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From Clarens to Hollow Park, Isabelle de Charrière's Quiet Revolution

NADINE BÉRENGUIER

“Love is more pleasant than marriage for the reason that novels are more amusing than history.”¹ In this lapidary maxim, Chamfort effectively captures what characterizes the plots of eighteenth-century novels. By placing novels on the side of love, this observer of eighteenth-century mores reminds us of the age-old dichotomy between love and marriage and underlines that, unlike love and the novel, the novel and marriage do not make a good match. What happens, then, when such a golden rule is transgressed and the intruder, that is, marriage, becomes the major topic of a novel? What is the impact of such a break with tradition on the ideological content of the novel? Such questions are raised by *Lettres de Mistriss Henley*, initially published in 1784, in which Isabelle de Charrière departs radically from the novelistic tradition of her time.² This break did not escape the attention of the first public reviewers who gave a critical reading of *Lettres de Mistriss Henley* with Samuel de Constant’s *Le mari sentimental*, published together (anonymously) in the 1785 Paris edition.³ In *Le Mercure de France*, the review began thus: “Le fond de ce double roman, dont la forme est assez singulière, a le mérite d’être absolument neuf.”⁴ [The content of this double novel, whose form is quite remarkable, has the advantage of being absolutely new.] It pointed out that the authors had left the beaten tracks of French prose-fiction by omitting “aventure merveilleuse, amants persécutés, dispersés, réunis;

... ces intrigues filées, promenées d'obstacles en obstacles ... Amants, passions amoureuses" (186) [unreal adventure, persecuted, separated, and reunited lovers; ... these endless plots meandering from obstacles to obstacles ... Lovers, amorous passions]. These remarks were echoed by the *Année littéraire*: "Ce roman, monsieur a une marche différente de celle des autres. La plupart renferment des intrigues amoureuses qui se terminent par le mariage; celui-ci, ou ceux-ci (car il y en a deux) commencent là où les autres finissent. On n'imagine guère que deux personnes mariées soient capables d'exciter un intérêt bien vif."⁵ [This novel, Sir, takes a different path from the others. Most of them have amorous plots which end in marriage. This one (or these for they are two) begins where the others end. It is difficult to imagine that two married persons can arouse such great interest.] It seems that even at the end of the century Chamfort's remark was still accurate. Nevertheless, both reviewers praised this attempt to provide insight into a matter previously ignored by novels: the (mal)functioning of conjugal unions. The *Mercure de France* in particular displayed an unambiguous enthusiasm: "Cette tentative a déjà été faite au théâtre; mais nous croyons que c'est la première fois qu'elle ait été risquée dans un roman: il nous semble cependant qu'elle pourrait être répétée avec succès, et même infiniment étendue" (186). [Such an attempt has already been made in the theater; but we believe that it is the first time that it has been risked in a novel: it seems nonetheless that it could be repeated successfully, and even infinitely extended.] Novels, in order to fulfill their edifying mission, should not leave any aspect of life unexplored but should rather "tracer les tableaux de la vie, afin que parmi ceux qui se rapprochent le plus des circonstances qui nous entourent, nous choisissons la route que nous devons suivre, les écueils que nous devons éviter" (187) [draw pictures of life, so that among those which are closest to the circumstances familiar to us, we can choose the path that we must follow and the obstacles that we must avoid]. As suggested by the format of the 1785 Parisian edition, the two novels were perceived as inseparable parts of a diptych. In *Le mari sentimental*, M. Bompré is led to commit suicide by the selfish behavior and insensitivity of his wife, while in *Mistriss Henley*, Mrs. Henley is disenchanted by the excessively rational attitude of her husband.⁶ In their haste to acclaim the uniqueness of this double plot, both reviewers privileged the issues raised by the controversy between *Le mari sentimental* and *Mistriss Henley* and forgot to mention a prior attempt to include married life in a novel: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761).

Le mari sentimental is explicitly inscribed (as we shall see) in *Mistriss Henley*, but the dialogue does not stop with the companion text. Too

many allusions to be ignored point, in *Mistress Henley*, to *Julie*. It is unnecessary to recall at length the impact of *Julie* on the public of the period or to document the fact that Charrière had read Rousseau's work.⁷ In the Second Preface to *Julie*, Rousseau, an ardent detractor of contemporary novels, proposes to break with the literary conventions of his day and to revolutionize prose-fiction in France by focusing on married life and domestic concerns.⁸ Charrière does not voice her own claims in such an outspoken way, but her deliberate choice to deal exclusively with the bare matter of married life and domesticity constitutes in itself another radical departure. Unlike Mary Wollstonecraft, who very explicitly responds to Rousseau in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Charrière answers implicitly but in fictional terms; she offers a serious and significant contribution to discussions about marriage and the family through a critical rewriting of the marriage ideology displayed in *Julie*.

I suggest with Nancy K. Miller that "Learning to read women's writing entails not only a particular attentiveness to the marks of signature that [she has] called 'overreading'; it also involves 'reading in pairs (or, in Naomi Schor's coinage, 'intersexually'). By this [Miller] mean[s] looking at the literature of men's and women's writing side by side to perceive at their points of intersection the differentiated lines of a 'bi-cultural' production of the novel — Persian *and* Peruvian — more complicated than the familiar, national history of its tropes."⁹ I do not propose *Mistriss Henley* for an exercise in overreading, but for "reading in pairs," taking *Julie* as a grid through which to read *Mistriss Henley*, and vice versa. This method does not mean that I will look at the influence of Rousseau on Charrière. Rather, I will examine Charrière's fictional treatment of Rousseau's marriage narrative and of its consequences for women. *Mistriss Henley* fully explores the new paths opened by *Julie* and, I will argue, more radically than *Julie*. Charrière's novel departs from narrative tradition in areas where Rousseau fell short of doing so. In fact, Rousseau preserved major rules of the genre he despised so much, a feature of *Julie* widely acknowledged by scholars studying his fiction.¹⁰ For her part, in *Mistriss Henley*, Charrière abandons all the conventions still favored by Rousseau and simultaneously provides a veiled ironic comment on *Julie* by giving a very different outlook on marriage as an institution, marital relationships, and domestic affairs (e. g., running a household, education and child-rearing, social functions).

Why did the first reviewers and later critics ignore a precedent as well-known as *Julie*? On the one hand, Rousseau's status and legacy might explain this silence. Rousseau was not considered merely a novelist, but rather a *philosophe* (in the general sense), concerned with various politi-

cal and social issues (such as the passage from a state of nature to civil society, the birth of property, the role of arts and sciences in society). Therefore, the characters, relationships, and situations in Rousseau's successful novel could be perceived as part of a wider system representative of his opinions and principles. The "didactic" side of *Julie* was commented upon by Rousseau's contemporaries, such as Duclos, d'Alembert, and Madame Necker, and has been examined by more recent critics, such as Jean-Louis Lecercle: "He could not avoid entrusting his characters with themes which obsessed him, to the extent that this book has been called a synthesis of his thought."¹¹ The short and bare format of the *Mari sentimental/Mistriss Henley* duet seems far removed from the all-encompassing project of *Julie*. Because of their focus on the severed relationship between two spouses, the critics perceived the new novels as very topical works whose perspective was limited to the psycho-emotional and the private. Such a view could conveniently accommodate the biographical reading of *Mistriss Henley* initiated by Philippe Godet, Charrière's first major biographer, who qualified it as "insignificant" despite its interest as a reflection of "the moral state of the author during this period of her life."¹² Though an autobiographical view is historically justified, it is regrettably likely to hide other possible implications of her departure from novelistic convention.¹³ Both the polemic and the autobiographical approaches reduce Charrière's innovation to a mere emotional reaction, be it to another novel, or to her own experience. In short, the difference of status between *Julie* and *Mistriss Henley* can account for the failure of literary critics to establish a connection between them.

Both the polemic and autobiographical elements that have prevailed among the novel's readers are actually embedded in the first page of *Mistriss Henley*. The reader is immediately invited by the protagonist to see her writing as a response to a "cruel et charmant petit livre" [cruel and charming little book] (*Le mari sentimental*) that has tormented her ever since she read it. A reading of the novel to her husband and his reaction to it are decisive in prompting her "confessions" to a silent "confidante." Hoping that her husband will perceive differences between their situation and that of Bompré in *Le mari*, she is distressed to sense his perception of similarities and his tendency to identify with the unfortunate husband:

Quand j'ai lu tout cela à mon mari, au lieu de sentir encore mieux que moi ces différences, comme je m'en étais flattée en commençant la lecture, ou de ne point sentir du tout cette manière de ressemblance, je l'ai vu tantôt sourire, tantôt soupirer; il a dit quelques mots, il a caressé son chien et regardé l'ancienne place du portrait. Ma chère amie, ils se croiront tous des MM. Bompré, et seront surpris d'avoir pu supporter si patiemment la vie (101). [When I read all of this to my husband, instead

of feeling these differences more than I did, as I had flattered myself he would when I started, or not feeling this sort of resemblance at all, I saw him sometimes smile, sometimes sigh; he said a few words, petted his dog and looked at the former place of the portrait. My dear friend, they will all think themselves Bomprés, and are surprised that they have been able to endure life so patiently.]

Besides identifying itself as a party in a controversy, the novel introduces the question of the influence of fiction on "real" life. By affording them a comparison with their own experience, *Le mari sentimental* becomes part and parcel of the conjugal difficulties encountered by the Henleys. After interpreting Constant's novel according to her own experience, Mrs. Henley tries to decipher its negative impact on her husband's behavior: "Il vivait et me jugeait, pour ainsi dire, au jour la journée, jusqu'à ce que M. et Mme Bompré le soient venus rendre plus content de lui et plus mécontent de moi. J'ai eu bien du chagrin depuis ma dernière lettre" (108). [He was living and judging me, so to speak, on a day-by-day basis, until Mr. and Mrs. Bompré made him more content with himself and less satisfied with me. I have had much sorrow since I last wrote to you.] Fiction and personal experience fuse and become confused, as fiction becomes so palpable that it intensifies the pain inflicted by life.

The well-established belief that novels had an impact on readers' taste and behavior was central to the debate that raged in the eighteenth century regarding this relatively new genre.¹⁴ Because of the preeminence of love in their plots, novels were accused of corrupting the morals of their readers, especially of young women. In *Mistriss Henley*, Charrière reformulates the relationship between the effects of fiction and its content and gives it a completely new turn. Even when fiction promotes a "serious" topic—and marriage is one—it can be harmful. Even "good" models—devoid of seduction, adultery, abduction, disobedience, and life-threatening conflicts—do not guarantee a beneficial effect of fiction on readers who might still have to pay an emotional price, contrary to what one might deduce from *Julie's* Second Preface: "Si les romans n'offraient à leurs lecteurs que des tableaux d'objets qui les environnent, que des devoirs qu'ils peuvent remplir, que des plaisirs de leur condition, les romans ne les rendraient point fous, ils les rendraient sages" (22). [If novels offered to their readers only depictions of objects that surround them, duties that can be fulfilled, the pleasures of their conditions, novels would not render them insane, they would render them reasonable.] As it refutes this point, Charrière's "insignificant" novel begins to take a radical stand.

A comparison of prefatory remarks in the Second Preface of *Julie* and the first letter of *Mistriss Henley* illustrates a novel's possible effects on

readers who identify with their characters. Both novelists innovate by targeting not individuals, but married couples. However, each sheds a very different light on this enterprise. In *Julie's* Second Preface, in the dialogue between R and N, R attributes to the depiction of a domestic life the power to reform mores in general and regenerate conjugal relations in particular:

J'aime à me figurer deux époux lisant ce recueil ensemble, y puisant un nouveau courage pour supporter leurs travaux communs, et peut-être de nouvelles vues pour les rendre utiles. Comment pourraient-ils y contempler le tableau d'un ménage heureux, sans vouloir imiter un si doux modèle? Comment s'attendriront-ils sur le charme de l'union conjugale, même privé de celui de l'amour, sans que la leur se resserre et s'affermisse? (23) [I like to imagine husband and wife reading this collection of letters together, drawing from it new courage to endure their common tasks, and perhaps gaining new views to render these tasks useful. How could they contemplate the picture of this happy household, without wishing to imitate such a pleasing model? How can they be moved by the charm of the conjugal bond, even deprived of the charm of love, without seeing their own union tightened and strengthened?]

In this passage, Rousseau presents his novel as a conduct-book that prescribes a new way of life (centered upon the home and the family) and that should inspire married readers to have more harmonious unions.

In the first page of *Mistriss Henley*, we see Mrs. Henley practicing what R advocates: that is, reading novels with her husband; ironically, however, she reads not *Julie*, but *Le mari sentimental*. Far from providing a model to be imitated by both spouses (like *Julie*, in Rousseau's opinion), this novel creates a split between husband and wife, who read it very differently. The lack of harmony between them is underscored by the purpose suggested by Mrs. Henley for the publication of her own letters. From a reader she turns into a writer:

Si ma lettre ou mes lettres ont quelque justesse et vous paraissent propres à exciter quelque intérêt, seulement assez pour se faire lire, traduisez-les en changeant les noms, en omettant ce qui vous paraîtra ennuyeux ou inutile. Je crois que beaucoup de femmes sont dans le même cas que moi. Je voudrais, sinon corriger, du moins avertir les maris (102). [If my letter or my letters are in any way correct and seem to you likely to trigger any interest, if only enough to be read, translate them, changing the names and suppressing whatever seems to you boring or useless. I believe that many women are in a situation similar to mine. I would like, if not to reform, at least to alert husbands.]

If Charrière makes her (male) readers reconsider their own attitudes, it is through a warning and not through a positive model. The prefatory

material built into the novel's body bears witness to the urgency of the situation and finds itself in stern contrast with *Julie's* elaborate dialogued preface (also entitled "Ecrit sur les romans") in which Rousseau indicates the objectives of his novel and debates the laws of the genre. Both novelists, eager to see reforms implemented in the mores of their contemporaries, are innovative in aiming at married readers, but this common effort reveals opposite attitudes on their part: on Rousseau's, a propensity to idealize situations; on Charrière's an attempt to scrutinize them as lucidly as possible, and lay them as bare as possible.¹⁵ This contrast emerges through their use (or neglect) of certain traditional plot elements. In what follows, I will compare *Julie's* and Mrs. Henley's fates as married heroines and mention a few aspects of Rousseau's fidelity to novelistic tradition, not in order to lessen the impact of his enterprise, but to highlight more clearly Charrière's narrative boldness in *Mistriss Henley*.

In eighteenth-century France, marriage, as social historians Jean-Louis Flandrin and James Traer have documented, was central to strategies of alliances ensuring the transmission, redistribution or acquisition of property, the continuation of a lineage, and the improvement of social status.¹⁶ Such conclusions, based on the study of family documents, are also found in the writings of social critics of the period, who claimed that as long as marriages were based on transactions between families rather than on individual agreements, no personal satisfaction could come from married life. Montesquieu, Diderot, collaborators in the *Encyclopédie*, as well as Rousseau himself, did not question the institution of marriage so much as the custom of arranged marriages, and they favored freedom in the choice of a partner, combined with the right to divorce (except Rousseau), as the solution to conjugal misery.¹⁷ In turn, fiction often dealt with obligatory arranged marriage; *Julie* was no exception. Like many other novels of the period, the first half of *Julie* stages an amorous passion between two young protagonists (Julie and Saint-Preux) and the stubborn opposition of Julie's father to their union. Under such circumstances, marriage is treated as a transaction upsetting the familial stability and as a source of conflict between generations. Family relationships crystallize and intensify around the prohibition of Julie's union with Saint-Preux and then, around the arrangement of Julie's marriage to Wolmar. Seen from this angle, Julie's situation resembles that of other novels' heroines, adolescents who have reached a marriageable age and struggle with the difficulties generated by the critical transition from childhood to adulthood. Thus marriage becomes a source of conflict between generations and the focus of parent/child power dynamics.¹⁸

In *Mistriss Henley*, the period directly preceding marriage, central to

many eighteenth-century novels, is practically discarded. Mrs. Henley does not use any pretext to linger on her past. When she announces to her correspondent in a rhetorical question: "Voulez-vous, ma chère amie, que je vous fasse l'histoire de mon mariage, du temps qui l'a précédé, et que je vous peigne ma vie telle qu'elle est aujourd'hui?" (102) [Do you want, my dear friend, to hear the story of my marriage, of the time which preceded it, do you want me to describe my life as it is nowadays?], one would expect her to focus on "the time that preceded it," as is customary in a fair number of eighteenth-century novels.¹⁹ Instead, Mrs. Henley briefly summarizes those years: an orphan raised by a loving aunt who treated her like a daughter, she was promised to Lord Alesford (the heir of her aunt's husband) at a very young age, and both quietly waited for their future union. Sent on a tour of Europe, the young lord died in Italy after being unfaithful to his beloved.²⁰ This period is narrated very hastily, her sorrow remembered in a few lines: "Je ne vous dirai point tout ce que je souffris alors, tout ce que j'avais déjà souffert pendant plusieurs mois. Vous vîtes à Montpellier les traces que le chagrin avait laissées dans mon humeur" (102). [I shall not tell you how much I suffered then, how much I had already suffered for several months. You saw in Montpellier the traces that my sorrow had left in my temper.] The ellipsis, underscored by the "I shall not tell you," supposes the reader well enough equipped to fill in the gaps of the narrative. Of course, no more details are necessary for a correspondent whom she met at the time of her affliction, just as they are superfluous for any reader familiar with the deceived lovers populating the fiction of the time. She can thus concentrate on her "life as it is nowadays"; this focus is signalled by the absence of her maiden name, which precludes any other identity.

The circumstances more directly surrounding their marriages also create a contrast between Julie and Mrs. Henley. Given by her authoritative father to an aging husband, Julie is again submitted to the fate of many heroines who are denied a say in the choice of a spouse and must marry according to family interests (or not marry at all and enter a convent). Fundamentally, in regard to their situation as women, both Julie and Mrs. Henley have an obligation to marry, and no other option is offered to either of them (as non-Catholics, not even the convent). Julie, whose brother is dead, is responsible, among other things, for continuing the family blood-line, which is threatened with extinction. As she will inherit very little money from her aunt, the future Mrs. Henley must find a husband in order to enjoy financial security. However, in contrast to Julie, Charrière's heroine is given a choice of possible partners, which she perceives as extreme freedom.²¹ Far from rejoicing over this widely praised freedom, Mrs. Henley expresses ambivalent feelings toward it

and in retrospect she regrets having been given the right to prefer Mr. Henley, a man of the gentry, over a merchant returned rich from India (whom she calls the "Nabab"):

Si un père tyrannique m'eût obligée à épouser le Nabab, je me serais fait peut-être un devoir d'obéir; et m'étourdissant sur l'origine de ma fortune par l'usage que je me serais promis d'en faire, "les bénédictions des indigents d'Europe détourneront," me serais-je dit, "les malédictions de l'Inde." En un mot, forcée d'être heureuse d'une manière vulgaire, je le serais devenue sans honte et peut-être avec plaisir; mais me donner moi-même de mon choix, contre des diamants, des perles, des tapis, des parfums, des mousselines brodées d'or, des soupers, des fêtes, je ne pouvais m'y résoudre, et je promis ma main à Mr. Henley (103–104). [If a tyrannical father had obliged me to marry the Nabob, I probably would have made a point of obeying; and in an attempt to forget the origin of my fortune through the use I made of it, "the blessings of the needy of Europe will divert," I would have told myself, "the maledictions of India." In a word, forced to be happy in a vulgar manner, I would have become so shamelessly and perhaps with pleasure; but I could not decide on my own to exchange myself freely for diamonds, pearls, carpets, perfumes, gold embroidered muslins, suppers, feasts, and I promised my hand to Mr. Henley.]

Irony pervades this passage, in which the character is creating her own fiction on the basis of traditional narratives and providing a defense of forced marriages. This ironic tone fits the paradox of her situation: she perceives her relative freedom as an unbearable burden and regrets the absence of a severe and impervious father who would have imposed his will (as Julie's father did). She could have been sold by her father (or her aunt, for that matter), but does not feel entitled to be herself the performer of the exchange as well as its object. This passage lucidly analyzes the unexpected consequences of the freedom to choose a husband. As Elisabeth de Fontenay argues in an article on the invention of "ménage" by Rousseau, "companionate marriage, [on the other hand], subjects the woman because it transforms the patriarchal contract between families into a conjugal and inter-individual bond deprived of any socio-political dimension. In making this bond private, one excludes women from public life and one condemns them exclusively to domestic life."²² In refusing to marry primarily for money (she does not marry for love either), Mrs. Henley seals an inter-personal agreement with the man whom she has elected as her husband.

This type of conjugal bond introduces the protagonist into a private and enclosed world, limited to the family and domestic duties. The absence of a father's strong coercion is symptomatic of the absence of external causes for the failed relationship: "Je suis d'autant plus

malheureuse qu'il n'y a rien à quoi je puisse m'en prendre, que je n'ai aucun changement à demander, aucun reproche à faire, que je me blâme et me méprise d'être malheureuse" (107). [I am all the more unhappy that there is nothing which I can blame, no change I can request, no reproach I can make, and that I blame myself and despise myself for being unhappy.] Again, this predicament is linked to the double role that she has had to perform: as a woman giving herself, she does not feel entitled to place responsibility outside herself. The focus on marriage as a private relationship between two individuals rather than as a function of external principles, as in *Julie*, is a revolt against *Mistriss Henley's* predecessor. The married couple, exposed as an internally fragile unit when stripped of external threats, becomes a newly-constituted literary character through Charrière's innovation.

While in other novels of the period, married life eludes narration as if its privacy had to be kept from indiscreet readers, or rather, as if it were unlikely to provide an acceptable plot line, in *Julie* as in *Mistriss Henley*, the marriage ceremony does not constitute a happy and hasty conclusion.²³ In both novels, marriage opens a new era for the protagonists, and married life is the object of much attention. *Julie*, one might add, is the first novel published in France in which the heroine leads her married life in the country, cares about the success of her marriage, has children and is involved in their education. The "révolution soudaine" [sudden revolution] that strikes her during the wedding ceremony constitutes the best symbol of the power of marriage, inaugurating simultaneously a new life for the character and a new theme for novelistic fiction. However, Julie's wedding is powerfully described as a sacrifice through which she undoes the violation of her sexual integrity: "Je fus menée au temple comme une victime impure qui souille le sacrifice où l'on va l'immoler" (353; III, 18). [I was brought to the temple as an impure victim that sullies the sacrifice where she is going to be immolated.] Her devotion to married life appears as a way to expiate her premature loss of virginity: "Douce et consolante vertu, je la [la vie] recommence pour toi; c'est toi qui me la rendras chère; c'est à toi que je la veux consacrer" (355; III, 18). [Sweet and consoling virtue, I recommence it (my life) for you; you will make it dear to me; I want to devote it to you.] Julie's past and her "fault" justify her mystical devotion to domesticity and give her marriage to Wolmar all the characteristics of an expiation for her illicit relationship with Saint-Preux. This suffices to make the Wolmars an exception to the rule asserted by the reviewer of the *Année littéraire* ("It is difficult to imagine that two married persons can arouse such great interest"); they are likely to interest readers greatly.

Only a brief sentence inaugurates Mrs. Henley's career as a wife, her

wedding being the object of no detailed description. "Nos noces furent charmantes" (104) [Our wedding was charming] says it all, because the frustrated wife wants to introduce without any further delay the central issue of the novel, that is, her relationship with her husband. She portrays him thus: "Spirituel, élégant, décent, délicat, affectueux, M. Henley enchantait tout le monde; c'était un mari de roman; il me semblait quelquefois un peu trop parfait; mes fantaisies, mes humeurs, mes impatiences trouvaient toujours *sa raison et sa modération* en leur chemin" (104; my emphasis). [Witty, elegant, decent, delicate, affectionate, Mr. Henley enchanted everyone; he looked like a story-book husband and sometimes appeared too perfect; my fancies, my moods, my irritations always found his reason and his temperance in their way.] Strangely enough, though, the expression "mari de roman" can hardly mean "husbands as novels portray them," since husbands are rarely given a positive role in the plot of French novels.²⁴ "Mari de roman," thus, might refer to prospective husbands, "prince charmings" who fight abusive fathers and (sometimes) defeat them at the end of the story. However, there is one exception to this rule, the perfect "mari de roman" identified in *Julie*: M. de Wolmar.

Mr. Henley is a younger and more seductive version of M. de Wolmar. Describing their husbands, both wives mention reason and moderation as the men's fundamental traits. Julie introduces him to Saint-Preux: "Sa physionomie est noble et prévenante, son abord simple et ouvert, ses manières sont plus honnêtes qu'empressées; il parle peu et d'un grand sens, mais sans affecter ni précision ni sentence. Il est le même pour tout le monde, ne cherche et ne fuit personne, et *n'a jamais d'autres préférences que celles de la raison*" (369; III, 20; my emphasis). [His physiognomy is noble and welcoming, his demeanor simple and open, his manners more honest than zealous; he talks little and with logic, but does not pretend to precision or sententiousness. He is the same for everybody, seeks nobody and avoids nobody, and has no other preferences than those dictated by reason.] Henley's position as Wolmar's heir is all the more interesting in that their reasonable behaviors have very different outcomes. Wolmar is a "mari de roman" of a new kind. Like any other novelistic husband he has not been chosen, but unlike most of them, he is highly praised and admired by his young wife. Unlike Mrs. Henley, Julie does not hint at the difficulties likely to result from daily intercourse with such a controlled personality. This reign of reason in their relationship, executed by Wolmar, is yet another manifestation of Julie's urge to expiate her passionate past. The perfection that Julie claims for her union with M. de Wolmar is best explained by her attempt to compensate for her haunting love of Saint-Preux. When Wolmar

invites Saint-Preux to join them at Clarens, the past illicit love is reinforced by its possible resurgence under the guise of adultery. In that respect, Rousseau remains faithful to the tradition according to which married life serves as a background for the analysis of illicit love, and more precisely of the feminine struggle against adultery or its temptation.²⁵ Wolmar's initiative regarding Saint-Preux, moreover, shows the limits of his reasonable behavior as he takes perverse pleasure at the triangular situation with which he experiments and tests his wife: "Il prend plaisir à la confiance qu'il me témoigne" (498; IV, 12) [He takes pleasure in the trust that he shows me], Julie comments to Claire.²⁶ Their relationship is shaped by a mediation which allows Rousseau to glorify simultaneously a married couple and an irresistible illicit passion, as if he made his innovations more admissible through the pervasive use of more traditional novelistic elements. This is at the same time the strength of his project and possibly the limit of his transgressive fiction.

Such traditional elements, though suggested briefly, are never carried out in *Mistriss Henley*, and no underlying passion counterbalances the reason incarnated by Mr. Henley. Mrs. Henley fantasizes about adultery as a device to arouse her husband's jealousy and modify his cool behavior towards her. At a ball, she has made the acquaintance of a young woman and her brother whom she has invited to dinner. She makes a point of telling her husband of this man's resemblance to her first fiancé, Lord Alesford, but to no avail. No titillating effect is obtained. Her attempt is immediately dismissed as irrelevant by Mr. Henley who declares, smiling: "Heureusement je ne suis pas jaloux" (116). [Fortunately, I am not jealous.] Reacting vehemently to what she perceives as indifference, she draws the portrait of a paradoxical "husband of her dreams": " 'Oui!' ai-je ajouté, excité à la fois par ma propre vivacité et par son sang-froid inaltérable, 'les injustices d'un jaloux, les emportements d'un brutal, seraient moins fâcheux que le flegme et l'aridité d'un sage'" (116). ['Yes!' I added, irritated as much by my own outburst of temper as by his unfailing self-control, 'the injustice of a jealous man, the anger of a brute would be less of a nuisance than the phlegm and the dullness of a wise man.'] Not only does she allude once more to another possible novelistic institution (the abusive husband), but she also reveals her mistrust of rationality and her delusion regarding the ability of reasonable behavior to operate in all realms of human endeavor. In a letter written after this outburst, she addresses her husband in these terms: "Vous avez pourtant eu un tort: vous m'avez fait trop d'honneur en m'épousant. Vous avez cru — et qui ne l'aurait cru? — que trouvant dans son mari tout ce qui peut rendre un homme aimable et estimable, et dans sa situation tous les plaisirs honnêtes, l'opulence et la considération, une

femme raisonnable ne pouvait manquer d'être heureuse. Mais je ne suis pas une femme raisonnable, vous et moi l'avons vu trop tard" (117). [You are however wrong on one account: you honored me too much by marrying me. You believed — and who would not have believed it? — that, finding in her husband all that can make a man lovable and estimable, and in her situation all honest pleasures, opulence and consideration, a reasonable woman could not fail to be happy: but I am no reasonable woman; you and I have realized it too late.]

The link established between marriage and happiness corresponds to a modern notion of the married couple. In her striving to perfection, Mrs. Henley is a very modern wife. Just before leaving London to settle with her husband in the country, she had dreamed of becoming "la meilleure femme, la plus tendre belle-mère, la plus digne maîtresse de maison que l'on eût jamais vue" (104) [the best wife, the most tender step-mother, the most worthy housewife that was ever seen]. Because this marriage is of her own doing, she sees it not only as the functional association of two persons in order to procreate, to continue the lineage, and to transmit wealth, but also as a strong affective bond, with its own dynamics that suppose a dedicated contribution of the individual to the benefit of the relationship. As a consequence, Mrs. Henley's affective energy is centered on her rapport with her husband. As the young Mrs. Henley has placed high expectations on married life as a source of personal success and happiness, she perceives its failure as a traumatic experience, all the more poignant in that no external factor (such as arranged marriage or love for another man still found in *Julie*) can be held accountable for it. While Rousseau still uses external elements to undermine the Wolmar couple, Charrière demystifies Rousseau's ideal pair by planting the seeds of its destruction inside the private conjugal walls.

Since no paternal constraint, no past illicit passion, no jealousy, no threat of adultery endangers their relationship, what exactly imperils the Henleys' marriage? Mrs. Henley indirectly answers this question at the beginning of her fourth letter: "Je vous entretiens ma chère amie, de choses bien peu intéressantes, et avec une longueur, un détail! — mais c'est comme cela qu'elles sont dans ma tête; et je croirais ne vous rien dire, si je ne vous disais pas tout. Ce sont de petites choses qui m'affligent ou m'impatientent, et me font avoir tort. Ecoutez donc encore un tas de petites choses" (112). [I talk to you, my dear friend, about things without interest, at too great a length and with too many details! — but so they are in my head; and I would feel as if I said nothing if I did not tell you everything. It is small things which afflict or irritate me, and put me in the wrong. Listen then to a heap of small things.] Their relationship is endangered by "a heap of small things." Aware of the lack of diversion in

her life, she admits to focusing too much on domestic affairs, such as the education of her step-daughter, the replacement of wallpaper and furniture, the unfortunate acquisition of a cat, the affair of her chambermaid with a neighboring farmer, the argument about a dress that she wears at a ball. With regard to Mrs. Henley's personal story, these incidents illustrate her incompatibility with Mr. Henley, and their accumulation expresses the emptiness of her life. More importantly for my purpose, these episodes engage problems of education and mothering that greatly preoccupied Rousseau. In order to complete the assessment of Charrière's critique of *Julie's* seemingly perfect world, I shall consider not so much the filiation of ideas as the way these issues are incorporated into *Mistriss Henley's* plot.

While Rousseau makes education and parenting the topic of a single enlightened conversation among Julie, Wolmar and Saint-Preux (who narrates it in letter 3 of part V), Charrière stages the issue in a series of short quarrels between husband and wife, concerning the clothes suited for her step-daughter, the teaching of La Fontaine fables, their diverging views on the future of their unborn child, and maternal breast-feeding. In *Julie*, the pages devoted to education are didactic and summarize major principles developed at length in *Emile*. Consequently, Julie's and Wolmar's ideas on the education of their sons are in full harmony. She will take care of them until they reach the age to leave the "gynécée" and come under the guidance of their father and Saint-Preux, their future tutor. Regarding the education of Henriette (Claire's daughter, whom Julie considers her daughter), Wolmar has nothing to say, since men cannot be involved in girls' education, and this discussion is absent from Julie insofar as "les principes en sont si différents qu'ils méritent un entretien à part" (585; V, 3). [Its principles are so different that they deserve a separate discussion.] In *Julie*, education is a segregated activity according to the children's age and sex, while in *Mistriss Henley*, all aspects of child-rearing (of male and female children) concern both parents, and constitute a potentially problematic endeavor as a source of conflict between them.²⁷

What unifies the Wolmars divides the Henleys. A case in point is provided by La Fontaine's *Fables*. On this topic, Julie peacefully expresses ideas that have Wolmar's full approbation: "Et convaincue que les fables sont faites pour les hommes, mais qu'il faut toujours dire la vérité nue aux enfants, je supprimai La Fontaine . . . Je veux aussi l'habituer de bonne heure à nourrir sa tête d'idées et non de mots: c'est pourquoi je ne lui fais rien apprendre par cœur" (581-82; V, 3). [And convinced that fables are meant for adults but that one must always tell the naked truth to children, I suppressed La Fontaine . . . I also want to

get him into the habit of feeding his mind with ideas and not with words: this is why I never have him learn anything by heart.]²⁸ In *Mistriss Henley*, the same topic is the pretext for a dispute between Mrs. Henley and her husband. As a good Rousseauian father (although he does not strictly go by the book on Rousseau's principles regarding geography and history), Mr. Henley condemns the teaching of the fable "Le Chêne et le Roseau": " 'Elle récite à merveille,' dit M. Henley; 'mais comprend-elle ce qu'elle dit? Il vaudrait mieux peut-être mettre dans sa tête des vérités avant d'y mettre des fictions: l'histoire, la géographie . . . ' " (105). ['She recites beautifully,' said Mr. Henley, 'but does she understand what she is saying? Maybe it would be better to teach her truths before teaching her fictions: history, geography'] The short exchange that ensues so baffles Mrs. Henley that she leaves the room in tears. Unlike M. de Wolmar, who considers Julie as a disciple,²⁹ Mr. Henley does not share his philosophical maxims with his wife and instead utters snap judgments at specific moments. Such patterns govern all their discussions, including those on education, in which he preaches modesty and simplicity in realms as disparate as clothing suited for girls and moral principles instilled in children. These animated confrontations are a far cry from the Wolmars' serene tone in their hour-long conversation, during which they appear to be less than literary characters, mere conduits for the philosophy of their author. In contrast, by weaving the topic of education into the plot of the novel, Charrière not only gives an account of how a couple comes to grip with new concerns, but also denounces the possible shortcomings of the models presented by Rousseau in his didactic novel.

As spokesmen of reason and philosophy, both Wolmar and Mr. Henley show interest in the pregnancy of their wives. Talking about her first pregnancy, Julie valorizes the *philosophe* in her husband: "Durant ma première grossesse, effrayée de tous mes devoirs et des soins que j'aurais bientôt à remplir, j'en parlais souvent à M. de Wolmar avec inquiétude. Quel meilleur guide pouvais-je prendre en cela qu'un observateur éclairé qui joignait à l'intérêt d'un père le sang-froid d'un *philosophe*?" (561; V, 3). [During my first pregnancy, in fear of all the duties I would have to fulfill and of all the care I would have to give, I often imparted my worries to M. de Wolmar. What better guide could I take for this matter than an enlightened observer who reconciled the concern of a father with the controlled attitude of a *philosophe*?] As a disciple of her husband, Julie harmonizes both roles (husband and *philosophe*) and attributes to the *philosophe* the ability to know what is best for women. Pregnancy, as a particular moment in the life of a woman, is not discussed, but rather what follows it. At stake is the larger issue of the rearing of men, and not

the specific preoccupations and needs of the expectant mother. Her concerns—maternal “duties” and “care” for the infant—reflect those of male *philosophes* and their thoughts on the role to be played by women in the educational process. Mrs. Henley has a very different position on the question, as illustrated by the discussion on breast-feeding.

During her pregnancy, ridden by anxieties about nursing, Mrs. Henley focuses on female physicality, and especially on the physicality of motherhood, to address sexuality and reproduction from the woman's point of view. She debates within herself whether or not to breast-feed her child and (rationally) considers the pros and cons: against it, the burden and fatigue involved and the damage to a woman's figure, and in its favor, the pleasure of bonding with the child and above all, her sense of duty joined to the “humiliation d'être regardée comme incapable et indigne de remplir ce devoir” (119) [humiliation of being considered unable and unworthy to fulfill this duty]. She feels that her body escapes her control through the moral pressure placed on mothers for the well-being of their children. Her attempt to hold a dialogue with her husband leads to a sermon, which once more reinforces her fears and hurts her more than it comforts her:

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. (120) [According to him nothing in the world could excuse a mother from the first and most sacred of her duties, except the danger of harm to her child through a defect in her temperament or in her personality, and he told me that his intention was to take the advice of his friend, doctor M., in order to know whether my extreme liveliness and my frequent impatience would justify choosing a wet-nurse. Not a single word about me, about my health, about my pleasure.]

As physiocrats and *philosophes* warned against a decline in the population, a new valorization of children's lives (also preached by doctors³⁰) engendered in large part the doctrine of motherhood that prevailed in the second half of the eighteenth century. Rousseau made it readily available to those reading literature, particularly in passages of *Emile*.³¹ Mrs. Henley fully measures the consequences of the double-edged argument borrowed from Rousseau, who valorized motherhood at the expense of the woman's other needs (emotional, physical, etc.). It is precisely because her role was seen as so crucial that a woman was considered unable to fulfill it alone and had to be placed under a competent authority.³² Mrs.

Henley's new responsibility as the mother of a priceless child, so well delineated by her husband, is accompanied by a loss of self-esteem. In correlating Mr. Henley with a *philosophe* who seeks the advice of his ally, the doctor, Charrière expresses serious doubts regarding the benefits for women of these recently introduced educational principles that deprived them of control over their own bodies. Such discussions, in presenting the Rousseauian model as a possible source of anxiety for women and of tension in a family, make the harmony of Clarens suspect and unveil its dark side. Ultimately, what threatens the Henleys' relationship is the Rousseauian philosophy.

Through its terrifying perfection, Hollow Park appears as a territory of strangeness that underscores Mrs. Henley's alienation: "Je ne vous parlerai pas non plus de tout ce que je fais pour me rendre la campagne intéressante. Ce séjour est comme son maître, tout y est trop bien; il n'y a rien à changer, rien qui demande mon activité ni mes soins" (118). [I will not talk to you any more about everything I did to make the country interesting for me. This dwelling is like its master, everything is too nice; there is nothing to change, nothing requiring my activity or my care.] As a woman from the city, she is a stranger in a rural environment which she does not understand and where she feels out of place. Any attempt on her part to contribute to her new environment leads to unfortunate events. Even her chambermaid disturbs the status quo by attracting the attention of a young farmer and breaking up his marriage to the daughter of Hollow Park's housekeeper. The moving about of old furniture and the removal of the portrait of the first Mrs. Henley from her room bear witness to her effort not to be a stranger any more in what should be her house: "Je ne dois pas être une étrangère jusque dans ma chambre" (106). [I must not be a stranger in my own room.] She fails in this endeavor, and in her last letter, concedes that her estrangement from her husband has reached its apex. After another excruciating conversation during which he announces his refusal of a prestigious position at court and in the parliament, Mrs. Henley admits to being torn between "l'estime que m'arrachait tant de modération, de raison, de droiture dans mon mari et l'horreur de me voir étrangère à ses sentiments, si fort exclue de ses pensées, si inutile, si isolée" (122) [the esteem forced from me by so much moderation, reason, right-mindedness in my husband and the horror of feeling so estranged from his feelings, so excluded from his thoughts, so useless, so isolated]. The destructive power of their marriage leads to the dissolution of her self, inscribed in the fainting fit that follows this moment of unbearable internal tension.

Her growing awareness of being a stranger is paralleled by her inability to secure a stable position in the privacy of her home. Her correspon-

dence opens with a fear of being identified by her husband with *Le mari sentimental's* selfish Mme Bompré, a sign that her self-image rests on very unstable grounds. Subsequently, she becomes haunted by images of other women with whom she compares herself, only to reinforce her sense of failure and displacement. In the privacy of her home, she replaces Mr. Henley's first wife, whose portrait hangs in her bedroom, and is very conscious of her inadequacy as a substitute mother. In her social circle, she feels an absolute misfit in the presence of Lady Bridgewater, magnificent through her elegance and simplicity, and of Miss Clairville, a young and modest country woman to whom her husband pays much attention. Their seemingly superior company subjects her to a vertigo of comparison which casts her into a well of self-loathing. The ball scene, during which Mr. Henley criticizes the dress her aunt sent from London, attests to her identity crisis: "Je me déplaisais, j'étais mal à mon aise" (115). [I disliked myself, I felt uneasy.]

Under these circumstances, Mrs. Henley's correspondence appears as the only means to break her solitude and her silence while scrutinizing the causes of her alienation. The confession of absolute loneliness, "Je suis seule, personne ne sent avec moi" (107) [I am alone, nobody feels with me], echoes Claire's situation at the end of *Julie*: "Je suis seule au milieu de tout le monde" (744; VI, 13) [I am alone amid everyone], allowing "a glimpse [here] of the unspeakable solitude at the heart of all relationships that every other page of the book has worked to transcend or conceal or deny," to quote Tony Tanner.³³ Through this line written from Claire to Saint-Preux after Julie's death, Tanner explicates a fundamental component of Rousseau's novel: idealization. In Charrière's novel, denial and concealment (through idealized situations and characters) give way to a lucid confrontation with the belief that only family life will bring back order and happiness. The utopia of the perfect husband in the perfect home is replaced by a rigorous observation of the cruel absence of communication in the family. She achieves this through a plot that leaves no room for complacency, and by the same token, is deprived of a major characteristic used (by men) to describe women's fiction: the use of imagination. Repeating a truism about women's talents in fiction writing, Choderlos de Laclos writes in a famous epistolary exchange with Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni:

Peut-être alors, conviendront-ils [les lecteurs] que c'est aux femmes seules qu'appartiennent cette sensibilité précieuse, cette imagination facile et riante qui embellit tout ce qu'elle touche, et crée les objets tels qu'ils devraient être; mais que les hommes condamnés à un travail plus sévère, ont toujours suffisamment bien fait quand ils ont rendu la nature avec exactitude et fidélité. [Perhaps then, will they agree that

women alone possess this precious sensibility, this easy and cheerful imagination that embellishes everything it touches, and creates objects as they should be; but men, who are condemned to a harsher labor, have always acquitted themselves when they have rendered nature exactly and faithfully.]³⁴

On the contrary, Charrière refuses to play with imagination or to embellish her story. It is not fortuitous that Clarens crumbles to give way to Hollow Park. Testing Rousseau's ideals in a hypothetical marriage, Charrière cannot protect the woman against the negative impact of doctrinaire self-control. After all, being human involves uncontrollable emotions.³⁵ In contrast to Rousseau, who idealizes reason and self control in *Julie's* marriage narrative while creating imaginary models and situations, Charrière condemns reason by paradoxically discarding from her novel's plot anything that would cater to readers' imaginations.

Even Mrs. Henley's attempt to dissect and question her lack of control—her correspondence—comes to an end. Witness to her deep identity crisis, her last letter simultaneously announces her prospect of giving life and repeatedly hints at her possible death. As an apparently open-ended conclusion to the novel, this ultimate message leaves us with the bitter-sweet taste of a puzzling alternative: “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” (122). [I am only a woman and I will not take my life, I will not be courageous enough; if I become a mother, I hope not to want death; but sorrow also kills. In one year, in two years, you will hear, I hope, that I am reasonable and happy, or that I am no more.] If the alternative to death is happiness (based on reason), happiness becomes a simulacre, and acquires a macabre flavor. This is not surprising since the novel emphasizes the inadequacy of reasonable behavior and its inability to secure satisfactory relationships, particularly in the private realm of the family. Mrs. Henley's acceptance of self-control, through the permanent suppression of affects and emotions, will only confirm the erasure of her self, by annihilating her ability to quietly challenge her husband's order. In *Mistriss Henley*, neither disease nor accident nor death-bed scene is necessary to signify the death of a woman. Charrière resorts to no external devices, and relies on the internal dynamics of the Henley family. Susan Lanser is right to state that the alternative “marriage or death” gives way to the collusion “marriage as death” (53) and that “*Mistriss Henley's* apparent ‘open’ ending is not open at all. *Mistriss Henley* the character and *Mistriss Henley* the text, court death in order to make utterly clear that marriage in Mr. Henley's

patriarchal terms — the terms of the heroine's text — is no life at all" (54).³⁶ Mrs. Henley's death — symbolic or "real" — prepared in the quiet, confined, and smothering atmosphere of Hollow Park sparks fundamental questions regarding what might be gained by women from the reforms suggested by Rousseau and other men in the preceding decades of the century. Heiress of Enlightenment ideas and ideals, Chaière participates in the ongoing debate about such issues as the extent of freedom in the choice of a spouse, the conditions of a harmonious married life, and the education of children: regarding marriage matters, freedom of choice is no panacea, and in domestic affairs "reason" surely cannot claim victory.

As a polemical novel, *Mistriss Henley* entered a much wider debate than its framing publication (*Le mari sentimental*) suggests. Reading in pairs (through a parallel with Julie's marriage narrative) proves rewarding as it highlights the far-reaching implications of the novel. In taking readers into a field of scrutiny that French novels (by women and men) had neglected until Rousseau and in radicalizing this new option (through the centrality of marriage as a personal relationship between two individuals and the integration of issues dear to Rousseau in this "trivial" plot), Charrière denounces the pretense of happiness implied by Julie's conjugal practices and shows the possible fallacies of Julie's idealized model of private relationships. The price exerted by idealization is tragic: the sacrifice of the woman's self. Remarkably, though confined to the domestic realm, the novel opens outward on a public debate concerning women's private role and status. Far from being limiting, Charrière's choice of such an intimate plot in *Lettres de Mistriss Henley* vindicates the right of the private woman to enact a quiet, but pervasive, revolution.

NOTES

- 1 Nicolas Sébastien Roch de Chamfort, *Products of Perfected Civilization*, trans. W. S. Merwin (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984).
- 2 Isabelle de Charrière, *Lettres de Mistriss Henley, œuvres complètes* 8 (Amsterdam: Van Oorschot; Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1980). All references in the text come from this edition. Except where otherwise indicated, translations are mine. The term "tradition" refers not so much to the novel's form (epistolary and "monovocal," quite frequent in the period) as to its plot.
- 3 A history of its publication can be found in the introduction to the above edition. Following a first publication in Geneva in 1784, the Parisian edition appeared without her authorization in 1785 and, in the *Journal de Paris* of

May 1786, she disavowed more particularly the apocryphal "Justification de M. Henley," in which Mr. Henley expresses remorse about the death of his wife subsequent to childbirth. The Parisian edition is anonymous and none of the reviewers seems very much concerned with the identity of the author(s). The *Année littéraire* does not raise the question. In the *Mercure de France*, the novelists are differentiated, since the reviewer refers to the author of *Le mari sentimental* as the author of *Camille, ou Lettres de deux filles de ce siècle* (without mentioning any name) and attributes *Lettres de Mistriss Henley* to Mme de C. . . . de Z. Even recently, the confusion about authorship has led Béatrice Didier to attribute both novels to Isabelle de Charrière in *L'écriture-femme* (Paris: P. U. F., 1981).

- 4 *Mercure de France*, no. 16 (22 avril 1786), 186 (republished by Slatkine Reprints, 1974).
- 5 *Année littéraire* 8, lettre VII (1785): 270.
- 6 The polemical aspect of the relationship between the two novels recalls legal briefs called "factums" written by lawyers in defense of their clients. They were usually presented in pairs to the judge, since each, representing a different party, gave a very different version of the facts. The judicial metaphor is also suggested by Marie-Paule Laden, who sees *Mistriss Henley* as a self trial: "Quel aimable et cruel petit livre": Madame de Charrière's *Mistriss Henley*," *French Forum* 11 (September, 1986): 287-99.
- 7 In 1790, Charrière published an *Eloge de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* that was first written for a literary competition organized by the Académie française; she was involved with her friend DuPeyrou in the polemic surrounding the publication of the second part of *The Confessions*. Throughout her correspondence there are numerous references to Rousseau's works.
- 8 "Les gens du bel air, les femmes à la mode, les grands, les militaires: voilà les acteurs de tous vos romans. Le raffinement du goût des villes, les maximes de la cour, l'appareil du luxe, la morale épicurienne: voilà les leçons qu'ils prêchent, et les préceptes qu'ils donnent." *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, Seconde Préface (Paris: Bibl. de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1961), 2:19. All references in the text come from this edition. [People of high rank, fashionable women, nobility, military men: here are the protagonists of all your novels. The affect-edness of city taste, maxims of the court, luxury, epicurian morals: here are the lessons that they preach and the precepts that they convey.] All translations of *Julie* are mine. The only modern translation is abridged: *Julie or the New Eloise*, trans. and abridged by Judith H. McDowell (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968).
- 9 Nancy K. Miller, "Men's Reading, Women's Writing: Gender and the Rise of the Novel," *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988): 48-49. In this article, Nancy Miller discusses canon formation using Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* as a paradigm for the way literary historians have treated women's writing.
- 10 Among others, Gagnebin and Raymond, in notes of the Pléiade edition of Rousseau's *œuvres complètes*, Joseph Boone in *Tradition Counter Tradition*

- (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 43–45, and Jean-Louis Lecercle in *Rousseau et l'art du roman* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1969), chapter 3.
- 11 "Il n'a pas pu éviter de confier à ses personnages les thèmes qui l'obsédaient, à tel point que ce livre a pu être qualifié de synthèse de sa pensée." *Rousseau et l'art du roman*, 73, with a reference to M. B. Ellis, *Julie or La Nouvelle Héloïse: A Synthesis of Rousseau's Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1949). For reactions of Rousseau's contemporaries to *Julie*, see Lecercle, 72.
 - 12 "Quant à l'autre roman [*Mistriss Henley*], insignifiant comme peinture de mœurs et comme intrigue, il reflète d'une façon intéressante l'état moral de l'auteur à cette époque de sa vie. *Mistriss Henley ou la femme sentimentale* n'est guère autre chose que la plainte de son âme endolorie. On ne peut comprendre *Mistriss Henley* que si l'on a lu le *Mari sentimental* de Samuel de Constant, dont elle est en quelque sorte la contre-partie." *Madame de Charrière et ses amis*, abridged edition (Paris: Attinger, 1927), 149 (two-volume original 1905). Other perspectives have been offered more recently in doctoral dissertations by Teresa Lluch Myintoo (Berkeley, 1980), Christabel Braunrot (Yale, 1973), and Sigyn Minier-Birk (Connecticut, 1977), and most recently by Susan S. Lanser in "Courting Death: *Roman*, *romantisme*, and *Mistress Henley's* Narrative Practices," *Eighteenth Century Life* 13, n.s. 1 (February 1989). Lanser's article, which reads *Mistriss Henley* in relation to Charrière's *Caliste ou lettres écrites de Lausanne*, provides an excellent reading of both novels.
 - 13 Laden points out that "Charrière's fiction falls chronologically between two important bodies of correspondence—with Constant d'Herménches, which ends in 1775, and subsequently with his nephew Benjamin Constant, whom she met during a trip in Paris in 1786—it is as if her fictional output relieved her need to confide in her friends" (290).
 - 14 The most thorough treatment of this question can be found in Georges May's *Le dilemme du roman au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: P. U. F., 1963).
 - 15 This aspect of Charrière's prose-fiction has been widely recognized, as is clear from the titles of articles such as: Suzanne Muhlemann, "Madame de Charrière ou un regard lucide," *Documentatieblad* 27–29 (June 1975): 141–57, or S. Dresden, "Madame de Charrière et le goût du témoin," *Neophilologus* 45 (October 1961): 261–78.
 - 16 Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Familles. Parenté, maison, sexualité dans l'ancienne société* (1976; reprint, Paris: Seuil, 1984); James Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).
 - 17 In spite of slight divergences, the freedom of choice of a partner remains one of the major claims of male Enlightenment thinkers regarding marriage.
 - 18 Numerous variations on themes such as the absolute and abusive authority of parents opposed to their daughter's marriage with the man of her choice, as well as the arranged and forced marriage with a man of their choice and consequential illicit love, are discussed in Pierre Fauchery's monumental thesis, *La destinée féminine dans le roman européen du dix-huitième siècle*.

- 1713–1807. *Essai de gynécomythie romanesque* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972), 132–38.
- 19 Marivaux's *Vie de Marianne* constitutes an extreme example, since the narrative is interrupted as soon as a suitor proposes marriage to Marianne.
- 20 She compares the traveling lord with Rousseau's Lord John from *Emile*, Book V (Pléiade, 4:853–54; Bloom translation, 470–71). This explicit reference in the early pages of the novel substantiates Charrière's unnoticed dialogue with the *philosophe*.
- 21 The fact that the novel is set in England may not be fortuitous, since continental observers contended that the English enjoyed more freedom in marriage matters. Lawrence Stone points out that "foreign visitors in the mid- and late eighteenth century were unanimous in their conviction that the English enjoyed a greater freedom of choice of a marriage partner and greater companionship in marriage than on the Continent." *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500–1800*, abridged ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 214.
- 22 "Le mariage de convenance, en revanche, assujettit la femme puisqu'il transforme le contrat entre familles, de type patriarcal, en un lien conjugal inter-individuel, et dénué de toute dimension socio-politique. En privatisant ce lien, on rejette la femme hors de la vie publique et on la condamne exclusivement à la vie domestique" — Elisabeth de Fontenay, "Pour Emile et par Emile, Sophie ou l'invention du ménage," *Les temps modernes* 358 (1976): 1792. Erica Harth, in "The Virtue of Love: Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act," similarly questions the progressive status of love-based marriage and concludes that it entails dependency for the woman. *Cultural Critique* 9 (Spring 1988): 3123–54.
- 23 In *Lettres de Madame de Sancerre*, despite many comments on unsuccessful unions, Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni summarizes the happy ending of her novel in one sentence: "Malgré la différence de leurs caractères, ces deux aimables femmes rendirent leurs maris également heureux" — *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: 1786), 6:338. [In spite of their different personalities, these two lovable women made their husbands equally happy.]
- 24 See Fauchery, 378–396.
- 25 In the section "Le mariage dix-huitième siècle" (368–69), Fauchery presents adultery as a French specialty in fiction. Madame de Clèves in Lafayette's *La princesse de Clèves*, the Marquise in Crébillon fils' *Lettres de la marquise de M*****, the Presidente de Tourvel in *Liaisons dangereuses* all provide vivid examples of attempts to resist adultery.
- 26 Put differently by Jean Starobinski: "*La Nouvelle Héloïse* is an 'ideological' novel. Happily for the work, however, the quest for a moral synthesis does not prevent constant slippage into passionate ambivalence. It is highly significant that the success of Wolmar, the novel's rational character, is threatened by psychological ambiguities that Rousseau constantly finds in himself and that are represented in the novel by Saint-Preux and Julie. Thus the enticement of failure counterbalances the aspiration to happiness, and desire for

- punishment coexists with the will to justification"—*Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 115.
- 27 From the outset, we know that Mr. Henley is looking for a mother for his five-year-old daughter: "II me parla de sa fille et du désir qu'il avait de lui donner, non une gouvernante, non une belle-mère, mais une mère" (103). [He told me about his daughter and about his desire to give her not a governess, not a step-mother, but a mother.]
 - 28 This issue is treated extensively in *Emile*, Book II (Pléiade, 4: 351–57; Bloom's translation, 112–16).
 - 29 In the letter on education, Julie insists that "je ne fais que suivre de point en point le système de M. de Wolmar; et plus j'avance, plus j'éprouve combien il est excellent et juste, et combien il s'accorde avec le mien" (437; V, 3). [I only follow scrupulously M. de Wolmar's system; and the further I go, the more I feel how excellent and just it is, and how much it matches my own system.]
 - 30 Tissot in *Avis au peuple sur la santé* (1761), Raulin in *De la conservation des enfants* (1767), and Buchan in *Médecine domestique* (1775) combined medical and hygienic advice with educational principles. Much information can be found in the chapter "The Preservation of Children" in Jacques Donzelot's *The Policing of Families* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).
 - 31 In the first book of *Emile*, Rousseau contributes to the age-old debate about the advantages and drawbacks of maternal breast-feeding. He defends the old idea that milk can transmit passions to the child and therefore prefers a healthy nurse to a spoiled mother (4:257; Bloom, 45). But from a moral point of view, however, no hesitation is possible: "Mais que les mères dignent nourrir leurs enfants, les mœurs vont se réformer d'elles-mêmes, les sentiments de la nature se réveiller dans tous les cœurs, l'Etat va se repeupler; ce premier point, ce point seul va tout réunir" (4:258). [But let mothers deign to nurse their children, morals will reform themselves, nature's sentiments will be awakened in every heart, the state will be repopled. This first point, this point alone will bring everything back together (Bloom, 46).]
 - 32 In *Emile*, the competent authority is not a doctor but the narrator-governor: "Au nouveau-né il faut une nourrice. Si la mère consent à remplir son devoir, à la bonne heure; on lui donnera ses directions par écrit: car cet avantage a son contrepoids et tient le gouverneur un peu plus éloigné de son élève (4:272). [For the newly born a nurse is required. If the mother consents to perform her duty, very well. She will be given written instructions, for this advantage has its counterpoise and keeps the governor at something more of a distance from his pupil (Bloom, 56).]
 - 33 *Adultery in the Novel. Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 178.
 - 34 "Correspondance entre Mme Riccoboni et M. de Laclos," *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Bibl. de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1951), 759. I use Nancy Miller's translation of this passage (50).
 - 35 In *Emile*, Rousseau's approval of the rational husband is spelled out in the

governor's stand on virtue through self-control: "Qu'est-ce donc que l'homme vertueux? C'est celui qui sait vaincre ses affections. Car alors il suit sa raison, sa conscience, il fait son devoir, il se tient dans l'ordre et rien ne l'en peut écarter Maintenant sois libre en effet; apprends à devenir ton propre maître; commande à ton cœur, ô Emile, et tu seras vertueux" (4:818). [Who then is the virtuous man? It is he who knows how to conquer his affections; for then he follows his reason and his conscience; he does his duty; he keeps himself in order, and nothing can make him deviate from it. . . . Now be really free. Learn to become your own master. Command your heart, Emile, and you will be virtuous (Bloom, 445).]

- 36 In the alternative death/marriage one can recognize the categories "dysphoric"/"euphoric" used by Nancy Miller in *The Heroine's Text* to characterize female destinies in eighteenth-century male fiction. Charrière's "unfinished" novels were criticized by Germaine de Stael in a letter to Charrière dated "27 août 1793" (*Œuvres complètes* 4:162–63). The "openness" of her novels and tales has been reassessed by feminist critics who have challenged the idea that open-ended narratives fail. See Susan K. Jackson, "The Novels of Isabelle de Charrière, or, a Woman's Work is Never Done," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 14 (1985): 299–306, and Elizabeth MacArthur, "Devious Narratives: Refusal of Closure in Two Eighteenth-Century Epistolary Novels," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 21 (1987): 1–20.