Sisters of La Princesse de Clèves: Two Heroines of Segrais and Saint-Réal

by
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Much critical attention has been paid to the woman in the works of Madame de Lafayette and also in those, more recently, of the less widely appreciated Madame de Villedieu. Numerous studies have, of course, centered on the former's Princesse de Clèves, and comparisons have been made between Lafayette's most famous novelistic heroine and Villedieu's Marquise de Termes. The woman as seen from the female novelist's point of view has provided a fertile ground for exploration of the narrative presentation of the woman and female psychology in seventeenth-century French fiction. I believe that it is worthwhile to explore as well two male-created heroines of the same period who, in many respects, closely parallel the more famous Princesse de Clèves and Marquise de Termes: the Comtesse d'Almont, of Segrais' *Nouvelles françaises*, and Elisabeth de France, of Saint-Réal's *Don Carlos*.

All four of the narrative works in which these female personages are found---*La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), the "Seconde Partie" of *Les Désordres de l'amour* (1675), "Eugénie, ou la force du destin" of *Les Nouvelles françaises* (1657), and *Don Carlos* (1672)--are purported by their authors to be historically grounded. This is, of course, in accord with the public taste for historical *vraisemblance* in the emerging genre, during the second half of the seventeenth century, of the *nouvelle historique*. The first two are set in the France of the mid-sixteenth century. The action of *Don Carlos* takes place, for the most part, in the Spain of the same chronological period and Saint-Réal also displays great concern for historical accuracy.[1] Segrais' *nouvelle* claims as well to portray real events--this time contemporary--though the characters are not well-known historical figures and references to historical facts are minimal.

The most important general similarities among these works are, certainly, those concerning the situations of the heroines. Each of these four women is married to a man whom she does not love and had her husband chosen by her family. (Wessie Tipping particularly emphasizes Segrais' original contribution in making a married woman the heroine of "Eugénie."[2]) Each woman is also in love with someone other than the man to whom she is married, and the works concern, to varying degrees, the struggle of these female characters to resolve complications arising from this circumstance. Passion in all these *romans* and *nouvelles* is seen as *destinée*, *fatale*, and as the origin of *des désordres*.

In an earlier study, I treated the similarities and differences which exist between the two better-known, female-created heroines. The present study focuses, then, on the two female characters who are in situations similar to that of the Princesse de Clèves, but seen from the male perspective. These characters will be compared and contrasted with respect to the nature of the marriage of each to an unloved husband and the conflict of marital duty and forbidden passion, the revelation of that love to the husband, and the effects of passion. In the matter of possible male attitudinal bias, the most pertinent topic of consideration is that of the treatment of the woman as human property. As Nancy K. Miller has so perspicaciously commented: "Le roman féminin, tout comme d'ailleurs le roman masculin fémino-centrique, est structuré autour de ce problème de la destination: à qui sera-t-elle?" ("D'une solitude," 800).

Marriage and Forbidden Passion

Both in the real life and the narrative fiction of seventeenth-century France, it is not at all unusual to encounter the situation of a woman married to a man whom she does not love. Both the Comtesse d'Almont and Elisabeth de France had their husbands chosen for them, for family and/or political considerations, but both women have developed feelings of love for another man before their marriage. Their reactions toward impending wedlock

to an unloved fiancé do differ from those of the Princesse de Clèves, whose passivity before marriage can be seen as a rather logical extension not only of her own somewhat docile nature, her desire to please a beloved mother, and her particular situation in a society where a woman's greatest chance for accomplishment lies in marriage to higher nobility, but also--and even more importantly, from a psychological point of view--her personal ignorance of romantic love up to that point. We remember that Villedieu's Marquise de Termes, who was already in love with another man before her marriage, openly protests her fate and objects, though futilely, in every way which she feels is within her power.

Saint-Réal's Elisabeth is more than willing to contract a marriage of state with the young and handsome Don Carlos. In fact, she develops "une inclination" for her fiancé before she even meets him, feelings which Don Carlos reciprocates. When the just-widowed Philippe II demands (as part of treaty negotiations with France) that the young Elisabeth be given to him in marriage, rather than to his son, Elisabeth's reactions seem at first remarkably restrained. She suddenly develops "une défiance d'elle-mesme qui ne se peut exprimer" (9). She had hoped before that Don Carlos would be pleasantly impressed by the portrait of herself which had been sent to him, but now, "elle souhaitta que tout ce qu'on disoit de ses agréements ne fut pas" (9). As the younger man's fiancée, she had wished that "le coeur de ce Prince fut encore moins tranquille que le sien...." Abruptly, however, "dez qu'elle sceut le changement de leur destinée, elle ne craignit rien tant que d'en être aimée" (9).

Such an abrupt emotional transformation, such rigid adherence to duty--in both thought and action--hardly ring true psychologically, particularly when compared with the complexity of the emotional upheaval the Princesse de Clèves goes through when she discovers forbidden passion. We are also reminded of Madame de Lafayette's far different, though brief, treatment of Elisabeth de France in *La Princesse de Clèves*. She finally resolves to obey the king, her father, but only after much "répugnance" (304).

Saint-Réal, perhaps in order to render Elisabeth's stifling of her own love more believable, explains that "ce qu'elle avoit dans l'ame pour Dom Carlos, fut plustost une disposition à aimer qu'une passion veritable..." (8). Further, he tells us that she delays her arrival in Madrid for the wedding "[c]omme si ces retardemens eussent pû faire dans son coeur ce que la raison n'y faisoit pas" (10), and even that she faints at the news that Don Carlos is approaching to greet her. These explanations and reactions might at first seem convincing within the context of the author's treatment of his characters' psychology. They are rendered less than adequate, however, by Saint-Réal's portrayal of Don Carlos as feeling all the despondency and anger at the tragic unfairness of the situation that one would expect Elisabeth to feel. Saint-Réal's description of his hero's torment is far more detailed and impassioned than that of the reactions he ascribes to Elisabeth:

> Quoique cette nouvelle fut un coup de foudre pour Dom Carlos,...il fut assez maistre de lui-mesme, pour empécher que personne ne pût conoître la douleur qu'elle lui causa. La violence qu'il se fit, lui cousta cher quand il fut seul. Tout ce que l'amour & la rage peuvent inspirer lui passa dans l'esprit. (7-8)

It would seem, then, that Saint-Réal finds a man capable of real depth of feeling--love, despair, anger--but a woman, even an admirable one, is necessarily docile, meek, obedient, and, overall, less subject to emotional turmoil.

Whereas the reader learns of Elisabeth's emotional involvement with "the other man" in normal chronological order, the story of the Comtesse d'Almont is fully known only after her marriage, as she recounts it to another character. The countess' underlying sadness had earlier been suspected by the Comte d'Aremberg as he observed her on her wedding day. Aremberg, in love with the future Comtesse from that first moment, watches for some sign that she may not love her fiancé. Even though she is to marry Aremberg's best friend, "il ne pouvoit...quelquefois s'empêcher de sentir naître quelque consolation en son

ame, lorqu'attribuant à quelque tristesse son extreme modestie, il croyoit que sa foi peut-être s'engageoit sans que son coeur y fit de reflexion" ("Eugénie," I, 43). Her only "rebellion" at this point consists of a mere glance at her father. Aremberg notices that during the marriage ceremony she, "ayant tourné la vûë vers un vénérable vieillard qui paroissoit son Pere, sembloit lui avoir reproché son obéïssance par un regard accompagné de quelque tristesse, quand la cérémonie voulut qu'elle lui demandât son consentement, avant de donner le sien" (I, 44).

It is only much later in the *nouvelle* that the reader learns any explicit details of the love of the Comtesse d'Almont for another man. She confides to Eugénie (in reality, the Comte d'Aremberg, who has disguised himself and taken the position of female servant/companion to the countess in order to be near the woman he loves) that "depuis sa plus tendre jeunesse, elle avoit été constamment aimée d'un jeune Gentil-homme de grande Maison, parfaitement honnête homme appellé Florençal, doué de toutes les qualités de l'esprit & du corps qui peuvent rendre un Chevalier accompli" (I, 67-68). She herself obviously reciprocates his feelings. "[J]e te confesse," she tells Eugénie, "que ses soins me plaisoient, & qu'autant qu'une fille qui est sous l'obéïssance pouvoit disposer de son inclination, il avoit tout-à-fait tourné la mienne de son parti..." (I, 71-72). The future Comtesse d'Almont (we never learn her first or her maiden name) is so rigidly virtuous in her adherence to duty, however, as to become almost a cardboard figure lacking any real depth of feeling. As his father's youngest son, Florençal could not expect to inherit enough to satisfy the greed of the father of the woman he loves and she herself never even considers the possibility of marrying without her father's consent. She respects Florençal, in fact, for having "trop d'estime pour moi, pour concevoir des esperances qui eussent pû m'offenser" (I, 69-70). The only slight weakness which she admits feeling is that "j'aurois facilement suivi le choix que le Ciel & mon coeur sembloient avoir fait pour moi, si j'eusse pû esperer d'y faire un jour consentir mon Pere" (I, 72).

In the Comtesse d'Almont we encounter, then, a dutiful, virtuous heroine whose greatest positive quality (if one considers it to be in fact positive) is obedience--to her family, to her husband, to the social order. Her own individual aspirations have been suppressed with a degree of internal struggle that seems unconvincingly minimal to the modern reader. Certainly, a twentieth-century woman can hardly suppress the instinctive feeling that these two male authors do not show great depth of understanding of what a woman in love must inevitably suffer when she is forced to marry against her true desire.

The theme of "l'amour fatal" is found not only in these narrative works, but is a characteristic common to most serious works of imaginative literature of the period. As Henri Coulet has remarked: "L'amour...n'est plus une vertu: il est une faiblesse, une fatalité contre laquelle la volonté est impuissante....[L]a passion noble....est remplacée par la passion coupable et même dégradante..." (211-12). It is extremely revealing to note that in the case of the two male authors here considered it is generally the male characters who are the most overwhelmed and powerless to resist love. Whether being overcome by love is considered a character strength or weakness depends largely upon one's point of view and system of values; however, it certainly produces, in these personages, more complex and absorbing psychological studies.

In Saint-Réal's work, Don Carlos suffers the most sustained mental anguish from the unfulfilled love that he and Elisabeth share and it is around him that the author structures the novel. "Eugénie" is also centered around the unfulfilled love of a man, that of the Comte d'Aremberg/Eugénie for the Comtesse d'Almont. (It is only toward the end of the *nouvelle* that the countess moves to the center of the action.) In others of the *Nouvelles françaises* the same characteristic may be noted. While Mathilde (of "Mathilde, ou l'heureuse reconnoissance"), loves Montafilant, she refuses to contravene her father's wishes in order to marry him, and Segrais devotes much more space to the hero's emotional anguish than to any that the heroine may feel. Similarly, the Comte de

Clermont/Aronde (of "Aronde, ou les amans déguisés") suffers patiently while Agnès constantly reiterates her prejudice against marrying beneath her social class.

The usual psychological characterization of women by these male authors would seem to be indicative of more pervasive male attitudes about the highest virtues in a woman. She can aspire to no higher calling--from a masculine perspective--than to serve a man, to be dominated by him, to belong to him. The choice of a partner, of course, is not up to her, but to her father. She is expected to be obedient and dutiful. These male authors' ideal woman, it would seem, expects this of herself and rigidly suppresses any emotional rebellion which may momentarily arise within her. She has, indeed, no great sense of self as apart from her wifely duties. Segrais and Saint-Réal imagine that a woman could indeed fit into this stifling, restrictive mold and yet not experience any great measure of anguish. Whereas the torment of Don Carlos at having been robbed of the woman he loves by his own father is minutely detailed and shown as dominating his entire emotional experience, Elisabeth is shown assuming her role as the wife of a harsh, selfish, brutal stranger with never an audible murmur of protest. Even those of her inner thoughts which are revealed to the reader disclose only her faithfulness to duty and her almost constant certainty that she has converted the feelings of love which she had for Don Carlos to benign feelings of friendship. How little understanding of the female psyche is exhibited by this male author as he rather boldly takes the reader into the bedchamber of the king and new queen! Would any woman really believe that--confronted with being initiated into sexual experience by such a man--Elisabeth would feel no revulsion, only mild wonder that he seemed so much more passionate at night than during the day? She merely notices the king's "regularité à renfermer dans les bornes de la nuit toutes ses caresses" (22). The subsequent mild comment by the author seems indeed ludicrous and totally lacking in comprehension of female psychology:

> Cette conduite si peu tendre en aparence, si éloignée de l'agréable déreglement d'esprit, qui

> accompagne d'ordinaire les passions satisfaites, ne répondoit pas à l'idée que la Reine avoit de la vie que doivent mener deux nouveaux mariez assez heureux pour s'aimer. (23)

Indeed, the torment that a woman would surely feel under such circumstances is not only totally ignored and misunderstood by Saint-Réal, but transferred instead to the male protagonist.

Much the same may be said of Segrais, since in "Eugénie" it is the central male character who is shown as being sensitive and tormented by unfulfilled love. The Comtesse d'Almont, on the other hand, exercises a degree of control over her love so great as to be not only remarkable, but unbelievable. She sheds a few tears and heaves a few sighs, but that is the extent of the suffering over passion which she evidences. Once she is married to the Comte d'Almont--who does not even love her--she firmly keeps Florençal in his place, always at a respectful emotional distance. She fulfills her obligation of obedience to her husband with hardly any objection. Only one mild protest is allowed to surface when the countess rather wistfully remarks to Eugénie: "Mais que les parens se trompent bien, ou qu'ils nous traitent cruellement, quand ils pensent que la reconnoissance & le devoir peuvent régler nos affections!" (I, 66). Nevertheless, the Comtesse adheres so strictly to her duty to be obedient to the males who dominate her that she not only entertains no thoughts of the possibility of marrying Florençal without her father's consent before she is married, but continues to obey his wishes after her husband's death.

The modern reader finds clear identification of these two male novelists with the prevailing view of the woman as most virtuous in complete obedience to her husband. So thoroughly do Segrais and Saint-Réal seem to accept these notions that they are apparently rendered largely insensitive to a real woman's true feelings and they are led to produce female characters who pale in emotional depth when compared with the most similar heroines of Lafayette and Villedieu. Let us continue these comparisons as we

examine the confession to the husband of the wife's love for another man.

The "Aveu"

Much critical literature has been devoted to the scene of the *aveu* in Lafayette's masterpiece. Despite some claims of the author's indebtedness in this regard, as in others, to Villedieu and to Segrais, the reader can easily recognize by comparison the superiority of Lafayette's treatment of the *aveu* as the climax of a skillfully handled, steady crescendo leading up to the actual avowal of love to the Prince de Clèves. The parallel confession in *Les Désordres de l'amour*, with the Marquise's emotional turmoil reflected in the physical symptions of her "fievre lente," lacks much of the psychological intensity found in *La Princesse de Clèves*. However, it is unquestionably superior in that regard to the most similar revelations of love found in "Eugénie" and in *Don Carlos*.

The most marked difference, from a structural point of view, between the *aveu* as presented by the female and the male authors is that the latter have fragmented the confession, and also made it largely indirect, thus blunting the greater impact which it has in the works of Lafayette and Villedieu. In "Eugénie," the full revelation and explanation of the Comtesse d'Almont's love for another man is made to her *confidente*, Eugénie/Comte d'Aremberg. Indeed, since the latter is the principal character of the *nouvelle*, it is his reactions to which Segrais shows the greatest attention. It is at first indirectly that the Comte d'Almont learns that his wife loves another man. Moreover, his discovery of the pieces of a letter written by his wife granting a last meeting to Florençal (but leaving indications of her own feelings ambiguous) is extremely contrived.[3] The psychological impact produced on the reader by this discovery is far less than in the case of Messieurs de Clèves or de Termes, since there is so little narrative preparation. The Comte d'Almont never loved or even really knew his wife and, prior to his return, had been away from her for two years. (In fact, he displays so little interest in seeing her again that when he is almost

home, he stops for a stroll in the Tuileries garden, where he finds the letter.) Adding to the fragmented and diluted quality of this *aveu* is the intrusion of the count's confusion over discovering his own letters--written to his friend the Comte d'Aremberg--in Eugénie's room. It is only after the count has been wounded and lies dying that his wife, in order to defend herself against his accusations and the more furious ones of her father, recounts to them more or less what she has already told Eugénie. The effect of this *aveu* to the husband is diminished not only by its being made at this juncture for the second time--and this time in *discours indirect*--but by the continuing confusion of the husband over who really wounded him, where Eugénie is, and how the Comte d'Aremberg fits into the puzzling situation. Our attention throughout is focused, necessarily, more on the working out of the intrigue than on the psychological subtleties of the situation.

If the Comtesse d'Almont's *aveu* is less concentrated and complete than that of the Princesse de Clèves, Saint-Réal has allowed to Elisabeth de France only the most indirect expression of the feelings which she has for her husband's son. She steadfastly preserves her virtue and allows, ostensibly, only warm friendship with Don Carlos. In this instance, the most open *aveu* that the heroine makes of her love is the discreet and indirect one of a letter written by her to Don Carlos when she believes that he is on the point of death. We are told only that "[e]lle lui écrivit tout ce que l'amitié et le desespoir peuvent suggerer de plus tendre & de plus touchant..." (71-72).

The reader's attention is continually diverted from the love triangle--and the psychological impact of its progress is thus lessened--by Saint-Réal's constant intertwining of political and romantic intrigue. From the point of view of historical accuracy, Saint-Réal has presented a more faithful representation of the events as they were recorded by other historians.[4] The revelation to Philippe of the love the queen feels for his son is never direct, but proceeds in a circuitous fashion, prompted by the intrigue of the political enemies of Don Carlos. In fact, Philippe's first suspicions about his wife are raised in relation to her

political sentiments. Upon considering the queen's apparent sympathies for the Flemish insurgents and Don Carlos' similar political leanings, the king finds himself "dans un trouble extraordinaire" (107). Although he had never before suspected Elisabeth of infidelity, he finds the similarity of his wife's and his son's political sentiments too striking to be mere coincidence. Philippe suddenly becomes suspicious not only of Elisabeth's loyalty to him as his subject, but of her faithfulness to him as his wife, and at this point it is the man more than the king who feels the pain of jealousy and resentment:

> Son ame occupée par ce premier mouvement jaloux, regarda avec indifference l'attentat qu'ils avoient fait sur son autorité, & les soins de sa grandeur, qui lui étoient si naturels dans les autres occasions, cederent pour ce coup à une autre consideration plus sensible, & plus délicate. (107)

Philippe rejects for a time these suspicions, but several of his ministers and the wife of Don Carlos' former tutor do all within their power to rekindle them. Their motives are both political (the ministers fear Don Carlos' growing power and popularity with the people) and personal (the Princesse d'Eboli was infuriated by Don Carlos' rejection of her advances). When Philippe again begins to suspect his wife, it is for personal rather than political reasons. Her apparent closeness to the attractive Marquis de Posa (in reality a faithful go-between for her and Don Carlos) arouses in the king "[un] esprit troublé de jalousie" (142) and produces "un etrange ravage dans son coeur" (143).

After Philippe has disposed of his supposed rival, the pendulum is shifted again by Saint-Réal back to political motivations. The king, his royal pride stung when he is informed that his son joked about Philippe's lack of heroic military exploits (and that Elisabeth seemed amused by his witticisms), again begins to suspect the two of being secret lovers. Very soon, Philippe has lost virtually all traces of the passion (one hesitates to call it love) that he had felt for his wife. In fact, "l'amour étoit déja changée en indignation, par les choses qui s'étoient passées..." (168).

Thus, the final revelation of the love of his wife for his son produces reactions in him that are most unlike those of the Prince de Clèves, or even the Comte d'Almont, who was far more aloof from his own wife than was the prince.

This *aveu*, the most indirect of those we have cited, is made entirely through the husband's discovery of a letter to the man his wife loves. The similarity with the revelation in "Eugénie" is obvious, but in Segrais' *nouvelle* the indirect confession is subsquently followed by a direct one. Saint-Réal prefers to maintain to the end some slight ambiguity about Elisabeth's feelings. This serves the dual purpose of, first of all, not explicitly insisting upon a relationship which was not corroborated by specific historical documentation and, secondly, of preserving intact the *vertu* of the heroine. When Philippe, seeking some proof of the link between Don Carlos and the Flemish insurgents, finds Elisabeth's letter among his son's papers, Saint-Réal is careful to explain that there is therein no "emportement qui put interesser son honneur, ou seulement offencer son devoir..." (190). However, the letter appears to Philippe "la plus emportée & la plus amoureuse du monde" (189). At this final moment of revelation the reader is still not told exactly what the letter contains, only that in writing it to the gravely wounded Don Carlos, Elisabeth "s'étoit abandonnée à toute son amitié...& elle y avoit exprimé ses sentimens avec toute la violence qu'une occasion si funeste pouvoit inspirer" (190). Although Philippe II, unlike the other husbands mentioned, is never told directly by his wife that she loves another man, he is no less convinced of it by her indirect confession. It is his reaction to the revelation, to an even greater degree than in the other cases, that determines the effects and final outcome of the forbidden passion.

The Effects of Passion

In certain respects, the effects of the love of the married woman for another man are similar for the male-created heroines to those we find in the female-created Princesse and Marquise. The passion, for example, has many negative results, including the death of one or more

of the principal characters. Yet despite similar circumstances, the stories of the Comtesse d'Almont and of Elisabeth de France do not closely follow the patterns of either of their sister heroines. In "Eugénie," Segrais continues, after the first *aveu* (of the Comtesse to Eugénie/Comte d'Aremberg), to focus more intently upon the intrigue and the psychological repercussions in the two principal male characters than upon the suffering of the heroine. In this *nouvelle*, (as in *La Princesse de Clèves* and the *seconde partie* of *Les Désordres de l'amour*), the husband is killed as an indirect result of the love of his wife for another man. However, in "Eugénie" the threads of the plot are much more complicated: his death is caused by his best friend, who is in love with his wife, and who, in planning to confront the man the countess really loves, comes upon the husband, who had been expecting to surprise his wife with her lover--a complex plot indeed! As is typical of works of the period, the idea of the wife as property is very strong, yet there is really no explicit or even implied criticism of the system. The problems and suffering which it causes are simply placed in much the same category as those generated by "les astres" or "le destin." The actions of the Comte d'Almont as he lies dying from the wounds which the countess believes that Florençal has inflicted are extremely revelatory. Suspecting his wife of infidelity, he will not even speak with her, but orders her to send for her father, much as one might contact the previous owner of some piece of goods which has proved defective. In this male-authored short story, the central female character is not even allowed the minimal privilege of being confronted by her husband's suspicions and defending herself against them in private. The Comte d'Almont recounts all that has happened in the presence of his father-in-law, another male relative, and the Comtesse. The tableau presented to the reader at this point--that of a lone, defenseless woman surrounded by three angry, accusatory men--symbolizes the real position of women in the society of the time in which the author is writing. Had Segrais been so inclined, had he been perspicacious enough, he might at least have implied criticism of the unjust situation in which half of the adult population found itself virtually devoid of rights. Yet he is either unwilling or unable to do so to even the rather modest

degree (by modern-day standards) that Lafayette and Villedieu do. As the Comtesse d'Almont falls to her knees (symbolically important once again) and makes her *aveu* to her husband, he is at least tempted to believe her, "ayant effectivement de l'affection pour elle" (135). (He must not be shown to be completely insensitive, for the author had, after all, portrayed him as a faithful and caring friend to the Comte d'Aremberg.) Far from displaying any hint of paternal love, however, her father berates her unmercifully. Evidently his tarnished reputation is far more important a matter to him than his daughter's happiness, or even her life. And in what manner does Segrais depict the heroine's reaction to all this? A modern feminist would hope that at least she--the victim--would be shown reacting against this brutal treatment as a sub-human being without the right to love whom she chooses, to live as she pleases, or even to receive a fair hearing. Instead, she becomes meek and resigned to her fate. The following passage deserves closer examination, since it is particularly revelatory of the attitude of the male author concerning how the persecuted female should react to injustice directed against her:

> [V]oyant qu'avec raison ils avoient lieu de ne la pas croire, elle ne demandoit plus que la mort, se lassant enfin de débattre si long-temps la cause d'une innocence si cruellement poursuivie par le malheur....Elle se rendoit...leur disant...qu'effectivement innocente ou coupable, elle étoit cause de la mort de son Mari; elle ne demandoit point de grace: Qu'ils la fissent mourir s'ils vouloient....(I, 139)

The heroine's resigned submission is evident throughout the passage. In fact, the most typically "heroic" quality found in the women of imaginative literature of this period resides in *in*action, in patient virtue and/or stoic suffering.[5] We note the many cues to her submission: "elle ne demandoit plus que la mort," "elle se rendoit," "elle ne demandoit point de grace." She even goes so far as actually to accept the blame for her husband's accidental death. In her mind (and in the mind of the male author) it is not the

male authority figures (who so brutally heap undeserved condemnation upon her) who are responsible for the dire straits in which she finds herself. Rather it is "le malheur" alone which has brought about this crisis. When at length the Comtesse d'Almont is saved from worse punishment, it is not through a softening of male hearts or a recognition by the male figures in the scene of the inherent injustice of the situation. We are told that "Dieu ne voulut pas plus long-temps laisser l'innocence au supplice" (139-140) and a monk recounts to the group the full confession of the now cloistered Comte d'Aremberg.

Having experienced such grievous effects of thwarted passion, the Comtesse and perhaps even her father might be expected to perceive some flaws in a system which traps women in loveless marriages. Such would be the hope of the modern feminist reader, at any rate. However, Segrais is far from even implying such a conversion in the consciousness of his characters. Though her dying husband asks her pardon for not believing her (at least showing some humaneness), no such gesture is recorded on the part of her father. On the contrary, the latter continues to insist that Florençal would not be a suitable husband. The Comtesse, rather than exerting one of the few rights she has legally acquired with her status as a wealthy widow, refuses to contravene her father's wishes by marrying the man she loves until after the father's death. There is surely here no awakened social consciousness of the unjust treatment of the female by society. Had Segrais himself felt any such awareness, and wished to acknowledge it, he certainly would have been able to do so even more directly in the ladies' conversation in the frame narrative binding the *nouvelles* together. These women discuss several subjects suggested by the preceding tale, but the unequal and unfair treatment of women as pieces of property is not among them. Segrais should at least be given credit, nevertheless, for having earlier manifested some awareness of this problem through the Comtesse d'Almont's comment to Eugénie that parents are wrong in assuming that gratitude and duty can control the heart (I, 66).

Far from criticizing, either explicitly (as the two female authors do) the suffering that women must endure as a result of being treated as mere objects, the other male author being examined here does not evidence even the minimal recognition of the problem shown by Segrais. Saint-Réal's Elisabeth de France suffers the most devastating effects of passion. Because of her love for another man, her brutal and tyrannical husband has both her and his own son killed. Although, then, Elisabeth is in circumstances very similar to those of the other heroines, her experience vis-à-vis her extramarital love is in many respects quite different from theirs. At each step in the unfolding of her relationship with Don Carlos, we have noted her remarkable, indeed, often unbelievable, restraint and her attitude of obedience and self-sacrifice. Dulong admires her for these qualities: "Elle aime, mais n'oublie à aucun moment ce qu'elle doit à son rang" (161).6The reader has perceived the crudeness and meanness of spirit of Philippe II up to the point when he discovers the tender letter written by Elisabeth to Don Carlos. In his response to this most indirect of the *aveux* in question, the king's truly brutal nature is more completely revealed. The following passage, which describes his first reactions, merits close examination:

> La fureur qu'il en conceut, fut dabord accompagnée d'une douleur si vive qu'elle lui auroit peut-être ôté la vie, si le desir de se vanger, si naturel dans ces occasions, ne la lui avoit conservé. Mais faisant aussi tôt reflection, qu'il étoit maître de ceux qui l'avoient offensé si cruellement, cette agreable pensée fit succeder une joie barbare à la rage qu'il avoit dans l'ame: elle changea son cuisant desespoir en une tranquilité pleine d'horreur. (190-91)

One is far removed from the warm and generous comprehension of the Marquis de Termes, the loving then jealous reception of the Prince de Clèves, or even the misapprehension but eventual pardon of the Comte d'Almont. Philippe II is indeed a monster, nearly devoid of humane feelings. He feels momentarily "une douleur," "un cuisant desespoir," but first of all "la fureur," and most of

all "le desir de se vanger." The antitheses--"une joie barbare," "une tranquilité pleine d'horreur"--strengthen our impression of Philippe as a savage madman concerned only with seeking revenge against those who have dared to steal this human possession from him and to challenge his authority.

To the very end of the *roman*, political and amorous intrigue are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to separate one from the other. Further, because Elisabeth's jealous husband is a monarch, he is able to bring about the most devastating consequences felt by any of these heroines as a result of their passion. Don Carlos, imprisoned by his father--ostensibly for political reasons--is allowed to choose the manner of his death. The scene in which he steps into a bath and cuts his own veins is graphically detailed by Saint-Réal, as is the subsequent death of the pregnant Elisabeth from "un médicament" which her husband insists that she take. Elisabeth's reply--"Puisque vous le voulez...je le veux bien" (217)--shows her, in Mansau's words, to be "une victime consciente et résignée" (391) of this greatest of injustices.

The author's sympathies are obviously with Elisabeth and Don Carlos and his implicit condemnation is of the barbaric Philippe II. However, he fails to address the inherent evil of the system in which Elisabeth has become trapped. The heroine's stoic acceptance of her status as Philippe's exclusive property is even more complete than that of the Comtesse d'Almont.

* * *

If a critic maintains, as does Nancy Miller, that there are differences between male and female literature, these may often be found not blatantly, but in what she has termed "the insistence of a certain thematic structuration, in the form of content" ("Emphasis," 37). One might at first jump to the conclusion that the Comtesse d'Almont and Elisabeth de France are hardly different from the Princesse de Clèves in seeming to place their marital duties above all their own emotional needs. However, even in

similar circumstances we have found personal reactions to the situations of these two male-created heroines markedly different in certain respects from those experienced by the most similar female protagonists of Lafayette and Villedieu. It would be inappropriate, of course, to read into these psychological distinctions either a fully developed "féminisme avant la lettre" on the part of the female novelists or an attitude of unrelieved male chauvinism in the works of Segrais and Saint-Réal. However, it is true that important and durable works of literature tend to multiply in meaning over the ages and it is always the critic's privilege, indeed, his or her duty, to seek to illuminate further the significance of the writings examined. Thus, though one would not wish to force false meanings upon the novels being considered, it is not out of place to attempt to discover what the novelists may have to say, either explicitly or implicitly, about the female condition. We have noted significant differences between the male and female-created heroines who are placed in similar circumstances, as well as the relative lack of depth and dimensionality of character found in these principal female personages of Segrais and Saint-Réal (while the female novelists are able to portray the psychology of their male characters with a surer touch). These factors do lead, in this critic's opinion, to the conclusion that in the cases we have examined, extreme limitations are revealed in the male novelists' comprehension of the female psyche.

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Notes

[1]Concerning the historical accuracy of *Don Carlos*, see Mansau's documentation.

[2]«Depuis le commencement du siècle,» notes Tipping, «les histoires de femmes mariées qui, au XVIe siècle n'ont pas manqué, deviennent, grâce au progrès de la moralité, très rares» (122).

[3]The letter was to have been delivered by Eugénie but s/he destroyed it, leaving the pieces in a public park, planning to present himself instead at the appointed hour and declare his own love.

[4]Villedieu is most similar to Saint-Réal in this respect. The characters whom she presents in *Les Désordres de l'amour*, for example, are all actual historical personages who follow closely their actual involvement in events as chronicled by historians. However, the author feels no compunction about continually shifting emphasis from politics to love as the important causative factor, filling in gaps in the historical records to suit her novelistic purposes. The reader of *Don Carlos* has the impression that Saint-Réal does not wish to be accused of following this same procedure and of compromising the historical record to the same extent that Villedieu and others do. He therefore--believing (as does Villedieu) that passion influences, indeed, usually determines the course of history--laces his account more heavily with long explanations of complex political intrigue which often seem cumbersome and distracting to the reader interested in the psychological aspects of the situations. The admirer of Lafayette's novels may wish that Saint-Réal had opted more clearly for an emphasis on either novel or history; however, his particular mixture of the two is a result of the genuine confusion of the genres which existed at the time. (*Don Carlos*' affinities with the tragic genre have been emphasized by Dana Rudelic.)

[5]Segrais' heroic Adelayde represents, of course, reversion to an earlier type found in the *roman héroïque* and seems to derive her temporary strength and boldness both from the fact that she is in constant service of love to one man and from the wearing of male attire.

[6]This attitude is certainly representative of the tradition which admires strength in women only in the very limited area of adherence to duty.

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