

Family Remains: The Politics of Legacy in Eighteenth-Century France

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## Abstract

This dissertation accounts for the persistent occurrence of outsider figures (orphans, bastards, and exotic Others) in eighteenth-century French literature, and analyzes how these figures interrogate traditional and patriarchal models of family. As Michel Foucault argues in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, the family unit serves as a generative site of power in early modern European societies. While Foucault focuses primarily on the marital and parents-children axes and their relevance to the formation of the individual political body, this dissertation analyzes how such power is also generated in the absence of these relationships. I argue that in their portrayal of figures that remain on the fringes of the family unit, the authors studied in this dissertation participate in a utopian experiment – one intended to create a better society through a discourse on evolved family relations. “Family Remains” combines structuralism with political and psychoanalytic theory to propose a new way of reading non-domestic fictional literature through the lens of the family. In so doing, it suggests that by arranging characters into non-heteronormative intimate communities, these authors create a new language of family politics, and in the process they propose new forms of power that are not necessarily passed from fathers to sons.

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## **Introduction**

### **Resurrecting the Family**

*Beneath the great continuities of thought, beneath the solid, homogenous manifestations of a single mind or of a collective mentality, beneath the stubborn development of a science striving to exist and to reach completion at the very outset, beneath the persistence of a particular genre, form, discipline, or theoretical activity, one is now trying to detect the incidence of interruptions.*

- Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

*What will the legacy of Œdipus be for those who are formed in these situations, where positions are hardly clear, where the place of the father is dispersed, where the place of the mother is multiply occupied or displaced, where the symbolic in its stasis no longer holds?*

- Judith Butler,  
*Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*

### **A Politics of Legacy**

On September 12, 2011, after years of debate, then French President Nicolas Sarkozy signed the decree that officially announced the creation of a *Maison de l'histoire de France*.<sup>1</sup> Following the lead of such French presidents as Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand, Sarkozy intended to leave the museum as his legacy to his country. However, the announcement of plans to build the museum, an announcement made during his 2007 presidential run, was immediately met with fear and criticism. The major complaints were succinctly summed up in two questions posed by one *New York Times* reporter as, "What does it mean to be French in the twenty-first century? And whose history should be celebrated?"<sup>2</sup> A group of French historians (including Roger

Chartier, Arlette Farge, and Nicolas Offenstadt) even called Sarkozy's proposal "un projet dangereux," writing in 2010 that "surtout les développements récents [the 2009 riots] ont montré combien la construction de cet espace politique suscitait d'interrogations, de méfiance et de rejet."<sup>3</sup> For over five years, Sarkozy's proposed legacy project was criticized for being overtly political. In an open letter to Frédéric Mitterrand (then the French Minister for Culture and Communications), French historian Pierre Nora criticized the President's proposal as a move to win over those who might otherwise vote for *Front National* candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen.<sup>4</sup> Sarkozy's opponents claimed that rather than an initiative to document French history, the *Maison de l'histoire de France* was actually a project to redefine what it means to *be* French in an exclusionary manner. After much public criticism, the costly project that was to be housed in the National Archives building was finally cancelled by François Hollande when he assumed the office of President in 2012.

To introduce a project on eighteenth-century French literature with an account of a twenty-first-century event may seem counter-intuitive, but Sarkozy's project, as well as the criticism it invited, made public an argument that has long existed in the French cultural imagination. The question, "What does it mean to be French in the twenty-first century?" indicates, as the museum project suggests, that there must have existed a path that led there. Sarkozy's project may have been short-lived; however, the debate surrounding it is one that has continued long after – and that began long before – the museum's failure. Throughout the country's long history, from the formation of the

Kingdom of France to the French Revolution and even to the riots of the early 2000's, being "French" has been a highly fractured identity.

For our purposes we might recast the first question, "What does it mean to be French?" in a more collective form as, "What does the French family look like?" The rhetorical import of this question is great, for one might ask if the question itself denies the possibility of its own answer, or as Paul de Man put it, "what is the use of asking, I ask, when we cannot even authoritatively decide whether a question asks or doesn't ask?" (10). De Man's seemingly simplistic inquiry rests upon a complex disjunction between the grammatical logic of the question that appears to desire an answer, and the rhetorical nature of the question (in the case its political nature) that invites further debate rather than an answer. De Man collapses what he calls "inside/outside" binaries that separate the *object* of reading (the novel, for example) from the *act* of reading. The meaning of the text, he argues, lies not in one action or the other, but instead arises from the tension between the two. Framed this way, our question "What does the French family look like?" simultaneously proposes a quest to define or portray the "French family" and expresses the impossibility of answering the question. In fact, embedded within the question are several more puzzles; to answer this question first requires definitions for "French," for "family," and for "French family," and furthermore it proposes a slippage between the individual and the collective. To be French or to be a member of a family is an individual identity, but one that is informed by its collective form. The dialectical relationship between individual and collective identity is foundational to this dissertation, which examines the family and "Frenchness" through a discourse on those who remain

on the fringes of the family. The heroes and heroines of the texts examined in this dissertation are each distanced from their family (whether spatially or emotionally), and it is only by nature of their exclusion from their kin – their *race* – that they can complete a subjective formation.<sup>5</sup>

To become a subject means reckoning with an object. The family has been the object of much political debate in the past ten years. In France, as well as in America, political discourse has become increasingly preoccupied with what constitutes the family. On both sides of the political spectrum, attempts have been made to provide an absolute definition of *family* and to decide who can have one and when they can have it. Whether arguing for or against same-sex marriage, or the availability of birth control methods for women, these discourses have not only scrutinized the family, but they have also changed its constitution. These discourses, then, have a productive quality – they aim to produce the families they describe. Camille Robcis elaborates on what she calls “familialism,” or a dedication to heterosexual marriage in the debates surrounding same-sex marriage and adoption, explaining that in defining family, political texts constitute society. She notes that in France the Napoleonic Code (1804) and the Family Code (1939) insist on the family’s political efficacy in creating universal consensus because, as the language of these documents suggests, the family has always been tied to the social. In this way, Robcis argues, “the heterosexual family was *constitutive* of the social. There could be no social contract without the heterosexual family” (4). While Robcis focuses on political iterations of the heterosexual family, we will examine alternative constitutions of family that contended with heteronormative models for representation in the political field.

The family, in addition to being the object of so much political discourse, is also the object of several discursive formations, for instance, that of literature, politics, and psychoanalysis. The notion of “discursive formations” emerges from Michel Foucault’s works of archaeology (*The Order of Things*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, *History of Madness*) and is defined in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. He defines a discursive formation thus:

whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation* (*Archaeology* 38).

As an object, family is fractured – both between and even within specific discursive formations. In this study we stand on the threshold of these formations, much like the outsiders we examine, drawing on each, to determine what is so powerful about family as an object and why, in eighteenth-century France, authors explore the family through its interstices. In other words, why do so many literary works of this time period feature unaffiliated characters (for instance, orphans, bastards, and slaves), whose relation to family is apparently non-existent or at best fraught? And why do so many political statements (oral and written) scrutinize the role of the family in society?

*Family Remains* thus accounts for the persistent occurrence of the figure of the outsider in early modern literature, analyzing how these figures interrogate traditional, patriarchal modes of family, and by extension the dynastic structure itself. The importance of the orphan and bastard figures – figures separated from the family – is so great that Marthe Robert understands the psychological origins of the novel as residing in the Family Romance fantasy. This fantasy, first articulated by Sigmund Freud in 1909,

occurs when a child begins to realize the deficiencies in his own parents and imagines their death and subsequent replacement with better parents.<sup>6</sup> Later in the essay, Freud notes that as the child matures and learns of sexual difference, he instead imagines himself a bastard child, and dreams that he is the product of his mother's extra-marital affair. Robert equates the novel with the child of Freud's family romance, arguing that the novel is distinctly different from the genres that preceded it and, consequently, that it is within this genre that authors can imagine "better" social conditions. As the novel matures, she argues, it becomes a "bâtard réaliste, qui seconde le monde en l'attaquant de front" (74). In other words, the novel is not constrained by generic convention such as the unity of time and place (as opposed to the tragedy, the comedy, or the opera) and thus it has the liberty of imagining a place and time beyond one particular moment. The eighteenth-century novel, therefore, becomes a privileged space for imagining a "better" family as the narrator emerges as a guide, leading the reader between times and places.

The bastard, the figure that for Robert represents an entire fictional genre, is a highly paradoxical figure. This figure is at once attached to, and severed from, the family. It is thus capable of critiquing patriarchal kinship structures (it is, after all, the father who is being killed off) while remaining firmly embedded within them. Kinship as an organizing principle of society cannot completely disappear lest the bastard be lost in the realm of the imaginary, or, in Lacanian terms, lest he be unable to complete his formation in order to find his place in the symbolic order; instead, familial roles are interrogated and redefined in figural rather than literal terms. For instance, a woman need not give birth to be a mother – she can perform the mother-function for another character that is unrelated

by blood. Hence, the terms that define relationships among individuals remain firmly entrenched in a linguistic system of kinship, even when the nature of these relationships departs from their biologically determined roles.

In the current work, we bring together discourses on the family and the eighteenth-century novel. However, this is not to say that our research is restricted to domestic fiction. Domestic fiction, indeed, contributes to defining models of family in eighteenth-century France. However, other models are to be found in the libertine novel, the philosophical novel, in theater, and in poetry. For example, the libertine novel, which, as Michel Delon suggests, proposes a utopian vision of complete individual liberty, performs a similar critique of the family as some novels of philosophical and domestic fiction (we shall see in our examination of Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, for instance, that this novel also critiques the constraints of the heteronormative family structure). In *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, Delon describes the contradictory nature of the libertine who is simultaneously an erudite, a seducer, a philosopher, and a man of the world. He argues that combining such diverse traits into one individual proves "l'impossibilité de figer une définition de ce qui est d'abord un art de jouer avec les idées, les sentiments et les mots" (43). It is by virtue of his *outside-ness* that the libertine possesses such diverse qualities, and by this same virtue that he produces a radically different type of knowledge – one that combines multiple discourses into one. In this way, the libertine novel, which can be understood as a response to domestic fiction, remains important to understanding the politics of kinship in eighteenth-



century France. We will argue throughout the dissertation that the structure of kinship is so thoroughly ingrained in language itself, that it transcends generic boundaries.

In authoring a new model of kinship dynamics within fiction, eighteenth-century novelists performed a utopian experiment – one intended to create a better society through a discourse on evolved family relations. We use the term “utopian experiment” to distinguish the utopian impulse found within the novel from the subgenre of the utopian novel. Aside from Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *L’An 2440: Rêve s’il en fut jamais*, none of the works treated in this dissertation are, strictly speaking, utopian novels. However, they each display a utopian impulse, that is, each novel proposes an idealized form of life.

Guillaume Ansart calls these utopian scenes in non-utopian fiction “micro-utopias”:

sera considéré comme micro-utopie tout épisode de roman dans lequel s’élabore un discours utopique au sens strict, c’est-à-dire un discours visant à la description, aussi brève soit-elle, d’une collectivité idéale, refermée sur elle-même, habitant un espace clos isolé du reste du monde (8).

As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the hero of Abbé Prévost’s *L’Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* finds a utopian form of living in America where he finally establishes a home with his lover. In Françoise de Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*, utopia for the heroine occurs in her country home where she is free to write her story. Finally, for the protagonist of Pierre de Marivaux’s *La Vie de Marianne*, utopia is experienced in a time after the lived-experience of the letters, as the aging woman sits at her desk writing letters to a friend.

In publishing these four novels, their authors also invited the public to join them in this utopian yearning, and thus they engaged in a political act. Nancy Armstrong writes

of domestic fiction that it “actively sought to disentangle the language of sexual relations from the language of politics and, in so doing, to introduce *a new form of political power*” (3, emphasis added). However, as we have seen, sexual relations need not be disentangled from politics to create new forms of power. The language of kinship is bound necessarily to a language of sexual relations as well as a language of politics; therefore, one cannot be completely disentangled from the others. Thus works that interrogate notions of kinship without being confined to the genre of domestic fiction, such as the works treated in this dissertation, create a new language of family politics. In so doing, these works propose new forms of power that are not necessarily passed from one generation of men to the next, and thus they seize on the shift from what Michel Foucault calls an “apparatus of alliance” toward an “apparatus of sexuality,” two terms that will be explained in greater detail in the second section of this introduction.

Western philosophy has long articulated modes of governance through a discourse on kinship. Aristotle was among the first to articulate family as a natural precursor to the state (*polis*), whereas Plato believed that the family was prohibitive to individual ability. Building on the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who argued that individual free will can be realized only in the context of family and property ownership, Friedrich Engels offers a materialist history of the family and the state, citing the role of property ownership as a catalyzing force in creating the modern family.<sup>7</sup> In eighteenth-century France, Rousseau returns to previous iterations of the family as a political institution, and concretizes the allegorical link between the State and the family:

La famille est donc, si l'on veut, le premier modèle des sociétés politiques; le chef est l'image du père, le peuple est l'image des

enfants, et tous étant nés égaux et libres n'aliènent leur liberté que pour leur utilité (*Du Contrat Social* 10).

Rousseau goes on to express the limitations to such an analogy, citing the king's lack of love for his people as the most egregious difference between the father and the king. Thus while Aristotle waivers in his claims between which came first – the family or the State – Rousseau's formulation gives precedence to the family.<sup>8</sup> The latter's definition of family is so popular amongst his contemporaries that it finds its way into Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. The language is repeated verbatim in Jaucourt's article "Famille" and paraphrased in Diderot's "Cité," as well as Antoine-Gaspard Boucher d'Argis's "Société." In other words, for these Enlightenment thinkers, organization within the family household formed the basis for governmental structures, but this influence remained unidirectional.

Because the relation between family and state is so inextricably intertwined, the family can serve as a social laboratory, through which we can better understand the power relations both of and between the government and its people. Each of the four novels discussed in this dissertation was written prior to 1789 during the period of the *Ancien Régime*. Although Louis XIV passed several laws to secure his place as absolute monarch, thus building his reputation as a strong leader of France, his rule was followed by a weakening in perceived paternal power. This weakening happens first during the Regency (1715-23), then under Louis XV, a ruler who was believed to have caused much economic ruin in France (1723-74), and finally, under Louis XVI, a ruler who would become the scapegoat for absolutism (1774-92). The power of the patriarch also

diminishes within the realm of fictional literature in the eighteenth century. Fatherhood in many novels of this time period becomes a moribund (if not already dead) institution, as fathers are dead, silent, or dying.

In the chapters that follow we will show how the father is not lost in these fictional families but his role is transformed. Be it relegated to a brother, to a mother, or to outsider, the function of fatherhood persists even if the latter's power is abated. More broadly, the novels do not dissolve patriarchy, but they seek alternatives to it. Rather than positing simply that the father figure is written out of literature in response to the waning power of the patriarch, we propose a more dialectical relationship between authority and literature, in which the patriarch's power also wanes as public opinion changes, a change that is informed by fictional literature. It is from within this dialectical relationship that we can assess not only the transformative power of family, but also the political power of literature as literature engages with social injustice. In so doing, literature offers explores potential solutions, and thus opens up a space for politics.

According to Jacques Rancière, *politics* is space in which social justice becomes possible with the righting of wrongs. He distinguishes between what he calls "la police," or the governing order of society as a whole, and "la politique," or the presupposition of equality of all individuals. Within this frame, the police necessarily denies politics because of its hierarchal nature. Even prior to the instauration of a democratic regime, man is a being who governs (within his home) and who is governed (within society), his subjectivity residing in this ruptured identity. To put it differently, "un processus de subjectivation est ainsi un processus de désidentification ou de déclassification.

Autrement dit, un sujet est un *in-between*, un entre-deux” (*Aux bords* 119). In order for an individual to become a political subject, he must first reject the principles that govern him. For Rancière, politics is not the exercise of power; it is the righting of a wrong.

Man as an *in-between* is, therefore, full of potential. The idea of bodies working together in harmony is at the heart of every social and political utopian dream, and yet the perfection that accompanies complete equality renders society stagnant. Utopian visions do not allow for change because there is no dissenting voice. All things being equal, any progress must come from a certain difference. Such a dissenting voice cannot be completely other (lest it remain simply an outcast). Instead, this voice must oppose the majority while remaining a part of society – in Rancière’s terms, *l’Un* is disrupted only by *l’un-en-plus* – thus becoming the one who speaks out against inequality and creates the stage where politics become possible. The in-between is a recurrent theme in this dissertation. Each of the protagonists discussed in the current work represent various liminal positions – the bastard, the exotic Other, the orphan, and the man living in the wrong time – each of these figures inhabits a space that is in-between identities. As we shall demonstrate in *Family Remains*, it is through an examination of their *in-betweenness* that we can assess each novel’s utopian impulse, locating the space in which the political becomes possible.

### **The Family Unraveled**

In numerous eighteenth-century novels, power is redistributed in the family as authors imagine new models for individual and collective governance based on the

language of affiliation. In order to examine fully the implications of such an argument, we bring together Foucauldian notions of power with the exploration of the individual psyche in psychoanalytic theory. In the following section, we will demonstrate the central concepts that frame this dissertation through a reading of Claude Prosper Jolyot de Cr ebillon’s libertine novel *Les  garements du c eur et de l’esprit*.

The problematic of domestic disintegration (and the parallel attempt to imagine a new form of family) traverses much of the eighteenth-century literary canon. Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), for instance, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Julie, ou La Nouvelle H elo se* (1761) owed their success to their emotional portrayals of troubled marriages and inadequate (even dangerous) pairings. In these novels, feminine virtue is put to the test, although in very different ways, and in each case virtue is rewarded with marriage and stability.<sup>9</sup> Both Pamela and Julie provide a new template for the wife and mother. In these households, women are generous and forgiving caregivers, who occupy themselves with ensuring the happiness of their husbands, children, and even their servants. It is around this time period that we see the origins of what will later be called the “cult of motherhood,” a discursive movement that replaces vanity with maternity as the essence of femininity. The impetus behind marriage begins to change, as do the families resulting from these marriages. As Elisabeth Badinter explains, arranged marriages become more and more shocking because they do not account for individual preference. In such marriages motherhood is functional, existing to perpetuate the family name. On the other hand, the child born of a mutually desired union is regarded as the product of love rather than of duty; “dans cette optique, on exalte sans

fin les douceurs de la maternité, laquelle n'est plus un devoir imposé mais l'activité la plus enviable et la plus douce qu'une femme puisse espérer" (Badinter 210-11).

Following this logic, motherhood is elevated from peripheral element to main plot line in many works of eighteenth-century domestic fiction.

A family organized around a warm and faithful mother and wife is only one possible model for fictional families. As we noted above, the study of kinship bonds is not confined to the genre of domestic fiction. Not every work of fiction portrayed a virtuous woman as the apotheosis of femininity, and many novels explored the various possibilities for other family members. For instance, Denis Diderot's bourgeois drama *Le Fils naturel* explores the changing role of the father toward his children, and Rousseau's *Émile* eschews mother and father figures in favor of an evaluation of the orphaned child's individual formation. Several scholars have claimed that Crébillon fils's *Les Égaréments du cœur et de l'esprit* serves as an early portrayal of a libertine education, and have focused on the hero's sexual and worldly education. Few (if any), however, have focused on the familial dynamics of the novel.<sup>10</sup> While the story does indeed center on the hero's budding sexuality and his encounters with various mentors, this focus does not preclude reading the novel through the language of kinship. Even the novel's framing suggests that sexuality and kinship are deeply entangled. The novel begins with an allusion to the hero's paternal inheritance and maternal love and ends with his sexual encounter with his mother's best friend. This novel explores kinship dynamics in a perverse way by displacing familial relations onto extra-familial characters.

Michel Foucault argues that the family unit serves as a generative site of power in early modern European societies. In the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, he renders explicit the connection between the family unit and sexuality. For Foucault, sexuality is not a drive; rather it is “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power” (103). He writes that in the eighteenth century specific mechanisms of knowledge and power were being formed that were centered on sex. These mechanisms included new theories on female physiology and childhood sexuality and invited more surveillance from within the home. Husbands watched their wives and parents observed their children, looking for any signs of aberrant behavior. Until the early modern period sexual relations had determined practices of marriage and the formation of kinship structures in a way that ensured the transmission of names and possessions from one generation to the next. This system, the apparatus of alliance, relied on and maintained a “homeostasis of the social body” (107), in which laws governing alliances between families were firmly fixed and there were severe repercussions for breaking the laws. Beginning in the eighteenth century, a new system emerges that governs and is governed by sexual relations. This system, the apparatus of sexuality, is superimposed upon and coexistent with the apparatus of alliance and shifts the importance away from the link *between* bodies, that is, the transmission of power from one generation to the next, to the sensations *of* the body. Against alliance, sexuality finds its motivating force “not in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way” (*ibid.*). Sexuality continues to develop, according to Foucault, as the family coheres into



its modern bourgeois form in the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Alliance and sexuality overlap and intertwine, altering the laws governing individual bodies and the social body. Foucault argues that the transformation from one system to the next takes place along two major axes: that of husband and wife, and that of parents and children. These two dimensions within the family are the strongest points in the transferal of power. In the present study, we propose the addition of a third axis – the children-children axis – that admits the potential for another transferal of power from one sibling to another.

The transfer of power is problematized in Crébillon fils's novel, where Meilcour, the hero, is an only child and a bastard. Yet prior to the hero's narrative, the author begins a discussion of the father-son relationship by using an example from his own life. The paratextual material published with *Les Égaréments*, includes a letter from the author to his father, famed tragic poet and member of the *Académie française*, Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon. This letter appears to anticipate Foucault's argument, with the author illustrating the joys and the difficulties of a father-son relationship in a state of evolution:

Attaché à vous par les liens les plus étroits du sang, nous sommes, si je l'ose dire, plus unis encore par l'amitié la plus sincère et la plus tendre. Eh! pourquoi ne le dirais-je pas? Les pères ne veulent-ils donc que du respect? Leur donne-t-il même tout ce qu'on leur doit? Et ne leur devrait-il pas être bien doux de voir la reconnaissance augmenter et affermir, dans le cœur de leurs enfants, ce sentiment d'amour que la Nature y a déjà gravé? (39).

The language of this paragraph betrays the instability of the parent-child relationship. The author first makes recourse to the blood relation (*les liens les plus étroits du sang*) but immediately follows this statement by invoking the bond of friendship. The hesitancy expressed in the vocabulary (*si j'ose dire*), as well as in the frequent use of interrogative

statements, indicates the author's precarious position as he appears ready to inherit the name-of-the-father, but wary of disturbing the balance of power. Furthermore, the language of friendship is countered by a return to a discussion of respect, yet the nature of such respect is emotional rather than dutiful – it is a *natural* sentiment (*ce sentiment d'amour que la Nature y a déjà gravé*). Thus in the space of a few sentences, the author expresses the parent-child relationship as one that demands the obedience and respect of child for parent at the same time that it inspires mutual love and respect.

The next few lines complicate this relationship even further, as the narrator first sounds like the child of Freud's family romance, then continues to confuse the language of kinship:

Pour moi, qui me suis toujours vu l'unique objet de votre tendresse et de vos inquiétudes; vous, mon ami, mon consolateur, mon appui, je ne crains point que vous voyiez rien qui puisse blesser le respect que j'ai pour vous dans les titres que je vous donne et que vous avez si justement acquis (39).

The author invokes first the language of a child who sees himself as "*l'unique objet*" of his father's affection, but then assumes the position of an equal in calling his father "mon ami." The letter ends with some musings on the potential success of his novel and an appeal to his father's genius. While he uses the proper closings for a letter, "votre très humble et très obéissant serviteur," he cannot help but add the one term of endearment that distinguishes him from a friend or acquaintance – "fils." The signature that connotes a bond of blood destines this novel to function as the author's legacy. Crébillon fils attaches his work, his life's narrative, to that of his father. Although he proposes that this

novel will make him an equal, in fact it is subsumed into his father's legacy and reinforces paternal power.

Such a preoccupation with paternal legacy is repeated in the content of the novel, which begins with the narrator's immediately calling attention to his illustrious family name and the material wealth he inherits from his mother:

J'entrai dans le monde à dix-sept ans, et avec tous les avantages qui peuvent y faire remarquer. Mon père m'avait laissé un grand nom, dont il avait lui-même augmenté l'éclat, et j'attendais de ma mère des biens considérables (47).

He describes his mother as virtuous and thoughtful; she appears the very portrait of the "good mother" by providing love and material support to her child, even giving him a "modest education" in order to combat natural youthful conceit. The tone of narration swiftly changes as the narrator gestures toward the failings of that education, writing that afterward, "je n'en ai pas été moins fat; mais sans les précautions qu'elle prit contre moi, je l'aurais été plus tôt, et sans ressource" (48). Parental influence thus fades away as the narrator symbolically casts himself as an orphan, and then replaces his parents with extra-familial counterparts.

*Les Égarements*, like each of the novels we examine, uses the first-person narrative to invite the reader into an intimate relation.<sup>12</sup> The reader learns not only of Meilcour's actions, but also of his motives and his thoughts about those actions. This effect allows us to witness directly the psychic progression of the hero as he grows from a naïve young man into a well-versed libertine. In other words, first-person narratives allow us to read the story of the protagonist's subjective formation from the position of the listener. The reader engages with the narrator's voice, much in the way later

psychoanalytic therapists would engage with their patients. In this way, this narrative style, which favors intimate encounters with the narrator, serves as a pre-cursor to the free-indirect discourse that would become popular in the nineteenth century. In order to understand Meilcour's transformation, we must first explain some key psychoanalytic concepts that form the foundation of the current study.

In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the Œdipus complex is crucial to the psychological development of the child. The child experiencing this complex desires the parent of the opposite sex and feels a sense of competition with the parent of the same sex. This complex is resolved only once the child identifies with the same-sex parent. For Jacques Lacan, this complex consists of three distinct moments: first, the child understands that his mother desires something besides himself; second, the imaginary father intervenes thus prohibiting incest; and finally, the father symbolically castrates the son, showing the child that he possesses the phallus (in other words, he possesses the power). Lacan argues that this process allows the child to move from the imaginary to the symbolic order. Subjectivity in the imaginary order is predicated upon coherence. The child draws a connection between object and image, but this connection remains a direct correlation – one image equals one object. The symbolic order (what Lacan also refers to as the “big Other”), on the other hand, represents an infinite series of fractures. This order is a linguistic one in which the child understands language as a proliferation of signifiers and where objects (or concepts, or groups of objects) can symbolize something beyond themselves. In his pre-œdipal stage, the child's desires are organized by the imaginary world (this is when the child forms an ego by associating images with objects and thus

recognizing the self). The successful resolution of the Œdipus complex signals the individual's passage from the imaginary to the symbolic order (a linguistic dimension constituting the Law which regulates desire) and results in a healthy individual. The individual who fails to successfully resolve the Œdipus complex is either neurotic (if he cannot understand the rules) or perverse (if he understands yet breaks the rules). As Lacan puts it, "in order for there to be reality, adequate access to reality, in order for the sense of reality to be a reliable guide, in order for reality not to be what it is in psychosis, the Œdipus complex has to have been lived through" (*Psychoses* 198).

In *Les Égarements*, a resolution of the Œdipus complex appears impossible because the hero's father died when he was a child. There was thus no one to prohibit his desire for the mother; indeed, this may explain the effusive language with which he describes her. This novel, however, shifts the perspective toward a new œdipal complex by transferring Meilcour's desire for the mother to desire for his mother's friend, Mme de Lursay. Lursay, an aristocrat who is an intimate acquaintance of his mother, serves as his first contact with a world outside his home. She is of the same station as his mother and roughly the same age, and in this way she symbolically replaces the mother. Soon after, he meets Versac, the man who will guide him on his libertine education – the man who will represent the paternal superego. Although Meilcour has left the parental home, he finds himself, once again, in an œdipal construction. Lursay represents the hero's sexual desires and Versac prohibits them, leading the narrator instead to Mme de Senanges, a replacement lover.

In the final pages of part one, the hero is on the verge of satisfying his desire for Mme de Lursay when he is dissuaded by the comte de Versac. Although the protagonist expresses his mother's hatred for the latter, he deeply admires the count. He describes the count as if portraying a hero: "Versac [...] joignait à la plus haute naissance l'esprit le plus agréable, et la figure la plus séduisante" (130). Although the narrator also lists some of Versac's negative qualities (for example, he is a womanizer who becomes wealthy through his liaisons), the tone remains one of admiration rather than admonition: "il semblait que cette heureuse impertinence fût un don de la nature, qu'elle n'avait pu faire qu'à lui" (131). At this moment, Versac gains a position of power over Meilcour. His newly-assumed power is so great that he prohibits desire by mere suggestion. Versac cools the hero's passion for Lursay simply by speaking negatively about her in the presence of Meilcour.

Normally, the Œdipus complex ends with a symbolic castration of the subject, that is, when the subject realizes that his father holds the phallus – the power – and he realizes that he must give up on his attempt to attain the desired object. It is at this point that he enters into the Symbolic order, and when he receives what Lacan calls the *non-du-père*. Lacan plays upon the homophonic affinity between "nom" and "non," arguing that once the father prohibits the son's desire (tells him no) the son enters the same symbolic order that will allow him to receive the *name* of the father. The result is a transfer of paternal power to the son through the liminal space of the mother (*Écrits* 67). In the case of Meilcour, he does not need a name (he has boasted already about his father's name) but he does desire the social power that accompanies Versac's name. Because of his

desire for social status, he accepts Versac's "no" (for a time) and turns his attention instead toward Mme de Senanges, Versac's female counterpart, who will help the hero complete his libertine education. A libertine education replaces the modest education when the œdipal triangle displaced onto the unaffiliated family.

That the novel ends with the hero's conquest of Lursay suggests a twist to our œdipal plot. The father's no is ultimately rejected, and the son fulfills his desire to sleep with the mother. Throughout the novel, his desire for the mother has been sublimated into a desire for Mlle Thévire, a young and beautiful aristocrat whom he sees at the opera. Put differently, his unhealthy desire for the mother-figure was masked behind the healthy desire for a young woman of no relation – a woman who for the first third of the novel remains a literal *inconnue*. And yet, the hero's sexual gratification finally comes at the hands of the maternal rather than the unaffiliated figure. We do not see a successful completion of the Freudian œdipal complex; instead, we see the hero's descent into perversion. He has understood the rules and he has rejected them. Instead of reproducing a family with himself at the head, the narrator reproduces repetition, as he completes the libertine education that will lead him astray.

Ironically, the fulfillment of incestuous desire is, in fact, a necessary component of the symbolic function of the novel itself. "Strayings" (*égarements*) of the heart and mind are precisely the actions of the libertine whose aberrancy (in the literal sense of "wandering") signals normalcy within the genre. The novel does not end because it cannot. It has indulged in the desire to share intimacy with the reader, and its hero has finally possessed the symbolic mother. The incompleteness of the Œdipus complex forms

the basis for his libertine education. As a result, his narration will extend beyond the pages of the text as we understand that this is but the beginning of his wanderings. The novel ends once the moral has been transmitted: the hero *has* assumed the power of the father (even if he has not received it from the father) and he reproduces not a family but rather a life of errancy.<sup>13</sup>

Crébillon fils's main character thus resists assumption into the family. He lauds his father's name, but eventually rejects his legacy, preferring instead the legacy of a libertine. He confesses his adoration for his assumed father (Versac) but ultimately rejects that power as well. His mother is present in the novel, yet he quickly replaces her with a mother-figure more suitable to his needs. Ironically, in attempting to detach himself from family, Meilcour creates new forms of intimate communities. The in-between quality of the hero is evident as he moves between the paternal home and the courtly world into which he desires entry. And yet, as we have seen, the power of such a character lies in his very liminality. In this dissertation we will repeatedly interrogate the space of the in-between, asserting that it is in this crucial period of the subjective formation that the characters possess the power to alter the way we imagine kinship and community.

The notion of family in *Les Égarements* is not immediately evident. Although the hero invokes familial relationships at the outset of his narrative, kinship relations quickly fade out of the story. And yet by analyzing the novel through a symbolic logic that allows multiple characters to perform the function of a mother or a father, perhaps we can take Marthe Robert at her word when she claims that the œdipal complex is “un fait humain



universal” (62). This then brings us back to Judith Butler’s question from the epigraph to this introduction, “What will the legacy of Œdipus be?” Although Butler’s question is posed to contemporary readers, referring to a twentieth- and twenty-first-century phenomenon where real families no longer follow the symbolic logic of kinship, where familial roles are not gender-normative, and where we see multiple possibilities for the composition of the family, in the context of this dissertation we will argue that this same question could also be posed in the eighteenth century. Analysis of outsider-figures in the fiction of this time period will show us how social, familial, and political positions may never have been stable or clear in the first place.

### **Family Remains**

The first half of the dissertation analyzes the ways in which existing models of the nuclear family are rearranged to produce new types of intra-familial relations. By focusing both on the evolution of the parents’ relation to the children, and on the relation of siblings to each other, these two chapters center on novels that endeavor to transform the patriarchal household into a more egalitarian space. Furthermore, Abbé Prévost’s *Manon Lescaut* and Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne* propose a body politic that takes into account the minor players in political society (women, colonized subjects, and second-born sons).

Chapter one, “Œdipus Interrupted: The Rise of Brotherhood in Abbé Prévost’s *Manon Lescaut*,” examines the transformation of masculine familial roles in Prévost’s sentimental novel, *Manon Lescaut*, focusing on the shift from strict paternal rule to a

more democratic form of governance that is organized around the principles of brotherhood. The hero, Des Grieux, attempts to assert himself as an autonomous individual, but the process is interrupted by male and female characters who question his maturity and masculinity. A naïve Des Grieux explores his own masculinity by placing himself in the role of the absent female figure. Endeavoring to realize a form of subjectivity outside of patriarchal modes of family and masculinity, the hero constructs a new familial legacy based on brotherly, homosocial relationships and free from authoritative relationships. Such an overwhelming cast of fathers, sons, brothers, and male friends at the expense of female roles is indicative of the tension that Foucault signals in the shift from systems of alliance to sexuality. This novel overlays fraternal upon paternal bonds in order to create a new type of democratized patriarchy and signals a changed relation between men in the public sphere.

In chapter two, “Knotted Nostalgia: Weaving Female Legacy in Françoise de Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*,” we analyze how the heroine, Zilia, articulates a new role for women in the family and how she breaks free from masculine hegemonies. Building on Julia Kristeva’s theory of writing as maternal and Nancy K. Miller’s assessment of a unique female writing and translation inherent to this novel, we demonstrate that by writing herself out of marriage, Zilia rewrites herself as an enlightened sister, calling into question the notion of “fraternité” that permeates Enlightenment discourse. Read as a case study for curing the nostalgia of the exotic woman who must live out her days in France, this novel shows the impossibility of erasing the legacy of the colonized ‘other,’ despite the subsumption of her Incan past into

her European present. Furthermore, the heroine's obsessive desire to write to her long-lost Peruvian lover, and later to translate these letters, thus reviving her Peruvian heritage, reveals the impossibility of writing over the colonized subject's inherited legacy and produces instead a new legacy situated beyond masculine, nationalistic norms while at the same time creating the space for an alternative to the masculine Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment that Graffigny proposes not only is based upon the fraternity of learned men, but also reveres the enlightened sister.

In the second half of the dissertation, focus shifts away from imagining the family as an a priori construction and instead analyzes how notions of kinship are built from the outside-in. The protagonists of Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* and Mercier's *L'An 2440: Rêve s'il en fut jamais* begin their narratives detached from family and community; in *Marianne*, we find an orphan bathed in the blood of two women, and in *2440*, we read the story of a dreaming man who finds himself both out of place and out of time. In these two chapters, we focus on the breakdown of language as each of the main characters confronts the ambiguity of intimate relationships. Rather than a space of failed language, scenes of ambiguity and rupture in these novels serve as a productive space where a new language emerges that allows for diverse models of kinship and community.

Chapter three, "Familial Transvestisms: Trying on Kinship in Pierre de Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne*," examines how the orphan of ambiguous origins in Marivaux's unfinished serial novel *La Vie de Marianne* side-steps patriarchy altogether by inventing a noble public persona independent of her past. However, Marianne's nobility is based on an ethics of sensibility rather than on bloodlines. Lacking an

inheritance, the protagonist transforms her body into a site of both economic and cultural exchange, but that body is read differently by men and by women. While Marianne's interactions with women propose a complete collapsing of physiognomy and character that diverges from Cartesian notions of dualism, her interactions with men demonstrate the heroine's adeptness at controlling the split between exterior and interior.<sup>14</sup> This chapter analyzes how Marivaux's choices in genre and style necessarily code the text as "feminine," and how this feminine coding invites the reader to participate in Marianne's ethics of sensibility, which is constantly evolving throughout the text. Rather than reinventing the family in a new monolithic form, *La Vie de Marianne* espouses a fluid notion of kinship where alliances formed are based on love and mutual trust.

Our final chapter, "Dreaming of Futures Past: Prescriptive Legacies in Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An 2440: Rêve s'il en fût jamais*," builds on our argument that inventing a past produces a particular present, but complicates it by considering the futurity implied in speculations on national legacy. Mercier's futuristic utopian novel blurs the boundaries that separate space and time, creating what we call an *impossible present*, that is, a present that can exist only within the narrative. We engage with Reinhart Koselleck's theorization of historical categories, arguing that by changing the social conditions within the novel, the author creates a new space of experience for eighteenth-century readers, and, by extension, he changes the future of Paris itself. Invoking Jacques Rancière's notions of rupture and Louis Marin's concept of the infinitesimal, we explain that by splitting the narrator both spatially (between text and

footnotes) and temporally (between present and future) Mercier relies on the productive space of the in-between to prescribe a new, better model of kinship.

Each of the authors studied in this dissertation not only produced novels that explored evolving models of kinship, they also returned to these works again and again, constantly revising the content and the form of these novels in what constituted a life-long project of imagining intimate communities. Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, the seventh volume of the *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, revises the familial narrative that traverses the first six volumes of the series; responding to criticism of her heroine, Zilia, who refuses to marry, Graffigny revises the novel, adding two letters that reiterate female independence and authority; Marivaux's *Marianne* consists of eleven volumes published serially, thus allowing the author to engage with his readers as he hears their responses to his work prior to publishing installments to come; and finally, Mercier's *2440* is the first in a series of novels written by the author (along with *Le Tableau de Paris* and *Le Nouveau Paris* – what we call his “Paris Trilogy”), a series that reveals both positive and negative aspects of Paris in order to demonstrate to readers not only the possibilities for a city, but also the possibilities of the French as a people.

These four novels dramatize a principle concern of individuals in pre-revolutionary, eighteenth-century France. This concern, with domestic life and its relation to the political sphere, is one that still haunts France in the twenty-first century. While the Revolution of 1789 did successfully overturn the monarchical regime, it did not answer the question of what the French family should look like. Within the first two decades of the post-revolutionary period in France the inhabitants of the country experienced the

institution of a republic, followed by the rise of an empire, and then a return to monarchy. What does it mean to be French? This question had much the same political valence in eighteenth-century France as it has today and it remains, in every century, a question without an appropriate response. Analysis of these four novels may not provide us with an answer to the question, but it will provoke an interrogation of the notion of “family” and “race,” all while showing us a few possible responses to our second question, “What does the French family look like?”

# Chapter One

## Œdipus Interrupted: The Rise of Brotherhood in Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*



Fig.1.1: *Portrait du roi Louis XV enfant* (c. 1715)  
Pierre Gobert

*Des premières sociétés la plus ancienne de toutes les sociétés, et la seule naturelle, est celle de la famille: encore les enfants ne restent-ils liés au père qu'aussi longtemps qu'ils ont besoin de lui pour se conserver.*

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*

### Introduction: A Bizarre Love Triangle

Jacques Lacan writes of kinship and language that “without names for kinship relations, no power can institute the order of preferences and taboos that knot and braid the thread of lineage through the generations” (*Écrits* 66). Following the argument of structuralists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Lacan proposes that the language of kinship shapes the very existence of individuals. He locates the emergence of individual subjectivity in the successful resolution of the œdipal complex, arguing that only with the

successful transfer of the *name-of-the-father* can a child enter into symbolic order. Within the œdipal triangle, the child desires the mother and it is through the father's interdiction of that desire that the child comes to understand the elemental structures of kinship.

How then is one to complete a subjective formation when one point of the triangle is altered or removed? Furthermore, what happens when the meaning of these familial designators begins to change? With his mother deceased, the hero of the Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, the Chevalier Des Grieux, grows up in a household where the familial structure is completely masculinized. Rather than identifying himself only through his father, Des Grieux must also attempt to identify himself both with and against his older brother. In this construction, family roles become unstable. The father is at times stern and rational with his youngest son, at other times caring and gentle. The older brother occasionally acquires the fatherly role by scolding the hero and prohibiting the latter's desire; yet in several scenes, he is also presented as compassionate and almost motherly. Both men (the father and the oldest son), however, serve as inhibitors to the protagonist's desire for romantic love with Manon, and thus Des Grieux remains in a perpetually infantilized state.

In an article on fathers in the eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie* edited by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, Louis de Jaucourt writes,

Un pere de famille ne peut être méchant, ni vertueux impunément.  
Celui qui vit dans le célibat, devient aisément indifférent sur  
l'avenir qui ne doit point l'intéresser; mais un pere qui doit se  
survivre dans sa race, tient à cet avenir par des liens éternels  
(*Encyclopédie* "Pere").



He further states that the good and noble father loves his children all the more because he thinks of them both as his inheritors and as his creatures. According to this model of fatherhood, the father's legacy is dependent upon the actions of his children and grandchildren who inherit both his name and his estate. Defining children as *créatures* denies them the agency of self-formation, leaving the formative task to the father.<sup>15</sup> Yet, later in the article, Jaucourt warns of the ills of the father who tries too hard to shape the future of his *race* (those bound to him as kin) at the expense of his children's happiness. Rather than forcing a vocation (and a destiny) upon the child, Jaucourt declares that if the child "a une répugnance ou un penchant bien marqué pour un [*sic*] autre vocation que celle qu'on lui destinoit; c'est la voix du destin, *il y faut céder*" (Jaucourt "Pere," emphasis added). In other words, being a good father in eighteenth-century France is akin to keeping one's balance on a tightrope. Lean too far in one direction and you risk falling into a severe form of fatherhood, inciting your children to resent you and to rebel; lean too far in the opposite direction, however, and you risk being perceived as too soft, encouraging children to take advantage of authority and to ruin the family reputation.

According to Maurice Daumas, the hero's crisis of subjectivity in this novel is emblematic of a crisis of youth in eighteenth-century France – one that results from the changing role of the father.<sup>16</sup> Daumas names this phenomenon the "Des Grieux syndrome": a crisis in which an old order (strict father / obeying son) fades away without a fully-formed new order to take its place. As Daumas points out, by creating a story in which the mother is absent, the author of *Manon* is able to explore fully the evolving roles of fathers and sons. Drawing on both literary and historical sources, he argues that

there are three distinct types of fatherhood in eighteenth-century France. The first, the *père traditionnel*, feels a sense of duty not to his children as individual beings, but to his lineage. The second, the *père névrosé*, is concerned with his children only inasmuch as their behavior affects his own social status.<sup>17</sup> The third and final type is the *nouveau père*. This new father's duty is solely to his children and their well-being. In this father, "l'esprit d'autorité est remplacé par un esprit d'équité" (Daumas 28). In this chapter, we will focus on the first and third types of fathers enumerated by Daumas, examining how the shift from a traditional to a new father can be located within the hero's household in the characters of the father and the brother. Although paternal power is never transferred to the hero, the transfer of the *nom-du-père* from the father to the eldest son in this novel also reveals the transformation of fatherhood as it traverses the generational gap that divides fathers from sons.

The diverse roles of fatherhood in *Manon* are evident as early as the first paragraph. Renoncour, the *homme de qualité* whose memoirs provide the publication space for the Chevalier Des Grieux's story, situates the hero's story within his own timeline and within the context of his own narrative. He writes:

Je suis obligé de faire remonter mon lecteur au temps de ma vie où je rencontrai pour la première fois le Chevalier Des Grieux. Ce fut environ six mois avant mon départ pour l'Espagne. Quoique je sortisse rarement de ma solitude, la complaisance que j'avais pour ma fille m'engageait quelquefois à divers petits voyages, que j'abrégeais autant qu'il m'était possible. Je revenais de Rouen, où elle m'avait prié d'aller solliciter une affaire au Parlement de Normandie, pour la succession de quelques terres auxquelles je lui avais laissé des prétentions du côté de mon grand-père maternel (51).

The reader's attention is oriented immediately toward the business side of kinship. The narrator describes a *complaisance* for his daughter, but not necessarily love or even compassion. He describes the task as little more than an annoyance he tries to rush through. Rather than a space for the creation of intimate bonds and for the formation of individual identity, the family unit is presented as a series of business transactions involving the transfer of inherited properties.

This sober presentation of family stands in stark contrast to the Chevalier's emotional journey as it is relayed to readers by the *homme de qualité* in the pages that follow. The hero of *Manon* repeatedly forms intimate bonds with those whom he encounters on his journey. Although the story revolves around his romantic relationship with the title character, Manon, Des Grieux describes the emotions he feels in his relations with men just as intensely. In fact, as we shall see, romantic scenes with Manon are often repeated with male characters such as the hero's friends Tiberge and M. de T... cast in her place. Furthermore, Des Grieux's brother and father intervene in the story, changing the protagonist's perspective (as well as that of the reader) on his romantic relationship. The hero's narration of his life moves seamlessly between romantic scenes and scenes of masculine bonding. In this chapter, therefore, we will examine what impact masculine homosocial relationships have on heterosexual romantic desire.

Father-child relationships are portrayed in the novel largely as formal arrangements necessary to the transmission of property and to the maintenance of the familial reputation. In the case of both Des Grieux's father and the *homme de qualité*, the father (when performing the paternal role *vis-à-vis* his children) is rarely presented as a

sensitive being. Instead, fatherhood consists of shaping the child in a social – as opposed to an emotional – manner, using rationality and severity as key parental tools. Because the father-son relationship perpetuates an imbalance of power, compassionate bonds between men must be sought elsewhere, be it with brothers, friends, or mentors. The *homme de qualité* signals the importance of extra-familial relationships in his own framing of the hero's story. Although he begins the story by mentioning his daughter, he concludes his introduction in the company of his male pupil, the Comte de Rosemont, a young man who serves as a counterpart to Des Grieux.<sup>18</sup> The narrator's shift in focus from kin (his daughter) to a more intimate bond of friendship and mentorship (with his pupil), as well as his focal shift from the feminine to the masculine, prepares the reader for the story to come.<sup>19</sup>

As is well documented, the popularity of domestic fiction both in France and abroad in the eighteenth century attests to a common fascination with the intimate inner workings of the family within European society.<sup>20</sup> Jaucourt's article on family in the *Encyclopédie* defines the family as a civil society established by nature. Furthermore, he writes "Les familles commencent par le mariage, & c'est la nature elle-même qui invite les hommes à cette union; de-là naissent les enfans, qui en perpétuant les familles, entretiennent la société humaine, & réparent les pertes que la mort y cause chaque jour" (Jaucourt "Famille"). The preceding examples demonstrate a preoccupation with the building up of the family; Prévost's novel, on the other hand, explores the family's breaking down, complicating in several ways the notion of the family's social reproduction. Des Grieux begins life with a mother, father, and brother, but the mother

dies before his narrative begins and he gradually distances himself from his brother and father. Whereas accounts of domestic fiction typically sustain at least the semblance of family, we focus on how this novel ends *without* the perpetuation of the nuclear family through the hero's marriage.

The removal of each family member is met with his or her replacement by an extra-familial relationship. The domestic is thus rendered foreign as the protagonist explores both new lands (in America) and new models of community that replace the family. Manon, the hero's childhood friend Tiberge, and his sexual-rival-turned-friend the young G...M... among others, serve as intimate companions to the hero without being related to him by blood or marriage. Such relations redefine the very meaning of domesticity. In spite of the masculine kin surrounding the hero in the paternal household, he fashions for himself a new intimate community in which relations and gender roles are not strictly defined. Thus the Chevalier forms and informs his personal journey *apart from* a struggle for masculine dominance within the familial household. The eschewal of paternal legacy (rejecting at certain points even his name) has the consequence of feminizing the young hero in his relationship with Manon as he struggles to define himself against models of masculinity rather than through them. By means of a type of subjectivity that is formed outside of traditional modes of family and masculinity, the hero, as we shall see, will attempt to construct a new type of family, free from hierarchal authoritative relationships of power.

What makes *Manon* such a compelling example of familial transformation is that its legacy is, in fact, in contradiction with the actual story being told. Many

interpretations of the novel portray *Manon* as a story of passionate love and its death.<sup>21</sup> However, the female character, Manon, is little more than a faint presence in the novel, and her absence renders mutual passionate love impossible. Naomi Segal argues that the purpose of Des Grieux's text is, in fact, "to talk about Manon *in her absence*" (126, emphasis added). In this way, the love affair between the hero and Manon serves as a backdrop for his relationships with men. Yet we argue that rather than simply disavowing or canceling out the heteronormative, romantic dimension of *Manon*, the feminine background fundamentally informs the transformation of masculine family dynamics. By experimenting with power and gender roles in his relationship with Manon, the hero alters his behavior in relationships with men – particularly in his relationships with his father and brother – thus transforming the very nature of male homosocial relationships.<sup>22</sup>

This novel presents the subjective formation of the protagonist, Des Grieux, through an emphasis on male-male relationships, almost to the exclusion of male-female relationships. Throughout his story, the hero describes arguments with his father, scenes of intimate bonding with his brother, Tiberge, M. de T..., and in America with his friend Synnelet, and scenes of intense rivalry with men such as the elder G...M... and the Italian Prince. Because the novel focuses on the period of the hero's subjective formation and culminates in his re-entry into French society as a man among men, in this chapter we will examine the mutability both of familial roles and of gender roles as the hero fails to enter the world of the fathers and instead enters a regime of the brother. Furthermore, we will consider how Des Grieux's relationship with Manon, as well as his relationship with his brother, indefinitely interrupts his basic oedipal formation; each relationship

prohibits the hero from maturing and inheriting paternal power. These interruptions render the reproduction of the traditional, patriarchal family impossible, and in its place we see a simulacrum of the patriarchal family wherein the inequalities of brotherhood (between eldest and younger sons) become apparent in a new form of fatherhood, a fatherhood that loosens the inequalities inherent to the father-son relationship while still reproducing a division of power.

### **Paternité, Féminité, et Fraternité**

The story of the paternal denial of filial desire as told in *Manon* diverges from the traditional œdipal dilemma of the competing desire of the father and the son for the wife/mother in two ways. First, the desired woman of this story, Manon, is neither mother nor wife, and therefore the œdipal triangle of masculine desire for the woman appears impossible. Because of the initial feminine lack (of the dead mother), Des Grieux must learn to navigate feminine space outside of the family. In so doing he becomes feminized as he struggles to comprehend under-defined gender roles in his relationship with Manon. Rather than standing beside the father, as a wife would, Manon stands in direct opposition to the father. The second divergence is to be found *within* the hero's family. As the younger son Des Grieux can inherit neither familial wealth nor the fatherly role. Throughout the story we do see the process of transference of the *nom-du-père* (and with it the father's function) from father to son, but this process takes place with the older brother rather than the hero. In the masculine space of the protagonist's family, it is never Des Grieux's status as male that is called into question, but rather his maturity. In this

space he is perpetually infantilized, unable to exit the stage of adolescence, which thus reinforces the impossibility of the hero's œdipal formation.<sup>23</sup>

Interrupters of Œdipus, Manon and the older brother represent two very distinct strands of prohibitive desires.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, Des Grieux's romantic desire for Manon proscribes familial relations. When Des Grieux initiates a return to paternal power, deciding to write to his father for financial help, Manon opposes this return "froidement" stating instead that *she* will take care of the both of them. On the other hand, Des Grieux longs for the safety and comfort of the familial home offered first by the father, then by the older brother. Familial safety and comfort, however, come at the expense of passionate love. When Des Grieux is first pulled away from his love nest, it is the compassionate figure of the brother (rather than the strict father) who draws the hero back into the (masculine) family home. These two desires – that is, for the masculine, familial home and the passionate, romantic love – cannot coincide. Manon refuses to play the "mother" role within the œdipal triangle, remaining firmly *outside* of the family while the oldest brother acts as intermediary to the father, reinforcing yet allaying paternal will, refusing to let Des Grieux live outside of family with his lover.

If we think of desiring not only in relation to a lack (of the desired object), but also as a productive force, then we are in a better position to understand how Des Grieux's desire for the female love-object (Manon) produces a feminine alter ego that is at once a part *of* and apart *from* the hero.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Des Grieux, his desire for Manon is not only the lusty desire to possess the beautiful woman, but also the desire for a female companion with whom to recreate the traditional familial household, an act



incorporating her into a communal desire for the reproduction of the traditional family. When Manon refuses to play the feminine part that he desires, Des Grieux must seek to fill this feminine lack in another way. The Chevalier is feminized in the novel, a process that determines his interactions with all of those around him – male and female – all while he desires masculine recognition within the paternal home. The father and both sons understand that the hero can never become the father-figure within this household due to the laws of primogeniture. Therefore within this masculine space he is perpetually treated as a child. The presence of the father and the older brother in the paternal home prohibits the hero from asserting any sort of male dominance within it. In this space, however, Des Grieux's own lack of masculine power is transformed into an infantilization of the hero. The shift in the power dynamic that occurs once the older brother inherits the paternal role is crucial to our analysis of fatherhood as it transforms from a traditional into a more modern form. Such a transformation hinges upon the move from the parents-children axis – an axis essential to the transformation from an apparatus of alliance to one of sexuality– to what we call the children-children axis.<sup>26</sup> The children-children axis focuses on the power dynamics between older and younger siblings wherein power is not transferred but rather shared and negotiated amongst children within particular families. By feminizing and infantilizing Des Grieux, Prévost offers a hero ill-equipped to assume a paternal role outside of the home. With no possibility of the hero reproducing the patriarchal household, the reader joins the novel in attempting to imagine other roles for the protagonist, roles that can exist only outside of the traditional patriarchal structure.

While the transfer of Des Grieux from the paternal home in the beginning of the novel to the fraternal home (wherein the older brother has assumed the fatherly role after Manon's death) may seem like a lateral move for the hero who simply shifts from one form of hierarchal authority to the next, in fact, the paternal home based on brotherhood propels the traditional family toward modernity. Because the story that the hero chooses to tell focuses on the *in-between* time, the time of youthful rebellion when Des Grieux is physically removed from paternal authority, his return to the familial home now governed by the eldest son / older brother reflects the tension inherent to a transition from tradition to modernity. His defiant journey first in France and then in America is more than simple youthful rebellion. In addition to a personal journey of formation, this journey signals a time of familial transformation and a move to a new order of governance, one that still resides in the home but where the power dynamic has been altered. Although it would be inaccurate to read Des Grieux's return to the brother as a complete acceptance of the modern, democratic principles of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, the hero's ultimate acceptance of the older brother's authority does signal a relaxing of the strict system of alliance. Such a loosening eases the entry of a system of governance based on brotherhood.

Upon his first encounter with Manon, Des Grieux remarks, "j'étais moins *enfant* que je ne le croyais." However, just paragraphs later, discussing the pair's meager finances, he claims that "nous nous imaginâmes, comme des *enfants* sans expérience, que cette somme ne finirait jamais" (60-61). The language implies an acceleration of the hero's formative process. Once he meets Manon, the hero stands on the precipice of

manhood, uncertain of how to move forward but understanding that he cannot move backward. The confusing language regarding his maturity is matched only by the confusing language regarding gender. Although Manon is younger, he writes of her experience and her delight in her fine conquest of the handsome Chevalier. Throughout this novel, the hero's attempts to affirm his maturity are inevitably met with a reassertion (and his own avowal) of his youthful naïveté. Moreover, economies of gender are constantly reevaluated as the hero's lover rebuffs his attempts to confirm his masculinity within the romantic relationship. In the pages that follow, we will examine these two economies – of age and of gender – noting how the hero explores the gaps that exist between youth and maturity, as well as between masculinity and femininity. In so doing, we will also analyze how Des Grieux undergoes a subjective formation that remains within the domestic realm but outside of the traditional oedipal triangle.

### **Feminine Lack – Des Grieux's Feminization**

From the first pages of the novel, the presence of Des Grieux's mother is ambiguous. In his personal introduction, Des Grieux states that his parents have decided that he should become a knight in the Order of Malta, adding, "ils me faisaient déjà porter la croix, avec le nom de Chevalier Des Grieux"(57). The use of the third-person plural pronoun indicates the presence of more than one parent. However, the next sentence denies the existence of a mother, "je me préparais à retourner *chez mon père*" (57, emphasis added). After this reference, any mention of the mother completely disappears until the hero's last encounter with the father when he compares his love for Manon to

that of his father for his mother. At this point we learn once and for all that the mother is dead as Des Grieux cries out, “Hélas ! souvenez-vous de ma mère. Vous l’aimiez si tendrement!” (191). The comparison of Manon to the dead mother results in the permanent estrangement of the hero from the father, the latter retorting, “Tes désordres la feraient mourir de douleur, si elle eût assez vécu pour les voir. Finissons cet entretien” (*ibid.*), and the two exchange their final *adieux*. By using the mother to invoke shame, the father also uses the presence of her absence to perform the function that he cannot. Her memory is meant to trump the *impuissance* of his words.

With this knotty disappearance of the mother, the rest of the novel offers little female presence. In fact, the only female to join Manon in the hero’s tale is the young prostitute who serves as Manon’s unconvincing double. In the absence of a genuine female presence in the novel, the subjective formation of the hero seems doomed to fail from the onset. However, some scholars argue for the existence of an œdipal structure in *Manon*, placing Manon in the role of Des Grieux’s mother. Naomi Segal suggests that Manon takes up the role of mother by financially (and to an extent emotionally) supporting Des Grieux. Discussing Manon’s duplicitous language and her power to make decisions for the hero, along with Des Grieux’s desire to show off Manon to his father like a prized and desired object, she writes:

[h]ere, then, we have the image of Manon as adored mother, innocently loved by a son she will reject; he wants nothing more than a happy nuclear family, and she refuses the comfort of triangular togetherness in favour of her right to make her own decisions for the two of them (Segal 133).

The problem with an œdipal model that places Manon in the role of mother lies in the very refusal that Segal points out. From the beginning, Manon refuses to be a wife. Despite her numerous sexual encounters, she never becomes a mother, and she flatly refuses any interaction with Des Grieux's father. For Manon, the labor of childbirth and rearing, traditionally attributed to the wife/mother, is replaced with the sexual act of reproduction itself. What Manon reproduces, however, is economic wealth rather than children. By accepting the masculine role of laborer (and bread-winner) and refusing to play the role of wife and mother, Manon renders impossible an œdipal formation via the maternal space of the woman. What she offers instead is an alternative gender economy, one that allows the woman to play a more active role in the domestic household as well as in the public sphere. Once Des Grieux accepts his role within the altered household, both characters are able to interrogate gender roles that grant a public presence to men while forcing women to remain in the private sphere. Within this alternative gender economy, the hero remains subject to Manon's desires, rather than the subject of his own.

Rather than serving as site of transfer for the *nom-du-père* as would a mother within a traditional œdipal construction, the female figure of this triangle, Manon, serves to *interrupt* such a transferal. Standing outside of familial relationships, Manon radically alters the œdipal playing field, shifting the role of the son's romantic opponent from the father to other men (in this case M. de B..., G...M..., etc.), thus disempowering the father who does not possess the desired object. Castration *is* symbolically realized in this œdipal construction except that it is the father – not Des Grieux – who is symbolically castrated.<sup>27</sup> Once the hero accepts Manon's guidance unequivocally, she assumes the role

of Des Grieux's super-ego, thus usurping paternal power from the father. The now *impuissant* father would theoretically move aside, allowing Des Grieux to step in as the dominant male, except that in this novel it is Manon, not Des Grieux, who has castrated the father. Manon, therefore, possesses the masculine power in the relationship. As Segal aptly points out, Manon does, after all, make the decisions. Her masculinization requires a counterpoint – therefore, Des Grieux must take up the female role in the relationship. When the hero enters this relationship, he turns his back on his masculine origins rooted in the paternal home to take on the feminine characteristics lacking in Manon.

In the first instance, then, we witness a symmetrical inversion, whereby phallic power comes to be transferred from Des Grieux to Manon. From the first time Des Grieux meets Manon his masculinity is called into question. Her maturity, which surpasses Des Grieux's even though she is younger, places her in a position of power over him – from this moment on he will do everything for her. While the trope of a lover who will do anything for his mistress would seem to fall in line with traditional gender roles, the language that Des Grieux uses alerts the reader that even at this early point in the novel, Manon has the stereotypically masculine power to manipulate the hero.<sup>28</sup> The hero describes himself as “excessivement timide et facile à déconcerter” (59). Manon on the other hand is “bien plus expérimentée” than the hero in spite of her age. She knows how to play the lover's game and uses her position of power over men to guarantee her freedom. To her assertions that her sadness is the “volonté du ciel,” she knowingly adds “un air charmant de tristesse” in order to excite a desire in Des Grieux to free her from the imminent prison of the convent. As soon as the hero avows that he will do anything

for her she wastes no time in executing her plan. For the first time in the novel she invents a familial relation for Des Grieux (calling him her cousin) as she uses the façade of masculine kinship relations to escape the destiny that her own family had already determined for her. Throughout this scene (and the rest of the novel) Des Grieux does not lead, but only joins in on a game that Manon alone completely understands.

Once Manon assumes the masculine role, according to romantic convention Des Grieux must necessarily assume the feminine role to create a balance. The scene in which Des Grieux rescues Manon from the *hôpital* – a space for the imprisonment of prostitutes, among others – offers a particularly striking example of the hero's feminization. Upon learning of Manon's imprisonment, Des Grieux goes on a crazed rampage. He loses his temper, tricks his closest friend, breaks out of prison taking a porter's life in the process, and plots with Manon's dubious brother, Lescaut, to free his beloved from her terrible prison. This scene echoes one in the *Mémoires* in which Rosemont learns of his lover's forced marriage and endeavors to kill the would-be husband. Both of these scenes (ending in a gruesome murder) seem to highlight typical aggressive masculine behavior, responding to the removal of the desired object with an excessive use of force. However, in the case of Des Grieux, these aggressive actions take place in the masculine space of the prison.<sup>29</sup> As soon as he returns to the space of Manon's imprisonment, he resumes his feminine character relying on ruse rather than force for a successful rescue.

Analysis of the interactions between Des Grieux and Manon, and particularly the final sequence of the scene as the hero rescues Manon under cover of night, reveals that the hero takes on a particularly female persona:

Nous retournâmes le matin à l'Hôpital. J'avais avec moi, pour Manon, du linge, des bas, etc., et par dessus mon juste-au-corps, un surtout qui ne laissait rien voir de trop enflé dans mes poches. Nous ne fûmes qu'un moment dans sa chambre. M. de T... lui laissa une de ses deux vestes; je lui donnai mon juste-au-corps, le surtout me suffisant pour sortir. Il ne se trouva rien de manque à son ajustement, excepté la culotte que j'avais malheureusement oubliée. L'oubli de cette pièce nécessaire nous eût sans doute apprêtés à rire si l'embarras où il nous mettait eût été moins sérieux. J'étais au désespoir qu'une bagatelle de cette nature fût capable de nous arrêter. Cependant je pris mon parti, qui fut de sortir moi-même sans culotte. *Je laissai la mienne à Manon* (132-33, emphasis added).

By the end of this scene Manon is literally wearing the pants in the relationship. Rather than simply relying on brute force to rescue his damsel in distress as does Rosemont, Des Grieux plots and schemes, fretting about clothing and clever devices to facilitate Manon's escape. Since the moment of the lovers' first encounter, Manon has renounced traditional gender roles, refusing to marry, to become a mother, to enter the convent, and even to be a faithful lover.<sup>30</sup> In the absence of these feminine traits in the heroine, they are absorbed into the hero. The first hurdle to the completion of the œdipal cycle is the hero's own sexual ambiguity. Des Grieux's behavior and his language not only designate him as feminine, but also go so far as to transform Manon into a part of himself, making Manon his *masculine* superego. From their first encounter, each sentence in which the hero pairs himself with Manon ("*nous nous entretenmes*," "*nous réglâmes*," "*nous nous ferions marier*") is predicated upon an earlier proclamation of her desires ("*elle serait râvie*," "*elle voulut savoir*") rather than his own. Thus the hero internalizes the influence of Manon almost instantly. Her maturity and ingenuity guide his actions from the first day that he decides to flee the paternal home.



Because Des Grieux is feminized in this, his most important intimate relationship, his actions in other relationships are coded as feminine as well. With his newfound sense of sexuality, even his homosocial relationships are transformed. What appear to be masculine affective bonds in fact reveal a different kind of attraction. Men offer the hero money and protection while he plays the willing *coquette*, eliciting favors from other men not only based on a gentlemanly sense of *honnêteté*, but also upon a sort of compassionate – at times sexual – attraction. In fact, during Renoncour’s second encounter with the hero in Calais, at the end of the latter’s story and after his return from America, he recognizes Des Grieux immediately, stating that in spite of the Chevalier’s sad state, “il avait *la physionomie trop belle* pour n’être pas reconnu facilement” (55, emphasis added). Segal argues that it is in his financial transactions that Des Grieux assumes a feminine role:

In receiving money from men – as he will, from now on, continue to do until Manon is dead – he similarly puts himself into the female position of one who, for love, is financially ‘protected.’ The discourse of comradeship, which is presented to overlay and transform the meaning of giving and receipt, is all the time subverted by his hypocritical and duplicitous ‘feminine’ intention (150).

It may have been the “*air si noble*” that piqued Renoncour’s interest in the beginning, but after the time spent with Manon it is the hero’s beauty that serves as his most remarkable trait.

Des Grieux’s feminine transformation becomes evident in his first encounter with Tiberge after he has met Manon, and after he has secured a hotel room for their romantic tryst.<sup>31</sup> In the opening paragraphs of the novel the hero describes Tiberge as the best and

most virtuous of friends with whom he has always shared everything; in this scene, Tiberge waits at home for Des Grieux like a suspicious lover.

Je suis sûr, me dit-il sans déguisement, que vous méditez quelque dessein que vous me voulez cacher; je le vois à votre air. Je lui répondis assez brusquement que je n'étais pas obligé de lui rendre compte de tous mes desseins. Non, reprit-il, mais vous m'avez toujours traité en ami, et cette qualité suppose un peu de confiance et d'ouverture. Il me pressa si fort et si longtemps de lui découvrir mon secret, que n'ayant jamais eu de réserve avec lui, je lui fis l'entière confiance de ma passion. Il la reçut avec une apparence de mécontentement qui me fit frémir (62).

Des Grieux's confession to Tiberge, which he thinks will bring them closer as brothers, is met with severity and the latter's apparent jealousy, not of the hero's newfound passion, but of Manon's usurpation of power over his friend. Much like the brothers in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, these two men are divided – not united – by sexual desire. Freud writes, “sexual needs are not capable of uniting men in the same way as are the demands for self-preservation. Sexual satisfaction is essentially the private affair of each individual” (*Totem* 86). In his passionate frenzy, Des Grieux has transgressed the bonds of heterosexual male friendship, assuming that his own sexual desire should be shared among friends. In the next sentence Tiberge chastises Des Grieux, making him promise to act in a wiser and more reasonable manner – in other words, to behave like a man. From this point until their reunion in America, this homosocial relationship verges on the homosexual as Des Grieux coyly asks for favors, and Tiberge, like the disgruntled husband, begrudgingly gives in.<sup>32</sup> In this, and in his other masculine relationships, the exchange of emotions for money and favors is directly correlated to Des Grieux's exchange of gender roles.

While Tiberge chides him and implores him to act like a man, in M. de T... Des Grieux finds a friend who is willing to play along in his gender-bending game. In their first meeting, it is not money that Des Grieux desires, but Manon's freedom. Using his "natural" speech to excite M. de T...'s sympathetic nature, the hero actually places his heart in another man's hands ("l'intérêt de ma vie et celui de mon cœur sont maintenant entre vos mains," 127). Not only does his ruse work, but the two also become fast friends. At the end of this encounter Des Grieux informs the reader,

Nous nous embrassâmes avec tendresse, et nous devînmes amis,  
sans autre raison que la bonté de nos cœurs, et une simple  
disposition qui porte un homme tendre et généreux à aimer un autre  
homme qui lui ressemble,

ending this tender discourse with "je vous suis attaché pour toute ma vie" (128). What makes this particular passage so revealing is its repetition three paragraphs later, "[n]ous nous embrassâmes avec cette effusion de tendresse qu'une absence de trois mois fait trouver si charmante à deux parfaits amants," but this time it is Manon who receives Des Grieux's affections while M. de T... stands watching in the corner of the room, the third point to this awkward love triangle. At this moment Manon pronounces one of the few lines that are directly attributed to her as she cries out, "Hélas ! dans quel lieu me laissez-vous !" (130-31). While her tender emotions are only hinted at by the hero who describes their embraces and intimate exchanges, her words betray her true, masculine nature as she once again takes control of the situation, dictating the actions for Des Grieux. The response to this statement does not come from Des Grieux, who having now returned to his feminine character can only assent to following her commands. Instead, M. de T... replies, "[p]our ce lieu [...] il ne faut plus l'appeler l'Hôpital; c'est Versailles, depuis

qu'une personne qui mérite l'empire de tous les cœurs y est renfermée" (131), imploring her to think creatively – in other words he suggests that she act like a woman. The language of this scene not only suggests a doubling of the romantic relationship as Des Grieux uses the same passionate words with M. de T... and with Manon, but also reinforces the tension between Manon and M. de T... that relegates Des Grieux to the feminine role of the triangle. Thus, the emotional security of another man in this novel serves to undermine the hero's masculinity just as much financial security; the hero can complete his subjective formation only once he understands how to be a man.

If Des Grieux is to learn how to "be a man," he must first learn to self-identify with other men. Segal argues that Des Grieux's feminization reaches its apex in the Italian Prince scene (which she calls the "mirror-scene") where Manon spends the entire day tending to Des Grieux's physical appearance as if he were a girl. This period of playing dress-up ends with her showing off her lover to the Italian Prince as a prized possession. At this point, Segal argues, "Des Grieux reasserts himself, acquires the language of patriarchy, and the balance of power is fatally changed" (49). The rest of the story she reads as Manon's gradual acquisition of the traditional feminine role as she takes M. de T...'s advice and starts acting like a woman until her death. While we can see certain elements of Des Grieux's masculine assertion in his identification with the prince as a noble man and in his desire to rectify the situation with gentlemanly *politesse*, he easily gives up and is once again incapable of taking control of the situation. In fact, in the next scene Des Grieux's next rival, the young G...M..., appears, which ends in the

hero's return to excessive emotion and his inability to behave like a man with the prostitute that Manon has sent as a replacement lover.

This sequence of events does, however, end with a certain *prise de conscience* in Des Grieux of his masculine identity. When M. de T... offers to gather his friends together to kill the young G...M..., the hero replies, “[r]éservons notre sang [...] pour l’extrémité” (163). The “nous” here represents not only Des Grieux and M. de T..., but also the young G...M... and, by extension, all noble men. For the first time in the novel Des Grieux recognizes himself as a brother of men. In the next sentence, “[j]e médite une voie plus douce, et dont je n’espère pas moins de succès,” the hero reacts with reason and reflection rather than excessive emotion. Although the hero will continue to waiver between the masculine and the feminine until his return from America, this self-identification with other men marks a turning point in the hero's perception of his own gender. It is here that we see the beginning of his return to the masculine realm.

The first step in Des Grieux's re-masculinization comes much later when he has left France (*la patrie*) for America. Only in the new land where he is spatially separated from paternal power can the hero finally realize a sense of masculinity. We can see early versions of this realization in his ability to play the normative masculine gender role as he and Manon “play house” in Louisiana. In fact, in earlier scenes where family roles have been assigned to him (by Manon and her brother), on the boat heading to America, the narrator finally invents a role for himself when he tells the captain that he and Manon are married. Moreover, when they finally arrive at their dirty cabin in New Orleans, Des Grieux becomes a caring “husband,” assuring Manon that she will make a good

housewife, “tu es une chimiste admirable [...] tu transformes tout en or” (204). The pair lives blissfully in America until the governor of the settlement learns that they are not married. According to the customs of the colony, he has the right to pair unmarried women with any man he chooses. Because of Manon’s beauty, he decides that she should marry his own nephew, Synnelet, thus making a decision that ends the utopian pastoral life that Manon and Des Grieux had shared for a brief period. In a desperate attempt to keep Manon, Des Grieux challenges his final rival to a duel. The ultimate reassertion of his male dominance comes with a final bloodshed, only this time at the end of his story, bloodshed does not result in murder. The hero disarms Synnelet with his first move, but in a display of noble benevolence he returns Synnelet’s sword, giving him another chance at a fair fight (“un sang généreux ne se dément jamais” 211). Although Des Grieux is cut on his arm, he ultimately stabs Synnelet, spilling his blood and believing he has killed him. However, the reader soon learns that the wound is not fatal. Instead of preserving the romantic relationship with Manon, this violent action serves to unite the two men. With each man having spilt the blood of another nobleman, the two become united as blood brothers.

Realizing the sincerity of Des Grieux’s romantic intentions, Synnelet endeavors to help Des Grieux obtain his desire (this time not just being with Manon, but the final possession of her as his wife), but he is too late. The hero’s newfound brother arrives at the scene to find Des Grieux dying and Manon already dead. Synnelet then carries Des Grieux back to the town where he nurses him back to health and in the meantime has Manon’s body moved to a more respectable burial place. When the hero awakens, he

finds that masculine bonds of friendship and brotherhood have replaced passionate bonds of desire. Des Grieux can finally retake his masculinity when he recognizes in Synnelet a brother, a *semblable*, a man. His re-masculinization necessarily corresponds to Manon's death. During his relationship with Manon, an œdipal formation was impossible because the hero was incapable of playing the masculine role. Only once he sheds his feminine alter ego and acquires the masculine role can he return to France as a man among men.

As we have seen, in order to complete his subjective formation, the hero must first reckon with his gender. In order to join the father and the brother, he had to accept his own masculinity, even though the assumption of the masculine role came at the expense of his acquired superego, Manon. However, in his relationships with his father and brother, the hero remains perpetually infantilized. In order to "be a man," Des Grieux must also prove that he is not a *boy*. In the next section, we will examine how the hero endeavors to mature in spite of his inability to inherit the name-of-the-father.

### **Masculine Lack – Des Grieux's Infantilization**

Within the space of the paternal household Des Grieux's masculinity is never called into question. In the absence of mothers and sisters this space is entirely masculine, and the hero is regarded as son and brother. However, as we have seen, the laws of primogeniture prevent the hero from paternal inheritance. Because Des Grieux can never ascend to the role of *père de famille*, in this space he will always remain a child. In this way the older brother becomes the second interrupter of the œdipal cycle, a figure who blocks Des Grieux from inheriting his father's estate and with it, the father's power.

Des Grieux's first return to the paternal household occurs just after Manon begins an affair with M. de B... In an act of self-preservation she betrays the hero, writing to his father to demand that he take his son back home. Once the Chevalier is back in the paternal household, he learns that his lover has betrayed him and he faints. After the initial shock of Manon's deceit has passed, the hero's father begins to show a genuine interest in his son's happiness. Acting in the manner of a *nouveau père*, the father caresses his son, forces him to eat, and reassures him that he will be happier without Manon. Misunderstanding Des Grieux's grief as a general desire for women, he even offers the hero the chance to give up his knighthood and to marry a new woman, one who would look like Manon but who would be faithful. When Des Grieux refuses this offer, the father understands that kindness is useless without capitulation to the son's desires, and he must retake his role as the traditional father.

The father's first instinct is to remind Des Grieux that he is still a child, and surprisingly, Des Grieux agrees. Whereas with Manon the hero claimed that he was more grown-up than he had once thought, removed from her and in the presence of his father, he claims, "je vois bien que je ne suis qu'un enfant" (74). With the protagonist imprisoned in the paternal home and removed from Manon, the father resumes his traditional role, maintaining a strict masculine influence over the son, and Des Grieux resumes his role as the *fil cadet*.

His role as the youngest son produces two distinct results. First, as the non-inheritor of the paternal lineage, Des Grieux must construct his identity by other means. The symbolic erasure of the paternal name as the hero is christened the "Chevalier Des



Griex” allows him a certain freedom in his behavior that the eldest son cannot possess. In other words, whereas the eldest son is bound by a sense of duty to the name and estate he will inherit, the younger son, because he is destined for the Order of Malta, is separated from both the land and the name. In this way his movement and his actions are freer than those of his older brother. Second, although the hero is bound to the father by blood, because of the nominal link between the father and the eldest son that he lacks, he feels a sense of alienation within the family. For Des Griex the paternal household represents a “world of fathers” in which each male inhabitant exercises power over him.<sup>33</sup> Only by being removed from the paternal household and its masculine relations can the hero finally grow out of his perpetual adolescence.

Alienated from this world of fathers *intra muros*, Des Griex seeks out new types of masculine relationships outside of the home. Each man with whom he forms relations (Tiberge, Lescaut, M. de T...) is roughly close in age to him, although their social status varies. While earlier we discussed the “romantic” quality of these relationships, this is not out of line with a reading of these relationships as a form of brotherhood. What governs both romantic relationships and brotherhood is a mutual affection and also respect of one man for another.

Manon’s brother, Lescaut, enters the story as the very symbol of masculinity. Bursting in uninvited, cursing and insulting his sister, he immediately asserts his dominance in the house that should be ruled by Des Griex. Lescaut moves into their home, even taking over their carriage: “[c]e fut une prise de possession, car il s’accoutuma bientôt à nous voir avec tant de plaisir, qu’il fit sa maison de la nôtre et qu’il

se rendit le maître, en quelque sorte, de tout ce qui nous appartenait” (87). Although Lescaut immediately refers to the hero as his brother, he very quickly pushes Des Grieux aside, taking his place beside the sister assuming the role of the dominant male in the family. Des Grieux reinforces Lescaut’s powerful position when he begins referring to him as “M. Lescaut.” The brother-in-law then begins dictating the hero’s life first by choosing a career for him (gambling), then once again by infantilizing the hero in the scheme to steal from the elder G...M..., inserting Des Grieux into the story as Manon’s “pauvre petit frère orphelin” (102).<sup>34</sup> This scene represents the second time that Des Grieux is assigned an invented familial relationship with Manon (the first instance was during Des Grieux’s very first encounter with Manon when she pretends that he is her cousin). Although this fictive relationship does allow him to remain close to his desired object (as did the previous one), it once again strips him of power, renders him a child, and disrupts his process of formation. The attempt to form a new identity as Manon’s lover and Lescaut’s brother ultimately renders him once again the younger brother within his love nest and reproduces the hierarchal form of power found within the paternal home. Put differently, the world of the fathers is not to be found in all of the potential father-figures that surround Des Grieux, rather, it is to be found within the hero himself. Des Grieux is incapable of escaping this paternal world because by admitting that he is still a child he has rendered impossible an assertion of paternal power.

Tiberge, on the other hand, serves as a different kind of brother-figure in *Manon*. There are many similarities between Des Grieux’s relationship with Tiberge and with his biological brother.<sup>35</sup> He has been raised with both (first at home with his brother, then at

school with Tiberge), Tiberge and the brother are both slightly older than the hero, and both believe that Des Grieux's happiness can be achieved only by leaving Manon behind – opting instead for a less passionate *bonheur* based on reason and reflection. The most obvious distinction between the two relationships lies in the origins and motivations for each. Des Grieux's attachment to his brother stems from filial bonds of kinship whereas his attachment to Tiberge develops outside of kinship bonds as a result of mutual affection. Rather than simply replicating the brotherly role, which would reinforce an unequal distribution of power, Tiberge offers an idealized form of brotherhood in which power between men is equally distributed. In this way, the hero is able to mature and to share power in his relationship with Tiberge in a way that he cannot with his older brother.

Given that the older brother serves a fatherly role with respect to Des Grieux, and that so many similarities exist between the two brother figures (the older brother and Tiberge), it is easy to understand why some scholars have attributed a fatherly role to Tiberge as well.<sup>36</sup> Like the older brother, he desires the hero's happiness and like the traditional father he supports Des Grieux financially. However, Tiberge cannot fulfill this function in the way that the natural brother can because he remains firmly outside of the family and furthermore outside of paternal rule. Although the two are best friends from childhood, we never hear of Tiberge setting foot in Des Grieux's home; conversely, the older brother leaves the paternal household only to bring the hero back.<sup>37</sup> In fact, while the older brother stands in for the natural father, Tiberge stands in direct opposition to him. After having lost all of his money in a fire, Des Grieux momentarily thinks about

writing to his father for help; however, he promptly remembers that his father's help will come at the cost of losing Manon. Rather than turning to his brother for help, which he understands will lead to the same fate, the Chevalier turns to his friend. In Tiberge, the hero finds a friend who can only chastise; unlike the father (and by extension the older brother), this friend has no power to keep him from Manon.

While the older brother will take up the fatherly role after the natural father's death, his main role for as long as the father is alive is as an intermediary to paternal power. The relationship between the two brothers, therefore, is necessarily different from the father-son relationship between Des Grieux and his natural father. During the natural father's life the brother's power, like that of Tiberge, is largely symbolic – the older brother can act only *as if* he were the hero's father.<sup>38</sup> The power of the brother lies not in his ability to act, but in his passive role in the œdipal transferal of the paternal name. Because of the sublimated form of paternal authority inherent in this relationship, the children-children axis becomes an important tool in analyzing the shift from alliance to happiness.

As noted in the Introduction, the apparatus of sexuality, as it is explained by Foucault, remains distinct from the apparatus of alliance, developing along two primary dimensions: the husband-wife axis and the parents-children axis. In *Manon*, however, both of these axes are disrupted due to the lack of the mother. The parents-children axis is instead a father-son axis centered on both generational and masculine kinship bonds. The result is a mixture of concerns for the son's sexual behavior, in terms of how it affects the child emotionally and how it affects the family name. What we lack in this relationship

that defines the deployment of sexuality is a preoccupation with the son's bodily sensations. It is then in the children-children axis, or rather that of brother-brother, that this turn becomes more clear. Although the father disregards the hero's sexual desires in favor of his own desire to uphold the family name, the older brother understands that desire. He too wishes to maintain the familial reputation, but he also desires the happiness and comfort of his brother. There is no generational gap between the Chevalier and his older brother, therefore, the brother is able to assume every familial role. He prohibits desire like a father, soothes pain like a mother, and chides like a sibling. The older brother is thus uniquely capable of understanding the youthful bodily sensations of the younger brother while at the same time maintaining his duty to the paternal name.

The difference in the relational dynamic between Des Grieux and the father, on the one hand, and Des Grieux and the brother, on the other, becomes clear in the scene where the brother brings the hero home from his love nest with Manon in a carriage. Although the father demands Des Grieux's return home, it is the older brother who carries out the request. The brother pulls the hero out of the feminized space that he inhabits in Paris, but immediately infantilizes Des Grieux when he hugs him in the carriage and offers to talk to the father first in order to soften the father's disposition. In this scene the brother takes on a matronly role as he hugs Des Grieux tightly, cries tears of joy, and watches him sleep on the way home. In this space of transition in the carriage, the older brother bridges the gap between feminine and masculine space. This relationship resumes a more masculine register only upon the return to the paternal household. In addition to mediating the father's desire, the older brother must also learn

to navigate the relationship with his brother in a way that allows him to play diverse kinship roles simultaneously. The result is a relationship in which familial duty and filial happiness are equally important.

Because the older brother fails to complete his task on this occasion (he does not inform Des Grieux of Manon's betrayal), the father does not charge him with such a task again. The next time the father demands the hero's return home, he goes to Paris himself: "Il avait pris le parti de venir s'assurer de mon changement par ses yeux" (181). Steeped now in the traditional role of the father and showing his discontent with the brother's new-father style of mentoring, the father realizes that to protect the familial reputation, he must bring his youngest son home from prison once and for all and that he must see to it himself. With the older brother absent on this trip, Tiberge attempts to assume the role of brother to Des Grieux. Before seeing his son, the father meets with Tiberge who, like the older brother in the carriage, "lui parla fort avantageusement des dispositions que je lui avais marquées pour le bien, dans notre dernière entrevue" (181). But Tiberge's efforts are futile. He may serve as brother-figure to Des Grieux, but he is not a son-figure to the father. Knowing that Tiberge's relationship with the hero is predicated upon intimate bonds of friendship rather than traditional bonds of *race* (the only system of alliance that the father can understand), the father sees through the hero's lies that Tiberge has taken for truth. The end of this encounter demonstrates the impossibility of a transfer of paternal power to any extra-familial relationship. We may note a relaxing of kinship roles in this novel, but this does not imply a complete democratization of intimate communities such as the types we will analyze in later chapters.

After talking with Tiberge, the father reasserts his power and calls for a reunion with his youngest son to bring him back into the paternal home. Yet the final reunion between the traditional father and the son who refuses to be infantilized can end only with a final rupture. As Des Grieux becomes increasingly aware of the necessity of his rebellion and his own self-formation (for which he must be free from paternal domination), he prepares to break free from paternal rule:

Ce n'était pas une légère entreprise pour moi; je ne dis pas seulement par la difficulté que je devais naturellement trouver à le vaincre, mais par une autre raison, qui me faisait même redouter ses approches: je m'étais dérobé de son logement contre ses ordres, et j'étais fort résolu de n'y pas retourner, depuis que j'avais appris la triste destinée de Manon. J'appréhendais avec sujet qu'il ne me fit retenir malgré moi, et qu'il ne me reconduisît de même en province. *Mon frère aîné avait usé autrefois de cette méthode* (190, emphasis added).

Des Grieux calculates each move to avoid a repetition of his last trip home. The last sentence marks the first time that the hero draws a direct correlation between his father and his brother. His brother has always shown him great affection, but at this point, Des Grieux sees in the brother's actions a "method" that can result only in the removal of Manon. He cannot turn to his brother for help because at this point he understands that his brother and father are inseparable and that each represents a power to be overcome. The hero's only chance for a complete maturation is to leave France, the "world of fathers," and to attempt to construct a life for himself and Manon in the new land, Louisiana.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, America represents a space where it is possible for a regime of brotherhood to triumph over the world of fathers. The duel over Manon,

the desired object, bound Des Grieux and Synnelet as brothers. Synnelet's role thus aligns with that of Tiberge in representing a type of brotherhood based on sociability and gentlemanly sameness, which is quite different from a form of brotherhood based on blood relations. The role of these two brother figures diverges however, in the functions that they perform. Tiberge, as we noted earlier, is slightly older than Des Grieux and serves as Des Grieux's superego time and time again as he encourages the hero to return to reason and to the paternal home. Synnelet, on the other hand, is roughly the same age as the hero, and furthermore, he has shared with him the desire for Manon. This relationship is thus the first – and the only one in the novel – in which there exists a pure equality between men. The hero's brother repeatedly escorts him to his prison (the paternal household) and Tiberge continually reminds the hero of his duty, but Synnelet – his symbolic blood-brother – frees him from prison and encourages his freedom.

Yet, as we see, Des Grieux is not quite ready for such freedom. He may have matured and regained his masculine consciousness, but he cannot leave the family into which he was born because he has not finished his oedipal formation. Although his in-between time of rebellion has come to an end, his time of need for the father has not. He still needs a father figure to guide him toward maturity and, as we have seen in Tiberge's interactions with the hero's father, such a guiding figure cannot stem from sociable brotherhood. Des Grieux can find the father only within the family. Now understanding that he need not complete the oedipal cycle in order to be a brother, the hero retakes his masculinity and is ready to resume his position in the paternal household as a now slightly more mature *frère cadet*.



One effect of Des Grieux's reconciliation of his past and the acceptance of his present is a collapsing of the narrative rhythm. Upon reaching the scene of Manon's death in his narration to Renoncour, the hero states, "Pardonnez, si j'achève en peu de mots un récit qui me tue" (214). Whereas the hero spends hour after hour (and page after page) recounting his promiscuous and immoral behavior during his time with Manon, her death marks the end of his confession, as well as the end of his period of rebellion. In the few paragraphs that follow Manon's death scene, we learn that Synnelet is so moved by the Chevalier's love for Manon that he moves her body to a proper burial place, that on the brink of his own death Des Grieux is so moved by the death of Manon that he decides he must go back to France, that Tiberge is so moved by an earlier letter sent to him by the Chevalier informing him of the latter's sad and imminent voyage to America with Manon that the trusty friend makes the journey to America to assist the hero, that Des Grieux receives a letter from his brother upon arrival in France informing him that his own father has died, and finally, that our hero runs into the *homme de qualité* once again where he is able to finish telling the story that he began just before leaving for America: the story that kills him.

This constant movement of others around Des Grieux at the end of the story – emotionally (characters being compelled to action because of feeling), spatially (Manon's body being moved, Des Grieux and Tiberge moving from one country to another), and temporally (time accelerating in the story) – acts as a catalyzing force designed to propel the now emotionally fixed hero back into French society. While, as Jean Sgard aptly notes, the calendar time that passes between Manon's death and Des Grieux's return to

France amounts to nine months (the time needed to “give birth” to the story), it is important to remember that these nine months are recorded in just a few paragraphs.<sup>39</sup> Much of Des Grieux’s narration takes the tone of a confession of events; however, the last few paragraphs of *Manon* indicate a reflective turn in the hero’s narration. With the death of Manon, Des Grieux’s period of rebellion against the father comes to an end as he returns to a state of reason. Having now been purged of his frenetic and passionate behavior in the discursive space of his confession, Des Grieux leaves the solitary space of the confessional and returns to the communal space of the family.

At this point, the hero returns to his home with Tiberge, the brother-figure who has consistently allowed him passage back home without forcing it. Having shared his childhood with Tiberge, he is the only friend who can accompany the hero back to his childhood home. The Chevalier must shed not only his romantic relationship (with Manon), which rendered him feminine and incapable of inhabiting the masculine family, but he must also leave his sociable brother (Tiberge), who replicates the natural brother without holding any real power. His need for paternal rule leads him to leave the new world – a world of no fathers – to return to France, his *patrie*. Crossing the Atlantic with Tiberge by his side, neither child nor father, he is baptized a brother among men.

The hero returns to France just in time to learn of his father’s death in a letter from his brother.

J’écrivis à ma famille en arrivant. J’ai appris, par la réponse de mon frère aîné, la triste nouvelle de la mort de mon père, à laquelle je tremble, avec trop de raison, que mes égarements n’aient contribué. Le vent étant favorable pour Calais, je me suis embarqué aussitôt, dans le dessein de me rendre, à quelques lieues de cette ville, chez

un gentilhomme de mes parents, où mon frère m'écrit qu'il doit attendre mon arrivée (219).

Des Grieux may fear that has killed off the father, but he has not eliminated fatherhood. Waiting at home for the prodigal son, the older brother now assumes the fatherly function. At this point familial brotherhood has transformed into a new type of fatherhood. In America, the hero was able to act as the husband in his household with Manon. In their Louisiana home, Manon finally assumed a traditionally female role, performing domestic chores while Des Grieux worked outside of the home. Yet for all the semblance of tradition, this picturesque scene of domestic bliss was fatally flawed. The hero, lacking a family name and paternal power, remains incapable of maintaining a patriarchal family. Their household was thus destined to inhabit a representational space nestled between fading models of traditional patriarchy and modern models of domestic equality. Although the idea of a complete equality among brothers will not acquire political expression for another sixty years, what we see in the transformation of fatherhood in *Manon* is one step in the development of a model of social identity based on *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*.

### **Between the World of Fathers and the Regime of the Brother**

Although much has been written on the character of Manon – about her absence, her masculinity, her femininity, her terrible fate, the list goes on and on – relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to the character of older brother of this story. This neglect seems logical, given that the *frère aîné* is perhaps the one character in the novel who speaks *less* than Manon. Yet his presence haunts the entire story. The older brother

is the figure who draws the hero back into the paternal home, but without him Des Grieux would have been able to complete his oedipal formation: he would have accepted the *nom-du-père*, inherited his father's wealth and estate, and a flight from home would not have been necessary (nor would it have been permitted). It is the older brother who inherits the name, function, and wealth of the father while the younger hero inherits nothing.<sup>40</sup> In spite of all of this, in the end of the novel Des Grieux returns to his childhood home in which the older brother has assumed the patriarchal role. Written in 1731, this novel could hardly have predicted the emergence of the notion of "fraternité" that grounds Revolutionary principles of equality based on gentlemanly *sociabilité* rather than kinship bonds.<sup>41</sup> The character of the older brother instead bridges the gap between the world of fathers and the regime of the brother.

We have previously discussed the world of the fathers, but until this point, we have only discussed the regime of the brother in broad terms. The term is borrowed from Juliet Flower MacCannell, who describes such a regime as a dangerous replacement within modernity for the patriarchal structure inherent to pre-modern society. MacCannell argues that in eighteenth-century ideological narratives, there exist forces that can be understood in terms of the Freudian categories of id (the part of the psyche that contains instinctual drives) and superego (the part of the psyche that counteracts and regulates the drives of the id). Within these narratives, the id contends with the superego for dominance, and once it gains control it is transformed into a collective "It," which is expressed in a rhetoric of fraternity. She asks,

What then does this son enjoy in replacing his father? Well, he gets to act *as if*, without having to take any action. A father-figure, he

mimes, selectively, the father's features. But he also gets to imitate and mock up relations to all other family members, too: not only is he the "father" (but only metaphorically) he is the mother's lover (the object of her love, but only in her dreams) and he is his brother's lover (but only rhetorically – the brotherhood of man) (MacCannell 16).

We have seen, in *Manon*, how the older brother does indeed act out each familial role.

Within the hero's narration, the brother serves alternately – and sometimes

simultaneously – as father, mother, brother, and son. And yet it would be a mistake to

read in this novel some sort of post-œdipal modernity. While MacCannell focuses on

modernity's failure to bring about the social equality promised by the brotherly rhetoric

of the Enlightenment (rhetoric that insists upon equality among all men), in *Manon*, we

see that promise just beginning to take form. Thus rather than a failure, the regime of the

brother here expresses hope and possibility. As we have seen, this novel shows a world of

the fathers in decline, and yet the regime of the brother is only just beginning to emerge.

Des Grieux's subjective formation thus takes place in the gaps in between two social

orders. Rather than choosing one over the other, the hero's narrative serves to interrogate

both.<sup>42</sup>

Brotherhood, in eighteenth-century France, is governed by a sense of gentlemanly

rules of both equality and *politesse* – a system that becomes known by a new name:

*sociabilité*. Daniel Gordon locates a subtle resistance to the absolute monarchy of

seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France in the fictional works of certain authors who

introduce the concept of *sociabilité*. Not completely identical to Revolutionary idealized

democracy, *sociabilité* as a governing principle, he argues, lies somewhere between

dynastic and democratic models of governance. These authors write in order to "evoke

the possibility of free existence within the gaps and interstices of a hierarchal regime” (Gordon 7). If we are to analyze the gaps within the system of absolutism using the notion of sociability, what better time period to study than the in-between time of the Regency of the early eighteenth century? It was during this time period, after all, that the rules regulating gambling were relaxed, and that France’s economy was revised according to John Law’s system that introduced credit and paper money to France.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the jubilant air of France during this time of change can be noted in the rising popularity of the Rococo style, and Antoine Watteau’s *fêtes galantes* paintings, in particular. Reading the hero of *Manon*’s period of necessary rebellion as analogous to the in-between period of the French nation (between Louis XIV’s death and Louis XV’s official coronation eight years later), we can better understand what it means to explore these interstices of the French national family within literature, searching for a new type of rule that would allow more individual autonomy without a complete upheaval of the patriarchal system.

If the story of a period of youthful rebellion in between two paternal powers sounds familiar to the first readers of *Manon* as well as modern scholars of eighteenth-century France, it is because there are parallels to be drawn between the hero’s story and the story of the French aristocracy in the first half of the eighteenth century. Des Grieux’s own search for formation outside of the restrictive paternal bonds of Œdipus can be read in a larger, historical context as an allegory of the French nobles trying to understand their place vis-à-vis a non-paternalistic rule during the brief reign of Philippe, Duc d’Orleans, Regent of France. As Sgard points out, the majority of Prévost’s œuvre is very intentionally placed during the final years of Louis XIV’s reign.<sup>44</sup> Because Des Grieux’s

return to France and subsequent recounting his story to the *homme de qualité* extends into the time period of the Regency, this period takes on a great importance within the novel itself, and therefore we will make a brief digression into this historical moment.

On September 1, 1715, Louis XIV dies, leaving the throne to his then five-year-old great-grandson. Unable to take the throne until the age of majority (thirteen), the boy king, Louis XV, holds a largely symbolic status while the Duc d'Orléans acts as regent. The interim years (1715-1723) known as the Regency see tremendous (if only temporary) changes in the structure of government, society, and economy. As acting regent, Philippe duc d'Orléans attempts to decentralize the power of the King by replacing royal ministers with councils (Polysynody), to restore France's economic health (ruined by Louis XIV's extravagant spending) by adopting John Law's financial system, and to broaden the literary field by revoking previous censorship laws.<sup>45</sup> The Regency, this period between two kings, thus provides an opportunity to imagine what a fatherless France might look like. Although the changes, like Philippe's reign, are finite, the years of the Regency offer a time of reflection on the familial organization of governance. As cousin of the future King and sixth in succession for the throne, Philippe's role as sovereign is more akin to that of elder brother than of father.

An avid writer of history, Prévost wrote novels both to record history through the personal lens of the narrator and to provide moral instruction. In the *Mémoires*, conversations between the *homme de qualité* and foreign dignitaries inform the reader of the death of Louis XIV, the insertion of the Duc d'Orleans as Regent, and of the crowning of Louis XV. In *Manon*, Prévost avoids direct political discussion, but the story

is framed against the politically charged background of the transition from rule by the King to rule by the Regent.<sup>46</sup> The hero's desire for an altered form of fatherhood after his escape to America is reinforced by the fact that his reassertion of masculine reason and subsequent return to France can occur only after the King's death. The passing of the King is then mirrored in the news of Des Grieux's own father's death, and we learn that the hero has returned to a home where the father's position is vacant. The loss of Manon (the hero's masculine superego) coupled with the absence of paternal moral instruction informs the reader that moral instruction must develop from within the individual rather than from external imposition. This move from the external (formation through paternal instruction) to the internal (formation through a reckoning with one's own position in society) anticipates the rise of the autonomous individual that will later be amplified by philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac.

But what is the paternal influence that the father imposes on the hero? As we have previously discussed, the paternal household of *Manon* represents a world of fathers. Rather than the traditional œdipal structure of father-mother-child, here we see the household structured as father-child-child. Although the older brother does occasionally assume the maternal role, his ultimate function is to replace the father upon the latter's death. While up until this point we have contrasted the son's encouragement of Des Grieux's happiness to the traditional paternal methods of the biological father. Strict adherence to a system of familial governance that privileges lineage over filial happiness does not preclude the father's caring dearly for his son. Therefore, we now need to examine further the complexities of the father.



The actions of Des Grieux's father throughout the novel paint the picture of man wavering between the deployment of traditional modes of patriarchy (as defined in the introduction to this chapter), and a deployment of compassion with regard to his son's education. Even in their reunion at the Châtelet prison after Des Grieux's final imprisonment in France, the stern father concerned with the family reputation gives way to the affectionate father, desirous of his son's happiness when he is touched by the hero's tender pleas for forgiveness. However, it is the hero's final appeal, "se peut-il que *votre sang*, qui est la source du mien, n'est jamais ressenti les mêmes ardeurs" (183), that touches his father and ultimately lessens his disappointment in Des Grieux. The hero's demonstration of humility and respect for the father helps to moderate the father's anger, but it is the evocation of kinship bonds – of *race* – that reminds the father of his duty to bring his son back home. Rather than the affectionate attention of the *nouveau père*, which has as its ultimate goal the happiness of the child, in this instance the hero interprets his father's compassion here a preoccupation with *race*. This scene thus dramatizes the importance of the generational gap in the severity of the father-son relationship. The father is not a brother; the blood that incites him to feel compassion for his son is the same blood that reminds him of his paternal duty. Consequently, as a father he can and must exercise his paternal power.

In spite of the father's relatively gentle comportment with him, Des Grieux recognizes his father as an obstacle to his happiness rather than an aid to it. In the end of his story, he necessarily portrays his father as a monster among monsters because he must do so in order to differentiate himself from the father and to accept responsibility for his

maturity. Just after the compassionate scene at the Châtelet prison, which results in the hero's release, Des Grieux learns of Manon's fate:

En me quittant, mon père alla faire une visite à M. de G... M... Il le trouva avec son fils, à qui le garde du corps avait honnêtement rendu la liberté. Je n'ai jamais su les particularités de leur conversation; mais il ne m'a été que trop facile d'en juger par ses mortels effets. Ils allèrent ensemble, *je dis les deux pères*, chez M. le Lieutenant général de Police, auquel ils demandèrent deux grâces: l'une, de me faire sortir sur-le-champ du Châtelet, l'autre, d'enfermer Manon pour le reste de ses jours, ou de l'envoyer en Amérique [...] M. le Lieutenant général de Police leur donna sa parole de faire partir Manon par le premier vaisseau. M. de G... M... et mon père vinrent aussitôt m'apporter *ensemble* la nouvelle de ma liberté (185, emphasis added).

At this point, Des Grieux understands once and for all that his father is part of the traditional paternal order. By placing his father among the ranks of M. de G...M..., the object of the hero's rage throughout much of the novel, Des Grieux understands that the function of the father, and therefore of the patriarchal system in its traditional form, cannot be reconciled with the hero's personal desire for Manon. He finally understands the existence of a world of fathers, and he knows that he cannot live happily (or live at all) in this world.<sup>47</sup> His father who in the prison cell had been an "homme d'esprit et de goût" is now understood to be "un de mes plus cruels persécuteurs." The hero discursively transforms his father from protector to prosecutor as he declares war on patriarchy.

The power of the patriarchal system depends upon repetition as reproduction. The traditional family structure must be maintained both within the royal palace and the family home. The role of father-king must be kept within the family and the preferred transmission of the title goes from father to son. While the fatherly role in *Manon* is

transferred from father to son, what we read instead is the story of the *other* son, the son who cannot receive the *nom-du-père*. The repetition that we see in Des Grieux's story is not that of reproduction, but instead a repetition of rupture – the break of the son with the father, the break of a Frenchman with his country, and finally the break of France with its King. Without a matured son to replace the King, thereby reproducing traditional patriarchy, the final rupture disrupts the natural succession of the King and places fatherhood in a precarious position.<sup>48</sup> Fatherhood for Des Grieux is called into question as the son realizes the impossibility of familial reproduction with Manon. Any affair with Manon will exclude the hero from the patriarchal family and for this reason the hero understands that he must create a new type of family rather than reproduce the old.

If Des Grieux cannot inherit the *nom-du-père*, then he will also refuse what Lacan calls the *non-du-père*, that is, the father's prohibition of his desired object, Manon.<sup>49</sup> At the father's final request for his son to give up his lover and return to reason, Des Grieux suggests that he would rather die than to give in to such a request. The father's assertion of power in the "no" coupled with the hero's refusal of paternal power ends in the final rupture between father and son. In the scene of their final *adieux* Des Grieux demonizes his father for the last time as he cries out, "adieu père barbare et dénaturé" (192). Realizing that he will never complete his oedipal formation in France, the land of the fathers, and knowing that his passionate desire proscribes his entry into the paternal order, the hero leaves his homeland for the new world of America.

It is only in America, a land of no fathers, that Des Grieux can finally escape restrictive kinship bonds and emerge from an externally imposed immaturity. Yet Des

Griex is still steeped in the language of the Old World. Although he understands the possibility of a free existence in America, he can describe it only in terms of the old system of fatherhood. Catherine Cusset writes, “[I]’Amérique, espace illégitime où vivent des bannis et des condamnés, devient l’espace légitime par excellence: la patrie” (98). Put differently, in a dialectical reversal, the space in which the hero enjoys a negative freedom – that is, he is free *from* patriarchy – becomes the father incarnate, *la patrie*. The “patrie,” however, is not America, but rather a space that exists within the hero, a fact which he conveys in the following statement: “[t]out l’univers, n’est-il pas la patrie de deux amants fidèles?” (199). Des Griex has escaped the fatherland, but the fatherland has not escaped him. As he recovers in the hospital the haze of his time of rebellion begins to lift and he remarks, “[j]’étais résolu de retourner dans ma patrie, pour y réparer, par une vie sage et réglée, le scandale de ma conduite” (218). As Cusset points out, this sentiment echoes the language in the first paragraphs of his story in which he touts his moral and innocent conduct. He tried and failed to reproduce the patriarchal family with Manon; in the new world, there is no place for the traditions of the old world and now he must return to the paternal household in France. However, arriving back in France, Des Griex begins to feel the guilt of a rebellious son whose actions contributed to his father’s death. What separates him from the guilty brothers of *Totem and Taboo* is that he does not share that guilt with his brother.<sup>50</sup> The guiltless older brother is thus free to assume the role of father. The Chevalier’s in-between time of rebellion comes to a close with the reinstatement of patriarchy in a diluted form that replaces the natural with the stand-in father.

By the end of the novel, Des Grieux has lost his mother, his father, and the lover with whom he had hoped to reproduce the patriarchal family structure (father-mother-child). The disintegration of the family around him leaves him an orphaned child in a society that has also been left ‘fatherless’ by the death of the King. However, the hero has already informed us that familial relationships need not be exterior to the relation between lovers, “[deux amants fidèles] ne trouvent-ils pas l’un dans l’autre, père, mère, parents, amis, richesses et félicité?” (199). One can find all the familial relations internally, and in order to create a new type of family, which would break from traditional modes of reproduction, the confines of the traditional family must disappear. Such a new iteration of family is not in opposition to the traditional family, but rather it is what Guy Debord calls a *dérive*, or an unintentional yet welcome drifting, of the family.<sup>51</sup> What follows the death of the father, then, is the possibility of a new language of kinship – one based on the principles of equality and above all, common happiness.

If we allowed the commonly accepted historical accounts to dictate the rest of the story, we might believe that this unequally balanced form of brotherhood would eventually transition into a renewal of fatherhood. In 1723, amidst the failed ruins of the Duc d’Orléan’s regal plans, the young king takes his place, restoring patriarchal power with the face of a thirteen-year-old boy. Traditional fatherhood, however, became tempered by the in-between time of the Regency and the reign of Louis XV was decidedly distinct from his great-grandfather’s reign. In fact, while Louis XIV is remembered as “Le Roi Soleil,” an epithet that demonstrates a fiery power, Louis XV’s desire to please the people lead to his own epithet, “le bien-aimé.”<sup>52</sup> In *Manon* as well we

see a renewal of fatherhood. In announcing his father's death to Des Grieux, the older brother assumes the role of father. However, the stratification of *fraternité* onto *paternité* alters the notion of fatherhood altogether. Having been raised together, the imposition of a hierarchal relation of power in which the older brother moves into a dominant position emerges only in adulthood. Thus, the brother's power is understood as artificially constructed, contrary to the father's supposedly intrinsic authority. Although the intermingling of brotherhood with fatherhood is distinct from what happens at the national level, in both cases traditional paternal power is thrown into relief during an in-between time involving rebellion against traditional modes of patriarchy. The new father, desiring the happiness of his child, offers an easing of the strict patriarchal regime of the past.

Des Grieux's return to the paternal household under brotherly rule indicates an embracing of the uncertainty of a new regime. As we stated in the previous section, the relationship between Des Grieux and the older brother is necessarily distinct from the hero's relationship with his biological father, yet the terms of this new relationship once the brother assumes the paternal role will never be seen. *Manon* (and thus the *Mémoires*) ends with the hero's promise to return to his brother as he finishes telling his story to the *homme de qualité*. Because Des Grieux has finished his confession, accepted his past, and returned to a state of reason, he has no need to continue his story. Because he is the younger son with no mother, a successful oedipal formation was never a possibility for the protagonist. And yet, the end of his story does see his successful subjective formation in another form. In accepting that he will remain subject to his brother's authority, he

opens up the possibility for a new role. He is no longer the youngest son; instead he is the youngest *brother*. Fatherhood dies leaving brotherhood in its wake and with it, a reorganization of familial authority. The older brother's authority over his younger brother is necessarily less severe than that of the father (given that he can act only *as if* he is the father), and furthermore, his authority can and will pass to the younger brother in the event of his death. Power relations in this structure are thus not completely equal, but power is more equally distributed.

Although Des Grieux's story informs the reader of his long struggle to replicate the traditional family, it ultimately ends in the hero's failure to do so. Nine months after Manon's death, we see the rebirth (and the baptism) of Des Grieux, who left a France ruled by paternal order and returns to his homeland with no father and no king. The reader then is left to assume that this beginning of a new era for Des Grieux (both as son and as citizen), links up to an era of new possibility in France. It is only during the Regency, the breath between two fathers when paternal power becomes ambiguous, that the hero can reproduce a family that is based on the bonds of brotherhood rather than patriarchy.

### **Conclusion: Œdipus Reimagined**

Of modern mechanisms of governmental formation, MacCannell writes, "If in modernity (the time of self-governance, self-begetting, no fathers) formal arrangements – social, personal, aesthetic – are no longer laid out or programmed Œdipally, they must be rethought" (144). Although for Des Grieux an Œdipal formation is impossible, for the older brother it is not. The knowledge of the older brother's eventual ascent to power

signals the triumph of Œdipus in *Manon*. However, the shifted focus on the prodigal son for whom fatherhood is nothing more than an obstacle to his passionate desire suggests a different desire – a communal desire to re-think restrictive paternal bonds. Prévost, along with such authors as Françoise de Graffigny, Pierre de Marivaux, and Louis Sébastien-Mercier, explores the interstices of absolutism, although as we shall see in the chapters that follow, each of these authors does so in very different ways. In *Manon*, rather than proposing an abandonment of Œdipus, the author allows for an exploration of its interruption and transformation.

To read *Manon* as the story of the prodigal son, who moves laterally from one patriarchal regime to the next, is to deny the richness of a story that rests in the breach *between* these two regimes. Calling into question traditional models of fatherhood requires a paradigmatic shift in thinking of the family from the parents-children axis to the children-children axis, and it also requires an examination of how we arrive at the latter from the former. It is clear that an exploration of brotherhood is central this novel. The Chevalier Des Grieux is surrounded by brothers: Tiberge, Lescaut, M. de T..., and Synnelet, each of whom fills a brotherly need for the hero throughout his time away from home. In the hero's relationship with Tiberge we see most clearly the possibility of a *fraternité* that directly corresponds to eighteenth-century notions of *sociabilité*.

We have noted that Tiberge never enters the hero's childhood home, but he does enter Des Grieux's home in America. Just after their beach-side reunion, the hero declares, “[j]e le conduisis chez moi. Je le rendis le maître de tout ce que je possédais” (218). Whereas Des Grieux's own brother becomes his “master” by blood, and his



brother-in-law Lescaut usurps power by force, Des Grieux deems Tiberge a true brother, with whom he can share his life without any loss of power. In fact, it is not to Renoncour that the hero first confesses his story, but to Tiberge, “[j]e lui appris tout ce qui m’était arrivé depuis mon départ de France” (*ibid.*). Like the *homme de qualité*, Tiberge (also a man of the cloth) is equally qualified to take the hero’s confession, but unlike Renoncour, Tiberge does not prescribe it. Des Grieux confesses to Tiberge out of a sense of gentlemanly duty to share with a friend.

At this point, he has confessed, he understands himself as the subject of his story and undertakes to atone for his sins. He could have begun his new life with his friend; he could have finally joined the clergy, as was his original, youthful desire, but instead he returns to the family. To end the novel with Tiberge, or with any of the other brother-figures rather than his own brother, would be to transcend the œdipal structure of the narrative altogether. What we see in *Manon* is the emergence of brotherhood as one possible model for social governance, distinct as it is from the model of brotherhood that we see later in groups like the Freemasons, in the conversations about *sociabilité* in the salons, or in the discourse of the Revolutionaries. While the latter rely on a concept of brotherhood more akin to friendship, the former is still very much grounded in blood relations.

What emerges instead in *Manon* is a familial laboratory. In this strange love story told as an interlude between two very different masculine regimes (of the father and of the older brother), the hero is incapable of escaping kinship bonds. As he moves throughout France and America, he tries out different familial structures, but in each of

these experimental relationships (with Manon, Lescaut, Tiberge, the *homme de qualité*) his own role never diverges from brother, son, or lover. Playing these three roles simultaneously, Des Grieux navigates his lover's alternative gender economy, he reckons with the generational gap that separates him from his father, and he strives to figure out his role in relation to his brother. Although his explorations are radical in their nature (a man who takes on a female persona is a radical break from tradition, for example), this novel's true revolutionary contribution lies in its embracing of ambiguity as it slides back and forth between, on the one hand, an alternative kinship network founded on equality and, on the other, the combination of paternal authority and fraternity. Des Grieux does refuse paternal authority, but his refusal does not lead to a rejection of the family as such, it leads only to an acceptance of a new type of authority. In *Manon Lescaut*, Oedipus is not destroyed, it is only interrupted; we thus see the potential of a future in which the stogy old system of the father will eventually fall at the hands of the brothers, where “*vive le roi!*” will be replaced with “*liberté, égalité, fraternité.*”

This chapter has very explicitly avoided a discussion of the role of the women in the eighteenth-century novel. The patriarchal model of family examined here necessarily focuses on the familial relationships between men. As we have noted, this problem is not specific to this novel, but it is emblematic of a problem of individual and collective representation in France during this time. The country's very motto, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, denies, as MacCannell points out, any place for women. In our next chapter,

we will examine how the role of the woman evolves during this same time period, basing our theories in an examination of Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*.

**Chapter Two**  
**Knotted Nostalgia:**  
**Weaving Female Legacy in Françoise de Graffigny's**  
*Lettres d'une Péruvienne*



Fig. 2.1: Example of a quipu from the Incan Empire, currently in the [Larco Museum Collection](#).

*Je parlerai de l'écriture féminine: de ce qu'elle fera. Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive de la femme et fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture, dont elles ont été éloignées aussi violemment qu'elles l'ont été de leurs corps; pour les mêmes raisons, par la même loi, dans le même but mortel.*

- Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse"

*Que trouves-tu donc de plus intéressant que des décou[vertes] sur notre propre individu, sur notre façon d'être et de penser? Autre radotage! Je ne sais rien de plus déterminé que les vérités que l'on découvre la-dessus.<sup>53</sup>*

- Françoise de Graffigny, Lettre à Devaux 18 avril 1745

**Introduction: Comment peut-on être Péruvienne?**

Just months after the publication of her epistolary novel, *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747), Françoise de Graffigny already was beginning work on revisions for the second edition. In that same year, she sent a letter to her friend, the future statesman the Baron Turgot, asking for his opinion on the novel and for his advice on how she might improve

it. In his response he makes three major suggestions. First, he proposes that the author make Zilia more French, “[v]ous m’avez paru goûter la principale qui est de montrer *Zélia* [sic] française après nous l’avoir fait voir péruvienne.”<sup>54</sup> Making this change would help to efface Zilia’s otherness, allowing her, in his opinion, to stand in more easily as a symbol of feminine virtue for France. Next, he advises her to lessen the kinship bond between Zilia and Aza from brother and sister to distant relatives. This familial alteration would make the pair’s love affair more palatable for a European audience. Finally, he urges her to conclude the novel with Zilia’s marriage to Aza, proposing that a marriage between the two would augment the moral utility of the text, teaching not just marriage, but more precisely what he calls “le bon mariage,” wherein individuals enter happily and willingly into the eternal union.<sup>55</sup>

However, Turgot’s advice fell on deaf ears. Instead, in the second edition of the *Lettres* (published in 1752), Graffigny amplifies the tone and force of her heroine’s rejection of marriage and her aversion to many European customs. Zilia extols the virtues of friendship over marriage and spends her days translating her *quipos* (a system of tying colorful cords in knots that the Peruvians use as a form of writing) into French in her country home, living in the margins of both French and Peruvian society. Rather than crossing an imaginary dichotomous line separating Peruvian from French, Indian traditions from European customs, woman from wife and mother, Zilia doggedly toes that line as she remains firmly between worlds, between languages, and between cultures.

Zilia draws these disparate worlds together with the letters she writes. Her story begins when she is wrested away from her native village by Spaniards on the day she is

to marry her beloved Aza, King of the Incan empire, Zilia begins writing letters to him in the hopes they will one day be reunited. Through her letters we learn that while being transported to Europe, the boat on which she is being held captive is seized by the French. It is then that she meets Déterville, a French aristocrat who will take care of her and become her most trusted friend, and in fact, the only person aside from Aza to whom she writes letters. Much to Déterville's chagrin, Zilia refuses his offers of marriage, preferring the memory of an Incan Prince to the reality of a French aristocrat. Throughout the course of the novel, Zilia must reckon with the disjunction between her own culture and system of beliefs, and those in which she finds herself in France.

Given that this work relays so heavily the *in-betweenness* of being, we will begin this chapter with an analysis of one of the heroine's early parenthetical comments. In the first letter of the novel, Zilia writes:

Depuis le moment terrible (*qui aurait dû être arraché de la chaîne du temps, et replongé dans les idées éternelles*) depuis le moment d'horreur où ces sauvages impies m'ont enlevée au culte du Soleil, à moi-même, à ton amour; retenue dans une étroite captivité, privée de toute communication avec nos citoyens, ignorant la langue de ces hommes féroces dont je porte les fers, je n'éprouve que les effets du malheur, sans pouvoir en découvrir la cause (*Lettres 17-18*).<sup>56</sup>

The impious savages to whom Zilia refers are her Spanish captors, and the "citoyens" are her fellow Incans. Throwing the reader into the story *in media res*, the narrator gives the impression of frenzy, confusion, and panic, precisely the feelings of a woman being kidnapped and dragged by unknown captors to an unknown location. Such feelings are reinforced by the language of the narrator who laments the "moment d'horreur," the "hommes féroces," and the "effets du malheur." The use of the present tense in the first-

person singular (*je n'éprouve*) combined with the effusive display of adjectives enhances the impression that the reader is receiving a first-hand account of a specific moment as yet unmediated by time. Yet, the words between the parentheses betray the instantaneity of the rest of the letter. The use of the past conditional in the parenthetical clause, coupled with its visual segregation from the rest of the sentence, indicate that the notion of ripping apart time (communicated within the parentheses) is grafted onto the event of the main clause at some point after the initial event, thus representing another temporal matrix – that is, the distanced perspective of the letter's author. The moment of crisis has passed and should, in the narrator's opinion, not simply be erased, but ripped completely from the fabric of time, leaving the frayed edges of the moment to be patched together through the work of narration and translation.

In describing and transcribing this moment of rupture the narrator draws a distinction between an epic time (of events which have already happened or will inevitably happen) and an historical time (which can be altered and manipulated).<sup>57</sup> Thomas Kavanagh describes the conception of alterable historical time in the *Lettres* as an “aesthetics of the moment,” where unpredictable events produce ruptures in the fabric of time.<sup>58</sup> Zilia's deep understanding of diverse temporalities and her ability to manipulate the French language so adeptly show us that the author of these love letters is not simply a *femme sensible*, painfully and dutifully writing to a geographically distant lover, nor a *primitive*, naïvely describing a culture she is not a part of, but that she is also a *femme philosophe* whose collection of letters serves as much as a collective annals of Incan and French history and culture as it does an individual story about a desire for love.

Knowing that the epic past cannot be changed, she suggests that the narrative of the past is at least capable of being manipulated. First, through the act of untying and retying the knots of the *quipos*, and second, by translating her story from Peruvian to French, Zilia alters the narrative of her own past. In this way her story – the woman’s story – and particularly the sister’s story that is undervalued under both patriarchy and the Regime of the Brother (as we saw in Chapter One) can be written into a masculine history.

Zilia must learn to adapt to European society after being wrested away from her native village by Spaniards on the day she is to marry her beloved Aza, King of the Incan empire. At this moment, Zilia begins writing letters to him in the hopes they will one day be reunited. Through her letters we learn that while being transported to Europe, the boat on which she is being held captive is seized by the French. It is then that she meets Déterville, a French aristocrat who will take care of her and become her most trusted friend, and in fact, the only person aside from Aza to whom she writes letters. Once in France, she also meets Déterville’s sister, Céline, who will become much like a sister to her. Much to Déterville’s chagrin, Zilia refuses his offers of marriage, preferring the memory of an Incan Prince to the reality of a French aristocrat. Throughout the course of the novel, Zilia must come to terms with a new European lifestyle, learning about literature, science, philosophy, and most importantly the French language. In the last chapter, we studied the mutable language of kinship structures within patriarchal and fraternal orders. In this chapter we will examine how these familial designators evolve for women. Furthermore, we will analyze the way in which these linguistic alterations develop when the foreign and “exotic” Other merges with the domestic.



In the “avertissement” of the novel, Graffigny invokes her deployment of a much-loved trope of eighteenth-century fiction, that is, the trope of the exotic other thrust into European society. To do so, she reprises Montesquieu’s famous question, “Comment peut-on être Persan?” As Nancy Miller points out, Montesquieu’s question effectively translates as “What does it mean to be French?” Yet by changing not only the origins, but also the gender of the protagonist, Graffigny alters the meaning of the question significantly. The implicit question to which the *Lettres* responds is very specific: “Comment peut-on être Péruvienne?” In reframing the inquiry in the feminine, Graffigny’s novel invokes rather different philosophical and political debates. The first revolves around questions of the exotic other. What does it mean to be Peruvian? What makes the Peruvian different not only from the French, but also from other “exotic” cultures? Graffigny does her best as editor and publisher of the letters to offer a detailed account of Peruvian culture. Acting as amateur historian and ethnographer, she provides an historical introduction as well as several detailed explanatory footnotes to guide the reader to an understanding of what ‘Peruvian’ signifies in eighteenth-century Europe. Contrary to works such as Voltaire’s *L’Ingénu* or Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*, which introduce non-European customs as inalterably foreign, Graffigny posits a moral system for Zila that departs from French customs only in varying degrees, allowing the heroine to adapt to and to blend together competing cultural identities.<sup>59</sup> The second debate, and the one on which much critical attention on this novel centers, is concerned with the notion of what it means to be woman in the eighteenth century. Although this novel is often categorized alongside the *Lettres portugaises* as a sentimental novel or love story,

and more importantly as female fiction, it is not until the second edition (1752) that Graffigny most aggressively addresses this question herself by inserting a chapter on women's education and another on male-female friendship. The third debate implicit in this formulation complicates the project set forth by Montesquieu. Rather than asking what it means to be French, Graffigny asks what it means *not* to be French. By placing Zilia in Europe against her will and offering a protagonist who is uneducated in French traditions (at least initially), Graffigny explores the process of coming to European subjectivity.<sup>60</sup>

Zilia's subjectivity in France is predicated in large part upon her gender and, as we saw in the previous chapter, much of the political discourse in eighteenth-century France centered on a rhetoric of masculinity.<sup>61</sup> From the institution of patriarchy to the rise of brotherhood, there was little room for the female voice in the social and political discourse that marked this century-long transformation. However, recent research has demonstrated the large – if largely silent – role that women played in effecting social and political change in early modern France.<sup>62</sup> However, the majority of the fictional literature of the day was written and produced by men; as a result, the day-to-day role of the woman in the cultural imagination was largely a masculine construct, and one contested by female authors. Courtly literature of the pre-modern period, such as that of Madame de Lafayette or Madame de Genlis for example, often articulates the ideal role of the woman as a dutiful daughter, marrying the suitor who is the most desirable match for the family, and afterwards as a gracious wife who promotes the family's good name and image publicly. Conversely, eighteenth-century domestic fiction such as that of Jean-

Jacques Rousseau and Jacques-Henri Bernadin de Saint-Pierre tends to focus on the woman as a devoted mother, whose labors take place in the private sphere of the home, benefitting the family's well-being rather than the name, and contributing to the public sphere only by virtue of the sons they raise.

Amongst all of the talk of upholding either patriarchy or democracy and brotherhood, notions of the woman as sister are rarely treated in public discourse. Juliet Flower MacCannell explains, "eighteenth-century women – mothers and daughters, mothers with daughters – do not get very far in speaking, writing, symbolizing, or experiencing their own desire, even to each other" (90). When a woman does dare to express her individual feelings and desires publicly in the early modern period, even when her work becomes a huge success (Lafayette, Graffigny, de Gouges, de Staël), she is often criticized more harshly than her masculine counterparts, regarded as an oddity, an exotic other, and someone writing at the wrong time. Whether as daughter, wife, or mother, the woman's place in eighteenth-century France is at home, subject to male domination. The sister, therefore, who experiences relative freedom within the home, is singularly capable of posing a problem to the status quo of masculine hegemony.

In *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* where the passage of time is ambiguous at best, time and timing is everything. In Peru, Zilia begins life as an orphan among orphans. All of the female children of her tribe are raised from birth in the Temple du Soleil, intentionally secluded from male and familial society. Contrary to the uncertain and often precarious status of orphans in eighteenth-century French society, all of the orphans cloistered in this temple have the potential to become noble.<sup>63</sup> Zilia, in fact, learns of her

noble status as an adolescent once she is chosen to marry the prince. Unlike a traditional marital structure (in both Peruvian and French societies) where the wife would remain politically and intellectually inferior to her husband, Zilia emphasizes in her letters that Aza prefers a more equal union.<sup>64</sup> It is no coincidence, therefore, that Spanish aggressors invade Peru on the exact day that Zilia is to marry Aza and assume the role of wife and princess. The heroine is kidnapped on her wedding day, losing the inheritance that she never had but that had always been destined for her. This false beginning is merely the first in a series of narrative devices that confuse the temporality of Zilia's story.<sup>65</sup> Throughout the novel, we will see ruptures in time, false endings, and interrupted cycles, each reinforcing this novel's unique critique of enlightenment values as they pertain to all outsiders – and particularly women.

If, according to Louis de Jaucourt in his *Encyclopédie* article "Femme," woman's primary function is "la procréation & la conservation des enfans," then Zilia's role in this novel is to question and subvert this notion.<sup>66</sup> She does not reproduce the species; instead she produces (and reproduces) letters. Furthermore, within her letters she produces the ideal, enlightened – female – citizen, although she does not create this citizen through childbirth. (How could she? She remains throughout the novel a Virgin of the Sun.) Instead her physical body extends into the body of her letters, which provide a space for the creation of new ideals of femininity that emerge from the establishment of a new family, governed by a childless and philosophically content matriarch.<sup>67</sup>

While much of the domestic fiction of eighteenth-century France including authors such as Rousseau, Marivaux, and Diderot, portrays the desire to define the

individual through his or her role in the family, Graffigny's *Lettres* propose quite the opposite. Zilia's education begins in the Temple where she is cloistered as an orphan and a virgin and ends in her country home in France, where she retreats – still an orphan and a virgin. That the heroine chooses solitude and the pursuit of knowledge over marriage and family suggests a subjective formation *à rebours*, one that rests entirely outside of traditional kinship structures. Rather than longing for the type of motherhood that emerges from the traditional patriarchal family (in both Peru and France), the heroine desires to create a family only once she has completed her education and subjective formation. Thus she constructs an intimate network of individuals based on an interest in personal development and enrichment rather than on the procreation and education of children. The result is that in Zilia's notion of family there exists a harmonious vibration of autonomous, individual yearnings. In this construction individuality is no longer merely the product of the family. For Zilia, family must consist of a group of individuals and must allow her to retain the autonomy she has garnered through the loss of Aza and the displacement outside of her homeland.

Much like the individual knots of the *quipos*, familial elements, for Zilia, can be rearranged or altered to produce drastically different configurations. Thus the reader experiences the family in fragmented form. In Peru, the orphan Zilia would have entered into the family of her husband on her wedding day. However, she has always already been a part of this family; Zilia and Aza share a familial bond from birth.<sup>68</sup> The day of their union is to be, therefore, merely the day of their re-union, a day when the fragmented family would be put back together. The French family, on the other hand, is

fragmented from within the home. In the only family that Zilia encounters in France (Déterville's), the father is absent (presumably dead) and the mother's sole function appears to be cleaving the family apart.<sup>69</sup> This 'bad mother' who upholds traditional customs by insisting on a full inheritance by the eldest son is seen only through the gaze of the non-inheriting children and furthermore is portrayed to the reader by Zilia, a stranger whose knowledge of French traditions comes from Déterville and Céline, her French benefactor and his sister who become her intimate friends. Because these two have an older brother, they are the non-inheriting children. Zilia tries to portray kinship networks through her letters, but having been raised apart from family and brought into a broken family, her knowledge in this area is not yet complete and her account remains inadequate.

If motherhood cannot offer a satisfactory model for feminine agency and identity, and if fatherhood is completely absent, then the family of this novel must be constructed via bonds of fraternity, sorority, and friendship. It is no wonder that Zilia's dreams of a life with Aza consist solely in the pursuit of knowledge and happiness rather than the production of family. In Peru, the only family that Zilia wishes to raise is the one consisting of her fellow citizens. Having no concept of family prior to her education in the Temple, she enjoys the freedom to imagine and create her society in the way she sees most fit. In France, she encounters a new model of family politics, which is governed by neither love nor reason, but instead by material and cultural wealth with the mother acting as guardian of familial wealth. Aside from the mother's overt distaste for outsiders, her strict adherence to traditions that pit brother against brother would make

her appear to Zilia every bit as fierce as the *yalpor* that rains from the sky during the storm as she strikes down more good and happiness than she creates. The only kind of familial love that Zilia knows in France and that she knew in Peru is that which exists between a brother and a sister.<sup>70</sup> In order to allow for a happy and fulfilled individual, whether male or female, family must be built around a model of friendship that imitates the brother-sister relationship. Furthermore, given the functional diversity of the sibling relationship between Peru and France (in Peru such affiliation results in marriage while in France it is more often akin to a parental bond), it is possible to produce a complete family from the seed of the sibling affiliation.

Laura Burch writes of Graffigny's efforts in this novel, "Elle souhaite en effet envisager une *nouvelle* république des lettres dont les frontières franchissent, déplacent, et dépassent les limites du sexe."<sup>71</sup> In this chapter we will explore how Graffigny's Peruvian heroine not only displaces the boundaries of gender, but also invents a new form of subjectivity that is free from conventional understandings both of gender and of nationality through a reorganization of notions of kinships structures. Through narrative and formal devices, as well as through content, the author of the *Lettres* proposes that the individual is irreducible to a single characteristic, and in so doing she creates a fissure in the fabric of the nation. Zilia seamlessly weaves between Peruvian and French. Through her unique brand of female writing she collapses the barriers between temporalities – between memory and desire – and uses her persuasive power to leverage passionate desire for intimate friendship. Ironically, by weaving together these oppositional

identities, Zilia is able to disentangle herself from the eighteenth-century view of woman and to create a new role for the woman in the bourgeois family.

### **Disentangling Identity**

Toward the end of the eighteenth century in France, time ceased to exist. The Revolutionary calendar, officially adopted in 1793, declared September 22, 1792 to be henceforth known as day one, the first of Vendémiaire, Year I.<sup>72</sup> The members of the new National Convention envisioned a world in which monarchy would literally be a thing of the past. Once they had eliminated the two bodies of the king (the physical body and the body politic), thereby ripping the very notion of a monarch out of the fabric of time, the Revolutionaries emptied the space once occupied by the patriarch, seeking within that space to create an active, democratic citizen. This citizen would now be subject to laws of popular, rather than royal, sovereignty. In the 1789 “Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen,” members of the first General Assembly proclaim equal rights for all men, stressing in Article XI the importance of free speech and declaring, “tout Citoyen peut donc parler, écrire, imprimer librement.” However, just four years later any notions of truly free speech were squelched under Robespierre’s reign of terror. It seems that erasing time is no cure for the desire to forget and start anew. Perhaps it is because women have never been the active subject in history that Françoise de Graffigny understood fifty years prior what the Revolutionaries failed to understand; writing over history will never work because the palimpsestic trace of what has been will always find its way to the surface. As Graffigny shows in this novel, the only way to alter history effectively is to write



oneself into it, to weave together various fragments of the past and present in order to create the possibility for a new political subject.

To begin our analysis of how Graffigny proposes writing oneself into history, let us consider the following passage, in which Zilia explains the limits of space and time, which demonstrates the non-linearity of Graffigny's conception of time:

[L]e temps ainsi que l'espace n'est connu que par ses limites. Nos idées et notre vue se perdent également par la constante uniformité de l'un et de l'autre: si les objets marquent les bornes de l'espace, il me semble que nos espérances marquent celle du temps; et que si elles nous abandonnent, ou qu'elles ne soient pas sensiblement marquées, nous n'apercevons pas plus la durée du temps que l'air qui remplit l'espace (45-46).

Time is not marked by unified increments (seconds, minutes, hours) or by the path of the sun as it moves across the sky; time, for the protagonist of the *Lettres*, passes only at the moment of realization of a particular desire. If, as the heroine states repeatedly, her one desire is to be reunited with Aza as husband and wife, and if this desire is never fulfilled, then what are we to make of the passage of time in this novel? Are we to understand the time that passes from the day of the heroine's kidnapping to the day of her retirement to the country home in France as nonexistent? Yes and no. As J.P. Schneider points out, what matters for Zilia is not an objective but rather a *subjective* description of the passage of time: "Pour Zilia seul compte le temps intérieur, qui, en l'absence d'Aza, rend tous les moments interchangeables" (19).<sup>73</sup> Although external time (clock time, calendar time) marches on, marked by the events that take place, internal time for the heroine remains suspended. Living neither wholly in the present, nor in the past, nor in the future, Zilia occupies a timeline of her own – a timeline where she is free to wait for her prince to

come, a timeline that rests outside of historical events, a timeline in which she engages in a nostalgic reflection that alters her relation to time and space, allowing her to produce an alternate history in which she is in charge of her own fate.

On the day that Zilia is kidnapped from her Peruvian village – the day she would have married the Incan prince – her fate would have been sealed as a wife and a princess. On that day, she would have left the secluded feminine space of the Temple to enter into the patriarchal society of Cuzco. Her fate had been determined from the day the Capa Inca penetrated the temple where the virgins were secluded. As princess of her nation, she would have forever remained in the service of her husband. We know, however, that Zilia was to be different from previous princesses because she had been taught by the male philosophers (the *Amautas*), receiving the same education as her male counterpart. It stands to reason, therefore, that she would have felt unsatisfied by the subservient, conjugal role destined for her. Perhaps the reason that Zilia never writes about any dreams of a future outside of her relationship with Aza is not because she cannot imagine what lies beyond their marriage, but because she can. Even after her capture, her dreams of a life with Aza rarely go beyond the moment of their reunification. The desire for an amorous reunion is the limit of Zilia's time, beyond that limit time must begin again and desires must be reformulated. In the meantime, the protagonist wistfully longs for the absent other, filling him with her own knowledge and emotions. In order to invent a new female identity, independent of the masculine symbolic order, Zilia must exist in the ruptures within time (never accepting to live in the present) and within language

(remaining unable to communicate with others); only within this ruptured space can her nostalgic desires be translated into new possibilities for female subjectivity.

### **From *Mal du Pays* to *Maladie du Siècle***

Nostalgia is the utopian space where the fetishization of the absent other meets the fetishization of time. Svetlana Boym writes, “Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship” (xiii). In dealing with the long-distance, nostalgic relationship between Zilia and Aza (and later between Zilia and Déterville), Graffigny’s *Lettres* is a novel that portrays the various meanings of “nostalgia,” a novel that explores the evolution of the term itself, tracing it from its origins as a medical term in the seventeenth century, to its reinvention in the eighteenth century as a psychological condition.<sup>74</sup> During this transformative time, the notion of nostalgia shifts from an individual illness (what sixteenth-century Swiss physician Johannes Hofer describes as a violent desire to return to a homeland), to a more generalized psychological yearning for a lost – often invented – past. While the first formulation focuses on a spatial separation of longing subject from removed object, the second centers instead on a temporal distance, wherein violent desires are mediated by time. In eighteenth-century France, we see a tremendous tension between these competing notions of nostalgia. While the only use of the word nostalgia in Diderot and D’Alembert’s voluminous *Encyclopédie* falls under the heading of ‘maladie,’ (as in

*maladie du pays*), authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau with his *Confessions* or *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire* bathe in the poetic melancholia of nostalgic reflection upon lost times. Analysis of the *Lettres* shows how this novel serves as a case study of nostalgia, demonstrating the cure for the *maladie du pays*, suffered by the foreign subject in a strange world.

Zilia, however, is not simply a homesick foreigner in a strange land; she is also a woman who has been taken from her motherland, where she was just about to attain a position of relative power (as an educated princess), and be thrust back into the realm of the noble, yet powerless woman. In addition to a desire to see her absent lover (and by extension her homeland), the heroine desires the freedom and power she would have experienced in Peru. Thus, Zilia's Peru is not just a place, but also a space – what Michel de Certeau calls “un lieu pratiqué” – where her quotidian actions produce female power.<sup>75</sup> By articulating her desire to return to this space as an illness, she implies that it can be cured by a reinvigoration of ‘Peru’ as a series of practices, even in France. More than the melancholic, Romantic heroes of a century later (Chateaubriand's René or Balzac's Rastignac, for instance) whose great *ennui* translates into the incurable “mal du siècle,” Zilia's nostalgic yearnings iterate female powerlessness in the eighteenth century as a treatable “maladie.”

Before she can cure the *maladie du siècle*, Zilia must first save herself from the *mal du pays*, but to do so she must overcome the shock of geographic and cultural displacement. In her early letters, it seems as if her nostalgia is so violent it might just kill her. “Je touchais au moment où l'étincelle du feu divin dont le Soleil anime notre être

allait s'éteindre" (28), writes Zilia to Aza shortly after her capture. This menacing desire must be replaced with a more abstract feeling; illness must give way to a subdued longing for the past (even an imagined past) in order for Zilia to record her story. For the heroine, the cure for nostalgia is directly tied to the subject's relation to language, writing, and time. As we see throughout the novel, when language moves from the intuitive to the symbolic (or from her native Incan to the learned French), her conception of time changes along with her notions of the relation between time and space. The transformation is furthermore externalized in this work as time and language "take on flesh," to borrow a term from Bakhtin, in the various forms of writing.

Writing occupies a particularly important place in Graffigny's novel. In fact, along with Choderlos de Laclos's *Liaisons dangereuses* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, there are few eighteenth-century novels that focus more intensely on the process of writing than *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*. In the first letter, the novel's heroine writes, "je courus à mes *quipos*, et profitant du silence qui régnait encore dans le temple, je me hâtai de les nouer, dans l'espérance qu'avec leur secours je rendrais immortelle l'histoire de notre amour et de notre bonheur" (18-19). While Zilia writes of the intense happiness she feels on that day due to her marriage to Aza, she appears even more excited about the prospect of recording that event so that it may serve as a written history for future generations. More than love, friendship, or marriage, what Zilia writes about most in this novel is writing itself. Each letter serves as a permanent testament to the events of her life. Ironically, the letters she writes, which are meant to serve as collective annals for her people, demonstrate the inverse – that is, her personal records

reveal the *limits* of such a collective history. Torn away from her family and her nation before she can even be a part of them, her story remains painstakingly individual and private.<sup>76</sup> Nancy K. Miller proposes that the novel's description of the protagonist's "coming to writing" actually allows the reader to see the creation of the female critical subject and of female writing as such.<sup>77</sup>

There are several factors that distinguish Graffigny's novel from other novels in letters of the day like those of Richardson, Montesquieu, or Rousseau (for instance, the female's voice is written *by* a woman and there is only one letter-writer), but perhaps the most intriguing distinction is the unique delivery of the first seventeen letters.<sup>78</sup> We learn in the first letter that Zilia's record of events is not originally written in French with ink on paper, but rather in *quipos*, a form of writing unique to the Incans, consisting of colorful cords knotted together to represent various events in history. Although the anthropological studies upon which Graffigny bases her knowledge of Peruvian culture suggest that *quipos* serve as a mnemonic device that aids in the retelling of collective history, what is particularly interesting about the exchange of the *quipos* as imagined by Graffigny is that once the reader receives the letter, he must untie and then re-tie the knots in such a way as to insert himself into the display of events. In this way, the knotted letter intertwines various individuals' separate events and emotions into a collective story.<sup>79</sup> With her *quipos*, Zilia literally weaves together various moments, people, and places from her past and present to record her story to leave as a legacy for future generations.

The colorful cords knotted together thus serve as a physical extension of her nostalgia, or in her own words, her ‘maladie.’ True to Hofer’s definition, Zilia describes her symptoms in the fourth letter as “la violence du mal qui me dévore,” and shortly thereafter the French doctor on the boat diagnoses her writing-induced illness. However, when he separates Zilia from writing her condition worsens. The heroine understands that the ability to write means access to knowledge, and that knowledge will provide her with the means to return to Aza, to Peru, and most importantly to a state of freedom.

Throughout the first seventeen letters, Zilia reflects on the pain of remembering as she gives existence to her thoughts through writing.<sup>80</sup> In her reflection, she offers a well thought-out discourse on the evolution of language and its relation to expression. As Diane Fourny points out, the heroine’s account of the development of language in the sixteenth and seventeenth letters (the last two written in *quipos*) closely resembles Rousseau’s arguments in the *Essai sur l’origine des langues* (published three decades later), in which language moves from the gestural to the intuitive, and finally to the symbolic.<sup>81</sup> Zilia begins in the seventeenth letter with an assessment of sounds. She explains that sound must be the most natural form of communication because its meaning is universal.<sup>82</sup> Language, on the other hand, is a contrivance of man that is culturally constructed. The heroine’s lack of knowledge of the Spanish language, coupled with the fear that she feels in the presence of her captors, leads her to convey this language in her letters as nothing more than a series of shrill sounds and barbarous gestures. Her native Incan, on the other hand, expertly communicates emotions, based as it is on the truths of the heart and the soul. True to the conventions of the primitive trope, this ‘savage’

language seems to correspond to Rousseau's theories of the first languages, which he describes as brought about by passion rather than need.

Rousseau's conception of language departs from Graffigny's when language reaches the symbolic. Zilia is resistant to learning French because of the misleading quality she sees in this language: "en général, je soupçonne cette nation de n'être point telle qu'elle paraît; l'affectation me paraît son caractère dominant" (73). Whereas in this novel Graffigny posits "truth" as antithetic to the French language, Rousseau understands all language as constantly in the process of assimilation, whereby affectation is merely the result of truth's catching up to passion, creating both figurative and literal meaning; "[c]oncluons que les signes visibles rendent l'imitation plus exacte, mais que l'intérêt s'excite mieux par les sons" (*Origine des langues* 91). While Rousseau holds a logocentric view of French in which the written word serves as a supplement to the spoken language and as a record of the truth produced in the presence of the utterance – the written word becoming what Jacques Derrida would call a signifier of a signifier – Graffigny's heroine has difficulty conceiving of the distinction between written and spoken language, going so far as to believe that learning to speak French will allow her to understand Déterville's soul ("L'intelligence des langues serait-elle celle de l'âme?"). To sever either (written or spoken language) from thought would produce a rupture in the production of truth that would be, for the Zilia of the first half of the novel, unethical.

Zilia begins to grasp more completely the notion of excitation by sound as she learns French. During the time when she remains incapable of understanding the French language Déterville endeavors to excite her emotion and to lead her to his own desires of



passionate love through a repetition of romantic language, “Dès que j’ai répété après lui, *oui, je vous aime*, ou bien *je vous promets d’être à vous*, la joie se répand sur son visage” (48). The empty signifiers mean nothing to her, however. Passionate love (*eros*) is comprehensible to her only as being attached to Aza and does not translate when it comes from the mouth of another man. Only later, as she realizes the necessity of learning French (once she runs out of cords) does she begin to understand the complexity of emotion that exists only in spoken language. After going to the opera for the first time she explains that the ability to understand sounds must be universal, “car il ne m’a pas été plus difficile de m’affecter des différentes passions que l’on a représentées que si elles eussent été exprimées dans notre langue, et cela me paraît bien naturel” (75). In her premature linguistic system, sounds correspond to feeling – written signs (*quipos*) correspond to truths. For Zilia, her native Incan is an intuitive language that conveys emotions by fusing together sign and signifier, offering immutable meaning.<sup>83</sup>

In the written Peruvian language, Zilia feels secure because each knot corresponds to an event and an emotion that she understands on a deeply personal level. Even collective history becomes an individual experience between her fingers. Writing is what makes the heroine feel whole because it is the extension of her thoughts and, as such, it is a part of her. When she first falls into the hands of the French and her cords are taken away from her, she feels as if her soul is being ripped out and as though she will die. Moreover, although she speaks and writes in her native language, throughout the first seventeen letters Zilia is repeatedly infantilized due to her inability to communicate with those around her. Like a child she is innocent and pure, awkwardly repeating new words

and phrases that bring a smile to the faces of those around her. Until the eighteenth letter she remains locked in a seemingly pre-linguistic stage, and therefore a pre-œdipal one. At this point, writing becomes the pharmakon, the poison that is killing her but that is also a cure for her nostalgia, and the activity that draws her away from the present moment but that also grounds her more firmly within herself.<sup>84</sup> In this linguistic no-man's-land, or what Julia Kristeva calls "chora," Zilia has not yet accepted the rules of a phallogentric society. Within the womb-like haven of this suspended moment the heroine is able to formulate a female subjectivity that can be iterated positively rather than from a position of lack.<sup>85</sup>

As she begins to panic at the thought of running out of cords, which would render her incapable of writing, the heroine learns that the French also possess a system that can "donner une sorte d'existence aux pensées" (72). Consequently, her fears of losing her sole means of communication seem to lessen. In fact, as her cords run out, the violence of the illness that she describes in the first letters begins to dissipate. At first she panics in the sixteenth letter as she sees the end of her cords, afraid to write because it will bring the end not only of her favorite activity (writing), but also of her love affair. Once the cords finally do run out in the seventeenth letter, Zilia laments, "ces nœuds, qui me semblaient être une chaîne de communication de mon cœur au tien, ne sont déjà plus que les tristes objets de mes regrets" (77). Once she ties the last knot, she understands that she must learn a new language. This decision leads to an experience that will alter her very being.

If these cords have served as the physical extension of her nostalgia, a sickness or disease, then the cure must lie in removing them from the body. This *nostalgectomy* that occurs at the end of the seventeenth letter leaves Zilia linguistically comatose. Without language she has no means of expression, and therefore her thoughts are left to float in the void between languages. The Aza her memory has created will become once and for all hypostatized in the past, unable to be revived in the present. Consequently, she resists the desire to learn French and although she is constantly surrounded by her new French family (Déterville and Céline), it is not until she runs out of cords that she finally *must* learn to speak, read, and of course write in French. Only a linguistic reintegration can bring her out of her coma.

If, as Fourny writes, the times when Zilia is between letters are a sort of non-moment, or a space where time does not exist and Zilia's universe fades away, then the break between letters seventeen and eighteen is tremendously important. Once she loses the ability to communicate she can no longer exist in the present. While the first line of the eighteenth letter reinforces the idea of a death between languages ("Combien de temps effacé de ma vie, mon cher Aza!"), it is quickly followed by the declarations of life, in which she embraces a completely new universe full of infinite symbolic possibility. In fact, Zilia remarks that during the time she could not write, she lived only in the future stating, "[j]e ne vivais que dans l'avenir, le présent ne me paraissait plus digne d'être compté" (78). The cords of the *quipos* allow her simultaneously to experience the present moment while still serving as an umbilical cord tying her to the past (Aza and Peru), but once that cord is cut she is forced into an abyss of darkness,

surviving on the yearning for a future moment when she will once again be able to express herself in writing, and therefore to exist materially (in the form of letters).

Within the non-moment, time ceases to exist, yet when she is thrust back into the present (in the eighteenth letter), time speeds up exponentially. Whereas time in her native language is arranged spatially (life is communicated through insular, communal events), French introduces a sense of temporal progression and a necessity to demarcate time. Just after she learns French, Déterville leaves Zilia for the first time, and she learns that he will be gone for six months. Because words describing units of time mean nothing to Zilia, she translates them into the only language capable of transgressing linguistic boundaries, the language of emotions; “j’ignorais encore l’usage de sa langue; cependant, à la vive douleur qu’il fit paraître en se séparant de sa sœur et moi, je compris que nous le perdions pour longtemps” (80). The emotion-filled departure of her friend provides her with a second desired moment of reunion and therefore another limit to time. Rather than reflecting on the past she must yearn for the future and the possibilities that lie therein. It is thus during the moments outside of language, when Zilia is forced to live in the present, that her illness is cured.

In the sixteenth letter, before learning French, Zilia compares the words of this language to women’s make-up, which cover up the truth of thoughts to make them pretty. In fact, once she has learned to write in French, she complains of the difficulty in directly and honestly conveying thoughts in French, stating, “il me faut un temps infini pour former très peu de lignes. Il arrive souvent qu’après avoir beaucoup écrit, je ne puis deviner moi-même ce que j’ai cru exprimer” (79). Although she finds the symbolic

French language false, a language in which the proliferation of signifiers confuses meaning, the Zilia of the second half of the novel begins to grasp the utility of affectation in language. By writing letters in French she can actually revive Aza. In the earnest Peruvian language he was forced to remain in the past, but in the creative French language he can be reconstructed in the present.

Once she awakens from her linguistic coma Zilia reiterates her desire to find Aza. Now that she has learned about external time, she becomes increasingly determined to continue to the next moment of her internal time.<sup>86</sup> Although she has spent the first seventeen letters basking in the pain of longing for her absent lover, it is at this point that we understand the creative force of her letters. Not only has she longed for the past, but with the *quipos* she has also brought the past into the present, by continuously creating an alternate past. Although Zilia aims in her letters to restore a virtuous Incan Prince and a beautiful homeland, the truth is that both the prince and the land have mainly existed only in her mind. Raised in the Temple of the Virgins, she never sees the Peruvian countryside until the day of her capture; and while she remains unswervingly faithful to Aza, the pair shares only a few hours together over the course of two years. Here Zilia demonstrates her acuity as amateur historian as her narrative collapses temporalities. Where the memory of individual experience is lacking (knowledge of Peru, for example), Zilia draws on current knowledge of timeless human desires such as a desire for happiness and companionship to fill in the gaps.

As we have previously mentioned, Zilia's conception of history is directly related to her relation to language and writing, and is therefore oriented spatially rather than

chronologically. This conception of history is much like the one that Reinhart Koselleck offers in his essay on the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectation.” In his formulation, these two categories of historical time coexist for, as he writes, “one is not to be had without the other.” He further states:

It makes sense to say that experience based on the past is spatial since it is assembled into a totality, within which many layers of earlier times are simultaneously present, without, however, providing any indication of the before and after. There is no experience that might be chronologically calibrated – though datable by occasion, of course, since at any one time it is composed of what can be recalled by one’s memory and by the knowledge of others’ lives. Chronologically, all experience leaps over time; experience does not create continuity in the sense of an additive preparation to the past (260).

Although Zilia’s experiences are assembled into a totality, in the form of a collection of letters, she embraces the creative possibilities of her own memory gaps. Within these gaps, Zilia invents a new story for herself, grafting onto collective history her personal experience and her hopes for the future.

As soon as she is finally reunited with the Aza of flesh and blood, when at last her desire has been fulfilled, Zilia learns of his infidelity. While the heroine has dedicated her existence to resisting integration into French society by holding onto the Peruvian language and refusing to learn French, Aza has converted to Christianity and found a Spanish wife. Once Zilia learns of Aza’s treachery, the past that she had created for herself is proven to be a lie. Although the intuitive Peruvian language does not allow for lies, the more symbolic French is predicated upon an art of minor falsehoods and double entendres. Her world is shattered not only because of Aza’s betrayal, but also because language has become obfuscated. She realizes that she has been lied to for the first time,

and she understands that her own recollections of the past have been faulty. It is at this moment, when language fails because she cannot reconcile truth with language, that Zilia becomes a victim of the infidelity both of her lover and of language. For the first time she longs to forget the past, dedicating the present to imagining the future. Ironically, the future that she imagines is the same that she imagined in the past. Unlike historic time, Zilia's internal time is mutable, allowing her to revive the faithful Aza she had previously imagined, bringing this memory back to life in the present moment and fusing experience and expectation. Forgetting the tragic event that separates her imagined past from the present, Zilia decides instead to imagine a future that can never exist.

Zilia's turn from a reflection upon a past moment to an imagination of the future signals a shift in her own understanding of nostalgia. Her emotions are now mediated by language (from Peruvian to French) and by time (the year that has passed since she last saw Aza), and although her heart is broken her violent illness is cured. Because of the slowness of writing in French, her feelings become temporally mediated and necessarily more reflective. With her new language she can reflect on a lost time while imagining a time that will never come, a new utopian future to which we will now turn.

In a letter written to Déterville just after Zilia's disastrous reunion with Aza she laments:

Ce n'est plus la perte de ma liberté, de mon rang, de ma patrie que je regrette; ce ne sont plus les inquiétudes d'une tendresse innocente qui m'arrachent des pleurs; c'est la bonne foi violée, c'est l'amour méprisé, qui déchirent mon âme (159).

As a final act of tearing Zilia's soul apart, Aza returns her letters. Not only has Zilia lost the cords that were once attached to her person, the cords she used to create her story, but

now the cords that tied her to Aza have also been severed once and for all. This event marks the painful progression of Zilia's internal time, yet she also realizes that she now holds Aza's very existence in her hands. By restoring her cords to her, the Aza of flesh and blood has given her the tools to recreate historical time. The heroine's postscript desire to rewrite the past is predicated upon her willingness to tear all of the terrible moments from her past out of the fabric of time, throwing them back into the realm of what she calls "eternal ideas." From this realm, she can choose moments, weave together experiences, and reorganize time in whatever manner she sees fit. By reducing history to a series of spatially disjointed concepts rather than a teleological series of events, the narrator of the *Lettres* combines the spatial element of her original written language (*quipos*) with the logocentrism of her learned language (French).

Such a mode of describing a reorganization of time is, in fact, in line with Zilia's initial mode of writing. When inserting parenthetical comments into her story as she translates the knots from *quipos* to French, the heroine must unravel the fabric of her story in order to insert (anachronistically) the French language. Much like the revolutionaries of the first National Convention who wanted to erase all reference to the king who had betrayed the nation, Zilia also decides simply to erase the moment of betrayal itself. Instead of destroying Aza, forgetting him completely and ripping the memory of him from the fabric of her own timeline, Zilia decides to bring him back to life in her own terms because, as she puts it, her heart will be his "jusqu'à la mort."

Although Zilia laments Aza's infidelity, his sudden removal from her life toward the end of the novel does not result in a near-death experience or a suicide attempt as it



had in the past because this time the cords that tied her identity so tightly to his have been severed. Within the ruptures in space and time she has created her own identity, independent of Aza. In fact, the last letters of the novel are no longer addressed to him. Instead, she writes the last letters to Déterville, and she even responds to letters from him.<sup>87</sup> Because her heart will forever belong to Aza, she refuses to marry Déterville. She cannot share her heart with him but she can share a much more important organ – her brain. She has created an active female subject, capable of exchanging thoughts and ideas with men as an equal.

The final letter, addressed to Déterville, concretizes the heroine's decision to lead a solitary life in her country home. Zilia has now resolved to live out her days reflecting on a past, lost moment, imagining the possibility of a future that cannot exist. The decision to sit at home pining over a missed opportunity would seem a tragic ending for the heroine, reminiscent of the sad but dutiful Princesse de Clèves, knitting by the fire until her untimely death. However, rather than signaling an end, this letter signals a return to the beginning. From the beginning the absent hero's name suggested a circular story. From A-Z and back to A, this is finally the point at which Zilia – whose name begins only at the end with "Z" – can break free from the strong hold of her memory of Aza and begin to live in the reality of her own constructed world, which is no less real to her than the world broken by Aza's betrayal. At this moment, she can finally weave her past into the present as she translates the seventeen letters from *quipos* into French, inscribing her memories in the indelible ink that produces the French language.

Through the work of translation, the heroine embraces the symbolic possibilities of French, but in a controlled environment. She has seen the deceit that comes with a language based on symbolism rather than emotion, but instead of rejecting that language, she decides to use it to her advantage, inventing a world in which she alone controls the language, a world in which Aza will return in the form that she has created, and in which the violence of her nostalgia has dissipated. Her individual illness cured, she can finally begin a treatment for the malady plaguing not only herself, but all the women surrounding her. Guided by reason and knowledge, writing her legacy, Zilia lays the foundation for a new female identity. By inventing a space where female education is taken seriously and where women have the potential to be equal to men, Graffigny's novel offers more than a cure for nostalgia – she offers a cure for the *maladie du siècle*.

The heroine's moments of reflection, the end that signals a new beginning in a woman's retreating to her country home to rewrite her past, serve as an incredibly powerful metaphor for feminine desire in eighteenth-century France. If Zilia can translate her Peruvian story into French, weaving together past moments in a way that creates a new present, so too can woman positively insert herself into a phallogocentric history. The eighteenth century in France was no *belle époque* for women, yet a discourse of equality proposed by certain major (male) philosophers of the Enlightenment such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant inadvertently paved the way for women of letters like Graffigny to enter into the philosophical discourse and to begin to assess the ills of an unequal society and to offer alternative paths to enlightenment.<sup>88</sup> In the end, Zilia's nostalgic desire for the familiar (Aza and Peru) translates into a something completely

new and different. Rather than offering a repeat of the beginning, the end of this novel signals a return to a beginning that has been altered. Zilia has mastered speech, has become integrated into French society without giving up her Peruvian identity, and has disentangled all of the knots that made her foreign. In the end she is neither French nor Peruvian, she is Woman – existing independent of a man and possessing a desire to learn. She combines the truth of Peruvian with the affective ornament of French to produce a new, more powerful truth. By taking fragments of her Peruvian and French identities and weaving them together, Zilia breaks free from nationalistic stereotypes to become a cosmopolitan, enlightened citizen – collapsing distinctive spaces and synthesizing competing notions of identity.

The traditional teleological narrative for an eighteenth-century woman, like the narrative of Zilia's trajectory (told with the first three French words she learns – *Déterville, boat, France*), can be summed up in three nouns: daughter, wife, mother. Because Zilia's independence is predicated upon her refusal of Déterville's hand in favor of Aza's memory, she must create a new family that interrupts (and disrupts) the female cycle of life. Such a family does not involve the production of children, but rather an exchange of ideas. Zilia is not an individual who exists only within and as an extension of the intimate sphere of the family; rather, her individuality serves as the basis for her own notion of kinship structures.

## Re-writing the Family

We are all familiar with the old adage, “families come in all shapes and sizes.” In our modern society, this phrase is often repeated to promote adoption or foster parenting, or to preach a general acceptance of the wide range of family compositions we see today. But can we apply this statement to the families of eighteenth-century France? Were these families so diverse? Although divorce remained illegal in France for much of the eighteenth century, shorter life expectancies, high infant mortality rates, and the generalized acceptance of concubinage (often resulting in bastard children) meant that the family, the “fondement à la société nationale” (“Famille” *Encyclopédie*), invoked for political purposes by Royalists and Revolutionaries alike, did in fact come in all shapes and sizes. This family was then, as it is now, a highly volatile unit, its composition changing from one family to the next or even from one day to the next within the same family.<sup>89</sup> For Zilia, family exists only in so far as she creates it. We have already discussed how writing for this heroine leads to a self-actualization or a “coming to” the body. Now we will examine how this body fits into the national body via the construction of the family in her letters and how, through writing, she creates a domestic space where the female body can exist as a welcoming home rather than a prison.

According to several editions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, throughout the eighteenth century (and much of the nineteenth century) family is composed primarily of all people of the same bloodline; however, only the males of the family perpetuate this bloodline.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the definition of “famille” in the *Encyclopedie* tells us that nature herself pushes men to marry and that “de là naissent les

enfants, qui en perpétuant les familles, entretiennent la société humaine & réparent les pertes que la mort y cause chaque jour” (Jaucourt “Famille”). In the European formulation, family is founded upon masculine blood. Within this unit then, the only union not based on consanguinity is that between a husband and a wife. A wife is chosen based on a number of factors (beauty, age, the size of her dowry, her noble status, etc.), but she must not be related by “close” blood – that is, she cannot be her future husband’s sister.<sup>91</sup> Based on Graffigny’s novel and the ethnographical research of Garcilaso de la Vega in his *Histoire des Yncas* (1742) (among others), we understand that the Peruvian family, unlike the European one, begins with the marital union of brother and sister. In this way, there would be no distinction between masculine and feminine blood within the union because they share a lineage prior to the marriage. In this construction, family is family – blood is genderless. When Zilia tells Déterville that she cannot marry him because the two are not of the same nation, her ultimate fear is that a union of the two in France would mean a complete loss of her heritage. Female blood would cede to the male bloodline, and any children produced from the union would be her family only in as much as it is his. To marry a Frenchman, therefore, would not only be the end of her freedom, but it would also be the end of the line for her Peruvian family.

In the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that the strongest points of a convergence of power reside at the nexus of one generation and the next. The transfer of name from the father to his male offspring constitutes a transfer of paternal power that is to be repeated *ad infinitum*.<sup>92</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, there are exceptions to this transfer of power and moments of failure, but the generalized

principle reinforces normative (and ecclesiastic) notions of family, which posit the propagation of the species as the sole purpose of marriage. As such, man and wife are made to mate – love and friendship are secondary, and frankly unnecessary. In the shift to a deployment of sexuality we see a qualitative difference in the view of female reproduction. It is no longer the woman's duty to produce child after child; nonetheless, she is still expected to produce a male heir. Her body is transformed from a factory (meant for the production of children) to a museum (where her maternal body is held up to public scrutiny). Yet, for all the importance of her role in the transfer of masculine power, the woman is unable to harness that power.

Keenly aware of the loss of female power in a European marriage and unable to marry Aza, her betrothed Peruvian prince, Zilia refuses to enter into any type of marital union. By granting Zilia access to knowledge, Aza had endowed her with power and made her his equal. A marriage to anyone other than Aza, therefore, would result in a loss of power and would relegate her to the role of matriarch, reproducing a race to which she does not belong. The apotheosis of Enlightenment idealism, the heroine possesses an insatiable desire for knowledge and only once she has been freed from the threatened constraint of domestic life is she able to pursue her quest for happiness that lies in learning. She must, therefore, invent a new family where not only can she retain the power that she has already garnered as an equal of men, but also where she can continue to learn. Such a family must sidestep the husband-wife axis, and in order to do so she proposes a family based on friendship where the bonds of friendship imitate sibling bonds. A family composed of unique individuals, unrelated by blood yet acting as if they

were brothers and sisters, redefines the system of alliance common to aristocratic societies and paves the way for a new, intimate model of kinship.<sup>93</sup> In this structure alliances formed do not preserve a particular family or name, but instead encourage the intensified contentment of each member of the unit. While in the previous chapter we saw how *Manon Lescaut* exposes a type of familial transformation in which the sibling relationship (the children-children axis) is grafted onto the father-son relationship (the parents-children axis), analysis of the *Lettres* shows familial transformation evolving quite differently. Rather than the parents-children relationship, in this novel sibling bonds are transposed upon and eventually overtake the husband-wife relationship, thus producing a more egalitarian family based on reasonable love (*philia* and *storge*) rather than passionate love (*eros*).<sup>94</sup>

Because Zilia favors the more reasoned and less passionate sibling relationship (which precludes a legal union in European society) over matrimony, she remains squarely between identities. Taken out of Peru, she is no longer physically tied to her homeland, yet by refusing to marry into French society she remains a foreigner in France. It is precisely because of her in-between status that she is able to construct a new political identity free from traditionally gendered and nationalistic stereotypes. Although her body is the object of much scrutiny, there is no place for it to exist comfortably. In order to become a political subject, Zilia will first have to break free from her position as exotic object. Other scholars have convincingly argued that in this novel Graffigny offers Zilia as the ideal citizen of the Enlightenment,<sup>95</sup> yet the ideas that her heroine proposes on the road to enlightenment are some that even the most famous philosophers of the day could

not have imagined. Zilia's desire to produce and reproduce knowledge (in her letters and through the act of translation) reinforces the notion of the protagonist as the ideal, enlightened citizen.

Yet, by introducing Zilia as analogous to the moon (rather than the Sun), Graffigny proposes a radically different Enlightenment, one based on the general principles of Enlightenment ideology (daring to know, waking up from a self-imposed nonage) while running counter to it by creating a place for women. Women's nonage is not self-imposed but rather imposed by men. As daughters, wives, and mothers, women's primary duty is to the male head of the family and, as we see from many works of literature of the day written by men (such as Rousseau, Mercier, and Diderot), their role with regards to knowledge acquisition is to inspire the desire to learn in their male offspring.<sup>96</sup> In order to create a space where the female can become an active member of the family – a space where she can act in her own best interest – she must enjoy a relative independence from male dominance. She must occupy the role of the sister.

### **From Possessed to Possessor**

Boucher D'Argis's definition of the husband in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* tells us that he is "considéré comme le maître de la société conjugale," ("Mari"). Furthermore, an article on "puissance paternelle" in the same work explains that a father holds legal rights over his children, his servants, and every object or person in his household. Such articles reinforce the notion of the proverbial patriarch as the possessor of all things familial.<sup>97</sup> Thus within this rhetorical system of logic, the question



of familial constitution is inextricably linked to the question of property ownership.<sup>98</sup> Graffigny too grapples with issues of possession and power in this novel; however, the problematic of female (rather than male) ownership unfolds in a drastically different fashion. Starting the novel with the expletive, “Aza! Mon cher Aza!” the reader encounters a woman seemingly possessed, that is, she is irrational and in control of neither her emotions nor her body. Although she uses the possessive pronoun “mon” to describe her lover, the reader quickly learns of his physical absence from her. Possessed by passion, by fear, and by confusion, the heroine tells us of the one thing she is in possession of – the *quipos*; “je ne sais par quel heureux hasard j’ai conservé mes *quipos*. Je les possède, mon cher Aza!” (21, emphasis added). Throughout the early letters of the novel, Zilia compensates for the lack of possession of her body (as she is transferred from one prison to another) by translating her *self* into the *quipos*. It is not unsurprising, therefore, that some scholars have seen in this novel an early form of the *Bildungsroman*.<sup>99</sup> Zilia goes on a quest of self-possession that ends with her refusal to marry, resulting in the *re*-possession of her body through the sublimation of violent, passionate desire (for Aza, and by extension marriage) into a desire to write and translate her own, female subjective experience.

Zilia’s fate as a noble Peruvian woman, much like the fate of her noble French counterparts, has been determined for her since birth. As the “plus proche parent” of the Prince, she is to marry him as soon as she is of age. To ensure her purity she is cloistered inside the Temple of the Sun along with all other female children of the tribe. It is not without a sense of irony on the part of Graffigny that this Temple is the one place in the

village where the sun does not shine. Female bodies are preserved here as vessels for the procreation of the species and are meant to remain in the dark both literally and metaphorically; they are shut in, locked behind one hundred doors that only the (male) *Capa Inca* can open, in a space where they are educated only by their governesses (*Mamas*) in how to be a good woman and a good wife. In the Temple, where male teachers are not allowed, actions and emotions are more powerful than words.<sup>100</sup> Upon seeing Aza for the first time Zilia is so moved, in fact, that she loses the ability to speak. Her emotional education allows her to understand events in a way that Aza, who has been educated in a traditional, masculine manner, cannot. The Prince, who relies upon a language based on the absolute truth of words, is fooled by the Spaniards who invade Peru. Zilia, on the other hand, is accustomed to a language that goes beyond written and spoken signs, which allows her to understand the gravity of the situation. Warning Aza of the error in relying on spoken language alone, Zilia writes, “Ta bonté te séduit; tu crois sincères les promesses que ces barbares te font faire par leur interprète, parce que tes paroles sont inviolables; mais moi qui n’entends pas leur langage, moi qu’ils ne trouvent pas digne d’être trompée, je vois leurs actions” (24). Her gender saves her in numerous ways: first, because she is a woman, the Spaniards assume her to be ignorant and deem her unworthy of communication, and second, her feminine education in the temple has rendered her capable of reading the body and understanding danger.

The first rupture in Zilia’s purely sensorial education comes while she is still in the female space of the Temple when Aza insists upon her education by the wise Incan philosophers:

Si tu étais un homme ordinaire, je serais restée dans l'ignorance à laquelle mon sexe est condamné; mais ton âme, supérieure aux coutumes, ne les a regardées que comme des abus; tu en as franchi les barrières pour m'élever jusqu'à toi. Tu as voulu que nos divins *Amautas* ornassent mon entendement de leurs sublimes connaissances (23).

Aza, the sun prince who brought the rays of light into the Temple of the Sun, lights the fire within Zilia that cannot be extinguished when she finally sees the light of day. Her double education (the reasoned education of the male *Amautas* and the sentimental education of the female *Mamas*) has prepared her to understand the events of the world in a way that no single man or woman can. Now that she possesses the knowledge of the ancients her expectations of marriage and family necessarily change, as she begins to understand the value of education and to feel a duty to share such knowledge with her people. By making Zilia his equal rather than his subject, Aza reinforces the more egalitarian qualities of the brother-sister relationship. According to the traditions, she is to fill the role that the moon plays to the sun, “de femme et de sœur [...] la mère de toutes choses” (11); but as we also learn in the introduction, it is feared that the moon will bring destruction to the world. It is by breaking the tradition and by endowing Zilia with the knowledge of the sun that she is transformed, no longer capable of playing moon to Aza's sun she has become his *semblable* and created an impossible equation: sun + sun can only equal fiery destruction.

Zilia's journey may be punctuated with various ruptures (the interruption of marriage, her removal from her homeland, etc.), but as we see time and time again, she understands it as her duty to rectify such disparities – to patch up the gaps – by rearticulating rupture as a positive moment, a time for construction. She does not simply

abandon one type of education (emotional) for another (intellectual); instead, she harnesses the power of both types of instruction to create a more complete education. Her wholeness is doubled in her role as simultaneously sun and moon. The rays of the sun symbolize the knowledge that gives life, but the light of the moon is the necessary force that maintains the cycle of life. It is in this dual role that Zilia proposes to learn, to instruct, and to *maintain* a constant and consistent production of knowledge.

Because she constructs her identity around the acquisition and reproduction of knowledge, it is no wonder that Zilia is heralded as a source of knowledge on so many things by the philosophers of eighteenth-century France. For example, Graffigny's heroine is named and cited in five articles in the *Encyclopédie* ("Devoir," "Écriture," "Larme," "Quipos," and "Religieuse" – each authored by Jaucourt). Jaucourt's crediting of Zilia, the fictional heroine, rather than Graffigny, the novel's author, with the knowledge produced in the *Lettres* can be understood, as Lorraine Piroux posits, as a move to present his thoughts as more natural. Piroux elaborates, "when a man of letters in eighteenth-century France appeared to draw his wisdom from a 'noble savage,' there was always reason to suspect that some deep, natural truth was being unveiled."<sup>101</sup> Yet, the *philosophe*'s citation of the Peruvian woman goes beyond the use of a narrative trope (akin to the one Graffigny uses in the novel); we must also read his citation of the fictional female as a displacement of female knowledge. To acknowledge a female author would be to admit the possibility for an enlightened *female* subject. By citing Zilia, Jaucourt performs a double displacement. First, he places the potential for an enlightened woman outside of Europe, in the exotic, foreign woman; and as if Peru was not far

enough away from France's border, he next relegates the potential for female knowledge – and therefore female power – to the realm of fiction.

However, seemingly in anticipation of a reception that would deny female enlightenment in any form, Graffigny's protagonist creates her own encyclopedia, explaining both Peruvian and French customs in an encyclopedic fashion. While, as we previously noted, temporal markers in this novel may be missing, subject headings abound. In the early letters, Zilia's entries focus mainly on the new technology she encounters such as "boat," "telescope," or "mirror." But later letters investigate broader philosophical categories such as "woman," "education," and "friendship." In this encyclopedia, the role of women is crucial to the development and the maintenance of the family and the nation. In fact, in the thirty-fourth letter (added for the second edition) we see the first direct comparison between family life in Peru and France. "On sait au Pérou, mon cher Aza," writes Zilia, "que pour préparer les humains à la pratique des vertus, il faut leur inspirer dès l'enfance un courage et une certaine fermeté d'âme qui leur forment un caractère décidé; on l'ignore en France" (138). She goes on in this letter to chastise the French for deceiving their children, for discouraging them from learning, and for laughing "inhumainement" when the children make a mistake. The rest of the letter reads like a series of encyclopedic entries on topics ranging from religion to education to empathy, with each topic explained by and for women. In fact, on the one occasion in which she mentions men in the letter, she states that she has no idea what a young boy's education consists of because, as she puts it, "je ne m'en suis pas informée." Her position in this letter could not be clearer: the ills of French society can all be traced to a cultural,

social, and political inequality between men and women. By inventing the enlightened, female subject she provides a new blueprint for a surprisingly different family.

Creating a family in which the woman plays an active role necessitates a recasting of masculine roles as well. Through the work of writing, the heroine begins to *rewrite* Aza. After the near-death experience of the third letter, Zilia remarks that it is Aza, “lumière de [s]es jours,” who brings her back to life. At this moment, Aza represents passion and desire; remembering the fire that he first lit within her, Zilia channels that same power to come back from the (nearly) dead. Yet, already she begins to understand the delicate relationship between the existence of her lover and writing. Explaining that writing seems to render her thoughts real, Zilia likens thinking to writing. In this moment when content becomes fused with form, there can no longer be a difference between the memory (or imprint) of a person and the person himself. His absence becomes the presence of writing, and while she wails at the fact that he is not physically there, she avows, “il n’y a pas un de mes moments qui ne t’appartienne” (36). Aza’s physical absence allows his memory to be ever present, and by the sixth letter the heroine transforms him into nature herself. After she hears the voice of Aza, imploring her to return to life after a second near-death experience, she realizes that she is mistaken, “ce n’est pas toi qui m’ordonnes de vivre, c’est la timide nature qui, en frémissant d’horreur, emprunte ta voix plus puissante que la sienne pour retarder une fin toujours redoutable pour elle” (41). The transformation of the masculine lover into feminine nature signals a tremendous transformation within the protagonist. While the third letter portrays an ailing woman brought back to life by the memory of passionate love, the sixth letter shows a

woman taking charge of her own life, quite literally, with a suicide attempt.<sup>102</sup> This time it is no memory of a man that returns her to reason, but a reflection of her lover, and by extension of herself, in the female space of nature.

Just after this suicide attempt Zilia reflects for the first time on the importance of her own body. It is precisely at the moment her French captors save her from death that she realizes the physical limits of her body, noting that it seems to take up too much space. The female body here is not simply imprisoned in this small room on a ship but is itself a prison – there is no place in the world she knows for the female body to exist comfortably except in letters.<sup>103</sup> A woman of letters is only free as a woman *in* letters. Within the space of the letters, Zilia can negotiate a symbolic medium that provides her with a material mediation to existence. Only once the physical body is translated into the body of letters can she begin to construct a world where the female body will occupy just the right amount of space.

Prior to this understanding of her body as mediated by writing, Zilia sees herself as nothing more than the extension of Aza. Even her proper name appears to be born of his, beginning with a Z and ending with an A. In her early moments of despair she remarks, “on cesse de vivre pour soi; on veut savoir comment on vivra dans ce qu’on aime” (32). The trope of living and feeling ‘in’ a loved one is a fairly frequent occurrence in the sentimental fiction of the day. We have seen it before in *Manon Lescaut* when a love-struck Des Grieux suffers not with or for but “dans Manon.” The desire to blend two souls so perfectly that they act and feel as one necessitates the disappearance of the other; the two must be the same in order to face the worldly forces that oppose their happiness.

However, Graffigny subverts the expectation that the exotic, female other must be the one to disappear, absorbed into the male consciousness. Zilia *wants* to learn to live in another but she does not succeed. Instead, she brings the male other to life within her own body as the Aza she creates with the *quipos* becomes her appendage. It is perhaps this double consciousness that leads her to feel that her body is too big. It becomes such a difficult task to sustain the two, in fact, that she complains of the physical and emotional pain:

Je ne vis plus en moi ni pour moi; chaque instant où je respire est un sacrifice que je fais à ton amour, et de jour en jour il devient plus pénible; si le temps apporte quelque soulagement à la violence du mal qui me dévore, il redouble les souffrances de mon esprit. Loin d'éclaircir mon sort, il semble le rendre encore plus obscur [...] L'impossibilité de me faire entendre répand encore jusque sur mes organes un tourment non moins insupportable que des douleurs qui auraient une réalité plus apparente. Que cette situation est cruelle!  
(33-34)

Incapable of speaking French, and lacking an Incan companion, Zilia has no one but the Aza of her memory in whom she can confide her emotions. Although the “violent” pain she feels in his absence has abated slightly, the presence of his memory becomes so unbearable to her that she needs a doctor to cure her pain. The French doctor examines her, taking her pulse and trying to read her body in order to offer a cure, but again Zilia shows her mastery of reading the human body as she finds her own cure. Aza’s existence *in* her renders her schizophrenic, and the only method of regaining her sanity is by severing his memory from her own by translating (and exiling) him from her body into the *quipos*.



In translating the memory of her lover into the physical form of writing, the heroine cannot help but translate her own experience as well. After the aforementioned suicide attempt on the French vessel, which results in a turn in her portrayal of Aza toward a (feminine) Nature, the content of her letters changes dramatically. Rather than reflecting on past times or violent desire, she writes in a more reasoned and scientific register, conveying instead the present moment.<sup>104</sup> More than the memory of Aza, it is the memory of a passion for learning that brings Zilia back to life; she loves nature and wants to learn about everything in it. Once she understands the importance of her body and begins to retake possession of it, she can begin to live not in the past (with Aza's memory) nor in the future (awaiting the moment of Aza's return), but for a brief time she can exist in the present.

How does a unique heroine's individual story become a collective history for an entire people? Zilia creates the possibility for a new female collective history as she shares the story of her own subjective formation with all those who care to read it – male and female. While such authors as Montesquieu in *Les Lettres persanes* or Voltaire in *L'Ingénu* present an exotic, ingenuous male stranger who comes to Europe, anxious to critique society from a position much “closer to nature” than that of the *homme policé*, Graffigny's heroine is not portrayed as a primitive at all. She is an educated woman with a desire to observe and learn rather than judge (one can almost hear Louis-Sébastien Mercier's cry from the future regarding his description of Parisian life, “Je n'ai voulu que peindre et non juger”).<sup>105</sup> This is not to say that Zilia never critiques French society;

however, she reserves her judgment only for that which she understands as particularly lacking in it, that is, the status, treatment, and education of women.

Upon her arrival in France, Zilia knows (and understands) three French words: *Déterville*, *vaisseau*, and *France*. Nancy K. Miller points out that what is missing from the heroine's French vocabulary is a verb, explaining that Zilia's "first words articulate a primitive form of female plot: the story of a being brought to destination" (143). Until this point the heroine has no French verb with which to describe her motion and emotion, no control over her destiny – her life and her journey are determined by fate alone. Although she is transferred from one prison to the next, fate appears to be (at least somewhat) on her side. She arrives on European soil unharmed and having avoided the ravishing experienced by her fellow virgins in the Temple; she is saved from the "savage" Spaniards by the French whom she judges less harsh than her first captors; and finally, she is taken in by a noble man, an encounter which allows her to retain the vestiges of a noble existence even in France.

Before arriving in France, it is Zilia's fate to be handed from one male to the next. Had she been a common woman, this type of circulation among men would likely have continued to be her fate. In this instance, her difference saves her, a difference that can be read in her body. Due to the popularity in eighteenth-century France of works on physiognomy, it is no wonder that one would understand beauty as a mark of nobility.<sup>106</sup> Though she cannot communicate with her French captors with words, they set out at once trying to read her body. The doctor touches her wrists and face to check for signs of illness, while *Déterville* touches her hands in search of romance. What both men

inevitably find is something noble. That which sets her apart from her Peruvian brothers and sisters translates in French via her body. The body that was once a prison eventually becomes the key to her freedom.

It is around the time of her capture by the French that Zilia begins to understand the limits and the limitations of the female body. She has only just begun to realize that her body occupies space when she sets foot on French soil and is confronted for the first time with the image of her body: “j’ai vu dans l’enfoncement une jeune personne habillée comme une Vierge du Soleil; j’ai couru à elle les bras ouverts” (49-50). Mistaking her reflection for another Peruvian woman, she sheds tears of joy as she rushes to embrace her, only to be disappointed by the glass that separates the two. Scholars have recognized in this scene a repetition of the trope of an *ingénue* encountering Western technology.<sup>107</sup> However, this scene goes beyond simple recognition of one’s image reflected in the glass. Even after Zilia understands the function of the mirror, she sits in front of it and has a conversation with her reflection, “je le touchais, je lui parlais, et je le voyais en même temps fort près et fort loin de moi” (50). Although Zilia appears to recognize the female body as “same” (and different from the male), the masculine pronoun “le” of this scene demonstrates her confusion regarding gendered bodies. She uses a wide variety of words to describe that which she sees before her (*cette ombre, une figure humaine, celle qui occupait toute mon attention*), but none of these terms are masculine. So what is the “le” she is touching, talking to, and observing? We can imagine that she is referring to the masculine, yet unnamed, “reflet,” but perhaps this ambiguous pronoun represents the protagonist’s hesitation to accept her gender. Moments later, reinforcing her femininity,

we see the entrance of the first woman Zilia encounters in France, her lady's maid (*une China*).<sup>108</sup> Upon seeing the servant, Zilia is relieved once again to be in the presence of other women. From her capture in Peru to her arrival in France, to be a woman amongst Europeans has meant being alone; in order for her to feel comfortable in her skin at this point, she needs to know that she is part of the collective, she must be one of many women. In this moment, when Zilia recognizes the potentiality of both the individual and the collective female body, she finally begins to gain her independence – she repossesses her body.

### **The Genesis of a Female Creation Story**

Until the moment when she realizes the importance of the female body, Zilia appears comfortable with an existence solely within her letters. But once she accepts the physicality of her body, she begins to yearn for a physical space in which she can exist independently. She expresses a female desire that will not be expressed politically until more than a century later. Like Virginia Woolf, Zilia desires a room of her own. While the reader of the *Lettres* does not learn of any Peruvian creation stories, as Graffigny recounts Zilia's coming to female subjectivity through writing she rescripts the Biblical creation narrative. Following Zilia back to that prelapsarian moment (before she is taken away from her native land), Graffigny rewrites the story of a coming-to-being from a female perspective. Eve was made from Adam's rib, but Aza springs forth from Zilia's hand. With the tying of a knot and the stroke of a pen, the heroine undertakes the reinvention of the family in more egalitarian terms.

As we have previously stated, the timing of events in the *Lettres* is never fortuitous. On the day she is to marry Aza, precisely the day she has completed her education and has partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, she is banished forever from her Edenic village in Peru. However, in this story it is Aza who offers the knowledge to Zilia. The female of this story is assigned her lot by the male. The time in the boat represents the beginning of a new life in which Zilia will become the creator of her own destiny, and it is at precisely this moment that she begins to write her story, inventing a new utopian space by recording her desires first for Aza, then for equality for all.

From the first pages of the novel, writing has been the activity that renders Zilia a free woman. She has translated her soul first into the *quipos* then into her letters in French, becoming a bit freer each time she writes. Accordingly, it must be an act of writing that delivers to her ultimate freedom. When Céline insists that Zilia sign a document agreeing to play matron to a beautiful country house for the day, Zilia goes along with this ruse: “Je n’eus pas plus tôt prononcé ces paroles, que je vis entrer un homme vêtu de noir, qui tenait une écritoire et du papier déjà écrit; il me le présenta, et j’y plaçai mon nom où l’on voulut” (147). Throughout the day, which she describes as nothing short of magical, she greets villagers and entertains as any good hostess would. It is only later in the day, when she is presented with a golden key, that she finally understands what has happened – she has become a property owner. By trading the golden chair of the *Capa Inca* recovered from the ship, Déterville has secured the house with gold that rightfully belonged to Zilia and has filled it with a mix of French and

Peruvian goods. Although Zilia does not marry, she does find a way to marry her Peruvian identity with her French surroundings. The woman who in the first letter possessed nothing but some colorful cords now owns a place where she can exercise the utopian praxis set forth in her letters in a space that is all her own.

The desire to author a new, utopian space is no novel concept in the eighteenth century. Men and women had been writing pseudo fantasy fiction for centuries, many of these works expressing a desire that the world be somehow other than it is.<sup>109</sup> Yet, in most of early utopian stories, the role of the woman remains fairly flat. As Carmelina Imbroscio explains, most of the utopian fiction of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France sees the woman either accepting her “natural” role as faithful matriarch, supporting the husband and instructing the children, or as denying her sex altogether, rejecting her femininity to play the masculine role.<sup>110</sup> Indeed if we look to Rousseau’s Clarens, the utopian space in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, we see family in harmony, where the wife respects her husband, raises her children to be wise and virtuous adults, and treats her servants fairly. This type of utopian formulation (where utopia is an isolated place with social systems that promote equality) slips easily into dystopia, as life appears to become repetitive and progress impossible. Zilia’s utopia, on the other hand, lies not in the cessation of time within a secluded space, but in praxis. The “room of her own” in the country house constitutes a space (*un espace*, or Certeau’s *lieu pratiqué*) where she is free to continue her work toward a female utopia, where all women become active subjects rather than subjects of men. We cannot see the result of her plan (neither in Peru nor in France), because her utopia is never complete. It is always a work-in-progress – a

structure that is replicated at the level of the narrative of the novel as well. As we see in the last letters, her retreat to her country home only signifies a return to the beginning – yet even this beginning is now different. Because of the alterations to the *quipos* Aza would have to have made to the first letter (the only one he responds to) we know that the original composition of the first letter is lost, existing only in translation into French through Zilia’s memory.

One of the central doctrines of Zilia’s utopian praxis is complete gender equality. However, to be equal one must also be independent. For the majority of the novel, Zilia remains dependent upon men. First she depends upon Aza, then Déterville, both of whom provide her with everything she needs – a place to stay, clothing, food, and most important, an education. In order to take full control of her own body and spirit, Zilia, like Zola’s poor Gervaise of a century later whose greatest desire is “un trou un peu propre pour dormir,” must possess a place of her own where she can live independently and continue to learn. Since she was taken away from her home just before she was to marry Aza, it makes sense within the frame of logic of this novel that she must return to a home just prior to their reunion.

In the letter just prior to the scene in which Zilia receives the key to her new home, the protagonist discusses love in terms of property ownership:

Si la possession d’un meuble, d’un bijou, d’une terre, est un des sentiments les plus agréables que nous éprouvions, quel doit être celui qui nous assure la possession d’un cœur, d’une âme, d’un être libre, indépendant, et qui se donne volontairement en échange du plaisir de posséder en nous les mêmes avantages! (145)

The possession of objects cannot rival the intense feelings when one owns another individual's heart, but as she points out the loved one must be free and independent. They must be able to enter into this possession willingly and aware of the implications of such a union. Yet it is just after she gains a tremendous amount of freedom, when she becomes a property owner, that she loses the love of her life forever: "Aza infidèle! Que ces funestes mots ont du pouvoir sur mon âme" (159). She learns that Catholic laws prohibit the marital union of brother and sister. The shared bloodline that will unite them forever as siblings is exactly the bond that will keep them apart.

Although she sheds many tears and talks of a general lethargy for a period after Aza's departure, Zilia seems to recover from this separation with relative ease. While previous separations from Aza left her on the brink of death, this time she has a safety net in the family that she has created in France. She now has a home and two close friends to look after her. In fact, she seems almost relieved to be free of the impending return of Aza. Now that she knows he will never return, she is free to imagine a future that does not have to end in marriage. "Si le souvenir d'Aza se présente à mon esprit," she writes, "c'est sous le même aspect où je le voyais alors. Je crois y attendre son arrivée. Je me prête à cette illusion autant qu'elle m'est agréable; si elle me quitte, je prends des livres" (164). She reflects on the past in order to imagine a future, but she is no longer a slave to the future. Now that she is free to create her own future, she can also enjoy the present by reading and writing. With this freedom, she is able to imagine a family that does not adhere to patriarchal traditions. She will be no one's wife, and she will be no one's mother, but she will always be a sister. By choosing the reasonable love of friendship



[*agape*], which is closely aligned for Zilia with familial love [*storge*], over passionate love [*eros*], Zilia successfully reinvents eighteenth-century woman who is governed in this story by intellect rather than passion. In so doing she happily takes up the role of sister and she creates a novel type of family with her new, French brother and sister at her side.

### **Conclusion: The Regime of the Sister**

Throughout much of the novel Zilia remains fascinated with French society. She describes her first ride in a carriage with the enthusiasm of a child; she is excited by her “discovery” of scientific objects (the telescope, the mirror, etc.); and when she finally moves into her country home she lives the comfortable life of a *petite aristocrate*. The only harsh critiques she offers center on the treatment, education, and behavior of French women. Her desire to disrupt the status quo of the woman’s place in polite, European society was too much for her eighteenth-century readers to handle. Some critics of the novel went so far as to publish conclusions of or continuations to the letters (some even falsely attributed to Graffigny herself), most ending with the heroine’s marriage either to Aza or to Déterville. In one, a 1748 *Suite des lettres d’une Péruvienne* published anonymously but in which the narrator claims it to have been written by the same author as the original *Lettres*, the “avertissement” sees the author apologizing for the disappointing ending:

Les défauts de stile, la simplicité ingénue, & le tendre sentiment qui animoit Zilia, & dictoit seul tout ce qu’elle écrivoit la première année de ses disgraces: tout cela me paroissoit trop opposé aux préjugés de notre nation pour croire qu’elle pût s’en amuser [...]

La Princesse Royale de Cusko, ne cherche plus une Péruvienne  
derrière une glace, & sa raison est trop éclairée pour refuser son  
bras à un médecin.<sup>111</sup>

Under patriarchy, much like later under the regime of the brother, the woman's place was in the home as wife and mother – an unmarried sister was not only unacceptable, but it was also dangerous. By refusing to marry, the single sister dismantles and disrupts the reproduction of the traditional family.

While the *Lettres* certainly depict the story of the protagonist's coming-to-writing, they also move beyond this notion to show one woman's coming-to-*using*-writing. Zilia makes a personal decision to refuse marriage and embrace friendship, but not only does she record that decision, she also takes the opportunity to educate other women, and furthermore to call for a revolution of women. While the women of the harem in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* begin to revolt against Usbek, Zilia takes this revolt one step further, calling for a revolution against the injustices that women suffer at the hands of all men. "En effet, mon cher Aza," she writes, "comment ne seraient-elles [les femmes] pas révoltées contre l'injustice des lois qui tolèrent l'impunité des hommes, poussée au meme excès que leur autorité?" (143). While in the first edition of the novel (1747), Zilia suggests that corporal punishment for men might make them rethink their treatment of women, with this addition in the revised version (1752), she actually encourages woman to revolt against the injustice of her position. Serving as a prime example of individual female agency, the heroine encourages other women to break free of their self-imposed ignorance, to become the enlightened Kantian subject *avant la lettre*, to dare not only to know, but also to act publicly. More than one hundred years

before the Third Republic would adopt “liberté, égalité, fraternité” as France’s national motto, Zilia had already proposed her own tripartite motto, “*je suis, je vis, j’existe.*”

These three exclamatory statements, written to Détéville in the inaugural stages of her independence, can also be read as an imperative. Her use of the first-person singular serves as a unifying pronoun, encouraging each individual to join in a state of being in which the pleasure of existence is a happy ending in and of itself. Happiness, for the heroine, can be obtained only when one exists freely. What she proposes then moves beyond social and political notions of “fraternity,” which appear to promote democracy and equality.<sup>112</sup> Zilia wishes to break free from patriarchy and to avoid the dominance of the brother as paternal power is passed on to the masculine children. Rather than a Regime of the Brother like the one that we see evolving in *Manon Lescaut*, *Lettres d’une Péruvienne* demonstrates the possibility for a Regime of the Sister.

In the last chapter, we analyzed the emergence of what Juliet Flower MacCannell calls “Regime of the Brother.” MacCannell theorizes that during the period of the Enlightenment, patriarchy begins to weaken, giving rise of the more pernicious brother who acts as the father without having the same power. While the rhetoric of fraternity proposes an ideological equality for all, as MacCannell points out, there is no room for the sister.<sup>113</sup> The regime of the brother excludes not only sorority, but also any type of fraternity that would include the sister. She explains, “[n]egating the relation to the past is not the only feature of the Regime of the Brother. It must also deny the sister” (24). While this may have been the outcome of the fall of Oedipus, we can see subtle resistance to a brotherly take-over in several early modern female-authored texts.

Madame de Lafayette's heroine the Princesse de Clèves, for example, chooses a solitary life over entry into a male-dominated system of alliances. Drawing on Lafayette's solitary protagonist as allegory for feminine power, Graffigny amplifies the link between female solitude and independence in the *Lettres*, going beyond a simple rejection of masculine hegemony to offer an alternative. Through her heroine's letters, she invents a new and powerful category of woman within the family and lays the groundwork for the feminist literature to follow.<sup>114</sup>

Zilia's creation of the independent female is possible because of this figure's complete otherness. At the level of form and content, this novel remains unclassifiable. At the formal level, the novel does not reproduce cultural norms and it also resists generic categorization. As a love story supplemented with philosophical observations and historical footnotes, this novel is not wholly sentimental, nor anthropological, nor philosophical. Though the heroine is transported from one country to another, this novel is not a travel narrative. The novel's heroine neither marries nor dies, and what we are left with is neither tragedy nor comedy. Within the narrative, Zilia remains so inextricably "in-between" that one would assume that she lives in a void – and in a sense, she does. In the end, she is neither wholly French nor Peruvian; she is coded neither as masculine nor as feminine; she lives neither entirely in the past, nor the present, nor the future but instead weaves all three temporalities together seamlessly. Within this non-space, however, Zilia escapes the traditional confines (family, nation, gender) that serve to delimit and to define one's identity. Within her own space she disentangles the various threads that serve to construct identity, and instead creates the possibility for a new,

female identity that does not anchor her in any masculine system. In her removed space, Graffigny's heroine invents the enlightened sister.

In the introduction to this chapter, we posed the question, "Comment peut-on être Péruvienne?" While one of Montesquieu's protagonists of the *Les Lettres persanes*, Rica, is constantly asked by the French to explain what it is like to be Persian, Graffigny's heroine is never even given the opportunity to offer a direct response. Because she is a woman who initially does not speak the language, she is forced to live on the boundaries of French society. Even when she does learn to speak and write French, Zilia, as Peruvian, as woman, even as princess, remains throughout so distinctly other that she can never completely integrate into French society, nor does she desire an integration into what she understands as a society where women are treated unfairly. Zilia does not attempt to erase her past in order to build a new identity, instead she flourishes in the ruptures between nations, genders, languages, space and time where she weaves together a completely distinct female identity – one that could serve as a pattern for other women to follow.

While Graffigny's heroine opens up the space for an enlightened sister, another female figure that is notably absent from this story is that of the mother. In this novel, the path to female subjectivity is a highly individual one. Zilia finds a repetition of her gender in her French sister Céline, but she finds opposition in the character of Céline and Déterville's mother. In fact, as we have noted in the first two chapters, the figure of the mother is one that is often missing or under-defined in the domestic fiction of the first half of the century. In the next chapter, we will examine what happens when the mother-

daughter relationship is privileged above all other relationships – romantic and familial in Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne*.

## Chapter Three

### Familial Transvestisms:

### Trying on Kinship in Pierre de Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne*



Fig. 3.1: *Jeune Orpheline au cimetière*, 1824  
Eugène Delacroix

*Dans le monde, on est ce qu'on peut, et non pas ce qu'on veut.*  
- Pierre de Marivaux, *La Vie de Marianne*

*Life must not be a novel that is given to us, but one that is made by us.*  
- Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*

#### **Introduction: The Family Romance Unleashed**

In act I scene ii of Pierre de Marivaux's *Le Prince travesti*, Hortense describes her ideal mate to the princess of Barcelona. "Jeune, aimable, vaillant, généreux et sage, Madame, avec cela, fût-il né dans une chaumière, sa naissance est royale, et voilà mon Prince; je vous défie d'en trouver un meilleur" (*Prince travesti* 7). In this, as in many of Marivaux's plays, the playwright holds the spectators in suspense until the final scene

when they will learn that the man who has acted noble and chivalrous throughout was in fact a prince in disguise. Providence plays an important role, leaving every individual of every rank to end up with precisely the mate for whom he or she was always destined. The heart naturally chooses a mate who will be unfailingly of the proper station (noble, servant, etc.) because in the Marivaudian theatrical world, *la noblesse oblige*. Put differently, nobility cannot help but to betray its own existence and will always reveal any attempt at a social transvestism.<sup>115</sup> In Marivaux's novel, *La Vie de Marianne*, on the other hand, the reader will remain forever in suspense as to the title character's original station in life. Stage directions and movements of characters on stage are replaced on the page with exposition and long philosophical asides. Whereas Marivaux-playwright demonstrates a certain panache for collapsing the split between spirit and appearance, Marivaux-novelist plays with this dualism in much subtler ways. Marianne may or may not be noble at birth but she becomes noble by the end of her life as is evidenced when she signs her autobiography as "La Comtesse de \*\*\*." In *Marianne*, the author forgoes the abrupt unveiling of a hidden noble birthright in order to privilege the process of becoming noble.

The process of becoming noble unfolds in two ways. First, the protagonist-narrator assumes a noble persona, adopting a *noblesse de l'esprit* that she repeatedly demonstrates throughout the novel with actions such as returning the clothes given to her under false pretenses or by showing gratitude to Mme de Miran.<sup>116</sup> The performative nature of her actions eventually produces the noble status she believes she was born into. Second, the heroine reenacts and alters the family romance as she engages with those



around her, experimenting with, and often confusing, various familial roles. Exploring possibilities for intimate relationships, Marianne adopts various father, mother, and sibling figures, carefully choosing those that best suit her needs and desires. Distinct from the child of Freud's family romance, Marianne, as an orphan, has no mother or father to replace. The ties that would bring her back begrudgingly to her 'natural' parents are therefore inexistent. Because Marianne is an orphan who is *believed* to be noble, she exists in a position between social stations where she is singularly capable of trying on different models of family. Nancy K. Miller describes her movement in the novel as an ascent akin to a *Bildung*. However, instead of relying on purely romantic or economic relationships, Marivaux's heroine relies on the charity associated with family-like relationships for her ascent. She uses her body as a means to attract not only lovers, but also mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers.<sup>117</sup>

In the chapter one, we explored the transformation of masculine kinship relations, which result in a new model for the father (the *nouveau père*); this father cares not only for the well-being of the child as bearer of the family name, but also for the child's overall happiness. In this chapter, we will analyze the emergence of a new mother. Decades before Rousseau penned *Émile*, in which he prescribed a new role for mothers as nurturers in addition to child-bearers, Marivaux proposed his version of just such a caring mother.<sup>118</sup> The Marivaudian mother, even when unrelated by blood, asserts herself as a role model for her daughter and shows a distinct preference for female-female relationships within the family. She cares for the physical, mental, and social well-being of her daughter and, much like Rousseau's Sophie, she relishes this role. That the

protagonist's tale should end with her solitary return to a convent suggests that motherhood, much like fatherhood, is limited in its term. The father's power ends with the transfer of power via the family name. The mother, on the other hand, would appear to have no name to give, a point highlighted in this novel by the lack of blood relation between mother and daughter. A second goal of this chapter will be, therefore, to analyze where and how power is transferred from mother to daughter in order to recuperate the productive power of family – even when kinship bonds appear to fail – in Marivaux's novel about the coming of age of a young, female orphan.

Because *La Vie de Marianne* is a lengthy novel with a complex story, it will be useful to provide a brief summary to guide us through our analysis. The story is told through letters written by a long since dead Countess, who, at some point in the late seventeenth century, wrote the letters to her friend explaining the story of her life. The letter writer, in her fifties by the time she takes up the quill, begins by recounting the mysterious origins of her early childhood. Found in the wreckage of a deadly carriage robbery, the baby, whose parents may be an aristocratic foreign couple or a middle-aged servant woman, is raised by a country vicar and his sister in their parish in Bordeaux. At the age of fifteen, Marianne accompanies her adoptive mother to Paris, where the latter dies unexpectedly upon hearing the news of her brother's death. An orphan once more, Marianne must learn to navigate the busy city of Paris with nothing more than a small amount of money and the clothes on her back. She meets a gentleman, M. de Climal, who provides her with money, clothes, and shelter at the atelier of Mme Dutour (a fabric seller who serves as a sort of foster mother to Marianne) until she realizes that his intentions are

less than admirable. In the meantime, she falls in love with his nephew, Valville, after a nasty spill in front of the latter's carriage. Once she breaks free from her benefactor, Climal, she seeks shelter at a convent where she meets Mme de Miran, who she will later learn is Valville's mother. Through a series of adventures, Miran consents to the marriage of Marianne and Valville in spite of the young orphan's unknown origins; Climal dies leaving Marianne an inheritance that would allow her to marry Valville without worry; Valville falls in love with another woman (Mlle Varthon); and Marianne considers a life as a sister in the convent. Just before she passes the narrative to her fellow sister, Mlle de Tervire, an older gentleman arrives at the convent, proposing marriage to Marianne. While we know, based on the title of the memoirs, that the narrator will eventually marry, her narrative remains unfinished, and we are left wondering how the rest of her life unfolds.

Such a chaotic narrative and wide-ranging cast of characters presents us with the potential for a family that is less than traditional. From adoptive parents, to father-figures who want to be lovers, to lovers-turned-brothers – notions of patriarchy fall apart in this novel, leaving us to question what remains. In the previous two chapters, we focused on a recalculation of kinship relations from within the (more or less) patriarchal family structure, where the protagonists struggle against assumption into a family in which the husband/father reigns supreme. In this chapter, the focus shifts away from a reorganization or redefinition of existing kinship structures to an investigation into the forms and the formation of intimate communities, thereby intensifying the study on the potentiality of kinship-like networks *tout court*. This novel emphasizes the negative

tendencies of the father-daughter relationship, portraying male figures alternately as impotent and evil. By de-emphasizing the importance of male-female relationships, this novel favors the exploration of female-female relationships, highlighting the mother-daughter dynamic in particular, and in the process it demonstrates the non-fixity of the family unit. The affectionate link that forms between Marianne and Mme de Miran may imitate the mother-daughter bond, but unlike the maternal role, which is predicated upon familial duty, these two women unite based on a mutual love, respect, and equality.<sup>119</sup>

### **An Origin Story**

The story of Marianne's life begins like this:

Pendant que je criais sous le corps de cette femme morte qui était la plus jeune, cinq ou six officiers qui courraient la poste passèrent, et voyant quelques personnes étendues mortes auprès du carrosse qui ne bougeait, entendant un enfant qui criait dedans; s'arrêtèrent à ce terrible spectacle, ou par la curiosité qu'on a souvent pour des choses qui ont une certaine horreur, ou pour voir ce que c'était que cet enfant qui criait, et pour lui donner du secours [...] Ils repoussèrent cette dame, et toute sanglante me retirèrent de dessous elle (*Marianne* 52).

This passage, a scene of death, resembles a birth scene in its chaotic nature. The crying baby desperately tries to escape the body of the young woman who is offered in this scene as a mother-figure if not a biological mother. Covered in blood, this child is delivered into her new world both literally (as she arrives in Bordeaux from a foreign land) and figuratively (as she must begin life without any parents) when she is pulled from the young woman's body. The child is promptly wrapped in a coat and carried to

the nearest village where she is adopted by the vicar and his sister. For all intents and purposes, this is the day of Marianne's birth.

The language that the narrator uses to describe the scene is, in fact, merely the reproduction of a story told to her later in life. The insertion of phrases tacked on anachronistically, as details seemingly forgotten, suggests an almost mechanical retelling of the story. Indeed, within the novel she retells her story at least three times. Ironically, the story that she knows so little about, that she tries to "skip over" to get to the more interesting portions of her life, is exactly the story that elicits the most sympathy and that thus serves as her most prized possession. Pierre Saint-Amand notes that the protagonist's incessant retelling of the story adds to the mystery of her persona each time, to the point that Marianne becomes an enigma. "Le nom de Marianne," he writes, "est prononcé comme s'il n'avait aucun référent, ou plutôt, il lui est refusé le statut de 'nom propre'" (Saint-Amand 16). However, in this vacant reproduction, Marianne brands herself, trading her mysterious name in order to receive everything she needs.

Once she realizes (from the temporally distanced perspective – as a young adult) that her story elicits charity, she learns how to use her story, returning to this moment often in her conversations with others. As long as Marianne continues to tell her story, she escapes the fate of the orphan, that is, she avoids becoming a nobody. Much like Des Grieux, who tells his story to the *homme de qualité* in exchange for the chance to see Manon, Marianne realizes that in exchange for her story, she can receive notoriety and goods, both of which are essential to existence in polite society. Within the economy of her narrative, her words become cultural capital that allows her to move between various

milieus that would otherwise remain closed to an orphan. At the same time that this story serves the base purpose of commodity exchange, it also has the performative quality of rendering the protagonist noble. Marianne thus transforms the ignoble act of bartering into the production of a noble self. Having been told the story of her noble origins by her adoptive mother, she is convinced that she is noble. As such, she conducts herself according to certain aristocratic codes, thus producing a noble persona. This persona, when paired with her ingenuous speech and touching story cannot help but to invite her interlocutors to share in her belief of her nobility.

The task of becoming noble is triply difficult for Marianne because she is an orphan, a foreigner, and a woman. Each of these attributes plays a crucial role in the events of her life that unfold throughout the story. We have seen how the story could have been different in Marivaux's other unfinished novel, *Le Paysan parvenu*, which parallels Marianne's adventures, and in which a young country boy rises through the stations thanks to his sharp wit and his sexual prowess. While Marianne too possesses these traits, she puts them to very different uses. Her wit is masked behind a façade of coquettish language and her sexual prowess relies on a keen knowledge of how to stir the passions of her interlocutors while stopping short of any sexual fulfillment. Because of the methods she employs, her ascent depends less on the assistance of romantic partners, and more on the assistance of those aspiring to more familial roles. M. de Climal, while openly desirous of the young Marianne, claims that he hopes to fill the role of her dead father, and Mme de Miran begins to call Marianne "ma fille" within days of their first

encounter. In both of these cases, her noble comportment betrays, for her interlocutors, a noble origin that invites her adoption into aristocratic society.

Discerning the means of Marianne's ascent is further problematized by Marivaux's narrative choices. The story is recounted in first-person narrative in the form of letters to a friend; however, unlike most other female letter-writers of early modern novels (e.g. *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, *Lettres portugaises*), Marianne is not recounting recent events, but rather she is reflecting on the now distant past. Her story is thus mediated by time and the effects of personal memory. This analepsis has the effect of splitting Marianne into two separate homodiegetic narrators. She thus simultaneously occupies the role of what Gérard Genette calls the extra- and the intradiegetic narrator, as she is both the protagonist and another minor character.<sup>120</sup> Philip Stewart describes this split by referring to two distinct Mariannes. He names "Marianne I" the adolescent who experiences the actions of the story, and "Marianne II" the fifty-something-year-old countess who pens the story. "Marianne's discourse," Stewart writes, "is flooded with its own metadiscourse, her unending commentary not on the world, which is on an altogether different level, but on her own loquaciousness, industry, or laziness, and so forth" (18). Consequently, not only does she offer opinions and asides about her past actions and emotions, but she also teases the reader, giving clues about events from her past still to come in the chronology of her narrative.

Aurora Wolfgang analyzes in great detail the feminine voice that Marivaux constructs in this novel. She goes so far as to claim that for Marivaux, "the figure of the coquette is the very paragon of the writer" (69). The essential task of the coquette, she

explains, is to work very hard to appear as if every jest, every word, every movement is completely effortless.<sup>121</sup> The work involved in presenting a coquettish naïveté through speech is doubly intensified first when Marivaux, a man, writes in the female voice, and second when Marianne II, now an older noblewoman, takes up the pen to relay her stories as a young ingénue. Such authorial and narrative transvestism results in a style where philosophical asides serve as abrupt interruptions to Marianne's otherwise sentimental tales.

In spite of the abrupt transitions in authorial voice, the novel's style nevertheless seems calculated rather than haphazardly thrown together. She begins the first letter (which is actually the continuation of a previous conversation) with "Il est vrai que [mon] histoire en est particulière, mais je la gâterai, si je l'écris; car où voulez-vous que je prenne un style?" (50). This sentence is quickly followed by a passage in which she describes how the charms of young, feminine beauty can mask the idiocy of dull and/or frivolous conversation. This example serves as a synecdoche of the novel itself. We see how the layers of narration peel apart, like Russian dolls: Marianne I's words are less important than the manner in which she deploys them; more interesting than the story that Marianne II recounts is the way she communicates it to the reader; and finally, Marivaux's own masculine voice remains hidden behind the female voice he creates. In each case, coquettish language, that is, language hard at work to mask the work of language, replicates the coquettish behavior of the protagonist. Because she is keenly aware of the impact of her speech upon her interlocutors, she is able to manipulate language to turn it in her favor.



Similarly, Marivaux's use of contrasting registers creates a confusion within the novel that replicates the confusion regarding the protagonist's origins. Although the narrator claims to be ashamed of her philosophical asides, writing, for example, "repreons vite mon récit; je suis toute honteuse du raisonnement que je viens de faire," this will not stop her from repeating this behavior: "vous verrez que j'y prendrai goût; car dans tout il n'y a, dit-on, que le premier qui coute" (60). The narrator continues throughout the novel to interrupt the narrative with personal reflection, all while offering apologies about this matter that does not belong. For a woman who repeatedly tells her reader that she *does not* and *cannot* have a "style," she spills much ink explaining that she will continue to write in this style that is not one. This strong will in writing that Mariane II exhibits is the same strong will that we see in Marianne I who convinces those around her of her noble origins, even in the absence of any proof. To put it differently, Marianne has no need to "prendre un style" because the "style" is continuous with her own mannerisms and is, thus, something that precedes the act of writing itself.

Much like the words that serve to mask the identity of the narrator and the author, Marianne I adorns her body with clothes that create a noble costume, simultaneously performing and proving her noble status. As the events of her life lead her from a country parish, to a bourgeois woman's atelier, to a convent, and to the house of her benefactor Mme de Miran, Marianne outgrows homes almost as fast as she can change clothes. In *Marianne*, the heroine remains throughout "furieusement femme" (her own words); however, she freely and adeptly traverses the divide between social classes and she does so by means of her sensibility, her body, and notably, her dress:

je passe tout le temps de mon éducation dans mon bas âge,  
pendant lequel j'appris à faire je ne sais combien de petites  
nippes de femmes, industrie qui m'a bien servi dans la suite  
(54).

In this early passage of the novel, the distanced voice of the now aging narrator implies the importance that clothes and the fabrication of a self-image – a noble style – would have in the outcome of her life. In one scene we see her donning expensive garments and jewelry in order to attract the attention of envious on-lookers at a church, in another she puts aside her finery in favor of a plain smock in order to elicit sympathy from her 'mother' Mme de Miran. Whether performing her role as orphan, daughter, sister, or lover, Marianne understands that the first step in creating the ideal familial situation involves dressing the part.

Language provides a correlation between Marianne's construction of her outfits and the construction of her family, a fact that becomes evident through the heroine's inner-monologues. The epistolary style of this novel provides a precursor to the free indirect discourse so famously exploited in the nineteenth century by Gustave Flaubert. Both formats allow for long psychological examinations of the protagonist. Even though Marianne's descriptions of her body remain opaque (varying little from the type of description we see in *La Princesse de Clèves*), the reader always knows exactly not only what she is wearing, but also how she believes others will perceive her in each particular outfit. Within these inner monologues, we see a reversal of the *noblesse oblige* so prevalent in Marivaux's theater. In other words, rather than discovering the true, noble identity of one dressed as a servant or peasant, Marianne portrays her inner nobility by masterfully crafting her dress.

Her dress, however, is meaningless without the language that she builds around it. Marivaux's fiction often relies on a rupture between a given statement and the meaning it produces, in order to heighten the intrigue and push forward the plot. Particularly on stage, it is generally Arlequin who adds comic relief and builds tension by bandying about double entendres. In the Marivaudian universe, fusing together *énoncé* and meaning would result in a utopian language where everyone – characters and spectators alike – would be in on the joke. Marianne plays with similar notions of a fusion of sign and signifier, at times masking meaning behind a particular look, movement, or word and at other times producing a pure meaning from her actions. The protagonist makes clear this distinction when she writes, “l'objet qui m'occupa d'abord, vous allez croire que ce fut la malheureuse situation où je restais; non, cette situation *ne regardait que ma vie*, et ce qui m'occupa me regardait, *moi*” (141, emphasis added). The “situation” refers to the question of where she will go now that she has confronted M. de Climal and the latter has refused payment to Mme Dutour for Marianne's lodging. The language of the paragraphs that precede this statement, which recount a conversation between Mme Dutour and Marianne and introduce a sense of panic regarding the orphan's future, is betrayed when the orphan herself places this situation within the events of her life, but not those of her person. The rupture between the self and the events that happen to the self allows the heroine, rather than any external forces, to dictate the terms of the split. Once again we see that Marianne's self, much like her clothes, are merely linguistic constructions, the “style” constructed in the letters remaining inseparable from the noble persona constructed for Marianne II.

Whatever the adornment on her body, whether she is dressed elegantly and nobly, or simply and humbly, the language of Marianne's inner monologue remains the same. Her critical commentary of her younger self gives the impression of an informed narrator, recounting the past from a position somewhere between the self and outside of the self. The narrator admits to her flaws such as pretending to cry over the memory of her dead parents when she really cries over the loss of beautiful clothes, and yet if modern psychology has taught us anything, it is that to be truly honest and critical of oneself is impossible. The reader of Marianne, therefore, does not receive an unbiased story of a young girl who falls in love and subsequently is betrayed, but rather a deeply personal story of one girl's understanding of human society as being mediated through language and appearance.

If the second half of the eighteenth-century sees a number of novels dedicated to promoting a sense of familial intimacy (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Paul et Virginie*), this may be because the literature of the first decades of the century critically examines the family unit, imagining structures that would eventually permit such intimacy to arise. Suzanne Pucci proposes that this shift correlates to the use of literary framing devices that tie the family to the family household. Changing the dimensions of family from the linear (from one generation to the next) to the spatial (and thus the synchronous), Pucci argues, forces the reader to focus on interpersonal intimacy rather than on blood ties. In this way, readers can begin to imagine a type of familial intimacy that exceeds the nuclear, blood-related family.<sup>122</sup> In this story, Marivaux takes up the female voice in the first person narrative, creating a sense of intimacy between the letter-writer, her epistolary

interlocutor, and also the reader. By inviting the reader into the intimate community of the friendly conversation of the boudoir, the author demonstrates simultaneously the isolation of the protagonist and her adherence to a larger community. Marianne is among the first female characters in the French literary tradition to be defined solely by her own, individual desires. While the fiction of the seventeenth century often tends to depict women within their familial relations (wife, mother, sister, or daughter), Marianne opens up the possibility for female freedom. Put differently, Marianne cannot be defined by familial relations because she has none; it is the narrator herself, who chooses the members of her intimate community and defines her role within it.

Her freedom, however, is limited to the society she inhabits. She may not have a mother or father, but in order to become *somebody* in seventeenth-century France (when her story takes place), she must somehow belong to a family. Because her origins are unknown, the heroine hovers between identities. She should not be able to marry into an aristocratic family because she has no heritage, no legacy, and certainly no dowry. To live in this society is to live in a place where those who are in-between slip through the cracks. The ruptures between noble and not noble, male and female, or family member and outsider cannot yet be sutured back together. To find a society based on desire and domestic intimacy we will have to wait until the turn of the eighteenth century with authors such as Chateaubriand and Bernadin de Saint-Pierre. And yet, Marianne is able to transform her body into a sort of cultural capital – trading on emotions like sympathy, compassion, and general good will for material wealth

In *Marianne*, we see a primitive form of the family romance. Marianne comes to know her own potential parents as the stories of her discovery are recounted to her. She does not have to imagine better or more noble parents than her own because the absence of her parents allows her to create a history and furthermore to act on that story. She is not bound by a return to the status quo of family politics, once she surpasses the primary stage. In the figure of Marianne there is no room for an Œdipus complex because the heroine's sexual, ethical, and materialistic education must all take place on a purely psychological plane outside of family politics. More than a curio, Marianne serves as a catalyst for a transformation of intimate relations. Although she tries to find happiness and a place for herself through marriage, she realizes that the type of intimacy she seeks cannot be found in the conjugal home. She does not marry Valville, but she does find a family in his mother. She begins life an orphan, she gains a mother and a brother, but unlike our other protagonists, she turns away from the family in the end, deciding instead to return to the convent where she will answer only to herself. It is precisely this refusal of romantic love and traditional models of family that turns the sentimental novel on its head. By rejecting traditional sentimental tropes, Marivaux creates an entirely new type of protagonist who is capable of resisting tradition.

### **The Multiple Bodies of Marianne**

Julia Kristeva describes the semiotized body as “un lieu de scission permanente” (26). This body is constantly being pulled back and forth between a pre-œdipal and intuitive language of sound, emotion, and drives (*chora*) and a phallogocentric language

where meaning is predicated upon the rules of a patriarchal society. Building on Plato's description of the *chora* as nurturing and maternal, Kristeva notes that all drives are mediated by the mother's body. Thus Kristeva offers a place of power to the feminine and the maternal, inserting them into the hyper-masculinized treatment of psychosexual development, as it analyzed by Freud and Lacan. The *chora* is inherently feminine and not yet informed by masculine structures of and strictures on language. Included in these masculine structures within society is the patriarchal family. Although Marianne recounts her story from the position of an older woman who occupies the role of wife and woman in just such a patriarchal society, the story that she recounts in her letters, combined with her obsession to monitor and control the signs and actions her body produces, demonstrates the heroine's desire to return to a *chora*-like world of signs and signifiers that predates her entry into civil society. Marianne loses her mother prior to her entry into the symbolic world, and thus she desperately seeks a return to the semiotized world of the *chora*, as is evidenced by her search for a mother rather than a husband. The novel's style, like the protagonist's life, takes up this scissionary style, dissecting language and body in a therapeutic manner as a means of reconstituting the self. Hundreds of years prior to the introduction of a talking cure, the heroine engages in a writing cure. Marianne parses out language, dissecting the act of writing as much as she dissects the language centering on her body, in the process constructing a new basis of language with which to discuss the individual in relation to the collective body. In other words, in this novel, language itself takes on a corporeal form, providing the heroine with a means to construct a new identity, one that breaks free from the confines of all known systems.

Just before transitioning to Marianne's voice in the first volume, the editor, the man who "finds" these letters in Rennes, writes, "Passons maintenant à l'histoire. C'est une femme qui raconte sa vie; nous ne savons qui elle était. C'est la *Vie de Marianne*; c'est ainsi qu'elle se nomme elle-même au commencement de son histoire; elle prend ensuite le titre de comtesse; elle parle à une de ses amies dont le nom est en blanc, et puis c'est tout" (49). The dissociation between signifier and signified is indicated before the story even begins. The protagonist has no name, and yet she has three names (Marianne, Countess, and the mysterious name we can never know). The woman to whom she writes is present and yet she is absent. We read no letters from her and again we do not even know her name. This introduction thus places the reader in precisely the confused state of the protagonist who does not know who she is. Furthermore, the editor draws attention to the materiality of the body as text by citing the name of the novel within the text itself.<sup>123</sup> Reading the letters of a woman with no name, no family, and only an invented past, the reader of *Marianne* must follow the example of the heroine's interlocutors, relying on the body of her language (and the language of her body) as the proof of the life she creates.

Given that the quality (*naissance*) of an aristocratic individual in early modern France is based upon bloodlines, Marivaux could make his heroine's debut no more dramatic than by presenting her as an orphan, baptized in the blood of two women of different social stations. The blood smeared on her body is at once noble and non-noble:

Un carrosse de voiture qui allait à Bordeaux fut, dans la route, attaqué par des voleurs [...] Remarquez qu'entre les personnes qui avaient été tuées, il y avait deux femmes: l'une belle et d'environ vingt ans, et l'autre d'environ quarante; la première fort bien mise, et l'autre habillée comme le serait une femme de chambre (51).



This comment, placed in the first few pages of the first section, marks Marianne as indecipherable from the beginning of her life; the blood that symbolizes the essence of life and death anoints her as someone between social strata. To be between stations, particularly in the seventeenth century, is to be no one; in this way, the moment her body is saved from the wreckage – the moment we previously analyzed as her symbolic birth – can alternately be understood as a kind of social death, where she is stripped of all that designated her as somebody in society aside from the clothes on her back.

In the above passage, the protagonist draws a distinction between the two women found dead at the scene based both on the stations signified by their clothing – one being well dressed while the other is dressed like a servant – and by their age. She notes that the older woman is twice the age of the younger. However, rather than relying primarily on age as a determining factor (it would seem that the younger would be more likely to be of child-bearing age), Marianne focuses on a supposed family resemblance and her own fine clothes. Just after this remark, the narrator reveals that the body that pinned her to the ground was, in fact, that of the younger, aristocratic woman. Was this woman's death a supreme act of maternal instinct, a mother protecting her child? Or was this the act of an aristocratic woman of no relation simply trying to run for her life? The reader is left perpetually in suspense, unsure whether to judge each action based on the language that describes it or by the social code implied by her station in life. Marianne's quality, therefore, must also be based upon the language of her actions.

Anne Deneys-Tunney notes that the eighteenth-century novel introduces a new discourse based on the body that runs counter to previous Cartesian dualist notions.

Although this “body language” is most fully developed only around the middle of the century with the works of Condillac and Buffon, Deneys-Tunney points to its emergence in the aftermath of the publication of Descartes’ *Méditations*, noting the confusion surrounding the language invoked in this new discourse: “La catégorie du corps s’étend désormais à celle du discours... discours-corps, et corps-discours, comme si les termes étaient interchangeables” (10). In *Marianne*, Deneys-Tunney claims, the discourse of the body lacks a body itself. She goes on to state that the female body in this novel exists as a series of metonymic relations (where clothing represents the body) and instants of contact with other bodies. In *Marianne*, Deneys-Tunney claims, the body can be seen only in glimpses, when it is unaware of the gaze upon it. Furthermore, it can never be seen as a whole. Paradoxically, the language of the body (*corps-discours*) requires a disappearance of the body.

In this case, with a complete disregard for any notion that would imply a distinction between body and soul, Marivaux need only describe the actions of one body part – the heart. Marivaux’s *discours-corps* then becomes a *discours-cœur* where the heroine’s noble actions are communicated through language that describes the soul’s expression in various body parts. Consequently, Marivaux provides a language for the novels of sensibility (such as those of Rousseau and Richardson) that rise in popularity over the course of the following decades, as well as for the materialist philosophers, who understand the soul as a part of the body and capable of moving through and being expressed by various body parts. The *discours-cœur* thus provides a new language of the body.

Deneys-Tunney's notion that the discourse of the body lacks corporeal form must not be confused, therefore, with the idea that the heroine lacks a body. In the absence of a composite description of the protagonist's body, her rich descriptions of individual body parts and the garments that alternately clothe and reveal them suggest that, in fact, her body – the female body – is of the utmost importance to both Marianne and those with whom she interacts throughout the novel. Not only is her body gendered (coded female), but it is also interpreted differently based on the gender of the onlooker.<sup>124</sup> In Marianne's interactions with men, dialogue centers mostly on clothing or body parts that excite and inspire – an ankle, a glove, or a lock of hair for example. In other words, in these interactions the body is broken down into its elemental parts, providing the components for the heroine's narrative. When interacting with women, on the other hand, she tends toward a discourse of a more emotional nature. In these scenes she explains her joys, her fears, or her gratitude; her clothing or her aches and pains become minor factors that embellish the story rather than main events of the story itself.

We have already noted that Marivaux is remembered, above all, as a playwright. It is not surprising, therefore, that his fiction writing should also draw inspiration from the more visual arts. In fact, Marivaux praises the intense link between scenes of life and portraiture in *Le Spectateur français*. The tableau, as an art form, is particularly important in the eighteenth century, marked as this century is by an increased interest in art criticism and salon culture; as a result, the spectator's opinion becomes increasingly important to choices in the production of art. In this way, the tableau becomes a culturally democratizing force. Suzanne Pucci explains, "These *tableaux* as well as other formal

surfaces have begun to predominate as a *consequence* of the spectator's vision, thus indeed capable of undermining the principles of royal spectacle and authority by gradually wresting the privilege and 'publicity of representation' away from an exclusive imperial perspective" ("The Spectator" 156-57). Adept in the art of 'painting' social mores, Marivaux-spectator applies his journalistic knowledge to *Marianne*, offering the reader a tableau of a woman who is also capable of wresting privilege and the "publicity of representation" from the noble class.

In *Marianne*, the portrait qualities are most evident in a series of scenes in which the protagonist enters a place where many unmarried women of the seventeenth century found themselves, the church. In particular, three church scenes placed early in the novel paint three very different portraits of the heroine. One scene highlights Marianne's mastery of inciting the passion of others, while in another she succumbs to the violent passion of sadness. And yet another depicts a moment when the disjunction between language and appearance causes her to be cast out of society, not unlike the initial scene in which she is found in the carriage. That each of these scenes should take place in a church exemplifies the mediating role of the church in the lives of the early modern family. The terms for all of life's events – marriage, birth, maturation, and death – are celebrated in and dictated by the Catholic Church. It follows, then, that the scenes where the protagonist endeavors to build her place in society take place in the church. These three scenes, which we are calling collectively Marivaux's 'literary triptych,' divide the perception of Marianne's body between three distinct audiences: a room full of her peers, male and female; a group consisting solely of older men (father-figures); and, finally, an

exclusively female space (the convent). Like the triptych paintings commonly seen in European cathedrals from the Middle Ages onward, the middle *tableau* (the scene in which a vastly adorned Marianne interacts with the priest and M. de Climal) constitutes the largest and the most detailed, conveyed as it is over several pages. However, while many Baroque triptychs (such as those of Rubens or Rembrandt, to name two well-known examples) consist of outer panels that provide a larger context for the action of the middle panel by filling in the periphery in a synchronic manner, the three scenes of Marivaux's triptych constitute a diachronic journey through the life – or rather a few days in the life – of Marianne. She appears in each panel, wearing the same dress and adornments (the lavish gifts of M. de Climal), yet the peripheral characters, as well as the mood, shift throughout. As we shall see, in each of these scenes Marianne's body is depicted in distinct ways, essentially presenting the reader with three *different* bodies for the heroine.

### 1) *Homo sacer*: la femme floue

In the first pages of the second volume, Marianne writes:

Je vous ai dit que j'allai à l'église, à l'entrée de laquelle je trouvai de la foule, mais je n'y restai pas. Mon habit neuf et mon figure y auraient trop perdu; et je tâchai, en me glissant tout doucement, de gagner le haut de l'église, où j'apercevais de beau monde qui était à son aise (87-88).

With these words, Marianne begins to paint the first scene in the church by placing her superbly adorned body above the crowd. In this scene, the heroine remains at ease, navigating the *beau monde*, while still remaining on the outside. Rather than hiding her

difference, in this scene she displays it prominently. As soon as she enters the church full of young men and women in their fine clothes, Marianne separates herself from the crowd. She is not cast out; rather, she chooses to remain alone, elevated above the room full of her peers. It is by virtue of her separation from the group that the heroine is able to transform her body into a commodity, exchanging glimpses of her pale skin or her perfectly defined chin for the type of cultural capital that will allow her to ascend social strata. If the *homo sacer* of ancient Rome is cast out of society because of a crime that renders him sacred (*sacratio*), then Marianne's original crime is the very act of losing her parents. An orphan, she is at once in the symbolic charge of the church and at the mercy of society. Stripped of her political rights and reduced to bare life (*homo nu*), the heroine uses clothing to produce the illusion of political life.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben evaluates the paradox introduced by Carl Schmitt wherein the sovereign individual is simultaneously inside and outside of political life. Within this state of exception, he is outside by virtue of his *choosing* to be outside, and yet this choice indicates an implication within the very system he rejects. We see this paradox playing out in this, the first of the three church scenes, where Marianne exhibits a certain sense of sovereignty by bypassing the group and choosing to place herself instead above the others. Yet, the language of this rather lengthy passage betrays her exclusionary game. The reader is presented with a woman very much entrenched in the cultural system of the *foule* (or crowd), a system in which the body is manipulated to entice potential mates. The heroine's aim in this scene is not

independence or sovereignty, but rather recognition and eventually acceptance into the crowd.

As Aurora Wolfgang points out, in this scene in particular, Marianne is not subject to the male gaze, instead, she controls it. We see her graceful manipulation of the male gaze in passages such as the following where Marianne both designates the actions of her own body, and describes the reaction of those observing her. In fact, in unveiling her charms to interested onlookers, she uses the tableaux hanging on the church walls to enhance her own portrait:

de temps en temps, pour les tenir en haleine, je les régalaï d'une petite découverte sur mes charmes; je leur en apprenais quelque chose de nouveau, sans me mettre pourtant en grand dépense. Par exemple, il y avait dans cette église des tableaux qui étaient à une certaine hauteur: eh bien! j'y portait ma vue, sous prétexte de les regarder parce que cette industrie-là me faisait le plus bel œil du monde (90).

By lifting up her chin in the church, the heroine invites all of the young men and women to see her flawless neck; by shifting a lock of hair, she displays the beautiful pale skin of her wrist to the spectators. As she embeds herself in the church tableau, she finalizes her transformation into an *objet d'art*, a work of beauty to be admired. As such, the men and women in the church regard her as a beautiful body in a pew rather than as a sentient being.

Neither in the crowd, nor outside of it, the reader comprehends the heroine's body as do the onlookers in the church, as little more than an assemblage of body parts. This language of dissection ceases only when Marianne sees the one body that she cannot read, that of Valville; "j'étais coquette pour les autres, je ne l'étais pas pour lui; j'oubliais

à lui plaire, et ne songer qu'à le regarder" (91). Once she designates him as like her, she begins to write as if she were writing for him. While the others openly enjoy Marianne as an aesthetic object, she insists that Valville *feels* her charms. At this point, the heroine moves beyond the language of the body and into a language of sentiment. The moment of the *tableau vivant* has ended. Her spectators have enjoyed the show, but as her emotions evolve so does her discourse on her own body. The body that was confusing, dissected, even blurry, now comes into focus as Marianne steps out of the church and in front of Valville's carriage where she will suffer the fortuitous fall that will alter the course of her life.

## 2) *Homo sacer: la femme vêtue*

Deneys-Tunney describes *La Vie de Marianne* as a libertine novel. However, her claim is based not on the content of the novel, but instead on the narrative structure. The intimate letters of one woman writing to another, combined with the constant pleas for complete anonymity, heighten the sense of voyeurism the reader feels. Furthermore, the heroine is constantly masking her emotions to those around her while divulging the true nature of her actions to her friend. The feeling of voyeurism is replicated in the content of the story by the constant repetition of scenes in which the protagonist dresses and undresses. Deneys-Tunney writes, "de même, l'abondance des scènes d'habillage et de déshabillage illustre le caractère libertin 'voyeuriste' d'une narration qui joue sans arrêt au strip-tease" (84). In fact, the pages leading to the second 'panel' of our triptych, where Marianne's clothes will be scrutinized by the priest, contribute to this strip-tease,



revealing the heroine who undresses and dresses again, all the while drawing attention to the social value of the garments.

While arguing with M. de Climal about the impropriety of his actions (once he has asked her to be his mistress), Marianne begins to undress in protest: “vous remarquerez que je détachais mes épingles, et que je me décoiffais, parce que la cornette que je portais venait de lui, de façon qu’en un moment elle fût ôtée, et que je restais nue-tête avec ces beaux cheveux dont je vous ai parlé, et qui me descendaient jusqu’à la ceinture” (137). Rather than as an incitement for libertine behavior, in this novel undressing seems to imply its inverse. Although she draws the reader’s attention to her long, beautiful hair, her waist, and the nudity of her head, this act frightens the man observing her and leaves him speechless. When her words fail her, she begins to do the most natural thing she can think of which is to let the body speak for her. In fact, Pierre Saint-Amand asserts that the heroine’s clothing constitutes a series of phallic substitutes that serve to fetishize Marianne (17). In such a universe the unadorned, female body symbolizes a return to a natural state, and for the desiring male the power in the naturalness of the female body overcomes the falsity of his actions and so he must flee the scene.

Although M. de Climal repeats to Marianne that he intends to be a father to her, his licentious behavior reveals his true intentions. Once he has decided to withdraw her funding, the protagonist is reminded of another father-figure to whom she has recourse – the priest in the church who initially led her to Climal. Through her decision to go to the priest and to tell him what has happened, she is also able to legitimize her decision to

keep the clothes that allow her to play the role of noblewoman. In order to prove Climal's bad intentions, she decides to wear the fine clothes he has bought for her. We thus see another scene in which Marianne describes the process of getting dressed, this process imitating that of an actress preparing for a role. With each article of clothing that she replaces, she becomes more and more immersed in her character, gaining a bit more confidence until she is finally ready to make her way to the church. Unlike her first journey to church in this dress, where she relished the attention lavished upon her due to her beauty, the attention she receives this time only reminds her of her innate difference. *La foule* that previously felt exciting and warm is now presented as cold and uninviting. Paris is no longer the bustling city full of potential that she describes as she enters the town from Bordeaux; instead, this Paris becomes an exclusionary realm to which she does not belong, "j'y trouvai de silence et de solitude pour moi: une forêt m'aurait parue moins déserte, je m'y serais sentie moins seule, moins égarée" (146). Although the crowd still notices her, this time her exclusion from it is not by choice, and she becomes conscious of the disadvantages of her state of exception.

It is in this state that she enters the church. This passage orients the spectator by pointing out immediately the importance of her appearance. Rather than noting what she sees upon entering the church, Marianne remarks that she *is seen* by M. de Climal. And although she notes his reaction to the sight of her ("[il] rougit et pâlit tour à tour en me voyant"), she insists to her reader that she did not spare him any looks. If the sight of her undressing frightened Climal, the sight of her fully clothed in the space of the church symbolizes his own immorality, and he demonstrates the physical traits of shame. In this

portrait, Marianne stands amidst two father-figures, one religious, the other secular. And yet, despite the presence of these three figures, the scene reads almost like a monologue. The priest admonishes Marianne for her supposed bad behavior and implores Climal to continue his charitable support of the young orphan, while Climal and Marianne remain, for the most part, silent. When Marianne finally breaks her silence to declare her innocence, it is only to burst into tears. Paralleling the scene of her initial discovery in the carriage, Marianne hopes that the sound of her sobs will entice the two men to help her as it enticed the two guards to carry her to safety. Again, we see the portrait of a well-dressed orphan, who *appears* to be noble, crying out for help, except this time she has already entered the symbolic (and phallogocentric) world where she is expected to engage in verbal communication to express her emotions.

Because Marianne does not engage in the proper and reasonable act of verbal exchange, she allows the space for her signs to be misinterpreted. Rather than eliciting pity, the tears bring about confusion when the priest is unsure of how to interpret them. In fact, the lack of verbal communication provides Climal the opportunity to manipulate the meaning of her emotional outbreak. He proclaims his confusion and embarrassment at this scene and uses the break in conversation to reassert his innocence and to flee the scene once more. In this instance, the language of emotions renders Marianne the object of Climal's plot.

Once Climal exits, the Father once again takes up his speech to reprimand Marianne for her actions. Marianne attempts to use words this time to explain her innocence, and yet she quickly realizes that this type of language also fails her (the priest

refuses to believe her story). The disjunction between her words, which aim to evoke pity, and her appearance, which cannot help but to evoke desire, leads to a failure of meaning. When both verbal language and body language have failed her, the heroine remembers that the clothes can speak for her. She thus draws the Father's attention to her clothing:

Vous parlez de mes hardes, elles ne sont que trop belles; j'en ai été étonnée, et elles vous surprennent vous-même; tenez, mon père, approchez, considérez la finesse de ce linge; je ne le voulais pas si fin au moins; j'avais de la peine à le prendre, surtout à cause des manières qu'il avait eues avec moi auparavant; mais j'ai beau lui dire: Je n'en veux point, il s'est moqué de moi, et m'a toujours répondu: Allez vous regarder dans un miroir, et voyez après si ce linge est trop beau pour vous (150).

At this, the priest, who has continually interrupted her remains silent, thus expressing his disbelief. Finally, it would seem, Marianne has found a language capable of proving her innocence – the language of her clothes. In fact, the priest remains silent until she breaks away from the discussion of the clothes to turn to what would appear to be the more damning evidence, Climal's kiss on her ear in the carriage. The mention of the kiss breaks the Father out of his cloud of belief, and it is only later, when Marianne manages to bring the discussion back to her clothes (“voilà pourquoi il m'habille si bien”), that he begins to believe her again. While in the first church scene the heroine described her body through its various parts, in this scene she learns that she must filter the language of her body through her dress. Metonymically speaking, Marianne becomes her dress, and that dress represents Climal's wrongdoing to the priest, as well as to Climal himself.

Marianne decides to wear the clothing that Climal gave her as proof of his ill intentions, but in the presence of only men her body cannot be heard because it is once

again mapped out as a glove, a piece of lingerie, or a lock of hair. In the masculine realm, the failure of a conjunction between verbal language and body language leaves the heroine as helpless as she is in the first carriage scene. At the end of this scene, the heroine once again is cast out alone into society, a young orphan with no name. The failure of language is best summarized by the heroine as she bids farewell to the priest: “Je le saluai sans pouvoir prononcer un seul mot” (155).

### **3) *Homo sacer: la femme nue***

The third and final panel of our literary triptych finds the heroine in a uniquely feminine space – the convent. In the first two panels, Marianne’s ability to use language ultimately fails because she is doubly other, that is, she is nameless (an orphan) and she is a woman in a masculine system. With neither a father nor a mother to guide her, Marianne’s capacity to manipulate language adeptly remains stymied. However, in the female space of the convent, she is among others just like her – women who are cut off from (secular) society. Christophe Martin describes such spaces of female sequestration as “une sorte de laboratoire et de lieu d’experimentation,” or a place where male authors can imagine and experiment with female organization (282). For Marivaux, this experimentation takes place at the level of language as he transforms the reasoned language of a woman navigating a man’s world into a utopian (feminine) language free from the constraints of male-dominated systems.

Having suffered the failure of her language in communicating the disparity of her situation to the priest, an abject Marianne once again steps out into the desolate streets of

Paris. Her attention is drawn to a convent, and she enters it “moitié par un sentiment de religion qui me vint en ce moment, moitié dans la pensée d’aller soupirer à mon aise” (155). Unlike the two previous scenes, as she enters the church she realizes that she is completely alone.

Là, je m’abandonnai à mon affliction, et je ne gênai ni mes gémissements ni mes sanglots; je dis mes gémissements, parce que je me plaignais, parce que je prononçais des mots, et que je disais: Pourquoi suis-je venue au monde, malheureuse que je suis? Que fais-je sur la terre? Mon Dieu, vous m’y avez mise, secourez-moi. Et autres choses semblables (*ibid*).

In this scene the language of the body corresponds exactly to the words she pronounces, the *gémissements* and the *sanglots* highlighting her existential crisis. This time it is not her neck that excites the spectator, but rather her tears – a substance that symbolizes mediation between the body and the soul.<sup>125</sup> In this instance the heroine is secluded in a feminine space and thus she forgets to perform. Because of the freedom she experiences in this space, the actions and emotions communicated through her speech are replicated in the movements of her body. Her body is no longer the Frankensteinian monster of the previous scene, a mishmash of various body parts; rather, her body moves as one and can be read in its entirety. This time her cries bring exactly the kind of help she needs, that of a woman. In this environment, there is no confusion; body language, speech, and even clothing harmonize completely.

After crying alone in the chapel for half an hour, Marianne is greeted by a young *tourière* who informs her that the church is closing. Sensitive to Marianne’s state, the young woman is touched and leads her to the chamber of the head nun where she also sees the older woman who had seen her crying in the chapel, Mme de Miran. This scene

mirrors the previous church scene in almost every way except that all of the masculine figures have been replaced by women. Rather than an alter boy, it is the *tourière* who finds her and leads her to the chamber. The priest is replaced by the very maternal figure of the nun who is described as kind-faced and plump, and rather than a man who has taken advantage of her, we see a woman eager to help. Still adorned in the same dress, this portrait places the heroine amidst two mother-figures. Whereas her entry into the male-dominated space caused her to burst into tears, entry into the feminine space of the nun's chambers abates her cries and allows her to find her voice. Her voice remains feeble, but she is able to communicate and to relay her story.

In the two previous church scenes, Marianne's body has been presented in separate pieces, on display to be observed, admired, and misunderstood. Any contact with her body has, until this point, produced anxiety and disgust. When Climal kisses her in the carriage she recoils, when the doctor touches the bare skin of her foot she blushes (all while making sure to display the beauty of her foot to Valville). In the convent, however, human contact becomes a welcome and calming act. As she begins to excuse herself from the nun's chambers upon seeing the two women in discussion, it is Mme de Miran who gently touches her hand, pulling her back into the room, urging her to explain her situation. And when she throws herself at the nun's feet in a sign of humility, the nun gently touches her arm, pulling her back up. Once her body comes into contact with another female body, her language becomes freer and she begins to recount her story from her origins in the carriage to the present moment. In this space, her body is

recognizable. She no longer exists in the state of exception because she is finally accepted into the group.

Once Marianne has secured a new adopted mother, who endeavors to become as dear to Marianne as the vicar's sister had been before her death, the heroine returns to Mme Dutour's atelier to gather her belongings. Closing the narrative circle, Marianne disrobes. While in previous scenes the protagonist described in great detail each ornament as she displayed it, put it on, or took it off, in this scene she recounts the entire process in one simple sentence: "Dès que j'y fus, et vite, et vite, j'ôte la robe que j'avais; je reprends mon ancienne, je mets l'autre dans le paquet, et le voilà fait" (165). Her striptease comes to a close as she finally finds a place where the language of her body matches that of her heart. She no longer needs the clothes to communicate her nobility because she now has a mother.

If we step back to look at the three panels of the triptych, we see that Marianne's language necessarily changes depending on her interlocutors. In each scene, she sorts through language, making missteps and encountering lapses in meaning. In Parisian society, she does not fit into a station, and her noble language and body stand in such contrast to her orphaned, excluded state that it confuses her audience, constantly producing a gap between signifier and meaning. In these three panels we see the heroine move from a *corps-discours* where language emanates from the body; to a *discours-corps*, where language attempts to classify and contain the body; and finally to a *discours-cœur*, where body and language meet, producing a utopian language. In this maternal language, the gap between signifier and meaning is closed when body language



and the language of Marianne's body become fused, allowing the heroine's body to be understood as a whole.

### **Mothers, Daughters, and Reproduction**

In eighteenth-century literature, the male gaze increasingly seeks to penetrate female spaces. Montesquieu enters the seraglio, Diderot enters the convent, Rousseau enters the female spaces of the domestic sphere; these are merely a few examples. Marivaux too cannot resist the desire to enter into female-exclusive spaces, although he, like several authors of the day, seeks to reorient the male gaze, placing it squarely in the eyes (and the writing hands) of a young woman who engages with other women. Doing so allows the narrator to take the reader into the convent, the dressing room, even the boudoir – spaces meant exclusively for women. Although Philippe Ariès has noted that changes to the familial structure in the latter half of the eighteenth century transformed the domestic household into a refuge for women, other scholars tend to read this change in negative terms with the household becoming not a refuge, but a prison.<sup>126</sup> Increasingly absent in political and social institutions (with the weakening of the absolutist regime and the changing atmosphere of the salons),<sup>127</sup> women are relegated further and further into what Christophe Martin calls “espaces du féminin.” These spaces, Martin argues, are not inherently feminine, in fact, one could argue the inverse as these spaces of female confinement are so thoroughly embedded in patriarchal institutions; instead, these spaces of feminine confinement allow for the production of female practices and – by extension – of a female identity. It is thus unsurprising that the absence of women in the public sphere should lead to a rise in the portrayals of secluded female spaces in fictional

literature, where the female voice breaks through the invisible barrier to tell its story to men.

Marivaux's exploration of feminine spaces is perhaps most distinct from that of his contemporaries in its insistence on the portrayal of female-female relationships. Marianne does not write to a lover from whom she is separated; rather, she writes to a female companion. Although she discusses her romantic relationship with Valville, as well as her tenuous paternal relationship with Climal in the letters, her narrative remains focused on her relationships with other women. In fact, rather than as a love story or even a novel of education, as many other critics have read the novel, *La Vie de Marianne* can be read largely as one woman's search for a mother. In other words, instead of transforming the space of the female letter into a playground for masculine desire, the author uses the letter as a space to explore female intimacy. In this section, we will examine Marianne's relationships with women, proposing that while the heroine remains a desiring individual, her desire breaks free from the masculine realm, lying instead in the creation of female intimacy and in the completion of her family romance as she searches for the ideal mother.

In *Between Men*, Eve Segwick explains that masculine homosocial relations are predicated upon an "obligatory heterosexuality" and a shared homophobia. For men, she claims, there is a stark contrast between "men loving men" and "men promoting the interests of men." For women, on the other hand, this opposition is much less dichotomous. She writes:

however agonistic the politics, however conflicted the feelings, it seems at this moment to make an obvious kind of sense to say that

women in our society who love women, women who teach, study, nurture, suckle, write about, march for, vote for, give jobs to, or otherwise promote the interests of other women, are pursuing congruent and closely related activities (2-3).

In this way, homosociality does not need to stand in contradistinction to homosexuality for women; “homosocial” can designate the entire continuum of female intimacy.

Although Segwick speaks specifically of a moment of feminism in the twentieth century, this continuum of female intimacy is also hinted at in several earlier works of fiction.<sup>128</sup>

Works such as *Paul et Virginie* and several of Isabelle de Charrière’s novels, among others, demonstrate the intensity of female cooperation and intimacy. In large part, fictional portrayals of male friendship tend to focus on difference resulting in conquest (be it of other cultures, other men, or women) whereas representations of female friendship are often organized around a sense of commonality.<sup>129</sup> Female characters that do not promote the well-being of other women tend to be typecast as abnormal (i.e. the wicked stepmother or the mean girl).

The continuity between friendship, kinship, and mentorship is highlighted in the scene just after the death of the vicar’s sister (the woman who serves as a surrogate mother to Marianne after she is found at the carriage scene) when Marianne points to the various designators of their relationship: “*ma chère tante, comme on l’appelait, et je dirais volontiers ma chère mère, ou plutôt mon unique amie*” (60, emphasis added). In this novel, friendship between two women thus requires a significant age gap. Nancy K. Miller points out that Marianne’s female peers (those who are close in age) serve largely as rivals.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, in the church scene in which the protagonist ascends the stairs to sit above the crowd she notes at length that any attention previously bestowed upon other

women had now turned to her. However, Marianne does not seem to revel in her position of power. She even remarks on the positive attributes of other women in the room. Female rivalry in this novel occupies a unique role – rather than competing solely for the attention of men, female characters in *Marianne* compete for prestige among other women. Prestige for these young women is based on mystery and intrigue, rather than on social status alone. For example, just after Marianne returns to Mme Dutour’s atelier with the fine clothes that M. de Climal has bought for her, Toinon cries out, “Diantre! Il n’y a rien de tel que d’être orpheline!” (78). Marianne may technically be Toinon’s social inferior (due to the former’s lack of parents), but in this case her fortuitous lack provides the *potential* to be noble; that is, Marianne’s potentially noble parents have more value in this narrative economy than Toinon’s living, non-noble parents. This logic also holds true in *Marianne* when distinguishing between degrees of nobility. Even in the convent when a young aristocratic woman insults Marianne, the protagonist is still perceived by her peers as belonging to a more noble class than her adversary because her actions demonstrate her nobility. In other words, the heroine’s lack of parents is symbolically transformed into the presence of *better* parents, thus producing envy in her peers and rendering sibling-like relationships impossible, as her peers cannot share her perfect parents. Marianne, on the other hand, seeks to render her own situation better by finding real counterparts to these fantasy parents; in particular she desires a mother.

The heroine’s desire to understand the mother-daughter relationship becomes clear in a passage early in the novel where she describes the scene of her parents’ death. We will recall that the protagonist notes that she is found between two women: one who

is young and well-dressed, and another who is older and dressed like a servant. She continues:

Si l'une des deux était ma mère, il y avait plus d'apparence que c'était la jeune et la mieux mise, parce qu'on prétend que je lui ressemblais un peu, du moins à ce que disaient ceux qui la virent morte, et qui me virent aussi, et que j'étais vêtue d'une manière trop distinguée pour n'être que la fille d'une femme de chambre (51).

Once again, Marianne demonstrates a primitive form of the family romance. With both of her parents absent from the beginning, the heroine is free to reconstruct a past in which her mother is necessarily the better of the two women. All those around her confirm Marianne's suspicions because she not only affirms her allegiance to a noble family, but she also performs the noble role. In fact, she performs it so perfectly that she leaves little doubt about her origins. However, the lack of positive proof haunts the protagonist, who attempts to "try on" the daughter role with each older woman she meets.

Marianne enters Paris with the vicar's sister in order to find a suitable match that would provide her with a name and financial security. However, the path toward these goals changes drastically when her adopted country parents die unexpectedly. Her debut into Parisian society thus mimics the beginning of her story as she is orphaned once again. Mirroring the bodies of the two women found at the carriage scene, the protagonist proceeds to try on two equally disparate mothers: Mme Dutour and Mme de Miran. These two characters play parallel yet opposing roles in the life of Marianne, demonstrating potential futures (or rather alternate pasts) for this orphan of ambiguous origins.

As soon as Marianne meets Dutour, she remarks on her genial and motherly personality.

Elle s'appelait Mme Dutour; c'était une veuve qui, je pense, n'avait pas plus de trente ans; une grosse réjouie qui, à vue d'œil, paraissait la meilleure femme du monde; aussi l'était-elle. Son domestique était composé d'un petit garçon de six ou sept ans qui était son fils, d'une servante, et d'une nommée Mlle Toinon, sa fille de boutique (68).<sup>131</sup>

From Marianne's own account, Dutour appears to be a suitable mother for her, and she seems willing to fill that role. She even tells Marianne that she felt close to her immediately upon their first encounter ("Dès que je vous ai vue, j'ai pris de l'amitié pour vous"). Mme Dutour looks out for Marianne as any mother would. She gives her advice; she stands up for her when she's been wronged; she even breaks up quarrels between Marianne and Toinon, just as a mother would break up arguments between two sisters. There is something about this relationship that is deeply appealing to Marianne. As we have previously noted, when she is leaving the atelier for good she even refers to Dutour as "une espèce de parente, et même une espèce de patrie" (166).

However, we soon notice the differences between the two women. Unlike Marianne's presumed birth mother (the well-dressed and pretty noble woman) or the vicar's sister (who is modest but attractive), both of whom display traits similar to those of the heroine, Mme Dutour is simple and plump. Even the names of these two women suggest a difference between them. Marianne's name is common but saintly, plain yet popular and representative of all Catholic women.<sup>132</sup> Dutour, on the other hand, suggests a kind of baseness. If we split the name into a noun and a *particule*, we hear "tour." *Le*

*tour* a type of circuit that would run on the ground opposes *la tour*, that would rise up and tower above the town and becomes a distinction that reinforces Dutour's non-noble status. Furthermore, the "Du" rather than a "De la" gives this shopkeeper a more masculine air.<sup>133</sup> In a moral system such as that of the narrator where closeness and kinship are based on similitude, the protagonist quickly decides that the two cannot share a mother-daughter bond.

Thus, Marianne knows from her first few minutes in the atelier that Mme Dutour will not become her new surrogate mother. The actions that designate Dutour as a mother-figure are the same actions that designate her as non-noble. When Marianne is not sure what to do with the unwanted affections of M. de Climal (when he asks her to be his mistress), Dutour advises her to use him – to take what he's giving without giving anything in return. And when Marianne cannot pay the coach fare for her ride home, Dutour stands up for her by yelling at him in the street, thereby demonstrating the vulgarity of her station. Marianne feels so strongly that a place such as the atelier is beneath her that she writes, "je n'étais pas faite pour être là" (68). Furthermore, she understands the difference between Dutour's mannerisms and her own as proof of the shopkeeper's inferior status. Just after listing Dutour's positive attributes, the narrator writes, "je sentais, dans la franchise de cette femme-là, quelque chose de grossier qui me rebutait" (*ibid*). Marianne continues to acknowledge her own precarious state and the lack of proof of her station, citing particularly her previous residence at the modest home of the vicar, and yet she cannot help but to be pulled toward something better, *ce mieux*, that she does not yet know but that she believes she deserves.

Because of this distinction, even though Marianne feels a connection to Dutour, she realizes that to continue to play the role of a noblewoman she must surround herself with others like her. Dutour cannot be a *mother* to Marianne because the protagonist has already called her a *father* – a *patrie* (fatherland) – in other words, a feminized form of a masculine genitive. In this story, Dutour is too masculine to be a mother to a daughter. She provides Marianne with a place to live but she does so only conditionally. Once Climal no longer pays for her room and board, Dutour must ask Marianne to leave. Dutour is a friend to the protagonist but she is incapable of fulfilling the role of mentor because she and Marianne do not speak the same language. The shopkeeper may be nice, but she is not noble. Her lack of a proper name prohibits her from becoming Marianne's mother. She provides sympathy and guidance, but she cannot provide for Marianne financially nor can she reinforce the protagonist's assumed status.

A second example of Marianne 'trying on' the daughter role occurs in her relationship with Madame de Miran. Miran serves as a counterpart for Dutour almost trait for trait. Where Dutour is vulgar and frank, Miran is refined and genteel. Where Dutour yells at a coach driver in the street like a mad woman, Miran knows that the defense of one's character must be carried out through subtler channels. Finally, where Dutour tells Marianne to use men to her own means, Miran encourages Marianne to follow her heart, even when it leads to a relationship with Miran's own son – a relationship that would otherwise be prohibited because of Marianne's obscure origins. In other words, Mme de Miran is exactly the mother of Marianne's initial family romance.



This imagined maternal relationship almost becomes a reality when Miran consents to the marriage of Marianne to her own son, Valville. Even when other family members try to break up this union, imploring Miran to see reason, Miran insists upon Marianne's nobility and refuses to cede. In adopting Marianne as her own daughter (if only in name and not flesh and blood), Miran believes that she has already endowed Marianne with her own nobility, restoring the heroine to her rightful noble place. In this way, Marianne and Miran are able to displace the desire for a mother-daughter union onto the union of husband and wife. Miran even attempts to hasten Marianne's marriage to her son so that the fictional familial bond can finally become concretized. It is through the husband-wife connection that both parties could finally have the union of mother and daughter they truly desire.

And yet, because of this displacement, such a union is destined to fall apart. Valville falls in love with another woman and Marianne frees him of his obligation to her. The transposition of the mother onto the lover means that when the heteronormative romantic relationship fails (a fate to which it was always doomed, relegated as it was to second place), the maternal relationship must also necessarily dissipate. Miran desperately implores Marianne to remain her daughter but Marianne knows this cannot happen. In fact, when the heroine returns to the convent she decides to stay there indefinitely because at least in the convent she will be "à la charge de personne." The moment she reenters the convent, Marianne begins a new era of her family romance. She voluntarily returns to her orphan state by removing herself from a society that favors

traditional kinship structures, sequestering herself once again in this exclusively feminine space.

Even after Marianne's return to the convent, and after she has received an inheritance from Climal and no longer needs financial assistance, Miran insists on continuing to serve as the protagonist's mother. Patrick Coleman proposes that Miran's continued motherly support of Marianne constitutes an exploration by the author into "what such a relationship might mean when it transcends the realm of social or familial obligation" (37). Coleman's assertion, based on the depth of Marianne's gratitude toward Miran, certainly has merit, but it fails to account for the natural progression of the parent-child bond. In fact, Marianne's departure from Miran's direct care constitutes a natural psychic progression. The mother-daughter relationship has not failed, it has simply moved into a new stage. Marianne no longer needs to imagine a better mother because in Mme de Miran, she has found a perfect fit. Thus rather than a failure, we see a successful transfer of power from mother to daughter.

As we demonstrated in the first chapter, the transfer of power within the Oedipal structure is guaranteed by the transfer of the *nom-du-père* from father to son via the mother. In *Marianne*, however, where men are absent, the protagonist desires a *nom-de-la-mère*.<sup>134</sup> Whereas Dutour has no name to give, Miran has a very powerful name. In Miran's name we hear the root of "miroir" (in Latin *mirare*). Miran invites Marianne to follow her actions, mimicking these habits as would a daughter with her mother. The protagonist is thus able to see her noble self reflected in Mme de Miran. This relation to an Other serves as the catalyst for a mirror stage that helps Marianne understand her

place in the symbolic order. Ironically, her place straddles the barrier between family and its exterior, remaining resolutely unidentifiable.

Because the narrator loses her parents before she can even speak, her true identity, including her name, are unknown. If she were believed to be noble, then the choice of her assumed name would seem a supreme act of irony. In a study on the cultural functions of *La Marianne* (Republican symbol of France), Maurice Agulhon explains that the name “Marianne” is a combination of the two most common names in the French Catholic tradition, “Marie” and “Anne.”<sup>135</sup> This invented name, so plain in its origins, becomes a sort of placeholder standing in for the true identity along the narrator’s quest for a proper name.

This name gradually shifts from a source of shame to a source of pride for the narrator. Her shame is quite clear in an early passage from the novel when Valville asks for her name in order to send a note about her whereabouts to her family. Troubled by the question, Marianne bursts into tears rather than daring to divulge her secret. She also demonstrates her shame in much subtler ways. For example, when Marianne writes a note to Mme Dutour stating that she should recount Marianne’s story to the *tourière* who will report back to Mme de Miran, she signs the note “Marianne.” However, in a scene just after this one, Marianne writes a note to Valville declaring her innocence, but in this instance she forgoes any signature, preferring once again not to divulge any evidence of her non-noble life.

Her feelings toward her name begin to change once she becomes close to Mme de Miran. Having a mother-figure who repeats her name next to the words “ma fille” brings

to this moniker a comforting feeling that it previously lacked. Later in the novel then, her sense of shame is transformed into pride. When the *jeune pensionnaire* at the convent (she is given no other name) becomes jealous of the attention Marianne receives, she refers to the narrator by her first name “Marianne,” transforming the name into an insult. “Vous avez là une belle robe, *Marianne*,” she declares, “et tout y répond; cela est cher au moins, et il faut que la dame qui a soin de vous soit très généreuse” (222). However, when one of the sisters comes to Marianne’s aid to admonish the other woman for calling the heroine by her name rather than by “Mademoiselle,” the protagonist stops her, taking a newfound pride in a name that otherwise means nothing. She writes, “je n’ai rien, Dieu m’a tout ôté, et je dois croire que je suis au-dessous de tout le monde; mais j’aime encore mieux être comme je suis, que d’avoir tout ce que Mademoiselle a de plus que moi” (223).

Just as Marianne begins to exit her Lacanian mirror stage, that is, once she begins to separate the image of the mother from its symbolic logic, Miran’s name is transformed into a signifier for good mother. Motherhood then passes into the realm of myth as Marianne and Miran occupy distinct yet similar roles. While the transfer of the father’s name requires both sexes (the father as possessor of the name and the mother as the conduit who transfers the name), this construction requires no masculine intervention. Miran is a widow and her son, as we have already noted, does not share her name. Miran is thus able to transfer her name to the protagonist, and we see the result in the name the narrator chooses to represent herself in the story.<sup>136</sup> “Marianne,” the name the narrator invents for herself in the first letter, is not only a plain name, a common name, but as

Saint-Amand points out, it also contains the name of her mother anagrammatically. M-I-R-A-N is rearranged and expanded as it becomes M-A-R-I-A-N-N-E. In choosing this name, Marianne leaves no doubt as to her origins. Although we stated at the outset of this chapter that the reader would remain forever in suspense as to Marianne's original station in life, this is not entirely correct. If Marianne's life consists, as she affirms it does, of the pages she writes, then the very title of the story indicates Marianne's true mother, and thus her true noble status.

Nancy K. Miller points out that while the title of this novel suggests the story of a life, what we read is actually only a small portion of a life. The narrator skips quickly over her origins to recount a story that spans little more than a few years.<sup>137</sup> While time in the novel is loosely marked, it is worth noting that the story reads almost like a gestation period during which the heroine grows from a helpless child into a savvy young woman. If Marianne's "life" consists only of a relatively short period of her life, this is because, in the narrator's own words, she wishes to skip over all the boring parts. She begins with the parts she can remember (or at least that others can remember for her) and she ends when she has found what she is looking for. Mlle Tervire reinforces her change in status as she implores the narrator, "Songez d'ailleurs aux motifs de consolation que vous avez: un caractère excellent, un esprit raisonnable et une âme vertueuse valent bien des parents, Marianne" (379). These three qualities announce Marianne's successful upbringing once and for all. Once it is established that Marianne no longer lacks a family – or at least a mother – the protagonist begins to take on a more motherly, nurturing role as she listens to and comforts Mlle Tervire, passing on her own authorial voice.

Women doing good things for women *does* equate to women loving women. There is no distinction in *La Vie de Marianne* between charity and love. Between a man and a woman, charity requires recompense; for example, when M. de Climal is charitable to Marianne, he expects her to be his mistress. However, with Mme de Miran, love is given freely but not required in return. In the end, Marianne returns to the convent alone, but her love for her family is still evident. She does not need to prove her love with favors because the love between a mother and her daughter in this narrative economy is simply evident. Marianne then reproduces this kind of love with Mlle de Tervire as she gives her voice over to a friend. Female homosociality thus reproduces intimate communities much in the way that heterosexual marriage would reproduce the species. Once again, in the absence of traditional reproduction, we see the production of something completely new.

### **Conclusion: The Productivity of Failure**

In *L'Amour en plus*, Elisabeth Badinter proposes that eighteenth-century France sees the emergence of a new, ideal mother. This “*mère moderne*” takes a renewed interest in her child. Following Rousseau’s advice, this mother breastfeeds her own child at home, dresses the baby in loose, comfortable clothing, and monitors every move in order to ensure the child will grow into a healthy, well-mannered *citoyen*. With Ariès, Badinter notes the transformation of children within the family, where the child becomes king and the mother is relegated to the role of glorified servant. According to Badinter, it is in the eighteenth century that we see rising a “myth of motherhood,” that is, in this time period,

the care of the child is transformed from a task for a wet-nurse into maternal instinct.

This myth is created by altering the way we read history to explain away the ‘bad mothering’ of the pre-modern world. Badinter explains:

En insistant sur les terribles aléas de la vie de jadis et sur les malheurs divers (pauvreté, épidémie, et autre nécessité...) qui s’abattaient sur nos ancêtres, on amène tout doucement le lecteur du XXe siècle à se dire qu’après tout, dans leur situation, nous aurions senti et agi de même. Ainsi s’opère dans les esprits la belle continuité entre mère de tout temps, qui conforte l’image d’un sentiment unique, l’Amour maternel. À partir de là, certains ont conclu qu’il peut y avoir plus ou moins d’amour maternel, selon les difficultés extérieures qui s’abattent sur les gens, mais qu’il y en a toujours. L’amour maternel serait une constante transhistorique (96).

Written this way, the “new mother” becomes the ultimate mother, the timeless mother, who never neglected her children, and who never had a life outside of her children. This myth is one we, as modern readers, are familiar with as it continues to haunt us today. Mothers face social and political scrutiny for the choices they make every day.

Although *La Vie de Marianne* predates Rousseau’s writings on motherhood, we can see the emergence of something new – a mother who embraces the role of mother – hoping to instruct and care for her child. However, Marivaux’s mother-figures (Miran and Dutour) present the reader with a paradox. Each woman becomes this ideal mother, while simultaneously neglecting her motherly duties. We will remember that Mme Dutour has a son, yet he is completely absent from the story. Although she actively engages with Toinon and provides support to Marianne, Dutour neglects her own flesh and blood. Similarly, Miran shows much more affection toward Marianne than she does toward her own son. In fact, the proof of this lies, in part, in Miran’s acceptance of the

pair's relationship. Because Valville is an only child from a noble family, Miran should have searched for a more suitable match for her son. Yet her love for Marianne overrides any *Ancien Régime* notion of a maternal instinct, which would place family name and reputation over gratification.

In this novel, being a mother to a daughter comes at the expense of mothering a son. Female homosocial relations come to replace kinship relations as the intimacy shared between women swells in intensity. Men in this novel disappear, and Marianne completes her family romance by eliminating the need for a father. Indeed, M. de Climal fails as a father-figure, but in his death he provides her with the inheritance she needs to solidify her position in noble society. The protagonist does not need a father but she does need a source of financial support to secure her freedom. In this way, male characters in the novel serve a purpose only in their absence. The absence of Climal provides Marianne with wealth, and the absence of Valville provides her with an even more intimate relationship with her new mother. After the death of the father, and with the continued support of the mother, Marianne leaves the fantasy of her family romance to return to her natural state – that of orphan.

Marianne warns the reader from the beginning of her tale, “ce début paraît annoncer un roman: ce n'en est pourtant pas un que je raconte; je dis la vérité” (51). We do not see a fairy tale ending in this story because it was never a fairy tale to begin with. Marianne's “ever after” will remain as much of a mystery as her origins; once again, the heroine skips over the boring parts. However, this unfinished novel does offer a certain



sense of finality as Marianne reproduces narration by passing her voice to her friend, her fellow sister, Tervire.

Female-female reproduction is possible when words move into the realm of body, producing, in Deneys-Tunney's words, a *corps-discours*. This novel, therefore, does fail to reproduce the patriarchal family. In its place, it reproduces a radically different family where the family tree, with all its branches, becomes a vine. It can twist and turn, but the transmission of tradition – the reproduction of family – is transformed from the body into language. In the end, the heroine will return to confinement in the convent where her body, the body that had been the key to her ascent in society, will be hidden away. This body becomes unnecessary now that her noble status is confirmed not by her family name, but by her family/name. This slash indicates simultaneously a joining and a separation of the two terms. Such an ambiguous connection, symbolic of Marianne's unique position, is the key to understanding her role in the symbolic order. Neither a part of a family, nor apart from her family, the protagonist occupies a liminal space where body, language, and meaning touch without becoming inextricable from one another.

As we noted earlier, Marianne reenters the convent at the end of the story, turning away from the society she has finally begun to understand. She could have continued to be the daughter of Mme de Miran, and the latter certainly encourages her to do so. However, it is Marianne's choice to return to her orphan state. This choice allows her to continue to interrogate the social structures around her and to espouse a more fluid notion of kinship. As she moves back and forth from the world of the nuclear family to the world of sisters, she realizes that she belongs to both and to none. The only way for her to

fulfill her own desires for familial compassion is to surround herself with as many different types of intimate connections as she can. The ebb and flow of kinship in this novel is demonstrated as characters fade away and come back into her life. She has not been locked into a nuclear family structure since the day she lost her mother and/or father in a carriage massacre, and she realizes that she has no desire to be locked into such a structure now. For Marianne, the lack of family, and the lack of a body of language to describe it, opens up the possibility for a revolutionary way of thinking and talking about family. One need not be locked into any family; instead, for Marianne, family is the result of a constant process of reevaluation and reconstitution.

*La Vie de Marianne* repeatedly attempts to represent the emergence of alternative kinship structures. These alternative kinship structures are characterized by forms of relation that exceed and undermine both patriarchy and heteronormativity. The difficulty with the articulation of such alternatives is that the terms deployed to describe kinship have become sedimented – so burdened by the passage of history – that they constitute monuments of almost sublime proportions. Psychoanalysis and structuralism both have gone so far as to say that kinship structures are foundational to the very use of language. So how then are we even to imagine names for what lies beyond *the family*? Rather than simply giving us those names and telling us what some new family would look like, this novel insistently repeats the very failure to imagine such a thing. But perhaps the problem lies in our desire to encapsulate the future of relations with the names of the present, for we might ask with this novel if failure – the failure of the family, the failure of representation, the failure of marriage – might not gain its own substance and if this

substance might not be the beginning of a social structure whose existence lies just beyond the threshold of the text.

Marivaux's novel thus demands that the reader constantly assess the value of extra-familial, interpersonal relationships. The heroine repeatedly meets others with whom she can establish (or not) a bond based on a sense of similarity. In the next chapter, we will see an orphan (of sorts) for whom similarity with those around him is impossible. When the hero of Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An 2440* is thrust into the future, he focuses instead on difference as a productive force of collective and individual identity.

**Chapter Four**  
**Dreaming of Futures Past:**  
**Prescriptive Legacies in Louis-Sébastien Mercier's**  
*L'An 2440: Rêve s'il en fut jamais*



Fig. 4.1: *Vue imaginaire de la Grande Galerie du Louvre en ruines* (1796)  
Hubert Robert

*Lorsque je lis l'histoire, je saute bien des pages, mais je cherche toujours très-curieusement les détails de la vie domestique: quand je les tiens une fois, je n'ai pas besoin de savoir le reste; je le devine.*

-Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *L'An 2440*

**Introduction: 'Tout un peuple auteur'**

The three previous chapters have focused on eighteenth-century French novels in which the principal concern is the construction – or reconstruction – of family. By expressing their conceptions of intimate communities through the language of kinship structures, each of the authors treated in this dissertation displays a utopian impulse – an impulse to manipulate the language that defines kinships structures and, by extension, to

alter the possibilities for what constitutes ‘family’ in the cultural imagination. In *L’An 2440: Rêve s’il en fut jamais*, Louis-Sébastien Mercier amplifies this utopian impulse, transforming it into the main plot element. When the eighteenth-century narrator of this novel wakes up in the Paris of 2440, he walks through the city, noting all that has changed and he expresses his joy that the city has been transformed into the best of all possible worlds. Mercier does not gesture toward new potential models of kinship; instead, he depicts a model of kinship that *will exist* in the future.

However, closer examination of the text reveals numerous contradictions (for instance, women have been granted more autonomy but they are relegated to a more or less silent position in the home). Fredric Jameson assesses contradiction as a necessary and constructive element of science fiction novels. He writes:

in order for narrative to project some sense of totality of experience in space and time, it must surely know some closure (a narrative must have an ending even if it is ingeniously organized around the structural repression of endings as such). At the same time, however, closure or the narrative ending is the mark of that boundary or limit beyond which thought cannot go. The merit of S[cience] F[iction] is to dramatize this contradiction on the level of plot itself, since the vision of future history cannot know any punctual ending of this kind, at the same time that its novelistic expression demands some such ending (“Progress vs. Utopia” 283).

In Jameson’s view, science fiction and utopian fiction – the two being inextricable, according to his argument – have little to do with the smooth extrapolation of the future from the present or the completely cohesive presentation of another world. Instead, these genres measure the impossibility of a world without gaps, or of a representation without ruptures. One might even say that the vitality of science fiction and utopian fiction arises

from the breaks they encounter as they mobilize their narratives. Indeed, as Jameson makes clear throughout his work, such encounters with contradiction work to enfold history into the text, and they do so not as the recapitulation of a causal chain but as what interrupts the ideological consistency of historical narrative representation.<sup>138</sup> Utopia, in this context, names not simply the presentation of a future world. It also designates the inconsistency in a dominant representation of the world that enables the production of a radically different view of things. Working from Jameson's theory, we can say that the contradictions in Mercier's text are precisely what defines it as utopian. We will thus examine the family, as well as the relation of the individual to family and society, as they are presented in *2440* through the novel's gaps, analyzing moments of discord and paradoxes within the text in order to understand the utopian impulse of Mercier's future family.

One of the first contradictions the reader encounters is a blurring of the boundary between life and death. Distinct from Catholic notions of the afterlife (where the soul rejoins its Father in heaven), Mercier's version of rebirth sees the soul joining its brothers and sisters on earth when each citizen's soul is reborn in the form of a book. "Quoi, tout le monde est auteur! ô ciel! que dites-vous là? Vos murailles vont s'embraser comme le salpêtre, & tout va sauter en l'air. Bon Dieu, tout un peuple auteur!"<sup>139</sup> In a chapter, notably called "Les Nouveaux Testaments," the narrator of Mercier's *2440* is astounded to learn from his guide that every citizen keeps a journal of his life that is published upon his death. The size and content of the book vary depending upon the life and the preferences of the individual, but each citizen is required to keep this journal. The

narrator's guide informs him that the book that lives on becomes the "soul" of the deceased. However, the purpose of this text is not to remember those who have passed, but rather to instruct future generations. The guide explains,

Ce sont des leçons immortelles que nous laissons à nos descendans; ils nous en aimeront davantage. Les portraits & et les statues n'offrent que les traits corporels, Pourquoi ne pas représenter l'ame elle-même & les sentimens vertueux qui l'ont affectée? Ils se multiplient sous nos expressions animées par l'amour. L'histoire de nos pensées, & celle de nos actions instruit notre famille (42).

In our last chapter, we saw how the artistic form of the portrait was of the utmost importance for Marivaux because it served as one means of communication – a communication of the body. For Mercier, on the other hand, the (male) physical body is important only in its capacity as a vehicle for the soul.<sup>140</sup> While Mercier does not claim to replace the biblical New Testament, he does suggest the possibility of an equally morally instructive tool, handed down not by saints, but by ordinary people.

Over the course of their lives, these ordinary people write a memoir that is at once individual and communal. These testaments not only serve each individual's descendants, but also contribute to the moral instruction of the entire nation. The books are read aloud at each citizen's funeral and then preserved. The words, once spoken, take on the force of an incantation that indelibly inscribes the deceased into History, where the soul will live on eternally. Death in this novel is revered rather than feared, and it provides an opportunity for new life and new creation. And yet, for all of the possibilities opened up by the death of the individual, nothing new ever really happens. Society is stagnant. What Mercier presents is not merely a *quest* for perfection – such is the task of the eighteenth-

century man; here Man *has already become* perfect. The idea of novelty and creation is thus nothing but a remnant of the narrator's early modern mind. He desires newness and evolution because he sees the possibility for man. When he encounters this human perfection in a dream, then he knows he has reached mankind's *telos*. In this way the testaments serve less as a pathway to the future than as a pathway to the past. By reading these testaments backwards through time, one could finally understand how to get from here to there. Man could finally have a map that leads him to perfection.

The perfectibility of man, in addition to being a preoccupation of many materialist philosophers in the eighteenth century (philosophers that Mercier both admired and criticized), also serves as the basis for much early modern utopian fiction.<sup>141</sup> Thomas More's *Utopia*, which inaugurates and provides a name for the subgenre, introduces an island where men work together as perfect beings. Similarly, Restif de la Bretonne's *Découverte australe par un homme volant* also offers an island where Man can live in perfection, but Bretonne's novel shifts the focus toward the family when the hero builds wings to fly himself and his wife to an island where they can begin a family in seclusion. In *2440*, Mercier looks outward (toward a general perfectibility of Man) while simultaneously turning inward (to the intimate family unit). In other words, the author of *2440* embraces the link between the individual and the collective, proposing a dialectical relation between the two. Only by perfecting Man can one perfect society, yet only by perfecting the family – what Jean-Jacques Rousseau calls the “oldest society” – can one perfect Man.<sup>142</sup>



Sadly, the testaments fail to provide a map to perfection for eighteenth-century readers because they are not included in the narrator's tale; he merely provides a description of them. Rather than unifying the past and the future, his account of all that he sees highlights the vast chasm between the two. From the first pages of the dedicatory epistle, the narrator addresses this future as one that "erupts" seemingly from nowhere:

Auguste & respectable année, qui dois amener la félicité sur la terre; toi, hélas? que je n'ai vue qu'en songe, quand tu viendras à *jaillir du sein de l'éternité*, ceux qui verront ton soleil fouleront aux pieds mes cendres & celles de trente générations, successivement éteintes & disparues dans le profond abîme de la mort (v, emphasis added).

In this way the individual gives way to the communal. Only by the succession of individual deaths over the course of time can man evolve into the perfect version of himself. In this version of History, once life ends, the soul resides somewhere deep in the belly of the nation, stirring and waiting patiently to "erupt," as it were, hundreds of years later – a fully-formed and fully-informed political being. Furthermore, Mercier introduces the desire to study the passage of time by referring to the humans of the future who will unknowingly trample on his ashes – ashes that, by that time, will have blended with the earth.

The above passage discusses not only the narrator's remains, but also those of thirty successive generations. While the narrator effaces the process of evolution, burying it alongside the thirty other generations, the gesture toward these lost generations of families that separate him from the future suggests an evolution of the species as a group of co-existing individuals. By explaining cultural progress through a discourse on

evolved models of kinship, Mercier shifts the valence of social critique from the geographic (as we see in the earlier utopian fiction of More, de Bergerac, and Voltaire) to the temporal. *Utopia* necessarily indicates spatiality (u-topos, the Greek word that indicates the no place that is simultaneously the good place). Louis Marin has analyzed the implications of the term, positing that utopian discourse emerges in the space between one order and the next, whereby the original space is neutralized. Put differently, the space in between the signifier (be it a word, the surface of a painting, or a physical space) and the intended signified generates meaning by the interplay between the two.<sup>143</sup> In Mercier's text, the signifier resembles the signified, although the space in between the two is measured in years. Thus Mercier invents the sub-genre of *uchronie*, where the idealized representation of society is separated by time rather than by space.<sup>144</sup>

Telling a story that spans almost a millennium from its beginning to its endpoint, *2440* seems to offer precisely an enlightenment story of teleological progress. As Gregory Ludlow puts it, "Mercier's *L'an 2440* affirms the belief in historical progress and development, rather than in the fixist notion of an ideal society, where time has stopped and perfection been achieved – in short, a static society sheltered from the flow of history" (21). Yet Mercier's devotion to this fixed point in the future precludes the time for actual cultural progress. The four paragraphs of the dedication mark one of only two references in this 308-page novel to the time in between 1770 and 2440 (the other being the brief mention of a biography of Louis XV written sometime in the twentieth century). The writer's pen may be able to cross over the interval of time, as Mercier claims, but it cannot faithfully fill in lost time. Living in what he perceives as a bad time,

dreaming of a better time, the author of *2440* loses the *in-between* time, and this gap, like the water surrounding Thomas More's famous utopian island, fixes his utopia just far enough away in time to make it an impossible present. Entering the future as an outsider, a man in the wrong time, the narrator is uniquely capable of describing the future society in a universal fashion. His description of the perfection he sees renders his future just as foreign as any far-off land.

As he explores future Paris, the narrator of *2440* becomes an archaeologist of the future. In fact, because of the stark division between body and footnotes, it is almost as if he is literally standing on the past; except that instead of digging it up to find out how things used to be, he is burying it beneath what has already come to pass. With his physical body in the eighteenth century and his mind in the twenty-fifth century, the narrator stands on the threshold of time. His utopian society is thrust into the future, transforming the very genre of the utopian tale. And yet, a certain geographical element still seeps through the text via its very form. Twenty-fifth-century Paris rests atop the ruins of eighteenth-century Paris. There is, therefore, a spatial displacement but it is vertical rather than horizontal; in other words, the flow of time emanates upwards from the core of the earth. Utopia, in this sense, is the *no* place that is the *good* place because it is out of phase with the current timeline, while still firmly anchored in the natural world.

As we have shown in Chapter Three, Marivaux's heroine espouses a fluid form of kinship that allows for a merging of assorted intimate communities that include – but are not limited to – the traditional nuclear family. Mercier's hero, on the other hand, despises such obfuscation. The narrator of this proto-science-fiction novel yearns for a wholeness,

a cohesiveness at the familial and the national levels, and in fact, this is exactly what he finds when he wakes up in Paris in the year 2440. The city has been whitewashed in every way. The streets have been cleaned of filth; the Seine becomes a source of life rather than a pestilent cesspool; the slaves have been freed, and notably, sent back home. In other words, every trace of alterity, every would-be ‘problem,’ has been eliminated. Twenty-fifth-century Paris is a utopian land where families live in harmony with one another, with nature, and with the nation. Even the once all-mighty king now walks amongst the common people. And yet, for all the presumed harmony, this story is presented from a place of precariousness and incompleteness. Although the narrator describes his journey through twenty-fifth-century Paris, he remains well aware of his existence in the eighteenth century. His thoughts and his voice are divided between two centuries separated by a gap of roughly 600 years. The Paris of his mind that he describes in the body of the text is completely divergent from, though ultimately dependent upon, the Paris inhabited by his body that he describes in the footnotes (the Paris of the eighteenth century).

This sort of *va-et-vient* between centuries displays a dualism between the fictional time (the twenty-fifth century) and the time of reading (the eighteenth century) where the two timelines are collapsed into one, each timeline informing and shaping the other. As Enrico Ruffi explains, “le but, pour [Mercier], ne peut justifier les moyens; ce sont les moyens employés qui préfigurent le but que l’on veut atteindre” (3). Mercier thus faces a great dilemma from the outset of the novel: if our present actions are constantly shaping the world that exists around us, how can we possibly imagine the realization of our

dreams? For Fredric Jameson, as we have seen, the response is simple, we cannot. Rather than imagining a 'real' future, science fiction, Jameson argues, "serve[s] the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come" (288). By imposing one timeline upon the other, the author thus reorients the trajectory of perfectibility from a straight line to a cyclical concept of perfectibility where representations of perfect individuals and families in the future are intended to alter the individuals and families of the eighteenth century, thus changing the course of history.

As the narrator states in the passage that serves as an epigraph for this chapter, domestic life is all that one needs to know in order to understand the history of a nation; everything else can be deduced from there. Deducing history through scenes of domestic life, then, serves as the task of this chapter. Through a study of the representation of domestic life in *2440*, we will deduce what can be learned about history (Mercier's term), politics, and family in eighteenth-century France. Furthermore, we will see how these perceptions are altered when a utopian narrative thrusts this ideal family 670 years into the future. In the past three chapters we have analyzed how intimate communities and the language used to describe them alter the social and political representational field in eighteenth-century France. In this chapter we will see one possible end-point for these changes, as presented by Mercier. Instead of imagining how changing the family can shape the future, we will see how Mercier's imagined future shapes the family of its past.

*Aux armes, citoyens! Ou, il faut défendre la famille*

After walking endlessly through the streets and edifices of twenty-fifth-century Paris, in chapter forty-one the narrator finally enters the family home. This is not the home of his guide, but that of a random family whose home the pair enters freely. In this future Paris, the home does not signal a space cut off from society, but rather a coming together of all families. He begins by describing the space of the family home:

C'étoient de grandes salles vastes, sonores, où l'on pouvoit se promener; & les toits munis d'une bonne charpente défioient les traits piquans de la froidure & les rayons du soleil: les maisons enfin ne vieillissoient plus avec ceux qui les avoient fait bâtir (272).

The elaboration of open and inviting spaces within the family home runs counter to the inward progression of the eighteenth-century family toward a more private home space, as assessed by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Habermas notes that as the bourgeois public sphere emerges in eighteenth-century Europe, the family begins to turn inward. The changes, he notes, can be seen even at an architectural level, where homes are increasingly designed for the needs of the single family.<sup>145</sup> Philippe Ariès argues that it is also during this time (between 1500-1800) that the family – as a cohesive unit – becomes the focus of private life. During this time, he argues, the family underwent a transformative process; no longer was it an “economic unit for the sake of whose reproduction everything had to be sacrificed,” instead, it became a safe haven for the individual and a “defense against outsiders” (*Private Life* 8). As these studies suggest, the family, since around the sixteenth century, was on a trajectory to become the locus of the private realm that it remains in modernity. In

Mercier's future home, however, any divisions between public and private seem completely absent. The rooms are specifically designed to accommodate all who enter, not only family members. They are large enough for people to walk around comfortably, and the acoustics of the room facilitate conversation. Furthermore, he describes the home almost as if it were alive ("*les maisons [...] ne vieillissoient plus*"). Young and vibrant, the family home no longer seems stogy and dated. The living space echoes the narrator's description of the family whose members appear welcoming and warm.

As he enters the salon, the narrator is greeted by the master of the house:

J'entrai dans le sallon, & je distinguai à l'instant le maître du logis. Il vint à moi sans grimace & sans fadeur. Sa femme, ses enfans avoient en sa présence une contenance libre, mais respectueuse; & le *Monsieur*, ou le fils de la maison, ne commença point par persifler son pere pour me donner un echantillon de son esprit: sa mere & même sa grand'mere n'auroient point applaudi à de telles gentillesses. Ses sœurs n'étoient point maniérées ni muettes; elles saluerent avec grace, & se remirent à leurs occupations, l'oreille en guet; elles ne regardoient point en dessous les moindres gestes que je faisois: mon grand âge & ma voix cassée ne les firent pas même sourire. On ne me fit point de ces vaines simagrées, qui sont le contraire de la vraie politesse (273).

The scene described in this passage is one of complete domestic bliss. The whole family is assembled, complete with all of the requisite components. Father, mother, children, even grandparents populate this space where we can see a move away from a household, or a space where members of family simply reside with their servants, toward a *home* in a much more modern, bourgeois sense, where family members fill the space with mutual love and respect.<sup>146</sup> And yet, for all of the warmth felt by the narrator, there is a striking lack of engagement between characters. While conversation is hinted at throughout the chapter, dialogue is scarce, and the tone with which the narrator describes such verbal

interaction is that of complete euphoria, which lends a dream-like quality to the scene. Once again, any disruption has been ironed out in this home where everyone is nothing less than *perfect*. No one makes a strange face, no one talks too much or too loudly, and no one abides by bygone forms of aristocratic *politesse*. Instead, family members use frank speech, avoiding any superlatives. Everything and everyone is exceedingly adequate.

Remarkably, the scene of future domestic bliss lacks a strong male figure. Although the women of the household are respectful of the father, they are still free, and their numbers far outweigh the men. The presence of the grandmother reinforces the maternal role as she takes part in the praise and instruction of the children. Motherhood here is thus doubled as both adult women raise the children as respectful young citizens. The sisters engage in conversation, but their manner is not affected, that is, they speak in a reasonable and literal fashion. Unlike the noblewomen of the narrator's time, these women's speech remains unadorned. Furthermore, the sisters are the only truly active figures in this scene. While others sit and chat, the sisters are hard at work ("*elles se remirent à leurs occupations*"), contributing to the familial household by their chores just as they contribute to society by their words. In fact, the narrator remarks his admiration for these active young women throughout the chapter, at one point stating, "*elles ne coupoient pas la journée par la moitié pour ne rien faire le soir*" (275). In other words, although the father is singled out as the *maître de la maison*, he seems the least involved of any family member in the everyday household business, which is run exclusively by women.



Mercier, it would seem, takes a very Aristotelian view on gender division of labor.<sup>147</sup> As the guide takes the narrator around Paris, they do not run into any women until they reach the household. Women appear to be completely excluded from the public sphere. They are so excluded, in fact, that their depiction within the narrative gives the impression that they magically appear once a man walks into the room. Women work from home, sewing, raising the children, and never getting involved in discussions of a philosophical or political nature. Yet, while women as individuals are scarcely seen in public, representations of women abound. In the throne room, in the king's library, in the salon, images of women serve as allegory for everything that was wrong with France in the eighteenth century, as well as everything that is good about it now. So why would Mercier, who elsewhere praises the intellect of women, choose to distinguish so starkly between the powerful yet empty aesthetic representation of women, and the docile figure of woman herself?<sup>148</sup> Questioning this very contradiction, Annie Smart distinguishes between the political and the civic in Mercier's work. Women may not have a *political* function in *2440* – they cannot contribute to the governmental systems of future France – but they do have a civic duty. According to Smart, the woman's civic duty lies not only in the reproduction of the species, but also in the education of future citizens. As teachers of civic and moral values, they transcend the maternal role to actively engage in the public sphere, all while being confined to the home.

Let us compare this representation of women with Mercier's description of young bourgeois women of eighteenth-century France, published ten years after *2440* in *Le Tableau de Paris*. In it he writes:

Les filles du petit-bourgeois vivent moins que les autres sous le regard de leur mère: elles ont des prétextes perpétuels pour mettre leur mantelet et sortir de la maison; elles sont réputées sages, tant qu'elles ne sont point enceintes; mais, quand leur grossesse se déclare, elles quittent la maison paternelle, et les voilà six mois après filles du monde (124).

Rather than contributing to the household economy, the eighteenth-century woman seeks to distance herself from it. She does perform labor at home, reproducing the species, but once this labor comes to an end she returns to society. Furthermore, the daughter remains separated from the mother. If she lives far from her mother's prying eyes, then she also lives far from her mother's instruction. Motherhood becomes for the daughter a loathsome chore and one with which she is completely unfamiliar. Whereas the future woman embraces her role as mother, thriving on the labor involved in raising virtuous citizens, the eighteenth-century woman finds herself a mother due to her licentious behavior. The mother's role is thus displaced and cordoned off from the body. The child born becomes a symbol of libertinism and something to be left behind rather than the promise of growth and abundance.

By the end of the eighteenth century in France, the representation of women as mothers became so commonplace as to lead to an understanding of maternity as a *natural* state for women. Rousseau's *Émile* found his ideal mate in Sophie, the dutiful mother, paintings by such artists as Greuze and Fragonard portrayed women doting on infants and young children, and new studies on physiognomy reinforced notions of woman's natural place as producer of children. Mercier's representation of the twenty-fifth-century woman in *2440* thus portrays a return of the woman to what many believed to be her natural state. The role of the mother, which had previously been *unnaturally* detached

from her body in the eighteenth-century, is reattached, like a prosthetic that was always already there. In fact, Elisabeth Badinter argues that maternal love is nothing more than a human sentiment, “et comme tout sentiment, il est incertain, fragile et imparfait” (Badinter 23). The eighteenth century, she claims, was a time period when motherhood became a political issue as men argued on financial, moral, and philosophical grounds for the return of woman to her natural state, that is, the state of living for her children. The narrator of *2440* highlights the rift between representations of the ideal good mother, and what he understands as the negligent mothers of the eighteenth century, reinforcing notions of the unnatural state of such women in his chapter “Tableaux Emblématiques.” Entering a room full of paintings in the King’s chambers, the narrator observes artistic interpretations of each successive century. When he arrives at the tableau representing the eighteenth century he remarks that the frame is largely occupied by the figure of a woman. This woman is beautifully adorned and stands with her hand outstretched. But, as the narrator points out, her smile seems forced and, as for her regard, “il étoit séduisant, mais il n’étoit pas vrai” (209). The reader learns that the beautiful ribbons are, in fact, covering the chains that bind her wrists, and, as the narrator explains what he sees as his eyes move down the frame, we learn that she has holes in her dress through which small children peer out. The ambiguous language of this scene highlights once again Mercier’s conflicting thoughts on women. Although the woman in the painting appears to neglect her children, hiding them away while she spends money on fine adornments for herself, the chains around her wrists hidden by ribbons suggest that she is literally a slave to fashion. To be a slave is to have no autonomy, thus the painting implies that women’s

obsession with fashion in the eighteenth century is based on social convention rather than personal desire.

The twenty-fifth-century woman, on the other hand, is represented as nothing more than a good wife and mother. Modeled after Rousseau's Julie, the future wife revels in her role as mother. The naturalness of woman's role as mother is repeated in the numerous references to breastfeeding mothers. In one instance, the narrator enters the throne room to witness a scene in which a young man will finally learn of his destiny to be king. As the narrator waits for the ceremony to take place, he describes the room:

Quatre figures de marbre blanc, représentant la force, la tempérance, la justice & la clémence, portoient un simple fauteuil d'ivoire blanc, élevé seulement pour faciliter la portée de la voix. Ce siege étoit couronné d'un dais suspendu par une main dont le bras sembloit sortir de la voûte. A chaque côté du trône étoient deux tablettes; sur l'une desquelles étoient gravées les loix de l'Etat & les bornes du pouvoir royal, & sur l'autre les devoirs des rois & ceux des sujets. En face étoit une femme qui allaitoit un enfant, emblème fidelle de la royauté. La premiere marche, qui servoit de degré pour monter au trône, étoit en forme de tombe. Dessus étoit écrit en gros caracteres: L'ETERNITÉ. C'étoit sous cette premiere marche que reposoit le corps embaumé du monarque prédécesseur, en attendant que son fils vint le déplacer. C'est de-là qu'il crioit à ses héritiers qu'ils étoient tous mortels, que le songe de la royauté étoit prêt à finir, qu'ils resteroient alors seuls avec leur renommée! (217)

This passage begins with the narrator's remark about four statues – all allegorical representations of virtues. Virtues, always depicted in the feminine, thus form the foundation upon which the throne rests.<sup>149</sup> The inherently masculine space of the throne is bathed in the feminine. On the tablets that surround the throne, the King's power is matched only by its own limitations and is countered by the power of the people. The reader's eyes move down the paragraph (as they might when regarding a work of art)

toward the prominent “ÉTERNITÉ” where the former King’s body lies, entombed until it will be replaced with the body of the man who will next occupy the throne. Placing the all-powerful “éternité” next to the fragile “songe,” the narrator dramatizes the rupture between the seemingly congruous body politic of the king on the one hand, and the utter precariousness of both of the king’s bodies (natural and politic) on the other.<sup>150</sup>

While the space and the decorations of this room highlight the transference of paternal power, it is notable that there is a constant female presence. In addition to the feminine virtues, the throne is across from the figure of a breastfeeding woman. The figure of the woman is necessary to highlight the need to reproduce and nurture the nation. The breastfeeding mother in this scene – a scene that highlights citizenship – presents the reader with “a spectacle of the maternal, and not the kingly body” (Smart 73). The woman thus undergirds the nascent nation. In fact, if we suspend our disbelief only slightly, we can imagine that the breastfeeding woman is not a statue at all, but a living being. The ambiguity of the scene’s language suggests that the woman may not be a statue, mere representation of a woman, but rather this may be an actual breastfeeding woman in the flesh.<sup>151</sup> Such a reading elevates the role of the woman once more. The live, breastfeeding woman on this stage is contrasted with the dead body of the father entombed in the stair; thus the woman becomes a representation of life itself. The “éternité” associated earlier with the King’s body is thus made possible only by being filtered through the female body – both by her own labor (reproducing citizens), and by her life-sustaining milk. Not only does she reproduce future generations, but her very (alive) body once again stands in for an entire century – only this representation of the

present moment, that is, the year 2440, relies upon a female body that is not bound in chains to popular culture, but rather is bound to her family by her very flesh. Unlike the king who, according to the footnotes, used to sap resources and energy from his subjects, this symbolic mother has the power to give birth to and to nourish a new nation, in Smart's words, "a nation of kin – all brothers of the same mother, as it were" (69).

If the woman has become such a powerful figure in the future – particularly in her role as mother – what then has become of the man? As we noted in Chapter One, the role of the father in the family has waned in power, yet men still dominate the public and political spheres. We understand that the twenty-fifth-century father is respected (rather than feared), but his role within the family is rarely discussed. While the author dedicates an entire chapter to women ("Des Femmes") where we learn that women's education consists of economy (*oikos*), how to please their husbands, and how to raise their children, the role of the father within the family seems to be that of on-looker. He is omnipresent, yet we never know exactly what he does. This type of ambiguity is common to Republican writing. The figure of the mother is in line with nature; she can literally give birth to new, virtuous citizens. For Republicans (and anti-royalists) such as Mercier, the father-figure, on the other hand, is too closely aligned with the absolute monarchy. While the father of Mercier's family is still the head of household and is revered, his muted position calls into question the legitimacy of the father's absolute power as such.

Lynn Hunt notes the ambivalent feelings toward fathers in the literature of the eighteenth century, describing the emergence of what she calls the "ideal good father."<sup>152</sup> Hunt goes so far as to claim that the rise of the "good father" figure in the fictional

literature of the eighteenth century undermines absolutist authority. The good father still has authority over his children, but he no longer exhibits a repressive power. Like the *nouveau père* from our discussion of *Manon Lescaut*, the ideal good father cares about his children's feelings more than his own authority. However, as Hunt points out, "as the father became 'good,' he also carried less weight in the story line" (22). This situation holds true for Mercier's novel, where discussion of the father is limited. If we think back to the passage in which the narrator enters the family salon, we see that the father is briefly mentioned in the first sentence ("[le maître] vint à moi sans grimace et sans fadeur") and then he is virtually forgotten. In fact, although we learn about the mannerisms and occupations of each of the other family members throughout the chapter, all that we learn about the father is that he goes to bed early, eats simple but hearty food, and never gets indigestion. Although he is always present, the father's role remains decidedly ambiguous.

While women's habits and personalities are described in great detail, men of the future are most often described only in terms of what they *are not*. They are neither too powerful and repressive, nor too weak-willed and passive. Once again, utopian longing leads the narrator to extol the virtues of the in-between. At the far ends of this imaginary spectrum, we find two types of men that the narrator remembers with disdain from his own time: the overly feminine libertines and the power-hungry King. Mercier discusses at great length the frail frame and feminine demeanor of eighteenth century man, contrasting him with the perfectly constituted future man, who wears loose, practical clothing. In fact, Mercier's chapter on clothing borrows heavily from Rousseau's *Emile*

which extols the benefits of loose-fitting clothing that allows freer movement and the ability to breathe. It is thus no surprise that the narrator finds an eighteenth-century model for the level-headed man of the twenty-fifth century across the border in Rousseau's homeland of Switzerland where men are robust and have a "radieuse santé" (97).

More important than a masculine physique is a rational mind. The chapter on the first communion analyzes the maturation of the human mind. Centering on a scientific exploration of the natural order, this initiatory ceremony involves giving a young man the tools that will help him in his quest for knowledge – namely a telescope and a microscope. Once the young man reaches the age of maturity, the elders bring him to the observatory where they put him in front of a telescope; "nous faisons descendre sous ses yeux Mars, Saturne, Jupiter, tous ces grands corps flottans avec ordre dans l'espace: nous lui ouvrons, pour ainsi dire, l'abîme de l'infini" (*ibid*). A pastor then beseeches him always to worship the God of this vast universe that surpasses even man's imagination. After this, they show him another universe, one that exists on a minuscule level, perceptible only with the use of the microscope. Drawing a parallel between the two universes – the micro and the macro – Mercier situates the young man firmly between them. Like Gulliver or Micromégas, this young man realizes that he is neither the greatest nor the smallest being in the universe. In this way, he feels the connection between himself and everything that surrounds him, noting that he is "le frère de tout ce que le Créateur a touché" (100).

This seemingly harmonious and peaceful scene of initiation is disturbed by the text surrounding it. In the beginning of the chapter, we learn that the elders stalk the



young man for an indeterminate period of time. They observe his mannerisms, even during his most private moments, waiting for the day when these solitary escapes will transform from a stage for licentious and youthful behavior into the space for internal reflection. Once he displays reasonable behavior even in his (almost) private moments, the elders decide that he is ready for initiation. More than a first communion with the supreme being (Nature), this ritual symbolizes an initiation into the cult of Man. “Dès ce jour il est initié avec les êtres pensans,” declares the guide – because his mind has matured, he has finally become a man. Initiation into the cult of the “thinking being” is displaced from the sexual to the spiritual. The spiritual awakening is reserved only for men; however, because of the displacement from sexual to spiritual, Man’s stronghold over women is weakened. Rather than the penetration of a woman serving as an entry into manhood, the future man penetrates the very fabric of the universe. His lot is decoupled from that of the woman, whose own entry into the adult realm, as we have previously stated, is dependent upon her role as mother.

The crisis of fatherhood extends throughout the novel to a crisis of masculinity in general – a crisis that will continue to grow in the final years of the eighteenth century. In fact, Hunt notes a similar crisis of masculinity taking place in post-Revolutionary France. After years of being governed by a strong male figure, the newly orphaned French citizens do not wish to replicate such power in the figure of the male; however, they worry about the presence of a strong woman in the cultural imagination. While a strong male figure recalls the tyranny of the monarch, a strong female figure would undermine male political power. Because of this fear, Robespierre turns to the gods (that although

gendered, transcend human sexuality), replacing Marianne with Hercules as symbol of France, reinforcing the notion of France as a virulent nation. Furthermore, Hunt notes, it is only in the last quarter of the eighteenth century that doctors begin to create a coherent view of the female physiology in order to further distinguish male from female and to curtail female power. Thus Mercier's novel exhibits the cultural conditions that lead to what MacCannell calls "the regime of the brother." Ironically these conditions, which are built into a fictional future, contribute to the pernicious regime that emerges in the eighteenth century.

In order to demonstrate further the conflict between the desire for and the fear of a strong, male leader, we shall return to the throne room. We have already noted how the throne room portrays the woman as the giver of life and nurturer of all virtuous citizens; in this same scene we also see two powerful images of masculinity. The first, the previous King entombed in the stair, the second, the son who waits to ascend the throne. However, unlike earlier iterations of monastic provenance, in this scene the son has no idea of his noble birth. In an early modern futuristic version of nature versus nurture, the future prince is taken from the family at birth and raised on a farm, far from the city and the court. The court has been stripped of its earlier extravagance, and the future leader requires a more rustic upbringing to lead the nation. Genealogy remains an important component in the transfer of power, yet here it is momentarily displaced as the son is adopted into a working family. The *retrouvailles* of noble patronage, a common trope in bourgeois theater (as in Marivaux and Diderot), is altered completely, leading not to a happy union in marriage, but rather to a union between the leader and his people.

These two scenes of masculine initiation – the first communion and the throne room – thus highlight a shift in masculinity away from domination over women and toward a communion between men. In each scene the son becomes a brother of men. The scene in the family salon shows us a father respected by his family, but the respect is presented as natural rather than forced. The father in *2440* does not need to manage the various members of his family because in this utopian future everyone is already perfect; there is no longer anyone to manage. The man's power no longer emanates from the family household; rather it comes from his bonds with other men. Mercier's novel enacts Rousseau's perfect society described in the *Social Contract*, where families join together and the individual family's authority is inseparable from that of society as a whole.

Rather than focusing on the individual family, the narrator of *2440* spends most of his time describing the interactions between individuals in society. Family homes no longer constitute a private sphere because they are open to all who choose to enter. The distinction between families becomes blurry in this future as a sense of duty to the family is replaced by a sense of civic duty.<sup>153</sup> Like the young man who learns of the dependence of the micro on the macro (and vice versa), so too is the smaller family unit inseparable from the nation. In fact, we see this interplay between micro and macro again when the narrator learns of the three most honorable things that a man can do: make a child, sow a field, and build a house. This series of noble actions begins with the individual, moves to the universal (sow a field for the enrichment of the self and others), and then occupies the space joining the two (the family home). When it comes to the individual and the collective, the happiness of the one is completely dependent upon the other.

As a means of returning to Jameson's proposal that all utopian narratives are bound by an ending beyond which "thought cannot go" (283), we shall turn to the ending of *2440*. Having left his guide, the narrator decides to visit Versailles where he is (delightfully) shocked to find the once beautiful castle in ruins. He stumbles across Louis XIV, resurrected from the dead to see the result his destructive reign, who laments, "je pleure & je pleurerai toujours...Ah! que n'ai-je su" (308). This democratizing move is perhaps one of Mercier's most revolutionary. It is not merely the evocation of the Sun King and his demise that is so astonishing, but it is also the means by which the author renders the once powerful king weak and powerless. Similar to the author, the narrator, and the reader – even the king cannot imagine the future. Just after this scene, the narrator wakes up and the story ends, leaving the reader to imagine what will come next. This post-narrative moment of suspense encapsulates the utopian impulse of the narrative itself, an impulse in which familial roles and the roles of individuals within family and society become unhinged and therefore pregnant with possibility.

The potential for mankind's perfection is at once embedded in Mercier's text and extends beyond the text, implicitly proposing social change on a large scale. In the section that follows, we will analyze the ways in which the author's utopian society is communicated through the manuscript, and the ways in which it prescribes a new model of society.

**“Pourquoi le genre humain ne seroit-il pas semblable à l’individu?”<sup>154</sup>**

In the first chapter of *2440*, the narrator’s English friend says of Paris, “Votre capitale est un composé incroyable. Ce monstre difforme est le réceptacle de l’extrême opulence & de l’excessive misère: leur lutte est éternelle. Quel prodige! que ce corps dévorant qui se consume dans chaque partie, puisse subsister dans un épouvantable inégalité” (3-4). To the foreign eye (and to the narrator’s own eye), eighteenth-century Paris is a “deformed monster,” a “receptacle of opulence,” and, perhaps most important, a “devouring body.” The metaphor of Paris as a living body is repeated throughout the novel as the city goes from being weak to robust – from diseased and moribund to hearty and vibrant.<sup>155</sup> The city grows and breathes; in turn it makes its inhabitants sick and eventually cures them with fresh air and clean water. This body is constantly changing and evolving, and it is completely dependent upon its internal parts: the people and systems that inhabit its bowels.

Thus in order to ascertain the changing body-city of Paris, it is necessary to do a little dissecting – or rather, vivisection – opening up the living city to find out how it worked in the past and how it will work in the future. In fact, the novel invites this type of dissected reading by its very structure. Because the narrator wanders through the streets of the city reporting what he sees in no particular order, the novel has the feel of a child’s plastic puzzle where one square is missing, allowing all the other pieces to be moved around in order to create a more complete picture.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, the copious footnotes that pepper the text present an image of the page that is literally divided into pieces. In parsing out the content and the form of the novel, we see that the whole of

Mercier's utopia becomes more than a representational space in a future time; it becomes an instructional manual, a moral guide for the Parisians of 1771 that might eventually lead them to the future that the narrator desires.

Mercier's text explores the utopian potential for the body of the nation by examining the parts of that body (individual citizens) to see how they work – both individually and collectively. Yet as we shall see, this novel displays an insurmountable tension between the whole and its parts. Mercier's question that serves as the title of this section, "Why can't the human race resemble the individual?" is one that he will try to answer throughout the text and it is the problematic that we will examine in this section.

First, we shall examine the textual body of *2440*. In constructing a utopian family and society, the form of the novel is of the utmost importance. As we have demonstrated in previous chapters, the form of the novel depends largely upon the protagonist's narrative voice. The narrator of *Manon Lescaut* takes full control of his voice, distinguishing it from that of the *homme de qualité* to the extent that Des Grieux's story is accorded its own volume; in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, Zilia weaves together words to create a tapestry of meaning and then translates that tapestry into French in order to share it with her new compatriots; and in *La Vie de Marianne*, the protagonist translates her body into the body of the text making her life legible to her friend. The interdependence of narrative voice and novelistic form remains evident in *2440*. The novel serves as a stand-alone piece, and yet it is a work that Mercier will continue to write for the rest of his life in one form or another. *Tableau de Paris* and *Nouveau Paris*, while clear departures from the futuristic form of *2440*, still continue the author's utopian project,

which aims at cataloging every aspect of the social and political life of the living, breathing city of Paris. In fact, these three novels read together constitute a Paris trilogy – a series of works in which each novel aims to bring to light all that is good and bad in Paris.<sup>157</sup>

Within this trilogy, *2440* stands out as the sole (formally) utopian novel.<sup>158</sup> While the two other novels document the people and systems of the city, this proto-science fiction novel aims not only to document, but also to demonstrate the city's potential. By highlighting the futurity of the novel, Mercier projects his vision of Paris as the natural outcome for years of human evolution. In so doing, he breaks free from previous utopian traditions, inventing the *uchronie*. Uchronia, a term first coined by French philosopher Charles Renouvier in 1876 with the publication of his very descriptively titled novel, *Uchronie (L'Utopie dans l'histoire), esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilisation européenne tel qu'il n'a pas été, tel qu'il aurait pu être*, describes precisely the projection of utopia into a distant time rather than a place.<sup>159</sup> As with utopia, uchronia represents not only a “good” time, but also a “no” time. Due to the temporal disjunction, the reader experiences defamiliarization with the story and is thus allowed to suspend disbelief and to imagine this future as a very real possibility.

Despite the subtitle of the novel (*Rêve s'il en fût jamais*), Mercier presents his Paris as a vision rather than a dream. By recasting the passive *rêve* as the actively prophetic *vision*, the author presents this city as an inevitable future, and in so doing he reinforces the realistic quality of his narrative. Robert Darnton identifies three additional elements used by Mercier to convey the verisimilitude of his future Paris: concrete

description, elaborate footnotes, and what he calls “Rousseauistic rhetoric.” Rousseauistic rhetoric (or what we have called the democratizing effect of Mercier’s language) “assigns roles to writer and reader, producing a common alignment against the institutions of the Old Regime” (120). As we saw in the previous section, Rousseau’s influence is evident in Mercier’s frequent reprisal of Rousseauistic themes (such as woman’s ‘natural’ maternal role and the health benefits of loose-fitting attire). Additionally, Mercier’s use of elaborate footnotes finds provenance in the work of Rousseau, the latter using lengthy footnotes in his philosophical essays to provoke further reflection in readers. Mercier also appeals to his readers’ sensibility and reason in the footnotes, but in *2440* the footnotes tend to overtake the page. We will now turn to these footnotes, as well as the concrete descriptions – the two remaining “methods” employed by the author – to see how these devices enhance the utopian impulse of Mercier’s text.

As Darnton points out, the footnotes in *2440* create a dialogue between two very distinct voices, the voice from the future in the body of the text, and that of the present moment in the footnotes. However, while he assigns these roles to two distinct characters, the language used in the footnotes alerts the reader that both voices actually belong to the same narrator. The narrator is thus divided between two timelines. As he transcribes his dream onto paper, his eighteenth-century voice cannot help but interject, highlighting the ills of his present moment – ills that must be eradicated in order to progress to the peaceful and reasonable future he describes. The footnotes thus serve mainly to draw a contrast between the eighteenth and the twenty-fifth centuries, and to urge readers to take action in the present moment. Within the footnotes we find scathing critiques of



everything from the church, to the government, and to sexuality. It is even within the footnotes that Mercier predicts a revolution, at one point writing, “tout en Europe tend à une révolution soudaine” (293).

The content of the footnotes is doubled by their use as a formal device. The division of the text between main body and footnotes disrupts the natural progression, as well as the aesthetic experience, of reading. The reader’s eyes must constantly move back and forth, flipping backwards and forwards through the pages. [See Figures 2-3.] Although footnotes are a common feature of the eighteenth century historical or philosophical novel (as we have seen above in our discussion of Rousseau, and in Chapter Two in our analysis of Graffigny), the excessive number of footnotes in this novel gives the reader the impression of actually reading two separate novels that somehow appear on the same page. The first story, recounted in the body of the text, presents the journey of a very old man observing future Paris, while the second, found in the footnotes, serves at times as philosophical treatise, and at others as political pamphlet. In fact, one can almost see the first draft of the later *Tableau de Paris* within the footnotes of 2440. In breaking up the readerly experience, the author forces the reader to reckon with the disjunction between the future and the present; thus the reader is implored to fill in the time separating the two in a meaningful way. In this way, the reader, much like the narrator, is encouraged to inhabit the space between now and utopia.

Nantes, & de Rouen à Marseille. Nous avons fait ce canal de Provence, qui manquoit à cette belle province favorisée des plus doux regards du soleil. En vain un citoyen zélé vous offroit ses lumières & son courage; tandis que vous payiez chèrement des ouvriers frivoles, vous avez laissé cet honnête homme se morfondre pendant vingt ans dans une inaction forcée. Enfin nos terres sont si bien cultivées, l'état de labourer est devenu si honorable, l'ordre & la liberté regnent tellement dans nos campagnes, que si quelq'homme puissant abusoit de son ministère pour commettre quelque monopole, alors la justice qui s'éleve au-dessus des palais, mettroit un frein à sa témérité. La justice n'est plus un vain nom, comme dans votre siècle; son glaive descend sur toute tête criminelle, & cet exemple doit être encore plus fait pour intimider les grands que le peuple; car les premiers sont cent fois plus disposés au vol, à la rapine, aux concussion de toute espèce. — Entretenez-moi, je vous prie, de cette matière importante. Il me semble que vous avez adopté la sage méthode d'emmagaziner les bleds; cela est très-bien fait; on prévient ainsi & d'une manière sûre les calamités publiques. Mon siècle a commis de graves erreurs à ce sujet; il étoit fort en calcul, mais il n'y faisoit jamais entrer la somme épouvantable des abus. Des écrivains bien intentionnés supposoient gratuitement l'ordre, parce qu'avec ce ressort tout rouloit le plus facilement du monde. Oï! comme on se disputoit sur la fameuse loi d'exportation (a); & pendant

(a) Cette fameuse loi, qui devoit être le signal de la félicité publique, a été le signal de la famine: elle s'est assise sur les gerbes des récoltes les plus fortunées; elle a dévoré le pauvre à la porte des greniers qui croûtoient sous l'abondance des grains. Un fléau mo-

Figure 4.2: From *L'An 2440: Rêve s'il en fut jamais*, 1776

ces belles disputes, comme le peuple souffroit la faim! — Remerciez la providence qui gouvernoit ce royaume; sans elle vous auriez éprouvé

rat, jusqu'alors inconnu à la nation; lui a coûté son propre sol étranger, & a montré dans le jour le plus horrible la dépravation humaine. L'homme s'est montré le plus cruel ennemi de l'homme. Épo. véritable exemple, aussi dangereux que le fléau même. L. lui en fin a consacré elle-même l'inhumanité particulière. Je crois beaucoup à la profonde humanité des écrivains qui ont été les fauteurs de cette loi; elle sera peut-être du bien un jour; mais ils doivent éternellement se reprocher d'avoir causé, sans le vouloir, la mort de plusieurs milliers d'hommes & les souffrances de ceux que la mort a épargnés. Ils ont été trop précipités; ils ont vu tout, excepté la cupidité humaine, puissamment excitée par cette amorce dangereuse. C'est un siphon, (dit énergiquement M. Linguet) qu'ils ont mis dans la main du commerce, & avec lequel il a succé la substance du peuple. Le Clamour public doit l'emporter sur les Éphémérides. On pousse des cris douloureux; donc l'institution est actuellement mauvaise. Que le mal parte d'une cause locale, n'importe, il falloit la deviner, la prévoir, la prévenir, sentir qu'un besoin de première nécessité ne devoit pas être abandonné au cours fortuit des événements; qu'une nouveauté aussi étrange dans un vaste royaume lui donneroit une secousse qui opprimeroit certainement la partie la plus foible. C'étoit cependant le contraire que les économistes se promettoient. Ils doivent avouer qu'ils ont été égarés par le désir même du bien public, qu'ils n'ont pas assez marié le projet, qu'ils l'ont isolé; tandis que tout se touche dans l'ordre politique. Ce n'est pas assez d'être calculateur; il faut être homme d'état; il faut estimer ce que les passions détruisent, altèrent ou changent; il faut peser ce que l'action des riches peut opérer sur la

Figure 4.3: From *L'An 2440: Rêve s'il en fut jamais*, 1776

A few footnotes, however, take on a rather different tone. Instead of contrasting with the content of the chapter, these notes aim to bridge the temporal gap. Take, for example, one of the longest footnotes in *2440*, from the chapter “Forme du Gouvernement.” This footnote spans three pages and discusses revolution and the fall of the monarchy. In it, the narrator unveils the general principles that govern the eighteenth-century king’s council, and he criticizes the court for the greed that leads a king to exploit his people and to justify the excess labor as a means of keeping the people from becoming insolent. The narrator then explains that this type of exploitation that requires subjects to work hard, long days runs counter to reason because an overworked subject is

far less productive than a well-treated subject. The second paragraph of the footnote introduces a perspectival shift as the narrator introduces a visionary – a philosopher – who would counsel the king to show the same love and respect to his subjects as he does to his family. In loving his subjects, the philosopher claims, the king will show respect for his family, and the kingdom will love and respect him in return rather than wish for a revolt. He advises the king:

Votre grandeur, votre sureté sont moins fondées sur votre puissance absolue que sur l'amour de votre peuple. S'il est malheureux, il souhaitera plus ardemment une révolution; & il ébranlera votre trône ou celui de vos enfans. Le peuple est immortel, & vous devez passer. La majesté du trône réside plus dans une tendresse vraiment paternelle que dans un pouvoir illimité (221).

After the imaginary counselor to the king offers this sage advice, the narrator notes that such a philosopher would, in the future, be considered a visionary of his time. In this footnote, therefore, the narrator demonstrates hope for a transition from the present to the future. Although he does not provide a description of the path to his utopian future, he does give clues within the footnotes of how it might come about. In order to invoke this change, he uses the language of family, but instead of being aggressive, paternal power must be tender. Furthermore, the narrator reverses the logic of the king's body politic by placing it within body of the people. Here it is not the king that lives on – he will surely die – but the people, who are constantly reproducing, who remain eternal.

In these instances then, the line on the page that separates the body of the text from the footnotes serves less as a tool for incision that amputates the past from the future than as a bridge uniting the two. If, as Darnton claims, Mercier intended this work to

serve as a guidebook to the future, then this aspect of the novel becomes most evident within the footnotes. While the body of the text shows the reader what future Paris will have become by the year 2440, the footnotes perform two functions: first, they describe the hurdles that must be overcome to arrive at the utopian future, and second, they demonstrate to the reader in a very concrete fashion the modes for getting there. Utopia can exist only in the future, and the footnotes instruct the reader on just how to fill in the in-between time. The narrator moves from time to space when his narrative turns toward the act of reading itself. In one of the final chapters of the novel, the narrator reads aloud a journal from the future and he learns about the rest of the twenty-fifth-century world.

### **The Global Body**

Upon waking up in twenty-fifth-century Paris, the narrator meets his guide who immediately takes him to the nearest haberdashery to dress him in the appropriate attire. It is not simply that his clothes are out of fashion, but they are in fact an affront to society. The ornaments that adorn his clothes along with the sword he carries at his waist are unacceptable in this peaceful and simple city. The narrator learns that the clothes of the future are much more comfortable and practical than his own, and he reports all of this to the reader in great detail. From the colors of the clothes, to the type of fabric, to the cut of the trousers – nothing is left to the reader's imagination. This episode brings us to the third element that Darnton attributes to Mercier's writing, the use of concrete descriptions. A mere glance at the chapter titles alerts the reader to the reportage-like narrative that is to follow. Entire chapters devoted to such items as shoes, hats, and lanterns must necessarily comport rich descriptions. These descriptions are globalizing

both in their attempt to account for and report everything that exists in Paris, and also in the effort to relate Paris to the outside world.

In describing the terrain of future Europe, the guide explains that there is no more war because the leaders of each country have decided to divide the countries up in the most reasonable fashion possible, that is, they have selected natural boundaries (forests, mountains, rivers, etc.). In the absence of turf wars, the people of the future have learned to live in harmony; Paris, therefore, has become a global city where all are welcome. Even the religious divisions that once separated individuals and nations have been effaced, creating a true global body. The guide explains, “Nous nous regardons tous comme freres, comme amis. L’Indien & le Chinois seront nos compatriotes dès qu’ils mettront le pied sur notre sol. Nous accoutumons nos enfans à regarder l’univers comme une seule & même famille” (134). First by abolishing all difference, and second by translating the language of the foreign into the language of family (or the familiar), the citizens of the future invoke a global body so sensible that it immediately brings about peace.<sup>160</sup> Mercier thus proposes an early form of French universalism – one which abolishes difference and renders everyone essentially French.<sup>161</sup>

This universalistic mentality leads to a heightened interest in world politics. While this novel takes place entirely in Paris, the narrator learns throughout his journey about other countries in his encounters with foreigners on French soil and in his perusal of the future gazettes. In chapter 42, the world is described through its various parts as each section gives reports from countries around the globe. The utopian project, displaced in time throughout the novel, here takes a spatial detour. In fact, this chapter, situated nearly

at the end of the novel, reads like a last-ditch effort to treat any subject left untreated in the previous chapters. In it we learn that French is now widely spoken in China, that Mexico has become a civilized country, and even that a stranger saved Tahiti from being colonized by the French after Bougainville's visit. The stranger, we learn, saved the inhabitants by encouraging them to kill any foreigner that would land on their soil and try to destroy their peaceful and egalitarian society. In demonstrating just how much the French have progressed since the eighteenth century, the article also informs the reader that this law has just been repealed: "plusieurs expériences réitérées ont prouvé que l'Europe n'est plus l'ennemie des quatre autres parties du monde" (292).

Although this chapter seems to be a detour away from Paris, it reiterates the city's position as the center of the global world. Each of the vignettes points back in one way or another to France. Rather than learning about Chinese culture, we learn that the people of Peking have just put on their first production of *Cinna*. It is not Japan's government that we learn about in the news from Judo, but rather that they have just translated Montesquieu. Even the narrator's attention is divided between the news that he is reading and the voice of his interlocutor, a Chinese man living in Paris. Like all other difference in the novel, cultural divergence has become a thing of the past as each country becomes a mere molecule within the greater nation of France.

Mercier's detour into the spatial in the "Gazettes" chapter reinforces the notion that in becoming a healthy nation, free from tyrannical rule, France can solidify its place in the global arena. It is no coincidence that the Paraguayans have abolished slavery, or that democracy reigns in America; the alternative future *topoi* take the cue from future

France. Slavery is abolished elsewhere in the world *because* it was first abolished in France; the Americans in Philadelphia live as a nation of brothers *because* they have followed France's lead. A fire lit in one country will quickly spread to all the others. In broadening his scope in this chapter to include not only the temporal, but also the spatial leap, the author insists upon the global efficacy and universalizing nature of Enlightenment ideology.

### **Natural Bodies and the Body Politic**

In order for France to become the center of the world in 2440, it first had to harness the power that comes with a nation full of involved citizens. If Mercier's Paris is a living being, then all of its internal parts must work together to keep it going from day to day. The insistence upon a powerful France at the center of the world that we see in the gazettes betrays the narrator's own preoccupation with man's place in the universe. With France at the center of the world, Paris at the (cosmopolitan) center of France, and man at the center of Paris –it stands to reason that the narrator would want to extend this intense zoom further in order to examine man's relation to other men. Put differently, if Paris is a body of smaller bodies, then just how do these bodies work together?

We previously discussed Mercier's preoccupation with Man's perfectibility and its relation to temporal structures. Such a formulation of perfectibility insists upon the collective improvement of Man at the macro level where the human species changes over time. The author of *2440* also explores the *topos* of perfectibility at the micro level by turning inward toward the human body. Like such materialist philosophers as Condillac

and La Mettrie, Mercier also understands the human body as a machine to be tinkered with and perfected. However, for Mercier, it is between the two extremes – the micro and the macro – where we find the most productive space for the improvement of the human race. Man must work to make society better, and a better society provokes improvements in Man. Rather than a *bête-machine* (Descartes), or an *homme-machine* (La Mettrie), Mercier proposes a *cité-machine*. In this machine, a spirit of the laws maintaining equality among humankind (what Jacques Rancière calls *le politique*) replaces the mind as the motor, and this spirit resides within the bodies of each individual part.<sup>162</sup> In order to keep the motor running in 2440 Paris, there is no room for iniquity; every *body* and everything must be kept perfectly in balance.

Maintaining a healthy body requires excising any unhealthy parts. Once again using the metaphor of the body, but this time to describe eighteenth-century France, the guide explains that rather than working together for the common good, eighteenth-century inhabitants of the city worked only for individual gain. The part then works against the whole, becoming a virus that produces illness in the nation. The guide tells the narrator that “un corps sain n’a pas besoin de cauter. Le luxe, comme un caustique brulant, avoit gangrené chez vous les parties les plus saines de l’Etat, & votre corps politique étoit tout couvert d’ulceres. Au lieu de fermer doucement ces plaies honteuses, vous les envenimiez encore” (33). Even at this early moment in the novel, the author seems to suggest that there is no cure for the disease that infects the Paris of his day and that the only option lies in amputation. His revolutionary rhetoric is here expressed in medical terms.



In this city-machine, therefore, where balance relies upon harmony, individuals are described in atomistic fashion. The natural body of Paris is sustained by the body politic of its inhabitants. Because of this reversal, however, the importance of the family unit is displaced onto the nation. The family still exists and remains necessary to the reproduction of the species, but its role in the formation of polite society extends to the general public as well. If all citizens are brothers and all are sons of the benevolent king, then the entire nation can be understood as a single family. The *polis* may have begun as a coming together of several families to form the city, but now there is an apparent tension between the individual and the collective as the collective weakens the intimate bonds of family.

Once familial identity has become dependent upon national identity, rather than the inverse, marriage serves as an important vehicle for the production of good citizens. In Mercier's future, laws on marriage are lessened in order to produce happier, more natural unions. The narrator describes marriage in detail in the chapter "Des Femmes." In this chapter Mercier expounds upon the virtues of a healthy marriage. In 2440, class divisions still exist, but individuals are free to marry across classes. The focus seems to have shifted not only toward creating happy marriages, but also toward marriages that will produce healthy children, that is, healthy, new citizens. The desire to produce a healthy (rather than a prestigious) race has the effect of democratizing marital practices: "tout citoyen qui n'est pas diffamé, fût-il dans le dernier emploi, peut prétendre à la fille du plus haut rang, pourvu que le consentement de celle qu'il recherche y réponde" (244). Because the laws leading to marriage have changed to allow unions to form between two

willing parties, it stands to reason that such unions will necessarily be happy ones. In a giant leap from the micro to the macro, the narrator explains that marital bliss is so great that the number of suicides has diminished and there are no longer civil wars. The family thus serves as the nucleus of society. Once the family is redefined in more egalitarian terms, the entire social order changes. Happy marriages result in happy citizens, and these citizens no longer feel the need to quarrel, rebel, or even take their own lives.

The amplified sense of human contentment in the body of the text stands in stark contrast to a discourse within the footnotes on the potential for revolution. The narrative within the body of the text suggests that true power in a nation comes from some space that transcends the individual and the collective. Within this liminal space, the two orders are constantly improving upon one another, creating a perfect balance. In order to attain that balance, however, there must first be an imbalance. We noted previously how Louis Marin proposes a generative power in the space between a signifier and its intended signified. Applied to Mercier's text, we can imagine a collection of individuals who claim, "We are a nation"; however, the space between the enunciation of that claim and its result (the collection of individuals becoming a nation) holds the potential for what the eventual nation will become. Marin further explains the utopian potential inherent to this in-between space, describing, what he calls, the "infinitesimal." In Marin's reading of Ernst Bloch, he describes the disruptive (and productive) power of the infinitesimal. "Everything is a sign, and of course, the sign is realized only in the infinitesimal. *First*, a unit of measure is agreed upon, a well connected series ...therefore...measure exists and as soon as the measure has been met, a minute drop

suffices to make it overflow” (Marin xvii). In the moment when the drop hangs between one container and the next, it is at its most powerful, that is, it has the *potential* to make the second container overflow (or not), but that potential has not yet been realized. Rather than a measurement, the infinitesimal refers to a space in between two series. It is neither the end of the first measurement, nor the beginning of the next – it is an in-between space that holds the potential for completion or revolution. Thus, the statement that we previously proposed as emblematic of 2440, “we are a nation,” inhabits this space and in fact offers both completion and revolution. A reading of the text without regard to the footnotes shows the pathway to that completion. The collection of individuals successfully forms a nation of equals. However, a reading of the footnotes without regard to the text calls for a revolution, precisely the revolution that would lead to the utopian Paris of the future.

As we have seen, the body of Mercier’s text leaves no room for excess. In fact, any aberrant behavior that could possibly signal a dissenting voice is wiped out. The task of controlling the people belongs to the people. The guide explains that at the age of fourteen, each citizen makes a social pact to uphold the law and to report any instance of crime immediately. In this way crime is eliminated instantly.<sup>163</sup> The notion of Paris as a healthy body whose parts must work harmoniously together is so ingrained in each citizen that difference – that is, anything that would throw off the balance – is an unbearable burden. In a dialectical reversal, the lack of the infinitesimal haunts the city by its very absence. Readers are thus invited to meditate upon the time and space that

separates 2440 from 1783, imagining themselves in that infinitesimal moment just before the final drop.

Future Parisians constitute a healthy society because they have excised all the infected parts of the city (they have moved slaughter houses to outside of the city limits, and have eliminated poverty); in the footnotes of the text, Mercier implores eighteenth-century Parisians to begin this process of dissection. In order to become a healthy whole, they must first cut out the unhealthy pieces. Presenting the family members of 2440 first as individuals allows them to form a collective not at the micro level of the family, but more productively at the macro level – as a political mass of people. The family of this novel is no longer a synecdoche for the nation, because in the future the nation can speak for itself.

### **All That Has Happened Will Happen Again**

In the preface to a 1799 edition of *L'An 2440*, Mercier boasts about his political acuity, claiming to have predicted the French Revolution: “Never, I dare say, did a prediction come closer to an event, nor did one give a more detailed account of an astonishing series of transformations” (qtd. in Darnton 125). In several passages of the novel, Mercier does indeed invoke the need for change; however, the brief passages in which he alludes to revolution describe an event altogether different from that of the French Revolution of 1789. Although the narrator of *2440* explains that sometimes violence is necessary in order to overthrow a corrupt government, the revolution he illustrates (that takes place sometime between 1771 and 2440) is bloodless and peaceful.

He explains that once individuals began to see the light of science and reason it spread quickly and led to a collective Enlightenment where all citizens simultaneously ‘woke up’ from what Kant would call their self-imposed nonage. At this time, citizens accepted a new form of government organized around the principles of equality among men. The dissonance between the revolution in 2440 and the Revolution of 1789 is immediately apparent. However, by invoking his novel as a prediction, he immediately begins to alter the narrative of the event itself. Historically speaking, Mercier’s comments can be understood not only as a proud statement, but also as the first in a series of narratives that aim to rewrite the history of the Revolution.<sup>164</sup> In opening up history this way, Mercier collapses temporal boundaries – that which was the future overlaps with the past as predictions are transformed into facts. In so doing, the singularity of the French Revolution becomes, under Mercier’s pen, an event left to hover somewhere in the space between then and now.

Mercier’s reflection upon his own words dramatizes the emergence of the modern concept of revolution. Prior to 1789, the term was used to describe planetary revolution and repetition. The French Revolution changed the meaning (and the political power) of the word, opening up what Reinhart Koselleck calls “a new space of experience” that altered the present moment to such a degree that it became impossible to imagine the future. At this time, revolution acquired another meaning; in addition to indicating a repetition of the past, now it could also indicate a sudden upheaval and a break from the past. Ironically, this conceptual change also begins to work backward, altering the past as well as the future. Koselleck explains,

from this time on, the revolutionary process, and a consciousness which is both conditioned by it and reciprocally affects it, belong inseparably together. All further characteristics of the modern concept of revolution are sustained by this metahistorical background (50).

In much the same way that Mercier's post-Revolutionary *prediction* alters the narrative of the revolution, so does the Revolution of 1789 retroactively alter the very notion of revolution. As Koselleck explains, events that were previously considered civil wars, after 1789 became retroactively (and henceforth) revolutions.

By placing the space for change in an impossible present (that is, a fictional future), Mercier indefinitely renews the discourse on revolution itself. The infinitesimal – that drop hovering above, waiting to disrupt the perfection of the measurements – will never fall. The future we see in *2440* remains hypostatized in the realm of a conditional past where the conditions lie outside of the text. “Premiers habitans de la terre, *auriez-vous jamais pensé* qu’il existeroit un jour une ville où l’on marcheroit impitoyablement sur les infortunés piétons” (5, emphasis added), the narrator asks in a footnote early in the novel. In one of the two passages in the novel in which the narrator expresses thought in the past conditional, he speaks not to the people of his own time, but rather to a previous generation. In fact, the only two instances of the past conditional in the novel are found in footnotes, both harkening to past or future generations.<sup>165</sup> Whereas most of the footnotes contain the author's criticism of the morals of his own time, as he implores the citizens to see reason, these footnotes add another dimension. By invoking past and future generations, the narrator reminds the reader of the temporal device at hand, and in so

doing brings these two disparate moments together in his own present, collapsing temporal matrices and placing Man in the center of these ruins.

Mercier thus manipulates time much in the way authors such as Diderot or Sade manipulate words. The author of *2440* divides time into distinct generations only to combine them in unique ways (placing the future beside the past, for instance), in essence creating a new category of historian. Whereas the narrator of *2440* serves as an archaeologist of the future by excavating the “ruins” of twenty-fifth-century Paris, the author is able to observe the changes beyond the time of writing, returning to his story and reorienting his narrative.<sup>166</sup> Mercier thus becomes a historian of the future. In this section we will explore Mercier’s distinct notion of history and the language that serves to both expand and restrict the temporal matrix of the novel. In this way, we will see the potential and the limits of the author’s utopian society. Focusing on the narrator’s exploration of the King’s library, as well as his dream within a dream (the lunar eclipse scene), we will see how the author reckons with the disjunction between the past and the future.

## **History**

When the narrator enters the king’s library, the librarian poses a seemingly simple rhetorical question: “Qu’est-ce que l’histoire?” This same librarian’s immediate response is, “Ce n’est au fond que la science des faits” (163-64). That history is transformed into a “science of facts” is unsurprising in a future where science has become a religion. As we previously noted, young men are initiated into a cult of science as soon as they reach the

age of maturity. History thus falls into the realm of science in this future world where science is revered. Yet although the author embraces the reign of science, history, it would seem, is the one science he abhors. Throughout the novel, the narrator's comments, as well as those of his interlocutors, betray a strong distaste for history. His comments on history echo the sentiments of Voltaire, who called history an accumulation of lies passed down through generations and who endeavored to create a philosophy of history that would reveal the truth.<sup>167</sup> Accordingly, in the future history has become a source of shame. The guide explains that at the university, "On leur enseigne peu d'histoire, parce que l'histoire est la honte de l'humanité, & que chaque page est un tissu de crimes & de folies" (48). History here has fallen into desuetude; no one wants to read about the violence and abuse of power in the past when things are so peaceful and organized in the present.

Distinguishing between history and time, the narrator points out that while history is a detestable concept, time, on the other hand, is something to be feared. Unlike history, which can be altered at the hands of man, time is destructive, capable of razing even the most powerful institutions. The narrator explains the fall of the Catholic Church in these terms:

Le tems, dont *la main invisible* & sourde mine les tours orgueilleuses, a sappé ce superbe & incroyable monument de la crédulité humaine. Il est tombé sans bruit: sa force étoit dans l'opinion; l'opinion a changé, & le tout s'est exhalé en fumée. C'est ainsi qu'après un redoutable incendie on ne voit plus qu'une vapeur insensible & légère, où régnoit un vaste embrasement (78-79, emphasis added).



Contrary to Adam Smith's notion of the "invisible hand," which posits a reassuring, self-regulating force of capitalism – a force that sustains the human race in that the rich are inclined to give to the poor, Mercier's invisible hand reaches out to strike down humanity.<sup>168</sup> Thus, transferring the metaphor of the invisible hand from the metaphysical (representative of a natural greater good or balance) to the temporal carries dire consequences.

Although the above passage suggests that it is History (the natural progression of time) that brings down the Catholic Church rather than history (the recounting of time), this is not necessarily the case; the narrator's obsession with historians suggests that the invisible hand is, in fact, not so invisible.<sup>169</sup> In this utopian future, history is manipulated at the hands of historians, demonstrating the quality that Georg W. F. Hegel would later praise in the French, that is, their ability to "ingeniously shape the past into a present and relate it to their present situation" (*Introduction* 9). The narrator of *2440* continually reinforces the notion of the evil and false historian. After enjoying a meal at the home of a prince, the narrator praises the simplicity of the meal. As he sits at one of the many tables in the prince's house devoted to foreigners and the needy, he regales his companions with stories from his own day when men occupied their time with two things – hunting and eating. The guests are shocked to learn that in his day hunting was a sport rather than a necessary source of nourishment, and they are appalled when he explains the extravagance of meals. He finishes his story and notes that the guests threw up their hands in astonishment and incredulity; "l'histoire, me disoit-on, ne nous avoit pas dit tout cela; au contraire. --- Ah! répondis-je, les historiens ont été plus coupables que les

princes” (2440 123). In this scene, the narrator highlights the gaping holes in history and offers his own story as a corrective. His story, therefore, passes from the realm of fiction into the realm of History.

The narrator also learns that historical events from his day have now passed into the aesthetic realm. History has become in fact so fragile that the librarians of the future have learned to appreciate the theater and the novel as more worthy sources of cultural history than any history book.<sup>170</sup> In fact, when the guide accompanies the narrator to the theater, it is to the latter’s great surprise that he learns that the tragedy to be performed is none other than the Calas Affair:

La famille de l’infortuné *Calas* parut & m’arracha des larmes. Ce vieillard paroissait avec ses cheveux blancs, sa fermeté tranquille, sa douceur héroïque. Je vis le fatal destin marquer sa tête innocente de toutes les apparences du crime. Ce qui m’attendrit, c’étoit la vérité qui respiroit dans ce drame (128).

The guide informs the narrator that in the twenty-fifth century the ultimate goal of theater is to perfect human nature. The divisions between history and fiction break down as the scene of domestic tragedy is acted out upon the stage. In fact, each of the works of fiction mentioned in this novel that serve a historically edifying purpose center on the theme of domesticity. Pierre de Corneille’s *Cinna* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* are just two of the few early modern works that survive into the future. Notably, these are texts that focus on a recalculation of the role of men in the public sphere. The former portrays the break-down of paternal power and its reemergence as a more forgiving and benevolent power; the latter provides an instruction manual for raising good citizens, following the

education of a young male pupil. Thus the problematic of male representation is relegated to the realm of fiction.

More broadly, the fictional works that remain, those that are regarded as pillars of historicity, reaffirm Mercier's claim that domestic life tells us all we need to know about history. All that remains of all the fiction from early modern France are these prized works of fiction that interrogate notions of kinship along with important philosophical works – everything else has been purged. Ironically, in an attempt to parse out the *true* history of France, the librarians of the future begin by cutting parts out. It would seem, therefore, that the maintenance of history, much like the maintenance of the healthy body, relies upon the ability to excise that which is unhealthy or excessive. In this way, history remains as much a fiction as the future itself. Such a notion of history eschews chronology in favor of a more ancient mode of identifying temporal progress, one that relies on narrative and metaphor, rather than fact, to relay the past.

In this novel, we see a dialectical tension between a desire to remember (the dialogue between the narrator and his guide constantly revolves around a recitation of the past) and a desire to forget, as the people of the future create a past by eliminating portions of it. In separating out events and deciding what constitutes History, the author opens up the possibility for multiple histories. Thus while History endures in a natural world that is separate from that of men, Mercier's novel offers a voice from the future that seeks to break history out of its stasis. *2440* shows us an impossible present in the form of a conditional future. In showing the reader what will have happened, Mercier demonstrates the possibility for what *remains to be accomplished* – in other words, he

informs the reader what would have to happen in order to get there. This conditional past reaches out to the present in search of the conditions.

In blurring the boundary between fiction and history, Mercier reinforces the notion that his work of fiction has the very real potential to serve as a history of the future. We have already discussed the utility of the lengthy footnotes that add an air of truthfulness to the narrative by drawing attention to the rupture between the past and the future. Now we shall discuss the very language of rupture that becomes a trope throughout the novel. In his use of various registers and shifting tenses, the author of *2440* manipulates language and time, suggesting continuity between the present and the future. In so doing, he creates a language with which to imagine a new definition for revolution.

### **Language**

The path to changing history lies in changing the language used to tell it. The library, container of books and by extension of language, becomes ground zero for a revolution in language and history. Appalled by much of the works of past authors, the librarian exclaims: “de votre tems, à la honte de la raison, on écrivoit, puis on pensoit. Nos auteurs suivent une marche toute opposée" (145). The author also criticizes the work of authors who “write and then think,” condemning such poets and playwrights as Jean Racine and Jean-Baptiste Rousseau in the footnotes. His criticism indicates a frustration with the work of poetic language. The author proposes a frank language that opposes poetic language, and he offers the text of *2440* as an important example of honest

language. Mercier reverses the tide, eliminating florid, useless language in favor of a reasonable, descriptive language.

Jean-Claude Bonnet points out that Mercier often stood in opposition to his Enlightenment contemporaries. “A bien considérer les positions de Mercier,” he writes, “il apparaît que, loin de s’inscrire sans réserve dans la tradition des Lumières, il en est à l’évidence le rejeton le plus résolument critique” (Bonnet 11). Choosing a language with which to describe rather than to explain and persuade, Mercier offers a more subtle critique of the overly-reasoned Enlightenment language than his contemporary, the Marquis de Sade. Sade’s *reductio ad absurdum* explores the flaws of Enlightenment language using satire to push reasonable argument to its extreme. Mercier, on the other hand, proposes an alternative language, one that is reasonable without being persuasive; as he explains in the preface to the *Tableau*, he wants only to paint, not to judge.

Thus, the author redefines the meaning of eloquence for his readers. Although he often uses the term to praise specific works, the works cited along with the narrator’s own language suggest a form of eloquence that is stripped of what the author understands as its negative persuasiveness and signals a return to its etymological roots. From Old French “eloquence” (and Latin *eloquentia*), the term means simply to “speak out.” In a footnote the narrator explains that the potential for such language exists in the eighteenth century, even if it is often abused: “Il n’y a plus de tribune aux harangues; mais l’éloquence n’est point décadée” (163, footnote b). The reference to the ancient tribunal suggests, once again, that true eloquent language has the power to incite virtuous

behavior simply by the virtue of the words themselves. The signifiers and signified become fused together in one unambiguously powerful sign.

There is, however, one moment when Mercier's language is decidedly poetic and figural rather than simply descriptive. In the lunar eclipse section, the narrator interrupts the narration of his dream, taking a detour into an unknown time, reciting a story whose geographic and temporal frames remain ambiguous. The author adds yet another temporal matrix to his tale. Within this narrative and temporal aside, the narrator waxes poetic on the dream that interrupts his vision. In this scene, the narrator stands between the promise of the future (a fertile field) and the evidence of the past (a cemetery).

J'habite une petite maison de campagne qui ne contribue pas peu à mon bonheur. Elle a deux points de vue différens: l'un s'étend sur des plaines fertilisées où germe le grain précieux qui nourrit l'homme; l'autre, plus resserré, présente le dernier asyle de la race humaine, le terme où finit l'orgueil, l'espace étroit où la main de la mort entasse également ses paisible victimes (139).

This chapter is descriptive, yet the use of frequent qualitative adjectives adds a figural dimension to the language absent from the other chapters. The “grain précieux” stands in stark contrast to the “dernier asyle de la race humaine,” each serving as a limitation of human existence. If the language of the numbered chapters are written in the author's forward-thinking utopian language, then this chapter signals a revolution – except that this revolution is not a break from the past but rather a return to it. The metaphorical language shows the author's affinity for the ancient epics and even for Fénelon at the same time that it presages the romantic turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>171</sup> This non-chapter situated near the center of the novel collapses linguistic operations, reinforcing the merger of temporal matrices that we see throughout the novel.<sup>172</sup>

The theme of a return to the past is replicated in the staging of a birth scene. The narrator's dream takes a frightening turn when he falls into a freshly dug grave. Alone in the darkness, the narrator gives in to his terror, "Je frissonne, je trébuche sur des monceaux d'ossements; l'effroi précipite mes pas. Je rencontre une fosse qui attendoit un mort; j'y tombe. Le tombeau me reçoit vivant. Je me trouve enseveli dans les entrailles humides de la terre" (142). As he stops struggling and begins to fall asleep, he finds a sort of calm and wishes that this could be how he dies. This near-death experience becomes a moment of utter peace for the narrator as he returns to a fetal-like state in the earth. In a scene that recalls our earlier argument that the author productively blurs the lines between life and death, the hero of *2440* emerges from the grave the following day as a living man who is no longer afraid of the ghosts that haunted him in the night. As he exits the grave the next morning, he remarks on the silliness of his fear. In Kantian terms, he has shed his self-imposed ignorance.

At first glance, the lunar eclipse chapter – this excursion into another level of the narrator's dreamscape – seems like an abrupt interruption. However, closer examination reveals that these few pages can be read as a synecdoche for the novel itself. First, the lunar eclipse presents us with a chapter that is not a chapter. It hovers somewhere in the space of the narrator's experience, but it is unclear whether this dream interrupts or is congruous with his vision of future Paris. This central chapter does, however, signal a change in direction. The preceding chapters focus mainly on the institutions of everyday life (clothing, vehicles, school, etc.), while the chapters that follow turn toward structures of government. This brief interlude thus hovers between time and space like the

infinitesimal drop waiting to fall. Second, the images of fertility (the grains) and fragility (the tomb) symbolize the two extremities of the human life cycle. That the narrator stands literally on the threshold separating the two planes highlights both the vast chasm between them and the possibility of their proximity. Finally, the layout of the chapter departs from each of the other chapters in the novel. In addition to this chapter's poetic language, there is a notable lack of footnotes. While other chapters contain multiple footnotes, often spanning several pages, the lack of footnotes in this chapter highlight its non-temporality. Because its situation in time remains unclear, there is no competing temporal matrix with which to contrast it. As such, the page remains intact; there are no lines that traverse the white spaces, and the page is filled only with words. As the reader's eyes move down the page, reading remains uninterrupted, suggesting continuity between the story being told and the reader's situation in time and space. Even at the linguistic level, the author rejects binary oppositions that would force him to accept one term of the opposition at the expense of the other. Instead, his notion of language, like his notion of history, is revolutionary in that it returns to a past system (using figural, persuasive language) all while it breaks free from the traditions in which it is embedded. Instead, the author incorporates the old systems into his own timeline.

By expressing history through aesthetic practices and using poetic language to communicate reasonable thought, Mercier revolutionizes the very concepts of language and history. Perhaps then we can take him seriously when he boasts that he predicted the French Revolution. As the author imagines new possibilities for the human race, he opens up a new space of experience. Although the revolution he predicts in the novel is silent



and peaceful, in its mere evocation, the author interrogates the notion of the term itself, further altering notions of what a “revolution” might mean. He implores his early modern readers to embrace their position within the present (eighteenth-century) moment, a moment of infinite possibility, and in so doing he suggests the possibility of a singular event – one capable of producing a new history. Such is the history we read in *2440*.

### **Conclusion: Are We There Yet? A New Family Legacy**

In *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch writes,

Nobody has ever lived without daydreams, but it is a question of knowing them deeper and deeper and in this way keeping them trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right. Let the daydreams grow even fuller, since this means they are enriching themselves around the sober glance; not in the sense of clogging, but of becoming clear. Not in the sense of merely contemplative reason which takes things as they are and as they stand, but of participating reason which takes them as they go, and therefore also as they could go better (3-4).

By invoking the utopian impulse inherent to man and linking it to a political impulse, Bloch argues that dreams, and specifically daydreams (or waking dreams), are imperative to inciting man to action to improve the future. It is through our daydreams that we will find a utopian praxis that breaks these visions of the future out of their stasis, aiming to provide a “guidebook to the future.” If we cannot imagine the future, at least we can imagine a future that will be better than the present. It is this utopian impulse, a desire for something beyond the present moment and the present conditions, that is at the heart of Mercier’s *2440*.

Mercier’s utopian vision may take place in the fictional year of 2440, but the utopian impulse that leads to change can be found in the contradictions inherent to a

novel that imagines the future. *L'An 2440* is fraught with contradictions. For instance, the absolute monarchy has fallen, but the country is still ruled by a king; the narrator describes a world where individuals live in harmony, yet this harmony seems to exist only on French soil. In fact, rather than celebrating difference – the difference that he claims has such a positive effect on the French – this novel renders everything equal. Everyone looks the same and everyone wears the same clothing. *2440* appears to glorify the very harmony that Candide, the hero of Voltaire's novel of the same name (1759), feared. After a month in El Dorado, Candide implores his companion, Cacambo, to leave the island, complaining, "si nous restons ici, nous n'y serons que comme les autres" (116). Furthermore, these are the same features of later dystopian novels like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or H.G. Wells' *1984*. Such contradictions open up the space to reimagine social and political systems, and it is only through these discrepancies that we see Mercier's guide to the future. By demonstrating his inability to imagine a future beyond the scope of his present, the narrator surrenders to the idea that the future, as such, has yet to be written. He realizes that the writing of the future must happen over time, and it is in the very failure of language and of time that we see his most utopian moments.

As we previously noted, Mercier continues his utopian project even after the publication of *2440*. There may be nothing to improve on in twenty-fifth century Paris, but there is certainly a long way to go in eighteenth-century Paris. Mercier continues his project not by going back to the future, but rather by returning to the present in the *Tableau de Paris*. In it, he paints the picture of Paris as it is, filthy and full of debauchery.

The organization of the novel is parallel to that of *2440*, as chapters describe objects and places in no particular order. The task of painting every aspect of the city is an impossible feat for one person, and so Mercier invites his reader to join in. The nation cannot be built by one painter, and the nation must be full of painters, constantly revising and reimagining the whole picture:

Le lecteur rectifiera de lui-même ce que l'écrivain aura mal vu, ou ce qu'il aura mal peint; et la comparaison donnera peut-être au lecteur une envie secrète de revoir l'objet et de le comparer (viii).

Mercier's utopia becomes a work in progress as he rewrites his own story and invites others to join him. He thus demonstrates man's constant search for something more.

As the narrator walks through the rubble of Versailles in the last chapter, he reflects upon the progress that has been made since his own day. He knows the king will die, and, as the ruins tell us, so will the absolute monarchy. The power of individual families and with it that of the family name has ceded to the power of a nation of equals. Family names are no longer important because one is no longer a Bourbon or a Medici; each citizen has one name that defines him – French. Mercier's daydream thus ultimately takes him on a journey to alter the present by imagining how to achieve his future. The narration may present an impossible present, one that exists in a temporal void – and yet, it opens up the *possibilities* for the present. We know that *L'An 2440* was a best-seller in its day.<sup>173</sup> It appears that Mercier's daydream was of particular interest to many readers both in France and beyond the country's borders. As his readership grew in number, the power of the infinitesimal also grew stronger and stronger, as potential readers, one by

one, placed themselves within Mercier's fictional world, imagining just how the country could manage to get from here to utopia.

## **Conclusion** **Œdipus Undone**

Although the title of this dissertation, *Family Remains*, suggests a certain work of archeology, in fact, the preceding chapters demonstrate the very impossibility of such a work. There can be no archeological dig to ‘find’ the eighteenth-century family, because such a thing never existed. The family of eighteenth-century France, much like the family today, was in a continual state of evolution (or revolution), which makes it impossible to isolate the existence of one type of family. While the words mother, father, sister, and brother abound in the novels treated in this work, we have seen how they act often as symbolic, rather than literal, designators. Following the literary tides that move from the court to the family home, the meaning behind each of these familial titles remains in a constant state of ebb and flow. This work does not tell us what the family was or what it will be, but it does help us to understand the power of its invocation. Debates centering on the family will continue to inform the way we understand our own intimate communities and our relation to the collective. Thus the question as to whether family informs governmental structures (as we have seen in Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, for instance), or whether government informs familial structures (as occurs when legislation determines the meaning of marriage, for example), remains less significant than the debates produced by such a question.

To return to the question that we began with in the Introduction, “What does the French family look like?” we find ourselves no closer to an answer. However, perhaps by examining the power relations that underlie the family in eighteenth-century fiction we

have come to a better understanding of the question. Finding out what the family looks like means examining it through several of the different discursive formations of which it is the object. Structuralism tells us that the family is the foundational structure of language and society. Psychoanalysis tells us that family is the structure of relations through which the individual subject emerges. Literature tells us that the family is not a fixed entity but rather it is a narrative device to be constantly reimagined. Each formulation thus endows the family with a different significance, however, it is this plurality that makes the family such a significant object of study. Family does not alternate between divergent notions – rather our interpretation of society depends upon a complex understanding of family and it is this fractured nature of family that makes it such a powerful political concept. For if family structures the ways in which we perceive language, perceive our own existence, and perceive the world around us, then it is only through its gaps that we can imagine the potential for something different; it is only in these ruptured spaces that we can continue to find the utopian impulse to create a better society.

In this dissertation we have analyzed works of of eighteenth-century French fiction that interrogate notions of kinship, and undertake the utopian experiment of redefining subjective and collective experience. We have also shown how familial outsiders create a political voice in a society from which they are excluded by inserting themselves into a discourse on kinship and intimate communities. These figures may lack mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters, but this does not prohibit them from creating bonds that imitate these familial relationships. In so doing, they reappropriate a linguistic

system based on kinship, deploying the language under different social conditions, and they change the very structure of the family.

In chapter one, we saw how Abbé Prévost questions the legitimacy of restrictive paternal bonds in *Manon Lescaut*. By orienting the narrative around the second-born son rather than the son who will inherit the name-of-the-father (and thus the father's power), the author displays for the reader the other side of strict laws of primogeniture. He reinforces this perspectival shift by moving the narrative out of the time period of Louis XIV's reign (1643-1715, the period when the action of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* takes place) and into the time of the Regency. Echoing the weakened power of the Regent (1715-1723, who was a nephew of the King and not a son), the narrative follows Des Grieux on his journeys that will lead him to a different kind of formation. Rather than resolving the Oedipus complex, Des Grieux remains entangled in it. He thus does not emerge from the complex as a healthy subject, but neither does he emerge a perverse individual – he simply does not emerge. By transposing the bonds of fraternity onto the bonds of paternity, Prévost changes the language of Oedipus and thus proposes a more egalitarian familial structure.

In *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, Graffigny also proposes a more egalitarian familial structure. However, in this novel gender and national politics replace the politics of primogeniture. Instead of becoming a French wife, the heroine chooses to remain a Peruvian princess – a choice that leads to her independence as she acquires a home of her own where she translates her story. Graffigny thus translates gender politics into the world of fiction, and displaces those politics onto the figure of the exotic Other in order

to demonstrate the possibility for female authority. The heroine's nostalgia for her powerful position in Peru becomes a productive force as she harnesses the potential of the *in-between*. In refusing to choose between nationalities, family roles, and genders, Zilia demonstrates the power of the female subject.

Building on the notion of female agency, chapter three demonstrated how an orphan of ambiguous origins transformed her body into a site of cultural and economic exchange in order to secure her place in society in Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne*. We argued that this novel enacts the family romance, yet changes both the gender dynamics and, therefore, the outcome of the fantasy. Rather than a male child, we see a female orphan who imagines an ideal mother. The author focuses on female-female relationships and portrays the strongest point for a transfer of power (for the female child) as residing in the mother-daughter relationship. The choice to feature an orphan protagonist also allowed us to examine not only the relations between characters, but also the relationship of the protagonist to her own body. We saw how Marianne learns to use her body as a language that will become equally as powerful as that of her words. Like *Manon*, this novel also ends with a recasting of Oedipus, except that in *Marianne* power is not only transferred *through* the female body, it is also transferred *to* the female body as the heroine acquires the *nom-de-la-mère*.

Our final chapter seized upon the utopian impulse to reimagine family displayed in each of the novels treated in the first three chapters, examining what happens when that impulse is elevated to the central point of the plot. In Mercier's *2440*, the Paris of the future provides new conditions within which to imagine family and government.



However, his inversion of social conditions did not lead to a suturing of the ruptures that we saw in the previous chapters. Although his world was more democratic, individuals were still subject to a King; although women were free to choose their husbands, they were not free to act publically; and although public governance had been perfected, there was still a community of the underprivileged. Even though Mercier attempted to provide rich descriptions in order to increase verisimilitude, such disparities could not help but seep through into the text. However, as we have seen throughout the chapters, it is within these fractures that we find the most potential for individuals. It is, in fact, precisely within these gaps that Mercier invites his readers to join in on his utopian fiction. By asking society to join him in imagining a pathway to the future, the author of *2440* creates a commonality amongst his readers, thus changing the conditions of his present.

As we have seen, “family” is a very ambiguous term, and throughout these chapters we have drawn on that ambiguity. The signifier – like the sign – resists classification, and it is by virtue of its resistance that family will remain a source for many future studies. In the current study, we have analyzed novels that manipulate the permutations of this foundational structure (family), works that at times have substituted kin for intimate acquaintances, and at others exchanged intimate relations for kin. In these novels, kinship is not defined and family is not resurrected. Instead, family remains a fractured object, and it is from within this fractured space (the *in-between* of the subject, the relations between individuals, even the space between signifiers and signs) that we can understand its power. At a time when the structures that underlie political existence were beginning to crumble (the absolute monarchy was on the verge of

becoming a little less absolute), Prévost, Graffigny, Marivaux, and Mercier altered what Reinhart Koselleck calls the “space of experience” and opened up new “horizons of expectation;” in short, they authored the future.<sup>174</sup>

We now find ourselves in another charged moment of history. Political discourses push us to define what it means to be married, to be parents, to be women. The erosion between private and public spaces has never been greater as surveillance technology becomes better and more available. Technological advances that create easier means of communication have made the distances between individuals seem smaller than ever. Our intimate community is growing larger every day, which requires us to question the distinction between intimate and distant. Furthermore, social media has transformed private events into public spectacle, leading us to ask if intimacy even exists. As we grow closer to those who remain distanced from us, do we grow distanced from those who are nearest? In order to understand what the future might hold, perhaps we would do best to open a book, for while we may not know what remains of the family, it is up to authors to change our own experience by excavating and interpreting the family remains.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> To read this decree (décret 2011-1928) in its entirety, visit:

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr>

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Klinnemen, "'Cultural Revolt' Over Sarkozy's Museum Plans," *New York Times* 8 March 2011: Arts & Design. Web: [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

<sup>3</sup> See "La Maison de l'histoire de France est un projet dangereux," *Le Monde* 21 October 2010: Idées. Web: [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr).

<sup>4</sup> See Pierre Nora, "Lettre ouverte à Frédéric Mitterrand sur la Maison de l'histoire de France," *Le Monde*: Idées. Web: [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr).

<sup>5</sup> The term "race" in the eighteenth century designates lineage or all individuals related by blood. In the eighteenth-century this term becomes particularly complicated when Enlightenment philosophers propose an equality of men while simultaneously writing of difference in different races of men. Andrew Curran traces the history of such contradictions in *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Although Freud argued that the family romance fantasy occurs in both male and female children, he claims that it cannot be completed in the female (a point to which we will return later in the introduction). Our use of the masculine pronoun (*his*) is thus deliberate and meant to accentuate the problematic of gender in the complex. Luce Irigaray offers a sharp critique of the masculinist tendencies in psychoanalysis, and particularly of the œdipal complex in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> See Aristotle, *Politics* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1981); Plato, *The Republic* (New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 2000); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel *Philosophy of Right*, trans. S. W. Dyde (New York: Dover Philosophical Classics, 2005); and Friedrich Engels, *Origins of Family, Private Property and the State*, trans. Tristram Hunt (New York: Penguin Classics, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Michael McKeon explains Aristotle's confusing language regarding the division of family and State in *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005): 7-10.

<sup>9</sup> One could also argue that straying from virtue is punished in these novels, taking the example of Julie who dies just after admitting to her continued love for Saint Preux, her former preceptor.

<sup>10</sup> For studies on Crébillon fils and libertinism, see, Patrick Riley, "Errancy and Libertine Education in Crébillon fils's *Les Égaréments du cœur et de l'esprit*," *French Forum* 20.2 (1995): 183-200 and Anne Deneys-Tunney "Meilcour ou le libertin 'partagé' selon Crébillon fils" *L'Esprit Créateur* 43.4 (2003): 83-94.

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Habermas attributes the rise of the modern bourgeois family to changes in the public sphere. During this time, the family unit turned inward as the male individual turned outward. In other words, as men began frequenting salons and cafes, the family home became a place of refuge, rather than a place of public entertainment. These structural changes, according to Habermas, led to a more intimate environment within the home. See *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere* (Cambridge:

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991). Philippe Ariès attributes these changes instead to a growing preoccupation with the child. See *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> René Démoris traces the history of the first-person narrative in French fiction in *Le Roman à la première personne: Du classicisme aux lumières* (Geneva: Droz, 2002). Démoris notes an increase in the popularity of this point of view in the last decades of the seventeenth-century that continues to grow in the eighteenth. He links this growth in popularity to an upsurge in the production of memoirs.

<sup>13</sup> In assuming power without receiving power, Meilcour resembles the brother of Juliet Flower MacCannell's interpretation of the Oedipus complex. We will return to a discussion of what she calls the "Regime of the Brother" in chapters one and two.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Deneys-Tunney discusses the "babbling body" of Marianne that speaks her desires without the need of the intermediary of voice. See *Écriture du corps: De Descartes à Laclos*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992): 71-130.

<sup>15</sup> According to *Le Petit Robert*, both "créature" and "créateur" are derived from the verb *créer* with the former being the object and the latter being the agent of creation. In this way, the father becomes the "creator" of his child and is therefore responsible for the finished object (the child as an adult).

<sup>16</sup> See Maurice Daumas, *Le Syndrome Des Grioux: La relation père/fils au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1990). Although we use the term generalized term "youth," Daumas's text, as well as this chapter, is particularly concerned with specifically male subjectivity. We will examine a crisis of female subjectivity in Chapter Two.

<sup>17</sup> For an example of a neurotic father, Daumas offers the case of a father in Besançon who refuses inheritance to his living sons, even though they are 67 and 68 years old. See Daumas, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Throughout the *Mémoires*, Renoncour draws parallels and distinctions between the two young heroes. The two are roughly the same age although Rosemont, as an only child, is the inheritor of his father's estate whereas Des Grioux, as the second male child, has no inheritance.

<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, that the property being transferred to the narrator's daughter comes from his maternal grandfather suggests that the transference of feminine property serves as a backdrop for masculine business transactions. The notion of female property inheritance is one that we will return to in Chapter Two.

<sup>20</sup> The cult of sensibility developing in the eighteenth century ensures the avid consumption of sentimental novels by authors such as Samuel Richardson and Pierre de Marivaux, novels that interrogate kinship bonds. On the popularity of domestic fiction see Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and, Michael MacKeon's *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> For example, the first transformation of the novel into an opera occurs in 1856, written by the French composer Daniel-François-Esprit Auber. It is subsequently transformed

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into many different operas by various composers (Puccini's is probably the most famous) over the years, each focusing most intensely on the love affair between Manon and the Chevalier.

<sup>22</sup> The idea of the homosocial comes from Eve Sedgwick's groundbreaking work, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (NYC: Columbia, 1985). In the preface, Sedgwick remarks that an "obligatory heterosexuality" is built into male-dominated kinship systems" within patriarchal societies (3).

<sup>23</sup> Segal aptly notes that the hero's role as younger son makes him "everyone's baby," which emphasizes both his familial rank and his internalization of feminine traits (149).

<sup>24</sup> By "prohibitive desires" I mean that each desire prohibits the other and that they prohibit Des Grieux from identifying with the father and completing his oedipal formation.

<sup>25</sup> In *The Critique of Judgment*, Kant explains that rather than simply a lack, desire implies man's striving to produce the Object, and therefore that desire produces the representations that cause the actuality of the desired object. In *Anti-Œdipus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Kant's understanding of desire as a productive force is supported by previous conceptions of desire as lack. They propose that desire does, in fact, produce a "real" object in its "psychic reality" (25). See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1914); and Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Œdipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> For a larger discussion of Foucault's notion of the shift from an apparatus of alliance to one of sexuality, see our Introduction.

<sup>27</sup> Lacan defines castration as a symbolic lack of an imaginary object. In a traditional oedipal model, the son understands that his father holds the power (*phallus*) over the desired object (the mother) and the son is forced to give up on his attempt to possess the desired object. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, this represents the resolution of the Œdipus complex. See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire: Livre IV, La relation d'objet*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991): 208-9, 227.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed discussion of gender roles in polite society in eighteenth-century France see Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1994); and Antoine Lilti, *Le Monde des salons: Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Segal states that the prison "combines aspects of the male home, the seminary and the hôtel de Transylvanie, [...] and a father-figure who echoes his own father, the Lieutenant Général and finally the Governor" (181). All of these factors reinforce the prison as an essentially male space in which the hero must behave like a man.

<sup>30</sup> In this way, Manon serves as a counter-example to traditional female characters up until the eighteenth century. If we look back, for example, to *La Princesse de Clèves* the virtuous heroine chooses a life of solitude in the convent rather than indulging in carnal pleasures. In fact, we need look no further than the *Mémoires* and the character of Nadine, Renoncour's nephew and Rosemont's lover, to see a perfect example of female

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virtuosity. Refusing to break up the father-son relationship, Nadine voluntarily goes to the convent to help quell Rosemont's desires.

<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that Des Grieux uses a paternal connection (an old servant of his father's) to secure his first romantic tryst with Manon at the hotel. This exchange of paternal connections for sexual gratification reinforces Manon's role in the symbolic castration of the father.

<sup>32</sup> In an article on male sexuality in *Manon*, Joe Johnson also notes the homosexual aspects in Des Grieux's relationship with Tiberge, however, he places Tiberge in the feminine role. This shift in gender roles, in fact, reinforces our theory in that Tiberge takes on the feminine role only in America, once Manon has died, and Des Grieux has returned to a comportment marked by masculine reflection and reason. In this situation, Tiberge's femininity counters Des Grieux's regained masculinity. See Joe Johnson, "Philosophical Reflection, Happiness, and Male Friendship in Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 31 (2002): 169-90.

<sup>33</sup> Naomi Segal uses this phrase "the world of fathers" to indicate a broader society in which both Des Grieux's own father and other father figures like the old G...M... hold power over him even outside of the paternal household. We use the phrase here to indicate that the world of the fathers can, in fact, permeate the paternal household as the eldest son serves also as would-be father to Des Grieux (66).

<sup>34</sup> In fact, René Démoris posits Lescaut as the inverse of Des Grieux. See René Démoris, *Le silence de Manon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1995): 59.

<sup>35</sup> Although Démoris finds that Des Grieux's relationship with Lescaut parallels the relationship between the hero and the older brother, such a comparison places the blood brother in the position of a malevolent companion who acts selfishly rather than out of brotherly love. As we saw earlier in the scene where the brother brings Des Grieux home in the carriage, such is not the case.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Segal, 148, as well as Michèle Respaut, "Des Grieux's Duplicity: *Manon Lescaut* and the Tragedy of Repetition." *Symposium*, 88:1 (1984): 71.

<sup>37</sup> Catherine Cusset argues that all of what she defines as "lieux du père" are enclosed spaces, which prohibit the son's escape. This notion also implies that these spaces are prohibited to those outside of the immediate family. See Catherine Cusset, "Loi du père et symbolique de l'espace dans *Manon Lescaut*," *Eighteenth Century Fiction*, 5.2 (1993): 93-103.

<sup>38</sup> The notion of the brother acting "as if" he were the father without holding any power is central to Juliet Flower MacCannell's argument in *The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy*. (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Sgard points out that the time in between Manon's death and the hero's return to France allows for just enough time for the gestation of the story (70).

<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of the second part of the novel, the hero writes, "J'étais presque sûr que mon père ne ferait pas de difficulté de me donner de quoi vivre honorablement à Paris, parce qu'étant dans ma vingtième année, j'entrais en droit d'exiger ma part du bien de ma mère" (143). However, the father's arrival in Paris after the final scheme against

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jeune G...M... and his subsequent departure and separation from his son alerts us to his denial of the son's maternal inheritance.

<sup>41</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the transformation of the term *fraternité* in revolutionary discourse see Marcel David, *Fraternité et Révolution française 1789-1799* (Paris: Aubier, 1987); or Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance and the French Revolution* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> Although MacCannell's argument focuses on the increased suppression of women under the brotherly regime, our argument in this chapter remains centered solely on the brother. We will interrogate the struggle of women under such a regime in Chapter Two.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed history of domestic and political life during the Regency, see, Charles Kunstler, *La Vie quotidienne sous la Régence* (Paris: Hachette, 1960). Kunstler even claims that "un besoin de changement et de liberté laisse présager les premières effervescences de la Révolution française" (9).

<sup>44</sup> See *Labyrinthes*, in which Sgard discusses Prévost's important role as historian.

<sup>45</sup> The Duke of Orleans made other changes of national alliances, and laws regarding religion. For a more thorough account of the Regency see Roger Price, *A Concise History of France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed analysis of the debate surrounding the temporal placement of Des Grieux's adventure, see Sgard's introduction to *Manon* (12-13). He notes that Des Grieux's affair with Manon takes place under Louis XIV's reign, and that Manon's death aligns with that of the King, allowing Des Grieux to return to France and tell his story to the Renoncour during the Regency.

<sup>47</sup> Des Grieux does, in fact, tell his father that by sending away Manon he his father will have caused his death (191).

<sup>48</sup> In fact, Louis XIV, like his great-grandson, took the throne at a very young age (4-5). During this time period his mother, Anne of Austria, was named regent but passed the power out of the family to Cardinal Mazarin. Although the King's death comes seven decades later, it is likely that there was fear of a repetition of the disaster of the previous regency. Under Anne and Mazarin's rule, France entered a civil war (La Fronde).

<sup>49</sup> In the seminars on psychoses, Lacan discusses the interplay of the *nom-du-père* and the *non-du-père*. In an interesting examination of the reversal of the traditional oedipal structure (according to which Des Grieux can be seen as rejecting the father's power), Naomi Segal offers "Le non de la mère," in which she posits that in fact it is Manon who refuses the legitimacy of patriarchy as such by usurping masculine language and entering into the masculine joke, a joke that should exclude female presence. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III, The Psychoses 1955-1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London: Norton, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> On the guilt of the son Freud writes, "What the father's presence had formerly prevented they themselves now prohibited in the psychic situation of "subsequent obedience" which we know so well from psychoanalysis. They undid their deed by declaring that the killing of the father substitute, the totem, was not allowed, and renounced the fruits of their deed by denying themselves the liberated women. Thus they created the two fundamental taboos of totemism out of the *sense of guilt of the son*, and

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for this very reason these had to correspond with the two repressed wishes of the œdipus complex. Whoever disobeyed became guilty of the two only crimes which troubled primitive society” (236).

<sup>51</sup> For more on the *dérive*, see Debord’s article, “Théorie de la dérive” in *Les Lèvres nues*, 9 (1958): 6-10.

<sup>52</sup> Louis XV’s popularity, however, was short-lived. In an attempt to channel the legacy of his powerful ancestors, Louis XV overturned certain policies put into place by the Regent including a renewal of penalties for publishing non-religious texts. For further discussion of Louis XV’s renewal of the strict religious policies of the *Ancien Régime*, see Jeffrey Merrick, “Politics in the Pulpit: Ecclesiastical Discourse on the Death of Louis XV,” *History of European Ideas*, 7:2 (1986): 149–60.

<sup>53</sup> All spelling variations copied from the original. See *Correspondances de Mme de Graffigny*, vol. 6, 23 octobre 1744-10 septembre 1745 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000), 348.

<sup>54</sup> Portions of Turgot’s letters to Graffigny can be found in *Oeuvres de Turgot et documents le concernant*, ed. F. Alcon. Paris (1913-23).

<sup>55</sup> For a more detailed study of the relationship between Graffigny and Turgot see Gilbert Mercier, *Madame Péruvienne: Françoise de Graffigny, une femme sensible au siècle des Lumières*. (Paris: Fallois, 2008), and English Showalter, *Françoise de Graffigny: Her Life and Works*, *SVEC*, 11 (2004). For a detailed account of the reader reception of the work see David Smith, “The Popularity of Mme de Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*: The Bibliographical Evidence,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 3.1 (1990): 1-20.

<sup>56</sup> Françoise de Graffigny, *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*. (New York: MLA, 1993), 17-18. Emphasis added. Although first published in 1747, in this chapter we will base all analyses on the revised 1752 edition, as it is the most commonly read version today. All further references will be provided in the text.

<sup>57</sup> In drawing on these terms from Mikhail Bakhtin, we also intend to stress here that Zilia’s understanding of time is simultaneously individual and collective in nature. Although the *quipos*, as described in the introduction, serve as an archive of Peruvian history and knowledge, the task of the narrator is to disentangle the individual’s story in order to construct a new temporal matrix. We will return to this idea in detail later in this chapter.

<sup>58</sup> See Thomas Kavanagh, “Reading the Moment and the Moment of Reading in Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, 55.2 (1994): 125-47. While Kavanagh’s notion of “the moment” in the *Lettres* is helpful in understanding Graffigny’s ability to rewrite historical time, it too easily denies the possibility of female agency in the novel. Because such a notion is experience-driven, it tends to fall into the type of reading that Nancy K. Miller criticizes when she writes of the constricting female plot (the female protagonist is led from place to place – or event to event – by a male guide) in many novels that deal with female writing. See Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).



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<sup>59</sup> Aside from the obvious differences in living conditions, the basic societal structure remains the same. Like France's monarch, Peru has a dominant patriarch (the *Capa Inca*), and masculine hierarchal structures are replicated in the domestic sphere.

<sup>60</sup> Although the comparison is often made between Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* and Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (even by Graffigny herself), Montesquieu's hero critiques French customs only from the point of view of the noble foreigner traveling through France for a set period of time. Although Zilia is also noble, she is unable to return home. She must, therefore, integrate into the fabric of French society in a way that the masculine exotic heroes can never do.

<sup>61</sup> In addition to the growing division between the masculine public sphere and the private (domestic) sphere to which women were largely relegated, education rates also remained grossly unequal. While literacy rates for men rose to 48% over the course of the eighteenth century, during that same period the literacy rate for females rose to about only 27%. See James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For more detailed discussion on the division of masculine and feminine space in eighteenth-century France see Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1994) and Elisabeth Badinter, *L'Amour en plus: Histoire de l'amour maternel XVIIe – XXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> For the role of women in philosophical circles, see Dena Goodman, *Republic of Letters* as well as her more recent *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). Carla Hesse has also pointed out the important role of female peasants (particularly the *poissonardes*) in *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> For a more detailed account of the precarious status of orphans in Paris, see Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics Before the French Revolution*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991): 81-114, in which the authors explain a series of incidents of children (particularly orphans and poor children) vanishing from the streets.

<sup>64</sup> In addition to Aza's insistence that Zilia be educated by the elders, the extent of their equality is reinforced by Peruvian folklore. The two are not only to become husband and wife, but they will also be united as son and daughter of the Sun and the Moon. The metaphorical sibling relationship is maintained at the literal level. A footnote informs the reader that the princess must be the prince's sister or closest blood relation.

<sup>65</sup> The beginning is determined to be "false" because we later learn that this letter is first of all translated at a later time, and in fact, the existence of the first letter in its original form is impossible. We understand that Aza received the first letter and wrote back, which would require him to transform Zilia's own knots. For the first (and perhaps the second) letter then, what we read is likely transcribed from memory rather than any existing letter.

<sup>66</sup> While Jaucourt's article ("Femmes") in the *Encyclopédie*, implicates both the mother and the father in the procreation and conservation of children based on common societal goals, he goes on to reinforce Aristotelian notions of patriarchal power within the

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domestic sphere, noting that Man is naturally stronger in body and spirit and must, in all civilized societies, be master over his wife and children.

<sup>67</sup> The word matriarch is used to emphasize the power of the female head of the family, without implying physical motherhood.

<sup>68</sup> Robin Howells scrutinizes the general belief that Zilia and Aza are necessarily brother and sister. Howells examines Graffigny's footnote, which opens the possibility for some other form of familial attachment. For this study, I propose that the exact familial relationship is of little importance; rather, Graffigny's decision to contrast the Aza-Zilia relationship with the Déterville-Céline relationship indicates the author's interest in the potential of a brother-sister-like relationship. See Howells, *Regressive Fictions: Graffigny, Rousseau, Bernardin* (London: Legenda, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> The choice to eliminate the father from the story altogether appears to be a relatively late decision. English Showalter's analysis of Graffigny's correspondence with Dévaux shows that Graffigny had originally intended the father to be present but weak – subjugated to the will of his overbearing wife. It was only just before the publication of the first edition in 1747 that Graffigny decided to take out the father once and for all. See Showalter, *Madame de Graffigny: Her Life and Works* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2004.)

<sup>70</sup> This type of love is known as “storge” in ancient Greek. This novel displays the different models of Greek love in almost encyclopedic fashion. We see “agape” in the love that Zilia feels for Aza, “eros” in the love that Déterville feels for Zilia, and “storge” in the love that exists between Céline and Déterville. However, the most important type of love in the novel, and the kind that Zilia proposes for Déterville, is “philia,” or platonic love.

<sup>71</sup> “La Nouvelle République des lettres: Graffigny et l'amitié philosophique,” *Françoise de Graffigny, femme de lettres: Écriture et réception*. Ed. Jonathan Mallinson. Oxford: SVEC, 12 (2004): 230.

<sup>72</sup> For a more detailed description of how not only the calendar, but also most categories of knowledge became redefined see Mona Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire 1789-99* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), particularly chapters six and seven in which she discusses the reorganization of space and time after the French Revolution.

<sup>73</sup> Schneider also elaborates on the absence of markers of time in the novel, noting that the letters are not dated and that very few indications of any time periods are noted within the letters themselves. Each of these details reinforces the notion of a fluid chronology in the text. See Schneider, “Les *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*: Roman ouvert ou roman fermé,” *Vierge du Soleil / Fille des Lumières* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1989).

<sup>74</sup> The term “nostalgie” is coined by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in 1688. Later definitions in the *Dictionnaire de la langue française* present the notion as rather an emotional state.

<sup>75</sup> In volume one of *L'Invention du quotidien*, Michel de Certeau explains, “Est un lieu l'ordre (quel qu'il soit) selon lequel des éléments sont distribués dans des rapports de coexistence [...] Est espace l'effet produit par les opérations qui l'orientent, le

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circonstancient, le temporalisent et l'ammènent à fonctionner en unité polyvalent de programmes conflictuels ou de proximités contractuelles. L'espace serait au lieu ce que devient le mot quand il est parlé" (172-73). In this novel, the heroine brings together places, ideas, and cultural and linguistic practices in the present moment within her *récit* of experience, thus making every place a space of possibility for female agency. See *L'Invention du quotidien*, vol. 1: *Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

<sup>76</sup> In this sense they are private because they remained unanswered. They only become public once they have been translated and published.

<sup>77</sup> See Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988): 125-61.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of the impact of the *Lettres* on writing and Enlightenment book culture see Lorraine Piroux, "The Encyclopedist and the Peruvian Princess: The Poetics of Illegibility in French Enlightenment Book Culture," *PMLA*, 121.1 (2006): 107-23, and François Rosset, "Les Nœuds du langage dans *Les Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 96.6 (1996): 1106-27.

<sup>79</sup> Although Graffigny's novel would suggest that *quipos* is a form of writing, it is interesting to note that both Graffigny and Jaucourt (in his article "Quipos" for the *Encyclopédie*) refer to *quipos* as a system of communication used by the Incans *in the absence of writing* (see Graffigny's historical introduction). In this way the author of the work negates the work of the hand as well as the work in hand, making the story only legible once it is translated into French.

<sup>80</sup> In this type of lamenting, what Svetlana Boym calls "reflective nostalgia," the desiring subject is obsessed with the *algia*, or the pain of longing itself, rather than with the dislocated object. Boym contrasts this form of nostalgia with what she calls "restorative nostalgia," in which the subject focuses on the *nostos* or the home (the desired object), often inventing a past moment that never existed. The latter, Boym explains, can be pernicious because the longing subject idolizes a fictive past and becomes detached from the present.

<sup>81</sup> See Diane Fourny, "Language and Reality in Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 4.3 (1992): 221-38.

<sup>82</sup> Zilia also draws a connection between sound and sentiment, stating, "S'il est vrai que les sons aigus expriment mieux le besoin de secours dans une crainte violente ou dans une douleur vive, que des paroles entendues dans une partie du monde, et qui n'ont aucune signification dans l'autre, il n'est pas moins certain que de tendres gémissements frappent nos cœurs d'une compassion bien plus efficace que des mots dont l'arrangement bizarre fait souvent un effet contraire" (75-76).

<sup>83</sup> The immutable meaning corresponds to a belief in the truth communicated through language. In fact, a footnote to the third letter informs the reader that it is inconceivable that an Incan could lie.

<sup>84</sup> Both the written and spoken language in Peruvian are directly linked to thoughts and therefore the "truth" of the soul. This fact highlights the Derridean observation, which seeks to collapse oppositions. This is perhaps where Graffigny most fruitfully departs

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from Rousseau in her conception of the origins of language, as she posits ideals that will later become central to the deconstructionist movement.

<sup>85</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974): 22-30.

<sup>86</sup> The difference between an external/historical time and an internal/personal time is further highlighted by the form of the novel. Graffigny's frequent footnotes, along with the historical introduction, demonstrate a desire to place Zilia's individual story within the frame of historical time. Aurora Wolfgang points out that this form also makes it difficult to categorize the novel as either sentimental or philosophical. For a detailed discussion of the footnotes and the unclassifiability of the *Lettres*, see Wolfgang, *Gender and Voice in the French Novel 1730-1782*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>87</sup> Although the reader never sees the letters to which she is responding, Zilia does address questions and issues brought up by Déterville in his letters. She does, however, insert one piece of writing into the novel that is not her own, that is the "Billet" that Déterville writes explaining how he came upon the Peruvian treasures that are transformed into gold to buy Zilia's house.

<sup>88</sup> Although Rousseau's writings are often criticized for their anti-feminism, Jennifer Popiel makes an argument for reading them as necessary to the progression of women's rights. Additionally, Nancy K. Miller argues that libertine novels by male authors such as Laclos incite early forms of feminism. See Popiel, *Rousseau's Daughters: Domesticity, Education, and Autonomy in Modern France* (Lebanon: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008) and Miller, *French Dressing: Women, Men, and Ancien Régime Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>89</sup> For a detailed account of marriage and divorce laws and the legal structure of the eighteenth-century French family, see James F. Traer, *Marriage and Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). With regard to evolving notions of motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood in the early modern period, see Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) and Elisabeth Badinter, *L'Amour en plus*. Jacques Donzelot highlights alterations in domestic structure due to the collapsing of public and private (domestic) spheres in *La Police des familles* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2005), and Arlette Farge explores the effects on the family of work, passion, and cultural conventions in *La Vie fragile: Violences, pouvoirs et solidarité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

<sup>90</sup> *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, ed. 1-8 (1694-1935).

<sup>91</sup> Zilia decries this fact to Déterville when she learns of Aza's infidelity. "Si j'étais étrangère, inconnue, Aza pourrait m'aimer: *unis par les liens du sang*, il doit m'abandonner" (159, emphasis added).

<sup>92</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1991).

<sup>93</sup> Suzanne Pucci offers invaluable insights on the overlapping nature of the romantic and the familial for the eighteenth-century bourgeois family. See "The Nature of Domestic Intimacy and Sibling Incest in Diderot's 'Fils Naturel'," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 30:3 (1997): 271-87, and "Picture Perfect: Snapshots of the Family" *L'Esprit Créateur*, 44:1

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(2004): 68-82. In this chapter, we reorient slightly her research to focus on the collapsing of friendship into kinship networks.

<sup>94</sup> We leave out here a fourth type of love *agape*, which seems to be neither reasonable nor passionate. According to ancient Greek and Biblical texts, this type of love is somewhat related to emotion, yet it is more closely linked with compassion or esteem. *Agape* is perhaps the type of love that is most fitting to all of Zilia's emotions because it is natural, truthful, and charitable.

<sup>95</sup> See the collection of essays, *Vierge du Soleil / Fille des Lumières: La Péruvienne de Mme de Graffigny et ses Suites*, ed. J.P. Schneider (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1989) for several perspectives on Graffigny's contribution to Enlightenment ideology.

<sup>96</sup> That these male authors are ambiguous in their writings on women (at times arguing for their power, and at others relegating them to the private sphere) reinforces our argument from Chapter One. In that chapter, we saw how the social and political importance of sentimental fiction (in this case written by a man) lies precisely in this wavering between patriarchal and more modern regimes.

<sup>97</sup> One notable exception is Denis Diderot, whose posthumously published essay "Sur les femmes" argues that women's inferiority is a direct result of their being denied education and political representation.

<sup>98</sup> Although we will focus on property ownership here, we will also point out that recent feminist scholarship has linked female power to sources other than property ownership, such as writing and self-ownership. See, for example, Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), and Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

<sup>99</sup> John C. O'Neal explains, "Graffigny's novel represents a special kind of *Bildungsroman*, one for a woman. Like a character in this subgenre, Zilia advances toward reason. She receives an education that few women in the eighteenth century enjoyed." See O'Neal's *The Authority of Experience* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996): 141.

<sup>100</sup> O'Neal writes that such an education reinforces a sensationist philosophy akin to that of La Mettrie where Zilia learns by "acquiring" senses throughout the novel. See, *Authority of Experience*, in particular, chapter five.

<sup>101</sup> Lorraine Piroux argues that Jaucourt's citations of Zilia (rather than Graffigny) constitute the use of a trope in order to make the information in his articles appear to come from a brand of wisdom closer to nature. See Piroux's "The Encyclopedist and the Peruvian Princess."

<sup>102</sup> The scene of Zilia's suicide attempt is generally read as a moment of ultimate defeat. In fact, Janet Gurkin Altman writes that this is the moment when Zilia's sense of the limits of her own being reaches a "nadir of nothingness." She continues, "even her death will be a non-event, taking place on no one's map, in no one's history" (188). However, to read this scene from a Foucauldian perspective, we see the limits of a woman whose body is constantly scrutinized and who is passed from one man to the next. In order to

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break free from the prison of her body – the space of continual scrutiny – she must leave it. She feels that she will never have the power to control her own body; therefore, she translates her soul into her letters in order to leave the body behind. See Altman, “Graffigny’s Epistemology and the Emergence of Third-World Ideology” in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays in Epistolary Literature*, ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (Boston: Northwestern University Press, 1989): 172-202.

<sup>103</sup> As Nancy Miller points out not only is Zilia’s body constantly imprisoned (in chains, in a boat, in a coach, etc.), but it also serves as a prison itself.

<sup>104</sup> Joan de Jean calls this “new Zilia,” who writes in a more reasoned register, a “radically new type of epistolary heroine, a model for the age of Enlightenment.” See *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*, ed. Joan de Jean and Nancy K. Miller (New York: Modern Language Association, 1993): xi.

<sup>105</sup> See Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le Tableau de Paris*, ed. Jeffry Kaplow (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1979).

<sup>106</sup> These works on physiognomy include studies by Johann Kaspar Lavater (*Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, 1775–1778), and the earlier work of Giambattista Della Porta (*De humana physiognomoniam libri IIII*, 1586).

<sup>107</sup> In *Regressive Fictions*, Robin Howells identifies this trope thus: “A fictional outsider or *naïf* is brought into confrontation with aspects of French society. Through the visitor’s failure to understand (surprise, puzzlement, then ‘innocent’ enquiry or reflections), the familiar is de-familiarized, and perhaps put into question. Polemical stupidity (sincere on the visitor’s part, polemical on the part of the author), produces effects of wit, comedy, satire and critique [...] The visitor reacts to France in terms of the supposed norms of their own society, or those of a universalist Nature of Reason” (23). While Howells does go on to point out some of the differences of this story as it appears in the *Lettres*, he places it relatively neatly into this tradition.

<sup>108</sup> In Quechua (the Peruvian language) the word “china” in fact means not exactly lady’s maid, but rather any female of any species. It is perhaps for this reason that Zilia chooses this word, to emphasize her own belonging to a particular gender.

<sup>109</sup> These types of narratives include Cyrano de Bergerac’s *Voyage dans la lune*, medieval romances that present characters in fantastical situations, or even the classic epic literature where heroes strive to understand human existence through encounters with the supernatural.

<sup>110</sup> Carmelina Imbroscio, *L’Utopie à la dérive: Sur les compromissions vitales du lieu utopique* (Pisa: Editrice Libreria Goliardica, 1995).

<sup>111</sup> *Suite des lettres d’une Péruvienne*, A Peine, [c.1748], *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. University of Minnesota (9 July 2012).

<sup>112</sup> While notions of fraternity do not necessarily exclude women from this equality by definition they do so in practice. Competing notions of *fraternité* become apparent when comparing definitions in the *Dictionnaire de l’académie française*, which continue to define the term as specifically a bond between brothers until the most recent edition (9<sup>th</sup>, 1986), to Boucher d’Argis’s article in Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*, which

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posits the possibility of fraternal bonds between two brothers or between a brother and a sister. However, the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, which marks the inauguration of a form of governance based on brotherhood, explicitly excludes women from political participation.

<sup>113</sup> Lynn Hunt makes a similar argument in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. Positively articulating Freud's *family romance* as a collective political unconsciousness, Hunt draws on historical and literary evidence to point to the impossible role of women before, during, and after the Revolution. Rather than moving from wife to sister (or more democratically from wife to woman *tout court*) the change in the woman's role, according to this formulation, is only marked by an adjective, from *bad* mother to *good* mother.

<sup>114</sup> Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Olympe de Gouges also seeks a place for women in a masculine dominated society when she overtly takes men to task for their exclusion of women in the public sphere in her *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*. Even Simone de Beauvoir's seminal feminist work *Le Deuxième Sexe* owes much to the groundbreaking ideas proposed by Graffigny, particularly with regards to notions of the woman as "other", and to positively articulating a category of woman from within a male-dominated society.

<sup>115</sup> While the term "transvestism" (or transvestitism) in modern English designates a person who dresses across genders and finds its origins with the work of late-nineteenth-century German doctor Mangus Hirschfeld, the French term "travesti" has rather different origins. As early as the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694) the verb "travestir" is defined not only as dressing across genders, but also as dressing across classes (*prendre l'habit d'une autre condition*).

<sup>116</sup> Patrick Coleman discusses gratitude or "reconnaissance" in *La Vie de Marianne* as an ethic of sociability in "The Intelligence of Mind and Heart: Reconnaissance in *La Vie de Marianne*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 18:1 (2005): 27-47.

<sup>117</sup> Miller expands on the aspects of the *Bildung* in *Marianne* in *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

<sup>118</sup> The term 'caring' carries a practical, as well as an affective meaning. The mother in *La Vie de Marianne* provides both material and emotional care to her daughter.

<sup>119</sup> The mother-daughter relationship has been the focus of much feminist criticism, particularly since the 1980's. Scholars such as Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow, and Elisabeth Badinter have questioned the legitimacy and the productivity of what has come to be called *motherhood*. See Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton and Company, 1986); Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1999); and Badinter, *L'Amour en plus* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010). For an analysis of the mother-daughter relationship in the eighteenth-century French novel, see Charlotte Daniels, *Subverting the Family Romance: Women Writers, Kinship Structures and the Early French Novel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000).

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We will return to an analysis of the mother-daughter dynamic in *Marianne* in the fourth section of this chapter.

<sup>120</sup> Genette discusses the various relationships of the narrator to narrative in several works, but perhaps most explicitly in *Discours du récit* (Paris: Point, 2007).

<sup>121</sup> The trait of “coquette behavior” is distinctly coded in the eighteenth-century novel as feminine. However, this exact definition will be given later by Balzac as a class distinction when he writes in his “Treatise on Elegant Living” that the task of the elegant man is to work very hard to appear as if he is not working at all. Deborah Houk explores the relationship of femininity and dandyism in her article, “Self-Construction and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth Century French Dandyism,” *French Forum*, 22.1 (1997): 59-73.

<sup>122</sup> See Suzanne Pucci, “Snapshots of Family Intimacy in the French Eighteenth Century: The Case of *Paul et Virginie*,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 37 (2008): 89-118.

<sup>123</sup> This type of synecdoche takes what Gérard Genette refers to as *architexte* and turns it on its head. By citing the name of the work as its title, the “editor” implicitly (or mutely to use Genette’s terminology) transforms the work, placing it within the genre of literature. However, in calling attention to the title *as title*, and by using a typography that would suggest the implicit categorization of “roman” (in this case the use of italics), the work of categorization is rendered explicit. For more on the problematic of transtextuality in *La Vie de Marianne*, see *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982): 227-33.

<sup>124</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the ways in which *Marianne* is coded as feminine, see Aurora Wolfgang, *Gender and Voice in the French Novel* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>125</sup> Frédéric Deloffre explains that tears, rather than signaling a giving up or a giving in, in *La Vie de Marianne* act as a solution to problems. The narrator describes, in fact, many scenes in which she cries because she can think of no other solution. For example, when Valville asks Marianne’s name, she panics and begins to cry. See *Une préciosité nouvelle: Marivaux et le marivaudage* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1993).

<sup>126</sup> In fact, Friedrich Engels assesses these changes in the domestic sphere as being founded upon “the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife” stating that the role of the wife shifts to head servant (104-05). See *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2010). For Ariès’ analysis of this social change see *L’Enfant et la vie familiale sous l’Ancien Régime* (Paris: Plon, 1960).

<sup>127</sup> For detailed analysis of the changing atmosphere of the salons and its negative implications for women in the public sphere, see Antoine Lilti’s *Monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005). For an analysis of how the role of women was changing within the political sphere among both aristocrats and merchants, see Carla Hesse’s *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>128</sup> In fact, the fluidity and ambiguity of female sexuality inherent to eighteenth-century fiction is magnified in Abdellatif Kechiche’s 2013 film, *La Vie d’Adèle*. In this adaptation from the graphic novel, *Le Bleu est une couleur chaude* (Julie Maroh),



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Kechiche alters the title, drawing inspiration from *La Vie de Marianne*. In so doing, he reorients the narrative of the graphic novel to focus on the romantic love between a young woman with an older woman, highlighting the dual nature of this relationship as both romantic bond and mentorship.

<sup>129</sup> A notable exception to this permutation of male friendship can be seen in our first chapter where we analyze male friendship in *Manon Lescaut*.

<sup>130</sup> See Miller, *The Heroine's Text*, 25.

<sup>131</sup> This is the only mention of Dutour's own child. This clause in the sentence, therefore, seems little more than a device to reinforce Dutour's motherly potential.

<sup>132</sup> In Maurice Agulhon's important work on the Marianne figure in Revolutionary France, he points out that in the eighteenth century the name "Marianne" is, in fact, the combination of the two most common Catholic names of the day, "Marie" and "Anne." The choice of the name would then appear to have the secondary function of drawing a parallel between the protagonist of *Marianne* and eighteenth-century French women in general. Christening her with a common name would allow the reader to feel *with* the protagonist, adding yet another layer to the "proof" of the real in the novel. See *Marianne au combat: L'Imagerie et la symbolique républicaines, 1789-1880* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).

<sup>133</sup> Further analysis of the name suggests echoes with *roture* or non-noble person – a final symbol of her lower status.

<sup>134</sup> In the first chapter, we discussed Naomi Segal's notion of the "non-de-la-mère" in *Manon Lescaut*. In Segal's construction, the "non" suggests an interruption and a usurpation of the transfer of power. Our reading in *Marianne* is quite different in that the power is transferred from woman to woman directly, without the need of any third party. The "nom-de-la-mère" in this instance thus transforms the Oedipal triangle into a straight line.

<sup>135</sup> Agulhon, Maurice, *Marianne into Battle*, 44-45.

<sup>136</sup> Moreover, the distinction of Miran's name from that of her son serves to mask the semi-incestuous relationship that transpires between Marianne and Valville once they share a mother. Names function in this novel much in the way that mannerisms in Marivaux's theatrical characters betray their true status and destiny. Linguistic pairings alert the reader to the eventual matches in the novel (*Miran-Marianne*; *Valville-Varthon*).

<sup>137</sup> Miller, *The Heroine's Text*, 22.

<sup>138</sup> See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), in particular Chapter One.

<sup>139</sup> Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *L'An 2440: Rêve s'il en fut jamais*, 41. All citations are taken from a 1776 edition. Original spelling has been retained unless otherwise noted. Copies of this manuscript are available at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and online at gallica.bnf.fr. All future references to this work will be noted in the text.

<sup>140</sup> This is not to say that Mercier is indifferent to the human body. Throughout the novel, he describes the unhealthy figure of French men in eighteenth-century France. Describing their bodies as too thin and too feminine, he writes of the virtues of a hearty diet and a healthy body, such as is to be found in Swiss men. The female body, however, is

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extremely important to Mercier's assessment of twenty-fifth-century society. We will return to this issue later in the chapter.

<sup>141</sup> Materialist philosophers who interrogate the limits of and possibilities for Man include Julien Offray de la Mettrie, *L'Homme machine*, ed. Paul-Laurent Assoun (Paris: Gallimard, 1999); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts, suivi de Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999); and Denis Diderot, *Lettre sur les aveugles, Suivi de Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000). There has been a recent renaissance in scholarship on materialism in the eighteenth-century. For a glimpse into some innovating research being performed in this field, see *Vital Matters: Eighteenth-Century Views of Conception, Life, and Death*, ed. Helen Deutsch and Mary Terrall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). For a discussion of Mercier's notion of materialism, see Enrico Ruffi, *Le Rêve laïque de Mercier* (Oxford: SVEC, 1995), especially chapters 3-4.

<sup>142</sup> Rousseau calls the family "la plus ancienne de toutes les sociétés, et la seule naturelle," in *Du Contrat social* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006): 9.

<sup>143</sup> See Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1984).

<sup>144</sup> *Uchronie* is, in fact, a neologism coined in the nineteenth century. The uchronia is a form of utopian literature that shifts the valence of social critique from the spatial to the temporal.

<sup>145</sup> See in particular chapter two, "Social Structures of the Public Sphere" (27-56).

<sup>146</sup> Norbert Elias analyzes living spaces in *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Press, 1983). Elias notes a distinction between *la maison* (of the bourgeois), *l'hôtel* (of the noble family), and *le palais* (of a prince or king). The hotel and palace are vastly more segregated than the house, because there are separations based not only on station, but also on the function of various rooms. Elias also interrogates the sociological implications both of the division of space, and of the mingling of individuals of different stations within these spaces. Natacha Coquery's more recent *L'Hôtel aristocratique: Le Marché du luxe à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998) examines the economic implications of market transactions that took place within the aristocratic home as bourgeois *marchands* determined aristocratic fashion, thus regulating the economy and culture.

<sup>147</sup> In *Politics*, Aristotle claims that marriage is structured on gender roles where the husband (the stronger and the leader) serves as the public face of the family in the *polis* and the woman remains the leader of the *oikos* (the household economy). See Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair (New York: Penguin Classics, 1981): 55-59.

<sup>148</sup> In the chapter "Femmes auteurs" in his *Tableau de Paris*, Mercier praises the female mind and chides men who wish to keep women from becoming authors. He claims that men wish to keep women from positions of power because they secretly fear that women will perform these roles better than men. However, the contradictory nature that drives 2440 is also present in the *Tableau*, in which we see other chapters expressing frustration at the silliness and carelessness of eighteenth-century women.

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<sup>149</sup> A cursory look at the statues adorning the Hôtel de Ville in Paris confirms this maternal iconography. Each of the statues representing a particular virtue consists of a mother with children at her feet. In many statues, the mother has one child at her feet and another at her breast. The breastfeeding mother thus remains important in the French political imagination even today.

<sup>150</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz expounds upon the historical and political implications of the theological division of the king's bodies in *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). He explains that the body natural is tied to the person of the king alone, while the body politic occurs when the king's body becomes representative of all of his subjects. In this way the king's body politic lives on even when the body natural dies.

<sup>151</sup> In fact, an illustration of the throne room from an early edition of the novel depicts a woman placing a baby in a bassinet. It is therefore logical to think that eighteenth-century readers may also have interpreted the breastfeeding woman as one of flesh and blood rather than of marble. This image is reproduced in Robert Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: Norton, 1995), 131.

<sup>152</sup> The shift that she identifies toward this good father and away from tradition is not unlike the shift from the "traditional" to the "new" father assessed by Maurice Daumas, and discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>153</sup> John Shovlin notes a similar blurring between family and society amongst eighteenth-century French elite. Shovlin notes a turn in popular discourse toward the term "political economy," which he argues became fashionable as early as the 1760's. Thus, around the time that Mercier was writing *2440* public discourse was already seeing a shift from household to political economy. See Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>154</sup> Expressing, once again, a concordance between the micro and the macro, the author of *2440* poses this question on the very first page.

<sup>155</sup> Henry Majewski compares Mercier's interpretation of Paris as a living being to the kinds of descriptions of Paris that we find later in Balzac. Majewski writes that Mercier interprets Paris as "an autonomous and growing being; fascinated by its diversity and mystery, he fervently describes its vitality and fears its corruption." *The Preromantic Imagination of L.-S. Mercier* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), 115.

<sup>156</sup> Robert Darnton describes this meandering narrative as a device that would allow the author to constantly revise his manuscript, adding chapters as he sees fit. See *The Forbidden Best-Sellers* (specifically chapter four) for a detailed discussion of narrative devices in *2440*, 115-36.

<sup>157</sup> Jean-Claude Bonnet even offers the *Tableau* as a corrective for *L'An 2440*. Bonnet describes *2440* as a failure in that it only invents a world in reverse – a world that has no future. See Bonnet, "La littérature et le réel," 14-15.

<sup>158</sup> While this novel is easily classified as utopian fiction, the rich descriptions of Paris in the *Tableau* as well as *Nouveau Paris* also point to a certain hope for the future. In this way they exhibit utopian tendencies without being utopian, strictly speaking.

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<sup>159</sup> For a detailed discussion of the development of the uchronic genre, see Paul Alkon's *Origins of Futuristic Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

<sup>160</sup> The guide claims: "Il faut que cette maniere de voir soit la meilleure, puisque cette lumiere a percé avec une rapidité inconcevable" (134).

<sup>161</sup> As we indicate in the introduction to this dissertation, French universalism has become the subject of much recent debate as politicians and citizens question what it means to be French in today's multicultural France. In this climate, universalism too easily tends toward racism. For more on the crisis of universalism see Naomi Schor, "The Crisis of Universalism," *Yale French Studies*, 100 (2001): 43-64.

<sup>162</sup> Rancière writes of *le politique*: "Parler du politique et non de la politique, c'est indiquer qu'on parle des principes de la loi, du pouvoir et de la communauté et non de la cuisine gouvernementale." See Rancière, *Aux bords du politique*, 13.

<sup>163</sup> For example, as the guide and the narrator walk to a public execution (an extremely rare occurrence in the twenty-fifth century), the guide tells the narrator that not only was the guilty man found quickly because each citizen had done their civic duty in reporting him, but also that the man himself will go willingly to his death. "Eh! pourquoi ses mains seroient-elles chargées de fers," the guide explains, "lorsqu'il se livre volontairement à la mort!" (66).

<sup>164</sup> Lynn Hunt discusses several ways in which certain authors and politicians began to recast the Revolution in a less gruesome light after the event. In particular, she describes how certain members of the national convention inflated certain actions of Marie Antoinette in order to portray her unfavorably as they debated whether or not she should be executed. See Hunt, *The Family Romance and the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), in particular chapter 4.

<sup>165</sup> The other instance of the past conditional is included in a letter that the narrator receives from a friend. In the letter, the friend imagines a journey to the center of the earth where he would pass by several layers of various generations of humans. On this voyage he would see all of the disasters they had caused and he would wish that the earth could swallow up the human race in order to save itself (185-87).

<sup>166</sup> The notion of ruins in the cultural imagination of eighteenth-century authors is more fully explored by Daniel Brewer in *The Enlightenment Past: Reconstructing Eighteenth-Century French Thought*. Brewer examines not only a fascination with existing ruins, but also the ways in which these authors "ruin the real," a process that "effaces the primary object or referent and sets a fantasy object in its stead" (187).

<sup>167</sup> Voltaire expresses distaste for history in many of his works, but he does so most directly in *La Philosophie de l'histoire* (1765). For a critical edition of this work see, Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet), *La Philosophie de l'histoire*, ed. J.H. Brumfitt (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1963).

<sup>168</sup> Although the theory of the "invisible hand" with regards to capitalism is most often attributed to Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, published in London in 1776, three years after the publication of *2440*, the Scottish philosopher actually introduces the concept much earlier in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). The first known translation of *TMS* dates to 1764 (by Eidous). Therefore, it is possible that Mercier borrowed the term from

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Smith. For a detailed listing of publication dates of Adam Smith's works and their translation into French, see Gilbert Faccarello and Philippe Steiner, "The Diffusion of the Work of Adam Smith in the French Language: An Outline History," published in *A Critical Bibliography of Adam Smith*, ed. Keith Tribe (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002): 61-119.

<sup>169</sup> Our reading of the division between History and history (or histories) draws on Koselleck's definitions of *Historie* (natural time) and *Geschichte* (the telling of history). See Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*.

<sup>170</sup> In the chapter on the king's library, the librarian explains to the narrator that the eighteenth-century historians were so concerned with history that they forgot to look at the present. Rather than recording their own achievements and flaws, they attempted to catalogue the world, writing a universal history. This attempt was such a failure, according to the librarian, that the novel became the sought out genre to learn the true story of the past.

<sup>171</sup> Majewski calls *2440* an early example of romantic visionary literature, "in which Mercier exercises his imagination while describing the end of the world" (5). He relates the role of the dream in this text to later, romantic forms of the fantastic.

<sup>172</sup> We call this sequence a "non-chapter" because the section itself is not given a numerical marker within the story. Placed between chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight, the lunar eclipse dream sequence divides the story nearly in half.

<sup>173</sup> See Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, table 2.1 and pp. 19-32.

<sup>174</sup> See *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 255-276.

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