea that the intellect must control and shape passion, but it does so in the service of passion for Sade. The result is incompatible with needs of the socially-oriented "cynique."

Even though the anti-social nature of Sade's work is its most outstanding feature, Hubert Juin has written that it is far less dangerous for society than the work of Crébillon or of other earlier libertine writers.[44] In effect, there is no danger of the reader taking any of Sade's novels as a handbook of libertinism, or at least there should not be. It was, after all, for this very reason that the Marquis disdained the works of Crébillon fils. Cruelty in Sade is not a practical matter. The vengeance that his libertines exact against their fellow men has no personal element in it. What they hate is the image of their own possible slavery. The victims' weakness demands punishment because it represents a submissive and defeatist attitude. Their existence is nothing more than a mindless imitation of molecular movement and, as such, is totally insignificant. Mme Delbène, the libertine nun who is Juliette's first tutor, declares that the only

thing for which she can never forgive men is their creation of a God (Jul VIII, 30). In so doing, they have given up all chance of finding true dignity by denying any responsibility for their actions. Cruelty as a philosophy is, in Sade, a much "cleaner" affair than it is in Laclos. There are no disagreeable or inconvenient effects on real victims.

* * *

Sade did not always ignore society. His philosophy of cruelty sometimes did have something to do with the lives of real men and, in those cases, Sade tries to adapt his beliefs about human nature to the problems of living in society. This is a final Sadian paradox that cannot be ignored since Sade placed great importance on his more traditional works.[45] The most successful of these is, as we mentioned earlier, Aline et Valcour, ou le roman philosophique (1785-88).

In this epistolary novel, Sade gives his ideas on society and shows that, in spite of his dreams of a radically free state of being, he somehow did retain at least a part of his century's ideal of progress and faith in the social state. Jean Fabre, noting the fact that this is both a philosophical and a political novel, says that here, for once, Sade maintains a connection with the mainstream of late Enlightenment thought: "c'est bien ainsi que semble évoluer toute la philosophie de ce siècle, devenant progressivement une politique, descendant des hauteurs de l'ontologie ou de la connaissance scientifique, pour se transformer d'abord en une réflexion, puis en une action politique."[46]

In Aline et Valcour, in fact, Sade indulges in a favorite Enlightenment pastime, the construction of a utopia based on the equality

and fraternity of men and on the basic rightness of living as simply and as closely as possible to nature. The description of the island Tamoé, under the leadership of the good "philosophe" Zamé, displays a Sade "sociologue." Like other eighteenth-century utopias, Voltaire's Eldorado or Diderot's Tahiti, for example, Tamoé is less a serious look at the lives of exotic natives than a criticism of contemporary European society. The leaders of such societies are always Europeans in disguise.

The idea of a progressive Sade deserves a closer look. Aline et Valcour is a vast novel, filled with contradictory points of view. In it, we have a panoramic view of human societies--from the "primitivism" of Butua, to the utopia Tamoé, to the contemporary society of Paris. En route, we meet people of all classes and situations. The central story is that of the conflict between the Président de Blamont and his cohort Dolbourg, on the one hand, and the lovers Aline and Valcour and their protector, Mme de Blamont, on the other. Léonore and Sainville, husband and wife, are befriended by Mme de Blamont and are closely tied to the main story since Léonore turns out to be the long-lost daughter of the Blamonts. Each one, Léonore and Sainville, separately interrupts the central action to give lengthy accounts of his travels, Sainville's story including the descriptions of Butua and Tamoé, Léonore's, the account of her stay with the good atheist Dom Gaspard and with the tribe of Brigandos, the gypsy leader, among other adventures. The interest of the novel does not lie with the protagonists whose characters are, as usual with Sade, little more than sketched. It is rather in the philosophical problems raised by the various protagonists, especially those found in the

tales of Léonore and Sainville and in some reflections by the Président.

Trying to find Sade's point of view in the novel is not an easy task. According to Fabre, Sade wanted to write "le bilan de la philosophie," a sort of "somme romanesque qui prétend ne rien refuser."[47] Sade himself seems to endorse this opinion. Noting that a certain character expresses an opinion contrary to that of another, he declares, in a note: "ce recueil épistolaire n'est point un traité de morale dont toutes les parties doivent se correspondre et se lier . . . il faut que le lecteur . . . s'amuse ou s'occupe des différents systèmes présentés pour ou contre, et qu'il adopte ceux qui favorisent le mieux, ou ses idées, ou ses penchants" (V, 109-10n).

It is obvious, though, that all the strong arguments, as well as the real power, are given (in the main story) to the cruel Blamont and that the sole victorious character, Léonore, is the true daughter of Blamont. However, the idea that Sade's total sympathy lies with the cruel libertine,[48] against the virtuous, must be qualified. Characters in the main story are divided along class lines, aristocrats and the powerful bourgeois.[49] This is stressed to such a point that it cannot be overlooked or seen as insignificant. Blamont belongs to just that social class that Sade, personally, despised most of all, that to which both Sartine and Mme de Montreuil, his persecutors, belonged. Sade makes very clear his opinions on this matter in notes throughout the two volumes of his novel.[50] In addition, he has given Blamont a profound dislike of the arts, which he judges totally useless, while Valcour is endowed with certain biographical details of his creator's life, including a love of literature and a veneration

for Rousseau. Valcour and Sade belong, also, to the same social class. The victory given to the cruel libertine may reflect a somewhat reluctantly agreed to, but inescapable, conclusion on Sade's part.

A brief examination of the novel will show that Aline et Valcour is less an objective "bilan philosophique" than a description of what Sade saw as the truth of society, a description of the triumph of those who embrace the power of eroticism. According to Pierre Naville: "Sade a répété mille et mille fois que tout ce qui est le ressort de la vie sociale et de la vie individuelle, la politique, la religion, la police, l'éducation, l'amour, la propriété, tout cela converge sur une activité fondamentale qui est celle d'Eros . . . En somme, tout est érotique parce que tout traduit la vie dans l'univers tout entier."[51]

Because Sade chooses to confine himself, for the most part, to an analysis of society in this novel, it has an additional significance for the problem of erotic cruelty as we have studied it throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. For Crébillon and for Laclos, aristocratic cruelty and erotic cruelty are the same. It is as if Sade, in Aline et Valcour, were proving that, in order to succeed, it is necessary for the libertine to escape the aristocratic world of the Ancien Régime polite cruelty. The implicit meaning of Sade's novel may be the necessity of learning to adapt to the new bourgeois society that has evolved. It is the unprincipled "arriviste" Blamont who has the real power to be cruel.

In a political reading of Les Liaisons dangereuses, Roger Vailland claims that the bourgeois Laclos was trying to take revenge on the nobility that had shut him out. He therefore makes Valmont fail at the hands of Mme de Tourvel, a bourgeoise.[52] Whether or not one accepts

this interpretation, it remains true that Valmont was trapped within a society whose rules no longer seemed to bring him victory; to succeed, he would either have had to admit his love for Mme de Tourvel and reform or throw off his prim notions of refined cruelty and convert to the "new" cruelty of the Président de Blamont.

The various parts of Aline et Valcour present a single image of human nature, and they complement each other by showing the various ways it manifests itself in different situations. This is true for Tamoé, as well as for Butua. In Tamoé, Sade proposes, much as Diderot had done in Le Supplément, to unveil a new plan for social living based upon the truth of man's nature, rather than upon artificial religious or social notions. Zamé's idea is to inhibit as little as possible the free functioning of man's natural appetites.

At birth, Zamé believes, a man is morally neutral, but he is born into a world of struggle. His desires are bound to put him in conflict with other beings. Although Zamé would not agree with the cruel Dom Lopès when he states that tyranny is the rule of nature, that "elle est empreinte dans le coeur de l'homme civilisé comme dans celui de l'homme naturel" (V, 70), he would agree that the role of a good legislator is to dull man's natural egoistic inclinations: "L'art ne consiste . . .qu'à bien connaître ses concitoyens et qu'à savoir profiter de leurs faiblesses; on les mène alors où l'on veut" (IV, 321). This statement could have been made by Blamont himself, who does, in fact, say that his secret consists in understanding "[c]ette science sublime qui nous rend maître des ressorts de l'âme" and therefore of the lives of others (IV, 130). The idea of a mass of men being controlled by a superior mind is the essence of sadism, such as it is seen in the Marquis' works.

The fact that, in Zamé, this understanding is tied to a belief in the equality of men and a committment to work towards their happiness, is incidental, for essentially Zamé is an autocrat who has no idea of human dignity. For him, equality is a mathematical notion. He is willing to satisfy the needs of his subjects only on condition that they all have the same needs. His legislative program exhibits the same concern for quantitative rather than qualitative success that is seen in Sadian libertines. As an example of how to deal with social injustice, he offers the following solution to the problem of racism. He suggests that, as there is nothing fundamentally humiliating in the situation of the victims of racial prejudice, they have only to ask for and receive a monetary compensation for the inconvenience caused. In this way, neither side is unhappy: the whites have the superiority they claim as a natural right and the blacks have a bit of material comfort in their lowly state (IV, 316-17).

Pierre Favre, a critic who has studied the societies of Butua and Tamoé from a political point of view, believes that the personality of Zamé is similar to that of his counterpart, the autocratic King Ben Mâacoro of Butua, and that, behind their dreams of absolute power, stands the pathological personality of their creator, the Marquis de Sade. According to Jean-Marie Goulemot, Zamé's dream is explained by a nostalgia on the part of Sade for a "féodalité aristocratique" that, however, he realizes can never be restored.[53] In any case, Sade himself dispels the notion that he is a humanist, by stating at the outset of the novel, in the "avis de l'éditeur," that "par des fictions plus agréables, il veut à Tamoé consoler ses lecteurs des cruelles vérités qu'il a été obligé de peindre à Butua" and that it is unfortunately true that "tout ce qu'il y a de plus affreux [existe] dans la nature,"

while it is only "dans le pays des chimères que se trouvent seulement le juste et le bon" (IV, xxvii-xxviii).

It is not clear if Sade was conscious of the inhumanity of Zamé, but even if we suppose, as I am inclined to believe, that he sincerely wished to propose a model society based on the eighteenth-century ideal of man's tendency towards "sociabliité," it is true also that social reform is purely an idle speculation for Sade. He is much more interesting when he writes about the essential facts of man's social life: not harmony, but conflict, the struggle of one character against the other and against nature itself.

The strongest and most typically Sadian characters in Aline et Valcour are Blamont, Sarmiento (the philosopher of Butua), and Léonore. They are all "philosophes," that is, natural leaders who manipulate the weaker members of society. Cold, calculating, and intelligent, they recognize no moral authority that could oppose their strength. "La nature," believes Sarmiento, "ne crée que pour corrompre" (IV, 202). To do evil is the primary intention of nature. Virtue is static and passive, created by nature "pour végéter dans l'asservissement" (IV, 241).

The philosophy of the virtuous is summed up by M de Bersac, a poor but honest actor who befriends Léonore: "ne nous mêlons pas du mal qui se fait dans le monde; tâchons de ne pas en être blessés, mais n'entreprenons pas de le réprimer" (V, 238). Those who try to right the wrongs of society, like Brigandos, who is the champion of individual rebellion, fail miserably. Brigandos is betrayed to the Inquisition by a man whose life he had generously saved. As for the direct opponents of the cruel libertine, they are thoroughly defeated,

and even seem to take a morbid delight in the contemplation of their own misery. It may be that Sade harbored a nostalgia for aristocratic rule, but he nonetheless shows aristocratic refinement to be a synonym for weakness. "Le vice écrasera la vertu," assures Mme de Blamont, who is always filled with presentiments of disaster.

The social philosophy of the three strong characters is simply one of exploitation. Society, for them, is merely the union of the weak, who, because they have the same needs, but not the ability to satisfy them separately, join together and seek protection in numbers. Society does not improve men, but is simply a state of coexistence, which, through the creation of laws, forces them to give up some of their natural ferocity in return for security. The strong, like Léonore and Blamont, do not accept the social state, since it is an artificial one based on an arbitrary pact to which they have never consented. Rather than rebel openly, however, they have learned to adapt; they advance to positions of power in order to take the role of oppressor, where, thanks to their superior intellect, they are able to appropriate the wealth of others and to satisfy their desires by victimizing the poor and the helpless. They are supremely unjust, but, as we have noted, Blamont's comment is: "Qu'importe, profitons-en et taisons-nous" (IV, 131).

Real secrets kept by unscrupulous libertines was, we have seen, one of the themes of Les Liaisons dangereuses. Blamont and Léonore propose a more complete treachery, one that is made possible by the rejection of aristocratic snobbery. Léonore, although brought up as a member of the nobility, belongs in reality to both the bourgeois and the aristocratic worlds. As Goulemot says, however, she totally re-

pudiates aristocratic ideals and embraces the reality of bourgeois society.[54] It is, in the end, Léonore who seems to carry the stamp of the author's approval. But the ending is not without ambiguity. Blamont, the most overtly cruel character of the main story, eventually is defeated and must leave France after the public disclosure of his black deeds. He lives comfortably for a few years in London, but is finally murdered by robbers on the roads of Great Britain. Sarmiento, although he dies "en paix" (IV, 243), is assassinated in the wake of an abortive attempt to depose Ben Mâacoro. Léonore alone triumphs, and although she had shown every indication of following in her father's footsteps, Sade engineers a sudden and psychologically unacceptable conversion for her at the last minute, which, if it is sincere, and not just another ploy to dupe society, amounts to a repudiation of her former principles.

This ending may simply be the one Sade thought best to give a novel that he was putting forth as a literary masterpiece. It may also be that Sade wanted to offer some consolation to the aristocratic victims, with whom he felt some affinity. Whatever the truth, it is pertinent to ask, as Goulemot does: "Léonore, Sarmiento, Sainville, ou M. de Blamont . . . tous ne détiennent-ils pas un peu de la vérité de Sade?" To try to find the truth behind all the conflicting systems of Aline et Valcour, and in so doing, the truth of Sade's view of the libertine in society, it is necessary to look for "le message implicite contenu dans les structures romanesques et les personnages de l'intrigue principale,"[55] a message of which the Marquis may or may not have been conscious as he wrote.

The true victor in any Sadian novel is, in the final analysis,

nature, which continues along its path as if men and their worries over dignity and glory did not exist. As Mme de Blamont says: "Il y a [dans la nature] une somme à peu près égale de biens ou de maux, suspendue sur nos têtes . . . mais il est indifférent sur qui elle tombe . . . c'est l'affaire du hasard" (IV, 133). The final point of Sadian thought is always universal indifference, against which man has no recourse. But, man must blind himself to this fact in order to be able to continue living, and in a novel like Aline et Valcour, in which we are shown the libertine operating within the scope of real society, Sade chooses for the strong over the weak, and for expediency over idealism.

It is not often that a libertine in one of Sade's more radical novels expresses a willingness to make allowances for the compromises that are necessary for living in society, but Mme Delbène, in Juliette, offers her young protégée a bit of advice, which seems also to sum up the philosophy of Léonore: "il est . . . de la vraie sagesse d'adopter un milieu raisonnable entre des extravagances et des chimères, et de se faire des opinions compatibles à la fois aux penchants qu'on a reçus de la nature et aux lois du gouvernement qu'on habite" (Jul VIII, 21). In the figure of Léonore, Sade seems to be putting this advice to use and to be counseling the libertine to reject his romantic aristocratic notions and get down to the practical matter of cruelty.

Notes to Chapter V:

[1] That is, seduction of the victim. The libertine does practice seduction of self in order to create his "théâtre privé du crime et de la cruauté," as Pierre Fedida remarks in "Les Exercices de l'imagination et la commotion sur la masse des nerfs: un érotisme de tête," in Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, édition définitive, XVI (Paris: Au cercle du livre précieux, 1967), 614.

[2] Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, IX, 28. All future references to the works of Sade will be identified in the text as follows: AV, for Aline et Valcour; 120J, for Les 120 Journées de Sodome; Idée, for Idée sur les romans; Jul, for L'Histoire de Juliette; NJ, for La Nouvelle Justine; and Phil, for La Philosophie dans le boudoir. Volume and page numbers refer to Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, édition définitive, 16 vols. (Paris: Au cercle du livre précieux, 1966-67).

[3] See the discussion of "le vêtement" in Roland Barthes, Sade, Fourier, Loyola (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1971), p. 25: "Cet objet dont on peut dire qu'il est au centre de toute l'érotique moderne . . . garde chez Sade une valeur impitoyablement fonctionnelle--ce qui suffirait déjà à distinguer son érotisme de ce que nous entendons par ce mot," Compare Valmont's preoccupation with "les formes enchanteresses" hidden by Mme de Tourvel's clothing, Les Liaisons dangereuses (Paris: Garnier, 1961), p. 17.

[4] Examples can be drawn from many a page in novels like Juliette. Here is one drawn at random. The heroine tells us that "[c]e jeu [of executing victims] nous plaisait trop, pour ne pas se prolonger excessivement. Nous immolâmes en tout onze cent soixante-seize victimes, ce qui fait cent soixante-huit pour chacun, parmi lesquelles six cents filles et cinq cent soixante-seize garçons" (Jul IX, 412). The orgy lasted 45 hours.

[5] Peter Brooks, The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 4.

[6] See Jean Leduc, "Les Sources de l'athéisme et de l'immoralisme du marquis de Sade," in Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, Vol. 68, ed. Theodore Besterman (Geneva: Institut et musée Voltaire, Les Délices, 1969), pp. 32-40. This series will hereafter be referred to as SVEC. See also Barry Ivker, "Towards a Definition of Libertinism in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction," in SVEC, Vol. 73 (Geneva: Institut et musée Voltaire, Les Délices, 1970), pp. 221-39.

[7] Laclos, p. 12.

[8] Gaëtan Picon, "Sade et l'indifférence," Fontaine, No. 62 (1947), pp. 646-54; rpt. in Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, XI, 53. A recent examination of the importance of Sade's prison experience for his work is found in Beatrice Didier, Sade (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1976).

[9] Maurice Blanchot, Lautréamont et Sade (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1963), pp. 48-49.

[10] Barthes, p. 23.

[11] Barthes, p. 36: "Le maître est celui qui parle . . . l'objet est celui qui se tait."

[12] It is not possible to know the Marquis' opinion of Laclos, since he never mentioned him. It is known that Sade owned a copy of Les Liaisons dangereuses. Gilbert Lely, Vie du marquis de Sade (Paris: Pauvert, 1965), pp. 659-61, discusses the possibility that Sade was jealous of the success of Laclos' novel, "un succès de librairie auquel n'avait jamais atteint aucun de ses ouvrages avoués" (p. 660).

[13] Leduc, p. 57.

[14] Jean Fabre, "Préface à Aline et Valcour," in Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, IV, xi and IV, xciii, respectively.

[15] We examined this novel above, in Chapter III. On Sade and the libertine novel before him, see Ivker, pp. 221-39, who discusses the seventeenth as well as the eighteenth centuries. It is pointed out in this article that, in L'Histoire de Juliette, Sade praises Thérèse for having "montré le but [du libertinage] sans néanmoins l'atteindre tout à fait." Sade also mentions, but criticizes as far too timid, Chorier's L'Académie des dames, Latouche's Le Portier des Chartreux, and Mirabeau's L'Education de Laure. All other libertine novels are considered "[des] misérables petites brochures" (Ivker, p. 222; Jul VIII, 442-43).

[16] Elsewhere, however, Sade also stresses, with all the power of his sinister imagination, the harmful social effects of artificial religious constraints. In Aline et Valcour, for example, where he is especially concerned with man as a social being, Sade has the adventuress Léonore report on a convent where the monks, who are "des hommes comme les autres" and therefore need women, are "contraints à tuer les objets de nos jouissances, de peur qu'il ne nous trahissent" (AV V, 222).

[17] Pierre Naville, "Sade et l'érotisme d'aujourd'hui," in Le Marquis de Sade. Colloque sur le marquis de Sade d'Aix-en-Provence les 19, 20 février, 1968 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968), p. 295. This collection of essays will hereafter be referred to as Colloque.

[18] Alice M. Laborde, Sade romancier (Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1974), p. 73.

[19] Jean Biou has called the struggle of Merteuil and of Valmont against each other and against their victims, "une lutte pour la reconnaissance," "Deux oeuvres complémentaires: Les Liaisons dangereuses et Juliette," in Colloque, p. 104.

[20] Albert Camus believes that Sade's "logique des passions" begins with the conclusions and constructs afterward the arguments necessary

to justify "la licence absolue des moeurs," L'Homme révolté (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 58. See also Pierre Naville, "Sade et la philosophie," in Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, XI, 22, who states that Sade's writing has the air of a "tentative incessante de justification."

[21] Blanchot, p. 19.

[22] Blanchot, p. 28, points out the similarity that exists between the experiences of the two.

[23] Some critics, basically agreeing with Sade, hold the opinion that Sade had the courage to push materialistic theories to their logical conclusion in their application to human nature, and that he illuminated, not, as he believed, the whole of man, but at least one secret part of his nature. Lester Crocker studies Sade in this light in Nature and Culture: Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), pp. 398-429.

[24] Crocker, p. 240.

[25] Besides Crocker, see the works already mentioned of Leduc and Naville. Also Camille Schuwer, "Sade et les moralistes," in Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, XI, 25-51, and Jean Deprun, "Sade et la philosophie biologique de son temps," in Colloque, pp. 189-205.

[26] Anne Lacombe, "Les Infortunes de la vertu, le conte et la philosophie," Esprit Créateur, 15 (1975), 425-37.

[27] Raymond Jean, "Le Sadisme de Diderot," Critique, 19 (1963), 34.

[28] It is necessary to emphasize here two things. First, it is not a question of seeking to prove a direct influence of Diderot on Sade. This would be impossible, since Sade could not have seen Diderot's most daring works before the publication of his principal novels. Secondly, I am not suggesting that Sade's work inevitably developed from a line of thought begun by Diderot. I agree with Raymond Jean that the difference between Diderot and Sade is the difference between a wide-ranging and freely chosen intellectual inquiry and an obsession. Among the critics who have noted that, among Sade's predecessors, Diderot has a "place de choix," are Giorgio Cerruti (whose phrase this is), "Le Paradoxe sur le comédien et le paradoxe sur le libertin, Diderot et Sade," Revue des Sciences Humaines, fasc. 146 N.S. (April-June 1972), pp. 235-51; Jenny H. Batlay and Otis E. Fellows, "Diderot et Sade: Affinités et divergences," Esprit créateur, 15 (1975), 449-59; as well as Jean and Leduc, whose works have been mentioned.

[29] Aram Vartanian, "Erotisme et philosophie chez Diderot," Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises. Cahiers, No. 13 (June 1961), pp. 367-90.

[30] Sade's man is of course criminal as well as unbelieving, but a persistent theme in Diderot, also, is: to what extent can a special man, a genius, make his own laws?

[31] Denis Diderot, Oeuvres philosophiques (Paris: Garnier, 1964), pp. 324-28. Future references to Diderot's philosophical works will be identified in the text, Rêve, standing for the three parts of Le Rêve de d'Alembert.

[32] For a discussion of the esthetic vision of Sade, see Laborde and also Franco Tonelli, L'Esthétique de la cruauté (Paris: Nizet, 1972), Chapter II, pp. 52-67.

[33] There are many Gothic moments in Sade, but in terms of overall purpose and atmosphere, he is not at all a Gothic writer. See Stephen Werner, "Diderot, Sade, and the gothic novel," in SVEC, Vol. 114 (Banbury, Oxfordshire: The Voltaire Foundation, Thorpe Mandeville House, 1973), pp. 273-90; Jean Fabre, "Sade et le roman noir," in Colloque, pp. 253-78.

[34] Alice M. Laborde, "Sade: l'érotisme démytifié," Esprit Créateur, 15 (1975), 443.

[35] Denis Diderot, Oeuvres romanesques (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 397. Future references to Diderot's novels will be identified in the text, N standing for Le Neveu de Rameau and JF for Jacques le fataliste.

[36] Arthur Wilson, Diderot (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), p. 569.

[37] Jean, p. 35 and p. 33, respectively.

[38] Jean also notes this teasing, p. 40, quoting Bordeu, who says: "Prenez-garde, je vous en préviens, tout à l'heure vous reculerez." See also Vartanian, pp. 383-84.

[39] Laborde, "Sade: l'érotisme démystifié," p. 443: this aspect of Sade's work shows "une attitude concertée visant à imiter un phénomène qui a visiblement frappé l'écrivain." The violence and the repetitious nature of Sadian arguments, as well as the absence of a "historic" time in his novels, are discussed by Laborde in Sade romancier.

[40] Vartanian, p. 376.

[41] Simone de Beauvoir, Must We Burn de Sade?, trans. Annette Michelson (London: P. Nevill, 1953), p. 25.

[42] Diderot sometimes has moments of pessimism, during which he forgets his theory of universal love and draws quite close to Sade's view of nature. The nephew, for example, proclaims that if a man were "abandonné à lui-même, qu'il conservât toute son imbécillité et qu'il réunît au peu de raison de l'enfant au berceau la violence des passions de l'homme de trente ans, il tordrait le col à son père et coucherait avec sa mère" (N p. 479).

[43] Paul Vernière, ed., in Oeuvres romanesques, by Diderot, p. 258n.

[44] Hubert Juin, Les Libertinages de la raison (Paris: Belfond, 1968), p. 213.

[45] Lely, pp. 407-09, notes the importance Sade gave to his theatrical works, which are the most conventional things he wrote. We have mentioned Sade's opinion of Aline et Valcour, above, p. 187.

[46] Jean Fabre, "Interventions sur la communication de Jean-Marie Goulemot," Colloque, p. 137.

[47] Fabre, "Préface à Aline et Valcour," p. xiii-xiv.

[48] Léonore is not pictured as a libertine, but this seems to be a mere concession to the fact that, in a traditional novel, the victor ought not be a true villain. Léonore exhibits the basic cruelty of libertines, and, at the end of the novel, she shows every sign of following the lead of her father. Mme de Blamont says of her, that her heart is "si ressemblant à celui de l'homme qui fait tous nos maux" (V, 310), and even more, ominously, she remarks that, even though Léonore has been faithful to her husband so far, "celle qui érige l'insensibilité en système, l'athéisme en pricipe, l'indifférence en raisonnement" could very well one day give in to the "feu des passions" (V, 268).

[49] See Jean-Marie Goulemot, "Lecture politique d'Aline et Valcour," Colloque, pp. 115-39.

[50] See, for example, AV IV, 35n; V, 2n, 4n, 15n, 153-54n, 282n.

[51] Pierre Naville, "Sade et l'érotisme d'aujourd'hui," p. 293.

[52] Roger Vailland, Laclos par lui-même (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1965)

[53] Pierre Favre, Sade utopiste (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967), p. 4; Goulemot, p. 135.

[54] Goulemot, p. 134.

[55] Goulemot, p. 123, for both quotations.

CONCLUSION

The problem of cruelty in the eighteenth century, even when restricted to a study of the libertine hero, is a vast one, and we have necessarily had to limit ourselves to a few chosen authors. There are many cruel works that we have not discussed. Lester Crocker, for example, points out that it was in Duclos' Histoire de Mme de Luz that Sade found the subject matter for his twin novels about Justine and Juliette.[1] In effect, we already find in this novel, written in 1740, the theme of the fultility of virtue. Clinging to the belief that self-denial is better than giving in to illicit pleasure, Mme de Luz accepts the pain of renunciation, but instead of being rewarded for her virtue, she falls prey to evil monsters at every turn. Reading the adventures of Duclos' poor heroine, who tries so valiantly, but so vainly, to preserve her honor and chastity, we are often reminded of Justine. In one episode, Mme de Luz is saved from the grips of an attacker only to be raped by her deliverer, who is overcome by passion. Sade, not content with the simple idea of switching attackers, has Justine raped and almost assassinated by the ungrateful Saint-Florent, whom the heroine herself had saved from the murderous band of la Dubois.

Virtue beseiged and defeated by figures of authority who abuse their power by requiring favors from pretty supplicants is another cruel episode found in many novels. Mme de Luz saves her husband in this manner and, to give only one other example, "la belle St. Yves" in Voltaire's L'Ingénu faces the same problem: ". . . après des sanglots, des cris, des larmes, affaiblie du combat, éperdue, languissante, il fallut se rendre . . . le cruel jou[it] impitoyablement de la nécessité où elle était réduite." In the end, this victim shares the fate of most other virtuous beings in the cruel and corrupt world: "Son âme tuait

son corps."[2]

The fate of the virtuous victim is usually seen, in such episodes, less as a just punishment of a wrathful Providence against a weak, even though nobly-minded, sinner, than as the symbol of the uselessness of virtue in an uncaring universe. In spite of the last minute reform of St. Yves' persecutor and the relatively peaceful existence given to the survivors of the tale, Voltaire's last words to us are far from consoling: "Combien d'honnêtes gens dans le monde ont pu dire: 'malheur n'est bon à rien' " (p. 381).

In choosing the works and the examples of cruelty to discuss in this study, primary attention was given, not to those authors who merely picture cruelty, but to those who examine it from the inside, that is, who try to explain, through the examination of the libertine "cynique," an attitude towards life that represents a particular blend of certain eighteenth-century trends of thought. The libertine "cynique's" personal philosophy of life is an embodiment of the pessimistic outlook that runs as an undercurrent throughout the Enlightenment period. It involves, as we have tried to explain, a necessary exaggeration and, therefore, a distortion of many ideas.[3]

The distinction between the libertine "cynique" and the libertine "galant" seemed important in order to stress the difference between "inner" and "outer" cruelty, in other words, the difference between those who attempt to choose and shape their own destiny and those who weakly submit to the "bon ton" of the day and finish by losing all sense of their own individuality. The "galant" feels a kind of duty to be a libertine. He is a common figure of the eighteenth-century social life, for as René Pomeau points out, "peu d'époques furent si

totalement astreintes au paraître."[4] But the "cynique" occupies a special place in his time, and we wished to show that, for him, libertinism is something more than just a social pose.

The title of Crébillon's Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit sums up very well the destinies of the "galant" turned sentimentalist and the "cynique" turned philosopher. The career of the latter is particularly interesting. Althoug it is true that Sade's works are "les derniers nés de la longue progéniture de Crébillon,"[5] the "cynique" must travel a long way from Crébillon's Versac to Sade's Juliette. Compare, for example, the Duc de Clerval's view of the senses as having "leur sorte de délicatesse: à un certain point, on les émeut; qu'on le passe, on les révolte" (H112), with the systematic exploration of the senses in Sade. In connection with the attempt by Sade's libertines to reach previously unexplored states of being, one critic mentions Rimbaud's "dérèglement de tous les sens."[6] In effect, one has the impression that, for Sade, as for Rimbaud and certain other seer-poets, Nerval coming perhaps first to mind, there is an urgency, a need to seek in literature an answer to questions that are, in essence, extraliterary.

Sade, as we have seen, manages to capture the "otherness" he seeks only at certain moments, as is the case for Rimbaud and Nerval also. Moments, of course, must end, and the Sadian libertine is obliged to begin over and over again.[7] He is a prisoner of his own obsessions, which are certainly determined in part by the obsessions of the author himself, but which also transcend the personal level and illuminate the problems of the libertine "cynique" in general. Like the libertines before them, Sadian heroes have discovered the mediocrity

of ordinary sensual pleasures, which are too tame, too limited to satisfy the thirst for power and the ferocity that the individual discovers in himself as soon as he allows his erotic instincts any real liberty. It is, Georges Bataille has said, the willingness of Sadian libertines to explore the farthest reaches of their tendency towards destruction, even at the expense of their own pleasure, that is remarkable. "Tous ces grands libertins, qui ne vivent que pour le plaisir, ne sont grands que parce qu'ils ont annihilé en eux toute capacité de plaisir."[8] In his examination of man's capacity for cruelty, Sade has put the final note to the career of the libertine "cynique," and, in so doing, has touched upon the deepest side of the problem of eroticism, which is, as Bataille notes,[9] at once, the most personal and yet the most universal of questions.

Notes to the conclusion:

[1] Lester G. Crocker, An Age of Crisis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p. 429.

[2] Voltaire, Romans et contes, ed. René Pomeau (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), p. 367 & p. 376, respectively.

[3] Roland Mortier, Clartés et ombres du siècle des lumières (Geneva: Droz, 1969), p. 123, speaks of the common "usure des idées maitresses" of Enlightenment thought. The "cynique" and the sentimental hero are both certainly guilty of ignoring one of the basic beliefs of the true "philosophes," as it is stated in the article "Faible" of the Encyclopédie: "à mesure que l'esprit acquiert plus de lumières, le coeur acquiert plus de sensibilité" (quoted in Mortier, p. 124).

[4] René Pomeau, L'Europe des lumières (Paris: Stock, 1966), p. 191.

[5] Henri Armand, "Le Libertinage et l'érotisme dans l'oeuvre de Crébillon fils," Diss. Emory Univ. 1970, p. 5.

[6] Giorgio Cerruti, "Le Paradoxe sur le comédien et le paradoxe sur le libertine, Diderot et Sade," Revue des Sciences Humaines, Fasc. 146NS (April-June 1972), p. 251.

[7] Gaëton Picon, "Sade et l'indifférence," in Oeuvres complètes du marquis de Sade, édition définitive, Vol. XI (Paris: Au cercle du livre précieux, 1967), p. 61, makes this point, calling Sade's idea of liberty a "corridor glacé et interminable, parcouru en tous sens et toujours vide."

[8] Georges Bataille, L'Erotisme (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1957), p. 192.

[9] Bataille, p. 303.

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