SEX, POLITICS, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY:
THE PETIT-MAÎTRE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

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Abstract

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The petit-maître, a popular social and literary type in eighteenth-century France, emblematizes the negative image of the old regime French aristocrat: he wears extravagant wigs, embellished waistcoats, high-heeled shoes, make up, and he is often criticized for his obsession with women and for his "effeminacy". The petit-maître is a symbolic bouc-émissaire: he is often portrayed as ridiculous and he is mocked and scorned for his affected manners, his ostentatious appearance, and his frivolity. He is the consummuate example of how not to act in old regime polite society.

Yet the figure's popularity at the time abounds: it appears in hundreds of comedies between 1650 and 1800 and it features prominently in numerous novels of the same period, including some by such well-known authors as Crébillon, Diderot, Rousseau, and Laclos. This figure also shares many qualities with the infamous eighteenth-century libertine: they are both represented as constantly seeking personal gain, but in so doing, they present themselves with manners and airs that aim to please, although not always achieving that goal. They are depicted in eighteenth-century literature as cunning manipulators who seek self-satisfaction and as countermodels for social and moral standards.

Despite the overwhelming popularity of the petit-maître in novels and plays of the time, he has gone virtually unnoticed in contemporary critical studies of old regime political history and society. Therefore, this dissertation has two main goals: on the one hand, it brings to light an extremely popular character that has been largely overlooked in
contemporary critical scholarship. On the other, it illustrates that the petit-maître, like the libertine, represents a reaction against seventeenth-century standards of sociability. Through an analysis of the ways in which the petit-maître symbolizes "bad taste", this dissertation aims at a reexamination of civility and libertinage in eighteenth-century France.

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Introduction

This dissertation is about the *petit-maître*: an old regime social and literary figure that was exceedingly popular at the time but that has been unduly overlooked in contemporary literary studies. A male aristocrat of low rank, the petit-maître is sometimes portrayed as a social *débutant* having just entered into worldly society; other times he is represented as an experienced socialite having found his place in *le monde*. In both cases, the petit-maître feels that to gain prominence in society he must stand out: he puts on airs, speaks in exclamatory remarks and hyperbole, and exaggerates his manners and gestures. This figure is also portrayed as a fashion obsessed coxcomb who tends to embellish his appearance in the effort to distinguish himself from other men and to gain the public’s attention. He wears wigs, rouge, false beauty marks (*mouches*), and dresses in the latest, most elegant fashions that often appear womanly. His whole persona depends on simultaneously impressing and disparaging others so as to set himself above them and to gain their esteem in order to develop an illustrious reputation. The image of the petit-maître is meant to serve as an example of 'what not to be' and is ridiculed or otherwise disparaged in society and in literature. It is a negative example, one that constantly challenges social norms and consequently is either punished, rehabilitated, or exiled.

The petit-maître is complex because it is a protean figure that changes according to the context in which it is portrayed. This complexity also stems from the fact that the boundaries between this character and the infamous eighteenth-century libertine are not necessarily clearly drawn: they are both figures that seek personal gain, but in so doing, they present themselves with manners and airs that aim to please but do not always
achieve that goal. They are depicted in eighteenth-century literature as cunning manipulators who seek self-satisfaction and as countermodels for social and moral standards.

Thus, the following work explores how the petit-maître, with his focus on appearance, his theatricality, and his attempts to master \textit{l'art de plaire}, represents a reaction against seventeenth-century codes of sociability. It also shows that the petit-maître has much in common with the eighteenth-century libertine and that the difference between the two is only a matter of degrees. Ultimately, it is the goal of this study to bring to light a prevalent social type and literary character that symbolizes bad taste and greatly influences the image of the libertine but has yet to be granted its due exposure.

The petit-maître was widely discussed by many writers in old regime France. In the late seventeenth century (1699) Charles Rivière Dufresny explains that in the French court, the petit-maître contrasts with the \textit{galant homme}. For Dufresny, the petit-maître is a ridiculous foil to the respectable and \textit{honnête} courtier: "Quoi que le courtisan et le petit-maître soient d'un même pays, ils ont néanmoins des mœurs toutes différentes. Le courtisan s'étudie à cacher son dérèglement sous des dehors réglés. Le petit-maître fait vanité de paraître encore plus déréglé qu'il n'est."\footnote{Dufresny. \textit{Amusements sérieux et comiques. Second édition, revue, commenté et augmenté} (Paris: NP [DCCVII]), 49.} In the eighteenth century, Voltaire's satirical \textit{Le Temple du goût}, published in 1733, describes petits-maîtres as superficial social butterflies who are refused entry into the illustrious temple of good taste: "les petits-maîtres […] des gens qui ont brillé dans de petites sociétés, qui ont régné chez certaines femmes, et qui se sont fait appeler grands hommes, sont tous surpris d'être
In the late eighteenth century (1776), Restif de la Bretonne describes Paris as being overrun with effete and frivolous petits-maîtres whose carriages trample the honest, decent, and hard-working people in the streets: "à Paris [...] la populace est écrasée par les carrosses, [...] le plus frivole petit-maître, la plus méprisable catin, peuvent impunément passer sur le ventre à cent mille honnêtes gens qui servent la patrie". Now the petit-maître exemplifies the danger to all of French society of the callousness and trivialities of the elite.

The widespread impact of the petit-maître figure is emphasized by the fact that it has a leading role in hundreds of comedies performed between 1685 and 1800, including ones by such famous playwrights as Marivaux, Réné Lesage, and Louis de Boissy. The character also features prominently in many well-known novels, including those of Diderot, Rousseau, and most of the corpus of Crébillon.

But given the predominance of the petit-maître in society and the popularity of the character in the theater and narratives of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is surprising to note that it is the object of very few contemporary critical studies of the period. When the petit-maître is critically examined, it is often incorrectly described and categorized. Philippe Laroch's study on the libertine in eighteenth-century novels, entitled Les Petits-maîtres et les roués: Evolution dans la notion de libertinage dans le roman français du XVIIIe siècle, fails to recognize the polyvalence of the petit-maître and instead makes a categorical distinction between this figure and the roué, insisting on the petit-maître's shallow frivolity and the roué's methodical and villainous qualities. But

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2 Voltaire, Le Temple du goût (Genva: Droz, 1953), 71.
Laroch's study neglects the prevalence of the petit-maître in theater and it fails to acknowledge that in many works the petit-maître is also represented as methodical, influential, and diabolical. Laroch's uncompromising definitions of these two "types" require him to make unyielding and ultimately incorrect claims. For instance, he insists that Crébillon's Versac is a *roué* despite the fact that Crébillon never uses the term in *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit* or any of his other works, and that the novel specifically calls Versac a petit-maître. Laurent Versini's exhaustive study on Pierre Ambroise François Choderlos de Laclos's novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* entitled *Laclos et la tradition: essais sur les sources et la technique des Liaisons dangereuses* also categorizes the petit-maître and the *roué* as different types of libertines. Although Versini does cursorily analyze theatrical representations of the petit-maître and also examines these characters in novels, he incorrectly argues that the petit-maître is merely an effeminate, lighthearted rascal. Versini claims that in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* Laclos portrays *roués* that are more complex than petits-maîtres.5 But in fact, as I will show, the characters in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* share many qualities with the petits-maîtres; most importantly, their homosocial relationships and their final requisite failures. Frédéric Deloffre offers a nuanced investigation of representations of petits-maîtres in theatrical works. His lengthy introduction to Marivaux’s comedy *Le Petit-maître corrigé* provides a cursorily formed history of the character. Deloffre's introduction discusses the origins of the term petit-maître, gives a brief synopsis of over fifty plays that center on the character, mentions moral standards in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries related to the representation of the petit-maître, and discusses a few aspects of the petit-maître’s

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5 For an analysis of Versini's argument, see Chapter Two of this dissertation entitled: The Petit-maître and the libertin in Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses.*
discourse. This study provides a solid introduction of the character and opens doors for a more profound study of the petit-maître’s social satire that will constitute the principal points of this dissertation.

The term petit-maître appears in the French language around the time of the Fronde. Furetière’s 1701 edition of the Dictionnaire Universel explains (retrospectively) that the term described those "jeunes seigneurs de la cour" in the entourage of Mazarin in the early 1640's: "On donna ce nom de petit-maître aux gens de qualité qui étaient du même âge que lui". In contrast, Mme de Motteville’s Mémoires, which describe French court culture of 1647, offer another depiction of the petits-maîtres adding an element of criticism by describing them as a group of young, parasitic opportunists who were the favorites of the Prince de Condé, a reputed homosexual:

Ses favoris qui étaient la plupart des jeunes seigneurs qui l’avaient suivi dans l’armée et participant à sa grandeur comme ils avaient eu part à la gloire qu’il y avait acquise, avaient été appelés les petits-maîtres, parce qu’ils étaient à celui qui le paraissait être de tous les autres.

Another group of "jeunes seigneurs" like the ones Motteville describes, are portrayed by Bussy-Rabutin in his Histoire amoureuse des Gaules (1660). Bussy-Rabutin mentions a masculine "cabal" whose members took vows prohibiting love for and marriage to women:

II. Qu’ils ferait vœu d’obéissance et de chasteté à l’égard des femmes, et qui aucun y contrevenait, il serait chassé de la compagnie, sans pouvoir y rentrer sous quelque prétexte que ce fut.

6 Deloffre’s study of Marivaux’s Le Petit-maître corrigé offers an explanation of the origins of the term petit-maître. Some of my information comes from this source and some from my own investigation.

IV. Que si aucun des frères se mariait, il serait obligé de déclarer que ce n’était que pour le bien de ses affaires ou parce que ses parents l’y obligeaient. Qu’il ferait serment en même temps de jamais aimer sa femme”.

Reinforcing the idea of masculine exclusivity of petit-maîtres, La Bruyère's *Caractères* (1689) describes a group of brutish young men, without manners, without refinement, and who prefer "les amours ridicules" to the love of women: "L’on parle d’une région où […] les jeunes (sont) durs, féroces, sans mœurs, ni politesse; ils se trouvent affranchis de la passion des femmes […], ils leurs préfèrent des repas, des viandes et des amours ridicules". The phrase "les amours ridicules", a pejorative metaphor for homosexual acts, designates these young men as counteragents of normative sexuality. La Bruyère, Motteville, and Bussy-Rabutin all make reference to young aristocrats who enjoy certain privileges at court and whose camaraderie reflects a tendency to exclude women and traditional marriage. In the eighteenth century, the petit-maître retains the status of young aristocrat but does not necessarily concentrate on the representation of same-sex preference. Instead, the petit-maître is seen as obsessed with women and fixated on exploiting them.

The fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* (1762) defines the petit-maître rather simply as: "[…] un jeune homme de Cour, qui se distingue par un air avantageux, par un ton décisif, par des manières libres et étourdies". But the *Encyclopédie* article entitled "Petits-maîtres", which was most likely written by Diderot, focuses on the petit-maître’s ethereality. Here, petits-maîtres are defined as affected, mannered young men and annoying insects that infest the earth:

10 This is despite the fact that in seventeenth-century French literature, authors did not often emphasize strict boundaries of sexual identity. For example in Honoré d’Urfé’s *Astrée*, Céladon is never denounced for dressing as a woman.
PETIT - MAÎTRE, (Langue française.) nom qu'on a donné à la jeunesse ivre de l'amour de soi-même, avantageuse dans ses propos, affectée dans ses manières, et recherchée dans son ajustement. Quelqu'un a défini le petit-maître, un insecte léger qui brille dans sa parure éphémère, papillonne, et secoue ses ailes poudrées. Nos petits-maîtres, dit M. de Voltaire, sont l'espèce la plus ridicule qui rampe avec orgueil sur la surface de la terre.11

The petit-maître’s outward appearance: his manners, gestures, clothing, and discourse, all give the appearance of the ephemeral. Like a butterfly that flies from flower to flower, he moves rapidly from one place, person, or subject to another.12 His manners, gestures and fragmented discourse are meant to attract attention and retain it by constantly altering and varying. His discourse, described elsewhere by the term le persiflage, reflects this tendency for constant variation and rapid change.13 Persiflage is flashy type of discourse: it is exclamatory and exciting, but fragmented. It attracts listeners and sometimes insults and mocks others but fails to make any point. Diderot’s petit-maîtres of his Les Bijoux indiscrets speak in persiflage, their conversation is described as a series of pirouettes: it turns in circles; it is light and entertaining and sometimes slanderous but inherently insubstantial. This discursive style reflects the petit-maître’s entire persona: his appearance, actions, gestures and speech expose his fickleness, ridiculousness, and at times slightly diabolical nature.

11 The Pergamon Edition of the Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des sciences des arts et des métiers notes that this article is attributed to Diderot with some uncertainty. Considering that the opinions regarding the idea of the petit-maître in this article are congruous with the ideas Diderot introduces in his aesthetic texts, the integrity of Diderot’s authorship of this article is not at issue in my project. Diderot and Jean le Rond D’Alembert, L’Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers...Compact Edition (New York: Pergamon Press, 1969), 169.


13 Elisabeth Bourguinat’s study on Le Persiflage notes that this type of conversation is a trademark of the petit-maître type. She emphasizes that persiflage can also mean a type of slanderous discourse that aims to create some deception or ruse at the expense of another person. Le Siècle du persiflage, 1734-1789. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 100-145.
The first literary representations of the petit-maître emphasize another one of the character’s emblematic qualities: effeminacy. In the seventeenth century, the term *efféminé* usually described the type of man who liked to frequent women’s spaces (the salon, the boudoir), fixated on them, and exploited them. Laurent Versini, although he inaccurately attempts to differentiate between different types of libertines in the eighteenth-century, is nevertheless correct in suggesting that one of the first representations of the petit-maître archetype appears in Dancourt’s comedy *Le Chevalier à la mode* (1687). Dancourt describes his chevalier as a "joli homme" and introduces into French comedy the character of the capricious opportunist, the ridiculous fool, the young man who adopts a certain type of feminine manners and dress that contribute to the development of the image of the petit-maître in eighteenth-century theater and in the libertine novel. The chevalier is: "le plus joli homme du monde" (Dancourt 1.1) who fawns over women: "Tu es une des plus aimables filles que je connaisse. Mais qui te fait tes manteaux? Je veux mettre ton ouvrière en crédit". Dancourt’s *joli homme* is a fashionable man on the seventeenth-century comic stage that is represented as a womanizer and as having some manners that please women.

Other precursors of the eighteenth-century petit-maître can be found throughout Molière’s corpus. His frivolous marquis and comic libertine both manifest some of the qualities of the eighteenth-century petit-maître. The marquis abounds in Molière’s plays: *La Critique de l’Ecole des femmes* represents this character as "an enemy of sound judgment" and a frivolous type who pretends to judge what he fails to know or

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understand and refuses to listen to those who disagree with him. In *Le Misanthrope*, the marquis is someone who knows nothing but talks of everything. Dom Juan, although considered to be one of the first dramatic representations of the libertine, also maintains some of the qualities of the eighteenth-century petit-maître, such as excessive attention to appearance, financial scheming, and the inability to attain his end goal, whether it be enjoying the sexual favors of the woman he seduces or sitting down to dinner.

My research has revealed that the petit-maître is depicted according to three distinct nuances: the young apprentice petit-maître, the petit-maître caricature, and the petit-maître mentor. First, the young nobleman petit-maître is a teenager who has just entered into society and is easily impressionable and influenced. This character is usually corrupted by an older petit-maître. He is affected, arrogant, and often ridiculous. Second, the theatrical petit-maître is more of a caricature than his young nobleman counterpart. He is mannered, effeminate, simultaneously ill informed and opinionated, and also slightly diabolical. Molière’s petit marquis serves as one of this type's precursors: he is an insolent and petulantly childish dolt who states opinions with no foundations and refuses to be contradicted. Dom Juan also contributes to the image of this theatrical petit-maître because they both exploit women and steal money. Last, the petit-maître mentor is slightly more complex because his persona is comprised of both uninformed arrogance and frivolity, but he is also methodical, mean-spirited, diabolical, dishonest, and sometimes irreligious. This petit-maître is not without some affinities with Laclos’s infamous *vicomte de Valmont* from his novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses*: the two

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share an expert command of the public persona and an apparent will to undermine social norms, but the petit-maître is also seen as capricious, ridiculous, and effeminate.

In many ways, the petit-maître represents the converse of the *honnête homme*. The seventeenth-century *honnête homme* is a social and literary type that represents the values of elite men. It is a figure that embodies *honnêteté*, a moral quality and an ideal of social conduct. The *honnête homme*'s behavior pleases, he has a grace or a *je-ne-sais-quoi* that can be easily recognized but not easily defined. In 1630, Nicolas Faret published a work that discusses ideals of social comportment. Faret was inspired by the Italian courtier, Baldassarre Castiglione, and his notion of *sprezzatura*, which was a technique of behaving well in society that noble men should master and an art of social conduct that appears to come naturally. In his text *L’Honnête homme ou l’art de plaire à la cour*, Faret lists the qualities of the *honnête homme* and describes his ostensibly natural grace: "Toutes les bonnes parties que nous avons alléguées, sont très considérables en un gentilhomme; mais le comble de ces choses consiste en une certaine grâce naturelle, [...] Ce point est si haut, qu’il est au-dessus des préceptes de l'art, et ne se saurait bonnement enseigner".16 Faret’s construction of the self is the cultivation of numerous elements that, once combined, seem elusive and give the man a grace that cannot be easily defined but can be easily identified. In the early eighteenth century, Antoine Gombaud chevalier de Méré picks up on both Castiglione’s ideas and Faret's formulation of the concept of *honnêteté*. In his *Discours de la vraie honnêteté* (1701), Méré discusses the universality of the principles of social comportment and focuses on the importance of *le naturel*:

"l’honnêteté [...] plus elle est naturelle, plus elle plaît; et c’est la principale cause de la

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bienséance que de faire d’un air agréable ce qui nous est naturel".\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Le naturel} is an acquired naturalness of movement, manners and discourse that appears easy, innate, because it has been completely appropriated and thus comes effortlessly. Faret and Méré both focus on a construction of a socially agreeable persona. This is the art of pleasing others so as to ensure their good opinion (\textit{l’art de plaire}). The honnête homme puts on a social mask with the intention of pleasing others by appearing effortlessly graceful and emphasizes a universal social harmony obtained through self-fashioning.

In this regard, the honnête homme resembles the eighteenth-century libertine who plays the same role as the honnête homme, but hides, under a veil of socially acceptable behavior, his true intentions to manipulate others for his benefit. \textit{Libertinage} in eighteenth-century France is the paradoxical search for freedom within the confines of the adherence to social norms. The libertine seeks personal gain rather than contributes to the good of society as a whole, but in so doing constructs a pleasingly seductive persona. He is portrayed in many eighteenth-century texts as a methodical villain, a hypocrite, and an actor focused on finding pleasure and encouraging others to do the same. Two of the most famous literary libertines, the vicomte de Valmont and the marquise de Merteuil of Laclos’s \textit{Les Liaisons dangereuses}, both don social masks and consider themselves to be works of art. Meretuil’s famous line: "Je puis dire que je suis mon ouvrage" reflects an aestheticization of the self.\textsuperscript{18} Both the honnête homme and the libertine create social selves through the art of fashioning their outward appearances and behaviors. However, the libertine, unlike the honnête homme, cultivates a private self that is the opposite of his public persona.

\textsuperscript{17} Antoine Gombaud chevalier de Méré, \textit{ Œuvres complètes} Vol. 3. Ed. Charles H. Boudhours (Paris: F. Roche, 1930), 74.
The petit-maître is not an *honnête homme* nor exactly a libertine but he nonetheless shares some of the qualities of the libertine. The petit-maître also manipulates others, sometimes slanders them with his discourse, and attempts to create a public persona while also manipulating social norms. However, the petit-maître usually fails at the creation of this perfect public persona, makes a spectacle of himself in his attempts to show off a non-existent command of his social self, and falls short of transgressing standards of sociability because he is seen as ridiculous rather than as clever or skillful. Representations of the petit-maître portray the character in the process of attempting but failing to either seduce several women, augment his reputation in society, or marry for financial solvency. His attempts to reach any kind of goal fail because he is focused on the means in themselves rather than on the end: in other words, he focuses on the display of his appearance, his conversation, and his gestures rather than on the messages that those outward signs communicate. There is no meaning behind his words; his discourse is empty. Moreover, the petit-maître’s appearance is embellished purely for the sake of ostentation, which makes him look more feminine than fashionable. His actions and gestures are often more pronounced than the context calls for and they amount to nothing more than silly pretention. Thus the petit-maître is a satirical tool used to illustrate the consequences of not respecting the values of *honnêteté*: he exemplifies the very notion of "bad taste". It is a figure that demonstrates a set of behaviors that were condemned and marginalized by institutionally established standards of conduct.

The first chapter of this dissertation discusses the three kinds of petits-maîtres: the neophyte, the caricature, and the mentor. In an analysis of Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon's novel *Les Egarements du cœur et de l'esprit* (1736), we will focus on the
relationships between these petits-maîtres as representative of homosocial bonds, using as a framework the notion of "homosociality" as it is theorized by Eve K. Sedgwick in her seminal study on representations of male relationships in the pre-modern English novel.19 We will examine the relationships between Meilcour, Versac, and the marquis de Pranzi in light of how the male bonds both depend on women and instrumentalize them. This chapter details the different facets of the three images of the petit-maître and shows that their connections are influenced by both sex and gender role-playing in the context of eighteenth-century sociability.

In the second chapter, we explore the resemblances between petits-maîtres as they appear in many works (such as in those by Crébillon, Louis de Boissy, and Réné Lesage) and the characters in Pierre Ambroise François Choderlos de Laclos's novel Les Liaisons dangereuses (1782). Specifically, this chapter addresses an argument made by Laurent Versisi who claims that there are two types of libertines in eighteenth-century literature, the petit-maître and the roué, and that Laclos's novel only portrays roués. This chapter shows both that Laclos's characters share many traits with the petit-maître and that the figures in Laclos's novel and other texts are highly influenced by reactions against normative social and religious values. The libertine that we see in eighteenth-century literature shares many qualities with the libertine figure that was described in texts by seventeenth-century religious apologists.

Chapter three brings to light effeminacy as a prominent quality of the petit-maître. His effeminate persona underscores the ways in which he illustrates reactions against seventeenth-century codes of masculine conduct. Through examining theatrical

representations of these figures in plays by Florent Carton Dancourt, Louis de Boissy, and Alain-René Lesage, we will discover that the petit-maître symbolizes ideals that directly oppose honnête values. In so doing, the petit-maître's persona highlights the virtues of honnêteté and also signals doubts about the authenticity of the honnête homme's practice of social performance.

Chapter four also underscores the uncertainty about the idealized man's social masking by examining the petit-maître's quality of impotence: the petit-maître is represented as constantly failing to seduce women and to produce the metaphorical "sons" that he puts much effort into recruiting. By acknowledging that the petit-maître's constant search for power or "potency" actually reinforces his failures or "impotence", we will examine Crébillon's novel Le Sopha, conte moral (1742), Claude Godard d'Aucour's novel Thémidore on mon histoire et celle de ma maîtresse (1745) and a comedy by Louis de Boissy entitled Le Francais à Londres (1727). Ultimately, these petits-maîtres, which act as foils for the works' honnête homme characters, raise the question of the honnête homme's power over women: does the perfectly sociable man have control of himself in the presence of women? Or is his self-control merely an act that hides an underlying ineffectiveness?

The juxtaposition of power and ineffectiveness is emblematized by one particular petit-maître that we will examine in chapter five. Germaine de Staël's late eighteenth-century novel Corinne ou l'Italie (1799) depicts a "stereotypical" Frenchman as a petit-maître who transcends national boundaries: the count of Erfeuil represents an image of the Frenchman as he was seen throughout Europe in the old regime. But Staël's work, instead of focusing on the petit-maître as a countermodel for sociability, rather redeems
the petit-maître to some extent in the international context: she uses this character to portray the ways that an exemplary man should and should not act in an idealized post-revolutionary and cosmopolitan world. Staël writes at a time when the image of the old regime man of fashion is beginning to change.

Finally, the epilogue compares the petit-maître to the nineteenth-century dandy. Focusing on the aesthetics of performativity, this epilogue shows that between the petit-maître and the dandy, there lies a crucial aesthetic difference: the dandy reflects a self-conscious performativity that signals some aspects of modernity and the petit-maître embodies inauthentic theatricality that signals some possible negative aspects of old regime standards of sociability. Through its analysis of the dandy, this epilogue touches on all of the aspects of the petit-maître that the dissertation examines. The dandy is not represented as a figure that is connected to others through homosocial bonds, like the petit-maître is, because the dandy does not want to produce metaphorical progeny.20 Also, the dandy is iconic precisely because he is effective. Unlike the petit-maître, the dandy expresses the successful manipulation of his persona and gives the appearance that he embodies the image he is trying to convey. He "succeeds" at the end and illustrates a stark contrast to the petit-maître’s emblematic failure.

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Chapter One: Mentor, Initiate, and Imitator: 
Homosociality in Crébillon's *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit*

In an article on Crébillon's novel *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit* (1736), Pierre Michel recognizes, perhaps more pertinently than any other critic, the importance of the relationship between two characters, the Marquis de Pranzi and the Comte de Versac, to the overall significance of the narrative. By noting that the public personae of each depends on the existence of the other, Michel indicates that, despite the damage that the ridiculous petit-maître Pranzi causes to Versac's reputation, they share not only the same qualities but also the same fate: "Pas de Versac sans Pranzi, qui le dégrade et qui est paradoxalement son devenir historique". In acknowledging that the characters are of the same ilk, Michel starts to guide readers toward a true understanding of the complexity of the petit-maître who often appears under different guises in this novel.

What Michel fails to include in his analysis, however, is the fact that the young M. de Meilcour is also a crucial component of the Versac/Pranzi couple: Meilcour, a nobleman and the novel's third petit-maître, acts as an intermediary between the two others because Pranzi serves as the key to understanding Versac's desire to educate Meilcour in his libertine ways. Understanding the relationship between Pranzi, Meilcour and Versac gives readers the key to understanding the entire narrative. I will show that these three male characters form the essential parts of one whole, complex assemblage of qualities displayed by characters typically considered petit-maîtres and that, in this novel,

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21 Pierre Michel, "Les Égarements ou le roman impossible," in *Les Paradoxes du romancier*. Ed. Pierre Réat (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires, 1975), 29. In fact, Michel sees the Marquis de Pranzi as the type of character that "ouvre la voie au Bel-Ami", which shows that he recognizes the importance of Pranzi in the novel. This is crucial because other critics largely ignore or relegate Pranzi to minor character status. It is not my intention here to enter into a debate on whether Pranzi does prefigure the Bel-Ami; rather, I will argue that according to my research, Pranzi is a typical, theatrical petit-maître. I will discuss the petit-maître's legacy in my final chapter.
the three cannot be considered mutually exclusive because the advancement of the narrative depends on the specific roles that each one plays.

Crébillon's novel illustrates the complexity of the petit-maître character as it appears in literature because it includes three main petits-maîtres, the Comte de Versac, Monsieur de Meilcour who is the narrator and main character, and the Marquis de Pranzi, whose shared qualities are that they are hypocritical, (Meilcour less than the others as he is just learning to master the art of hypocrisy), they opine on every given subject without real knowledge of it\textsuperscript{22}, and they are frivolous socialites who tend to embrace appearance, manners, and airs above all else. Versac is labeled as "le plus audacieux petit-maître qu'on ait jamais vu" (\textit{Egarements} 69) and also describes himself at one time as \textit{un fat}: "j'étais fat, à la vérité" (135).\textsuperscript{23} Meilcour is the narrator of the story; the novel is Meilcour's narration of the events of his own past. As the older narrator, Meilcour retrospectively describes his younger self as having a sense of self-importance typical of petits-maîtres: "J'entrai dans le monde à dix-sept ans, et avec tous les avantages qui peuvent y faire remarquer. [...] J'étais naturellement porté à m'estimer ce que je valais; et il est ordinaire lorsque l'on pense ainsi, de s'estimer plus qu'on ne vaut [...] ma mère ne parvint pas à m'ôte l'orgueil" (23). Pranzi displays the most pronounced of all of the typical petit-maître qualities because he embodies the arrant and unmitigated frivolity attributed to some members of the noble class: "Sot, présomptueux, impudent, aussi incapable de bien penser que de rougir de penser mal" (84). Pranzi's social vices illustrate the profanation of the ideal noble traits of aristocrats. But on the other hand,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In the narrative, Mme de Lursay describes Versac in these exact terms: "il ne se connaît à rien, et juge de tout." Crébillon, \textit{Les Egarements du cœur et de l'esprit in Les Romans libertins du XVIIIe siècle}. Ed. Raymond Trousson (Paris: R. Laffont, 1993), 76.
\item Definition of 'fat' from \textit{Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française}. 4th edition (1762): "Impertinent, sans jugement, plein de complaisance pour lui-même."
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there are subtle differences between these characters that lie in the roles they play within the narrative: they act as an initiator, an initiate, and an imitator/caricature. Versac, the mentor petit-maître, enacts the desire to educate young men in his ways; the young noble, Meilcour, embodies an 'intermediary' between the mentor and the caricature because he is not (yet) either one, but is on the verge of becoming one or the other; and the caricature/imitator petit-maître, Pranzi, illustrates the results of the process of a libertine education.

If Versac, Meilcour and Pranzi are all petits-maîtres, it is clear that different petits-maîtres share many of the same qualities but function slightly differently according to the roles that they play within their respective narratives. Meilcour acts as the naive apprentice who assumes the role of the pupil, which moves the dramatic action forward. Versac's presence in the narrative serves to counterbalance (and counteract) an education offered by a woman (Mme de Lursay) who focuses on teaching the young Meilcour to be skilled in the art of seduction while also respecting the rules of proper social interaction with women. The Marquis de Pranzi plays a relatively small role as both a sycophant and a troublemaker but nonetheless crucially demonstrates the standard results of the type of education Versac attempts to impart to younger men.

Before I begin my discussion of the interaction between the three petits-maîtres in Les Egarements, I'd like first to examine these three parts in other petit-maître works. In many narratives, these different roles build the work's individual and unique story line. The roles played by these ostensibly minor characters have enormous influence over the narrative line and thematic significance. For example, the main character, Prince
Angola, of La Morlière's *Angola ou l'histoire indienne*, is like Meilcour because he is an initiate petit-maître on whom the plot centers. Angola, like Meilcour, is the social neophyte who is in a position to learn about worldly life. The presence of this naive character allows for the construction of a unique presentation of the concept of sociability.

The story begins as Angola, an Oriental prince, is cursed at birth by a jealous and spiteful fairy who swears to doom the young man's future if he ever falls truly in love. As a result, another fairy, Lumineuse, takes Angola under her wing at the age when he is to enter into society, brings him to her court (a fantasy court which implicitly represents French court society of the time), and ensures that his education in the ways of the world will guarantee his pleasures with women but will guard against his experiencing true love. As I will later show, Lumineuse is like Mme de Lursay in *Les Egarements* because she takes charge of the young man's sexual education: she guides him in understanding the proper techniques of seduction. But she is also like Crébillon's Mme de Senanges who ends up being the first woman to sleep with the young Meilcour: when Angola fails to seduce a young woman, Lumineuse deems it necessary to sleep with him in order to advance his sexual education and stave off the possibility of his developing sentimental attachments to women.

La Morlière's novel also includes a mentor petit-maître, Almaïr. He is like Versac in that he teaches Angola the ways of the world. But he is also unlike Versac in that he is merely an adviser to Angola and he is of a lower social rank than the prince. Almaïr's role, rather than to act as a wise older tutor who introduces Angola to the techniques of mastering his social persona, is instead to deflect moral conscience: each time Angola
broaches the subject of love, or even brings up the idea of acting decently with women, Almaïr aptly and logically reasons that the path of the womanizer, rather than of the sentimental lover, is most beneficial to a young man at court and most suitable to Angola's lifestyle. Almaïr is much less subtle than Versac in that he makes an obvious display of the debased actions and thought processes of the petit-maître. I will show that Versac's lessons are much more complex: although he promotes certain principles that may be deemed immoral, he also emphasizes important notions of proper social interaction and la bienséance (we will examine this idea in further detail later).

Nevertheless, Almaïr and Versac are the mentor petits-maîtres who aim to promote a young man's pursuit of pleasure.

Angola's story concludes with a "correction": Angola falls in love with a respectable, young woman, he manages to defy the evil fairy's curse, and he ends up becoming king. Readers of Les Égarements, are left in the dark at the novel's conclusion, not truly knowing either Meilcour's or Versac's final fates. In the story of Angola, as in many other petit-maître narratives, the initiate petit-maître is essentially reformed: he no longer follows his past pleasure-oriented lifestyle when he falls in love with a respectable woman. Petit-maîtres who are not reformed do not fall in love and usually simply disappear at the end with no indication of a post-narrative continuation.

This is the case in the comedy Les Petits-maîtres by Justus Van Effen (1719) where there are three main petits-maîtres, as in Les Égarements. Here, they are the comte, the marquis, and the chevalier. The difference here is that instead of one neophyte, one mentor and one imitator, all three are mainly caricatures, but each one fills a specific role. The marquis and the chevalier are rather minor characters, but their presence is necessary.
to the main character, the *comte*, who needs constant reinforcement of petit-maître values. The two serve to support the main character and keep him aligned with their principles. Many petit-maître stories and comedies modulate relationships among characters; they are communal stories of groups of men.

The *comte* is the first character to appear on stage in the first scene where he immediately reveals his plans to marry the young and rich Julie solely for her fortune. The marquis arrives next to discuss these plans and lightly ridicules the *comte* for what he perceives as his real fondness for the young woman:

Chevalier: Apprends mon cher Marquis, [...]que le fat postule une fille en mariage, et ce qu'il y a de plus détestable, une fille des plus jolies; tout le monde le croira amoureux tout de bon. Comte: Amoureux! Que la peste te crève! [...] Chevalier: Eh bien, mon cher, puisque l'amour ne s'en mêle pas, le cas est pardonnable. (1.2)²⁴

The marquis's accusations serve to reinforce the petit-maître credo: they must remain indifferent to love and they must only marry for reputation or fortune.²⁵

The dramatic action advances when Julie's uncle encourages her to marry Orante, the play's 'honnête homme' character, and she admits that she feels a fondness for the *comte* that she does not feel for Orante. Her meddling aunt Araminte, the play's petite-maîtresse, also favors the *comte* for his exaggerated manners and haughty airs and she encourages Julie to marry him.

²⁵ "True love is forbidden to these young nobles and marriage is only a means to further finance their ruinous life style". James L. Schorr."Les Petits-maîtres and La Critique by Justus Van Effen," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 278 (1990): 2. Petit-maîtres are almost never married and almost always seek marriage to a rich widow as a means to a financial end. As I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the creation of the petit-maître might have been influenced by a group of young men in the seventeenth century who made vows to each other against marriage. This group of men and their vows to each other are described by Bussy-Rabutin, *Histoire amoureuses des Gaules* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1967), 216.
The *chevalier*, the play's third petit-maître, arrives on the scene at the moment when the *comte* learns of Orante's intention to marry Julie. The *chevalier's* role is similar to that of the marquis: he discourages the *comte* from falling in love by encouraging him not to take too many pains in courting the young woman. But it is the *chevalier* who predicts the final outcome of the dramatic action when he reminds the *comte* that he is in the good graces of the petite-maîtresse, Araminte, who also happens to be Julie's rich aunt. With this reminder, the *chevalier* prompts the *comte's* idea to marry the rich, older widow instead of Julie.

At the end of the play, Julie is eventually convinced both by her uncle and by Orante himself that Orante is the more suitable husband. Julie eventually rejects the *comte* who ends up marrying Araminte. The *comte* succeeds in securing himself a good financial position but, at the same time, he fails in his original plan to obtain a beautiful, young wife for the social status it brings. During the several scenes that constitute the denouement, the *chevalier* and the marquis are simply absent from the scene. There is no indication of their final exit, nor is there any mention of their whereabouts. They simply disappear from the scene despite their influence upon the actions of the *comte*, which ultimately lead to the conclusion. The two petit-maître lackeys appear to be ridiculous but prove to be crucial characters without whom the dramatic action cannot come to a close.

The fact that these works include several petits-maîtres that play different roles illustrates not only the complexity of petits-maîtres, but also the symbiosis of their relationships: one petit-maître simply cannot exist without the other within the narrative. Even if they do not work together toward a common goal, their combined actions
contribute significantly to the dénouement and determine the final outcome. I have only mentioned here some works in which the interdependence of petits-maîtres is most obvious. The relationships between these characters are crucial in many plays and novels of the time. The qualities of each petit-maître, although they differ slightly in each work, contribute significantly to the overall image of the ethos of urban social life in eighteenth-century France.

In the following pages, I will focus on the three petits-maîtres in Crébillon's novel *Les Egarements du cœur et de l'esprit*, Meilcour, Versac and Pranzi, by showing that they are more closely linked than many critics have mentioned and that this connection is both symbiotic and compulsory. I will also emphasize an element that has been largely ignored: the important role that Pranzi plays in Versac's lessons to Meilcour. Finally, I will explore the influence of the women characters on Versac's education of both Meilcour and Pranzi. First, let us turn to Meilcour's complex relationships with his educators Mme de Lursay and Versac in order to later explain the roles of Pranzi and Mme de Senanges in the narrative.

*Authority, hypocrisy, and sexual exchange in Les Egarements*

Meilcour's principle mentors in this novel are Mme de Lursay, Versac and Mme de Senanges (Mme de Senanges's role in Meilcour's life has generally been seen as more minor than that of the other two, but I will later show that her presence is crucial to understanding the motives behind Versac's desire to educate Meilcour.) It is important to note that whereas Mme de Lursay's lessons are most aptly described as *praxis* because
she attempts to show Meilcour how to act and to have him participate in his own education rather than to explicitly articulate what she wants from him, Versac's lessons are primarily theoretical: Mme de Lursay's education is different because she wants to be Meilcour's mistress whereas Versac does not. When he sees that Meilcour is unable to surmise the best ways to act in society through witnessing others' actions, Versac realizes he can only verbally express his principles to the young man in the hopes of educating him.

But in addition to the educational intentions of the older and more experienced socializers (Mme de Lursay, Mme de Senanges and Versac), also at stake are Meilcour's intentions with regards to fulfilling his own romantic desires. His sexual education by the others will depend largely on his interests in pursuing or rejecting love affairs.

The main problem of the novel, however, is the fact that Meilcour's intentions are not clear in his own mind. Meilcour does not seem to know what exactly he aims for; he does not understand what will satisfy his desires as witnessed by the fact that throughout the novel he fails to understand Mme de Lursay's intentions with him. He also continually seeks out the young, beautiful Hortense de Théville but returns again and again to Mme de Lursay, whom he ends up sleeping with in the end. But it is this

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floundering that drives the entire narrative; as Pierre Hartman argues, Meilcour's "confusion" is what constitutes the "principe d'apprentissage" in the novel.27

This may account for the fact that throughout the novel, Mme de Lursay fails to make him understand, despite her best efforts, the proper way to seduce a woman. She also cannot make him understand that she wants him to seduce her. Because Meilcour is not sure of his own intentions, he cannot be sure of hers. Meilcour's continual misapprehension actually leads to Mme de Lursay's lessons becoming or being perceived as more and more hypocritical. In this elite society people are confined to operating within a certain system of behavioral codes carried out primarily through discursive methods – proper conversation is the means by which one socializes and therefore must remain the most important element in socialization, more important than the open declaration of one's love or desires which is often seen as indelicate or improper. Discourse thus becomes double entendre, which hints at the speaker's actual intentions but does not announce them openly. Its effect is decipherable according to a code that is widely shared. Hypocrisy – saying one thing while meaning another – therefore, is a necessary element to socialization in this novel.

But Meilcour does not yet understand this.28 And the more he misunderstands Mme de Lursay's intentions, the more she must find ways not to verbalize exactly what she means. The more he misinterprets her words, the more she says one thing but acts in

27 Hartman, 73.
a way that contradicts her discourse. ²⁹ Mme de Lursay prides herself on her constant observance of the rules of la bienséance – that famous guiding set of principles for both art and socialization defined as "la convenance de ce qui se dit, de ce qui se fait par rapport aux personnes, à l'âge, au sexe, au temps, au lieu". ³⁰ Mme de Lursay knows that the concordance of speech's content to the age, rank, and situation of the speaker is of the utmost importance. In intimate situations, worldly women had to obey the rules of la bienséance at the expense of saying exactly what they meant. Mme de Lursay's hypocrisy is a tool often used by women to seduce men, and normally men can see through the polite veil. But Meilcour does not see through it; he is an anomaly because of his austere upbringing.

Versac, the other prominent hypocrite of the novel, paradoxically does say what he means to Meilcour, or at least, so it seems, because ultimately Versac's motivations remain by and large obscure to the reader. He clearly sees Meilcour's uncertainty and attempts to correct it at the end of the novel when he pulls the young man aside in order to help him to understand social interaction. But rather than to help the young man negotiate the treacherous terrain of la politesse, Versac's lessons are confusing to Meilcour. Paradoxically, Versac speaks sincerely about the art of deception or double entendre:

²⁹ Some critics attribute Mme de Lursay's lack of clarity in her lessons to a "perversion" in her actual project of education: "Mme de Lursay infilète son rôle d'initiatrice à l'amour en direction d'une éducation leurrante et faussée, perverse dans son principe, puisqu'elle vise bien moins à éclairer son amant sur les choses de l'amour qu'à lui brouiller la vue. [...][a] la marquise ne saurait prétendre au rôle de l'initiatrice authentique. Ce n'est pas grâce à elle, mais bien contre elle que se fera l'apprentissage de Meilcour." Pierre Hartman, "L'Apprentissage de Meilcour," in Songe, Illusion, Egarement dans les romans de Crébillon. (Grenoble: Éditions littéraires et linguistiques de l'Université de Grenoble, 1996), 225-6. But it is clear that this lack of clarity is part of Crébillon's aesthetic in this novel: Lursay's lessons, rather than being a "perversion", are actually confined to the social norms that she must observe in order to obtain her goals as a respectable woman and as a seductrice.

Il faut encore que vous joigniez à l'art de tromper les autres celui de les pénétrer; [...] C'est aussi un grand défaut pour le monde que de vouloir ramener tout à son propre caractère. Ne paraissiez point offensé des vices que l'on vous montre et ne vous vantez jamais d'avoir découvert ceux que l'on croit vous avoir dérobés. Il vaut souvent mieux donner mauvaise opinion de son esprit, que de montrer tout ce qu'on en a; cacher, sous un air inappliqué et étourdi, le pendant qui vous porte à la réflexion, et sacrifier votre vanité à vos intérêts. (133)31

He tells Meilcour he must hide his natural reactions. Versac teaches Meilcour to play dumb, which is a comic reversal: whereas a hypocrite might normally make himself appear better than he is, Versac puts a lot of effort into appearing more frivolous and superficial than he is.

Whether or not Meilcour finally understands social interaction as it is enacted both by Versac and Mme de Lursay is not made explicitly clear in the novel. We do know that at the end Meilcour finally succeeds in sleeping with Mme de Lursay, which may or may not indicate an ultimate success on the part of his educators.32 My main concern is not necessarily to explore the arguments for or against the ultimate failure of these lessons, but rather to examine the ways in which they are executed.

Mme de Lursay's and Versac's lessons express requisite conformity to a set of rules for behavior that are not defined by any rational principles but rather by a perverse notion of sociability. They both embrace the principle of saying one thing while meaning

31 Versac's lessons to Meilcour constitute the climactic element of the novel and many critics have analyzed and commented on them. For the most part, it is recognized that Versac indeed communicates a système of knowledge that paradoxically embraces ignorance, ridiculousness, and "les erreurs du siècle" while also taking the form of Enlightenment rationalism with its focus on "principes, étude, savoir, penser, réfléchir, and raisonner". It is not my intention here to engage with all of the critics on this point, but rather to comment that Versac's lessons are indeed lessons in hypocrisy like those of Mme de Lursay. See for example: Jean Garagnon, "Le maitre à penser Versac ou les égarments philosophiques," in Les Paradoxes du romancier. Ed. Pierre Retat. (Lyon: Presses Universitaires. 1995), 128-142.

32 In fact, it seems that Versac's course on social etiquette is unsatisfactory – he fails to respond to Meilcour's questions and at the end, it seems that Meilcour is not profoundly affected by it (he returns to his previous habit of daydreaming of Hortense). The only evidence that Meilcour is affected is that he finally does succeed in sleeping with Mme de Lursay, but this is precisely the opposite objective from what Versac was trying to achieve – his expedient goal is to exact revenge upon Lursay, not to help fulfill her erotic desires. There is no concrete evidence of Versac's success in influencing Meilcour in the way he intends.
another because they recognize the importance of respecting the rules of *la bienséance*.\(^{33}\) They both justify the pursuit of pleasures, Versac perhaps more overtly than Mme de Lursay. They embrace "le mensonge convenu" and the "illusion consentie qui facilite le commerce galant".\(^{34}\) Hypocrisy, then, might be understood as exterior decency despite private desires that sometimes contradict ideals of public decorum.\(^{35}\) Although Mme de Lursay is more obviously or openly "decent" than Versac, he does recognize and acknowledge the importance of *la bienséance*.

But the conversation between Versac and Meilcour at the end of the novel is a "counter-education" whereas Mme de Lursay merely teaches Meilcour that hypocrisy is a necessary element in any attempt to balance sociability (norms) and pleasure.\(^{36}\) According to her lessons, a man must always take care to act and speak using proper language and socially acceptable turns of phrase even when attempting to seduce. In order to gain access to a woman's body, a man must treat her with respect by following the rules of *la bienséance*. Versac reverses Lursay's lessons: he teaches Meilcour to disrespect the woman and to make their liaison public. Instead of teaching Meilcour the correct balance between respecting norms and pursuing pleasure, he rather seeks to upset any balance and places pleasure at the forefront of a young man's guiding priorities. It should be noted that "pleasure" for Versac is not so much sex as it is humiliating people, especially women, in public. But this disgrace is akin to the type of sex that Mazulhim in *Le Sopha* has when he uses sex to humiliate women. Versac also embraces the use of

\(^{33}\) Incidentally, Crébillon follows this model in his own style. His writing, especially in his novel *Le Sopha*, describes unspeakable sex acts (such as anal sex) using a polite and therefore elegant discourse.


\(^{35}\) Ibid., 24

proper language in company; but in order to please people or to place himself at the
center of attention, he often crosses the line between what is acceptable and what is
slanderous.

In fact, Versac's public language draws attention and allows him to subversively
insult others in order to set himself above them. I will examine in detail Versac's
discourse in order to demonstrate his hypocrisy because it will help me to later explain
Meilcour's interaction with Versac and the reasons for which the two become engaged in
a mentor and student relationship.

Versac's art of speech

In Versac’s first scene of the novel, his verbal style is prominently displayed.
Crébillon illustrates that Versac's reputation in society is dependent on the fact that his
main means of communication occurs almost exclusively at the expense of women. In
his first scene, Versac launches a veiled diatribe against Mme de Lursay through a series
of indirect insults. He pretends that he is only revealing the truth about her and that it is
his civic duty to do so. He also intimates that it is his duty to reveal the hypocrisy of the
type of woman that she is; the type of woman who imposes her false virtue on others:

Ne dirait-on pas, poursuivit Versac, qu'on ne la connait pas? [...] N'a-t-on pas vu
commencer cette haute pruderie dans laquelle elle est aujourd'hui? Cela empêche-
t-il que tels et tels (il en nomma cinq ou six) ne lui doivent leur éducation. [...] C'est, reprit-il, par esprit de justice: c'est que je ne saurais supporter des femmes
hypocrites, qui, plongées dans les dérèglements qu'elles blâment dans les autres,
parlent sans cesse de leur vertu et veulent en imposer au public. (71-2)

It is ironic that Versac wants to expose Mme de Lursay's hypocrisy given that
acting one way and thinking another forms the basis of his art de plaire. But one aspect
of his strategy is to draw attention to others' faults in order to deflect the attention from
one's own. The specific term that describes this kind of public speech is *le persiflage*.37

*Persiflage* is the term used to describe certain ways of speaking that insult, mock, humiliate, tease or put down others. It is double-speak, as well as the practice of mocking another person but doing so in a witty way, so as to entertain the company. It relies on irony.38 This is the standard practice of petits-maîtres, as we see in Duclos' *Acajou*39, Diderot's petits-maîtres in his novel *Les Bijoux indiscrets*40, and Laclos's *Valmont*.41

*Persiflage* is a form of public entertainment42; as such it is the one aspect of Versac's character that is most prominent his first appearance in the novel, at Mme de Lursay's salon. His goal in this scene is to draw the crowd's attention by pretending to have urgent gossip to relate. He wants to titillate and excite by appealing to the

37 Elisabeth Bourguinat’s thorough study on this type of speech in the eighteenth century defines *persiflage* in several ways, I will quote here the ones that reflect most precisely what we find in *Les Égarements*:
   1. se livrer à un badinage d’idées et d’expressions, qui laisse du doute ou de l'embarras sur leur véritable sens.
   2. Tenir de propos forme, des discours sans idées liées.
   3. Dire à quelqu’un ou de quelqu’un des choses flatteuses d’une manière assez fine pour qu’il les croie sincères, et que les autres personnes qui les entendent sentent qu’elles ne sont que des ironies.
   4. Plaisanter, railler indécemment quelqu'un.
   5. Parler ironiquement, d'un ton moqueur.

We will see that the variety of definitions of *persiflage* is necessary because this type of speech is constantly changing according to the way people speak. *Le Siècle du persiflage* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 7.

38 Bernadette Fort describes *persiflage* as an integral element in Crébillon's work: "La société décrite par Crébillon est une société étroite et fermée. ... Dans un cercle aussi limité, où, d'autre part, les gens n'ont rien d'autre à faire que de s'observer les uns les autres et de commenter les scandales du jour, il n'est pas étonnant qu'après la poursuite des plaisirs, ce soit la médisance qui forme l'occupation favorite." (18).

39 *Le Parfait Persifleur* is an imaginary work attributed to the protagonist of Duclos's *Acajou et Zirphile.*

40 "Eh oui, dit un petit-maître, des vapeurs! Cicogne les nomme hystériques; c'est comme qui dirait des choses qui viennent de la région inférieure. Il a pour cela un élixir divin; c'est un principe, principiant, principié, qui ravive... qui... je le proposerai à madame. On sourit de ce persiflage". Diderot. *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, in *Œuvres Romanesques*, Ed. H. Benac (Paris: Garnier, 1965), 14.

41 Valmont is a master of the double entendre, as witnessed by letter 48 in which he writes to Mme de Tourvel using his lover's nude body, as a writing desk: "La table même sur laquelle je vous écris, consacrée pour la première fois à cet usage, devient pour moi l’autel sacré de l’amour". Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 120.

42 Bernadette Fort notes that *persiflage* is a form of malign entertainment, not exactly disastrous to an individual's self-concept but also not without social consequences: "[...]}si la médiasance laisse la conscience individuelle intacte, elle n'en diminue pas moins la personne dans on existence et son prestige social" (21).
company's vain compulsion to hear about the misfortunes of others:

Il entra avec fracas, fit à Madame de Meilcour une révérence distraite, à moi, une
moins ménagée encore, parla un peu des choses indifférentes, et se mit après à
médire de tant de monde que ma mère ne put s'empêcher de lui demander ce qui
lui avait fait toute la terre pour la déchirer perpétuellement.

Eh parbleu, madame, répondit-il, que ne me demandez-vous plutôt ce que
j'ai fait à toute la terre, pour en être perpétuellement déchiré? On m'accable, on
me vexe...Mais à propos, y a-t-il longtemps que vous n'avez vu la bonne
comtesse? [...] Elle est pénétrée de la plus auguste douleur: elle vient de perdre le
petit marquis, qui lui a fait la plus condamnable infidélité que de mémoire
d'homme on ait imaginée. Comme ce n'est pas la première fois qu'elle est quittée,
on pourrait croire qu'elle se consolerait de celle-ci comme des autres. (70)

In the first few minutes after entering the salon, Versac says much about nothing, which
is one aspect of persiflage. Then he verbally attacks several women and raises suspicion
about an unnamed countess. His method is clever: he deflects the blame for slandering
others by pretending that he too is endlessly persecuted, then pronounces a few words
about the countess to pique the interest of the present company so that he can, under the
pretext of merely showing concern for her well-being, publicly announce her personal
circumstances ("Elle est pénétrée de la plus auguste douleur"). He uses inappropriately
pompous language, juxtaposing "auguste douleur" and "petit marquis" (presumably
another petit-maître) in order to cast ridicule on his victim. With this accusation, Versac
toys with the discursive codes that women themselves impose on society: women must
retain their reputations (save face) in intimate situations for fear of appearing as, or being
exposed as, sexually promiscuous. Men are not subject to this imposition because their
promiscuity is not punished. Women, in this sexist society, thus enforce some of the
codes that subjugate them; Versac is abundantly aware of this fact and he uses it to his
advantage.

It is crucial to note, however, that the other characters are not completely fooled
by Versac’s attempts at discursive manipulation. Mme de Meilcour, for example, challenges him on the veracity of his claims about the countess. She recognizes that his false modesty is merely an act: "Je ne crois pas, répondit ma mère, un mot de toute cette aventure" (70). Versac knows that this kind of speech is tricky: he almost crosses the line between, on the one hand, bolstering his reputation by putting down others and, on the other, losing his credibility by being too insulting.

After slandering the countess, Versac responds to Mme de Meilcour's disbelief and immediately launches his attack on Mme de Lursay:

Comment! dit Versac, c'est un fait public! Pourriez-vous me soupçonner de le prêter à la comtesse, qui est une des femmes de monde pour qui j'ai la plus grande considération, et que je tiens en estime particulière? Ce que vous dites est aussi prouvé qu'il l'est qu'elle et la divine Lursay ont mis du blanc tout leur vie. (70)

Versac continues to hyperbolize on the subject of the countess, which lets the company know that they have to brace for some piece of nasty gossip that is about to come their way. However, Mme de Meilcour is still not fooled: "Autre genre de calomnie, répondit Mme de Meilcour: jamais Madame de Lursay n'a mis de blanc" (70). If either for the fact that she truly does not believe his accusations or if she merely challenges them in order to discourage her son from engaging in such behavior 43, Mme de Meilcour acts nonetheless as the voice of reason. But in so doing, she encourages Versac to go further to reinforce his point. He knows how to manipulate such a situation and is not affected by her claims of disbelief.

We see how Versac expertly negotiates the line between being too insulting and merely entertainingly gossipy when we learn that Meilcour believes whole-heartedly his

claims about Mme de Lursay. The young man is so affected by Versac that he immediately storms off in anger to confront her. Meilcour responds silently to Versac's accusations:

Des amants! Mme de Lursay!' pensais-je m'écrier. [...] je courus chez Madame de Lursay, dans l'intention de me venger, par ce que le mépris a de plus outrageant, du ridicule respect qu'elle m'avait forcé d'avoir pour elle. (70-1)

With his speech, Versac reinforces the public image he has created for himself. Later in the novel, Versac reveals to Meilcour that his whole public persona is merely a carefully crafted act and that he must do all that he can in order to appear fashionable and unique. Versac's type of speech is a direct response to the fact that the public responds to flashiness, suave manners, unconventionality, and to men who make an effort to distinguish themselves from others. Versac explains to Meilcour during their conversation at the end of the novel: "les hommes n'admirent que ce qui les frappe, et que la singularité seule produit cet effet sur eux. On ne peut donc être trop singulier, c'est à dire qu'on ne peut trop affecter de ressembler à personne, soit par les idées, soit par les façons" (133). His persiflage is merely one aspect in the careful construction of a public persona but it is also one of the most effective. Versac seduces others with his gossip; but most importantly, he seduces Meilcour. He succeeds in penetrating Meilcour's disbelief and convinces the young man of his lover's promiscuity. But paradoxically, Versac ultimately succeeds in his seduction by dropping his mask and by deflating his prestige. When Versac opens up to Meilcour, Meilcour feels he is the only one to be in Versac's intimate confidence. He convinces Meilcour that if he learns to act like Versac in public, he will succeed in creating a reputation for himself in society and will not be left behind.
Meilcour is now in Versac's clutches: Versac notices the young man's reverence for him, recognizes Meilcour's immediate belief in his claims, and knows that Meilcour is ripe for being molded. It is after his theatrics in the salon that Versac notices Meilcour's reaction to him and finally decides to make him his pupil.

**Versac's motivation**

Although we can see that Versac succeeds to a certain extent in influencing Meilcour early in the narrative, the question remains: why does Versac enter so eagerly into what proves to be a "counter-education" of the young man? Why is it so important to Versac that Meilcour learn to act in a way that pushes the boundaries of social norms and ensures the fulfillment of his pleasures while also respecting social codes to some extent?

Some critics see the reasons for the relationship between the two men in terms of a need for paternal replacement: Meilcour, an impressionable, fatherless young man who desperately needs a paternal guidance, searches for it, and finds a replacement in Versac.44 But we might counter this argument by noting simply that it is Versac who seeks out Meilcour rather than the other way around: at the end of the novel, Versac tells Meilcour: "Je viens savoir, me dit-il, ce que vous faites depuis deux jours. Il n'y a pas d'endroit dans Paris que je n'aie parcouru sans vous y rencontrer" (128). It is Versac's

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44 Thomas Kavanagh argues: "Describing the narrator's entry into society, this first-person memoir novel retraces the first and most difficult stages of the young and fatherless Meilcour's attempts to understand and make his mark on the world of the Parisian aristocracy. Utterly perplexed as to what he should do and how he should act within that society, Meilcour adopts as his role model and father substitute that renowned master of all social skills, the great libertine Versac." The libertine's bluff: cards and culture in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33.4 (2000): 512. Also, according to Jean Garagnon, Versac's role is: "moraliste", "savant" "initiateur", "Il est l'homme fait qui conseille un adolescent et l'introduit à la connaissance des femmes. On aura reconnu, sous ces différentes figures, le substitut au personnage absent du roman: le père" (137).
desire to develop a relationship with the young man rather than any explicit desire on
Meilcour's part to become close to Versac. Meilcour does make it clear how much he is
in awe of Versac but he does not necessarily seek Versac out in order to become close to
him. In fact, as I noted above, he knows it would be against his mother's wishes to
develop a friendship with Versac as she attempts to keep Meilcour away from him for
fear of his influence. More than a father, Versac is an "anti-mother".

Other critics interpret Versac's role as a matchmaker for Meilcour and Mme de
Lursay. They see Versac helping Meilcour to understand social discourse, which
eventually brings the young man to the point where he is finally able to succeed in his
social (sexual) endeavors. But while Meilcour does seem to finally grasp the nature of
Mme de Lursay's hypocritical speech as witnessed by the fact that he succeeds in
sleeping with her, this was never necessarily specified to be Versac's intention for him.
In fact, Versac's main goal was to separate the two and to have Meilcour enter into a
sexual relationship with Mme de Senanges rather than with Mme de Lursay. Meilcour
explains how Versac simultaneously inhibits his developing relationship with Mme de
Lursay and encourages Mme de Senanges's pursuit of him:

    il (Versac) commença par avertir en secret Madame De Senanges, de qui il avait
    pénétré les intentions, que Madame de Lursay faisait tout ce qui était convenable
    pour que nous fussions bien ensemble. Il ne doutait pas de l'usage qu'elle ferait de
    cet avis et qu'au moins elle en redoublerait ses agaceries. (87)

I will return to Mme de Senanges and Mme de Lursay in greater detail later. Here, I
would like to emphasize that of all of the explanations that critics offer about the reasons
for the development of the relationship between Versac and Meilcour, few have focused

45 Philip Stewart notes: "Versac, lui, comprend bien ce qu'ont les mots de strictement conventionnel, et il
saît ne pas croire à leur apparence. A la fin, Meilcour comprendra toutes ces distinctions aussi, et sera alors
libre de choisir entre l'amour-égarement et l'amour sentiment." Le Masque et la parole: le langage de
specifically on the idea that the relationship is characterized most prominently by they ways in which the two men use women.

In order to reveal a new interpretation of the relationship between Meilcour and Versac, I would like to look closely the actions and discourse of Versac when he takes Meilcour to l'Etoile to furnish him with a secret and all-important lesson of la galanterie. Then I will focus on the Versac's and Meilcour's joint treatment of Mme de Lursay the educational project.

\textit{Versac's ultimate educational failure}

Towards the end of the novel, readers become acquainted with Versac's motives for wanting to educate Meilcour when he takes the young man on a walk to l'Etoile, a secluded hill that overlooks parts of Paris, in order to impart some secret knowledge in a removed place where no one will see or overhear them. This seclusion stems from the content of the conversation itself: Versac wants to illustrate to Meilcour that the libertine must remain at a critical distance from society in order to successfully play his role in it. \textsuperscript{46} Versac sees the social world as his stage and he must retain the illusion that he has both created his role in society as well as mastered it. He wants Meilcour to fully understand this, which can only happen if he is physically pulled away from the subject of their discussion.

\textsuperscript{46} This point is argued by Elena Russo: "The libertine conversation takes place in the alleys of the Champs Elysées, which converge towards the elevation of l’Etoile, a secluded spot from which one can contemplate Paris, from an elevated distance: the setting of the conversation thus reflects its content. Versac wants to undermine the ethos of worldliness in the eyes of his friend, he wants to create separation and distance between the young Meilcour and the world he inhabits. Under the pretext of unveiling its secrets to him, Versac tries to alienate Meilcour from "le monde," Parisian polite society. The promenade of l’Etoile is the site where a private space is created for the two libertines, a space that becomes the antithesis of the public space of the salon. Their physical position on the hill, overlooking the city, is emblematic of the relationship that the libertine entertains with society. A detached observer, a hard critic, an opportunist, the libertine never gives himself up completely to the world of the salon. He always keeps an inner distance that allows him to see society as a theatrical illusion, and himself as an actor playing a role that he has written and fully mastered." "Sociability, Cartesianism, and Nostalgia in Libertine Discourse," \textit{Eighteenth Century Studies} 30.4 (1997): 384-85.
But the content of the conversation reveals yet another aspect of Versac's motivation for the secrecy of their meeting. Versac insists several times that Meilcour can only succeed in the world if he imitates Versac: "ce n’est qu’en suivant mes traces qu’on peut parvenir à une assez grande réputation" (132). Versac wants to create imitators while at the same time creating a unique persona for himself, one that ensures his own originality. This paradoxical desire is characteristic of petits-maîtres. It is even made explicit by the petit-maître in Boissy's play *Le Francais à Londres* who announces to any Englishman within ear-shot the benefit of learning the elegant ways of the French; but at the same time, he prides himself on his originality and, unlike Versac, he makes it known: "Moi, je ne copie personne, madame; je me pique d'être original" (1.12). Versac wants to create imitators, but he does not want to imitate others. Therefore, Meilcour has something that Versac wants: the possibility of becoming a successful protégé. It may seem counterproductive that Versac would want to create an imitator who could become a future rival, but the pedagogical reproduction of the self is an overarching theme in petit-maître plays and narratives; for the moniker "maître" also signifies teacher. Any prospective protégé will be more valuable to Versac the better "educated" he becomes, and this can only be accomplished if Versac's principles are never revealed to the public.

47 Jean Garagnon notes: "S'il éclaire si bien Meilcour sur sa vie, c'est qu'il avait été constitué par Versac à partir de la sienne propre." (135).
48 Louis de Boissy, *Le Français à Londres*, in *Théâtre Français* Vol. 14. (Paris: Duchesne, 1732-91). It is possible that Boissy had the famous quote from La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* in mind when he attributes these words to the marquis. Boissy uses the same phrasing as La Rochefoucauld does, which may illustrate an express opposition between the marquis and the *honnête homme*: "Le vrai honnête homme est celui qui ne se pique de rien". La Rochefoucauld. *Maximes du duc de la Rochefoucauld* (Paris: Didot frères, 1850), 330.
49 Katherine Deimling discusses Versac's selfish and dubious reasons for wanting to educate Meilcour: "The desire to study others only for one's own benefit may apply to Versac's teaching of Meilcour; if he listens to his mentor, the hero risks becoming a pawn in Versac's plan." "The value of his teachings thus
Despite Versac's apparent attempts to keep it light, the tone of his lessons is underpinned by a gravity and seriousness that only become apparent when we closely examine his language. Versac indicates that there is unquestionably no other way than his to create a good reputation: "[...]ce n'est qu'en suivant mes traces qu'on peut parvenir à une aussi grande réputation" (132). He emphasizes to Meilcour that the only hope he has of gaining a reputation is to follow him. He continues to insist on imitation: "Je vous conseille, encore un coup, de m'imiter. Sans cette condescendance, vous n'acquerrez que la réputation d'un esprit dur et peu fait pour la société" (140). Versac's repeated urgings (je vous conseille, encore un coup) deserve more analysis than to simply attribute them to being part of Versac's lessons in the art of hypocrisy. If we consider that petits-maîtres in many works also express the same agenda – for example Boissy's marquis in *Le Francais à Londres* succeeds in finding a recruit to "educate" in his elegant French ways50 – we realize that there is a reason behind this need for imitation. So what is Versac doing exactly with his insistence on imitation? Again Versac's discourse provides insight into this issue.

One important aspect of Versac's lesson at the end of the novel is the consequence of not disguising himself and of not following the principles he has learned: "il m'est d'une extrême conséquence qu'on ne sache pas ce que je suis et à quel point je me

seems questionable, as the objects of his lessons are, by his own admission, deserving of scorn and shame." "The Female Mentor in Crébillon's *Les Egarements du cœur et de l'esprit*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction.* 16 (2003): 24-5.  
50 The entire scenes 14 and 15 are similar to the exchange between Versac and Meilcour at l'Etoile; the marquis gives the young Lord Houzey lessons on the *art de vivre*: "Vous avez du goût, milord, vous irez loin. Vous avez de la figure, vous avez des grâces, ce serait un meurtre de les enfouir; il faut les développer, monsieur, il faut les développer. La nature commence un joli homme, mais c'est l'art qui l'achève. Le Lord Houzey. Eh! En quoi consiste précisément cet art? Le Marquis. En des riens qui échappent et qu'il faut saisir." (1.14).
déguise" (140). The terms "extreme conséquence" and the phrase "à quel point"
command the auditor's attention and lend a significance to Versac's discourse that is not
apparent elsewhere in the novel. There is urgency in Versac's desire to make known to
Meilcour the vital significance of his principles. Not only is it an intense concern of
Versac's that no one be aware of his duplicity but also it is crucial that no one have the
slightest idea of the extent to which he goes in order to disguise himself.

But this sense of urgency that Versac expresses is also a means to seduce
Meilcour and to make the young man feel as if he is being introduced into the hero's
innermost circle. In this sense, Versac is not necessarily unveiling himself, but pretending
to for Meilcour. It is a polyvalent strategy: on the one hand, Versac expresses the great
advantages and the devastating consequences of adopting a social mask. It is imperative
despite the displeasure it gives him. He even openly admits to Meilcour the torment of
having to hide behind a mask: "Pensez-vous que je me sois condamné sans réflexion au
tourment de me déguiser sans cesse?" (135). He explicitly states that it is torture that
must be endured. He admits that without it, he would have been lost: "Sûr que je ne
pourrais, sans me perdre, vouloir résister au torrent, je le suivis. Je sacrifiai tout au
frivole; je devins étourdi, pour paraître plus brillant; enfin, je me créai les vices dont
j'avais besoin pour plaire: une conduite si ménagée me réussit" (135). Versac did not
merely choose this path; rather, he sacrificed "everything" to it; "sacrificing" to
"frivolity" makes the whole speech appear paradoxical or satirical.

On the other hand, by explicitly telling Meilcour all of this, he may be toying with
the young man's credulity. Versac wants Meilcour to believe that he is better than he
truly is. It is possible that all of this revelation is not truly revelation of his inner most
thoughts and fears, but rather an orchestration of ideas that he thinks will both appeal to Meilcour and make Versac look better in the young man's eyes.

In either case, Versac shows how vital social skills are to the petit-maître. A petit-maître is nothing without his reputation, which is essentially a mere reflection of others' opinions. Reputation is simply defined in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* as: "Renom, estime, opinion publique." Versac communicates to Meilcour that refusing to play the game he outlines for him would mean a loss of self because the petit-maître is entirely defined by society. Another of Crébillon's characters, Mazulhim from the novel *Le Sopha*, amply demonstrates this point: he is entirely defined by his reputation as a notorious womanizer but he actually has some major sexual dysfunctions which remain hidden behind this illustrious reputation and which, if revealed, would destroy his public image. He owes everything that he is to the "discretion" of the ladies who have witnessed his impotence without disclosing it to others:

Ce qu'il y a de singulier, c'est que ce Mazulhim qui employait si mal les rendez-vous qu'on lui donnait, était l'homme d'Agra le plus recherché; il n'y avait pas une femme qui ne l'eût eu, ou qui ne voulût l'avoir pour amant: vif, aimable, volage, toujours trompeur, et n'en trouvant pas moins à tromper, toutes les femmes le connaissaient, et toutes cependant cherchaient à lui plaire; sa réputation enfin était étonnante. On le croyait! ... Que ne le croyait-on pas? Et pourtant, qu'était il? Que ne devait-il pas à la discrétion des femmes, lui qui ayant pour elles de si mauvais procédés, les ménageait cependant si peu? If anyone were to reveal his "mismanagement with women", it would be devastating to Mazulhim's entire existence. We know this because almost an entire half of the narrative is dedicated to the description of his intricate plan to ensure that one woman, who witnesses his problem and is particularly offended by it, does not make it publicly known. This conniving might also be the sexual act itself, the very place where the petit-maître's

pleasure is deployed. In either case, Mazulhim spends much time and energy to ensure that his sexual dysfunction remains hidden from others.

Although Versac has successfully carved a niche for himself in the social world, the public image he hides behind is merely part of the same sexual-social games of prestige in which Mazulhim engages. Everything he does and every decision he makes is fully contextualized in the social world. Both his reputation and his social self are based on others' perceptions of him; he is nothing without society.\(^5\) Crébillon's satirical portrayal of Versac prefigures Rousseau's critique of worldly individual, indeed, the socialized individual: "l'homme sociable toujours hors de lui ne sait vivre que dans l'opinion des autres, et c'est, pour ainsi dire, de leur seul jugement qu'il tire le sentiment de sa propre existence".\(^5\)

This idea is also repeatedly reinforced in the many novels and plays in which the petit-maître simply disappears at the end of the dramatic action. His entire persona is based on others' perception of him and once his scheming ways are revealed, he simply ceases to exist. When his true intentions are unveiled, he disappears. His parasitic existence dictates his withdrawal from the narrative.

By imparting lessons in arbitrary codes – lessons, as Bernadette Fort calls, "of ambiguity" – which on the one hand do serve Versac but on the other (and this is an important point) cannot be taught, Versac undermines the young man by not allowing

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\(^5\) In Madame de Staël's novel *Corinna*, the character of the stereotypical Frenchman, le Comte d'Erfeuil, makes this lesson explicit when he attempts to explain (to teach, as it were) to his English travelling companion, Oswald, the relationship, as he sees it, between society and the individual: "la société a, quoi qu'on fasse, beaucoup d'empire sur le bonheur, et ce qu'elle n'approuve pas, il ne faut jamais le faire. - On vivrait donc toujours pour ce que la société dira de nous, reprit Oswald; et ce qu'on pense et ce qu'on sent ne servirait jamais de guide [...]. C'est très bien dit, reprit le comte d'Erfeuil...mais avec ces maximes-là, on se perd et quand l'amour est passé, le blâme de l'opinion reste". Staël, *Corinna ou l'Italie*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 243.

him to come to his own conclusions about how to make a place for himself in society, as Versac was able to do for himself. Versac wants to demonstrate that his process of learning to socialize is unique and this is the only way to be original. He admits that for him there was no 'model': "Il est sans doute aisé d'être fat...mais il n'est pas si facile d'acquérir celle (la fatuité) qu'il me fallait. Cette fatuité audacieuse et singulière, qui, n'ayant point de modèle, soit seule digne d'en servir" (Egarements 135). This insistence on originality was typical of the honnête homme (La Rochefoucauld stated: "il y a un air qui convient à la une figure et aux talents de chaque personne: on perd toujours quand on le quitte pour en prendre un autre. Il faut essayer de connaitre celui qui nous est naturel").55) The honnête homme must act according to his own natural talents, rank, and tastes while the petit-maître creates an artificial persona by playing on appearances rather than basing his image on an authentic, inner character. Versac is thus subverting honnêteté by repurposing its values in the interest of his own principles.

Although Versac claims to be the master of his own social persona, he is not a master of the entire social world. His lessons to Meilcour reflect this contradiction: although he attempts to teach Meilcour mastery of the self, his actions and the way in which people react to him in the novel show that the persona he has created is purely contingent on outside opinion; he must act in ways that encourage certain reactions from others. And by teaching Meilcour only to embrace the ways in which to create a public image, and by attempting to communicate to him ideas in the form of lessons that Versac came to on his own, he only teaches Meilcour to be a bit player in the theatre of social interaction. He does not teach him how to become a fully realized man (an honnête homme), how to succeed with women (as Lursay is attempting), and be respected by

55 La Rochefoucauld, OC, 509.
others, but rather how to become a mere reflection of society's expectations and to succeed as a performer on the social stage.

It is at this point where I would like to examine the significance of the marquis de Pranzi that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. My argument that Versac's lessons teach Meilcour only to play the role of the superficial socialite is substantiated by the simple fact that Versac's education of the marquis de Pranzi turned him into a caricature rather than a crafty and cunning socializer. Pranzi most closely resembles the theatrical type of petits-maîtres that we see in comedies: for example, he closely resembles the petits-maîtres in Louis de Boissy's plays and in Van Effen's Les Petits-maîtres that we examined earlier. He is mostly one dimensional, sometimes portrayed as a sycophant, often shown to be a superficial or benign villain whose only goal is to seduce women for money. In Les Egarements, Pranzi is first and foremost described upon his introduction into the narrative in these terms: "homme à la mode; élève et copie éternelle de Versac" (82) and then as:

\[ \text{Né sans esprit comme sans agréments, sans figure, sans bien, le caprice des femmes et la protection de Versac en avaient fait un homme à bonnes fortunes, quoiqu'il joignit à ses autres défauts le vice bas de dépouiller celle à qui il inspirait du goût. Sot, présomptueux, impudent, aussi incapable de bien penser que de rougir de penser mal; s'il n'avait pas été un fat (ce qui est beaucoup, à la vérité), on n'aurait jamais su ce qui pouvait lui donner le droit de plaire.} \] (84)

This devastating description calls attention to Versac's former tutelage and demonstrates that his type of education does not necessarily work. Pranzi is for all intents and purposes a fool; he is regarded as ridiculous and irritating, and he is a man living off women, which is dishonorable. Crébillon's inclusion of the marquis de Pranzi in the narrative is a subtle insinuation that Versac's educational endeavors have already failed and will most
likely fail again. Meilcour, if he follows Versac's lessons diligently, could possibly turn out like Pranzi, even though Meilcour has more "natural" gifts (fortune, looks, and intelligence) than Pranzi does. Pranzi is the harbinger of one possible outcome of Versac's libertine education.

The act of taking Meilcour to the Etoile away from the prying eyes and ears of others is indeed a lesson in "mastery" but it is also indicative of Versac's desire to repeat his efforts in his educational project that perhaps failed once with Pranzi. On the other hand, there are several indications that Versac's lessons do not have much of an affect on Meilcour. After their conversation at the Etoile, Meilcour immediately returns to his habit of daydreaming of Hortense, seemingly unfazed by Versac's intense and shocking revelations: "Je ne fus pas plutôt rentré que, sans faire beaucoup de réflexions à tout ce que Versac m'avait dit, je repris mon emploi ordinaire. Rêver à Hortense, m'affliger de son départ, et soupirer après son retour, étaient alors les seules choses dont je pusse m'occuper" (142). Moreover, we do not necessarily know that Versac's lessons helped teach Meilcour how to act with women. Readers do not know the extent to which Versac has influenced the young man, indicating that their relationship is more about a power struggle – one man continually seeking to gain the upper hand over another – than about the direct influence of Versac.

To return to the point I made earlier, Versac does not aim to teach Meilcour to succeed with women (as opposed to Mme de Lursay who wants to teach him both how to act respectfully with women and how to gain access to their bodies), but is rather

56 Henri Duranton also describes the representation of the libertine art de vivre as a general failure: "La seule vraie supériorité revendiquée par Versac, la lucidité cynique, de détourner de ces ridicules, invite à les assumer pleinement, à les pousser à la limite. Constamment une transcendance s'amorce, mais qui jamais n'aboutit. Un style de vie voudrait se faire passer pour une éthique, fût-elle pervertie, mais toujours en vain." "Les Liaisons dangereuses ou le miroir ennemi," in Revue des Sciences Humaines 153 (1974): 160.
(perhaps unwittingly) teaching Meilcour to play the one-dimensional role of a nominal, clumsy womanizer, just as he did with Pranzi. During their conversation at the Etoile when Meilcour is eager to talk about women, Versac initially staves off the topic and then finally pretends that, because the subject is too vast to broach after their long discourse, they must save it for another day: "A présent, ajoute-t-il, nous pourrions en venir aux femmes. Mais la conversation que nous venons d'avoir ensemble à été d'une longueur si énorme qu'avec plus d'ordre, et des idées plus approfondies, elle pourrait presque passer pour un traité de morale. Remettons-en le reste à un autre jour" (140-41). Meilcour tries to push the issue and Versac refuses to entertain his questions under the pretext of wanting to ensure that Meilcour be fully and properly instructed in the matter: "Au moins, lui dis-je, répondez à la question que je voulais vous faire. [...] Non, reprit-il, il m'en couterait tout autant, et vous ne seriez pas bien instruit. C'est un sujet qu'il faut traiter de suite" (141). But they never return to the subject. Instead of speaking to his young recruit about women, Versac interferes in Meilcour's relationships. His interest in Meilcour's attachments to women is merely to be able to exert influence over the young man's actions.

The idea that Versac does not necessarily aim to teach Meilcour to succeed with women but at the same time uses women to influence Meilcour is the crucial point to keep in mind for the remainder of this chapter. As we have seen, Versac works to turn

57 I agree with Pierre Michel that Versac is a failure in his lessons and that his pupils are failures as well because Crébillon offers no actual representation of a real 'hero' in this novel: "le libertin ne peut être un vrai héros du roman. Qui est donc le héros des Egarements?" (36).
58 Katherine Deimling who notes: "The libertine's motives are dubious, therefore, and his claim of purely pedagogical intentions appears suspect: he insists, "comme je n'ai d'autre but que celui de vous instruire" and 'Je serai charmé de vous instruire" (208). This assertion seems contradicted by the mentor's admission that he has no pretension in life to improve anyone's character, "Si nous étudions les hommes, que ce soit moins pour prétendre à les instruire, que pour parvenir à les bien connaitre. Renonçons à la gloire de leur donner des leçons" (212).
Meilcour against Mme de Lursay. But he also continuously attempts to encourage Meilcour to have a sexual affair with Mme de Senanges. I will examine Versac's and Meilcour's interactions with these two women in detail. But first, I want to consider the inclusion of sexuality in the mentor and student relationship: the fact that Versac attempts to have his student sleep with one woman and not another is an element of his "counter-education".

*Sexual or counter-education and homosocial bonding*

Perhaps nowhere is counter-education more thoroughly explored than in the marquis de Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), which investigates the idea of pursuing education at the expense of any type of normative morality by focusing on the sexual instruction of a young girl by her thirty-six year old male instructor. 59 In Sade's work, counter-education is a type of sexual tutelage that defies social acceptability. Just as the young pupil in *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* is a receptacle for the older man's knowledge, desire, and phallus, the pupil in Crébillon's novel is the receptacle for the older petit-maître’s knowledge. But Crébillon's work lacks the explicit sexual interaction between the mentor and student that appears in Sade's novel. The sexual aspect that is full-fledged in Sade is only suggested in Crébillon's novel.

Sade's counter-education aims to empty the child/initiate/student of all accepted ideals of morality and substitute in its place an education grounded in bodily functions.

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devoid of any ethical referent.\textsuperscript{60} Whereas Sade's educators function completely outside of external social (or moral) influences, as witnessed by Sade's motif of the physically closed space of the convent, fortress, or castle where like-minded libertines seclude themselves, Versac respects social mores to a certain extent. But while Crébillon's counter-education does not include explicit sexual acts between the student and the mentor, comparing it to Sade's counter-education does call to mind the importance of sexuality, which we cannot completely ignore in our analysis of the relationship between Versac and Meilcour because Versac encourages the young man to enter into a sexual relationship with Mme de Senanges, who is arguably the female equivalent of Versac and functions here as his surrogate.

In this section of the chapter, I will interpret Versac's actions as attempts at different methods of "homosocial bonding" in which two men do not necessarily engage sexually with one another but rather sexually instrumentalize a woman or several women in the interest of gaining certain advantages for themselves.

By the phrase "homosocial bonding", I refer to the concept as Eve K. Sedgwick defines it in her seminal study on the representation of male bonding in literature: *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.\textsuperscript{61} Sedgwick notes that the term homosocial is: "a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual' and is just as obviously meant to be

\textsuperscript{60} For an insightful view into Sade's anti-ethical project and the way in which Sade's de-sentimentalized materialist subject paves the way for the formulation of Kant’s concept of an autonomous subject, see chapter six of Natania Meeker. *Voluptuous Philosophy: Literary materialism in the French Enlightenment.* (New York: Fordham UP, 2007).

distinguished from 'homosexual'. In fact, it applies to such activities as male bonding" (Sedgwick 1). Analyzing the relationship between Versac and Meilcour as a "homonocial bond" is pertinent when we consider that: "the homosocial in particular has the advantage of loosely collecting the whole range of relationships that might arise between individuals of the same sex, while leaving open the question of sexual investment".62 As I have noted, the relationship between the two men lacks the explicit sexual element but does include their mutual investment in sexual relationships with women.

For my interpretation of the connection between Versac, Meilcour and Mme de Lursay, I focus specifically on Sedgwick's analysis of William Wycherly's English play The Country Wife (1675). I will not enter into my own analysis of the play but will rather attempt to explain Sedwick's perspective on the nature of the homosocial relationship in the play, which I will then use as a frame of reference for my examination of Les Egarements.

Sedgwick's analysis states that "cuckolding" is the principal means by which men develop bonds with each other in this play. Cuckolding, primarily a sexual action, refers to the act of one man sleeping with another man's wife. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as: "To make a cuckold of; to dishonour (a husband) by adultery". The idea of the adulterating man dishonoring the married man is particularly significant.

Sedgwick interprets the concept somewhat differently than one might suspect in that she constructs her analysis, not on the notion of adultery in the legal sense per se, but rather on her own interpretation of the act of cuckoldling: the act of one man sleeping with

another man's wife is a "transaction" between men which essentially places the married man in a position of inferiority to the adultering man and also reduces the one woman involved to an "object of symbolic exchange" or more simply "property" (Although it might not always be the case that the woman is objectified in a typical cuckolding scenario, it is in this context). Here, the woman is simply the property of the married man, which is "appropriated" by the other man who is doing the cuckolding.

If the position of the woman is more or less fixed as property, then it is the status of both of the men in relation to each other that comes into question. What is at stake in the relationship between the men? Would it not make most sense to think that the men, rather than establishing a bond, would rather fight over the fact that one man infringes on another man's property? Sedgwick answers:

The bond of cuckoldry is [...] hierarchal in structure, with an "active" participant who is clearly in the ascendancy over the 'passive' one. Most characteristically, the difference of power occurs in the form of a difference in knowledge: the cuckold is not even supposed to know that he is in such a relationship. [...] The programmatic emphasis on cuckoldry in The Country Wife means that the triangular transaction between men of the possession of a woman - a transaction whose structuring presence in other texts sometimes requires some inferential work to detect – is simply the most patent subject. [...] To misunderstand the kind of property women are or the kind of transaction in which alone their value is realizable means for a man, to endanger his own position as a subject in the relationship or exchange: to be permanently feminized or objectified in relation to other men. On the other hands, success in making this transaction requires a willingness and ability to temporarily risk, or assume, a feminized status. Only the man who can proceed through that stage, while remaining in cognitive control of the symbolic system that presides over sexual exchange, will be successful in

63 The idea of "woman as property" is obviously one that exists throughout history in social contexts as well as in literary ones. But to insert my discussion into the context of the eighteenth-century novel, I note here specifically the recurrence of this notion in the works of Rousseau, who is known for his anti-feminist perspective. Two of his most famous fictional women, Julie and Sophie, from La Nouvelle Heloise and Sophie et Emile respectively, are indeed conceptualized as the property of their men: Saint-Preux, Wolmar and Emile. Lori Jo Marso argues: "Saint-Preux's self-absorption (stemming from his education as manly citizen) encourages him to think solely of what he desires, mapping his own desire onto the 'objects' around him. When is not imagining Julie as a lover in the form of an amulet or piece of paper, Saint-Preux imagines Julie as property. Wolmar too considers Julie 'property' transferred from her father to himself." (Un)Manly citizens (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001), 59.
achieving a relation of mastery to other men (50).

It is a homosocial bond created not by friendship but rather by the competition for possession of property or some mutual interest in using one woman. But rather than creating a polemical divide between the two men that they both desire to overcome by asserting their respective "rights" over the woman in question, Sedgwick explains that one man's active role (as the adulterer) and the other man's passive role (as the cuckold) essentially fix the dynamic between the two with regards to the woman and that in order to resolve the conflict, the passive man must consciously and willingly realize his powerless position and assume a temporarily inferior status in order to ultimately regain his "property".

There is however, an added complication in Wycherly's play: the cuckolded man is actually the orchestrator of the scenario in which another man takes his wife (or in Sparkish's case, his fiancée). In this sense, then, the cuckolded man, Sparkish, actually gains some power in the male couple because he not only encourages the other man to make passes at his fiancée but also: "He imagines that a proper deployment [...] of his beautiful fiancée will help him secure not only a bond with but a certain mastery over the men he most admires" (52). Sedgwick goes on to explain this interaction between two characters in Wycherly's play, but I believe it can be applied to the complex relationship between Mme de Lursay, Meilcour and Versac, with some minor differences.

First and foremost, no one is married in this novel. But Meilcour does regard Lursay in some ways as his property. He indicates that these are his feelings at the beginning of the novel when he becomes enraged with jealousy at hearing that she has had other men in the past. Perhaps not consciously, he sees her as his and his alone, the
idea that any one could have her now or could have had her at any moment in the past
enrages him to such a degree that he is immediately both ready to break completely with
her and to humiliate her in public for what he sees as a transgression against him. This
attitude differs from how Sparkish treats his fiancée – his claim to her seems rather casual
because he is not bothered by the idea of her being with other men (in fact, he encourages
it) — but she is nonetheless his possession of which he may dispose as he sees fit. In
both cases, the woman is conceptualized as property.

When Versac enters the scene, he upsets Meilcour's precarious notion of Mme de
Lursay as being exclusively his. It is Versac who indicates to Meilcour that Mme de
Lursay has had many previous young men as lovers and therefore Versac has power
because he possesses knowledge about the woman that Meilcour does not have. It is not
direct carnal knowledge, but it is sexual because it is knowledge of her sexual past with
Pranzi and others. At this point, Versac becomes the other man in the trio, the one with
whom Meilcour must somehow negotiate to regain his imagined "property". Using
Sedwick's analysis above, since Meilcour misinterprets his relationship with Lursay and
conceptualizes her proprietarily, he endangers his chance of holding the position as the
"active man" in his relationship with Versac, who has the upper hand because he knows
more about her. However, by the same token, Meilcour enters into a complicit
relationship with Versac, through the use of the common instrument of Mme de Lursay,
by witnessing and not discouraging Versac's openly disrespectful treatment of her.
Therefore, Meilcour, in his mind, implicitly grants Versac access to Mme de Lursay by
not defending her honor in public. Versac is the most powerful man in the relationship as
he has the knowledge of Mme de Lursay that Meilcour does not have, but this does not
mean that Meilcour does not have any power in the male couple as he, in his mind, allows his property to be verbally and publicly violated by a man he admires. (As I mentioned earlier, "pleasure" for Versac consists not necessarily in engaging in intercourse with women but rather in publicly humiliating women, which is for him a type of oppressive sex act). The homosocial relationship is a complex dialectic of power, which transfers back and forth from the cuckolder to the cuckolded.

Petits-maîtres often misinterpret their relationships with women. These narratives almost always end with the petit-maître failing at his attempt to seduce the woman in question and indirectly allowing the more powerful man of the homosocial couple (sometimes another petit-maître, sometimes an honnête homme) to gain her favors. For example, in Marivaux's comedy Le Petit-maître corrigé, the young noble Rosimond misunderstands the desires of a woman, Hortense. He fails to see that his exaggerated manners, ridiculous airs and womanizing ways offend her. She demands that he renounce his outlandish ways before she will agree to marry him. Rosimond's mother, understanding Hortense's hesitation to marry her son, appeals to Dorante, Rosimond's fellow petit-maître and friend, for his help in showing Rosimond the error of his ways. The mother's incitement leads Dorante to believe that he has a chance to seduce and marry Hortense, provided that he act more appropriately with her than Rosimond does. In this sense, Dorante has more information about the woman in the love-triangle than Rosimond does and is therefore in a position of superiority in the male couple because he is better prepared to seduce her. Using Sedgwick's analysis as our frame of reference, we can see that Dorante assumes the status of the prospective cuckolder – the active participant in the male duo – who attempts to seize Rosimond's claim to Hortense.
In order for Rosimond to regain his position as Hortense's future husband, he must temporarily assume that it has been lost (he must temporarily assume the status as the passive man in the male couple) and then allow an action to occur that will counteract Dorante's superior position. Rosimond, upon learning of the alleged affair between Dorante and Hortense, immediately accepts it instead of growing angry at the betrayal and wishing to defend his honor by confronting the two. In accepting this relationship, he also entertains the idea of marrying Dorimene, the petite-maitresse of the play, instead of Hortense. This is an example of how the cuckolded man of the homosocial couple regains some power: he gives up his "property" in order to gain some more or other property (another woman). He therefore must accept an inferior position in the male couple in order to regain the upper hand, either with the first woman or with the second.

However, because of Dorimene's insipid habits, her arrogance toward those around her, and her overbearing behavior with Rosimond, coupled with the idea that he has lost Hortense forever to Dorante, Rosimond decides to break with Dorimene. The loss of Hortense finally encourages him to realize the error of his ways. This is the moment where the male bond takes a turn. Rosimond now comes to the realization that he wants no other woman than Hortense, and he abandons Dorimene. But, instead of actively seeking out Hortense and claiming her for his own, he honorably relents his claim to her hand, and he gives his blessing to the new couple. He relinquishes not only the passively gained property (Dorimene) but also his original property. He does this in order to regain Hortense's love. The reassurance that he has changed his womanizing ways is what Hortense wanted all along. When she realizes that Rosimond would rather
be alone than with Dorimene, Hortense wants to reconcile with him. At the end of the play, Dorante, like so many other petits-maîtres and, most importantly, like Versac, simply disappears from the scene. His last line expresses anger – upon hearing of her agreement to marry Rosimond, he announces to Hortense: "Je ne me plains point, Madame, mais votre procédé est cruel" (3.12)\(^{64}\) – which arises possibly from the fact that he has lost Hortense, or possibly from the fact that he has lost the game that the two men were engaged in, which played out through the 'possession' of a woman, but which essentially expressed his latent power over another man.

Returning to Meilcour, the driving force behind his continual pursuit of Mme de Lursay, as I have noted, is his inability to understand her. This misunderstanding can be seen as Meilcour's assumption of the passive role in the male couple because misjudging his relationship with Mme de Lursay fundamentally means that he indirectly subordinates himself to Versac. Versac has the upper hand because he has the information about Meilcour's "property" to which Meilcour does not have access, just as he does not yet have access to her body. Versac actualizes this knowledge in order to verbally violate her and degrade her in public. This act is akin in some ways to a kind of collective rape. Meilcour accepts that Versac has this knowledge of Mme de Lursay and does nothing to counteract Versac's humiliation of her. However, Meilcour does hold some power in the relationship: although he does not have as much power as Versac does, they are both nonetheless engaged in a mutual effort to demean Mme de Lursay. We should note that Mme de Lursay is, however, far from passive because she is in love with Meilcour and makes every effort to ensure that her relationship with Meilcour will work.

As Sedgwick remarks, the male homosocial couple includes the constant transfer

of power from one man to the other, back and forth. In either case, Sedgwick sees the subordination of one man to another man as an "effeminization" or objectification of one man to the other. In the homosocial relationship, there is usually an element of effeminacy of one or both men. As I have mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation and as I will explore in further detail in the next chapter, effeminacy is a common trait of petits-maîtres. In fact it is generally understood that the origin of the term petit-maître stems from the nickname associated with the young men in the entourage of the Prince de Condé (1588-1646), who was reputed to be both effeminate and homosexual.\(^{65}\) Moreover, Versac is already described in the novel in terms that would lead us to interpret him as effeminate. Versac is described by the narrator: "il joignait à la plus haute naissance l'esprit le plus agréable et la figure la plus séduisante" (Egarements 69). It is not often that many men are described as having a "seductive face or physique" but young women might often be described in this way. He is not only adored by women but also spends most of his time with them: "Adoré de toutes les femmes qu'il trompait et déchirait sans cesse, vain, impérieux, étourdi: le plus audacieux petit-maître qu'on ait jamais vu" (69). In fact, he was introduced into society by women and was molded by them and because he spent so much time with them, he got to know them well. He is adored by them because he knows how to manipulate them by appealing to their sense of vanity through his constant veiled criticism of other women. Thanks to this intimate knowledge of women, he developed expert skills: he knows his place with them, he knows how to please them, and he knows how to gain the upper hand.

\(^{65}\) Mme de Motteville’s *Mémoires*, which depict French court culture of 1647, describe the petits-maîtres as a group of young, "parasitic opportunists" who were the favorites of the Prince de Condé, a reputed homosexual.
with them over any other man: "quoi qu'il en puisse être, elles l'avaient mis à la mode des
l'instant qu'il était entré dans le monde, et il était depuis dix and en possession de vaincre
les plus insensibles, de fixer les plus coquettes et de déplacer les amants les plus
accrédités" (69). He is also "à la mode" and "vêtu superbement" which in themselves are
not necessarily womanly qualities but it was thought that men who focused too much on
their appearances were not necessarily interested in those activities that were considered
typically masculine.

But the homosocial transfer of power between two men transforms the way in
which Versac is perceived. In the male couple, according to Sedgwick's analysis, there is
one active player and one passive one and the passive one is effeminized. Versac's
motivation in teaching Meilcour therefore signals a desire to gain some feeling of power
or masculinity. He must intervene in the relationship between Meilcour and Mme de
Lursay because he perceives that this is one way of asserting power over the young man
and fulfilling his need for masculine status.

Versac's intentions become more and more clear: he is teaching Meilcour, not to
be a master of the social world, but rather how to be a ridiculous man who only succeeds
with women rather clumsily (like Pranzi). Moreover, he aims to use the young man to
create and bolster a masculine self-image. But it is not all one sided; Meilcour also has
power over Versac because he has what Versac wants: Meilcour is the kinetic template of
an "unmolded" young aristocrat that Versac is desperate to manipulate for his own
purposes. Sedgwick's cuckolding scenario helps us to conceptualize the notion of
masculine power in this novel: it is hidden under effeminate personae but it is nonetheless
the basis upon which the two main characters first bond and then ultimately diverge.
Finally, understanding Versac's intentions with Meilcour leads us to the reasons that Versac wants Meilcour to enter into a relationship with Mme de Senanges.

Meilcour, as the narrator, describes Mme de Senanges, first of all, as a **femme philosophique** to which he owes some of his sexual education, "Mme de Senanges, à qui, comme on le verra dans la suite, j'ai eu le malheur de devoir mon éducation, était une des femmes philosophes pour qui le public n'a jamais rien été" (81). A **femme philosophique** is a sexually promiscuous woman; the equivalent of **une femme galante**. Calling Mme de Senanges a **femme philosophique** is ironic: unlike the heroine of the eponymous novel *Thérèse philosophe*, who is a young beautiful woman on the path to a positive self-discovery, Mme de Senanges is old and lecherous. This irony reinforces her ridiculousness. Meilcour also describes her as physically undesirable:

> Mme de Senanges avait été jolie, mais ses traits étaient effacés...Le fard qui achevait de flétrir les tristes restes de sa beauté, sa parure outrée, son maintien immodeste, ne la rendait que moins supportable. C'était enfin une femme à qui, de toutes ses anciennes grâces, il ne restait plus que cette indécence que la jeunesse et les agréments font pardonner [...] mais qui, dans un âge plus avancé, ne présente plus aux yeux qu'un tableau de corruption qu'on ne peut regarder sans horreur. (81)

It is essential to note Meilcour's low opinion of her; indeed it is outright disgust, an opinion that must be obvious because Versac is aware of it as well. Meilcour's description, which uses strong, moralizing terms such as "indécence, corruption, and horreur", illustrates his opinion of her as physically and morally repulsive.

But for Versac, Mme de Senanges is the best sexual educator for Meilcour because she is the necessary counter-part to Versac in the homosocial relationship he establishes with Meilcour; she is Versac's female alter ego. Versac wants a recruit to carry on his reputation and Mme de Senanges is motivated by pleasure, by the thought of
the affirmation of recapturing a beauty she has long lost, and also for social bragging rights.

Mme de Senanges is being used by Versac, first of all, as the missing element of his lessons to Meilcour that Versac himself cannot give to the young man: the experience of sexual education. Therefore, Mme de Senanges is the female half of the androgynous duo – she is Versac's female avatar that can carry out what he cannot. Versac can provide all other elements for Meilcour's successful initiation into the world but he must use a counterpart, another libertine, to teach Meilcour how to behave in a sexual relationship. Mme de Senanges is the woman who initiated Versac in the past, when she was younger and more attractive; she fulfilled the role that Mme de Lursay would want to play with Meilcour. We should also note that Mme de Senanges is the female double of Versac, she also has her own "Pranzi": it’s Mme de Mongennes, who is a younger version of her, a sidekick, a rival, and whose name is moreover an anagram of Senanges.

Just as with Mme de Lursay, Mme de Senanges is Versac's "property" because he has knowledge of her sexually. He subtly hints that he owes his sexual education to her: "Je ne puis en honneur vous conseiller de prendre (Mme de Mongennes); et sans entrer dans les raisons que j'ai pour cela et qui à présent nous mèneraient trop loin, je vous dirai simplement que Mme de Senanges vous convient mieux que Mme de Mongennes" (142).

If this is the case, then Meilcour would merely follow in his footsteps by allowing Mme de Senanges to educate him, thereby ensuring that he become a true copy of Versac.

It is necessary that Mme de Senanges is unattractive and undesirable especially to Meilcour; this will ensure that there is no risk of Meilcour losing sight of Versac's goal.
of education by getting involved in a sentimental love affair. Versac's persuasion of Meilcour to sleep with Mme de Senanges is disruptive because he actually tries to convince the young man of her charms even though his plan depends on her not being charming enough to make Meilcour fall in love with her. Mme de Senanges is also socially depreciated: it would be a disgrace for the young man to have her as a mistress. Versac recognizes Meilcour's distaste for the woman but attempts to convince him that it is merely due to his "amour-propre". He claims that her charms are enough to seduce him "despite himself": "Je prévois tout ce qui arrivera du dégoût que vous avez conçu pour elle, quoique fort injustement. Vous rendrez malgré vous, justice à ses charmes, et qui sait si ce n'est point par amour-propre que vous dissimulez actuellement l'impression qu'elle vous a faite?" (141). Versac knows Meilcour will never feel love for Mme de Senanges, but Meilcour must be given some reason to enter into a relationship with her.

It is not only merely convenient that Meilcour finds Mme de Senanges repulsive but it is also deliberate on Versac's part: he chooses a woman for Meilcour who will not tear him away from his goal of molding the young man into a capable socialite and womanizer; a task that he cannot accomplish if Meilcour does not understand how to sleep with a woman for the sole sake of pleasure rather than for "love" or because he feels a deep sentimental connection to her, like in Morlière's novel Angola where the main character is allowed to have sex but not to fall in love. Versac's desire that Meilcour be initiated by the same woman who initiated him is also a way to humiliate the young man and dominate him sexually. It is significant that the only education she can provide is

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66 "The narrator explains that Senanges was uniquely suited to the task at hand (Meilcour's libertine education) because of the remarkable coalescence in her of vile and disagreeable traits". Patrick Riley, "Errancy and Libertine Education in Crébillon fils' Les Egarements du cœur et de l'esprit," French Forum 20.2 (1995): 189.
carnal: it is a minor, albeit necessary, element of social mastery in a world in which the main currencies are language and deception and the main commodity is power over others, gained through the use of these two means.67 Moreover, Versac specifically chooses Mme de Senanges as his female avatar because it is to her that Versac owes his sexual education. By encouraging that Meilcour lose his virginity to Mme de Senanges, Versac puts Meilcour in a position to replay his past thus establishing an intimate and indirect sexual connection between the two men. By losing his virginity to Mme de Senanges, Meilcour can also "lose his virginity" to Versac.

It is not necessarily that Versac feels sexual desire for Meilcour, but rather that he sees the sex act as another means for domination. Because he cannot achieve the act himself, he seeks out a woman for the job. Here, I refer to Sedgwick's notion that the homosocial and the homosexual are two aspects of male relationships that exist on the same continuum: "to draw the homosocial back in to the orbit of 'desire', of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (Sedgwick 2).

The instrumentalization first of Mme de Lursay and second of Mme de Senanges helps to explain Versac's need to educate Meilcour, which, from the narrative itself, may not be extremely clear. This project to educate stems from Versac's need to establish a sense of self that can only be gained through the production of imitators. Versac's self is purely theatrical and thus constantly compromised by the fact that it is completely dependent on the opinions of others. Therefore, we can understand the role that the

67 "She (Mme de Senanges) can only impart carnal knowledge, a kind of knowledge that counts for little in Crébillon's erotic world, where speechifying, stratagem, and ruse are the order of the day". Ibid.,190.
Marquis de Pranzi plays in the narrative as well as the reasons for Versac's encouraging Meilcour to sleep with Mme de Senanges: Pranzi is the symbol of the failed libertine educational project and Mme de Senanges is the missing piece of this project that allows for sexual domination of one man over his initiate.

**Conclusion**

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, many petit-maître narratives do not reveal the final fates of the characters. In *Les Egarements*, the narrative's conclusion leaves readers unclear about the final fates of Pranzi, Meilcour or Versac. Pranzi simply disappears; he is not mentioned after his exit from his final scene. As for Meilcour, the denouement confirms his eventual acquisition of power because he ends up sleeping with Mme de Lursay. But readers are left unaware of how their relationship plays out after the fateful encounter. In regards to Versac, readers are given no indication as to his final fate. Like Dorante in Marivaux's play, he simply disappears from the narrative action after the conversation at the Etoile. Dorante disappears and Rosimond gets the girl. By the same token, because Meilcour ends up sleeping with Mme de Lursay, he defies his mentor and shows that ultimately Versac does not hold sway over him.

The instrumentalization of Mme de Lursay helps to explain Versac's desire to educate Meilcour. The education stems from Versac's need to establish a sense of self that can only be gained through the production of clones or imitators. For Versac, the self is purely theatrical and therefore continually compromised because it is completely dependent on the changeable and inconstant opinions of others. From this analysis readers can understand the role that the Marquis de Pranzi plays in the narrative: Pranzi is
the symbol of a specific libertine educational project that does not pan out in the same way that it does with Meilcour. Meilcour does not become the caricature and sycophant that Pranzi is.

Homosocial relationships are typical of petits-maîtres and appear in almost all of the texts that I examine for this dissertation. They are often characterized by the instrumentalization of women and also often play out at the end of the narrative in such a way that the reader is left not knowing the final fate of the two men. I believe this is deliberate: there is a reason not to neatly conclude the stories of homosocial petit-maîtres. The fact that these relationships are often left open-ended indicates an ambiguity regarding the representation of masculinity because the supposed powerful man in the male couple often simply disappears at the conclusion of narrative or dramatic action. A complex dialectic of domination and submission plays out through a shifting notion of masculinity, which is illustrated in many ways by the petit-maître and which we will examine in more detail in the following chapters. In the next chapter, I will examine how the famous 'libertine', the vicomte de Valmont, in Laclos's Les Liaisons dangereuses enacts and furthers the principles introduced by Versac in Les Egarements and illustrates the ultimate failure of "noble" masculinity.
Chapter Two: The Petit-Maître and the Libertin in Laclos's Les Liaisons dangereuses

In his classical study on the libertine in Pierre Ambroise François Choderlos de Laclos's novel Les Liaisons dangereuses (1782), Laurent Versini describes the petit-maître as an "espèce papillonnante" and "un coquet efféminé". For Versini, "petit-maître implique une nuance sociale, c'est l'homme de qualité à la mode jusque dans son habillement. [...] Ils ne sont pas mûs par de francs appétits, par une saine sensualité, mais par une vanité mesquine" (40). Versini is correct to note that the petit-maître is a fluttering social butterfly and an effeminate man of fashion who is often guided by his petty vanity. But Versini defines the petit-maître only as a countermodel to "good and healthy" heteronormative sexuality and sociability and he overlooks many of the figure's other essential traits. The petit-maître is often portrayed as methodical, hypocritical, villainous, ineffectual and, in some texts, irreligious.

For Versini, these are not the qualities of the petit-maître but rather of the roué, which he argues is another generation of libertine that appears in literature in the year 1770 and that is a more malevolent version of the petit-maître:

[...] le petit-maître [...] préfigure le roué de 1770: les amusements de l'homme à la mode le conduisent par le persiflage à la méchanceté, la fatuité contient, au moins en germe, le culte d'un égoïsme méprisant et l'habitude de dénigrement. (40) [...] Ce sont les vices de cette génération que Laclos a voulu peindre en leur laissant 'tous les agréments' dont ils sont ornés et en les couvrant de l'hypocrisie des mœurs. (42)

Whereas Versini does see some continuity between the petit-maître and the roué, he also posits a break between them by arguing that the petit maître is not as malicious, hypocritical, or dangerously seductive as the roué, as if the lack of a "healthy sexuality"

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68 Versini, 40.
precluded access to a larger panoply of "masculine" vices. Thus the petit-maître, according to Versini, is limited to subordinate flaws such as fatuousness, and can never hope to rise to the level of vigorous (one is tempted to add "healthy"), full-fledged egotism and malice. Petits-maîtres in many works written prior to 1770 display the qualities that Versini attributes to the *roué*, such as: ill will, contemptuous selfishness, and the habit of slandering others. And while it is true that Laclos's characters are dangerously attractive, methodical, and hypocritical, many petit-maîtres also demonstrate these same qualities.

For instance, Versac in Crébillon's novel *Les Egarments du cœur et de l'esprit* (1736), who is specifically called a petit-maître, is depicted as not only frivolous and ridiculous in some regards but also as insolent methodical and clever. On the one hand, he is arrogant and trivial: "vain, impérieux, étourdi" (*Egarments* 53). His discourse is inconsequential; it is confused, tangled, and it lacks meaning. It is described as "un amas de minuties" (150) and "un discours entortillé" (160). But on the other, Versac has a commanding persona, he constantly slanders others for entertainment, he is skilled in managing gossip to his advantage, he is portrayed as nasty and hypocritical, and he aims only toward satisfying his own desires and pleasures.

Theatrical petits-maîtres are comic characters, but they also have a diabolical side. They are portrayed as attractive to women and as unscrupulous swindlers and liars who have no qualms about exploiting women. In Van Effen's play *Les Petits-maîtres* (1734) the count plots to steal money from his creditor by contriving a way not to repay his debts. He also announces his plans to first marry a young innocent girl for her fortune and then to leave her promptly and take her money with him. In Lesage's play *Turcaret*
(1709), one petit-maître essentially steals money from the main character. Theatrical petits-maîtres are thieves in every practical sense who plot to marry young innocent women and reduce them to ruin.

Most importantly for this chapter, some petits-maîtres are described as irreligious individualists. Few plays and novels emphasize this trait, but in *La Bibliothèque des petits-maîtres* (1741) Francois-Charles Gaudet declares it to be a distinguishing trait of the figure: "ce qui les distingue c'est sans doute l'esprit d'irréligion que l'on nomme communément l'esprit philosophique mais est au contraire le plus grand abus de la philosophie". 69

Therefore, I believe that Versini's characterization of the petit-maître is misleading because petit-maîtres are much more complex than his description recognizes. Whereas Versini sees a new generation of libertine, called the roué, which appears around the time of the publication of Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, I see that many petit-maître characters have several of the exact qualities that he attributes to the roué. The petit-maître is *both* a ridiculous and comic figure and a highly methodical scoundrel who masters the art of double-speak, who is skilled at manipulation, and who is guided by principles that oppose traditional religious values.

In this chapter I will show that Laclos's characters have many qualities in common with petits-maîtres, especially their attractive features (*les agréments*), their hypocrisy, and their ironic and satirical language. In fact, the religious metaphors and double-speak that are emblematic of Laclos's libertines appear also in petit-maître works. It is my contention that these metaphorical techniques originate in descriptions of

libertines in religious apologists' texts from the seventeenth century. Thus, this chapter will concentrate first on the element of libertine irreligiousness in order to clarify the similarities between Laclos's characters, the religiously nonconformist and freethinking libertin as it is described in seventeenth century religious texts, and the petit-maître as he is portrayed in eighteenth-century plays and novels. This approach allows us to view the eighteenth-century petit-maître in two ways: on the one hand, as a tool in the hands of those who wish to satirize and castigate all attempts to criticize religion, and who want to portray religious nonconformists as immoral and ridiculous; on the other, as a social type who portrays behavior that counters traditional social codes and standards. Second, this chapter will examine the theme of worldly education in Les Liaisons specifically focusing on Valmont's bond with his protégé, Danceny, and how it parallels the relationships of other petit-maître couples.

The libertine "fantoché"

In old regime France, irreligiousness, sacrilege, impiety, licentiousness, and debauchery were traits exemplified by a figure called the libertin. The term libertin is polyvalent: on the one hand, when it was first written by Calvin in the mid-sixteenth century, it was used to indicate a group of religious sectarians in Geneva who questioned Christian morality from philosophical and philological perspectives. Libertins were "membres d'une secte politico-religieuse qui se dressa contre l'autorité de Calvin, à Genève". On the other, the term libertin was also used polemically during that same

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time to indicate those individuals who demanded a total liberation from the control of the church and other institutions: the libertin was "celui qui s'affranchit de toute religion", and "épris d'indépendance, qui va en toute liberté".

Libertin is an all-inclusive designation for an individual who sought freedom from the confines of diverse sources of institutional power. It is a figure that was viewed as demanding intellectual freedom, religious freedom, moral and sexual freedom, as well as political freedom. The libertin was depicted either as a progressive intellectual, a free spirit looking to break free from oppressive ideologies, or a social dissident looking to uproot or simply disrupt cultural traditions and codes of civility. Stéphane Van Damme notes that the libertines were not at all a cohesive group and that their sole commonality was the fact that they were all marginalized because they challenged the authority of all civil establishments; they were a "collection hétéroclite d’êtres n’ayant en commun que leur marginalité qu’elle soit stigmatisante ou au contraire valorisante". Libertin was thus a "grab-bag" and polemical term that had pejorative and satirical implications.

In her study on le libertinage in the seventeenth century, Louise Godard de Donville examines the characterization of the libertine figure by the Jesuit priest François Garasse in his influential book 

*La Doctrine curieuse de beaux esprits de ce temps ou médiateur de la liberté de conscience à l'âge classique.* Ed. Philippe Fréchet and Antony McKenna (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2012), 167-184.


2 Ibid.


4 Stéphane Van Damme, "Violences fondatrices" in *Les Dossiers du Grihl* [Online], Les dossiers de Stéphane Van Damme, Historiographie et méthodologie, Online since 26 June 2007, connection on 06 August 2013. URL : http://dossiersgrihl.revues.org/722 ; DOI : 10.4000/dossiersgrihl.722
prétendus tels. Contenant plusieurs maximes pernicieuses à la Religion, à l'Etat et aux bonnes mœurs (1623). By recognizing the somewhat divergent connotations associated with the term libertin, specifically affranchi (freed) and insoumis (disobedient), Donville notes that, in the second half of the seventeenth century, they were conflated into one word with negative implications that signified impiety, impudicity, and absence of faith:

On peut dire donc que le libertin positif (affranchi) s'est affirmé avec la laïcisation des rapports sociaux, qu'il a fait surface dans la deuxième moitié du XVIIe siècle. Mais au seul libertin "négalit" (insoumis à l'égard de la religion) appartient la grande majorité des emplois du mot (la totalité, en ce qui concerne le substantif) au XVIe et pendant le premier XVIIe siècle. Autrement dit, si notre catégories moderne du 'libertin' est complexe (au point d'englober tous les déviants du passé) par superposition de l'affranchi et de l'insoumis, la catégorie ancienne ne l'est pas moins...mais les composantes ne sont pas les mêmes. Ce que les XVIe et XVIIe siècles mettaient en relation dans un même mot, par un jeu d'analogies devenu étranger à notre mode de penser et à nos classifications, c'était l'impiété (ou insoumission, voire agressivité à l'égard de Dieu ou de l'Eglise), l'impudicité (et encore l'ivrognerie, le gourmandise, la vanité, la curiosité) et l'absence de foi.75

The libertine, as Donville interprets Garasse's depiction, is a "personnage protéiforme" that opposed many different facets of institutional authority. It is a figure that takes different forms, both for those individuals who are called libertins as well as for those who used the term libertin to designate others. In works of religious apology, such as Garasse's Doctrine, the libertine figure is a religious "puppet" or decoy formed in the effort to destroy both subversive social practices and irreligious intellectual activities that the apologists opposed. According to Donville's analysis, Garasse was the first to provide a coherent and fully formed conceptualization of this multifaceted figure:

Avant Garasse, le libertin désignait, soit le persécuteur [...] soit des groupes distincts, historiques, datés: libertin du Brabant, libertin-épicurien, athéiste ou débauché [...] et encore, mauvais catholique selon les Jésuites, déiste, rationaliste

With Garasse, the libertin is seen as a general contestataire. In Garasse's Doctrine, "il n'y a plus "des" libertins, mais un".76

The descriptions of beaux esprits prétendus in Garasse's texts, which are "hommes frivoles, ivrognets" who "vivent licencieusement" and "esprits insensibles à la piété de Dieu", as well as "hommes dénaturés avancés en malice" illustrate that Garasse does not make categorical differentiations between those who demonstrate these different sets of traits.77 The Doctrine's vehement damnation of the libertine is a totalizing condemnation of all types of wayward minds: "les esprits écartés sont les plus dangereux" (Garasse 173). Garasse's "petit homme vil" is also an "esprit démon" (177). Using the terms bel esprit prétendu, libertin, athéiste, impie, and others, Garasse attacks non-believers and protestants alike, as well as groups of philosophers such as the epicureans, cynics, and even occultists.

But while the Doctrine includes the fervent rejection of the values associated with these movements, the ostensible reason for its publication was to admonish two authors in particular: Pierre Charron and Théophile de Viau. The latter was believed to be one of the principle authors of Le Parnasse des poètes satyriques (1623), a series of explicitly sexual poems that used religious metaphors.78 Garasse rails against the profligacy of this collection at length in the Doctrine, as well as against its authors. Viau was tried for his role in the production of Le Parnasse, he spent two years in prison, and he died shortly thereafter.

76 Ibid., 330.
78 The Parnasse satyrique was officially censored because of its perceived threat against good faith as well as its filth: the Mercure Français called the poetry "indigne d'un Chrétien tant en croyances qu'en saletés" Cited by Lachèvre, Le Procès du poète Théophile de Viau Vol. 1. (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), xviii.
after he was freed. Pierre Charron was also implicated in the *Doctrine*: Garasse accuses Charron of promoting Montaigne's scepticism as a libertine moral philosophy. 

While the censors succeeded in their objectives to denounce Charron and to torment and officially prosecute Viau, the *Doctrine* garnered harsh criticism from Catholics and fellow Jesuits, and Garasse eventually fell into disgrace. This criticism stems from Garasse's method: while allegedly aiming toward the incrimination of the libertine, his method was to obsessively condemn all the possible ways in which an individual could deviate from catholic faith and doctrine. His compulsive examination of the details of scandalous texts in order to illustrate their licentiousness actually provided publicity for the texts he was trying to denounce. This inadvertent advertisement, coupled with the text's outlandish, comical language and fixation on animal metaphors, comparing *beaux esprits prétendus* to every manner of insect and barnyard creature, called Garasse's credibility as a theologian into question. He gained the reputation of a religious zealot who was obsessive to the point of absurdity; in his *Jugement et Censure du livre de la Doctrine curieuse*, François Ogier compares Garasse to a "poète satyrique" and calls him a "farceur". Voltaire also evidences the perception of Garasse as a ridiculous fanatic by famously describing him as: "le plus absurde et le plus insolent

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81 Peter Harrison has noted that Garasse's animal metaphors may represent a reaction against the humanist notion, popularized by Montaigne and others, that man should live in accordance with nature: "In 1624 Pere Garasse pointed out that such arguments rested upon equivocations about the concepts of "nature" and "natural." For man to follow his natural inclinations in moral affairs, as the beasts apparently do, would turn him into a beast." "The Virtues of Animals in Seventeenth-Century Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59:3 (Jul., 1998): 477.  
calomniateur, et en même temps le plus ridicule écrivain qui ait jamais été chez les jésuites!"\textsuperscript{83} Such loud disapproval, however, did not prevent Voltaire from borrowing widely from Garasse’s book. This appropriation bears witness to the text's widespread influence.

The *Doctrine* provides a vibrant illustration of certain traits of the *libertin* that also appear in the eighteenth century in petit-maître novels and plays. Garasse's description of the *bel esprit prétendu*, as Ogier recognized, is indeed satirical because the *Doctrine* applied a technique called *eutrapely* that used comedy, stereotypes, amalgams, and anecdotes.\textsuperscript{84} Garasse thus introduces social satire into the libertine model: the description of the libertine in Garasse's text is satirical to such an extent that satire becomes a fundamental aspect of the broad notion of the libertine. In the following section of this chapter, I will examine how the language technique that Garasse attributes to the *libertin*, especially religious and sexual metaphors, are also used by Laclos and authors of petit-maître works. I will also show how the irreligious traits and actions that Garasse assigns to the *libertin* are evoked by petits-maîtres and the characters in Laclos's novel.

*Garasse's beaux esprits prétendus and Laclos's libertines*

From the beginning of Laclos's epistolary novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Merteuil and Valmont are portrayed as two formidable libertines engaged in a struggle for power in which the language of devotion figures prominently. In constant pursuit of supremacy over other characters, they also use religious discourse in their efforts to

\textsuperscript{83} Voltaire, "Lettre à S. A. Mgr le Prince de **** sur Rabelais et d'autres auteurs accusés d'avoir mal parlé de la Religion chrétienne" (1767), Lettre III, in *Mélanges* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 1227.

\textsuperscript{84} *Eutrapelia* comes from the Greek for wittiness; it referred to pleasantness in conversation. It later became associated with more extreme comic practice of making profane jokes. See Eutrapelia and Eutrapsy in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. See also Van Damme, "Garasse, François" (524-26).
establish control over one another.\textsuperscript{85} The ironic tone of their usage shows the extent to which they flout religious doctrines as well as underscores their propensity for what Garasse calls 'impertinence'.

In Valmont's first letter, Letter 4, he parodies religion in a light-hearted way. In discussing Merteuil's sexual strategies, he says: "Je connais votre zèle, votre ardent ferveur; et ci ce Dieu là nous jugeait sur nos œuvres, vous seriez un jour la patronne de quelque grande ville, tandis que votre ami serait au plus un Saint de village" (Laclos 21). This satirical language serves two purposes: it allows Valmont to introduce his idea to seduce the devout Présidente de Tourvel, and it is a way to implicitly acknowledge his engagement in a power struggle with Merteuil, whose language is also often reliant on religious metaphor. In her first letter, she commands Valmont to return to Paris and kneel prostrate in front of her: "Revenez mon cher Vicomte, revenez. ...Ce peu de mots devrait suffire; et, trop honoré de mon choix, vous devriez venir, avec empressement, prendre mes ordres à genoux" (17). Merteuil personifies a God to be worshipped by Valmont, but she also alludes here to the language of chivalry. Petits-maîtres often use chivalresque turns of phrase to parody traditional standards of gallantry. Merteuil often explicitly identifies herself as "The divinity"; in Letter 63 she writes to Valmont about acting as an authoritative confidante to both Mme de Volanges and Cécile: "Me voilà comme la divinité; recevant les vœux opposés des aveugles mortels, et ne changeant rien à mes décrets immuables" (152).\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{85} For analysis of the power struggle between Valmont and Merteuil in light of Laclos's ideas presented in his essay on the education of women, see Suellen Diacanoff, \textit{Eros and power in "Les liaisons dangereuses": A study in evil} (Geneva: Droz, 1979), 70-1.

\textsuperscript{86} Polly Detels suggests that Merteuil's religious language serves the same purpose as her education of Cécile: "Merteuil's use of pious language has mainly to do with three things she holds dear: knowledge, power, and pleasure. Her direction of the erotic education of Cécile affords her all three."
But Valmont's and Merteuil's metaphorical language also remarkably resembles Garasse's characterization of the *bel esprit prétendu*. Garasse dedicates a large part of the second book to the maxim: "Les beaux esprits prétendus ne croient en Dieu que par bienséance et par maxime d'Etat" (Garasse 227). Garasse thus glosses this maxim: "faire une chose par contenance, c'est la faire par compliment, du bout des lèvres, sans que le cœur y touche" (233-4). This description can be applied to Valmont, who only acts in accordance to Christian ideals in order to appear to be a good Christian. Valmont never explicitly states that he is an atheist, but he commits acts in the name of God, faith, and charity that only serve to further his own exploits.

In Letter 21, Valmont describes to Merteuil his contrived 'act of charity' when he draws Mme de Tourvel's manservant to the village in order to have him witness a scene in which Valmont rescues a family from poverty and ruin by paying their debts. Valmont only performs this act for the sake of spectacle so that Mme de Tourvel's spy can return to her and recount the event. Mme de Tourvel is thus duped into believing that Valmont's actions illustrate his genuine magnanimity. Valmont ensures her belief in the sincerity of his actions by remaining publicly silent about them. Of course, this behavior also allows him to appropriate another Christian virtue: humility. Upon his return to the house, he enters the drawing room and silently listens to Mme de Tourvel's consciousness in Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*" in *Voegelinian Readings of Modern Literature* ed. Charles R. Embry (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 48. I disagree slightly with this argument, as I believe Merteuil's language has to do with Laclos's formulation of the libertine as an anti-religious *controversiste*. But we might interpret Merteuil's education of Cécile as an element of her sacrilegious character; I will discuss this relationship in light of Garasse's characterization of the religious dissident a little later.

87 Patrick Byrne discusses the various uses of irony in *Les Liaisons* and says specifically about this letter that Valmont contrives his ruse as 'payment' to win over Tourvel, thus paying her as one would a prostitute. Valmont writes: "l'ayant, en quelque sorte, ainsi payée d'avance, j'aurai le droit d'en disposer a ma fantaisie, sans avoir de reproche à me faire" (Letter 21). *Les Liaisons dangereuses: a study of motive and moral* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1989), 53.
narration of the event, only offering modest protestations to her praises (Letter 23). In order to ensure Mme de Tourvel's acceptance of the sincerity of his performance, he has to elicit others' verbal reports of it; his plan requires narration, but not by him. There is here a further level of irony in the fact that Valmont turns Mme de Tourvel into the unwitting accomplice of her own deception. Like God “the clockmaker,” he has set the whole machine into motion. The reality he has created takes on a life of its own and his intervention is no longer required.

Valmont behaves toward love as Garasse says the libertine behaves towards religion; he simulates belief when in fact he does not believe. Valmont writes to Mme de Tourvel: "mon unique but est de vous convaincre de ma bonne foi" (Laclos 89). He constantly affirms his faith in romantic love, whereas in fact he is just simulating. He wants Mme de Tourvel to see him as faithful in order to get close to her and seduce her.

He appears to be a believer in love strictly par contenance and out of opportunism and personal gain. Thus Valmont's profession of "faithful love" is like the libertine's profession of faith, in a figurative sense.

Likewise, Merteuil manipulates the language of moral rigorism and chastity so expertly that it leads others to believe that she is inherently a prude. The language she uses when writing to Mme de Volanges echoes that of a true disciple: "je n'ai jamais cru à ces passions entrainantes et irrésistibles, dont il semble qu'on soit convenu de faire l'excuse générale de nos dérèglements. ... j'ai toujours cherché à me persuader que, pour résister, il suffisait de le vouloir" (281). She takes care to use language that makes her

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appear pious and she does this expertly because the other characters are convinced of her virtue. Mme de Tourvel calls her "une femme estimable" (40) and Mme de Volanges tells Mme de Tourvel "il est juste de la louer" (80). Cécile believes Merteuil to be 'good' at heart: "Mon dieu, que je l'aime Madame de Merteuil! Elle est si bonne ! Et c'est une femme bien respectable" (74-5). Merteuil does not appear to be irreverent to anyone except Valmont.

In Valmont's and Merteuil's world, a properly socialized individual must never appear to be impious at the risk of being publicly rejected and not permitted entry into society. Garasse's words "le croire est une courtoisie" (Garasse 230) describes the false devotion of the beaux esprits; there is an obligation to be religious in order to live up to the standards of politeness set by the elite class. Garasse's phrase thus describes the entire worldly society of Les Liaisons. Faith is an essential element of social interaction. But on the other hand, one cannot appear overly devout at the risk of seeming sanctimonious and pedantic; a properly socialized individual finds a way to strike the balance between the two extremes, such as Molière's Cléante does in Tartuffe when he cautions both Tartuffe and Orgon (in act 4, scene 1) that the conspicuous display of religious devotion in the public sphere is undesirable socially and questionable from the standpoint of religion as well.

According to Garasse's model, the libertin uses metaphors and ambiguous language also when speaking directly against God: "il n'y a point de Dieu, mais qu'ils la dirent en termes ambigus et l'enveloppèrent d'une parole à sous-entente [...] ils vont autour du pot et usent de synonymes pour se mettre à couvert d'un sac mouillé. Et c'est cela que voulait dire David: que les impies marchent et rodent tout autour" (Garasse 269-70). The
skill with double language, puns, and innuendos that Garasse attributes to the bel esprit also appears in Crébillon's works in which petits-maîtres master double-speak. Crébillon's narrator Amanzeï in Le Sopha provides a description of this double language when he recounts a scene in which a woman is being seduced by a Brahman: "il s'établit entre eux une conversation fort tendre, mais où l'amour parlait une langue bien étrangère, et en apparence bien peu faite pour lui. Sans leurs actions, je doute que j'eusse jamais compris leurs discours". Also in Crébillon's Les Egarements, Versac describes this practice of double-speak to Meilcour as one of the principal elements of his science du monde: "L'arrangement, ou plutôt l'abus des mots, tient lieu de pensées" (Egarements 136). The ambiguous language described here by Versac, codified because it can always be deciphered, characterizes both Crébillon's petits-maîtres and the libertin as it is described by Garasse.

Returning to the passage I quoted above in which Valmont designates Merteuil's sexuality as 'zèle et ardente ferveur' (Letter 4), we see that Valmont and Merteuil use elegant forms of blasphemy and euphemism for amusement. The terms fervor and zeal are most often used in the religious context. But here these terms are also metaphors chosen to designate sexual acts, which help the reader to decipher them. This lexicon is commonly found in novels where petits-maîtres figure prominently, and they often appear in contexts where religious practices are used as a metaphor for sex. In the scene that I mentioned earlier from Crébillon's novel Le Sopha, where a woman is seduced by a Brahman, the ambiguous language described by Versac is a perfect example of this practice of double-speak.

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89 Crébillon, Le Sopha, 57.
90 The first edition of the Dictionnarioie de l'Académie française (1694) notes religious connotations: "ZELE, Affection ardente pour quelque chose. Il se dit principalement à l'égard des choses saintes & sacrées": "FERVEUR, subst. fém. A.— RELIG. État d'âme passionné d'une personne qui éprouve ardeur et zèle religieux."
91 Béatrice Didier makes note of the "glissement de sens" between gallant discourse and religious discourse in eighteenth-century language (168).
seduced by a Brahman, a Hindu priest, Crébillon describes the Brahman's "soul" as in a state of *extase* on the brink of satisfaction. Even when the scene is not set in a religious context and the characters are not necessarily members of the clergy, these religious terms are metaphors for sexual desire:

> Cet heureux bramine s'approcha de Fatmé d'un air doucereux et empesé, plus fade que galant. [...] 'Reine des cœurs, dit-il à Fatmé, en minaudant, vous êtes aujourd'hui plus belle que les êtres heureux destinés au service de Brama. Vous élevez mon âme à une extase qui a quelque chose de céleste, et que je voudrais bien vous voir partager'. [...] Il s'établit entre eux une conversation fort tendre, mais où l'amour parlait une langue bien étrangère, et en apparence bien peu faite pour lui. Sans leurs actions, je doute que j'eusse jamais compris leurs discours (*Sopha* 57).

In *Lettres de la Marquis de M*** au Comte R***, Crébillon again uses the terms *zèle* and *âme* to suggest sexual excitement. In this passage, the marquise states that it is the lover, rather than the husband, that solicits intense pleasure: "Je lui suis obligée du soin qu'il prend de me vanter avec tant de zèle; s'il en est si content, jugez combien le serait un homme que j'aimerais et qui jouirait de mes transports. Un mari ne voit que la statue, l'âme n'est faite que pour l'amant" (*Lettres* 113). In this passage, the "soul", which is a metaphor for the libido, does not respond to the conjugal duties enacted with the husband but rather to the sexual stimulation provided by the lover. The terms *ardent ferveur, âme, enthousiasme, zèle, extase, transports*, which are typical of devotional literature, are often used in petit-maître narratives and describe the type of physical reactions that can occur both during prayer and during sexual acts: eager anticipation, total physical absorption in the moment, and a pleasurable sensation produced by the act. In these works, as well as in *Les Liaisons*, the metaphors reinforce the irony of the narrators' descriptions.

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92 Crébillon, *Lettres de la Marquise de M*** au Comte de R*** in *Œuvres*. Ed. Ernest Sturm. (Paris: Editions François Bourin, 1992), 113. Subsequent to Crébillon, Condillac, in his *Traité des sensations*, 1754, imagines a statue that is organized like a human body but has no sensations, hence no ideas and sentiments, and then is progressively introduced to the senses and to ideas.
The practice of reading in *Les Liaisons* is also ironic and reflects the traits Garasse assigns to the *bel esprit prétendu*. Garasse's observation that these figures "substituent les méchants livres à ceux de la Bible" (Garasse 489) describes Merteuil's reading practices. By "méchants livres" Garasse refers specifically to Manichean scriptures, the *Vividum Evangelium* (translated in French as *L'Evangile vivant*) which Garasse calls false gospel (490). Of course Merteuil is not portrayed as reading gnostic texts, but she nevertheless substitutes other forms of knowledge – such as novels, philosophical texts, and moralist writings (which she reads in order to learn how to appear to be morally upstanding) – for Christian gospel. These are the books that dictate her actions and principles; they constitute her surrogate scripture. In Letter 81 Merteuil recounts that, as a very young woman just after the death of her husband, she turned to these books in order to supplement her education in the ways of the world:

> La maladie de M. de Merteuil vint interrompre de si douces occupations [...] Il mourut, comme vous savez, peu de temps après [...] tout ce que j’accordai à la décence, fut de retourner dans cette même campagne, où il me restait bien encore quelques observations à faire. Je les fortifiai par le secours de la lecture: mais ne croyez pas qu'elle fût toute du genre que vous la supposez. J’étudiai nos mœurs dans les romans; nos opinions dans les philosophes; je cherchai même dans les moralistes les plus sévères ce qu'ils exigeaient de nous, et je m'assurai ainsi de ce qu'on pouvait faire, de ce qu'on devait penser, et de ce qu'il fallait paraître. (Laclos 207-8)

Merteuil's reading methodology is skewed: although she reads works by moralists, she puts them to subversive use. She simulates rather than emulates their principles. Her

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93 Several critics have commented on the trope of novel reading in *Les Liaisons* (note: I am referring specifically to the characters' readings that are tangential to their reading of each other's letters. This is Merteuil's reading of novels and other books and Cécile's reading of the books given to her by Merteuil). Some of the most notable are: Béatrice Didier, 169-179, which I refer to in this chapter; also, chapter one of Patrick Byrne's *Les Liaisons dangereuses: a study of motive and moral* and the libertinism dependence on 'ideological qualification' in *Models of Reading* (207-220); and Peter Brooks. *The Novel of Worldliness* (181-183). But few have focused on the notion of Merteuil "substituting" other books for scripture, despite the fact that Mme de Tourvel's reading of a religious text serves as a stark contrast to Merteuil's; she reads volume two of *Christian Thoughts* (Letter 107).
reading of these books and close observation of the behavior of others allowed her to realize that everyone hides secrets. Ultimately, her reading and observations helped her to create her principles and her public persona.94

Merteuil, playing the role of petite-maîtresse, also uses novels to disseminate her principles to her prospective apprentice, Cécile. Cécile writes to Sophie Carnay, her friend at the convent, about her first conversation with Merteuil on the subject of Danceny and tells her that Merteuil gave her books to teach her how to conduct herself in the love affair:

[...] jusqu'ici je ne lui parlais que de mon amitié, et lui voulait toujours que je dise mon amour. [...] Je l'ai dit à Madame de Merteuil [...] Madame de Merteuil m'a dit aussi qu'elle me prêterait des livres qui parlaient de tout cela, et qui m'apprendraient bien à me conduire, et aussi à mieux écrire que je ne faisais: car, vois-tu, elle me dit tous mes défauts, ce qui est une preuve qu'elle m'aime bien; elle m'a recommandé seulement de ne rien dire à maman de ces livres-là, parce que ça aurait l'air de trouver qu'elle a trop négligé mon éducation, et ça pourrait la fâcher. Oh! Je ne lui en dirai rien (75).

The books prime Cécile for her passage into le monde.95 Merteuil wants Cécile to learn the ways of the world and to develop ideas for operating in society using the method that was successful for her: reading that helped supplement her observations of individuals' behavior in society.

94 Béatrice Didier considers Merteuil's act of reading to be indicative of her inadvertent adherence to Jesuit practices: "On peut voir en Merteuil une disciple de Loyola et ajouter les Exercices à la liste de ces moralistes sévères qu'elle dit avoir lues pour sa formation" (167).

95 Merteuil's act of lending novels to Cécile is also a kind of sexual preparation that defies the standard means of educating women about sex through marriage. Mary McAlpin argues that Cécile's convent education was explicitly described in order to emphasize Laclos's argument (communicated in his Des femmes et de leur education) that the ideal environment for the education of young women is among de-sexualized nuns: "Cloistering prepubescent girls with sexually inexperienced nuns was, of course, the standard method of protecting them from such knowledge, a practice not explicitly attacked in the Liaisons dangereuses ... if we are to believe Laclos's first, untitled essay on women, there was no more suitable method—or rather, no method at all—to prepare a young girl such as Cécile for her fate." "Cécile and the Triumph of Love in Les Liaisons Dangereuses," Eighteenth-Century Studies 43.1 (2009): 4. Thus the act of reading encouraged by a "fallen" woman, Merteuil, who was not educated in a convent but rather at home (see Letter 81) expressly counteracts the conjugal sexual preparation in the convent and encourages a new kind of sexual preparation freed from the constraints of conjugality.
She also teaches Cécile elements of *la bienséance*. In the passage I quote above, Cécile recounts Merteuil's instructions to her to write better. Learning to write well means mastering *l'art de plaire* because, as Merteuil notes, one writes in order to entertain the recipient rather than oneself. Merteuil explains this point to Cécile in greater detail later in the novel (Letter 105) because, even after Merteuil's initial prompting, the girl has yet to adopt an intelligent writing style:

Un mot encore. Voyez donc à soigner davantage votre style. Vous écrivez toujours comme un enfant. Je vois bien d'où cela vient; c'est que vous dites tout ce que vous pensez, et rien de ce que vous ne pensez pas. Cela peut passer ainsi de vous à moi, qui devons n'avoir rien de caché l'une pour l'autre: mais avec tout le monde! Avec votre amant surtout! Vous auriez toujours l'air d'une petite sotte. Vous voyez bien que, quand vous écrivez à quelqu'un, c'est pour lui et non pas pour vous: vous devez donc moins chercher à lui dire ce que vous pensez, que ce qui lui plaît davantage. (289)

Merteuil tells Cécile that she should communicate in a more sophisticated way that allows her to hide certain thoughts and feelings in the interest of orchestrating her words more thoughtfully. Merteuil wants to teach Cécile how to please others, how to interact with them, and how appear to them; Cécile must learn certain aspects of *la bienséance* in order to get what she wants while also respecting the limits of social codes. Merteuil's advice about writing for others instead of for herself is reflected in the definition of *la sociabilité* in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, which states "nous ne sommes pas nés pour nous, mais pour les autres hommes". La Rochefoucauld says the same about conversation: one should speak "selon l'humeur et l'inclination des personnes que l'on entretient". Merteuil teaches ideals of *honnêteté*, not only because she wants Cécile to master social ideals, but also because she wants the girl to understand others and the motivations for

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96 La Rochefoucauld, *OC*, 509.
their actions, as Merteuil does. In this sense, Merteuil teaches Cécile hypocrisy under the pretext that she is teaching the girl the socially proper way to express herself.

Relatedly, Garasse's last maxim of the *Doctrine*, entitled "La ruse et hypocrisie que tiennent les athéistes pour semer leurs maudites maximes" (Garasse 849), discusses the hypocrisy of the libertine and focuses on the practice among *beaux esprits prétendus* of disseminating their lessons. Garasse uses the term *honnête homme* when he describes how the *athéistes* appear polite and devout in public: "il ne passera grande fête qu'il ne s'en aillent confesser et recevoir le sacré corps de Notre-Seigneur devant tout le monde, afin qu'on les remarque ...c'est un honnête homme; il se confesse souvent; je l'ai vu communier" (850). Because they hide their dissention by participating in the behaviors of the devout public, they are more than just dissenters; they are fraudulent and deceptive. They take great pains in order to appear pious and *honnête* and this is how they gain entry into lords' manors "pour abuser les faibles esprits de la jeunesse" (851). The older Merteuil takes the teenage Cécile as a pupil. Valmont on his part agrees to recruit Danceny as an apprentice in order to further his and Merteuil's schemes. Versac makes Meilcour his disciple. The Marquis de Polienville recruits the young Lord Houzy in order to teach him French *sociabilité*. All of these libertine relationships are characterized by one mentor and one younger apprentice, and the mentor always wants to teach the young charge to follow in his or her footsteps. The mentors almost always focus on the primacy of the appearance of social propriety in order to be able to enact self-serving (usually pleasure oriented) goals; thus, hypocrisy is an essential element of libertine didacticism.

Garasse's descriptions of the *impie* and the *libertin* prefigure descriptions of petit-maître pupils – who have just entered the world with no idea of its customs and codes,
and primed for social and sexual tutelage – and petit-maître mentors – experienced socializers who know perfectly their place in society. Garasse describes the impie figure as, on the one hand, dangerous, malicious, and detestable: "J'appelle impies et athéistes ceux qui sont plus avancés en malice, qui ont l'impudence de proférer d'horribles blasphèmes contre Dieu, qui des brutalités abominables" (182). On the other, libertins are misguided and impressionable débutants of impiety who are on the path to be easily corrupted. For Garasse, beaux esprits are both radical atheists and immoral novitiates who are not yet as fully depraved as their more advanced counterparts: "Ainsi puis-je dire qu'en l'école de nos dogmatisants, il y a deux sortes de disciples: les uns sont libertins et les autres sont tout a fait impies; les uns sont commençants, les autres sont parfaits, les uns sont chenilles, les autres sont papillons; les uns sont apprentis et les autres sont maîtres en malice" (181). Garasse's metaphor comparing the bel esprit to both an older, fully developed moth and an early stage larva that has not yet progressed to the moth stage illustrates the distinction: they are not two different types of libertines but rather they are figures seen as being at two different stages of impiety. The distinction that Garasse makes between his 'libertin' and his 'impie' is not a complete differentiation but rather shows that the two are componential parts of one the whole notion of the bel esprit prétendu. Petits-maîtres are also often portrayed as young pupils and more advanced masters.

Garasse addresses the secrecy of the lessons that the advanced impie imparts to the young libertin, which is another vital element of petit-maître education. Garasse explains the way in which the beaux esprits prétendus disseminate their ideas in secret: "Ils dogmatisent en secret, et n'enseignent leurs maximes que sous la cape" (198).
According to Garasse, *beaux esprits prétendus* hide their lessons in order avoid exposing themselves to public shame for their duplicity. The idea of secrecy calls specifically to mind the conversation between Versac and Meilcour at the Étoile where Versac explains how he formed his principles through his experiences in *le monde*. Versac tells Meilcour his reasons for leading him to a solitary location for their conversation: "pour nous livrer plus librement à des objets qui, par leur étendu et leur variété, pourront nous mener loin, je voudrais que nous allassions chercher quelque promenade solitaire où nous puissions n'être pas interrompus" (*Egarements* 130). Seclusion is an integral component of the lessons themselves. The student must be removed from the context of the lesson in order to develop a critical distance from society. This distance allows him to play an important role in the orchestration of schemes and helps prevent him from becoming caught up in the drama of worldly interactions.

For Versac and Merteuil (and Valmont as well), the public persona is contingent upon the concealment of its underlying ideals. The primacy of secrecy is the main factor in the correspondence between Valmont and Merteuil, because when the secrets are unveiled, they are both destroyed. Public shame is exactly what befalls Merteuil at the end of the novel when her letters are revealed, particularly Letter 81 where she lays out her system and Letter 85 that describes her manipulation of Prévan. When her secrets are unveiled, Merteuil experiences failure in all possible ways: after the letters are revealed, she is publically scorned at the opera, she falls ill with small pox which disfigures her, she loses a lawsuit against her late husband's family that leaves her bankrupt, and she surreptitiously departs alone in the middle of the night to escape the persecution of the very society she had previously mastered. Valmont, on the other hand, is destroyed not

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97 See: Elena Russo, 387.
necessarily by the socially unacceptable actions revealed in the letters, but by another man whom he personally affronted. I will return to this point in greater detail in the next section of his chapter.

To conclude this section, I want to reiterate that Laclos and other authors assign to their libertine characters traits that are also outlined in Garasse's *Doctrine* text as beliefs and behaviors he was fighting against. The libertine is not necessarily cohesive concept but rather a decoy, an invented figure that illustrates an ideological conflict. Some of this lack of cohesiveness and clear-cut boundaries is still to be felt in the *bel esprit*'s heir, the fictional libertine, who runs the gamut from the petit-maître to the roué in what is often a nearly seamless way. It is a figure that is profoundly informed by religious reactions against "heresy" and "atheism" in all forms. As Beatrice Didier notes, Valmont and Merteuil's words and actions reflect traditional Jesuit ideals in an ironic way, from Valmont's first letter to Merteuil that requests her to educate proselytes to Merteuil's infamous Letter 81 that lays out the history of the formation of her libertine will through self-reflective education. Other petits-maîtres, such as Versac, Meilcour, and Boissy's marquis both subvert religious ideology and use ironic language in the same ways that Valmont and Merteuil do.

*Les Liaisons dangereuses, worldly education, and the homosocial bond*

I would like now to examine more closely the practice of education in *Les Liaisons* to show how the erotic tutelage presented in this novel parallels the type of instruction we find in many petit-maître tales. Just as Versac takes Meilcour under his wing because he sees that the young man has the makings to become his libertine

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98 Didier, 164-170.
imitator, Merteuil and Valmont recruit worldly neophytes. Merteuil makes Cécile her pupil because she recognizes the young girl's potential to become an adept woman of le monde: "Ou je me trompe, ou elle deviendra une de nos femmes les plus à la mode" (Laclos 54). While this statement echoes Versac's motives for educating Meilcour, it also calls to mind Mme de Saint-Ange in Sade's novel La Philosophie dans le boudoir (1795) who is infinitely more explicit about her reasons for educating Eugénie; she wants to the girl to fully experience pleasure: "[... ] aucune borne à tes plaisirs que celle des tes forces ou de tes volonté; aucune exception de lieux, de temps et de personnes; toutes les heures, tous les endroits, tous les hommes doivent servir à tes voluptés" (Sade 36). But even Madame de Saint-Ange takes appearances into account and reminds the girl of society's judgment and the need to seem chaste: "Tant que les lois seront telles qu’elles sont encore aujourd’hui, usons de quelques voiles; l’opinion nous y contraint; mais dédommageons-nous en silence de cette chasteté cruelle que nous sommes obligés d’avoir en public" (37). In Sade's novel, Mme de Saint-Ange as the mentor does not hide the motives from the pupil, which differs from Merteuil's duplicitous influence on Cécile, but the essence of the lessons are the same. Women's education is a trope in many eighteenth century novels; both in those that veil sexual acts with elegant language and in those that do not. The female libertine can only emancipate herself from gender

99 Mary Mcalpin refers to this recruitment attempt but argues that: "Merteuil's goal in having Cécile become "what she must become" is to make the young girl into a confidante" (1). This argument, however, does not take into account the fact that Merteuil uses the phrase 'pupil' specifically and also acts in the interest of Cécile's worldly education by lending her novels allegedly to ensure the girl's propriety of comportment in society and in writing. Whereas the role of pupil may bring with it the role of confidente in some regards, this is not Merteuil's primary goal.

100 Marcel Hénaff discusses the education of women as a trope in Sade's works. He notes that the male educational bond, which I have observed in many petit-maître narratives, does not figure prominently in Sade's novels and is replaced by female educational relationships. These relationships are characterized by a daughter's defiance of a mother's authority and therefore the destruction of domestic female authority: "tandis qu'il n'y a pas, on l'a vu, de roman d'initiation du jeune libertin chez Sade, puisque tout est acquis
enslavement by appearing to adhere to social codes.

But whereas Mme de Saint-Ange makes her educational goals rather apparent to her pupil, Merteuil hides her ulterior, self-serving motives for molding Cécile: "Quant à la petite, je suis souvent tentée d'en faire mon élève, c'est un service que j'ai envie de rendre à Gercourt" (Laclos 54-5). Merteuil wants to take her revenge on Gercourt, Cécile's prospective husband, who abandoned Merteuil in the past. Because of Gercourt's public bragging about the chastity and innocence of his young fiancée, Merteuil sees an opportunity to publicly humiliate him by presenting to him "une femme toute formée au lieu de son innocente Pensionnaire" (55). But Merteuil eventually abandons the task; perhaps out of jealousy when Cécile becomes her rival with respect to Dancény and Valmont, perhaps because Cécile does not understand Merteuil's lessons properly, perhaps because Merteuil loses interest once Valmont has slept with Cécile (she eventually lets Valmont to take over as Cécile's "mentor"), or finally perhaps because Cécile proves to have no moral compass which, paradoxically, is abhorrent to Merteuil (although Merteuil is not morally upstanding herself, she nonetheless knows that having an inside understanding of moral codes is absolutely necessary for successfully enacting her simulations). Although readers are not offered a definitive reason, the fact is that Cécile proves to Merteuil that she is not libertine material.

Valmont also recruits an apprentice, but he carries this relationship through until the end of the novel. The bond between Valmont and Danceny resembles the homosocial
bond between Meilcour and Versac in Crébillon's novel *Les Egarements du cœur et de l'esprit* in many respects, but in *Les Liaisons*, the dynamic is more complex. On the one hand, the relationship between Danceny and Valmont is characterized by the exchange of power. But on the other, the homosocial bond between Danceny and Valmont is greatly affected by another homosocial couple, two petites-maitresses: one who actively intervenes in the male couple (Merteuil) and one whose intervention is more passive (Cécile).

In both novels, the sexual education of a young man is directed by two older and experienced mentors: one man and one woman. Like Versac and Mme de Senanges who work together to educate Meilcour, Merteuil and Valmont are, at first, accomplices in the seduction of Danceny. Valmont fools Danceny into trusting him with the help of Merteuil who lies to Danceny about Valmont’s character: she pretends that he and Danceny share the same values and that they find themselves in the same difficult situation of loving a woman from afar.

Like Versac, Valmont is the dominant member of the male couple. Valmont asserts his superiority over Danceny by mocking the young man's scruples behind his back; Valmont calls him a ridiculous "sentimentaire" (395). Danceny also perceives Valmont as superior. Just as Meilcour is in awe of Versac and Boissy's Lord Houzy in enamored with the dazzling French manners of the marquis de Polienville, Danceny is charmed by Valmont; he calls Valmont his "ange tutelaire" (160).

But when Danceny fails to follow his educators' instructions by not sleeping with Cécile, he ends up becoming the target of Merteuil's seduction and his sexual education ends up primarily in her hands. She becomes the main corruptor of Danceny. This
seduction is crucial because it leads Merteuil and Valmont to instrumentalize Danceny separately in order to humiliate one another.

First of all, Merteuil's seduction of Danceny changes her relationship with Valmont. When Merteuil expresses her desire to seduce Danceny, Valmont protests: "Pour votre motif à vous, je le trouve, à vrai dire, d'un ridicule rare; [...] c'est pour Danceny que vous vous donnez toute cette peine-là! [...] Je vous le dis sérieusement, je désapprouve ce choix" (318-9). Ultimately Valmont fails to prevent the relationship between Merteuil and Danceny from advancing to full-fledged sexual education. The difference between Mme de Senanges's education of Meilcour in Crébillon's novel and Merteuil's education of Danceny is that Mme de Senanges acts primarily according to Versac's will, and Merteuil acts independently; she is a free agent in her seduction because she goes against the will of her accomplice, Valmont. The previous collaboration between Valmont and Merteuil thus changes and the two former co-conspirators (and educators) end up in direct opposition.

Now, instead of acting as Valmont's counterpart in their mutual education of Danceny, Merteuil rather encourages a rivalry between the two men. When she orchestrates a meeting where Danceny and Valmont are both present – she promises Danceny a rendezvous at the same time that she knows Valmont will come to see her – she makes it clear to Valmont that she is refusing him her sexual favors and replacing him with Danceny as her lover. However, only Valmont is aware of the rivalry with Danceny at this point. Danceny does not yet see Valmont as his rival because he does not know about the past sexual relationship between Valmont and Merteuil and he does not yet know about Valmont's seduction of Cécile. Danceny remains a dupe almost to the
But it is not only Merteuil who uses Danceny; Valmont also uses him against Merteuil. After becoming Danceny's rival for the affections of Merteuil for a short time, Valmont reasserts his authority by exploiting Danceny in his scheme to humiliate Merteuil: he convinces Danceny not to attend a meeting with her that she had arranged (Letter 155). Danceny is again under Valmont's control because he uses Danceny as a pawn in his humiliation of his former female accomplice. The relationship between mentors and protégés is thus constantly figured and reconfigured geometrically in the course of the novel, following all different combinations deriving from the structuring principles of parallelism, mirroring, and antithesis.

However, at the end, Merteuil takes revenge on Valmont by manipulating Danceny once again. When Merteuil shows Danceny Valmont's letters, it is Danceny (through Merteuil) who ends up dominating Valmont. Toward the end of the novel, when Danceny challenges Valmont to a duel, the two men are in open opposition, which is due to Merteuil's involvement. Ultimately, Danceny wins the duel and kills Valmont (I will return to this point a little later).

The mentoring relationships in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* are polyvalent because they constantly shift. This is also partially the case in *Les Egarements* where Meilcour as the retrospective narrator recounts a shift in his relation with Versac over time. In petit-maître stage comedies, we do not necessarily see these shifts because plays are normally set within the span of a day or two, rather than over a longer period of time. But the problematization of the mentoring relation is still apparent in these theatrical works, as well as in Garasse's *Doctrine*, and in petit-maître novels.
In Les Liaisons, the constant shifts of power in the mentoring relationships dictate the opposition between the two main characters and trigger the events of the denouement. The conflict between Valmont and Merteuil that developed when Merteuil abandoned Cécile and seduced Danceny transforms into an opposition between Danceny and Valmont, which is initiated by Merteuil. This opposition occurs because Valmont seduced Danceny's beloved, Cécile (hence Cécile's somewhat more passive intervention into the relationship between Valmont and Danceny). When Danceny discovers Valmont's betrayal, he turns this affront back on Valmont and challenges him to a duel in order to regain his honor. Danceny's brief letter to Valmont revealing his knowledge of Valmont's affair with Cécile and challenging Valmont to a duel formulates their opposition in noble terms:

J'ai vu la preuve de votre trahison écrite de votre main. J'avoue que mon cœur en a été navré, et que j'ai ressenti quelque honte d'avoir autant aidé moi-même à l'odieux abus que vous avez fait de mon aveugle confiance; [...] J'en serai instruit, si, comme je l'espère, vous voulez bien vous trouver demain, entre huit et neuf heures du matin, à la porte du bois de Vincennes, village de Saint-Mandé. (431)

This letter initiates the event that serves as the catalyst for both Danceny's revenge and for the reestablishment of Valmont's masculine authority. On the one hand, Danceny does destroy the man who victimized him because he wins the duel. One might interpret Danceny's victory in the duel as a removal of his opponent's power. A victory in battle denotes the victor's domination. But the fact that Valmont's death occurs in the context of the duel mitigates the loss and the dominated connotation. By fighting a duel, and especially by losing, Valmont is granted some male authority because it allows him to die a hero's death. In the culture of the duel, the vanquished is not discredited. In his Discours sur les duels, Brantôme discusses a famous duel between two nobles, La
Châtaigneraie and Jarnac, and notes that the vanquished "perdit la vie, non pas l'honneur". In a duel, it is not the skill or position of either man that determines the winner; rather, God is the ultimate judge: "le succès de ce combat fit voir manifestement que la victoire ne dépend ni de la force ni de l'adresse du corps, ni de la faveur des princes, mais uniquement de la volonté de Dieu". Danceny becomes the instrument of God's revenge (or the instrument of the novelist who needs to end the novel by giving his misbehaving characters their comeuppance).

Therefore, the eventual outcome of the educational relationship in *Les Liaisons* differs from the outcome of these bonds in Crébillon's novel because *Les Liaisons* ends with a more heroic form of aristocratic homosociality. In *Les Égarements*, rather than killing his mentor, Meilcour ends by disregarding Versac and disobeying his instructions. Danceny goes further in his rejection of his mentor than Meilcour does in Crébillon's novel because in *Les Liaisons* the homosocial relationship ends in death. By killing Valmont, Danceny gets his revenge, but he also accords to Valmont some heroic and gallant status, thereby affirming his adherence to what were considered traditionally masculine qualities. The duel allows Valmont to regain some masculine authority after having been dominated by Merteuil (and also, indirectly, by Danceny when he takes Valmont's place in Merteuil's bed).

But the heroic death in *Les Liaisons* does not negate Valmont's previous repeated

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103 Anne C. Vila notes: "One could say that Danceny's ultimate function in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is to redeem Valmont's manhood, first on a symbolic level by dealing him a heroic death by the sword, and second on a social level by promoting the official "pro-Valmont" pro-masculine interpretation of the novel's events that dominate the work's conclusion." *Enlightenment and Pathology: sensibility in the literature and medicine of eighteenth-century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 278.
failures. In fact, his entire persona is characterized by failure. Acknowledging that coming undone at the end is a trademark of the libertine, Beatrice Didier recognizes that this trait applies to Valmont:

La vengeance va entrainer l'effondrement des libertins tout autant que de leurs victimes. L'échec de Valmont est flagrant. ...il aboutit à un triple échec: Cécile croit toujours aimer Danceny, et finalement entre au couvent; la Présidente, si longue à se rendre, se reprend et meurt; Mme de Merteuil se refuse au moment ou Valmont venait demander le prix de sa rupture avec la Présidente. (146)

(The failure of Merteuil is just as patent as that of Valmont, or perhaps even more so, given her superior position throughout the novel). The difference between the libertine failure in this novel and failure in other petit-maître novels and plays is a difference of degree. The failure is evident in many of these works; in Les Liaisons, it is nuanced within a narrative that illustrates complex power struggles between two formidable principle characters. The mere act of engaging in the duel grants Valmont some masculine authority but it does not erase his continual failure and his similarity with the petit-maître, who must always fail, or be corrected, at the end because he represents a perversion of elite values; a perversion that must be condemned.104

In Les Liaisons, the relationship between the two main protagonists as well as the relationship between the two male petits-maîtres are characterized by constant exchanges of power: there is a transfer of power back and forth between Merteuil and Valmont as well as between Danceny and Valmont. Rather than the novel ending with the consummation of the relationship between the older female mentor and her male protégé, like in Crébillon's work, Les Liaisons ends with the reassuringly oedipal scenario of the young petit-maître both sleeping with his female mentor and killing his male mentor in a

104 Patrick Byrne notes the moralizing role of Tourvel's and Valmont's deaths in the novel: "It is the remarkable juxtaposition of the deaths of Valmont and the Présidente which encourages the belief that some kind of sentimental justice is being meted out" (30).
It is ultimately Danceny who has the last word in the novel. This ending contributes greatly to the novel's infamy and ambiguity because Danceny is not an honnête homme: he allows himself to be seduced by Merteuil, while still believing that he is in love with Cécile, who, herself, is not an honnête femme. In this controversial work, all of the characters are corrupted in some way and all of the relationships are constantly turned into their opposites.

**Conclusion**

One of the main differences between the ending of Les Liaisons and other petit-maîtres narratives is that petits-maîtres do not customarily fight duels and they do not die. While the petit-maître and the traditional noble seek to dominate other men, they do so differently. The nobleman masters principles of honnêteté: he appears gallant, heroic, courageous, witty and sensitive because he has fully assimilated all of the tenets of honnêteté. He dominates other men through the display of his inherently 'good' qualities that help him to behave perfectly according to polite standards.105 The petit-maître distorts these standards in two ways. Sometimes he reinforces the value of honnêteté by diabolically subverting it: he masters the appearance of politeness without assimilating the requisite honnête qualities and by having ulterior, dishonest motives. Other times, he reinforces the values of honnêteté by parodying politeness, manners, airs and sensitivity: he acts in direct opposition to these standards and he shows how ridiculous and depraved one appears when doing so. Many times, the petit-maître is undone by his own stupidity,

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by social humiliation, and by being rejected by the woman he was wooing. Instead of
dying at the end, petits-maîtres normally just disappear because they are meant to be
inconsequential.

But, as I have shown, Valmont and Merteuil have many qualities that are common
to petits-maîtres. They symbolize the hypocrisy of les bienséances. They are somewhat
methodical and treacherous, but they both experience ultimate failure, which illustrates
their fundamental ineffectiveness. They are characters that have been conceived of
within an entire contestataire culture. They treat religion with such heedlessness and
disrespect that it would be plausible to conjecture that Laclos (or the entire eighteenth-
century petit-maître narrative tradition) was inspired by a type of fanatical religious
discourse presented in texts like Garasse's Doctrine curieuse de beaux esprits prétendus.

We have also seen that Garasse's text assigns to the libertin a satirical discursive
technique that is similar to the double-language used by many authors of petit-maître
narratives, especially Crébillon. The image of the libertine evoked by Crébillon's
characters, Laclos's characters, and other petits-maîtres satirizes seventeenth-century
standards of civil behavior, which are predicated on adherence to both religious ideals
and other honnête social codes.

Returning to Laurent Versini's definition of the petit-maître, I have shown that it
is insufficient because it describes only one aspect of the figure. The petit-maître is not
merely coquettish, effeminate, and vain. He is also, at times, diabolical, methodical, and
a master of the art of double-speech. The difference between petits-maîtres, especially
those in Crébillon's Les Égarements, and the characters in Laclos's novel is only a
difference of degree. I have critically engaged Versini's argument that petits-maîtres and
roués are two different types of libertines in eighteenth-century works and that Laclos only portrays roués in his novel. Laclos's characters are not drastically different from other petits-maîtres because Valmont and Merteuil use metaphorical language common to many petit-maître narratives and they end up experiencing final and requisite failures; failures that occur because they reject normative values of sociability. In the following chapter, I will examine the petit-maître’s most prominent quality, effeminacy, which serves as a symbol of another way in which the figure parodies the "polite" masculinity of the seventeenth-century honnête homme.
"Du clinquant, des grâces, une nuance d’esprit sur un grand fond de fatuité; c’est l’essence d’un petit-maître. Cette espèce d’être féminisé, infiniment raisonnable à son jugement, infiniment sot au notre." 106

This description of the petit-maître from François-Charles Gaudet’s *Bibliothèque des petits-maîtres* (1741) summarizes in a few words most of the defining qualities of the type: foppishness, flamboyance, and wit overshadowed by arrogance and bravado. Most importantly, Gaudet’s description focuses above all on one trademark of the petit-maître: effeminacy. Gaudet’s use of the phrase "être féminisé" expresses that although he has many defining features (flashiness, manners, conceit), the petit-maître is primarily a "feminized being". Indeed, we will see that effeminacy is one of, if not the, most predominant features of this character who is often described in terms of his resemblance to women, his penchant for make-up, and his fondness for sartorial embellishment.

The effeminacy of the petit-maître is described in detail in many eighteenth-century French texts. Guillot de la Chassagne, a minor author writing in the mid-century, provides a vivid illustration of petits-maîtres' mannerisms. He describes them as a group of excitable 'airheads' who suddenly scream with delight when they see each other and then just as abruptly grow bored in each other’s company:

Ils s’écrient en se rencontrant, se baisent deux ou trois fois, comme si c’était la maîtresse la plus chérie, se disant bonjour, bonsoir […] ensuite ils font une cabriole, se balacent au nez deux ou trois fois, et se quittent parce qu’ils n’ont plus rien à se dire. 107

106 Gaudet, 3.
Masson de Morvilliers in his epigram *Portrait de l’homme du jour* (1779), describes the petit-maître's appearance and specifically uses the term *efféminé*:

> Voilà à trente ans cet être efféminé,  
> N’a-t-il pas l’air d’une poupée?  
> Chargé d’odeurs, de rouge enluminé,  
> Comme il pâlit à la vue d’une épée.\(^{108}\)

Morvilliers also brings up the important point that petits-maîtres were often young men, sometimes just having entered society, sometimes having been in society for a short time. Whether a petit-maître mentor or a petit-maître apprentice, the feminized fashionable man uses perfume and rouge; he dresses like a woman, looks like one, and is a coward.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau focuses on the feminized appearance of the petit-maître in his play, *Narcisse ou l’amant de lui-même* (1753), where the main character's effeminacy is communicated through his looks: "par sa délicatesse et par l’affectation de sa parure, une espèce de femme cachée sous des habits d’homme" (1.1).\(^{109}\) In fact, the effeminate quality of the petit-maître is presented as a requisite element of the character in almost all of the plays and novels that include him. In Crébillon's *Les Egarements du cœur et de l’esprit* (1736) the infamous petit-maître Versac is described as a social butterfly who flutters about the salon from woman to woman: "après avoir longtemps rêvé, (il) traverse le cercle et dérange tout, pour aller dire à une femme qui est loin de lui qu'elle n'a pas assez de rouge, ou qu'il la trouve belle comme un ange" (*Egarements* 162); and in Diderot’s *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), typical petit-maîtres are portrayed as insects whose only interests lie in gossiping, bragging, and jumping from one topic to another, in fragmented and disconnected way:

The petit-maître's reputation for fickleness, over-indulgence, garish appearance and attention to fashion – in fact, a petit-maître in Desmahis's play *L'Impertinent* calls himself a "victime de la mode" (1.1)\(^{110}\) – makes him a target for criticism in plays, novels and other works on politics and aesthetics.

This chapter focuses on theatrical representations of the specifically effeminate quality of the petit-maître. It shows that the petit-maître's effeminacy in many eighteenth century comedies is a reaction against a very specific social ideal of masculinity, or *honnêteté*, discussed by several seventeenth-century theorists. I choose to concentrate here on theatrical representations because it is in comedies that the effeminacy of the petit-maître is not only most apparent but also crucial to the dramatic action. Often times in these plays, the petit-maître’s feminized appearance and demeanor are attractive to a female character and it ensures her attachment to him. But this attachment also provokes controversy because it causes a rift between the petit-maître and another principal male character interested in pursuing the same woman. The petit-maître and the other male character, usually a strong, brave, honorable type – an *honnête homme* or some variation – often end up facing each other in either a dispute or a physical confrontation and it is this opposition that allows the *honnête homme* character to finally reveal to the others the petit-maître’s schemes to exploit women. In the following pages, I will first examine

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what I see as two opposing views of feminine influence; second, I will investigate the concept of ideal masculine behavior in notable seventeenth-century French texts on honnêteté; and, finally, I will explore how the petit-maître, with his effeminate persona, serves as a parody of the type of man who fails to enact the tenets of honnêteté.

Feminine authority and two diverging views of female influence

The significance of feminine influence on the proper behavior of men is addressed for instance in Voltaire's *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1752), which implies that men’s appropriation of qualities normally attributed to women is a necessary element of men’s refinement and moral development:

Les maisons que tous les seigneurs bâtirent ou achetèrent dans Paris, les femmes qui y vécurent avec dignité, formèrent des écoles de politesse, qui retirèrent peu à peu les jeunes gens de cette vie de cabaret qui fut encore longtemps à la mode, et qui n'inspirait qu’une débauche hardie. […] La décence, dont on fut redevable principalement aux femmes qui rassemblèrent la société chez elles, rendit les esprits plus agréables.  

Voltaire focuses on proper social behavior, which he attributes to men acquiring *la politesse* - loosely translated as politeness, good manners, and good breeding. For Voltaire *la politesse* is not the sign of a degenerate effeminacy but rather the outward expression of virtue. *La politesse* inspires men to rise above the debauchery of brothels and cabarets and to discover *la décence*. Men learn *la politesse* and decency by socializing with women. Voltaire does not use the term "effeminate" (*efféminé*) to describe men - it is usually only used to speak of "womanly men" in a derogatory sense -

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but instead, he praises women’s influence on men to bring about men's emulation of some womanly qualities.

Moreover, according to Poullain de La Barre, women act as proverbial gatekeepers barring men from polite society; if a man wants to enter the salon, he must learn from her: "S'ils veulent rentrer dans le monde et y bien jouer leur personnage, ils sont obligé d'aller à l'école des Dames pour y apprendre la politesse, la complaisance, et tout le dehors qui fait aujourd'hui l'essentiel des honorés gens". The entrance into society is perhaps the most crucial rite of passage for a young man in eighteenth-century aristocratic culture because this is where he comes in contact with women. According to Poullain de La Barre, women hold the ultimate authority in the salon and men must obtain their approval. Men were taught above all that socializing was women’s specialty and that the influence of women in this domain was desirable because they could teach men the complaisance, attention to others, and sensitivity necessary to be pleasing in civil society, as well as the basics of polite conversation. It is only through embracing women’s influence in the art of socializing that a man can succeed and fully evolve to embody the ideal of masculinity that social interaction requires.

However, some authors note a possible drawback to this tutelage. They worry that the influence of women could easily risk working too well and push the man to appropriate not only women’s conversational skills, but also their other qualities, manners and constitution. Some texts from the late eighteenth century communicate an

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113 François Poullain de La Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes, discours physique et moral où l'on voit l'importance de se défaire des préjugés* (Paris: Antoine Dezallier, 1679), 37.
almost palpable fear of the over-influence of women on men. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, who writes exactly one century later than Poullain de la Barre, expresses a profound anxiety about "de-masculinization" and depicts effeminate petit-maîtres in his *Tableau de Paris* (1781-8) as symbols of the "de-naturalization" of an entire society:

Il y a deux siècles que nous avons eu la faiblesse d'imiter les femmes dans cet art de la frisure qui nous effémine et nous dénature[...]la rage de la frisure a gagné tous les états: garçons de boutiques, clercs de procureurs et de notaires, domestiques, cuisiniers, marmitons, tous versent à grands flots de la poudre sur leurs têtes, tous y ajustent des toupets pointus, des boucles étagées; l'odeur des essences et des poudres ambrées vous saisit chez le marchand du coin, comme chez le petit-maître élégant et retapé.\(^\text{114}\)

Mercier focuses on the tendency of many men to imitate women’s habits that effeminate them. According to Mercier, the imitation of women’s qualities serves also to de-naturalize men, or make them something other than what they should naturally be. A ‘natural’ man is one who is refined, but his refinement is not over-done or conspicuous. Men’s imitation of women’s hairdressing is the opposite of natural; it is described as a rage, an overwhelming craze that infects worldly men. Mercier specifically presents the petits-maîtres as the prototype of this craze; a petit-maître is an over-elegant man (*retapé*) who spurs the epidemic of effeminacy that arises from men’s misguided desire for feminine elegance. Mercier seems to target an egalitarianism of elegance by criticizing the fact that effeminacy affects men "de tout les états".

The notion of an epidemic of effeminacy that risks contaminating all aspects of society is also discussed by Rousseau. In his *Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les spectacles*, (1758) Rousseau denounces those literary works written by men who are preoccupied

with pleasing women because these works portray all societies (or more specifically French societies) in the eighteenth century as wrought with frivolity, pettiness, and bad taste:

Imaginez quelle peut être la trempe de l’âme d’un homme uniquement occupé de l’importante affaire d’amuser les femmes, et qui passe sa vie entière à faire pour elles […] Livrés à ces puériles habitudes, à quoi pourrions-nous jamais nous élever de grand? Nos talents, nos écrits se sentent de nos frivoles occupations; agréables, si l’on veut, mais petits et froids comme nos sentiments. […] Ces foules d’ouvrages éphémères qui naissent journellement, n’étant faits que pour amuser des femmes, et n’ayant ni force ni profondeur, volent tous de la toilette au comptoir. C’est le moyen de récrire incessamment les mêmes, et de les rendre toujours nouveaux. C’est pour cela que la plupart des productions de notre âge passeront avec lui, et la postérité croira qu’on fit bien peu de livres dans ce même siècle où l’on en fait tant.115

Rousseau is concerned with the notion of the petty overtaking the grand, meaning the noble or virtuous. This is a moral judgment that is articulated through the denunciation of men who spend their time in the pursuit of pleasure, women, and pleasing women. Although here Rousseau specifically addresses the subject of literature and discusses his perceived overall lack of depth and intelligence in the type of literature written for women or to please women, he implies that women’s influence over men in general is responsible for a certain quality of triviality in an entire society.

The writings of Voltaire and Poullain de La Barre concerning the importance of women’s influence on socializing men and, on the other hand, the writings of Mercier and Rousseau concerning the negative effects of effeminacy on an entire society highlight how this quality is presented in the figure of the petit-maître: it means he is obsessed with

women, he exploits them, and he is the opposite of the *honnête homme* who knows how to assimilate feminine influence, like sympathy, availability, and concern for others.

**Effeminacy and sexual identity**

Effeminacy for Rousseau and Mercier stems from feminine influence. The substantive "effeminacy" or rather the adjective "effeminate" is not significantly elaborated in historical French dictionaries; in the first (1694), fourth (1762) and sixth editions (1835) of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, *efféminé* is simply defined as "Qui tient la faiblesse d'une femme". The second volume of the *Dictionnaire de Furetière* defines *efféminé* slightly differently: "qui se dit d'un homme mol, voluptueux, qui est devenu semblable à une femme". The adjective *mol* comes from *mollitia*, which in Latin means debauchery, such as male passive homosexuality; an effeminate man is like a woman because he takes a similar sexual position.

The idea of the effeminate man being like a woman in the sense that he is the passive partner in same-sex acts dates back to Antiquity. In ancient Greece, an effeminate man, like a pre-pubescent male, lacks hard muscles and strength; the greek *malakos* means physical softness and: "denotes the feminine. It always represents the negative female characteristic to which the positive masculine characteristic is contrasted. In fact, *malakos* often referred to men who prettied themselves up to further their heterosexual

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exploits".\textsuperscript{117} In other words, effeminacy indicated both a man who desired women and a malleable and supple body, which means that the man has preserved, in his adult age, the physical qualities of a young boy.

A male body that was considered desirable was strong and robust and was often described as "excelling". For example, Timarkos, a notorious male prostitute in ancient Greece, was physically attractive to other men and was portrayed as "excelling others in appearance".\textsuperscript{118} The adjective "excelling", signifies muscular, strong, and physically fit: "applicable to any living thing, it (excelling) denotes the age at which one is most attractive and desirable [...] the young Autolykos whose beauty, like a 'light in the dark' dumbfounded all the guests at a party [...] he had just won the \textit{pankration} (a ferocious blend of boxing and wrestling)" (69). Timarkos, as the young, attractive male escort, may have had the same type of strong, solid, muscular appearance as Autolykos, which was considered both virile and beautiful.\textsuperscript{119}

Furthermore, effeminacy and same-sex activity were not intertwined. For example, although the male escort Timarkhos engaged in sexual acts with men, he was not considered effeminate: "Timarkhos is no where described [...] as effeminate in appearance or manner" (Dover 69). (In fact, evidence of the association of effeminacy to same-sex desire appears by and large later in the eighteenth century, when we start to see


evidence of the categorization of sexual identity based on the gender of participants\textsuperscript{120}).

An older man engaging in sexual acts with a young and physically fit man did not threaten either man's masculinity; on the contrary, sometimes men who preferred the exclusive company of other men were seen as very masculine because they wanted to surround themselves with individuals of physical strength and firmness.

It was not gender but rather age that acted as the distinguishing factor in male sexual identity. Young men's bodies - which are smooth and relatively hairless either because they have not yet passed to the age where hair grows abundantly over the body, or they have just surpassed the age of puberty - were desirable to older men. But an older man who shaved or epilated, either to refine his appearance or to recapture the aesthetic of his lost youth, was admonished as effeminate: "L'épilation témoigne du désir de l'homme adulte de conserver son aspect adolescent [...] au-delà de l’âge ou l'habitude l'autorise [...] Aristophane oppose ces 'culs rasés' aux 'culs noirs' des hommes virils".\textsuperscript{121} Shaving signified not only effeminacy and the effort to recapture a youthful aesthetic, but also an obsession with women and a desire to imitate them: "Les personnages d'Agathon et de Clisthène incarnent la perversion du male efféminé: épilés, rasés, vêtus comme des

\textsuperscript{120} Bryan T. Regan discusses a shift in heteronormative views of sexuality in the eighteenth century: "Before the eighteenth century, it was conceivable that any man or woman might engage in the unnatural act of sodomy as part of a more generalized 'bisexual' behavior. [...] This sexual model began to change in the eighteenth century, although the reasons for the shift remain unclear. [...] In this new gender order, sodomites constructed themselves (and were constructed) as effeminate in opposition to manly men [...] This paradigm helped lead to the beginning of distinct sexual identities" "The Enlightenment Confronts Homosexuality," in \textit{Homosexuality in Modern France}. Eds. Jeffrey Merrick and Brian T. Ragan, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12. See also: Jeffrey Merrick, "The Marquis de Villette and Mlle de Raucourt: Representations of Male and Female Sexual Deviance in Late Eighteenth-Century France," in \textit{Homosexuality in Modern France}. Eds. Jeffrey Merrick and Brian T. Ragan, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 30 -53

\textsuperscript{121} Sartre, 42
femmes, parlant comme elles, il sont l'image inversée de la virilité".122 A relatively hairless body was, on the one hand, a sign of youth in men and, on the other hand, a sign of femininity in women, but it was not a sign of effeminacy in young men. It is only older men who epilate that are considered the opposite of virile. There is an association between men, their desire for other men, youth, strong physiques, and virility. While a young and physically fit man is both masculine and thus desirable to older men, an effeminate man is considered constitutionally soft and he is not necessarily the idealized object of male sexual desire.

Some of these views of masculinity endure in eighteenth-century France where effeminacy still does not indicate same-sex preference. A womanizer at this time is effeminate because he spends all of his time with women in the efforts to seduce them. A man who engages in sex acts with other men, at this time, is seen as morally unrestrained and as behaving aberrantly, but he does not have a separate identity from other men.123 One example is Sade's character Dolmancé in his *Philosophie dans le boudoir* who engages in sex with men but is not portrayed as effeminate.

In the eighteenth century, a man's desire to refine his appearance to an extreme is still considered effeminate, and an effeminate man is still a man who is obsessed with women. During the eighteenth century in France, the opinion of the effeminate man's

122 Ibid. 50
sexuality begins to change, but it is still rather profoundly informed by the Ancient tradition. As noted by Craig A. Williams in his investigation of masculinity in antiquity, effeminacy was a "symptom of an underlying failure to live up to the central imperative of masculinity: control and dominion, both of others and oneself"\textsuperscript{124}, and it continues in pre-modern France to be defined by the same criteria. Since the effeminate man is one who conspicuously fails to realize an ideal of masculine behavior that is rooted in the notion of control of the self and others, we might look to the \textit{honnête homme}, the pre-modern, social man \textit{non plus ultra}, to determine the measures of idealized masculinity. The \textit{honnête homme} is a man who lives in society and relishes in it; he is the perfect gentleman who displays an inherent naturalness in his manners, actions, and speech and he exemplifies the notions of virtue and integrity. He feels perfectly comfortable in every social situation. Comparing the effeminate petit-maître to the traditionally masculine \textit{honnête homme} will help us to reveal the ways in which the petit-maître parodies those men who do not live up to \textit{honnête} standards.

\textit{The Honnête homme and ideal masculinity}

\textit{Honnêteté} is an ideal, "une qualité morale, un sentiment du cœur"\textsuperscript{125}, "la préférence des autres à soi"\textsuperscript{126}, and "the capacity to please (that) is both the natural gift of his aristocratic nature and the product of a hidden art, both concurring to create a charm,

\textsuperscript{125} Versini, 187.
\textsuperscript{126} Mme de Lambert, \textit{Avis d’une Méré à sa fille} (Paris 1728), 183.
a *je-ne-sais-quoi* that cannot be analyzed because it knows no rules or codification".\(^{127}\)

Honnêteté is the cultivation of virtue and of social graces and is all about appearing as though these social graces were not learned but rather come completely naturally. It is an "esthetic, ethical and social discourse of ideal comportment" and the codification and simultaneous internalization and assimilation of what were considered proper social behaviors.\(^{128}\) In other words, it is a "habitus" of both discursive but also importantly non-discursive aspects of manliness that bound men into an elite group. An *honnête homme* was a perfect gentleman who knew how to behave properly in any social situation, be it with men or with women. He could adapt his speech and manners to fit any circumstance all the while upholding certain tenets of virtue. He was a courageous, honorable, pleasing, gracious, and flexible; a man whose wit and intelligence were revered.

Baldassarre Castiglione, in *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528), was among the first early modern writers during the Italian Renaissance to discuss the concept that he termed *sprezzatura*: a technique of behaving well in society that noble men should master and an "art of doing everything as if it came naturally".\(^{129}\) Castiglione’s work transcended national boundaries and his idea of acting according to what is natural was highly influential in early modern France, where he was translated by Gabriel Chappuis in 1580. Later, in the seventeenth century, Nicolas Faret discussed naturalness in his bourgeois representation of the *honnête homme*. In his *L’Honnête homme ou l’art de plaire à la cour* (1630), Faret adopts Castiglione's notion of a technique of sociability and

\(^{127}\) Russo, 385.  
\(^{128}\) Seifert, 11.  
\(^{129}\) Russo, 385.
emphasizes a self-fashioning that contributes to a universal ideal of social harmony. Faret’s text, rather than examining *honnêteté* as a principle, instead enumerates the qualities that the *honnête homme* must make an effort to display. Faret emphasizes that the combination of all of these qualities gives the *honnête homme* a certain natural grace that cannot be taught. Seventy years later, another famous text on the subject appears by Antoine Gombault chevalier de Méré, a French courtier and theorist. Méré picks up on Castiglione’s and Faret’s ideas but presents them in a new way. In his *Discours de la vraie honnêteté* (1701), Méré describes *honnêteté* as a naturalness of action and a purity of intentions, like Faret, but he also theorizes *honnêteté* in a way that Faret – who is more focused on praxis – does not. For Méré, *honnêteté* is a "science" because it includes an ordered understanding of the skill of performance. In general, the French concept of *honnêteté*, informed by Castiglione, described by Faret, and theorized by Méré and others all focus on the role the *honnête homme* plays in society: he adopts a public persona or dons a social mask with the intention of pleasing others by making his acquired social skills appear as if they come completely naturally.

**Honnêteté: naturalness and feminine influence**

The idea of *le naturel* is crucial to both the philosophy and practice of *honnêteté*. Naturalness is discussed in texts on *honnêteté* and is often juxtaposed to the learned or the acquired. In this section of the chapter, I will compare how the texts on *honnêteté* by Faret and Méré illustrate their slightly different ideas of how the natural and the artificial combine in order to constitute *honnête* behavior.
According to Faret, whose *L'Honnête homme ou l'art de plaire à la cour* is considered more of a practical guide to *honnêteté* than a philosophical reflection on what constitutes *l'art de plaire, le naturel* is that which is innate from birth, and it must work in conjunction with acquired skills for the person to be able to cultivate behavioral civility: "il n’y a que les heureuses naissances qui avec ces aydes estrangeres s’eslevent jusques au comble de la perfection". But without the natural disposition for the cultivation of this perfection, no acquired skill or talent will be sufficient to produce the character necessary for the man to develop fully into an *honnête homme*. Faret privileges naturalness over acquired skills but also praises those who are only somewhat gifted from birth with natural grace and charm but who manage nonetheless to cultivate these qualities and gain the respect of others:

Entre ces deux extrémités, il se trouve encore un milieu de ceux qui n’ont pas reçu d’extraordinaires faveurs de la Nature, mais aussi qui n’ont point de remarquables imperfections: Et ceux là peuvent avec l’ayde des precepts, et par des soins assidus corriger leurs defauts, et meriter à la fin l’estime (11-12).

The *honnête homme* must be born with certain intuitions and a disposition for developing good character but this ideal can also be cultivated in those men who are only marginally gifted with these qualities by the careful study of the tenets of good behavior. Faret’s text implies that the natural and the acquired must work together and are not mutually exclusive: "La bonne education y sert encore de beaucoup" (19). For Faret, although it is preferable that the gentleman be of noble birth, it is not a steadfast requirement (this is all the more logical when we consider Faret's own bourgeois origins). *Honnêteté* is universal in that any talented man, not just aristocrats, can cultivate perfect gentility.131

131 This universality also appears in La Rochefoucauld's description of "airs and manners". But, paradoxically, La Rochefoucauld also emphasizes the notion of individuality in naturalness: "Il y a un air
A non-noble man can excel in the art de plaire if he combines his learned behavior with his aptitudes.

For Méré, on the other hand, artifice takes on a more important role. Naturalness is not sufficient for a man to perfect his social persona. Refinement is mostly a social act; it is driven by being born with a natural propensity or ability to learn refinement, but it is only fully developed through education: "J’ai quelquefois vu disputer, si cette qualité si rare vient principalement d’une heureuse naissance, ou d’une excellente éducation; et je crois, que pour l’acquérir en perfection, il est nécessaire que la nature y contribue et que l’art, comme partout ailleurs, achève ce qu’elle a commencé".132

In Méré's text, naturalness is represented as the ability to make certain refined and learned manners appear as if they come naturally. However, to Méré, learning is not imitation; he makes the distinction between imitation and the expression of true honnêteté: "quand on pense à se rendre honnête-homme, en observant un fort honnête-homme, on ne se doit pas attacher à des choses peu considérables, [...] à prendre sa mine, ou sa voix, ou sa démarche, il faut imiter et surpasser, si l'on peut, les vrais avantages qui le distinguent" (71). There is a certain je-ne-sais-quoi that comes from the observation of a masculine model, the correct identification of the model's intangible qualities, and knowledge of how to transcend, rather than simply to imitate, these qualities.

An example of this is given by Méré: "qui convient à la figure et aux talents de chaque personne; on perd toujours quand on le quitte pour en prendre un autre. Il faut essayer de connaître celui qui nous est naturel, n'en point sortir, et le perfectionner autant qu'il nous est possible." See: La Rochefoucauld OC, 432. Each person, regardless of rank or station, has the capacity for appearing perfectly natural by acting in a way that is specific to his or her tastes, talents, and station. There is no single and universal imposed behavior that suits each person; rather, the one, universal tenet that rings true for all individuals is to act according to one's own abilities, background, and originality.

akin to creative imitation in literature and poetry: *inventio* means following great models but doing it in a personal way.

Naturalness in Méré’s text is not at all natural in the innate sense but in the sense that the *honnête homme* makes his learned capacity for pleasing people appear seamless, unrehearsed, and almost involuntary. For Méré, provided that a man appears charming and masters the conventions that are pleasing to polite company (*le monde*), his private virtues or vices are not of primary importance.¹³³ Méré's *honnête homme* is a good actor: "C'est un grand avantage que d'être bon acteur".¹³⁴ Honnêteté is a skill because it is about the command of appearances. This differs from Faret's presentation of the *le naturel* in the *honnête homme* because he does not necessarily recognize the dichotomy between natural virtue and the appearance of it.¹³⁵

In Faret’s text, the *honnête homme* is born with a certain propensity, *un naturel*, for learning pleasing social behavior. He has an innate, sensitive disposition that allows him to understand the world because he is impressionable and affected by things around him, be they objects or the words or actions of people. He has a certain sensitivity that makes him receptive to proper influence. Faret discusses this type of sensitivity in the sections dealing with women's conversation. For example, he talks about *la grâce* and notes that the *honnête homme’s* speech must express this quality. The *honnête homme’s* conversation must have "toutes les grâces du langage" (Faret 88) because "l’excellence

¹³³ Maurice Magendie remarks: "Pourvu qu’on ait dans le monde, cet agrément délicat, ce sens des convenances, qui charment les connaisseurs, peu importe que dans la vie privée, ou dans la vie publique, on ait des qualités morales qui ne seraient d’aucun usage parmi la belle société; c'est l'aptitude sociable de l'individu, et non sa valeur intrinsèque qui intéresse Méré." *La Politesse mondaine et les théories de l'honnêteté en France au XVIIe siècle de 1600 à 1660. Tome I.* (Paris: Slatkin, 1925), 773.


des bons mots consiste principalement à estre courts, aigus, clairs et proferez avec bonne grace" (85). Interwoven with the idea of sensitivity in discourse are the notions of simplicity and authenticity: the ideal man’s speech must be clear and to the point in the sense that, in conversation, he must not interrupt others, he must not quickly change subjects, and he must not repeat the same points (he must not *pirouetter* in conversation like the petit-maître described by Diderot). The *honnête homme* has a clear main idea that he conveys simply and honestly.

Indeed, the *honnête homme* expresses his sensitivity when he is in the presence of women. It is in women's company that he exemplifies the perfectly socialized man. He must not only respect women but also make an active effort to please them: "En suitte de tous ces soins que l’on met à rendre l’exterieur agreable, le premier et principal precepte que doit observer celuy qui veut plaire aux femmes, c’est de les honorer avec tous les respects, et toutes les soumissions qui luy sont possibles et convenables" (95). In this way, the *honnête homme* learns sensitivity from women and thus *honnêteté* grants women authority. Faret enacts a typical lexicon of sensitivity and pleasure by using the terms *le charme, le divertissement, le ravissement, le plaisir*, and *l’agréable* to describe the elements of proper socialization with women.136 Conversation with women is "la plus douce et la plus agreable" (93) of all and must demonstrate "rien ny de rude, ny d’aigre, ny de trop éclatant, ny de trop foible: Au contraire, qu’il soit doux, clair, distinct, plein et net, en sort qu’il penetre facilement jusques dans l’ame, sans trouver aucune resistance à

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136 Pierre Dumonceaux reveals some specific words that were used in France the seventeenth century to express and describe sensitivity: for example, le charme, divertir, ravir, le supplice, plaire, l’agréable. *Langue et Sensibilité au XVIIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1975)

I will note also that in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* Rousseau attributes these qualities in Saint-Preux to his interaction with Julie. Rousseau's Saint-Preux has assimilated the values of *honnêteté*, although Rousseau rejects the notion of its aristocratic origin.
l’entrée" (94). Interaction with women serves as the ultimate valuation of the *honnête homme’s* sensitivity: "Enfin c’est icy que toutes les reigles de la plus delicate complaisance se doivent mettre en pratique, et que les plus humbles soumissions sont de bonne grace à qui que ce soit" (96).

For Faret, it is women who teach men to access their sensitivity and it is this quality that allows them to develop an ideal social presence. Méré also emphasizes the importance of the "graces of women", which men naturally lack: "Il me semble donc, que le commerce des honnêtes-gens est à rechercher; mais les entretiens des Dames, dont les grâces font penser aux bienséances, sont encore plus nécessaire pour s’achever dans l’honnêteté" (Méré 75). But unlike Faret, Méré, in his discussion about women’s influence, warns against a superficial type of polite interaction that both women and some men (whom he refers to as "impertinents") can fall into:

Il n'est rien de plus aimable que ces Dames si délicats, qui craignent la foule. Aussi pour dire le vrai, une Dame qui peut converser avec un galant-homme, n'est pas excusable de se divertir avec un impertinent: il y a même une sorte de politesse qui n'est pas d'une extrême mérite, et où il entre mois de goût que d'habitude. (80)

Méré recognizes the possibility of bad taste entering into polite conversation and behavior, which arises from a shallow grasp of the essence of *honnêteté*. Moreover, Méré refers to this bad behavior as "superficielle, et quelquefois même bien ridicule" (80). He conjures the image of the petit-maître who either naively tries too hard to act the part of the gallant man without truly understanding social commerce, like Crébillon's Meilcour; or it is the petit-maître who lacks the essence of good character and *esprit* necessary to embody the ideal, like Crébillon's Versac, Pranzi, and Mazulhim or De la Morlière's Almaïr. In any case, the man comes off as offensive and insulting as well as
superficial and ridiculous. It is curious that Méré raises this subject in his discussion of women, as if to imply that women are somehow linked to the possibility of the slippage from good to bad taste. He does not use the word *efféminé* when he refers to impertinent men who only play at *honnêteté* without assimilating it, but he specifies that this is a type of man that often converses with women.

Unlike the *honnête homme*, the petit-maître is obsessed with women. He also fails to demonstrate a positive control of himself and of others: he is not self-collected, he cannot control his passions, and he cannot appeal to women by being sensitive and attentive. He does everything, not to please people, but rather to make people ill at ease. The *honnête* qualities of naturalness and feminine grace are enacted by the theatrical *honnête homme*: he is courageous, honorable, and heroic (masculine), but also sensitive, caring, witty, and he makes everyone feel comfortable. The *honnête homme* is attentive to women socially, not for sexual purposes or to manipulate them. Thus, the petit-maître demonstrates the antithesis of *honnêteté* because he fixates on women in order to exploit them.

*The Petit-maître on stage: honnêteté and anti-civility*

Depictions of the petit-maître’s effeminacy in plays signal two reactions to *honnêteté*: one conventional and one transgressive. On the one hand, effeminacy is an element of the ideologically driven caricature of *honnêteté* by those authors who want to use the petit-maître figure as a countermodel to highlight the good qualities of the successful *honnête homme*. On the other, some portrayals of the petit-maître's theatrical
effeminacy undermine the *honnête homme*, putting the model into question by showing that sociability might be nothing more than a mask.

Many plays of the petit-maître genre written throughout the eighteenth century emphasize the effeminacy of the petit-maître, such as *Le Petit-maître corrigé* (1734) by Marivaux, *Narcisse ou l’amant de lui-même* (1752) by Rousseau, *Le Petit-maître en province* (1765) by Harny, *Les Petits-maîtres* (1719) by Van Effen and the list goes on. However, a few popular ones illustrate clearly the different ways that this trait emphasizes reactions to *honnêteté*. We will start with the analysis of one play that was considered to be a precursor to the petit-maître genre, Dancourt’s *Chevalier à la mode*, a comedy first staged in 1687 and performed at least fifty times throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Next, we will examine a play from the early eighteenth century, Alain-Réné Lesage’s *Turcaret* (1709), which includes two petits-maîtres. One is an effeminate man and the performative antithesis of the *honnête homme* and serves to accentuate the virtuousness of the *honnête* model. The other petit-maître demonstrates a theatrical ploy because he ends up being the only character in the play that also manifests qualities of the ideal *honnête homme*. *Turcaret* focuses on the same aspects that Dancourt emphasizes but also exploits a more fully developed petit-maître caricature. Finally, I will examine a play by Louis de Boissy performed over sixty times between 1740 and 1798 called *Les Dehors Trompeurs ou l’homme du jour* in which the petit-maîtres is portrayed primarily as having *honnête* qualities and turns out not to be a petit-maître. It is not necessarily that this play represents an *honnête* petit-maître, since petits-
maîtres are always the opposite of honnête; rather, it presents a less extreme portrait of the type, which expresses a certain anxiety regarding sociability.

Dancourt’s *Chevalier à la mode* (1687) somewhat predates the petit-maître genre (which Frédéric Deloffre purports to have begun around the 1730s\(^{137}\)) but serves as one of its formational precursors, thus indicating that in Dancourt's time, ideological critiques of sociability are not yet dominant, as they will later become. This comedy in five acts focuses primarily on the Chevalier de Villefontaine who attempts to seduce three women: he seeks the financial security of a marriage to a noble marquise, looks for the same with a bourgeois widow, and he pursues the carnal pleasure of an affair with a young, innocent girl of noble birth. The play begins with the bourgeois widow confessing her infatuation with the chevalier and ends with all three of his women discovering that he had written them the same love letter and that his primary interest was money and social prestige. Throughout the play, Dancourt unveils the perils of a society in which the values of civility (*honnêteté*) - honor, justice, modesty, equity, and fidelity - can be sacrificed in return for financial security. The play’s main theme centers on the critique of the negligence of these values and we will ultimately discover that the chevalier is a man whose appropriation of feminine qualities serves as evidence of the way he falsely represents the qualities of a true honnête homme.

The fashionable man in the *Chevalier à la mode* is first of all described as: "le plus joli homme du monde" (1.3). We might assume that the expression "joli homme"

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expresses a feminine quality, as it is normally women who are described as "jolie".

However, the term "joli homme" is equivocal: the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* (1694) indicates that it refers both to a young man who has just entered into the world and has succeeded at gaining the respect and good favor of others:

"On dit d’un jeune homme qui commence à entrer dans le monde, et qui s’y distingue et s’y fait estimer que c’est un joli homme"; and to an insolent young man who has overstepped some boundaries of propriety:

> On dit par mépris à un homme qui fait ou dit quelque chose qui déplait qu’il est joli, je vous trouve bien joli, vraiment vous êtes joli de me parler de la sorte […] En ce sens il se dit aussi de ceux qui ont mis leurs affaires en désordre par la débauche, par leur mauvaise conduite.

In both cases, the man has succeeded by portraying his own self in such a way that creates a persona – whether it be a persona that pleases others as in the first definition or one that displeases (*qui déplait*). ¹³⁸

At the point in the plot when the chevalier is described as the "plus joli homme du monde", it is not yet clear to the reader which connotation the play invokes. But it is an expression that serves to foreshadow the chevalier’s somewhat contradictory character: he is both a man well respected in his milieu – "Qu’il est obligeant! Et qu’il dit les choses de bonne grâce! Au moins, Monsieur le chevalier, Lisette m’a rendu compte de votre honnêteté" (1.8) – and one who is exposed in the end for the impecunious scoundrel he truly is. In court, he is generally seen as ridiculous:

¹³⁸ Pierre Saint-Amand discusses the "joli homme" in his article dedicated to theatrical petits-maîtres but he does not mention the fact that the definition of "joli homme" from the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie* presents two sides of the type. My analysis here takes both poles of the definition into consideration.
Le chevalier de Villefontaine! Tu te moques, mon enfant, cet homme-là n’est point fait pour épouser. C’est un aventurier qui n’en a pas le temps, un jeune extravagant qui n’a pas cent pistoles de revenu, qu’on ne connaît à la cour que par le ridicule qu’il s’y donne et qui n’a pour tout mérite que celui de boire et de prendre du tabac. (1.5)

In his own milieu, which is slightly outside the court, the chevalier may be seen as honnête: he is perceived as having that natural grace of action and demeanor that pleases company, he pays attention to others, he is sensitive enough to know how to speak to them and how to interact with them, and seems to show respect for them. All the while, however, the true character behind his mask of sociability begins to come through as his efforts to seduce the three women are exposed. The father of the young innocent girl, who happens to be the brother of the marquise the chevalier aims to marry for her money, is not deceived by the chevalier’s ruse: "Non, non Monsieur, il n’est pas besoin de vous cacher […] Quoi! En même jour, vouloir épouser ma sœur et ma fille? C’est bien avoir la rage d’épouser pour me persécuter! (5.6).

On the one hand, the chevalier has successfully carved a niche for himself in society. On the other, he aims to seduce three women and take their money. The honnête homme also creates a persona by seeking to please others thereby enhancing his own character in their eyes and expressing his social virtue. But the joli homme in this play is the figure that conveys the downside of the honnête homme’s act of social masking: the joli homme expresses the possibility that playing a role may cover an ignoble character rather than enhance a noble one.

The fact that the chevalier is so well versed in the art of seduction indicates that
he has dedicated much effort to examining what pleases and displeases women: he fixates on women in order to manipulate them. Here, it is also a fascination or obsession with women that is expressed as the appropriation of feminine qualities. The joli homme pays very close attention to looks and clothing, so much so that he even inquires about one woman's tailor: "En vérité? Tu es une des plus aimables filles que je connaisse. Mais qui te fait tes manteaux? Je veux mettre ton ouvrier en crédit. Par ma foi, voilà le plus galant négligé qu’on ait jamais vu!" (1.6). Although the honnête homme is able to interact with women, the chevalier twists this connection. In so doing, he expresses the emerging concern regarding the possible dark side of sociability and refinement: that it is an art that may be used to cheat and lie, in other words, an art of hypocrisy. The chevalier in Dancourt's late seventeenth-century comedy is a figure who represents the developing backlash against the discourse of sociability that becomes more apparent in the eighteenth-century petit-maître.

Alain-René Lesage’s Turcaret, (1709) includes two more developed petit-maître characters that each represent conventional and transgressive reactions to honnêteté. On the one hand, the chevalier, like most petit-maîtres, attempts to carry out a scheme and to manipulate the other characters for his own benefit. He is described as pleasing to certain women, with his "ses airs passions, son ton radouci, sa face minaudière" (1.1). In this play, he also has the love of the main female character, the petit-maîtresse baroness. She admits openly to her affection for him: "Je suis entraînée par un penchant si tendre que je ne puis y resister" (1.4). The chevalier’s effeminate manners and airs attract the love of
the somewhat clueless but also devious baroness and we will see that the relationship between these two serves as the basis for the dramatic action of the play. The play also includes a marquis who at first appears to be a petit-maître but turns out to have the qualities of an honnête homme.

The plot centers on the ways in which the chevalier attempts to profit from the baroness’s feelings for him; like many effeminate petits-maîtres, he fixates on her and exploits her. We learn in the first act that the baroness, a widow, aims to marry the rich bourgeois, Monsieur Turcaret, for his money. Thus, as the opposite of an honnête femme, she is scheming, which explains her attraction to the conniving chevalier whom she intends to keep as her lover. We learn additionally that the chevalier attempts to steal money from Turcaret and from the baroness in order to cover his enormous gambling debts. The chevalier’s plans are gradually revealed when he sends his lackey to the baroness to offer her a gift, a beautiful portrait of an unknown young woman, and to relay news of his current impecunious state brought on by the loss of all of his money in a card game. The chevalier hopes he will both win the baroness over with the gift as well as gain her pity in order to swindle money from her. The baroness does indeed give into her feelings and offers the chevalier a diamond ring, originally given to her by Turcaret, so that he can pay his debtors.

In the meantime, Turcaret offers the baroness yet another gift, a large check that she in turn gives the chevalier to cash. In offering him the check, she asks the chevalier to return to his creditor to buy back her ring with this new money. Eventually Turcaret
discovers that the baroness gave her ring to the *chevalier* and correctly surmises that she is in love with the *chevalier* and not with him.

The turning point in the story occurs when the marquis arrives on the scene to talk to Turcaret and finds him with the baroness. The marquis is described as having qualities of the petit-maître: "un jeune seigneur, fort agréable de sa personne, mais dont les mœurs et la conduite ne conviennent point" (2.3), and indeed displays some qualities of the type, such as a destructive fondness for drinking and women. But in reality he turns out to be an *honnête homme*. He reveals to the baroness the truth about her future husband: that he pays for her gifts by benefiting from the debts of others and that he stole the diamond ring he gave to the baroness from the marquis himself. The marquis exposes Turcaret showing that he is not the successful, morally upstanding bourgeois gentleman, the "homme de bien et d’honneur" (3.5), that the baroness believes him to be. The marquis describes Turcaret in no uncertain terms: "C’est l’usurier le plus vif! Il vend son argent au poids de l’or. […]" (3.5). The marquis also unveils the truth about the ring that Turcaret gave to the baroness:

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\text{J’eus besoin d’argent, j’avais un brillant de cinq cent louis; on m’a adressa à M. Turcaret; M. Turcaret me renvoya à un de ses commis et c’est celui qui tient son bureau d’usure. Le temps est passé et mon diamant est perdu. […] (Il regarde le diamant de la baronne) Eh! le voila, Madame! (3.5)}
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The marquis is the "good" character because he is the one with a valid claim of ownership of the luxury object; the diamond is a symbolic marker of social legitimacy. Also, he reveals the information about Turcaret in such a truthful, straightforward, frank manner that the baroness instinctively believes all of his accusations. Like the sensitive
*honnête homme*, he is sincere and honest in his speech. He clearly and immediately announces the truth about Turcaret: "vous connaissez cet homme? Il vous ruinera" (3.5) and, unlike most petit-maîtres, he does not aim to slander others merely for the sake of his own amusement when he truthfully declares "mon dessin n’est pas d’insulter" (3.5). He also does not put on airs and he openly admits his own faults: "Ma tante […] sera toute étonnée de me voir si raisonnable, car elle m’a presque toujours vu ivre" (3.5). In fact, he talks about the balance that he seeks in his own life and implies that his reputation with merchants is not as unfavorable as that of other young noblemen of his ilk: "Je mène une vie réglée, je suis toujours à table; j’ai du crédit chez les traiteurs parce que l’on sait que je dois bientôt hériter d’une vieille tante" (3.5).

The only role that the marquis plays is that of the 'whistle-blower'; he does not complicate the plot with his own selfish motives but rather moves the action forward by supplying the one crucial piece of information on which the entire plot hinges: that Turcaret is not the upstanding bourgeois gentleman he is believed to be. The marquis represents the sole character in the play that displays qualities of *honnêteté*: despite appearing to be a petit-maître at first, he is truthful and candid. He is also the only one who is able to detect lies and he immediately sets them straight by revealing the truth.

In fact, at the end of the play, the marquis is the only character that is not punished or avenged in any way because his behavior did not merit correction, unlike that of the *chevalier*, the baroness, and Turcaret. The *chevalier* ends up being duped by his own valet who steals the money that the chevalier stole from the baroness. The baroness
is left alone without a rich husband or a lover: she renounces the chevalier when she
discovers that he was trying to steal from her and she abandons Turcaret when she
discovers that he is both married and in irreparable debt. Turcaret is left penniless when
his creditors discover that he has no money to cover his debts and his estranged wife,
who had previously been kept in the country because the two do not get along, now vows
to stay in Paris with him "[pour] l’accabler d’injures" for the rest of his life (3.6). The
only main character who does not come to a tragic end is the marquis who actually
succeeds in getting back his ring and exposing Turcaret.

In this comedy, the chevalier is a foil for the honnête homme: he seduces the
baroness with his feminized persona. His graceful manners and pleasing appearance
allow him to manipulate her. She does not discover until the end that he is not in love
with her as she is with him. The most important aspect of honnêteté is a natural
appearance. Already with his effeminate appearance, the chevalier opposes this idea: his
"charm" makes a caricature of honnêteté ("ses airs passionnés, son ton radouci, sa face
minaudière"). He is also not natural in the way that his intentions do not coincide with his
actions and speech: he hides his true motivations behind a mask of overly polite behavior.

On the other hand, the marquis's main motivation in the play is to expose
Turcaret's lies. The marquis is not presented as a masked character; his true intentions
are clear. By unveiling Turcaret's lies, the marquis untangles the web of deceit spun by
each of the other characters. He is the paradigm of the natural man because he does not
put on airs or attempt to hide any of his motives behind a veil of flattery and bravado.
Lesage's comedy includes two petit-maître characters: one that enacts principles that starkly contrast with *honnêteté* and one that calls into question the ideology of *honnêteté*.

Finally, in another eighteenth-century comedy, *Les Dehors trompeurs ou l'homme du jour* (1740) by Louis de Boissy, there are two petits-maîtres that both express doubt about the authenticity of the portrayal of *honnêteté*, thus calling the *honnête* model into question. The marquis has assimilated some feminine qualities, but they turn out to be the qualities of an *honnête homme*. In the baron character, effeminacy is not as obvious as in other plays' portrayals, but he ends up being similar to many petits-maîtres.

The play begins with the baron and the marquis meeting and discussing their lives, their desires, their philosophies of life, and finally their perspectives on women. It so happens that the woman the baron intends to marry is the same woman the marquis loves. The baron, however, has a completely different opinion of her than the marquis: to the baron, she is vapid and incapable of thinking and speaking intelligently. To the marquis, she is the most graceful, charming, and intelligent woman he has ever known. As the plot unfolds, we discover that she is not "stupide" as the baron would have it, but a perfectly sensitive and intelligent woman worthy of respect and esteem. She loves the marquis and, because the baron treats her with contempt, she chooses not to engage with him on either a sentimental or intellectual level thereby appearing obtuse to him. This portrait is not necessarily one of an *honnête femme* – a true *honnête femme* would not hide her intelligence and wit for a man – thus the play seems to indicate that this is the type of woman that comes alive only when she is in love. The notion of "stupide" in this
context is the opposite of honnête: stupidity here is the lack of wit, the absence of social graces, and the incapacity to speak and think clearly.

In the first act, there is not much differentiation made between the two petit-maîtres: they share so many of the same thoughts and perspectives that they decide to enter into a pact of eternal friendship. This is a typical quality of the petit-maître type whose real historical models were a group of men who made vows to each other and to the group never to abandon each other either by falling in love with women or getting married. The comic aspect of these characters is becomes apparent when the marquis vows to the baron that they will remain together forever. It is an ironic statement because it is impractical and untrue:

Mon estime pour vous est égale à la vôtre ;  
Et je vous ai d’abord distingué de tout autre.  
Je vous connais, Monsieur, depuis fort peu de temps,  
Et vous m’êtes plus cher qu’un ami de dix ans. […]  
Ne nous quittons plus, soyons toujours ensemble.  
Le malheur nous unit, et le goût nous rassemble (1.3).

But gradually the differences between the two characters begin to reveal themselves. The baron develops as a character that disdains most women and the marquis does not. Moreover, the baron implicitly breaks their pact by deciding to marry. He reveals his plans to marry a woman whom he considers to be nothing more than a pretty face:

C’est un être qui sait à peine articuler ;  
Triste sans sentiment, rêveuse sans idée,  
C’est par le seul instinct qu’elle paraît guidée.  
Dans le temps qu’elle lance un coup d’œil enchanteur,

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Un silence stupide en dément la douceur.
D’aucune impression son âme n’est émue,
Et je vais épouser une belle statue. [...] 
j’ y dois renoncer.
Auprès d'elle il n' est rien que n' ait tenté ma flamme (2.1).

He shows very little respect for his supposed fiancée and for women in general. He observes a lack of sensitivity in her – that her soul is unable to be affected by any impression. According to the baron, she lacks a natural intelligence. His discourse often includes insults and uses terms that starkly contrast with the values of honnêteté such as describing women as "gauches" and "imbeciles":

Ces imbéciles-là, gauches en toutes choses,
Ou ne vous disent mot, ou ricanent sans causes; [...] 
Je serais trop heureux de me voir délivré
De ces espèces-là, dont je suis entouré (2.1)

The marquis on the other hand, is revealed as a truly sensitive man. He divulges his love for a woman with whom he has lost contact because she was removed from the convent where they used to meet. The marquis’s discourse expresses his sensitivity: when he discusses his love he uses terms such as la nature, la grace, doux, les yeux, son souris, that sharply contrast with the baron’s vocabulary:

J’adore comme vous une jeune beauté
Que j’ai vue au couvent, dont la grâce ingénue
Frappe au premier abord, intéresse et remue
Le doux son de sa voix et ses regards vainqueurs
Sont d' accord pour porter l’amour au fond des cœurs.[…]
Elle parle fort peu, mais pense infiniment :
À l’égard de son cœur, c’est le pur sentiment ; […]
On m’a dit qu’elle en était sortie ;
C’est tout ce que j’en sais. Une main ennemie,
Que je ne connaissais pas, l’arrache à mon amour,
Et ce coup à mes yeux l’enlève sans retour. (4.2)
The marquis both notices and is taken with the woman's charm and he is completely conquered by her inherent qualities. This discourse shows that the marquis develops into the ideal "honnête homme" because he both retains his status as a masculine man but also reveals a sensitive character that allows him to appreciate her "natural" qualities (I define natural here as it is presented in the texts by Faret and Méré: an inherent capacity for refinement). Moreover, in revealing his feelings and emotions openly, the marquis uses terms that are attributed to women’s conversation: "il faut que mon coeur s'ouvre, et que ma juste estime à vos yeux se découvre" (4.2). Consequently, in his relationships with women he is always in their favor. Lucile loves him for his esprit – her heart responds to the openness of his:

Sans vous, loin de vous je n’ai point de pensée.  
Je suis stupide auprès du monde indifférent,  
Et je n’ai de l’esprit qu'avec vous seulement.  
Le mien ne brille point dans une compagnie :  
Le sentiment l’échauffe, et non pas la saillie.  
Celui que l’amour donne à deux cœurs bien épris,  
Est le seul qui m’inspire, et dont je sens le prix. (4.2)

The play's potentially progressive woman-positive depiction turns out to be a reactionary one: Lucile admits that she has no thoughts in her head unless she is aroused by love. This serves to reassure her future husband. After the marquis confesses his love for Lucile and bears his heart to her, she responds that he is her "hero":

Vous possédez, marquis, le mérite solide :  
Il n'en a que le masque et le vernis perfides ;  
De tout Paris son art veut faire la conquête ;  
À régner sur mon cœur votre gloire s'arrête.  
Il est par ses dehors et par son entretien,  
Le héros du grand monde, et vous êtes le mien. (4.2)
Just as the baron conquers *le monde* with his artificiality, the marquis conquers Lucile's heart and retains his status in the affair as the virile man. Lucile's words clearly demonstrate the perspective that the baron is not *honnête*; he only dons the persona of the *honnête homme* with his "masque" and "vernis". Although his mask fools many, it does not fool his potential lover who recognizes his disingenuousness and his objectification of her.

It is finally revealed that the two men are dealing with the same woman and when they both accidentally reveal their true characters to her father, he chooses to betroth his daughter to the marquis. Although the spectator (or reader) is led to believe that the marquis is a petit-maître, he turns out to have *honnête* qualities; it is the woman who brings these out in him. The marquis is not effeminate although he appears to be influenced by a woman. He is not overtly theatrical and fixated on his relationships with women. He does not attempt to exploit Lucile. The play also illustrates that the baron, who appears to be *honnête*, is inauthentic and embodies all of negative qualities of the petit-maître. Here, the line between the effeminate petit-maître and the *honnête homme* is blurred, thus undermining the *honnête* ideal.

**Conclusion**

Some of the plays analyzed in this chapter show that the effeminate man lacks the masculine qualities that are the keystones of *honnêteté*. In these comedies, the petit-maître’s persona, his extravagance in his manners and airs, all betray the notions of naturalness and sensitivity, which are crucial components in the formulation of *honnêteté*. 
His social graces are not graces at all because he not only makes known the importance of displaying them but also talks incessantly about them and emphasizes the process of learning them. He cares little for pleasing others as witnessed by his constant verbal attacks and general disdain for others. Despite his concern for creating a seductively pleasing appearance, he is not exactly pleasant as he seeks to disrupt any given social scene, entering loudly in order to draw all of the attention to himself, flitting from woman to woman, whispering compliments in one’s ear and mercilessly slandering her to another, and finally departing briskly and curtly in the hopes of leaving a lasting impression. The petit-maître’s discourse praises manners, airs, and affectation and shows that he does not take interest in people’s natural gifts. He is interested in the construction of a persona.

But these plays also portray some petits-maîtres in such a way that they call the honnête homme’s "natural" appearance into question. The petit-maître constructs a ridiculous persona: he is inauthentic and theatrical. The honnête homme also constructs a persona: he appears charming and virtuous and socially gifted. But the fact that the petit-maître hides a bad character underneath a veil of theatricality indicates the possibility of the honnête homme’s ability to hide a bad inner character under a veil of socially acceptable behavior. These types of satires encourage spectators to ask if honnêteté is nothing more than a persona.

The critique of effeminacy is wrapped in the desire to maintain an ideal of social comportment and has much to do with imposition of social models. Effeminacy, as it seen by critics such as Mercier and Rousseau, is a result of the over-influence of an illegitimate type of femininity. But I have shown that since Antiquity, effeminacy has
not necessarily been associated solely with femininity in men; rather, it is a unique identification used only critically to denounce men who appear not to adhere to social standards. We see through these theatrical examples that effeminacy was attacked because it was seen as a symptom of the divergence from an ideal social model. The petit-maître shows us that it is not women's influence that is condemned on the stage but rather the misconstrual of the positive ways that good women affect men. The petit-maître is effeminate because he is obsessed with women and he exploits them.

In the following chapter, we will investigate negative masculine qualities in further detail by examining the representation of the petit-maître as both physically and symbolically "impotent". I will show that impotence and effeminacy are defining qualities of the type of man who either refuses or involuntarily fails to observe principles of "good" masculinity.
When Almaïde, a femme du monde in Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon's novel Le Sopha (1742), recounts a sexual encounter she had with a young unnamed petit-maître, she initially presents him as a brutish lout who enters her room brusquely and forces himself on her with reckless abandon: "ce jeune homme dont je vous parlais m’avait renversée sur un sopha. Je n’étais pas encore revenue de mon étonnement, qu’il s’y précipita sur moi...il parvint malgré ma résistance, à me fermer la bouche avec le baiser le plus insolent." (Sopha 94) But soon after, her description abruptly changes tune as she tells of a surprising transformation in his behavior: "Au milieu d’une situation dont j’avais d’autant plus à craindre que je n’en craignais plus rien, je ne sais pas pourquoi mon ennemi suspendit tout d’un coup sa fureur et ses entreprises" (96). The previously frenzied petit-maître now relents, softens physically and emotionally, and envelops Almaïde in his arms: "ses yeux changèrent; une sorte de langueur, qui vint y régner, en bannit la fureur; il chancela, et en me pressant dans ses bras, avec plus de tendresse et moins de violence qu’auparavant, il devint aussi faible que j’étais moi-même" (96). The euphemistic term "faible" reveals the petit-maître's impotence, which transforms the entire tone of the encounter.

Immediately following the petit-maître’s yielding, instead of feeling more comfortable with the man whose forceful lust has effectively abated, Almaïde displays a humiliation that turns to anger: "je me relevai avec violence. A mesure que mes idées devenaient plus claires, je sentais plus vivement ma honte. Vingt fois j’ouvris la bouche pour charger ce jeune téméraire des reproches qu’il méritait. [...] après l’avoir regardé
avec toute l’indignation que méritait l’insolence de son procédé, je le quittai brusquement" (96). The petit-maître, once the aggressor, is now forced into a submissive role, as he has no choice but to endure the anger and disdainful regard of the scorned woman. In the beginning of the episode, before manifesting his sexual dysfunction, the man displays forceful desire as he overpowers her. But he is now the submissive partner: the woman dominates by chastising him, humiliating him and eventually abandoning him. There is a power play that occurs between the two individuals in the couple that is highlighted when the man fails to complete the sex act.

Almaïde recounts her story of a petit-maître's impotence to a new lover, which makes it kind of verbal erotica acting as a stimulating influence for the new couple. But the story of her petit-maître’s impotence allows her to seduce while also retaining her virginal status in her new lover's eyes. The impotence of the rival is subordinated to the insincere Almaide’s power play with her present lover: she highlights her chastity and she flatters the new lover. Thus, impotence is not necessarily portrayed in this narrative only as a man's inability to penetrate his lover. Petits-maîtres' spells of impotence in many narratives illustrate a complex dialectic of power where two people in pursuit of the common goal of sexual pleasure also vie for the conservation of their public reputations even during intimate acts of seduction.

Impotence is a characteristic of many petit-maîtres in many plays and novels of the eighteenth century.140 A stereotypically effeminate and decadent eighteenth-century

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140 The subject of impotence and the impotent male character abound in French literature from as early as Rabelais (Le Quat Livre’s prologue includes a fable that centers on the loss of a coignée – hatchet or phallus) through the Revolution with Claire de Duras (Olivier, ou le secret) and the later modernist works of Stendhal (Armance). In these texts, impotence as a subject or the impotent man himself is at the forefront.
male aristocrat, whose savage wit sometimes casts him in the role of the worldly villain, the petit-maître is also criticized as ridiculous, affected, and ineffective. He is often represented as physically impotent, meaning unable to complete sexual acts, or as symbolically impotent in the sense that he is unable to reach any goal, come to any conclusion, or succeed in any endeavor. In fact, the French term for impotence, *l'impuissance*, is defined in the fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* (1762) in two ways: a man could be either physically impotent in the sense of being incapable of producing children, or he could be considered symbolically impotent by having no power to act: "(1) IMPUISSANCE se dit particulièrement du vice de conformation, ou de quelque accident qui rend incapable d'avoir des enfants. Impuissance avérée, reconnue, prouvée. L'impuissance est une des causes qui rendent un mariage nul. (2) IMPUISSANCE. s.f. Manque de pouvoir pour faire quelque chose". I use the term physical impotence in this chapter to indicate that during sexual encounters, the petit-maître character is unable to perform or complete sexual acts. Conversely, I use the term symbolic impotence to express that the petit-maître character is sometimes portrayed, not necessarily as sexually impotent, but rather as unsuccessful: he is ineffective in his speech - which is full of empty signs - and equally as ineffective in his manners – he is flamboyant, he flaunts superficiality, he has an opinion on everything but actual profound knowledge of nothing. Furthermore, many of these petits-maîtres, in the absence of biological children, attempt to recruit young men to produce "social children": disciples

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of the plot and often times the entire narrative structure centers on the question of the main male character’s virility. See: Margaret Waller, *The Male Malady: Fictions of Impotence in the French Romantic Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1993)

Also, Lawrence D. Kritzman also extrapolates the theme of impotence from Montaigne's *De l'institution des enfants*: "A good part of *De l'institution des enfants* is devoted to the inevitable threats of unmastery and impotence*. *The Rhetoric of Sexuality and the Literature of the French Renaissance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 63.
who continue their *mondain* legacy. In both cases, petits-maîtres fail in their endeavors and physical or symbolic impotence is what leads to their failure.

Impotent petit-maîtres in many narratives are obsessed with power and with devising ways to impose some power over other characters despite their continuous failures. This persistent, obsessive, and unsuccessful pursuit of power exemplifies the Foucauldian paradox that declares power itself to be impotent:

The pouvoir n'est pas omnipotent [...] Si les relations de pouvoir ont formé des formes d'enquête, d'analyses des modes de savoir, c'est précisément parce que le pouvoir n'est pas omniscient, mais qu'il était aveugle [...]. Si on assiste au développement de tant des forces de pouvoir, de tant de systèmes de contrôle, de tant de formes de surveillance, c'est précisément parce que le pouvoir est toujours impuissant.141

Foucault's claim indicates that there is a "void at the heart of all power".142 Therefore, the imposition of power in every form is problematic because it has no solid foundation. Systematic forms of authority have been established and institutionalized precisely because power is elusive. It is the constant search for power that confirms its instability. For the petits-maîtres in this chapter, the relentless and compulsive search for power indicates that they experience a deficiency of power in some form, and therefore constantly seek to fill the void. In other words, their search for power disguises a lack of potency, which is confirmed by their impotent bodies. On the other hand, impotence could be a function of the desire for power. Either way, for petits-maîtres, the desire for dominance is linked to their ineffectiveness. Ultimately, their failures confirm the paradox.

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Impotence and political patriarchy in France

Why is impotence, specifically, a distinguishing quality of the petit-maître? Why is the petit-maître, a social type and literary character that serves as a concrete symbol of the intangible notions of luxury, decadence, and corruption during the old regime, represented as the very opposite of virile, both literally and figuratively? Viewing the petit-maître and his ineffectiveness from a larger socio-political perspective, we may consider the creation of this type to be a tool in the hands of those who want to portray a certain aristocratic culture as being effete and degenerate. On the one hand, petits-maîtres represent young nobleman or lowly aristocrats, several times removed from the monarch, who flaunted their aristocratic status to substantiate their superior attitudes toward others and especially the bourgeois class, but who generally were in weak financial positions and had little or no power in the court or society. For example, in Justus Van Effen’s 1734 play Les Petits-maîtres the main character is portrayed as perpetually impecunious, and he is endlessly sending his lackey to beg wealthy aristocratic men of higher rank for some credit. These types of portrayals of petits-maîtres reflect a social trend: to the aristocrats represented in these works, these types of men were inconsequential because they were low in rank, and to the bourgeois they were frivolous cads who represented the kind of decadent over-spending that was not a productive part of society.

Since the French political system during this part of the old regime was dependent on a patriarchal structure - as Lynn Hunt notes, the system in France was contingent upon the notion of fatherhood (especially during and after the Revolution)\(^\text{143}\) - there was a focus on men’s duty to display their status as fathers and to enact the power that comes

with this position.\textsuperscript{144} Especially during times of political turmoil, French pamphleteers and other writers condemned the elite for being unmanly when they did not live up to the standard set for them by the patriarchal ideal: a man was considered inherently ineffective, frivolous, effeminate, or impotent if he was not a powerful and virile father, when he embellished his clothing and appearance, when he gestured and carried himself elegantly, or when he spent too much time in the pursuit of carnal pleasures with women that were not necessarily in the interest of producing legitimate children.\textsuperscript{145}

The accusation of impotence was used by the French not only to cast down those men who did not appear to embody the national ideal but also to slander political leaders who failed to show courage and skill in leadership or who were profoundly disliked by the public. The fact that some of these despised leaders did not father children only added fuel to the fire of public hatred. Henri III for example, one of France’s most reviled monarchs and a reputed cross-dresser, did not have any children, was demonized by the public for his corruption and misrule, and was portrayed as sexually ambiguous; his masculine status was constantly called into question as he was famously labeled by Agrippa d’Aubigné as "un Roy femme ou bien un homme Reyne".\textsuperscript{146} He was one of the

\textsuperscript{144} Jeffery Merrick confirms the dependence of the French social system on a patriarchal structure throughout the early modern period: "The father ruled his wife, children, and servants like a domestic monarch, and the divinely ordained monarch ruled his subjects like a royal father [...] Monarchs and magistrates protected the interests of families and strengthened the authority of fathers by outlawing clandestine marriages, criminalizing female adultery and infanticide, and imprisoning wayward wives as well as rebellious children." “Sexual Politics,” (68-9).

\textsuperscript{145} This opinion regarding libidinal promiscuity on the part of men possibly goes as far back as an ancient Greek and Roman social custom that considered womanizers to be effeminate. Craig A. Williams remarks: "the writers of and readers of Roman texts could easily imagine a notorious womanizer or adulterer as effeminate, and a Roman orator could curl his lip at a decadent young man who sashayed about more softly than a woman in order to please a woman" (125).

first monarchs to be questioned for impotence: due to "his physical failure to produce an heir, what had been gender concerns became sexual issues". 147

Also, the case of Louis XVI, who did not produce children with the queen Marie-Antoinette until several years after the start of their marriage, 148 illustrates that a political leader being slandered as sexually impotent could have even more grave implications than just public derision. In anti-loyalist rhetoric, which used sexuality as a channel for denunciation, an accusation of the monarch’s impotence could be seen as "both a metaphor for, and an actual cause of, failures of the body politic". 149

In addition to the common practice of criticizing ineffective or reviled monarchs, denunciations of effeminacy and impotence were leveled against the upper class in general: "The ruling class was portrayed as utterly ineffective and dissolute, the males impotent and effeminate". 150 For example, the Prince de Condé, not a monarch but an aristocrat of high rank, was portrayed in this way. The Prince was known as "a weak and skinny soul" and the popular proverb from the sixteenth century "son dada resta court à Lerida", used euphemistically to describe men who could not develop or maintain an erection, refers to the defeat that the Prince de Condé’s army suffered against the Spanish

148 Jeffrey Merrick discusses the ways certain Parisian news sources promulgated the impotent image of Louis XVI: "The nouvelles, having recorded complaints about Louis XV’s turpitude and exaggerated the number of his illegitimate offspring, recorded gossip about his grandson’s impotence and wondered about his ability to produce an heir to the throne. Saluting the future Louis XVI and his wife in 1773, three years after their marriage, the Parisian poissardes stretched out their 'long, thick, plump, stiff forearms' and wished him "one like this. It's not too much for such a pretty wife," they added. As the market women waited and waited to celebrate births in the royal family, the king's sexual capabilities became a subject of speculation and satire" (80).
in Lerida.\(^{151}\) It criticizes the Prince de Condé for total ineffectiveness in his military duties, and as such, implies ineffectiveness as a man and sexual impotence: the "dada", the sword or, euphemistically, the phallus, stopped short of penetrating the defenses of the enemy.\(^{152}\) The denunciation of these political leaders and upper class men illustrate that impotence was not merely a medical condition suffered by men in private; it was used as a means of publicly deriding leaders for political failures as well as ridiculing worldly counts and marquis who maintained superior attitudes and noble airs despite being reputed as having no money or power.

The representation of the petit-maître as impotent stems from his position within the power structure of the social hierarchy: as a lowly aristocrat he was represented in fictional texts as either completely powerless from the start or as a man whose power was removed by the end of the narrative. The episode of the unnamed petit-maître’s physical impotence in Le Sopha reveals that often in eighteenth-century erotic novels, this power problem and the struggle for an 'upper hand' characterizes sexual encounters that end in failure: Almaïde is initially forced into submission as the petit-maître physically overpowers her, but consequently gains the dominant position by humiliating and abandoning the weakened man. It also allows her to experience sexual pleasure with a new man, while retaining her chaste public reputation. Since "The risk of submission – of being dominated or losing a position of dominance – drives most masculine models"\(^{153}\), I consider the petit-maître to be a masculine subject who constantly runs this


\(^{152}\) Katia Beguin discusses the image of the Prince de Condé (1588-1646); he was seen as generally ineffective perhaps due to his low position in government compared to that of other princes de Condé, his income of 12000 per year, considered criminally low for a member of the aristocracy, or finally perhaps precisely due his failures in battle, particularly against the Spanish at Lerida (29-30).

\(^{153}\) Seifert, 6.
risk and accordingly portrays in his actions an anxiety about this submission by continually seeking but failing to secure a position of dominance over women and over other men. The impotent petit-maître is a man who either fails to impose power over other characters, who spends much time and energy on devising ways to claim power or who does succeed initially in imposing power over other characters but eventually loses it. Let us now turn to episodes of petits-maîtres' physical impotence which illustrate the effects on a man's social status and his position vis-à-vis other characters when he loses face because of impotence and when he attempts to gain back his reputation.

Impotence and the decadent body: Crébillon's Le Sopha

Many fictional petits-maîtres are represented as physically impotent, meaning either that they are explicitly described as unable to complete sexual acts or that they have some sexual dysfunction. Often, they are objects of jokes as men who spend large amounts of time with women in the attempt to seduce them but, at the precise moment of penetration, cannot succeed. These men are also often chastised by the women in

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154 Pierre Bourdieu’s *La Domination Masculine*, discusses the power relationship between the dominating man and dominated man that originates both in the social context and in the individual as a ‘habitus’ cultivated through environmental experience and social interaction. This habitus is therefore manifested through the body. This notion informs my analysis in the sense that the impotent male body of the petit-maître is characterized by and coupled with a specific representation of a tension between himself and other male characters that he creates and acts upon. *La Domination Masculine* (Paris: Seuil, 1998)

155 For example, Mme de Sévigné, in a letter to her daughter from 1671, makes a joke of her son’s alleged impotence by referencing the proverbial defeat of Condé at Lerida. She writes: "A favorable occasion had presented itself and yet…dare I say it? ‘He could not get his dada up at Lerida’. It was a very strange situation: the demoiselle had never before found herself in such a predicament. The cavalier made his exit, in disarray, convinced that he had been bewitched. But what you will find amusing is that he could not wait to tell me about his mortification. We laughed uproariously. I told him that I was delighted that he had been punished for his sins at the precise point of origin!" Mme de Sévigné, *Correspondances* Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1925), 1047. Her son’s impotence was a strange source of humor for a mother to share with her daughter.

Angus McLaren remarks: "Jokes about sexual humiliations played a vital part in a common male culture of the seventeenth century that only became more stratified in the eighteenth century. Laughter was used by some men to police the sexuality of other men. Men did not so much fear demanding women as the did the sneers and sniggering of their fellows. A man’s honor was most attacked when his enemies mocked his
question because of the humiliation the women may feel for not having been attractive or seductive enough to sufficiently inspire the men. After the failed seductions and the consequent humiliation the men also feel, they often find ways to reassert the power that they have lost.

Crébillon's novel *Le Sopha* illustrates the complex power relationships that play out between men and women in situations where the men experience spells of impotence. The novel centers on the stories of sexual promiscuity of courtiers in the eighteenth-century "Orient" and includes several male characters who, for one reason or another, are unable to complete sexual acts. The narrative is a series of stories told by the Indian sultan’s storyteller, Amanzéï, about the time he spent when his soul took the form of a sofa – literally a piece of furniture normally found in women's boudoirs. During his time as a sofa, Amanzéï’s soul travels from boudoir to boudoir witnessing, and sometimes even participating in, many sexual exploits. His soul is condemned to this unrelenting voyage until he finds a couple that joins together in the sexual expression of true and virtuous love. The narrative’s series of nine episodes recount various amorous scenes to which Amanzéï is a witness. These episodes center on the question of whether or not, in an environment where free love abounds, true love is ever possible.

competence as a spouse. In being dunned by a woman, he put the reputation of all men at stake and it was therefore essential that he be portrayed as a fool. By denigrating the masculinity of others, one could laud one’s own potency" (75).


157 Indeed, Amanzéï is an actual participator in the sex act in the tale of Zéïnis: "His soul tries unsuccessfully to ‘slip’ (se glisser) into Zéïnis, but while he is not able to fully experience sexual satisfaction, he causes Zéïnis to have an orgasm" (Nell, 65).
In Amanzéï's story of Almaïde, the failed petit-maître was somewhat "valued" in his brutal state and is devalued in his softened state. In the beginning, before manifesting his inadequacy, Amanzéï describes this petit-maître's behavior as rather violent and displays all of the qualities of a sexually aroused man. Almaïde eventually becomes ready to give herself over to him voluntarily; his roughness pleases her to a certain extent: "Il me serait impossible de vous dire combien d’abord j’en fus révoltée. Je l’avouerai pourtant: mon indignation ne fut pas longue. La nature, qui me trahissait, me porta bientôt ce baiser dans le fond du cœur." (Sopha 93). However, immediately following the failed sexual encounter, he relents and becomes affectionate ("il chancela, et en me pressant dans ses bras, avec plus de tendresse et moins de violence qu’auparavant"). Now he is in the submissive position vis-à-vis the woman because she chastises him, humiliates him and eventually abandons him ("je me relevai avec violence. [...] je le quittai brusquement"). Now that he can no longer insist and she can no longer feign chaste refusal (she was, after all, willing to participate in sex act: "un feu inconnu se glissa dans toutes mes veines, [...] je ne pouvais plus résister"), he loses all of his appeal in her eyes. Since she recounts this tale in the interest of seducing a new lover, she retains this power even after the episode in question. Impotence thus allows her both to seduce and be pure (or be considered as such by her new lover). The power dynamic between the two characters is an alternating struggle wherein one person must relinquish power at the same time that the other takes over. This vacillation illustrates the instability of the source of power in the acts of seduction described in this novel as power constantly transfers from one person to the other.
In another episode, the seventh story of the series, the power dynamic between a woman, Zulica, and her impotent lover, Mazulhim, plays out in a different way. Unlike Alamaïde, who recounts a tale of impotence in which she ultimately asserted some power after she felt humiliated by her lover, Zulica is a powerful woman from the beginning. The novel describes her past sexual encounters in a way that demonstrates her ability to control both the sex act and the men involved. When Mazulhim points out her past sexual experience, she owns up to her reputation in an overt manner that might suggest pride: "ce n'est pas que je sache, aussi bien qu'une autre, l'art de filer et de mettre de la décence dans une affaire mais... Vous ne le pratiquez pas, interrompit-il; oh! pour cela, l'on vous rend justice. C'est que cela est vrai, au moins! reprit-elle; exactement, je ne suis point fausse" (367). Zulica does not feign chastity, and this act vastly diverges from the model for acceptable feminine social behavior, even in such intimate situations. By virtue of her disregard for adherence to norms, she asserts some independence of thought and thus some social and sexual authority. But Crébillon nevertheless portrays her from a reactionary perspective as a promiscuous woman who needs to be shamed.

Because of the fact that Zulica communicates some perceived sexual authority, Mazulhim decides he must find a way to control her.\textsuperscript{158}

The tale of Mazulhim and Zulica actually begins with a description of Mazulhim before his encounter with her. Despite his sexual impotence, Mazulhim has successfully found ways to assert social authority because he is reputed to be a virile and successful womanizer. Although his sexual dysfunction has been witnessed by many women in the

\textsuperscript{158} Sharon Nell remarks: "She has been a woman who has been able to control on her own her sexual relationships [...] Zulica finds herself between two male characters who find a way to control her sexual behavior" (66).
court, he succeeds at hiding his defect so well that he is known as one of the most triumphant womanizers of his social circle:

Ce qu'il y a de singulier, c'est que Mazulhim qui employait si mal les rendez-vous qu'on lui donnait, était l'homme d'Agra le plus recherché. Il n’y avait pas une femme qui ne l’eût eu ou qui ne voulût l’avoir pour amant: vif, aimable, volage, toujours trompeur en n’en trouvant pas moins à tromper, toutes les femmes le connaissaient et toutes cependant cherchaient à lui plaire. Sa réputation enfin était étonnante. On le croyait…Que ne le croyait-on pas? Et pourtant, qu’était-il? Que ne devait-il pas à la discrétion des femmes, lui qui, ayant pour elles de si mauvais procédés les ménageât cependant si peu? (362-3)

Mazulhim's successful creation of a reputation demonstrates his social authority. However, in his secluded house where he invites young ladies to be alone with him, away from the prying and judging eyes of society, Mazulhim unsuccessfully attempts to enact seductions. Somehow, the women involved in these seductions do not reveal his dysfunction. Despite his success in creating for himself a public reputation as a successful seducer, he actually owes his reputation to the discretion of these women.

As a woman with a reputation, Zulica is not like Mazulhim's other women: with her, Mazulhim cannot count on discretion. During their first meeting at his petite maison, Mazulhim tries to have sex with her, hoping for the best. She feigns chaste refusal all the while not actually refusing his advances and it seems that the two will consummate their relationship. But the sex act is suddenly interrupted by Mazulhim's impotence:

Alors il la posa doucement sur (le sopha). Je vous assure, Mazulhim, que je suis outrée contre vous. Je vous le dis, c’est que je ne vous le pardonnerai jamais. Malgré ces terribles menaces de Zulica, Mazulhim voulut achever de lui déplaire. Comme, entre autres choses, il avait la mauvaise habitude de ne s’attendre jamais, et qu’elle avait apparemment celle de ne jamais attendre personne, il lui déplut en effet à un point qu’on ne saurait imaginer. (369)

Although Crébillon refers to it obliquely here, it is highly possible that Mazulhim's sexual dysfunction is impotence. In his edition of Crébillon's Le Sopha, Jean Sgard discusses
Zulica's euphemistic reference to Mazulhim's problem – she tells Nassès later in the story that Mazulhim suffers from a "cœur épuisé" – and argues that it is indeed impotence that plagues Mazulhim: "Le cœur épuisé est, dans la bouche de Zulica, un euphémisme qui désigne l'impuissance de Mazulhim". Crébillon's language, however, prevents absolute clarity of this point. For Mazulhim "Ne s’attendre jamais" may also mean that he rushes towards orgasm right away, and for Zulica "ne jamais attendre personne" could mean that she does not wait and give the man a chance to get excited and get an erection. But in either case, Mazulhim does not satisfy her. Crébillon offers a comic parallelism between the two, which suggests that the responsibility for this failure is on both sides.

Zulica reacts with anger out of shame or frustration. Although at first she is able to calm her impatience: "Zulica s’était armée de patience et cachait son dépit le mieux qu’il lui était possible" (369-70), as Mazulhim makes excuses, she grows angry and tears herself forcibly from his embrace: "Laissez-moi, lui dit-elle d’un ton aigre. Je ne veux ni vous voir ni vous entendre" (370). After having to endure listening to his excuses, offended by his audacity to treat her coldly after the event of his sexual dysfunction, and humiliated that perhaps a lack of physical attractiveness or seductive prowess on her part may be the cause of his problem, Zulica grows angry and acts out in screams of rage and a fit of fury as she physically destroys anything in her path: "Désespérée de l’accident qui lui arrivait, outré de l’air froid de Mazulhim, elle s’en prit dans sa fureur à un grand vase de porcelaine qu’elle trouva sous sa main, et qu’elle brisa en mille morceaux" (370-1). Mazulhim is left only to defend himself to Zulica with the excuse of a black magic curse: "Il fallait, disait-il, que pour le rendre tel qu’il se trouvait, tous les magiciens des Indes eussent travaillé contre lui" (370), which was a common pretext at the time.

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159 Sgard, *Le Sopha*, 844 nb 103.
Zulica's reaction demonstrates the same type of anger that Almaïde experiences upon discovering that her potential seducer is not able to fully carry out the seduction: both women’s feelings of humiliation turn to rage. The difference in this episode from the episode recounted by Almaïde is Mazulhim’s attempt to save face after his sexual insufficiency is revealed. After his initial excuses, he tries to cover up the fact that he is impotent by putting the responsibility of arousal on the woman’s shoulders and, in effect, subversively blaming her: "Mais, continuait-il, que peuvent leurs charmes contre les vôtres? Aimable Zulica, ils en ont différé le pouvoir, mais il n’en triompheront pas!"

(370). Charmes has a double meaning: it means both spell and physical attractiveness. He expertly turns the situation around and tries to absolve himself of any blame by alluding to her reputation for promiscuity: "Je trouverais tout simple qu’une femme ordinaire, sans monde, sans usage, s’offensât mortellement d’une aventure pareille; mais vous! Que vous soyez précisément comme quelqu’un qui n’a jamais rien vu! En vérité, cela n’est pas pardonnable" (372).

Although Mazulhim’s first attempt to retain his reputation as a successful womanizer is to place the blame elsewhere, this tactic fails because Zulica does not fall for this manipulation and does not blame herself. She tells him: "n’en parlez plus; aussi bien ne suis-je pas assez imbécile pour que vous puissiez me persuader jamais, que plus un amant a de tendresse, moins il peut l’exprimer à ce qu’il aime" (372). Here, Zulica is responding to Mazulim’s pretext that he cannot get an erection because he is too moved by sentimental love for her. Mazulim, in a previous episode, peddles the same pretext with a woman who actually believes him because she is in love with him and unlike Zulica she is portrayed as a sensitive, affectionate woman. But Zulica knows this trick
and is not fooled. Thus, Mazulhim must take more drastic measures to ensure that she
does not reveal his dysfunction and destroy his reputation at court.

Soon after his first failed attempt, Mazulhim does eventually manage to penetrate
Zulica, but in a different way. Although Crébillon's narrative uses polite and elegant
language to describe the act, it communicates the occurrence of anal sex:

A peine Mazulhim, qui était l'homme du monde le plus avantageux, se sentit
moins accablé, qu'il porta le témérité jusqu'à se croire capable de plus grandes
entreprises. [...] Soit qu'il imaginât qu'il ne pouvait différer sans se perdre, soit (ce
qui est plus vraisemblable) qu'il crût n'avoir besoin de rien de plus auprès d'elle, il
voulut tenter ce qui (et encore par le plus grand hasard du monde) ne lui avait
jamais manqué qu'une fois. Zulica qui ne s'éblouissait pas facilement, et qui
d'ailleurs n'étroit pas la femme d'Agra qui pensait le moins bien d'elle-même, fut
étonnée de la présomption de Mazulhim, et lui fit sur son audace les
représentations les plus sensées. Elles ne réussirent pas; et Mazulhim s'opiniâtra
toujours, par une suite nécessaire de la confiance en ses charmes; et pour
l'humilier [...] Tout d'un coup sa physionomie changea, et je jugeai à sa rougeur et
à son dépit, autant qu'à l'air railleur et insultant de Mazulhim, que ce qu'elle avait
annoncé comme impraticable, était aisé au dernier point. (376-7)

To understand Crébillon's language in this episode, readers must be aware that in the
eighteenth century, sexual prejudice decreed that there was a kind of anal "virginity", and
that a woman who had had anal intercourse at least once, could experience no pain and
no difficulty on subsequent times. While Zulica protests Mazulhim's attempts to engage
in this act with her under the pretext that she is a virgin in this regard (ce qu'elle avait
annoncé comme impraticable), it turns out that Mazulhim succeeds easily in penetrating
her (était aisé au dernier point). This implies that the anal sex act itself is a way to
humiliate Zulica, because it betrays – by its simple happening – the fact that she has had
anal sex, a transgressive act, many times already. She is "publicly" consecrated as a
promiscuous. Mazulhim's position in this situation is more assertive than during the
previous attempt because he now succeeds in his conquest to engage in intercourse. It is one way for him to regain his sense of power.

But to further ensure Zulica's silence and domination, Mazulhim hatches another plan to sexually control her in which another man participates. He enlists the help of Nassès, a male friend, in this endeavor. When Zulica arrives at Mazulhim's petite maison two days following their first encounter, Mazulhim has Nassès appear in his stead to greet her. Nassès was specifically chosen by Mazulhim: on the surface, it seems that Mazulhim simply asks a good friend whom he trusts to relate his apologies to Zulica for not being able to meet her that night. But Mazulhim's choice of Nassès for his messenger is much more strategic.

When Nassès arrives, both he and Zulica are equally as surprised to see each other, Nassès did not expect to discover that Mazulhim's lover is Zulica; she has publicly declared her dislike of Nassès in the past. Nassès’s role as Mazulhim’s messenger is also a surprise to Zulica: she is somewhat ashamed because her presence in the petite maison confirms her sexual relationship with Mazulhim (and thus conforms her promiscuity).

There is already a hint, at this point, of the power that Nassès and Mazulhim eventually enact to silence her Zulica. While attempting to seduce her, Nassès also makes a fool of her: "Après quelque résistance, Zulica, persuadée par ce que lui disait Nassès, consentit enfin à rester. [...] il veut la tourner en ridicule" (394). Knowing of her numerous sexual adventures, he taunts her with hidden sarcasm: "Pensant comme vous faites, Madame, disait Nassès à Zulica, vous devrez être bien étonnée de vous trouver si sensible…"(394). The narrator reminds his audience that Nassès fêigns his love for her the whole time. The Sultan, who discusses the affair between Zulica and Nassès as his
storyteller recounts it, says to his Sultane: "Cette dame-là est accoutumée à avoir des
amants, par conséquent, il est ridicule qu'il lui dise qu'elle doit être bien étonnée? Ne
voyez-vous pas qu'il veut la tourner en ridicule? répondit la Sultane" (394). Despite his
confessions of love, Nassès actually despises Zulica. The narrator's reminder confirms
that Nassès does not necessarily want to have pleasure with Zulica; rather, he wants to
take revenge on her for her past and openly professed contempt of him. The context of
carnal gratification is only subsidiary, or an effect of his prise de pouvoir, which
foreshadows how the two men eventually work together to dominate her.

When Zulica reveals to Nassès her unsuccessful sexual encounter with Mazulhim,
Nassès will not accept her claim that Mazulhim experienced episodes of impotence and
argues that it would be impossible to keep impotence a secret in this society where
everyone talks:

Eh! Pensez-vous, répondit-elle, qu'un femme mécontente de Mazulhim, (s'il est
vrai cependant qu'il puisse s'en trouver qui soient sensibles à ce dont nous
parlons) dise à qui que ce soit, la raison pour laquelle elle en est si mécontente?
précisément, oui, reprit-il, elle ne le dira pas à tout le monde, mais elle le dira à
quelqu'un, et la preuve de cela, c'est que vous me le dites à moi. […]il y aurait
par conséquent quarante mille hommes, ou à peu près, qui sauraient, dans la plus
exacte vérité, ce qu’il est, et vous voudriez qu’entre des femmes piquées et des
hommes humiliés, un secret de cette nature eût été enseveli? Cela n’est pas
probable! Non, Madame, encore une fois, non. (417)

Nassès is not willing to accept any argument in favor of Mazulhim's inferiority as a lover.

This argument expresses the homosocial bond between the two men: Nassès may not
believe Zulica or he be merely feigning his refusal to believe Mazulhim's impotence in
order to collaborate with Mazulhim against her. In either case, Nassès argues that if it
were true that Mazulhim is indeed sexually inadequate, her desire to have him as her
lover should only increase because, Nassès argues, a failed lover would seek to please his
unsatisfied partner in other more creative and perhaps more satisfying ways. Nassès expertly argues Mazulhim's case and silences Zulica's objections. Moreover, he represents Mazulhim’s counterpart: Nassès is a successful womanizer who embodies the exact reputation that Mazulhim falsely created for himself. Not only does Nassès succeed in silencing Zulica, but also he reveals to her his sexual prowess. He says that he holds a reputation with ladies of the court that is not unfounded: "Il y a dix ans que je suis dans le monde, j’ai vingt-cinq et vous êtes le trente-troisième beauté que j’ai conquise en affaire réglée" (425). He counts his affairs like Da Ponte's Dom Juan.

Thus, the two men together enact their control both through physical and discursive means. Nassès succeeds in silencing Zulica about Mazulhim and in blackmailing her by encouraging her to reveal the dangerous secrets of her past affairs, which, if publically known, could destroy her. Nassès turns from pretending to love her to mercilessly condemning her for her promiscuous past. She grows bitter at his accusations, and in the midst of her angry retorts, Mazulhim arrives at the petite maison to find the two in an argument. Mazulhim feigns a belief that the two have been having an affair and therefore he pretends to break off his relationship with Zulica for her alleged infidelity, which he orchestrated. But he manages to find a way to maintain control of her: he threatens to reveal her infidelity in public and damage her reputation but stipulates that she can avoid this fate by being available to him for his carnal desires if he should ever wish. He also advises her to do the same for Nassès, should he desire her favors as well:

Que ferez vous de Nassès? Zulica à cette question parut étonnée. […] Vous vous êtes quittés mal et il me semble qu’en cela vous avez manqué de prudence. Si vous faites bien, vous le reverrez: croyez-moi, évitez un éclat. […] Si vous obstinez à ne le pas revoir, il parlera peut-être, et quoique rien assurément ne soit
Mazulhim's words bear witness to the double standard in this society for women who are revealed to be promiscuous. By threatening her with the public humiliation she would suffer if her many sexual affairs were revealed to the public, Mazulhim uses Nassès's blackmail to blackmail her further into submission. Mazulhim's threats show that he has a profound understanding of discursive codes of *le monde*. Zulica has no choice but to abide by his wishes because, as a master of discursive manipulation, Mazulhim's warnings about her damaging her own reputation have an effect. The *mise en discours* of power is, at this point, an effective way to silence her.¹⁶⁰ He plans for another man to succeed at seducing her and threatens to verbally expose her promiscuity through gossip. The two men are allies and accomplices. Mazulhim has Nassès do what he cannot; thus one man takes over when the other is incapable.

The men's control of Zulica is now enacted because they have found a way to continually impose upon her and to mute any discursive power she may have otherwise had. After sending Nassès to seduce Zulica, Mazulhim's reputation as a womanizer becomes uncompromised because Zulica cannot reveal his sexual secrets without bringing shame upon herself. Nassès, as the chosen masculine and potent counterpart, also denies Mazulhim’s deficiency and forces the woman to put herself in a position to have to yield to their sexual desires. She is dominated both physically and discursively by both men.

Mazulhim’s story is one example of a petit-maître who adopts a façade while maintaining a reputation despite his defect. This episode illustrates both the failure of the

petit-maître and the fact that he can only succeed at filling the void of power by enlisting the help of another man. Other petit-maîtres are also represented in this way: at one point they do succeed in regaining some "potency" or effectiveness. But when they do, they either are dependent on another man for his help, like Mazulhim, or they are "corrected" of their petit-maître ways. In these instances, gaining effectiveness comes with the purging of the petit-maître status, and it often comes about through the intervention of another man.

**Impotence, rape, and fatherly authority: Thémidore**

This is the case with Godard d'Aucour’s main character in the novel *Thémidore ou mon histoire et celle de ma maîtresse* (1745). Thémidore, is a young petit-maître who experiences impotence in an attempt to seduce a courtesan. The story centers a young man's discovery, through socializing with various types of women, of how to act according to certain licentious principles he gradually creates for himself over the course of a few years. These principles are formed as the result of his various experiences in society and failures that he endures in the process. Ultimately, Thémidore is "reformed" of his petit-maître status and his impotence has a large influence on his final fate.

The tale of Thémidore's sexual power quest begins with one of his first forays into his worldly education. With a group of three experienced courtesans, he finds himself unable to sexually perform and he is derided for it by another man:

Rozette prit cet instrument à partie, et soutint que la façon d'en tirer des sons était indécente elle blâma les coups de langue, et soutint que jamais le sexe ne devait toucher à une flute en compagnie. Où la morale allait- elle se loger? Dans le fond, il est vrai de dire qu'il est certaines choses dont une femme ne doit jamais faire savoir qu'elle sait faire usage. Rozette, après ces réflexions sur ma flûte parla de son état. C'est l'ordinaire qu'après certaines parties, lorsqu'on a, pour ainsi
parler, épuisé le plaisir, on se jette sur les embarras de la vie ou sur les obligations de la nature et ses malheurs. [...] Le Président se réveilla, descendit, et vit Rozette avec surprise. [...] Le repos l'avait rafraîchi, un verre de liqueur le remit en humeur, la compagnie lui donna de l'audace et se sentant fort, il défia ma faiblesses. Je fus humilié, je le confesse. Argentine et Laurette triomphaient intérieurement. Mes yeux se tournèrent du côté de Rosette, et lui demandaient pardon de ce qui m’arrivait, ou plutôt de ce qui ne m’arrivait pas: elle en parut touchée. [...] Je fus humilié, je le confesse. On me badina, on me tourna en ridicule. Le président jouissait de mon trouble; et fier d’un instant de valeur, orgueilleux dans la prospérité, il me félicitait ironiquement sur mes exploits du canapé.161

In this case, Thémidore's impotence arises perhaps either from sexual exhaustion because he has already had sex with several prostitutes in the same night. Or it might stem from the fact that at the moment of his spell, there were several filles du monde present and he may have experienced performance anxiety before the small audience. In any case, Thémidore's impotence is highlighted by the reaction of another man, le président, who, arriving on the scene immediately after the failed encounter, guesses the outcome of the attempt by the looks of the three others and directly ridicules Thémidore for it. The brothel is a space for a communal experience of sex that reinforces homosociality: the two men use their sexual abilities to compete with each other.

The description of impotence here differs greatly from Crébillon's description of Mazulhim's impotence, in which only two characters must negotiate their positions and reputations with regards to the other. Thémidore's impotence has been observed by several women and indirectly observed and affirmed by another man. In Thémidore's narration of his spell of impotence, the public setting intensifies his humiliation. Thémidore is humiliated by the public ridicule, but it also seems he is ashamed of his faiblesses most of all in the eyes of Rozette, his preferred mistress. Rozette does not react

like Almaïde or Zulica in Crébillon's tales; rather, she finds reasons to explain Thémidore's dysfunction. It is *le président*, however, playing the virile foil to Thémidore's malfunctioning body, who emphasizes the dysfunction, provokes the public humiliation, and foreshadows the eventual retaliatory moves Thémidore will make. In this case, the president is a rival whereas with Mazulhim and Nassès, the two men were allies.

It would only stand to reason that because of the humiliation he feels in this instance and the ridicule of another man, Thémidore eventually displays an obsessive need to gain some confidence and status as a virile man. D'Aucour's novel does not necessarily focus specifically on the main character's impotence as does the episode of Zulica and Mazulhim in Crébillon’s *Le Sopha*, but it nonetheless emphasizes his one instance of sexual failure in the beginning of the story because Thémidore's behavior throughout the remainder of the narrative is molded by his constant struggle for power over other characters. His profligacy is a main focus of the narrative.

After this fateful night with Rozette and the others, Thémidore eventually does manage to complete the sex act in many consequent affairs - he is described as taking part in a luxurious lifestyle where sexual promiscuity takes the main stage because he: "ne cherche qu’à voler de conquête en conquête, et s’attache rarement" (296). It is likely that his first experience with impotence incites him to continually seek to assert sexual virility in every possible situation.

As expected, Thémidore's obsession with worldly affairs quickly takes a drastic turn. But perhaps unexpectedly, this turn is violent: Thémidore commits an act of sexual
aggression against a woman. His fixation on the outward expression and confirmation of his virility eventually leads him to rape.

The rape occurs when a young woman arrives at Thémidore’s father’s house one afternoon to ask for his help in a family affair. Thémidore, just arising out of bed, stumbles upon her in the salon. He quickly learns that she happens to be the young wife of his sworn enemy, Dorville. The moment he learns of this man's indirect presence in his home, he launches his violent attack against his wife with no further thought:

Rien n'excite plus les passions que la vue d'une personne qui, ne se croyant pas examinée, fait devant un miroir l'exercice de la coquetterie. Mon tempérament est impétueux; son feu se trouva encore animé par le désir que j'avais de faire un coup d'éclat. Je fermai les yeux et je me livrai à tout évènement. Je sortis brusquement du cabinet, feignant d'être surpris de rencontrer quelqu'un [...] je m'informais qui elle était [...]. Elle ajouta qu'elle n'avait pas l'honneur d'être connue de moi, mais que son époux était tous les jours à la maison, et qu'il se nommait le chevalier de Dorville. 'Comment madame, repris-je, cet homme est votre époux ? C’est mon ennemi mortel ; il m'a joué un tour sanglant; sans doute que vous en étiez complice? Puisque j'en trouve le moment, il faut que je me venge'. Aussitôt je la saisis entre mes bras, je la serre, je la pousse sur le canapé ; elle veut crier. Je lui mis le poignard dans le sein, elle perdit connaissance ; sans songer aux fenêtres et aux portes ouvertes, sans me soucier du bruit que faisait le froissement de nos robes de taffetas, je combattis, j’attaquai, et triomphai…Semblable à un pandour, j’attaque, je pille, je tire mon coup de pistolet, et je suis déjà décampé. (314-5)

Like Valmont in Les Liaisons dangereuses, the narrator uses military terms to describe rape: he calls himself un pandour which refers to a militiaman but it also refers to a man whose manners are violent and coarse.\textsuperscript{162} He uses the terms combat, attack, and triumph ("je combattis, j’attaquai, et triomphai"). These are common terms used in sexual contexts in the eighteenth-century narratives. The rape in this novel is presented as if it is merely a logical extension of Thémidore's past behaviors or as part of an erotic tale of a sexual predator and his prey. The narrative's neutral and almost insouciant observation of

\textsuperscript{162} Dictionnaire de l'Académie française. 8th Edition.
the rape does not reflect the seriousness of the crime because, on the one hand, it is
counted retrospectively by the first person narrator who does not recognize the
seriousness of his actions. On the other, the casual treatment of the rape could also be
attributed to its cultural context: during the French ancien régime there was a tendency,
on the part of official law enforcement, to downplay the seriousness of violence that
occurs in private settings:

La violence sexuelle s'inscrit dans un système où la violence règne pour ainsi dire
naturellement à propos de rien (à nos yeux), des enfants sont excédés de coups par
des adultes; des femmes par des hommes, ou par d'autre femmes; des domestiques
par leurs maitres. [...] Il parait bien artificiel, dans de telles conditions, d'isoler le
délit sexuel des autres formes d'agressivité constamment présentes, ou latentes,
dans la vie quotidienne de la société 'traditionnelle'.163

Georges Vigarello's investigation of rape in the eighteenth century interprets the status of
the woman in these sexual crimes as 'l'absence du sujet' (48). He specifies that this
absence occurs because the juridical system of the old regime failed to recognize both
rape as a crime and the woman as an official and lawful victim:

L'affrontement brutal, par exemple, dans cette transgression toute particulière
qu'est le viol, n'est pris en compte que si le tumulte et les cris de la lutte ont été
largement perçus [...] La violence sexuelle commence avec ce qui en est entendu
[...] La femme violenté n'existe que projetée dans ses effets sur les gens" (49).

In Thémidore, both the narrative context of the rape and the discourse used to describe
the rape do not mention or allude to official criminalization. Moreover, in D'Aucour's
narrative, although Mme de Dorville wants to cry out, she cannot; the act of crying out
was legally required at the time for an act to be considered a rape. The female victim is
silenced both during the act and in the presence of the law and therefore the crime does
not exist in the eyes of the perpetrator.

163 Jean-Paul Desaive, "Du geste à la parole: délits sexuels et archives judiciaires (1690-1790),"
Furthermore, in cases of rape where the object of the rape is a wife, her status as a wife signifies that the only victim is the husband who oversees the honor of his wife:

Celui intenté contre Brosser, par exemple, accusé quelques mois après la promulgation du code d'avoir 'livré un combat brutal' envers la femme d'un 'fabricant' de Beauvais. L'avocat de Brosser récuse la plainte de la victime et réclame une plainte explicitement déposée par le mari: 'Personne n'ignore que le point d'honneur d'une femme est exhaustivement confié au mari'.

Mme Dorville, as a wife, is both silenced herself and also hardly mentioned in the narrative aside from this one instance of rape. She is never again brought up. She is seen by Thémidore only as an object and the narrative itself treats her as having no agency. Therefore, there is no narrative retribution offered to counter the rape since the criminal aspect is narratively discounted. The woman is forced into submission by a man who violently overpowers her. With his discursive treatment of the rape, Thémidore temporarily recaptures the feeling of being sexually virile by physically and emotionally violating her.

Thémidore not only gains physical power over this woman, but also by extension over his male enemy, because he forces access to his wife's body. The enemy, Dorville, is a young "nouvelliste" who was responsible for the separation of Thémidore and Rozette, Thémidore's courtesan mistress whom his misses. For Thémidore, Dorville embodies the cause of his misery due to the loss of his beloved. Thus, when in the presence of his enemy's wife, Thémidore takes the first action that comes to mind, which is to seize and appropriate the offending man's object of affection.

The rape in d'Aucour's novel underscores the fact that Thémidore is driven by a desire to uphold his reputation in society, to set himself above other men, and to affirm to

himself his status as a potent man. In this narrative, instead of slandering people with his speech, which many petits-maîtres often do to assert some false superiority over others, the petit-maître uses his body to indirectly overpower Dorville through taking his wife. The rape for Thémidore serves as an affirmation of his manliness with regard both to his male enemy Dorville and to women. This narrative also illustrates the notion that there is a point at which the petit-maître becomes overwhelmed not with desire but with a certain fury spawned by his perceived inferiority to another man, who is in this case his enemy Dorville. It displays the man's desperate need to regain what he has lost, his virility, masculine status, and physical strength.

A petit-maître is in constant pursuit of power; he is continually in the process of claiming, asserting, seeking or imposing power. But, as I have mentioned, he rarely succeeds. This is precisely the case with Thémidore who, despite regaining his physical potency, ultimately fails to regain all power, first because he is in a constant struggle with himself to form a concept of his own authority with regards to women, and second because, as we learn at the end of the story, he is eventually forced to live, not according to his own values and desires, but rather according to the values and desires of another man. The narrative ultimately shows Thémidore as never actually gaining a solid sense of authority because he submits his final fate to the decision of another man. The other man here is his father.

The narrative's inclusion of the father figure as a foil for the young, wayward Thémidore illustrates the narrative's representation of the value of patriarchal authority. At the beginning of the story, when the father discovers that his son has been spending his nights with a prostitute, he has her locked away in a convent, knowing the effect it
will have on his son. Thémidore is chagrined at his father's treatment of his lover, but he fails in his repeated attempts to convince his father to let her free. At the end of the story, his father finally concedes to free her from the convent only if Thémidore promises never to see her again. Thémidore concedes: he spends one last fateful night with Rozette but has resolutely decided to leave her: "Enfin après avoir passé une nuit des plus voluptueuses, je la quittai le lendemain de très grand matin; elle pleura en me voyant partir. Depuis ce temps, cher marquis, selon que j’avais promis à mon père, je ne l’ai point vue d’habitude" (353).

Because of his adherence to paternal will, Thémidore does not succeed in his goal to keep his mistress in his life. As a result of this failure, or as a result of accepting to live according to his father's wishes, at the end of the novel, he is reformed and no longer appears to be a petit-maître. In the final lines of the novel, Thémidore states: "je suis les avis de mon père, et je suis actuellement pris d’une aimable demoiselle avec laquelle je serai peut-être assez heureux pour m’unir par les liens sacrés du mariage” (354). He finally lives according to the rules set forth by society for young, respectable men. In the end, he winds up renouncing his old ways because he is forced to do so by his father, but then he finds himself quite content in an honorable marriage and in the domestic lifestyle. Thémidore not only follows but also assimilates patriarchal authority.

To conclude my discussion of D'Aucour's narrative, I want to reiterate that Thémidore's initial bout of physical impotence seems to have repercussions on his behavior throughout the narrative. It is characterized by an obsessive desire to save face and by the enactment of physical force: the impotent petit-maître seeks retribution against others for his defect and tries to regain power through rape. Although the rape in some
way affords Thémidore some temporary power over his male enemy, it fails to grant him power over all men in his life, specifically his father. Thémidore is forced, by his father, to eventually start acting in a way that is inconsistent with the petit-maître reputation. The finale is presented as a happy ending, which highlights the conventional function of the petit-maître: in this story, he does not physically disappear from the narrative action but he is reformed. The father must intervene for the sake of his son's position in society.

The intervention of paternal authority occurs in many petit-maître plays and novels. For example, in Rousseau's play *Narcisse ou l'amant de lui-même* (1752), a petit-maître is also "corrected" of his self-absorption and frivolity through the influence of a father. Like Thémidore, Rousseau's Valère is a petit-maître who is reformed at the conclusion of the dramatic action. Here, unlike in D'Aucour's novel, there is no explicit physical impotence, but this play resembles Thémidore's story in that the petit-maître’s correction is sealed by the intervention of paternal will.

In Rousseau's play, the father's (Lisimon) presence is felt throughout the play although he does not appear on stage until the end. It is Lisimon's desire for heritage that creates the drama. Valère's projected marriage to Angélique, ordered by the father, is the basis of the dramatic action because Valère is not interested in marriage. It is the patriarch, the virile father, who encourages a legal union for his son, thus aiming to ensuring his filial loyalty by adherence to social and gender codes that deem fatherhood the necessary manifestation of a virile constitution.

The inspiration for this play, as Rousseau describes anecdotally in *Les Confessions*, comes from another play written by Rousseau's acquaintance, d'Aubonne, 165 Here, we see the theme of 'refusal of marriage' that often accompanies representations of petits-maîtres.
about a man who is described as having "les goûts ultramontains". This was a common phrase used at the time to refer to homosexual preferences: the adjective \textit{ultramontain} is a relative term that means over the Alps: for the French, \textit{ultramontain} refers to Italians, for the Italians, \textit{ultramontain} refers to the French.\footnote{Dictionnaire de l'Académie française. 4th edition (1762).} In this context, it refers to the homosexual practices of the ancient Romans:

\begin{quote}
Pendant que j'étais au séminaire, M. d'Aubonne fut obligé de quitter Annecy. Monsieur l'intendant s'avisa de trouver mauvais qu'il fît l'amour à sa femme. C'était faire comme le chien du jardinier; car, quoique madame Corvezi fût aimable, il vivait fort mal avec elle; des goûts ultramontains la lui rendaient inutile, et il la traitait si brutalement qu'il fut question de séparation. M. Corvezi était un vilain homme, noir comme une taupe, fripon comme une chouette, et qui à force de vexations finit par se faire chasser lui-même. On dit que les Provençaux se vengent de leurs ennemis par des chansons: M. d'Aubonne se vengea du sien par une comédie; il envoya cette pièce à madame de Waren, qui me la fit voir. Elle me plut, et me fit naître la fantaisie d'en faire une, pour essayer si j'étais en effet aussi bête que l'auteur l'avait prononcé: mais ce ne fut qu'à Chambéri que j'exécutai ce projet en écrivant \textit{l'Amant de lui-même}.\footnote{Rousseau \textit{Les Confessions Livre troisième} (Paris: H. Launette), 175.} 
\end{quote}

Corvezi is a man who neglects his wife. He neither wants to have sex with her, nor allows her to have sex with anyone else (\textit{le chien du jardinier}\footnote{"Chiens." Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé. Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, 2012. Web. Aug. 2013. http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/chiens. \textit{"Faire comme le chien du jardinier qui ne mange point de choux et n'en laisse point manger aux autres". \textit{"Mais, madame, s'il vous aimait vous n'en voudriez point, et cependant vous ne voulez point qu'il soit à une autre. C'est faire justement comme le chien du jardinier."}(4.5) Molière, \textit{La Princesse d'Elide} in \textit{Œuvres complètes}. (Paris: Hachette, 1873).}). With his "Italian" tastes, he is not useful to her. He treats her so poorly that the couple is estranged, which, for Rousseau, becomes a comic situation that serves as the inspiration for his classic petit-maître comedy. The play thus signals a suggested link between homosexuality and effeminacy since the main character, Valère, is loosely based on Corvezi.

Rousseau's comedy begins with Valère's sister, Lucinde, intervening into the relationship between father and son by acting on behalf of the father. When Lucinde
hears of Valère's aversion to marrying Angélique, she takes it upon herself to ensure the marriage does take place. She acts as the agent of the patriarchal desire when she finds a way to carry out her father's plan. She decides to have Valère's portrait embellished and slightly transformed to resemble the portrait of a woman. Valère's effeminacy is highlighted when Lucinde invents her scheme and notes that the transformation is not as far-fetched as one may think: "c'est une femme sous les habits d'un homme" (1.1). Valère's fiancée, Angélique, although she is not in on the invention of the plot and opposes it when Lucinde reveals it to her because she does not want to deceive her future husband, agrees to participate because of her desire to marry Valère and her genuine affection for him. As the women anticipate, Valère falls in love with the "woman" in the portrait. He admits his fondness for Angélique, but claims he cannot marry her when his heart belongs to another.

The father's influence is most directly portrayed when Lisimon sees Valère preening at his toilette and having his hair perfectly coiffed before dressing. Lisimon chastises him:

Faut-il tant d'appareil pour nouer des cheveux et mettre un habit? Parbleu! Dans ma jeunesse, nous usions mieux du temps; et, sans perdre les trois quarts de la journée à faire la roue devant un miroir, nous savions à plus juste titre avancer nos affaires auprès des belles. (1.4)

Lisimon substantiates his status as a virile man with the claim that, at Valère's age, he and his cohort knew how to properly "advance their affairs with women". This is a not-so-subtle implication that a man who is overly interested in his appearance does not have masculine prowess and cannot fully progress in his sexual pursuits. Lisimon connotes his

son's physical and symbolic impotence. Thus, the absence of ideal (fatherly) masculine qualities is a large part of the play's representation of the son's narcissism.

Although the father is not directly responsible for the means of Valère's correction, he acts as the driving force behind it. It is Lucinde who invents the conspiracy and it is Angélique who resolves it: after hearing Valère declare his love for both her and the woman in the portrait and admit the confusion of his heart, she forces him to choose between her and the imaginary woman. He finally chooses Angélique and she in turn reveals truth that the portrait is simply a feminized version of him. Thanks to Angélique's intervention, Valère repents: "Venez, belle Angélique, vous m'avez guéri d'un ridicule qui faisait la honte de ma jeunesse." (1.18).

But it is at this point when Lisimon enters the scene to deliver the coup de grâce. He not only confirms Valère's correction but also he is the only character that can authorize or prevent the marriage. It is the father who has the final word and it is the father who "fills the void" of the petit-maître's power: the father now sees the son as a proper man who is on the correct path to paternity. He gives his blessing for the marriage based on the success of his intervention: "les voilà tous raisonnables. J'en suis charmé. Embrassez-moi, mes enfants, et allons conclure ces heureux hyménées. Ce que c'est qu'un coup d'autorité frappé à propos!" (1.18). The fatherly intervention here ensures the correction. The petit-maître whose potency is restored in the end of the novel is almost always represented as having been corrected and therefore no longer a petit-maître. Correction confirms total transformation and vanishing of petit-maître status.

Like Valère's failure in his pursuit of the woman in the portrait, sometimes petits-maîtres’ failures and general ineffectiveness manifest themselves not as actual physical
impotence but rather as symbolic impotence. But even in these cases, the petit-maître seeks some way to assert power in the absence of a perceived lack of authority. Symbolic impotence demonstrates the same power struggle as physical impotence, but the dynamic plays out more often between men, and the sexual element is less overt. Many times, the unfolding of these types of narratives depends on the actions of a father figure.

Symbolic impotence and the obsession with progeny:

Le Francais à Londres

By "symbolic impotence" I mean variety of social, emotional and structural failures that end in the petit-maître's disappearance from the narrative or dramatic action. Some petits-maîtres, even if they are not necessarily portrayed as sexually impotent, are unable to secure the woman's consent to marriage. Many of these characters are represented as ineffective or unable to reach some end goals.

Petits-maîtres often attempt to recruit young men to adopt the their principles and lifestyle and to carry them on into the next generation. In this respect, they succeed to some extent at producing non-biological progeny, recruited to carry on a worldly legacy. Ultimately, however, these recruitments fail because any power that the petits-maîtres have is temporary and finally eludes them.

In the first chapter, I showed how petit-maître couples, such as Meilcour and Versac in Crébillon's Les Egarements du cœur et de l'esprit, reinforce their homosocial masculine bond through their instrumentalization of a woman. I now intend to discuss another petit-maître couple that consists of a mentor and a protégé, but here I will focus
specifically on the interruption of the couple's bond by another, more powerful, man. Like Nassès in Crébillon's *Le Sopha*, this man has all the masculine qualities that the other two lack. As in the tale of Thémidore and in the play *Narcisse ou l'amant de lui-même*, it is a father who intervenes in a young man's life and ultimately determines the outcome of his son's relationships. The assertion of power by the third man outside the petit-maitre couple not only illustrates but also causes the failure of the petit-maitre's attempt to produce a social "son". The father has more power than the petit-maitre because of the simple fact that he has managed to biologically father a son and to exert control over his life.

Louis de Boissy's popular comedy *Le Francais à Londres* (1727) includes two petit-maitres, a younger apprentice petit-maitre and an older mentor who is represented as ineffective in his attempt to mold his young friend into a clone. This petit-maitre, the marquis de Polienville, is an effeminate, affected, coquettish man who attempts to persuade a young English man, Lord Houzey, to adopt his manners and social behaviors. (We may note Boissy's play on names: the marquis is "poli en ville", polite only in the urban setting; the young English lord "Houzey" rhymes with the English word "floozy", which indicates a woman who is easy to seduce). In this play, the marquis is represented as a failure in many respects. Not only does the marquis fail to succeed in his endeavor to recruit Lord Houzey, he also fails to seduce the young woman, is eventually rejected by all the characters of the play, and in the end simply disappears from the dramatic action. The failure of the petit-maitre in his play, like in Rousseau's play and d'Aucour's novel, is sealed by the intervention of a father.
The play is set in the English countryside at the stately manor of the play's father figure, Milord Craff. The marquis, represented as the stereotypical frivolous and decadent Frenchman that was popular in English anti-French propaganda, is staying at the house for an extended period of time. He constantly comments on the differences between English and French comportments and ways of life and insists openly that the English lack all manner of sophistication. The story begins with the marquis explaining to his cousin, the baron, his specific grievances about the English’s lack of entertaining conversation: "leur conversation, ils n’en ont point du tout. Il font une heure sans parler et n’ont autre chose à vous dire qu’Howdyado" (1.1). According to the marquis, the English also lack physical finesse: "font tout de mauvaise grâce, ne savent ni marcher ni s’asseoir, ni se lever, ni tousser, ni cracher, ni éternuer, ni se moucher" (1.1). This last criticism is ironic, however, because here the marquis describes actions that are not noble subjects in that they all involve the emitting of phlegm. This statement by the marquis highlights the ridiculousness of his accusations and already the audience is given indication that the marquis's lessons will eventually fail because of his frivolity.

The marquis does not necessarily begin with the intention of tutoring the play's young Englishman in French ways and manners; but it is the inevitable result of the conversations between the two men. The marquis takes full advantage of his petit-maître status because he acts as the pedagogue (maître) to a young protégé. Although the audience is not initially privy to their first conversations, Lord Houzey tells his sister that he has learned so much in the few conversations he had with the marquis that he finds himself completely changed. Houzey now believes himself to be gentile, mannered, polite, and savvy with women:
J’ai fait connaissance avec un jeune Seigneur Français, qu’on appelle le Marquis de Polienville. […] je ne suis qu’un maussade auprès de lui et je ne compte savoir vivre que du jour que je le connais. Ah! Qu’il m’a appris des choses en cinq ou six conversations et que je me suis façonné avec lui et tu dois me trouver bien changé. J’étais sot, timide, embarrassé quand je me trouvais avec les Dames. Mais à présent, ce n’est plus cela. […] Je suis sémillant, je badine, je folâtre, je papillonne, je voltige, je les amuse toutes (1.6)

But he may just appear silly to these women; amuser may mean either that he entertains them or that they laugh at his expense. In any case, Houzey is not portrayed as a master of social graces.

Gradually, the marquis’s lessons become more explicit and precise, and we find him ironically teaching good manners that form the basis of honnêteté. For example, the marquis declares that, despite nature’s small role in the process, becoming a gentleman is an "art": "La nature commence un joli homme, mais c'est l'art qui l'achève" (1.14). This discourse subverts the chevalier de Méré’s Discours sur le vrai honnêteté (1701) which states that nature has a hand in the development of gentlemanly qualities but that the art of self-fashioning is the main contributing factor in the persona of the honnête homme: "J’ai quelquefois vu disputer, si cette qualité si rare (honnêteté) vient principalement d’une heureuse naissance, ou d’une excellente éducation; et je crois, que pour l’acquérir en perfection, il est nécessaire que la nature y contribue et que l’art, comme partout ailleurs, achève ce qu’elle a commencé" (Méré 3, 70). The crucial word here is the discredited "joli homme", which turns the classical discourse of honnêteté on its head: the marquis is using the consecrated language of honnêteté in order to teach his protégé how to become ridiculous.

The marquis seems to argue in favor of honnêteté by instructing Houzey on the most polite ways to treat others:
Un homme du monde a des manières par égard, par attention pour les autres, pour leur marquer la considération qu'il a pour eux, l'envie qu'il a de leur plaire et de s'attirer leur bienveillance. Est-il dans un Cercle ? il est toujours attentif à ne rien faire, à ne rien dire que d'obligeant ; il prête poliment l'oreille à l'un, répond là, dit une douceur à la mère, et regarde tendrement la fille. Vous fait-il un plaisir? la façon dont il le fait, est cent fois au-dessus du plaisir même. (1.14)

All of these actions illustrate the savoir-faire of an ideal honnête homme. When discussing how to treat others, the marquis seems to follow the principles of honnêteté, but the impression soon changes.

But, just as one might suspect, the marquis borrows the discourse of honnêteté to express the exact opposite of the ideal when he starts to put too much emphasis on the public display of his self-worth:

Un joli homme se donne des airs par complaisance pour lui-même, pour apprendre aux autres le cas qu'il fait de sa personne, pour les avertir qu'il a du mérite, qu'il en est tout pénétré, qu'on y fasse attention. Est-il à la promenade? il marche fièrement la tête haute, les deux mains dans la ceinture, comme pour dire à ceux qui font autour de lui rangez-vous, Messieurs, regardez-moi passer: n'ai-je pas bon air ? Suis-je pas fait autour ? et vous, mes Dames les friponnes, qui me parcourrez des yeux en souriant, vous voudriez me posséder. (1.15)

When discussing how a man should present himself in public, he falls into the inevitable trap of impolite, boisterous, and ridiculous over-confidence that characterizes the petit-maître’s misreading of the tenets of honnêteté. The marquis lacks the all important humility of the honnête homme and thinks that self-confidence can only be communicated through an obvious display and through loud pronouncement:

Il faut s'afficher soi-même, il faut se donner pour ce qu'on vaut : il faut avoir le courage de dire tout haut qu'on a de l'esprit, du cœur, de la naissance, de la figure. Le monde ne vous estime qu'autant que vous vous prêtez vous-même ; & de toutes les mauvaises qualités qu'un homme peut avoir, je n'en connais pas de pire que la modestie, elle étouffe le vrai mérite, elle l'enterre tout vivant. C'est l'effronterie, morbleu, c'est l'effronterie qui le met au jour, qui le fait briller. (1.15)
Modesty is the sworn enemy of the petit-maître. The marquis has drawn the young man in with the promise of politeness, but then sublety injects his token affectation into his lessons that comes from the conspicuousness of his high self-opinion.

Nevertheless, or perhaps because of the seductive nature of these lessons – which set free a young man’s worst natural impulses – Lord Houzey is ready to follow in the marquis’s footsteps. But before the effects of this instruction will result in Lord Houzey’s eventual development into a petit-maître, his father, Milord Craff, enters the scene with the explicit intention of intervening. When the marquis and Houzey are engaged in a "lesson", Milord Craff enters to act as the voice of reason and to call attention to the ridiculousness of the marquis’s instructions: "Quelle impertinence! … C'est trop de patience, je n'y puis plus. Vous voulez bien, M. le Marquis, que je vous remercie des bonnes et solides instructions que vous donnez à mon fils. À Lord Houzey d’un ton sec: Pour vous, Monsieur, je fus bien aise de voir comme vous employez votre temps" (1.15). It takes a simple act of authority to break up the relationship between the tutor and the pupil.

Milord Craff represents a typically masculine Englishman, the opposite of the French petit-maître. First of all, he is a father and lord of a manor. Second, Milord Craff is presented neither as an affected and mannered cad nor as an incorrigible boor with no idea of manners. He makes use of good sense and reason: "Quelque opiniâtre que vous soyez, je vous convaincrai par la forcé dé mon raisonnement…Quoique je sois homme de condition, je n'ai pas honte de parler comme un savant" (1.18). He recognizes the differences between himself and the Frenchman but also sees the frivolity and bad character of the marquis that is, to Houzey, so well hidden under his seductive, flashy
persona. Craff tells the marquis: "Pour un garçon qui fait métier de politesse, c’est bien en manquer; et je suis bien bon de vouloir faire entendre raison à un Calotin" (1.18).

*Calotin* is a denigrating term used to describe corrupt or pedantic clergy members.¹⁷⁰ Craff uses it here to connote the fraudulent nature of the pedagogical relationship between the marquis and Houzey.

This play shows how easily the French fop can infect a young impressionable youth with his showiness and effeminate manners. But the good opinion that the young man has of the petit-maître is only formed by mere superficial seduction because the marquis eventually fails to fully enact the transformation of his young protégé. In the beginning, the marquis is presented as a dangerous character because he easily influences the other characters to adopt his ways. He has power in this respect. But this fleeting power is eventually usurped by another man. This intervening man is an exemplification of masculine power and control. It is no coincidence that this man is the father; as such, he highlights the "impotence" of his adversary. Not only has he been able physically to father children but also he succeeds in his endeavor to stop the marquis’s lessons, he foils the marquis's plans to marry the daughter, and he disgraces him publicly. It is Craff who ultimately renders the marquis's lessons ineffective.

At the end of the play, we are given no indication as to the marquis’s future plans and are led to believe, through *didascalie*, that the marquis suddenly vanishes without a trace. It is as if the marquis never existed in the world of the play. He pronounces one bitter and arrogant good-bye to the woman he wanted to seduce and disappears: "Adieu

Madame, vous êtes plus punie que moi. Vous m’aimez et je pars. il s’en va.” (1.24). He ultimately fails in his seduction but refuses to openly acknowledge it.

This disappearance is a reversal of the situation at the start of the dramatic action, because at the opening of the play, he is presented as an influential force: he is the main character, he does hold sway over some women, and he almost succeeds in an effort to produce his clone in a younger man. He seems so effective that he almost converts an Englishman to adopt and assimilate his French style.

Although the play ends with the father's success and the petit-maître’s disappearance, the action throughout the play does not necessarily confirm the marquis's lack of power or the father's possession of it. Throughout the action, the marquis's influence over the young man is never in question. Moreover, the young man does not ultimately renounce the marquis or see the errors of his ways. Although the father accomplishes an effective intervention, he does not necessarily succeed in convincing his son of the error of the marquis's ways. Ultimately, despite the disappearance of the petit-maître, the power struggle between Houzey and the father is not necessarily resolved. The absence of resolution in this play confirms its portrayal of the tenuousness of the ideology of honnéteté. The marquis is, at times, in control of others, like the honnête homme. But unlike the honnête homme, he disappears by an act of fatherly power. The other petit-maître in the play, Houzey, is not reformed; thus, there is no final word about how one must behave socially.
Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined both symbolic and physical impotence of the petit-maître and its consequences for them and other characters. Many times, as in *Le Français à Londres*, the petit-maître merely disappears. In some cases, as in *Thémidore* and *Narcisse ou l'amant de lui-même*, the petit-maîtres are reformed, and at the end of the story, they can no longer be considered petits-maîtres. Also, like Mazulhim of Crébillon’s *Le Sopha*, the impotent petit-maître must recruit a counterpart to help him carry out his scheme.

In all of these cases, we see that petits-maîtres illustrate the notion of effeminacy. They are viewed as "unmanly" and they fail to succeed or continue to live with their impotent conditions. They constantly seek the upper hand. But the pursuit of power does little more than emphasize and reaffirm their lack of power either over their own sexuality or over other characters. The episodes of impotence ultimately show the petits-maîtres' desire to be what they are not: they constantly fail to achieve what they desire. These episodes also explain in part why the petit-maître is such a popular character: he masterfully manipulates the idea of power by feigning that he has it. He is intensely seductive but also ultimately ineffective.

This chapter has shown the extreme negativity attached to the petit-maître but also illustrates that the portrayal of impotence serves to signal the contested status of the discourse on *honnêteté*. In these plays, when the petit-maître's "power" fails, it is mainly because the *honnête homme’s* claim that he is relinquishing his power over women is being called into question: does the *honnête homme* actually relinquish this power? What does it mean to be a perfectly sociable man? By the same token, is the petit-maître a
potential (or actual) rapist or is he impotent? In other words, these works raise the concern that the petit-maître is the hidden truth of the *honnête homme*; the truth that the narratives and plays uncover. The portrayals of the petit-maître all waver between contradictory, but ultimately undesirable, models of masculinity that all must be rejected in the end.

This contradiction helps explain the remarkable fact that the petit-maître, which embodies only a negative example of a social man, endures in literature and society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, as Boissy’s play demonstrates, the petit-maître’s popularity even crosses national boundaries. In the following chapter, I will discuss the wide-reaching influence of the image of the French petit-maître throughout Europe in the eighteenth century.
Benjamin Constant, the nineteenth century author, politician, and companion of Germaine de Staël, writes about her 1807 novel, Corinne ou l'Italie. Specifically, he addresses Staël's character, le comte d'Erfeuil, which was attacked in the French press at the time for representing Frenchmen in a negative light:

On a reproché à Mme de Staël quelque exagération dans la teinte innocente et légère du ridicule qu’elle donne quelquefois au comte d’Erfeuil. On a prétendu qu’il n’était pas possible qu'un Français, à Rome, appelât une Italienne une belle étrangère. On avait donc oublié ce trait si connu d'un Français dinant avec beaucoup d'autres Français chez un prince d'Allemagne, et lui disant tout à coup: 'C'est singulier, Monseigneur, il n'y a que votre Altesse d'étranger ici.' Celui qui écrit ces lignes a vu de ses yeux, dans un spectacle allemand, un comédien français s'avancer pour haranguer le parterre, et commençant son discours par ces paroles: Respectables étrangers...'.

Constant discusses the way in which the French comte d'Erfeuil addresses the Italian character, Corinne, at one point in the narrative as "beautiful foreigner" despite being in her country: "Ne voudriez-vous pas, belle étrangère, reprit le comte d'Erfeuil, que nous admissions chez nous la barbarie tudesque, les nuits d'Young des Anglais, les Concetti des Italiens et des Espagnols? Que deviendrait le goût, l'élégance du style français après un tel mélange?" A Frenchman addressing a native as "foreigner" in his or her own

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171 Benjamin Constant, Œuvres (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 838
172 Staël, Corinne ou l'Italie. Ed. Simone Balayé (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 177. In his comments, Constant responds to a review of Staël's novel that appeared in the Le Journal de l'empire, May 12, 1807. The journalist, Féletz, argues: "Le compte d'Erfeuil, défenseur de la littérature français, est le plus faible de tous (les personnages du roman); cependant, tel est son esprit naturel et surtout la bonté de sa cause qu'il a le plus souvent raison contre Oswald [...] et contre Corinne[...]. Le comte d'Erfeuil triomphe surtout lorsque parlant de l'art dramatique, il peut citer avec un noble orgueil les grands noms de Corneille, de Racine, de Molière." Féletz's assessment of d'Erfeuil is strange in that he seems to consider the fictional persona to be an actual Frenchman rather than merely a character of Staël's creation. He argues that d'Erfeuil is represented poorly by Staël and that his opinions, although Staël tries to present them in a negative way, are actually viable and reasonable. Féletz does not criticize how d'Erfeuil portrays the Frenchman, but rather the way Staël imagines the Frenchman to be ridiculous, when even her own character is logical and
country illustrates his alleged predisposition to consider France the center of the civilized world. D'Erfeuil also asserts the "purity" of the French style which he says must be preserved against the barbarism of the English, the Italians, and the Spanish; in short, all other cultures.

But this comment is only one reason for d'Erfeuil's bad press. He also is criticized for representing Frenchmen in a way that is very similar to portrayals of petits-maîtres. D'Erfeuil's address of "belle étrangère" recalls a comment made by the petit-maître, the marquis de Polienville, in Boissy's comedy *Le Français à Londres* (1727), who, despite being in London, claims that all Londoners have a "foreign air": "cet air étranger qu'ont tous les habitants de cette ville" (1.1). Like many petit-maître caricatures in stage comedies, d'Erfeuil is frivolous and shallow; for example, his conversation is witty and entertaining but superficial:

> Il jouait avec les mots, avec les phrases d'une façon très ingénieuse, ni les objets extérieurs ni les sentiments intimes n'étaient l'objet de ses discours. Sa conversation ne venait, pour ainsi dire, ni du dehors ni du dedans; elle passait entre la réflexion et l'imagination, et les seuls rapports de la société en étaient le sujet. (*Corinne* 36)

This type of discourse is similar to that of other petit-maîtres. In Billardon de Sauvigny's comedy *Le Persifleur* (1771), petits-maîtres are portrayed as superficial composers of verses that consist of nothing more than hollow verbiage and ostentation: "héros de toilette, jolis falseurs de vers, amateurs d'ariettes...Qui n'ont pour tout esprit que du faste

knowledgeable despite her desire to depict him as the opposite. Constant defends Staël by supporting the veracity of her representation as the typical Frenchman outside of France who is reputed to have all of the same qualities of frivolity and francocentrism that d'Erfeuil displays.

et des mots" (1.4). Despite the beauty of the verses, there is no meaning behind the words and the discourse is empty, like the comte de Versac’s conversation in Crébillon’s novel *Les Egarements du cœur et de l’esprit*, which is described as: “un amas de minuties" (*Egarements* 150).

Not only does d'Erfeuil's conversation border on frivolity, but also he refuses to speak any language but French, and he judges citizens of other countries based on whether they speak his language: "C'est vraiment une charmante personne que Corinne, elle a de l'esprit et de la grâce; je n'ai pas bien compris ce qu'elle disait, parce qu'elle parlait italien, mais à la voir je gagerais qu'elle sait très bien le français; nous en jugerons ce soir" (*Corinne* 72). And although he is a Frenchman in Italy, d'Erfeuil takes no inspiration from his travels and only hopes to find in Rome French people with whom to converse: "dans cette ancienne capitale du monde, je trouverai surement quelques Français avec qui causer, et c'est tout ce que je désire" (36). This preference smacks of the attitude displayed by other petits-maîtres who believe that it is only the French who know the elements of good conversation. Boissy's marquis de Polienville admonishes the English for their lack of French grace in verbal exchange, as evidenced by the statement he makes in the first scene about English conversation. D'Erfeuil's (and Polienville's) francocentrism in conversation here is a manifestation, on a grand and national scale, of petits-maîtres' typically inflated self-opinions.

Additionally, d'Erfeuil is like other petits-maîtres in his status as a secondary character whose purpose is to bring to light certain elements of the main characters' personalities and to help advance the narrative through his interaction with the main

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characters. For example, in *Corinne ou l'Italie*, d'Erfeuil initiates the narrative action by introducing the two main characters to each other. Also, like many mentor petits-maîtres who direct their young recruits in managing their appearances, d'Erfeuil tries to instruct Oswald in how to control society's opinions about his relationship with Corinne: "Ce n'est pas bien, lui dit-il, de vous montrer ainsi publiquement" (243).

Finally, d'Erfeuil resembles many other petits-maîtres in his disappearance from the narrative: like the marquis and the comte at the end of Van Effen's comedy *Les Petits-maîtres* who are simply absent from the final scene, like the marquis de Polienville at the end of Boissy's *Le Francais à Londres* who simply exits with no indication of a final fate, and like Pranzi and Versac of Crébillon's *Les Egarements* who also disappear from the story, d'Erfeuil simply ceases to be present and readers are offered no indication of his situation.

However, there is one distinctive aspect of d'Erfeuil that differentiates him from most other petits-maîtres: d'Erfeuil is a petit-maître who also happens to be an émigré. The first mention of d'Erfeuil in the narrative describes him as such: "Oswald entendit raconter à un négociant, chez lequel il s'était arrêté quelque temps, l'histoire d'un émigré français, appelé le comte d'Erfeuil" (33). As an émigré, d'Erfeuil is a Frenchman without country and a traveler out of his element who seems at times to feverishly grasp at the lost familiarity of his native land by resolutely defending all things French to the point of disparaging other cultures.₁⁷⁵ *Émigrés* were Frenchmen either cast out of France after

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₁⁷⁵ For example, d'Erfeuil attacks Italian theater by asserting the superiority of the French theater: "Notre théâtre est décidément le premier de l'Europe [...] On est accoutumé en Italie à regarder le théâtre comme une grande salle de réunion où l'on n'écoute que les airs et le ballet. [...] je ne sais pas ce qui peut amuser dans ces ballets, si ce n'est leur ridicule. [...] Il n'y a pas plus en Italie de comédie que de tragédie; et dans
1789 or who chose to leave around that time for political reasons. On the one hand, émigrés might appreciate other nations more fully than people who have not travelled and therefore act as spokespersons for cosmopolitanism, which means "belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants". On the other hand, they might romanticize and overdramatize their relationship with the patrie, feeling nostalgic for their homeland and overly proud of their cultural heritage. In Corinne, the comte d’Erfeuil tends toward the latter, as Constant recognizes. D’Erfeuil's characteristic francocentrism casts him as the narrative's stooge who continually makes outlandish claims for the superiority of all things French over those of other nations. This tendency consigns d’Erfeuil to the role of a performer in front of an audience, constantly displaying and proclaiming his national pride. In this regard, d'Erfeuil's performance of cette carrière encore c'est nous qui sommes les premiers" (177-8). I will detail more of these types of remarks from d'Erfeuil later in the chapter.

The term émigré appeared in the French language around the time of the Revolution (between 1789 and 1802) to refer to citizens whose flights from France were mainly politically motivated. See: Elizabeth McCartney, A Paris of the mind: French émigré fiction and the exiled republic of letters: 1789-1815. (Diss. U of Pennsylvania, 2009), 6. See also: Donald Greer, The Instance of Emigration During the French Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1951) and Ghislain Diesbach, L'Histoire de l'emigration française (Paris: Broche, 1998). The first mention of D’Erfeuil in the novel describes him an émigré: "Oswald entendit raconter à un négociant, chez lequel il s'était arrêté quelque temps, l'histoire d'un émigré français, appelé le comte d'Erfeuil" (33). He left France for Rome to seek out a relative from whom he is supposed to inherit.


I will return to Staël's cosmopolitanism and De l'Allemagne later in the chapter.
the typical Frenchman abroad illustrates a theatrical persona, which is a characteristic of petits-maîtres.

But Staël's portrayal of a petit-maître is unique because, first, there are very few petit-maître émigrés for the simple reason that they are on the wane after the Revolution, and second, despite emphasizing his typical qualities, Staël's portrait also actually includes an element of acclaim: d'Erfeuil is frivolous, ridiculous, and constantly performing his role of the overly proud Frenchman abroad; but he is also courageous, sympathetic, honorable and at times, even heroic. In this way, Staël's representation of the petit-maître varies from many other portrayals in which he was more one-sided and served only as the work's comedic element or typical villain.

I believe that in addition to being a crucial character in the novel, d'Erfeuil does not represent France only in a negative light, as many critics claimed. He has great influence on Oswald who admires his "mélange singulier de courage et de frivolité (Corinne 37). His lightheartedness is infectious, so much so that Oswald wonders if d'Erfeuil knows a secret to living that Oswald should adopt: "Son existence légère s'accorde-t-elle mieux que la mienne avec la rapidité de la vie?" (37). Moreover, d'Erfeuil is a loyal friend to Corinne: toward the end of the novel, when Corinne returns to England, d'Erfeuil finds her on the brink of death and saves her life. Finally, it is d'Erfeuil who is indirectly responsible for the narrative denouement by allowing Corinne to exact her final revenge against the man who abandoned her. I will explain these points in more detail later.

In this chapter, I will show that d’Erfeuil enacts a certain image of the Frenchman
outside of France that Mme de Staël carefully constructs. With his blithe demeanor and ease of living combined with his unabashed francocentrism in the face of foreign influence, d'Erfeuil reflects the attitudes and amour propre considered typical of some aristocrats in old regime France. But he also embodies the qualities of a loyal friend and travelling companion, not necessarily enthusiastic to experience new cultures but also not loath to tour regions beyond French national borders. For Staël, who was Swiss and was a foreigner in France, Germany, England, and elsewhere when she was exiled from Paris by the emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, d'Erfeuil is a distinctive petit-maître and émigré: he is an itinerant traveler trying to find his way between the disappearing old regime.
regime, which is his comfort zone, and the cosmopolitanism of the new republic, which is a new experience for him.

But before examining d’Erfeuil's enactment of Staël's view of the tension between the values of the old regime and her ideal of a cosmopolitan republic, I would like first to examine the role of the Frenchman outside of France in other popular works of the eighteenth century. In many plays, novels, and philosophical texts, the descriptions of French male characters outside of France echo descriptions of petits-maîtres. These portrayals focus on French national identity.\(^{181}\) The most common petit-maître qualities - such as frivolity, fatuousness, over-elegance, and effeminacy - are seen by foreigners as typical traits of Frenchmen. In addition, these portraits of petits-maîtres outside of France have a political purpose: they are not necessarily portrayed as a satire of those men who do not behave as *honnêtes hommes* in order to enforce correct behavior, such as in many petit-maître tales; rather, these portraits depict petits-maîtres as the indictment of the old regime civilization and political system.

In *De l’homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles et de son éducation* (1773), where he argues that wit, intelligence, and morality are the products of education and experience, the philosopher Claude-Adrien Helvétius writes about collective frivolity among individuals in a nation: "Une nation trop occupée de la fatuité d'un petit-maître est à coup sûr une nation frivole".\(^{182}\) Helvétius explicitly references the French petit-

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181 Determining national identity in France in the eighteenth century was based on factors proposed by Montesquieu in *L’Esprit des lois* such as climate, geographical location, and social organization. See specifically: Book XIX chapter XXVII: ‘Comment les lois peuvent contribuer à former les mœurs, les manières, et le caractère d'une nation’. Staël's theory of national character along with many others, were most likely highly influenced by the writings of Montesquieu. It is generally recognized that the notion of French national character in the eighteenth century was formed based on one small segment of the population, generally the educated elite. See David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003), 144.

maître, but indicates that any country could become 'a frivolous nation' as a result of its national habits. The sort of meretricious attitude typical of petits-maîtres can potentially grow into a national epidemic in any nation that overvalues showiness and triviality.

Louis-Sébastien Mercier offers a similar view in his Tableau de Paris (1781) when he ironically praises the frivolity of the French as a native quality that honors them and distinguishes them from other Europeans:

Et qu'importe un ridicule de plus, ajouté à nos incroyables petits ridicules? Le tout est de sauver nos jours d'une pesante monotonie, et de varier nos goûts, nos modes, nos enthousiasmes, nos engouements, afin de ne point perdre ce caractère de frivolité natale, qui nous honore et nous distingue aux yeux de l'Europe.\(^{183}\)

In L'Ami des hommes (1755), Victor Riqueti marquis de Mirabeau addresses economic determinants of national character during the old regime and writes about the notion of 'personal interest' and the tendency of individuals in France to seek instant gratification. He sees these qualities as symptoms of the illness of extravagance and indulgence that circulates throughout the nation: "La frivolité de la nation d'une part, l'abondance de l'or, grand corrupteur de la nature de l'autre, semblent nous avoir entièrement inclinés vers l'intérêt personnel et momentané, qu'on appelle jouissance. On place son bien à fonds perdu, on bâtit, on se meuble, on vit enfin uniquement pour soi".\(^{184}\)

Picking up on Mirabeau's idea of defectiveness in French culture generated by excessive attention to the self, Immanuel Kant addresses French frivolity in one of his early works, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (1764). On the one hand, Kant recognizes the good in French culture by highlighting its "fine jests,

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comedy, laughing satire, enamored flirting, and light and naturally flowing writing”.

On the other hand, he admits that the French are also prone to overvalue the trivial:

The fault on which this national character borders nearest is the trifling, or with a more polite expression, the frivolous. Weighty matters are treated as sport, and trivialities serve for the most earnest business. In old age the Frenchman still sings sportive songs, and is, as much as he can be, still gallant toward the ladies. (103)

Kant's comment about the old Frenchman conjures the image of an elderly rascal who still attempts to seduce ladies in his old age. This is an important reference because it bears witness to the prominent role of women in French culture. Frenchwomen are the means by which Frenchmen socialize as they provide the example for their male compatriots to follow:

In France, woman gives the tone to all companies and all society. Now of course it cannot be denied that gatherings without the fair sex are rather tasteless and boring; but if the lady gives the beautiful tone, so should the man on his side give the noble. Failing that, the society becomes just as boring, but from the opposite reason, for nothing disgusts so much as excessive sweetness. In French taste it is not worded, “Is the gentleman at home?” but “Is Madame at home?” “Madame is at her toilette,” Madame has vapors” (a sort of beautiful caprice); in short, with Madame and by Madame are all conversations and all pleasures kept occupied. (102)

Rousseau of course also discusses the power of Frenchwomen in socialization (and Rousseau himself may be one of the sources of Kant’s views on the French character, since Kant never travelled outside Germany) but Rousseau's comments on women’s' authority are derisive in many places. In exploring the notion of morality in French national character during the old regime in his famous *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758), Rousseau specifically mentions the effeminacy with which the

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French are identified. He writes that dominant salonnières were responsible for the effeminacy attributed to Frenchmen:

[...] faute de pouvoir de se rendre hommes, les femmes nous rendent femmes. [...] chaque femme de Paris rassemble dans son appartement un sérail d'hommes plus femmes qu'elle, qui savent rendre à la beauté toutes sortes d'hommages, hors celui du cœur dont elle est digne. Mais voyez ces mêmes hommes, toujours contraints dans ces prisons volontaires, se lever, se rasseoir, aller et venir sans cesse à la cheminée, à la fenêtre, prendre et poser cent fois un écran, feuilleter des livres, parcourir des tableaux, tourner, pirouetter par la chambre.186

Rousseau's portrait of the fashionable man here echoes Diderot's description of frivolous petits-maîtres in his Les Bijoux indiscrets whose salon behavior equates to nothing more than a dance or "pirouette": "l'on pirouette encore aujourd'hui; entamer une conversation sérieuse ou sensée [...] pour aller marmotter une parodie à quelqu'un qui lui demande des nouvelles de la guerre ou de sa santé, ou lui chuchoter à l'oreille".187 For Rousseau, the women who were accountable for the "effeminization" of Frenchmen relegated them to the salons, which Rousseau sees as nothing more than gender-reversed harems in which servile men attended to every desire of their female masters. Although he does not specifically mention the petit-maître, the Swiss Rousseau emphasizes the foreign perception of Frenchmen in the eighteenth century as effeminate.

The reputed effeminacy of Frenchmen in the eighteenth century was equally disparaged and also feared by the English for its possible influence across the Channel. During the time that would correspond to the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV, the development of a new gender identity for men in England was beginning to emerge: resulting from a change in the socio-economic statuses of Englishmen as the country became more "powerful, prosperous, tolerant, and civilized", there was a new expectation

186 Rousseau, A M. d'Alembert, 135-6.
187 Diderot, OR, 216-17.
for men to refine their conduct within society. The new standard of politeness encouraged Englishmen to learn from interaction with women: men were to be gentle, complaisant, and sentimental, all the while retaining traditional male attributes such as rationality, courage, and self-control. However, many English critics voiced their fears about politeness, arguing that women’s influence could result in behavior that imitated women rather than in a clear refinement of conduct. In other words, to its detractors, politeness was effeminizing and was in danger of creating an effeminate society in England and therefore of spreading French-style absolutism: "Both critics and proponents of polite society assessed modern gentlemanliness in terms of its proximity to the nebulous yet always troubling state of effeminacy", which causes: "delicacy, triviality and debilitating self-indulgence" (Carter 7).

David Fordyce, a Scottish philosopher who wrote about educating British gentlemen in his Dialogues Concerning Education (1745), discusses the need to avoid typical French effeminacy brought on by the practice of gallantry: "The sickly and lame compositions of your French [...] inspire quite false notions of honor and courage, dissolve the mind [...] and in the room of the noblest passions and an useful activity for the public, they substitute a fanatic and effeminate thing, which they name gallantry" (1, 360). Fordyce's commentary bears witness to the political implications of the type of behavior attributed to the petit-maître: this type of French "gallantry" is not beneficial to the public interest in Scotland. To Fordyce, in France, "Foppery is often mistaken for

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Politeness" (2, 308). The "fop" was a popular character in English theater during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He was like the petit-maître: an overly powdered, ostensibly made-up, frivolous, ridiculous, and effeminate man notorious for embracing French influence. 190 The fop is described as: "Frenchified: having succumbed to the seduction of the French, he displayed French fashions, French manners and French smatterings" (Cohen 9). Many authors in France and abroad wrote about Frenchmen's reputation for effeminacy.

Turning now to representations of petits-maîtres abroad in fiction, we see the disapproval of French effeminacy enacted on the eighteenth-century stage. Boissy's fickle and affected French marquis disdains people unlike himself. To him, the English lack elegance, manners, grace, wit and any positive quality:

Je veux dire qu'ils n'ont pas l'air qu'il faut avoir, cet air libre, ouvert, empressé, prévenant, gracieux, l'air par excellence; en un mot l'air que nous avons nous autres Français. [...] un homme sans manières, n'est présentable nulle part et n'a pas l'air que nous avons en France, est un homme qui fait tout de mauvaise grâce. (1.1).

As I mentioned earlier, the marquis views all the English residents of London as having a "foreign air" despite being in their own country. In Boissy's play, the marquis fails to see any redeeming qualities in the English, despite their reputation for common sense, intelligence, and practicality.

Although the marquis's criticisms of the English culture are extreme, there is one character in the play that embodies these denigrations.191 The dour, brutish, and

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190 There were perhaps as many English plays in which the fop figures predominantly as there were petit-maître plays in France. The themes of French influence in England or a boorish Englishman trying to find his way in Paris become a banality in both countries due to the sheer volume of these comedies. For a detailed account, see: Andrew P. Williams, The Restoration Fop: gender boundaries and comic characterization in later seventeenth century drama (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1995).

191 In his article "English Gloom and French Enlightenment", Eric Gidal reviews the popular Englishman 'type' to its French detractors: dour, unrefined, taciturn to the point of rudeness, overbearing, and brutish
unrefined Englishman, Jacques Rosbif, is no better than the marquis at understanding alterity. He is mystified by the marquis's French habits and manners, which he interprets as shallow and ridiculous, and endlessly mocks him because of them. In turn, the marquis considers Rosbif a typical example of an Englishman: "C'est lui qui fait un homme lourd, pédant, mélancolique, taciturne, ennuyeux; le fléau des compagnies, un moraliseur, un rêve creux; en un mot...Un Anglais, n'est-ce pas?" (1.16). The two characters interact to produce the play's comedic elements, but they do not evolve throughout the dramatic action and they cannot ultimately reconcile their differences.

There is one character, however, that clearly represents the notion of an ideally cosmopolitan citizen. In the play, the ideal European citizen happens to be a French baron; however, he is a Frenchman who has spent much time in England, understands the English people, and is sympathetic to differences between the French and English cultures. When responding to the marquis's criticisms of English conversation, the baron illustrates their admirable qualities: "leur conversation est pleine de bon sens. [...] Les Anglais ne sont pas brillants, mais ils sont profonds" (1.1). The baron emphasizes some of the typically redeeming qualities of the English that were widely recognized at the time. The Swiss author Béat-Louis de Mauralt in his Lettres sur les Anglais et les Français (1725) also communicates the opinions offered by the baron:

Il me semble qu'il entre dans l'idée ordinaire qu'on a de l'Angleterre que les hommes y sont braves, les femmes belles; [...] La bravoure des Anglais est établie partout et sans doute avec raison: ils en donne une preuve convaincante, qui est de ne guère craindre la mort. [...] c'est parce qu'ils ont du bien et du bon sens.\[192\]


The baron's acknowledgement of the admirable qualities of the English – their "brave" political character and their strong tradition of the defense of property and rights – draws no reaction from the marquis: he simply ignores the baron's retorts to his denunciations. Nonetheless, it is clear that Boissy wants to stress these traits by creating a character that both recognizes and assimilates them.

The baron enacts the praiseworthy elements of both types: French elegance and wit on the one hand, and English seriousness, common sense, and independence, on the other. He also attempts to attenuate the extreme elements of both by trying to reason with the marquis and Rosbif. The baron represents an ideally cosmopolitan citizen and the play illustrates common perspectives on national character when it is based on national types. Parodying national types, the play underscores their excess and dysfunction, while also communicating the value of foreign experience and influence. At the end of the play, both the marquis (the seducer) and Jacques Rosbif (the prospective fiancé) lose the world-wise woman (the honnête femme) to the baron who ends up marrying her.

Another play that highlights the relationship between the French and other Europeans in the eighteenth century is Dorat's Le Chevalier français à Turin (1778). Here, unlike in Boissy's play, there is no character that embodies a multicultural ideal. Rather, all of the characters are extreme caricatures. The French chevalier is a scheming petit-maître, looking to dupe all the other characters. The young Turinese man, Mata, is a version of a petit-maître: as a young nobleman, he spends all his time seducing women,

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193 Eric Gidal argues: "Boissy reconciles these polarities in the Baron de Polinville, who combines the politesse of the French with the common sense of the English and thereby wins the hand of the coveted English maid" (28).
but he is not as scheming or as manipulating as the chevalier. He is a libertine without being malicious. Younger than the chevalier, he most closely resembles a petit-maître apprentice. The Turinese count, on the other hand, is overly proud, somewhat obtuse, and most of all, extremely pedantic. The Turinese ladies, the countess and the marquise, are hypocritical and coquettish.

The comedy's main storyline involves the Frenchman attempting to prove that the women in Turin are not as virtuous as they pretend and their male compatriots claim them to be. The French chevalier decides that if he can persuade the two women to go to the ball with him rather than with their lovers, he will be able to seduce both of them. In the end, the chevalier does succeed, and the dénouement merely confirms the idea that these women are as promiscuous as Parisian women. This play merely presents the rather misogynist idea that women of many European cultures are falsely prudish. This sexist perspective is nevertheless a commentary on cosmopolitanism because it confirms the similarities between individuals of different nations.

In addition to the numerous French plays that deal with the theme of the overseas image of Frenchmen, there are also some works by English playwrights that highlight the typical qualities of petits-maîtres abroad. Samuel Foote's popular comedy *An Englishman in Paris* (1753) is an adaptation of Boissy's play, *Le Francais à Londres*. *An Englishman in Paris* emphasizes the idea of a conciliation of the French and English cultures, but it parodies national types in a different way.

The dramatic action centers on a scheme to encourage the English girl, Lucinda, to recognize the merits of her English suitor, Buck, rather than to be swept away by the

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seductive manners of the insincere Frenchmen who surround her in Paris. Buck cannot attract Lucinda because he is loutish, hotheaded, and brutish. Because he wants to marry Lucinda, Buck is encouraged by his Parisian acquaintances to learn manners and grace in order to please her. The French marquis, who is another suitor of Lucinda's, is a seductive, frivolous, and womanizing Frenchman. His role in the play is merely to enable Lucinda to recognize the merits of Buck's seriousness and fidelity.

Although this comedy does present the negative sides of the two national types - the frivolous and unfaithful Frenchman and the brooding, hostile and hotheaded Englishman - it ends with the Englishman learning to temper his boorishness by learning some French manners for the sake of pleasing a woman. The perspective presented by the Englishmen in the play is that Frenchmen are all petit-maîtres: "I still say that a Frenchman...is a fop. It is his national disease" (1.1). However, the comedy communicates that this characteristic frivolity is the necessary but undesirable byproduct of the most redeeming French quality: their capacity for *la politesse*. From the play, we discover that in order to please their women, Englishmen should learn to socialize like Frenchmen. Both Boissy's and Foote's plays redeem the Frenchman abroad to a certain extent.

In this chapter, we will discover that in her novel *Corinne ou l'Italie*, Germaine de Staël also redeems the French petit-maître in an international context by bringing the him out of the old regime into modernity, by which I mean into the post-revolutionary French society with its epicenter in a new locus outside of the court. But Staël's novel accomplishes this redemption in a different way than Boissy's and Foote's plays. In *Corinne*, d’Erfeuil is a petit-maître palimpsest: a copy of the typical petit-maître from
which certain qualities are erased and new qualities are added without eliminating the true essence. The petit-maître and typical Frenchman abroad in this novel is a jovial companion whose grasp of the art de vivre makes him at times annoyingly superficial, but at heart a loyal companion. With d’Erfeuil, Staël recasts the typical Frenchman outside of France as a petit-maître in a new role and puts into practice some of her ideas about nationality and French national identity. I will explain these points by first exploring Staël's definition of national character while taking into consideration her notion of cosmopolitanism. Then, I will examine the comte d'Erfeuil in the novel Corinne ou l'Italie to reveal the narrative implications of a petit-maître in an international context.

"Le caractère national" and Staël's cosmopolitanism

In her celebrated work, De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales (1799), which is as much a political treatise as it is an essay on European literature, Madame de Staël includes a chapter about French national character. She claims that it is illustrated by the qualities of "le bon goût" (which she equates with "la grâce") and "la gaieté": "La gaieté française, le bon goût français avaient passé en proverbe dans tous les pays de l'Europe, et l'on attribuait généralement ce goût et cette gaieté au caractère national" (271). She argues that these two characteristics distinguish the French from foreigners and attributes them to the influence of the political system in France, specifically during the old regime and the reign of the absolute

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195 Sylvia Raphael claims that the French word 'nationalité' first appears in Staël's Corinne. The novel therefore "stands at the birth of modern nationalism" Introduction. Corinne or Italy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), xii.
monarchs (starting with Louis XIV\textsuperscript{197}): "en France [...] il sera bien prouvé alors que ce qu'on appelait l'esprit français, la grâce française, n'était que l'effet immédiat et nécessaire des institutions et des mœurs monarchiques, telles qu'elles existaient en France depuis plusieurs siècles" (278). Staël emphasizes the idea that French wit and grace, which are considered typical of all Frenchman, were traits of the elite social classes. These qualities stem from sovereign customs or codes of courtly life.

However, as Staël also remarks, courtiers actually made these qualities almost universal among French people because, on the one hand, the way that courtiers interacted with the king required the utmost grace, elegance, and wit, and on the other hand, courtiers traveled from the court to the city and exerted their influence over the urban public who admired them and their manners:

La cour voulait plaire à la nation, et la nation à la cour; la cour prétendait à la philosophie, et la ville au bon ton. Les courtisans venant se mêler aux habitants de la capitale, voulaient y montrer un mérite personnel, un caractère, un esprit à eux; et les habitants de la capitale conservaient toujours un attrait irrésistible pour les manières brillantes des courtisans. (277)

If la grâce and la gaité were standard qualities of the French elite, then they became qualities of the people through the influence of courtiers in the city.\textsuperscript{198} The petit-maître is

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\textsuperscript{197} Staël explicitly blames the Louis XIV monarchy for planting the seeds for the type of government that was responsible for the downfall of the Revolution. Pierre Barbaris argues that Staël subtly emphasizes her opinion about the kind of absolutist government that started with the reign of Louis XIV in \textit{De l'Allemagne} when she says: "Il est temps de parler du bonheur. J'ai écarté ce mot avec un soin extrême, parce que depuis près d'un siècle surtout on l'a placé dans des plaisirs si grossiers, dans une vie si égoïste, dans des calculs si rétrécis, que l'image même en est profanée". Staël's phrase \textit{Depuis près d'un siècle} indicates that she is speaking about the time between approximately the year 1725 and 1811. 1725 is around the year where the Regency was in power, Law's system was in play, other ideas about absolutist governing developed, and where "tout a commencé. Et tout a continué malgré la Revolution", according to Barbaris's analysis of Staël. "Madame de Staël, du romantisme, de la littérature, et de la France nouvelle," \textit{Europe} 64 (1987): 12.

\textsuperscript{198} This notion is anticipated by the Swiss author, Béat-Louis de Muralt, who in his \textit{Lettres sur les Anglais et les Français} (1725) discusses the influence of the court in France on the general population. He argues that the French elites attention to 'la mode' has both advantages and disadvantages for 'la multitude': "Rendons justice à la mode, pour le bien et le mal qui en revient au Français. Le mal général et important qu'elle leur fait, c'est qu'elle attache à la nouveauté aussi bien qu'à la bagatelle, à la nouveauté indépendamment de l'avantage qui doit l'accompagner. Elle incommode et ruine beaucoup de gens [...] Le
one type of courtier described here: an aristocrat of low rank, he had to observe the
unwritten rules of courtly conduct perhaps more strictly than his aristocratic compatriots
with higher positions within the royal hierarchy. The petit-maître is almost exclusively
represented in texts as frequenting the city: his favorite activities include being seen at the
opera in Paris, in the salons of Parisian socialites, and at the Tuileries garden hobnobbing
with other nobles and elite bourgeois.

Staël praises the French for their manners and elegance, but later slightly hedges
her admiration by noting that courtiers brought the theatricality of the court and its
excessive admiration of appearances to the urban public:

Dans l'ancien régime, tous les Français, plus ou moins, s'occupaient
extrêmement du paraître, parce que le théâtre de la société en inspire
singulièrement le désir. Il faut soigner les apparences lorsqu'on ne peut faire
juger que ses manières; et l'on était même excusable de souhaiter en France
des succès de société, puisqu'il n'existait pas une autre arène pour faire
connaître ses talents, et s'indiquer aux regards du pouvoir. (277-8)

As I have noted, theatricality is a defining quality of the petit-maître. The petit-maître's
emblematic theatricality is an aspect of French courtly life that disseminated among the
capital and the urban population (probably primarily the bourgeois, although Staël does
not specify this). This image of French courtly life is an ideological construction that
does not necessarily reflect the reality of the French elite culture, but it is this idealized
image that Staël seems to cling to in her representations of the time.199

By discussing the old regime social order in De la littérature, Staël implies that

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199 Staël frequently refers to French society as theater and repeatedly calls Paris 'le théâtre'. In her
Considerations sur les evenements principaux de la revolution francaise, she almost exclusively refers to
this theatrical setting in negative terms: l'épouvantable théâtre, le théâtre de la guerre, l'affreux théâtre.
See: Simone Balayé, "La Revolution et ses personnages selon Mme de Staël," Revue d'Histoire littéraire de
the qualities that distinguish the French from other nationalities can turn into an overwhelming focus on appearance. This is due to the authoritarian governments of the past that established a national power structure in which the only way for individuals to survive was to make an impression on influential people. The open display of status and personal connections among the elite class is presented as a negative trait that was attributed to the French nation as a whole under the monarchy.

In *De la littérature*, Staël writes about the problems of the French social structure under the monarchy and during the revolution but it is not until *De l'Allemagne* (1810), her notable work reputed to have introduced German romanticism to France, where Staël writes more extensively about a possible solution for forming a new just and free republic in France. Here, she analyses not only France but also the French people as a nation.

First addressing the origins of France's new republic, Staël frequently discusses the Revolution and indicates that it was well intended but incorrectly executed. She attributes the downfall of the praiseworthy ideals of the Revolution to the typical frivolity and egotism of the French. In a way, Staël blames the crumbling of French society on bad kings of the past and despots of the old regime, who created generations of elitists consumed with vanity and fatuity. According to Staël (who in *Considerations sur les principaux evenements de la revolution française* uses the example of the minister of

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201 "Le début des Considérations, qui expose comment les abus de l'Ancien Régime ont rendu la Révolution inévitable, met en relief les bons rois, Louis IX, Louis XII, Henri IV, et les grands ministres. Madame de Staël leur oppose les souverains les plus redoutables, artisans du pouvoir absolu, Louis XI, Charles IX, Catherine de Médicis, Louis XIV enfin, pour lequel elle n'a pas de mots assez durs, ainsi que pour le cardinal de Richelieu. Énumérer les événements les plus sombres de l'histoire de la France montre comment la Révolution une fois déchaînée ne pouvait être que terrible et que, de cela, les responsables étaient moins les contemporains emportés dans le flot que les générations et les siècles qui les avaient précédés." Simone Balayé, "La Révolution et ses personnages selon Mme de Staël," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France. Révolution et littérature française (1789-1914)* 90.4/5 (1990): 633.
state Maurepas as a model for the type of fatuous sycophant aristocrat she strongly opposes\textsuperscript{202}, it is only good, righteous, and courageous politicians with a sense of duty and honor who were able save France from the evils of the Terror by making decisions based on the common good for the entire nation. Staël indicates her view of the Revolution and the Terror as the result of a state of moral civilization rather than as the outcome of a political crisis:

On peut juger diversement les événements de la révolution française; mais je crois impossible à un observateur impartial de nier qu'un tel principe généralement adopté aurait sauvé la France des maux dont elle a gémi, et, ce qui est pis encore, de l'exemple qu'elle a donné.\textsuperscript{203}

She emphasizes the duration of the political turmoil rather than focusing on the economic issues and the possible contingencies of them for the future.

In \textit{De l'Allemagne}, besides delineating who was to blame for the downward spiral of French society during the Terror, while also illustrating the kinds of values and actions necessary to transform France into a new free and just state, Staël offers a blueprint for French nation building inspired by a representatively utopian German society. By arranging France and Germany into a dialectic relationship in this text, Staël molds Germany into France's conceptually ideal "other" and presents her notion that a new republic in France should be shaped by German attitudes, reason, and social harmony.\textsuperscript{204}

In addition to indicating how France can benefit from the German model for its post-

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\textsuperscript{202} Maurepas was the minister of state under Louis XVI at the same time of her father Necker's appointment as minister of finance. She calls him a 'vieux courtisan' and views him as the embodiment of the problems of a self-serving and corrupt government.


\textsuperscript{204} Françoise Massardier-Kennedy argues: "The Germany she appeals to is used not as a historical reference, but as a utopian antidote to France[ ...]. She focuses on the essential: how sentiments are expressed and how power is exercised. [...] She is interested in the ways in which cultural hybridization can be apprehended as a gain for the culture that lets in influences from the outside." "Staël, Translation, and Race," in \textit{Translating slavery: gender and race in French women's writing (1783-1823)} (Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1994), 41. I do agree that there is a hint of an ideological construct in her representation of Germany in \textit{De l'Allemagne}, however; it may not be as clear as Massardier-Kennedy suggests.
Revolutionary migration toward modernity, she acknowledges that French elegance, grace, and manners serve as good examples for Germans. Staël dreams, somewhat vaguely, of a society in which a moralized cosmopolitanism enables historically and politically distinct cultures to seamlessly fuse together. This dialectic speaks of valuing the union of nations, the interconnectivity of their peoples, and the mutual influence of their cultures.

Yet, for Staël, France still has a lot to learn from Germany whose culture is more in tune with her cosmopolitan worldview. In her chapter entitled *Des mœurs et du caractère des Allemands*, Staël argues that social harmony exists in Germany because the German court has less influence over the general population than in France. This is because Germans generate affable relationships between the different social classes. In Staël's Germany, class separation is not as clear as it is in France and therefore the demarcation of classes is more "positive":

La démarcation des classes, beaucoup plus positive en Allemagne qu'elle ne l'était en France, devait anéantir l'esprit militaire parmi les bourgeois: cette démarcation n'a dans le fait rien d'offensant; car, je le répète, la bonhomie se mêle à tout en Allemagne, même à l'orgueil aristocratique. [...] Rien n'est amer, dans quelque rapport que ce puisse être, lorsque la société, et par elle le ridicule, a peu de puissance. (54)

German affability and cordiality spread among all classes of people do not succumb to court privilege or aristocratic pride. In France, although the manners of the court disseminated throughout the city, there is still a clear demarcation of class, which generates pompousness and resentment. This is possibly due to the influence of *ridicule*, a typical pastime of worldly classes in France. The substantive *ridicule* is partially defined by Jaucourt in the *Encyclopédie* as: "dépend(ant) de la manière de penser et de sentir qu'ont les gens vicieux, pour tâcher de nous dégrader, en mettant la honte et la
gloire partout où ils jugent à propos. [...] Le pouvoir de son empire est si fort, que quand l'imagination en est une fois frappée, elle ne connait plus que sa voix." *Ridicule* is an enormously powerful act: it is the open display of disdain, which depends entirely on the existence of an audience; it has the power to oppress anyone subject to it and to suppress any desire to transgress it. Its power is acknowledged by the well-known seventeenth century moralist, La Rochefoucauld, who famously states: "Le ridicule déshonore plus que le déshonneur".205 Staël posits that ridicule among the French creates an atmosphere rife with bitterness and competition. It seems that to Staël the element of French society that is to be the most criticized (*le monde*) consists of a community of petit-maîtres.

However, as Staël remarks, this bitterness disappears in cultures where the act of ridicule has little power. This typically French activity does not exist in German culture (the French royal court and the Parisian salons were allegedly notorious for it). Thanks to the good rapport between the elite class and other socio-economic classes, Germans are necessarily less antagonistic than the French: "Les hommes ne peuvent se faire un véritable mal à l'âme que par la fausseté ou la moquerie: dans un pays sérieux et vrai, il y a toujours de la justice et du bonheur. Mais la barrière qui séparait, en Allemagne, les nobles des citoyens, rendait nécessairement la nation entière moins belliqueuse" (54). The "barrier" that Stael talks about here is the "demarcation of classes" that she mentions in the passage I cited previously; she claims that in Germany, social classes do not mingle and that individuals do not aspire to upper mobility.

It is the foreign perception of the French qualities of elegance and grace that intensified French vanity and led to the practice of ridicule. In her chapter entitled *Des Etrangers qui veulent imiter l'esprit français*, Staël talks specifically about the public

consequences of *le ridicule* for the French: "Les français ont fait peur à l'Europe, mais surtout à l'Allemagne, par leur habileté dans l'art de saisir et de montrer le ridicule: il y avait je ne sais quelle puissance magique dans le mot d'élégance et de grâce qui irritait singulièrement l'amour-propre" (141). Staël's analysis that French ridicule has the ability to intimidate other Europeans who are not accustomed to the practice suggests that France isolates itself from the rest of Europe and prevents itself from participating in civil international exchange.

In this chapter of *De l'Allemagne*, Staël emphasizes that Germans do not try to replicate the French; rather, they develop their own strengths, which creates a refinement specific to their culture. Since Germans are not given to imitation, they have their own kind of subtle charm, refinement, and merriment that are different from the French kind but not less admirable: "les farces tyroliennes, [...] représentent la nature humaine avec vérité, mais non la société avec finesse. Toutefois cette gaieté, telle qu'elle est, vaut encore mieux que l'imitation d'une grâce étrangère" (145). Although Germans lack French flair in their comedies, they understand how to represent human nature truthfully. This is more important than any attempt to copy foreign arts, manners, or behaviors, which inevitably fail - an idea that perhaps stems from La Rochefoucauld, whose analysis of *les manières* from the seventeenth century states that it is better to follow one's own instinctive ways that correspond naturally to his status and rank, than to adopt the manners of others (i.e. "foreign" ones).²⁰⁶ Staël seems to take inspiration from La Rochefoucauld's idea on social behavior and adapts it to the grander scale of a nationalized comportment.

In fact, Staël's idea about the need to prevent cross-cultural imitation lies at the

²⁰⁶ La Rochefoucauld, *OC*, 509.
To Staël, cosmopolitanism cannot be accomplished through one culture merely imitating another by adopting its ideals, habits, customs and manners, which may not match the "natural dispositions" of its citizens. But Staël's view of "natural disposition" is problematic, given that she does not specify what she means precisely by the term and that it is practically impossible to define one, specific, natural disposition of different individuals in an entire nation. Despite the vagueness of the notion of the "natural disposition of a nation" as it appears in De l'Allemagne, we can attempt to clarify Staël's notion of "cultural imitation" by examining her other writings, specifically her novel Corinne ou l'Italie.

Staël addresses the idea of imitation in this novel through her title character. During a conversation regarding European arts, Corinne tries to convince d'Erfeuil of the necessity of originality in the creation of national character:

"J'ai de la peine à croire, répondit Corinne, qu'il fût désirable pour le monde entier de perdre toute couleur nationale, toute originalité de sentiments et d'esprit, [...] Le génie est essentiellement créateur, il porte le caractère de l'individu qui le possède. La nature, qui n'a pas voulu que deux feuilles se ressemblent, a mis encore plus de diversité dans les âmes, et l'imitation est une espèce de mort, puisqu'elle dépouille chacun de son existence naturelle. (Corinne 176-7)"

The rejection of imitation is the key to Staël's cosmopolitanism as it is presented in Corinne. Another character in the novel emphasizes this point. Prince Castel-Forte,
Corinne's Italian admirer, interjects into the conversation between her and d'Erfeuil. He summarizes most thoroughly Staël's view of the ways in which nations, through their arts and therefore their cultures, can benefit greatly from each other in ways that they would not imagine if they did not seek each other out:

Il me semble que nous avons tous besoin les uns des autres; la littérature de chaque pays découvre, à qui sait la connaître, une nouvelle sphère d'idées. C'est Charles-Quint lui-même, qui a dit: qu'un homme qui sait quatre langues vaut quatre hommes. Si ce grand génie politique en jugeait ainsi pour les affaires, combien cela n'est-il pas plus vrai pour les lettres? Les étrangers savent tous le français; ainsi leur point de vue est plus étendu que celui des français qui ne savent pas les langues étrangères. Pourquoi ne se donnent-ils pas plus souvent la peine de les apprendre? Ils conserveraient ce qui les distingue, et découvriraient ainsi quelquefois ce qui peut leur manquer. (177)

Staël's words, attributed to Prince Castel-Forte, illustrate her view of the symbiotic relationship between nations' literatures and their politics: the arts reveal paths of reflection that influence ideas about the ways in which people function in a society under a given government. By the same token, the studying of different languages, for Stael's Castel-Forte, means increasing one's social value through an enlargement of perspective: learning new languages would allow an individual to retain his distinctive traits while also permitting him or her to discover some good traits that he or she might be missing. 

Stael does not specify what exactly she means by missing traits, but she nevertheless does imply that national cohesion means mutual sympathy and understanding between nations. Her adjective étendu connotes the notions of understanding between nations, mutual respect, and tolerance. In Corinne, Staël uses England as the anti-example of her ideal nation. When she writes of a patrie de la pensée in de preface of De l'Allemagne, Staël

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209 "England functions in this novel as the evil empire of patriarchy." Naomi Schor, "The Portrait of a
emphasizes the idea of a fatherland, which is not an ideological space and not a physical nation, but rather culturally diverse non-place that is open and free.\textsuperscript{210}

Although in her works on politics and literature, Staël explores questions of national identity, culture, and cosmopolitanism, it is in Corinne, where she most directly explains her idea of a type of cultural organization necessary for France to progress into a free and just state. And it is also in Corinne where Staël most plainly discusses her general notion of national character (one that is not specifically tethered to France or another European country). She posits that it can only be judged by the character of the specific individuals from those nations, rather than national institutions. Therefore, it is resistant to a fixed definition:

C'est donc le hasard des relations individuelles qui inspire aux voyageurs la satire ou la louange; les personnes que l'on connait particulièrement décident du jugement qu'on porte sur la nation; jugement qui ne peut trouver de base fixe, ni dans les institutions, ni dans les mœurs qu'on porte sur la nation. (561)

Just as the new cosmopolitan nation does not have a fixed physical space, national character does not have a fixed definition.\textsuperscript{211} It remains slightly unclear.

This is precisely why the character of d'Erfeuil is so intriguing. If, according to Staël, national identity cannot be expressed through the "jugement qu'on porte sur une nation", then why does she create a character that seems to reflect the stereotypical image that foreigners have of Frenchmen (and why would Constant defend d'Erfeuil as an


\textsuperscript{211} As Jocelyne Huchette notes: "le caractère national tel qu'il doit être entendu chez Mme de Staël renvoie moins a une permanence, a une essence fixe et pérenne qu'a un procès, a une détermination historique et géographique - ce qui se traduit poétiquement, dans Corinne, par des métaphores, des comparaisons géographiques et climatiques" (68).
accurate representation of a Frenchman abroad)? Why would Staël's characterization of a Frenchman so closely resemble a petit-maître? The answer, as I have mentioned, is that d’Erfeuil is not meant to appear as a one-sided character. D’Erfeuil is a petit-maître who is redeemed in many ways. Staël creates a character that serves a greater purpose than being an indication for the French of how not to behave when traveling abroad. As I will show, d'Erfeuil serves as the key to understanding Staël's narrative presentation of both her theory of national identity, based on a specific cultural identity, and her notion of the typical Frenchman transitioning from the old regime to the new republic.

It will help me to explain d'Erfeuil's role in *Corinne* by turning to one of the few plays written by Staël. We will see that this play offers a clue for deciphering d'Erfeuil's enactment of his role of the Frenchman in the novel. D'Erfeuil realizes his role through his relationships with Oswald and Corinne. We will see that the narrative presents d'Erfeuil as similar to Oswald in some ways, but different in others. Their similarities are important because they illustrate Corinne's part in the narrative, but their differences draw the narrative to a close.

*Corinne ou l'Italie, Le Mannequin, and English vanity*

To continue my discussion of d'Erfeuil's function in Staël's novel *Corinne ou l'Italie*, I turn to a play by Staël, *Le Mannequin* (1811), where she includes a character very similar to d'Erfeuil. This character is the comte d'Erville, who is also a Frenchman outside of France (not an émigré as the play takes place during the early 1750s). D'Erville is a caricature petit-maître resembling those we have seen in many plays of the genre. The only difference between this and other petit-maîtres is the context: in *Le Mannequin*, the petit-maître is no longer a scheming and ridiculous scoundrel of *la*
société mondaine but rather a scheming and ridiculous Frenchman in Germany. In Le Mannequin, Staël emphasizes national character by writing national caricatures.

Set in Berlin at the house of a German nobleman who is of French aristocratic descent (M. de la Morlière), this play includes a Frenchman, M. d'Erville, who is described as "rien qu'une caricature de leurs (les Français) défauts" (1.1).²¹² M. de la Morlière invites d'Erville to his home in Berlin in order to introduce him to his daughter, Sophie, and to join the two in marriage. De la Morlière is an absurd character: he inaccurately judges d'Erville as a perfect French honnête homme, which arises from his blind infatuation with the dazzling allure of French culture. As a Frenchman whose family left France generations ago to settle in Germany and who continually regrets this departure, he seeks out all things French.²¹³ De la Morlière does not recognize d'Erville's superficiality and flakiness.

D'Erville is a petit-maître abroad. He is described almost exactly as the petit-maître is described in other texts: "Il n'écoute personne. [...] Il parle sans cesse. [...] Il ne sait rien. [...] il n'aime que lui, et cette rivalité-là en vaut bien une autre et jamais femme n'en a triomphé" (1.1). He arrives in Germany and flatters de la Morlière to an extreme because he believes he will inherit from him when he marries Sophie. But ultimately he feels no responsibility toward her. Sophie recognizes that d'Erville: "est d'un ignorance d'autant plus remarquable qu'il a des phrases sur tout et des idées sur rien" (1.1). Yet she fails to convince her father of this fact.

Sophie is the play's honnête femme. She is educated, graceful, and elegant but also rational, logical and honorable. She represents the perfect blend of nations: she has

²¹² Staël, Le Mannequin (Paris: Geldage, 1911).
²¹³ Although it is very likely, neither the play nor other consulted Staël works indicate if this character was from a Huguenot family.
been educated *à la française*, which makes her refined and beautiful. Sophie recognizes d'Erville immediately for the petit-maître he is and wants to persuade her father not to force her to marry him.

The intrigue of the play begins when Sophie decides to play a trick on d'Erville. Knowing his preference for quiet, unthinking women, and wanting to prove to her father that d'Erville is not an appropriate husband, she takes a mannequin, dresses it up as a lady, calls it her German cousin, and poses it in the salon to look like a person sitting on the sofa. Because she realizes that d'Erville prefers quiet women unlike herself, Sophie suspects that d'Erville will fall in love with the mannequin. At the very least, she thinks he will show great fondness for the inanimate object, which will convince her father that d'Erville is not the honorable, generous, and polite Frenchman he pretends to be. De la Morlière agrees to take part in the scheme so he can prove once and for all that d'Erville is a worthy companion for Sophie.

As predicted, d'Erville is interested in Sophie's mannequin: he hears of her beauty from Sophie and when he sees her for the first time, he admires her "nez parfaitement grec" and her "cheveux fins". He attributes her silence to her being overwhelmed with admiration for his speech and appearance. He does not care that she does not move, look at him, or respond because he is too wrapped up in how he perceives the way in which she quietly pays him close attention. This extreme distraction calls attention to the unprecedented lengths to which Stael takes the "trick" in this play: she emphasizes the ridiculous attitude of the marquis through an equally ridiculous pretext.

Accordingly, as Sophie predicted, d'Erville is extremely fond of the mannequin.
that he takes for a real woman. D'Erville tells de la Morlière that because he has become more reasonable since his arrival in Germany: "je pense, comme les philosophes de ce pays, qu'il faut se marier par inclination" (2.8). Upon this announcement, d'Erville approaches his new mistress and quickly realizes that she is a mannequin. Despite his embarrassment and irritation for having been hoodwinked, he eventually laughs at the joke. The play ends with Sophie pronouncing the moral of her lesson to d'Erville, asking him admit his mistake, and revealing her love for Frédéric. She does however end up agreeing to consent to her father's wish of her marriage to d'Erville, if D'Erville he still wants it. D'Erville consents to put an end to their marriage agreement, but he succeeds in getting in the last word: the last line of the play, pronounced by d'Erville, calls attention to the grotesqueness of the extreme length to which the play's ruse was taken. This ending is different from some petit-maître comedies where d'Erville would have simply either disappeared or been reformed. Stael seems to want to emphasize a subtle lesson of tolerance by calling attention to the excessiveness of the play's ruse.

This excessiveness is most apparent at the moment when d'Erville states that he prefers women who are shy, quiet, and not given to argue with him. This is important because it prompts Sophie to dream up her scheme and it also expresses an aspect of national prejudice that we see in the novel *Corinne*. D'Erville describes Sophie as having qualities that to him are undesirable but illustrate her role as an *honnête femme*:

> Mlle Sophie a des opinions décidées sur tout. Souvent elle me contredit, et ce n'est pas le moyen de me connaitre; car moi, je me tais des qu'on veut discuter: cela m'ennuie. Il faut savoir m'apprécier d'abord ou bien renoncer à m'entendre. Le croiriez-vous? J'aime les manières anglaises, la timidité anglaise. (1.4)

According to d'Erville, Sophie is not to his liking precisely because she has been educated *à la française* by her French and German father. D'Erville prefers a docile
Englishwoman to the more cosmopolitan Sophie. He does not mention her German qualities but we only assume that her common sense and straightforwardness equally displease him.

D'Erville's preference is a decisive element in the play: it prompts the beginning of the central conflict by preparing the ruse Sophie will later enact, it allows Sophie to prove her point to her father that d'Erville does not love her, it helps her illustrate her wisdom and clarity in seeing d'Erville for the petit-maitre that he is, and finally it allows her to display her graciousness and good spirit when her ruse is finally revealed at the end of the play and she apologizes to d'Erville while also encouraging him to partake in the joke.

D'Erville's preference for the quiet Englishwoman in *Le Mannequin* is crucial to my perspective on the novel *Corinne* because it is in this play where Staël, through d'Erville, hints at an explanation for Oswald's preference for the young, docile, quiet, subservient, and English Lucile over the proud, outspoken, educated, and Italian Corinne. This preference is the central element in the play and in the novel because it illustrates a similarity between d'Erville, d'Erfeuil and Oswald that would not otherwise be apparent. Next, I will explore the similarities between d'Erville and d'Erfeuil, which emphasize French *amour propre*. I will then show how Oswald is similar to d'Erfeuil in that he also exhibits a vain disposition.

The *comte* d'Erfeuil of *Corinne* is similar to the *comte* d'Erville of *Le Mannequin*. They are both Frenchmen outside of France who illustrate an overwhelming preference for their native land. In the play Sophie describes d'Erville: "il voyage non pour s'instruire

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214 Rousseau remarks on the alleged character of Englishwomen in his *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles*: "Les Anglaises sont douces et timides" (109).
mais pour se montrer" (1.1). Although d'Erfeuil travels because he no longer has a homeland, perhaps he likes displaying his talents and natural French grace in new settings. He does not travel in order to educate himself in world languages or cultures.

In addition to the nationalistic quality expressed by these petits-maîtres abroad, d'Erville and d'Erfeuil both display typical French vanity. D'Erville is a caricature wholly defined by his *amour propre* and the entire plot centers on it: it is because of his tendency to prefer only women who pay him maximum attention or who fawn over him endlessly that Sophie invents her ruse in the first place. By the same token, d'Erfeuil's vanity is a major element of his character. His *amour propre* is an annoyance for Corinne who tries unsuccessfully to persuade him to reveal information about the reasons for Oswald's melancholy:

> [...] soit qu'il voulut cacher par un air de mystère qu'Oswald ne lui avait rien confié, soit qu'il crut plus honorable de refuser ce qu'on lui demandait que de l'accorder, il opposa un silence imperturbable à l'ardente curiosité de Corinne. Elle qui avait toujours eu de l'ascendant sur tous ceux a qui elle avait parlé ne pouvait comprendre pourquoi ses moyens de persuasion étaient sans effet sur le comte d'Erfeuil: ne savait-elle pas que l'amour-propre est ce qu'il y a au monde de plus inflexible? (Corinne 123-4)

D'Erfeuil keeps the information secret either to come across as attractively mysterious or because he takes pleasure in refusing others' requests so that they will be at his mercy. Either way, Corinne has not met anyone with the vanity of d'Erfeuil and does not understand the extent to which it can affect a person's actions.

D'Erfeuil's vanity is also illustrated by in his francocentric attitudes and opinions. He argues with Corinne for the superiority of all French arts over the arts of Italy, Greece, England and other countries:

> [...] dans la littérature française, dit Corinne, en s'adressant au comte d'Erfeuil, vos prosateurs sont souvent plus éloquents, et même plus poétiques que vos
poètes. Il est vrai, répondit le comte d'Erfeuil, que nous avons en ce genre les véritables autorités classiques; Bossuet, La Bruyère, Montesquieu, Buffon, ne peuvent être sur passés; surtout les deux premiers, qui appartenaient à ce siècle de Louis XIV, qu'on ne saurait trop louer, et dont il faut imiter, autant qu'on le peut, les parfaits modèles. C'est un conseil que les étrangers doivent s'empresser de suivre aussi-bien que nous. [...] Notre théâtre est décidément le premier de l'Europe; car je ne pense pas que les Anglais eux-mêmes imaginassent de nous opposer Shakespeare. (176-7)

D'Erfeuil's praise of what he calls the "classic authorities" of literature echoes Voltaire's glorification, in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, of French arts and culture during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. D'Erfeuil's speech underscores his similarities to the type of old regime decadent aristocrats who, in Staël's view, made the revolution possible. Moreover, d'Erfeuil cannot reconcile with Corinne on these opinions about art and literature and is never able to surmount his prejudice in this topic. After Corinne's lengthy and convincing arguments for the value of the Italian arts, d'Erfeuil's response is merely to reinforce his opinion of the French arts and to more vehemently disparage the arts of other countries:

Le comte d'Erfeuil, entendant parler de l'esprit français, prit la parole. Il nous serait impossible, dit-il de supporter sur la scène les inconséquences des Grecs ni les monstruosités de Shakespeare; les Français ont un goût trop pur pour cela. Notre théâtre est le modèle de la délicatesse et de l'élégance, c'est là ce qui le distingue; et ce serait de nous plonger dans la barbarie, que de vouloir introduire rien d'étranger parmi nous. (188)

This preference for all things French, as well his unrelenting insistence upon it in front of a multi-cultural audience, illustrates his unbridled *amour propre*.

The petit-maître d'Erville in Staël's play *Le Mannequin* and d'Erfeuil of *Corinne* are both vain and francocentric. The most important element of d'Erville for my analysis is that he prefers English ladies over French ones; a preference which may seem to contradict his francocentrism, if not for his insistence throughout the play on the
superiority of the French in relation to other nationalities. The crucial point here is that he fancies subservient and docile women who do not question him. This is because he enjoys being the center of all attention rather than sharing the spotlight. He thinks others should regard him as highly as he regards himself. It is of little importance that his type of woman is not French. D'Erfeuil, who also likes being in the spotlight and takes pleasure in being sought out by others, shares d'Erville's vanity; it just so happens that d'Erfeuil's vanity is most often demonstrated through his francocentric attitude. As I will now explain, in the novel Corinne, Oswald also demonstrates the same type of vanity represented by d'Erfeuil and d'Erville. It is this quality in Oswald that creates the central conflict of the novel.

In the novel Corinne, Oswald might seem like the type of serious and honorable character who would disapprove of d'Erfeuil's vanity, but he actually shares it in some ways. Oswald's character is well developed in the novel: there are many instances which illustrate the fact that he is heroic, brave, handsome, and of uncommon intellectual brilliance, but also self-destructive, melancholic, and splenetic. These elements of Oswald's personality have been widely recognized in critical studies on the novel and are acknowledged as being typical of the Englishman type in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: "French accounts consistently portray the English as suffering from a splenetic temperament with as much potential for misanthropy and useless self-destruction as for magnanimity and heroic selflessness" (Gidal 27). But Oswald is also extremely vain, self-absorbed, and egotistic. This element of the character of Oswald, Lord Nelvil has not necessarily been widely explored.215

215 There is one critic who finds a similarity between Oswald and d'Erfeuil but it does not have to do with their vanity. Simone Balayé notes that Oswald and d'Erfeuil, as spokespersons for England and France, are
Oswald and d'Erfeuil share a vain preference for their own qualities and ways of life over those of others. Oswald expresses a national prejudice that is subtler than the type of nationalistic attitude for which d'Erfeuil is criticized, but it is nonetheless an obvious preference for his own country, at Corinne's expense. When Oswald and Corinne are in Naples and discover an English ship in the port, Oswald is invited to board but worries profoundly about how to introduce Corinne to his compatriots who will not understand their casual relationship. He is clearly more concerned with how the English will receive him than with how Corinne will feel upon meeting them: "Le capitaine et la société anglaise qui étaient à Naples proposèrent à lord Nelvil d'y venir le lendemain. Il accepta sans songer d'abord s'il y conduirait Corinne, et comment il la présenterait à ses compatriotes. Il fut tourmenté par cette inquiétude toute la nuit" (Corinne 294). Oswald's failure to consider whether he would take Corinne aboard illustrates his natural tendency to be concerned only with himself, which demonstrates certain self-absorption.

When Oswald and Corinne finally board the ship, Oswald simply pretends that Corinne is his wife without consulting her. We see that he is infinitely more comfortable in this English setting than anywhere else:

Oswald était occupé de Corinne et de l'impression qu'elle recevait; mais il était aussi quelquefois distrait d'elle par le plaisir de se trouver dans sa patrie. Et n'est-ce pas, en effet, l'air natal pour un anglais, qu'un vaisseau au milieu de la mer? Oswald se promenait avec les anglais qui étaient à bord pour savoir des nouvelles de l'Angleterre, pour causer de son pays et de la politique. Pendant ce temps, Corinne était auprès des femmes anglaises qui étaient venues de Naples pour assister au culte divin. Elles étaient entourées de leurs enfants, beaux comme le jour, mais timides comme leurs mères, et pas un mot ne se disait devant une

similar in that they represent two adversaries of Italy: "Mme de Staël fait dialoguer Corinne et d'autres personnages, adversaires de l'Italie, pour des raisons diverses. Oswald discutera politique, société, beaux-arts [...]; le compte d'Erfeuil, chargé de symboliser une certaine frivolité à la française qui exaspère Mme de Staël, attaquera avec beaucoup de verve et de comique." Carnets de voyage de Mme de Staël (Geneva: Droz, 1971), 165.

During their stay on the ship, Oswald pays as much attention to Corinne as he does to his new English acquaintances: he glances once in Corinne's direction, not due to concern for her well-being, but rather to confirm that she is as comfortable as he is in this English setting. He does not notice her longing gazes from the port toward the city of Naples. The narrative claims that Oswald's failure to notice Corinne's despondency is beneficial to Corinne ("Heureusement pour elle..."), but it is only beneficial because it allows her to keep her passionate yearning for Italy relatively hidden from Oswald's view. Her obvious longing for Italy would surely disturb Oswald because it would force him to realize that she would never be happy in England. Even if Oswald has some inkling of Corinne's loyalty to Italy, in this scene, he ignores it. Here, Staël reinforces the idea of the love that Englishmen have of their country; a love that cannot be challenged by a mere person.217

This episode is important because it illustrates Oswald's self-absorption and his anglocentrism. This is significant because these qualities define Oswald's relationship

217 England, in Staël's novel, represents the antithesis of Italy and all those negative authoritarian influences that Corinne needed to escape: "With respect specifically to tradition, Italy stands in sharp contrast to England, which is depicted in Corinne as embodying an aristocratic commitment to the past, family lines, and property. This is not the England of liberalism and constitutionalism that Staël strongly admired in other points in her writing career, but rather the England at war with France after 1793, harboring French émigrés and menacing France with the restoration of the ancien régime through force." Doris Y. Kadish, *Politicizing Gender: Narrative Strategies in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1991), 22.
with Corinne, which is the main focus of the novel. I will now examine the outcome of the relationship between Oswald and Corinne because it shows the influence of Oswald's vanity on Corinne, which leads to the conclusion of the narrative.

Oswald's feelings for Corinne, despite his initial awe of her, oscillate between desire and aversion. This is because he never fully understands her: as an Englishman, he cannot come to terms with how he feels about a woman in the public eye. Naomi Schor astutely explains the ambiguity of Oswald's feelings for Corinne, which is highlighted at the moment when he witnesses her live adaptation of Shakespeare’s Juliet:

Nineteenth-century French fiction is full of male protagonists whose desire is mediated by the desiring gaze of other men—hence the erotic prestige enjoyed by the actress or indeed by any beautiful woman who ventures into the polyfocal space of the theater. Less common in the French tradition is the reversal of this scenario, where instead of swelling male desire, the spectacle of female success irritates the lover's jealousy, arouses his desire for exclusive possession of the admirable love object. (Schor 120-1)

In this scene, Oswald is aroused by the public attention that Corinne attracts, but also feels jealous of this attention and wants to possess her exclusively. I believe that Oswald reacts this way to her public persona throughout the narrative, not only in this scene. Oswald's desire to possess Corinne because he is jealous of the attention she draws from others reflects his need to persistently reaffirm his importance to her. His insistence upon his salience in Corinne's life is reflective of his narcissism. Because Staël represents Corinne's public persona as a reflection of the influence of Italy upon her character, it would seem as if Oswald is attracted to Italy and repelled by it at the same time.

This attraction and repulsion demonstrates Oswald's unwillingness to surmount national differences in his relationship with Corinne. We see this conflict play out in the narrative. At one point, during a conversation between Oswald and Corinne about the literatures of different nations, Oswald expresses that he shares Corinne's opinion that all
nations should benefit from a free exchange of ideas unrestricted by national prejudices.

However, at another point in the narrative, Staël writes that Oswald's natural inclination is to prefer countries that set great store by order, that pay close attention to detail, and that value function over form:

Oswald; il avait d'ailleurs des préventions contre les italiens et contre l'Italie; il ne pénétrait pas encore le mystère de cette nation ni de ce pays, mystère qu'il faut comprendre par l'imagination plutôt que par cet esprit de jugement qui est particulièrement développé dans l'éducation anglaise. Les italiens sont bien plus remarquables par ce qu'ils ont été, et par ce qu'ils pourraient être, que par ce qu'ils sont maintenant. Les déserts qui environnent la ville de Rome, cette terre fatiguée de gloire qui semble dédaigner de produire, n'est qu'une contrée inculte et négligée, pour qui la considère seulement sous les rapports de l'utilité. Oswald, accoutumé dès son enfance à l'amour de l'ordre et de la prospérité publique, reçut d'abord des impressions défavorables en traversant les plaines abandonnées qui annoncent l'approche de la ville autrefois reine du monde: il blâma l'indolence des habitants et de leurs chefs. (45-6)

Through her powers of persuasion, Corinne eventually enlightens Oswald to the sublime beauty and pleasures of Italy. We should note Staël's stereotype of Italians as only historically and potentially glorious, which was a widespread view at the time. Oswald's preference for his native culture never entirely disappears. The relationship between Oswald and Corinne is characterized by a conflict of the their nationalities. The melancholic Englishman is never fully at home in the Italian setting. Oswald's anglocentric preferences reflect his opinion of the prominence of his own culture over that of the Italians, and they also express his nationalistic attitude.

Oswald's nationalism is emphasized by his choice of the English Lucile for a wife. Oswald chooses Lucile, Corinne's English half-sister, to be his wife instead of

218 It is important to note that Italy in Corinne is a thought experiment rather than an actual place. 'Italy' is used as the backdrop against which to present the ideal qualities of the public woman unchallenged; it is a feminine utopia where Corinne's talents are wholly epitomized and praised. Like Germany in De l'Allemagne, Italy in Corinne, ou l'Italie provides a standard against which to measure the practices and prejudices of other European countries, specifically England. See: Suzanne Geurlac, "Writing the Nation (Mme de Staël)," French Forum 30.3 (2005): 43-56.
Corinne because he is more comfortable with Lucile's quiet, docile, English timidty than he is with the outspoken, sophisticated, opinionated, Italian Corinne. This preference illustrates that even in his women, Oswald seeks to mirror his own image. When Oswald glimpses Lucile for the first time in her adult life upon his return to England after his year in Italy, he is taken with her charm and youthful attractiveness:

Lorsqu'il arriva chez lady Edgermond, il fut frappé du bon goût qui régnait dans l'arrangement du jardin et du château; et comme la maîtresse de la maison n'était pas encore prête pour le recevoir, il se promena dans le parc et aperçut de loin, à travers les feuilles, une jeune personne de la taille la plus élégante, avec des cheveux blonds d'une admirable beauté [...]. Oswald la reconnut pour Lucile. (450)

It is significant that Oswald sees Lucile upon his first return to England: when he approaches the Edgermond estate for the first time in a year, he is struck by a reminder of his fondness for the orderly beauty of English manors. This contrasts with his recent experience of the wild sublime of Italy and prepares him for seeing Lucile. While walking the estate grounds, in the midst of being reminded of the natural beauty of his native land, Oswald is confronted with the image of Lucile. Had he seen her in Italy, he might have had a different reaction to her. However, in this setting, where Oswald takes comfort in the orderly aesthetic of the English garden, Lucile's English charm is highlighted.

Many critics attribute Oswald's choice of Lucile to his filial loyalty. They argue that "knowing that his father had specifically rejected Corinne, as a suitable marriage partner and sacrificing his personal desires to guilt and patriarchal sanction", Oswald chooses Lucile. 219 Although this is true to a certain extent, I see the choice as more illustrative of his preference for women of his own nationality. He is entirely dazzled by

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Lucile upon their meeting, probably even more so because she has that familiar English modesty that he had not seen in so long: "Lord Nelvil resta frappé de cet air imposant et modeste, et de cette figure vraiment angélique" (450). Lucile incarnates three elements of pleasure for Oswald: his familiarity with his fatherland, his preference for quiet, modest, English ladies, and his erotic desire for her body (he is struck by the beauty of her physical appearance). The choice of Lucile for a wife is certainly not a choice in which Oswald must sacrifice his personal desires: he is probably equally as aroused by the young Lucile as he is by her sister. In fact, in preferring Lucile, Oswald finds himself in a perfect situation. By choosing her, Oswald can retain ties to his fatherland, remain loyal to his father, and fulfill his personal desires.

Furthermore, Oswald's choice to marry Lucile highlights Corinne role in the narrative and in their relationship. As I have explained, Oswald is similar to d'Erfeuil in that they are both vain and nationalistic. It is this similarity that emphasizes the isolation of Corinne. Corinne becomes isolated after she falls in love with Oswald; she is unable to participate fully in exchange with individuals of different nations, and she unable to present her talents before her adoring public as she could do before having fallen for him.220

Isolation is a running theme throughout Corinne's life in the novel. Before she meets Oswald, she is already isolated in some ways. In England years before meeting Oswald in Italy, Corinne was isolated in a small town, despite having had family there. As the daughter of her father's deceased first wife, who was an Italian woman, Corinne

220 According to Suzanne Guerlac, Staël suggests that Corinne could have had Oswald after all, if only she had accepted to give up Italy and reconciled herself to the lot of the English wife. Corinne can be a woman by that name, marry Oswald and have his child, or be the celebrated national artist who embodies the spirit of Italy, the land she has chosen to identify with and to represent" (47).
drew the ire and jealousy of his second wife, a staunch English lady, who constantly disdained Corinne for her refusal to adhere to the codes of female conduct mandated by English society. Corinne would not be silent, subservient, or even modest. When her father died, her stepmother, Lady Edgermond, grew even more cold and distant. When Lady Edgermond insisted relentlessly upon Corinne's marriage to her English nephew, Corinne finally decided to abandon England and all of her memories of her beloved father. She left for Italy where she found a home, companions, friends, and most of all the public recognition of which she felt worthy.

But the isolation of Corinne is slowly rekindled when she meets Oswald in Rome, and it comes to a climax when Oswald leaves her for Lucile. It is this choice that seals Corinne's fate: upon Oswald's departure from Italy, he stops communication with Corinne because he has started to fall in love with Lucile. Although Corinne does not yet know that he has chosen her sister, she is heartbroken at his lack of communication. Corinne secludes herself near Venice and retires into her life of solitude out of the public eye. Corinne is abandoned by the only man she ever truly loved and because she loved him, she will never again be the independent and inspiring public figure she once was. As a result, she cannot love again and will consequently be isolated for the rest of her life. The end result of Oswald's vanity is Corinne's self-imposed and fatal isolation. Oswald's preference for the more English woman leads to Corinne's eternal seclusion.

Although Oswald appears to be one of the novel's main protagonists, I interpret

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221 "Corinne renonce à sa gloire de poétesse, elle n'est plus la prophètesse du risorgimento italien, elle devient la femme que l'amour soumet à l'homme et qui n'existe que par lui et que pour lui" (Coulet 655).
his role as the narrative antagonist because he works against Corinne.\textsuperscript{222} He is responsible for her misery, isolation and finally, her demise. I attribute this to his failure to recognize or appreciate the national values that she represents: "aveuglé par ses préjugés qui constituent aussi sa force, l'Anglais ne peut comprendre ni l'Italie ni l'Italienne".\textsuperscript{223} He values "la timidité naturelle" (\textit{Corinne} 438), and "l'air imposant et modeste" (450) typical of English women. He notes that Lucile has "la reserve, la contrainte, et l'imagination, naguère ébranlée par l'éloquence et la passion" (453). Corinne predicts that his return to England - which confirms his ultimate preference for Lucile and his fatherland - will be the beginning of her end:

Le départ d'Oswald pour l'Angleterre lui paraissait un signal de mort; elle savait combien les mœurs et les opinions de ce pays avaient d'influence sur lui; c'est en vain qu'il formait le projet de passer sa vie avec elle en Italie; elle ne doutait point qu'en se retrouvant dans sa patrie, l'idée de la quitter une seconde fois ne lui devînt odieuse. (397)

In this novel, Oswald is a seductive and dangerous character. He is attractive, charming, and elegant and Corinne is taken with him: "Oswald aurait pu parler longtemps encore sans que Corinne l'eût interrompu; elle se plaisait tellement et dans le son de sa voix, et dans la noble élégance de ses expressions qu'elle eût voulu prolonger cette impression" (186). He is seemingly honorable, loyal, and sensitive as witnessed by his

\textsuperscript{222} Many critics have speculated about Oswald's complex role in the narrative. Some attribute his choice to leave Corinne as completely dictated by an omnipresent paternal power. This leaves Oswald with no blame but also no absolution. See: Claire Garry-Boussel, "L'Image du père dans Corinne, Madame de Staël. Corinne ou l'Italie."\textit{L'âme se mêle à tout}, in \textit{Romantisme Colloques: Société des etudes Romantiques} (Paris: Editions Sedes, 1999), 117–24. Other critics blame his choice to leave Corinne on the influence of his Protestant education: "Oswald is seen as responsible for his fate only insofar as he realized that his Protestantism and hyper-rationalist approach to morality were lacking the beauty and flexibility of the decidedly mystic Catholicism demonstrated by the heroine. His fatal flaw thus consists in his refusal to give due credence to the privileged role that sentiment must play within morality." Karen Pagani "Judging Oswald within the Limits of Reason Alone in Madame de Staël's Corinne," \textit{European Romantic Review} 23.2 (2012): 147. These approaches do not take into consideration the close relationship between Oswald and d'Erfeuil. Why would Staël include d'Erfeuil in the narrative as such a close companion to Oswald if she didn't mean for the two characters to have some sort of influence on each other? I believe that Oswald's role must be considered as contingent upon the other characters' roles in the narrative.

\textsuperscript{223} Gengembre 107.
love for his father and his grief over his father's death. But he is entirely responsible for the death of Corinne.

It is not necessarily "le fait d'appartenir à un pays qu'Oswald ne comprend pas" that "crée le conflit qui entraînera la mort de Corinne" as Simone Balayé argues.\(^{224}\) Rather, I think that it is both Corinne's status as an exceptional public woman who cannot be reconciled with that of a traditional wife and Oswald's unwillingness to transcend prejudices of supposed nationality in his relationship with Corinne that creates the central conflict and causes her fatal bereavement. Balayé confirms that Oswald's rejection of Corinne has to do with his loyalty to father and his nation (or fatherland): "Repris par la société anglaise, il (Oswald) trahit celle qu'il aimait et épouse Lucile, se conformant ainsi aux volontés de son père que la mort a rendues sacrées pour un homme à jamais culpabilisé par sa désobéissance ancienne".\(^{225}\) Oswald's continued attachment to his father and therefore his fatherland, even after his father's death and after having left England, is a choice that he does not have to make. He chooses to remain loyal to his father and his country rather than to abandon them in order to pledge his love for Corinne and her nation. His choice of Lucile is a byproduct of his anglocentric preferences.

Although one may see it as surprising that Staël depicts Oswald as having of the same type of vanity illustrated by her character of the typical Frenchman outside of France, the attribution of vanity to Oswald is clear. It is also significant because it shows an Englishman embodying a trait that is considered typically French. Sharing this quality at times, d'Erfeuil and Oswald are often more similar than their national characters.

\(^{224}\) *Introduction*, 23.
\(^{225}\) Ibid.
dictate (the image of the notoriously sanguine Frenchman is antithetical to the image of the melancholic Englishman).

Staël not only presents the differences between national types in her novel, but she also indicates the similarities of individuals from different nations. This does not negate Staël's idea that the individuals of a nation make up its character and therefore distinguish that nation from others. Early in Corinne, Staël comments on the similarities of people from different nations, owing them simply to the process of civilization:

*L'art de la civilisation tend sans cesse à rendre tous les hommes semblables en apparence et presque en réalité; mais l'esprit et l'imagination se plaisent dans le différences qui caractérisent les nations: les homme ne se ressemblent entre eux que par l'affectation ou le calcul; mais tout ce qui est naturel est varié.* (39)

It is by "calculation" and "affectation" that men resemble each other; they are "naturally" different. Oswald and d'Erfeuil together serve the purpose of showing how aspects of all cultures, particularly those aspects that are constructed through the universal process of civilization, can make men similar. Here, it is their vanity that unites them.

**D'Erfeuil's sympathy and cosmopolitanism realized**

However, as I mentioned earlier, the two men do diverge on some counts. This divergence relates to Staël's view of the natural differences between citizens of different nations. D'Erfeuil and Oswald differ when it is a question of natural inclination. This is shown when it comes to relieving Corinne of her suffering. When faced with the suffering of Corinne, d'Erfeuil's natural inclination is to be sympathetic and to help her. Oswald, on the other hand, causes her suffering rather than relieves it. The difference between the ways in which Oswald and d'Erfeuil deal with Corinne leads to the

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226 Huchette notes that the novel is: "la représentation des caractères nationaux à travers les caractères individuels" (67).
dénouement when Corinne perishes because of Oswald's rejection. Although he is ultimately unable to prevent her death, it is through Corinne that d'Erfeuil enacts his redeeming qualities and he does this because of the effect of Oswald's actions on her.

Early in the narrative, we see evidence of d'Erfeuil's protection of Corinne. He seems to want to safeguard Corinne's reputation when Oswald puts it at risk by traveling alone with her. When d'Erfeuil speaks to Oswald after his trip with Corinne to the Roman countryside, Oswald's tendency to act only for his own self-interest becomes apparent. D'Erfeuil recognizes that a single young man traveling alone with a single young woman gives the impression that they are engaged in an inappropriate relationship, but Oswald merely disregards the gravity of the situation:

Ce n'est pas bien, lui dit-il, de vous montrer ainsi publiquement, arrivant seul de la campagne avec Corinne: vous la compromettez; et qu'en ferez-vous après? Je ne crois pas, répondit, Lord Nelvil, que je compromette Corinne, en montrant l'attachement qu'elle m'inspire. [...] ce sont de certaines convenances établies qu'il ne faut pas braver ... Lors Nelvil sourit; et sans humeur, comme sans peine, il plaisanta le comte d'Erfeuil sur sa frivole sévérité. (243-4)

Oswald shows no concern for compromising Corinne's reputation, which illustrates his tendency toward selfish behavior. It is also an ominous indication of what will become of Corinne if her relationship with Oswald continues.

D'Erfeuil continues his attempts to warn the couple about compromising Corinne's reputation when he pleads with Corinne not to go to Naples alone with Oswald. He argues that society will not understand their relationship and that her public social standing will be gravely affected:

Y pensez-vous, lui dit-il, quoi! Vous mettre en route avec lord Nelvil, sans qu'il soit votre époux, sans qu'il vous ait promis de l'être! Et que deviendrez-vous s'il vous abandonne? - Ce que je deviendrais, répondit Corinne, dans toutes les situations de la vie, s'il cessait de m’aimer, la plus malheureuse personne du
monde. [...] - On cesse d'aimer, reprit le comte D'Erfeuil, mais l'on ne cesse pas de vivre au milieu de la société et d'avoir besoin d'elle. (278)

Despite d'Erfeuil's overemphasis on the importance of society's opinion, he is correct that Corinne's reputation will be compromised and that it will have a grave affect upon her. Even if Corinne is not directly concerned with her reputation, she no longer feels comfortable in her public role after Oswald abandons her. Her discomfort in her former role shows that she does put some stock in public opinion. Her public persona, which is an enormous part of her fully actualized self, depends on the public's opinion of her. In the above referenced conversation with d'Erfeuil, Corinne denies this, at her own peril.

In addition to these two warnings to the couple about compromising Corinne's reputation, d'Erfeuil also explicitly cautions Corinne against a relationship with Oswald because Oswald will leave her in the end: "Lord Nelvil est un homme tout comme un autre, reprit le comte D'Erfeuil; il retournera dans son pays, il suivra sa carrière, il sera raisonnable enfin, et vous exposez imprudemment votre réputation en allant à Naples avec lui" (279). This wise presage falls on the deaf ears of a lover; Corinne does not heed d'Erfeuil's warning and suffers endlessly when Oswald does abandon her.

Finally, at the end of the novel, D'Erfeuil attempts to come to Corinne's aid and this time, he succeeds. He is the person who rescues Corinne when, after she has returned to England, she faints on the side of a road after having bid her final goodbye to Oswald. D'Erfeuil finds Corinne lying in a ditch on the road near the Edgermond estate. When he discovers Corinne lying weak and pallid in a delirious stupor, d'Erfeuil is so concerned that he arranges for her to be taken to a neighboring town to convalesce where he follows her for a week:

Quelle fut sa surprise en reconnaissant Corinne à travers sa mortelle pâleur! Une
vive pitié le saisit; avec l'aide de son domestique, il arrangea quelques branches pour la transporter. […] Le comte d'Erfeuil suivit Corinne et pendant huit jours que l'infortunée eut la fièvre et le délire, il ne la quitta point; ainsi c'était l'homme frivole qui la soignait, et l'homme sensible qui lui perçait le cœur. (506)

Although the character of d'Erfeuil never completely transforms through the narrative - he continues to be portrayed as slightly self-involved and superficial - he nonetheless shows great sympathy and kindness to Corinne in her time of need: "Ce contraste frappa Corinne quand elle reprit ses sens, et elle remercia le comte D'Erfeuil avec une profonde émotion; il répondit en cherchant vite à la consoler: il était plus capable de nobles actions que de paroles sérieuses, et Corinne devait trouver en lui plutôt des secours qu'un ami" (506).

Despite keeping himself at an emotional distance from Corinne due to his natural predisposition for lightheartedness, it is d’Erfeuil who allows Corinne her final revenge against Oswald. D’Erfeuil is indirectly responsible for the narrative dénouement when, due to his inability to keep a secret, he reveals to Oswald information about Corinne's stay in England after Oswald had abandoned her. This revelation prompts Oswald to return to Italy, this time with his wife and child in tow, to make amends with Corinne. When learning of Oswald's whereabouts, Corinne refuses to see him but welcomes his daughter whom she educates extensively and molds into a young version of herself. This is Corinne's ultimate revenge: she forces Oswald to confront her memory until his last dying day through her likeness in his own daughter. D’Erfeuil sets the events in motion that lead to the narrative's conclusion with Corinne's final retribution for being abandoned.

Conclusion

Despite Corinne's failure to convince d'Erfeuil of the merit of the arts of European
countries other than France, and despite her incomprehension of his vanity, he nonetheless affects her in very positive ways in the novel. D’Erfeuil illustrates a rejection of cosmopolitanism through his francocentric attitude and his vain insistence on the righteousness of his own opinions, but he also embraces the notion of individuals of all nationalities helping each other. He does this when he saves Corinne from death and when he inadvertently puts in motion the events of the conclusion, which allow Corinne to take her revenge against Oswald. He embraces Corinne not more readily but actually more faithfully in the course of the narrative than Oswald does.

On the one hand, with an insular and notoriously aristocratic perspective, the comte d’Erfeuil illustrates Staël's interpretation of old regime values in France created by those politicians who catered to the whims of despotic rulers. The frivolity, superficiality, egotism, and vanity generated in French culture by the absolutist system of government are precisely those qualities that Staël rails against in her political writings about how the Revolution went wrong. On the other hand, d’Erfeuil does travel and serve as a loyal companion to Oswald and later to Corinne, which illustrates the tempering of his typically French vanity when it comes to helping others in need. If Oswald is England, Corinne is Italy (and England), and d’Erfeuil is France, then his existence in the narrative and his aid to (or attempts to aid) the other characters show the benefits of transnational exchange that Staël discusses at length in *De l’Allemagne*. His light-heartedness helps Oswald in his search to free himself of his melancholy over the death of his father. Although Oswald never lets go of his guilt completely, he does find

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227 It has been argued that these qualities of d’Erfeuil are simply reflections of the typical French *salonnier* of the old regime. But I think that the situation of the text (the fact that it has an international focus), the time period (spanning the time before and after the Revolution and during the regime of Bonaparte), and d’Erfeuil’s status as an émigré make him more complex than a simple *salonnier*.
temporary comfort in d'Erfeuil when he sees his easygoing attitude toward life. He wonders if d’Erfeuil may have some secret knowledge about taking pleasure in the art of living that he should adopt to escape his constant spleen typical of the English: ("Son existence légère s'accord-t-telle mieux que la mienne avec la rapidité de la vie?"). Additionally, d'Erfeuil's revelation to Oswald about Corinne's trip to Scotland indirectly helps Corinne free herself emotionally from the man who destroyed her. Despite his francocentric discourse, d'Erfeuil's actions illustrate (perhaps unwittingly) an embrace of cosmopolitanism. Oswald's actions illustrate his rejection of cosmopolitanism, despite his verbal support of it.

In this chapter, we have examined the petit-maître in the international context and have seen that, although foreigners saw the "old regime French homme à la mode" in a very specific way, Staël's novel attempts to enact a transformation of France's international image in the new republic. In the nineteenth century, the homme à la mode is the dandy, and it is also a performative figure. But the theatricality expressed by the dandy is judged differently than the petit-maître's practice of ostentatious display. The dandy is elegant and refined rather than ostentatious. The following chapter juxtaposes the petit-maître to the dandy and examines a new type of self-conscious performativity reflected by the modern French man of fashion.
Epilogue: The Petit-maître, the Dandy, and the Politics of Appearances

With his powdered wigs, make-up, fake beauty marks, and high-heeled shoes, the petit-maître is a feminized, fashionable man of the eighteenth century. Although this dissertation has focused on the petit-maître and the aesthetic motivations involved in his representation, it is critical to note that he is only one version of the ubiquitous fashionable man in France. When faced with descriptions of French *hommes à la mode* throughout history, many readers, instead of systematically recalling the petit-maître, may instinctively conjure images of the popular nineteenth-century dandy. The dandy is the literary and cultural equivalent of the old regime's "man about town". He was discussed and theorized by many prominent nineteenth-century poets and artists (most notably Baudelaire) and he is the subject of countless critical analyses of society and gender in nineteenth-century France.

But, while the dandy may be more widely recognized than the petit-maître, the two are not entirely dissimilar. The dandy sometimes is described as "very conceited", "he gives himself airs"[228], and he is "frivole, brillant, et chargée de chaînes d'or"[229]. The nineteenth-century edition of Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* defines the dandy as an "Homme recherché dans sa toilette et exagérant les modes jusqu'au ridicule". He therefore shares an excessive attention to grooming and appearance, and he is condemned by many French authors in the nineteenth century because exaggeration or excess in appearance is regarded as inauthentic and particularly distasteful. Thus, on the

[228] This description references "an imitation Brummell in a contemporary novel" mentioned by Ellen Moers in her early work on the dandy: *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking, 1960), 20.
one hand, this epilogue focuses on the similarities between the petit-maître and the dandy and investigates the lineage of the man of fashion from the old regime into modernity. On the other, it will show that despite these similarities, the dandy and the petit-maître are evaluated according to differing criteria: whereas the petit-maître's obsession with his appearance draws criticism and the labels of "theatrical" and "effeminate", the dandy's attention to his appearance is not always condemned and is often portrayed as an elegant, androgynous quality. These figures express opposite views of performativity: whereas one makes a spectacle of himself, the other stands out from the crowd by mastering the appearance of simplicity. Let us now turn to texts that focus on the similarities between the petit-maître and the dandy in order later to bring to light the way sexual politics and performative aesthetics underpin their differences.

The Affected Dandy

Descriptions of the frivolous dandy appear in many nineteenth century texts that criticize him in terms similar to those that were used to disparage the petit-maître: they represent the dandy as a superficial and ostentatious fool. Stendhal, in particular, is known for his view of the dandy's ridiculousness. He specifically associates this figure with affectation as we can see in one of the minor characters, the marquis, from his novel Armance (1827). The marquis is described upon his introduction into the narrative as a fat, which is a term used often to refer to petits-maîtres: "au Théâtre Italien; il y trouva en effet Mme d'Aumale et dans sa loge un marquis de Crêveroché; c'était un des fats qui obsédaient le plus cette femme aimable; mais avec moins d'esprit ou plus de suffisance

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que les autres, il se croyait distingué". But the pretentious marquis is also specifically labeled a dandy: "On arriva dans un lieu reculé du bois de Meudon; mais M de Crêveroche, plus affecté et plus dandy qu' à l' ordinaire, trouva des objections ridicules [...]" (132). Stendhal emphasizes the flawed way that Crêveroche distinguishes himself from others. Affectation in the effort to individualize is a common theme in early French dandyism. Despite his minor role in the narrative, the Marquis de Crêveroche expresses Stendhal's disparaging perspective on the affectation of the dandy.

Moreover, in his nonfiction work, *De l'amour* (1822), Stendhal remarks that the *maisons d'éducation* (boarding schools) in Paris are furnished with both distinguished professors and empty-headed dandies: 
"[...] nous serons tout ébahis de voir sortir de nos maisons d'éducation de Paris où les maîtres les plus distingués enseignent, suivant des méthodes parfaites, l'état le plus avancé des sciences, des dandys, des espèces de jocrisses qui ne savent que bien mettre leur cravate et se battre avec élégance au bois de Boulogne". The term *jocrisse* refers to a type of character that often appears in comic theatre, and that is simple minded and effeminate because he lets himself be led around by women. He is ridiculed for his frivolity and weakness. Stendhal caricaturizes the young generation of educated elites as refined but senseless dandies with superficial intelligence and talents, which closely resembles portrayals of the petit-maître in many plays and novels of the eighteenth century.

In addition to this Stendhalien assessment of the dandy, other well known authors

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depict the man about town in a negative light. In 1831, Alfred de Musset reiterates the idea of the dandy as a daft fashionable. Musset specifically calls attention to la physionomie of the dandy, which reveals his lack of intelligence: "Dans la tête stupide de l'impassible dandy, il ne se passe rien".\(^{234}\) The dandy is obtuse; perhaps his mind is obfuscated by his concentration on trifling matters, perhaps the fashionable man who fancies his appearance is intrinsically incapable of any kind of profound wisdom or understanding.

Most importantly, Honoré de Balzac explicitly remarks that the dandy is the direct heir of the petit-maître: "À l'incroyable, au merveilleux, à l'élegant, ces trois héritiers des petits-maîtres, ont succédé le dandy, puis le lion".\(^{235}\) For Balzac, the dandy, like his predecessor, is a frivolous twit and a ridiculous caricature. In his *Traité de la vie élégante*, a cross between the classic genre of the éloge paradoxal and a pseudo-scientific guide to style originally published serially in Émile de Girardin's royalist review *La Mode*, Balzac elaborates on a genealogical lineage that extends from the old regime petit-maître to the nineteenth-century homme à la mode:

Le dandysme est une hérésie de la vie élégante. En effet, le dandysme est une affectation de la mode. En se faisant dandy, un homme devient un meuble de boudoir, un mannequin extrêmement ingénieux, qui peut se poser sur un cheval ou sur un canapé, qui mord ou tête habituellement le bout d'une canne, mais un être pensant ..., jamais ! L'homme qui ne voit que la mode dans la mode est un sot. La vie élégante n'exclut ni la pensée ni la science : elle les consacre. Elle ne doit pas seulement apprendre à Jouir du temps, mais à l'employer dans un ordre d'idées extrêmement élevé.\(^{236}\)

In the *Traité* - an ironic anatomization of the all of the components involved in elegant

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\(^{236}\) Ibid., 12, 247.
living - Balzac discusses several types of modern men. One is the "elegant" man who is sensitive to change (society, fashion, manners, and decoration) but who incorporates fashion into a totalizing aesthetic that reflects political and social harmony. Another is the dandy who only directs his attention to his appearance and his public persona, like the petit-maître. He is not a profound thinker; he is affected, obtuse, and is only interested in fashion for its own sake rather than for the expression of a kind of self-discipline. Since the Traité is a text about the concept of distinction – it theorizes new standards of differentiation between people in modern life and opposes them to the old regime means of class distinction based on birth (I will return to this subject of the Traité later in this chapter) – Balzac's assessment of the dandy is that he is an affected figure who incorrectly distinguishes himself from others. As I have shown, this view is echoed in many texts from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

**Dandy aesthetics in France**

However, around the 1830's, many texts illustrate a change in the image of the dandy in France. After this time, printed accounts appear in which the dandy is described in opposite terms than the ones used in Musset's, Stendhal's, and Balzac's early works. Now the dandy is praised as having qualities that directly oppose typical petit-

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237 The Traité was published in five installments during the time when La Mode was grappling with how to relate to its readership and questioning how to deal with its political leanings that opposed the July monarchy. Balzac's Traité is as much a political text as it is a summary of the notion of 'elegance' and its parameters in the modern context. See: Eva Demianowicz, "Dandysme et litterature dans la revue La Mode." Diss. MacGill University, 2010.

238 John C. Prevost is specific in his estimation of the exact date of the change in the dandy's image when he notes: "Vers 1832, une nouvelle conception du dandysme prit forme. [...] le dandysme semble bien être le bonheur qui se trouve dans la rêverie artistique, rêverie suscitée par le gout des formes, des couleurs et des sensations" (160-1). Emilien Carassus also notes that in the 1830's: "on oppose les fashionables aux plus récents dandys qui commencent à traverser la Manche. (31) [...] Arnold Frémy dans un article de 1836 signale ce qu'il y a de maitrise d'impassibilité, de sang-froid dans le dandysme théorique" (32). Emilien Carassus, Le Mythe du dandy Collection U2 (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1971).
maître features: he appears to be a perfect gentleman, he is both witty and verbally reserved, and most importantly, he is purposefully unaffected in his dress, manners, and expressions. He privileges attention to appearance and legitimates fashion. The *Trésor de la langue française* notes that "En France, à l'époque romantique", the dandy was seen as "élégant, qui se pique de suivre rigoureusement les modes". This definition refers to the dandy's reputation as fashion obsessed, but omits the explicit negative judgment that we see in earlier definitions. Now he is "elegant". As I will show, the dandy at this time appears in many texts as not only the polar opposite of ridiculous, but also as the emblem of the very notion of refinement in modern style.

The dandy is presumed to have originated in England in the early nineteenth century, specifically in the court of Prince George, the regent from 1811 to 1820. The socialite George 'Beau' Brummell, a close confident of the prince, is generally recognized as the first "real" dandy. Brummell is generally seen as the foundation of the later imagined myth of the English dandy.

Across the channel, although the dandy was acknowledged as English, it was appropriated and Gallicized. In the mid-century, with French writers such as Charles Baudelaire and Jules Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly, the dandy's image transformed. Although he retained a somewhat lavish lifestyle and continued to focus closely on his appearance, he also started to take on more conceptual depth: "Largely through his (Barbey's) influence, French dandyism achieved intellectual maturity... and his distinction went into the making of the poet Charles Baudelaire" (Moers 270). Moreover, the dandy became mythified in French culture: "Vers 1850, le dandysme n'est plus en France un pur
comportement social. Il s'est doté d'une dimension intellectuelle et culturelle".239

Domna Stanton is among the first to address the myth of dandyism in France when she argues that the idea of a specifically French dandyism emerged by way of a French interpretation of the English literary character, rather than by the French imitation of a particular English gentleman that was supposed to have embodied the type:

It was not the English dandy in the flesh as much as his literary representation that fired the French imagination and stimulated imitation of a type depicted in texts both foreign and domestic. On French soil, this corpus of material generated not a duplication, but an interpretation, a rewriting that led to the literary phenomenon of the French dandy.240

Thus from the flesh and blood dandy in England emerges dandyism in French literature and culture: "le mythe du dandy ne se crée pas strictement autour des dandys réels. Le dandysme idéal, sa conception imaginaire, joue un rôle important dans la construction du type. Ainsi, au dandy réel s’ajoute un dandy imaginaire".241 The mythified dandy in French society took inspiration from his English predecessor but is primarily recognized as a French cultural phenomenon.242

The mythification of the dandy means that, like the petit-maître, the dandy resists literal, 'real-world' incarnation. A man may display some of the qualities associated with the petit-maître or the dandy, but he can never fully embody the type because it is an ideal one:

[I]Il existe une sorte de dandysme idéal, une conception imaginaire et d’ailleurs variable du dandysme à laquelle chaque dandy réel est en partie redevable de sa domination magique, mais qu’aucun ne saurait pleinement incarner. […] Plus exactement le mythe naît du réel mais l’informe à son tour et la qualification de

239 Patrick Favardin and Laurent Bouëxière, Le Dandysme (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1988), 64.
241 Demianowcz, 10.
242 "Le dandysme est un des témoignages du courant d'orgueil et de vanité qui s'est manifesté en France après la Révolution" (Prevost 162). "En France, c'était surtout l'art de vivre tel que comprenaient les viveurs de 1830 à 1840, de sorte que le dandy français ne faisait guère que continuer des mœurs connues de tous les élégants de Paris depuis la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle" (164).
dandy passe d’abord par l’idée que l’on se fait du dandysme (Carassus 15).

Thus, the man and the myth are involved in a dialectic: a man identified as a dandy informs the myth of dandyism, whereas it is the myth that encourages the identification of an individual as a dandy. Like the petit-maître, who is a character on stage and in novels and who is also mythified in the social context of the old regime salon and aristocratic culture, the dandy was transformed into myth in nineteenth century anti-bourgeois French culture. The process of mythification can be attributed to certain notable authors. Baudelaire and Barbey "theorize" the dandy in a way that was never before seen. These two authors discuss dandies who are elegantly dressed, artful observers of the active, urban landscape. The dandy for them is supremely aloof and his cold exterior demonstrates his complete control of his persona. His capacity for total composure in his urban setting also illustrates a new ideal of beauty; one that values both the traditional permanence of le beau and the unconventional and transitory nature of the space and time he inhabits. Baudelaire, Barbey, and the fictional artists they create transcend the real-life dandy figure (such as Beau Brummell) and transform him into a protean type that morphs according to the given (present) context.

When Barbey notes: "Il resta mis d'une façon irréprochable; mais il éteignit les

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244 In fact, before Baudelaire and Barbey, Balzac hints at a definition of 'beautiful' as the blending of the eternal with the ephemeral but Balzac focuses on this idea in women's appearances rather than men's. In *La femme de trente ans* Balzac notes: "La physionomie de la femme ne commence qu'à trente ans. [...] Une tête de vieille femme n'appartient plus ...aux artistes vulgaires qui n'y découvre rien; mais aux vrais poètes, à ceux qui ont le sentiment d'un beau indépendant de toutes les conventions sur lesquelles reposent tant de préjugés en fait d'art et de beauté". Balzac, *La Femme de trente ans. Comédie Humaine Vol. 2.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 1206.
couleurs de ses vêtements, en simplifia la coupe et les porta sans y penser”245, and Baudelaire asks: "Qu'est-ce que donc cette passion qui, devenue doctrine a fait des adeptes dominateurs...? C'est avant tout le besoin ardent de se faire une originalité, contenu dans les limites extérieurs des convenances”246, they describe the aestheticization of the dandy as a mutable representation of an ideal: he can play at being seen while also blending in and becoming almost invisible to those who do not recognize his subtle and understated beauty. The dandy becomes a myth through his ever changing and supremely understated yet singular appearance.

This is one aspect of the French dandy that I find most compelling when comparing him to the petit-maître of the old regime: the dandy and the petit-maître are both formed through texts into mythic aesthetic figures which serve as signs of their times. Moreover, the dandy and the petit-maître are very often discussed in terms of how their outward appearances communicate some underlying artistic standard: they are both iconoclastic because they manipulate current style conventions. But whereas the petit-maître during the old regime is almost always represented as a negative model because he expressly defies old regime moral standards of "good taste", especially in his dress, for the dandy, the act of transcending the conventional through clothing acquires a new value that it did not previously have. In modern times, the dandy indicates that attention to outward appearance has become a legitimate category within a new realm of aesthetics that holds ethical and philosophical value.

With this contrast in mind, the remainder of this chapter takes aim at one of the most obvious aspects of the petit-maître, his appearance, and uses it as a means to examine the notion of elegance in the dandy's fashioning. This approach allows me to study the fashionable man in France from the old regime to modern times, not by positing a linear development from one type to the next, but rather through discussing certain transformations in the aesthetics of the *homme à la mode*. Specifically, the way that the dandy and the petit-maître portray their personae reflects two opposite political poles: as part of the effort to construct an ideal democratic sociability (as opposed to in a monarchy), the dandy's androgyny and mastery of theatrical illusion express an ideal of unification (of aesthetics and social classes). Effeminacy in the petit-maître, on the other hand, symbolizes a type of discordance and division (of social classes) that was emblematic of the conspicuously theatrical monarchy. The dandy and the petit-maître thus act as two symbols of the conflation of gender, appearance, and politics.

*Petit-maître Fashion*

The petit-maître’s ostentatious and over-worked appearance might be the most obvious source of his detractors' comments. Although throughout my dissertation I have examined critiques that inveigh against the petit-maître, which include cutting down both his appearance and character – he is effeminate in appearance and mannerisms, feeble in moral character, and all together ineffective – I have not yet specifically discussed the petit-maître's clothing as it is described in texts.

This is in part due to the petit-maître’s appearance infrequently being described in great detail in novels or plays, although it is almost always mentioned. For example, in
Rousseau's *Narcisse ou l'amant de lui-même*, the only specific mention of Valère's appearance is by Valère himself while he is at his toilette putting on make-up: "C'est une fort méchante habitude que l'usage du rouge; à la fin je ne pourrai m'en passer, et je serai du dernier mal sans cela. Où est donc ma boîte à mouches?" (1.3). Molière's Dom Juan, a character who shares many traits with the petit-maître, is briefly described by Sganerelle as having: "une perruque blonde et bien frisée, des plumes à chapeau, un habit bien doré, et des rubans couleur de feu" (1.2). The caricatural aspect of Dom Juan's appearance is brought up by two other characters, two peasants, who go through Dom Juan's clothing as it dries on the line. They are awed at the size of his shirtsleeves, which are so large that "two men could fit in them standing up": "Mon quieu, je n'en avais jamais vu s'habiller. Que d'histoires et d'angigorniaux boutont ces messieus-là les courtisans ! Je me pardrais là dedans, pour moi, et j'estais tout ébobi de voir ça. [...] Ils ant des chemises qui ant des manches où j'entrerions tout brandis, toi et moi" (2.1). The peasants marvel at the spectacle of the nobleman's bizarre clothes and thus the scene is a critical and comic look at the courtier from outsiders. A little-known comedy, *Le Petit-maître en province* (1766), describes the way that a petit-maître ridiculously and ostentatiously adorns his horses and valets in his likeness: "Ah quelle magnificence! L'habit de tes valets est tout à fait brillant. ...le chapeau est élégant. Cet habit, n'est-il pas mille fois plus galant que les sombres couleurs d'une triste livrée?" (1.3). From these descriptions, we can see that make-up, bright colors, and an overall flashy appearance are emblems of petit-maître fashion.

Many male French aristocrats in the eighteenth century, particularly those wanting to make a certain show of wealth or status at court, often wore the formal full
dress (*habit à la française*) consisting of a silk coat (*habit*), knee-breeches (*culottes*), and a formal, skirted waistcoat (*veste*). The *habit* was trimmed in gold and silver braids of various designs and the *veste* was often extremely lavish: it was made of luxurious silks embroidered and brocaded with the most expensive threads.²⁴⁷ Some aristocrats, from whom the petit-maître type took inspiration, took the display of wealth to an extreme and wore waistcoats of extravagant design, donned excessively powdered wigs, powdered their skin, and painted their cheeks with rouge and fake beauty marks (like Rousseau's petit-maître, Valère). This excess, as I have shown in my chapter on effeminacy, was one of the main reasons his masculinity was called into question. Effeminacy is an element of the way that the petit-maître theatricalizes his appearance; he makes a spectacle of himself with his make up and clothing. Theatricality is thus the overall emblematizing aesthetic of his persona it is the element on which critics focus on most pointedly.

*Diderot, Rousseau, and petit-maître theatricality*

Diderot and Rousseau both discuss the evils of theatricality; while Diderot focuses most heavily on aesthetics and Rousseau focuses on the politics and morality of appearances, their comments on theatricality incriminate the type of appearance that the petit-maître emblematizes.

In his *Salon de 1767*, Diderot engages in the discussion of outward appearance by denigrating the extravagance of French fashions for men during his time. He notes the ridiculous effect, in painting, of transposing modern clothing into the antique context, and the dignifying effect that ancient costume would have if it were transposed into modern

Diderot indicates that there is a clothing style associated with heroism. Conversely, there is a style associated with modern courtly life that makes heroic actions not believable, or dissonant, when seen portrayed in an historical painting or on the stage.

In this text, *De la poésie dramatique* (1758) Diderot exclusively dedicates a section to costume (entitled "Vêtements") in which he argues in favor of simplicity, specifically of natural clothing on stage: "La comédie veut être jouée en déshabillé. Il ne faut être sur la scène ni plus apprêté ni plus négligé que chez soi". An actor's effort to please spectators with elegant gold embroidery or other embellished costume is not of primary importance because it is not in the interest of communicating the "vrai". Diderot calls for a more "realistic" illusion in theater; luxurious costumes on stage are a distraction because they emphasize the convention of the spectacle itself rather than the action being represented. Diderot advises actors: "Si c'est pour le spectateur que vous ruinez en habits, acteurs, vous n'avez point de goût; et vous oubliez que le spectateur n'est rien pour vous" (266). This does not mean that the actor should completely neglect the spectator; rather, spectators are made to feel, through the technique of the actor, that they are not watching a play but rather become absorbed in watching, almost voyeuristically, something that is really taking place. The same goes for

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painting. Now, verisimilitude is portrayed through costume that realistically reflects the given situation: "Quelle vraisemblance, qu'au moment d'une action tumultueuse, des hommes aient eu le temps de se parer comme dans un jour de représentation ou de fête?" (266).

Domesticity, or the private scene, which is the opposite of the public or theatrical scene, is the setting for the expression authenticity because of its negation of theatricality (Diderot refers to theatricality as *le théâtral*). In the theater, *le théâtral* must be strictly avoided. For Diderot, costume's enemy is *le faste*, which is akin to *le théâtral* in acting or painting: "Le faste gâte tout. Le spectacle de la richesse n'est pas beau. La richesse a trop de caprices; elle peut éblouir l'œil, mais non toucher l'âme" (265). Diderot is against the display of *luxe* where it is not called for. Luxury in stage costume counteracts the production of a "realistic" illusion, where discursive meaning, gestures, and appearance should all correspond very well.

In *Essai sur la peinture*, Diderot discusses the conformity of action to appearance: "Sachez donc ce que c'est que la grâce, ou cette rigoureuse et précise conformité des membres avec la nature de l'action". The theatricalized man, like an actor or dancer (which the petit-maître exemplifies), plays to an audience and appears so posed that he becomes ridiculous. Diderot imagines a scene where a dance teacher instructs his student: "Allons, nigaud, tendez-moi ce jarret, déployez-moi cette figure; ce nez un peu au vent.

Et quand il en aurait fait le plus insipide petit-maître, il commencerait à lui sourire, et à s'applaudir de son ouvrage" (452–3). A dancing instructor who is teaching a student how

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to pose turns the student into a caricature by making him look out of place and unnatural.

Addressing his friend, Grimm, and using him as an example, Diderot explains the beauty of a private scene in which the *philosophe* is sitting in his kitchen chair with his nightcap hanging over his eyes and his hair disheveled: "Vous voilâ étendu sur votre chaise de paille, les bras posés sur vos genoux, votre bonnet de nuit renfoncé sur vos yeux, ou vos cheveux épars et mal retroussés sous un peigne courbé ... vous êtes tout à fait pittoresque et beau" (453). Diderot suggests that Grimm is the living embodiment of the philosopher at work. But upon hearing that someone important is coming to visit him, Grimm arranges his clothing and body as if he were a self-conscious actor unconvincingly playing the role of the courtier. He is no longer the perfect picture of a *philosophe* when the marquis de Castries arrives: "On vous annonce M. le marquis de Castries; et voilà le bonnet relevé, la robe de chambre croisée; mon homme droit, tous ses membres bien composés; se maniérant, se marcélisant, se rendant très agréable pour la visite qui lui arrive, très maussade pour l'artiste" (453). For Diderot, in an everyday situation, posing appears 'mannered'; in 'se marcelisant' ('marcelizing' himself, which means contorting his body as the famous dancing instructor, Marcel, would do with his students), the man appears affected and the scene becomes artificial. For Diderot, arranging clothing and body to appear a certain way to a spectator is an example of theatricality that diminishes the appeal of the model.

Diderot's statements about improper display (which includes gestures, presence, and clothing) echo Jean-Jacques Rousseau's views on 'le luxe' discussed specifically in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750). Although in this *Discours*, Rousseau does not necessarily address the subject of costume in painting or on the stage, he uses fashion
as a metaphor for the all of the ills of 'luxury'. Rousseau denigrates ostentatious dress as a corrupting influence:

Qu'il serait doux de vivre parmi nous, si la contenance extérieure était toujours l'image des dispositions du cœur ; si la décence était la vertu ; si nos maximes nous servaient de règles ; ... Mais tant de qualités vont trop rarement ensemble, et la vertu ne marche guère en si grande pompe. La richesse de la parure peut annoncer un homme opulent, et son élégance un homme de goût ; l'homme sain et robuste se reconnaît à d'autres marques : c'est sous l'habit rustique d'un laboureur, et non sous la dorure d'un courtisan, qu'on trouvera la force et la vigueur du corps. La parure n'est pas moins étrangère à la vertu qui est la force et la vigueur de l'âme. L'homme de bien est un athlète qui se plaît à combattre nu ; il méprise tous ces vils ornements qui gêneraient l'usage de ses forces, et dont la plupart n'ont été inventés que pour cacher quelque difformité.

Rousseau imagines an idealized world in which signs would actually reflect their intended meaning. He is concerned here with the idea of imitation: fashion, manners, and (in many ways) the arts, encourage imitation among people. Spectacle creates a desire for replication, and thus encourages a draw toward uniformity. This is the opposite of authenticity and therefore virtue (la vertu ne marche guère en si grande pompe). Like Diderot who opposes le beau to le faste, Rousseau defines virtue here as the absence of spectacle.

For the richly dressed man, elegant clothing serves as a sign of taste and distinction. For the field laborer, who is ideally healthy and robust, physical strength and vigor are the authentic signs of his inner virtue. His rustic clothing reveals his focus,

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252 Rousseau's argument is deeply ensconced in political economics: marchands de la mode, according to Rousseau, create fashion commodities to entice women to buy, thereby drawing women away from the domestic space and disrupt the requisite balance between masculine public and feminine private social spheres. See: Jennifer M. Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau: Femininity and Fashion in Old Regime France," French Historical Studies 18.4 (1994): 939-967.


254 Nickolas Pappas notes the Rousseau's opinion regarding the imitative influence of fashion: "For Rousseau the pressure toward like-mindedness is the distinguishing characteristic of fashion. He opposes the fashionista to the true philosophe, not from any resistance to change or to thoughts of the body but in fear of the uniformity that attention to dress inspires."Fashion as seen as something imitative and foreign," British Journal of Aesthetics 48.1 (2008): 1-19.
which is his work. In this context, inner robustness – such as good health – is reflected in outward appearance – such as a strong and muscular body. Sartorial ornamentation for Rousseau is unnecessary and also false because it hides somatic 'deformities' that reflect irregularities of character.

Rousseau makes a metaphorical connection between clothing, physical strength, virtue and masculinity: la force and la vigueur of the body are crucial, and they are qualities that would not be attributed to courtiers who conceal their degenerate, defective and emasculated physiques with embellishments, in other words 'fashion' ('c'est sous l'habit rustique d'un laboureur et non sous la dorure d'un courtisan'). Rousseau implies an opposition between worldliness and masculinity. Courtly elegance is equated with sexual impotence, physical weakness, and moral vice. Masculine beauty would only be apparent in men who work; they develop strong bodies and focus on their efforts rather than on their appearances.

For Rousseau, fashion does not distinguish people from each other; rather it makes them uniform. The need for distinction expresses a universal desire for reputation and this desire is what causes the downfall of modern society. In his Discours sur les origines et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes (1754), Rousseau states: "ce désir universel de réputation, d'honneurs, et de préférences, qui nous dévore tous, exerce et compare les talents et les forces, combien il excite et multiplie les passions, et combien rendant tous les hommes concurrents, rivaux ou plutôt ennemis, il cause tous les jours de revers, de succès, et de catastrophes de toute espèce". 255 Being seen and desiring to be

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seen means that one exists only in the eyes of others and does not live an authentic life. This self-aggrandizing attitude is the universal catalyst for rivalry.

Inauthenticity is typical of many Frenchmen, according to Rousseau, who are vain and emasculated. In his *Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758) Rousseau attacks the entire culture that produces effete, elitist, and effeminate petits-maîtres. Discussing literature in particular, he perceives an overall lack of depth and intelligence in the type of literature written for women or to please women: "nos écrits se sentent de nos frivoles occupations; agréables, si l'on veut, mais petits et froids comme nos sentiments. […] Ces foules d'ouvrages éphémères qui naissent journellement, n'étant faits que pour amuser des femmes, et n'ayant ni force ni profondeur." 256 A society whose arts focus only on frivolous entertainment has no power or depth. Since women and themes that please women, such as *la galanterie* and *l'amour*, are so influential in this production, Frenchmen including the classical heroes of the theater, all appear effeminate:

[...]des héros de Racine, de ces héros si parés, si douceux, si tendres, qui, sous un air de courage et de vertu, ne nous montrent que les modèles des jeunes gens dont j'ai parlé, livrés à la galanterie, à la mollesse, à l'amour, à tout ce qui peut efféminer l'homme et l'attiédir sur le goût de ses véritables devoirs (107)

For Rousseau, to be 'effeminated' is to be entirely captivated by gallantry and romantic love, and also to degenerate into impotence. The theater dampens and drains all masculine strength, and turns the man away from his inherent passions and manliness.

As Rousseau discusses in *La Nouvelle Heloise*, this type of taste for feminine arts among a certain elite class permeates and infects the rest of society: "C’est ainsi que la sphère du monde et des auteurs se rétrécit [...] on n’y sait plus montrer les hommes qu’en

habit doré. Vous diriez que la France n’est peuplée que de comtes et de chevaliers".257

The theater, specifically, is a public setting that encourages the lower classes to imitate the rich people they see there, both on stage and in the audience. Imitation of *folie* produces an even more profound *folie*: "le peuple, toujours singe et imitateur des riches, va moins au théâtre pour rire de leurs folies que pour les étudier, et devenir encore plus fous qu’eux en les imitant. Voilà de quoi fut cause Molière lui-même ; il corrigea la cour en infectant la ville : et ses ridicules marquis furent le premier modèle des petits-maîtres bourgeois qui leur succédèrent" (253). Rousseau argues paradoxically that Molière's petits marquis and petits-maîtres, rather than being an object of ridicule, a mockery of the elites, as Molière intended them to be, become on the contrary a model that unintentionally inspires the bourgeois to act like those it mocks. Rousseau appropriately sees Molière's satirical "marquis" as the main model for the French petit-maître. For Rousseau, French effeminacy, emblematized by the petit-maître, is an epidemic that infects individuals of all social classes.

Both Rousseau and Diderot touch on the same crucial notions that are taken up in later discussions about the aesthetics of appearances. They both express trepidation about the future of a society that they see as being in the grip of an immorality spawned by rampant commercialism and manifested in the notion of 'spectacle' in the visual arts, the theater, the fashion industry, and the salon. Both Diderot's and Rousseau's comments on costume and clothing, which call to mind descriptions of the petit-maître's style, create an inexorable association between morals and fashion. The petit-maître is almost always criticized as being morally depraved because he is effeminate, frivolous, and showy.

Sexuality and Fashion: Baudelaire's Modern Dandy

Fashion, for Baudelaire's dandy, is of profound social and artistic significance: the clothing of the dandy and the artist in particular is both a signifier and a tool of modernity because it is a fundamental expression of social and political values. Many critics attribute Baudelaire's (and other authors') praise of modern aesthetics in art and of the modern fashionable man to the political transformations occurring in France throughout the nineteenth century, particularly socio-economic democratization, which triggered new cultural and literary reactions.

Indeed, the dandy is highly politicized. Baudelaire calls attention to the political component of the dandy: "Le dandysme apparaît surtout aux époques transitoires où la démocratie n'est pas encore toute-puissante, ou l'aristocratie n'est que partiellement chancelante et avilie." (OC 2, 711). His "antibourgeois" persona illustrates the notion that "dandyism (is) a protest against modern industrial capitalism". This politicization is expressed outwardly by the dandy's modern black suit, l'habit noir. By dressing in black, the man both opposes a certain gout français of the old regime nobles and adheres to a new bourgeois standard of appearance. But at the same time, he surpasses bourgeois uniformity by distinguishing himself from other men through variation.

Although Baudelaire admits that the black suit, the 'uniform' of the dandy, can be

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259 Some critics argue that the invention of the French dandy is a byproduct of the post-monarchial political transformations occurring all over France after 1789: "the political backdrop in France set the tone for a more overt democratization of dandyism, and opened the discourse to the broader political and sociological question of leisure time that would become an increasingly prominent topic over the coming decades." Napolean Jeffries, Introduction in Treatise on Elegant Living (Cambridge: Wakefield Press, 2010), xviii.

dull in its monotone shades, he recognizes that it can also be supremely elegant. He notes in his *Salon de 1846*, specifically in the section *XVIII De l’Héroïsme de la vie moderne*:

> Et cependant, n’a-t-il pas sa beauté et son charme indigène, cet habit tant victimé? N’est-il pas l’habit nécessaire de notre époque, ...? Remarquez bien que l’habit noir et la redingote ont non seulement leur beauté politique, qui est l’expression de l’égalité universelle, mais encore leur beauté poétique, qui est l’expression de l’âme publique; une immense défilade de croque-morts, croque-morts politiques, croque-morts amoureux, croque-morts bourgeois. Nous célébrons tous quelque enterrement (*OC* 2, 494).

The *habit noir* has funereal overtones; it consists of a black tailcoat, black trousers, a dark colored vest, and often a white shirt and dark colored tie. Baudelaire notes the absolute conformity of this mourning attire to the current times. His eulogy of the habit noir is somewhat ironic because it symbolizes death, but Baudelaire fully endorses it as such. Stylized in the correct way, the *habit noir*, because of its generalized status, has the paradoxical effect of distinguishing the man from the crowd (l’âme publique) and contributing to a totalizing aesthetic of conformity (l’égalité universelle). The redingote, also mentioned here, was a requisite accompaniment to the *habit noir*. It was an open robe based on the English riding coat that fitted tightly to the body and had long, tight sleeves. The redingote "usually incorporated masculine features such as a caped collar and a waistcoat". It was fitted over the *habit noir* had an equally 'masculating' effect on the appearance of the man. The *habit noir*, with its accessories and accompaniments, carried the instinctive sign of masculinity because it served as a somber backdrop against

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261 James Andrew Hiddleston notes: "the black coat of the modern age 'le frac funebre et convulsionné que nous endossons tous' does not present an insuperable obstacle to the modern painter, since 'les grands coloristes savaient faire de la couleur avec un habit noir, une cravate blanche et un fond gris' Baudelaire insists on harmony as the basis of color theory." *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory*. (Oxford: Oxford UP 1999), 18.

which to juxtapose women's clothing (particularly women of 'le demi-monde'), which continued to exhibit bright colors and ostentatious styles like those of the previous century.

The dandy's black suit therefore emblematizes the politics of modernity insofar as it is a full endorsement of the tragic quality of modern time. It is a form of heroism in the face of death: the habit noir signifies a heroic, but also an ironic, confrontation with death. The petit-maître, on the other hand, wore clothing that was at the opposite end of the spectrum from the black suit: petit-maître clothing was always brightly colored and embellished with dazzling threads of gold and silver. The petit-maître's habits did serve to distinguish him from the crowd, as does the habit noir of the dandy, but in an entirely different way: embroidered and shimmery waistcoats, wigs, and high-heeled shoes (particularly red heels in the court of Louis XIV) served as concrete evidence of the petit-maître’s aristocratic social position. He wanted to stand out in order to distinguish himself from the masses, but also from other aristocrats, in an apparent and emphatic way. The dandy's black suit accomplishes the task of distinguishing him from the masses without the palpable obviousness of the petit-maître’s clothing. For the dandy, it is not necessarily a matter of distinguishing oneself within the social ranks of the well-established société de la cour but rather about creating a sense of concrete identity within the unstable political and social climate of his time.

The petit-maître, with his sartorial bravado and exaggerated manners, speech, and gestures represents a theatricalized figure whose sexual identification is called into question through the label of 'effeminate'. The dandy, on the other hand, is not an effeminate figure. His clever style makes him consummate 'man of the day' in
Baudelaire's texts.

*The Dandy and the Question of Gender*

In Baudelaire's texts, the masculinity of the dandy figure is complex because Baudelaire does not necessarily use femininity or effeminacy as models to oppose the dandy's masculine image. Baudelaire's descriptions of the dandy denounce women but also seem to call for a feminization of his appearance. For example, in the 'Le Dandy' chapter of *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire states that dandyism: "est une espèce de culte de soi-même, qui peut survivre à la recherche du bonheur à trouver dans autrui, dans la femme, par exemple" (*OC* 2, 710). The dandy, who takes part in this 'cult of the self', is a complete being who, rather than being self-focused, is focused on his image in others. The 'dandy self' perseveres in his search for identity by way of seeking out his image in others, even in women. Baudelaire's use of the phrase 'dans la femme, par exemple' at the end of his description of dandyism brings to light how women figure into this *culte de soi-même*: they are an afterthought and not a necessity, but even they have the potential to serve the dandy in mirroring his identity. In the dandy's quest for self-creation, Baudelaire's above statement is not so much a harsh criticism of women as it is a gesture of recognition.

But, on the other hand, much of Baudelaire's writing also denounces women. In the *Journaux intimes* (in *Mon Cœur mis à nu*), he writes that the literal outer manifestation of natural femininity is not only the opposite of the dandy but also is

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263 Deborah Houk emphasizes Baudelaire's notion of the dandy's self-reflectiveness. It is his ability to transform to any given situation that is the effect of his expert capacity for imitation and thus assimilation of the qualities of others; it is therefore "the self created through a process of mirroring". "Self Construction and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century French Dandyism," *French Forum* 22.1 (1997):62.
almost horrifyingly vulgar:

La femme est le contraire du dandy. Donc elle doit faire horreur. La femme a faim et elle veut manger. Soif et elle veut boire. Elle est en rut et elle veut être foutue. Le beau mérite! La femme est naturelle, c'est-à-dire abominable. Aussi est-elle toujours vulgaire, c'est-à-dire le contraire du dandy (OC 1, 677).

For Baudelaire, the woman portrayed by romantic writers is brutal, base, and profane. She is driven by physical impulses. She embodies man's animal part. But she must always be this abomination because she can only be what she naturally is. Therefore, a well-dressed 'real' (natural) woman cannot exist: "Woman well dressed ceases to be nature and becomes an approximation to art".264 (Saisselin 110). A well-dressed woman is not a woman at all, but rather a fiction. The ideal woman, therefore, is purely theoretical: she is aestheticized by the artist's imagination to such an extent that she defies incarnation.

Rather than aiming to effectively feminize the man through a literal replication of the cosmetic and jeweled appearance of women, Baudelaire's dandy appropriates the feminine ability to reinvent one's natural physical appearance through artifice.265 In that sense, woman is a kind of artist. By usurping the typically feminine practices of making-up and accessorizing, and then changing these grooming practices to suit men, Baudelaire's dandy creates a new image of artificial beauty through 'absolute simplicity'. In his section on the dandy in Le Peintre de la vie moderne, Baudelaire notes: "la perfection de la toilette consiste-t-elle dans la simplicité absolue, qui est, en effet, la

265 "It is in the texts of Baudelaire that one can find some of the first explicit acknowledgments of the importance of clothing, jewelry, and cosmetics in deflecting and disguising the horror of female". Rita Felski, The Gender of Modernity (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995), 110.
meilleure manière de se distinguer...." (OC 2, 710). Perfect simplicity is what distinguishes the dandy from the masses.

However, the dandy's beauty, which takes inspiration from the woman-as-art, is not a feminized beauty. Michel Butor has noted that in the dandy masculinity is linked to the occupation of artist and that natural femininity is incompatible with art: "cette liaison entre virilité et poésie est si forte qu'il en arrive à considérer la femme écrivain comme une quasi-impossibilité".267

But the dandy is also not a typical man. The 'natural' and virile, that is to say, sexualized, man is as abominable as the natural woman. Baudelaire's essay on the dandy reduces sexuality to nothing more than the act of satisfying a base instinct or enacting a conjugal drudgery. Baudelaire states: "l'amour ne peut être qu'une orgie de roturier ou l'accomplissement d'un devoir conjugal. Au lieu de caprice brulant ou rêveur, il devient une répugnante utilité" (OC 2, 710).268 For the elegant dandy, sex is distasteful.

Thus, Leo Bersani rejects Butor's estimation of the categorical masculinity of Baudelaire's male artist, and argues: "the very sexuality of art desexualizes the artist".269 For Bersani, the practice of art serves to disconnect the artist from his corporality and unites him with the spiritual (13). It is not a question of masculinity because: "The

266 "the Baudelairean flâneur represents a tendency among male modernists to appropriate the feminine paradoxically to defuse their own anxieties in relation to the emasculating gender and class instabilities of modern urban life" Amelia Jones, 'Clothes Make the Man': The Male Artist as a Performative Function," Oxford Art Journal 18:2 (1995), 21.
268 Dandysm has been called an act of negation of the phallus: "masculine desire figures among those traits most incompatible with dandysm. [...] The normal function of the mirror - that is, to reflect the physical body placed in front of it - is vitiated here to support the creation of a phallic body. [...] And thus, the gaze itself, this gesture which theorists such as Luce Irigaray have deemed central to "male dominated" culture, attests, for the dandy, an abnegation of the male body. The dandy remains in front of the mirror not to assure himself of his own corporality, but to ensure that his body, the male body, remains unseen. Bodily desire in its most basic form is repugnant to the dandy." Philip G. Hadlock, "The Other Other: Baudelaire Melancholia, and the Dandy," NCFS 30.1/2 (2001): 59.
constant in Baudelaire's thought would be the idea of a connection between art and a loss of virility" (14). Bersani recognizes what many critics have seen as the dandy's mixture of ideally artistic masculine and feminine qualities: "(Baudelaire) speaks of 'a delicate skin, a distinguished accent, a kind of androgynous quality', acquired by men raised principally by women" (14 nb3).

Many critics have acknowledged the androgynous quality of the dandy. But some have noted that the dandy is only androgynous in the sense of a masculinized androgyny. His appearance expresses a freedom from the constraints imposed by traditional signifiers of masculinity: "the Baudelairian aesthete is never a bona fide androgyne, or masculine woman, but always a man; a man who, by way of liberating himself from bourgeois constraints, reinvents himself through androgynous possibility. Hence Baudelaire's disdain of women and praise of men". We should note, however, that this 'praise of men' is actually praise of the artistically modern man, rather than of all types of men.

Androgyny is indeed an integral component of the ways in which the dandy expresses political ideals. The dandy's type of self-distinction, which is not based on class status but rather on his mastery appearances, depends on a type of elegance that is not defined by binary sexual codes. Moreover, the dandy in Baudelaire's theorization is a

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270 The theme of androgyny Baudelaire's work is not new to the dandy. In fact, Baudelaire commented often on androgyny and was among the first critics to recognize it in Flaubert's Emma Bovary, thereby liberating her in some ways from the traditionalist criticism that focuses her token feminine frivolity. Baudelaire states: "Comme la Pallas armée, sortie du cerveau de Zeus, ce bizarre androgyne a gardé toutes les séductions d'une âme virile dans un charmant corps féminin" (OC 2,81). See: Elisabeth Ladenson, Dirt for Art's Sake: Books on Trial from Madame Bovary to Lolita (New York: Columbia UP, 2012). Moreover, Balzac's and Gautier's works contain androgynous characters, such as Balzac's Séraphîta and Gautier's Mlle de Maupeù. See: Frédéric Monneyron, L'Androgyne Romantique: du mythe au mythe littéraire (Grenoble: Ellug, 1994).

reaction against bourgeois banality: it reflects the ideal of distinction from the masses through the mastery of an appearance that seems perfectly harmonized. Balzac also discusses social distinction in modern times but insists more heavily on other outward symbols of elegance besides androgyny. In his *Traité de la vie élégante*, which I mentioned at the beginning of this epilogue, Balzac's ironic tone allows him to emphasize the serious nature of the elements of social life that were in the past century considered frivolous, such as fashion, grooming, ways of speaking, and habitation.

*Balzac and the Irony of Elegance*

Balzac's *Traité de la vie élégante* (1830) presents l'élégance as the aesthetic and political standard for modernity. Like Baudelaire, Balzac also discusses the *habit noir* and notes both its egalitarian yet somber effect: "Serions-nous donc morts? Je ne sais, mais nous sommes tous vêtus de noir comme des gens qui portent le deuil de quelque chose".272 For Balzac, *porter le deuil* means to mourn the past – the past distinction of classes, the clarity of social hierarchy, the simplicity of ordained division between people – which is opposed to the murky uncertainty of distinction between individuals in modern society. The mention of the *habit noir*'s macabre uniformity is one factor that aligns Balzac's discussion of dress with those of Baudelaire with regards to the dandy's dress. Both recognize the potential drabness of the black suit and the fact that it invokes an image of death, Baudelaire specifically is fascinated by death and the grotesque, but they also acknowledge the extreme poetic elegance of the type of subtlety that only dark colors on dark colors can express. Balzac's *Traité de la vie élégante* also expresses that

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subtleties and nuances are the order of the day in fashion as in society. The *Traité* conveys, in an ironic tone, the new ways that class differences in modernity are now communicated only very subtly in clothing:

[...] dans notre société, les différences ont disparu: il n'y a plus que des nuances. [...]S'il existe un privilège, il dérive de la supériorité morale. De là, le haut prix attaché, par le plus grand nombre, à l'instruction, à la pureté du langage, à la grâce du maintien, à la manière plus ou moins aisée dont une toilette est portée, à la recherche des appartements, enfin à la perfection de tout ce qui procède de la personne (*CH* 12, 224).

When Balzac writes that "differences have disappeared", it seems to indicate that stark differences between social classes illustrated through obvious outward expressions (e.g. embellished fashion), have given way to differences expressed more subtlety by nuances and details in fashion, demeanor, language and habitation. One is judged to be a person of quality based on his or her grasp and use of proper language, the simplicity of his or her appearance, the effortlessness of his or her grooming, and the uncomplicated way in which he or she choses to live (simply elegant habitations); in short, one is esteemed through one's capacity to live elegantly. Elegance is now is the signifier of class difference: it is a true sign because it signifies every aspect of the individual, rather than a false or empty sign that has no underlying meaning or message behind it.

For Balzac an elegant appearance is what serves to distinguish the man as an *homme de qualité* (as opposed to an *homme sans qualités*).

Balzac's text calls *la vie élégante* "la science des manières" (*CH* 12, 219), juxtaposing the serious (*science*) to inconsequential (*manières*) (like Marivaux, who calls dressing a science: "la science de bien placer un ruban, ou de décider de quelle couleur on
le mettra!". This juxtaposition highlights the paradoxical tone of the text. Balzac notes: "La vie élégante est [...] La science qui nous apprend à ne rien faire comme les autres, en paraissant tout faire comme eux" (CH 12, 216). Elegance itself is paradoxical because it means being singular (not doing anything like others) while at the same time appearing tastefully conventional (doing everything like others, only a little better). He also describes elegant life ironically as a science in order to juxtapose the ostensibly frivolous subject of fashion to the serious topics of class and politics.

In the Traité, outward symbols, especially clothing, are presented as the most crucial markers of social distinction. Fashion (la mode) touches all arts and it provides insight into the characters of individuals: "Alors, il n'est donc plus indifférent de mépriser ou d'adopter les fugitives prescriptions de LA MODE, car mens agitat molem (l'esprit informe la masse, Virgile): l'esprit d'un homme se devine à la manière dont il tient sa canne [...]" (CH 12, 226).

But fashion is also public opinion expressed in clothing; it carries political significance: "la mode n'a jamais été que l'opinion en matière de costume. Le costume étant le plus énergique de tous les symboles, la Révolution fut aussi une question de mode, un débat entre la soie et le drap" (CH 12, 226). Balzac underscores the political aspect of clothing as symbol by using soie and drap metonymically: silk means the aristocracy, and a cotton sheet indicates the lower classes, who could not afford silk. Balzac is ironically making this connection between the Revolution and the fabric that dressed its advocates, but he nonetheless underscores the fact that clothing is both highly influential in public life and also highly influenced by society. He highlights the

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reciprocal relationship between the symbol and the object: "Ces choses, futilès en apparence, représentaient des idées ou des intérêts...le bonnet ou le chapeau signalent une révolution. Avez-vous un bonnet vert? Vous êtes un homme sans honneur. Avez-vous une roue jaune, en guise de crachat, à votre surcot ? Allez, paria de la chrétienté !..." (CH 12, 250). A hat signals a revolution in the sense that an individual's choice of clothing adheres him to a group and groups express social and political opinions. A yellow roundel was a symbol that Jewish people had to wear in the Muslim world to distinguish themselves from the Muslims. Christians, also a minority in Muslim countries, wore a blue symbol. The different ways that individuals clothe or adorn themselves based on their social or religious status represent their belonging to a group. All individuals in a group being clothed the same way signals their collective opinion and affiliation. Balzac emphasizes the large-scale political causes and effects of ostensibly frivolous accessories and highlights the use of symbols as indicators of political, religious and ethnic distinction.

The elegant man's style both influences society and is influenced by it. Although the Traité is a text about social distinction, it is also about social harmony because a dandy distinguishes himself from the group through mastering the signs (clothing, habitation, manners) that adhere him to it. The petit-maître does not master the signs and does not adhere to a cohesive group (like the libertine figure, as I discussed in chapter two, who is represented as having a connection to a group of dissenters only by virtue of the fact that all of its 'members' are marginalized in different ways).
Aristocratic theatricality and post-revolutionary performativity

The dandy's mixing masculine and feminine signs and his expression of the possibility of a universal ethos of good taste imply a social and political harmony that did not appear with the petit-maître figure. The petit-maître aims not at harmonization of society or the distinction of different types of elegance through his appearance, but rather at general discordance. His embellished appearance reflects this: he makes a spectacle of doing everything to set himself apart from others, both men and women, rather than to blend in with them. He also creates a divide between how he wants to appear and how he actually does appear. This discordance is antithetical to the congruence of the elegance discussed by Balzac and Baudelaire.

On the one hand, the blend of masculinity and femininity in the dandy easily lends itself to comparison with the effeminate persona of the petit-maître. These two aspects of pre-modern and modern fashionable men demonstrate both continuity between the two and also a stark contrast. Both participate in some form of gender bending, but the difference lies in the effect of this play. Effeminacy and androgyny (or the blending of masculinity with femininity) reflect profound political undercurrents.

Robert K. Martin, not addressing the dandy and petit-maître in French culture, but rather commenting on androgyny and effeminacy in American literature, nonetheless puts his finger on the crucial point that effeminacy in civilized society eventually gives way to androgyny as an ideal of integration of both sexes:

(for Walt Whitman) the effeminate man was the overly civilized man, who had adopted the values of civilization (i.e. woman) over the primitive (i.e. man). The ideal therefore becomes an androgyny that represents the integration of the values of civilization and the primitive, or of female and male. This androgyny should not be confused with effeminacy, ... for androgyny indicates self-sufficiency and wholeness, whereas effeminacy indicates weakness, indulgence, and

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Martin's comments call to mind the basis of effeminacy that I have observed throughout this dissertation: that it is a judgment and that it is primarily founded on the notion of excess. The effeminate man loves women to excess, so much that he wants to imitate them. The effeminate man also excessively adorns himself, which reflects the aestheticization of his sexual identification, and (according to his detractors) illustrates a blatant flouting of normative gender roles. The petit-maître, an effeminate man as identified by others, almost never refers to himself as womanly or feminine. He does not see himself this way, despite his penchant for rouge and gold embroidery. In fact, when other characters point out his pervading 'femininity', by, for example, repainting his portrait to make him look like a woman, or by pointing out his obsession with fashion, he enacts some form of denial. Valère in Rousseau's play *Narcisse ou l'amant de lui-même* sees a portrait of himself changed into a woman but categorically refuses to recognize himself in the portrait, despite the obvious. In other petit-maître comedies, for example *Les Petits-maitres* by Van Effen, the main character repeatedly refuses to capitulate to his creditors for debts accrued through the purchase of his expensive wears (illustrating an obsession with fashion). But it remains true in almost every case that the effeminate petit-maître is nonetheless dependent on 'outside' opinion to enact his theatrical persona: who would he be if he could not make a show to others, interrupt others, slander others, and ridicule them in order to appear superior to them? He is a normative counter-model and represents 'what not to be' rather than a positive model, like the dandy.

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Thus the differences between the dandy and the petit-maître are not limited to sexual identification. Theatricality is also an essential element of the personae of both and there is important but subtle difference in the way they express their consciousness of their own performativity. To provide an example: in a little-known, one act comédie by Harny first staged in 1766 and called Le Petit-maître en Province, the marquis's requisite bravado and boldness are described in no uncertain terms. This play highlights the theatricality of the petit-maître:

Pour se faire admirer parcourir tout Paris,
sur chacun en passant jeter un ridicule,
au spectacle du jour arriver à grand bruit,
dans chaque loge entrer, quoi qu'on n'ait rien à dire. ...
Ou l'on voit tour à tour les beautés à la mode;
Les jouer, les tromper toutes également. (1.8)

In order to be admired in the urban setting, the petit-maître must adhere to certain expected modes of behavior: he must ridicule others, he must arrive in a crowd making the most noise, he must be seen in every loge despite having no reason to be there, and he must flirt with women. All of these actions are contingent upon otherness: his goal is to appear a certain way to others. At the heart of the petit-maître’s aesthetic existence is 'bad' theatricality: his entire persona is dependent on how he acts and appears in public but he entirely misses his goal and often loses control of his image. Versac does exactly what Harney attributes to his petit-maître in this play.

Le Petit-maître en Province also cleverly illustrates the relationship between the petit-maître, his appearance, and the socio-political position it expresses. The Parisian marquis, visiting some relations in the country, outside of Paris, explains his urban experience to his rural and unrefined cousin: "le plaisir (de s'habiller) est un Dieu que la
contrainte atterre: à de brillant succès l'aimable homme attendu; doit chercher le grand jour, doit rougir de se taire. Il est anéanti, perdu, si dans la foule une fois confondu, on peut le forcer au mystère" (1.8). The petit-maître is completely destroyed or erased if he is lost in the crowd. He must make himself stand out from others through his theatrical persona. He is entirely dependent upon distinction, but his attempts to set himself above others appear contrived and hilarious and therefore signal the exact opposite of what he hopes to be: not original but entirely banal.

This is the emblematic difference between the petit-maître and the dandy: unlike the petit-maître who stands out from the crowd in an obvious and brash way, the dandy is rather the most elegant man in the crowd. Contrary to the theatrical and effeminate petit-maître, the self-sufficient dandy seems to have no dependence on outside opinion. The dandy never acknowledges a need for outsiders to observe him but he successfully manipulates the signs because in order to be a dandy, to achieve all of the aesthetic elegance of the ideal, the dandy must be seen: "Tout son comportement, tout son art de vivre sont fondés sur un système de manifestations dont le but le plus évident est d'obliger les autres à le reconnaître en tant que dandy" (Carassus 46) and "the dandy... incarnates with special vividness (a) quest for visibility".275

The difference between the desire to be seen in the petit-maître and in the dandy, I observe, lies in the dandy's mastery of his performance of this desire. The dandy controls theatricality and presents himself as the real thing, the true embodiment of the image he

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portrays, like a successful play that makes spectators feel as if they are observing a real scene, not a staged one. As Françoise Coblence observes, the dandy needs to see himself reflected in others, but he does so successfully: "Non pas que le dandy soit un Narcisse amoureux de son reflet, mais plutôt que seul ce reflet l'assure de son existence. Le dandy n'existe d'abord que pour autant qu'il se voit". The petit-maître, on the other hand, is the opposite of 'self-reflective'; he is unable to see himself from the outside, as others see him. He is unable to switch roles between seeing and being seen; whereas the dandy se voit, the petit-maître ne se voit pas.

Whereas the petit-maître does everything to stand out in the crowd, and the dandy does as well, the dandy stands out through the art of perfect blending. He simply stands out because he manipulates conventions so masterfully. Baudelaire and Balzac specifically point this out when discussing the dandy's black suit: they equate the dandy's ability to 'blend' to his capacity for seeing the subtleties and nuances of color and putting them together in a subtle and elegant way. He (the dandy-as-type and the dandy-as-artist) can combine similar colors so well as to give an extraordinarily singular effect. He expertly treads the fine line between blending in with others and never being seen like them.

The conflation of masculine and feminine traits in the dandy and his mastery of performative illusion thus reflects a seamless assimilation: the assimilation of the man into the crowd, the assimilation of two supposed poles of appearance (gendered

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appearance of feminine and masculine) in one, and the reconciliation of the public persona with the image he wants to portray. This unification is thus the manifestation of the need to see oneself in a certain way, an effort to be seen by others, and the concealment of the obvious desire to be seen by others. This is the antithesis of the petit-maître's theatrical persona. For the old regime petit-maître there was no interest in order, harmony, stability, or coherence. Instead, he sought to disrupt, by his manners, persona, countenance, and dress. His *modus operandi* is to make a scene in every situation and every possible way. The petit-maître is the countermodel that allows eighteenth century writers to express the perils of disruptive theatricality and to reject it.

*Conclusion*

In the texts that I have explored in this epilogue, we do not see the same type of critique of effeminacy that we see in Diderot and Rousseau's texts and in many of the petit-maître works I have examined in this dissertation. Androgyny and self-conscious performativity in the dandy are themes that bespeak shifts in sexual identity and appearance for the fashionable man. They are also signs of the modern democratization of society that occurs in the many decades following the end of the French old regime.

Prior to the Revolution, in the culture of the monarchy, the petit-maître represented the perils of sociability; in worldly society, where one must make a certain but unobvious show of social status, the petit-maître's theatrical persona illustrates the facile slippage from good to bad taste. He is effeminate, impotent, and his satirical
homosocial representation of elite male sociability reinforces the values of the *honnête homme* by illustrating the consequences of not living up to the elite standards of good, masculine behavior. Like the eighteenth-century libertine figure, which is also a symbol of social and religious dissention, the petit-maître is almost always represented as reformed or punished in proportion to the transgression he represents. He is a figure that also expresses a foreign opinion about French politics because he represents all that is wrong with the French system of monarchy in the old regime, most notably showiness and bad taste. The petit-maître is the *bouc émissaire* of those who reject the association between aristocracy and sociability.

The petit-maître and the dandy are fashionable Frenchmen who illustrate a transformation of aesthetic culture from pre-modern to modern times. Although we cannot argue that the political transformations came about through the representation of performativity or sexual identity, we can recognize these factors portray on an individual level some aspects of the radical change in the political climate in France. Through their appearances, the dandy and the petit-maître reflect similar but subtly varying representations of the transformation of the image of masculinity from old regime culture to modern society.

On the one hand, effeminacy in the petit-maître is political in the sense that it forms the basis for the denunciation of a feminized man. It was considered to be a transgression against sexual and civil normativity. Androgyny in the dandy is the marriage of masculine and feminine traits that integrates a totality of forms and a
uniformity of assimilation while at the same time confirming personal distinction. Thus effeminacy is associated with theatricality and disjunction. Although for Baudelaire's artist, androgyny is still an oppositional marker that is anti-patriarchal and disruptive of bourgeois society, androgyny is in some ways associated with self-reflection and unification.

On the other, the petit-maître represents the rejection of the aristocrat as performer; an aristocrat who attempts to perform his merit is a bad performer: he is pretentious and focuses on affirming his superiority to others. He cannot master the signs of performance because he always appears to conspicuously play his role. He fails to seduce his spectator, just as he fails to seduce women. He attempts to but constantly fails to corrupt young men. He is a tool in the hands of those writers, like Diderot and Rousseau, who reject theatricalized sociability in the name of an authentic form of socializing, which is not "theatrical". The petit-maître is the figure that represents the idea of conspicuous role-playing. Rousseau rejects the petit-maître type of theatricality as a political problem. Diderot rejects it as an aesthetic one, which is ultimately political because the arts and theater tend to produce new models of citizenship.

With modernity came the dandy and a new connection between aesthetics of appearance and politics because appearance became democratized. Distinction and nobility are no longer just a matter of birth, they are a matter of performance. The dandy is the emblem of that new performativity of status: "With his art of dress, the dandy saw himself as inaugurating a completely new order of distinction and aristocracy" (Stanton
169). It is not the disintegration of elegance or distinction that we see in the transformation of the myth of the French fashionable man; rather, distinction and aristocracy still exist in the cultural conscience, but they are seen in a new light. "Amid the transition from aristocracy to democracy, dandyism rises in a spirit of 'opposition and revolt' to affirm a 'new kind of aristocracy' anchored in personal distinction rather than economic or social status" (214). The dandy invents himself because aristocracy is now a matter of performing one's role better than others, of being better dressed, more charming, and more simply sophisticated. The dandy emblematizes the new post-revolutionary drive to pleasure and the new self-consciousness of the performativity at the heart of modern society.

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Vita

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