

Sentimental Manipulations: Duty and Desire in the Novels of Sophie Cottin

by

Brenna K. Heitzman

Department of Romance Studies
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Philip Stewart, Supervisor

Michèle Longino

Toril Moi

Laurent Dubois

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
Romance Studies in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

“Sentimental Manipulations: Duty and Desire in the Novels of Sophie Cottin” examines four novels by Sophie Cottin, from 1798 until 1806. A forgotten but once-popular novelist, Cottin used the theme of motherhood to develop the relationship between women and desire and duty. These novels use the sentimental novel in different ways that challenge the limits of genre and confront social perceptions of motherhood. The generic transitions reveal subversive representations of women’s sexuality and choice. The author’s rewriting of motherhood and genre thus plays a crucial role in understanding the complex and developing notion of the sentimental novel in a period of transition after the Revolution.

The eighteenth century gave rise to more structured gender divisions in society that provided little space for women’s freedom outside of the patriarchal dictates of the family and motherhood. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s 1761 publication of *Julie; ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* and his 1762 publication of *Emile; ou de l’éducation* are thought to have defined social roles for women in relation to their reproductive abilities. The novel, as a site of social production, was understood to have influential moral implications and was used to confront and maintain socially accepted behavior. Mother-child depictions in literature, therefore, reveal socially acceptable behavior for women.

My first chapter examines the development of motherhood as a form of social duty imposed on women. I explore the Rousseauian themes in Cottin's first sentimental epistolary novel, *Claire d'Albe*, published in 1778. The representation of adultery reveals the complex relationship between women's duty, virtue, and sexuality. In my second chapter, I analyze how Cottin manipulates the epistolary sentimental genre in *Amélie Mansfield*, published in 1802. Cottin creates narrative spaces that privilege women's expression and redefine women's choice through a violent and controversial depiction of the protagonist's suicide. I explore the social implications of the removal of the suicide scene from all publications of the novel after 1805. My third chapter examines the incorporation of elements of the travel narrative into the sentimental genre in *Malvina*, published in 1800, and *Elisabeth; ou les exilés de Sibérie*, published in 1805. Through the description of travel, I explore Cottin's representations of duty and women's education at two distinct moments in her publishing career.

Dedication

To the three people who influenced me the most in my French studies: my mother, father, and grandmother.

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Introduction

The novels of Sophie Cottin are fascinating representations of the sentimental genre. Filled with depictions of women's adulterous affairs, illicit romances, death, suicide, and sexual pleasure, her novels depict and confront the feminine condition in eighteenth century France. Throughout her novels, Cottin explores the tension between a mother's social duty to maintain her virtue in a society that restricted women's activities based on their gender. Motherhood opposes the often overpowering and socially destabilizing desire to express women's sexuality outside of the rigors of patriarchal control.¹ The potentially liberating representations of women's choice in each of her novels are enhanced by genre manipulation unique to each novel. Cottin pushes the limits of the sentimental novel to provide original representations of women as mothers that increase the dramatic tension and moralizing intentions of her work.

This dissertation will treat, in combination, rather than serially, two overlapping subjects of the sentimental novel in the eighteenth century: duty and desire. First, I will

¹ Feminist theory took up the idea of French mothering in the 1980's with contributions from Adrienne Rich, Judith Butler, and Nancy Chodorow. See Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). Feminist research counters the idea that gender is a biological construction and rejects the idea of an uncontested union of nature and culture. Feminists like see gender as a social construct. Since the 1980's there has been resurgence in interest in French mothering thanks to the works of Nadine Berenguier, Pamela Druckerman, and Meredith Michaels who have see a need to reevaluate French motherhood. See most recently Nadine Berenguier, *Conduct Books for Girls in Enlightenment France*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), Élisabeth Badinter *Le Conflit: la femme et la mère* (Paris: Flammarion Lettres, 2010); Pamela Druckerman, *Bringing Up Bébé: One American Mother Discovers the Wisdom of French Parenting* (New York: Penguin, 2012); and Meredith Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

consider how duty is represented in the sentimental novel and how the novel acts as a social and moralizing tool used to confront and maintain socially acceptable behavior. I will then situate duty in the historical context of the eighteenth century. The unifying theme of this study will be to examine the relationship motherhood has to duty. Women's duty was decidedly linked to the woman's body and reproductive labor. In the eighteenth century, the motherhood was intrinsically tied to the education of children and relegated women to the domestic sphere. The gendered division of societal spaces left little room for women's freedom.

By reading Cottin's texts singularly as well as in relationship to each other, I will show that the representation of duty in the novel does not remain static. Cottin's literary examination of the theme of motherhood as women's duty is played out at the level of genre – she manipulates common tropes of the sentimental novel by mixing generic codes and changing them. Finally, there is a distinct and radical change in the definition of women's desires and duty that occur in Cottin's later novels. I argue that this reflects a turning away from the classic sentimental notion of duty towards Cottin's hybrid version of a sentimental and Christian ideal of duty.

A Popular, but Forgotten Author

Despite a small corpus of work which includes only five books, several essays, and a collection of letters, Cottin enjoyed enormous success during her ten-year

publishing career and beyond through the posthumous publications of her works. The loss of her readership in the late-nineteenth century and the limited publications of her novels since are due to a shifting literary terrain and changing public interest. However, that Cottin prevailed as one of the preeminent French novelists from the late-eighteenth century for a period encompassing three decades of the nineteenth century is a testimony to her success as an author of sentimental fiction that has yet to be fully explored in contemporary scholarship.

Sophie Cottin is a relatively unknown author to contemporary French scholars, but she was not a marginalized author. In her lifetime, her works garnered numerous accolades in newspaper publications such as the *Décade Philosophique*, the *Journal des Débats* and the *Mercure de France*. After her death in 1807, Cottin's works retained their popularity. Michael J. Call remarks that:

translated versions of her novels also appeared in English, Dutch, Romanian, Croatian, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. After her death, fourteen editions of her complete works were published in French between 1817 and 1856, and translations of selected works were being published for her American reading audience as late as 1916."²

Such European acclaim reflects the wide acceptance of her work by the publishing and literate communities of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries. The continued commercial success of her works into the nineteenth century prompted the French critic

² Michael J. Call, *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002) 13.

Saint-Beuve to exclaim that “rien n’égale le succès qu’eurent dans leur temps les romans de madame Cottin.”³

Cottin’s popularity can be defined in two ways: by the publication of her novels as well as their public reception. In *Le Triomphe du livre*, Martyn Lyons examines archival data bases in order to differentiate public taste in reading from retrospective literary critiques to “retrouver les goûts les plus répandus des Français, cachés par la tradition académique.”⁴ Among all books published between 1816 and 1820, he finds that Cottin’s first published novel, *Claire d’Albe*, was the best-selling novel with a print run that is estimated to have been between 25,000 to 30,000 copies. Seven editions of this novel alone were published between 1816 and 1831. Cottin’s last published novel, *Elisabeth; ou les exilés de Sibérie*, also appears in this list of twenty best-sellers, with an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 copies printed.⁵ *Elisabeth* became her most popular novel. Before 1830, ten editions were printed, with an additional ten before 1848.⁶ In addition to this publishing popularity of her novels, Françoise Parent-Lardeur names Cottin among the

³ Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, vol. 11 (Paris: Garnier, 1851) 488.

⁴ Martyn Lyons, *Le Triomphe du livre* (Paris: Promodis, 1987): 83. He also asserts that the history of the book provides insight into the ideologies prevalent in a society at the time of publication: “l’histoire du livre est donc également l’histoire de la propagation des idées; en s’intéressant au public, à ses habitudes de lecture, à ses goûts et préférences littéraires, l’historien peut commencer à mesurer l’impact et la résonance de certaines idées ou idéologies dans un contexte social donné” (9-10). Also, see his introduction for further information on the Revolution’s impact on publishing culture and publishing restrictions.

⁵ Lyons study compiles data for all books published and does not differentiate between genres. Therefore, the presence of two of Cottin’s novels among the twenty best-sellers is all the more revealing of public demand to purchase her novels. Among the best-selling novels during this time frame are Staël’s *Corinne*, with an estimated print run of 8-8,500 copies, and Bernardin’s *Paul et Virginie*, with an estimated 20-30,000 copies printed.

⁶ Lyons, 105.

“most well known or the most in favor” novelists based on the catalogues of private lending libraries.⁷ Both of these studies highlight Cottin’s widespread public popularity.

Despite all of her laurels, there has been limited scholarship and critical attention devoted to her works since the mid-nineteenth century. Many critics claimed that her novels do not stand the test of time. In 1883, for example, Gustave Merlet wrote in the *Tableau de la littérature française* that Cottin’s novels “ne supportent plus la lecture, car tout y est artifice et convention: ils nous apprennent seulement ce qu’il y a eut [*sic*] d’exalté dans la sensibilité de nos grand’mères. On s’étonne même qu’une veuve si discrète ait produit des pages si enflammées.”⁸ Publisher André Le Breton’s critique of Cottin’s work had significant influence on the public reception of her work. He dedicates a portion of his study, *Le roman français au dix-neuvième siècle*, to Cottin, describing her as follows: “Elle a eu cet honneur et cette infortune que chacun de ses romans a été refait en tout ou en partie par quelque écrivain plus habile qu’elle et qui l’a fait oublier.”⁹ More recent scholars of Cottin’s works, such as Leslie C. Sykes and

⁷ Françoise Parent-Lardeur, *Les Cabinets de lecture—La Lecture publique sous la Restauration* (Paris: Payot, 1982) 157. In her article on private lending libraries, she argues that these public spaces made printed material available to a broader reading public. “Les cabinets de lecture dans Paris: pratiques culturelles et espace social sous la Restauration.” *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 34. 5 (1979): 1016-1038.

⁸ Gustave Merlet, *Tableau de la littérature française: 1800 à 1815*. Vol 2. (Paris: Didier, 1878) 217-218

⁹ André Le Breton, *Le roman français au dix-neuvième siècle, Avant Balzac*. Vol 1. (Geneva: Slatkine, 1979) 93. Le Breton argues that *Claire d’Albe* becomes Baroness Barbara Juliane von Krüdener’s *Valérie* (1804), *Elisabeth* becomes Xavier de Maistre’s *Jeune Sibérienne* (1825), *Malvina* becomes Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne* (1807). He argues that in Chateaubriand’s *Aventures du dernier Abencérage* (1826), Aben-Hamet bears a striking resemblance to the hero, Malec Adhel from Cottin’s *Mathilde*. Finally, he sees elements of *Malvina* in Staël’s *Dephine* (1802).

Michael J. Call, have accused Le Breton of having dissuaded scholars from working on Cottin.

Sykes has set forth the most thorough biography of Cottin to date. His work, *Madame Cottin* published in 1949, reconstructs Cottin's life based on excerpts from Cottin's personal correspondence and reconstructs a history of the public reception of her works through newspaper articles and written debates among Cottin's contemporaries. Sykes compiles a selected collection of Cottin's letters. In both her letters and her novels, Cottin abundantly uses suspension points to mark moments of silence, reflection, overwhelming emotion, and suspense. This current study will also remain faithful to the punctuation of Cottin's work. Suspension points will be followed by a space in order to differentiate them from moments of ellipsis in citations. Since Sykes's publication, scholarship on Cottin has remained limited. *Madame Cottin* remains the most accurate and comprehensive biography of Cottin's life and publishing career. For this reason, I will rely on Sykes for the majority of Cottin's biographical information.

Cottin's Life and Works

The exact details of Cottin's childhood are uncertain, but what is known has been reconstructed from her father's correspondence. Her father, Jacques Risteau, was the

director of the Compagnie des Indes.¹⁰ Based in Paris, his wife gave birth to a second daughter on March 22, 1770.¹¹ Although both parents were Protestant, French law required that children be baptized by a Catholic priest to be officially recognized as citizens.¹² Baptized with the name Marie, she was given the name Sophie by her paternal grandmother. Shortly after her birth, her grandfather died and the family moved to Bordeaux where Ristean assumed responsibility for the family's shipping company. Little more is known about Cottin's childhood, but she did travel to her grandmother's home in Tonneins, a town in south-western France, where she developed a close bond with her cousin Julie Vénès. Julie and Cottin become lifelong friends and correspondents. It is through this epistolary relationship that details of Cottin's early life can be reconstructed.

Sophie Cottin's life was marked by her early childhood and the education she received from her mother. The frequency of spelling mistakes in her writing and her tendency to write as if she were speaking attest to the absence of a formal education. Marquiset, Quérard and, Lacoste referred to her education as having been "fort

¹⁰ Ristean was appointed the director in 1765, and was responsible for directing the transportation of goods from metropolitan Europe to the French colonies.

¹¹ Leslie Sykes, *Madame Cottin* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1949) 2 [hereafter Sykes]. Her sister, Henriette, was two years her senior and died when Sophie was fifteen; her father writes: "ma fille ainée Anne-Marie-Henriette, fille accomplie pour son âge, pleine de talents et de grâces, dont le mémoire sera toujours chère à son malheureux père, qui la regrettera jusqu'au tombeau."

¹² For a comprehensive study on the changing religious relations and the Revolution, see Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000). Ashton states: "The laws of the Gallican Church exclusive rights. Until 1787 to be a Frenchman was to be by definition a Catholic" (7).

négligée” (3). Cottin herself comments on the education she received. According to her own letters to her cousin Julie, “ni elle ni sa cousine Julie n’avaient beaucoup d’instruction” (4). However, Louis-Gabriel Michaud argues in *Biographie Universelle* that Cottin received a more well-rounded and erudite education than she claims. Sykes sides with Michaud and contests that her education was more likely fostered by “une mère très cultivée” (3).

The impact of the Revolution on Sophie Cottin was profoundly influenced by her marriage to Jean-Paul-Marie Cottin, a rich banker whose family had emigrated to England several years after the revocation of the Edit de Nantes. After meeting her future husband during his business trip to Bordeaux in 1788, Sophie wrote to her cousin and expressed a genuine admiration for her intended: “toutes les qualités précieuses et qu’il est si rare de trouver dans les jeunes gens d’aujourd’hui” (269). They decided to marry; however, while in Paris, Cottin became very sick with an intestinal illness that delayed their wedding. They eventually married on May 16, 1789.

Cottin had a life that was full of travel, reading, and letter writing, but which was also marked by the Revolution. The name Cottin had been ennobled under the ancien régime, and her father-in-law and husband were supporters of the nobility. The name Cottin also appeared on the list of the Club monarchique, founded in 1790 (29). While it is uncertain whether the name Cottin referred to the father or son, Sophie and her husband left Paris in 1791 and spent several months in England. Call suggests that their

quick return was most likely incited by the fear of having their properties confiscated by the revolutionaries.¹³ Cottin's husband died in September, 1793 due to the illness that began before his marriage that was, most likely, provoked by the additional stress of death of family members and the imprisonment of his brothers and business partners.

Widowed at the age of 23, Cottin was in financial ruin. The fortune that she was expected to inherit was estimated at 1,500,000 francs, but was converted by the revolutionary government into promissory notes valued at 100,000 francs (17). She left Paris and returned to Champlan, a property her husband had purchased the year of his death with his business partner, Girardot, who was subsequently imprisoned. In a letter to her mother, Cottin explains that she retreated from Paris to "[se] jeter dans une solitude absolue"¹⁴ To maintain her state of isolation, she tried to buy out Girardot's share and become the sole owner, but both names were under suspicion of the authorities. From 1794 to 1795, the state threatened multiple times to seize the property.

During this time, Cottin's turned to nature and her cousin to abate her depression and thoughts of suicide. Cottin's letters vacillate between happiness and depression. She describes the property as having a deep effect on her mood. For example, she writes to her mother: "Ma douleur s'adoucit, mes idées se consolident et ma santé se raffermir" (286), but soon after, in a letter to her cousin, she writes: "Oh!

¹³ The law authorizing the confiscation of property of those who had left France was passed on February 9, 1792.

¹⁴ Sykes, 286.

Pourquoi le temps ne vole-t-il pas plus rapidement pour amener cette calme époque, si cependant je suis destinée à y arrivée" (289). Cottin's cousin Julie had a formative role in nursing Cottin back to health. The presence of her children focused Cottin to the extent that she sent a letter to a friend in Paris asking for information on adoption. While nothing came of her request, Cottin and Julie shared parenting responsibilities of her three children. Julie referred to Cottin as "l'amie qui sait toujours remplacer la plus tendre des mères."¹⁵ Cottin played the role of surrogate mother to Julie's children. This relationship had such an effect on her, that, when Julie gave birth to her third child, Cottin wrote: "Enfin nous voilà mères d'une troisième fille" (75).

Cottin did not only seek solace in her family, but created strong relationships via her correspondence which allowed her to engage in a wider intellectual community than her isolation in Champlan provided. Her correspondence with Bernardin Saint-Pierre requires particular attention. In her two letters to this author she invokes Rousseau both times: "Bernardin, homme vraiment bon, puisque vous existez, puisque vous respirez le même air que moi, pourquoi ne vous dirais-je pas ce que je regrette de ne plus pouvoir dire à Jean-Jacques"¹⁶ and later "Ce que je désire n'est point une réponse, mais quelques lignes de la main de Bernardin, que je mettrais à côté de celles de Jean-Jacques..." (51).

¹⁵ Anne Marguerite Petit Du Noyer, known as Mme de Clauzade, *Une Oubliée: Madame Cottin, d'après sa correspondance* 2nd Ed. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1914): 78.

¹⁶ Catherine Cusset, "Ceci n'est point une lettre: Echange épistolaire et mystique de la transparence. Le cas de Sophie Cottin (1770-1807)." *La Lettre à la croisée de l'individuel et du social* Ed. Mireille Bossis. (Paris: Editions Kimé, 1994) 50.

These letters evidence Rousseau's major intellectual influence on Cottin's philosophy of education and, by association, her interest in Bernardin's philosophy of natural education portrayed in *Paul et Virginie*.

In addition to these epistolary bonds, Cottin developed several relationships with men after the death of her husband. Cottin began writing to Etienne Gramagnac after her husband's death. As a widower, he advised her on the management of her estate and resources. His letters to her eventually took on a more personal tone. Cottin ultimately refused Gramagnac's advances: "La situation où je suis est la seule qui me convienne. L'indépendance et la paix, voilà les seuls bien où j'aspire."¹⁷ Cottin also rejected the advances of the twenty-one year old son of her relative, Jacques Lafargue. They initially met on her property, but corresponded while he was in Paris. Cottin eventually developed feelings for him, writing, she refused his proposal. His health began to deteriorate rapidly after the rejection, and Cottin invited him to Champlan to recuperate: "Je peux résister à tout, à votre amour, à ma tendresse, mais non pas à votre peine" (29). This interaction had a fatal outcome. Lafargue shot himself on the property. His death forced Cottin to leave the confines of the country and return to Paris where she met her last and most tumultuous romantic interest prior to her death.

As with her ties to Gramagnac, Cottin's correspondence to Pierre-Hyacinthe Azais began through the mutual exchange of letters and information. Azais was a

¹⁷ Sykes, 296.

philosopher and their relationship was founded on intellectual compatibility. Cottin expressed her love for him to her cousin, but eventually was forced to end the relationship. Azaïs, disliked by her friends and family who doubted his sincerity, agreed to marry her for the purpose of having children. Knowing she was infertile, she wrote: “Je crois que ce que Dieu a décidé est le mieux possible; puisque ni vous ni moi n’avons la force de lever l’obstacle qu’il a mis entre nous, apparemment qu’il nous est bon qu’un obstacle nous sépare” (272). Their relationship ended in 1804, and Cottin devoted her energies to her writing and traveling.

Sykes notices traces of the first signs of the illness that would eventually lead to Cottin’s death in her correspondence of January of 1807. The exact cause of her death is undocumented, prior to her death in August of the same year, Cottin’s correspondence reveals that she suffered for three months. There is no consensus on the cause of death, but Sykes attributes it to breast cancer: “Elle avait un cancer au sein, dont on l’opéra” (70). Jean Caubet published a biography in 1986 in which he claims that the cause of death was tuberculosis.¹⁸ While Call recognizes that this could explain the slow death, he claims that it is unlikely. Call asserts that there was no mention of any symptoms the days before the death in her cousin’s letters. In fact, there is no mention of her illness

¹⁸ Jean Caubet, *Sophie Cottin* (Tonneins: Jean Caubet, 1986) 40.

during the last days of her life. He claims that this silence “gives more credence to Leslie Sykes’s claim that Sophie Cottin dies of breast cancer.”¹⁹

No matter what the cause of her death, Cottin’s correspondence suggests that she was coming to terms with her own mortality as she approached death. Her letters show a dramatic shift towards religious devotion. She writes to her cousin on her return from a trip to Italy that she:

J’ai appris non seulement à me résigner, mais à aimer les peines que Dieu m’envoie. Elles ne sont que l’expiation de mes torts et je bénis sa justice et sa bonté. Je ne m’enfoncerai jamais dans le chaos des sciences, ma piété n’a pas besoin de savoir, elle est toute d’amour.²⁰

The transition towards religious rhetoric reoriented her writing towards less morally subversive texts of her early publishing career, and influenced her last publications.

Cottin’s Literary Influences

Cottin’s works were deeply influenced by Rousseau’s sentimental novel and ideas on education found in *Emile* and *Julie; ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. During the Revolution, the popularity of these works gave way to his more political works, like *Le Contrat social* (1762) which may be considered one of the founding texts of the French Republic, but Rousseau’s oeuvre remained in circulation. Raymond Trousson’s study of Rousseau and Isabelle de Charrière unravels the public posthumous discourse surrounding Rousseau

¹⁹ Call, *Infertility*. 155.

²⁰ Noyer, 320.

and the re-publication of his works. Charrière spoke out against authors like Edmond Burke who criticized Rousseau as the following: “écrivain sans goût, utopique dans *Emile*, immoral dans *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, dangereux dans le *Contrat social*, scandaleux dans les *Confessions*, le paradoxal Genevois, idolâtré par la Révolution est aussi le grand maître de la ‘philosophie de la vanité’.”²¹ In addition, she remained in the forefront of posthumous discourse and discussion by contributing to new editions of the *Confessions* and his completed works.

In 1789, Cottin is first introduced to Rousseau through Germaine de Staël’s publication, *Lettres sur les ouvrages et le caractère de J.-J. Rousseau* (1788). She wrote a letter to her cousin, Julie Vénès, on February 17, 1789, in which she recounts an anecdote about reading Staël’s text with her family after dinner:

Je voudrais t’envoyer ce livre: je suis sûre qu’il te ferait [sic]. [Mme de Staël] fait l’éloge de son père [Necker] avec enthousiasme, et personne ne peut y trouver rien de trop. Elle parle de l’*Héloïse*, elle détaille tous les ouvrages de Rousseau, elle finit par dire qu’il s’est empoisonné, en parle comme d’une chose sûre. Elle ne parle point de lui, de son caractère, avec enthousiasme; elle le justifie souvent, mais le blâme quelquefois, et l’esprit d’impartialité qu’elle met dans son jugement persuade davantage en faveur de Rousseau que l’admiration exagérée de ses partisans outrés. Il y avait hier des personnes qui, avant la lecture, s’étaient disputés sans se persuader; après avoir lu, ils ont été d’accord. J’eusse été curieuse de savoir si ta sœur eût été persuadée par la raison et l’esprit de Mme de Staël. On parla de l’*Héloïse*, on fut la chercher, on en lut quelques lettres. Une lettre de Julie à Claire me fit bien plaisir: elle y peignait leur amitié. Ce sentiment n’a qu’une expression, aussi papa s’écrira-t-il: ---Mais c’est

²¹ Raymond Trousson, “Isabelle de Charrière et Jean-Jacques Rousseau.” *Bulletin de l’Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises* 43.1 (January 1985): 34.

Sophie et sa cousine! ---Cette comparaison flatteuse, mais pourtant vraie, me causa un plaisir que je sens et dont je jouis encore en te parlant.²²

Based on this letter, we see a genuine appreciation for Rousseau's text and the possibility for his works to imitate life. This admiration continues later that same year after her cousin's marriage to M. Verdier. Cottin writes on December 11, 1789:

Je relis avec plaisir la *Nouvelle Héloïse*, mais seulement les derniers volumes. Je leur trouve un charme, une douceur qui me pénètrent. Je trouve dans la courte analyse que Julie fait de l'éducation de ses enfants beaucoup de choses utiles...J'aime Rousseau: ses ouvrages, ce me semble, sont dictés par la vertu, et il y a trop de naturel et de sentiment pour que son cœur n'est [*sic*] pas autant travaillé que son imagination" (279).

Based on her correspondence, it becomes clear that Cottin is an author more concerned with Rousseau's writing on education in works such as *Emile* and *Julie* than with his political writings due to her interest in the expression of emotion.

Cottin's own literary production emphasizes Rousseau's influence on her writing. She writes to her cousin that she enjoys dedicating her time to reading educational treatises, but that the novel remains her preferred genre:

J'aime à pleurer, à être attendrie; je trouve que ce sentiment qui fait verser de douces larmes est agréable, aussi j'aime les romans. Un bon roman me dédommagera de plusieurs mauvais; j'en lis beaucoup, cela ne me gâte point le goût. Je trouve que souvent cela m'instruit: les auteurs, en faisant parler l'amour, l'amitié, des différents sentiments qu'ils traitent, disent ce qu'ils pensent et tout ce qu'ils sentent. (280)

²² Sykes, 277.

The sentiments expressed in the novel produce similar effects in the reader which displays a nuanced idea of the interrelationship between the novel as text and the novel as educational tool. Rousseau's influence on Cottin is evidenced by her preferred choice in genre.

Cottin did not intend to become a novelist and believed that women should not write.²³ She inserted a vitriolic condemnation of women writers, including of herself, in the *Préface of Malvina* that was omitted in later publications due to the pressure from her friend and biographer, Joseph Michaud (500). For her, women's writing was inherently linked to gender and woman's duty." She explains to her sister-in-law, Mme Jauge, in 1800, that for her the act of writing is acceptable since she is unable to fulfill woman's duty as wife and mother:

Ne croyez pas pourtant, ma sœur, que je sois partisane des femmes auteurs, tant s'en faut... Il me semble que la nature ne donna un cœur si tendre aux femmes, qu'afin de leur faire attacher tout leur bonheur dans les seuls devoirs d'épouse et de mère, et ne les priva de toute espèce de génie que pour ôter à leur vanité le vain désir d'être plus qu'elles ne doivent; que s'il est permis à quelques-unes d'exercer leur plume, ce ne peut être que par exception, et lorsque leur situation les dégage de ces devoirs, qui sont comme la vie du reste de leur sexe.²⁴

Cottin believed that her status as a childless widow gave her a certain literary freedom.

She also separates herself here from other women authors who write despite being wives and mothers.

²³ Samia I. Spencer, "The French Revolution and the Early Nineteenth-Century French Novel: The Case of Sophie Cottin" *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 18 (January 1991) 500.

²⁴ Sykes, 330.

While Cottin's correspondence creates the impression of a woman who was an avid reader, letter writer and appreciator of the arts, her engagement in the writing and publishing community was driven by need of money. In 1798, Cottin began writing her first epistolary novel, *Claire d'Albe*, in order to procure funds for a friend who was attempting to flee the country. Money remained a concern in the negotiation about selling her novel to the Parisian bookseller, Maradan. *Claire d'Albe* was purchased and published anonymously in 1799; however, in her correspondence, she remarks that Maradan wanted to pay 240 francs, but she was able to increase her payment to 300 francs (399). The success of this novel prompted her to demand more money for her next publications.

Cottin's second and third novels were also published anonymously. *Malvina*, a novel written in chapters with only a few interventions of the epistolary, was published in 1801. Call remarks that since this novel is four times longer than its predecessor, Maradan paid four times as much.²⁵ In that same year, a second edition was printed. Cottin began writing her last epistolary novel, *Amelie Mansfield*, during the first months of 1799, and it was published at the end of 1802, and announced as written by the author of *Claire d'Able* and *Malvina* (100). Maradan paid Cottin 4,000 francs for *Amelie Mansfield*.

French publisher Michaud purchased the rights to all three works, and, subsequently, several portions of *Malvina* and *Amélie Mansfield* were suppressed in

²⁵ Call, 80.

future publications. In addition to omitting Cottin's critique of women authors in the Préface, a scene in which the protagonist's love interest is seduced by another woman was removed. In the case of *Amelie Mansfield*, the first edition depicts a scene in which the protagonist, Amélie, attempts to commit suicide. This scene was removed from the second edition, published in 1805, and does not appear in any editions thereafter.

Cottin's fourth novel and longest novel, *Mathilde; ou Mémoires tirés de l'histoire des croisades* was published in a six-volume set in 1805 under the name Sophie Cottin. Unlike the previous novels, which take place in Europe and Britain, *Mathilde* is set in Egypt and Palestine. This novel also marks a generic and thematic transition from the sentimental tradition. This novel incorporates many more historical elements and does not investigate the protagonist's relationship to love and to motherhood. Mathilde does not succumb to carnal passion like Amélie, Claire, and Malvina. In *Mathilde*, duty is defined by religious conviction, not by a relationship to the protagonist's role as wife or mother.

In 1806, *Elisabeth; ou les Exilés de Sibirie*, hereafter known as *Elisabeth*, was published. Although Cottin's shortest novel, it was also the most financially lucrative novel for Cottin and was sold for 12,000 francs for the first edition, and 16,000 for the rights to republish the novel (161). This novel alone was reprinted forty-eight times either as a single publication or in a collection. It was also translated into English,

Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Croatian. *Elisabeth* became popular in puritanical America. According to Sykes, it was taught in schools.²⁶

Cottin's last published work is *La Prise de Jéricho; ou la pécheresse convertie*. The first publication of this text is unknown, and it is most often found published in the same volume as *Elisabeth*. This short text is usually referred to as a poem, although it is not in verse. Usually printed in the same volume as *Elisabeth*, it is not typically included in the discussion of Cottin's works.²⁷ The choice to omit or include this text brings to light the textual choices of inclusion and exclusion that have come under scrutiny in contemporary Cottin scholarship.

Contemporary Criticism

Since Sykes, most of the scholarship surrounding Cottin has been limited to articles published in the 1970s. Jean Gaulmier's articles, "Sophie et ses malheurs; ou, Le Romantisme du pathétique" (1970) and "Roman et connotations sociales: *Mathilde de Mme Cottin*" (1973), mark the beginning of more recent scholarship on Cottin since the publication of Leslie Sykes work. In addition, Gaulmier was responsible for the reprinting of Cottin's first novel, *Claire d'Albe*, in 1976.

²⁶ In 1862, *Elisabeth* was reprinted by Northgate Press for *Bertrand's School Classics*, and also appeared in the Rouard collection, *Bibliothèque morale de la jeunesse*, in 1868. Sykes, 415.

²⁷ See Sykes, Call, and Samia I. Spencer.

Beginning in the 1980s and reaching its peak in the 1990s, however, there was resurgence in Cottin scholarship thanks to the works of feminist scholars who sought to revive the works of forgotten women writers. Joan Hinde Stewart's influential work, *Gynographs*, published in 1993, engages Cottin's *Claire d'Albe* in the discussion of women writers of the late eighteenth century like Marie Jeanne Riccoboni, Isabelle de Charrière, and Félicité de Genlis. As evidence of renewed interest in this author, Cottin's name began appearing more frequently in literary histories. Frank Paul Bowman introduced a summary of *Claire d'Albe* in *A New History of French Literature* in 1989, and *Claire d'Albe* also appeared in Lynn Hunt's *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* in 1992. Catherine Cusset and Samia I. Spencer published several articles in the early 1990s that explore Cottin's engagement with the sentimental genre. However, the majority of contemporary critics have centered their discussion on *Claire d'Albe*. This short novel and the audacious depiction of sexual pleasure during the protagonist's adulterous fall are possible reasons for the selection of this novel from Cottin's corpus.

Scholarship has remained limited to article publications, with the exception of the influential publication of Michael J. Call's work, *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* in 2002. Alone among Cottin scholars, Call provides a comprehensive analysis of Cottin's entire corpus. Call's literary analysis of her five books, however, considers Cottin's inability to have children as the key explanation of her female protagonists. His argument is based on the model proposed by modern psychologists of psychological

stages an infertile person goes through in order to reconcile themselves with their infertility. Call's argument ultimately hinges on the idea that Cottin's "writing functioned as autotherapy for [Cottin], allowing her to work through each phase until she reached a final resolution he could live with."²⁸ We can see Call's contribution as a reductive vision of the woman writer that Joan Hinde Stewart addresses in *Gynographs*. She warns that "by reducing a varied oeuvre to a monotonous autobiography, [critics] perpetuate the stereotypical vision of the woman writer."²⁹ Although Call's argument relies too much on biographical references, he rightly uncovers the influence of the Rousseauian model of female domesticity in her works and contributes a perceptive analysis of the tension between the public and private and the depictions of femininity in the novels to Cottin scholarship.

From this limited critical bibliography, I am building on the works of Sykes and Call in particular, while relying on the important contributions to the field of women's writing from Hinde Stewart. Of primary concern to this study is the representation of women in the domestic sphere and their relationship to the restrictive limitations motherhood imposes on women's sexuality. As with Sykes and Call, I explore the developmental patterns in Cottin's novels. Both Call and Sykes seek to create a linear

²⁸ Call, *Infertility*. 156.

²⁹ Joan Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs: French Novels by Women of the Late Eighteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) 71.

analysis of Cottin's works, but both authors' choice of how best to analyze Cottin's works has come under scrutiny.

As I build on Call's analysis of femininity and the relationship to the body, I also distance my work from his in the linear analysis of Cottin's novels. Call organizes his analysis around the publication date of Cottin's novels. This structure forces him to jump from considering the violent representations of sexuality in *Claire d'Albe*, to the more altruistic sacrifice in *Malvina*, and again to the violence and anger expressed in *Amélie Mansfield*. His chapter dedicated to *Malvina*, which he aptly titles "Back in Step with Jean-Jacques: *Malvina*," accurately uncovers the non-linear thematic representations occurring across the novels. This simplistic reading of *Malvina* reduces the complex plot to a woman's desire to be a good mother. However, a deeper reading of how motherhood is described uncovers an overarching shift in ideology in Cottin's works. This ideology is not based on motherhood, but on devotion to one's friend. In this novel, women's friendship supersedes the devotion of a mother to a daughter. The shift from motherhood to shared devotion between women as the impetus for action in the novel can best be examined in relationship to Cottin's later works, such as *Elisabeth*. I argue that Cottin's works do not undergo thematic shift that follow the progression of her publication dates, but, rather, a methodological shift that alters the field of vision of the sentimental novel. I will, therefore, refocus my analysis of Cottin's novels from a

chronological order to a thematic in order to more productively uncover the impulses that push Cottin to explore genre differently.

The focus of my investigation is to examine the ways in which the novel represents women's duty and motherhood. In four of Cottin's novels, *Claire d'Albe*, *Malvina*, and *Amélie Mansfield*, motherhood involves the education of children and the redefinition of women's desire. I have chosen to not include an analysis of *Mathilde* because of the lack of representations of motherhood.

Of secondary concern is the way in which Cottin pushes the limits of the sentimental genre. Like other women writers, Cottin wrote in both the epistolary and non-epistolary form.³⁰ Unusually, however, Cottin integrates elements of other genres in ways that are not commonly seen among her peers. I build on Sykes argument of the sentimental novel; however, my categorization of Cottin's novels differs from his. Sykes has argued that *Claire d'Albe*, *Malvina*, *Amélie Mansfield*, and *Mathilde* all cohere closely with the sentimental tradition. Jean Gaulmier, too, corroborates this argument by saying that the same basic plot animates all of these novels.³¹ Sykes analyzes *Elisabeth* separately from the other novels by arguing that the central theme is filial rather than amorous love and, therefore, arguing that this novel diverges from the model established in her

³⁰ Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni published the epistolary novel *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby* (1759) as well as the *l'Histoire d'Ernestine* (1765) which does not take on the form of letters.

³¹ Jean Gaulmier, "Sophie et ses malheurs ou le Romantisme du pathétique" *Romantisme* 3 (1972): 2-16.

previous works.³² Sykes rightly recognizes that there is a thematic shift from women's sexual desire to filial love.

Sykes's choice of the omission of *Elisabeth* from an analysis of desire does not take into account the unique way in which Cottin is investigating love through the sentimental genre in each of her novels. Filial love, or filial piety, is loosely defined as love for the father. Amorous love and filial piety is represented in different ways, but their points of intersection reveal Cottin's ideological shift that redefines women's duty in the novel. Félicité de Genlis, an author in her own right, was one of Cottin's harshest critics of *Claire d'Albe* and *Amélie Mansfield*, but admired her other novels. She also highlights Cottin's attention to filial piety, but sees a connection with this depiction to motherhood. Genlis comments that *Elisabeth* is "bien écrit, avec goût et pureté. *Elisabeth; ou les Exilés de Sibérie* doit ajouter encore à la réputation de l'auteur; les sentiments les plus purs, l'amour maternel, l'amour filial y sont exprimés d'une manière touchante."³³ Therefore, to explore how Cottin redefines women's desire, I reintroduce *Elisabeth* into the discussion of the sentimental novel.

Many Cottin critics are faced with the choice of how to categorize the varied writings that she produced throughout her prolific, yet short, career. This dilemma uncovers the fundamental, but also misunderstood elements inherent to Cottin's

³² T. M. Pratt, "The Widow and the Crown: Madame Cottin and the Limits of the Neoclassical Epic." *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 9.2 (1986): 197.

³³ Félicité de Genlis, *De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française, comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs; ou, Précis de l'histoire des femmes françaises les plus célèbres* Vol. 2. (Paris: Maradan, 1811) 267-68.

writing. The difficulty in categorizing Cottin's oeuvre reveals the traits of an author who is willing to experiment with generic manipulation. Cottin's last published text is a prime example of her generic manipulation. As with other scholars, I also omit the analysis of this text from my argument, but on the basis of thematic difference, not for genre categorization. Sykes excludes her *Prise de Jéricho* from all analysis stating that: "Je n'ai pas cru nécessaire de traiter de la *Prise de Jéricho* dans la partie littéraire de cette étude, car cette prose poétique ne fait pas corps avec le reste de l'œuvre de Mme Cottin."³⁴

One of the very few critical works that mentions, let alone examines Cottin's small epic poem, is T. M. Pratt's article "The Widow and the Crown: Madame Cottin and the Limits of the Neoclassical Epic" published in 1986. The premise of his argument is that Cottin introduces elements of the genre of the epic into the sentimental genre. He argues that, like Marmontel's *Les Incas ou la destruction de l'empire de Pérou* (1777), Cottin attempts to bring "the most notable but also the most traditional species of literature into closer harmony with the spirit of the age."³⁵ Pratt disagrees with Sykes's removal of this text from the analysis of the sentimental genre. This text is a love story of the Canaanite woman, Rahab, and the Israelite spy, Issachar. The elements of the epic are evident in the plot that is loosely based on the genealogy of Christ listed in Chapter 1 of

³⁴ Sykes, 68.

³⁵ T. M. Pratt, "The Widow and the Crown: Madame Cottin and the Limits of Neoclassical Epic." *British journal for eighteenth-century studies* 9.2 (1986): 197. Pratt also argues that Cottin succeeds where Marmontel fails in successfully merging the two genres.

the Gospel of Mathew. In light of this, Pratt declares that “the real theme of this work is thus more sentimental than marital and approaches that of Mme Cottin’s novels of love” (200). Pratt declares that the text is ultimately a “noteworthy example in a period of literary transition” (202). Pratt’s argument is intrinsic to this current study on the novel which seeks to examine other examples of generic manipulation in the sentimental narrative.

The Sentimental Novel and Duty

I will use Margaret Cohen's work on sentimental codes as my point of departure. The sentimental novel is a subgenre of the novel, and Cohen contends that it is a site of social production.³⁶ Cohen defines the limits: “[a] genre designates the fact that writers share a common set of codes when they respond to a space of possible, a horizon forms by the literary conventions and constraints binding any writer at a particular state of the field.”³⁷ These codes are socially and historically relevant only to the extent that the orient writers’ practices in their time. The genre, therefore, reflects and inscribes the social ideologies of a historical moment. The novel came to the forefront of the literary and publishing worlds in the eighteenth century. Novels were exploited as the primary

³⁶ The sentimental novel was one of the three distinct practices of the novel that remained stable throughout the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The other two are the gothic novel (le roman noir) and the comic novel (le roman gai). After this time the sentimental social novel is the genre writers employ throughout the 1830s and 1840s.

³⁷ Cohen, 17.

means to examine the private and social spheres and transmit moral values to their readers.³⁸

Women were inscribed in a patriarchal society that relegated them to the domestic sphere under the protection of their fathers or brothers.³⁹ Rousseau's *Du contrat social* (1762) posits that all men are born free and agree to surrender certain freedoms in order to participate in society.⁴⁰ Carole Pateman offers a compelling analysis of the social contract. Pateman asserts that: "le contrat social s'oppose au droit fondé sur l'autorité paternelle et institue la liberté et l'égalité civiles des fils, ces derniers viennent à bout du pouvoir des pères au moyen de l'appropriation des corps et de la sexualité des

³⁸ Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). According to Cook, "Eighteenth-century epistolary fictions allow us to examine the Enlightenment ideal of a Republic of Letters precisely because the letter-narrative exposes the private body to publication. The letter-narrative is formally and thematically concerned with competing definitions of subjectivity: it puts into play the tension between the private individual, identified with a specifically gendered, classed body that necessarily commits it to specific forms of self-interest, and the public person, divested of self-interest, discursively constituted, and functionally disembodied." (8) As seen in the previous chapter, the epistolary novel marries well with the ideals of the eighteenth-century sentimental that juxtapose the private and the public. David Denby's study of the narrative and social order from 1760 to 1820 shows the affect a wider French and international readership had on the creation of public opinion: "fictional narrative becomes a privileged site for the self-conscious expression of such notions: this is part of a new relationship between text and society, mediated by the spread of reading and related, both as cause and effect, to the emergence of public opinion and to the whole process of secularization." David J. Denby, *Sentimental Narrative and Social Order in France, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 2.

³⁹ Julie Hardwick states: "Patriarchy as a principle of social organization in early modern France was a profoundly and consciously gendered concept." Julie Hardwick, "Widowhood and Patriarchy in Seventeenth Century France." *Journal of Social History* 26.1 (Autumn 1992): 134.

⁴⁰ *Contrat social* (London: J. M. Dent & sons, 1912). For an analysis of Rousseau's political thought and how it shaped the political ideas of the Enlightenment, see Michael O'Dea, *Rousseau et les philosophes* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010). For a compelling feminist argument on the concept of the citizen, see Alice Ormiston, "Developing a Feminist Concept of the Citizen: Rousseauian Insights on Nature and Reason." *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* Ed. Lynda Lange (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002) 144-168.

femmes.”⁴¹ She contends that the heterosexual contract is at the origin of all modern forms of gender inequality. According to Pateman, Rousseau’s philosophy thus legitimized relations of subordination between men and women.

The sentimental conflict placed women between two poles: inclination and duty. Cohen compares the sentimental genre with tragedy in order to illustrate the moral binary expressed by the sentimental plot. As she observes in Hegel’s *Antigone*, each opposing side of the conflict “can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by denying or infringing the equally justified power of the other” (40). Unlike the example of Hegel’s tragedy, however, both opposing forces exist in the same protagonist in the sentimental plot. Central to Cohen’s argument is the concept that the moral conflict experienced by the protagonist forces the individual to choose between individual liberty and their duty to uphold the welfare of the community (39).

The sentimental plot hinges on the depiction of two scenarios that bring individual freedom into conflict with the collective welfare: adultery and family obstacles to marriage (38). The focus of the plot is to incite and sustain a broader emotional reaction rather than promote plot movement through action. This is not to say that there is no action represented in these novels. Sykes highlights that action is necessary for the conflict to be revealed:

⁴¹ Carol Pateman, *Le Contrat sexuel* (Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 2010) 22-23.

Il est rare que le roman sentimental soit exclusivement consacré à l'étude des sentiments; en général il est doublé d'une sorte de roman d'aventures. Pour que des situations émouvantes puissent naître, il faut qu'il y ait une intrigue présentant des péripéties chargées de troubler le cours paisible et normal des événements.⁴²

The action allows for the protagonists to confront conflict that evokes an emotional reaction for the character and the reader. In both instances, women are caught between the moral imperative to uphold the social order of patriarchal society. In this way, the sentimental narrative remains faithful to broader Enlightenment ideals of social solidarity and public good.

The post-revolutionary desire to reestablish order for the welfare of the country contrasts with ideas of individual desire and adds to the genre's popularity. Cohen contends that the sentimental novel achieves greater success after the Revolution as a result of changing societal views that correspond to the moral imperatives of the sentimental plot:

The sentimental novel catches its protagonists between two moral imperatives, each valid in its own right, but which meet in a situation of mutual contradiction. Collective welfare, which constitutes one term of the double blind, is aligned with an unstable cluster of Enlightenment abstractions including the public good, manners, society, reason, and other people's well-being. Against this imperative, the sentimental novel asserts the imperative to individual freedom, which it associates with happiness, choice, nature, the private, sentiment, and erotic love.⁴³

⁴² Sykes, 109.

⁴³ Cohen, 34. The term "double blind" is used by Cohen to describe the situation of the female sentimental protagonist. Whether she chooses duty or inclination, she is destined to lose.

Self-awareness was a primary literary and philosophical preoccupation of the French Enlightenment, and the French Revolution brings into perfect but short-lived focus the interdependence of personal narrative and history.

Women play an important role in the plots of sentimental novels that goes beyond their role as protagonist. Margaret Cohen asserts that “when the sentimental novel uses female protagonists as paradigmatic liberal subjects, it assumes that the domestic sphere is a microcosm of collective life; that women’s careers can grapple with problems that threaten the very makeup of the *res publica*”(47-48).⁴⁴ The central and pointed description of a domestic universe becomes public. The sentimental novel gained in popularity after the Revolution due to this combination of the personal and the public.

The sentimental novel also reflected Enlightenment ideals that contrasted men and women’s natural states. Nature and Reason became gendered concepts: men were associated with the creative and women with the physical and sensual.⁴⁵ Colleen Mack-Canty describes the relationship between men and women in the eighteenth century as the following:

⁴⁴ Cohen continues: “such an assumption is, however, fragile, given the disparity between the ideological function of Woman and women’s juridical, political, and social status” (48). Cohen makes a clear distinction between the fictional depiction of women in the novel and the lived experience of women at the time since there was significant opportunity for women to function outside of the limiting definition of the domestic sphere. Salon owners, for example, exerted a considerable influence and social pressure on political, philosophical, and literary production.

⁴⁵ Alice Ormiston, “Developing a Feminist Concept of the Citizen: Rousseauian Insights on Nature and Reason.” *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* Ed. Lynda Lange (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002) 144.

In the nature/culture dualism, man was seen as representing culture, and needing to be unconstrained by and to have domination over natural processes, both of a nonhuman nature and human embodiment. Men were identified with disembodied characteristics such as order, freedom, light, and reason, which were seen as better than, and in opposition to, women's allegedly more 'natural' and/or embodied characteristics such as disorder, physical necessity, darkness, and passion. The use of the term 'man' cannot be constructed as generic here. The subtext is the association of women with nature, as women's embodiment generally, given its reproductive capacity, is harder to deny than men's.⁴⁶

At a time when reason was the main social currency, women were excluded from the public sphere for physically incarnating the opposite qualities.⁴⁷ This duality reified further the social divide that excluded women from the public sphere and limited the roles they could perform within that sphere based on women's presumed physical inferiority to men.

Literature reflected the Enlightenment ideas that separated male and female characteristics. In Philip Stewart's analysis of society's changing attitude on love from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, there is a noticeable transformation in the way in which love is represented in the novel. Unlike the courtly love of the previous century, love is redefined and women's expression of passion and pleasure was limited:

⁴⁶ Colleen Mack-Canty, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality." *NWSA Journal* 16.4 (Autumn, 2004): 155.

⁴⁷ This theory was not universally accepted. Both women and men in the eighteenth century published texts exploring the duality proposed between men and women. For one example, see the text published under the name M*** which was later attributed to Mme Archambault. *Dissertation sur la question, 83. Mme D'archambault Dissertation Sur La Question, Lequel De L'homme Ou De La Femme Est Plus Capable De Constance ? ou la cause des femmes* (Paris: Chez La Veuve Pissot, 1750). Archambault's text is among the many that appeared in the eighteenth century and called for a change in the role of the mother in relation to raising children.

“la notion de la galanterie perdait sa corrélation avec l’honneur et, par une volte-face totale, commençait à encourager la faiblesse—en premier lieu, celle des femmes.”⁴⁸ This redefinition of love in literature mimics the changing social belief that women’s social role was defined by the reproductive ability of their bodies.

Kant’s theory has direct implications on women’s sexuality and pleasure; therefore, I will turn to this eighteenth-century philosopher for a definition of duty as a concept. For Kant, pleasure is immoral because it is not done for the sake of duty.⁴⁹ This action is based on reason since duty must hold true for all rational beings.⁵⁰ Necessary action must be performed either “from respect for a law” (29) or as an obligation.⁵¹ Kant explains that an individual’s duty always exists in relation to the other: “the practical necessity of acting according to this principle, i.e. duty, does not rest at all on feelings, impulses or inclinations, but merely on the relation of rational beings to one another.” (97) Actions are only good if performed out of duty, rather than out of practical need.

⁴⁸ Philip Stewart, *Le Masque et la parole: Le langage de l’amour au XVIIIe siècle*. (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1973) 14.

⁴⁹ My understanding of Kant and sexuality is influenced by Toril Moi. Moi attributes the nineteenth-century literary depiction of women to Kant’s ideas of sexuality. For Kant, sex acts are only moral if they serve the purpose of procreation. In light of this philosophy, Moi argues: “The representation of human sexuality requires idealization, or it will be vulgar. In order to become properly poetic, sex must be sublimated, ennobled, and beautified, that is to say it must be turned into highly idealized love [...] In order to avoid the coarse and the vulgar, consciousness must transcend the body; morality, duty, and will must conquer mere material nature.” Moi, Toril. *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 78-79. The heroine’s death is an escape from the tension between physical pleasure and idealized love. Since she does not act, she retains her virtue.

⁵⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Ed. Jens Timmermann. Trans. Mary Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 79.

⁵¹ “The dependence on the moral principle of autonomy of a will that is not absolutely good (moral necessitation) is obligation. This cannot therefore refer to a holy being. The objective necessity of an action from obligation is called duty” (107).

Desire is therefore placed directly in opposition with duty in circumstances where and external duty is imposed on an individual.

Duty is inherent to understanding the moral conflict of the sentimental novel. Moral action has to overcome mere material or bodily needs. Duty is intrinsically linked to moral worth.⁵² At the very basis of Kant's theory outlined in the *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals* is the idea that duty is an action based on two motives: the primary motive is a person's reason for doing the action, and the secondary motive requires that the individual have a general commitment to the act and an unconditional commitment to morality.⁵³ For actions to have moral worth, the actions must be universalizable and be done for the sake of duty.⁵⁴ If an action cannot be universally adopted then it is not morally permissible; i.e. moral judgment must be equally applicable to the same situations. Moral actions must be performed out of duty to the laws governing morals. The concept of morality demands that actions must be in accordance with the demands of practical reason.

For Kant, the third factor in defining duty is its relationship to good will. The philosopher defines will as the "capacity to act according to the representation of laws"

⁵² I argue that moral worth for female protagonists in the eighteenth century novel is defined by the word virtue. Since morality and duty are interrelated, duty and virtue are represented in similar ways in the novel. A woman's duty is to maintain her virtue by following the laws of society. Kant explains that "to do an action without inclination, solely from duty; not until then does it have its genuine moral worth" (25).

⁵³ Philip Stratton-Lake, *Kant, Duty, and Moral Worth* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 5.

⁵⁴ Russel Grigg, "Desire and Duty in Kant." *Sophia* 30. 1 (1991): 34. Benjamin Ferguson seconds this idea. He states that "action has moral worth if the primary motive for the action is the motive of duty." Benjamin Ferguson, "Kant on Duty in the *Groundwork*." *Res Publica* 18 (2012): 303-319.

(53). Good will includes the right to do one's duty and to respect moral law. According to this theory, a rational being with good will automatically does his/her duty. Kant's definition of duty illustrates the internal conflict of the sentimental novel in which the female protagonist struggles to reconcile duty with desires that oppose her morality.

The sentimental novel is described by Cohen as a "war of duties" where a female protagonist is torn between her own happiness and the welfare of her husband and children. Cohen contends that:

sentimental heroines are idealized from their introduction, the sentimental plot subjects its protagonists' moral worth to ample trial. Setting up the conflict between individual freedom and collective welfare from its opening events, the sentimental plot accumulates situations that test the protagonist's ability to negotiate this conflict as they simultaneously test the conflict's force⁵⁵

Most often, sentimental novels depict the life of a young married woman of an elite social class who struggles against her passion for a young outsider who threatens to disrupt the stability of her marriage. The woman who succumbs to these feelings cannot survive in the social order and often dies. Her death symbolizes the reestablishment of social order and emphasizes the consequence of placing personal desire over public wellbeing.⁵⁶

Motherhood became synonymous with women's duty, but was not limited to the biological reproduction of children. Christine Th  re underlines the importance placed

⁵⁵ Cohen, 60.

⁵⁶ Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1762) are most often considered to be the first examples of the sentimental novel.

on education in the eighteenth century: “the valorization of pedagogical function of the mother, supersedes her procreative function.”⁵⁷ Women’s duty was to educate the children in the social rules dictated by the society in order to reproduce patriarchal order from generation to generation. Motherhood fulfills both requirements for moral worth since it conforms to both procreative and social duties for women.

Throughout her fiction, Cottin explores the tension between duty and desire through her representations of mothers and the domestic sphere. She establishes a fictional universe in which women’s desire is continually opposed to duty. Her sentimental novels explore the conflict between duty and desire by providing liminal spaces that create instability in the social order. These moments of heightened action allow Cottin to investigate and subvert patriarchy’s limitations on women’s freedom and choice. The remainder of this study is devoted to four of Cottin’s novels.

Chapter 1 offers an analysis of Cottin’s first epistolary novel, *Claire d’Albe*. I explore Cottin’s overarching moral ambition by analyzing how adultery is portrayed in the novel through the use of subtle generic manipulation. I begin my study of *Claire d’Albe* by examining the terms “duty,” “virtue,” and “desire” – all terms that define the role of women in the eighteenth century, in relationship to the concept of motherhood. I begin my study by examining these terms in relationship to the social concept of

⁵⁷ Christine Théré, “Women and Birth Control in Eighteenth-Century France.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32.4 (Summer 1999): 560.

motherhood. Women's social role in France was prescribed within the confines of patriarchy. I show that the novel acts as a site of resistance which men and women writers exploited to contest the established roles set forth by Rousseau's two influential novels, *Emile* and *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. In this chapter, I establish a literary relationship between Cottin and other women novelists to uncover her representation of the domestic sphere and unique depiction of women's passion. Cottin aligns herself with the sentimental tradition established by Rousseau; however, she remains faithful and deviates from the sentimental model presented in *Julie* in key ways. By comparing how motherhood is represented in *Claire d'Albe* and *Julie*, Cottin's depiction of feminine passion represents a changing aesthetic of women's desire and duty.

Chapter 2 illustrates how Cottin uses the epistolary form to offer new and radical forms of women's choice in *Amélie Mansfield*. Anonymity allows this author to depict radical forms of marriage and subversive representations of women's agency in their lives. Filial piety is defined in a way that highlights Amélie's duty as mother, daughter, and sister. Cottin moves towards a more egalitarian notion of women's place and authority in the family. Epistolarity offers a framework from which Cottin gives authority to her protagonist by manipulating the conventional generic codes of the sentimental novel. Through the analysis of letters and voice, I show that this fiction exemplifies the dominant conception of letter writing as a way to represent authentic passions and emotions. Although her work garnered acclaim during its first publication,

the audacity of her protagonist's suicidal death was removed from all editions thereafter. There is no written trace to explain the reasons behind these changes. Critics like Sykes and Call suggest that Cottin's decision was potentially driven by pressure from her editor, Michaud, or as a response to the vitriolic condemnations by conservative moralizing critics like Félicité de Genlis. By looking at the paradigmatic changes throughout her work as a whole, the rewriting of her protagonist's ultimate act of women's agency reflects Cottin's loss of anonymity as an author. This novel symbolizes an ideological shift in how duty and desire are conceived in her work and signals a movement towards more religious rhetoric and imagery prevalent in her later works.

Chapter 3 confronts critics, like Sykes, who fail to recognize the revolutionary ways that Cottin manipulates the sentimental novel. Sykes comments that: "moins un précurseur du romantisme—elle ne l'est que dans le sens strictement limité où le sont tous les romanciers sentimentaux du dix-huitième siècle—que la continuatrice d'une longue tradition."⁵⁸ In this chapter, I contest this generalization of Cottin's work, and uncover the distinctive use of description in the sentimental novels *Malvina* and *Elisabeth; ou les exilés de Sibérie*. I demonstrate that Cottin progressively incorporates more elements of the genre of the travel narrative into her sentimental fiction. This generic manipulation allows the author to explore the female body and movement

⁵⁸ Sykes, 125.

throughout the gendered spheres that organize patriarchal society in the eighteenth century.

These four novels show discrete moments in the author's career; however, the point of contact in which they both manipulate the genre and portray motherhood evidences a clear authorial preoccupation with contemporary literary production and personal evolution. This ideological shift is based on personal and social factors that both instigate her career as a writer and end her career prematurely. My analysis of Cottin's novels in particular uncovers a thematic movement away from motherhood towards filial piety that ultimately leads towards a redefinition of women's duty and a radical representation of women's education.

1. Duty and Desire in Sophie Cottin's *Claire d'Albe*

In the eighteenth century, motherhood reinforced the dominant sexist ideology of what was considered socially acceptable behavior for women; however, this social identity thwarted female agency and desire. Maintaining social harmony for women involved repressing other desires that would conflict with the duties that the title of daughter, wife, and mother imposed. This chapter will focus on the literary analysis of two novels: Rousseau's *Julie; ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* published in 1761 and Cottin's *Claire d'Albe* published in 1798. The purpose of this study is not to compare these novels as parallel texts, but to look to Rousseau's pioneering novel, *Julie*, to understand the tradition of the sentimental novel on which Cottin's novel is relying. Cottin uses strong Rousseauian themes that provide the basis of this analysis.

Both novels pretend to be cautionary tales that explore themes of the nature of passion, moral behavior, the education of children, and suicide.¹ The two female protagonists in these novels transform, transgress, and reinforce the eighteenth-century concept of the motherhood as they navigate the irreconcilable relationship between duty and desire in society.² Passion is a consequence of desire that leads to adulterous thoughts and behaviors for both protagonists. Both protagonists encounter situations that have the potential for adultery which may or may not be realized. In *Julie*, adultery

¹ Jeanne Thomas Fuchs, *The Pursuit of Virtue* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993) 5.

² Donald R. Wehrs explains that: "Rousseau portrays desire and duty in unbridgeable conflict: one or the other must be renounced." "Desire and Duty in 'La Nouvelle Héloïse'." *Modern Language Studies* 18.2 (Spring, 1998): 82.

is a symbolic situation. Julie's sexual experiences with St. Preux occur outside of marriage. Unlike Julie, Cottin's protagonist does commit adultery. The way in which adultery is represented in the novels examines the complex relationships between women's duty, virtue, and sexuality. This study seeks to explore the extent to which Cottin relies on the dominant ideologies of women's duty set forth by Rousseau, and how the representation of women's relationship to duty and desire in *Claire d'Albe* subverts and offers a radical new depiction of women's sexuality.

As objects of this analysis, both Cottin and Rousseau significantly impacted their readership with their paradigmatic depictions of motherhood in their epistolary novels. Rousseau's *Julie* is emblematic of a young woman coerced into the suppression of her desire in order to fulfill the social obligations imposed on her by her family. The juxtaposition with Cottin's novel in this analysis shows how the definition of motherhood is propagated in the sentimental novel, but unveils the subtle subversive aspects of Cottin's plot and character description that confront social strictures imposed on women. Essential to the thrust of this argument is that motherhood in the novel is a social construct that has the potential to confront and maintain socially accepted behavior. Mother-child depictions in literature, therefore, become exemplary of socially acceptable behavior. My overall goal is to illustrate how Rousseau and Cottin depict women's duty by exploring the limitations motherhood imposes on women's desire.

The choice of genre plays an integral role in analyzing how morals are transmitted through the epistolary narrative. The epistolary novel conveys the truth and emotions of the character's experiences. The form of the letter allowed a privileged look into the emotions of the character, adding to the realism of the story. The letter, thanks to its first-person narration, gives the sense that the thoughts being read are the most faithful to the writer's feelings. By reading a letter written in the first person, the reader has a sense of the character's motivations from the most direct source possible since the letter highlights the reasons for a character's personal motivation. Howland asserts that the epistolary genre allowed the reader to have a greater impression of reading the truth. He writes that "eighteenth-century epistolary novelists were aware of the subjectivity inherent in any first-person narrative. In multiplying the narrative loci, they acknowledge the fragmentary, incomplete nature of any individual's point of view at the same time as they provide a rounder image of reality which is easier for the public to follow."³ The use of letters was thought to compensate for the biased impression of a single author. This ideological transformation created a market for works that focused more on the confidential and intimate behavior of the characters.

The change in literary focus was a gradual shift that occurred between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cottin is not alone in her manipulation of fictional

³ John W. Howland, *The Letter Form and the French Enlightenment: The Epistolary Paradox* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991) 84.

letters to tell a story in a realistic fashion. The interest in authenticity and truth holds true for seventeenth-century novels such as *Lettres portugaises traduites en français*. First published anonymously in 1669 as the real letters of a Portuguese nun and later revealed by Frederick Green in 1926 to be the fictional work of Gabriel de Guilleragues, this novel was also widely read because of the authenticity proposed by the “Au lecteur,” which incited public curiosity in the ambiguous origin of the letters and the purported feminine passions depicted within. In the “Au lecteur,” Guilleragues insists on the truth in the writing by asserting that he: “[a] trouvé les moyens, avec beaucoup de soin et de peine, de recouvrer une copie correcte de la traduction... .”⁴ The writer continues asserting that he is a mere translator: “je ne sais point le nom de celui auquel on les a écrites, ni de celui qui en a fait la traduction, mais il m’a semblé que je ne devais pas leur déplaire.” Likewise, in Marie-Catherine de Villedieu’s *Le Portefeuille*, published in 1674, the preface insists that the following text is a series of letters found under a bench one day. The author, therefore, pretends to be the mere editor of the letters to attest to the truth of the emotions evoked by the female writer.

By using the epistolary genre, Cottin inscribes herself in a literary form in which woman’s desire is depicted as a threat to patriarchal society and woman’s virtue is tested through themes of seduction and abandonment.⁵ The epistolary provides

⁴ *Lettres portugaises* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2006) 25.

⁵ The following texts have helped form my understanding of women’s writer use of the epistolary form in the eighteenth century: Elizabeth J. MacArthur, *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary*

sympathetic portrayals of deviant women. Through epistolary correspondence, the reader is witness to the emotional struggle that the protagonists experience. The heroines disapprove of deviant behavior, but are unable to change the course of their own conduct. Each author describes a situation that contests the stability of the perceived social structure by depicting women's internal struggle to reconcile their emotions with duty. Peace can only be regained or hinted at by the removal of the dissident female characters either through death or by their seclusion in a convent. Women's desire and love in these novels does not extend to women who deviate from the social construct of marriage and distort the definition of motherhood.

Cottin participates in this long tradition of the realistic epistolary novel and thereby responds to other authors who investigate women's choice in marriage and love. Elisabeth C. Goldsmith argues that epistolary fiction was often produced in response to other epistolary novels and highlights the intratextuality of the genre.⁶ Elisabeth C. Goldsmith uncovers proof that epistolary fiction was often produced in response to other epistolary novels and discovers the intratextuality of the genre.

Goldsmith contends that Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747) was

Form (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990); Joan Hinde Stewart, "Mme de Graffigny and French Epistolary Writers of the Eighteenth Century." *Correspondence and Epistolary Fiction* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002); B. Melancon, "The Epistolary Legacy and the Eighteenth-Century French Writer." *Orbis Litterarum* 51 (1996): 321-333.

⁶ "Lettres and the Epistolary Novel." *Teaching Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century French Women Writers* Ed. Faith E. Beasley. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2011) 79.

inspired by Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721) and proposes that Riccoboni's *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butelard* (1757) can also be read as a response to *Lettres portugaises traduites en français* but continues that it can also be analyzed in relation to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748). Rousseau's *Julie* inspired numerous responses and imitations, including Cottin's *Claire d'Albe*.

In Rousseau's *Julie*, interweaving letters written from the perspective of each individual character construct the action. These written voices tell the story of Julie d'Étanges. Set in Switzerland, Julie is a young girl from a wealthy family who falls in love with her tutor, known only as St. Preux, a pseudonym. Knowing that this union would be unacceptable to her mother and father because of the difference in their social classes, Julie continues to correspond with him in secret. The only witness to their illicit communication at first is Julie's cousin Claire, through their letters to her and as a bystander to their secret meeting. Their romance continues to develop by mail even while St. Preux is traveling abroad; however, their letters are discovered by Julie's mother, who dies shortly thereafter. Julie's father subsequently forces her to marry his friend, M. de Wolmar, who is significantly older than Julie. Julie takes her marriage vows seriously, rejects any amorous propositions from St. Preux and dedicates her life to her role as wife and mother of her two young boys. Julie meets a heroic end when she

rushes into the water to save her son from drowning. She becomes sick and dies in Claire's arms, her last words a cry to St. Preux: "St. Preux!... cher St. Preux!"⁷

Claire d'Albe, like *Julie*, is a novel about a young girl who marries a much older man in order to honor her father's last request. Claire's life as a wife and mother is established from the onset of the novel. Recently forced to move to her husband's family property near Touraine, France, her domestic happiness is disturbed by the arrival of a young male outsider who threatens the marital union. Her husband, M. d'Albe, promises to take in the son of a dying relative and treat him as his own. Frédéric lives at their house but is unable to call Claire his mother, because Claire's relationship with Frédéric weakens her relationship to her children and her resolve to follow the social duty her marriage entails.

Like *Julie*, *Claire d'Albe* consists of a series of letters; however, the decreased variability of letter writers focuses more attention on Claire's written voice which dominates the narration. For the majority of the novel, Claire recounts her feelings to her cousin, Elise. The reader is not privy to Elise's half of the correspondence, but Claire's letters reveal Elise's presence. Claire's letters reflect Elise's critical judgment of Claire's adulterous feelings and her desire to guide Claire to maintain a virtuous life with her husband by rejecting her feelings towards Frédéric. As a young unattached man,

⁷ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Julie Ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* Ed. Henri Coulet. Vol. 2. (Paris: Gallimard, 1993 [originally 1761]) 378.

Frédéric's presence has the potential to disrupt the marital union between Claire and her husband. Playing the role of a moral compass and guide, Elise sees the potential danger of Frédéric's presence in the household.

Claire's written voice is only interrupted when she is separated from Frédéric. Ultimately, Claire is unable to repress her feelings for him, and Elise intervenes to separate them. Elise eventually takes Frédéric in as a guest in her house. This attempt at separation is short-lived. Frédéric escapes Elise's house and returns to Claire's. During this moment of transition, Elise writes to d'Albe to warn him of Frédéric's arrival. Elise, d'Albe, and Frédéric all convene at d'Albe's property, but Frédéric is the first to arrive. Frédéric finds Claire praying at her father's tomb and they consummate their love for each other. Overcome with guilt, Claire dies, her last words impart a warning to her daughter of the dangers of social and moral impropriety.

In the eighteenth century, the binary created between duty and desire that is discussed in this chapter inherently enshrouds the subject of virtue. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers three possible definitions of virtue. As a quality of persons, virtue can be defined as "the power or operative influence inherent in a supernatural or divine being." However, virtue also can be defined as "conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality; voluntary observance of the recognized moral laws or standards of right conduct; abstention on moral grounds from any form of wrong-doing or vice."

Finally, virtue is defined as “chastity, sexual purity” especially on the part of women, and of a married woman in particular.

Each of these definitions flirts between religious and social devotion and uncovers a relationship between the public and personal understanding of virtue for women. Virtue and duty are socially imposed concepts, much as the title of wife at this time. Tony Tanner contends that “the category of being a wife is in no sense given even in the most conventionally prearranged marriages. It is a totally social and cultural arrangement, and an arrangement on which society relies.”⁸ He continues by asserting that “the figure of the wife ideally contains the biological female, the obedient *daughter* (and perhaps sister), the faithful *mate*, and responsible *mother*, and the *believing* Christian” (17). Therefore, virtue is a form of duty that is inherently linked to the social role of women as wives and mothers.

Gaston Hall’s research has heavily contributed to how virtue is understood in *Julie*, and, by association, has influenced interpretation of virtue in other sentimental novels. Hall contends that Rousseau at times uses virtue to mean little more than chastity, but expands on this restricted meaning by introducing the notion of duty once Julie agrees to marry.⁹ In her letter to St. Preux Julie establishes clear boundaries

⁸ Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 16.

⁹ In her perceptive article, Eléonore M. Zimmermann traces the ways in which Rousseau’s definition of virtue change throughout the novel. She also suggests that Rousseau’s representation of virtue is based on the definition of virtue as “force morale, courage” and a “ferme résolution de fuir le mal et de suivre le bien”

between herself and her lover based on her new role as a wife. Julie explains her new found relationship to chastity: "Liée au sort d'un époux, ou plutôt aux volontés d'un père par une chaîne dissoluble, j'entre dans une nouvelle carrière qui ne doit finir qu'à la mort"¹⁰ and continues by writing: "Je veux être fidèle, parce que c'est le premier devoir qui lie la famille et toute la société. Je veux être chaste, parce que c'est la première vertu qui nourrit toutes les autres" (425). Social order is maintained through repentance and strict adherence to the moral and social duties of being a wife.¹¹ Hall illustrates that Rousseau's definition of virtue is based upon maintaining the duties imposed on women in the domestic sphere. According to Hall, "Rousseau has substituted for heroism and an austere sanctity a new concept of virtue in domestic tranquility and order."¹²

Virtue in *Julie* and in *Claire d'Albe* has social implications as well as personal expectations. Cottin explores the loss of virtue as a personal loss of self worth for loving an unworthy object and the social loss of virtue. The public corruption of the woman by a socially unaccepted lover in which society judges her as unvirtuous for having corrupted her social duty of which being an obedient daughter, faithful wife, and

in addition to "chasteté." Eléonore M. Zimmermann, "'Vertu' dans *La Nouvelle Héloïse*." *Modern Language Notes* 76. 3 (March, 1961): 251.

¹⁰ Rousseau, *Julie*. 40.

¹¹ Jeanne Fuchs illustrates the ethical and aesthetic convergences in *Julie* and their relationship to the moral lesson intended by Rousseau. She rightly traces the representations of Rousseau's ideology on education, love, and nature in *Julie* to his other major works such as *Le Contrat Social*, *Les Confessions*, and *Rêveries*. See *The Pursuit of Virtue* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).

¹² H. Gaston Hall, "The Concept of Virtue in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*." *Yale French Studies* 28 (1961): 33.

devoted mother are of primary importance. Her husband's forgiveness is not enough to overcome her personal and social transgression. As she is dying, d'Albe exclaims: "votre faute est grande sans doute, mais il vous reste encore assez de vertus pour faire mon Bonheur, et le seul tort que je ne vous pardonne pas est de souhaiter une mort qui me laisserait seul au monde."¹³ To which she responds: "Cher et respectable ami, croyez que c'est pour vous seul que je voudrais vivre, et que mourir digne de vous est ce qui rend ma dernière heure si amère" (153). Her response uncovers a definition of virtue that is not solely based on action, but on feelings as well. Claire's response is at once a recognition that her unvirtuous behavior has made her unfit to continue her duties as a mother in addition to a wife, and thereby reaffirms her belief in upholding moral values for her children, and a recognition that she has failed herself and her own personal moral code.

Both Cottin and Rousseau investigate women's virtue and duty and the powers that oppose these qualities. While Cottin explores this opposition in other ways in her later novels, the primary conflict of *Claire d'Albe* is the threat that desire in the form of passion, or sexual love, poses to the protagonist's ability to fulfill her duty and maintain her virtue in the marital union. Unlike Julie, Claire does not find happiness in domestic tranquility and does not turn to religion to cover her desire for her lover. Central to this

¹³ Sophie Cottin, *Claire d'Albe* Ed. Margaret Cohen. (New York: The Modern Language Association, 2002 [originally 1799]) 152.

of virtue is physical purity which is threatened by adulterous thoughts and actions. To best understand the way in which Cottin portrays desire as a natural virtue rather than an opposing concept, we must first consider how adultery is represented in the novel.

The first principle of analysis is that desire creates adulterous feelings in the married woman that are socially disruptive. In Tony Tanner's book *Adultery in the Novel* he unravels the social and cultural dangers of adultery to society. Tanner persuasively argues that adultery destabilizes the foundation of society: "*Adulteresse* points to an activity, not an identity; an unfaithful wife, and usually by implication a bad mother, is an unassailable conflation of what society insists should be separate categories and functions" (12). Adultery is an action that transgresses social, cultural, and physical boundaries by creating confusion between classes. Tanner successfully demonstrates that barriers are both gendered and class oriented. Adultery and motherhood are conflicting actions. Adultery is, therefore, central to the argument that both novelists are confronting motherhood in different ways to transmit different morals by the way in which desire is expressed.

Yvonne Knibiehler sets forth a definition of the social concept of the French women in the eighteenth century. Knibiehler contends that during the Enlightenment, the spiritual dimension of motherhood, combined with the physical act of becoming a mother, removed any sense of independent self from women: "construire un modèle terrestre de la bonne mère, toujours soumise au père, mais valorisée par l'enfantement:

la fonction maternelle absorbe l'individualité de la femme."¹⁴ Women are not seen as individuals, but only in reference to their social role: to maintain order in the house which in turn maintains social order. Women are often categorized as either good mothers or dangerous women; both categories are reflections of society's influence on the construction of gender norms.

In a society which imposes roles on women, women's agency has limited spaces for expression. As we will see, the choice of friends is a space in which women have a limited freedom of choice.¹⁵ However, even this limited space can be directed by patriarchal authority. In *Claire d'Albe* the physical separation of Claire from her friend Elise is a purposeful act performed by d'Albe to test her faithfulness to him. D'Albe is fearful of Claire's friendship with Elise and the close bond he sees forming between them and separates the two friends. Claire transcribes M. d'Albe's confession as follows: "c'est du sein de cette jouissance que je vous arrache pour vous mener dans un pays nouveau, dans une terre éloignée" (6). His trust in and respect for Claire is based on her proving that she can find complete happiness as a wife and mother, despite being taken away from all the other pleasures in life that she has cultivated prior to their marriage. M. d'Albe is aware of the happiness of which he is depriving his wife and uses the isolation of the countryside to test her dedication to her role as wife and mother as

¹⁴ Yvonne Knibiehler, *Histoire des mères et de la maternité en Occident* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2000) 4.

¹⁵ See Janet Todd's work, *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

expected by society, her husband, and ultimately her father who unites them. Claire's biased, but tempered, letters imply that M. d'Albe's separation of the two and destruction of this symbiotic parenting bond was unjust and betrayed his selfish need to ascertain his wife's allegiance to him and his rules, but additionally shows that as his wife she had no control over his choice to move her.

Adulterous behavior provided women agency outside of the limits patriarchal society attempted to define. Adultery is the transgression of boundaries that have social, cultural, and physical implications. A woman's choice to engage in adultery confronted the social definition of virtue as a moral obligation to uphold social norms as well as breaching the physical boundary of the body and the mind. Thinking and acting on adulterous thoughts conflicts with the definition of virtue as chastity and moral and physical purity towards the husband.

1.1 Women Writer's after Rousseau

After presenting a compelling argument on adultery in Rousseau, Tanner jumps to the 1809 publication of Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, leaving a 45 year gap between the eighteenth century and the nineteenth. It is during this time that women's writing begins to occupy a significant place in literary publication. Rousseau's literary contribution to the French canon had farther reaching social implications on women's duty and his texts serve as a background of the literary tradition of exploring women's

duty in the novel that is taken up by women writers. Women's writing fills the gap between Rousseau and Cottin and this section will focus on examining specific women and their relationship to writing.

In Pierre Fauchery's substantial work *La Destinée féminine dans le roman européen du dix-huitième siècle* (1972), he credits the eighteenth century as giving rise to the representation of women's voice in the novel. Fauchery rightly claims that women writers of the eighteenth century begin to inhabit an ever-growing place in literary publication; however, he categorizes them as autobiographers, saying that the protagonist of a women writer is "encore et toujours elle-même" (111). Fauchery inherently limits the extent to which women writers engage in the process of literary creation. Joan Hinde Stewart, in her pioneering book *Gynographs*, seconds Fauchery's claim that there is a steady increase in literary production by women starting around the mid-eighteenth century, however, she sees a broader social and moral imperative at play in women's writing.¹⁶

Like Cottin, writers such as Marie Jeanne Riccoboni, Isabelle de Charrière, Olympe de Gouges, Félicité de Genlis, Germaine de Staël take part in a larger movement of women writers whose works shocked the contemporary reader, undermined social systems, and confronted the socially prescribed duties for women. Adultery, desire, and

¹⁶ Joan Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs: French Novels by Women of the Late Eighteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) 3.

passion are all themes accentuated by women writers, and it is precisely these themes and their confrontation with the ideal of women's duty and virtue and their representations of social transgressions that made these novels popular and appealing to readers in the late eighteenth century.

Women writers in the eighteenth century were considered literate women. For the purposes of this discussion, the term literate women will be used as Catherine R. Montfort and J.J. Allison define it in their introduction to *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*. According to Montfort and Allison, women writers had two characteristics in common: education and they all wrote texts meant for publication.¹⁷ In general, women were less educated than men; however, the majority of women authors were part of the upper class and had resources that allowed them to obtain an education.¹⁸ Authors like Isabelle de Charrière and Germaine de Staël were educated by governesses or tutors, whereas other women were self taught.¹⁹ Cottin's biographer,

¹⁷ J.J. Allison, *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*. (Alabama: Summa Publications, 1994) 4.

¹⁸ See Elisabeth Badinter's *Emilie, Emilie: l'ambition féminine au XVIIIè* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983). In *Emilie, Emilie*, Badinter evidences that a greater percentage of men knew how to write their name compared to women in both the upper and lower class; however, the percentage of women in the upper class who could write exceeded that of men in the lower class. See also, Mita Choudhury's work *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). Choudhury discusses female education and citizenship in the convent and the role politics played in deciding who controlled the information disseminated by the nuns.

¹⁹ Convents were another site of education for women. Charlotte Corday, a pivotal player in the French Revolution for killing Jean-Paul Marat, was also educated in a convent. Cottin references her in a letter while writing *Amélie Mansfield*. She writes: "Je veux écrire l'histoire de Charlotte Corday...Oui, je veux l'écrire, à mon goût, à ma manière; peut-être la blâmera-t-on, peut-être sera-t-elle mauvaise, n'importe. Je ne sais écrire que d'après mes propres idées: s'il me fallait penser comme on me conseille, je ne saurais plus penser du tout." (Leslie Sykes, *Madame Cottin* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1949) 322-23. While Cottin rarely references the Revolution directly in her works, Michael J. Call in *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* sees

Leslie Sykes, writes that for Cottin “ni elle ni sa cousine Julie n’avaient beaucoup d’instruction.”²⁰ While Cottin may have suffered from little formal instruction, it is clear from her correspondence that she was well-read.²¹

Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni’s (1713-1792) publishing career began later in her life. Her first career was as an actress for the Comédie Italienne in Paris. At the age of 40 she began publishing and several years later used the proceeds from her writing to retire from the theater.²² While she enjoyed moderate success in the theater, her novels were extremely popular. From 1780 to 1790 seven editions of her complete works were published. Her most popular novels, *Lettres de mistriss Fanni Butlerd* (1757), *Histoire du marquis de Cressy* (1758) and *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby* (1759), were all published prior to Rousseau’s genre-changing *Julie*, with *l’Histoire d’Ernestine* (1765) published four years after. The titles attest to the fascination many French novelists and readers had with English following the translation of English novelist Samuel Richardson into

traces of Corday’s story in *Amélie* and likens the protagonist’s anger and disgust by patriarchal society to similar feelings that drove Corday to kill.

²⁰ Sykes, 4.

²¹ Olympe de Gouges was uneducated and had no literary formation. She references this lack of formal training in the preface to her play *Le Bonheur primitif* (1789) by writing: “Jean-Jacques avait trop de lumières pour que son génie ne l’emportât trop loin, et c’est peut-être ce qui l’a empêché de saisir le véritable caractère de l’homme dans le temps primitif; mais moi, je me ressens de cette première ignorance, [...] mes opinions peuvent être plus justes que les siennes.” The nod to her limited education, which appears in many of her writings, may a humble, self-deprecating literary device or an example of flamboyant revolutionary rhetoric in which she gives herself authorial authority by accentuating the fact that she is not educated. In either case, she confirms her limited education, but exposes knowledge of literary and cultural references that she acquired on her own.

²² For the most recent biography of Riccoboni, see Emily A. Crosby *Une romancière oubliée: Madame Riccoboni* (Paris: F. Rieder, 1924).

French beginning in 1741. According to Heidi Bostic, Riccoboni's novels appear at a crucial juncture in the history of the French novel since she publishes after Richardson and prior to Rousseau.²³ Hinde Stewart underscores Riccoboni's literary importance by stressing that she was "one of the era's most renowned writers, male or female."²⁴

Riccoboni's most widely acclaimed novel, *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby*, confronted libertine notions of unrestrained physical pleasures. In her novel, Riccoboni depicts what some critics have called a rape and what others have called a seduction.²⁵ Riccoboni never uses either term, but describes a scene involving sex and aggressive behavior.²⁶ The male protagonist, Milord d'Ossery finds himself alone with his friend's sister, Miss Jenny. They find themselves by chance in the same room. The two are thrown into complete darkness when she moves to exit the room and blows out the only candle. As they both navigate the room to find the cord to call for more light, Miss Jenny trips over the table that held the candle and d'Ossery falls with her. Her laughter distracts him and, driven by "le seul instinct", he has sex with her.²⁷ Immediately, he

²³ Heidi Bostic, *The Fiction of Enlightenment* (Newark University of Delaware Press, 2010) 107.

²⁴ Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs*. 74.

²⁵ Suellen Diaconoff titles her chapter in *Through the Reading Glass: Women, Books, and Sex in the French Enlightenment* "Reading Rape", whereas Hinde Stewart calls it a "passing infidelity" in her work *The Novels of Madame Riccoboni* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 82.

²⁶ Suellen Diaconoff underscores the ambiguity between the two terms. She writes that: "in the language of the eighteenth century, rape and seduction are not adequately distinguished, so that the crime of rape is often treated as morally unsanctioned seduction" (232).

²⁷ Jean-Marie Riccoboni *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby* (Paris: Les Editions Desjonquères, 1997 [Originally 1759]) 149.

regains his senses and the reader is left with the image of Miss Jenny crying in the moonlight.

This scene can be interpreted as a reaction to libertine fiction. Jean-Marie Goulemot states that in libertine fiction “the presence of rape is at the very heart of the amorous practices.”²⁸ However, in Riccoboni’s text, there is no seduction or pleasure. Riccoboni’s novel contrasts sharply to the characters’ blatant manipulation in Choderlos de Laclos *Liaisons dangereuses*, and, after its publication 1782, sparked a four week exchange of letters between the two authors. During this time, Riccoboni and Laclos discussed the purpose of literature and their philosophical views on esthetics.²⁹

Rousseau’s *Julie* serves to establish a tradition of sentimental writing and, while Riccoboni’s works can be considered pre-sentimental, Isabelle de Charrière’s novels resemble the epistolary sentimental novel established by Rousseau. Charrière, a Dutch writer, spent most of her life in Switzerland. The author of plays, pamphlets, and music, her most celebrated novels were: *Lettres neuchâtelaises* (1784), *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie* (1784), *Lettres écrites de Lausanne* (1785), *Caliste ou continuation de Lettres écrites de Lausanne* (1787). Charrière’s own fiction diverges from the dominant

²⁸Jean-Marie Goulemot, *Laclos et le libertinage, 1782-1982* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982) 166-167.

²⁹ In her book *Textual Promiscuities*, Antoinette Marie Sol discusses the literary engagement with Riccoboni and Laclos. The third chapter examines Laclos’s reading of Riccoboni’s fiction and explores the manner in which Laclos literally makes use of the feminine voice, plot elements and physical space in Riccoboni’s works (Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 2002).

trends in French literature of the eighteenth century in one key aspect.³⁰ Charrière leaves her novels unfinished, allowing the future of the protagonist to remain open for interpretation. Her contemporary, Germaine de Staël commented on Charrière's first novel, writing in a letter dated August 27, 1793: "Je me suis intéressée vivement aux lettres neufchâteloises mais je ne sais rien de plus pénible que votre manière de commencer sans finir, ce sont des amis dont vous nous séparez."³¹

While Staël complains about Charrière's ending, her novels provoked discussion also because of her representation of the lower class. In *Lettres neuchâteloises*, Julianne is a woman of a lower class who engages in an affair with the aristocratic Henri. She becomes pregnant with his child and is given money by Henri's uncle to leave, allowing Henri to continue his relationship with Marianne de la Prise. While unresolved, this ending allows for the potential for the two aristocrats to marry. Her first novel confronts the family dynamic established in the sentimental tradition. Like other women authors, Charrière subtly challenges the social order. According to Charlotte Daniels, "Charrière has recourse to strategies closely related to new familial discourses but which exploit contradictions in Rousseau's vision to justify dissenting behavior."³² Charrière allows for her protagonists to maintain social order since the threat of social dissension is both present and absent in representation of Julianne's illegitimate child.

³⁰ Allison Jenene *Revealing Difference: The Fiction of Isabelle de Charrière* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995) 14.

³¹ Isabelle de Charrière *Œuvres Complètes* (Amsterdam: G. A. van Oorschot, 1979-84) 4:163.

³² Charlotte Daniels *Subverting the Family Romance* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000) 69.

In *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie*, the woman's body plays a crucial role in examining discourses of power and resistance during the Revolution. In the treatise written in 1831 by Saint-Just, *Fragments sur les institutions républicaines*, he instructs women to breast-feed since it is the foundation of the educational system. Charrière's protagonist foreshadows this future discourse on women's bodies. Mistriss Henley attempts to find happiness in her marriage by conforming to her husband's demands. Despite her failed attempts to conform to her husband's desires, she is happy when she becomes pregnant. Her body immediately becomes a subject for masculine discourse as her husband consults a doctor to determine whether to allow her to breast feed their unborn child without consideration of the mother to be:

A son avis, rien au monde ne pouvait dispenser une mère du premier et du plus sacré de ses devoirs, que le danger de nuire à son enfant par un vice de tempérament ou des défauts de caractère, et il me dit que son intention était de consulter le docteur M. son ami, pour savoir si mon extrême vivacité et mes fréquentes impatiences devaient faire préférer une étrangère. De moi, de ma santé, de mon plaisir, pas un mot.³³

The female body becomes replaceable. The ideas reflected in M. Henley's actions are an allusion to the ideas regarding breastfeeding during infancy and the role of the woman as discussed in Rousseau's *Emile* (1762). Confronting this dominant discourse, Charrière's heroine emphasizes the separation between women's duty and desire. Mistriss Henley remains silent, but uses her body to resist against the power her

³³ Isabelle de Charrière, *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie* (New York: Modern Language association, 1993 [originally 1784]) 40.

husband imposes. The last words from Mistriss Henley question the future authority her husband will hold over her body: "Je ne suis qu'une femme, je ne m'ôterai pas la vie, je n'en aurai pas le courage; si je deviens mère, je souhaite de n'en avoir jamais la volonté; mais le chagrin tue aussi. Dans un an, dans deux ans, vous apprendrez, je l'espère, que je suis raisonnable et heureuse, ou que je ne suis plus" (40). The end of Charrière's novel proposes a site of resistance to masculine control in Mistriss Henley's body.

Each woman writer at the time treats themes of education and desire in her novels, and Félicité de Genlis does not differ. However, whereas writers like Charrière and Riccoboni call for a greater equality in the education provided both men and women and express a desire for autonomy, Madame de Genlis used her writing to promote ideals that maintained gender difference and is best known for her strong criticism and her thoughts on education.³⁴ Genlis believed that novels should be used as a way to transmit moral values and "considered novel writing as consonant with woman's duties, providing the writing was moral and modest."³⁵ She produced several works that expressed her theories on education, including *Théâtre d'éducation* published in four volumes from 1779 to 1780, *Les Annales de la vertu* (1781), and *Adèle et Théodore* (1782). In particular, she explores the role of the mother in her children's education in *Adèle et Théodore*. In this text, Genlis stresses the importance of reading as the mother

³⁴ For a biography of Félicité de Genlis see Gabriel de Broglie's *Madame de Genlis* (Paris: Perrin, 1985).

³⁵ Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs*. 189.

chooses books for her children to read as moral and educational tools, to counteract bad behavior. However, the books are distributed sparingly to inspire a stronger desire to read.

In her work *Les Mères rivales ou la Calmonie* (1808), Genlis uses the theme of social duty in distinctly different ways than the other authors mentioned. Genlis describes the dangers of passionate love outside of patriarchal authority and examines filial piety; however, her protagonists transform passion into a socially productive tool. As Lesley H. Walker asserts: "Through a series of sacrifices, passion is purged of its excess and transformed into productive and presumable harmonious familial relations...amorous passion has been converted into filial duty and tenderness...."³⁶ *Les Mères rivales* contrasts Cottin's portrayal of female duty. Diaconoff attributes this to Genlis's "belief that the primary function of all reading must be to construct the moral individual."³⁷ Amorous passion eventually separates Cottin's protagonists from their devotion to moral and filial duties as a mother, sister, and daughter.

Genlis was one of Cottin's most severe critics and dedicated a substantial portion of her provocative work, *De L'Influence des femmes sur la littérature française* (1811), to discussing the moral impropriety of *Claire d'Albe*. Genlis sought to compile a literary history of women writers, and dedicates thirty pages to Cottin in her last and longest

³⁶ Lesley H. Walker, *A Mother's Love: Crafting Feminine Virtue in Enlightenment France* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008) 105-6.

³⁷ Diaconoff, 85.

article. According to Genlis, Cottin deserves a space among other most famous women writers at the time, such as Graffigny, Riccoboni, and many others, because of her influence on the literary world: “on doit juger avec sévérité les ouvrages qui méritent d’être lus; une critique réfléchie un hommage.”³⁸ And judge Cottin she does. At the same time that she credits Cottin for creating a new genre of fiction which she calls the “genre passionné,” she vehemently criticizes *Claire d’Albe* for violating fictional and social conventions:

ce roman est à tous égards un mauvais ouvrage, sans intérêt, sans imagination, sans vraisemblance et d’une moralité révoltante; mais comme on a eu le triste honneur de former une nouvelle école de romanciers, qu’il est le premier où l’on ait représenté l’amour délirant, furieux, et féroce, et une héroïne *vertueuse, religieuse, angélique*, et se livrant sans mesure et sans pudeur à tous les emportements d’un amour effréné et criminel. (242-43)

Genlis’s main concern with Cottin’s novel is that her protagonist, Claire, uses a vocabulary that contradicts the language of a virtuous woman. Genlis uses Claire’s third letter to Elise as an example. Claire’s description of spring has a visceral affect on her: “déjà j’éprouve ses douces influences, tout mon sang se porte vers mon cœur qui bat plus violemment à l’approche du printemps. [...] le désir naît, parcourt l’univers, et effleure tous les êtres de son aile légère; tous atteints et le suivent; il leur ouvre la route du plaisir.”³⁹ According to Genlis’s critique, virtue and desire are conflicting values in a

³⁸ Félicité de Genlis, *De l’influence des femmes sur la littérature française, comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs; ou, Précis de l’histoire des femmes françaises les plus célèbres* Vol. 2. (Paris: Maradan, 1811) 240.

³⁹ Cottin, *Claire d’Albe*. 12.

heroine. Genlis rightly points out the central conflict of *Claire d'Albe*, that virtue and duty are opposed by sexual love. Desire and passion are destructive qualities that threaten the virtuous nature of the heroine.

Genlis's primary criticism of this novel lies in the representation of sexual passion and what she sees as Cottin's failure to strongly condemn the heroine's adulterous behavior. According to Hinde Stewart, for Genlis, "virtuous women are never suicidal and adulterous women are not virtuous."⁴⁰ Genlis goes as far as stating that the pages dedicated to the sex scene on Claire's father's tomb should be suppressed: "Non-seulement une femme, mais un homme qui aurait quelque respect pour le public, n'oserait transcrire la page infâme et dégoûtante qui suit ce discours, dont l'extravagance et l'impiété font toute l'énergie."⁴¹ For Genlis, the fact that the "sage et prudente" (254) Elise describes Claire's final moments does nothing to redeem the morally reprehensible action. Despite Elise's immediate declaration that: "Des années de vertu sans tache, des mois de combats et de victoires sont effacés par ce seul instant!"⁴², Genlis sees this conclusion as small solace compared to the overshadowing depictions of sexual pleasure throughout the novel.⁴³

⁴⁰ Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs*. 193.

⁴¹ Genlis, *De l'influence des femmes*. 253-54.

⁴² Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 148.

⁴³ Genlis writes: "Mais à quoi servent quelques lignes raisonnables, lorsque dans le cours de l'ouvrage, on n'a cherché qu'à colorer le vice du charme et de la vertu?" (255-56).

Each of these authors seeks to make the domestic sphere public through the production and distribution of novels. However, despite their acceptance in the literary elite of the time, many of these authors have been forgotten by the French canon. Hinde Stewart argues that one possible reason authors like Riccoboni, Charrière, and Cottin were left out of the canon was due to the content of their works and the intense representations of the domestic.⁴⁴ Reinvestigating Cottin's representations of the domestic in *Claire d'Albe* uncovers the conflicting relationship between desire and duty. It has yet to be fully examined how Cottin's first novel, which describes one of the most striking scenes of adulterous passion in literature at the time, defines motherhood as a dominant element of women's virtue and its conflicting relationship to desire.

1. 2 Motherhood in the Novel

Our second principle of analysis is that of the relationship of a mother to her children as depicted differently in the two novels. We must therefore examine the social and cultural relationship of motherhood to duty before entering the literary imaginary of the novel. Important to the discussion of women's duty is reproductive labor. Reproductive labor and the importance placed on producing and mothering children has legitimate applications to discussions about the domestic sphere in the eighteenth century. The term reproductive labor is most often associated with the nineteenth

⁴⁴ Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs*. 21.

century.⁴⁵ The origin of the term came from the growth of industrialization that created a wider gap between the domestic sphere and the public sphere, with men's work being increasingly focused on industry and women's work focused on maintaining the home.⁴⁶ Reproductive labor can be defined as activities performed by women in the private sphere that are "necessary for the growth of patriarchal capitalism because they maintain, sustain, stabilize, and *reproduce* (both biologically and socially) the labor force."⁴⁷ From the beginning, the idea of reproductive labor was inextricably linked to an analysis of the gendered division of labor and its central role in perpetuating women's subordination.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Our Mother's Grief: Racial Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families." *Journal of Family History* 13.4 (1988): 415-431. Thornton Dill asserts that "the theoretical distinction between productive and reproductive labor is crucial to feminist discussions of the development of separate spheres of male and female labor that developed in the 19th century which led to the increased confinement of white wives to reproductive labor in the home" (431).

⁴⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie R. Hochschild, "Maid to Order: The Politics of Other Women's Work." *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003). "Marxist feminists Maria Rosa Dallacosta and Selma James proposed in 1972 that the home was in fact an economically productive and significant workplace, an extension of the actual factory, since housework served to 'reproduce the labor power' of others, particularly men" (465).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* The concept of reproductive labor was originally taken from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who outlined the difference between the production of goods and the labor force necessary to maintain this production. This idea was later taken up by Marxist feminists in the 1970's to investigate unpaid women's work in the home. Most recently, reproductive labor has been used to explore differences in race and class and investigate how women's work is influenced by modern technology that allows surrogacy and alternative parenting. On race, see Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor" *Signs* 18. 1 (Autumn, 1992): 1-43. On surrogacy, see Debra Satz, "Markets in Women's Reproductive Labor" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 21. 2 (Spring, 1992): 107-131. On parenting, see Amy Mullin, *Preconceiving Pregnancy and Childcare: Ethics, Expertise, and Reproductive Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ Mignon Duffy, "Doing the Dirty Work: Gender, Race, and Reproductive Labor in Historical Perspective." *Gender and Society* 21.3 (June, 2007): 315.

This definition of reproductive labor has clear attachments to changing ideologies after the Revolution of 1789 which produced confusion in the importance of social hierarchies. Denise Z. Davidson in her perceptive work on class and society after the Revolution argues that:

Postrevolutionary confusion about whether birth, wealth, or merit would determine one's place in society also made gender distinctions particularly salient. Because gender seemed more 'natural' than other categories of differentiation, women's dress, morals, education, and comportment emerged as central to the processes of observation and categorization that helped build a sense of how postrevolutionary society would operate.⁴⁹

Literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries illustrates this class confusion and a desire to order and maintain specific gender roles.

Eighteenth-century novels often depict a society in which women's activities are relegated to the domestic sphere by their fathers and then their husbands and men's activities are performed in the public sphere.⁵⁰ This served as a literary example of a gendered division of labor. While women's work was often centered on household activities, women's work for the wealthy social class in

⁴⁹ Denise Z. Davidson, *France after Revolution: Urban Life, Gender, and the New Social Order*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 2.

⁵⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989). The social distinctions of the public and the private sphere are taken from Jürgen Habermas's transformative work in which he establishes three categories of Bourgeois society: the private sphere, the public sphere and the sphere of public authority. The private sphere encompasses the household and its environs while the public sphere mediates between the private sphere and the sphere of public authority. (30)

the eighteenth century included a devotion to family, procreation, and the education of children.⁵¹⁵²

In the philosophical environment of the Enlightenment that encouraged social solidarity, the private sphere was a space where mothers were expected to raise children to follow social norms, thereby forming future subjects and educating children to perpetuate gendered social roles.⁵³ For women, the private sphere was identity forming and maintained a circular logic of subjugation. A daughter's role was to abide by the moral code of her parents and become a loyal wife who would become a mother and thereby continue the cycle. Reproductive labor can be used as a term to understand the confining nature of women's duty and the inextricable relationship to motherhood that duty imposed.

⁵¹ See Evelyn Nanko Glenn, "Gender, Race, and the Organization of Reproductive Labor." *The Critical Study of Work: Labor, Technology, and Global Production* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001). Evelyn Nakano Glenn defines social reproduction as a term that "was coined by feminist scholars to refer to the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people on both a daily basis and intergenerationally" (71).

⁵² It is important to note that certain scholars question the complete reification of social spheres. Certain scholars suggest that women were not segregated from the public sphere. On the overlap of the public and private spheres, see Elizabeth Colwill, "Women's Empire and the Sovereignty of Man in La Décade Philosophique, 1794-1807." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29. 3 (Spring, 1996), pp. 265-289 and Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in the Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). In addition, scholars question the diminished influence of women in politics after the Revolution. Women, like the salonnières, held positions of power and influence prior to the Revolution, but salons run by women still existed after the Revolution. See Steven Kale, "Women, Salons, and the State in the Aftermath of the French Revolution." *Journal of Women's History* 13 (2002): 54-80. However, the use of the public and private sphere is still relevant to the analysis of women's literature in the late eighteenth-century since "the particular ways in which [women] chose to engage with public life suggest that women were consciously negotiating increasingly well-defined behavioral norms for the genders and the classes." Davidson, 5.

⁵³ Bonnie Thornton Dill argues that reproductive labor includes education. A mother is required to perform duties which encompass "bearing children, and planning, organizing, and carrying out a wide variety of tasks associated with their socialization" (431).

Despite Enlightenment ideals that called for rights for all men, women were relegated to the role of mother with their rights encompassing the management of the home.⁵⁴ This stance was corroborated by Pierre Roussel's study titled the *Système physique et moral de la femme*, first published in 1775, which connects a woman's biological ability to have children to her function in society.⁵⁵ Throughout Roussel's text, he argues that women's bodies are naturally made for giving birth: "la nature travaille à mettre la femme en état de se reproduire, et à donner aux organes qui doivent servir à cette œuvre importante."⁵⁶ He continues in the seventh chapter, *Des moyens naturels qui conservent, et des causes accidentelles qui peuvent changer ou faire dégénérer le tempérament de la femme*, by explaining that women's delicate sensible system renders them only suitable for a life that is entirely circumscribed by the domestic sphere in order to protect their health:

La science qui les achète presque toujours aux dépens de leur santé, ne saurait dédommager les femmes de la détérioration de leur tempérament et de leurs charmes. Qu'elles s'abandonnent aux hommes la vaine fumée

⁵⁴ Traian Stoianovich, "Gender and Family: Myths, Models and Ideologies." *The History Teacher* 15.1 (1981). "Around 1750, for example, domesticity was a virtue limited to provincial noblewomen and to an undetermined portion of the bourgeoisie. The married woman of the people had not yet become a homemaker: 'Cleaning, washing, or mending clothes with any frequency, even cooking and child-rearing were fairly marginal aspects of her existence.'" (72).

⁵⁵ Roussel's text was not the only one examine the role of the body in determining social roles. In 1802, Pierre Cabanis published *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* in which he attempts to prove that men have a deepened sense of sensibility compared to the fleeting feelings of women because of differences in their internal organs. He writes: "les opérations désignées sous le nom de morales, résultent directement, comme celles qu'on appelle physique, de l'action, soit de certaines organes particuliers, soit de l'ensemble du système vivant; et que tous les phénomènes de l'intelligence et de la volonté prennent leur source dans l'état primitif ou accidentel de l'organisation" *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* Vol. 2. 3rd Ed. (Paris: Caille et Ravier, 1815) 2.

⁵⁶ *Système physique et moral de la femme* (Paris: Chez Caille et Ravier, 1813) 47.

qu'ils cherchent dans cette acquisition dangereuse: la nature a assez fait pour elles; ce serait un attentat contre elle, de flétrir les dons précieux qu'elles lui doivent. (59-60)⁵⁷

Roussel instructs that women can only remain healthy by devoting themselves to motherhood and avoiding any intellectual stimulation beyond what they encounter in their daily lives.

The *Encyclopédie* also supported the claim that women were destined to be mothers and fulfill this role in society. Louis de Jaucourt defines woman's role in this way:

Son bonheur [woman's happiness] est d'ignorer ce que le monde appelle *les plaisirs*, sa gloire est de vivre ignorée. Renfermée dans les devoirs de *femme* & de mère, elle consacre ses jours à la pratique des vertus obscures: occupée du gouvernement de sa famille, elle règne sur son mari par la complaisance, sur ses enfants par la douceur, sur ses domestiques par la bonté: sa maison est la demeure des sentiments religieux, de la piété filiale, de l'amour conjugal, de la tendresse maternelle, de l'ordre, de la paix intérieure, du doux sommeil, & de la santé [...].⁵⁸

Motherhood can be seen as the way in which identity and position in society is learned and produced. Terry Arendell asserts that women's gender identity is reinforced by mothering; therefore, womanhood and motherhood are presumed to be synonymous

⁵⁷ In her controversial article, "Sex and Sensibility: Pierre Roussel's *Système physique et moral de la femme*", Anne C. Villa argues that Roussel while establishing a "biomedical engineering of sensibility" was attempting to outline the makings of an enlightened being, albeit male. She contends that sex was not necessarily the primary issue at play in the late-eighteenth-century attempt to establish biological criteria for enlightenability; rather, type of sensibility was." "Sex and Sensibility: Pierre Roussel's *Système physique et moral de la femme*." *Representations* 52 (Fall, 1995): 88.

⁵⁸ Louis de Jaucourt, "Femme." *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2011) 6:471.

when defining women's identity.⁵⁹ Motherhood can then be defined as the relational and logistical work of child rearing. This role was subordinate to the role of the husband in the home and required a rejection of all other pleasures that might distract from maintaining domestic order and raising children.

While educational manuals and texts were published for parents about how to best raise children prior to the eighteenth century, the education of children began primarily to be perceived as the duty of the mother around 1760.⁶⁰ According to Christine Théré, "maternity was first evoked in terms of duty, the principal charge being the education of children. [...] It was the mother who was responsible for transmitting moral precepts and virtues and thus contributing to the maintenance of 'good morals and manners'."⁶¹ Since girls were destined to become mothers, there was a growing preoccupation with education and the depiction of women in educational manuals, theater, and novels during the eighteenth century.

⁵⁹ Terry Arendell, "Conceiving and Investigating Motherhood: The Decade's Scholarship." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62.4 (2000). "Mothering is associated with women because universally it is women who do the work of mothering. Motherhood is entwined with notions of femininity and women's gender identity is reinforced by mothering. Especially since the 19th century, mothering has been presumed to be the primary identity for most adult women. That is, womanhood and motherhood are treated as synonymous identities and categories of experience" (1192).

⁶⁰ In the early eighteenth century, education manuals were published, such as *L'avis d'une mère à son fils et à sa fille* (1728) by the salonnière Anne-Thérèse de Courcelles, known as the marquise de Lambert; however, there is a distinct rise in education manuals published by women for girls towards the latter half of the century.

⁶¹ Christine Théré, "Women and Birth Control in Eighteenth-Century France." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32.4 (Summer 1999) 559.

Of the texts published on education, none had more resonance than Rousseau's novel *Julie* and his treatise *Emile*, published in 1762.⁶² These works are often characterized as shaping the modern concept of the family and influencing the late eighteenth-century republican ideal of motherhood that relegated woman's role in society as mother and purveyor of the hearth and home.⁶³ As we will see in *Julie*, Rousseau constructs a literary space in which to illustrate his view on women's education and duty to family; however, *Emile* is equally important in discussing Rousseau's influence on the literate society of the late eighteenth-century since it establishes a tradition of thinking that is confronted in the sentimental novels written by women after its publication and into the nineteenth century.

Emile, a bildungsroman, consists of five books in which the narrator takes on the role of "gouverneur" of Emile and raises him from birth to adulthood. This text was important in transmitting the ideals of a more "natural" way to parent to the growing numbers of literate society. The doctrines relating to motherhood that are described in the first book include the importance of breastfeeding and the rejection of swaddling as unnatural practices in the raising of healthy individuals. While the use of wet nurses

⁶² For more on the influence of the eighteenth century, and Rousseau in particular, on shaping the philosophical, cultural, and educational approaches to domesticity and child rearing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Jennifer J. Poliel, *Rousseau's Daughters: Domesticity, Education, and Autonomy in Modern France* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2008).

⁶³ Elisabeth Badinter, *Mother Love: Myth and Reality: Motherhood in Modern History* (New York: Macmillan, 1981). She cites Rousseau's work as integral to redefining the concept of motherhood in France: "C'est Rousseau, avec la publication d'*Emile* en 1762, qui cristallise les idées nouvelles et donne le véritable coup d'envoi à la famille moderne, c'est à dire à la famille fondée sur l'amour maternel" (42).

predates the eighteenth century, there had been an expansion of the practice to all levels of the urban social hierarchy with the bourgeoisie comprising the largest percentage of the population sending their children to women of lower classes to breastfeed their children.⁶⁴ Certainly the doctrines of the narrator/teacher in *Emile* are a reaction against the social trend that separated infants from their mothers. The narrator/teacher states that the use of wet nurses is the result of mothers' rejection of their natural duties to the detriment of the child: "Depuis que les mères, méprisant leurs enfants, n'ont plus voulu nourrir leurs enfants, il a fallu les confier à des femmes mercenaires, qui se trouvant ainsi mères d'enfants étrangers pour qui la nature ne leur disait rien, n'ont cherché qu'à s'épargner de la peine."⁶⁵ While the narrator outlines certain obligations that a mother should follow in finding a good wet nurse if necessary, it is clear that according to him the best method of breastfeeding a child is for the biological mother to perform the act.

The treatise contributed to the creation of a new social code whereby a woman was considered unnatural if she did not perform these motherly duties. *Emile* was not the only text in support of breastfeeding, but was one of the major texts that, as Badinter explains, contributed to "engendering a myth that is still tenaciously supported two hundred years later: maternal instinct, or the spontaneous love of all mothers for their

⁶⁴ Elisabeth Badinter. *L'Amour en plus: histoire de l'amour maternel (XVIIe-XXe siècle)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980) 117.

⁶⁵ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, ou De l'éducation* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1966 [originally 1762]) 44.

children.”⁶⁶ The “natural” maternal ideal presented in *Emile* becomes a common trope among women writers such as Charrière and Cottin.

As we have seen in *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie*, Charrière’s protagonist directly confronts the idea that breastfeeding is a natural duty. In a letter to her friend, Mistriss Henley’s transcribes her husband’s words that breastfeeding is a woman’s “plus sacré” duty when discussing whether or not to breastfeed their unborn child. Her husband’s quick decision to let the doctor decide whether or not to breastfeed becomes an immediate source of angst. M. Henley sees breastfeeding as a duty that can be replaced by someone other than the mother. Mistriss Henley’s reasons for wanting to breastfeed seem to conform to the “natural” ideal of motherly duties presented in *Emile*; however, she writes that her husband’s decision does not take into consideration “[s]a santé” and “[s]on plaisir”. For her, breastfeeding is a duty that she is not only obligated to perform, but one that she invites. The focus of her argument against her husband’s wishes moves from fulfilling the duties of a nurturing mother, and introduces the element of women’s desire, agency, and personal safety.

Cottin’s protagonist is confronted with a similar ethical dilemma in which her personal welfare is at stake. Claire develops a fever while breastfeeding. As her condition worsens, she decides to wean her daughter for fear that her milk might harm her daughter’s health. The doctor and her husband attempt to convince her to continue

⁶⁶ Badinter, *Mother Love*. 117.

for her own safety. According to the doctor, if Claire stopped breastfeeding while sick the milk could pass into her blood “et causer une revolution fâcheuse.”⁶⁷ Whereas Mistriss Henley feels that her health is not being taken into consideration, Claire is willing to accept the will of her husband and doctor. Before handing over her daughter to her husband, Claire, however, evokes their shared duty as parents: “Cette enfant est à vous, mon ami, lui ai-je dit, et vos droits sur elle sont aussi puissant que les miens; mais oubliez-vous qu’en lui donnant la vie, nous prîmes l’engagement sacré de lui sacrifier la nôtre” (48). Her husband eventually concedes and allows Claire to continue breastfeeding.

In both examples, the women see breastfeeding as a natural duty and are willing to confront their husbands’ wishes in order to fulfill their desires. The men attempt to assert control over the woman’s body; however, the women retain agency within the social constraints of the domestic sphere by asserting ownership over their bodies, pregnancies, and mothering actions. The female protagonists’ devotion to the duties of motherhood even before the birth of their children or while their children are still breastfeeding, shows the impact of *Emile* and the changing notion of women’s role in society and its relationship to women’s bodies.

In addition to this Rousseauian ideal of early motherly responsibilities found in book 1 of *Emile*, the book’s final section introduces Sophie and outlines the woman’s role

⁶⁷ Cottin, *Claire d’Albe*. 48.

as a young daughter and in a marriage. Sophie is Emile's wife, given to him by the narrator as the final step in Emile's education and progress towards adulthood. Sophie is described as a passive complement to Emile. The comparison between Emile and Sophie relies on nature and anatomy to create separate social roles for each. The narrator explains that the differences in anatomy between the two sexes affect the individual experience and role in the relationship and, as such, society:

De cette diversité naît la première différence assignable entre les rapports moraux de l'un et de l'autre. L'un doit être actif et fort, l'autre passif et faible: il faut nécessairement que l'un veuille et puisse, il suffit que l'autre résiste peu. Ce principe établi, il s'ensuit que la femme est faite spécialement pour plaire à l'homme. Si l'homme doit lui plaire à son tour, c'est d'une nécessité moins directe: son mérite est dans sa puissance; il plaît pour cela seul qu'il est fort. Ce n'est pas ici la loi de l'amour, j'en conviens; mais celle de la nature, antérieure à l'amour même.⁶⁸

Natural anatomical differences, therefore, create gendered social divisions which are reflected in the formal and informal education provided for each sex. Rousseau defines nature differently for men and women: "For Emile, nature is to be construed as a guide for a future form of a man, a rejuvenating and purifying source which can develop man's essential original 'nature'.[...] For Sophie, on the other hand, nature is already present."⁶⁹ It is a woman's natural duty to become a mother; therefore, her education should prepare her for this function. In this way, *Emile* provides an educational model for Sophie that can be used for all women in society.

⁶⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*. 466.

⁶⁹ Jean Bloch, "Laclos and Women's Education." *French Studies* 38.2 (April, 1984): 150.

Emile outlines the difference in education provided for boys and girls. The son was educated to leave the private sphere of the household and become an active participant in society, whereas many literary representations in the eighteenth century show that girls seemingly were raised to repeat the cycle from birth to motherhood that Rousseau outlines in *Emile*. As demonstrated by the dialogue between the young girl and her nurse, girls will become responsible for the education of their own children, their careers predestined according to their gender from birth. The narrator creates an imagined dialogue between a young girl and her nurse:

La Bonne: Et que deviennent les grandes filles?

La Petite: Elles deviennent femmes.

La Bonne: Et que deviennent les femmes?

La Petite: Elles deviennent mères. (495-96)

This dialogue serves as an educational tool for the young girl as she recites what is a presupposed path for all women. According to this logic, women are biologically and socially destined to become mothers; therefore, to be a woman is to be a mother and all education is intended to promote this end. The narrator constructs a “natural” ideal and normative experience, where motherhood and woman are defined in relation to man.

The narrator of *Emile* argues that women should not be raised in ignorance, but qualifies that women are at a disadvantage when educated beyond what role nature imposes on them. The narrator states:

Cultiver dans les femmes les qualités de l’homme, et négliger celles qui leur sont propres, c’est donc visiblement travailler à leur préjudice. [...] Elles doivent apprendre beaucoup de choses, mais seulement celles qu’il

leur convient de savoir. Soit que je considère la destination particulière du sexe, soit que j'observe ses penchants, soit que je compte ses devoirs, tout concourt également à m'indiquer la forme d'éducation qui lui convient. (474)

Emile is taught to embrace all aspects of education; however, Sophie is restricted and is only allowed a minimal amount of understanding in certain areas. This constrained notion of education for girls was predominantly based on their future role as wives and mothers.

This circular logic seems to leave no room for women's independence, choice, and desire beyond the patriarchal society of the eighteenth century, since the role of the woman is prescribed from birth; however, Rousseau does provide a radical space for women's agency.⁷⁰ Sophie is allowed to choose her husband. She ends up being treated like a child by her parents and the narrator imagines her father, stating: "Vous choisirez, et nous serons consultés. [...] L'époux qui vous convient doit être de votre choix et non pas du nôtre" and "la naissance, les biens, le rang, l'opinion, n'entreront pour rien dans nos raisons. Prenez un honnête homme dont la personne vous plaise et dont le caractère vous convienne" (526). Despite Rousseau's imaginary ideal, his novel *Julie* directly contradicts Sophie's choice. Julie is unmarried, yet still unable to choose St. Preux because he comes from an inferior social class.

⁷⁰ What can be seen as female independence and choice usually results in the death of the female protagonist or her removal from society. Several examples from eighteenth-century texts being Diderot's *La Religieuse*, published posthumously in 1796, Choderlos de Laclos's *Liaisons dangereuses*, 1782, not to mention *Julie* and *Claire d'Albe*.

Emile's influence on French society can be seen in particular by the immediate publication of education manuals, most often by women, designed to teach mothers how to educate their children. Texts outlining how to educate children were certainly already present in the late seventeenth century, as evidenced by Fénelon's *De l'éducation des filles*, published in 1687, one of the first texts focusing on and outlining the lack of education for girls compared to that received by boys.⁷¹ Fénelon's work suggests that the lack of education women received at the time was a detriment to society, and proposed to change that by offering women limited education in mathematics and home management while stressing the importance of a strong education in the teachings of the Church. However, this concept was brought to the forefront of the literary milieu in the eighteenth century with a steady increase in educational texts outlining the importance of education and women's role in society.

Of note is that many of these manuals were written from personal experience and for or about the writer's own children. In 1764, Adelaïde d'Espinassy published a small brochure of only eighty-four pages titled *Essai sur l'éducation des demoiselles*. She

⁷¹François Fénelon, *De l'éducation des filles* (Paris, Librairie des bibliophiles, 1885). While openly supporting religious beliefs, he praises convents as being "presque la seule ressource d'éducation pour les jeunes filles" (xxv), but proposes that mothers take charge of their daughter's education because "les filles n'y entendent parler du monde comme d'une espèce d'enchantement" (Ibid.). For more on Fénelon's *Traité de l'Éducation des filles* see Claire Boulard Jouslin, "Eighteenth-Century England Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies 12. 2 (Fall 2012): 48-77. According to Jouslin, Fénelon's book was, however, of interest to Protestant thinkers and attracted a British following that far exceeded the interest of French readers at the time. *De l'éducation des filles* was translated into English and published in London in 1669 and reedited seven times prior to 1750. (49) Claire Boulard Jouslin argues that Fénelon was as influential as Rousseau in eighteenth-century England and explores the reasons behind the popularity of his text in England, Ireland, and Scotland.

begins her *Avis de l'Auteur* by stating that she wrote the text at the bequest of her friends, and that she had no intention of becoming an author: "je n'eus jamais l'intention de m'ériger Auteur, j'en connais trop le danger; d'ailleurs je n'ai point les talents qui y sont nécessaires. Lorsque je composai cet Essai d'éducation, je n'eus en vue qu'une Niece que j'aime, et qui dans l'âge le plus tendre promet beaucoup."⁷² D'Espinassy entered the literary discussion in direct reaction to *Emile*. While sympathetic to Rousseau's intentions to protect young women from "les passions dangereuses", a theme echoed in *Julie*, she seeks to improve upon Rousseau's teachings:

Il nous a tracé, dans son *Emile*, un être fantastique qui n'existera jamais. Le portrait de sa Sophie est plus dans le vrai à quelques égards, et l'éducation qu'il suppose qu'elle a reçue revient à celle que je voudrais qu'on donnât aux jeunes demoiselles. Mais il ne fait qu'effleurer cette manière; il ne paraît pas juger les femmes capables de soutenir une certaine éducation; elles ne sont nées, selon lui, que pour plier continuellement sous le joug d'un époux. [...] Le but de mon éducation est d'éloigner de ma jeune élève toutes les passions dangereuses à son sexe, et de la rendre aussi sensée qu'aimable. (4-6)

Almost a decade later in 1774, Louise d'Épinay, a salonnière and author, published *Conversations d'Émilie*, a dialogue about her grand-daughter. She also published *Lettres à mon fils: essais sur l'éducation*, a text with the primary concern of how to educate boys, in 1759, which was awarded the Prix Monyon by the Académie française shortly after her death in 1783.

⁷² *Essai sur l'éducation des demoiselles* (Paris: B. Hochereau, 1764).

Choderlos de Laclos's educational text, *De l'éducation des femmes* (1785) offers a pessimistic view of women's education in society. While he believes in education reform for women, he does not think it possible without a radical change in society. He likens women's social status to slavery: "Partout où il y a esclavage, il ne peut y avoir éducation: dans toute société, les femmes sont esclaves; donc la femme sociale n'es pas susceptible d'éducation."⁷³ Jean Bloch proposes that Laclos is both reiterating the commonplace eighteenth-century assumption that society is corrupt in addition to expressing the idea that moral corruption constitutes a major problem in the eighteenth century and for the education of women in particular.⁷⁴

We see Laclos's opinion echoed in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Wollstonecraft was one of the most severe critics of Rousseau's philosophy of education. Like Laclos, she criticizes Rousseau's theory of natural order that segregated boys and girls and offered them different educations based on the roles they were expected to play in society. She comments that "The child is not left a moment to its own direction, particularly a girl, and thus rendered dependent—dependence is called natural."⁷⁵ Wollstonecraft rejected the idea that a woman's natural state is subordination to a man and argued that this supposed natural state of being is imposed

⁷³ Choderlos de Laclos, *De l'éducation des femmes* (Paris: Librairie Léon Vanier, 1903) 14.

⁷⁴ Bloch, "Laclos and Women's Education." 145.

⁷⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* Eds. Meller and Chao. (New York: Pearson, 2007 [originally 1792]) 61.

on women through an unequal and biased education.⁷⁶ Wollstonecraft recognizes and rejects the disparity between women's and men's education:

But I still insist, that not only the virtue, but the *knowledge* of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavor to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the *same* means as men, instead of being educated like the fanciful kind of *half* being—one of Rousseau's wild chimeras. (58)

Wollstonecraft was not alone in her criticism of Rousseau's philosophy of education, and the genre of the novel allowed for other authors to explore the belief that a woman's duty is relegated to the home, and potentially confront the concept that the only venue of creativity for women in society was as a mother and educator.

1.3 Motherhood versus Individuality in Claire d'Albe

Cottin does not critique Rousseau's insistence on separate education for boys and girls. In *Claire d'Albe*, Cottin also depicts the gendered division of labor concerning the education of her children. Claire's two children, Adolphe and Laure, receive different educations based solely on their gender. Masculine choice allows for her son to choose

⁷⁶ The French philosopher, Michèle Le Doeuff, argues that reason is often associated with masculinity which places limits on the amount, type, and depth of knowledge that is provided for women throughout history. The restrictions placed on women's education certainly has historical origins that date from Plato to the present day, which she unravels in her persuasive book *Le Sexe du savoir*. Le Doeuff comments in particular on the influence of Rousseau's *Emile* in creating a tradition of limiting women's education in order to relegate them to a submissive role in relationship to men. See *Le Sexe du savoir* (Paris: Aubier, 1998).

his activities and is encouraged to follow those that provide enjoyment, while daughter's choice is limited to activities in the domestic sphere.

Claire's son Adolphe is encouraged to spend time in the factory that his father has established. Claire writes to Elise that "Adolphe se plaît beaucoup plus ici que chez toi; tout y est nouveau, et le mouvement continuel des ouvriers lui paraît plus gai que le tête-à-tête des deux amies. Il ne quitte point son père."⁷⁷ Adolphe's interaction with his father is seen as a positive and formative influence on his development. Adolphe receives an initial education from his mother; only to move out of the domestic sphere to have his social education in the public sphere is fulfilled by observing his father.

Claire's goal is clearly to teach her children how to reproduce the social order. This can be seen through her behavior towards her son, Adolphe. During a conversation with Frédéric, Adolphe says: "Eh bien, mon cousin, tu dis comme maman; elle ne m'embrasse qu'une fois quand j'ai bien étudié, et me caresse longtemps quand j'ai fait plaisir à quelqu'un, parce qu'elle dit que je ressemblerai à mon papa" (21-22). Claire rewards Adolphe for acting like his father and behaving like a good citizen.

It must be said that Laure is younger and still breastfeeding, but Claire's interaction with her daughter is centered on the mother/daughter bond. Claire writes to Elise: "Laure ne jouit point comme son frère de tout ce qui l'entoure; et encore veut-on lui disputer cet éclair d'intelligence; M. d'Albe m'assure qu'aussitôt qu'elle a tété, elle ne

⁷⁷ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 10-11.

me connaît pas plus que sa bonne, et je n'ai pas voulu encore en faire l'expérience, de peur de trouver qu'il n'eût raison" (11). Claire's unhappiness with how her daughter's intelligence is perceived is clear; however, at the heart of her observation is the importance she places on her role as mother in defining her identity. D'Albe tempers Claire's excitement that her daughter's concentration on her mother is a sign of intelligence and thereby negates the influence of Claire on Laure. M. d'Albe's subtle undermining of her connection to her daughter and Claire's role as a mother foreshadows Claire's ultimate choice between her duty as mother and her own passion.

Claire's concern with the way she is perceived by her daughter alludes to a long standing tradition in French literature. As early as the seventeenth century, the public reading of personal letters emphasized literature as a method of transmitting socially acceptable behavior in women. The correspondence between Madame de Sévigné and her daughter can then be seen as an attempt to realize a social perception of the ideal mother-daughter relationship through writing. Through the public reading of her daughter's letters, created a public image of a good mother, linking the written to the social as a way to transmit socially accepted morals. As Michèle Longino Farrell states: "Guidelines for mothers and for daughters held up the mirror as paradigm for their relations: the mother was to serve as exemplary mirror to her daughter; the daughter was to be a reflection of her mother's behavior; and thus the mother in her daughter was

to see an image of herself".⁷⁸ The clear division between the private and public spheres begins to blur as mothers become agents of social education, responsible for instilling moral values into daughters. Sévigné used her letters to her daughter to create a bond that was singular to the two women, as opposed to her less involved epistolary relationship with her son. Sévigné's letters were a paragon of maternal expression that lasted well beyond the eighteenth century.

Like the Sévigné correspondence, the bond between Claire and Laure is a form of social currency. The mother-daughter experience is based on transmitting lived experience to the daughter, while the mother-son experience is inherently limited since the sons were destined to leave the domestic sphere. Claire's mother attempts to create a bond that will allow her daughter to conform to society's expectations of her as a good mother and wife. As with Sévigné, whose social persona is as much tied to her daughter's actions as her own, Claire's reaction to d'Albe's comments show a desire to create an eternal bond with her daughter since there is circularity in the actions both will perform as mothers.

As for Claire's daughter, despite her young age, her focus is on observing her mother. In addition, Claire's hesitation to test her husband's assertion that her daughter does not have a real emotional tie to her belies a belief that the role of mother must be

⁷⁸ Michèle Longino Farrell, *Performing Motherhood: The Sévigné Correspondence* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991) 17.

taught. This concept is reiterated several letters later when Claire and Laure are alone together; Claire writes: "Cette après-midi nous étions seules, je tenais ma fille sur mes genoux, et je cherchais à lui faire répéter mon nom. Ce titre de mère m'a rappelé ce qui s'était dit la veille, et j'ai demandé à Frédéric pourquoi il donnait le nom de père à M. d'Albe'."⁷⁹ Claire identifies herself as a mother while at the same time teaching Laure what a mother is.

Claire attempts to use motherhood to distract from her desire. In an early letter to Elise, Claire writes: "Je suis seule, il est vrai, mon Elise, mais non pas ennuyée; je trouve assez d'occupation auprès de mes enfants, et de plaisir dans mes promenades, pour remplir tout mon temps" (12). She uses the word "occupation" to refer to her children and "pleasure" when writing about her own activities. This subtle linguistic shift shows that, for Claire, her children are not associated with her own personal pleasure. Her children are a necessary and socially acceptable way for her to fill her time.

Central to the analysis of motherhood in *Claire d'Albe* is linguistic representation of Laure and Adolphe by Claire in her letters to Elise. Claire's attachment to her children strikingly diminishes throughout the novel as her letters to Elise become focused on her desire for Frédéric. As the novel progresses and Claire spends more and more time with Frédéric, her time and attention becomes more difficult to redirect towards her children.

⁷⁹ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 23.

Upon Frédéric's arrival to the house, Claire is in the constant presence of her two children or her husband when with Frederic. Frédéric's opinion has direct implications for Claire's mothering of her two children. On their first outing together, Claire stresses to Elise that she has gone with her children, even though d'Albe has asked Frédéric and Claire to spend time together: "Je suis partie avec mes enfants. Frédéric portait ma fille, quoiqu'elle sentît le *lait aigre*" (19). Frédéric's criticism of Laure subtly undermines Claire's duty as mother. He does not idealize her for her maternal duties.

The idealization of Claire becomes stronger during their first encounter alone. Claire is tending to a friend's medical needs when Frédéric passes by and spots her disheveled with her hair down. She is described as being *en extase*.⁸⁰ Later, when asked by d'Albe to comment on how nice Claire looks dressed for dinner, Frédéric responds that her beauty can't compare to her natural beauty of earlier times. Seeing her in a natural state of attire is more powerful for Frederic than her socially accepted dress. Frédéric's image of Claire separates her natural state from that of motherhood.

This is different from the way Claire is valorized by her husband. When d'Albe hears of Claire's efforts to help someone in need he responds by saying, "Mon jeune ami [...], quand vous connaîtrez mieux ma Claire, vous parlerez plus simplement de ce qu'elle a fait aujourd'hui: s'étonne-t-on de ce qu'on voit tous les jours?" (30). Claire's

⁸⁰ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 30.

actions as those expected of her in her social position. D'Albe sees Claire as a perfect representation of a good wife and mother, stating:

Claire a raison [...] une femme, en se consacrant à l'éducation de ses enfants et aux soins domestiques, en donnant à tout ce qui l'entoure l'exemple des bonnes mœurs et du travail, remplit la tâche que sa patrie lui impose; que chacune se contente de faire ainsi le bien en détail. (28)

D'Albe sees Claire's work in the private sphere as a catalyst for public good and as her contribution to society.

Despite Claire's assertion to Elise that her place is with her children, Claire becomes more and more resentful of their presence and her duty towards them as her interest in Frédéric grows and manifests itself physically. Her repressed desire threatens her role as mother as well as her personal safety. In order to quell her feelings for Frédéric, she suggests to her husband that they try and find him a wife. Upon seeing him happy with the chosen woman she immediately becomes sick and develops a life-threatening fever. She sacrifices her health for her children by continuing to breastfeed; however this altruistic action, while reinforcing Frédéric's love for her by her willingness to put her own health in danger for others, eventually becomes a source of personal angst. While Frédéric's response might be mistaken as valuing Claire for her mothering, his respect for her decision is based on the culmination of other self-sacrificing actions, such as the moment where she goes to the village to care for a sick woman. Frédéric admires Claire's sacrifice for others based on a sense of a larger community, not morally on her mothering capabilities.

However, when d'Albe, Frédéric, and the other members of their party leave her alone with her children to attend an event, her displeasure at being left alone speaks to her longing for an activity she participated in before motherhood became her priority. Claire resents that her poor health forces her to abstain from social events. Adèle, Frédéric's love interest, insists that they leave Claire in order to attend a ball and uses Claire's role as mother to convince the others to leave her alone: "comment craindrions-nous qu'elle s'ennuie, ne la laissons-nous pas avec ses enfants?" (50). Claire's description to Elise of Adèle's comment shows her discomfort with being reminded of her duty by the woman she sees as her rival. There is a distinct change in her attitude towards her motherly duties once Frédéric arrives at the estate: "Pour la première fois je sens le besoin d'un peu de société, et je regrette de n'avoir point été au bal" (51). Claire regrets her duty towards her children and the social seclusion this causes.

The turning point in Claire's feelings towards Frédéric is marked by the last moment in the novel in which her children play an active role in her life. While walking with Frédéric, her husband, Adèle, and her son, Claire sacrifices her safety to protect her son from a raging bull by covering him with her body. During the commotion an old man is gravely injured. Claire insists on accompanying the old man to his house to console his family and wait until the surgeon arrives. Frédéric stays with her, and while accompanying her back to the house, he professes his love for her. Even though Claire rejects his advances, citing her husband and his benefactor/father, she is tempted, and

writes to Elise: "Pourquoi le ciel injuste l'a-t-il poussé vers une femme qui ne s'appartient pas?" (64). This is the first moment that Claire directly laments her role as a woman, her marriage to d'Albe, and her duty towards her children and marks a distinct change in her willingness to sacrifice her personal pleasure for her family.

Cottin's protagonist does not successfully reconcile her passion with her marriage, and she ultimately questions her father's decision and her husband's worth through the rhetorical questions and responses she gives to Elise. Claire's initial correspondence is preoccupied with affirming her devotion to her husband despite his having displaced her to the country in isolation. Claire defends her husband based on his relationship to her father: "Et moi, Élise, en considérant le monde et les hommes que j'y ai connus, ne dois-je pas aussi bénir mon père de m'avoir choisi un si digne époux?" (10). Later, Claire writes: "je resterais encore ici; car une femme qui aime son mari compte les jours où elle a du plaisir comme des jours ordinaires, et ceux où elle lui en fait comme des jours de fête." (14-15). Claire's happiness is based on her father's desire to see her married and her husband's desire to see her fulfill his wishes. Ruth P. Thomas comments that Claire has been "programmed to believe that marital happiness is achieved through submission and service and sacrifice to the other."⁸¹

⁸¹ Ruth P. Thomas, "Arranged Marriages and Marriage Arrangements in Eighteenth-Century French Novels by Women." *Women in French Studies* 14 (January 2006): 41.

Claire's isolation from society and her husband causes her to reflect on and begin questioning her role in society.⁸² Claire writes to Elise: "Elise, gronde-moi si tu veux, mais malgré ton absence, je suis heureuse; oui, je suis heureuse de la satisfaction de M. d'Albe."⁸³ Claire's reiteration of "je suis heureuse" is a rhetorical device that undermines, or at the least questions, her true happiness in her marital union. Her feeling is contingent on d'Albe. The repetition attempts to convince Elise and potentially Claire herself of her individual happiness. Claire's future correspondance supports this rhetorical stance since Claire states several letters later: "et pour moi, je crois bien qu'il ne me manqué que toi pour y être heureuse." (12). This correspondence belies the underlying tension with her role as wife and mother because her individual happiness is contingent on her proximity to her friend, and not truly on her husband's approval. Claire displays unease with her role as wife and her devotion to her husband and father by contradicting her previous definitions of happiness.

Claire's comments to Elise recall Julie's response to St. Preux in Rousseau's novel. After her marriage to Wolmar, Julie responds to St. Preux's assertion that she is no longer his. His central question is whether she is happy in this union. Julie has undergone a spiritual rebirth symbolized by the return to linguistic distance in addressing him with the formal "vous". She writes to St. Preux: "Vous me demandez si

⁸² Ruth Perry asserts that isolation is an integral component of all epistolary fiction since the plot is driven by an obstruction that separates two or more people and forces them to maintain a relationship through letters. *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMA Press, 1980) 93.

⁸³ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 6.

je suis heureuse. Cette question me touche, en la faisant vous m'aidez à y répondre; car bien loin de chercher l'oubli dont vous parlez, j'avoue que je ne saurais être heureuse si vous cessiez de m'aimer: mais je le suis à tous égards, et rien ne manque à mon bonheur que le vôtre."⁸⁴ Far from Claire's definition of happiness that is based on her husband and father's wills, Julie asserts her happiness without hesitation. Julie is content in her marriage. This illustrates her changing views of love and desire.

Frédéric's presence enhances Claire's desire and unhappiness that draws her from her social duties. According to Michael J. Call,

Claire d'Albe, the story of a young mother of two who succumbs to an illicit passion, experiencing for the first time in her life the *plénitude* she has desperately sought, inscribes Cottin's personal search to create a viable female identity outside the protonatalistic norms of eighteenth-century French culture. To achieve this, Cottin creates a radically different male gaze that valorizes the heroine, Claire, through her virtues and not her reproductive potentiality.⁸⁵

Claire's way of life is challenged by Frédéric. Whereas his mother abandoned her station in life for love, Claire has chosen to marry because of filial responsibility to her father. Likewise, her relationship with her husband, M. d'Albe, is based on her function as the mother of his children. While Claire's virtue and charm are based on M. d'Albe's confidence in her as a mother and faithful wife, Frédéric immediately sets aside both of these roles when he describes her beauty and virtue; as Call points out, "when Frédéric

⁸⁴ Rousseau, *Julie*. 438.

⁸⁵ Call, *Infertility*. 62.

openly praises her virtues as a woman, he makes no direct mention of her role as a mother. [...] Frédéric, then, the young man born and reared in the mountains and hence ignorant to the cultural norms of the dominating class, ascribes value to Claire based on her abilities to inspire devotion in her mate *outside* the field of maternity" (65). Frédéric's vision of Claire threatens the static symmetry of marriage by creating confusion between how Claire views herself as an individual and as a member of society.⁸⁶

1.4 Adultery in Julie and Claire d'Albe

The conflict between the individual and society in the sentimental novel is accentuated by the protagonist's movement through space. The novel reflects society's gendered division of social spaces. Tanner proposes that the relationship of the protagonist to the environment illustrates the relationship of the public and private spheres to women's sexual freedom. Therefore, the way space is depicted in the novel provides an insightful optic to analyze the tension between desire and duty. Tanner's analysis of adultery in *Julie* is essential to understanding how *Claire d'Albe* transgresses the epistolary boundaries set by Rousseau's benchmark novel and the pre-established rules and moral guides for women that are depicted within. Particularly, Tanner's analysis of space in *Julie* can contribute to our understanding of how adultery is perceived in *Claire d'Albe*, and better illustrate the different ways in which desire is

⁸⁶ Tanner argues that adultery creates an unstable triangle compared to the static symmetry of marriage.

developed in both novels. The foundation of Tanner's analysis of *Julie* is that there is limited movement in the sentimental novel, which makes the use of space more important. Tanner asserts that "although the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel may be said to move toward marriage and the securing of genealogical continuity, it often gains its particular narrative urgency from an energy that threatens to contravene that stability of the family on which society depends."⁸⁷ The violation of the boundaries established by patriarchal control leads to instability, asymmetry, and disorder.

Ongoing debates in the scholarship on Rousseau's works suggest that there are two ways to read the domestic sphere represented in *Julie*: as a microcosm of an economic ideal of the state or as the ideal family life.⁸⁸ Rousseau's *Contrat social* has at its philosophical roots the idea that the family is the first space in which children encounter the rules of society. Rousseau writes that: "la famille est donc si l'on veut le premier modèle des sociétés politiques; chef est l'image du père, le peuple est l'image des

⁸⁷ Tanner, 4.

⁸⁸ For more on the connection between Rousseau's *Julie* and his political works see Donald R. Wehrs, "Desire and Duty in 'La Nouvelle Héloïse'"; Andrew Billing, "Political and Domestic Economy in Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*." *The Romantic Review* 100.4 (2009): 473-491; and Joel Schwartz, *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). For an argument for the domestic sphere as a space for the production and maintenance of society see Nicole Fermon, *Domesticating Passions: Rousseau, Woman, and Nation*. (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997). For a compelling argument for *Julie* as both a representation of the ideal family life and as a model of the ideal Republican state see Eileen Hunt Botting, "Rousseau: Champion Critic of the Transformation of the Family."; and Annie Smart, "Ties That Bind: Motherhood, Economy and State in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*" *Esprit Créateur* 39.2 (Summer, 1999): 64-73. *Family Feuds: Wollstonecraft, Burke, and Rousseau on the Transformation of the Family* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

enfants.”⁸⁹ The concept of the father being the head of the family is seconded by Julie’s observation of her father’s control over her mother. Despite Julie’s love and respect for her mother, she describes her as weak and powerless: “ma mère est faible et sans autorité; je connais l’inflexible sévérité de mon père, et je ne ferai que déshonorer moi ma famille et toi-même.”⁹⁰ Julie recognizes her mother’s subservient role to her father and her moral obligation to avoid following her desires in order to maintain the social structure of the family unit. Hence, to add a third possible interpretation of the domestic sphere to the prior scholarship, Tanner argues that the domestic sphere should be seen to represent a microcosm of social delineation of space since it both separates the public from the private and shows clear class distinctions.

Adulterous behavior in the novel is usually instigated by the presence of an outsider who is a socially displaced or unplaced figure.⁹¹ In *Julie*, this is supported by St. Preux who declares to Julie that he is “errant, sans famille, et presque sans patrie.”⁹² His name is also a pseudonym which only augments the class distinction between Julie and St. Preux. In *Claire d’Albe*, Frédéric’s biological relationship to d’Albe is complicated by his ambiguous social status. Julie writes that d’Albe is “uni à sa mère par les liens du sang.”⁹³ However, Frédéric’s mother’s choice to marry for love rejects her social status.

⁸⁹ *Contrat social* (London: J. M. Dent & sons, 1912) 11.

⁹⁰ Rousseau, *Julie*. 82.

⁹¹ Tanner, 3.

⁹² Rousseau, *Julie*. 119.

⁹³ Cottin, *Claire d’Albe*. 11.

Her death renders Frédéric socially displaced. D'Albe's attempt to reconstruct a social status for Frédéric by allowing him entry into his home is ultimately rejected. The influence of the outsider raises questions of legitimacy. M. d'Albe brings Frédéric into his home and takes on the role of mentor and father. M. d'Albe asks Claire to similarly think of the young man as her son. Frédéric becomes the father's illegitimate son and the woman's illegitimate child.

While on the one hand M. d'Albe sees no conflict with a young woman of twenty-two playing mother to a young man close to her age, on the other hand, Frédéric immediately rejects the idea of Claire as a motherly figure based on his vision of her as a sexual woman. In a conversation with Frédéric that Claire transcribes for Elise, Frédéric declares that he can never consider her as his mother; Claire begins: "Mais votre mère est morte aussi, il faut que je devienne la vôtre." 'Vous! oh, non.' 'Pourquoi donc?' 'Je me souviens de ma mère, et ce que je sentais pour elle ne ressemblait en rien à ce que vous m'inspirez [...]. C'est au moins une différence. J'embrassais ma mère sans penser à sa figure; mais auprès de vous je ne verrais que cela.'"⁹⁴ Despite the fact that Claire is already a mother of two, Frédéric rejects the idea of her playing a motherly role in his life. In doing so, he not only establishes his attraction for her as physical, but openly sees her as a woman separate from her role as mother. This discussion also marks a turning

⁹⁴ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 23-24.

point in how Claire begins to define her self-worth not simply as a woman who satisfies her *husband's* wishes, but as one who can inspire love in *another*.

Frédéric can be considered a socially dangerous character because he does not conform to social rules. His description is similar to that of Rousseau's Emile in that he has been raised out of society. Claire describes him after their first meeting: "C'est un caractère neuf, qui n'a point été émoussé encore par le frottement des usages. Aussi présente-t-il toute la piquante originalité de la nature." (21). He comes to the house without a sense of decorum and is often described as speaking out of turn, speaking his mind too freely, and is remarked on for his "peu de civilité" (22). Similarly, Frédéric does not satisfy the gendered descriptions of women's and men's roles.⁹⁵ Unlike d'Albe, Frédéric's actions are guided by his emotions, a trait which likens him more to Claire. This connection becomes all the more evident when Frédéric recounts his childhood; he writes her during his absence:

Vous le savez, Claire, je fus élevé par une mère qui s'était mariée malgré le vœu de toute sa famille; l'amour seul avait rempli sa vie, et elle me fit passer son âme avec son lait. Sans cesse elle me parlait de mon père, du bonheur d'un attachement mutuel; je fus témoin du charme de leur union, et de l'excessive douleur de ma mère, lors de la mort de son mari; douleur qui, la consumant peu à peu, la fit périr elle-même quelques années après. (68)

⁹⁵ St. Preux is also often described as a feminine character. See Anne Callahan, *Writing the Voice of Pleasure: Heterosexuality without Women* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

Frédéric associates himself with his mother and the same passions that prompted her to reject her social status in society. By describing his mother as a woman who went against her family to marry for love, he connects himself with a woman who was perceived as a danger to society. His mother married for happiness, but it was to a member of an inferior class. Frédéric's mother is dangerous because she cannot master her desire and redirect it in the interest of social harmony by following the wishes of her family. Eventually, Frédéric's story foreshadows Claire's death and his inability to live without her.

Cottin's description of adultery differs drastically from Rousseau's both in the way the protagonists experience desire and in the way passion is represented. Hinde Stewart recognizes this difference and asserts that contemporary studies on Cottin have "failed to give play to the audacity of her portrayals of violent love and lovers which break so drastically with the sentimental tradition."⁹⁶ This shift can be seen as a reworking of the expression of sentimentality and the rules of decorum traditionally found in the sentimental novel. Of particular interest is the way in which adulterous behavior is represented and the reactions it elicits. Cottin allows her protagonist to feel sexual passion, while Rousseau's protagonist experiences love in a more platonic different way. In *Julie*, desire is overshadowed by obligation to maintain one's virtue and

⁹⁶ Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs*. 183.

uphold social duty. Therefore, the definition of love is separated from sexual desire and replaced by fidelity and love found in marriage.

In Tanner's interesting analysis of space, he explains how physical locations affect how adultery is perceived by society. Tanner uses the images of the city, field, and temple to illustrate how patriarchal authority over both sexes changes with each location. These spatial delineations are not necessarily literal spaces in Tanner's argument, but represent a distinction between inside and outside of society, "where the socially displaced individual or couple may attempt to find or practice greater freedom."⁹⁷ Language plays an integral role in the division of these spaces. The city represents a space where everything can be heard; therefore, there is an integral transparency in all communication that requires one to abide more rigorously by social code. According to Tanner, within the city, the prescriptions of law extend to both sexes; however, women experience the possibility for greater freedom of expression the farther they travel from the prescribed limits of this patriarchal space into the "field". The way language is perceived in the city contrasts starkly with the way language is perceived in the field. In the communal space of the city, language has total authority, but in the field there is voice but no community, hence less transparency (20). Because of the increased distance from linguistic visibility, women's responsibility to uphold social obligations

⁹⁷ Tanner, 23.

decreases. The image of the city and field can provide a space for women to act on their desires and potentially escape their duty.

The temple reconciles the two realms of the city and field. According to Tanner, the temple “is both in society and, inasmuch as it is a sacred space, out of it.” (22). The temple represents a religious space in which to communicate with a higher power outside of society. In the temple, the woman becomes an individual, separate from society, since she is seen by and able to address Christ directly, and not in reference to the social roles in which women are reduced to a spectacle and to a category. The temple offers a space in which to observe the tension between the city and the field while remaining within the binary they establish. Tanner contends that the novel mimics the space of the temple: “we could then see the bourgeois novel as a kind of secondary temple attempting to contain, dramatize, and analyze the city-field-temple tensions discernible in the society to which it addresses itself.” (23). Seen in this way, the novel provides a space to question the social binary that women are either naturally good or bad.⁹⁸

Key to Tanner’s argument is the blurring of lines between the city and the field.

Tanner rightly analyses Julie’s “unlegalized sexual embrace”, for she never truly

⁹⁸ Both city and field exist in relation to each other. The woman who enters the field must return to the city. The binary between duty and desire is maintained despite the suggested freedom of the field. Anna Rosner argues that the potential for freedom from society is impossible: “Le personnage féminin du Siècle des Lumières est naturellement ‘bon’ (mère, vierge Marie, religieuse) ou ‘mauvais’ (figure sexuée ou diabolique).” “*Claire d’Albe* ou l’anti-roman féminin.” *Romance Notes* (Sept. 2005): 77-78.

commits adultery, as moments of women's control over space. Tanner confirms that it is Julie's dominant desire in life to maintain interconnectedness between her relationship as daughter and lover.⁹⁹ Julie's interactions with St. Preux are calculated as she navigates space and distance from her father's authority. The primary example is Julie's first sexual encounter with St. Preux. The arbor in which Julie first embraces St. Preux is at once within and without the household, maintaining a link between the two. This connection Julie maintains between filial devotion and desire is again reinforced by the presence of Julie's cousin who is the mediator between Julie's duty as a daughter and her sexual desire. Julie manipulates her sexual encounters with St. Preux; Julie plans out their first kiss: "Je choisissais les lieux que nous devons parcourir ensemble; je marquais des asiles dignes de nous retenir. [...] *l'inséparable cousine*... vous vous rendrez chez elle à dix heures; elle vous amènera."¹⁰⁰ Julie's cousin's voyeuristic presence in this moment of desire realized is as a representative of the family while at the same time as a passive participant in Julie's embrace. Julie blurs the lines between "city and field" by inviting her cousin to join them.

It is not the point of this discussion to further analyze the myriad ways in which Julie manipulates St. Preux in regards to space, asserting her female dominance and creating what Rebecca Kukla calls "permanent romantic love relationships which

⁹⁹ Tanner, 114.

¹⁰⁰ Rousseau, *Julie*. 107-08.

exclude the possibility of possession”¹⁰¹, nor to explore how this spatial manipulation serves to reinforce St. Preux’s lack of identity and social status, as Tanner suggests. Rather, the purpose of our discussion of space is to explore how women’s desire is realized or un-realized in the novel.

Important to the analysis of Julie’s desire, realized as sexual encounters, is the idea of control.¹⁰² Scholars maintain that the description of Julie’s sexual encounters ultimately reinforces the socializing force of women’s sexuality and argue that *Julie* is about the power of women and their capacity to shape men.¹⁰³ As seen in the description prior to their meeting in the arbor, Julie organizes when they will meet, but goes further to detail specifically *how* St. Preux will navigate this space. Furthermore, Julie chooses the chalet where she and St. Preux will spend their first time alone and dictates all further romantic meetings.

Their first meeting in the chalet is representative of Julie’s control over St. Preux that encompasses both the space he inhabits and the reactions of his body. We see from

¹⁰¹ Rebecca Kukla, “The Coupling of Human Souls: Rousseau and the Problem of Gender Relations.” *Political Dialogue: Theories and Practices* Ed. Stephen Lawrence Esquith. (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1996) 71. The scene after her marriage to Wolmar in which Julie attempts to convince Claire and St. Preux to marry comes to mind as a way to maintain a connection while avoiding the compromising effects of desire. Donald R. Wehrs highlights that “Julie wishes Saint-Preux to marry Claire for the same reason he wishes to decline: to make the satisfaction of desire impossible.” “Desire and Duty in ‘La Nouvelle Héloïse’.” *Modern Language Studies* 18.2 (Spring, 1998): 86. Not to mention the invitation of St. Preux into the domestic sphere of her household to serve as a tutor to Julie’s children.

¹⁰² Kukla, 71.

¹⁰³ Joel Schwartz proposes that *Julie* is a defense of conjugal fidelity and married life by analyzing women’s role as a socializing force. See *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

their first encounter in the arbor that physical touch is transformative for St. Preux; St. Preux says: "Je suis ivre, ou plutôt insensé. Mes sens sont altérés, toutes mes facultés sont troublées par ce baiser mortel."¹⁰⁴ However, after his desire is realized, St. Preux experiences passion in a violent and physical way. The description of mortality when confronted with passion continues as St. Preux waits for Julie in the chalet. He is in a feminine space surrounded by Julie's objects. The mere idea of her presence represented by the objects and smells creates a physical reaction in him that threatens to kill him. He writes: "Tout y flatte et nourrit l'ardeur qui me dévore! O Julie! Il est plein de toi, et la flamme de mes désirs s'y répand sur tous tes vestiges. Oui, tous mes sens y sont enivrés à la fois" (197). St. Preux reaches a moment of masculine frenzy. The text hints at (or foreshadows) orgasm since St. Preux experiences agitations and cruel palpitations followed by impotence.¹⁰⁵ His letter concludes with a personal plea to recover prior to Julie's arrival: "Mon cœur, mon faible cœur, tu succombes à tant d'agitations. Ah cherche des forces pour supporter la félicité qui t'accable" (198). His passion alone is expressed, whereas Julie's realized desires are never blatantly described.

Men's passion is expressed in terms of physical violence. In *Julie*, questions of illegitimacy are prevented by the violent actions of Julie's father. After finding out about Julie and St. Preux's illicit love affair, her father attacks her; Julie writes: "il me maltraita

¹⁰⁴ Rousseau, *Julie*. 108.

¹⁰⁵ Michael O'Dea, "The Dialogics of Desire in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7.1 (October, 1994): 42.

sans ménagement, quoique ma mère se fût jetée entre deux, m'eût couverte de son corps, et eût reçu quelques-uns des coups qui m'étaient portés." ¹⁰⁶ While there is no explicit mention of a pregnancy or miscarriage, both are alluded to in the description of Julie's physical health after the fall resulting from her father's attack. She finds herself sick "je crains bien que ma chute d'hier n'ait quelque suite plus funeste que je n'avais pensé. Ainsi tout est fini pour moi; toutes mes espérances m'abandonnent en même temps" (232). Julie's loss illustrates her father's authority over the household and his need to maintain order. As an act of women's agency, adultery threatens society by introducing the question of paternal authority and legitimacy to the marital union: "A threat to the system guaranteeing natural paternal authority is that a woman, like Héloïse, can always act "as if". Her body, with its hidden recesses of generation, can always exchange one man's child for another man's name beyond the reach of the law's inspection."¹⁰⁷ Not only does the socially unplaced or displaced figure threaten the marital union, but he also introduces the socially disruptive element of foreign blood into the genealogical line of the family.¹⁰⁸ Violence is required to reconstruct Julie's virtue.

¹⁰⁶ Rousseau, *Julie*. 228.

¹⁰⁷ Peggy Kamuf, "Underground Rousseau: Julie, of the New Heloise." *Fictions of Feminine Desire: Disclosures of Heloise* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982) 105.

¹⁰⁸ For a compelling discussion of illegitimacy and the obligations of women in family in *Julie*, see Lynda Lange, *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

In *Julie*, virtue in the form of marriage and motherhood has a tempering effect on the female protagonist's potentially socially destructive actions. The importance of Julie's mother as her moral compass is reiterated on her mother's death bed. Again, Julie's mother places her child's welfare above her own. Julie imagines her mother's only regret in dying is that she is leaving Julie without a moral guide: "Non, ce n'était pas la vie qu'elle semblait quitter; j'avais trop peu su la lui rendre chère. C'était à moi seule qu'elle s'arrachait. Elle me voyait sans guide et sans espérance, accablée de mes malheurs et de mes fautes; mourir ne fut rien pour elle, et son cœur n'a gémi que d'abandonner sa fille dans cet état."¹⁰⁹ Julie blames herself for her mother's death and, in recognizing her need for her mother's moralizing presence, inscribes herself within the patriarchal system that condemns her love affair. Rousseau clearly portrays a complex relationship between Julie and her mother that is ruptured as a consequence of Julie's sexual desire being revealed to her mother. Julie's mother's death is recounted immediately after St. Preux and Julie's correspondence is discovered.¹¹⁰

Julie's father regains order by evoking a daughter's guilt at being the agent of her mother's demise. Julie agrees to enter into the socially prescribed role of wife. It is not marriage, but the choice of husband at stake in her decision to marry. Julie's father does not appeal to ultimate patriarchal authority when he attempts to convince Julie to marry,

¹⁰⁹ Rousseau, *Julie*. 380.

¹¹⁰ Like *La Princesse de Clèves*, as interesting point of contrast.

but appeals to moral obligation to her family and her emotions and guilt over her mother's death. He asks her to marry the man of his choosing so as not to condemn him, and therefore her entire family, to death like her mother. As Ruth Ohayon states, "Virtue and modesty are qualities the mother upholds and passes on to the daughter, who internalizes them to forge an image of herself. Thus, individuation, the process of evolving as a separate entity from the family, is not a goal for the heroine since it would threaten her attachment to the mother and family and, in particular, her status as daughter."¹¹¹ Julie's reaction to her father's plea to marry is one of social obligation that likens her to her own mother's virtues and maintains her family tie: "Liée au sort d'un époux, ou plutôt aux volontés d'un père par une chaîne indissoluble, j'entre dans une nouvelle carrière qui ne doit finir qu'à la mort."¹¹² For Julie, she is assuming her role as a woman in society. Julie becomes the epitome of a good mother, one who sacrifices her desire to instead fulfill her duty as wife and mother.

The loss of Julie's mother is the catalyst for her renouncing her lover and redefining happiness. As Ruth Ohayon states, "Julie commits herself to a passionless life, devoid of happiness and fulfillment for herself—a symbolic death. The deadening of her vital sense of life establishes a continuity with her deceased mother. Existence for

¹¹¹ Ruth Ohayon, "Rousseau's Julie; Or the Maternal Odyssey." *College Language Association Journal* 30.1 (Sept. 1986): 72.

¹¹² Rousseau, *Julie*. 406.

both represents repression."¹¹³ Julie redirects her desire for St. Preux. Passion, or sexual pleasure is redefined as the affective pleasure of love in the marital union. Julie clearly describes the incompatibility of conjugal happiness with passion:

L'amour est accompagné d'une inquiétude continuelle de jalousie ou de privation, peu convenable au mariage, qui est un état de jouissance et de paix. On ne s'épouse point pour penser uniquement l'un à l'autre, mais pour remplir conjointement les devoirs de la vie civile, gouverner prudemment la maison, bien élever ses enfants. [...] Il n'y a point de passion qui nous fasse une si forte illusion que l'amour.¹¹⁴

Desire has been replaced by Julie's duty to her husband and her children. According to Andrew Billing: "Julie's marriage to Wolmar does not lack a sentimental dimension, although its affective basis is not love but a form of companionate friendship that is presented as the *consequence* rather than the *precondition* of the marital union."¹¹⁵ In the end, Julie's repression of her desire has a moralizing effect on the reader. If we see the novel as embodying the space of the temple as Tanner suggests, *Julie* offers an alternative to women's desire through the transformation of women's energy towards her family and maintaining domestic stability.

Claire d'Albe subtly undermines the moral imperative found at the end of *Julie*.

Unlike the positive representation of enjoyment and peace that Julie finds in marriage, Claire's ultimately rejects both by succumbing to Frédéric in an almost brutal union. In

¹¹³ Ohayon, 74.

¹¹⁴ Rousseau, *Julie*. 442.

¹¹⁵ Andrew Billing, "Political and Domestic Economy in Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*." *The Romantic Review* 100.4 (2009): 482. For an interesting argument on conjugal love in *Julie*, see Elena Pulcini, *Amour-passion et amour conjugal: Rousseau et l'origine d'un conflit moderne* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998).

Julie, violence appears in the form of masculine presence or sacrificial violence by the woman for her children. Julie's death occurs as a result of her sacrificing her own safety to save her son from drowning in an action that Lisa Dish calls a "sacrificial suicide".¹¹⁶ In *Claire d'Albe*, violence is not used to reconstruct an ideal domestic sphere in which duty and motherhood are primary concerns. Sexual violence destabilizes the patriarchal order and valorizes women's passion.

Claire explicitly underlines the danger Frédéric holds to patriarchal control. In the last letter Claire writes to Elise prior to Frédéric's leaving, she reiterates that their desire for each other threatened her prescribed role in society: "Nos torts sont égaux, Elise, et nos devoirs ne l'étaient pas: j'étais épouse et mère. [...] J'étais épouse et mère, Elise, et ni ce que je devais à mon époux, à mes enfants, ni respect humain, ni devoirs sacrés, rien ne m'a retenue; j'ai vu Frédéric, et j'ai été séduite."¹¹⁷ The repetition of the same words mimics the rhetoric used to attempt to persuade the reader of Claire's happiness in her marriage. Her reiteration that these were the roles she held in the past illustrates to the reader that Claire no longer sees herself as either and foreshadows her ultimate removal from society.

Despite the repercussions of their adulterous behavior, Claire and Frédéric are overwhelmed by the power of their uncontrolled emotions which threaten to kill them.

¹¹⁶ Lisa Disch, "Claire Loves Julie: Reading the Story of Women's Friendship in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*." *Hypatia* 9.3 (Summer 1994): 20.

¹¹⁷ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 103-4.

Upon being separated from Claire, Frédéric becomes pale and “en un instant il a été couvert de sang, des artères comprimées par la violence de la douleur s'étaient brisées dans sa poitrine” (117). The sudden violent and physical outburst by Frédéric contrasts starkly with the image of idealized love presented in *Julie*. The couple's reunion, unlike the potentially orgasmic moments before St. Preux meets Julie in the chalet during their first meeting without chaperones, depicts two people on the verge of death. Whereas Claire is found weak and languishing, Frédéric arrives “pale, éperdu, couvert de sueur et de poussière” (146). Masculine frenzy is described more closely to a sickness or fever, rather than impatient idolatry.

Sacrifice and violence merge in a conscious act of amorous rebellion at the end of the novel in the climactic scene which reunites Claire and Frédéric. Claire has been weakened by her attempts to repress her desires, but Frédéric's displaced identity is again affirmed by his transgression of the physical boundaries between Elise and Claire's house and his desire to penetrate Claire. He is outside of the bonds that restrict women from realizing desire. Claire's capitulation to Frédéric's wish to consummate their love borders on violent persuasion: “L'amour a doublé les forces de Frédéric, l'amour et la maladie ont épuisé celles de Claire...Elle n'est plus à elle, elle n'est plus à la vertu; Frédéric est tout, Frédéric l'emporte...” (148). Claire sacrifices virtue for passion in a moment described as natural. In her weakened state, Claire is less able to uphold her moral duty and allows herself to experience pleasure outside of social obligation.

Unlike Julie who finds “jouissance” in marriage and associates it with peace, Cottin redefines enjoyment as sexual passion. Women’s individuality and personal desire is placed above the social dictates that demand women’s personal sacrifice in order to maintain order. Cottin writes:

Elle l’a goûté dans toute sa plénitude, cet éclair de délice qu’il n’appartient qu’à l’amour de sentir; elle l’a connue, cette jouissance délicieuse et unique rare et divine comme le sentiment qui l’a créée: son âme confondue dans celle de son amant, nage dans un torrent de volupté; il fallait mourir alors, mais Claire était coupable, et la punition l’attendait au réveil. (148)

Unlike St. Preux in *Julie* who described having orgasmic-like physical sensations, women’s pleasure is completely realized in woman’s “plénitude”, a blatant allusion to Claire’s orgasm. The word “jouissance”, which also has sexual connotations, but has more profound didactic meaning in the context of *Claire d’Albe*. By associating this word with words like “délice”, “désir”, “plaisir”, and “bonheur”, Cottin does not outrightly condemn adulterous actions, but rather defends Claire’s choice.

While Genlis accused Cottin’s description of spring as overtly passionate, scholars have failed to connect the similar imagery of this scene with the final scene between Claire and Frédéric and the repercussions this description has on the didactic intention of the novel. Claire likens nature to a sacred space:

Dans ce temple de l’union des êtres, où les nombreux enfants de la nature se réunissent, désirer et jouir étant tout ce qu’ils veulent, ils s’arrêtent et sacrifient sans choix sur l’autel du plaisir; mais l’homme dédaigne ces biens faciles entre le désir qui l’appelle, et la jouissance qui l’excite, il

languit fièrement s'il ne pénètre au sanctuaire; c'est là seulement qu'est le bonheur, et l'amour seul peut y conduire. (13)

The juxtaposition of choice and pleasure and the sacred and natural foreshadows her final adulterous action prior to meeting Frédéric. Women's sexuality is, therefore, natural and sacred and repressed by society. Claire is able to experience momentarily what her duty to her father, husband, and children deprived her of and escape the rigid social structure that motherhood imposed upon her before rejecting Frédéric and returning to her father's authority: "elle s'élançait auprès de l'autel divin [...] ce dernier asile" (149). Cottin presents two conflicting images of the sacred, both in the form of an altar: natural choice and patriarchal authority. The presence of conflicting images of the sacred questions the sincerity of chastising Claire's adultery.

Contrary to the representation of paternal repression of women's passion as seen in *Julie*, Claire's father is present, but powerless to prevent her from committing adultery. Unable to stop thinking about Frédéric, Claire seeks solace at her father's tomb. In the symbolic narrative described by Tanner, the image of the tomb acts as the "temple", a sacred and religious space in which to explore the dynamic between society and desire. Tanner accentuates this binary by writing: "In the temple there is sympathy for the antinomian impulses of the socially condemned, plus recognition of the necessary structuring of laws of all

kinds."¹¹⁸ The symbolic act of returning to the temple reunites Claire's family and moral code; Claire's father acted as both mother and father since her mother passed away while she was an infant. She showed him "toute la tendresse filiale qu'inspire un père, toute la vénération qu'on a pour un dieu" (42). His tomb, therefore, represents a holy place of patriarchal authority and reverence. However, it is here that Frédéric finds Claire and they consummate their love. She rejects the father's control over a daughter's virtue by losing her virtue on the steps of his tomb. This act is not only one of adultery, but of incest insofar as Frédéric regards d'Albe as a father figure. Claire's complete abandon to her passion at the altar of her father's tomb represents a clear rupture with the patriarchal authority of her father and husband both of whom she claims to have revered in her first letters to Elise.

Claire's blatant expression of desire on the steps of her father's tomb shows that there is no place without paternal authority except death; however, her death is liberating. In fact, Frédéric uses religious rhetoric to persuade Claire to abandon her duty for desire: "goûtons avant de la quitter cette félicité suprême qui nous attend dans l'éternité."¹¹⁹ He appeals to the belief that Claire's happiness, in the form of sexual pleasure, is possible in death. Anna Rosner proposes that the dysphoric end, as she calls

¹¹⁸ Tanner, 24.

¹¹⁹ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 147.

it, which condemns Claire's actions as guilty and adulterous is Cottin's way of feigning to "peut-être respecter les codes de la 'bienséance' contemporaine qui proscrivent la jouissance féminine sans mort."¹²⁰

1.5 The Death of the Mother

Both *Julie* and *Claire d'Albe* complicate the love triangle existing between the young female protagonist, her older husband, and her young lover with the addition of a female confidant, who serves as moral touchstone. The correspondence between the two women highlights the underlying moral lessons at play in the sentimental epistolary novel. Despite Janet Altman's argument that confidants typically fall into two categories—"the 'epistolary confidant,' a sympathetic listener to the dilemmas of the heroine and the 'archivist' of her letters, and the 'active confidante,' an independent agent who manipulates the course of the story"¹²¹—Claire and Elise incarnate both aspects at once to varying degrees throughout the novels.

Janet Todd classifies women's friendship into categories, two of which are of primary concern to the discussion of motherhood in *Julie* and *Claire d'Albe*: sentimental friendship and manipulative friendship. Todd explains that sentimental friendship is the solidarity between two women as they navigate their relationship to patriarchal

¹²⁰ Anna Rosner, "Claire d'Albe ou l'anti-roman féminin." *Romance Notes* (Sept. 2005): 85.

¹²¹ Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982): 51-53.

authority.¹²² Claire and Elise are voyeurs to the adulterous actions and thoughts of Julie and Claire, respectively, and thus bridge the gap between the private and the public. The role of the confidant in these novels epitomizes sentimental friendship as described above. Julie relies on Claire as a faithful witness to her secrets and actions. She writes to Claire: "Où étais-tu, ma douce amie, ma sauvegarde, mon Ange tutélaire?"¹²³ Like Julie's mother, Claire also reminds Julie of the morally unsound path she is following as she continues to correspond with St. Preux; Claire's is able to predict Julie's father's disapproval: "Je t'en conjure à genoux, ma douce amie, songe aux dangers qui t'environnent, et dont le risque augmente à chaque instant" (225). It is important to note that Claire does not argue for the immorality of Julie's behavior, but only of the danger.

Throughout *Claire d'Albe*, Elise's silent and moralizing voice is reflected in Claire's letters through Claire's responses to her unseen questions and critiques. Claire's one-sided correspondence often begins with reactions to Elise's silent condemnations of her behavior, which become stronger and stronger as the novel progresses: "Il se peut, mon aimable amie, que j'aie appuyé trop vivement sur l'espèce de soupçon que tu m'as laissé entrevoir, mais que veux-tu? Il m'avait révolté..."¹²⁴ She continues: "Pourquoi donc, mon Elise, viens-tu, par des mots entrecoupés, par des phrases interrompues, jeter une sorte de poison sur l'attachement qui m'unit à Frédéric?" (39). Claire shows through

¹²² Todd, 3-4.

¹²³ Rousseau, *Julie*. 142.

¹²⁴ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 35.

her dialogue the condemnation she feels from her friend: “Ah! qu’as-tu dit, ma tendre amie! De quelle horrible lumière viens-tu frapper mes yeux?... O honte! chaque mot que je trace est un crime...” (78). Ultimately, Elise’s attempted manipulations fail to separate Claire and Frédéric, and she is left to assume Claire’s role as mother on her deathbed.

Friendship goes beyond sisterhood to incarnate the melding of personalities, one moral and other transgressive. Both members of each couple can take over the others’ role as mother. In *Julie*, the confusion between bodies is uncovered by the presence of Henriette, Claire’s daughter, who physically resembles Julie. Henriette is sent to live with Julie and comes to call her mother. Both women co-parent the child, and by using the same name to refer to both Julie and Claire, Henriette further eliminates the distance between their individual personas.¹²⁵

There is a similar crossing of physical boundaries for the women in *Claire d’Albe*. D’Albe declares that his motivation for separating the two was based on the female mentoring: “déjà vos plans sont formés, vous [Claire and Elise] confondez vos enfants, le soin de les élever double de charme en vous en occupant ensemble, et c’est du sein de cette jouissance que je vous arrache” (6). This is the first appearance of the word

¹²⁵ There is a longstanding tradition of female mentoring in French literature. For example, *L’Histoire d’Ernestine* (1765), is a novel about a young woman is educated by several strong women through different forms of mentoring, companionship, and jealousy. In a way similar to how Farrell describes the relationship between Madame de Sévigné and her daughter, Ernestine’s relationship with Madame Duresnoi goes through “patterns of desire, imitation, and rivalry” similar to those of Madame Sévigné and her daughter. Michèle Longino Farrell, *Performing Motherhood: The Sévigné Correspondence* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991) 150.

“jouissance” in Claire’s letters; however, it is directed as a feeling between the two women. “Jouissance” is not used in the same way as we have seen between Claire and Frédéric. There is no textual evidence that the two women share sexual pleasure, but d’Albe does see their friendship as destabilizing of Claire’s fidelity towards him. In a similar way that adultery interrupts the marital union, Elise’s presence turns Claire’s focus from her duty as a husband. This friendship remains restricted, however, since it does not allow for the protagonist to stray from her duty as mother. The blurring of women’s bodies and the interchangeability of their role as mothers creates a deeper connection between the women. Nancy K. Miller describes the two women protagonists as each other’s double or as half of a whole.¹²⁶ Each confidant accepts the prescribed role in which she will educate her friend’s daughter after the death of the daughter’s biological mothers.

Cottin illustrates a female mentoring dynamic between the two women that allows for the women to experience their desires in a safe and understanding space, outside of the control of patriarchy. Like the “field”, the moments the women share together are in constant reference the eyes and ears of “the city”, but offer a brief lessening of imposed duty. The representation of these women proposes an alternative to the rigid domestic sphere and allows for women’s movement between spaces and

¹²⁶ Nancy K. Miller, *The Heroine’s Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 115.

families. Like the “temple”, both confidants take part in the social and moralizing effect of the sentimental novel and address the role of motherhood through angles of motherhood and female friendship.

The deaths of the protagonists bring to light the ability of the confidant to cross social boundaries. In Rousseau’s novel, the impossibility of maintaining social order as wife and mother becomes clear as Julie’s authoritative voice begins to disappear from the novel, foreshadowing her imminent death. The correspondence of *Julie* begins to be interspersed to a greater degree with other voices, like the voice of Julie’s husband. In *Julie*, Claire serves as a mediator between the “city” and the “field”. She is by Julie’s side, and her presence allows St. Preux to enter the private space and witness the death. Wolmar describes Julie’s death as follows: “J’accours, j’entre, j’ouvre le rideau.... St. Preux !.... cher St. Preux !.... je vois les deux amies sans mouvement, et se tenant embrassées; l’une évanouie, et l’autre expirante.”¹²⁷ Claire faints and symbolically dies along with Julie. The focus on Claire and Julie’s symbiotic relationship draws attention from the juxtaposition of her former lover and her husband creating a sacred space for the reader to observe both.

In *Julie*, Julie’s last moments are narrated through letters written by her husband, Wolmar, and speak of her unwavering loyalty: “Elle n’a point vécu comme une autre: personne que je sache, n’est mort comme elle. Voilà ce que j’ai pu seul observer, et que

¹²⁷ Rousseau, *Julie*. 377-8.

vous n'apprendrez que de moi" (345). Wolmar's telling of her death scene idealizes Julie's life and role as wife and mother. It is still her husband, representative of her father's control, who narrates her last moments, but creates the eternal image of virtuous woman that others can aspire to emulate. Julie, like Mme de Clèves, lives a life after her mother's death that is full of "vertus inimitables" according to her husband.¹²⁸ Julie is able to transform her passions and become the ideal mother and make the ultimate sacrifice for her children. Desire is redirected and transformed into conjugal love and a mother's love.

Claire d'Albe undergoes a disruption of the voice of the female protagonist that is similar to *Julie*. In *Julie*, Julie's written voice disappears after her fall in the lake and her death is told through the letters of her cousin and husband. The transgression of environmental boundaries in *Claire d'Albe* is emphasized by small narrative transition in the epistolary. The continuity of letters is broken by the insertion of a narrative voice that recounts the actions from an omniscient perspective:

Ici finissent les lettres de Claire, le reste est un récit écrit de la main d'Elise; sans doute elle en aura recueilli les principaux traits de la bouche de son amie, et elle les aura confiés au papier pour que la jeune Laure, en les lisant un jour, pût se préserver des passions dont sa déplorable mère avait été la victime.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Madame de Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1996 [originally 1678]) 239.

¹²⁹ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 145.

This narrative aside is directed to the readers and imagines the reasons behind the actions of the characters. The reader is no longer privy to a first-hand account of the characters intentions through their own written voice. While not excluded by the rules of the genre, this passage marks a moment that cannot be conveniently folded into the epistolary genre. This slight generic manipulation avoids the impropriety of Claire's voice recounting her own social and marital transgression. The reader is privy to the second-hand retelling of Claire's actions through an interlocutor known to condemn adulterous behavior.

Elise's voice usurps authoritative control. With Elise's moralizing voice, some semblance of social order appears to be reconstructed since Claire's extramarital desire is condemned. Elise judges harshly Claire actions as immoral and unvirtuous. Claire is the first to name Claire: "La noble Claire n'est plus qu'une infâme adultère!" (145). By naming Claire this way, Elise condemns women's passion that would threaten the social order of the family.

Elise's last duty as a woman is to fulfill Claire's abandoned role as mother and instill in Laure the virtues of her social class, thereby completing the circle from mother to daughter. As Claire prepares for her death, she speaks of her daughter for the first time since Frédéric professed his love. Claire bequeaths Laure to Elise:

[T]oi qui vas devenir la mère de mes enfants, je ne te recommande point mon fils, il aura les exemples de son père; mais veille sur ma Laure...qu'elle sache que ce qui m'a perdue est d'avoir coloré le vice des charmes de la vertu... (136-5)

Elise is left to raise Claire's daughter. Elise, who was involved in Claire's moral downfall, is now charged with recounting the story to her own daughter as it was told to her in its graphic detail by Claire. As Claire's double, Elise is imbued with both moral and immoral qualities. Elise's authorial voice creates sympathy and blurs the strict social code associated with adultery for women in the eighteenth century.

The education Claire instructs Elise to give Laure incarnates the very danger that Rousseau warns against in the *Préface to Julie*: "Jamais fille chaste n'a lu de Romans."¹³⁰ Novels were considered perilous for female readers and threatened the link between chastity and virtue.¹³¹ Using Claire's adulterous actions to teach Laure questions Elise's reliability and the persuasiveness of her moralizing rhetoric. In the end, Claire's actions and virtues are "imitables", unlike the virtuous Julie, and therein lies the social danger of retelling her story.

Cottin's use of women's education in the novel is a compelling confrontation of Rousseau's cautionary *Préface*. The danger of novels was that they could lead to "social unrest and societal transformation."¹³² The choice of moral guide for Laure is complicated by the immoral lessons that she will learn and, hopefully, avoid. Despite Elise's outward moral stability, she is implicated in the socially disruptive actions of her friend and charged with perpetuating women's choice. Claire's actions are ultimately morally

¹³⁰ Rousseau, *Julie*.72.

¹³¹ Bostic, *The Fiction of the Enlightenment*. 54.

¹³² Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)91.

ambiguous, contrasting with those of virtuous Julie who is exculpated by her husband's last positive words about her character. Her death underlines the danger in abandoning women's duty and virtue, but serves to educate the future generation of women who can potentially find new ways to express desires that are currently unavailable to Claire within the constraints of her reality.

For Genlis, this ambiguous and immoral ending is the result of the historical context in which the novel was written. She claims that *Claire d'Albe* is a reaction to Robespierre and written afterwards "dans un temps où tout fut détruit ou métamorphosé. On créa un autre langage, une autre poétique, une autre morale."¹³³ Call summarizes Genlis's entire critique against Claire d'Albe as "blasphemy against motherhood."¹³⁴ Genlis sees no possibility for a return to virtue for Claire, the last word Claire shouts, "Frédéric", being the nail in Genlis's coffin of Claire's social depravity. However, to apply Nancy K. Miller's theory of women writers to Cottin, it is possible that the use of Frédéric's name is a classic form of rebellion in the form of "a critique of the available cultural solutions."¹³⁵ The tradition of the sentimental novel created by Rousseau is, therefore, used as a form that Cottin uses to investigate women's freedom from duty.

¹³³ Genlis, *De l'influence des femmes*. 241.

¹³⁴ Michael J. Call, "Measuring Up: Infertility and 'Plénitude' in Sophie Cottin's *Claire d'Albe*." *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 7.2 (January, 1995): 200.

¹³⁵ Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University, Press, 1988) 127.

I propose a new reading of *Claire d'Albe* that allows one to see the character of Frédéric as a way to escape authority and express women's sexuality. Prior to Frédéric's arrival, Claire's letters to Elise depict a passionate woman at odds with her role in life. He is not reason for desire, but the catalyst for Claire's preexisting and repressed desire, desire that is present and ultimately repressed by her father's insistence that she maintain class and gendered distinctions by marrying a man of his choosing. Women can have a purpose in society that is not limited to their reproductive abilities. In the universe she creates, desire is permitted between a man and a woman provided that it is based on choice. Motherhood remains, however, incompatible with desire.

The first anonymous publication of *Claire d'Albe* allows Cottin to confront the overtly simplistic definition of women's virtue and range of choice as defined through marriage and motherhood. Anonymity provides a space to explore more radically women's desire than she was otherwise able to under the title of author. This change in authorial status potentially explains the return to women's virtue and purity in her next published novel, *Malvina*. Cottin's correspondence puts both texts into dialogue with one another since she publically confesses to having written *Claire d'Albe* with more freedom without fear of social criticism. In a letter to a friend, she writes: "en écrivant [*Claire d'Albe*], que jamais on n'en soupçonnerait l'auteur, m'y avait fait répandre des

couleurs un peu voluptueuses des passions un peu vives.”¹³⁶ She continues by explaining that *Malvina* is “un peu la correction de l’autre.” Cottin’s correspondence reveals that she was aware of the audacious representation of women’s desire in this *Claire d’Albe*. Anonymity played a large role in Cottin’s ability to confront patriarchal dictates and introduces a compelling element to understanding her revision of women’s freedom in *Amélie Mansfield*.

¹³⁶ Sykes, 330.

2. Epistolarity and Women's Choice in *Amélie Mansfield*

As in *Claire d'Albe*, Cottin explores the relationship between desire and duty through the use of the plurality of written voices in her longest epistolary novel, *Amélie Mansfield*. Unlike *Claire d'Albe*, however, the small narrative transition that frees Claire from expressing her moment of pleasure, gives way to greater manipulations of the epistolary narrative in *Amélie Mansfield*. Claire's adulterous behavior places her social duty as a wife and mother in opposition to her sexual desires for which she is both condemned and exculpated. Cottin breaks the social and narrative structure seen in *Claire d'Albe* to allow her protagonist in *Amélie Mansfield* greater freedom of choice. Cottin provides a narrative space for women's agency by removing marriage from the social context of patriarchy and redefining women's choice through a violent and controversial depiction of the protagonist's death.

This chapter will explore two narrative moments in particular that allow the protagonist to explore women's agency within the limits of the epistolary novel. Both moments rely on the epistolary theme of isolation that establishes emotional tension through the social and geographical isolation of the protagonist. The first disruption in the epistolary form allows for the expression of women's choice as she defines and redefines the relationship between duty and filial piety. In the latter, the conflict between duty and desire are expressed in the conventional conflict between motherhood and sexual desire. However, Cottin does not portray a woman who dies as a result of

her victimization, but describes a violent representation of women's choice in which she refuses the lingering death of the sentimental protagonist and asserts her authority by taking her own life.

Amélie Mansfield discusses the sentimental themes of motherhood, duty, and desire within a unique epistolary organization. The novel is comprised of a series of letters that begin on May 2 of an undisclosed year, and conclude over a year and a half later on the 29th of November. The letters are comprised of multiple written voices that reconstruct the actions during this fixed time-frame. Each letter announces the author of the letter and the designated addressee, the place where the letter was written, and the date. As the emotional intensity rises and falls throughout the novel, the letters circulate more rapidly which is demonstrated by increasingly precise descriptions of the time the letter was written. These details allow the reader to follow the actions of the characters as the letters circulate through time; however, this linear organization is disrupted by two significant narrative moments: "Histoire d'Amélie" and "Journal d'Amélie".

These ruptures in the epistolary stand apart from the other letters for their increased length compared to the other correspondence as well as the unique titles that remove the texts from the epistolary exchange. "Histoire d'Amélie" is an autobiography couched within a letter. Compared to the other letters which vary in length from ten to twelve pages, "Histoire d'Amélie" spans seventy pages of the novel and provides an uncommon literary space from which the protagonist breaks the forward motion of the

other correspondences and provides a retrospective exploration of her life. Likewise, “Journal d’Amélie” offers a space for the protagonist to share her emotional experiences outside of the epistolary exchange of letters. The “Journal” is comprised of a series of personal letters written over a period of seventeen days. Like letters, these entries are dated, but unlike the other correspondence they often specify a precise time of the day, with multiple entries being written in one day; for example on October 3rd there are entries at 3, 6, and 8pm. Intermingled with correspondence between other characters who are writing during the same time, they make no mention of the action happening around the isolated protagonist. These insertions prioritize the woman’s experience.

Combined with the epistolary correspondence and these two autobiographical narrative moments, the reader uncovers the life story of the protagonist through a series of letters that remain faithful to the code of the sentimental genre.¹ *Amélie Mansfield* is the story of a young girl who navigates complex familial ties and attempts to find happiness and escape a prearranged marriage. Amélie’s correspondence begins at her grandfather’s home in Dresden. Her grandfather, the Comte de Woldemar, in an attempt to prevent marriage outside of his social class and maintain the family’s aristocratic lineage, formulates a plan in which his grandchildren are forced to marry as he sees fit or they will lose the family fortune and title. Amélie and her oldest cousin,

¹ Margaret Cohen contends that “sentimental plots prefer the fewest characters necessary for the action, usually from one or two families in the same social circle” (50).

Ernest de Woldemar, are paired from birth; however, if Ernest refuses the marriage, he can only retain both title and fortune by marrying their cousin Blanche de Geysa. If he refuses to marry either of the two women, the entire estate is passed on to Amélie's brother, Albert de Lunebourg, who will then be forced to marry Blanche or lose his title.

In order to facilitate the marriages, the Comte de Woldemar insists that they all live together under his roof. During their childhood, Amélie develops an intense hate for Ernest and for his mother, Madame de Woldemar. Amélie describes her childhood as one terrorized physically and mentally by Ernest: "Il ne se passait guère de jour que Blanche et moi ne fussions les victimes de sa tyrannie" (15). Ernest is sent away after a violent incident with Albert, but these experiences forever taint Amélie's impression of Ernest and she vows never to marry him.

As with other sentimental novels in the eighteenth century, a man from a lower class enters the patriarchal domain and threatens to damage the heroine's virtue. M. Mansfield is an intellectual welcomed by Amélie's father. Woldemar sees the physical attraction between Amélie and M. Mansfield and despises him for threatening the marriage between her son and Amélie. Shortly after Amélie meets M. Mansfield, her mother and father die. Upon her father's death, Woldemar forces a union between Amélie and Ernest. Her arrival at Amélie's house prompts a hasty elopement by M. Mansfield and Amélie who retreat to Albert's home in Prague where Amélie gives birth to a son, Eugène. Albert and Blanche, who have fallen in love, are directly affected by

Amélie's refusal to marry Ernest. Once Ernest returns from his time abroad, Blanche and Ernest are to be married.

In *Amélie Mansfield* the heroine's role as a wife is short-lived. Shortly after the birth of her son, Eugène, M. Mansfield abandons her and is killed in a duel. Widowed and bitter from her husband's betrayal, Amélie seeks freedom and solitude from society. She agrees to live with her uncle M. Grandson in his castle near Lugano. One evening a man named Henry Semler presents himself at their door. Ernest, who is now an adult, arrives under this false name in order to punish Amélie for her rejection. Despite his hatred for her son, whom he sees as a living symbol of her dead husband, Ernest falls in love with her. M. Grandson offers to give him Amélie's hand in marriage, but he refuses since he cannot publically marry without divulging his true identity. Amélie and Ernest unite in the woods where he once again gives her a false name, saying that he is Adolphe, the friend with whom he traveled when young. They declare their love for each other and enter into a symbolic marriage.

It is finally through correspondence that Ernest is unmasked. Ernest must return to his mother's home in Vienna to ask for her blessing. Amélie is once again left alone. During his absence, Amélie receives conflicting letters from Blanche and Ernest, and discovers that he cannot be Adolphe. Ernest finally confesses his true identity in a letter, but Amélie's emotions and anger overcome all else. She abandons her son to the care of M. Grandson and goes to find and confront Ernest in Vienna.

Ernest's lie implicates Amélie in a false marriage. Unlike Julie's altruistic plunge into the lake to save her son, Amélie throws herself into the Danube in anger at her loss of identity. As Michael J. Call describes, Amélie: "pregnant out of wedlock and angry at her victimization by a deceitful lover, swears to die on her Father's tomb in a symbolic rebellion against male perfidy and exploitation, which have robbed her of her own sense of identity."² Blanche recounts Amélie's final days. Even though Amélie is rescued from the water by Ernest she becomes fatally ill and dies, but not before it is uncovered that she is pregnant with Ernest's child. Ernest also dies, and he and Amélie are buried together leaving her only son to be raised by Albert and Blanche.

Amélie's status as a widow and mother play integral roles in the novel. As a widow she is able to move more freely, but it also symbolizes her desire for freedom and identity within patriarchy. Representations of the widow in the novel reflected social concerns and issues affecting these unmarried women's circulation in society.³ The image of the widow in eighteenth-century novels uncover a preoccupation with depicting widows in unhappy marriages, widows in mourning,⁴ and widows raising

² Call, 57.

³ When discussing the literature of the eighteenth century, the widow also figures prominently in French comedy. Alain-René Lesage depicts a widow milking a cow while being milked by her lover in *Turcaret* (1709). Marivaux's theater often depicts widows. For two examples, see *La surprise de l'amour* (1722) and *Les Fausses confidences* (1737). Thomas argues that representations of the widow in theater was different than the representations in the novel: "Because of the dramatic conventions, [widows] roles are usually more confining than the widows' in the novel." (Twice Victims, 434)

⁴ While widows maintain a strong presence in literature, the representations of these women and their relationships to their families are varied and do not center around motherhood. For representations of widows in mourning see in particular Madame de La Tour in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*

children.⁵ However, among the varied representations of widows in literature, Ruth P. Thomas argues that the few novels that stray from the caricature of these women by depicting the widow as the central protagonist of the novel are among those representing widows in unhappy marriages. She cites the following novels: Diderot's two novels *Madame de La Carlière* (1772) and *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (1796), Duclos's *Les Confessions du comte de **** (1741), Marie Jeanne Riccoboni's *Lettres de Juliette Catesby à Milady Henriette Compley, son amie* (1759), and Robert Challe's *Les Illustres françaises* (1713). Common to these novels is the representation of virtuous and obedient widows who want to control their own lives once their freedom is regained through the death of their husbands. In addition, each novel depicts women whose lives are determined by widowhood. Amélie is no different. Her widowed status allows her to move more freely throughout society and create an identity not based on a relationship with men. Through this redefinition of women's independence, Amélie constructs a marriage outside of the constraints of patriarchy.

(1787) and Lady Sidley in Claude-Joseph Dorat's *Les Malheurs de l'inconstance* (1772) which inspired Laclot's *Liaisons dangereuses* and the representation of a widow, Mme de Merteuil who profits from her husband's death.

⁵ The following represent widows with children and investigate how they navigate motherhood. See Mme de Contamine in *Les Illustres Françaises* (1713) written by Robert Challe and Crébillon's Mme de Meilcour *Les Egarèments du cœur et de l'esprit* which appeared in three published parts from 1736 to 1738. Both novels depict widows who sacrifice their own personal happiness to devote their lives to their children.

The image of Eugène plays an important role throughout the novel and symbolizes Amélie's virtue and independence outside of patriarchal dictates. Amélie is depicted as the ideal mother. She forms her identity through motherhood. When writing to her brother, she stresses the importance of Eugène as a symbol of her desire to assert her independence. She writes: [J]e n'ai pas même besoin du souvenir de mes malheurs pour rejeter M. Semler, il me suffit d'être mère: ce n'est pas à l'homme qui marque autant d'éloignement pour mon fils que je voudrais donner aucun pouvoir sur moi."⁶ Through motherhood, Amélie asserts her own authority. As a widow, she dictates her status in society by asserting the power to reject men. Motherhood is depicted in the novel as a duty that she is happy to perform.

Motherhood is not repressive of women's desire in *Amélie Mansfield*, but is repressive of masculine desire. Eugène's presence continually disrupts Ernest's feelings towards Amélie. Eugène is a constant reminder of Amélie's rejection of Ernest and her association with M. Mansfield. When Ernest first meets Eugène at M. Grandson's house he states that "sa vue me fait mal,"⁷ and he reiterates that "jamais Ernest de Woldemar ne servira de père au fils de M. Mansfield" (236). The only obstacle to Ernest's love for Amélie is her son. As Ernest struggles between his hatred of the sight of Eugène and his love for Amélie, she struggles with what she thinks is unfounded hatred of her son since

⁶ Sophie Cottin, *Amélie Mansfield* Vol. 2 (London: Henri Colburn & Co., 1809) 16.

⁷ Sophie Cottin, *Amélie Mansfield* Vol. 1. (London: Henri Colburn & Co., 1809) 221.

she is still under the impression that he is M. Semler. It is only when Ernest accepts her son that Amélie agrees to become his wife.

2.1 Filial Piety

Women's choice is demonstrated in the novel through filial piety. The importance of this theme is reinforced by the constant repetition of the phrase throughout the novel. M. Mansfield uses it to sway Amélie to marry him. By exploiting her father's last wishes, he attempts to convince her to follow her desire and not concern herself with the rejection she expects from her extended family. M. Mansfield states:

Le monde [...] ne verra point sans admiration une jeune fille qui fut modèle de piété filiale, braver la tyrannie de parents éloignés et injustes; il applaudira avec transport à la grandeur d'âme qui vous fera sacrifier le nom illustre que vous n'estimez pas, pour prendre celui d'un homme.⁸

The words reappear in a letter from Amélie to Albert. Filial piety gives her the strength to go against her aunt's wishes. Her aunt has ordered that she never return to Woldemar, where her father and his ancestors are buried; however, her reverence for her father gives her the courage to confront the tyrannical edict of her aunt: "mais la piété filiale m'élève au dessus de cette crainte, et j'ose croire que mon frère ne blâmera pas mon courage" (85). Furthermore, Albert uses it to excuse Blanche's apparent betrayal of Amélie. As a sign of solidarity, Blanche attempts to avoid her aunt but is

⁸ Cottin, *AM1*. 66.

forced by her parents to return to Woldemar. Albert states: “j’ai pensé qu’il était possible que son devoir lui en fît la loi, et que l’obéissance filiale devait aller avant l’amitié même” (123). Additionally, Amélie encounters two girls on her trip to Italy and praises them for sharing “joyeusement entr’elles les soins de la piété filiale et ceux des travaux rustiques” (149). In each of these descriptions, filial piety is invoked to represent Amélie’s devotion to and love for her father and/or brother.

Cottin redefines filial piety, by distancing the term from its religious connotations. The terms *filial* and *piety* both hold religious meanings that will be explored independently and jointly. The eighteenth-century definition of “filial” appears independently from piety in relationship to religious theology. Jean-Baptiste Mallet defines “filial” as paternal love in relationship to God:

Les théologiens distinguent la crainte servile & la crainte filiale: la crainte qu'ils appellent simplement servile, *simpliciter servilis*, est bonne & louable: celle qu'ils nomment servilement servile, *serviliter servilis*, est mauvaise; elle se trouve même dans le cœur des plus grands scélérats: mais la crainte, *timor filialis*, qui résulte de l'amour & du respect filial, est la plus parfaite, & se rencontre dans les âmes les plus justes.⁹

Fear of God provides the basis for filial love and respect. *Piety* implies a sense of devotion and reverence to God and the father, *filial* limits this devotion to the relationship between parent and child.

⁹ Jean-Baptiste Mallet, “Filial.” *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D’Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2011) 6:797.

As a joint term, filial piety is only found in the *Encyclopédie* under the definition of “femme”. François-Édouard Desmahis defines woman’s moral duty as the following:

Renfermée dans les devoirs de femme & de mère, elle consacre ses jours à la pratique des vertus obscures: occupée du gouvernement de sa famille, elle règne sur son mari par la complaisance, sur ses enfants par la douceur, sur ses domestiques par la bonté: sa maison est la demeure des sentiments religieux, de la piété filiale, de l’amour conjugal, de la tendresse maternelle, de l’ordre, de la paix intérieure, du doux sommeil, & de la santé: économe & sédentaire, elle en écarte les passions & les besoins.¹⁰

Filial piety is defined in relation to women’s duty to motherhood, chastity and faithfulness in marriage, and religious obedience. Filial piety is placed in direct opposition to desire and women’s passion.

Filial piety is portrayed differently from these definitions in *Amélie Mansfield*.

While the common factor of all her novels is that it is a young girl who either confronts or accepts duty to her father, husband, or a strong patriarchal figure, *Amélie Mansfield* transforms the typical subservient male/female relationship. Gone is the blatant rebellion against paternal authority and filial responsibility as seen in *Claire d’Albe* where Claire succumbs to Frédéric upon the steps of her father’s tombstone. In *Amélie Mansfield*, filial piety is set in place by her father to ensure that her desires are maintained and protected against forces such as a tyrannical grandfather and a manipulating aunt. Amélie’s father epitomizes all that her grandfather does not:

¹⁰ François-Édouard Desmahis, “Femme.” *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D’Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2011) 6:472.

Le genre d'esprit de mon père ne lui permettait point d'adopter les usages de la noblesse saxonne, qui, n'admettans [sic] aucun mélange dans les diverses classes de la société, apportant un obstacle invincible à ce que les hommes de mérite soient traités comme ils doivent l'être; il aimait passionnément les arts et les lettres.¹¹

Amélie encounters Mansfield who is not of noble blood. Amélie's father invited intellectuals from all social classes to his house. Amélie idealized her father's liberal views which were transmitted to her and her brother. Amélie writes: "Je ne voyais que par les yeux de mon père, et je chérissais tout ce qu'il aimait" (26). Her father allows Amélie to envision a more liberal role for herself in society.

Despite the multilayered nature of this story, Cottin immediately establishes a dichotomy between patriarchal control and filial piety. In her first correspondence she must decide whether to accept her uncle as a paternal figure in her life. If Amélie accepts his offer, M. Grandson will make her his heiress in addition to taking on the role of grandfather to her son. M. Grandson has invited Amélie to live with him and Amélie asks for Albert's advice, saying "je ne le prendrai point sans ton approbation: que ne l'ai-je toujours crue nécessaire pour me guider!"(1). Amélie emphasizes the importance of Albert's approval. Amélie's choice emphasizes the difference between the despotic reign of her grandfather and the democratic choice offered to her by her uncle.

Desire is placed in a mutually beneficial binary with filial piety, allowing for the female protagonist to refuse to submit to the pressures of patriarchal control. Amélie is

¹¹ Cottin, AM1. 24-25.

given the liberty to choose whether to accept his proposal and, her freedom of choice undermines patriarchal authority, the supreme authority the father or father figure has over the family. Amélie finishes the letter by asking her brother to think carefully about the decision and consider whether there is “un avantage au monde qui puisse l’emporter sur la douleur de ne plus nous voir” (2). Amélie’s choice is based on a mutual decision. She clearly expresses at the same time a reverence and devotion to her brother; however, unlike the blind filial piety that appears in Cottin’s later novels at the expense of the heroine’s own personal desires, Cottin creates a female protagonist in *Amélie Mansfield* who struggles to reconcile her own needs and wants with those of her brother’s.

Based on the descriptions of her father, brother, uncle, and Ernest’s childhood, Amélie does not owe filial piety to the male members of her family who retain the most financial and domestic control. She sees both her grandfather and Ernest as symbols of unjust masculine power. Like Claire, who visits her father’s tomb, Amélie returns to the tombs of her father and grandfather. Both Claire and Amélie return to pay homage to their fathers’ memory. Claire’s prayers are an attempt to follow patriarchal authority and suppress her desires that result in her ultimate rebellion against this authority by consummating her love on her father’s tomb. Amélie returns to Woldemar to say goodbye to her father one last time. Instead of showing reverence to the patriarchal

authority of her extended family, she confronts and judges her grandfather. Amélie writes to Albert:

À l'aspect de tous ces tombeaux, de celui de mon grand-père surtout, élevé au dessus des autres comme pour dominer encore, j'ai été frappé plus vivement que jamais du néant de la naissance et des grandeurs: c'est ici que ce mortel, si fier de ses ancêtres, a été forcé d'abandonner ses prétentions hautaines; mais le mal qu'il a fait lui survit; et tandis qu'il dort en paix, les ordres de son orgueil jettent la discorde dans la famille et trouble ma vie. Ce n'est pas ainsi, ô mon excellent père! Que vous avez marqué votre passage sur cette terre; et là où vous n'exerçâtes que des vertus douces et bienfaisantes, vous n'avez dû laisser que des souvenirs de reconnaissance et d'amour.¹²

Amélie challenges the dominant role that her grandfather plays as the head of the family. Instead of inspiring awe and admiration, his tomb only emphasizes his mortality and the negative aspects of his personality, such as his wasted pride. Instead of maintaining his bloodline and ensuring the continuation of his family line, his only legacy is dissension and hatred. The comparison made before the tombs of her father and grandfather directly confronts the idea of blind faith in patriarchal control that both Amélie and her father rebel against by allowing her to follow her own desire.

Albert's presence symbolizes their father's liberal beliefs after his death. Albert is given authority over Amélie, but, unlike the domineering patriarchal control that her grandfather imposed, Albert's influence is not that of control.¹³ His duty is to serve as

¹² Cottin, AM1. 88-89.

¹³ Christine Adams presents an interesting argument on brother/sister relationships in the eighteenth century. Adams analyzed the correspondence of a professional family in Bordeaux, the Lamothe family, as a case study of sibling relations in eighteenth-century France. She researched more than 300 personal letters

her moral guide and let her choose freely. On his deathbed, Amélie's father passes paternal authority over Amélie to Albert. He addresses his son by saying:

Albert, je te connais bien et je suis sûr de toi; ni l'adversité ni les passions ne dégraderont ton âme vertueuse; mais cette pauvre orpheline,...Mon fils, sers-lui de père, de mère, deviens sa providence: j'ignore si l'époux qui lui est destiné doit faire son bonheur [...]. Albert, ne permets point qu'elle s'accomplisse, et que mon Amélie ne soit jamais forcée. (48-49)

Amélie's father establishes a clear difference between his son and daughter. By insisting that Albert is strong enough to not allow adversity and passions affect his virtue, he inherently attributes a greater susceptibility to Amélie since she, unlike her brother, is sensitive enough to be affected by her passion.¹⁴ Albert's emotional superiority over Amélie establishes a gendered dichotomy between reason and passion. By asking Albert to be Amélie's "providence", her father is better able to defend her against the dangers that giving liberty to Amélie could present.

over twenty-five years, from 1750 to mid-1760's. She concludes that "Close brother-sister relations reflect another familial ideal developing in the eighteenth century, that of the new domesticated family, a family model that was much less hierarchical, less formal, and more openly loving." "Devoted Companions or Surrogate Spouses?: Sibling Relations in Eighteenth-Century France." *Visions and revisions of Eighteenth-Century France* Eds. Christine Adams et al. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) 61. Adams offers that this study does not offer a typical example of sibling relationships, but does point to the need to explore traditional ideas of family life and marital relations. She sees a connection in the social relationship of siblings in Victorian England to that of France which is supported by authors like: James Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 1980); and Jean-Louis Fandrin, *Familles: parenté, maison, sexualité dans l'ancienne société* (Paris: Seuil, 1984)

¹⁴ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall contend that "[A brother and sister's] treatment of each other was explicitly meant to prefigure that of marriage and through it they were to learn appropriate gender behavior." *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 348-49.

The power conferred to her brother, however, is not based on submission as was that of her grandfather's and Ernest's childhood cruelty. In *Amélie Mansfield* there is a more liberal view of raising a daughter than in such works like Rousseau's *Emile* and even Cottin's own *Claire d'Albe*. In addition, her father's last wish is to ensure that Amélie has choice, albeit tempered choice, since her brother will serve as the voice of reason in her decision. Giving a young woman choice in marriage reflects the liberal view of feminine destiny.

In *Amélie Mansfield*, the female protagonist not only rebels against patriarchal control but redefines the moral value placed on marriage for young women. Amélie's father's more liberal views supersede her grandfather's authoritarian reign on the family. Amélie begins by refusing to follow the rules imposed by her grandfather and thereby rejecting social status and wealth by marrying someone not authorized by the family's patriarch and who is of an inferior social class. Amélie refuses to engage in the patriarchal establishment of marriage. After being abandoned by M. Mansfield, she asserts throughout the novel: "si j'avais le malheur d'aimer encore, je crois que je ne pourrais jamais me résoudre à former des nouveaux nœuds [...] ce n'est pas dans la sainte union du mariage que l'amour se conserve" (228). She continues by writing to Albert: "Je rejette le mariage, Albert, mais je crois que tout amour qui secoue son joug n'est ni pur ni heureux" (257). While she foreshadows her future love for Ernest by not

abandoning the possibility of love, she clearly states that marriage and love cannot exist together.

Not only does Amélie reject the destiny imposed upon her by her grandfather, but she only accepts marriage based on her own moral standards. After she has been betrayed by Mansfield, she hesitantly allows herself to fall in love again with Ernest, but refuses a traditional marriage union. Instead, she and Ernest create a private marriage based on their love for each other that exists outside of the social convention of marriage. Ernest refused Amélie's hand when it was offered by M. Grandson. Amélie, therefore, is not subject to being given in marriage by a patriarch, but chooses to engage in a marriage of her and her lover's own creation. There is an egalitarian transformation of marriage that occurs between her and her lover. They both meet on the bank of the river and profess their love for each other. It is Amélie, however, who engineers the details of their union. Amélie responds to Ernest by saying: "Maintenant que le ciel a entendu nos vœux, que je suis ton épouse, que nous ne devons plus avoir qu'un cœur et qu'une existence."¹⁵ Importantly, it is Amélie who recognizes their union as an oral pact stated before God. She, therefore, asserts her feminine authority and enters into a marriage of her own design.

¹⁵ Cottin, *AM2*. 135.

2.2 Epistolarity

Amélie Mansfield challenges traditional conceptions of filial piety and its use in the sentimental novel, but the novel's unusual use of letter writing also serves as a tool to investigate women's voice, freedom of choice and virtue. Women's virtue is depicted and reaffirmed through Cottin's unique manipulation of the epistolary genre. Her representation of morality is based on freedom of choice and outside of negative social aspects of patriarchy. Susan Lanser argues that narrative voice becomes a matter not simply of technique but of social authority because expression of sexuality and desire often involve social exclusion.¹⁶ In *Amélie Mansfield*, Cottin uses the epistolary genre to confront the rigid dichotomy of duty and women's sexuality from the perspective of her protagonist's actions.

The choice of genre plays an integral role in analyzing how morals are transmitted through the epistolary narrative. Cottin's choice of genre was intentional. In Cottin's preface to the 1802 edition of *Amélie Mansfield*, she writes:

Ce roman est en lettres; cette forme m'a toujours paru plus favorable à la vraisemblance que la narration. Comment, en effet, ajouter foi au récit d'un auteur, ou croire qu'un des personnages qui raconte ce que les autres ont fait et pensé ne s'est pas trompé? Ce n'est que lorsque chacun de ceux qui concourent à l'action rapporte lui-même les projets qu'il médite, les obstacles qu'il rencontre, les sentiments qu'il éprouve, que le lecteur peut accorder sa confiance."¹⁷

¹⁶ See *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) in which Lanser explores patterns of narration from the mid eighteenth century to the present.

¹⁷ Sophie Cottin, *Amélie Mansfield* (Paris: Maradan, 1802) VII-VIII.

The epistolary novel conveys the truth and emotions of the character's experiences.

Cottin's narrative goal is to portray real emotions and feelings in the reader.

In light of the literary history behind the genre, it is important to place Cottin's *Amélie Mansfield* in dialogue with current debates on the use of epistolarity. In Bernard Duyfhuizen's article he proposes that all epistolary novels contain a double narrative in which there is a narrative of events and a narrative of the letters that precipitate or report the events.¹⁸ He contends that the most complex textual societies created in the epistolary novel are *Clarissa*, *Julie*, and *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and asserts that what separates these works from other epistolary fictions is the multiple correspondents and an editorial framework to transmit the letters to the reader.¹⁹ In contrast with these three novels, Cottin's *Amélie Mansfield* transcribes seductions and depicts the isolation of the female protagonists. While the differences between each novel are substantial, it is important to the understanding of Cottin's work to invoke Richardson and Laclos as points of reference.

John Preston argues that the presence of a long series of letters serves as the basis of action in the novel: "it is the act of writing that forms the action of the novel" (24). The characters engage in the act of writing. Richardson's characters are isolated individuals. The use of letters highlights the theme of alienation that pervades the novel. Preston

¹⁸ "Epistolary Narratives of Transmission and Transgression." *Comparative Literature* 37.1 (Winter, 1985): 1.

¹⁹ The multiplicity of correspondents in these works mentioned by Duyfhuizen is opposed to monophonic works such as Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* and Riccoboni's *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butelard* (as well as As with Richardson's *Pamela*).

continues by asserting that Laclos, however, provides the reader with a “symmetry of interlocking relationships”. The letters are not the only action, but are vehicles for supporting action in the novel. Cottin’s novel melds both forms of letter writing.

Despite the similarities between Cottin’s fiction and that of her predecessors, *Amélie Mansfield* differentiates itself from other epistolary fictions of the time by the lack of a feminine counterpart to Amélie. Other epistolary novels offer both male and female perspectives. Much like Laclos’ *Liaisons dangereuses*, the plot of *Amélie Mansfield* is told through the interweaving voices of both male and female interlocutors; however, there remains one dominant female voice. Amélie is the catalyst for all the correspondence between the other characters. In addition, her letters are given authorial power over the others as we will see later. The majority of correspondences in *Amélie Mansfield* are between Amélie and men. The initial correspondence in Amélie is with her brother, Albert, and her uncle, M. Grandson. Male voices are constantly present throughout the novel. Amélie’s relationship to these masculine characters is complex since she is manipulated and empowered while directly contesting the patriarchal control that surrounds her throughout the novel.

The absence of a female counterpart to the female protagonists in *Amélie Mansfield* marks a significant difference in the epistolary styles as seen in *Claire d’Albe* and *Julie*. Amélie does not initially establish a strong relationship with another woman in her correspondence. Her writing is predominantly addressed to men. In April

Alliston's analysis of *Lettres de Mademoiselle de Boismiran, recueillies et publiées par Mme de **** (1777), she discusses the importance of defining a feminine relationship before the narration has begun that is commonly seen in epistolary writing. Alliston discusses Madame de Boisgiron's narrative and highlights the fact that "before her narrative begins, the heroine has developed both of the primary forms of female friendship in novels and women's correspondence: with a substitute mother [...] and also with a confidante and peer."²⁰ This is also seen in Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie* (1784). The link between the heroine and a feminine friend is illustrated in the title since the works are purported to be published by a woman who had intimate knowledge and access to the correspondence. Cottin's first novel, *Claire d'Albe*, establishes a similar relationship between Claire and Elise. Claire's initial letter reiterates her pain at leaving her longtime friend. The reader therefore has a sense of the interruption of an ongoing dialogue.

The female correspondent plays the role of friend and double of the heroine in the sentimental epistolary tradition. Alliston stresses that the heroine's double acts to protect both the reader and writer from the social implications of conforming to beliefs that subvert patriarchal society:

Doubling enables literature of sensibility to portray a female character exhibiting qualities of active strength in opposition to the patriline plots

²⁰ April Alliston, *Virtue's Faults: Correspondences in Eighteenth-Century British and French Women's Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 121.

that would divert her own, while avoiding the social unacceptability under real patriarchy, the patriarchy confronted by novelists and readers, of investing a supposedly virtuous heroine with such unfeminine qualities. (121-22)

As seen with Claire, her confidant Elise is the strong double of the heroine and is used after her death to vilify the immoral actions of Claire's infidelity and rejection of her motherly duties. Without an established female correspondent, Amélie veers from the generic norm. However, Amélie's brother, Albert, assumes the role of confidant.

Cottin uses the epistolary form to assert feminine authority through choice. By immediately establishing a masculine/feminine confidant with the correspondence between Albert and Amélie, Amélie navigates both public and private spheres. Her experiences are read and shared by a man at the same time that she is implicated in the private sphere through her status as mother and wife. The superiority Albert has over Amélie in controlling his passions is established as a masculine/feminine difference, but one that does not rely on domination. Albert attempts to guide Amélie through difficult moral choices. Despite the potential masculine authoritative presence this could have on his sister, Albert respects Amélie and shows continual love and support.

Albert's support is seen throughout the novel and appears as early as her initial rupture with the patriarchal authority of her grandfather. Despite the fact that Amélie's marriage to M. Mansfield directly impedes his marriage to Blanche, he shows his love for Amélie, regardless of her decision to marry M. Mansfield, by offering them his house in Prague, so they can be away from the judgmental eyes of society and their aunt.

Albert is not a neutral correspondent. As with Elise in *Claire d'Albe*, he serves as her moral touchstone. He does not condone her marriage to M. Mansfield; ultimately, however, he supports her choice: "Albert combattit fortement ma résolution; le noble Albert, que ni les sollicitations de mes parents, ni celles de Blanche, ni celles de son propre cœur ne pouvaient décider à me presser en faveur d'Ernest, s'opposa toujours à mon mariage avec M. Mansfield."²¹ Albert remains faithful to his father's wish that she not be forced into marriage and essentially represses his own desire to fulfill Amélie's.

It is important to note that in this novel there is a generational and gendered gap in how feminine desire is perceived. Amélie's relationship with Woldemar is immediately transformed when Amélie shows interest in M. Mansfield. After her mother's death, Woldemar attempts to usurp parental control by adopting the role of Amélie's mother and thereby obtaining rights to dictate whom she will marry. Amélie says: "elle devenait ma mère, me disait-elle [...] Je fus peu touchée de cette marque d'affection" (42). Unlike M. Grandson who invites Amélie to become his daughter, Woldemar assumes this position. She refuses the pseudo-mother role offered by the remaining matriarch of the family. Woldemar is an example of failed female mentorship.

Woldemar is the family matriarch, but attempts to preserve the patriarchal control of her father. She blames Amélie for taking away her son's wealth and going against her wishes. In light of Amélie's refusal of Ernest, Woldemar attempts to

²¹ Cottin, *AM1*. 55-56.

manipulate those around her to isolate and abandon Amélie by cutting off all written and verbal communication. Blanche says that:

Notre hautaine et despotique tante ayant donné à mon père, en manière de conseil, l'ordre positif de m'interdire toute communication avec toi, il a obéi, et ce n'est qu'à force de supplication et de caresses que j'ai pu obtenir de lui en secret un dernier adieu. (140)

It is only by appealing to her father that Blanche is able to contact Amélie. Woldemar's strategy is to silence Amélie's voice. Throughout the novel Woldemar refuses to hear her name spoken in her presence.

The failed demonization of Amélie by Woldemar only works generationally, and only on the women. Blanche's mother and Madame de Simmeren, Adolphe's mother, readily accept the ostracization of Amélie. Even as she faces death, the women are unsympathetic to Amélie. Ernest brings her to his mother's house in Vienna after she is found by the water. Amélie is deathly ill, but Woldemar and Blanche's mother attempt to isolate Amélie even in her illness. Blanche writes to Albert: "et ma mère, par [Woldemar's] ordre sans doute, m'a enfermée dans la chambre."²² Again, it is Blanche's father who speaks out against the patriarchal edict and allows Blanche contact with Amélie.

Woldemar attempts to erase Amélie's presence through her correspondence as well. Even though she is aware of the relationship between Amélie and her son,

²² Sophie Cottin, *Amélie Mansfield* Vol. 3. (London: Henri Colburn & Co., 1809) 158.

Woldemar's letters are a constant appeal for her son to return to her. Ernest asks his mother to bring Amélie to her home to nurse her back to health. In her response, Woldemar writes: "Je ne vous fermerai point la porte, quoique vous l'ayez mérité peut-être; mais je veux ignorer du moins que vous ne revenez pas seul; arrangez-vous pour que cette femme ne paraisse pas à mes yeux" (147). She ignores her son's reason for returning and distances herself again from her niece, calling her "cette femme." In addition, she rejects his emotional bond with Amélie. Her response to Amélie's health shows deliberate cruelty to Amélie at the expense of her son's happiness. Samia I. Spencer, in her analysis of Cottin's oeuvre, remarks that:

Unlike the female characters, who gain from their privileged relationships with older men—be they fathers or protectors—the male characters are adversely affected by their bonds to older female relatives. Mothers or pseudo-mothers are overshadowing, domineering, merciless, ruthless, and tyrannical, of a cruelty that has no limits. Their determination to achieve their goals blinds them to any other consideration, and leads them to cause the death.²³

By refusing to help Amélie, Woldemar is ultimately deciding her son's fate since Ernest will not be able to survive without Amélie. Despite her refusal to acknowledge Amélie's presence, her constant rejection and attempts to control Amélie's interactions through others negates her desire to erase her from her life. Woldemar refuses to accept her son's

²³ Samia I. Spencer, "The French Revolution and the Early Nineteenth-Century French Novel: The Case of Sophie Cottin." *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 18 (January 1991): 501.

love for Amélie, but admits that his presence is contingent upon Amélie's. The rhetoric of her letter attempts to manipulate her son into abandoning Amélie.

The manipulative and vindictive actions of Woldemar are reminiscent of the Marquise de Merteuil in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) by Laclos. Samia I. Spencer asserts that in *Amélie* "a war of wills opposes a young, virtuous, and honorable heroine to an older, stubborn, ruthless, and possessive woman."²⁴ Both Merteuil and Woldemar attempt to play a maternal role to force a union between two young people at the expense of their dignity and social standing. In the case of *Amélie Mansfield*, the desired union is based on retaining monetary and physical control over the title and estate. Woldemar tries to impose the patriarchal order attempted by Amélie's grandfather at the expense of her son and niece. After the failed union of Amélie and Ernest during their youth, Woldemar is not satisfied with Amélie's absence and aims to tarnish her reputation, thus creating an image of Amélie that doesn't correspond with that as told through Woldemar's letters.

Howland examines the epistolary communication of the Vicomte de Valmont and the Merteuil from Laclos's work and asserts that:

the Vicomte de Valmont and the Merteuil are not content, of course, merely to embellish reality as it is perceived by their correspondents; Laclos's two virtuosos in the art of epistolary communication go so far as to actually create reality of character, rather than simply to enhance

²⁴ Samia I. Spencer, "The French Revolution and the Early Nineteenth-Century French Novel: The Case of Sophie Cottin." *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 18 (January 1991): 503.

certain aspects of it. This third level of epistolary premeditations sees the missive used as a strategic weapon for outright deception and the ultimate domination of the adversary or prey."²⁵

Like the two manipulators mentioned above, Woldemar seeks to destroy Amélie's reputation and create a lasting impression of her immorality in the face of her peers after having lost the male gaze of her son. She vindictively transfers her anger at her son's absence and his loss of his title into hatred for Amélie. Like Merteuil, Woldemar ultimately is the one to pay for her unsympathetic view of Amélie's character and life choices.

In the end, it is Woldemar's survival and regret that inspires pity. Amélie's last wish is that Ernest reconcile with his mother. Woldemar is leaving the house to avoid Amélie's death when Amélie calls her back to be reconciled with her son. Her return to the house and her hesitation to approach the two lovers shows that she is not unfeeling. According to Blanche, Woldemar returns to the house with tears in her eyes and says: "Blanche, soignez-la, consolez-la, dites-lui bien que je ne veux pas sa mort... dites-lui... Non, ne lui dites rien" (215-216). This is a rare moment of uncontrolled and non-manipulative speech, and it illustrates that although she knows that her words have the power to offer some consolation to both Amélie and Ernest, she cannot move beyond her anger. Woldemar's disinclination to outwardly show regret and emotion in front of

²⁵ John W. Howland, *The Letter Form and the French Enlightenment: The Epistolary Paradox* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991) 155.

Ernest and Amélie is countered by her freedom of speech in front of Blanche, although her apparently uncontrolled desire to publically ruin Amélie's name is quickly replaced by control and silence. Woldemar's attempts to manipulate the couple are unsuccessful, and result in the death of her son and niece.

Unlike Woldemar, Merteuil successfully corrupts the young Cécile by manipulating her relationship with two men. While Cécile loses her virginity and is sent to a convent, Merteuil is punished for the role she played in victimizing Cécile. Merteuil suffers from smallpox, but survives and is left to endure public embarrassment at her disfigurement. Her punishment is described by Madame de Volange, the mother of Cécile, to her friend Madame de Rosemonde:

Le sort de Mme de Merteuil paraît enfin rempli, ma chère et digne amie; et il est tel que ses plus grands ennemis sont partagés entre l'indignation qu'elle mérite, et la pitié qu'elle inspire. J'avais bien raison de dire que ce serait peut-être un bonheur pour elle de mourir de sa petite vérole. Elle en est revenue, il est vrai, mais affreusement défigurée; et elle y a particulièrement perdu un œil.²⁶

Merteuil has lost all her manipulative power since her disfigurement and lack of finances now affords her no social standing. Merteuil's disfigurement symbolizes her moral corruption, now visible for all to see.

Similarly, Ernest's death ends Woldemar's manipulations. Woldemar expresses regret and an acceptance of the eternal suffering that this will cause her:

²⁶ Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1996 [originally 1782]) 511.

Dieu! je ne me plains point; ma peine est grande, mais je l'ai mérité!... Mon fils... Amélie... saintes et douces victimes! Vous n'avez point appelé la colère divine sur ma tête; mais le remords qui s'est placé là [...] ce remords qui me fait frémir à l'idée d'une éternité que je sens être inséparable de lui, ce remords vous vengera assez.²⁷

Woldemar acknowledges her participation in their death by calling them “victims.” She admits her fault in recognizing that she is worthy of God’s punishment. While Merteuil is cursed by a disfiguring disease, Woldemar will also suffer for the rest of her life, but her punishment is self-inflicted. She admits that her own remorse will be sufficient vengeance for the pain and suffering she has caused. Like Merteuil, who no longer holds her previous social status, Woldemar’s place as matriarch is destroyed with the death of Amélie and Ernest.

Throughout the novel, Amélie successfully garners masculine support even when confronted with Woldemar’s presupposed authority in the family. Masculine voices are present throughout the novel and create sympathy for a heroine who goes beyond the established social duties imposed on women. Amélie’s relationships with M. Grandson and Albert are both based on truth and respect. Neither man judges Amélie’s actions as immoral. Their correspondence serves to redeem the potential moral corruption caused by her marriage to M. Mansfield and rebellion against her grandfather. Amélie is even able to transform the hatred that Ernest has fostered since childhood. There is a dramatic difference between the way Amélie is described by

²⁷ Cottin, *AM* 3. 252.

Ernest and portrayed in the beginning of his correspondence and after Ernest's contact with her increases. Ernest no longer sees her as the woman who ruined his life, but someone for whom he is willing to abandon his title and fortune: "cache-moi un bonheur auquel je sacrifierais rang, naissance, devoir."²⁸ Ernest's command here is rhetorical. While Ernest appears to want to avoid sacrificing the values given to him in his youth, his allusion to this loss indicates a desire to sacrifice. Ernest's desire for Amélie coupled with his regret that she has a son with M. Mansfield and subsequent capitulation to this moral boundary he has established sway Adolphe's negative view that has been imposed on him by Woldemar and her sympathizers. The masculine voices reinstate Amélie's virtue and honor that has been tarnished by her aunt, who refuses to forgive her for rejecting Ernest.

The masculine voice remains present even in Blanche's correspondence with Amélie. Despite their childhood together, Blanche's role in the novel as an adult and her relationship to Amélie are solely based on her status as Albert's sister and their intimate and trusting brother/sister relationship. Albert and Amélie sacrifice for each other, and Blanche's correspondence in the novel is focused on maintaining her relationship with Albert through Amélie. In Amélie's initial correspondence to M. Grandson, in which she explains her past, she admits that Blanche is responsible for her knowledge of Albert's sacrifice: "Ce n'est qu'après mon mariage avec M. Mansfield que j'ai appris ce que je

²⁸ Cottin, AM1. 88-89.

coûtais à Albert, et c'est Blanche qui me l'a appris; sans elle j'aurais ignoré toujours sans doute le mal que j'ai fait à un frère si chéri" (54). Blanche's relationship with Amélie is contingent on Albert as a unifying element between the two women. In addition, in the first letter from Blanche to Amélie that appears in the novel, Blanche is concerned with Albert's behavior after Amélie leaves with M. Grandson: "Depuis ton départ, je suis triste; ton frère n'est plus aimable" (140). Blanche immediately blames her and Albert's happiness on Amélie since it is Amélie's absence that has directly influenced the way in which her brother is reacting to Blanche. As with other examples in which a female correspondent serves as a moral compass for the protagonist, Blanche questions Amélie's moral decisions; however, unlike Elise in *Claire d'Albe*, for example, her remonstrations come after Amélie's marriage, which has disrupted the established patriarchal order. Unlike Amélie, Blanche tempers her desire:

Je veux bien lui plaire plus qu'à personne mais c'est tout, et exiger davantage, c'est vouloir plus que la nature ne permet aux femmes de donner. Tu souris; mais il n'est pas question de toi ici; on sait bien qu'Amélie est une exception; et dis-moi, qu'as-tu gagné à l'être? En renonçant à cette douce et innocente coquetterie que je défends ici as-tu été plus aimée? [...] Crois-moi, cousine, c'est être ingrat que de ne pas bénir cette mobilité de sensations et cette envie constante de plaire, qui est pour notre sexe le préservatif des grandes passions, c'est-à-dire, des grands malheurs et des grandes sottises. (142-143)

Blanche's ideas echo the social pressure to avoid extreme passions that can disrupt the established social order. She couches her discourse under the form of advice but directly critiques Amélie's choices for having a negative effect on her and her brother. Ironically,

the advice Blanche offers Amélie is given late since she has already committed to travel a path of “grandes passions” and “des grands malheurs et des grandes sottises” by living isolated in Switzerland with her uncle.

However, the advice Blanche gives is a reaction to how she feels about Amélie’s brother. Blanche’s quote establishes the different natures of the two women with a single man in common. While Janet Todd states that “female friendship is the only social relationship we actually enter in the novel and the only one the heroine actively constructs,”²⁹ Cottin constructs a different narrative environment in which Amélie does not build friendships with women. As seen in the discussion of Amélie’s suicide attempt, Blanche serves as eyes for Albert so that he can witness the experience. Additionally, Blanche serves as the go-between for Amélie and Albert as Amélie is on her deathbed and cannot write to her brother. Blanche is committing a continued act of rebellion against the patriarchal control of Woldemar based on Blanche’s desire to keep Albert apprised of his sister’s health. Blanche is a faithful interlocutor for Amélie only because of her ties to Albert and his love for his sister.

2.3 Women’s Voice and Memoire

Cottin sets her epistolary fiction apart from others by giving an intimate authorial voice to her female protagonist. In the outset of the novel, Cottin creates a

²⁹ Janet Todd, *Women’s Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 2.

frame story in which Amélie removes herself from the linear narrative outlined in the epistolary form and recounts her past. Cottin adds a temporal structure by dating each letter as written by the multiple voices present in the novel. Each letter serves to establish a moment beyond the one prior since they are in response to each other, creating a temporal chain, or timeline, constructed by the reader. As the novel progresses, the reader is aware that the action of reading correspondences entails a moment of writing, a moment of waiting, and a moment of reading for all the correspondents. The action of the novel is based on the characters receiving and waiting for responses. In addition, Cottin introduces elements of Amélie's journaling into the epistolary format. According to Janet Altman, these moments create privileged spaces, moments of high tension, and tragic isolation.³⁰

The initial narration of *Amélie Mansfield* is very different from other epistolary novels. The reader is not asked to reconstitute a totality out of the dispersed voices. Cottin breaks the fragmented dialogue of the letter and inserts an aside that takes the reader out of the linear progression of the novel. Amélie is twenty-two when her correspondence with M. Grandson begins, but here recounts her life story from childhood to present. This establishes a mixing of generic forms in which the epistolary narrative, which is inherently read as a series of interruptions, is disrupted and replaced

³⁰ *Epistolarity* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982) 57.

by the cohesive narration of the memoir. Howland highlights this narrative element as found in the memoir by writing:

The temporal distance, which engenders what has been called the *double registre* of the memoir novel, allows the memorialist to organize the chaotic succession of the events of his life into a coherent chain. In short, the character-as-writer becomes a nuncio between the character-as-actor and the reader; he retrospectively reconstructs his life into a narrative that can be followed by someone else.³¹

Cottin allows Amélie to retell her story in a narrative device outside of the epistolary as seen by the format of the novel. Amélie prepares M. Grandson and the reader for the narrative as an aside:

Je vous demande votre indulgence pour quelques pages sur ma première enfance, qui a eu trop d'influence sur ma destinée pour devoir les supprimer, et je vous la demande plus encore pour quelques détails de généalogie, qui m'ont paru indispensablement nécessaires à l'intelligence de plusieurs évènements.³²

Further enhanced by the subheading given to this portion of the novel, the "Histoire d'Amélie" denotes a graphical, temporal and narrative change.

Instead of inscribing her heroine in the more common epistolary tradition in which correspondents express a presupposed understanding of their past, Amélie is given authorial control of how the reader perceives her story and, as such, her moral fortitude and virtue. Howland describes the epistolary tradition as one in which "the

³¹ Howland, 83.

³² Cottin, *AM1*. 11. Here Cottin, as a disciple of Rousseau, highlights the influence childhood has on forming the adult individual as seen in Rousseau's *Emile* and the *Confessions*. In addition, the fictional autobiographical style in Cottin's novel can be likened to Rousseau's autobiographical work from the *Confessions*.

correspondents are made to tell each other things they already know at the outset in order to inform the public of what has happened so far.”³³ Cottin deviates from this structure in Amélie’s biographical letter to her uncle. Cottin’s narrative technique could be likened to the structure found in Isabelle de Charrière’s text, *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie* (1784); however, Amélie does not have the same relationship with her correspondent as Mistriss Henley. Mistriss Henley inserts her biography into her correspondence, but unlike Amélie, who is writing for personal reasons, Mistriss Henley is creating a literary account to develop public solidarity in her lived experience in reaction to *Le Mari sentimental* (1783). In Charrière’s case, the protagonist inserts her personal biography, but her correspondent is almost an omniscient reader since she has already heard her story. Mistriss Henley writes: “Je vous dirai des choses que vous savez déjà, pour que vous entendiez mieux, ou plutôt pour pouvoir plus facilement vous dire celles que vous ignorez.”³⁴ Cottin does not use this explanatory narrative device. Amélie is asked to justify her actions to a recipient, her uncle, who does not know the full story. He is ignorant of the truth and is only aware of the gossip that has been circulating. This is a moment in the novel where Amélie’s voice has authority over the others as she justifies her actions by telling the truth from her biased perspective without corroboration from other interlocutors.

³³ Howland, 134.

³⁴ Isabelle de Charrière, *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie* (New York: Modern Language association, 1993 [originally 1784]) 5.

Continuing her status as a virtuous woman relies on her ability to persuade and inspire confidence. The novel hinges on her efforts to persuade her uncle through writing. Living with her uncle is contingent on her explaining her reasons behind refusing her cousin and her role in M. Mansfield's abandoning of her and her son. Amélie's success has direct implications on the authority given to her voice by being able to convince the reader that she is telling the truth.

Amélie is both writing to her uncle and brother in the present and reflecting on the past. Her letter to her uncle serves as a biography of her early life and creates a retrospective narration. She writes her entire life story to explain and excuse her moral standing. Told in the first person, the letter attempts to convince the reader of the truth behind Amélie's emotions. This is a literary device that allows the reader to delve into the psychological motivations of the main character and permits access to the truth as she sees it, thereby engendering sympathy and pity for the female protagonist.

Amélie's biographical aside serves to exculpate herself from misinterpretations of her past actions. Elizabeth J. MacArthur remarks that epistolary novels "lack the central, organizing authority a narrator provides. No one perspective orders the characters' diverse points of view; no external voice evaluates them, suggests whom to believe or to admire."³⁵ The separation of "Histoire d'Amélie" from the epistolary

³⁵ Elizabeth J. MacArthur, *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990) 9.

narrative segregates Amélie's perspective from that of the other characters. Cottin establishes that Amélie is a biased narrator. M. Grandson asks for her perspective of the events of her life, and the reader is left—as is M. Grandson—to either believe or mistrust Amélie's perspective. Like the uncle who subsequently finds himself convinced of her moral standing and welcomes her into his home, the reader is expected to read her letters as emblematic of her morality and virtue. Amélie does not try to garner pity by the retelling of her story. She admits that her decision to marry M. Mansfield, albeit as a result of her aversion to her cousin, was a decisive moment in her life: "je décidai en un moment du sort de ma vie entière."³⁶ Her honest and forthright speech through her admission of responsibility for her actions allows the reader to believe her more fully and creates respect for a narrator who is willing to admit mistakes.³⁷

In addition, Cottin establishes a clear, although biased, description of the other characters from Amélie's perspective. Just as Amélie relies on the education received in her childhood to explain her adulthood, the image she presents of Ernest as a child forms the reader's initial impression of him as an adult. Amélie is a self-proclaimed disciple of her father. Her admiration for him parallels Ernest's childhood connection with his mother. Both children were raised with opposite and conflicting values. According to Amélie's father, the education Woldemar provided Ernest was

³⁶ Cottin, *AM1*. 68.

³⁷ This is paralleled in the failure of Madame Woldemar to convince her peers of Amélie's wicked, vindictive and manipulative character. Her speech is seen as untrustworthy and biased.

unsatisfactory: “peu satisfait de l’éducation qu’elle avait donnée à Ernest [...] on nous apprit sans doute à respecter notre nom, mais la vertu avant lui ” (18-19). Unlike Ernest, Amélie is taught that virtue is more important than a title. According to Amélie’s description of Ernest’s violence, his education confirms her father’s opinion. Ernest is violent and disrespectful of others: “Le caractère violent et emporté d’Ernest le rendait le fléau de tout ce qui l’entourait” (14). She attributes Ernest’s abuse of power to the education he received from his mother who corrupted Ernest by imbuing him with the illusion that his power and control rested in his future acceptance of the aristocratic title.

Likewise, Amélie predicts the destruction of her relationship with Woldemar. Before Amélie makes her decision to leave with M. Mansfield, Woldemar warns her of the possible repercussions: “Prenez-garde à vous, Amélie: quoique vous me soyez aussi chère que mon propre fils, il est des erreurs que je regarderais comme si coupables dans une fille de mon sang, qu’un repentir de toute la vie ne pourrait me les faire pardonner.” (44) Amélie’s recreation of the dialogue she had when she was young highlights Woldemar’s unyielding personality. Amélie continues shortly thereafter by saying: “j’étais révoltée de la tyrannie de Madame de Woldemar” (45). In both of these instances her aunt is seen as a dominant and threatening adult. This first-person narration biases the reader against Woldemar and Ernest, and establishes a pre-existing conflict between herself, her aunt and her cousin, adding to the suspense felt by the reader.

Amélie's reaction to Ernest mirrors the constant hatred Woldemar harbors for Amélie herself. In her letter to M. Grandson, Amélie's final words do not focus on her status as mother or widow, but on Ernest's role in her life choices. Amélie declares that Ernest is:

la cause de toutes mes infortunes, l'objet de mon aversion, qui, par l'effroi d'être à lui, m'a précipité malgré moi entre les bras d'un autre, et est parvenu ainsi à accomplir l'arrêt, qui, dès le berceau, l'avait rendu maître de ma destinée. (79)

Amélie's last words to M. Grandson condemn her cousin and portray her as the victim of circumstance. Amélie transfers the culpability of her actions to another. Like Woldemar, Amélie portrays Ernest's actions as unpardonable, and Amélie's dialogue foreshadows the impossibility of her future relationship with Ernest. Ernest's very name is connected, for Amélie and the reader, to the unjust actions she describes in her past.

Cottin creates another liminal space in the epistolary narrative towards the end of the novel. Again this text is removed from the epistolary correspondence with the title "Journal d'Amélie"; however, Amélie's journal has a much different psychological perspective than her story. As her biographical aside serves to introduce her personal emotions and reclaim her virtue, Amélie begins writing a journal with the purpose of documenting her life and serving as a last testimony to the dangers of passion, but she does not designate a specific recipient or group of readers:

toutes mes pensées, toutes mes actions, depuis qu'aucun être n'aura plus correspond avec une infortunée... ; je le veux, pour dévoiler une inconcevable perfidie, pour montrer à l'innocence le malheur d'une

passion, et pour mettre la crédulité à l'abri de ces séduisants dehors de la vertu qui m'ont perdue.³⁸

Amélie's words show a distinct psychological shift as the reader seems to follow contrasting emotions. The ellipse symbolizes a shift from feeling of melancholy and isolation to the confident assertion of her motivations for writing. Her writing recalls similar feelings as seen at the end of her biographical correspondence to her uncle in which she expressed anger at her uncontrolled destiny. By using "perfidie," "malheur," and "crédulite" she again rebukes Ernest for disrupting her happiness.

Amélie's writing emphasizes the elements of isolation and silence that accompany the memoir. Memoir writing requires seclusion and an investment in writing that is personal and private. Amélie begins by writing: "dans l'obscurité qui m'environne" (61). Left alone by Ernest, Amélie inhabits the solitude that initiates her writing and presages the silencing of her voice in death. Cottin uses the journal as a way to find an authentic form of expression, similar to the use of letters, in which her protagonist can resume her life to share with the public.³⁹ Unlike letters, which require the reader to glean the moral imperative behind the collection of voices, the memoir allows the protagonist to speak directly to the reader through writing. The reflection of their lives unveils the moral code the writer hopes to impart. Amélie follows the literary tradition inherent in the memoir that the writer is near the end of life and reflecting on

³⁸ Cottin, *AM3*. 61-62.

³⁹ Howland, 78.

his/her previous actions; Amélie describes her current state: “je m’approche de la tombe.”⁴⁰ She implies that she will not be alive when her writing is found, and her desire in writing is to leave an account of her life. Like the story she creates for her uncle, her journal serves as a biographical account of her life. The use of the memoir replaces the female confidant who summarizes the life of the protagonist in other epistolary fictions. Instead of designating a specific correspondent, Amélie evokes all her previous correspondents at once. Contrary to Elise in *Claire d’Albe*, who is witness to Claire’s death and charged with telling Claire’s story to her daughter and teaching her the dangers of passion, Amélie acts as her own moralizing voice.

Amélie illuminates the conflict between her role as a mother and her personal desires. Similar to Claire’s struggles with Frédéric’s refusal to accept and love her children in Cottin’s novel *Claire d’Albe*, Amélie’s status as mother is seen as a barrier between her and her lovers. In *Amélie Mansfield*, however, motherhood is not portrayed as the ideal duty for a woman, but is seen as an obstacle to feminine desire. Unlike M. d’Albe who continually valorizes Claire’s mothering abilities, Mansfield abandons Amélie because of her dedication to her son, Eugène. Amélie cites the duties of raising a child as the reason he decides to leave. According to Amélie, M. Mansfield was “ennuyé de m’en voir toujours occupée.”⁴¹ Unlike the ideal mother who sacrifices herself for her

⁴⁰ Cottin, *AM* 3. 61.

⁴¹ Cottin, *AM* 1. 73.

child in *Julie*, Cottin's protagonist is not initially portrayed as an altruistic mother.

Amélie's reaction to her husband's departure has a direct impact on how she perceives her son: "loin de trouver une consolation près du berceau de mon fils, sa vue envenimait ma blessure" (75). Eugène's birth marks the end of her marital happiness. The image of her son becomes a constant reminder of M. Mansfield's betrayal. According to Call, by choosing to live with M. Grandson, Amélie isolates herself as a way to "concentrate her energies on raising her child and demonstrating her courage and self-denial through service to others."⁴² While the isolation of her journal allows her to focus on her personal motivations, her choice to exile herself with her uncle allows her to refocus on her duties as a mother.

In Amélie's journal she critiques her own actions as morally wrong. Included in the journal, Amélie's goal in writing mimics Cottin's goal that she described in her preface: "J'ai essayé de montrer à quel excès de malheur peut conduire l'amour même le moins coupable, et à quel point l'orgueil peut endurcir le cœur et aliéner le jugement."⁴³ Amélie is torn between self-fulfillment and following societal norms. She reiterates that she is a "coupable mère"⁴⁴ and "une mère désolée" (67) but calls her son an "innocente victime" (122). Her actions towards Ernest directly impact her ability to be a good mother. She portrays Eugène as a casualty of her love for Ernest. Despite her

⁴² Call, *Infertility*. 89.

⁴³ Cottin, *AM1*. X.

⁴⁴ Cottin, *AM3*. 63.

acknowledgement that her actions are wrong, Amélie is unable to prevent herself from leaving. Amélie views her departure to find Ernest as abandonment: “j’abandonne mon fils” (66). Her passions are overpowering. Amélie likens her desire to confront Ernest to a divine and unyielding power that she has no control of by saying “une nécessité absolue, irrésistible, me commande de partir” (63). Again, Amélie’s personal narration implies that she is following a predestined path and cannot avoid her fate. The journal serves as a personal space designed to be shared and also as a last testament to the value she places on motherhood, as a word of warning that passions will distract from a woman’s duty to be a good mother and remain with her child.

Cottin’s use of the memoir form in her epistolary fiction gives Amélie authorial control over the other fictional voices and thereby gives Amélie control of her victimization. While her journal emphasizes her innocence, gullibility, and deceit, she affirms her moral code and authorial control. She addresses Ernest in her journal as the “impénétrable auteur de [sa] misère” (66). Amélie condemns him to the public at large. She retains the virtue that was recognized in her by her father and brother: “Non, je n’appellerai point la malédiction sur ta tête [...] jamais il ne t’arrivera un malheur par Amélie, et je ne veux mourir qu’après t’avoir pardonné.... Mais il faut te connaître, il faut te voir une fois encore, j’y suis résolue... ” (66). Cottin’s protagonist does not act in reaction to Ernest but chooses to pardon him to remain true to herself. Amélie reaffirms her desire to remain virtuous despite any harm that has befallen her. In a final act of

female self-empowerment—by saying she is resolved to see him again—she decides how she will spend her final moments.

Cottin's protagonist acts similarly to Marie Riccoboni's Fanni in *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butlard* (1757). Both women chose to engage in romantic relationships of their own free will and are eventually betrayed by their lovers. Amélie is misled and lied to by Ernest, and Fanni's lover Alfred is unfaithful. In reaction to their lovers' actions, both female protagonists write to make their life experiences public. Amélie writes her journal with the idea that it will be published. By not designating a specific reader and leaving her journal as a cautionary tale for innocent readers, she is opening her private emotions to public scrutiny. Fanni, likewise, uses her letters as a way to expose the duplicitous character of seducers and to warn women.⁴⁵ Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook remarks that:

In her letters to her aristocratic lover, the young Englishwoman Fanni refuses the agnostic model of sexual relations in which men conquer women and insists on her free decision to give herself to her beloved. In precisely the same way, she refuses the exploitative implications of the sentimental epistolary tradition, from the *Lettres portugaises* to Richardson's novels. After being abandoned by her lover, Fanni transforms herself from private victim to public author by publishing her own letters...⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Jacqueline Letzter, *Intellectual Tacking: Questions of Education in the Works of Isabelle de Charrière* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 32.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 28.

In Riccoboni's novel the female protagonist chooses to make her seduction public. By publishing the correspondence between herself and her lover, Fanni takes control over her relationship by publicly condemning infidelity. Both authors allow their heroines to assert female agency instead of accepting the results of their lovers' betrayal in a passive and private way. Fanni's letters allow her to avoid the shame of being a victim: "J'ai préféré la douleur à la honte; j'ai mieux aimé gémir de cet effort, que de laisser dépendre mon bonheur d'un homme qui n'étoit plus digne d'en être l'arbitre."⁴⁷ While Amélie does forgive Ernest and encourages a reconciliation between mother and son, both women prefer to act rather than to keep the victimization secret and suffer the shame in private.

Shame and virtue play important roles in *Amélie Mansfield*. While Cottin creates a female protagonist who confronts societal norms, Amélie's actions are based on her moral virtue as opposed to outside influences. Her marriage to Ernest is based on a mutual understanding and a spoken vow between the two lovers. When Ernest confesses his true identity, however, it ruptures the pact the two had formed. Since Ernest was married under a different name, Amélie recognizes the marriage as invalid. Like Claire, Amélie succumbs to carnal pleasure outside of marriage, and for Amélie this action immediately threatens her values and moral code. Her written response to Ernest

⁴⁷ Marie Jeanne Riccoboni, *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butelard* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 1979 [originally 1757]) 189.

when he confesses to having married her under a false name: “ce que je sais, c’est qu’il s’est joué de ma vertu, de ma vie et de mon bonheur.”⁴⁸ Amélie feels no longer virtuous since he consummated their marriage under false pretenses.

Amélie’s journal is the last time that she narrates in the first person. It is the last time that the reader has privileged access to Amélie’s thoughts as she prefigures her death. According to her relatives after her death, her virtue is untarnished since she was an unwitting victim of another’s lie and lived a virtuous life; however, Amélie’s journal is a constant reminder of her solitude and isolation. Amélie is both physically isolated from her family and temporarily isolated from her correspondents by the nature of the epistolary form. She must wait as each letter travels from one recipient to the other.

The isolation that begins her journal continues once she is in Vienna. Once she sees Ernest in Vienna surrounded by his mother and Blanche, she is under the impression that he has decided to marry Blanche. Amélie later explains her motivations for going to the Danube as a result of her loss of virtue and what she thought was Ernest’s abandonment of her for Blanche. She explains to Ernest on her deathbed: “mais la vertu ne m’était pas moins chère que ton amour; et, privée de l’une ou l’autre, il fallait mourir” (235). Her despair at losing both causes her to wander the city alone until she eventually finds shelter in a small chapel.

⁴⁸ Cottin, *AM2*. 279.

Amélie's decisions in the chapel reflect a desire to die, and foreshadows her potential drowning:

Je me suis retirée vers le chœur, qui m'a paru être le lieu le plus sombre et le plus reculé; là, je me suis couchée par terre, sur un tombeau sans doute, mais je n'ai pas peur des tombeaux; tout ce qui est insensible et mort me fait envie; je voudrais être cette pierre insensible, ce monument glacé, cette ruine qui s'écroule; je voudrais n'avoir jamais existé. (119-20)

The image of Amélie alone in the tomb anticipates her death. From this moment on, Amélie's actions and words are recounted by others. Blanche chronicles everything for Albert, including Ernest's experience finding Amélie by the river. To maintain the epistolary tradition and the vraisemblance of the work, Blanche is quick to specify in her letter to Albert that "les details qui suivent, il me les a racontés il y a une heure: comptez sur leur exactitude" (135). The emphasis on the truth and accuracy in relation to time maintains the ambition of epistolary fiction in which the veracity and emotions of the characters are more believable as the proximity to the actions and reactions increases. Contrary to the use of multiple voices, Amélie's personal writing in her memoir-like "Journal" creates action by her isolation in the act of writing.

Amélie's state of mind is reminiscent of Claire's pain in *Claire d'Albe*. The emphasis on finding solace and isolation through seclusion and a tactile connection to the marble of a tomb alludes to *Claire d'Albe*. Claire is found by her husband, immobile on her father's tomb after succumbing to Frédéric. Cottin emphasizes the dramatic effect with the use of eclipses: "il aperçoit un objet... une robe blanche... il approche... c'est

Claire étendue sur le marbre et aussi froide que lui.”⁴⁹ In both cases, the female protagonist is attracted by the cold marble, which symbolizes her death, and she cannot live with the shame of having ruined her virtue. Call remarks that, as in *Claire d’Albe*, Cottin’s heroine Amélie:

decides that maternity and maternal duties are insufficient for complete happiness but this time, rather than dying because she cannot have her lover, the heroine dies because she cannot live without self-respect [...] [Cottin’s] heroine determines that she has lost an essential part of her identity, with no hope of restoration or redemption of that essential part.”⁵⁰

In both instances, the protagonists visit tombs in order to confront their inability to reconcile duty with desire. The tomb is symbolic of social judgment; however, unlike Claire, who dies a lingering death, in *Amélie Mansfield*, Amélie does not wait for a passive death, but attempts to commit suicide.

2.4 Re-writing Suicide

In both the first and subsequent versions of *Amélie Mansfield*, Amélie is found by Ernest; however, there are substantial changes between the first published edition of *Amélie Mansfield* in 1802 and the second publication in 1805 and those thereafter. There are changes between both editions throughout the novels.⁵¹ In the second volume of the

⁴⁹ Cottin, *Claire d’Albe*. 151.

⁵⁰ Call, *Infertility*. 99.

⁵¹ The copy of the 1802 edition of *Amélie Mansfield* was found in the archives of La Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. However, due to the age of this novel, not all changes between the editions could be examined due to

1805 edition, Cottin removes Amélie's violent, threatening response to Ernest. In a letter written to Albert, Amélie confronts Ernest, whom Amélie knows as Henry Semler, and demands to know the obstacle that prevents him from being with her. In the first edition she writes: "Malheureux! Sais-tu ce que le cœur d'Amélie peut renfermer de passion et de désespoir?"⁵² In the second edition, Amélie's reaction is replaced with the more tempered: "Parle: que signifient ces phrases interrompues?"⁵³ The words of the first edition immediately condemn Ernest and foreshadow Amélie's future despair. While she questions his intentions in both editions and suggests to Albert that they hide a "malheur terrible" (95), the revised sentence reflects more closely her previous interactions with Ernest.

The most notable change between the editions involves the suppression of a suicide attempt. In the first edition of *Amélie Mansfield*, Amélie attempts to commit suicide but is rescued by Ernest. The fever she dies from several days later is a result of this action. However, in the second edition, instead of attempting to commit suicide, Amélie is stopped by her fear of divine punishment. In the first publication of Amélie,

the quality of the book. Pages 27 to 30 are missing from the second volume. Among the missing elements is Amélie's first threat of suicide to her brother in reaction to M. Grandson's eviction of Ernest from his home after he refuses her hand in marriage. In the 1809 version, Amélie calls to her father and says goodbye to her brother, asking him to "ne hais pas ma mémoire" (96). In addition, pages 112 to 121, which included portions of Amélie's journal and letters between Adolphe and Albert, are missing.

⁵² Cottin, *AM* 1. 83.

⁵³ Cottin, *AM* 3. 95.

Ernest discovers Amélie's body in a way similar to that in which M. d'Albe finds Claire. Both men see an object from afar that becomes clearer, and the body of a woman appears. In the first edition, Ernest sees a body in the water. It is only after jumping into the water that he recognizes it is Amélie as he drags her body to the bank.⁵⁴ Blanche tells Albert: "...il croit apercevoir un corps lutter contre l'onde ; il se jette, plonge avec lui sous les eaux, le saisit: c'était elle... Il la soutient d'un de ses bras, nage de l'autre, atteint le rivage, la dépose sur le sable et tombe sans connaissance auprès d'elle..."⁵⁵ Cottin's use of ellipse creates suspense. The reader is drawn into the action and forced to wait in a way that mirrors Ernest's search for Amélie. Like Ernest, the reader is forced to pause after recognizing that it is Amélie in the water.

Cottin drastically modifies the discovery scene in subsequent publications. While Ernest thinks he sees a body in the water and rushes in to save it, Cottin removes the moment where he touches it and replaces it with a moment of misunderstanding. The moment of discovery is not performed by Ernest, but by the onlookers: "ce n'était point elle; tout à coup il entend des cris retentir sur le rivage, il se hâte d'y revenir; on lui dit,

⁵⁴ The discoveries of Amélie and Claire have resonances with Hamlet's Ophelia. See Anne Cousseau's "Ophélie: Histoire d'un mythe fin de siècle." *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 101.1 (2001): 81-104. Cousseau argues that portrayals of young women and allusions to white dresses, water, and desire inherently evoke images of Ophelia: "Robe blanche, insouciance du comportement, futilité du discours, reprise anaphorique de l'optatif qui souligne combien le personnage vit selon le seul principe de désir, tout connote de manière simplifiée et amplifiée l'enfance dans laquelle Ophélie est retenue" (102).

Representations of Ophelia become much more prevalent in the nineteenth century in both literature and art. In particular, George Sand's *Indiana* (1832) alludes to Ophelia directly by naming the dog Ophelia. Sand's optimistic view of women's status allows for the possibility for women to mature and develop in a more open society that allows for equality between men and women.

⁵⁵ Cottin, *AM1*. 150.

qu'une femme vient d'être trouvée sans vie sur le sable; il vole vers elle, arrache le domino noir qui couvre sa tête, reconnaît Amélie, la croit morte et tombe sans mouvement auprès d'elle."⁵⁶ Instead of Ernest's sacrifice to save Amélie by throwing himself in the water, she is discovered, not saved by an unnamed onlooker. Unlike the heroic moment created in the first edition, Amélie's discovery is one of awkward mistaken identity in which Ernest's actions are unproductive.

The onlookers play different roles in each edition. In the first edition, they are witness to Amélie's suicide attempt. Their testimony leaves no doubt as to whether Amélie's appearance in the water was an attempted suicide or not. When asked how long she was under the water, it is an onlooker who responds by giving a fixed time. The onlooker's statement can be seen as irrefutable proof of Amélie's suicide attempt: "Pas plus de quelques minutes, a répondu l'homme qui l'avait rencontrée: depuis l'instant où je l'ai perdue de vue jusqu'à celui où monsieur l'a retirée, il ne s'est pas écoulé un quart-d'heure."⁵⁷ The onlooker implies that he lost sight of Amélie until she was recovered by Ernest, confirming to the doctor that she was an active agent in her decision to jump in the water. Unlike the protagonist in *Julie*, her plunge into the water holds no pretense of virtuous motherhood to save her child. In effect, Amélie places a child in danger, since her intention is to kill herself and, by association, her unborn child.

⁵⁶ Cottin, *AM3*. 136-7.

⁵⁷ Cottin, *AM1*. 151.

In the edited versions, the onlookers presume that she almost drowned because her clothes are wet. This implies a potential suicide attempt; however, Blanche quickly corrects this assumption:

En effet, Albert, votre sœur n'avait point accompli ce funeste dessein: arrivée sur le bord du fleuve, au moment de se précipiter, elle avait été arrêtée, non par la crainte de la mort, mais par celle de la colère divine; il semblait, nous a-t-elle dit, que Dieu m'attendit là pour me montrer toute l'étendue du crime que j'allais commettre.⁵⁸

Blanche does not make a similar aside to Albert in the first edition and her story of Amélie's suicide attempt is uninterrupted. However, in this edited version, Amélie is given a voice to defend her actions. Blanche re-creates a dialogue in which Amélie sees suicide as a crime. Amélie's decision not to commit suicide is based on her fear of divine retribution.

The omission of this suicide attempt is incongruous with the character that Cottin has created up to this point. The first publication portrays a heroine who goes against society and makes her own choices. Living up to her father's memory and her freedom of choice, Amélie's suicide attempt is a way for her to choose her fate as a heroine who makes her decisions outside of social convention. According to Amélie's journal, she is already shamed and her virtue destroyed. When Amélie is in the chapel we not only see her at peace with death, a death she feels she merits, but God's presence

⁵⁸ Cottin, AM3. 138.

is portrayed differently than seen in the subsequent editions. In the chapel, God has a direct influence on Amélie:

il m'a semblé que la main de Dieu me retenait. [...] J'ai remercié Dieu de m'avoir envoyé sur la terre le châtiment de ma faute; heureux qui a assez souffert dans ce monde pour être sûr, au moment de la mort, que son expiration est finie. (121-22)

God's influence on Amélie forces her to return to the chapel where she experiences tranquility and an understanding of her crime and punishment. Amélie describes herself at peace with her death. In light of her confession, the removal of her suicide attempt conflicts with Amélie's assertion that she cannot live without virtue and forces the reader to ask: Would a heroine who is resigned to death based on a crime she believed warranted death hesitate for fear of divine wrath?

Ironically, the novel's conclusion restores Amélie's virtue as she is remembered in death. The final words of the novel recall the importance of Eugène. After the burial of Amélie and Ernest, the novel concludes with an omniscient narrator who describes the lives of the surviving characters. The focus is finally on the child that Amélie has left behind. Blanche, who is now Eugène's adopted mother, brings him to where they are buried in Switzerland. Eugène is described as "l'enfant qu'elle avait laissé, et la seule image qui restât d'elle sur la terre" (268). Eugène is no longer seen as the image of his father, but that of his mother. Amélie is remembered by her brother as having a pure and sensitive soul. Despite her last composition, her memory is not that of a mother who abandoned her son or who threatened suicide. The comparison between Eugène and

Amélie emphasizes the similarity of their situations. Both are orphans and victims. Eugène is the innocent victim of his mother's uncontrolled passion and Amélie is the virtuous victim of her grandfather, who set her on the path that ultimately resulted in her death.

In the late 1700s, during the time Cottin was writing *Amélie Mansfield*, suicide had particular social connotations. Jeffrey Merrick's compelling book chapter "Suicide in Paris, 1775" explores the political and public reaction to suicide. During this time, suicide was considered a crime by the state. Merrick reports that:

French subjects who killed themselves were supposed to be punished by having their bodies dragged through the streets on a hurdle, hung by the feet in the gallows, and excluded from burial in consecrated ground and by having their property confiscated by the crown.⁵⁹

However, Merrick explores reports of death in Paris in 1775, and claims that testimony does not suggest that Parisians viewed suicide as a sin or even a crime in itself. He argues that Parisians of the late eighteenth-century embraced the important "meaning" of suicide based on the sense that "something is fundamentally wrong with the situation of those who take their lives. [...] Suicide is directly dependent upon the situation in which the individual existed at the time of the action." (175). While Merrick found that onlookers expressed disapproval of those who impetuously put an end to their days without sufficient reason, he reports that they:

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Merrick, "Suicide in Paris, 1775." *From Sin to Insanity: Suicide in Early Modern Europe*. Ed. Jeffrey R. Watt. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) 159.

commonly assumed or at least asserted that men and women who committed suicide were not themselves at the time, if not for days, weeks, or months before. [...] Parisians constructed suicide narratives out of information and speculation about the health and wealth of the dead. When they talked to police, they generally absolved their late relatives, neighbors, and friends of responsibility for their own deaths, in part, no doubt, to avoid any possibility of posthumous prosecution. (164-65)

Despite the political repercussions, suicide was considered to be the result of a momentary lapse of sanity. Merrick's analysis of the reception of suicide suggests that the French were aware of the individual choice suicide represented.

Cottin alludes to the heroic death of the protagonist and, thereby, excuses the potentially socially disruptive and immoral suicidal action. Cottin's unconventional use of the epistolary form relies on the pre-established sentimental codes that announce the incompatibility between women's love and desire from the outset of the novel.⁶⁰ Despite the fact that *Amélie Mansfield* was published late in 1802 or in January of 1803 and was the third novel published anonymously by Maradan, there is evidence that Cottin may have begun writing it before the publication of her first novel, *Claire d'Albe*. In 1799, Cottin sent her brother a letter in which she confides: "je ne répons pas que dans les moments de tristesse, je ne me sauve de moi-même au sein des malheurs de Charlotte."⁶¹ Included with this letter were several pages which featured Charlotte Corday as the

⁶⁰ In her perceptive exploration of isolation and separation, Ruth Perry asserts that the plot of the sentimental novel is "more a matter of developing specific uncertainties and complications such as class differences, parental pressures, and certain moral prohibitions against sexuality. [...] It is not the maturing of character which is presented, but rather the testing and defining of character, in an unpleasant sequence of pressing situations." Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1980) 94-95.

⁶¹ Sykes, 43.

heroine. Cottin herself connected *Amélie Mansfield* to this historical figure. In February 1799, she exclaimed: "Oui, je veux l'écrire l'histoire de Charlotte Corday... je veux l'écrire, a mon gout, a ma manière; peut-être la blâmera-t-on, peut-être sera-t-elle mauvaise, n'importe. Je ne sais écrire que d'après mes propres idées; s'il me fallait penser comme on me conseille, je ne saurais plus penser du tout" (322-23). From the outset of the novel, Cottin foreshadows Amélie's suicidal death by associating her with Charlotte Corday.

Corday was a prominent figure of the Revolution who was executed in 1793 for assassinating Jean-Paul Marat.⁶² Despite this murder, society was tolerant of Corday's action. *Littell's Living Age* published an article on Corday in 1844 which described the lasting image of Corday on the public:

The French Revolution presents an endless gallery of scenes calculated to move the heart to pity and wonder; but it scarcely affords one more affecting than the self-sacrifice of Charlotte Corday. The act of this young woman was, indeed, of a kind which ought never to be regarded in any other light than as a great crime; yet the generous part of mankind seem to have agreed that, all the circumstances being considered, some allowance may be made in her case, without danger to the interests of society.⁶³

⁶² For biographies of Charlotte Corday, see Dauxois, Jacqueline. *Charlotte Corday*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1988); and Melchior-Bonnet, Bernardine. *Charlotte Corday*. (Paris: Perrin, 1972).

⁶³ Eliakim Littell and Robert S. Littell. Eds. "Charlotte Corday." *Littell's Living Age*. (13 July 1844): 560.

Cottin's depiction of Corday coincides with Littell's understanding of Corday's action. Cottin valorizes Corday by portraying Amélie's suicide as an act of women's agency rather than a crime. Based on Cottin's depiction, suicide relies on individual freedom.⁶⁴

Only after her name was added to subsequent editions of her first three works did she express regret that she may have surpassed the limits of bienséance. Cottin recognized that she had a social responsibility for the depictions of women in her novels once she lost anonymity. She writes:

Tout le mal vient de ce que je suis trop connue; j'éprouve tous les jours qu'une femme gâte bien son sort en sortant de l'obscurité: vous savez bien que, là où il y a de la peine, il y a toujours un tort; c'en est un très grand pour une femme que d'écrire; on ne saurait trop le répéter, ni moi assez reconnaître. Mes moindres démarches sont observées, et le blâme qu'on y jette rejaillit sur ce qui m'entoure et qui m'est cher.⁶⁵

Call, who briefly mentions the different editions, hypothesizes that "the revision indicates that Cottin may have realized her reading audience would sympathize more with her heroine if Amélie remained a total victim and did not become responsible for her own death."⁶⁶ In the first edition, Amélie is a victim of her own deliberate actions. Call emphasizes the innocence and victimization that is associated with the heroines of the sentimental novel. Amélie's suicide would provide her with an agency that would conflict with the moral rules of the genre.

⁶⁴ Another perspective on eighteenth-century attitudes towards suicide can be found in L. G. Crochker's "The Discussion of Suicide in the Eighteenth Century" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1952): 47-72.

⁶⁵ Noyer, 282.

⁶⁶ Call, *Infertility*. 97.

Margaret Higonnet asserts that fictional representations of suicide have more profound social resonances: "by cutting short the 'natural' span of life, the person who takes his or her life both turns into a metaphoric ruin and breaks the frames that society relies upon to produce meaning."⁶⁷ While the other heroines die, their deaths are portrayed as the natural result of their actions. Amélie's potential suicide conflicts with the virtue and innocence her character embodies. The rewritten suicide attempt depicts a protagonist who undergoes a passive surrender to death. This change illustrates Higonnet's assertion that the removal of representations of women's suicide in literature assuaged a growing public concern that suicide was a noble act.

Despite the editing between editions, Amélie can be seen as a virtuous heroine who does not let masculine authority usurp her ability to choose. The title of the novel is emblematic of the greater theme of woman's choice in the novel. Amélie is only addressed as Amélie, mother, sister or wife throughout the novel. She is never referred to by her maiden name, nor is she labeled by her marriage to Ernest. While Amélie retains her married name of Mansfield in the title, it is a name that she chose to accept. Even in death Cottin maintains Amélie's individuality and refusal to engage in the oppressive patriarchal society of her childhood. Amélie and Ernest are buried together and their funeral service is held at the same time as six marriages. The macabre weddings are held around the coffins and after the services Amélie and Ernest's coffins

⁶⁷ Margaret Higonnet, "Frames of Female Suicide." *Studies in the Novel* 32.2 (2000): 229.

are decorated with a wedding crown as a symbolic, posthumous marriage between Amélie and Ernest: “On a suspendu une couronne nuptiale sur la tombe de ces infortunés.”⁶⁸

Amélie and Ernest are united in death, but, even in death Amélie’s name reflects the virtues bestowed on her by her father. Amélie does not take on Ernest’s name. She remains true to her choice to remove herself from the patriarchal strictures of her grandfather as represented by the lack of title her maiden name would have afforded her. Amélie’s virtue is maintained by retaining the only name that she chose herself. One might see Amélie’s death as punishment for rejecting her grandfather’s ultimate will; however, Amélie’s choice of how to live and die in a patriarchal society is a liberating act of feminine empowerment and supported rebellion against patriarchal control.

In *Amélie Mansfield*, Cottin defines filial piety in terms of paternal, rather than religious, devotion. While there is strong religious imagery in the text, duty to maintain filial piety supersedes religious authority, as seen in the suicide attempt of the heroine. Cottin creates a different relationship between motherhood and virtue. While Amélie’s devotion to motherhood creates the destabilizing force that initiates Ernest’s betrayal and leads to her eventual demise, motherhood has a greater affect on repressing masculine desire. Ernest’s conflict with raising the son of a man of a lower class leads to his dissemination of the truth. Filial piety, however, is the driving force that permits

⁶⁸ Cottin, *AM3*. 260.

Amélie to create a more liberal feminine space both inside and outside of society.

Cottin's generic manipulation of the epistolary transforms as does her definition of filial piety, motherhood, and duty in *Malvina*. Cottin's turn towards prose fiction also denotes a transformation of motherhood from a patriarchal imposed duty to a restrictive duty imposed on the protagonist by a dominant and idealized female figure.

3. Alternative Mothering and the Body: Travel and the Sentimental Novel

For Sophie Cottin, the sentimental novel remains an effective vehicle to educate the reader and offer alternative ways to relate to motherhood, but she incorporates the sentimental themes of education, duty, and passion with more frequent travel descriptions. Elements of the travel narrative play increasingly dominant roles in the plots of her novels *Malvina* (1801) and *Elisabeth; ou les exilés de Sibérie* (1806). There is greater emphasis placed on the movement of women outside of the domestic sphere in these texts. Cottin moves away from the epistolary genre, but continues to push the limits of the sentimental novel. Her generic manipulation emphasizes a progressive thematic movement away from an oppressive and patriarchal definition of motherhood towards one based on filial devotion and gender equality. In *Malvina* and *Elisabeth*, Cottin challenges limits placed on women by allowing each protagonist to move more freely in society.

The theme of travel in Cottin's corpus is a changing concept. *Malvina* resembles *Claire d'Albe* and *Amélie Mansfield* in that it also portrays a woman torn between desire and duty. In each of these novels, uncontrolled women's passion threatens the protagonist's virtue. Filial piety, virtue, and motherhood are all linked as elements that impede women's sexual desire. *Malvina* and *Elisabeth* show moments in Cottin's career that reflect a changing attitude towards women's duty defined by representations of

motherhood and the education of women. Malvina's movement in the novel centers on the dynamic tension between desire and her duty to educate her adoptive daughter. Her movements in and outside of society are twofold. Malvina is prompted by a desire to flee from outside influences that threaten her virtue, but she is also physically drawn to these influences. In stark contrast to the vacillating motives for travel in *Malvina*, travel in *Elisabeth* coincides with the protagonist's unwavering devotion to filial desire. Desire and duty are no longer conflicting elements since women's sexuality does not threaten to disrupt her duty. Women's desire to explore passionate sexual relationships with men become, in fact, secondary urges. Descriptions of travel emphasize the thematic differences between both novels.

Travel and descriptive travel imagery are common in all of Cottin's novels. *Claire d'Albe* begins after her voyage from her cousin's to live in Touraine and *Amélie Mansfield* takes place in Germany, Switzerland and Vienna. In these novels, travel enhances themes of education, motherhood, and duty. For Claire, separation from her friend and the sudden arrival of Frédéric culminate in a conflict between desire and duty. Likewise, Amélie's travels away from her son towards Ernest illustrate a similar conflict. Travel is best observed as a method of education in *Amélie Mansfield*. Ernest's formative, but not described, travels throughout Europe have dramatic effects on his personality. He is no longer the cruel tyrant that his mother trained him to be from infancy. The epistolary form of these novels highlights the notion of travel since the emotional tension is based

on the transportation of letters to and from the correspondents. Travel in *Claire d'Albe* and *Amélie Mansfield* promotes a sentimental agenda that explores the conflict of women's duty and desire within the domestic sphere. The primary concern of these two novels remains the psychological description of the characters. Description plays an integral role in *Malvina* and *Elisabeth*; however, the increased detail and attention to descriptions of travel complicate the limits of the sentimental genre.

Interspersed with dialogue, letters, and description, *Malvina* has a much more complex plot than *Claire d'Albe* and *Amélie Mansfield*. From the outset, names play an important role in delineating space. *Malvina* is Cottin's first novel in which her protagonist does not have a family name. Malvina is a foreigner and displaced from her place of origin. Compared to the other characters' names such as Fanny, Birton, and Prior which resonate with names of English or Scottish origin, Malvina's name is representative of difference. Unlike the other character names that tie them to England and Scotland, Malvina's name is of an unknown origin. *Malvina* announces an engagement with space and representation from the title.

Malvina is the story of a young Frenchwoman. Like *Amélie Mansfield*, the story begins with a retrospective look at her life. Widowed at twenty, Malvina de Sorcy leaves behind her family and fortune in France to live with her friend, Clara Sheridan, Clara's husband, and their daughter, Fanny, in England. The close friendship between the two women helps Malvina forget the tyrannical behavior of her deceased husband, and

Clara to ignore the grief caused by the continuous, depraved actions of her libertine husband. Their domestic happiness is ruptured after three years when Clara becomes ill and dies. On her deathbed Clara makes her husband agree to allow Malvina to raise and educate their daughter to which he readily agrees in order to avoid being responsible for fulfilling the duty.

Clara's death is a decisive moment in Malvina's life since it restricts her freedom of choice. Clara's desire to see her friend raise her daughter comes at the cost of Malvina's freedom. Clara declares that Malvina can never remarry: "elle fut [sic] s'engager une seconde fois à consacrer sa vie entière à l'éducation de Fanny, à ne jamais partager son temps et son affection entre elle et un autre objet; elle fut [sic] promettre enfin de renoncer pour jamais à l'amour!"¹ Malvina's immediate acceptance of Clara's terms is based on her faithfulness to her friend, but also on the social isolation in which she has lived. The widowed Malvina has never known love, and has defined her identity through Clara and Fanny. As Samia I. Spencer contends, "only when [heroines] fall in love do they seem to acquire a heightened sense of identity."² Ignorant of all other desire but to please her friend and mother Fanny, Malvina receives permission from Sheridan to take Fanny away from the debauchery of Sheridan's house. Malvina finds herself

¹ Cottin, "Malvina" *Ceuvres Complètes De Mme Cottin*. Vol. 2. (Paris: Gueffier, 1820) 9.

² Samia I. Spencer, "The French Revolution and the Early Nineteenth-Century French Novel: The Case of Sophie Cottin." *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 18 (January 1991): 502.

misplaced in society and seeks to isolate herself in order to better concentrate her energies on her duty as Fanny's mother.

Her self-imposed isolation is challenged by the numerous and complex female relationships that develop throughout her travels. Having lived in England for so long and lost her fortune, she can no longer return to France. She reaches out to a distant relative, Miss Birton, who agrees to let them both live with her at her home in northern Scotland. Birton's vain and manipulative nature is soon uncovered as Malvina observes her interactions with the many friends with whom she surrounds herself. Malvina lives in semi-seclusion, but eventually meets Clare who befriends her. Clare extends an open invitation to Malvina to visit her at her home near Edinburgh. Clare's friendship ultimately allows Malvina greater freedom of movement.

During her stay with Birton, Malvina encounters two men who challenge her desired isolation from society and make her question her fidelity to her deceased friend. Mr. Prior happens upon Malvina when looking for books in the library. He is the son of a poor Scottish family. They begin a friendship which is challenged by Sir Edmond, the nephew and soon to be the only heir of Birton. Both men are immediately attracted to Malvina. Despite Prior's warning that Edmond is a remorseless seducer of women, Malvina reciprocates Edmond's affection but is torn between her promise to Clara and her own desires.

Their love is constantly threatened by a long series of misunderstandings and manipulations which separate and reunite them as they travel to and from Edinburgh, Falkirk, and Kinross, to finally settle in an unnamed house in the countryside near Falkirk. These movements are inspired by Birton who attempts to marry her nephew off to a friend's daughter. Malvina is worried that Edmond is in love with other women. Birton plants seeds of doubt in Edmond about Malvina's faithfulness by preying on the friendship she has with Prior and portraying it as "une intimité honteuse".³

Prior eventually confesses his love for Malvina, but Malvina has already promised to marry Edmond. The manipulating Birton tells Sheridan about Malvina's plans to break her promise to his dead wife. He immediately sends her a letter demanding that she return Fanny to him once she is married. Malvina is torn between her maternal duty to sacrifice love for Fanny and her love for Edmond. Seeing no other way but to deny Edmond, she abandons him in Edinburgh and flees with her Clare and Fanny to Kinross.

In a twist of fate, they stop at an isolated farm to rest their horses and encounter a young girl who is desperate to help save her dying mother, Mary. They call for a Catholic priest, and while they are waiting it is uncovered that the young girl happens to be Edmond's illegitimate daughter. As Malvina digests this news, Prior arrives to attend to Mary. He speaks with Malvina in private who continues to deny him and affirm her

³ Cottin, OC2. 9.

love for Edmond despite the impossibility of their marriage. Edmond, who is unaware of Sheridan's ultimatum, arrives suddenly. Seeing Malvina alone with Prior becomes too much and the tension between the two culminates in a duel in which Edmond is seriously injured. Malvina nurses Edmond back to health, and he convinces her to marry him in secret despite her concerns about losing Fanny.

Distance between the two lovers continues to signal problems with communication and it creates space for communications to be lost. They settle in a small house that is situated in a vast forest. Their domestic bliss is destroyed when Birton discovers they are married and alerts Sheridan. Edmond leaves to confront Sheridan in Edinburgh. Edmond and Malvina are further victims of Birton's manipulations. During his absence, Malvina writes to him, but her letters are intercepted. In addition, she receives falsified news that he has been unfaithful while in the city and writes that she can no longer live since he has betrayed her. In the meantime, Edmond has received permission from Sheridan to adopt Fanny. Concerned that he has not heard from her, he returns to their house to find Malvina dying. The interception of letters emphasizes the emotional turmoil of the characters. The rupture in the reliability of communication is enhanced when the characters arrive before their correspondence.

In an attempt to bring her back to health, they bring Fanny to her, but her despair has made her delirious and she does not recognize her daughter. Malvina dies, leaving Fanny to be raised by Edmond and Clare. Edmond cannot bear to leave Malvina's side.

He transfers his responsibilities for Fanny to Prior. Prior and Clare raise Fanny together while Edmond returns to Malvina's tomb and remains by her side until he dies.

Unlike *Claire d'Albe* where the heroine dies from guilt at her adulterous affair, Malvina dies as a virtuous mother. As seen previously, Claire abandons her children for her lover and her dying words invoke his name despite her guilt at betraying her husband. While she gives her friend Elise the task of educating her daughter, this education is based on Claire's loss of virtue. In comparison, Malvina retains her virtue. Her death is not Edmond's fault. Malvina does not die because Edmond has cheated, but because of a maternal guilt. Malvina thinks that she has sacrificed Clara's daughter to a man who was her enemy: "qu'elle avait peut-être sacrifié l'enfant de Clara à un homme sans foi et sans honneur."⁴ Malvina's last concern is for upholding her promise to Clara by performing her duty as Fanny's mother. The dramatic difference in the heroines' death scenes represents a transition in the portrayal of woman's duty. Malvina is a woman who dies with her virtue, but representation of women's bodies and their movement in society subtly undermines what a woman's duty is as mother and offers a more liberal and forgiving idea of how to perform motherhood.⁵

⁴ Sophie Cottin, "Malvina" *Ceuvres Complètes De Mme Cottin*. Vol. 4. (Paris: Gueffier, 1820)189.

⁵ I am drawing from Michèle Longino Farrell study on the Sévigné *Correspondance*. She asserts that a set of codes were established through letters governing appropriate generic behavior for women in the seventeenth century. "Mme de Sévigné cultivated and privileged her public maternal identity, performing her chosen role in keeping with the demands for display of her milieu. She thus asserted purpose and assured visibility for herself in a society that was intent on categorizing and thereby stratifying itself, organizing itself with the king." *Performing Motherhood: The Sévigné Correspondence* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991) (6). Cottin is not representing motherhood in relationship to a courtly life, but

There are striking similarities and differences in *Malvina* and *Elisabeth*. In *Malvina*, woman's choice is linked to female mentorship and co-parenting, not the procreative act of marriage. *Elisabeth* is also a novel that investigates women's choice and motherhood, but from the perspective of an unmarried girl. Elisabeth's actions are a result of the unique education she received from both parents and not a desire to investigate the social strictures of a heterosexual marriage.

Elisabeth, Cottin's shortest novel, is the story of a young girl who lives in exile with her parents, Springer and Phédora. The action begins as the reader enters Tobolsk, the capital of Siberia, and is led to the protagonist's secluded home by the narrator. The reader is introduced to the family from afar: "A deux ou trois verstes de Saïmka, au milieu d'une forêt marécageuse et remplie de flaques d'eau, sur le bord d'un lac circulaire, profond et bordé de peupliers noirs et blancs, habitait une famille d'exilés."⁶ Elisabeth's idyllic childhood spent in the harsh but formative elements is disrupted when she realizes that their isolation is due to her father's forced exile. Seeing the despair and pain her parents share, she embarks on a journey from Saïmka to Moscow to beg her father's pardon.

there are parallels that can be drawn between motherhood as a performance in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. The novels acts as a site to reinforce correct behavior for mothering.

⁶ Sophie Cottin, "Elisabeth ou les exilés de Sibérie" *Œuvres Complètes De Mme Cottin*. Vol. 12. (Paris: Gueffier, 1820) 15.

Elisabeth's trip is delayed as a result of her status as an unmarried woman.

Unlike Malvina, she cannot travel without an escort. Since her father is unable to leave his home, Elisabeth plans to leave with Smoloff, the son of the governor, who has fallen in love with her. His love goes unrequited since her only goal is to pursue her father's innocence. He offers to accompany her on her journey. Smoloff's father declares that it is improper for Elisabeth to present herself at court with her lover as an escort, and refuses to let Smoloff travel with Elisabeth. Because of her unmarried state, Elisabeth cannot travel alone with Smoloff and is forced to wait for an appropriate chaperone: "il n'y a de protecteurs digne de votre innocence, que Dieu et votre père: votre père ne peut pas vous suivre, Dieu ne vous abandonnera pas" (97). Elisabeth is then forced to wait for a passing missionary who will serve as her escort. The well-traveled missionary is the only one who knows the route and can guide her. He dies along the way and Elisabeth is left to her own devices to reach her destination.

When she arrives in Moscow, she is surprised to find that Smoloff has also traveled there to seek her father's pardon. Elisabeth is received by the king, Alexander, who pardons her father and returns his entire fortune and title. Elisabeth and Smoloff return together where she is welcomed by her parents. Unlike Malvina, Elisabeth does not reconcile the dramatic tension through death. In a gesture uncharacteristic of Cottin's previous fiction, Elisabeth defers to her father when asked how to repay Smoloff and as his reward her father gives her hand in marriage.

3.1 A Change from the Epistolary

Malvina and *Elisabeth* allow for travel to be explored from a stance that takes on a different literary form from *Claire d'Albe* and *Amélie Mansfield*. Cottin chooses to write both of these novels using chapters rather than the epistolary genre used in the two previous novels. The change in narrative stance is significant to the analysis of travel because it offers a different relationship to the fictional experiences of the protagonist. In addition, Cottin's use of descriptive elements portrays an author who is preoccupied with pleasing her readership and who is at the forefront of literary trends. Cottin is not afraid to push the limits of genre, but also displays her engagement with the publishing community, both as an author and a reader.

Published between *Claire d'Albe* and *Amélie Mansfield*, *Malvina* is not an epistolary novel. Michael J. Call aptly recognizes that she had a tendency to work on two or three novels simultaneously by underlining the fact that her longest novel *Mathilde*, published in 1805, took her six years to complete.⁷ Her choice to distance her writing from the epistolary with *Malvina* can then be seen as the beginning of a generic shift that remained constant in her writing style for all of her subsequent novels.

The form of *Malvina* reveals Cottin's desire to maintain a continued presence in the literary community. By choosing a form of the sentimental novel that was more

⁷ Michael J. Call, *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002) 116.

accessible, she was able to publish books in closer succession to each other. In her preface, Cottin announces to her readership that her choice to switch genres was a deliberate one:

Un roman en lettres, où chaque style doit être aussi distinct que le caractère de ceux qui écrivent, me paraît la plus grande difficulté de ce genre d'ouvrage, et, pour tenter de la vaincre, j'attendrai encore quelques temps. Cependant, comme différents motifs, que je ne veux point énoncer ici, m'engageaient à écrire, j'ai essayé la forme par chapitres, comme la plus aisée.⁸

By addressing her readership and explaining her change of form, she also announces a narrative shift from the perspective of different letter writers allowed by the epistolary genre. Instead of using distinct authorial voices to create a cohesive plot, an unidentified narrator comments on the female protagonist's actions by directly addressing the reader.

The chapters represent physical displacements as well as emotional shifts in character. Ugo Dionne's analysis of the chapters uncovers a potential link between travel, space, and the form of the novel. Dionne asserts:

Dans la France du dix-huitième siècle (et plus encore dans celle du siècle suivant) les livres, tomes, parties et chapitres peuvent aussi servir à marquer les différents espaces du récit. *Télémaque*, *Gil Blas* et *Candide*—comme le *Grigri* de Cahusac (1739) ou le *Czar Demetrus* de Née de la Rochelle (1715)—proposent une structure 'géographique', où les unités correspondent à autant de lieux, c'est-à-dire à autant de stades, d'étapes dans le parcours des héros.⁹

⁸ Cottin, OC2. 1-2.

⁹ Ugo Dionne, "Livres et chapitres: la division du roman des Lumières." *Le Second Triomphe du roman du XVIIIe siècle* Eds. Philip Stewart and Michel Delon. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2009): 134.

The form of the chapter can also be used to separate different narratives in both a thematic and material way. This is particularly pertinent in *Malvina* where the titles and chapter divisions often mark a physical displacement of the protagonist. The novel begins with the chapter titled “Adieux, départ, arrivée” and the first words from *Malvina* reiterate a geographical and emotional displacement: “Adieu, terre chérie, asile sacré qui renferme tout ce que mon coeur aime!”¹⁰ The physical displacements echo the emotional shift and merge elements of both the travel and sentimental genre.

While Call attributes this type of narration to *Elisabeth*, he overlooks significant moments in *Malvina* where the narrator foreshadows events of which the characters are unaware. He states that *Mathilde*, published 1805, was her first novel written from a “narrative stance of zero focalization rather than from internal as was her style in earlier novels.”¹¹ Call is drawing on the theory of zero focalization first discussed by Gérard Genette.¹² Zero focalization describes the perspective of the narrator based on the amount of knowledge and information that the narrator holds. Corresponding to the omniscient narrator, the narrator “knows more than the character, or more exactly, *says* more than any of the characters know.”¹³ The narrator immediately foresees a conflict

¹⁰ Cottin, OC2. 3.

¹¹ Michael J. Call, *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002) 97, *Infertility*. 116.

¹² See Gérard Genette, *Nouveau Discours du récit* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1983) in which he uses the term “focalization sur” to stress the difference between a story that tells about something and a narrator that focuses on the story.

¹³ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980) 188. In this study, Genette distinguishes three degrees of focalization: zero, internal, and external. The epistolary

between duty and passion: "Ainsi Malvina, arrivée à vingt-quatre ans sans avoir connu l'amour, ne se croyait pas susceptible d'en éprouver; mais pour y avoir été étrangère, on n'y est pas inaccessible. Hélas! Pourquoi l'ignorait-elle?"¹⁴ The use of "Hélas!" stresses the narrator's distress and Malvina's ignorance. Call also observes that Cottin's work undergoes a narrative shift throughout her career; however, he does not recognize *Malvina's* role in Cottin's narrative progression.

The movement away from the individualized written voice transfers the reader's investment in reconstituting the story and uncovering the moral goal of the narrative to an omniscient narrator. The narrator also serves the function of a moralizing force by exculpating any actions that could be perceived as corrupt. Throughout the novel, the narrator tempers Malvina's dramatic interpretation of her promise to Clara by maintaining that there are limits to how far a woman can repress her desires. The narrator questions whether she goes with Stanholpe to the ball in order to make Edmond jealous and replies: "Je ne le crois pas: Malvina avait l'âme si pure! Mais elle était femme, et ce mot me rend tous mes doutes."¹⁵ The narrator's insistence that

elements of Cottin's novels would fall in the second category since the narrator equals the character; "the narrator says only what a given character knows" (189). In addition, there are elements of internal focalization in *Claire d'Albe* during the narrative transition in which the omniscient narrator recounts Claire's adulterous behavior and Elise's duty to transmit Claire's story to her daughter. However, this narration does not dominate the text.

¹⁴ Cottin, *OC2*. 21.

¹⁵ Sophie Cottin, "Malvina" *Ceuvres Complètes De Mme Cottin*. Vol. 3. (Paris: Gueffier, 1820) 25.

Malvina is just a woman emphasizes her humanity. The narrator goes so far as to imply that Malvina is misinterpreting Clara's wishes: "elle croyait que son devoir l'ordonnait ainsi" (64). The narrator's affirmation that Clara would not demand that she follow her oath to such a drastic extent implies that the impositions of her duty were beyond the means of most women. Malvina's resistance to her oath is a form of power in which Cottin displays the need for there to be an equal balance of women's pleasure, desire, and love.

Cottin's uses the preface to *Elisabeth* to establish the narrative perspective of her work. Cottin's preface to *Elisabeth* alludes to an authorial preoccupation with representing truth through literature. Cottin asserts that her story is based on true events:

Le trait qui fait le sujet de cette histoire est vrai: l'imagination n'invente point des actions si touchantes, ni des sentiments si généreux; le cœur seul peut les inspirer. La jeune fille qui a conçu le noble dessein d'arracher son père à l'exil, qui l'a exécuté en dépit de tous les obstacles, a réellement existé; sans doute elle existe encore; si on trouve quelque intérêt dans mon ouvrage, c'est à cette pensée que je le devrai.¹⁶

Cottin places a direct emphasis on how she reconciles the relationship between fiction and reality. The preface mentions that the young girl existed and still exists which testifies to the assertion made by Leslie Sykes and Xavier de Maistre that the plot of *Elisabeth* is taken from a series of anecdotes run in newspapers in the first half of 1805.

¹⁶ Cottin, OC12. i.

The *Journal des Débats*, *Publiciste*, *Bulletin de l'Europe* all published stories about a young Russian girl named Prascovie who was indeed the daughter of a man exiled in Siberia for unjust reasons. Her father, Loupolow was a member of the Catherinoslaw government who was accused of crimes against the state. Exiled with her father at seven years old, Prascovie decided to travel from Tobolsk to Petersburg at the age of twenty to demand her father's pardon. She gained the protection of the princess Troubetskoy who aided her in reopening her father's case. The committee responsible found that her father has been justly exiled, but rewarded Prascovie's courage by granting clemency for her father.

Sykes uses Cottin's correspondence to trace the moments when she first began writing *Elisabeth*. Her earliest mentions of the novel lead him to believe that she began writing *Elisabeth* in autumn of 1805.¹⁷ Therefore, he argues that it is highly likely that the origin of her story is based on the actual events. The assertion that *Elisabeth* existed and still does exist highlights Cottin's interest in representing the reality through the sentimental narrative. The manipulation of details pertaining to the factual life of Prascovie evidences a literary and moralizing goal that accentuates the filial piety of the young woman. The moral imperative in *Elisabeth* attempts to convince the reader that the narrative depicts true feelings and emotions that can be found outside of the fictional representations of the novel. The noble qualities attributed to the heroine incite the

¹⁷ Leslie Sykes, *Madame Cottin* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1949) 206.

reader to see Elisabeth as a representation of virtue that can be attained and should be emulated.

3.2 The Ideological and Historical Imperative of the Travel Narrative

The travel narrative shares elements with Cottin's previous generic choices. Her fiction takes part in what Philip Gove terms the "imaginary voyage" in which the term voyage refers to a composition or a narration that is the product of the creative imagination.¹⁸ Friedrich Wolfzettel sees a direct relationship between the eighteenth-century traditions of verisimilitude and the travel narrative. He argues that, like the epistolary novel, the imperative of the travel narrative is to integrate the individual experience with a communally shared idea:

Décrire, non pas les faits, mais les émotions suscitées par l'expérience des faits, telle semble être la formule d'une tendance qui, concurremment à celle d'une sensibilité exacerbée. [...] [L]e moi confidentiel, par contre, aura recours, ou bien directement à l'autobiographie, ou bien à des lettres dont la fonction est déjà celle de la confession publique. Paradoxalement, ce caractère privé et intime de l'écriture est conditionné par le caractère anonyme d'une réception de masse, le moi particulier cherchant un nombre virtuellement infini d'autres moi qui sont prêts à s'identifier avec lui. Ce phénomène, dont le mécanisme est bien évident dans le cas de Rousseau, est également valable pour la littérature de voyages.¹⁹

There is an inherent tension between the public and private in the travel narrative that also plays a role in sentimental epistolary fiction. *Amélie Mansfield* is an example of

¹⁸ Philip B. Gove, *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941) 4.

¹⁹ Friedrich Wolfzettel, *Le Discours Du Voyageur* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996) 305.

epistolary fiction in which letters make the personal public by describing individual truth through their psychological and emotional reactions.

Similar to the epistolary genre of Cottin's previous novel, the travel narrative confronts similar challenges in order to portray an emotional or lived experience through the use of language. Christine Montalbetti points to the common difficulty inherent in all travel writing: "l'inaptitude du langage à décrire l'objet visuel."²⁰ Travel narratives reconcile experience and linguistic representation as they work to transfer the real into narrative.

In order to describe the ways that Cottin integrates her fiction into a travel narrative, I suggest an initial examination of the definitions of travel and the ways in which literature depicts travel. According to Todorov, in the travel narrative:

[L]e voyage coïncide avec la vie, ni plus ni moins: celle-ci est-elle autre chose qu'un passage de la naissance à la mort? Le déplacement dans l'espace est le signe premier, le plus facile, du changement; or qui dit vie dit changement; en ce sens le voyage et le récit s'impliquent mutuellement. [...] Tout est voyage, mais c'est un tout sans identité.²¹

Each voyage is different and personal, but, whether imaginary or lived, the subjects displace themselves from their interior or present situation towards an exterior that often allows them to observe the unknown. Travel is often depicted as a discovery. The common element to all travel narratives is that the narrator/author leads the reader

²⁰ Christine Montalbetti, *Le Voyage, Le Monde Et La Bibliothèque* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997) 171.

²¹ Tzvetan Todorov, "Le voyage et son récit" *Les Morales de l'histoire* (Paris: Grasset, 1991) 121.

through the voyage. Todorov asserts the importance of the narrator as a guide: “le narrateur doit être différent de nous, mais pas trop différent, et en tout les cas pas aussi différent que nous sont les êtres qui font l’objet de son récit” (135-36). The narrator/author is leading the reader and therefore has knowledge of the voyage that affords him/her a position of trust. Valérie Berty confirms that “[Cette production textuelle] suppose de la part du voyageur, puis de l’auteur-narrateur qu’il devient en relatant son expérience, une certaine attitude mentale envers l’étranger, une sensibilité particulière, née d’une curiosité.”²² The reader is taken along on the voyage, but must maintain a faithful connection to the narrator/author/guide to avoid being displaced from the observer.

The travel narrative as a genre has longstanding roots in French literature, but in the eighteenth century particularly, there is a surge of interest in the travel narratives, both real and fictive.²³ The way the narrative, subject, and perspective are represented to such a varying degree emphasizes the difficulty to delineate the limits of this genre.

Valérie Berty asserts that the challenge to defining the travel narrative lies in the diversity of its representations: “ce sera dans ce refus des frontières, qu’elle peut

²² Valérie Berty, *Littérature et voyage au XIXe siècle* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001) 24.

²³ For examples of narratives that depict physical displacements from one’s place of origin, see Paul Lucas’ *Voyage du Sieur Paul Lucas au Levant* (1704), Robert Challe’s *Journal de voyage fait aux Indes orientales* (1721), Bougainville’s *Voyage autour du monde* (1771), Rousseau’s multiple trips recounted in *Confessions* (1782). Examples of fictional voyages include Cyrano de Bergerac’s *L’Autre Monde* (1657), Alain René Lesage’s *Aventures de Gil Blas de Santillane* (1715-1735), Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* (1721), and Françoise de Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne* (1747).

s'affirmer comme littérature. La diversité des formes et l'absence de toutes règles."²⁴ The inability to universally define a voyage is inherent in the travel narrative.

Literary representations establish codes inherent to the travel narrative. Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (1794) is a parody set in the tradition of the travel narrative. This text reduces the genre to its essence and, thereby, outlines the features de Maistre deems important for his narrative to be recognized as a travel narrative. De Maistre's ironic tone is apparent from the outset of his work. Using a first person narrator, de Maistre ironically establishes his narrative as a universal and revolutionary form of travel since, for the traveler, it "ne lui coutera ni peine ni argent."²⁵ He directly follows this reasoning with an impassioned call for others to embark on similar voyages:

Suivez-moi, vous tous qu'une mortification de l'amour, une négligence de l'amitié, retiennent dans votre appartement, loin de la petitesse et de la perfidie des hommes. Que tous les malheureux, les malades et les ennuyés de l'univers me suivent! — Que tous les paresseux se lèvent en *masse!* (5)

This veritable call to arms jests at the exclusivity of depictions of travel that only allow the wealthy, healthy, and energetic to travel. The new way to travel that the narrator describes is limited to the fixed space of the narrator's room.

²⁴ Valérie Berty, *Littérature et voyage au XIXe siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001) 23.

²⁵ Xavier de Maistre, "Voyage autour de ma chambre" *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1866) 5.

Geographic and temporal precisions remain an essential component of de Maistre's narrative. The text is divided into chapters that represent days. As the trip begins, the narrator travels in relation to his geographically positioned room:

Ma chambre est située sous le quarante-cinquième degré de latitude, selon les mesures du père *Beccaria*: sa direction est du levant au couchant; elle forme un carré long qui a trente-six pas de tour [...]. [J]e la traverserai souvent en long et en large, ou bien diagonalement, sans suivre de règle ni de méthode. (8)

Based on this initial description, his movements are communicated using cardinal points. The objects found in this space become points from which the reader can follow as if reading a map: "Après mon fauteuil, en marchant vers le nord, on découvre mon lit" (10). The narrator invites the reader to share in his discoveries as he chronicles the objects in his room. Despite the seemingly imprecise method of travel, he does outline his route prior to beginning his trip.

As the narrator travels from object to object, he uncovers generic codes of the travel narrative. Spatial orientation, movement through time and space all become organizing elements that define his trip. The final component involved in his narrative is the attention to detail. He specifies that this is common to all travel narratives:

Qu'on ne me reproche pas d'être prolix dans les détails, c'est la manière des voyageurs. Lorsqu'on part pour monter sur le mon Blanc, lorsqu'on va visiter la large ouverture du tombeau d'*Empédocle*, on ne manque jamais de décrire exactement les moindres circonstances: le nombre des personnes, celui des mulets, la qualité des provisions, l'excellent appétit des voyageurs, tout enfin, jusqu'aux faux pas des montures, et soigneusement enregistré dans le journal, pour l'instruction de l'univers sédentaire. (31)

According to his structural outline, descriptive elements are required for the travel narrative. These principal organizing factors allow him to contend that his new form of travel has legitimate correlations to the previously established preoccupations common to the majority of other travel narratives.

De Maistre's agenda to satirize the genre is successful only to the extent that it inserts itself within a common set of codes that the reader can interpret and correctly categorize as the travel narrative. The rules of the genre are therefore contingent on the way in which the writer interprets the genre. Genre therefore requires examination within a socio-historic context. The historical investigations in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* attempt to provide a broad definition of the travel narrative in light of the limited critical attention it has received within the academy.²⁶ Roy Bridges contributes to the historicizing of the travel narrative by examining the way in which it was defined from 1720 to 1914. He defines the term "travel writing" to mean "a discourse designed to describe and interpret for its readers a geographical area together with its natural attributes and its human society and culture."²⁷ Based on this study, the generic codes outlined above correspond to the definition of the travel narrative that

²⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the ideological and historicizing goal of this work, see Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs introduction in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²⁷ Roy Bridges, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 53.

evolves in the eighteenth century. Bridges claims that a typical pattern had emerged in the discourse of travel by 1800:

Proceeding from a base in civilization to an unknown region, the traveler must describe experiences and observations day to day on the basis of a log or journal. This format left some scope for the depiction of the picturesque of the exotic but the emphasis was more and more on science and precision. (56)

Bridge's observation, that the changing definition of the travel narrative placed greater emphasis on description during the period in which Cottin was writing. Based on these definitions, description played a large role in defining the genre. By examining de Maistre's *Voyage*, a clearer image of the generic tendencies of the travel narrative in the late eighteenth century can be formed. The loose set of generic codes provided by de Maistre allows us to investigate Cottin's engagement with the rules of travel narrative in her sentimental novels.

As seen in de Maistre's work, travel is represented in similar ways to travel in *Malvina*. Malvina also travels with her imagination. She finds solace only in the books she finds in Birton's library, which serve as a way for her to connect with Clara:

Elle s'arrêta devant un rayon qui soutenait tous les auteurs français: c'étaient les bons amis de sa jeunesse; c'était entr'eux et milady Sheridan qu'elle avait passé les plus beaux moments de sa vie.²⁸

Like de Maistre, she finds an alternative way to travel within the confines of isolation. Sensory memory plays a role in the act of reading since books for Malvina serve as a

²⁸ Cottin, OC2. 47.

way to recall moments in her past: “Ces souvenirs se succédèrent avec rapidité” (49).

Her self-imposed isolation allows her to avoid any outside force that could disrupt her dedication to Fanny and Clara’s memory.

Malvina’s movements are also represented by the physical displacement of her body. Malvina’s travels throughout Scotland are chronicled both geographically and with a dedication to reconstructing the time needed to physically move between towns:

Au bout de dix jours Malvina arriva au lieu de sa destination, dans la province de Bread Alben, qui sépare l’Ecosse septentrional de la partie méridionale. Le château de mistriss Birton était situé à quelques milles de Killinen; son extérieur gothiques, les hautes montagnes couvertes de neige qui le dominaient, et l’immense lac de Tay qui baignait ses murs, rendaient son aspect aussi important que sauvage.²⁹

The narrative describes the passing of time in a realistic way by specifying the amount of days needed to logistically move from one place to another. The use of non-fictional landmarks creates a pretense of reality. The narrative furnishes the reader with geographical detail similar to a map. Through this attention to detail, the reader is invited to participate in the same voyage as the traveler.

Likewise, Cottin focuses on creating a detailed portrait of nature in *Elisabeth*. The description of the environment affords the reader the sensation of traveling across the terrain:

En avançant d’avantage vers le pôle, les cèdres, les sapins, tous les grands arbres disparaissent: des broussailles de mélèzes rampants et de bouleux

²⁹ Cottin, OC2. 12.

nains deviennent le seul ornement de ces misérables contrées; enfin, des marais chargés de mousse se montrent.³⁰

Cottin emphasizes the appearance and disappearance of the surrounding, natural elements as the reader and the narrator progress towards the isolated family around whom the action will take place.³¹ As in Cottin's novel, the emphasis is placed on the natural description of the landscape as a way for the reader to situate himself/herself into the action.

In *Elisabeth*, representations of travel become more pronounced as Cottin incorporates more elements of travel narrative. There is a clear authorial engagement to recreate travel with geographical descriptions, precisions of dates and time, and an emphasis on the distance travelled. The narrator describes landscapes, encounters with numerous people from different economic classes, and constantly refers to the time spent traveling by providing dates: "Ce fut le 18 de mai qu'Elisabeth et son guide se mirent en route; ils employèrent un mois entier à traverser les forêts humides de la Sibérie"³² and "Elle avait mis près de trois mois à se rendre de Sarapoul à Vododimir"

³⁰ Cottin, OC12. 3-4.

³¹ Her description is reminiscent of Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie* which takes place on the island of Mauritius. In Bernardin's description the reader enters into an unknown land described by the environmental surroundings that serve to further isolate the protagonists: [S]ur le côté oriental de la montagne qui s'élève derrière le Port-Louis de l'île de France, on voit, sur un terrain jadis cultivé, les ruines de deux petites cabanes. Elles sont situées presque au milieu d'un bassin formé par de grands rochers, qui n'a qu'une seule ouverture tournée au nord. On aperçoit sur la gauche, la montagne. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, (1787) *Paul et Virginie*. (Paris: Librairie Générale de France, 1999 [originally 1787]) 13-14. The similarities in environmental description demonstrate Cottin's engagement with the works of her contemporaries as well as her borrowed use of the theme of isolation to depict natural education.

³² Cottin, OC12. 128.

(168). In addition, Elisabeth experiences the threats of delay due to the weather. Upon approaching a river, she asks a boatman for a ride and is told she must wait two weeks for the river to freeze in order to cross. These details construct a tension between time constraints of travel and the protagonist's ultimate desire to return home. Despite the relatively few pages that are dedicated to her actual voyage, the struggles Elisabeth encounters along the way evoke elements of travel narrative as the reader is taken along with Elisabeth as she experiences the world outside of the utopian environment of her home.

Cottin accentuates the economic and temporal factors involved with travel that are not commonly found in other sentimental novels. In *Malvina*, her movement is inspired by her conflict between desire and duty; however, Cottin incorporates elements that detail logistical factors that make this travel possible. Malvina flees Edingburg because she fears that Edmond is engaged to another woman: "A l'aide de quelques guinées, Malvina obtint aisément du cocher qui la conduisait, de la mener sur-le-champ à Falkirk. Elle y arrivera au milieu de la nuit, descendit à la meilleure auberge."³³ Time, money, and space are all taken into consideration in the description of her movement.

Both novels represent a movement outside of a private space towards the unknown. For Malvina, the inn represents a public space that leaves her vulnerable to discovery. Despite her attempt to isolate herself, Edmond is able to find her because of

³³ Cottin, OC3. 90.

the public nature of the inn. Likewise, Elisabeth encounters innkeepers as she enters Moscovie: “Elisabeth répondit qu’elle n’avait aucun asile; que toutes les portes lui avaient été fermées; elle avoua sa misère sans honte.”³⁴ The description of her encounter illuminates her distance from the domestic sphere. She is completely without resources or family attachments having given away the last of her money prior to arriving in Moscovie: “Elisabeth sortit de sa poche le rouble qui lui restait, en rougissant beaucoup d’avoir si peu à offrir” (171). Money allows the women to travel of their own accord outside of the domestic space. The precision of space and funds adds a descriptive element not common to the sentimental novel.

3.3 Description in the Sentimental Genre

The primary concern of this chapter is the notion of genre in Cottin’s novels. Cottin’s novels have prompted questions of categorization from her first publication. As we observed in the analysis of *Claire d’Albe*, Genlis, hesitant to qualify Cottin’s novel as purely sentimental, feels the need to create a new space by stating that Cottin is the first to write in the “genre passionné”.³⁵ Likewise, Cottin’s contemporaries and contemporary critics of her work have acknowledged that her later novels include more descriptions of travel. Colette Cazenobe suggests that the public reception of *Malvina* has changed: “le

³⁴ Cottin, OC12. 192.

³⁵ Genlis, *De l’influence des femmes*. 242.

public a aimé des paysages écossais, la peinture exacte et précise de la vie de château. Ce qui nous retient aujourd'hui est une grande variété de portraits de femmes à travers lesquels l'auteur s'exprime son sexe."³⁶ However, the mixed reactions to the descriptive elements increase the generic confusion between the travel narrative and sentimental.

Again we turn to Genlis's critique of Cottin's work in which she points to the varied use of descriptive elements in *Malvina* and *Elisabeth*. Genlis undermines Cottin's originality by accusing her of stealing the plot *Malvina* from her own work *Des Vœux téméraires ou l'enthousiasme* published in 1802, but does credit this work for the originality of the description: "mais les détails et beaucoup de scènes intéressantes appartiennent à Cottin, et font le plus grand honneur à son talent." (258-59). Genlis likewise attributes the success of *Elisabeth* in part to the description of Siberia stating that:

[O]n ne peut trop admirer les nobles sentiments et l'excellente morale. Le début de ce roman commence par une description des déserts de la Sibérie. Cette description est de la plus grande beauté, elle a un ton sévère parfaitement assorti au sujet; l'auteur est véritablement original dans ce beau morceau, il n'emploie aucun ornement superflu, aucune expression pompeuse; tout est simple, mais grand et d'une telle vérité, que l'on croirait que le tableau est fait d'après la nature. (267-68)

³⁶ Colette Cazenobe, "Une Prér romantique méconnue, Madame Cottin." *Travaux de Littéraire* 1 (January 1988): 185.

She asserts that Cottin achieves a level of verisimilitude in her work that makes the reader feel as though she is using lived memories to describe the idyllic setting in which she begins her novel.

However, Genlis argues that the weakness of Cottin's writing in this novel is the overuse of sentences that are too beautiful and the use of too much description which weakens the reader's interest and creates an overall coldness to the work. Genlis highlights elements inherent to both the sentimental genre and the travel narrative. Genlis's critique, however, lies in the mixing of narrative elements of the sentimental tradition and that of the travel narrative. She does not use these categories in her analysis. While the descriptive transitions are not excluded by the rules of the sentimental genre, Genlis's critique reveals a conflict between the expectations of a reader of a sentimental novel faced with Cottin's *Elisabeth*.

Elisabeth went on to receive the attention of Xavier de Maistre almost nineteen years after its publication in reaction to Cottin's description of Siberia. In 1825, de Maistre published *Jeune Sibérienne* in reaction to Cottin's novel. At the onset of the work, he alludes to Cottin, stating that this story "fit assez de bruit dans le temps pour engager un auteur célèbre."³⁷ This is a direct reference to Cottin's *Elisabeth*, which he continues to critique for the overly sentimental nature of the description:

³⁷ Xavier de Maistre, "Voyage autour de ma chambre" Œuvres complètes (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1866) 259.

Mais les personnes qui l'ont connue paraissent regretter qu'on ait prêté des aventures d'amour et des idées romanesques à une jeune et noble vierge qui n'eut jamais d'autre passion que l'amour filial le plus pur, et qui, sans appui, sans conseil, trouva dans son cœur la pensée de l'action la plus généreuse et la force de l'exécuter. Si le récit de ses aventures n'offre point cet intérêt de surprise que peut inspirer un romancier pour des personnages imaginaires, on ne lira peut-être sans quelque plaisir la simple histoire de sa vie, assez intéressante par elle-même, sans autre ornement que la vérité. (259-260)

After this reference to rehabilitating the true story of Prascovie, the rest of his novel is dedicated to recounting the life of the young woman, while avoiding the personal reflection found in Cottin's novel in the moralizing voice of the narrator.

Sykes reads de Maistre's novel as an attempt to redeem the Prascovie depicted in Cottin's *Elisabeth*. De Maistre's need to rewrite *Elisabeth* in 1825 shows a generic distancing from the sentimental novel and an attempt to clearly separate sentimentality from the travel narrative. Both novels have different methods of depicting this historical figure. Sykes emphasizes that when reading de Maistre's work: "nous sommes ici en présence non pas d'un roman, mais d'un récit fidèle de faits vécus, d'un 'reportage' admirable de sobriété".³⁸ He insists that the major difference between de Maistre's novel and Cottin's is the generic difference between the two. Sykes states that *Elisabeth* is a text written as if it "décrit des choses qu'elle ne connaît que par des livres assez superficiellement consultés" (211). Sykes's critique of the superficial descriptive elements in the novel is supported by Cottin scholar Catherine Cusset. Cusset reiterates

³⁸ Sykes, 218.

the lack of verisimilitude in the travel narrative aspects of the story by stating that the novel describes “Elisabeth’s filial devotion to her parents and the purity of her heart: she does not even meet real obstacles as she crosses Siberia and Russia because everybody, from the Siberian brigands to the Russian soldiers, is moved by her pious love for her father.”³⁹ The sentimental elements of *Elisabeth* create a tension between descriptions that purport actual events. Therefore, *Elisabeth* cannot be strictly categorized as a travel narrative. Despite the descriptive elements found within, Sykes classifies *Elisabeth* as a sentimental novel: “*Elisabeth* est donc encore un roman sentimental; mais c’est surtout un roman moralisant.”⁴⁰

De Maistre’s text from the outset defines itself in opposition to Cottin’s fictional universe. De Maistre recognizes this generic tension and uses description to impart knowledge. Nathalie Dolbec supports Sykes’s reading and compares de Maistre’s *Jeune Sibérienne* to *Elisabeth* as a way to explore how description serves each author in distinctly different ways. She argues that the use of description serves different purposes for each author: “ce que la descriptrice cottinienne favorise c’est une description mise surtout au service du didactisme (mathésique⁴¹, moral ou édifiant). En revanche, chez de

³⁹ Catherine Cusset, “Rousseau’s Legacy: Glory and Femininity at the End of the Eighteenth Century Sophie Cottin and Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun.” *Femmes savants et femmes d’esprit: Women Intellectuals of the French Eighteenth Century* Ed. Roland Bonnel and Catherine Rubinger (New York: Peter Lang, 1994) 411.

⁴⁰ Sykes, 214.

⁴¹ This term most likely refers learning via mathematics or through physical objects.

Maistre, le descripteur attache une grande importance à la compétence.”⁴² Dolbec uncovers the generic differences between the authorial purposes of the two authors. Whereas de Maistre attempts to narrate a historical moment, Cottin’s description imparts a moralizing tone.

Dolbec’s perceptive analysis of both novels uncovers the relationship between the sentimental elements found in *Elisabeth* with those of the travel narrative. She observes that the text is written “à la manière des manuels de géographie ou des guides touristiques” (47), but uses this description in order to portray the positive effects of education of women. She rightly connects Cottin’s didactic description with a preoccupation with imparting education from a mother to a daughter.

A primary example of Cottin’s moralizing description is found during her travels with the missionary. When he becomes sick, Elisabeth makes him a drink using the various plants and vegetation found in nature: “[E]lle alla cueillir dans les champs de la réglisse à gousses values, ainsi que des roses de Gueldre; puis en le mêlant, comme elle l’avait vu pratiquer à sa mère avec des feuilles de cotylédon épineux, elle en fit une boisson salubre, qu’elle apporta au pauvre religieux.”⁴³ Nathalie Dolbec likens this description to a recipe persuasively arguing that “elle convoque le stéréotype de l’infirmière bénévoles préparant, à partir d’ingrédients dont la plupart sont ici de virtuels

⁴² Nathalie Dolbec, “Opérations d’ancrage et d’affectation dans les descriptions d’*Elisabeth ou les exiles de Sibérie* de Mme Cottin et de *La Jeune Sibérienne* de Xavier de Maistre” *Itinéraires du XIXe Siècle* Eds. Roland Le Huénen and Stéphan Vachon (Toronto: Centre d’Etudes du XIXe Siècle Joseph Sablé, 1996) 55.

⁴³ Cottin, OC12. 137.

asémantèms⁴⁴ [*sic*], un remède de mère en fille.”⁴⁵ The description, therefore, serves to show the positive effects of motherhood on women. Elisabeth’s mother successfully educated her to perform her duty in society. Compared to the oppressive depictions of motherhood in Cottin’s other novels, motherhood in *Elisabeth* is redefined as a positive and enriching experience. Travel allows Cottin to place her protagonist in positions that show the positive effects of the education of women in society and redefines education as a duty exclusively affiliated to women.

Though Dolbec’s analysis is important to the study of genre in Cottin’s work, it does not seek to explore education in the novel in more depth, nor does it treat the use of description in Cottin’s overarching literary progression. Her study focuses on the descriptive differences between de Maistre and Cottin, and does not explore the significant relationship between description of travel specifically and education.

In a similar way, Cottin scholarship has yet to explore fully Cottin’s use of descriptions of travel in her corpus. While Sykes clearly recognizes a difference between *Elisabeth* and Cottin’s other novels, he and the majority of critics since have failed to recognize adequately the subtle shift and transformations that enrich Cottin’s novels, and rarely comment on the narrative moments that connect the travel narrative and the sentimental genre. Sykes comments that *Elisabeth* distinguishes itself from Cottin’s other

⁴⁴ I acknowledge that I do not have an understanding of this specific word.

⁴⁵ Nathalie Dolbec, “Opérations d’ancrage et d’affectation dans les descriptions d’*Elisabeth ou les exiles de Sibérie* de Mme Cottin et de *La Jeune Sibérienne* de Xavier de Maistre” *Itinéraires du XIXe Siècle* Eds. Roland Le Huenen and Stéphan Vachon (Toronto: Centre d’Etudes du XIXe Siècle Joseph Sablé, 1996) 52.

novels in the richness of description: “Les descriptions, rares dans les autres romans, se font [ici] plus nombreuses”, but continues by writing that “[l]a place faite aux sentiments est toujours considérable, mais ces sentiments ne sont plus les grandes passions ardentes d’amants malheureux.”⁴⁶ Likewise, Call does not underline the progressively more descriptive passages in *Malvina. Elisabeth* clearly represents a different relationship between virtue and duty as seen in Cottin’s other novels. Women’s passion is entirely devoted to filial love in *Elisabeth*. However, travel is organically imbricated in Cottin’s sentimental works. In order to explore the ways in which Cottin remains faithful to the sentimental genre while incorporating elements of the travel narrative, the points of contact between the two genres become more pertinent to any discussion of generic manipulation.

In Margaret Cohen’s comprehensive work *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, she recognizes the difficulty and limits to ascribing any fixed definition to genres, and offers a set of criteria of general tendencies common to all sentimental novels. These criteria are based on Cohen’s approach to examining genre as a social relation. In light of the post-Revolutionary production of the sentimental novel, the application of a loose yet clear definition of this subgenre provides a structure, or set of codes, with which to investigate Cottin’s manipulation of the limits of the genre.

⁴⁶ Sykes, 204.

Space functions to designate the public and private spheres in the sentimental novel. Essential to Cohen's analysis of the sentimental novel is the ideological objective of the subgenre to explore the relationship between individual freedom and collective welfare. She remarks that there are two scenarios from which the sentimental novel can explore this juxtaposition: adultery and the presence of family obstacles to marriage (38). *Claire d'Albe* is relevant to this discussion because both scenarios coexist in this novel. As seen previously, space in *Claire d'Albe* reinforces the tension between individual freedom and collective welfare through the setting of the novel. As Clare moves from the patriarchal constraints of the household into nature, she becomes more vulnerable to her desires, and eventually places her individual freedom above her duty to maintain social harmony. This novel illustrates the importance of the representations of the domestic sphere in exposing the ideological objective of the genre. Cohen states: "The sentimental novel reinforces such restraint in how it handles setting. Sentimentality begins at home. These intimate family groups interact in domestic spaces: the salons, bedrooms, and gardens of residence, although occasionally characters do travel" (50). In the Habermasian sense, space highlights the domestic sphere as well as the public by placing the two in reference to each other.

In *Malvina* and more dramatically in *Elisabeth*, the representation of space is complicated by travel. Both novels begin in intimate family groups that are unconventional. Many sentimental novels describe the symbiotic relationship to

motherhood between two female friends, but these relationships are often challenged by the husbands. The reader is introduced to Malvina who has successfully reconciled female friendship within the confines of patriarchy. For Elisabeth, the initial representation of the domestic is unconventional in the egalitarian representation of the domestic in which both parents participate in her education. These unconventional beginnings, however, remain within the generic code of the sentimental novel. However, travel allows the protagonist to leave the domestic sphere and enter the public sphere.

As seen in the literary and scholarly debates centered on *Malvina* and *Elisabeth*, Cottin's description was heavily commented upon. The overarching critical theme of description in her novels reveals that this narrative element somehow confronts the codes of the sentimental genre. One of the most dominant characteristics of the sentimental genre is the lack of description. Cohen reiterates this point: "The effacement of description characterizes the sentimental novel as well. Sentimental novels delineate setting and the material aspect of characters only with a few attributes that are often commonplace."⁴⁷ She argues that the limited use of description focuses the reader's attention on the action: "Sentimental novels, like tragedy, efface material details to concentrate all attention on the progress of the action" (49). The reaction to the descriptive elements in these novels is symbolic of Cottin's generic modifications in her

⁴⁷ Cohen, 48.

later novels. Cohen explains that certain forms of description do appear in the sentimental novel. However, the use of description has a moralizing goal:

At moments of narrative peripeteia, sentimental texts sometimes break with their suppression of material details to provide extensive descriptions of natural beauty. These exceptions to the light touch might seem a distraction from the sentimental novel's concentrated focus on the events resulting from the collision between collective welfare and individual freedom. In fact, however, such detailed material, and above all visual descriptions of nature, reinforces the surrounding events by recapitulating them in allegorical form. (53)

Description promotes the overarching moralizing affects of the novel as well as reiterates the characters' emotional relationships with their internal struggles.

Cohen reads *Claire d'Albe* as emblematic of the conventional use of description in the sentimental novel. Claire describes her house in the country as an ambiguous space. While she specifies that it is near an actual city, the exact location is uncertain in the description. She writes to Elise:

L'habitation où nous sommes est située à quelques lieues de Tours, au milieu d'un mélange heureux de coteaux et de plaines, dont les un sont couverts de bois et de vignes et les autres de moissons dorées et de riantes maisons; la rivière du Cher embrasse le pays de ses replis, et va se jeter dans la Loire; les bords du Cher, couverts de bocages et de prairies, sont riantes et champêtres; ceux de la Loire, plus majestueux, s'ombragent de hauts peupliers, de bois épais et de riches guérets; du haut d'un roc pittoresque qui domine le château.⁴⁸

The description is precise in the details of nature, but remains imprecise in the specificities of her house. Cohen argues that this description remains ambiguous in

⁴⁸ Cottin, *Claire*. 8-9.

order to establish a relationship between nature and Claire's relationship with her husband:

Describing the landscape as unifying opposites in a beautiful equilibrium, Claire offers an allegory of her own relationship, which the novel is in the process of establishing. Like the landscape, her marriage brings together a graceful, cheerful young woman with a 'stately' older man. Retrospectively, Claire's allegory takes on a darker cast. The landscape becomes the picturesque figures of a harmony Claire cannot achieve in ethical practice.⁴⁹

From this example, we can see that description functions as an integral part in describing the emotional state of the characters.

Cottin's description in *Amélie Mansfield* remains faithful to this code. Amélie travels, but space remains an essential element to the sentimental plot of this specific novel. Space is used as an allegory. Her movement away from her grandfather's house is symbolic of her rejecting his dominant patriarchal control. In addition, her choice to live with her uncle is representative of her freedom of movement. The focus of the description is on her emotions rather than on her movement through space. Even when she chooses to leave the isolating space and reenter society to follow Ernest to Vienna, however, she remains unseen. She disguises herself in order to observe Ernest. The purpose of her trip is to find and confront him; however, the description of the spaces she encounters only adds to the isolation she feels as a result of his initial departure.

⁴⁹ Cohen, 54.

As mentioned above, descriptions of travel are interlaced with details of monetary concern. The protagonists can only travel within their financial means. These details heighten the dramatic tension of travel, but are not implicated in the moralizing effects of the story. There is a confrontation in these novels between a material truth, a truth of facts; and a moral truth, a truth of ideas and sentiments that remain separate in many sentimental novels (50). In *Malvina* and *Elisabeth* these two elements of description are united.

In *Malvina*, Cottin inserts elements of material description into allegorical description. Malvina is physically displaced from her friends' tomb by her chambermaid. Her mechanical movements dramatize the overwhelming emotions she feels because of the loss of her friend: "[Her chambermaid] vient l'arracher à ce tombeau: elle se laissa conduire en silence à la chaise qui l'attendait; en y montant elle ne pleurait plus: il y a des chagrins qui n'ont ni plaintes ni larmes."⁵⁰ The somber nature of Malvina's image parallels that of the description of the surrounding natural scene as she moves away from Clara's tomb: "On était alors à la fin de novembre; les arbres dépouillés de leurs feuilles, et le vaste tapis de neige qui couvrait la terre offraient à l'œil attristé un austère et monotone tableau: [...] les oiseaux se taisaient."⁵¹ Nature assumes

⁵⁰ Cottin, OC2. 9.

⁵¹ Cottin, OC2. 10.

the unnatural silence that Malvina is affecting. The silence and solitude of the season and nature surrounding her mimic the emotions that she feels.

The narrator gives precise details about travel and time that seem inconsequential to the emotional state of the protagonist. During a trip from Falkirk to Edinburgh, Malvina finds herself again in the same inn where she was found by Edmond. She decides to have her carriage prepared by the staff so that she can leave, but cannot break through the cacophony of voices:

Le maître de l'auberge buvait, sa femme grondait, les domestiques couraient en disputant d'un côté et d'autre; de sorte qu'au milieu de ce tumulte, Malvina pouvant à peine faire entendre sa faible voix, fut obligée d'attendre au jour pour partir, et ne put arriver à Edinbourg que le lendemain vers onze heures du matin.⁵²

Malvina's inability to be noticed, which also emphasizes her ambiguous state in society, delays her trip. However, Cottin also interjects a lively description of the inn and the specific details of Malvina's arrival in Edinburgh. Neither of these details the emotional state of the protagonist and creates a deeper affiliation with the codes of the travel narrative.

The allegorical description becomes increasingly more prevalent in the narration towards the end of the novel and as the reader approaches the description of Malvina's death. The narrator's description of the house in which Edmond and Malvina reside after their marriage is similar to Claire's description above: "La maison était petite, mais

⁵² Cottin, OC3. 171.

élégante et commode: elle était située au milieu d'une vaste forêt qui rendait son abord difficile, et entourée d'un enclose considérable bordé de haies vives et de larges fossés."⁵³

The solitude and beauty of the house and its environs represent the desired isolation of the married couple. From this moment on, the description represents Malvina's state of mind. The elements of Edmond's departure from this idyllic setting in order to obtain permission to keep Fanny all emphasize separation: "elle aperçoit la trace des roues fraîchement empreinte sur le sable, les entend rouler sur le pave, entrevoit la voiture qui fuit à travers les arbres, et la main d'Edmond qui lui fait un signe d'adieu: frappé de l'affreux pressentiment qu'elle ne doit plus le revoir" (96). The visual and auditory descriptions highlight the absence of Edmond. The tire imprints, the sound of them driving away, and the sight of him through the trees all add to the emotional effect on Malvina who recognizes that these temporal traces of Edmond symbolize an emotional rupture between the two lovers.

In *Elisabeth*, the union of the material truth and moral truth create a collective and moralizing image. The moments in which Elisabeth veers from the path towards her goal serve as allegorical descriptions that emphasize her unwavering devotion to her father in the face of hardship. As Elisabeth travels to Moscow, she decides to take a route that has her avoid the marshes of the Volga river:

⁵³ Cottin, OC4. 92.

Elisabeth prit cette route qu'on lui avait indiquée; elle marcha longtemps à travers ce désert de glace; mais comme aucun chemin n'y était tracé, elle se perdit, et tomba dans une espèce de marais fangeux, dont elle eut beaucoup de peine à se tirer. Enfin, après bien des efforts, elle gagna un tertre un peu élevé. Couverte de boue et épuisée de fatigue, elle s'assit sur une pierre, et détacha sa chaussure pour la faire sécher au soleil, qui brillait en ce moment d'un éclat assez vif. Ce lieu était sauvage, on n'y voyait aucune trace d'habitation, il n'y avait personne, et on n'y entendait même aucun bruit. Elisabeth vit bien qu'elle s'était beaucoup écartée de la grande route.⁵⁴

This undefined space shows her determination to overcome the rigors of nature. Her ability to rise above challenges manifests itself in the metaphoric action of her seeking higher ground in order to find her way. Her vantage point allows her to see more clearly as well and the reader to see her more clearly. Whereas nature mimics Malvina's emotion, Elisabeth is physically affected by nature.

3.4 Women's Bodies Exposed

Women's visibility in society is an essential component of the sentimental novel and is pertinent to the discussion of the points of contact between this subgenre and the travel narrative. For Cohen, visibility of the protagonist occurs through what she calls the sentimental blazon, a moment in which the sentimental novel suspends the progress of the action to detail the physical body of the protagonist.⁵⁵ The female protagonist is

⁵⁴ Cottin, OC12. 175.

⁵⁵ Cohen, 54.

the visual object of another character's desire. This can be seen in both portrait scenes from *Claire d'Albe* and *Julie*.

Frédéric and St. Preux observe the women's bodies through portraiture. Both Frédéric and St. Preux reject the portraits of their lovers as being unable to depict all the elements of the women's personalities. In *Julie*, St. Preux's examination of Julie's portrait details all of the physical attributes that the portraitist was unable to correctly paint. St. Preux writes that the painter:

a placé la racine des cheveux trop loin des tempes, ce qui donne au front un contour moins agréable et moins de finesse au regard [...]. Le coloris des joues est trop près des yeux, et ne se fond pas délicieusement en couleur de rose vers le bas du visage comme sur le modèle.⁵⁶

His criticism of the portrait illustrates the inability of a portrait to capture the essence of Julie by outlining each part of her body that does not accurately represent her. In *Claire d'Albe*, Frédéric reacts similarly to Claire's portrait by saying:

Ce teint uniforme ne parallèlera jamais celui dont les couleurs varient comme la pensée. C'est bien le bleu céleste de ses yeux, mais je n'y vois que leur couleur; c'est leur regard qu'il fallait rendre [...]. Non, non, des traits sans vie ne rendront jamais Claire; et là où je ne vois point d'âme, je ne puis la reconnaître.⁵⁷

Frédéric also lists how the portrait differs from Claire's physical attributes by examining her physical body.

⁵⁶ Rousseau, *Julie*. Vol. 1. 354.

⁵⁷ Cottin, *Claire*. 52.

Cottin remains faithful to imagery of the sentimental blazon in *Malvina*, but offers two complementary portraits for the reader. The first description of Malvina occurs during moments in which the action is suspended. The narrator takes advantage of “ce moment de calme”⁵⁸ when Malvina first arrives at Birton’s house. After her long trip, the narrator takes the time while she is asleep to create a “portrait” of Malvina for the reader. In the portrait the narrator creates of Malvina she is described as a person who is without reproach:

[J]e veux rendre, s’il est possible, quelques traits de cette femme charmante, dont les qualités, l’esprit et la figure formaient un ensemble qui n’a appartenu qu’à elle, et que la terre n’offrira pas deux fois. [...] Je ne prétends pas dire que Malvina fût sans défaut; mais chez elle ils semblaient un attrait de plus. (16-18)

The narrator depicts Malvina as a virtuous woman unlike any other, and there is a clear attempt to render her as real as possible by describing her virtues through her actions. Cottin strays from the objectifying code of the sentimental blazon. Malvina’s body is not described. The focus of analysis is on her personality, not solely on her physical description.

While the narrator’s portrait of Malvina remains faithful to the generic constraints of the novel, the second image of Malvina retains the objectifying gaze of a masculine presence. When Malvina first encounters Edmond in the library, he is struck by her physical beauty:

⁵⁸ Cottin, OC2. 16.

Ses beaux cheveux blonds, dont les boucles ondoyantes tombent sans art sur ses épaules; ce teint semblable à ces roses blanches qui, nuancées d'un léger incarnat, laissent l'œil incertain sur leur véritable couleur, ce cou d'albâtre [...]. (97)

Malvina is reduced to her physical traits as she becomes the object of Edmond's desire. Each aspect of her description enhances her natural beauty. She is described in a similar way in which the countryside and ultimately her house with Edmond are described.

Likewise, in *Elisabeth* the description of Elisabeth's body is related to nature. The description of Elisabeth reinforces the realistic geographical setting of the novel. Elisabeth's father is exiled when she is four years old. Due to the seclusion afforded by his exile, Elisabeth is constantly surrounded by nature. She spends her time outside and this has a pronounced affect on her body: "Sa santé se fortifiait par le grand air, sa taille se développait par l'exercice, et sur son visage où reposait la paix d'innocence, on voyait chaque jour naître un agrément de plus."⁵⁹ Through this description, she becomes the object of the reader and implicates the reader in the objectification of the woman's body. However, this objectification has a didactic purpose that is emphasized by the geographical setting of the novel.

The effects of nature are especially visible when Elisabeth is compared to her mother, who did not receive the same education in nature as Elisabeth. Despite having

⁵⁹ Cottin, OC12. 25.

lived in the same location for as long, her mother's body has not been altered by the location. The night she meets Smoloff, Elisabeth and her mother are outside looking for her father who is late coming home. Worried about the inclement weather during their search, Elisabeth shields her mother from the wind: "Elisabeth, élevée dans ces climats, et accoutumée à braver les froids les plus rigoureux, soutenait sa mère et lui prêtait sa force" (54). The difference between the physical abilities of Elisabeth and her mother is due to the effects of her childhood which have made Elisabeth stronger and more resilient.⁶⁰

The physical image of Elisabeth supports the Rousseauian model depicted in *Emile*.⁶¹ In his treatise on education, Rousseau explains that nature changes the physical

⁶⁰ The corporal difference between the two women is a result of Rousseau's influence on Cottin's philosophy of education. In Rousseau's model of education, the formative years in which to receive education from nature are from infancy to adolescence. Learning from experiencing nature is defined by Jeffrey A. Smith as "negative education in "Natural Happiness, Sensation, and Infancy in Rousseau's 'Emile'." *Polity* 35.1 (2002): 93-120. Negative education is the state of learning from observing the rules of nature which directs man to happiness from infancy to adolescence. This contrasts with guided education in which education is directed by society.

⁶¹ Rousseau was not the first author to connect the relationship between nature, education, and childhood. See Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, "Plan de deux discours sur l'histoire universelle." *Oeuvres de Turgot* Vol. 1. (Paris: l'Édition Schelle, 1751). Turgot preached a return to nature since he saw the formation of the body as an integral part of the education of a person, and that this begins in childhood. He argues that reason begins in childhood: "l'homme reçoit ses diverses idées dans son enfance, ou plutôt les mots se gravent dans sa tête; ils se lient d'abord avec des idées particulières; peu à peu se forme cet assemblage confus d'idées et d'expressions dont on apprend l'usage par imitation" (302). In 1901, Gabriel Compayré writes *J.-J. Rousseau et l'éducation de la nature* in which he places Rousseau French theory of education and its relationship to nature in a historical context. Prior to Rousseau, authors like Montaigne, Fénelon, Locke recognized the importance of nature on education. For a specific analysis of nature's effects on the body, see chapter four, "For a discussion on the education of children and adolescents, see chapter three, "Principes essentiels d'*Emile*, et leurs conséquences." In this chapter, Compayré critic the utopist vision of education through nature: "Comment espérer qu'Emile, qui n'a rien étudié, va tout d'un coup vouloir et pouvoir tout apprendre, que sa pensée endormie s'éveillera soudain" (Paris: Paul Delaplane, 1901) 31. However, Rousseau's theory of education continued to be influential in the nineteenth century. For an analysis of the

body during childhood: "Observez la nature, et suivez la route qu'elle vous trace. Elle exerce continuellement les enfants; elle endurecitur leur tempérament par des épreuves de toute espèce; elle leur apprend de bonne heure ce que c'est que peine et douleur."⁶²

Elsabeth's body has formed differently from her mother's because of exposure to the natural elements.⁶³ Elisabeth's body is the result of the utopist education described by Rousseau for men.⁶⁴

Elisabeth's natural education redirects Rousseau's gendered philosophy of education from the segregated to the universal. *Emile* outlines different roles for men and women in society. In the patriarchal structure of marriage, differences between the female and male bodies prescribe fixed social roles. In *Emile*, both members of the union complement each other's physical and mental attributes: "L'un doit être actif et fort,

influence of Rousseau's philosophy of education in relationship to nature and society on the prominent author Flaubert, see Douchin, Jacques-Louis. "Rosanette et la ville corruptrice ou quelques réflexions sur le 'Rousseauisme' De Flaubert." *Flaubert, la femme, la ville*. Ed. Marie-Claire Bancquart. (Paris: PU de France, 1983). 139-142.

⁶² Rousseau, *Emile*. 49.

⁶³ Rousseau's philosophy on education has led to the modern concept of physical education. For more on the Rousseau's treatment of education and its relationship to nature, see Guillemette Johnston, "The Discourse of Natural Instruction in Rousseau's *Emile*." *Proceedings of the Midwest Philosophy of Education Society* (1997): 100-109; Harry Neumann, "Philosophy and Freedom: An Interpretation of Rousseau's State of Nature." *Journal of General Education* 27.4 (1976): 301-307; and Rolf Toiassen, *Nature et nature humaine dans l'Émile de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Oslo: Presses universitaires, 1961).

⁶⁴ D. J. Allan argues that nature is defined in two distinct ways in *Emile*: as a primitive society and in terms of the growth of a child. There is a close parallel between the growth of the state and the growth of a child. See "Nature, Education and Freedom According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau." *Philosophy* 12.46 (April 1937): 191-207. For more on Rousseau's philosophy of education in relationship to his politics see Arthur M. Melzer, Arthur M. *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

l'autre passif et faible: il faut nécessairement que l'un veuille et puisse, il suffit que l'autre résiste peu."⁶⁵ Sophie, Emile's counterpart, is taught to embody the passive role, while Emile depicted as the more active member of the couple.⁶⁶ Based on the binary established in *Emile*, women are expected to fulfill a social role determined by the physical limits and differential function of the female body. Sophie is educated to fulfill the role imposed on her by patriarchy, whereas Elisabeth's education is complete in the sense that she removes the dualism enforced by patriarchal ideals. The representation of Elisabeth's body underscores a philosophical tension between Rousseau's philosophy and Cottin's depiction of an idealized education for women.

The depiction of the Elisabeth's body serves a functional as well as a moralizing role. It indicates an education received by nature. Her body does not become a site of women's sexuality. Rather, it adds to the moralizing imperative of the novel by serving as an example of the effects of a natural education on women's bodies. When her future husband sees Elisabeth as a potential sexual partner, Elisabeth does not describe his physical traits. Her personal motivation is due to filial piety, rather than motherhood. The narrator describes the physical body of Elisabeth, but Smoloff regards her as the

⁶⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*. 466.

⁶⁶ Patriarchy exercises an observable power over women. According to Michel Foucault: "Le pouvoir, c'est essentiellement ce qui réprime. C'est ce qui réprime la nature, les instincts, une classe, des individus." Michel Foucault, "*Il faut défendre la société*": Cours au Collège de France (1975-1976), ed. M. Bertani and A. Fontana. (Paris: Seuil, 1997):15. According to Foucault, power relationships cannot exist in a singular direction: "où il y a pouvoir, il y a résistance et pourtant, ou plutôt par là même, celle-ci n'est jamais en position d'extériorité par rapport au pouvoir. [...] [L'histoire et le pouvoir] ne peuvent exister qu'en fonction d'une multiplicité de points de résistance: ceux-ci jouent dans les relations de pouvoir" (125-26).

object of his desire, he does not describe her body throughout the novel. Smoloff's feelings towards Elisabeth change when he finds her during her search for her father: "Elle élevait vers le ciel ses yeux, dont la fierté et la tendresse, le courage et la douleur peignaient si bien son âme et semblaient présage sa destinée. Le jeune homme en fut ému: il croyait rêver; il n'avait rien vu, jamais rien imaginé de pareil à Elisabeth."⁶⁷

Smoloff's attraction to Elisabeth is not based on the physical attributes common to other sentimental heroines, but on her moral fortitude and devotion to her father.

3.5 *Travel in Malvina*

The narrative transitions between the sentimental and travel narratives accentuate the relationship between women's bodies and space. Cottin's sentimental novels explore the tension between duty and desire by providing liminal literary spaces that create instability in the social order and, thereby, symbolize a site of social investigation. Both *Amélie Mansfield* and *Malvina* explore women's freedom through the lens of the widowed body. These protagonists are able to circulate more freely in society once widowed and the death of their husbands actuates their movement outside of the domestic sphere. Both Amélie and Malvina leave their countries after the death of their husbands. Amélie writes to her uncle: "depuis longtemps, mon oncle, je nourrissais secrètement le désir de quitter ma patrie, et en songeant en quel lieu j'irais fixer mon

⁶⁷ Cottin, OC12. 36

sort, c'était près de vous que mon cœur m'appelait."⁶⁸ For Amélie, the ability to move is dependent on her status as a widow. The duties imposed on her by her marriage to Mansfield restricted her desire to leave the domestic sphere. Likewise, widowhood for Malvina has implications for her own possibility of physical displacement. The narrator's initial description of her is based on her freedom of movement: "Malvina de Sorcy était française: veuve, à vingt-un ans, d'un homme qu'elle n'avait point aimé, le premier usage de son indépendance fut de quitter sa patrie et d'aller se réunir à une amie qu'elle aimait avec excès, et qui était mariée en Angleterre."⁶⁹ In *Malvina*, her ability to travel between social spaces is founded on the collective perception of her social status as a widow.

The duties, responsibilities, and freedoms associated with this category are highly tied to the social and historical context in which they are represented. The widow is portrayed as a figure that is constrained and liberated from the patriarchal and social constructs of marriage in the eighteenth century. Because they were already married, widows had the freedom to choose to remarry or remain apart from the sexual constraints of producing children. Widows and visibility and space are all socially and historically important elements of travel, movement, physicality, and women's bodies.

⁶⁸ Cottin, *AM1*. 9.

⁶⁹ Cottin, *OC2*. 5.

The widow as a person exists in an unusual space within patriarchy. In the seventeenth century, the widow disrupted the prescribed role for women in society.

Julie Hardwick asserts that widows occupied a unique role in society:

Widows transgressed the gender boundaries that ordered French society in general and household authority in particular, and in doing so they threatened the patriarchal order. As long as widows did not remarry, they remained in a kind of limbo at odds with their surroundings. Female heads of household were liminal figures as the differing experiences of widows and widowers showed. No rites of passage existed to contain this disruption.⁷⁰

Widows autonomy as heads of household was often constrained by social pressure to either remarry or enter the church. Historically, a large percentage of young women chose to remarry and abandon the autonomy of their widowed status. Olwen Hufton's provides a historically accurate depiction of widows. She argues that widows from all social classes were likely to remarry if the woman was under thirty and had no more than one or two children.⁷¹ Prior to the seventeenth century between 60 and 80 per cent of young widows remarried and begin again if the first marriage had never occurred (222).⁷² The ability to assume roles predominantly reserved for men blurred the gendered social boundaries. The discomfort sparked by the existence of widows in the

⁷⁰ Julie Hardwick, "Widowhood and Patriarchy in Seventeenth Century France." *Journal of Social History* 26.1 (Autumn 1992): 134.

⁷¹ Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998) 222.

⁷² Prior to the eighteenth century, Olwen attributes the increase in remarriages to higher periods of employment or times immediately after widespread and fatal disease, like the plague. She asserts that the eighteenth century saw a decrease in remarriages because opportunities receded, and postulates that this trend was typical of large European cities. See Jeremy Boulton, "London Widowhood Revisited: the decline of frequent remarriage in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries." *Continuity and Change* 5 (1990): 323-55.

seventeenth century continues to influence thought in the eighteenth century, at a time when gendered social boundaries were becoming more distinct.

In eighteenth-century French society, widows were usually allowed greater autonomy and independence that allowed them to move more freely in society. Compared to unmarried and married women, widows had greater freedom and legal rights. A widow's stipend was stipulated in the marriage contract, and allowed them economic independence without the masculine supervising gaze of their husbands and fathers. This economic freedom posed a danger to the organizing social structure. In her insightful study of the social impact of widowhood on society, Scarlett Beauvalet-Boutouyrie explains that widows posed an imagined danger to maintaining social stability: "Sortie de la tutelle masculine, on la devine capable de transgresser l'ordre établi et de remettre en cause la norme."⁷³ Widows could travel between the domestic and social sphere with more ease than their female counterparts.

The Revolution and the years that followed had dramatic repercussions on the financial autonomy of widows.⁷⁴ The Napoleonic code of 1804 sought to apply the ideas of the Enlightenment with elements borrowed from previously implemented laws. Susan K. Foley emphasized that Enlightenment philosophy only reinforced gendered divisions in society: "The philosophes' arguments, which had allowed women to be

⁷³ Scarlett Beauvalet-Boutouyrie, *Etre veuve sous l'Ancien Régime*. (Paris: Belin, 2001) 21.

⁷⁴ French women played a vital role in the formation of French literature and philosophy through their participation in the salon culture of the eighteenth century. See Faith Evelyn Beasley. *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory* (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub, 2006).

thought of as separate and different versions of the 'human species', now justified women's exclusion from the 'rights of man'.⁷⁵ The Napoleonic code had direct implications on women's social and economic independence. Women's had different relationships to legal representation depending on their marital status:

An unmarried woman, if she had an income of her own, was the least disadvantaged. But even she was deprived of legal functions by virtue of being female. Her word was not legally of any account whereas the word of any man was. A widow was in a similar position, and her legal relationship with her children also depended upon the conditions laid out in her dead husband's will. He could even exclude her from contact with her children, or at least hand guardianship to a male relative of family council. (21-22)

Women with money were able to live more independently, but still did not retain the same legal rights over their children as men.

In *Malvina*, we can see Cottin grappling with these ideas of women's authority in the domestic sphere.⁷⁶ Malvina plays an important social role after Clara's death by assuming the role of Fanny's mother. The presence of a man and a woman was generally

⁷⁵ Susan K. Foley, *Women in France since 1789: The Meaning of Difference* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) 19.

⁷⁶ H. Coulet observes that Cottin's novels takes part in a literary tradition that does not mention political events during or immediately after the Revolution. He argues that the impact of the Revolution can be seen in way in which sentimental themes are represented in the novel. He sees evidence of the impact of the Revolution in the subjects of Cottin's works by revealing that: "l'héroïsme sentimental de la *Nouvelle Héloïse* et l'alliance de la vertu et du bonheur recherché par les bourgeois de la Révolution sont également impossible à une époque de réaction." "Quelques aspects du roman antirévolutionnaire sous la Révolution." *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 54 (1984): 39-40. In addition to the sentimental themes discussed by Coulet, *Malvina* can be interpreted as a literary exploration of women's rights.

considered crucial to the operation of the household.⁷⁷ Malvina's intervention after Clara's death restores the gendered hierarchy of the family. Undeterred by Sheridan's complete surrender of his daughter to Malvina's care, he is still able to assert legal power as her biological father since Malvina has no legal ties to Fanny. Malvina's motherhood is contingent on Sheridan's authority.

Despite the economic and political restrictions imposed on women after the Revolution, the way in which widows were socially perceived did not undergo such dramatic transformations.⁷⁸ Widows were still seen to threaten the gendered boundaries of the domestic sphere. Kathleen Llewellyn asserts that: "The widow was an ambiguous figure in early modern French literature. Because of her independence she was regarded by her society as dangerous, economically, socially, and, in particular, sexually."⁷⁹

Olwen confirms that there was a social mistrust of widows. She argues that education

⁷⁷ Christine Adams asserts that: "Unmarried women, however, especially sisters and daughters, played an essential role in the stabilization of early modern family formations. In cases where their mother died, or their brothers remained unmarried, daughters and sisters could be Michael J. Call, *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002) 97ed upon to serve as surrogate wives, in a sense, to step in and take over the management of the household. In an era of high celibacy, especially among elite urban women, this allowed unmarried women to fill an important practical role in their natal families. "Devoted Companions or Surrogate Spouses?: Sibling Relations in Eighteenth-Century France." *Visions and revisions of Eighteenth-Century France* Eds. Christine Adams et al. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) 60.

⁷⁸ The seventeenth century literary representations of widows continue to inspire literature of the eighteenth century. Widows are often represented through caricatures defined by their bourgeois origins. Ruth P. Thomas claims that "capricious, hypocritical and enslaved by their own sexuality." "Twice Victims: Virtuous Widows in the eighteenth-century French Novel." *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 266 (1989): 434. For representation of the widow as a sexual figure, see Voltaire's *Zadig* (1747) and Denis Diderot's *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748).

⁷⁹ Kathleen Marie Llewellyn, "Death Defines Her: Representations of the Widow in early Modern French Literature." *Aimer et mourir: Love, Death, and Women's Lives in Texts of French Expression* Eds. Eilene Hoft-March and Judith Holland Sarnecki. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009). 214.

manuals published prior to the Revolution all included sections dedicated to education widows. She argues that these manuals reveal the concern that widows posed a sexual danger to society:

Theologians and moralists dealt with the widow as if she was part of a homogenous group. The aim of much prescriptive writing was to contain a woman who had experienced sex and hence had had her libido aroused. Now her husband was not there to control her, her ungoverned lust was seen as a threat. (226)

Women were already considered to be sexual creatures, and their status of widows left them unconstrained by masculine supervision.⁸⁰ Likewise, Ruth Thomas interprets widows as potentially disruptive social figures by stating that “her autonomy threatened the social order, all the more dangerous because of her sexual experience and power of seduction.”⁸¹ All these examples of widows point to the need for required supervision of widows in order to curtail her sexual liberty.

The widow’s body is sexually liberated from the constraints of patriarchy, but is sexualized in *Malvina*. Malvina’s status as a widow and a foreigner subject her to scrutiny. Both aspects of Malvina’s social status leave her without the confines of a family social structure and the limits household management imposed on other widows.

⁸⁰ Jeffrey Merrick finds supporting evidence the stereotype of women’s sexuality in literature in the late eighteenth-century: “Perpetuating traditional stereotypes about female sexuality and feminine shortcomings, the *nouvelles* portrayed women in general as silly, fickle, unruly, lustful, treacherous creatures likely to disrupt households and society as a whole.” “Sexual Politics and Public Order in Late Eighteenth-Century France: The *Mémoires secrets* and the *Correspondance secrète*.” *Journal of History of Sexuality* 1.1 (1990): 74.

⁸¹ Ruth P. Thomas, “Arranged Marriages and Marriage Arrangements in Eighteenth-Century French Novels by Women.” *Women in French Studies*. 14 (January 2006): 45.

Her lack of physical isolation is reiterated by her reaction to her life after Clara's death: "sur une terre étrangère, isolée, sans amis et sans parents; il lui était indifférent d'être là où ailleurs."⁸² Malvina's physical and social relationship to the foreign space causes her to be seen as a dangerous and liminal figure.

Upon Malvina's arrival in Scotland, Birton immediately tries to restrict her movements throughout the castle. Malvina's gaze is geared towards isolation and introspection, but Birton constantly challenged Malvina's attempts to isolate herself.⁸³ Birton requires Malvina to interact with her friends and eat meals with her, but and it is only on the arrival of her nephew that Birton enforces isolation upon her: "vous êtes libre de rester chez vous tout le temps qu'Edmond passera ici" (80). Birton's kindness belies her underlying desire to physically segregate Malvina from Edmond. Birton explicitly removes her body from Edmond's sight. The spatial manipulation of Malvina's body implies an awareness and fear of the visceral power it represents.

The untamed sexuality of the widow's body is seen in the description of Malvina's body. Birton refers to Malvina as a "bizarre créature" and later comments that she has she has "une humeur si sauvage."⁸⁴ Birton attributes an animalistic quality to Malvina that is seconded by her masculine observers. Malvina's body is on display at a party thrown in Edingburgh by Birton's friend Lord Stanholpe. Stanholpe responds to

⁸² Cottin, OC2. 6.

⁸³ Llewellyn asserts that "Foucault's description of sexuality as a state of isolation and lack could just as easily and accurately describe the entirety of the widow's life" (267).

⁸⁴ Cottin, OC3. 4.

Malvina's presence by saying: "je ne connais rien de plus séduisant que ces beautés farouches, quand on est parvenu à les apprivoiser" (4-5) and "Que le ciel me confonde, si j'en ai jamais vu une qui m'ait fait la même impression" (3-4). Stanholpe's desire is based on the power to possess and control.

The movement of Malvina's body from city to city further objectifies her liminal state. She is coerced to attend a ball in Edinburgh with Stanholpe. The image of her body attracts the attention of the attendees: "la figure et surtout les grâces de Malvina attirèrent bientôt tous les spectateurs autour d'elle; il n'était question dans la salle, que de la charmante Française: on montait sur les chaises pour la mieux voir" (36). Her body, which is put on display because of her difference, becomes a spectacle. Malvina's exoticism renders the view of her body public property.

The desire to control the widow's body is also felt by her lover. Edmond is attracted to her virtue and innocence and confides in a letter to his friend Charles:

Lorsque je contemple cette aimable innocence, cette douce fraîcheur, cette beauté sans tache, image de la nature au premier printemps du monde, sans doute je ne me crois pas digne de la posséder; mais en même temps je jure au fond de mon âme que nul autre que moi ne la possédera jamais.
(173)

Edmond's desire is based on his desire to control her body. Like the imposition of the public gaze on Malvina, Edmond's first descriptions of her are based on the desire to possess and corrupt. His initial reaction to Malvina is representative of the conflicting

desires that will ultimately lead to her death. Malvina is torn between her desire to give herself to Edmond and her duty to devote her life to mothering Fanny.

While widowhood allowed women to remarry and improve their social and economic status, Malvina is trapped in a static state of motherhood without the freedom of choice to remarry. Malvina is forced to deny the possibilities afforded other widows. Jacques-Alain Miller describes the illusion of symbolic closure in which a woman who gives herself completely to her husband and children, putting their desires ahead of her own, trades in her desire for the desire of the Other.⁸⁵ By assuming the responsibilities as Fanny's mother, Malvina suppresses her own desires; however, she also physically replaces Clara. There is a slippage in Malvina's title. She calls herself Fanny's mother and the mother of Clara's child. In a moment of seduction, Malvina runs to Fanny and says: "n'ai-je pas juré de consacrer les jours à cet enfant? [...] mais dans l'état où je suis [...] suis-je digne encore d'être mère et amie?"⁸⁶ Malvina's role as mother and friend are codependent. Malvina's self image is linked to the embodiment of both roles.

Motherhood represents a duty that impedes personal freedom and exerts oppressive control over a woman's body woman. Fanny's role in the novel is present from her first utterances at her mother's grave. It is Fanny who interrupts Malvina from her mourning over Clara's tomb, calling to her new duty as a mother: "Madame, la

⁸⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller. "On Semblances in the Relation Between the Sexes." *Sexuation* Ed. Renata Salecl. (Durham: Duke UP, 2000) 16.

⁸⁶ Cottin, OC3. 223.

chaise est prête.”⁸⁷ Fanny’s voice breaks the emotional connection between Malvina and Clara’s tomb. Fanny’s voice forces her to abandon her desire to stay with her friend and perform her duties as a mother.

Fanny’s physical presence symbolizes Malvina’s continued connection to Clara, but also is a constant reinforcement of the static social role that motherhood imposes. Fanny is a constant reminder of the friendship she has lost: “Malvina regarda l’enfant, et apercevant dans ses yeux cette même expression qui animait jadis ceux de sa mère, elle retrouva des larmes en souvenir de l’amitié.”⁸⁸ Through Fanny’s gaze Malvina is reminded of her friend and also the sacrifice. Through Fanny’s regard Malvina sees her friend condemning her for conflict between duty and desire.

Fanny’s presence becomes more oppressive as her relationship with Edmond progresses. Edmond attempts to convince Malvina that marriage to him would have redemptive qualities: “Un mot de Malvina peut faire de moi un nouvel être: elle peut transformer en vertus jusqu’à mes défauts mêmes” (58). Edmond attempts to distract Malvina from her duty. Michael J. Call asserts that “Edmond claims love should take precedence over reason and duty, even morality. [...] Claire succumbs to Frédéric’s persuasive rhetoric about love without conscience. Here, in the novelistic antidote to

⁸⁷ Cottin, OC2. 1.

⁸⁸ Cottin, OC3. 160.

Claire that *Malvina* represents, Malvina stands firm on her resolve to remain chaste."⁸⁹

Malvina refuses to succumb to Edmond's persuasions and thereby remains virtuous by keeping her promise to her friend and conserving her virtue as a good mother by placing her duty to her child above her own desire. Malvina experiences a brief moment of pleasure with Edmond in which she "s'abandonna quelques instans aux plus séduisantes idées"⁹⁰ and an immediate reminder of her guilt. Her desire is immediately interrupted by the thought of Clara's voice reminding her of her promise:

Mais, hélas! mon âme se glace au souvenir de mes devoirs et de mes sermons. Clara, ce ne fut point à une femme soumise à une passion tyrannique que tu confias ta fille. [...] Clara je tiendrai cette terrible promesse; je rejetterai tous les liens qui pourraient atteindre ta fille en me ravissant mon indépendance. (63-64)

Clara segregates Malvina and prevents her reintroduction into society through marriage. Malvina's devotion to her word affords greater power to her duty than to her desire to be with Edmond.

In light of his failed speech, Edmond resorts to her duty as a mother to convince Malvina to marry him. His manipulative rhetoric relies on her body to bypass her moral duties while maintaining her virtue. In a moment of seduction, Malvina grabs Fanny from her crib and places her between herself and Edmond. Malvina defends herself against Edmond with her daughter by creating a physical and verbal distance between

⁸⁹ Michael J. Call, *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002) 97, *Infertility*, 78-79.

⁹⁰ Cottin, OC3. 8.

them: "Viens mon enfant [...] viens me défendre contre la plus puissante des séductions; que ta vue raffermisse mon courage."⁹¹ Fanny is the physical embodiment of Malvina's duty as a mother and symbolizes the fidelity towards her friend.

At the crucial moment where Malvina must choose between Edmond and whether to return Fanny to her father, Fanny attempts to stop Malvina physically from following Edmond. During their argument, Fanny runs to her mother when she sees that she is trying to leave. Malvina responds with a physical aversion to the presence of her child: "Au nom du ciel! éloignez cette enfant, s'écria Malvina en la remettant entre les bras de mistress Clare, empêchez-la de me retenir, elle me coûte déjà assez cher" (152). Fanny is the silent representation of Clara's will and Malvina's duty. Her repulsion to share the same space with Fanny embodies her desired rejection of her duty.

Upon Malvina's death, Edmond's actions parallel Malvina's as he is tasked with her care. When Edmond sees Fanny for the first time he pushes her away:

La première fois qu'on lui présenta Fanny, dans l'espérance que cette vue calmerait sa frénésie, il détourna ses yeux avec horreur, ses bras se roidirent pour la repousser, et il s'écria en frissonnant, qu'on ôtât de devant lui celle dont la funeste influence avait entraîné sa femme au tombeau. (233)

⁹¹ Cottin, OC3. 97.

Edmond mirrors Malvina's actions. Fanny's body continues to exert an oppressive power. She symbolizes the imposed duty of motherhood as well as the memory of the dead mother on the observer.

3.6 *Peregrination in Elisabeth*

Both *Malvina* and *Elisabeth* represent a female protagonist who is displaced in society. While Malvina chooses to leave her homeland to be with her friend, Elisabeth's displacement goes unrecognized until she reaches adolescence. Both protagonists are representations of women who inhabit literary spaces outside of the structured social order; however, Elisabeth's isolation is announced from the title. As an exile she has been raised outside of the pressures of patriarchy, and this has significant effects on her body and desires. Unlike *Claire d'Albe*, *Amélie Mansfield*, and *Malvina*, Elisabeth does not undergo an emotional shift that brings the tension between desire and duty to the forefront of discourse. Elisabeth's only displacement throughout the novel is physical. Cottin redefines the tension between women's bodies, desire, and duty. In *Elisabeth*, education plays an integral role in defining women's duty from motherhood to filial piety.

Women's bodies in the novels are described differently. Emotional turmoil is replaced with physical hardships as the reader follows Elisabeth on her grueling voyage for paternal redemption. Unlike any other heroine in Cottin's novels, Elisabeth

experiences the physical effects of travel on the body. Elisabeth must stop her journey due to the harsh conditions: "Couverte de boue et épuisée de fatigue, elle s'assit sur une pierre, et détacha sa chaussure pour la faire sécher au soleil."⁹² Whereas the female body serves as a site of resistance in her previous work, the physical description of the female body in Elisabeth emphasizes the sacrifice she is making for her father and is detached from the procreative or educative function imposed on the women in Cottin's previous work. Call remarks that "her pilgrimage will turn out to be as arduous as any conceived in the name of religious faith, but it is concern for the Father's redemption, not for her own salvation, that drives her on."⁹³ Unlike Malvina's travels that are instigated by the pressure to flee or follow Edmond as she reconciles her desires with virtue, Elisabeth's unwavering focus is on her destination, completing her task, and returning home.

Filial piety incites the protagonist's movement in the novel and is defined for the reader through Elisabeth's actions. Cottin's novel confronts education given to women through the repetition of her devotion to her family. Far from Rousseau's Sophie who is educated in how to be a good mother, Elisabeth is seemingly oblivious to any role outside of filial devotion. Despite her mother's assertion that she is "également dévouée à son époux, à sa fille et à son Dieu"⁹⁴, Elisabeth's isolation prevents her from engaging in the desires to be a wife and mother. Even when confronted with her father's regret

⁹² Cottin, OC12. 175.

⁹³ Michael J. Michael J. Call, *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002) 97, *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002) 145.

⁹⁴ Cottin, OC12. 23.

that she will never be able to be loved by a husband and child due to his forced exile and the women's chosen exile, Elisabeth's response evokes her complete devotion to her parents: "O mon père! me voici entre ma mère et toi, et tu dis que je ne serai point aimée?" (42). Elisabeth's love for her parents is all-consuming throughout the novel.

Unlike the other protagonists in Cottin's novels, Elisabeth's first encounter with a man does not awaken repressed sexuality. She meets Smoloff while searching for her father who has failed to return home after dark. She recognizes the silhouette of a man who she assumes is her father. However, when confronted with the image of another man, Elisabeth's first reaction is to exclaim: "Vous n'êtes pas mon père."⁹⁵ Despite observing that he is young and handsome, she is not deterred from her search for her father. These words are descriptive for her and do not have amorous connotations. Shortly after their meeting, Smoloff's declares his love for her. Whereas declarations of love for Claire, Amélie, and Malvina have life-altering repercussions, Elisabeth is unmoved emotionally and physically:

Elisabeth est demeurée immobile; l'idée d'un autre amour que l'amour filial lui paraît si nouvelle, qu'à peine elle la conçoit: peut-être lui eût-elle paru moins étrange, si son cœur avait eu de place pour la recevoir; peut-être que si elle avait vu ses parents heureux, Smoloff aurait été aimé; s'ils le sont un jour; peut-être l'aimera-t-elle: mais tant qu'ils seront dans l'infortune, elle demeurera fidèle à sa pieuse passion. (76-78)

⁹⁵ Cottin, OC12. 36.

Her reaction to Smoloff's declaration of love is to examine rationally the potential outcomes that could allow her one day to consider loving other than her parents. Elisabeth does not acknowledge and personal or emotional sacrifice in placing filial duty above the potential for sexual pleasure.

Cottin scholars have commented on Elisabeth's unwavering loyalty to her parents. Paul Pelckmans addresses Elisabeth's reaction to Smoloff by writing: "La fille idéale selon Mme Cottin n'est pas exactement celle qui sacrifie tout à son père, mais plutôt celle qui n'a rien à lui sacrifier puisqu'elle n'attache aucune valeur à quoique ce soit en dehors de lui—et surtout pas au bonheur que pourrait lui valoir un amour partagé."⁹⁶ Unlike Cottin's other heroines who must forfeit their duties for desire, gone are the passionate reactions of a heroine who must choose between duty and desire. In addition, Call observes: "Obsessively devoted to [her father's] cause, she demonstrates the lengths to which a child may go in the name of filial affection. [...] [L]ove between man and woman is relegated to second tier in the face of Elisabeth's sacrifice for the father."⁹⁷ Elisabeth's only desire in life is to perform her filial duty and protect her father and family. Duty instigates the protagonist's travel to fulfill her desires.

The way in which travel is perceived distinguishes *Elisabeth* from the pure sentimental genre. *Elisabeth* is not a novel that dramatizes a war of duties in the private

⁹⁶ Pelckmans, "L'impasse Imaginaire." 38.

⁹⁷ Michael J. Call, *Infertility in the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002) 97, *Infertility*. 150.

sphere. The novel lacks any moral dilemma since there is only firm resolve on the part of the protagonist towards her familial responsibilities. Cottin's *Elisabeth* is revolutionary in its depiction of women's independence. Elisabeth's identity is not based on a woman's reproductive ability and duty to educate children. Rather, her identity is formed outside the confines of gender.

Space allows Elisabeth to be raised and educated by both her parents. The isolated environment removes her from the dichotomy of the domestic and public spheres.

Elisabeth is raised under the direct tutelage of both her parents. Unlike Emile, who is educated by one sole instructor, Elisabeth's parents participate equally in her education:

Les longues soirées étaient employées à l'instruction de la jeune Elisabeth. Souvent assise entre ses parents, elle leur lisait tout haut des passages d'histoire. Springer arrêtait son attention sur tous les traits qui pouvaient élever son âme; et sa mère, Phédora, sur tous ceux qui pouvaient l'attendrir. L'un lui montrait toute la beauté de la gloire et de l'héroïsme; l'autre, tout le charme des sentiments pieux et de la bonté modeste. (20)

Cottin establishes clear gender differences between Elisabeth's parents and the education they provide her. Like Rousseau, Cottin reinforces the impact of society by portraying Elisabeth's parents' skills as reflective of those attributed to women and men by a patriarchal model. However, as seen with Elisabeth's tolerance of harsher climates compared to her mother's body, Elisabeth assumes the qualities that both her father and mother reproduce for her. Spencer asserts that Elisabeth's father

is a more typical male character, endowed with 'extraordinary energy.' He, too, passes his values to his admiring daughter: pride, nobleness, heroism, glory, and honor. At an early age, Elisabeth shows a marked preference for

active roles, and finds inspiration in historical books—not children’s literature of fiction. It is thus natural that she grows up to be a ‘female hero’ herself.⁹⁸

The education that Elisabeth receives endows her with the qualities of both her mother and father as symbolized by her position between the two as she reads at night.

Elisabeth’s education grants her the ability to overcome the gendered divisions of society as well, and allows her to navigate both spheres.

Elisabeth’s travels symbolize her difference. Despite Malvina’s widowed status, society still exerts repressive pressure on her choices and movements. Elisabeth, however, is able to leave the domestic sphere and circulate freely in the public sphere as she journeys to the city. Cottin’s choice to create a female protagonist who embarks on a voyage on her own, even after the death of her escort, is revolutionary. In the majority of fictional travel narratives the voyager is usually male.⁹⁹ Susan Bassnett remarks that there was a gendered difference between women and men travelers due to the patriarchal system. According to Bassnett:

[T]he women travelers of the eighteenth century, deemed to be exceptional, reflected social attitudes towards women’s mobility, just as the need for so many women travel writers to reinvent themselves in the

⁹⁸ Samia I. Spencer, "The French Revolution and the Early Nineteenth-Century French Novel: The Case of Sophie Cottin." *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 18 (January 1991): 501.

⁹⁹ Françoise de Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne* also does not follow the model of a male traveler. Life in French society is portrayed through the perspective of a female outsider, Zilia. Like Cottin’s protagonist, Zilia is forcibly removed from her country of origin.

age of empire derived from their reactions to their position in a hierarchical society of unequal opportunity.¹⁰⁰

Cottin's representation of a woman traveler is unique since Elisabeth is a solitary voyageur without a male or female escort.

Elisabeth's freedom of movement suggests the possibility for greater mobility and agency for women in society. As in sentimental fiction, this novel presupposes the education of moral values by the reader through the examples offered in the novel. Likewise, the travel narrative has a similar goal: "C'est l'éducation de l'âme qui est encore visée par ces déplacements du corps."¹⁰¹ In *Elisabeth*, there is a clear intention to depict an education, but it is that of the reader. Elisabeth's voyage opens her mind to the world outside the one she has known, but it does not change her virtuous and devoted nature. Todorov observes that: "la découverte que le narrateur fait de l'autre, son objet, le lecteur la répète en miniature, à l'égard du narrateur lui-même; le processus de lecture imite dans une certaine mesure, le contenu du récit" (135). The reader sees the cruelties of society from the perspective of the exiled Elisabeth's eyes.

By incorporating elements of the travel narrative, Cottin changes the sentimental novel to promote greater women's independence in society as well as provide a social critique. Elisabeth's filial piety transforms into social devotion as she travels. Elisabeth places others' needs above her own and her voyage involves her in the struggles of

¹⁰⁰ Susan Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender." *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* Ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 239.

¹⁰¹ Tzvetan Todorov, "Le voyage et son récit" *Les Morales De L'histoire* (Paris: Grasset, 1991) 129.

others. Throughout her voyage, Elisabeth donates what little money she has to those in need until she doesn't have any left for her own voyage:

[L]a pitié était la seule richesse d'Elisabeth; c'était avec la pitié qu'elle soulageait la peine des infortunés qu'elle rencontrait le long de sa route, et c'était à l'aide de la pitié qu'elle allait voyager désormais, car, en atteignant Volodimir, il ne lui restait plus qu'un rouble. (168)

Again, Elisabeth's sacrifice is not seen as such, but is an innate quality to her individuality. Her altruism, like her filial devotion, replaces the lustful desire seen in other novels.

Cottin does not juxtapose reason and sensibilities, but makes them work harmoniously. Just as Elisabeth traverses the boundaries of society, her ability to reason opens her eyes to the struggles of the world: "quand la jeunesse succéda à l'enfance, et que la raison commença à se développer, elle s'aperçut des larmes de sa mère, et vit que son père était malheureux."¹⁰² Elisabeth's filial devotion is enhanced by her ability to reason. Throughout her voyage, Elisabeth struggles and takes on those of others:

Le long de sa route, Elisabeth rencontrait souvent des objets qui portaient dans son cœur une tristesse à-peu-près semblable à celle qui naissait du sentiment de ses propres malheurs: tantôt c'étaient des infortunés enchaînés deux à deux [...] tantôt c'était des troupes de colons destinés à peupler la nouvelle ville qu'on bâtissait. (165-67)

The descriptions of these individuals seem to recall the elements of travel narrative that began the novel. The detailed description of the trees that bring the reader closer to

¹⁰² Cottin, OC12. 26.

Elisabeth and her family is likened to the people who Elisabeth sees. They become the scenery and the natural elements of a society outside of the idyllic world she has known.

Elisabeth's altruism contrasts sharply with the images of social corruption she encounters. During her voyage to Moscow, she is confronted by thieves. In face of danger, Elisabeth exhibits her natural honesty and shows them the little money she has in her pocket. She does not react as the thieves expected, and, shocked by her action, the thieves are unsure of how to proceed:

Les bandits se regardent l'un l'autre; ils ne sont point touchés, ils ne sont point émus, l'habitude du crime ne permet pas de l'être; mais ils sont surpris: ils n'avaient point l'idée de ce qu'ils voient; c'est pour eux quelque chose de surnaturel, et cette jeune fille leur semble protégée par un pouvoir inconnu. Saisi de respect, ils n'osent pas lui faire de mal; ils n'osent pas même lui faire du bien.¹⁰³

While her resolve and filial piety towards her father remains the same, the only emotional shift experienced in the novel is achieved by the people she meets and her benevolent actions towards humanity. Elisabeth's conflict with the thieves differentiates her from other women and the constraints of society. The men attribute supernatural qualities to Elisabeth because of her difference. By confronting them she displays masculine qualities; however, the thieves' unsure reaction to Elisabeth's fearlessness reinforces her social difference. Cottin creates a female protagonist who is able to function outside of the constraints of patriarchy.

¹⁰³ Cottin, OC12. 177-78.

Elisabeth's travels are only delayed by her social devotion to others. While the narrator outlines the details of her voyage to Moscow, very little is recounted of her voyage back to her family. While her voyage to Moscow is interspersed with observations of time and cities, creating a veritable geographical and ecological map of her path, the author gives no indication of the time taken or route used to return home. The only moment that separates Elisabeth's return to her family is her desire to pay homage to her guide:

Elisabeth était si pressée d'arriver auprès de ses parents, qu'elle voyageait la nuit et jour; mais à Sarapoul elle voulut s'arrêter, elle voulut aller visiter la tombe du pauvre missionnaire; c'était presque un devoir filial. [...] [I]l lui semblait que du haut du ciel le pauvre religieux se réjouissait de la voir heureuse, et que, dans ce cœur plein de charité, la vue du bonheur d'autrui pouvait même ajouter au parfait bonheur qu'il goutait dans le sein de Dieu. (222)

The image of the tomb has positive connotations in *Elisabeth*. Upon visiting the tomb of the missionary who died in her care, it is as though she is being rewarded for her devotion to others and completion of her task. Elisabeth's physical sacrifice is not depicted as a burden, but as an innate quality to her individuality. Her altruism, like her filial devotion, replaces the lustful desire seen in other novels.

Malvina and *Elisabeth* are not parallel texts. Written and published at different moments in Cottin's career, they are representative of philosophical changes in the authorial preoccupation to use genre in unique ways in order to transmit morals to her

readership. *Elisabeth* can be read as the culmination of Cottin's philosophy of education and Elisabeth can be seen as the fully realized success of egalitarian education.

In Cottin's previous works, *Amélie Mansfield* and *Malvina*, both protagonists leave their orphaned children in the care of men and women. In *Amélie Mansfield*, Albert embodies all that Amélie finds virtuous. In her death, both he and Blanche assume equal responsibility in raising Amélie's son, Eugène: "Albert et Blanche élevèrent l'enfant avec les leurs: les soins et les caresses qu'ils lui prodiguaient lui auraient fait oublier qu'il était orphelin."¹⁰⁴ In *Malvina*, Malvina's last concern is for Fanny's education. M. Prior, despite his love for Malvina, is described as mirroring Malvina's maternal role towards her daughter. In a moment of physical weakness when confronted by Edmond's presence, she faints and is unable to take care of her daughter. Edmond entrusts Fanny's care to Prior to calm the agitated child: "il suffirait de vos caresses pour y réussir, car Fanny vous aime tendrement, et vous êtes le seul ici qui puissiez la consoler de l'absence de sa mère."¹⁰⁵ Prior is able to care for Fanny like her mother. Upon her death, Malvina entrusts Fanny's education to both Prior and her friend Clare: "il se rendit chez mistriss Clare et entendit, de sa bouche, les derniers vœux que Malvina avait faits pour qu'il partageât avec elle les soins qu'exigeait l'éducation de Fanny."¹⁰⁶ The widows in these two novels sought to realize women's sexual desire in a patriarchal society.

¹⁰⁴ Cottin, *AM3*. 267.

¹⁰⁵ Cottin, *OC2*. 225.

¹⁰⁶ Sophie Cottin, "Malvina" *Ceuvres Complètes De Mme Cottin*. Vol. 4. (Paris: Gueffier, 1820) 241.

The subversive tendencies of Cottin's two novels are revealed in her depiction of mothers. Both Malvina and Elisabeth's mother provide education for their children that subtly undermines the attempted subjugation of women in society. Catherine Cusset lists Cottin apart from other women writers who assert their political activism through literary production:

On commence à comprendre dans quelle contradiction se trouve prise Mme Cottin. A une époque où des femmes comme Olympe de Gouges, Isabelle de Charrière ou Germaine de Staël revendiquent pour la femme un accès au discours politique et à l'action publique, Mme Cottin voue les femmes à se restreindre au rôle d'épouses et de mères.¹⁰⁷

The death of Cottin's characters highlights her political motivation by offering opportunities for the future generation through education reform. The depictions of a more egalitarian option for the education of young girls demonstrates Cottin's investment in creating a philosophy of education based on Rousseauian philosophy that extends to women.

Cottin situates the protagonist of *Malvina* and *Elisabeth* in spaces outside of France. Like Chateaubriand's *Atala* (1801) and Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie*, Cottin creates a foreign space to suggest that there is the possibility of greater freedom in a new world. The joyous return of Elisabeth to the welcoming arms of her parents and their utopian existence seems to allude that a better life can be had through education and a redefinition of women's role in society. However, the optimistic view of women's

¹⁰⁷ Catherine Cusset, "Sophie Cottin ou l'écriture du déni." *Romantisme* 22.77 (Jan 1992): 27.

independence and ability to move freely throughout society is overturned by the last lines of the novel. Despite the future marriage between Smoloff and the virtuous Elisabeth, the narration ends on a pessimistic note. The narrator addresses the reader directly stating:

Ce que j'ai connu de la vie, de ses inconstances, de ses espérances trompées, de ses fugitives et chimériques félicités, me ferait craindre, si j'ajoutais une seule page à cette histoire, d'être obligé d'y placer un malheur.¹⁰⁸

The potential optimism of Cottin's is tempered by the very verisimilitude that she sought to evoke in her preface. Despite the heroism that exists and will continue to exist in the world, the fate of the protagonist is always misfortune for women within patriarchal society. Far from the idealism that we see in works to follow like George Sand's *Indiana* (1832), Cottin's fiction ultimately remains faithful to the sentimental narrative by suggesting that the potential for women's freedom and happiness is fleeting even in fictional universe of the novel. Hope for increased freedom for future generations is tempered by pessimism fostered by the narrator's experience.

¹⁰⁸ Cottin, OC12. 229.

Conclusion

Similar to the way in which the analysis of motherhood uncovers literary transgressions that redefine women's duty, the image of the tomb illustrates a progressive literary shift in Cottin's novels from the spiritual to the devout. Throughout her literary production there is an increase in the description of objects that represent the religious. Whereas Cottin's earliest novels suggest that she attempts to be unspecific about religious designation, her last publications merge the sentimental genre with religious history and biblical imagery. The religious takes on multiple forms in these novels, but the representation of tombs in particular demonstrates a thematic and ideological transition in the moralizing intent portrayed in the sentimental novel.

Tombs reflect the author's fascination with space. As representations of opposing entities, they designate points of contact between the physical and spiritual, the public and private, and the material and immaterial. In each of Cottin's novels, the protagonists are faced with multiple and varying representations of the tomb. These "sepulchral encounters"¹ provide a rich tapestry to analyze the change from women's audacious to more conservative representations in Cottin's novels. This brief analysis of the tomb's repeating imagery seeks to demonstrate that the representation of the tomb is not uniform and to show that these encounters illustrate a shift in the religious motivations of the author.

¹ Call, 157.

Tombs are images that Cottin evokes in all of her novels, but only one critic has commented on the plurality of tombs in her corpus. Michael J. Call astutely recognizes that the tomb is the only image that remains constant throughout her ten-year writing career. In Call's cursory analysis of the tombs in each novel, he comes to the conclusion that "in every case, the tomb represents the past but, more importantly, it also symbolizes the Father: his presence, his power, and his law."² This generalization fails to accurately describe the multiple ways in which the image of the tomb reflects the protagonist's relationships to what is represented by the tomb and the nuanced way in which Cottin redefines the father's role in women's lives.

In order to analyze the forms that the spiritual and religious take in Cottin's description, I will use the terms spiritual and religious. The spiritual defines the human spirit, or soul, in opposite relation to the material or physical body. The spiritual does not imply religious affiliation. The term religious reflects a belief in God or in a divine power that is reflected in the practice of a religion. In the case of Cottin's novels, religious most often refers to Christianity as well as to objects or ceremonies used in Christianity. Cottin's varied settings for her novels provide moments in which the protagonists encounter other religions; however, these are always referenced to Christian faith. The encounters with the tombs demonstrate moments where the physical body encounters either the spiritual or the religious. These moments accentuate

² Call, *Infertility*. 156.

the overarching religious or spiritual imagery in the novel as a whole and the development of an increasingly religious vocabulary.

The tomb acts as a symbol which is restrictive and emancipating and best Cottin's fits into the symbolism of the tomb provided by Call. The tomb occupies a space that reinforces paternal lineage and authority and symbolizes a spiritual connection to Claire's father.³ "[L]e tombeau du meilleur des pères" is located on her husband's family property. There are no religious references throughout the first novel. The lack of religious imagery is echoed in Janine Ronsard's reading of *Claire d'Albe*:

Claire d'Albe ne parle guère de Dieu que selon les formules rapides de la fin du XVIIIe siècle. Avec elle, on comprend mieux que l'amour est une religion qui s'accommoderait mal d'une autre, et la voie romantique s'ouvre toute grande. C'est-à-dire que la confusion religion-passion se fait ici plus évidente.⁴

The tomb symbolizes the repression of women's desire. As an emancipator act, Claire's sexual encounter on the steps of her father's tomb is an affront to his former authority and a rebellion against her husband's current authority over her desires. This act of defiance forces her to face the spiritual. Prior to her death, Claire exclaims that: "Le ciel n'a pas voulu que je meure innocente" (152). The reference to a higher power emphasizes the moral implications of her social transgression, rather than any religious persecution for having betrayed the sacrament of marriage.

³ Cottin, *Claire d'Albe*. 10.

⁴ Janine Ronsard, *Pudeur et Romantisme*. (Paris: Librairie A.G. Nizet, 1982) 16.

In *Claire d'Albe* and *Amélie Mansfield*, the tomb represents the continued patriarchal presence in the protagonist's life, a reflection of the past actions of the buried relative, and the potential rebellion of the protagonist. The tombs of Amélie's father and grandfather represent patriarchal control that is reiterated through the repetition of variations of the term filial piety. Control is enforced differently for each man, but the tomb remains a symbol of the father.

While there are some subtle religious references, the overall imagery in this novel does not dwell on the religious. The church where Amélie finds refuge for the evening is non-denominational. She describes it as "la première église que j'ai vue. A l'exception d'une petite chapelle où finissaient quelques cierges, et où plusieurs personnes du peuple semblaient adresser des prières, le reste était dans une profonde obscurité."⁵ The church is of Christian faith, but the description enforces ambiguity, both in religious affiliation and her obscured visibility. Amélie cannot even be sure of whether the people she encounters are practicing their faith through prayer.

As with *Claire d'Albe*, *Amélie Mansfield* ends with a tomb, but this tomb does not symbolize patriarchal control. Amélie and her lover, Ernest, are buried together in an unconventional ceremony that unites marriage with death: "Six jeunes filles qui se marient autour d'un cercueil, et les funérailles de deux amants au milieu d'une pompe nuptiale" (255). As with *Claire*, Amélie is united with her lover on an altar; however, the

⁵ Cottin, *AM3*. 119.

references to religion remain unclear. The presence of “le pasteur”, “le curé”, and “l’autel” do not overshadow the sentimental emotion felt by the observers over the protagonist’s sacrifice with further religious symbolism or solemnity. The macabre weddings are held around the coffins and after the services Amélie and Ernest’s coffins are decorated with a wedding crown as a symbolic, posthumous marriage between Amélie and Ernest: “On a suspendu une couronne nuptiale sur la tombe de ces infortunés.”⁶ Their symbolic posthumous marriage within the church represents a union with the spiritual and the religious.

The representation of the religious and spiritual meet in *Amélie Mansfield* and *Malvina*. As with Amélie, the religious encounters that Malvina faces do not influence her own relationship to Christianity. The religious references, as seen with Prior’s practiced Catholicism, function as descriptive elements to situate the plot. Leslie Sykes reiterates that the use of religion is descriptive rather than moralizing: “Mme Cottin croit savoir que l’Ecosse septentrionale est restée fidèle au culte catholique, et que le bas peuple, même à Edinbourg, croit fermement à la sorcellerie.”⁷ Likewise, the reference to a religious afterlife is not taken from the Bible, but rather from Milton:

Dans l’âme de Clara régnait la franchise, la pureté; on eût dit que toutes les vertus s’y étaient réfugiées; et en la perdant, comme l’Eve de Milton chassée de l’Eden, je suis descendue sur une terre malheureuse et désenchantée par de pénibles comparaisons –Ah! Reprit sir Edmond avec

⁶ Cottin, *AM3*. 260.

⁷ Sykes, 129.

émotion, ignorez-vous donc qu'il est un autre Eden que celui de l'amitié, mille fois plus doux, plus enchanteur, autant au-dessus du sien que le bonheur l'est du repos? –Quand je le croirais, répliqua-t-elle, en s'efforçant de sourire, je n'en serais pas plus heureux, puisque j'ai juré de n'y jamais entrer.⁸

For Malvina, Edenic bliss is in the form of friendship or sexual pleasure. This again distances Cottin from religious rhetoric in her later novels which are inherently based on a Christian faith.

The tomb has a different function in *Malvina* as it symbolizes a feminine presence and authority. Malvina and Clara maintain a spiritual bond that ultimately rises above all other relationships in the novel. Malvina's connection to Clara replaces the moralizing presence of God and the authority of a patriarchal father. Malvina hears Clara's moralizing voice whenever desire threatens to betray her promise to sacrifice love for her daughter. Malvina addresses Clara as though Clara has an omniscient view of Malvina's actions: "vois mes pleurs et aies-tu pitié; prête-moi des forces contre ma faiblesse. [...] [T]u m'ordonnes de ne plus le voir; j'obéirai."⁹ Malvina speaks to Clara as if she were praying. Clara exerts a divine and celestial power over Malvina. On her death-bed, Malvina sees Clara who calls: "Viens à moi, viens te réjouir parmi les anges; un jour ton époux viendra; mais il doit être enchaîné sur la terre pour protéger ma fille

⁸ Cottin, OC2. 69-70.

⁹ Cottin, OC3. 234.

que tu abandonnes.”¹⁰ The physical and spiritual bond between these women is symbolized by the tomb which unites them both.

Elisabeth demonstrates an ideological shift from the spiritual to the religious. *Elisabeth* is replete with religious imagery. From the first description of the landscape, the reader enters through a chapel: “une petite chapelle de bois avait été élevée par des chrétiens; on remarquait que de ce côté les tombeaux avaient été respectés, et que, devant cette croix qui rappellent toutes les vertus, l’homme n’avait pas osé profaner la cendre des morts.”¹¹ The images of the tombs are directly symbolizing a universal respect for religious faith. In addition, the narration dedicates time to describing Elisabeth’s mother practicing religious faith: “Phéodora soupirait tout bas de ne pouvoir assister à l’office divin, et passait une partie de ce jour en prières. Prosternée devant Dieu et devant une image de saint Basile, pour lequel elle avait une profonde vénération” (24). Religious devotion is overtly described. Elisabeth’s mother’s piety is transferred to her daughter as Elisabeth makes her own pilgrimage to the missionary’s tomb who served as escort in the place of her father and God.

Contrary to the other protagonists, religious devotion does not allow Elisabeth to consider sexual passion. Elisabeth’s reaction to Smoloff’s love is to look to the heavens to remind her of her devotion to her father. Her action exhibits the extent to which her filial

¹⁰ Cottin, OC4. 230.

¹¹ Cottin, OC12. 19.

duty transgresses the social and religious boundaries. She describes her filial devotion as “pieuse”. Elisabeth is associating divine love for God to her love for her father.

Pelckmans affirms Elisabeth’s redirection of religious terminology:

Des termes comme ‘pureté’ ou ‘innocence’ montrent bien comment, dans l’esprit de la romancière, la moindre trace d’une ferveur autre que filiale altérerait la qualité éthique du dévouement d’Elisabeth; seul, le sentiment religieux trouve grâce devant cet exclusivisme, mais on a souvent l’impression que les piétés religieuse et filiale ne sont que deux aspects d’une même perfection.¹²

Despite her mother’s teachings that Elisabeth should divide her love equally in three parts, Elisabeth has a singular devotion in her life that redirects love for God and her mother to love for her father. She reiterates this when she is contemplating her voyage: “une seule pensée la poursuivait toujours; elle la gardait religieusement au fond de son cœur.”¹³

In *Mathilde; ou Mémoires tirés de l’histoire des croisades* announces historic religious symbolism from the title.¹⁴ Christian religion overpowers all else. As Elisabeth, Mathilde never succumbs to carnal passion like Amélie, Claire, and Malvina; however, piety is

¹² Pelckmans, 38.

¹³ Cottin, OC12. 28.

¹⁴ Between 1802 and 1822 three books were published that took on the subject of the Crusades: Cottin’s *Mathilde*, Joseph-François Michaud’s *Histoire des croisades (1811-1812)*, and François Vernes’s *Mathilde au Mont-Carmel*. David J. Denby contends that the prevalence of these works reveals a renewed interest for religion and the birth of “une nouvelle historiographie.” “Le Thème des Croisades et l’héritage des Lumières au début du 19e siècle.” *Dix-Huitième Siècle*. 19 (1987): 411. Denby recognizes that there is a blantant religious dimension to Cottin’s text, but fails to connect the religious objects and symbolism of her previous texts: “la dimension religieuse constitue un élément nouveau dans le romanesque de Mme Cottin” (413).

exclusively reserved for religious practice.¹⁵ Unlike Elisabeth who is devoted to her father and God, Mathilde is called “une fille du Christ.”¹⁶ Mathilde’s faith is sparked by the presence of a Christian warrior’s tomb. This allows her to resist succumbing to her passion for Malek Adhel. She relies on her religious devotion to withstand Malek’s sentimental rhetoric: “Malek Adhel, ta voix est bien puissante sur mon cœur; mais celle du Dieu mort pour moi y parle plus haut encore: sans doute, ce n’est pas trop de ses ordres pour résister à ton amour, et c’est ce qui fait ma gloire.”¹⁷ The only obstacle separating the two is religion.¹⁸ Mathilde successfully converts him from Islam and they are married as he dies. She abandons all ties to her family, and retires to a convent in Carmel where she interments her husband. Religious love overpowers any other love depicted in Cottin’s novels. Unlike Elisabeth who confuses love for God with love for her father, Mathilde confuses her love for her husband with love for God: “la pensée de Malek Adhel s’enoua de tant de religion et de pureté qu’elle se confondit bientôt dans son âme avec celle de Dieu lui-même.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Sykes comments: “Tout ce moralisme est empreint d’une religiosité plus marquée encore que dans *Mathilde*.” 215.

¹⁶ Cottin, OC11. 334.

¹⁷ Cottin, OC10. 96.

¹⁸ Jean Gaulmier observes similarities between *Mathilde* and Chateaubriand’s *Atala* (1801). He writes: “Mathilde devant Malek Adhel, sont les séparent des vœux religieux, correspond à *Atala* devant René. [...] Tout le contexte sentimental qui, dans l’actualité de 1801, a assuré à *Atala* un triomphe de larmes a servi également le succès de *Mathilde*.” “Romans et connotations sociales: ‘Mathilde’ de Madame Cottin.” *Roman et société* (January 1971): 12. Cottin mentions *Atala* in her correspondence in 1801; She writes: “Il y a là-dedans tout ce que j’aime: le désert, la mélancolie, la religion et l’amour” (Sykes, 338).

¹⁹ Cottin, OC11. 284.

From these novels, we can observe a progressive, but consistent incorporation of religious imagery into the sentimental plots of Cottin's novels. The representations of tombs allow the reader to evaluate the relationship between religion and women's liberty. The progression of Cottin's novels reveals a move towards religious conservatism. Women's sexual desire is completely displaced from her religious duty as the spiritual is overshadowed by the religious.

Religious upheaval and disruption in the Catholic Church certainly had social repercussions that were felt by authors during that period. After the publication of *Mathilde*, Cottin's religious engagement was remarked upon by critics. Her thematic shift towards piety and religion provoked Benjamin Constant to question the motives behind her last two published novels: "pour conformer à la mode du jour, [Mme Cottin] s'était faite dévote?"²⁰ Constant's question highlights the thematic tension between her first publications and the last, but also accentuates social and political changes of a moment of religious disruption and reevaluation. At a period in history where religion and politics were both undergoing dramatic changes, literature served as a venue to express ever-increasing social confusion. Constant's question is revelatory of the seemingly abrupt thematic change in Cottin's works. Not generally considered to be a politically-engaged author, Cottin's religious views only surface in her later novels.

²⁰ Benjamin Constant, (1888) *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à sa famille, 1775-1830*. Ed. Jean H. Menos. 2nd Ed. (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2009) 227.

Born to Protestant parents, the social and political environment in which she was writing certainly afforded more religious and civic liberties to Protestants. In 1789, Protestants attained civic recognition that dissolved any legal distinction between Protestants and Catholics.²¹ This allowed a modicum of religious freedom to Protestants that was tempered for many due to their gender.

Due to the Revolution and swift political changes that followed, the fluctuating influence on the church was both emancipating and restrictive for women. Women's place in society was influenced by both church and state. Prior to the Revolution, church was seen as an outlet for women's emotions that could not easily find expression elsewhere. Women were often pushed to seek a life in the church, even though the majority chose to marry.²² During this time, new rhetoric was emerging from the church to counteract the traditional gendered emphasis on female corruptibility in order to retain women parishioners. Nigel Ashton's comprehensive analysis of the influence and adaptability of the Catholic Church, demonstrates that the church attempted to provide women with religious outlets and helped them navigate the public spheres that were becoming more distinct. He argues that "within the home, women were to obey their husbands and go diligently about their tasks; yet outside it there was slowly expanding

²¹ Jeremy Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 245. For a comprehensive analysis of the rights of Protestants after the Revolution, see Burdette C. Poland, *French Protestantism and the French Revolution: A Study of Church and State, Thought and Religion, 1615-1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

²² Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000) 41.

scope for independent initiative" (42). Women were encouraged to take proactive role in spiritual life and participate in the lives of their parishes.

After the Revolution, women's cultural and social visibility was even more linked to relationship between the church and state. Denise Z. Davidson explores the effects of the French Revolution on women. She comments that post-revolutionary confusion about what would determine one's place in society also made gender distinctions particularly salient in the 1790's. Women's movement in the public sphere became all the more conspicuous since they represented religious faith. Davidson stressed that religion furnished the "central theme of their activities."²³ Davidson claims that "under the Restoration, women of all classes became central figures at festivals, as they represented model faithful subjects and citizens due to their image as supporters of the Bourbons and of the Church" (13).

While it is likely that Cottin was aware of these political and social changes, the most revealing traces of her changing spiritual and religious engagements in her novels comes from her personal correspondence. As a professed disciple of Rousseau, her initial correspondence reflects a conscious devotion to Rousseauian philosophy. Due to the association with Church absolutism and intolerance proved by Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict de Nantes, the Enlightenment philosophers "generally

²³ Denise Z. Davidson, *France after Revolution: Urban Life, Gender, and the New Social Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 2.

specialized in an anti-clerical and anti-religious polemic.”²⁴ However, as the century progressed, Rousseauian philosophy was tolerated by the Church.²⁵

Correspondence between Cottin and her cousin, Julie, indicates that Rousseau heavily influenced Cottin’s philosophical views on education and women’s role in society. However, in a letter written to her cousin in 1789, Cottin affirms a strong appreciation for Rousseau’s philosophy as formative to her thoughts on religion. She writes that

[Rousseau’s] idées sur la religion sont gravées dans mon cœur et dont devenues les miennes; elles me consolent, me rendent heureuse... Je crois et j’espère, voilà ma profession de fois... La morale chrétienne me paraît si sublime, que je la crois plutôt divine qu’humaine. Malgré cela, je ne puis avoir de certitude si celui qui la donna fut homme ou dieu; il y a là-dedans des mystères au-dessus de ma raison, et comme le peu que j’en ai ne peut comprendre les dogmes, j’écarte les raisonnements et ne suis que le sentiment. Je vois un dieu dans toute la nature, je le sens, mon cœur est plein de la reconnaissance et de l’amour que je lui dois... La première qualité que je donne à un être suprême est la justice et la bonté: voilà le principe sur lequel je fonde une autre vie. (279)

In this letter, Cottin grapples to understand religious dogma and Christian morality. She finds solace in the Rousseauian sentiment of natural education to instruct her understanding of religion.²⁶ As Sykes rightly comments, Cottin’s correspondence prior

²⁴ Jennings, 304.

²⁵ Jennings asserts: “As a species of morality that stressed man’s inherently uncorrupted nature and capacity for improvement without grace—whether sacramental or otherwise—a Rousseauian philosophy unavoidably came into conflict with the Catholic teaching, though most churchmen after 1750s were willing to tolerate the theory if it contributed to responsible and neighborly conduct within the parish” (98).

²⁶ See Jeremiah Alberg, *A Reinterpretation of Rousseau: A Religious System* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Alberg considers the theological dimension in Rousseau’s philosophy and proposes that Christianity can be used as a tool to organize Rousseau’s ideas as he created a system of thought as an alternative to

to the publication of *Mathilde* illustrates a firm belief in natural goodness as a way to understand God: “Le sentiment sera donc à la fois la source du bonheur et le principe de la vertu; la jeune moraliste ne demande rien à la religion.²⁷” Her decision to follow her feelings and see God in nature is a more tempered and spiritual faith than we see in her later correspondence.

There is a dramatic change in the specificity of her religious belief. Far from the sentimental faith inspired by nature, goodness, and virtue, Cottin’s correspondence to a friend in 1803 demonstrates a transition towards a firm belief in Christianity. She writes: “ [Si] vous puissiez revenir à la seule vérité qui soit au monde, à la religion, à cette religion divine, évangélique, toute d’indulgence et d’amour, qui encourage le repentir, réprime l’orgueil” (354). Her description of divine religion that encourages repentance reveals a reinterpretation of the Christian morality that she struggled to understand years before. Unlike her previous doubt as to whether dogma was made by man or God, her correspondence in 1803 leaves no doubt that she no longer considered sentimentality as the basis for her religious devotion.

Christianity. On the social relationship between religion and politics in Rousseau’s works, see Frédéric de Buzon, “Religion naturelle et religion civile chez Rousseau” *Les Études philosophiques* 3 (1993): 331-343.

²⁷ Sykes, 8.

Sykes notes that references to religious faith in Cottin's correspondence dramatically increase in 1803 after her stay in Bagnères.²⁸ At this time, Cottin was heavily invested in a philosophical discussion with Azais. A young philosopher, he was successful in changing Cottin's views on religion. Upon returning to Champlan, Cottin wrote to him: "vos opinions m'ont ramenée tout à fait à Dieu" (78). During this stay she spent considerable time writing *Mathilde*, which she describes to a friend as: "un ouvrage qui démontre qu'il n'y a que la religion chrétienne qui puisse préserver une femme des dangers de la séduction."²⁹ The increased representation of the religious in her novels illustrates that Cottin began integrating her personal faith into her writing.

In the last year of her life, Cottin's died leaving two uncompleted works that remain as a testimony to the ideological transformation in her religious beliefs. In 1807, Cottin began writing two texts: her completed work, a study on *La Religion chrétienne prouvée par les sentiments*, and an unfinished novel titled *Mélanie*. Her preoccupation with religious sentiments is clear from the title of her completed manuscript in which she writes: "on peut être bon sans religion, mais non vertueux" (406). Cottin's novel also belies a similar shift towards representation of religious through the lens of sentimentality and is reminiscent of the piety expressed in *Mathilde*.

²⁸ Sykes illustrates that "c'est qu'à partir du séjour de Bagnères les expressions de sa piété sont beaucoup plus fréquentes qu'auparavant dans la correspondance de Mme Cottin" (77-78).

²⁹ Noyer, 196.

The unfinished plot of *Mélanie* incorporates themes of travel, motherhood, and sexual desire, but the overarching religious references reflect Cottin's religious devotion. Comprised of 422 pages which contain numerous corrections and edits, *Mélanie* begins with the arrival of a veiled woman and her daughter to an abbey of Escaledieu, near Bagnères, France. A series of events cause the protagonist, Léonore, to abandon her faith, which is restored on by her repentance for the sake of her daughter. At the end of the novel, she prays to God to save her dying daughter. Her daughter recovers, and Léonore takes them to a convent in Switzerland where she dedicates the rest of her life to God and her daughter: "Pendant quinze ans, elle se consacre à l'éducation de sa fille et à des œuvres pénitentielles."³⁰ Cottin remains faithful to the pervasive theme of education of young women that connect each of her previous five novels; however, unlike the egalitarian education proposed for women in *Amélie Mansfield*, *Malvina*, and *Elisabeth*, the religious motivation behind this redefines women's education. Rousseau's natural education is replaced by a didactic and religious overtone that prioritizes religious faith.

This change from the spiritual to the religious is representative of Cottin's loss of youthful social rebellion at the hands of the Revolution which opened her eyes to death, depression, melancholy, and feelings of isolation that made her question her own mortality as she faced her own lingering death. Even though her works became more

³⁰ Sykes, 407.

religiously conservative, she continued to push the limits of genre in new and radical ways by incorporating elements of the epic and historical novels into her sentimental framework.

Cottin's novels are rich in symbolism and visual imagery that has yet to be fully explored in academic scholarship. The representations of women in Cottin's work redefine the traditional associations of women with nature, depression, and pessimism. Her work was in constant transition as she depicted the relationship to the duty of motherhood, and provides important cues into the desires of the reading public of the nineteenth century.

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Biography

Brenna K. Heitzman was born on July 3, 1980 in Chicago, Illinois. She received a B.A. in French Literature from Hamilton College in 2002. In 2005, she received her M.A. in French Language, Literature, and Culture from Syracuse University and was awarded a Certificate in University Teaching. In 2007, while completing her Ph.D. requirements, she received her M.A. in French Literature at Duke University. She received her Ph.D. in French and Francophone Studies from Duke University in 2012 and was awarded a Certificate in Women's Studies. She is the recipient of the Oral Language Instructional Fellowship, the Dissertation Research Travel Award, the Aleane Webb Dissertation Research Award, the Dr. James W. Plonk Graduate Fellowship, and was awarded a visiting scholar position at the Ecole Normale Supérieure Fontenay Lyon in 2008.