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FEMMES GALANTES, FEMMES SAVANTES: LITERARY EXPRESSIONS OF WOMEN'S SEXUALITY AND MENTORSHIP IN THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A Dissertation in

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ABSTRACT

Femmes Galantes, Femmes Savantes explores instances of woman-to-woman mentorship in *ars erotica* – or the erotic arts – in eighteenth-century French and Francophone literature. More specifically, this project asks how these mentorships might provide a means of defying and manipulating racist/sexist/heteronormative notions about women's sexuality. The eighteenth-century is an especially salient time for identifying different forms of women's subjugation, as the rapidly growing notion of white bourgeois "virtuous womanhood" in France relegated women to the domestic sphere through expectations of marriage and motherhood, limiting their participation in public life. On the other hand, women of color in colonized spaces such as Saint-Domingue and Senegal faced racist and sexist stereotypes which defined Black and mixed-race women as lascivious seductresses of European men, increasing their vulnerability to white male sexual aggression that was ubiquitous in slave colonies. Ideas such as these about women's bodies and sexuality became widespread throughout the eighteenth-century, permeating medical, literary, and philosophical publications. My project identifies how mentorships in *ars erotica* help female characters in fiction to resist these heteropatriarchal/racist/sexist ideas about women's bodies and sexuality. They accomplish this through training each other in the courtesan arts – a term I use to describe the lifestyle, practices, and sexual economy of courtesans (elite prostitutes) which I consider in this project to be an erotic artform.

My framing of *ars erotica* in this project is inspired by Michel Foucault's notion of *ars erotica* as a truth-seeking practice in which knowledge about pleasure is learned through experience. I also engage Tanya Augsburg's notion of an aesthetic feminist erotic art that subverts the heteronormative male gaze, and Sanjay K. Gautam's consideration of courtesans as performers of the erotic. Considering these three frameworks, my project's contribution to the field is twofold. First, I propose a new theorization of a feminist *ars erotica* as a liberatory practice in which knowledge about pleasure and resistance to heteropatriarchal/racist/sexist oppression is shared through woman-to-woman mentorship and is expressed through courtesan performance – with "performance" being modeled through the courtesan persona, courtesan's writing, singing, and self-adornment/fashion. Second, my project engages with a variety of genres including two libertine/erotic novels, a series of Creole courtesan songs, travel narratives, and a serial fiction. Most of these texts – with the exception of the courtesan songs – are male-authored and appeal to the white, male, heterosexual gaze on the female body. I argue that the *femme galante* helps to subvert this gaze as the terms *Galante* and *galanterie* take on specifically gendered connotations in the eighteenth century, often used to describe women of "ill repute" (prostitutes and courtesans). Therefore, my reading of these texts suggests a re-framing of their content through the lens of the *femme galante,* which centers women's stories and female intimacy through a focus on woman-to-woman mentorship in *ars erotica.*

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By way of conclusion to these remarks, I add a final shout-out to my sister through the inclusion of what has become our shared mantra which symbolizes, for us, both endings and beginnings: ***In Omnia Paratus.***

INTRODUCTION

Feminist *Ars Erotica* in Eighteenth-Century French and Francophone Literature

"Vous me croyez femme, et vite, vite, vous voilà à mes pieds. La première idée d'un homme est de penser qu'une femme l'attend à ses pieds, le désire à ses pieds, qu'on obtient tout d'elle en s'y prosternant" (qtd. in Kaplan 928).

The above quote was written anonymously by Jeanne Marie Riccoboni in a heated epistolary exchange with the editor of the eighteenth-century periodical *Le Monde,* Jean-François de Bastide.[1] Within Riccoboni's criticism of Bastide, there is an air of condescension, the tone of a woman seeking to be taken seriously in the male-dominated world of literary and journalistic publication. What Riccoboni is insinuating in her response to Bastide is that men believe that women only seek flattery – to have men *falling at their feet.* The implication of this is that flattery is a woman's top priority, and men can obtain any and everything from a woman through their cajolery. Riccoboni's critical tone in her response suggests that women do – and should – seek much more than simple platitudes from men and, in fact, may not seek anything from men at all. What women want, instead, is to be taken seriously. Riccoboni, in her witty and condemnatory response to Bastide is, in other words, iterating early feminist critiques of the kinds of

[1] This quote was taken from Marijn S. Kaplan's article in which she discusses this epistolary exchange and its feminist overtones in detail.

patriarchal social ideologies that developed throughout the eighteenth century in France. She highlights, through this simple yet powerful scrutiny of men's expectations of women, the simplistic and inferior position that patriarchal society prescribes to and expects of women. In so doing, she implies that women should expect – and perhaps demand – more.

Riccoboni, however, was not discussing the positionality of all women in eighteenth-century France. Indeed, her critique of men's expectations of women is focused primarily on the increasingly dominant figure of femininity during this era – the virtuous bourgeois woman. This figure of "ideal womanhood" became, in the eighteenth century, and later in the nineteenth century, the standard by which women were meant to strive. This dissertation examines how women who engage in what was sometimes considered the lowest form of work – prostitution – might resist patriarchal notions of virtuous womanhood in the eighteenth century that consider women's social and legal positionality to be subordinate to men. Specifically, this dissertation will identify instances of woman-to-woman sexual mentorship in *ars erotica* – or erotic artforms – that appear in literature throughout the eighteenth century. These mentorships function as a tool for identifying how fictional texts provide a medium for depicting an alternative reality – one in which women manipulate heteropatriarchal stereotypes in order to achieve a social, financial, and/or legal positionality that is superior to that of both the men in their lives as well as the "virtuous" women to whom they are constantly compared. The primary literary figure that I examine is the courtesan – an elite prostitute and socialite who transforms men's flattery and libidinous desire into an opportunity for financial and social gain. Courtesans demonstrate a type of agency in their professional

and personal lives that was denied to many women in eighteenth-century France. The literature that I examine in this dissertation depicts not only examples of women evading the patriarchal institutions of marriage and motherhood that often limited women's social mobility and financial autonomy, but also how they taught other women to do so through mentorship in *ars erotica.*

Ars Erotica

Ars erotica, a notion of pleasure, sexuality, and mentorship famously theorized by Michel Foucault in the first volume of *Histoire de la Sexualité*, serves as a theoretical framework for this dissertation. Foucault argues that *ars erotica* represents an approach to pleasure that stands in opposition to the Western world's focus on *scientia sexualis.* The latter approach to sex and pleasure, according to Foucault, has roots in the West's focus on the ritual of the confession to seek out the truth about sex. Though it can take many forms – a penitent confesses to a priest, a student confesses to a teacher, a patient confesses to a doctor – the confession ritual, argues Foucault, has become the West's primary discursive tool for identifying sexual practices.[2] Within the discursive structure of confession exists a power dynamic in which the person confessing is subordinate to the confessor – the person who hears the transgressions. The confessor, in turn, interprets and explains the truth of the transgressions to the person confessing. Discovering the truth

[2] Fouccault describes the confessional ritual as a form of truth-seeking explaining that, "l'aveu a été, et demeure, encore aujourd'hui, la matrice générale qui régit la production du discours vrai sur le sexe" (84).

about sex, specifically, following the methodology of *scientia sexualis,* is a two-step process:

> S'il faut avouer, ce n'est pas seulement parce que celui auquel on avoue aurait le pouvoir de pardonner, de consoler et de diriger. C'est que le travail de la vérité à produire, si on veut scientifiquement le valider, doit passer par cette relation […] Celui qui écoute ne sera pas simplement le maître du pardon, le juge qui condamne ou tient quitte; il sera le maître de la vérité. Sa fonction est herméneutique. (Foucault 89)

Scientia sexualis, therefore, leads to the judgement of sin or pathologizing of sexual deviancy through the discursive structure of sexual confession.[3] Its focus is on perversions and taboos that evoke fears and anxieties about sex, especially in subversive forms. Whereas *scientia sexualis* presents a discursive practice in which the "master of the truth" interprets sexual confessions and is placed in a position of authority over the confessor, in *ars erotica,* the truth of sex is drawn from pleasure itself.[4] Knowledge about pleasure is shared with the student by a master of the erotic arts, but in Foucault's formulation this "master" is a mentor, a guide towards pleasure rather than a judge of

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[3] Foucault argues that scientia sexualis is rooted in the practice of confession that started with the church and was transferred to parents, and then to medicine to medicine through doctor/patient – each of which designate an authority of the listener such as a priest/parent/doctor (72).

[4] Foucault describes that *ars erotica* it is not defined through an absolute law of permissibility or taboo. He explians that,"dans l'art érotique, la vérité est extraite du plaisir lui-même, pris comme pratique et recueilli comme expérience; ce n'est pas par rapport à une loi absolue du permis et du défendu, ce n'est point par référence à un critère d'utilité, que le plaisir est pris en compte; mais; d'abord et avant tout par rapport à lui-même, il y est à connaître comme plaisir, donc selon son intensité, sa qualité spécifique, sa durée, ses réverbérations dans le corps et l'âme" (Foucault 77).

sexual aberration: "il guide avec un savoir et une sévérité sans faille, le cheminement du disciple" (Foucault 77). In *ars erotica,* experience replaces the discursive practice of *scientia sexualis.* There is no ritual of confession, but rather a didactic interaction in which the mentor – the master of the erotic arts – leads the mentee towards knowledge about sex. Though Foucault describes that this knowledge is shared between mentor and mentee through the experience of pleasure itself, he does not specify what exactly he means here by "experience."

In this dissertation, I contend that knowledge in *ars erotica* can be shared through the experience of physical sexual pleasure between mentor and mentee, or from the mentee learning through observation – meaning the witnessing of erotic acts of the mentor and/or listening to the mentor's stories about their erotic experiences. In the latter case, the mentee learning through observation denotes, at times, some form of discursive practice through conversations with the mentor. Although Foucault insists that *ars erotica* evades discursive structures, I contend that when discursive practices manifest in the erotic arts, they do not take on the same structure as the confessional ritual seen in *scientia sexualis.* This is because when a mentor converses with a mentee in *ars erotica*, there is no hierarchical structure in which either interlocuter judges the experience of the other. Instead, these discursive moments of mentorship in *ars erotica* lead to some form of sexual experience such as arousal, masturbation, or sexual intercourse for either or both parties. In this sense, the discursive elements of *ars erotica* lead to a visceral experience that is the product of the mentor/mentee's conversations.

In addition to the ambiguous nature of Foucault's definition of "experience" through which knowledge is shared in *ars erotica,* it is important to note that Foucault's

definition of this sexual mentorship assumes that the mentor – the master of the erotic arts – is male. Where Foucault excludes women from the role of the mentor in *ars erotica,* I have found in the literature examined in this dissertation examples of a feminine form of *ars erotica* in which mentorships in the erotic arts exist uniquely between women. Not only are women placed in the position of the mentor, but they are also uniquely sharing knowledge of the erotic arts with other women so that they may, too, share this artform with others. Additionally, these mentorships between women help them to use the erotic arts to resist various patriarchal and imperialist oppressions in eighteenth-century France, Saint-Domingue, and Senegal. It is through these forms of resistance that I frame the mentorships within this literature as depicting a feminist *ars erotica* which is not only a truth-seeking practice, but also a liberatory practice.

Foucault's lack of attention to women in the *ars erotica* mentorship relationship has led to a lack of scholarly attention to a feminist framework of his theorization of mentorship in the erotic arts as a truth-seeking and/or liberatory practice. Feminist performance scholar and arts curator Tanya Augsburg, however, explores what a feminist aesthetic erotic art might encompass. Augsburg examines how contemporary explicit feminist sexual imagery in visual and performance arts might depict a feminist *ars erotica,* which she broadly defines as "the full range of affirmative sexual aesthetic expressions, practices, identities, and cultures opposed to patriarchal sexual oppression and violence" (496). Augsburg's analysis of explicit art shows how queer female desire expressed in visual media resists heteronormative assumptions that erotic art only serves the cis-hetero male gaze. In literary studies, Carina D. Pasquesi identifies how *ars erotica* manifests in Elizabeth Stoddard's nineteenth-century English novel *The*

Morgenson's through the main female character's resistance to Victorian-era notions of romantic love, family life, and domesticity. Outside of Western literary studies, Sanjay K. Gautam analyses feminist *ars erotica* through representations of courtesans and courtesan performance in the Kāmasūtra, arguing that courtesans in this iconic text shift between arts and erotics and embody the notion of erotics as theater, or performance. Whether this artform appears in visual arts, performance arts, literature, or another artistic medium, a feminist *ars erotica,* at its core, is an art of resistance. Like Gautam, my focus on *ars erotica* in French and Francophone literature focuses on an artform that is performative but also aesthetic – the courtesan arts. Although not all the women characters that I examine in this dissertation claim the title of "courtesan," the artform that they practice – that is, their way of dressing, speaking, and soliciting patrons – reflects a courtesan art.

Artistic expression is inextricable from courtesan life because, as Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon remind us, "for courtesans, art is never an extracurricular activity but one that permeates their lives. Always negotiating a complex dynamic, courtesans are forever producing themselves and being reproduced by the fantasies of their consumers" (8). Performance art is linked to how courtesans solicit patrons and how they present themselves in society. Aesthetically, courtesans dress and adorn themselves in specific ways that illicit social attention, especially from potential patrons. It is likewise for this reason that I refer to courtesans' clients as patrons because they are both patrons of a service as well as patrons of an art through their relationships with courtesans.[5] Unlike in

[5] I use the term "patron" throughout the dissertation with the exception of chapter four in which I use the terms "husband," "partner," or "suitor," to refer to the relationships that the *signares* had with European men. This is because these relationships were referred to as marriages in the texts that I examine. I use these

other forms of art, the courtesan arts vacillate between what is performance and what is reality, what is private and what is public. The erotic lies at the center of this delicate balance between art and reality because "for the courtesan, appearance is reality or, to be more precise, the duality between appearance and reality is turned into the source of a new kind of life […] Erotics assumes this duality and puts it into productive use" (Gautam 15). My theorization of a feminist *ars erotica* combines Augsburg and Stoddard's emphasis on feminist resistance and Gautam's identification of the courtesan as the central figure in the theatre of erotics, with Foucault's notion of *ars erotica* as a mentorship practice in which knowledge is passed on from mentor to mentee. The feminist *ars erotica* in the literature I examine can be identified through woman-to-woman mentorships in the erotic arts. These mentorships reflect a didactic and artistic practice of resistance to patriarchal, imperial, and racist oppressions in the eighteenth-century Francosphere.

In addition to the above-mentioned theorizations, I am inspired by Audre Lorde's "Uses of The Erotic: The Erotic as power," in my conceptualization of a feminist *ars erotica*. Specifically, I consider Lorde's emphasis on the importance of feeling in the use of the erotic as a source of women's power to be a crucial function of a feminist *ars erotica.* She explains this feeling of the erotic for women as follows: "the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (53). Recently, Caleb Ward has analyzed the notion of feeling in Lorde's work, noting that, "her account is not focused

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terms in chapter four to be consistent with what is reflected in the historical and literary archive that make up my investigation into the *signares.*

only on sexual intimacy or pleasure, but on a quality of feeling that can emerge from any creative undertaking" (3). This feeling, in Lorde's notion of the erotic, is one which has been suppressed in Western patriarchal social discourses and oppressive structures that seek to limit how women define, experience, and benefit from sexuality and sexual pleasure. However, the feeling that Lorde associates with the erotic, as Ward points out, goes beyond sexual pleasure. It is a feeling that Lorde describes as, "an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire" (54). This notion of the erotic as a feeling of satisfaction that can manifest through creative undertakings and lead to further aspirations for women is at the core of a feminist *ars erotica*. This is why, in the literature that I examine, I explore how feminist *ars erotica* emerge through woman-to-woman mentorships. These mentorships, although linked to a form of sexual labor, go beyond seeking feelings of sexual pleasure; they help women aspire to something more than their labor. Specifically, they create guidelines for how to escape oppressions that seek to stifle women's sexual, financial, and social autonomy. The women I examine, for instance, do not rely on marriage to men in order to survive financially in patriarchal societies that tie women's value and access to material wealth to husbands or fathers. As such, these women escape the oppressive confines of marriage in the eighteenth-century.

In each of the following chapters, I refer to the "courtesan arts" to designate a form of *ars erotica* practiced by these female characters. This is a crucial feature of their mentorship because their mentors guide them in a feminist erotic art hat is specific to the courtesan profession. Though not all of these women identify as courtesans – notably the *signares* who have their own honorific title – I consider them all to engage in the practice

the courtesan arts that is mastered through woman-to-woman mentorship. These mentorships between women are key to identifying feminist *ars erotica* in this literature because most of the texts I analyze were written by men.[6] Because the erotic is linked to a feeling which is unique to women, it is arguably impossible for a cisgender, heteronormative man to truly be able to capture this feeling in writing. Indeed, many of the women in this literature seem to represent male fantasies about women's sexual pleasure. Lorde's essay on the use of the erotic as power demonstrates that the very capturing of the erotic in written form must evade oppressive structures – including written structures – that have historically suppressed women's feeling of the erotic. Her essay even takes on a poetic style, using art as a means of capturing through writing that which is felt through the erotic.

The Creole courtesan songs from chapter three, likewise, depict a poetic structure that eludes the oppressive confines of western patriarchal dominance of the written literary form. The other texts that I examine, however, do not share this stylistic and evasive feature, and their authors cannot properly express the feminine erotic, or the feelings associated with it. Therefore, I use mentorships between women in these novels as a tool for identifying feminist *ars erotica.* While the male authors of the literature that I examine may not be able to properly express the feminine erotic, they did incorporate examples of woman-to-woman mentorships that lead the female characters within their

[6] All the literature I examine is male authored with the exception of the Creole courtesan songs from chapter three which, although sung by women, were likely transcribed by a male author.

texts towards a feminist erotic art through which they are able to resist multiple and often intersecting oppressions in the eighteenth-century Francosophere.

Furthermore, close-readings and analyses of the relationships between women in these texts helps to distance them from the male gaze. Female intimacy in these literatures is found in the margins, de-centered from the main plotlines. By situating these female relationships at the forefront of my analysis, I pull them out of their textual marginality and privilege them over appeals to white, heteronormative, male desire. However, while one focus of this dissertation is on how to avert or read past the male gaze, it is important to also acknowledge that women, too, were reading these texts in the eighteenth century. Esteemed literary historian Robert Darnton has done extensive work over the past decades on the censorship and illicit trade of literature – such as the works covered in this dissertation – in Ancient Regime France. In *Censors at Work,* for instance, Darnton describes that literature is "a cultural system embedded in a social order" and proposes that:

> One conclusion to be drawn from all the activities of all the people who dealt with books is that their world extended throughout French society, down to peddlers who could barely write and smugglers who could not read. Even authors [...] sometimes came from lower layers of society, and women could be found everywhere within the world of books. (59)

If, as Darnton suggests, literature is a cultural system that permeates all levels of the social order, surpassing boundaries of class and gender, then it would be unreasonable to believe that women would not have been a part of the readership of erotic literature in eighteenth-century France. In fact, Julie Peakman discusses women's readership of

erotica in the eighteenth-century in her discussion of the popular "whore biography" genre. She contends that "readers were not merely elite men; women were known to read and appreciate erotica, and there is nothing to suggest they would not have enjoyed whore biographies" (*Amatory Pleasures* 78). To that end, my analysis of woman-to-woman mentorships in *ars erotica* in male-authored literature may, at times, highlight – amongst many things – the heteroerotic elements of these texts.

However, that these elements exist does not mean that they were not also read, and enjoyed, by women. Indeed, women are the focus of this dissertation because they also had the potential to read, enjoy, and learn from these mentorships. It is for this reason that I not only consider how these mentorships manifest between women on the page, but also beyond the page. In other words, by accepting the potential for eighteenth-century women to be readers of these texts, I am also considering that they may also have participated in feminist *ars erotica* through the defiant act of reading erotic literature "meant for men" for their own benefit, sexual or otherwise.

Virtuous Womanhood and *Femmes Galantes*

In order to understand the significance of the existence of mentorships in *ars erotica* between women in eighteenth-century French and Francophone literature, it is important to outline how women's sexuality, social status, financial (in)dependence, and legal rights were all inextricably intertwined in this era. Essential to this dissertation is also the question of freed or enslaved status and race, as the courtesan *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue and the *signares* of Senegal will face both gendered and racial

oppression within the slave societies that they inhabit in the literature that I explore. In terms of gendered and sexual oppression for all of the women concerned in this dissertation, the eighteenth century marks a crucial moment in the history of women's sexuality. This was a time of widespread medical and philosophical debate about women's bodies, reproductive capacities, and sexual pleasure. In *Making Sex,* Thomas Laqueur contends that the eighteenth-century European "discovery" of a two-sex biological model was the origin of sex as we know it today. He argues that before the Enlightenment era it was believed that all humans shared the same sex organs, with women's sexual organs being an inverted version of the male reproductive system. The eighteenth century thus brought the idea of separate sexes to the forefront of medical and cultural debate. Though Laqueur's theory of a "discovery" of the two-sex biological model provides a compelling and detailed analysis of how eighteenth-century medicine "othered" women through sexual difference, many other medical historians have suggested that his analysis presents a reductionist vision of the evolution of the medical differentiation between sexes prior to the eighteenth century. Joan Cadden, for instance, argues that Lacqueur's theory of the discovery of the two-sex biological model ignores medieval medical models of sexual difference.[7] James Stolberg likewise critiques Laqueur's emphasis on the eighteenth-century discovery of the two-sex biological model, highlighting sixteenth and seventeenth-century medical writings that identify distinct biological sexes and sex organs.

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[7]Cadden posits that two-sex biological models existed before the eighteenth century, noting that, "medieval views on the status of the uterus and the opinions of medieval physiognomers about male and female traits suggest evidence of other models not reducible to Lacquer's" (Cadden 3).

Despite the inconsistencies in Laqueur's chronology, his pinpointing of the eighteenth century as a crucial turning point for women's sexual medicine rightly highlights how women's bodies and sexuality were the focus of growing fascination and condemnation in a variety of textual genres including medical treatises and fictional publications. Mary McAlpin provides a thorough analysis of how both medical and literary texts in Enlightenment France targeted women's sexuality and girl's premature sexual awakening as the root of cultural degradation. Importantly, controlling women's sexual desire and reproductive health was fundamental to eighteenth-century Republican agendas, because, "the continuation of the family line was at stake – not to mention the future of European civilization" (*Female Sexuality* 2). Indeed, discourses surrounding women's sexuality as the root of social ills infiltrated eighteenth-century publications in France. Jean Jacques Rousseau famously targeted women's sexual virtue as the wellspring of moral righteousness or wickedness in his famous educational treatise *Émile*. He argues, for instance, that, "la femme est coquette par son état," and that, "S'il n'y avait point d'hommes frivoles, elles se pressent d'en faire; et leurs frivolités sont bien plus son ouvrage que les siennes ne sont le leur" (*Émile* 476). Rousseau indicates that men's "frivolous" behavior is women's responsibility essentially, creating a framework in which nearly all social ills can be blamed on women's immorality. Furthermore, Rousseau weaponizes his arguments about the "nature" of women to promote a notion of separate and unequal education of girls and boys, insisting that men within the patriarchal

social order dominate the social and political spheres and therefore promoting separate and unequal social mobility for women and men.[8]

While Rousseau is certainly not the only Enlightenment era *philosophe* to link women's sexuality and virtue to moral deterioration, the attention that his work has received from eighteenth-century to modern-day scholarship warrants some discussion in a dissertation about women's resistance to patriarchal structures in eighteenth-century French and Francophone spaces. Many scholars of Enlightenment France have highlighted the oppressive, sexist rhetoric contained within works like *Émile.* Historians such as Lynn Hunt and Joan Landes call attention to Rousseau's influence on women's social and political subjugation, with Landes specifically emphasizing the hypocrisy of Rousseau's demand that women be barred from participation in the public sphere while simultaneously placing the responsibility of raising future citizens – and therefore creating a virtuous republic – in their hands.[9] Literary scholars such as Aurora Wolfgang and Deena Goodman likewise address Rousseau's impact on eighteenth-century gendered notions surrounding "women's" versus "men's" writing and anxieties surrounding "French Culture and literature becoming 'feminized' by women's participation in it"

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[8] Rousseau contends that women will have an education, but one "qui lui convient" which is focused on domestic roles such as wifehood, motherhood, and household management. See Rousseau, *Émile* book 5 for a detailed description of the type of education that he considers appropriate for girls and women, which he frames through the fictional figure of Sophie, the wife of Émile.

[9] Landes describes the subordination of women that Rousseau proposes in *Émile,* noting that, "women's duty consists of subordinating her independent aims and interests to a higher goal, the ethical life of the community. But unlike her male companion, of whom Rousseau also demands the sublimation of particular interests on behalf of a desire for the public good, woman is barred completely from active participation in the very sphere that gives purpose to all her actions" (Landes 69).

(Wolfgang 21). Riccoboni's exchange of letters with Bastide about her periodical *L'Abeille* is a testament to the ever-increasing worries in French literary culture about how women might tarnish the male-dominated spaces of writing and publication.

Other scholars, such as Jennifer Popiel and Helena Rosenblatt, have pointed out the anachronistic trouble of reading Rousseau without considering the historical context in which he is situated. Both Popiel and Rosenblatt identify the important role that Rousseau gave women – to manage households and raise a new citizenry – which was, at the time, a radically innovative responsibility placed into their hands. These scholarly arguments redeem Rousseau's work, even if slightly, of the frequent accusations of sexist separationist rhetoric and highlight that, "if he was not a twenty-first-century feminist, neither was he, by eighteenth-century standards, a complete misogynist" (Popiel 3). Whether one considers Rousseau's take on women's social roles a revolutionary shift in the importance of women French society or a sexist ploy to limit women's social mobility, it is undeniable that *Émile* was an influential part of eighteenth-century French conceptualizations of virtuous womanhood.

Rousseau is not alone in his theorization of women's virtue being linked to notions of chastity, domesticity, and submissiveness in eighteenth-century French society. Many authors broached this subject, but for the purposes of my discussion on virtuous womanhood I will focus on Rousseau in addition to Félicité de Genlis and her educational treatise *Adèle et Théodore.* Like *Émile*, Genlis' educational treatise highlights how girls might be educated to become virtuous wives and mothers. Scholars of eighteenth-century French literature have often compared Genlis' and Rousseau's educational treatises, highlighting similarities and departures in educational theories that

the two authors propose in their works, especially when it comes to girls' education. Marisa Linton posits that Genlis, "owed much to Rousseau's ideas about virtue as the goal of education" noting that the type of virtue presented in *Adèle et Théodore*, thanks to Rousseau's *Émile,* presented a similar "socially conformist quality" in regard to girls' education and virtuous womanhood (56). Lesley H. Walker, however, identifies the originality of Genlis' pedagogical approach, describing it as a methodological experiment in "aesthetic terror" in which children are presented with temptations, and if they give into them are punished, the behavior corrected, and the virtuous lesson learned.[10]

Both Rousseau and Genlis produced educational treatises which outline the archetype of the virtuous woman in eighteenth-century French society. While *Adèle et Théodore* and *Émile* are not the focus of this dissertation, the lessons in womanly virtue contained within them are crucial to understanding how this standard of womanhood is difficult – if not impossible – to achieve, as well as how it presents a limited, oppressive identity for eighteenth-century French women. Their oppression is rooted in women's incapacity to live autonomously within the patriarchal structures of both the family and French society which assign marriage and motherhood as the primary roles that women serve, with "serve" being a key word here as these virtuous womanly roles are defined by their service to others rather than to themselves.[11] For this reason, Rousseau's and Genlis' descriptions of women's domestic responsibilities and their emphasis on women's sexual purity in *Émile* and *Adèle et Théodore* will serve in this dissertation as a reference point

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[10] See Walker, especially pp. 153 to see her explanation of the "aesthetics of terror" that she contends Genlis incorporates into her pedagogical project.
[11] Another option for women was also the convent, which, like marriage and motherhood, is defined by service to others.

for the kind of virtuous womanhood that woman-to-woman sexual mentorships resist in the literature that I examine.

The virtuous woman, in eighteenth-century France, represents the epitome of bourgeois womanhood. She is above all domestic, and her value – as well as her joy – is determined through marriage, child rearing, and household management. Most importantly, her identity is defined not by what she makes of herself, but rather by what she can do for others. She is a daughter, a wife, and a mother – identities inextricably tied to and defined by her relationship to parents, a husband, and children. In fact, Rousseau argues that women's value is determined solely by what others think of her: "par la loi même de la nature, les femmes, tant pour elles que pour leurs enfants, sont à la merci des jugements des hommes; il ne suffit pas qu'elles soient estimables, il faut qu'elles soient estimées" (*Émile* 475). According to Rousseau, women are made to please men, and, as such, the opinions of men determine their worth.[12] Genlis seemingly reverses Rousseau's notion of women pleasing men, but nonetheless emphasizes the idea that women's reputations determine their value. Describing a respectable, virtuous, woman, Genlis explains that, "elle est aussi distinguée par sa réputation que par sa figure et ses agréments […] toutes les femmes lui pardonnent ses talents et sa beauté en faveur de sa simplicité et de sa modestie" (103).[13] Both Genlis and Rousseau frame women's value

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[12] Rousseau contends of women's role in pleasing men that "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" (*Émile* 466).

[13] This reference to women's appearance occurs when one of Genlis' characters describes another woman that she knows. Genlis mirrors Rousseau's language of reputation, natural charm, and purity combined with awareness of the regard of others in judging a her worth.

through the opinion of others, relegating virtue to what seems to be a private and public performance. It is in this vein that virtuous women in the eighteenth century share common ground with the women that I examine in this dissertation. Courtesans, like virtuous women, and seemingly all women in the eighteenth-century Francosphere, rely on performativity to socially advertise their virtue. Where they differ is in the virtues themselves.

The courtesans and *signares* in the texts I examine throughout this dissertation seem to share at least one virtue: *la galanterie*. The eighteenth-century meaning of this term resembles that of *libertinage,* particularly in that both represent terms that are difficult to define due their varying and proliferous usage in literature, legal documents, medical treatises, and everyday vernacular to signify everything from sexual illness to moral indecency, criminal activity, and literary genre. The difference between *galanterie* and *libertinage,* especially in the latter part of the eighteenth century, is blurred at best. Russell Ganim differentiates between *galanterie* in the seventeenth-century usage of the term and *libertinage* in the eighteenth century, claiming that the former is "predicated on politeness and respect" whereas the latter is associated with "aggression and transgression […] libertinage puts personal erotic behavior, and its corresponding quest for pleasure and power, at odds with established social and moral order of individual probity and aristocratic virtue" (1125). Ganim's definition of libertinage aptly highlights how this "lifestyle, replete with specific habits and accouterments" defied social structures of authority, particularly in regard to sexual deviancy (Steintrager 9). However, his definition of *galanterie* does not account for the shift in the meaning of *galanterie* during the eighteenth century.

The seventeenth-century meaning of *galanterie* evoked images of courtly life and, "an ethos founded on distinction and sociability [an] ideal of judicious social practice [that] valorized women" (Wynn 18). Madame de Lafayette, for instance, incorporates *galanterie* as a form of respectable desire in *La Princesse de Clèves* in which the Duke de Nemours pursues his betrothed love interest with, "polish and civility [which] can act as a check on the libido, without entirely suppressing it" (Ganim 1127).

In the eighteenth century, the meaning of *galanterie* came to be more closely associated with libertinage. For instance, Alain Viala reminds us that the original *Encyclopédie* of 1759 incorporates three articles "consacrés à 'galant' et 'galanterie' [qui] montrent à la fois la persistance d'une conception positive et ambitieuse de celle-ci et sa dégradation en une version vulgaire et rendent vers le libertinage de mœurs" ("Du galant homme" 52). Viala roots this shift in meaning to the gradual distaste in France for courtly aristocratic extravagance. In his discussion of this evolution connotations associated with *galanterie,* Viala also contends that when *galanterie* came to be associated with *libertinage* (around the mid seventeenth-century), it also took on misogynistic overtones.[14] He explains, "femmes débauchées, femmes non pas spirituelles mais rusées, et bien sûr femmes menteuses, elle [la misogynie] constitue un caractère majeur de cette galanterie licencieuse" (*Essai historique* Location 4047). While I would agree with Viala's analysis, I would also argue that even earlier definitions of *galanterie* which

[14] Viala considers this shift in meaning in the mid-seventeenth and moving into the eighteenth century a rupture in the positive connotations of gallantry (usually associated with courtly honor) and the negative connotations (usually associated with libertinage). He argues that this shift in meaning associated with *galanterie* was especially visible in art and literature. See Viala, especially his chapter "Licence et Libertinage."

emphasized social practices and courtly behaviors that "valorized women" did so through male expectations of behaviors and appearances, which defined what kinds of women would be valorized. In both respects, the male gaze is prioritized in designating women as *galante.*

The term, in either definition, takes on gendered undertones that had serious impacts for women in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Where *hommes galants* and *femmes galantes* came to be associated with *libertinage,* the social and legal repercussions of *galanterie* were not the same for both.[15] The 1762 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* for instance, defines "galanterie," in part, as, "un commerce amoureux et criminel." The criminal aspect of *galanterie* was nearly always associated with women, and often this term was used to refer to the work of courtesans, or to refer to courtesans themselves as *femmes galantes.* So frequently was this term associated with courtesans that, as Nina Kushner points out, there was an entire police department in Paris dedicated to investigating the activities, contracts, and relationships of courtesans called the *département des femmes galantes.*[16] Women's *galenterie,* therefore, not only became synonymous with sexual impropriety but it could also be criminally punished.[17]

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[15] Anna Maria Marchini, for instance, cites adultery – a sexual deviancy from marriage – as the most profound example of inequality between men and women, as women were much more harshly punished than men, if men were punished at all (126). This example demonstrates the gendered inequality associated with women's versus men's *galanterie* in the eighteenth century.

[16] Kushner's analysis of the "erotic exchanges" of courtesans in eighteenth-century Paris covers reports of inspectors who investigated these women's activities. This police unit was established in the mid eighteenth century (29).

[17] Criminal punishments for prostitution began before the eighteenth century, and it was far more common for lower-paid ("street-walking") prostitutes to be arrested because they more visibly threatened social order (Kushner 38).

The activities of courtesans and their affairs were often recorded by police, but they also caught the attention of the public, notably authors who made them "the subject of an entire genre of libertine literature, as well as more serious works of fiction" (Kushner 16). In an era where virtuous womanhood was gradually becoming a significant topic of interest in fictional and philosophical writing, it seems that these *femmes galantes* offered an antithesis to the figure of the virtuous woman. Many authors of libertine fiction capitalized on this dichotomy between women's virtue versus women's *galanterie*. To focus solely on this binary opposition between the virtuous woman and the *femme galante,* however, would only reify patriarchal and misogynistic definitions of womanhood prominent in the eighteenth century (and arguably, today). To pit "virtue" against "gallantry" is not my goal in this dissertation. While I do identify these identities as oppositional, they are rooted in the same form of oppression. To that end, I identify *galanterie* in the literature I examine as a form of *libertinage* that is inextricably tied to women's sexuality. However, I also consider *galanterie* to be a vehicle for feminist resistance in the eighteenth century. The *femmes galantes* that I study in this dissertation exhibit libertine resistance to moral and social codes, especially surrounding women's virtue and sexuality. So, what separates the *femme galante* from the libertine? Although countless scholars as well as literary authors have described women in the eighteenth century as "*galante*," very few – if any – have sought to define this term as it relates to women.

I use the term *femme galante,* on one hand, as a reference to the courtesan arts that these women practiced.[18] Most scholarly works which refer to *femmes galantes* identify them as sexually deviant. However, in 1928, sibling scholars Edmond and Jules de Goncourt provided a more detailed idea of what images women's *galanterie* might have evoked in the eighteenth-century imaginary. They describe *femmes galantes* as, "women of pleasure, parading every debauch of grace, wit and of taste, crowned with shamelessness and folly, cynical and superb" (194). I would characterize the Goncourt's description as encompassing what I associate with the courtesan arts – a form of *ars erotica* that is performative and requires a balance between frivolity and entrepreneurial diligence, sexual seduction and public reputation. The *femme galante* exhibits these performative traits, tying her to the erotic arts and, in this dissertation, to mentorship between women.

Through woman-to-woman mentorships, these *femmes galantes* practice the courtesan arts and also exhibit nonconformist behaviors and lifestyles compared to the patriarchal socio-cultural standards of virtuous womanhood. Kathleen Wilson makes a similar observation of what she terms the "female rake" in libertine fiction. She writes that the female rake, "marked the boundaries – national, geographical and moral – of Enlightenment explorations of unconventional sexualities and demonstrated the impossibility of women being accepted as independent sexual subjects" (97). Where Wilson's "female rake" cannot be accepted as an independent sexual subject, the *femme*

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[18] Kushner indicates that "kept women" or courtesans were often referred to as *femmes galantes* and likewise uses this term interchangeably with the previous two in her work. See *"*Dames Entretenues and the *Demimonde*" in *Erotic Exchanges.*

galante demonstrates agency in her sexual relationships with her patrons, albeit through the manipulation of her objectification. This is why mentorship is a key feature of the *femme galante's* agency – it is through the sharing of knowledge of *ars erotica* that these women learn to manipulate male libidinous desire and position themselves not only in a more liberatory financial and legal position than the married virtuous women to whom they are compared, but also in a more socially – and often financially – dominant position than the men they encounter.

Courtesans: Resisting Gendered and Racial Oppressions

Courtesans, unlike the virtuous wives and mothers of the eighteenth century, do not determine their worth by what they can do for others. While it is true that the labor for which they are paid is in service to others, they are not solely defined by this service. Rather, it is through this service to patrons that courtesans can establish their own reputation, build connections with important social figures, and traverse class boundaries. Although they often come from lower social classes than their patrons, courtesans move up the ranks through their relationships with the social elite and distinguish themselves through their social connections, their appearance, and their public performance of the courtesan arts.[19] It is the ability to work their way up the social echelons of society, achieve high-ranking economic status, and, at times, even influence legal and political

[19] Feldman and Gordan describe that "often indistinguishable from women born into higher classes, they tend to assume certain upper-class styles and privileges in a performance that crosses and blurs class lines and distinguishes them from other groups [of prostitutes]" (6).

decisions (such is the case with the *signares*), that separates courtesans from other women in eighteenth-century French and Francophone societies.

Feminist and early modern scholars have discussed at length women's limitations in patriarchal eighteenth-century societies, often linking women's oppression to the institutions of both compulsory marriage and motherhood. Adrienne Rich contends in *Of Woman Born* that patriarchal social structures have even halted women's social evolution by creating, "a system which turned against woman her own organic nature, the source of her awe and her original powers" (127). Rich's reference to the "source of awe" and "original power" of giving birth emphasizes that the patriarchal need to control the reproductive capacities of women and birth-giving people has played a central role in their oppression – an issue that is ongoing even today. Elisabeth Badinter has demonstrated in *L'amour en plus* how Christian dogma in France that linked women to sin – notably the "original sin" – influenced the codification of women's inferior social and legal status in the Ancient Regime which, despite the secular goals of the Revolution, was later re-established by Napoleonic civil codes.[20] More recently, Anna Maria Marchini has detailed how marriage represents the most significant legal difference between men and women of legal majority in eighteenth-century France because, "the woman is subject to the authority of her husband even more than a minor is subject to his guardian" (126). Scholarship on women's labor and participation in the workforce outside of the home in early modern studies often focuses on women's limitations and

[20] See Badinter's explanation of "la théologie chrétienne" in chapter one of *L'amour en plus.*

their victimhood under a strictly patriarchal Ancient Regime and post-revolution French society that relegated them to the domestic sphere.

While it is undeniable that women's rights and agency in eighteenth-century France was subject to patriarchal oppression through legal and social expectations of virtuous womanhood, it is important to consider that often, scholarship on women's limited rights and imposed domesticity often focuses on Bourgeois women. Bourgeois domesticity is the basis for many of the works about virtuous womanhood penned by authors such as Rousseau and Genlis, and often women of lower social classes or economic backgrounds cannot adhere to virtuous bourgeois domesticity due to their financial need, which required them to be involved in the workforce whether through licit or illicit means. Anne Montenach's recent monograph *Gender, Space, and Illicit Economies in Eighteenth-century Europe* outlines how although many early modern studies have focused on the lack of agency of women in public life, they have failed to consider that plenty of eighteenth-century women were also involved in labor outside (and inside) the home that granted them agency.[21]

Montenach's work highlights how women were able to find loopholes especially in market regulations, establishing themselves as entrepreneurs of either licit or illicit goods and services. Courtesans represent a group of women who found cracks in the legal codes, economic regulations, and social restrictions that were often placed on

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[21] Montenach contends thar that, "without ignoring the potential for control and exploitation, which was fundamental to the situation of women in the modern era, researchers can set aside the pessimistic image of woman as victim and examine new perspectives on possibilities for freedom through which they could exploit regulatory loopholes and make use of their ability to adapt and to make decisions and choices: in other words, their agency" (5).

women in eighteenth-century France. To borrow Montenach's phrasing, "for women, whom the law specifically excluded from a wide range of professional and licit activities, the underground economy offered possibilities for earning a living and operating in the market (9). Exclusion from the realm of professional public life did not, therefore, prevent women from participating in economic life, even if their entrepreneurial endeavors were, at times, illicit. Kushner has done extensive work to describe how courtesans, in fact, evaded police and legal repercussions for their illicit trade in what she terms the "*demimonde*" of Paris.[22] Central to Kushner's work is an analysis of courtesan social relationships wherein she identifies that there are three factors separating courtesans – whom she refers to as *dames entretenues* or "kept women" – from prostitutes in eighteenth-century Paris. She writes, "the nature of her clientele, the constructs that governed her work relationships, and last, her professional status" (3). Courtesans had relationships with social elites who paid for their livelihoods and sometimes maintained relationships over a long period, but rarely did a courtesan ever marry her patron. Furthermore, a courtesan established contracts with patrons to detail what she would receive in return for her services.[23] It was this contractual structure that distinguished courtesans in the professional realm of the *demimonde*, because "it made mistresses respectable and more appropriate as intimate partners. It thereby allowed for the possibility that these relationships were not merely mercenary, but meaningful"

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[22] Kushner defines the *demimonde* as "a sexual market in which certain services were sold, as well as the customs and institutions that shaped the market's operation and the community of individuals who participated in it" (4).
[23] Kushner indicates that these were typically oral contracts and they were not legally binding, meaning both a courtesan and a patron could break a relationship at any time (34).

(Kushner 162). The professional reputation of courtesans distinguished them from other prostitutes in the eighteenth-century *demimonde* and was based on sexual capital. This capital was determined by their physical appearance and by their social reputation which elicited attention from elite patrons. As Kushner describes it, sexual capital is determined by how well a courtesan could master her performative and aesthetic art.[24]

Of course, the sexual marketplace, sexual capital, and notions of virtuous womanhood are further complicated in colonized spaces where courtesans are faced with both sexist and racist ideologies surrounding women of color.[25] Additionally, social status took on more ominous undertones when slavery made up the lowermost social position with which people of color were associated. In colonies like Saint-Domingue, the *Code Noir* implemented legal racial segregation which also influenced a caste-like racial system made up of several different racial categories which sought to socially distinguish people through their proximity to whiteness or blackness.

Moreau de Saint-Méry, for instance, attempts to classify these varying racial categories in his *Description Topographique,* identifying well over eighty different races which can result from interracial procreation. Importantly, he positions "white" and

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[24] Kushner describes that, "as far as the sources permit is to understand it, sexual capital was a multilateral construct in which the body was read as attractive not just because of its innate qualities, but because its owner's success as a mistress rendered it thus" (154).

[25] Although I'm focusing on the colonized spaces of eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue, Gorée, and Saint-Louis, it is important to note that race, slavery, and sexual capital were also intertwined in metropolitan France. Jennifer Palmer has done extensive work in her book *Intimate Bonds* (2016) to point out how kinship networks, sexual abuse, interracial intimacy, and slavery existed both in French colonies and in metropolitan France.

"black" as racial origin groups from which all other racial identities descend.[26] As Joan Dayan describes it, although, "the society boasted its cast-like distinctions (*grands blancs, petits blancs,* free coloreds, slaves, and aristocrats), the overwhelming opposition seemed to be between whites and nonwhites" (284). For this reason, even free mixed-race people in colonized spaces, despite any perceived proximity to whiteness or any socially elite status they attained, still faced racial discrimination in places like Saint-Domingue, Gorée, and Saint-Louis.

This discrimination, however, did not interfere with the proliferation of interracial relationships in these colonized spaces throughout the eighteenth century. This meant that the mixed-race population gradually expanded throughout the eighteenth century, leading to a powerful group of elite free people of color. Of course, as many Black feminist scholars such as Dorothy Roberts have argued, these relationships were not always without cost as they often reified white western notions of Black women's sexual wantonness, a construct which "served to justify white men's sexual abuse of Black women" both in slave and post-slavery colonized spaces (Roberts 11). Saidiya Hartman, likewise, points out that this sexual abuse was often even legally codified and socially accepted in slave societies since, "not only was rape simply unimaginable because of purported black lasciviousness, but also its repression was essential to the displacement

[26] Before he charts out these numerous racial classifications, Saint-Méry highlights that these categories are based on black and white racial mixing, or racial mixing between at least one Black parent and people of other races: "C'est pour mieux faire connaître cette localité colorée que je vais parcourir les degrés du mélange de toutes les nuances, produites par les diverses combinaisons du mélange des Blancs avec les Nègres, et des Nègres avec les Caraïbes ou Sauvages ou Indiens Occidentaux, et avec les Indiens Orientaux" (70-71).

of white culpability that characterized both the recognition of black humanity in slave law and the designation of the black subject as the originary locus of transgression and offense" (79-80). My goal in this dissertation is to both acknowledge the history of sexual violence against women of color perpetuated by Western colonizers while at the same time identifying a sexual economy in which women of color exerted some form of agency over their bodies and their sexual exchanges.

Of course, the women of color who were able to exert agency in their sexual encounters with white European men were, for the most part, free women of color who entered into interracial relationships. Several scholars of the eighteenth-century French Atlantic have likewise discussed the causes and implications of interracial personal connections in colonized spaces. Jennifer Palmer argues, for instance, that interracial relationships help us to understand how empire significantly changed perceptions of gendered and raced labor because they "opened up spaces where people of color could explore and assert alternatives to a dichotomous black and white hierarchy, as imagined by French colonial officials" (5). Conversely, Doris Garraway emphasizes that in colonies like Saint-Domingue, interracial relationships and the children that resulted from them were often rooted in white male libertine desire for women of color, with color lines still strictly dividing the white, Black, and mixed-race populations.[27] Garraway contends that in the eighteenth-century, a "cult of the mulatta woman" developed, leading white

[27] I use "libertine" here, and throughout this dissertation, to refer to "the sexually free behavior and norms of upper-class men, and in particular, of the French aristocracy during the decline of the *ancient régime,* as well as the writing which celebrates it […] Libertinism is the name given to the free operation of sexual desire against or in delicate negotiation with conventional moral, religious and civil codes" (Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell 2).

European men to desire relationships with mixed-race women as "she [the mixed-race woman] was deemed superior in charms, intelligence, and sexual savoir faire to white women, thus leading white men to shun women of their own race in favor of colored lovers and concubines" (28). Jennifer L. Morgan, importantly, points out the difficulty of tracing the cultural history of enslaved people in the eighteenth-century Transatlantic world due to limitations in the archive and in our analytical approaches to this kind of study, posing the question, "how can we comprehend the alchemy of commerce, race, and slavery in women's lives when those who chose which documents to archive so consistently erased its traces" (20)? The result of many of these archival erasures is a focus, as Morgan contends, on Black suffering in early modern studies of Africa, the Atlantic Slave trade, and European imperialism.

Like Morgan, I seek to highlight how women of color found ways to empower themselves and assert autonomy in an era in which their raced and gendered bodies were not only commodified in the Atlantic Slave trade, but also hypersexualized by Western pseudoscientific theories surrounding race and sexuality. My work on women of color in this dissertation analyzes how, like the courtesans of early modern France, these women were able to manipulate stereotypes about their sexuality and capitalize on white male libidinous desire to achieve financial and social liberties within slave colonies. Part of the difficulty of this study, as Morgan points out, is indeed finding a historical and literary archive that sheds light on these manifestations of agency. Deborah Jenson's work on the Creole courtesan songs of early modern Saint-Domingue provides an invaluable resource for identifying a mulatta literary tradition that provides a "literary inscription of the process of unbecoming slaves, of discovering a public space of choice and power

negotiations around the politics not only of colony or nation, but shared bodies and affect" (*Beyond* 279).[28] I build off of Jenson's work on these Creole courtesan songs to demonstrate how a feminist *ars erotica* can be identified within some of these Creole courtesan songs, and my analysis of their lyrics highlights how mentorship plays an important role in dispersing important lessons to young courtesans who work in the sexual marketplace of Saint-Domingue.

Mentorships in feminist *ars erotica* in Saint-Domingue and Senegal, like in metropolitan France, are focused on women teaching each other the courtesan arts. The courtesans of Saint-Domingue and the *signares* of Senegal are both groups of mixed-race women who establish themselves and their descendants as social elites within colonized spaces and teach other mixed-race women how to survive and thrive in these tumultuous social and political settings. Garraway argues that the courtesan mulatta figure is a stereotyped fantasy created by white colonial writers that depicted wanton sexual desire and a penchant for luxurious adornments – a figure who, therefore, combines imperial materialist consumption and pleasure.[29] Although many European depictions of the courtesan *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue and the *signares* of Senegal rely on these kind of racial and gender stereotypes, there are some important observations recorded by

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[28] I use the term "mulatta" (*mulâtresse*) here to replicate the eighteenth-century term used to identify mixed-race women in colonized spaces like Saint-Domingue.

[29] Garraway argues that the mulatta courtesan as depicted by colonial writers was, "an independent sexual agent and colonial border figure [who] was credited with power to dominate her lovers, when she did not dispose of theme entirely. With the colony's white men at her feet, the stereotyped mulatto courtesan extracted their resources for her own adornment, arrogating to herself an empire of consumption as well as pleasure" (231).

travel writers that visited Saint-Domingue, Gorée, and Saint-Louis that provide crucial information about the lives of these women, even if this information is skewed by Euro-centric notions of virtuous womanhood and racial/sexual (im)purity. Kimberly Snyder Manganelli points out, for instance, how travel writers like Saint-Méry often identified the public attention that courtesans received through their ostentatious clothing and adornments which, for European travel writers was often a "visual symbol of their fallenness" (22). Importantly, Manganelli emphasizes how the mixed-race courtesan posed a threat to the imperial project by destabilizing the patriarchal social order through her significant financial autonomy.[30] Displays of wealth such as luxurious adornments so commonly recorded in travel narratives about mixed-race courtesans and *signares* attach European symbolism to things like jewelry or clothing. However, what is a symbol of "fallenness" for someone like Saint-Méry is a symbol of social and economic status for the free women of color in places like Saint-Domingue, Gorée, and Saint-Louis.

European depictions of the courtesan *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue resemble those of the *signares* of eighteenth-century Gorée and Saint-Louis. Although accessibility to wealth and elite social status for women of color in Saint-Domingue was similarly attained by women in Gorée and Saint-Louis, the primary difference between these two groups is that the *signares* already held significant social status and economic influence before the introduction of the French to these slave port cities. Historians of early modern Senegambia such as George Brooks, Guillaume Vial, Aissata Kane Lo, Lisa Ze Winters,

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[30]Manganelli explains that, "because her wealth was not legitimized by marriage but passed on to her as gifts or an inheritance from her white lover, the financial autonomy of mixed-race women undermined the patriarchal social order in the colony and threatened the imperial project" (24).

and Hilary Jones have argued extensively about how the *signares* attained significant social and economic status through their participation in trade markets – including the Atlantic slave trade – upon the introduction of the Portuguese to West Africa in the early modern era. Vial points out that even their name – *signare* – has Portuguese etymological roots denoting a social distinction given to these influential women by their Portuguese trade partners.[31] Unlike Saint-Domingue, the slave-port cities of Gorée and Saint-Louis were not under official French imperial rule as colonies until the nineteenth century.[32] Legal codes surrounding slavery and racial segregation like the *Code Noir* did not, therefore, create the social hierarchies of these colonized spaces. Rather, the *signares*, "relied on slave ownership to achieve economic prosperity, buttress their gendered authority, and distance themselves from subservience and enslavability" (Zimmerman 20-21). Because the *signares* themselves established social hierarchies based on wealth and proximity to wealthy European men, systems of wealth and inheritance that solidified social status in Gorée and Saint-Louis were based on matriarchal lineage. Through these matriarchally-based economic and social structures, the *signares* trained their female

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[31] Vial explains of the origins of the honorific title *signare* that, "le terme a donné la forme *senhora,* par le portugais, dont signare est issue […] La traduction du portugais la plus complète de *senhora* me semble être la suivante: "Maitresse, celle qui a des domestiques, des serviteurs, des esclaves. || Femme, épouse. || Dame, madame, mademoiselle." Elle rend, en tout cas, bien compte de certains des aspects que nous allons étudier: la capacité à commander à *ses* domestiques et à *ses* esclaves, la notion honorifique qui se rattache au titre; de même que l'origine du terme oblige à envisager les contacts des Portugais avec l'Afrique" (Vial 29-30).

[32]Sarah J. Zimmerman explains of eighteenth-century Gorée that, "despite the physical proximity of African residents and foreign company employees, no single set of political or legal traditions reigned over the island prior to the mid-nineteenth century" (21-22).

family members in the art of *signare* culture – a practice that parallels the courtesan arts in Saint-Domingue in that *signares* manipulated stereotypes about women of color to maintain their powerful social and economic influence in these slave port cities.

European observations of the *signares,* like those of the courtesans of Saint-Domingue, often reduce them to objects of white male desire, ignoring the significant impact they had on the social, economic, and racial development of Senegal. There especially seems to be repetitive attention paid in eighteenth-century travel narratives to both the relationships that these women had with white European men, as well as their luxurious styles of dress and adornment.[33] Winters contends that although scholars have, for a long time, focused on how these travel narratives present a euro-centric, colonizer's vision of free mixed-race women in the early modern Atlantic world, "what is missing is a consideration of what such dress might reveal about the relationships between enslaved and free(d) women of color as they shared and reproduced a repertoire and rituals of adornment and toilette that marked their status and belonging in the diasporic communities" (79). I would like to reiterate Winters' call for re-approaching early modern European-authored travel narratives so that we might, to borrow Marisa Fuentes' phrasing, "eke out extinguished and invisible but no less historically important lives" (7). These women of color in both Saint-Domingue and Senegal were subjected to both racial

[33] Antoine Edmé Pruneau de Pommegorge describes in *Description de la Nigritie* (1789) that the *signares* are "fort attachées aux blancs"(3) and goes on to describe their luxurious style of dress which includes "des boucles d'oreilles d'or, des chaînes de pieds d'or ou d'argent"(4). Moreau de Saint-Méry similarly describes the *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue in *Description Topographique* as having a penchant for luxury and a strong attachment to white men, claiming that "elles ne veulent d'autres hommes que des Blancs" (97) and that "le luxe des mulâtresses est poussé au dernier terme" (92-93).

and gendered stereotypes that permeated white male fantasies about the Black and mixed-race women. Facing these oppressions within a colonized space, free women of color found a way to manipulate these preconceived notions about their bodies and their sexuality to establish themselves as social elites. Perhaps the observations of these women – which are riddled with misconceptions and prejudices – might also provide some insights into how these women mentored each other in the courtesan arts and resisted the intersecting oppressions of racism, imperialism, and sexism in the early modern Atlantic world.

Although the male-authored texts that I analyze in this dissertation rely on gendered and racial stereotypes about women of lower social classes and women of color, a combined analysis of their texts highlights that a feminist *ars erotica* consistently manifests through woman-to-woman mentorship. This is why I consider these mentorships to be an important tool for identifying feminist *ars erotica* in literary texts that otherwise situate women as objects of male desire rather than as agents of their sexual, social, and financial decisions. By using these mentorships as the mechanism for identifying a feminist *ars erotica,* I am essentially eradicating the role of the male author from the production of the erotic art in these fictions. While it is true that I highlight the fetishization of women's sexuality within these texts, the focus of this work is not on male libertine desire but rather on how women help each other to capitalize on that desire on their own terms, to meet their own ends. Through this methodological approach, women's pleasure – as shared by women with women – can be considered a form of resistance to eighteenth-century notions of "virtuous (white) bourgeois womanhood."

Overview of Chapters

Throughout each chapter of this dissertation, I examine characters that engage in woman-to-woman sexual mentorship in *ars erotica* through the teaching and mastery of the courtesan arts. Through their training in this erotic artform, these women achieve sexual, financial, and social independence. Each of the mentorships in *ars erotica* that I explore depict the courtesan (or *signare*) lifestyle as an artform in that it requires an apprenticeship in how to adhere to a specific vision and presentation of their profession which balances sexual appeal with eighteenth-century notions of feminine beauty and decorum. Their ultimate manipulation of this gendered and often racialized sexual appeal to achieve social, financial, and sexual independence in a way that undermines oppressive patriarchal institutions such as marriage and motherhood which would restrict these liberties. These acts of resistance take on different forms depending on the cultural, political, and social settings of the literature itself, which suggests that a feminist *ars erotica* has the potential to challenge multiple systemic oppressions.

Chapter one explores Claude Villaret and Antoine Bret's libertine fiction *La Belle Allemande, ou les galanteries de Thérèse* (1774). Through this rare publication, I examine how the novel's title character is mentored by her mother and a madam in Paris to embrace her penchant for erotic pleasure and apply it to the courtesan arts. Thanks to these mentorships, Thérèse learns how to define her erotic identity as a courtesan in the Parisian *demimonde*. Through an analysis of Thérèse's experience of the two woman-to-woman mentorships in feminist *ars erotica* I, demonstrate how she creates a courtesan persona through which she performs her art to seduce patrons in the Parisian

demimonde.[34] A crucial distinction between Thérèse and the "virtuous women" described especially by Rousseau is her proximity to public life – Thérèse's success in the *demimonde* depends on her ability to publicize her courtesan services either at the Opera or at social gatherings in order to attract patrons. Public attention, therefore, is inextricably linked to private intimacy. This is not so unsimilar to how Rousseau describes women's domesticity in *Émile,* in which women's duties in private life directly impact public civility.[35] Thérèse reverses this notion, placing women first in the public eye then in intimate, private dealings with patrons.

Another important feature of Thérèse's development in a feminist *ars erotica* that I highlight is her ability to mentor other women in the courtesan arts and teach them in what ways this lifestyle provides more freedom than other options for women during this era, notably marriage. She first mentors her friend – a fellow courtesan – about an unsavory patron that she is seeing. By the end of the novel, Thérèse becomes a mentor to the wife of one of her patrons, explicitly stating how she could avoid the financial entrapments of marriage and earn her own money by embracing the courtesan arts. Notably, Thérèse is able to juxtapose her satisfaction with her public courtesan life compared with the distressed wife of her patron, solidifying in the final pages of the novel how her mentorship in a feminist *ars erotica* (the courtesan arts) has led to her satisfaction. I use the term "satisfaction" purposefully here to represent the feeling that

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[34] The *demimonde* refers to the sexual marketplace.

[35] Popiel argues that "the private and domestic sphere was not, for Rousseau, set up in opposition to the political sphere but instead in opposition to the artificiality of public life. Sophie may have been private, but that in no way implied that she was not civic" (48).

Thérèse expresses at the end of the novel which she says is "indescribable." I identify this as a way to locate the expression of the feminine erotic in the novel by applying Lorde's notion of the erotic as feeling to the indescribability of Thérèse's sentiments. The direct comparison between Thérèse at the end of the novel to the virtuous wife highlights to the reader how the latter's marriage – often associated with "women's happiness" – ultimately renders her isolated, and Thérèse's lifestyle as a courtesan provides more joy and satisfaction than her married counterpart. Chapter one, therefore, serves as an example of what I would consider a standard model of mentorship in a feminist *ars erotica* through which the reader is able to follow the evolution of Thérèse's apprenticeship in the courtesan arts and ultimately see her transformation from student to *maîtresse* – a master and mentor of this erotic artform.

In the second chapter I similarly investigate the role of sexual mentorship between women in an eighteenth-century French libertine novel titled *Thérèse Philosophe* (1748) by the Marquis d'Argens, which presents the story of a young girl on a sexual philosophical journey to learn about the role of sex and pleasure in society, and specifically in women's lives. I focus on an analysis of the relationship between Thérèse and three women – Éradice, Mlle C, and Mlle Bois-Laurier – each of whom act as a confidante and mentor to Thérèse. I apply Susan S. Lanser's notion of the confidante relationship as a structurally sapphic connection between women to identify queer desire and queer mentorship in *ars erotica* in this novel. I also apply Tracy Rutler's notion of "fruitful fractures between and within narration" to highlight the queer structure of this text itself by identifying the location, appearance, and narrative style of these queer relationships to show how the novel's heteroerotic libertine materialist philosophy is

facilitated by sapphic desire. In other words, I analyze how heteronormative erotic sex and the novel's overarching philosophical message is filtered through sapphic desire as expressed through these queer feminist mentorships in *ars erotica.*

Sapphic desire, in this novel, transitions from fantasy to physical reality when Thérèse meets Mlle Bois-Laurier with whom she shares her first interpersonal sexual relationship, all while learning the erotic art of pleasure and seduction. The sexual relationship between Mlle Bois-Laurier and Thérèse is especially notable given the former's reputation as a "virgin prostitute" who's impenetrable vagina created a spectacle for clients during her time as a prostitute but prevented any of them from sexually penetrating her. This does not, however, prevent her from enjoying sexual pleasure through clitoral stimulation – an avenue of sexual pleasure for and between women which is only hinted at in the very brief reference to the relationship between Thérèse and Bois-Laurier. It is, in fact, the brevity and lack of detail in the novel surrounding the sexual relationship between these two characters that further demonstrates the queer structure of the text and this mentorship in *ars erotica.* If feminist *ars erotica,* and notably the courtesan arts, rely in large part on training women in the public performative aspects of this artform, then the relationships between Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier flips this erotic artform completely, taking training in the erotic to the intimate, private domain of the bedroom. Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier essentially reverse the heteronormative, private sphere of sexual intimacy by making the bedroom a space for queer intimacy in an otherwise heteroerotic novel.

My third chapter shifts focus to a Francophone colonized space through an analysis of Creole courtesan songs from Saint-Domingue, presumably sung by mixed-

race women, which were originally transcribed by hand in Moreau de Saint-Méry's unpublished text *Notes Historiques.* This chapter is grounded in Black feminist and decolonial feminist approaches to interrogate the intersecting oppressions of racism, patriarchy, and imperialism that a feminist *ars erotica* resists in these creole songs. I once again incorporate Lorde's notion of the erotic as power to identify the pleasure in these songs as representing both sexual pleasure and "the sharing of joy" between women manifested through the singer/narrator's mentorship of her interlocuter in the song. I likewise highlight how, as songs, these texts suggest a public performance which mentors a public audience in feminist *ars erotica.* Analyzing three songs – "Zabet," N'a rien qui dous" and "Chanson pour les Mulâtresses du Cap," I incorporate the decolonial feminist theories of scholars such as Maria Lugones and Françoise Vergès to demonstrate how mixed-race women like the singer/narrator of these songs face oppressions in this colonized space that racialize and sexualize their bodies and create myths about *mulâtresses* that are inherited through the lineage of slavery which is rooted in "*le ventre des femmes Africaines*" (Vergès 62).

My specific focus on how the singer/narrator emphasizes the importance of "making whites pay" highlights the types of resistance that Winters argues manifests in artistic expressions of women of color throughout the early modern Transatlantic world. Where Winters highlights how the performance of African-rooted dance and music in colonized spaces might indicate how diasporic subjects "theorized and responded to an 'intensely violent world,'" I argue that the performance of these Creole courtesan songs by mixed-race women teaching others how to "make whites pay" likewise indicates an

artistic resistance to colonial oppression.[36] Indeed, specific articulations of the role of race in the sexual marketplace within these songs evoke the importance of a feminist *ars erotica* to teach younger mixed-race women how to defy the intersecting oppressions that they face in this colonized space and ultimately reverse the colonizer/colonized and the patron/courtesan social hierarchies.

In my final chapter, I similarly interrogate the intersections of racism, sexism, and imperialism through an exploration of literary representations of the *signares* of Gorée and Saint-Louis Senegal, the elite mistresses of wealthy European merchants in these slave-port cities. Though literary representations of these women are rare, I draw connections between a mid-nineteenth-century French novel series, *Les Princes d'Ébène* (1852) by Gabriel de la Landelle and eighteenth-century travel narratives such as Antoine Edmé Pruneau de Pommegorge's *Description de la Nigritie* (1789) and Dominique Lamartine's *L'Afrique et le Peuple Africain* (1789) that depict the *signares* but often ignore the important role they played in the social and economic makeup of early modern Gorée and Saint-Louis. In order to articulate how these women resisted European cultural oppression through the preservation and celebration of their African-rooted *signare* traditions, I employ Fuentes' practice of "stretching the archive" to "eke out" traces of *signare* culture across the travel narratives and the fictional series.

In nineteenth-century literary representations of mixed-race women such as Landelle's *Les Princes D'Ébène,* the *signares* are often presented through the lens of the

[36] In her analysis of visual/artistic depictions of the *signare* balls, for instance, Winters argues that "the performance of music and dance not only produced and sustained community but also signaled an intellectual practice wherein black diasporic subjects theorized and responded to "an intensely violent world'" (63).

tragic mulatta figure who is destined to meet disaster and misery throughout her story.[37] My analysis shows how the *signare* characters in this fictional series move beyond this trope and identifies instead how these women engage in a matriarchal system of mentorship in feminist *ars erotica* that is rooted in *signare* tradition. Put otherwise, the relationships that these women characters choose in the novel model the *signare* tradition of *mariage à la mode du pays* - a form of marriage whose primary function is to improve the social and financial status of the women involved.

Like the artistic resistance through song from chapter three, this chapter underscores connections between artistic expression and feminist resistance through the *signares'* public displays of African culture and fashion. Physical appearance, including style of dress and adornment is one observation of the *signares* that is consistently covered in travel narratives and fictional texts about these women. I incorporate Anne Lafont's notion that *signare* adornments such as jewelry – an "Afropean fashion" – held political meaning that symbolized their resistance to European cultural oppression as well as their elite social and economic status.[38] Since fashion, adornment, and public appearance are crucial to mastery of the courtesan arts, I argue that they are an integral

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[37] Manganelli describes of the tragic mulatta figure in literature that at any point she could be, "ripped from home and exposed as an item for sale on the auction block, where she was the ultimate example of commodified female sexuality" (10). This is precisely what happens to Maïssa, the *signare* in Landelle's series.

[38] Lafont describes the "Afropean" fashion of the *signares,* explaining that, "the *signare* style originates as a specific mode of dress – an Afropean fashion – which spreads to each *signare* court, displayed like a parade […] Appearance, in its sophistication and distinctiveness, thus proves to be a political technique addressed at once to the women and men already subject to the *signares* and those they seek to conquer in order to consolidates superior social, political and economic position" (1001).

part of *signare* mentorship in feminist *ars erotica* that helps to sustain these women's elite positions in early modern Senegal.

Though each of these chapters focuses on a form of mentorship in *ars erotica* between characters, it is important to note that there is also another element of mentorship that is woven throughout this dissertation and that is the mentorship of the readers of these texts – or in the case of the courtesan *mulâtresses,* the listeners of their songs. I especially emphasize the reader/listener's mentorship in chapters one through three by incorporating Marine Ganofsky's notion of education in libertine fiction in which she argues that "the most crucial education taking place [..] is that of the reader […] libertine fiction investigates voluptuousness in order to share with readers lessons on how to best reach it" ("The Libertine Novel" 232). If one of the goals of libertine fiction is to reach readers on a didactic level to teach them about libertine pleasure, then fictional representations of feminist *ars erotica* in fiction might likewise inform readers (or listeners) about how women's sexuality and mentorship – a form of solidarity – might provide a means for resistance to oppressions in their lived realities. This is especially true in instances where erotic fictions or songs implement the narrative "erotic I" – or a first-person libertine narrative that "gives such an effect of presence in the narrative, and thus an impression of realism" (Goulemot 122). In chapters one through three, the "erotic I" is depicted through the first-person narratives of Thérèse in *La Belle Allemande,* of the personal accounts of Thérèse and Mlle La Bois-Laurier in *Thérèse Philosophe,* as well as through the voice of the singer/narrative if the Creole courtesan songs.

Each of these first-person female narrators speak directly to their audience, depicting woman-to-woman mentorships in an erotic artform of resistance. Notably, the

brief incorporations of Maïssa's first-person narratives in chapter four's analysis of Landelle's *Les Princes d'Ébène* takes on a more tragic tone, further emphasizing the author's reliance on the tragic mulatta figure to tell this *signare's* story. With the exception of chapter four, however, all of the fictional texts that I analyze throughout this dissertation employ the "erotic I" as a narrative device to mentor the reader, in the very least, in the existence of feminist *ars erotica* and of their potential for undermining the patriarchal – and importantly male-fabricated – social structures that perpetuate women's oppression. It is, perhaps, for this reason that the "erotic I" does not exist in fictional representations of the *signares.* These women already existed within a matriarchally-based society of their own construction, and a direct mentorship to the reader that mirrors the lived reality of these already powerful women threatens to destabilize patriarchal and imperial projects in the early modern Francosophere. This is likewise why woman-to-woman mentorships in feminist erotic arts seem to manifest primarily in marginalized texts that fall outside of the literary and historical canon, after being heavily censored or omitted from the eighteenth-century literary marketplace as well as the contemporary literary archive. If these kinds of texts were to make it into the eighteenth-century canon, they might render it easier for readers to identify these mentorships in *ars erotica* as systems of solidarity that help women to resist social institutions that limit their autonomy and agency.

Scholarship in eighteenth-century literature has yet to fully acknowledge the solidarity networks that are established amongst women through mentorships in *ars erotica,* focusing instead on how male-authored libertine fictions and/or travel narratives about courtesans and *signares* depict the male gaze rather than any form of female

empowerment. While this might be true, it may also be time to look beyond the male gaze and read in-between the margins of these texts both by identifying the marginality of the women characters within them and the marginality of readers' access to these texts. In so doing, we can begin to identify how mentorships in feminist *ars erotica* have historically, and may continue today, to help women identify and express a feminine erotic that is not defined by men. In other words, this kind of study might help to demonstrate one way in which women can escape the stigma of spending their lives waiting, to echo Riccoboni, for men to *fall at their feet* and instead build and stand on their own ground, on their own terms.

CHAPTER ONE

Mothers, Madams, and Libertine Whores: Mentorship and Courtesan Arts in *La Belle Allemande*

La Belle Allemande, ou Les Galanteries de Thérèse, published in 1774 by Antoine Bret and Claude Villaret, is the story of a young woman native to Colmar who moves to Paris with her mother as a teenager to learn how to enter the Parisian *demimonde* as a courtesan. Told through Thérèse's first-person account in the style of a memoire when the courtesan is only nineteen years old, Thérèse's recollection of her training in the courtesan arts provides an example of a mother/daughter and madam/courtesan mentorship in *ars erotica.*[39] Through these mentorships, Thérèse learns how to dress, act, and socialize – in public and private settings – as what Nina Kushner would describe as a *dame entretenue* in the Parisian *demimonde*.[40] This storyline, Kushner argues, models the reality of many courtesans in the eighteenth century, including Thérèse Levasseur, the

[39] In this chapter, as in the rest of the dissertation "*ars erotica"* and *"courtesan arts"* are synonymous. I use them interchangeably as the courtesan arts are the erotic artform at the center of the mentorships that I examine.

[40] Kushner defines "*dames entretenues*" as "kept women" of Paris, who were also referred to as courtesans or "*femmes galantes*." She describes that these women were "given material and financial recompense sufficient, at least in theory, to support a household" (3). Although other scholars, such as Susan Griffin distinguish between "kept women" and "courtesans" usually through the latter's public persona, Kushner's detailed analysis of the erotic exchanges of the eighteenth-century Parisian *demimonde* as recorded through police investigations highlights the lives of both forms of women's paid sexual relationships with elite men.

longtime lover of none other than Jean-Jacques Rousseau whom he discusses in his *Confessions.*

In fact, the similarities between Thérèse's story in *La Belle Allemande* and the story of Levasseur described by Rousseau in *Les Confessions* are notable, especially as Rousseau indicates of his lover that he "ne l'abandonnerais ni ne l'épouserais jamais" (217).[41] Their romantic and sexual attachment outside of marriage, which promises Levasseur support from Rousseau, mimics the courtesan/patron relationships depicted in *La Belle Allemande.* Levasseur's relationship to her mother as described by Rousseau similarly draws parallels to the mother/daughter relationship in Bret and Villaret's novel. Describing his monetary support of Levasseur, Rousseau writes, "content de tenir Thérèse honnêtement, mais sans luxe, à l'abri de pressants besoins, je consentais que ce qu'elle gagnait par son travail fût tout entier au profit de sa mère, et je ne me bornais pas à cela" (*Les Confessions* 223). Though authorial intention surrounding choices of names and storylines in *La Belle Allemande* are impossible to decipher given the lack of any details from the authors surrounding these choices, the striking similarities between the relationships depicted in the two works, not to mention the shared names of the heroine of the novel and Rousseau's lover, certainly raises some questions about Bret and Villaret's knowledge of Rousseau's relationship with Levasseur.

However, without any current scholarship – and to my knowledge archival sources – to verify this inquiry, we are left with the texts themselves which, although they

[41] Although Rousseau indicates in *Confessions* that he would neither marry nor abandon Levasseur, it should be noted that the two did, in fact, later get married.

share some similarities, depart in one very important way.[42] Where Levasseur is described by Rousseau as being modest and timid, Thérèse in *La Belle Allemande* never shares these qualities.[43] Rather, Thérèse describes herself as follows: "Née dans le sein de la volupté, élevée et familiarisée dès mon enfance avec les jeux de l'amour le moins formaliste, je dois tout au goût des plaisirs. L'inconstance, la caprice, la légèreté, la faiblesse, la sensualité, voilà les sources où j'ai puisé mon élévation" (2). In other words, Thérèse is depicted in the novel through a series of paradoxical traits, none of which model the modest and timid Levasseur. This incongruous personality mirrors the paradox of Thérèse's life as a courtesan: one in which she manipulates male desire to avoid the patriarchal confines of monogamy, notably in marriage. Put otherwise, she is positioning herself as an object of male desire, and her objectification helps her to find a crack in the patriarchal system. As a courtesan, she is not bound by the laws of marriage to a man who can control her social, sexual, or financial decisions. It is through this small act of resistance, in the form of a manipulation of male desire, that Thérèse's story depicts a subversion of the patriarchal institution of eighteenth-century marriage.

Like the differences in personality traits, the mother/daughter relationships depicted in *Les Confessions* and *La Belle Allemande* do not parallel each other. While it is true that both Levasseur and Thérèse seem to have mothers who profit off their intimate affairs, Levasseur is painted by Rousseau as a victim of her family. He describes

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[42] While there is an abundance of scholarship on Levasseur, there are hardly any studies on *La Belle Allemande* in general, let alone its potential connection to this historical figure.

[43] Rousseau describes of Levasseur that "la première fois que je vis paraître cette fille à table, je fus frappé de son maintien modeste […] elle était très timide" (*Les Confessions* 216-217).

her as, "en proie à sa famille […] la seule qui n'eût point été dotée, était la seule qui nourrissait à son père et sa mère" (*Les Confessions* 223). Thérèse in *La Belle Allemande,* on the other hand, eventually recognizes her mother's manipulations and separates from her. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, this allows Thérèse the sole authority over her courtesan affairs and her wealth. Despite this separation from her mother, which occurs in the second half of the novel, the mentorship that she receives from her mother puts Thérèse on the path of becoming a courtesan. In fact, mentorship plays a key role in Thérèse's entire story, with her mother, and later a madam in Paris, guiding the development of her reputation – a facet of courtesan identity that is crucial to success and to balancing public identity and private, intimate affairs.[44]

Mentorships in the courtesan arts in *La Belle Allemande* take on a twofold structure, with mentors acting as both teachers of *ars erotica* as well as procurers of patrons for their mentee. Importantly, like other mentorships in *ars erotica,* the vital role of the mentor is that of a guide, not an authority figure who determines what is permissible in the erotic arts.[45] This becomes especially important for Thérèse after one of her mentors (her mother) betrays the inherent freedom attributed to mentorship in *ars erotica* by attempting to exert authority over her sexual and romantic choices. This misstep by her mentor will nonetheless help Thérèse in the development of her own

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[44] Pamela Cheek mentions in her article "Prostitutes of 'Political Institution'" that prostitutes were often referred to as "*filles publiques*" or "public girls" (193-194). Courtesans would also fall under this category, designating their relationship to the public and the importance on their public reputations.

[45] Leon Antonio Rocha explores the nuances of authority in Foucault's *ars erotica,* summarizing the latter's theorization of the erotic art as something that "does not forbid or permit" (330). The role of the mentor then, is to guide without manipulating their authority.

mentorship practice whereby she will, herself, share knowledge about *ars erotica* with women without trying to manipulate or control them.

Thanks to her mentorships in the courtesan arts, Thérèse is able to resist patriarchal monogamous partner structures – notably through marriage.[46] Of course, becoming a wife or a courtesan were not the only forms of existence for women in the eighteenth-century. Anne Montenach sheds light on the many forms of labor that women, especially from lower income families, participated in during this era through licit and illicit means inside and outside of the home.[47] My comparison of Thérèse as a courtesan to the bourgeois virtuous wife in this chapter reflects the direct juxtaposition of these two figures in the novel both in her mother's experience of marriage as well as in her encounter with one of her patron's wives at the end of the novel. Marriage, therefore, serves as the primary oppressive mechanism for women in the novel. Married women are depicted as trapped in unhappy relationships with unsavory men, whereas Thérèse, as a courtesan, represents a woman free from the social, financial, and sexual constraints of conjugal life.

It is important to note that Thérèse is averse not just to marriage, but to monogamy in general, as it would limit her availability to patrons in the *demimonde*.

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[46] Kushner points out that courtesans' success, "challenges the family-economy paradigm that understands women's labor only within the family […] As single women, many came to be free from the control of the family and the household. As sexual entities, they were generally independent of husbands, brothels, and other institutions that regulated female sexuality at the time" (9).

[47] Montenach's book especially focuses on women from lower incomes who were more involved in the illicit trade of goods that their bourgeois counterparts. She details in her introduction how these women were active in markets – and in spaces – typically regarded by scholars as restrictive and off-limits to eighteenth-century women.

Sexual availability is a key feature of the courtesan arts and is among many other important traits that Thérèse acquires during her mentorships and through her experience in the *demimonde*.[48] Other qualities that I will examine in this chapter include charm, cheek, and timing – each of which help Thérèse build the quintessential courtesan persona after having mastered her *ars erotica*. Importantly, Thérèse's mastery of these qualities highlights the artistic nature of the courtesan lifestyle. Being a courtesan is, above all, a performance wherein women create a public persona who exudes sensuality, demands admiration, and balances public seduction with private intimacy. Once Thérèse has reached peak courtesan notoriety, she becomes a mentor in this artform to other women. Her transformation demonstrates the possibility for continuity in feminist *ars erotica* whereby the courtesan arts can be shared with other women, building more opportunities for resistance to patriarchal oppression. Importantly, this chapter will identify how Thérèse's mentorship of other women – which leads to a feeling of satisfaction at the end of the novel – is a literary expression of the feminine erotic manifested through the indescribable feeling that this character is unable to fully communicate to her readers.[49]

Because the novel is told through the first-person narrative of Thérèse, the erotic undertones create an illusion of realism within the text. The "erotic I," in this case, also presents a sense of voyeurism – Thérèse, as the narrator, acts as a guide for the reader to

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[48] I incorporate in this chapter Susan Griffin's seven virtues of courtesans that she lays out in *The Book of Courtesans.* These virtues include timing, beauty, cheek, brilliance, gaiety, grace, charm.

[49] This feminine erotic "feeling" that I discuss is in reference to Lorde's theory of the erotic as feeling for women which has been suppressed by Western patriarchal social and political structures.

witness those realistic, intimate acts which should be private.[50] It is likewise through this narrative device that Thérèse guides her readers as a mentor in a feminist *ars erotica.* The "erotic I" works in tandem with the first-person narrative style of the novel to create a "whore (auto) biography" which, as Julie Peakman argues in *Amatory Pleasures,* was a novelistic technique that developed throughout the eighteenth century and which purported to present "true" accounts of courtesan's sexual relationships including the identification of their patrons.[51] Thérèse's memoir is an example of this novelistic technique, incorporating structural components of the whore (auto) biography throughout her narrative.[52] The realism of the "erotic I" in the whore (auto) biographical narrative attempts to convince readers that the scenes depicted reflect some facet of sexual reality, and actively engages them in the story's erotic plot through the reading process, perhaps even inciting a visceral reaction through arousal. If the text can incite this kind of interactive experience with readers, which makes them reflect on their own reality as it relates to the story, then Thérèse's story might also inspire readers to consider alternative

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[50]See Goulemot, pp. 120-130 for a full analysis of the "erotic I" in libertine fiction as well as the role of the reader as a voyeur of erotic acts on the page.

[51] Peakman discusses in *Amatory Pleasures* how this novelistic form incorporated stories about well-known prostitutes and the writers of these tales. She argues that this genre "ran fictitious tales alongside facts, using gossip and divulging secrets as a means to bring their readers closer to their subject, but the 'facts' in different accounts sometimes conflict." (66). Although she uses the term "whore biography," I insert (auto) to reflect that Thérèse's story is a first-person narrative of her own life.

[52] This style incorporates, for instance, asterisks that are used hide the names of certain "real-life" characters, engaging the reader in a game in which they have to "interpret the gaps and is thereby complicit in the 'naughtiness of the story" (Peakman, *Amatory Pleasures* 62).

realities for women – ones that resonate with the kinds of resistance to financial, social, and sexual oppression her story depicts.

This interaction between text and reader is precisely what, as Lisa Jane Graham argues, "made reading dangerous" in eighteenth-century France. This was a time when legal and moral authorities considered written text to be a "conduit between reader and reality" and condemned the reading of materials that "disrupted an information economy predicated on scarcity and secrecy by making visible, and therefore available, what should be hidden" (Graham 468). Thérèse's mentorship of her readers makes visible the veiled world of the *demimonde*, offering an alternative to not only the patriarchal institution of marriage but to many male-dominated spaces. The *demimonde* in *La Belle Allemande,* after all, depicts a woman-led business world in which courtesans and madams brokered contracts, controlled their own money, and freely pursued their own sexual and/or financial interests.[53] This world is constructed around mentorships in *ars erotica* in which women teach each other how to find cracks in an otherwise male-dominated, patriarchal society. For many courtesans who, like Thérèse, come from modest economic backgrounds, these mentorships in *ars erotica* also help them to transcend social and economic class barriers in eighteenth-century France. In other words, mentorships in *ars erotica* are the vehicles through which women might identify

[53] Kushner argues that the *demimonde* the most powerful women were the madams who managed the sexual marketplace, as they could manipulate information to report to police about the goings-on of the *demimonde* and elite madams even formed professional communities amongst each other. Courtesans, likewise, held high social influence amongst Parisian elites who frequented the *demimonde* and took part in its activities. Kushner describes them as celebrities of the era. See *Erotic Exchanges* especially the introduction and chapter five.

weaknesses in hierarchical systems that perpetuate gendered, sexual, and economic marginalization, and exploit those weaknesses in an act of resistance to these oppressions.

Because Thérèse's story is framed as a whore (auto)biography, Thérèse represents the literary figure that Kathryn Norberg terms the "libertine whore" not only because of her status as a courtesan but also because of her general disposition towards the *demimonde*, pleasure, and reason. Her story models the whore (auto)biographical narrative style, and Thérèse herself embodies the traits of the libertine whore as a literary figure. Norberg contends that the libertine whore is:

> A businesswoman and an artist who provides "varied" sex for men who can afford it. She is a courtesan who lives in luxury and abides by "philosophy," usually materialist philosophy. Intelligent, independent, proud and reasonable, she is *not* diseased or monstrous; she is not victimized either by life or her clients. She may have come from working-class roots, but she overcomes them through her education and intelligence. (227)

Despite all of these seemingly empowering qualities, it is important to remember that the libertine whore's sexuality is also implicated in her fictional incarnation. Thérèse's sexual desire is a typical, if not cliché, portrayal of women's sexuality in male-authored libertine fiction and appeals to a cisgender, heterosexual, primarily male gaze.[54] As a libertine whore, Thérèse is "utterly fictional, an image which has more to do with male fantasy than with social reality" (226). Thérèse's sexuality does, however, provide insights into libertine writing about women's pleasure and literary representations of the

[54] Norberg emphasizes that authors who wrote libertine whore stories were men who "probably wrote for a predominantly, if not solely, male audience" (230).

feminine erotic in the eighteenth century. That being said, I echo Marine Ganofsky's argument that libertine fiction "highlights that erotic desire is always *already* much more than 'just' sex: it cannot yet be severed from moral, social, philosophical, and religious preoccupations" ("The Libertine Novel" 229). The portrayal of Thérèse's sexual drive, appealing primarily to male readership, also serves as the focus of the mentorship relationship that she has with her mother and with a madam later in her story. It is her penchant for bodily pleasure that establishes Thérèse's as a *femme galante* and leads to her success as a courtesan, a success made possible only through these mentorships.

Because the depiction of Thérèse's sexuality relies on male fantasy, it seems paradoxical – if not contentious – to analyze any form of feminist resistance through this lens. It is for this reason that I focus on mentorship, rather than only sexuality, to identify how the courtesan arts can lead to resistance. It is through mentorship that Thérèse learns how to find cracks in the patriarchal systems that marginalize women and restrict their social, sexual, and financial liberties. Her mentors teach her how to perform the art that offers her some form of liberatory respite in the gendered hierarchies of eighteenth-century French society. These mentorships also, notably, represent her connection to women. In a novel whose goal to appeal to the male gaze through the libertine whore's autobiography, mentorship in the courtesan arts stands as the only singularly female enterprise in Thérèse's memoir. It is this uniquely woman-to-woman form of mentorship, therefore, that acts a s a vehicle for resistance to patriarchal oppression in *La Belle Allemande.*

Although Thérèse's story does not necessarily depict the reality of prostitution and courtesan arts in eighteenth-century France, it does hint at some key features of the

demimonde and the public women who worked in it. Throughout this chapter, I historically contextualize Thérèse's experiences both through mentorship and her relationships with patrons. To do this, I primarily reference Nina Kushner's extensive research on elite prostitution in eighteenth-century Paris as presented in her work *Erotic Exchanges: The World of Elite Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Paris.* I likewise make frequent reference to Susan Griffin's *The Book of Courtesans* to establish a historical background of the courtesan arts and explain the experiential aspect of training in this *ars erotica*. Kushner's book provides insight into the lives of elite prostitutes including their interactions with police, madams, and patrons as well as the family dynamics that influenced courtesan work. Griffin's book, on the other hand, highlights the performative aspects of the courtesan arts, detailing how these women created public personas. Both of these works influence my analysis of Thérèse's courtesan art in *La Belle Allemande,* especially in her relationships with her mentors who help her to develop her courtesan persona and practice.

Early Mentorship

As the title of the novel suggests, Thérèse is a *femme galante* and her life story focuses on her work as a courtesan, notably her sexual relationships with men. Bret and Villaret portray Thérèse's gallantry in a quintessentially libertine fashion – through the lens of heteronormative male desire, objectifying women's sexuality. Peakman expertly points out that gendered representations of sexual desire and intimacy in erotic and libertine fiction of the eighteenth century often depict men and women in "'normal'

sexual hierarchical roles, highlighting the extreme characters of the passive female on the one hand, and the uncontrolled lascivious female on the other" (*Mighty Lewd Books* 2). These fictional portrayals of women in libertine fiction reflect the dichotomous real-world presumptions about women being either virtuous or *galante*. Thérèse represents the latter of Peakman's two categories of women in erotic and libertine fiction, as her sexual desire seems to manifest at an early age. As a libertine whore, however, gallantry is more complex for Thérèse than simply being a marker of her lack of virtue. Thérèse's gallantry is linked to her art and therefore requires a certain balance between pleasure and caution. Overindulgence in gallantry could threaten to diminish her courtesan art in the same way that prudishness could deter the patrons who fund her lifestyle.

Gallantry is also, notably, a trait Thérèse inherits from her mother. At the beginning of the novel, Thérèse incorporates an anecdote about her mother's wedding day infidelity to not only validate her inherited gallantry but also her disdain for marriage in general. She first describes her mother's marriage as a source of misery, painting her mother as a victim and her conjugal vows as a farce:

> Victime de l'obscurité dans laquelle elle vivait, elle fut obligée de déshonorer ses attraits par l'alliance monstrueuse d'un boulanger septuagénaire […] Ma chaste mère, tendre victime de l'amour et du devoir, fut conduite au pieds des autels, où elle jura à son mari une fidélité éternelle, serments qu'elle n'était résolue de garder qu'autant qu'ils pourraient se concilier avec son intérêt et ses plaisirs. (5)

Thérèse's description of her mother's marriage evokes a sentiment of sacrifice on her mother's part: she can never truly be satisfied in this "*alliance monstrueuse*" and this relationship is portrayed as a necessity or a duty. Importantly, Thérèse notes that her

mother would be dishonored not by the infidelity that would directly follow her wedding vows, but by the marriage itself. Put otherwise, her mother betrays herself in agreeing to enter into conjugal life and swear fidelity to a husband.

Thérèse's pessimism towards marriage is further exemplified through the delightful tone she takes in describing her mother's infidelity with a lover, simply referred to as *le Procureur,* with whom the mother planned to meet up for sex on the day of her wedding: "ces heureux amants, délivrés des regards importuns, s'abandonnèrent en liberté à tous les transports que l'amour est capable d'inspirer" (7-8). Unlike the despondent tone that Thérèse takes in describing the marriage between her mother and father, this brief sexual exchange uses terms like "happy lovers" who "abandoned themselves in liberty," thereby denoting Thérèse's clear preference for the extramarital affair over conjugal sexual monogamy.[55]

This anecdote about her mother's infidelity on her wedding day exemplifies her mother's gallantry and serves as a means of positively qualifying her own gallant interests. According to Thérèse, her mother's infidelity on her wedding day is not a case of a young woman being misguided by a lover, but a totally natural occurrence that should be celebrated, and which also emphasizes the similarities between herself and her mother. She writes,

[55] While I use the term "father" here to describe her mother's first husband, Thérèse also mentions at one point in the narrative that her mother was never sure about her true father's identity as there were too many men that she was intimate with during the time of her daughter's conception. This is another example of how the authors link Thérèse's gallantry to her mother.

> J'ai choisi parmi beaucoup d'autres ce léger trait de galanteries de ma mère, pour donner seulement une idée de ses inclinations, et faire entrevoir à quel degré d'éminence elle a pu porter l'espèce de vertu dont elle fait possession, par l'usage et l'expérience secondés d'un si beau naturel. Je ne m'entendrai pas sur une infinité d'autres aventures, à moins qu'elles n'ayant quelque rapport avec les événements de ma vie. (10-11)

Thérèse indicates at the end of this recollection of her mother's gallantry that this is the trait she chose to exemplify through this anecdote because it is the trait they share. The description of her mother in the first few pages of the novel sets the scene for her mentorship in the courtesan arts which will help Thérèse profit from her gallantry in a way her mother never could. Thérèse even acknowledges her mother's role in raising her to become a courtesan before she begins to recount her own story,

> Comme j'ai obligation de toutes mes vertus, et de toute la gloire dont je jouis actuellement, aux soins de ma mère pour mon éducation, je serais coupable d'une ingratitude affreuse, si, par ma négligence à la faire connaitre, je la privais des éloges dû à ses talents et à son expérience (3).

For the rest of the first part of the novel, Thérèse's mother plays an important role in her life as a mentor who will help her learn the courtesan arts and who will also procure patrons for her. The role of procurers was commonly taken on by mothers in the eighteenth-century *demimonde* who arrange contracts with their minor children.[56] This

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[56] Although a detestable practice to our modern (and, arguably, also in eighteenth-century) sensibilities, Kushner notes that girls from low-income families were often sold into the *demimonde* and even though this was illegal, "police reinforced the idea that parental authority was operative in the demimonde" (74). It is also

was so common an occurrence that some libertine fictions immortalized the mother/procurer figure, especially in confessional or memoire-style narratives such as Louis-Charles Fougeret de Monbron's *Margot La Ravaudeuse* (1753) and, of course, *La Belle Allemande.* Mentorship in the courtesan arts in this novel, therefore, serves two primary functions.

The first function of mentorship in *La Belle Allemande* is the didactic objective of *ars erotica* in which the mentor teaches their mentee certain lessons about the *demimonde* such as how to present oneself physically (how to dress), how to prepare one's body for the physical demands of the courtesan arts (this includes sexual intercourse as well as physical fitness to attract patrons), and how to behave in the *demimonde* in order to build a courtesan persona and seduce patrons. The second function is that of procurement whereby the mentor helps the up-and-coming courtesan to network in the *demimonde* and secure contracts with patrons. Each of Thérèse's mentors in this novel fulfill both of these functions and, towards the end of the novel, Thérèse herself will model this structure of mentorship for other women in the *demimonde*.

Mentorship with her mother in the courtesan arts begins at an early age for Thérèse, when her mother notices her physical development during puberty. Thérèse notes that, "ma mère, qui sentait de quelle ressource des pareils avantages pouvaient être par la suite, mettait tous ses soins à cultiver mes traits naissants; Elle faisait un grand fonds sur eux, et les regardait comme un acheminement aux aventures les plus flatteuses"

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worth mentioning that for women, the age of majority was twenty-five, so when Thérèse's mother enters her into the *demimonde* around fourteen or fifteen years old, she would still have around a decade of parental authority over her.

(15). After noticing these budding physical traits in her daughter, her mother decides to move to Metz with only Thérèse, abandoning her other children and her husband out of both boredom and her interest in mentoring Thérèse to enter the *demimonde*.

Her mother's abandonment of her children and husband is Thérèse's first lesson in resisting patriarchal social oppression as it transfers the power of family decision-making from paternal to maternal authority. This kind of shift in familial power threatens patriarchal social structures that depend, as Elisabeth Badinter argues, on familial obedience to the virtues of paternal authority. Furthermore, it is important to note that Thérèse's mother abandoned her husband and children without going through a legal divorce, even though Thérèse describes their separation as a divorce.[57] At the time that *La Belle Allemande* was written (prior to 1791), divorce would not have been easy for women to obtain.[58] Susan Desan reminds us that before 1791, a physical separation from a husband was extremely difficult for wives to obtain except in instances of extreme physical abuse. Furthermore, when they were approved, neither spouse had the right to

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[57] Anna Maria Marchini and Suzanne Desan both thoroughly explain women's legal inferiority in eighteenth-century France. Both scholars indicate that there was a significant rise in divorce rates and petitions for divorce by women after the 1791 constitutional decision to allow for more conditions under which people could request divorce and/or legal separation. See Marchini "Legal Inferiority" pp. 126 and Desan "Broken Bonds: The Revolutionary Practice of Divorce" in *The Family on Trial.*

[58] Desan lists two forms of separation under the Ancient Regime, the second of which is the *separation de corps* denoting that the spouses would physically separate from each other and no longer cohabitate. For women to legally obtain this form of marital separation, they had to provide proof of "severe cruelty or mistreatment; attempted murder by the husband; bigamy; exceptional cases of insanity; adultery accompanied by aggravating factors, such as debauchery, defamation, or supporting the mistress within the household. Battery headed the list of successful grounds" (33).

remarry.[59] Bret and Villaret's incorporation of Thérèse's mother's separation from her first husband, directly following the grim description of this marriage, reflects a pro-divorce rhetoric that became more common in eighteenth-century France leading up to the revolution. In her work *Strength in Numbers,* Carol Blum aptly summarizes the "flood of writings favoring divorce in the eighteenth-century" citing writers such as Diderot and Montesquieu, among many other *philosophes*, who wrote in favor of divorce (74). Whether the goal was to contribute to the growing pro-divorce discourse of the latter half of the eighteenth century or to simply reify Thérèse's mother's gallantry – or both – her mother's decision places Thérèse outside the realm of paternal authority. For the remainder of the first half of the novel, it is her mother who will guide Thérèse to embrace her gallantry.

Once they arrive in Metz, Thérèse's mother passes herself off as a widow and enters into an unofficial union that Thérèse refers to as a marriage, though she mentions that her mother did not officially marry this second husband until she learned of her previous spouse's death seven years later.[60] This relationship, in fact, seems to resemble something of a patron/courtesan relationship in that it avoids any legality and serves the sexual needs of both parties as well as the financial needs of Thérèse's mother, as the second husband is gainfully employed as a language teacher. Thérèse says of this union, "il est vrai que ce second hymen fut une de ces alliances dénuées de cérémonial, où la

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[59] [59] Blum indicates that Montesquieu elaborates his argument for divorce in both *Lettres Persanes* and *Esprit des Lois.* She also cites Diderot's "Du Divorce" to demonstrate both *philosophe's* pro-divorce sentiment (66, 74).

[60] Thérèse describes that,"au bout de sept années de divorce, ma mère apprit enfin la mort du Boulanger, son premier mari, ce qui lui donna la liberté de s'unir sérieusement avec le second" (16).

seule volonté des parties est requise sans autres formalités" (16).[61] After entering this union with her new lover, Thérèse's mother passes the metaphorical torch of gallantry her daughter, or, as Thérèse phrases it "je vais entrer en lice à sa place" (17). However, this is not just because her mother has decided to commit to a new lover. Rather, she identifies the penchant for gallantry that her daughter has inherited, something which they both notice from a very early age. Thérèse remembers the early budding of her gallantry at the age of thirteen in the following passage:

> Quoique dans un âge où les passions ne font encore qu'effleurer le cœur, je commençais déjà à sentir. La vue d'un homme bien fait excitait en moi une curiosité, dont je ne pouvais deviner le motif. L'impression que cette vue faisait sur moi, était plus intéressante que les mouvements d'une curiosité ordinaire. (17)

The early arousal of female sexuality is a pinnacle of the whore (auto) biographical narrative, and Thérèse's early signs of gallantry are articulated through the language of curiosity.[62] Being curious took on different meanings in eighteenth-century France

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[61] The use of the phrasing "second hymen" here makes an interesting reference to the hymen as a symbol of women's virginity to be given to a husband in marriage. For Thérèse's mother this "second hymen" symbolizes her commitment to her new lover while simultaneously representing her (many) infidelities to her first husband. The use of this phrasing may be indicative of the eighteenth-century focus on the hymen and women's virginity in medical and philosophical texts surrounding women's virtue. Corinne Harol's book *Enlightened Virginity in Eighteenth-Century Literature* thoroughly investigates the elusiveness of virginity and its many appearances in literature during this era.

[62] Peakman's description of sexual awakening in the whore (auto) biographical narrative model's the first experience of arousal that Thérèse describes: "courtesans provide descriptions of their first sexual encounters, with reasons as to why they were first enticed into sex. Their female sexuality was aroused at an early age […] Once her passions had been stirred, she became aware of all the men around her" (89).

depending on the gendered positionality of the curious subject. Neil Kenny explains in detail the differences between male and female curiosity in the early modern era, noting that, "the eighteenth-century celebration of good kinds of curiosity was dependent on the continuing existence of bad kinds (often female or feminized) against which the good kind (often male or masculinized) could stand out by contrast" (385). Jörn Steigerwald, similarly, points out the negativity surrounding female curiosity in the eighteenth century, noting that, "when female curiosity is the starting point of a woman's sexual education, the female imagination is the most dominant and also the most dangerous faculty of women, one which already needs to be regulated by their education" (937). Where education, as Steigerwald argues, was meant to regulate female curiosity, Thérèse's mother chooses to foster this trait through her education rather than stifle it.

Because Thérèse already exhibits an inclination towards gallantry, her mother decides that her education will be focused on developing this innate characteristic in her daughter, which will be a key component to Thérèse's training in the courtesan arts. For instance, her initial training is focused primarily on activities that will condition the social skills necessary for attracting patrons, as well as nurturing her physical attributes:

> Ma mère se confirmait de jour en jour dans la haute idée qu'elle s'était formée de mes charmes. On eut soin de me donner un maître de danse, et les autres choses à perfectionner les agréments du corps; pour mon cœur et mon esprit, on avait trop bonne opinion d'eux pour ne pas s'en rapporter à la nature. (16-17)

Although Thérèse's mother did not provide a formal education for her daughter, opting instead to leave this aspect of her training "to nature," the structure of early education depicted in *La Belle Allemande* mimics the instructive role of the virtuous mother.

Félicité de Genlis, for instance, promotes the notion of maternal oversight of children's education – especially of daughters – in *Adèle et Théodore,* declaring that, "les mères qui ont reçu une éducation distinguée doivent seules se mêler d'élever elles-mêmes leurs enfants […] Avec du bon sens et de la bonne volonté, une mère élèvera toujours bien sa fille" (xxii). The extent of Thérèse's mother's education is not disclosed in the novel, so it is impossible to know if she herself received a "bonne education" to Genlis' standards. However, regardless of her educational background, Genlis would likely not approve of the type of education that Thérèse's mother is providing for her daughter. Where the virtuous mother, as Lesley H. Walker contends, "knows and anticipates her daughter's behavior and thus keeps her out of harm's way" (27), the gallant mother – Thérèse's mother – knows and anticipates her daughter's potentially unvirtuous behavior and encourages it.

Despite the differences in content of instruction, Thérèse's mother follows the structure laid out by Genlis in which mothers oversee their daughter's education – even if lessons in the courtesan arts certainly do not focus on the kind of modesty, virtue, and wifely/motherly duties that Genlis would prescribe in her maternal curricula. As far as a courtesan's education in gallantry is concerned, the focus is on what Peakman refers to as "the art of pleasing." In fact, Peakman provides an excellent summary of what a courtesan's education would entail:

> A certain standard of knowledge was paramount for a courtesan and her education was a crucial element in her seduction technique. She should be well-informed, but not overly so: just enough to keep a man keenly entertained. Attracting clients involved displaying as many skills as she could to their best advantage. Public

> demonstrations of some (but not too much) learning about literature, music and dance for a courtesan was a means of advertising. It was through her education that she could retrain her social status by appealing to men of the upper echelons of society. (*Amatory Pleasures* 87)

Thérèse will not be taught to confine herself to domestic life, but rather to showcase herself as a courtesan – a profession and lifestyle which allows her to avoid the unhappy legal bounds of marriage in the eighteenth century while also securing an elite, wealthy status. One might be tempted, at first glance, to compare Thérèse's mother to a pimp. However, as Susan Griffin contends, the mothers of courtesans often organized their entry into the *demimonde*. Although a courtesan would certainly support her mother financially, she does not serve only to enrich her mother in the way a prostitute does a pimp. Rather, "a courtesan could benefit from her own success" (Griffin location 88). This success, of course, would require an education that would teach Thérèse a delicate balancing act – a performance in public that leads to paid, private intimacy.

Bret and Villaret do not incorporate any intellectual or artistic education for Thérèse outside of her dance classes. If Thérèse had enough charm and intellect to leave those aspects of her education "to nature," then her mother's emphasis on dance and other corporeal developments depicts her focus on the physicality of the courtesan profession. This is a profession that requires the sexual capacities of a physical body, and Bret and Villaret's inclusion of this focus on Thérèse's bodily regulation iterates the developing libertine materialist philosophy of the eighteenth century. While I will focus more heavily in the next chapter on libertine materialism as it manifests more overtly in the Marquis d'Argen's *Thérèse Philosophe,* it is worth noting how Thérèse's education in

La Belle Allemande also hints at a libertine materialism, especially in terms of the types of self-control that she must balance with pleasure in her gallant career.

In her recent anthological contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Philosophy,* Natania Meeker discusses eighteenth-century libertine materialism and contends that at first glance, libertinage is seemingly at odds with its classical antecedents.[63] With the libertine's focus on excess and pleasure, regulation of the passions does not seem to fit their mold. However, Thérèse's initial education – which is described primarily through the physical training of her bodily traits – calls attention to a form of self-regulation that lends itself to libertinage. In training her body and social repertoire through learning dance, she is preparing herself for the important physical – or material – aspects of the courtesan arts. She must look, dress, socialize (dance) in such a way that she can keep a patron, to borrow Peakman's phrasing, *keenly entertained.*

Furthermore, if we are to incorporate the self-regulatory aspects of earlier materialist philosophies, then perhaps another aspect of libertine materialism that Thérèse embodies in this novel manifests through her entrepreneurial management of her affairs. Courtesans, after all, established contracts with their patrons that, unlike the bonds of marriage, were not legally binding and presumed finality upon their creation.[64] It is through these agreements with their patrons that courtesans controlled their material

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[63] Meeker discusses this concept in "The Art of Self-Deception" in which she contends that classical materialism balanced on one hand, *apatheia* or "the indulgence of either feeling or appetite [and] *atraxia* on the other – which emphasizes the "careful management of the passions, not their indulgence" (600).
[64] The courtesan's contracts were not legally binding but rather an "oral agreement between patron and mistress that delineated her remuneration" (Kushner 34).

wealth and the sexual intimacies they exchanged for it. This is the driving force behind Thérèse's ultimate success in the *demimonde*. As a libertine whore, she neither overindulges in nor deprives herself of sexual pleasure. Sexual gratification, instead, combines with meticulous consideration of how her healthy libido can lead to material wealth. Unfortunately for Thérèse, this is one aspect of her training in the courtesan arts that her mother does not quite master herself. Though she teaches Thérèse that sex can be monetarily compensated, she is not the best model for securing payment. Indeed, it would not be until Thérèse and her mother get to Paris that they will meet Thérèse's second mentor in the courtesan arts who teaches her how to broker such deals with men in the Parisian *demimonde.*

From Metz to Paris: Thérèse's Second Mentor

The Parisian *demimonde* offered more opportunities to Thérèse to profit from her gallantry than the smaller, less opulent sexual marketplace in Metz. However, while in Metz she does receive a lot of attention from admirers seeking especially to be her first lover, or as she phrases it, they wanted to, "donner à une femme les premières leçons de tendresse" (21). Due to Thérèse's young age and ever-increasing sexual drive, her mother surveils her activities, at one point interrupting a romantic romp with one of her admirers before she is able to have sex with him to make sure that Thérèse understands that sexual activity should be rewarded:

> Nous étions dans un des endroits le plus intéressant de notre entretien, lorsque ma mère, qui survint à l'improvise, interrompit nos jeux, mit en fuite les amours, et

> me glaça par sa présence. Elle exhala sa fureur contre G… par les plus sanglants reproches […] il [G—] fit à ma mère les promesses les plus éblouissantes, lui donna des arrhes de l'exécution de sa parole, et par le moyen de sa bourse et de ses politesses, il trouva le secret de l'adoucir, et de rétablir le calme. (27)

From Thérèse's description of this event, it is clear that her mother's anger stems not from the liberties that G— was taking with her daughter, but instead in from the fact that the two lovers had not come to an agreement about what monetary compensation Thérèse would receive, and neither had they consulted her about it. After this encounter, Thérèse describes having G— and other suitors visit, and these structured visits helped her to develop, "la prodigieuse inclination qui me portait à la volupté" (30). These visits are organized by Thérèse and her mother, and each suitor that comes to see her agrees to terms set by both for compensation in return for some form of sexual service, although penetrative sex would not occur until later. Because of these numerous visits, Thérèse begins to develop a negative reputation in Metz thereby reducing the number of suitors seeking her out. As her number of suitors decreases so does her, and her mother's, income.[65] This series of events makes clear the importance of reputation in the courtesan arts, which balances public and private life, so that courtesans can avoid attracting too much attention to their bedroom activities while at the same time inciting enough interest from patrons to be pursued.

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[65] Reputation for a courtesan can be described as a form of sexual capital which was calculated by "appearance, personality, salary history, [and] artistic talent." (Kushner 158). Kushner further describes how memberships in theatrical companies or in the Opéra also built sexual capital in the *demimonde*.

This emphasis on reputation, of course, highlights the double-standards surrounding women's and men's sexuality and their participation in *libertinage* because the men with whom Thérèse shares these sexual encounters see no repercussions, even though they are men from the upper echelons of society.[66] As Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell contend, men's libertinism often built up their phallic masculine reputations thereby boosting their social reputations, whereas libertine women (*femmes galantes*) were often "castigated as wantons and whores" (11). While it is true that Thérèse is commodifying her sexual encounters, it is imperative that she maintain a reputation above the status of a lower-level or streetwalking prostitute. Choosing the right patron was an important feature of the courtesan arts, and it is crucial to remember that "the social status of these women, their lifestyles and their working conditions were closely linked to the status of their clients" (Peakman, *Amatory Pleasures* 82).[67] This is what separates courtesans from other forms of prostitution in eighteenth-century France. The courtesan must paradoxically embody social affluency, elitism, and sexual availability all at the same time.

This delicate balance is something that Thérèse's mother is unable to teach her on her own, as she herself has never been a courtesan nor has she interacted with the sexual marketplace. Although Thérèse inherited her mother's gallantry, her mother has not

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[66] One of Thérèse's visitors, for instance, is described as "un jeune sénateur du Parlement" (28). She also explains how other members of the Parliament graced her with their visits.

[67] This is not to say that some courtesans did not also work for madams in brothels. Kushner indicates that, "some kept women used madams as brokers, to procure patrons or [....] to find part time work" (99). As we will see later in this chapter, Thérèse will work in La Dame G——'s brothel even after she contracts a patron.

mastered all aspects of the courtesan arts. Due to her declining reputation in Metz, Thérèse's mother decides they must go to Paris, the social and cultural hub of France and "the center of the *demimonde* not just of France but of Western Europe" (Kushner 70). In Paris, Thérèse would have far more opportunities to attract wealthy, elite patrons who would pay far more than any of the men she encountered in Metz. However, as they are leaving Metz, a long-time pursuer of Thérèse follows them and negotiates what Thérèse refers to as an "*alliance clandestine*" with her mother to pay for a night with her daughter. It is this night, it seems, that Thérèse considers to be the night that she lost her virginity (engaged in penetrative sex) as the description of this encounter is much more detailed than any others that preceded this event. It is also the source of Thérèse's greatest shame – not because of the sexual exchange, but because it resulted in a lack of payment. In fact, as Thérèse is detailing her memory of this night, her narrative combines both resentment and passion, indicating the positive sexual experience mixed with animosity towards this stingy lover:

> Amour, as-tu pu permettre qu'un cœur tout à toi fut trompé d'une manière si cruelle? La bonne foi avec laquelle je me livrais au scélérat, qui me jouait, méritait-elle d'être traitée avec tant d'indignité? […] Tendres langueurs, empressements redoublés, transports rapides, mon âme s'abandonna toute entière aux doux épanchements de la joie la plus pure et la plus délicieuse […] j'étalai au perfide tous les trésors de la volupté, et par des efforts surnaturels, j'épuisai jusqu'aux dernières ressources de la tendresse. Enfin, succombant l'un et l'autre sous la multitude et l'excès de nos plaisirs, nous nous endormîmes dans le sein de l'amour. (35)

As her lover is getting ready to leave, he declares to Thérèse and her mother:

> Je retourne à Metz, un heureux voyage; vous allez dans une ville où les charmes de mademoiselle vous répondent d'un avenir heureux, à l'égard de nos conditions, daignez m'en dispenser pour le présent; si je les remplissais, je me priverais d'un nécessaire pour vous donner un superflu, dont votre figure et votre jeunesse peuvent aisément réparer la perte." (36)

In other words, this man wrote a check he could not cash in agreeing to a monetary exchange with Thérèse's mother before sleeping with her, and then claims that since Thérèse is so young, beautiful, and charming, she will more than make up for the loss once in Paris. The clandestine nature of their agreement leaves Thérèse without any witnesses outside of her mother (and her mother's husband who traveled with them) to vouch for their agreement, so there is nothing stopping this lover from leaving without payment. Notwithstanding the blatant disrespect in his justification, this lover calls attention to the bountiful resources of the Parisian *demimonde* that Thérèse will take advantage of. Her mother, having not secured payment before this sexual exchange, teaches Thérèse an important lesson in courtesan/patron relationships: terms must be strictly agreed upon before any physical relationship can commence, and there must be someone to witnesses to this agreement who can vouch for Thérèse in the *demimonde*. This is why the social and bureaucratic structure of the Parisian *demimonde* will better serve Thérèse's courtesan interests, as she will be able to find someone who can help her broker these deals and – if necessary – sully the name of an unpaying patron.[68] In other

[68] Kushner indicates that although the Parisian *demimonde* had its own unique culture, customs, and traditions, "in some important ways the culture and

words, Thérèse needs a madam to mentor her in the business aspects of the Parisian *demimonde*.

Once Thérèse and her mother arrive in Paris she meets her second mentor in the courtesan arts – a neighbor named La Dame G—, who is a madam with social and business connections in the *demimonde*. Thérèse states of La Dame G—'s influence that, "le nombre des connaissances de Madame G… était prodigieux, gens de toutes couleurs et de tous états; Partisans, Commis, Guerriers, Magistrats, Commerçants, Abbés, Citoyens, Étrangers, tous étaient admis" (44).[69] This portrait of La Dame G— depicts not only the diversity of the *demimonde*, but also the reach of madams in Paris who were, "the hubs of overlapping networks of buyers and sellers of elite sexuality" (Kushner 99). These women ran the *demimonde*, and Kushner describes that madams were involved in every form of sexual trade ranging from running brothels to brokering deals between courtesans and patrons.[70] Importantly, madams also traded in information both to police and amongst demimondaine society, deciding, "which people about whom something needed to be said [and] manipulated their positions as information brokers to both secure and, when possible, to advance their own standings" (Kushner 102). La Dame G— is a

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practices of the *demimonde* were not particularly exceptional. For example, the business conventions governing patron/mistress relations […] were no different from those of any licit small-business deal" (4).

[69] I would note here that La Dame G—— seems to be a madam who runs a brothel out of her home as well as one who brokers deals for courtesans; for Thérèse's she does the latter. Her home is described by Thérèse as "le rendez-vous des quatre parties du monde, où chaque voyageur apportait son offrande. L'intérêt ouvrait la porte, et la volupté faisait les honneurs du logis" (45).

[70] Kushner details the extent of madams' influence as well as the many roles they served in the *demimonde* in her chapter "Madams and their Networks" in *Erotic Exchanges.*

source of important information for Thérèse about wealthy patrons seeking courtesans, and the former's position as a madam secures the terms of contracts that Thérèse makes with patrons when she is first starting out as a courtesan in Paris.[71] If a patron, for instance, were to try to bamboozle Thérèse the way that the man from Metz did, La Dame G—could use this information to destroy his reputation in the *demimonde*, making it increasingly more difficult for him to convince other courtesans to keep his company.

La Dame G—, of course, does not take interest in Thérèse out of the pure goodness of her heart. Rather, she notices Thérèse in the same way many people do once she arrives in Paris and makes herself known to the *demimonde*, thanks to her mother's guidance in maintaining a foreign, "exotic" appearance to attract attention:

> Ma mère connaissait à peu près la carte de Paris; différentes relations l'avait mise au fait des mœurs de ses habitants; elle savait le cas que l'on y faisait de tout ce qui venait des lois. Cette raison la porta à me faire conserver mon habillement d'étrangère, c'était en quelque sorte m'afficher par le côté le plus séduisant. (37-38)

Foreignness was a growing trend in eighteenth-century France, and many fiction authors tried to express through their characters the experience of either being foreign or

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[71] Ideally, courtesans would build up enough of a reputation in the *demimonde* to no longer need the assistance of madams to find patrons. Kushner explains of the courtesan/madam relationship that, "those *femmes galantes* who worked as free agents, finding *entretenues* and customers entirely on their own, were sometimes approached by madams acting as brokers for prospective patrons. Hence, even when they wanted to manage their own affairs, *dames entretenues* could be brought into the orbit of the madams" (99).

encountering the exotic through a cultural stranger.[72] Following this movement towards the literary stranger in French society, Bret and Villaret invoke Thérèse's foreignness as a key feature of her courtesan persona. Her mother's decision to showcase Thérèse's foreignness through her German attire attracts the attention of Parisian demimondaines, including patrons and madams. La Dame G—, with all her connections, would have been aware of this attention and would seek to ensure that she, too, can profit off of this new "foreign" demimondaine.

Thérèse's move to Paris marks a transition in her mentorship in *ars erotica.* Where her mother was her first and only mentor when she was living in Metz, La Dame G— offered her new ways to approach the sexual marketplace and provided invaluable information to guide her choice of patrons, starting with her agreement with Monsieur S.R. This wealthy patron, described as a social and political elite, not only pays a commission for the financial support of Thérèse and her mother, but also offers her expensive gifts. His sole condition is that Thérèse remain faithful to him, to which she agrees – despite her distaste for monogamy – even detailing that one of her gifts symbolized this fidelity:

> Je reçus le lendemain une robe, que m'apporta une couturière avec une lettre de S.R. Il me priait d'accepter son présent comme une marque de son amour, et de

[72] Sylvie Romanowski argues that the "outsider" in eighteenth-century novels was a tool for a cultural critique that balances both criticism and normalization of French cultural customs. She notes that the stranger in eighteenth-century Fiction "can reassure the home readers that their culture can not only be satirized and critiqued, but also understood and, even better, justified from the outsider's perspective […] Skeptical and startled, these strangers accomplish just enough, but not too much of a critique" (11).

> faire attention à la couleur (l'habillement était bleu), qui est le symbole de la fidélité qu'il attendait de moi. Quoique la constance ne fut pas de mon goût, j'allais cependant lui répondre en héroïne lorsqu'il entra lui-même. (41)

Unfortunately, after a few visits with Thérèse, S.R suddenly stops seeing her, and this leaves Thérèse in a difficult position because, having pledged her fidelity, she did not seek out other patrons to supplement her income. She turns to La Dame G— for advice after S.R.'s sudden disappearance. This is where Thérèse's mentorship in *ars erotica* takes a new direction because La Dame G— helps her to see the (professional) value in her beauty, youth, and gallant sexual desire. She is aware that Thérèse was not keen on S.R.'s demand for fidelity and suggests a new option for her outside of singular courtesan/patron relationships:[73]

> Elle me fit envisager ma jeunesse et mes charmes, comme des moyens sûrs de réparer la perte d'un cœur par l'acquisition de mille autres. Que dirais-je? Elle m'offrit une si charmante perspective, elle me peignit avec des couleurs si séduisantes les délices de la multiplicité, que, malgré une répugnance secrète, elle me persuada; et pour comble de générosité, elle m'offrit ses services d'une manière si cordiale, qu'il ne me fut pas possibles de me défendre de ses instances. (42)

The new perspective – or rather new opportunity – that La Dame G— offers Thérèse is something of a hybrid courtesan/brothel prostitute position. One could speculate that La

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[73] Fidelity was often an expectation of patrons and not courtesans, and Kushner contends that "the expectation of fidelity always was in tension with a counter expectation that kept women regularly would seek out and engage in extrapatron sex […] Kept women cheated for money, for fun, and for love" (146).

Dame G— formulated this plan from the beginning. She is, after all, the madam who organized Thérèse's contract with S.R., and then subsequently consoles Thérèse by offering her a new position as a brothel prostitute to make up for her lost income. In fact, this hypothesis would align with the whore (auto)biography narrative that Bret and Villaret are building in the novel which resembles Thérèse's story up to this point. Consider, for instance, Peakman's summarization of the whore (auto) biographical plotline in which she describes them as:

> Documentary-style biographies […] a collation of information and misinformation about the life of a popular courtesan from her poor beginnings (they were often from plebian backgrounds or had been cast out from their families) to their introduction to their first seducer and their loss of virginity, through their slide into prostitution. Frequently, the women found rich protectors who were well-known to the audience, making their stories yet more commercial. (*Amatory Pleasures* 63)

Thérèse's story models this plot: She comes from a modest family in Colmar, her reputation is ruined in Metz, she loses her virginity to a lover who hustled her, then she contracts a patron in Paris through La Dame G— who subsequently leaves her without any notice and income – to wind up working in a brothel. All that is left to complete this narrative is for Thérèse to find a rich patron who can financially support her enough that she doesn't have to work in the brothel. This only works, however, if Thérèse no longer wants to work in the brothel.

As it turns out, Thérèse's recollection depicts this time in her life as a positive experience, and one which taught her about the spectrum of male sexual desire. She is not

ashamed of her work in the brothel but sees it as an opportunity to learn about the demimonde while satisfying her sexual desires. Although La Dame G—benefits from Thérèse's working in the brothel, she also provides a space for Thérèse to explore the types of sexual requests and pleasures that she will no doubt continue to encounter as a courtesan. Whether or not La Dame G— conspired to set Thérèse's sudden break up with S.R to turn her towards the brothel, Thérèse both enjoys and benefits from this time in her training in *ars erotica*. Importantly, this portion of her story initiates her development as the libertine whore rather than the virtuous courtesan.[74]

Although Thérèse eventually becomes an courtesan, she represents the former of these two literary tropes, as the virtuous courtesan is a "hapless victim, an impoverished working-class child who is dominated and abused […] doomed to endure the sadism of both men and society" (Norberg 227). The libertine whore, Norberg contends, is the antithesis to the virtuous courtesan, as she, "belongs to the passions, to the sexual and to sexually explicit literature. Unlike the virtuous courtesan, she knows no shame or guilt and never denigrates her trade, except to suit the censors" (228). Bret and Villaret's portrait of Thérèse as the libertine whore requires her to shamelessly seek sexual pleasure while also benefitting from it both physically and monetarily. However, as Norberg reminds us, "the libertine whore is a reflection of male sexuality and a mirror of man's lust" (230). Thérèse's pleasure in her brothel work, her sexual appetite throughout the novel, and her distaste for monogamy are all characteristics of her typification as the

[74] I borrow both of these terms from Norberg who compares the depictions of these two prostitute figures in her article "The Libertine Whore."

libertine whore – a figure developed through stereotypical male portrayals of female sexual pleasure.

Bearing in mind that Thérèse's sexuality is framed through the lens of heterosexual male desire, another reading of Thérèse's time in the brothel which focuses on mentorship in *ars erotica* allows us to unravel the importance of these mentorships being overseen uniquely by women for women. For instance, La Dame G— knows that Thérèse would not be satisfied being committed to one man because the two had discussed this previously. Thérèse made the madam aware of her sexual appetites and her distaste for monogamy. It is not despite her initial disappointment with S.R., but thanks to it, that she learns of the different forms of profitable sexual labor available to her through her connection to La Dame G—. In short, women talk to each other in this novel, often to seek council about the goings-on of the *demimonde*. Women discuss what patrons are available, how to get rid of or attract a new patron, and they share intimate – usually humorous stories about their sexual exploits. If Thérèse is going to have a mentor in the courtesan arts in Paris, no one would know more about the sexual marketplace and its culture than a madam. Thérèse's mentorships in *ars erotica*, then, are uniquely designed for women by women, despite her sexuality being depicted through the trope of the libertine whore who serves the male gaze.

I would venture to guess that La Dame G—did, in fact, organize the contract and the rupture of the relationship between Thérèse and S.R. for two reasons. First, La Dame G— seeks to introduce Thérèse to the many avenues of profiting from her talents working in the *demimonde* in a way that satisfies her sexual urges. Where Thérèse's mother sought individual relationships for her daughter, La Dame G— allows Thérèse

the full gambit of sexual partners and their compensation. Secondly, La Dame G—herself can profit from Thérèse's work not only in the brothel but also with any potential patrons that she may meet in the process.[75]

La Dame G— is not the only person who benefits from Thérèse's time in the brothel, as Thérèse herself acquires an important skill in *ars erotica* through her many nocturnal meetings with various men during this time. As courtesans performed sexual favors for their patrons, having a broad repertoire of male sexual desires and practices will help Thérèse later as she seeks to appease wealthy patrons. Furthermore, she is introduced to a variety of men of different backgrounds, and finally encounters one wealthy client who is seduced enough by her charms and skill to request becoming her patron.[76] Thérèse writes of their introduction:

> Je fis la connaissance de L.B. qui ne dédaigna pas mes charmes, quoique déplacés. Il me fit des offres avantageuses, et me promit de se charger du soin de ma fortune, si je voulais me restreindre au bonheur de lui plaire. J'acceptai le parti, le premier quartier consigné d'avance me prévint en faveur d'un homme qui avait des manières si nobles. Comme j'étais trop voisine de M.G pour qu'il pût

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[75] Kushner indicates that madams could bolster their own reputation in the *demimonde* through their connections to famous courtesans, and that courtesans who used madams "to launch their careers more directly also remained loyal, at least for a while" (125).

[76] I use "client" to designate men seeking sex from prostitutes in settings like brothels, and "patron" to designate men who pay for the private and public company of courtesans. Because courtesans are public figures, patrons are supporting the courtesan artform, not solely seeking sex – although sex is an important part of their agreements with courtesans.

> s'assurer de la cessation du commerce qui me liait avec elle, il jugea à propos de me transplanter. [77] (45)

Not only does L.B. agree to financially support Thérèse, but he also pays for her new lodging because, as Thérèse explains, he was too worried about her proximity to La Dame G—and her brothel. At first glance, this might seem like the precautions taken by a concerned lover and reflect the plotline of the virtuous courtesan saved from the brothel by a wealthy protector. This reading of Thérèse's first successful contract with a patron, however, would be overly simplified and appeals too much to a male savior rhetoric common in virtuous courtesan narratives that attempt to reconcile prostitution and feminine virtue.[78] Furthermore, L.B. cannot be a savior as this relationship does not last due to Thérèse's inability to maintain monogamy resulting her inevitable boredom with this patron.

Rather than relying on the trope of the virtuous courtesan or the libertine whore – even if I believe that Thérèse represents the latter – my reading of this relationship with L.B. is centered on the mentorship connection that Thérèse has with La Dame G—. Considering the breadth of this madam's connections in the *demimonde*, and her familiarity with Thérèse and her mother – and notably the holes in Thérèse's education in

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[77] M.G. here refers to La Dame G——, also referred to by Thérèse as "Madame G" or "M.G" throughout the novel.

[78] Norberg cites Restif de la Bretonne's *Le Palais royal* as an example of the harrowing tales of prostitutes depicted as hapless victims. She contends that portrayals of the virtuous courtesan often combine themes common in sentimental novels and depict prostitutes as women who are "fundamentally good" (in Rousseau's conceptualization of the good "virtuous" woman) but who have been corrupted, often against their will. See Norberg especially pp. 227-229 for her description of the virtuous courtesan in literature and this figure's appeal to Rousseauist notions of feminine virtue.

the courtesan arts as overseen by her mother – then it is too simple to assume that she sought in Thérèse to simply attain another brothel worker. Madams in the Parisian *demimonde* were not just providers of prostitutes for pleasure-seeking men. They were, rather, "operatives in an intelligence system [and] they exercised a great deal of influence" (Kushner 101).[79] To echo Kushner's sentiments surrounding the madams' work, it took "a particular kind of intelligence [and] one could only imagine that it was also empowering" (103). Considering the intellectual, cultural, social, and business demands of madam's work, it is more realistic that La Dame G— would set up this encounter between L.B. and Thérèse to launch the latter's career as a courtesan and upgrade her from the status of brothel worker. After all, their meeting occurred in her home (the brothel) where she convinced Thérèse to work for the time being to satisfy her sexual urges while also supplementing the income that she lost after her first attempt at establishing a patron contract was unsuccessful.

It is impossible to know, however, the extent of La Dame G—'s influence on Thérèse's meetings with clients and patrons, as Bret and Villaret focus most of Thérèse's narrative in this part of the story, describing the numerous sexual encounters with various men to appeal to the libertine whore narrative. What is important at this point in Thérèse's story, as far as this dissertation is concerned, is that she has had two crucial

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[79] Kushner points out that madams had to balance the social and cultural interactions and transactions of the *demimonde*, the management of young women seeking to build their reputations as courtesans or enter brothels for work, and also manipulate the police in a way that made them tolerate the goings-on of the sexual marketplace without interrupting its industry. See Kushner's chapter "Madams and their Networks" in *Erotic Exchanges,* especially the subsection "The Madams and Police Toleration" for a detailed analysis of all the moving parts of the *demimonde* that madams managed.

woman-to-woman mentorships in the courtesan arts. Thérèse's mother takes on the role of a procurer of patrons for her daughter, but her lack of knowledge of the culture, practices, and business dealings of the Parisian *demimonde* leaves a void in Thérèse's mentorship in the courtesan arts. La Dame G—fills this void, providing Thérèse with a space to introduce herself to the *demimonde*, satisfy her sexual urges, build her repertoire of sexual practices, and finally meet potential patrons who can help her to distinguish herself as a courtesan rather than simply a brothel worker.

Where her mother focuses the didactic aspects of her mentorship on the development of Thérèse's physical body and emphasizing her foreign, "exotic" beauty, La Dame G— centers on sexual practice and socialization in the *demimonde*. Both of these mentorships work in tandem to prepare Thérèse for her introduction to the courtesan arts, and both of these women act as teachers and procurers for Thérèse's in the *demimonde*. There are, however, some things Thérèse will have to learn through her own experience on a trial-and-error basis with various patrons. Luckily for Thérèse, she has no problem changing patrons or entertaining multiple patrons at a time.

Experience: A Trial-and-Error Tutelage

In *The Book of Courtesans,* Susan Griffin lays out seven essential virtues successful courtesans adhere to: timing, beauty, cheek, brilliance, gaiety, grace, and charm.[80] Each of these virtues is inextricably linked to a courtesan's public and private

[80] By brilliance, Griffin is referring both to wit/intelligence and to the French notion of *brillante,* noting that courtesans seemed to "shine." Much of her

performance. These virtues are ascribed to how she presents and comports herself in in such a way that she can seduce patrons while maintaining an appealing, often luxurious, public image in the *demimonde*. They make up, as Griffin argues, a courtesan's persona. However, a courtesan's persona balances the public and the private, because even during intimate exchanges with a patron, a courtesan is performing. This is why the courtesan lifestyle is at its core, an artform.

To offer a more modern example, courtesans and their personas are akin to those of social media influencers. These women were seen and known in public, because a courtesan "was expected to accompany her various lovers to public places and events, café's, restaurants, balls, parties, the theatre, the opera, even hosting gatherings of her lover's friends at her own home" (Griffin location 132). Like the social media influencers of today, the courtesan's public performance might not match her private behavior when isolated from the public eye, but she invites the public to see what she wants them to see of her private affairs. By the end of *La Belle Allemande,* Thérèse embodies each of the seven virtues that Griffin lays out as fundamental to the courtesan's persona. In Thérèse's case, I would also add to Griffin's seven virtues a penchant towards gallantry, as Thérèse's healthy sex drive and shameless pursuit of sex also play a vital role in her courtesan persona. Her mastery of these courtesan virtues develops through both her mentorships in *ars erotica* and her firsthand experiences with patrons in both private and public settings. In what follows, I will focus specifically on how Thérèse

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analysis of "brilliance" is related to adornments and shining objects that courtesans wore and acquired. In Griffin's book, each chapter is devoted to an analysis of one of these seven virtues.

learns through experience the importance of cheek, charm, and timing as she develops her courtesan persona in the public sphere of the *demimonde*.[81]

Thérèse's mentorships with her mother and La Dame G— were primarily focused on the private, intimate interactions that make up an important aspect of courtesan life. The courtesan persona, however, needed to be maintained in both spheres because these women's success with patrons "relied on artful self-presentation and self-performance" (Feldman and Gordon 8). What courtesans do in private, however, can only be hinted at in public, because, "while they may have acted outside the prescribed role of the 'ideal woman,' they also simultaneously had to fit into it. If they were to retain a 'respectable' outward appearance, they had to obey the strict regulations of [sexual] double standards" (Peakman, *Amatory Pleasures* 79-80). Thérèse has learned thus far how to interact with patrons (and clients in the brothel). She is aware of the varied sexual practices of the *demimonde*, as well as how to broker agreements with patrons – all of which are done outside of the public eye which she has yet to experience or be introduced into as a courtesan.

Because her mentors cannot constantly be with her, much of her mastery of the public aspects of the courtesan arts are learned through experience, with the potential for added support from mentors that can occur later in public settings. For instance, I will discuss later a situation in which Thérèse consults with her mother about a decision that

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[81] I focus on these three virtues because we are already aware of Thérèse's unique beauty which is amplified by her exotic foreign attire, and adornments are attributed to brilliance. Her gaiety is depicted through her enjoyment of the unpredictable and sexual nature of the *demimonde*. Grace is attributed to grace in movement, which was mastered through her mother's mentorship and insistence on things like dance lessons.

could threaten her public reputation, but she does so in private. Much of Thérèse's learning about public life as a courtesan is gained through trial and error, with her errors being primarily designated to the realm of infidelity. It is important to note that courtesans did not always maintain relationships with one person at time as there was more profitability in taking on a patron contract while pursuing lovers on the side who paid for their intimate and companionate services. Although patrons might sometimes stipulate fidelity in their contracts, infidelity was so common, Kushner argues, that "the discovery of infidelity and the repeated firing of the same unfaithful mistress [became] literary topoi" (130). Thérèse's anti-monogamous stance exemplifies this common practice in the eighteenth-century Parisian *demimonde* and it would seem that the problem lies not with the infidelity itself, but instead with the discovery of infidelity which leads patrons to abandon their contracts with Thérèse.

Infidelity, for instance, is the reason that her first patron – L.B. – breaks up with her. After moving Thérèse to a new apartment to distance her from La Dame G—'s brothel, he discovers that she has met another madam – a neighbor with whom she passes her free time and, as Thérèse explains, "j'y trouvais un double profit par l'augmentation de mes honoraires (46). L.B. discovers that Thérèse has been working in this new brothel only because he, himself, was seeking company at the same establishment. This initial infidelity and rupture of the courtesan/patron relationship signals Thérèse's violation of eighteenth-century notions of feminine virtue that L.B. expected of Thérèse, regardless of her position as a courtesan. Such virtues include, as Jenny Skipp reminds us, "passivity, chastity, compassion and thoughtfulness" (125). Where L.B. expected Thérèse to wait passively for him, he considered himself at liberty to actively seek out additional sexual

partners. This indicates not only an obvious gendered double standard regarding sexual activity but also L.B.'s presumption that his contract with Thérèse would ensure her adherence to the "womanly virtue" of sexual passivity. Furthermore, Thérèse's reaction to L.B.'s reprimands after he discovers her amorous side business at this new brothel is not one of sadness, fear, or anxiety about being caught in her infidelity but rather one of dominance. In fact, it is she who breaks off a relationship with him: "Après lui avoir interdit pour jamais l'honneur de ma présence, je sortis en lui lançant un regard fier et dédaigneux" (47).

Thérèse's entrepreneurial ambition in seeking out higher profits through additional lovers, combined with the dominance she exerted over L.B., is another indication of her violation of eighteenth-century womanly virtues. Many authors of erotic fiction presented sexualized women using traits such as those that Thérèse exhibits to warn of the dangers of female sexual liberty which "de-feminized women by stripping them of more positive womanly attributes" (Skipp 125).[82] Perhaps rather than reading these traits as a warming against de-feminization, however, we could see these traits as necessary to the mastery of the courtesan arts, especially of the virtue that Griffin refers to as "cheek" or the ability to "navigate an atmosphere filled with judgements, not simply with her head held high but with a kind of sparkling *élan,* a manner whose very force would make what was said against her seem negligible" (location 1309). What Griffin

[82] Norberg identifies that the figure of the libertine portrays an unequivocal political message that is anti-feminine virtue. She explains that, "the whore has nothing but scorn for the new cult of womanhood, with its belief in innate feminine modesty and virtue. The *pudeur* extolled by Enlightenment thinkers makes her laugh so heartily that it is possible to imagine that the novels were written primarily to refute this doctrine of sexual difference." (238)

terms "cheek" could also be considered perseverance and authority in the face of social rejection and reprimand. However, "cheek," as a skill which is necessary to the performative dimension of the courtesan arts, can be honed only through experience, not mentorship.[83] Her mother or La Dame G— cannot, for instance, reprimand L.B. for her as this would weaken Thérèse's public image. Likewise, how someone handles "cheek" is subjective and personal to them. Some may use humor, others wit. Thérèse chooses calculated boldness as she resists L.B.'s judgements by choosing to end their relationship rather than subject herself to his jealousies and hypocrisies. She likewise shows boldness in the actions she takes following this breakup by deciding that, rather than sulk in the financial loss, it is time to officially debut herself in public as a courtesan. She does so by later deciding to go to the premier place for courtesans to make themselves visible in the *demimonde* – the opera.[84] She explains,

> Je résolus de me faire voir au spectacle, où je n'avais pas encore paru. Je débutai par l'Opéra, où j'étalai dans une première loge mes charmes, relevés de tout le piquant que leur pouvait donner mon habillement d'étrangère. Dès que je fus placée, je devins le but de tous les lorgneurs de profession. (52)

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[83] Griffin asserts that cheek as a virtue was even more important for courtesans who were not wellborn, because they "understood perhaps better than most how much social position is both expressed and maintained by performance" (location 1323). This would have been true for Thérèse, who, coming from a modest background, must use cheek to navigate conversations with social elites.

[84] The opera, the theatre, and the ballet – the performing arts scene in general – were hubs in the *demimonde*. Kushner contends that many kept women worked in the performing arts as dancers or singers (4-5). Nussbaum indicates that the performing arts were likewise a locus for gallantry in the British *demimonde* during the eighteenth-century (see Nussbaum's *Rival Queens*).

After this debut at the opera, Thérèse notices an increase in public attention, both positive and negative:

> J'étais sensible à la douceur de me voir l'objet d'une tendre curiosité. Je voyais quelques concurrentes, dont les yeux jaloux feignaient de m'examiner avec dédain, mais l'attention du public me dédommageait de l'importunité de leurs regards, d'ailleurs l'air insultant dont elles tâchaient de rassurer leur contenance, était un nouvel éloge pour moi, et qui m'apprenait ce que je valais. (52-53)

Her positive and opportunistic tone indicates that she welcomes any kind of attention she receives from the public, and it is especially through her response to scrutiny that we see her mastery of "cheek" through this public experience. Thérèse does not ignore the judgmental looks but enjoys the attention. She understands that receiving attention signifies her entrance into the public, elite society of the *demimonde*. Thérèse's separation from L.B. does not signal a loss, but an opportunity to make the public aware of her availability as a courtesan, and she is successful in this attempt because she subsequently receives attention from several patrons. She writes,

> Plusieurs Seigneurs vinrent me complimenter dans ma loge, et me faire des propositions […] je me trouvai si bien de cet essai, que je continuai; tout le monde brillant de l'Opéra soupira pour moi. Je fis des heureux. J'eus la gloire de voir à mes pieds des têtes illustres, qui ne rougirent pas d'oublier leurs grandeurs en ma présence. (53)

Thérèse knows now that she has created a reputation that has value, a persona that patrons will seek out and pay to experience for themselves. She exhibits boldness, or "cheek" in the face of L.B.'s attempted reprimands by attending the opera as an available

courtesan and relishing in the attention she receives. Thérèse's decision to attend the opera following the rupture of her relationship with L.B. likewise demonstrates her awareness of the importance of timing, another of Griffin's courtesan virtues.[85] Having "entertained" plenty of men of the *demimonde* by this point, and successfully contracted – and subsequently separated from – patrons, Thérèse knows that her reputation as the "exotic foreign beauty" in Paris is building. Before L.B. can sully her image, she presents herself, in her foreign attire, choosing impeccable timing for a public début as a courtesan which is no doubt evidenced by the numerous inquiries of patrons that follow.

Despite having to learn about the public life of the *demimonde* on her own, there are still traces of her mentorships with her mother and La Dame G— depicted in Thérèse's interactions in public. For instance, her choice to wear her foreign attire calls back to her mother and La Dame G—'s attention to her exotic foreign persona. However, her reaction to scrutiny and the reprimand of patrons – an all-too-common occurrence in courtesan/patron relationships – must be learned through her own experience. Her mother's and La Dame G—'s mentorship, up to this point, has prepared her for her entry into the public sphere of the *demimonde*, her behavior within it is up to her. Her ability to continue to maintain courtesan virtues such as timing and cheek, is up to her. The primary challenge for Thérèse moving forward as a courtesan will be maintaining her public image.

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[85] Griffin provides several examples of the "good timing" of courtesans, ranging from the delivery of a good joke, to knowing precisely what kind of behavior and clothing was appropriate – and also seductive – during different times of day. See Griffin's first chapter in *The Book of Courtesans* for detailed historical examples of courtesan timing.

There is only one time in the novel, in fact, that Thérèse seriously threatens her newly developed public persona as a courtesan, and that is when she decides to run away with a lover, D.M., and renounce her gallantry. She describes her strong feelings towards this lover stating that,

> Aurais-je pu, sans être la dernière des femmes, ne pas adorer un amant si digne de toute ma tendresse? On peut juger qu'avec les sentiments que D.M. m'avait inspirés, la vie ambulante que j'avais menée jusqu'alors, me fit horreur. J'y renonçai absolument" (62).

Thérèse also notes that her mother was not thrilled with her newfound love for D.M writing, "ma mère, qui n'était plus sensible qu'à l'intérêt, et qui voyait une partie de ses projets déconcertés par ce nouveau plan de conduite, ne goûta pas ma façon de penser" (62). Despite her mother's disapproval, Thérèse decides to run away with D.M.

Thérèse's relationship with D.M. seems to be a reversal of the libertine seduction plotline. Scholars of libertine fiction have long discussed the theme of seduction and the gendered implications of its manifestation in literature. Jennie Mills, for instance, argues that violent seduction was frequently featured in libertine fiction, resulting in women's rape becoming the "epitome of seduction" in the eighteenth-century British literary and cultural imaginary. The seducer, however, is not always male. In his book *the Libertine's Progress,* Pierre Saint-Armand distinguishes between (female) coquettes and (male) seducers, describing that the former takes on the role of a sorceress and the latter a devil, with both representing a manifestation of superstition and mysticism which is seemingly at odds with the age of reason.

Courtesans in fiction like Thérèse are often described as having a kind of mystically enticing presence, similar to how Saint-Amand describes the enchanting powers of coquettes. This preternatural, captivating power of the courtesan relates to what Griffin identifies as charm, which she describes as an enigmatic and mysterious quality that can sometimes even lead to early courtesans in different European cultures being associated with witchcraft.[86] In *La Belle Allemande,* charm and seduction are cornerstones of Thérèse's success as a courtesan; her patrons often fall head over heels for her charms upon meeting her. She constantly references "*mes charmes*" in her descriptions of encounters with men, and charm is especially potent when she takes on a young, inexperienced patron who had little defense against her enchanting presence having never interacted with courtesans in the *demimonde*. Additionally, charm takes on inherently sexual undertones which Thérèse describes in her encounter with this young patron who is watching her get dressed. She writes, "cet effet de mes charmes sur un cœur tout neuf, m'amusait trop agréablement pour ne pas faire durer le plaisir en allongeant ma toilette" (142). In this sense, charm is not only a feeling of enchantment, but also incites arousal and, therefore, is an imperative function of the physical sexual component of courtesan work. Charm, therefore, invokes the important balance between public performance and private intimacy.

[86] Griffin explains the "mysterious composition" of charm in her seventh chapter and describes that charm invokes a feeling of warmth and excitement and an enlivening of body and soul (location 2958). Charm is often associated with stories of "love at first sight" in positive depictions or "fatal attraction" in negative depictions.

Because charm in Thérèse's story denotes a direct connection to the courtesan arts, when she is seduced out of her gallant lifestyle, she uses terms like "amour" or "aimable" to describe her feelings for her lover and seducer, D.M. However, her descriptions of her first meeting with D.M. resemble the power of charm she holds over her patrons: "je sentais à chaque instant redoubler la rapidité de mon inclination pour lui. Jamais l'amour ne m'avait fait éprouver les plaisirs si touchants. Mon cœur pour la première fois se livra sans réserve. D.M. devint tout pour moi. Je n'envisageai plus de plaisirs que dans sa possession" (F.B. Strinck 56).[87] The language of desire mixed with possession that Thérèse incorporates into her portrait of the first meeting with D.M. are intense to say the least, especially considering that this is how she felt after one dinner with him. Described as a sort of love at first sight, D.M. holds a power over Thérèse that she explains as a feeling she has never had before – a new experience that she has yet to have with any former patron. D.M. has, in other words, charmed her. And if Thérèse can be charmed, she can be seduced. However, this seduction reverses the image of the male libertine seducer. Rather than trying to seduce Thérèse into gallantry, D.M. is trying to seduce her out of it.

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[87] This citation is taken from a digitized version of the novel originally published in 1776 in Strasbourg by the publisher F.B. Strinck. I specify the publisher only in this parenthetical citation as the rest of the quotes from the novel that I incorporate in this chapter come from a Kessinger's Legacy re-print originally published in 1776 in Paris by the publisher listed as *Aux Depens de la Compagnie*. The printed version is missing these pages. The online version can be found through Gale Primary Sources Online. Both versions are cited in the bibliography.

Typically, the male seducer in libertine fiction attempts to lead a woman away from virtue.[88] Since Thérèse has already been established as a gallant woman who does not adhere to eighteenth-century notions of womanly virtue, her escape from the *demimonde* with D.M. depicts an inversed seduction plotline. This is further demonstrated through Bret and Villaret's reversal of the seductive roles of nighttime and daytime wherein night designates a time to pursue libertine pleasures as darkness offers a way to obscure or conceal the sexual indulgences portrayed on the page.[89]

For Thérèse, night is the time for her to pursue her sexual desires, the time when clients or patrons pay her visits to satisfy their sexual desires. Night is a time for gallantry. Her seduction, however, takes place during the day. After facing her mother's harsh disapproval of her choice to commit to D.M. and leave the *demimonde*, she is devastated until D.M. comes to visit her to offer a suggestion on how to evade her mother:

> Il me proposa un enlèvement, j'acceptais sans balancer ce parti, qui seul me pouvait mettre en sûreté contre de nouvelles tentatives. Jour pris pour le

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[88] Eighteenth-century French libertine fiction is rife with examples of the male seducer, the most famous of which might be Valmont's seduction and rape of Cécile in Chardelos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses.* Other examples include Julie in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* who falls prey to what Joan DeJean calls a "pedagogical seduction." DeJean elaborates on the seduction plotline in the works of Rousseau, Laclos, and Sade in her book *Literary Fortifications,* arguing that the seduction narrative is a plot device that employs a structural pattern within the text in which "the writer veers from the path that appears charted out for him" (121).

[89] Ganofsky contends that seductions were so often set a night that "French libertine fiction can itself be deemed a nocturnal literature" ("Libertine *Clairs-Obscurs*," 500).

> lendemain, je sortis sur les dix heures, mon amant m'attendait au bout de la rue, je montai dans son carrosse, il me fit conduire au couvent. (63-64)

Unlike the sexually charged nocturnal seducer, D.M. uses the cover of day rather than night to make an escape plan for Thérèse. He then takes her to a convent, a place of hiding that represents her turn towards virtue. Despite its virtuous symbolism, the convent nonetheless mirrors housing situations like a brothel in that it is inhabited only by women who, in this novel, partake in libertine pleasures the likes of which Thérèse is attempting to escape.

Although descriptions of the nun's sexual advances and exchanges in this part of the novel are vague, Thérèse certainly hints at them, foreshadowing the inescapability of her own gallantry. She writes, "nous arrivâmes au couvent, où D.M. prit congé de moi. Les religieuses me firent toutes les caresses imaginables. J'admirais la tranquillité de ces bonnes filles; il ne me vint pas cependant dans l'idée de les imiter" (64). The convent in libertine literature often represents a space of women's homoeroticism, written typically to appease the voyeuristic male reader.[90] Bret and Villaret's incorporation of this brief description of the nuns in the convent who offer "all of the caresses imaginable" and whose actions Thérèse is "not interested in imitating" is a nod to the emerging popularity of convent erotica in the eighteenth century.[91] This allusion to the erotic convent suggests

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[90] Susan S. Lanser in *The Sexuality of History* identifies the convent as a space of sapphic desire, contending that, "all-female spaces such as the convent or the harem are of course common circumstantial settings […] in which women […] allow themselves to become entangled romantically with women" (47).

[91] Peakman provides a detailed analysis of English and French convent erotica of the eighteenth-century, and notes that this genre in France reflected the rise in anti-clerical pornographic novels at the time such as *Thérèse Philosophe,* a novel which I will discuss in further detail in the next chapter. See Peakman's' chapter

to the reader that even in Thérèse's escape from the *demimonde*, she will not be able to elude her own gallantry. In other words, the seduction will not be successful.

D.M's seduction of Thérèse out of gallantry represents an interruption to Thérèse's libertine whore plotline. It is a diversion of whore (auto)biographical narrative that Bret and Villaret have thus far built throughout the novel and will continue to develop until the end of Thérèse's memoir. I borrow Joan DeJean's explanation of seduction in *Literary Fortifications* to frame Thérèse's seduction as a structural discontinuity in the narrative. DeJean describes seduction as, "a crossing of paths that necessitates a switching of paths, that induces a *clinamen* on the part of the victim that is less self-defensive than self-destructive" (107). Given Thérèse's story leading up to this scene which characterizes her as unashamed of her sexual appetites and disinterested in monogamy, this sudden change of personality seems ill-fitted to her character development. The impulsiveness of her change in character is augmented by the brevity of this love story in Thérèse's overall memoir. Taking up around eleven pages – less than a tenth of the entire novel – this fleeting romance depicts a shift of Thérèse's path, initiated by her crossing of paths with D.M. In other words, this romance is structured within the text as an interruption to Thérèse's path of gallantry which is developed from the beginning to the end of the novel, save for this one brief intermission.

D.M.'s seduction of Thérèse out of the *demimonde* might, at first glance, appear to be a grand romantic gesture, but it threatens self-destruction for the courtesan. Having recently entered the public scene of the *demimonde* and still working to build her

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"Anti-Catholic Erotica" in *Mighty Lewd Books* for examples of convent erotica in the eighteenth century.

courtesan persona, pursuing D.M. could lead to the loss of momentum of her developing popularity. Additionally, if their relationship failed to work out (and considering Thérèse's history with infidelity, it likely would fail), Thérèse might not hold the same favor in the *demimonde* that she has been working to build up until this point. To reiterate Griffin's notion of timing being one of a courtesan's most crucial virtues, this interruption could cause irreparable damages to Thérèse's potential fortune and success. For these reasons, as well as for her own financial preservation, Thérèse's mother intervenes in D.M. and Thérèse's relationship, manipulating her daughter to return to the *demimonde* by threatening to have D.M. charged with kidnapping.[92]

Notwithstanding the harshness of her mother's actions, this manipulation represents the final act of mentorship she bestows upon Thérèse. Although cruel mothers forcing their daughters into the *demimonde* are a common trope in libertine fiction, Thérèse's mother is also conscious of the importance of timing for courtesans in the *demimonde* and it is this, more than anything else, that motivates her manipulation of Thérèse.[93] The courtesan virtue of timing denotes having a "particularly intense relationship with the present" (Griffin location 409). This means that, although

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[92] Of the many normative eighteenth-century structures and policies that the *demimonde* upheld, authority of parents was one. Kushner explains the authority of parents over their minor children in her introduction to *Erotic Exchanges*. Considering Thérèse is only nineteen years old when she is writing her memoir, at this point in the novel she would have still been a minor and her mother would have had the authority to report her kidnapped to have her returned to her custody.
[93] Norberg explains that authors who prioritized feminine virtue often depicted prostitutes and courtesans in literature as "victims of evil mothers and fathers who have sold them into their disreputable trade" (228) She cites Restif de la Bretonne's *Le palais royal* (1790) as an example of this literary victimization of prostitutes.

courtesans may hope to build a fortune to protect their future, their *presence* in the present is what truly helps them to develop their persona. It is crucial to be seen, especially at events and places where courtesans are expected to show up. As it happens, during Thérèse's absence, her mother becomes aware of a very particular circumstance that could bolster her daughter's career; a famous courtesan had just repudiated her very wealthy patron, referred to as De R. Thérèse describes the result of this ruptured relationship on the gallant population of Paris:

> Le bel et judicieux usage qu'il avait fait de ses trésors, avait intéressé à sa douleur tout le monde galant de Paris […] Les mères y menaient leurs filles; les nièces s'y faisaient conduire par des tantes, quels enchantements ne furent pas employés pour charmer la tristesse de l'infortuné Midas! […] Elle [ma mère] soupira plus que jamais, de la douleur de se voir séparée de moi, dans une conjoncture si favorable à l'avancement de notre fortune. (65-67)

The way Thérèse paints this scenario, it seems that every courtesan in Paris was interested in catching the attention of De R, and his sudden availability as well as his desire for courtesans signals a unique opportunity to Thérèse's mother. So exclusive was this potential patron, in fact, that Thérèse's mother even engages in a bit of gallantry herself by sleeping with De R's valet in exchange for his putting in a good word with his employer about Thérèse. Her efforts, it turns out, were successful, as De R does pursue Thérèse, who reluctantly accepts the contract after her mother threatens to have D.M. arrested.

Recalling the reversal of the seduction narrative used to depict D.M.'s seduction of Thérèse, it is noteworthy to mention that even after accepting to return to the

demimonde, Thérèse does not immediately re-adapt to gallantry. Bret and Villaret depict her uneasiness by once again playing with the libertine settings of day and night as Thérèse describes her relationship to her new patron, "ce fut avec ce personnage que je passai la plus triste et la plus désagréable des nuits; il dût s'apercevoir de la répugnance qu'il m'inspirait. Le jour arriva et mit fin à mon supplice" (71). Whereas Thérèse leaves the *demimonde* under cover of day, her return is signaled by night, but also by a melancholy that is quelled only when day comes, and her patron leaves. Once again, we see a reversal of the libertine setting of night which has not yet reclaimed its place as a setting of pleasure for Thérèse. While Thérèse attributes this to her heartbreak over D.M., I would argue that her melancholy more likely stems from the betrayal of her trusted mentor – her mother. Her mother's mentorship had been warped into manipulation and greed, and this signals the end of her tutelage in *ars erotica* under her care.

Thérèse gets over her separation with D.M. in a matter of a few days, and although she describes sadness surrounding his absence, she also realizes that she nearly sacrificed her gallant life for this love who, ultimately, was just another patron who took no interest in her after the debacle with her mother.[94] This changes her perspective on what the *demimonde* offers her, and how she would like to take charge of her courtesan lifestyle. Her interests are not aligned with love, but with pleasure and the physical and material benefits that it provides for her. Thérèse takes this approach with her subsequent

[94] Thérèse writes that after she returns to the *demimonde*, D.M. no longer visits her because, "il ne voulut plus se compromettre" (66).

patrons in the *demimonde*, describing, for instance, that she determines who would make a good patron by appealing to reason rather than love:[95]

> Accoutumée aux mauvais procédés des hommes, je m'étais dès longtemps proposée pour maxime de ne plus prendre les choses si à cœur, et de rectifier par des compensations bien ménagées les torts qu'ils pouvaient avoir avec moi […] Un peu d'expérience du monde m'avait trop appris combien il est facile à une femme qui a quelque beauté et une sorte de réputation, de former autant d'engagements qu'il lui plaît, pour désespérer de donner promptement un successeur au négligent étranger qui refusait de rendre à mes charmes le juste hommage qu'ils méritaient. (89)

The emphasis on reason and practicality in her courtesan/patron relationships signals Thérèse's final separation from eighteenth-century notions of virtuous womanhood, as many philosophical and medical texts of the time claimed that, "emotion dominated over reason in women [and] they were always likely to have exaggerated responses to outside stimuli" (Hunt158). Outside stimuli necessarily implicates the public sphere, the primary domain for courtesans to flaunt their personas and entice patrons. Thérèse expresses, in fact, the importance of the public sphere by referring to her experience in the world (in the *demimonde*) which has taught her how to find a "successor" if she deems a patron unworthy of her. She particularly notes that replacing a patron is an easy task for a

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[95] When explaining her emotional approach to one of her patrons, for example, Thérèse emphasizes reason, writing that, "l'attachement du Marquis pour moi n'était pas de ces passions violentes qui tyrannisent l'âme; la volupté intéressait plus que les sentiments de mon cœur, il aimait le plaisir, il trouvait toujours mes dispositions conformes à son goût, cela lui suffisait; j'étais trop raisonnable pour en exiger davantage" (91-92).

"beautiful woman of a certain reputation," or, in other words, a courtesan who has built up a noteworthy public image. Thérèse does not hint at any appeal to emotion in her choice of patrons, but rather chooses men who will adequately compensate her and demonstrate that they deserve her attention. Furthermore, she ensures that she has other patrons lined up if she decides that one is not meeting her standards. Most importantly, it is Thérèse who decides all these things for herself, setting her own standards and demanding that her patrons meet them lest they be dumped and replaced by someone more worthy of her time and her talents.

The dichotomous relationship in the eighteenth century of oppositional categories of private/public, female/male, and virtuous/gallant are all implicated in the courtesan persona. As a public woman, Thérèse's entire image is linked to the kinds of "outside stimuli" that were thought to overexcite women and cause them to become overly emotional, iterating the importance of relegating the virtuous woman to the private sphere of the home rather than the public "male" sphere.[96] The courtesan transgresses this notion by not only being a public woman, but one who approaches patron relationships through practicality rather than being driven by emotion. Thérèse's near-seduction by D.M., and her mother's intervention in this relationship, provides an important lesson to Thérèse in self-preservation and advancement in the *demimonde*. Once she returns, she no longer makes the mistake of becoming overly attached to her patrons, instead

[96] This is not to say that women in the eighteenth century were thought to have lacked the ability to reason, or *have* reason, but that women's reason was different and separate from men's. Joan B. Landes elaborates on this notion of gendered reason in *Women and the Public Sphere,* citing the Marquis de Condorcet's notion that "women are not governed […] by the reason of men. But they are governed by their own reason" (115).

prioritizing her courtesan persona and the accumulation of wealth and status that it provides.

Although her mother's final act of mentorship serves as an important lesson to Thérèse, her betrayal tarnishes her daughter's trust, and it is after this episode with D.M. and De R that the two are finally separated. This manipulation by her mother compromises the role of the mentor in *ars erotica,* because, as Leon A. Rocha reminds us, "*ars erotica* does not classify or name, does not forbid or permit, does not medicalize or pathologize, does not biologize or naturalize, does not discipline, interrogate, decipher, survey, or administer bodies" (330). Preventing Thérèse from leaving the *demimonde* by threatening to have her lover arrested violated the role of the mentor as a guide rather than as an authority figure, and irrevocably ruptures their mentorship relationship.

Her mother's departure from Paris, however, signals a transition for Thérèse, and she iterates her desire to stay in the *demimonde* but untethered to anyone, even her mentors. When her mother decides to leave Thérèse recalls:

> Elle [ma mère] partit pour Colmar, je ne fus pas for affligée de son départ. Je me trouvais libre, et je pouvais suivre mes inclinations sans être contrainte. Je commençais à me lasser de la dépendance dans laquelle j'avais vécu jusqu'alors, et je trouvais enfin qu'il était temps de sortir de tutelle, et de me gouverner par moi-même. (72)

In short, Thérèse is finally ready to be on her own. She has built up her reputation, perfected the art of public persona, and snagged a wealthy patron that everyone was after– albeit one whom she despises and will soon leave. She has not been seduced out of gallantry and, most importantly, she recognizes that she not only wants to continue to be

a *femme galante,* but also that her desire is to do so without restraint. Pleasure and reason – not emotion – are the bedrock upon which her courtesan persona will continue to thrive. She has become a master of the courtesan arts, and, at this point, she is ready to become a mentor in this *ars erotica* for other women.

The Student Becomes the *Maîtresse*

In the second part of the novel, after the departure of Thérèse's mother, we see a shift in her role in mentorship in *ars erotica.* Where, up until this point, the novel has focused on her training in the courtesan arts under her mother and La Dame G—, in the second half of the story we are introduced to women that Thérèse mentors. Like her mother and La Dame G—, Thérèse takes on both a teaching and procurer role, though not as overtly or thoroughly as either of her own mentors. The first instance of Thérèse's mentorship of another woman occurs when she offers advice to her close friend and fellow courtesan Mlle ***, who has entered into a relationship with a man who, in Thérèse's estimation, does not serve the best interests of her friend. First, Thérèse descries the physical unattractiveness of this man which is no match for her friend's beauty and charm:

> Rien au reste de plus ordinaire que son mérite, point de figure, à moins qu'on ne veuille donner ce nom à une petite mine chiffonnée, qu'on ne peut définir, un corps déhanché et contrefait, l'air d'une pagode, minaudier en chantant, et chantant alternativement du nez et de la gorge, et presque toujours faux; tel qu'il est on ne l'a pas aisément, les femmes se l'arrachent. (108)

Thérèse clearly indicates her distaste for the physical appearance and certain behaviors of this patron but looks are not as important in the courtesan/patron relationship as financial support and gifts. Additionally, if financial support comes with too many restrictions for a courtesan, she may decide to reject the patron altogether, as Thérèse did after L.B. expected fidelity from her while she sought to continue sleeping with other men for profit. Thérèse is especially critical of her friend's patron is in his demands of Mlle*— and the restrictions he places on her, notably that she is obligated to live with him while they are together.[97] Thérèse describes this cohabitation as a constraint to her friend's potential profits, and considers this requirement to be the only mark of his successful "conquest" of Mlle*—: "[il] doit les trois quarts de ses attraits de vainqueurs à la contrainte dans laquelle elle est oblige de vivre avec lui" (108). This obligation to cohabitate limits Mlle*—,'s ability to form relationships and agreements with other patrons who no doubt pursue her, considering Thérèse's use of the language of victory and conquest to frame of her friend's agreement with her current patron. [98]

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[97] Kushner explains that patrons and courtesans rarely lived together, with most patrons providing apartments for the courtesans that they contracted. See *Erotic Exchanges* especially the section "Relationships on the Margins" in chapter six in which Kushner gives examples of extremely rare instances in which patrons and courtesans cohabitated.

[98] Having a relationship with a courtesan with high sexual capital, or in other words a well-developed reputation in the *demimonde*, was a mark of prestige and conquest for patrons like "owning a splendid carriage, except in that case, the carriage could choose its owner, conferring even more status. It was an act of conspicuous consumption" (Kushner 187). If Mlle*** is described as a conquest for a patron, she is likely a well-known and highly pursued courtesan.

Limiting a courtesan's access to the *demimonde* and other patrons is, in Thérèse's experience, a serious faux pas that would likely cause her to reject a patron. Lamenting this requirement of cohabitation, Thérèse writes,

> Il me parut nouveau qu'un homme ne bornât pas son ambition au seul plaisir de lui plaire, et qu'il ne se tint pas assez honoré d'inspirer des désirs, sans exiger qu'elle ajoutât à la faiblesse qu'elle avait pour lui, l'oubli de son propre intérêt; en un mot, j'étais révoltée d'apprendre qu'il y eut des hommes qui osassent mettre un prix à leur amour, et des femmes assez dupes pour les acheter. (108-109)

Thérèse identifies these limitations in her friend's courtesan/patron relationship because she has had enough mentorship and experience in the *demimonde* to have perfected both her courtesan persona and her ability to negotiate agreements with patrons that serve her best interests. She says as much at the beginning of the second part of the novel, writing, "je ne tardai guère à prendre la résolution de rompre absolument avec un homme qui me ménageait si peu" (89). In Thérèse's experience, a patron who does not satisfy a courtesan –whether financially, sexually, or through his behavior – is not worth sacrificing her time and, potentially, her reputation. Evoking again the notion of reason, she tries to convince her friend that her unconventional pairing and agreement with this patron threatens to weaken her position as a courtesan:

> Lorsque ma bonne amie me fit confidence de son goût pour lui, je le trouvai si déraisonnable, que je ne pus m'empêcher de lui en marquer ma surprise […] Mon amie, que mes exhortations ne persuadaient pas, voulut pour me faire approuver ses sentiments, me présenter l'heureux petit mortel dont l'acquisition lui tenait si fort au cœur […] Je consentis à ce qu'elle exigeaient de moi, car quoique je ne

> l'approuvasse pas, je ne pus m'empêcher de succomber au penchant naturel qui me porte à être compatissante pour les faiblesses de mes amis. (108)

What is evident from Thérèse's recollection of her advice to her friend is that Mlle*— listens to but does not heed her warnings. Although mentorship works two ways and necessitates that a mentor provides guidance (and in *La Belle Allemande,* procurement of patrons), the mentee is not obligated to follow her mentor's lessons directly. Thérèse, for instance, did heed her mother and La Dame G—'s guidance, and thus continuously built upon her courtesan art and her public persona, resulting in more profits and success in the *demimonde*. Even though Mlle*— is at liberty to ignore her friend's admonishments of her patron, Thérèse nonetheless takes on the role of the mentor who, in attempting to guide Mlle*— in better courtesan practices also highlights the inefficiency of her patron, thus insinuating that other patrons would be more suitable for her friend. Mlle*—, already being a highly pursued courtesan, has no need for Thérèse to procure patrons, but rather to remind her of her own ability to seduce more and better patrons.

Mlle*—'s ability to ignore this advice depicts the liberty inherent in *ars erotica* because, recalling, Rocha's explanation of *ars erotica*, mentorship in the courtesan arts does not forbid or permit. Thérèse does not make the mistake that her mother made and try to sabotage Mlle*—'s relationship with her patron, but she does provide what guidance she can according to her own experience and mastery in the courtesan arts. She does, nonetheless, identify Mlle*—'s desire to adhere to her arrangement with her patron as a weakness, and explains that she does not protest this decision further due to her compassion for her friend. There is, of course, another, more self-serving reason that

Thérèse might avoid further challenging her friend's decision. She and Mlle*— are both courtesans in the *demimonde* and therefore are, technically, in competition with one another.[99] If Mlle*— will not heed her friend's advice, then Thérèse, in her better judgement and superior understanding of the courtesan arts, can still profit from the more contractually flexible, potentially higher-paying patrons in the *demimonde*.

Mlle*—'s poor choice in patron is not the only time that we see Thérèse acting as a mentor to another woman in the *demimonde*, and her mentorship is perhaps most vividly depicted at the end of the novel, when she offers advice to the wife of one of her patrons. Rather than taking on the role of mentor to a woman who is already a well-established courtesan, here, Thérèse is mentoring a woman who has never practiced the courtesan arts. Thérèse encounters her patron's wife after she – having paid him a visit to provide services – is interrupted by his wife who unexpectedly returns home and proceeds to get into an argument with him about their finances. Thérèse recounts, "madame venait demander à son marie le paiement d'une pension modique qui lui était assignée pour son entretien et ses menus plaisirs" (170). This wife, it seems, requests money from her husband that she receives regularly in the form of an allowance. This scene depicts the legal inferiority of (bourgeois) women under the patriarchal authority of their husbands – a legal inferiority through conjugal contract to which Thérèse, as a courtesan, is not bound.[100]

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[99] Kushner explains that courtesan/patron contracts were a way to protect courtesans because "As workers, elite prostitutes were extremely vulnerable, not least to competition. The operated in an open market into which new girls entered every day […] the contract provided the promise of payment" (161).

[100] Marchini contends that "It is precisely in case of marriage that the difference between males and females becomes significant: the woman is subject to the

The husband's response in this scene utterly shocks Thérèse because he reprimands his wife for her monetary request, leaving her devastated and in tears as he storms out, abandoning Thérèse who has, up to this point, been hiding in a closet. She describes her feelings at this moment, "il ne serait pas facile de peindre l'étonnement où me jeta un procédé aussi dur […] Une injustice aussi odieuse me révolta. J'étais indignée; le sort de cette femme me fit pitié" (171-172). Symbolizing the constraints of virtuous womanhood, the patron's wife inhabits a limited space in the novel, a metaphor for the restrictive domestic space that the virtuous woman inhabits in eighteenth-century French society. She is present in the novel only in the bedroom of her home, the intimate space of domesticity and conjugal bliss. Ironically, it is in this exact space where the courtesan blurs the private and public spheres. Her public persona attracts patrons, and their private intimacy builds her wealth. However, no matter what setting – private or public – the courtesan maintains her art, her performance.

Placing these two seemingly oppositional figures – the bourgeois wife and the courtesan – in the same space at the very end of the novel blends the dichotomous spheres of private life and public performance in a way that undermines the growing literary focus in the eighteenth century on the idealized domestic family and domestic utopia that centered the virtuous domestic wife and mother as a literary heroine.[101]

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authority of her husband even more than a minor is subject to his guardian […] Under the regime of community property, the husband also administers his wife's property and can squander the commonwealth" (126).

[101] Lesley H. Walker discusses this idealized domesticity in eighteenth-century French fiction in *A Mother's Love,* focusing on representations of the virtuous mother. She argues that women writers especially used the domestic sphere in the novel to highlight the power of the mother/daughter educational relationship which can be seen, "as a microcosm for the larger Enlightenment project that

However, the wife's devastation during this scene paints a quite different picture of conjugal life, highlighting domestic suffering – if not abuse – through her interaction with her husband. The husband's infidelity and aggression towards his wife depicts the trend in libertine literature to portray marriage – especially upper-class marriage – as an arrangement resembling more of a business deal that maintained wealth within certain families in the upper echelons of society. For this reason, bourgeois adultery in libertine fiction, as Sarah Maza contends, "was tolerable within a subculture in which marriages were entered into for the sake of fortune and family name and in which spouses were allowed to lead seperate lives once they had fulfilled their procreative duties" (286). The husband's adultery in *La Belle Allemande* reflects this critique of bourgeois marriage, as the source of his wife's unhappiness is not his infidelity, but rather his refusal to allot her money to fund her "pleasantries."

In this sense, Thérèse's presence in the same space as the patron's wife produces a dichotomy between two characters that is simultaneously oppositional and unsurprising. Furthermore, this portrayal of the money-hungry bourgeois wife draws parallels to the courtesan arts; after all, what really is the difference between these women if they both profit off arrangements with men that are, at some level, based in the exchange of sex?[102] Where one trades sex in marriage for the purposes of procreation and family fortune, the

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sought, through human intervention, to bring greater justice and equality to many – including women" (29). She cites authors such as Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, Marie de Sévigné, Félicité de Genlis, Madame d'Epinay, and Madame de Roland as women authors who modeled idealized domesticity in their works while promoting this kind of reformative approach to girl's education.

[102] This, of course, is only an imagined and hyperbolic portrayal of the bourgeois wife who, like the libertine whore, is a wholly fictional creation in *La Belle Allemande.*

other engages in a sexual economy to build her private wealth. Bret and Villaret's portrait of the bourgeois wife, then, would grant the courtesan more agency than her virtuous counterpart. This agency is depicted in Thérèse's confrontation with her patron's wife in which she is able to give this woman what her husband refused. Stepping out of her hiding place and revealing herself to the wife, Thérèse consoles her, saying:

> Madame [...] je viens d'être témoin de la manière dont votre indigne mari vous a traitée; la perte d'un cœur aussi méprisable ne mérite pas vos pleurs. Je vous offre pour consolation le partage de ses dépouilles […] Ne vous informez point, continuai-je, du motif qui m'engage à faire ce que je fais. Votre âge et votre figure devraient vous mettre à l'abri de scènes aussi désagréables. Que d'hommes se trouveraient heureux d'obtenir comme grâce la permission d'acquitter les dettes de votre mari! Adieu, Madame, je vous souhaite assez de courage pour profiter de l'avis. (172-173)

As a solution to the wife's predicament, Thérèse proposes, in no uncertain terms, that she should find other men to offer her the money that her husband refuses to her. In fact, she insinuates that this would not even be a difficult task for this young and beautiful woman. Highlighting attributes that would better serve her in the *demimonde* (youth and beauty) than in her marriage, Thérèse not only proposes a solution but demonstrates the material benefits of her suggestion by giving to the patron's wife a portion of the money that she has earned. In a double blow to the patron, Thérèse is giving the wife what she asked for all along – her husband's money. This financial gift, however, must pass through the courtesan's hands before the wife has access to it. Her husband's marital transgression,

therefore, leads to her financial benefit. Likewise, the wife's potential infidelities may also lead to more possibilities for her financial and sexual freedom.

The juxtaposition of the virtuous wife and the courtesan to shame the institution of marriage features frequently in libertine fiction, and libertine whore narratives are especially critical of married women and men.[103] However, Thérèse's gifting of money to the patron's wife also symbolizes another common theme found outside of the realm of libertine literature, a theme which is more typical of sentimental novels: the financial rescue of the economically dependent wife.[104] In her analysis of second-sex economics in literature, Susan S. Lanser identifies that the financial dependence of women on men is frequently problematized in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, explaining that,

> Most of the predicaments faced by the heroines who need rescue originate in financial dependence or need […] the rescuers, conversely, are almost always women with independent means or the ability to earn […] these novels [are] modeling the economics both of women's entrapment and of the agency required to escape it. ("Second-Sex Economies" 236)

While we are not aware of what the patron's wife decides, Thérèse represents the kind of female financial rescuer that appears in the sentimental genre, even though she provides only a temporary solution. Thérèse's offering of money that she earned – albeit from the

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[103] James A Steintrager contends that libertinism as a philosophy in eighteenth-century France, "always included a strand of social critique about love and marriage that slid easily toward sexual license" (14). Libertine fiction likewise reflected this philosophical trend.

[104] Lanser uses the examples of Sarah Scott's *Millennium Hall* (1762), Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* (1795), and Isabelle de Charrières *Trois femmes* (1796), amongst others to illustrate this recurring literary theme.

very husband who has caused this dilemma –depicts a level of agency and financial security that is available to the courtesan but not to the virtuous wife. Thérèse does not have to ask a husband for access to her material wealth, she owns it independently.

Beyond simply serving the role of financial rescuer, however, Thérèse acts a mentor in *ars erotica*, proposing a long-term solution to the wife's predicament. Thérèse's mentorship of her patron's wife depicts a final stand against the monogamous confines of marriage, bringing her anti-marriage stance full circle. Recalling that Thérèse describes her distaste for marriage at the beginning of the novel through her recounting of her mother's conjugal infidelity, it is fitting that Thérèse would end her memoir by comparing herself to a bourgeois wife – a figure typically associated with feminine virtue but who is nonetheless critiqued in libertine fiction. Thérèse is the embodiment of the literary libertine whore, a figure diametrically opposed to the bourgeois wife and who, "has nothing but scorn for the new cult of womanhood, with its belief in innate feminine modesty and virtue" (Norberg 238). Although these two characters are constructed to be contradictory, their interaction is generally positive, thanks to Thérèse's capacity to identify a woman in need of a mentor in *ars erotica.* Rather than presenting herself to the wife as an enemy, she approaches her as a guide – but importantly, not as an equal. Indeed, in offering the wife money and advice, Thérèse takes a superior social positionality compared to the bourgeois wife. Through her mastery of the courtesan arts, she has transcended class boundaries, transitioning from a modest family at the beginning of the novel to the top tiers of the social elites of Paris. Although she may not hold the title of "respectable, virtuous woman" according to eighteenth-century sensibilities, she

nonetheless is a pre-eminent member of the *demimonde* with social, financial, and sexual privileges unavailable to her bourgeois counterpart.

The Female Erotic, Mentorship, and Readership

Throughout this chapter, I have highlighted the different ways that mentorship in the courtesan arts appears throughout *La Belle Allemande,* detailing how Thérèse's mother and La Dame G— function as both teachers of *ars erotica* and procurers of patrons for the young courtesan. I have likewise discussed Thérèse's transformation from mentee to mentor of the courtesan arts for Mlle*—, and her patron's wife. What remains to be discussed is how, through all these mentorships, the female erotic is centered. As I have mentioned throughout this chapter, Bret and Villaret write Thérèse as a libertine whore – a prototypical figure in libertine fiction, especially texts written using first-person narratives in the style of a memoir. However, her sexual trade is not the sole feature of her character. Rather, the libertine whore, some might argue, is a feminist literary figure. She represents an eighteenth-century female sexuality that is "independent, sensual, sensible, and skilled" (Norberg 227). She is business savvy, not degraded or abused by clients (or patrons), possesses a healthy sex drive, and – importantly – embraces the feminine erotic in a way that transforms it into a source of power. However, the fact remains that she is a wholly fictional character created by men, for a predominantly male audience. The question, then, is whether or not male authors can reproduce the feminine erotic – the source of the libertine whore's power – on the page.

To explore this possibility, I would like to first turn to Audre Lorde's conceptualization of the feminine erotic as feeling. In her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" Lorde contends that the erotic exists beyond the realm of the sexual and represents a source of power and possibility for women, and it has been, "misnamed by men and used against women," especially in pornography which, "emphasizes sensation without feeling" (54). Lorde describes women's erotic as, "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire" (54). This feeling of internal satisfaction to which women can aspire is the focus of Thérèse's erotic expression in the novel. In her conversation with the patron's wife, Thérèse's describes this feeling directly as she is leaving the bedroom:

> Je sortis en même-temps sans attendre sa réponse. Qu'il y a de plaisir à être généreuse ! Je n'ai jamais rien fait qui m'ait flattée plus agréablement. Je rentrai chez moi avec une satisfaction que je n'entreprendrai point de décrire; mon amour-propre y est trop intéressé. (173)

In Thérèse's final words in the novel, we see a semblance of what the feminine erotic might resemble. After having counseled her patron's wife to join the sexual marketplace, and having given her money, she feels an intense feeling of satisfaction that she is unable to describe. The existence of a textual depiction of the feminine erotic is rooted in its indescribability. Notably, Thérèse's expression of the erotic is tied directly to her mentorship of other women in *ars erotica.*

Although Bret and Villaret incorporate erotic depictions of sexual exchanges between Thérèse and her many patrons, it is this feeling of intense satisfaction, briefly

incorporated at the end of the novel, that depicts the manifestation of the feminine erotic. The authors attempt to mask this erotic power, however, by attributing it to *amour-propre* – a notion in the eighteenth century that was concerned less with self-esteem or self-love and more with vanity or "a need or desire to be valued" (Neuhouser 31). Thérèse mentions a*mour-propre* throughout the novel in this vein, which makes sense as her position as a courtesan dictates that she be desired by others. Although important to her courtesan persona, it is not *amour-propre* which manifests her erotic, but rather her intense satisfaction. Based in feeling rather than discourse, the feminine erotic eludes textual description. Reading the feminine erotic through the lens of mentorship, however, makes it identifiable on the page. The satisfaction that Thérèse feels directly correlates to her mentorship of her patron's wife when she councils this distraught woman to embrace her youth and beauty to escape the financial and sexual constraints of her marriage. In this sense, mentorship is the vehicle that leads women toward the full power of the feminine erotic.

Thérèse's feminine erotic power is both difficult to capture in writing, yet simultaneously transcends the written form of the novel itself through the final act of mentorship that this illustrious courtesan provides in her memoir: the mentorship of the readers themselves. To identify this final form of mentorship for her readers, I reiterate Ganofsky's argument that, "the most crucial education taking place in the libertine novel is that of the reader" ("The Libertine Novel," 232). At the beginning of the novel – which, in this case, signifies the closest point in time to the reader – Thérèse has already reached success and fortune as a courtesan. Upon introducing herself and her goals in writing her story, she invites readers to actively participate in the story itself:

> Objet de la jalousie de mes pareilles, et de la critique des autres, que de raisons pour m'engager au silence! Cependant, toutes les réflexions que je fais, unies mêmes à toutes celles que les lecteurs y pourraient ajouter de leur grâce, ne sont pas assez puissantes pour m'arrêter. (2-3)

As she is lamenting the harsh criticism of her life, as well as the jealousy she incites in other courtesans, Thérèse suggests that readers use their own judgement – either positive or negative – and incorporate their own reflections into this story. In other words, she calls on them to think outside of the social norms that she transgresses throughout her story. Later in the novel, Thérèse once again speaks directly to readers, asking them not to judge her for what she describes on the pages that follow (which will be something resembling depression): "je supplie mes lecteurs de suspendre leur jugement, et de ne pas me condamner d'avance. La suite leur fera bientôt voir que ce n'est pas sans sujet que mes idées deviennent plus sombres qu'à l'ordinaire" (129).[105] Speaking directly to her readers and using first-person narration throughout the novel, the authors employ the use of the "erotic I," which invites the reader to be both an intruder and a participant in Thérèse's story.

In erotic texts, first-person narratives are utilized to create the illusion of reality. In a first-person narrative "everything happens as if the narrative voice played the role of

[105] Although it may seem counterintuitive to today's sensibilities to apologize for describing sadness or depression, it is important to keep in mind that Thérèse, in writing her memoir, is doing so in a way that can help her to continue to build her courtesan persona. If we are, as readers, to believe her story, then she must adhere to her courtesan virtues even in writing. Depression, sadness, general overly emotional attachments to people or events threatens to destabilize the *joie de vivre* that courtesans embody through their public image.

the guide […] the narrator has a double role, both describing and acting" (Goulemot 125). Thérèse, indeed, serves as both a guide who describes the events of her story and as an actor who details on the page certain conversations and sexual acts through dialogue. As we have seen in the example between Thérèse and her patron's wife, some conversations and acts of mentorship are presented through dialogue – or perhaps more of a monologue – in which she speaks directly to her interlocuter. The use of the present tense places the reader directly in the conversation with her, as seen from her point of view. This is an especially useful technique in libertine fiction that depicts sexual acts which, although less frequent in *La Belle Allemande* than in other more explicit fictions of the eighteenth century, still occur at points throughout Thérèse's story.

Although sex scenes in the novel do not depict the feminine erotic as a source of power, they do use erotic language as a useful tool to capture readers' attention. Sex scenes in *La Belle Allemande* are depicted through sexual utterances and ellipses to emphasize the pleasure taking place on the page. For instance, in one explicit scene Thérèse's sexual pleasure is expressed through disjointed vocal utterances: "Ah Ciel! […] Ah! par pitié, mon cher F…je ne souffrirai pas…non, cruel…ah." (79).[106] The combined use of disjointed utterances and ellipses invites the reader to not only observe the sexual act, but also to participate in the erotic imaging of the act on the page, as ellipses indicate an omission that, "leaves room for the reader to supply her or his own

[106] In *The Telling of the Act,* Peter Cryle explains that disjointed utterances in erotic fiction are also used to mimic the effect of "spontaneity" of sexual intercourse and that "producing these vocalizations, drawing them out from women characters in particular, becomes the business of a confessional erotic discipline that is both enacted and recounted in fiction" (129).

words and actions in the space left blank" (Cryle 167). The first-person narrative style of the text, along with Thérèse's acknowledgement of her readers and their own agency to enjoy or despise her story, both lend themselves to mentorship in *ars erotica* between the narrator and her audience.

Thérèse as a mentor for her readers does not take on the dual role of teacher/procurer, as she is not trying to convince her readers to join the *demimonde* nor is she trying to introduce them to patrons in the way her mother and La Dame G— did for her. She is nonetheless teaching them about the courtesan arts, and importantly, about how to wield the power of the feminine erotic as a tool for resistance. This interaction between reader and text – especially in literature that depicts erotic scenes – is what Lisa Jane Graham argues "made reading dangerous" in the eighteenth century, particularly for women. Graham explains that the social anxieties associated with reading in eighteenth-century France were sparked by moralist, medical, and philosophical ponderings about the effects of reading during an era when the reading of fiction became an increasingly more popular activity. She argues that many of these debates centered around the danger of reading fiction specifically because, "fiction encouraged new ways of reading not just texts but the worlds that produced them" (452). Texts like *La Belle Allemande* had the potential to reach readers on a real, visceral level by combining the intellectual, imaginative act of reading with the physical experience of arousal. This kind of literature transports the experience of reading from the page to the physical world.

If readers can immerse themselves imaginatively and physically into the erotic aspects of a narrative, then why should they not also be able to project themselves into other aspects of a story like *La Belle Allemande*? Thérèse invites her readers to do just

that, by speaking directly to them and asking them to use their own judgements – or their own reason – to determine for themselves how to interpret her story. Dispersing erotic elements throughout her narrative helps to make their participation in the story a physical reality through arousal, but the figure of the libertine whore might also inspire readers to reflect more on their own realities outside of the text.

As a literary libertine whore, Thérèse challenges multiple patriarchal structures that place men in positions of sexual, social, and financial dominance over women. She resists male dominance throughout the novel, placing herself in positions of power over men. The *demimonde* provides the setting in which a courtesan can overcome these kinds of gendered hierarchies, as well as traverse social class boundaries that limit social and financial mobility for women like Thérèse who come from low social and financial backgrounds. It is a place where she can freely pursue her sexual desires outside of the constraints of marriage. Thérèse is able to enjoy these liberties thanks to her mentorships in the courtesan arts guided by her mother and La Dame G—. Importantly, Thérèse's transition from mentee to mentor emphasizes the inherently transformative nature of *ars erotica.* Once someone has mastered this artform, they can pass it on to others. For women, this sharing of knowledge is a crucial function of the feminine erotic as a source of power.

Whether or not Bret and Villaret can adequately capture the feminine erotic on the page is inconsequential to the passing on of its knowledge through woman-to-woman mentorship. A focus on mentorship evades the male sexual gaze and centers the feminine erotic not on the sexual act itself, but rather on the power of the feminine erotic to help women find cracks in the patriarchal system. If erotic language is a tool for enticing

readers, then Thérèse's overarching story of class mobility, female sexual freedom, and women's dominance is the finished product presented to them. The final act of mentorship in the novel – Thérèse's mentorship to her readers – guides them towards identifying, questioning, and possibly even resisting the oppressive social structures that make this finished product a fictional conjuration rather than a material reality for her audience. Her mentorship in *ars erotica,* put otherwise, guides them towards the empowering capacities of the feminine erotic.

CHAPTER TWO

Thérèse Philosophe and Philo(Sapphic) Mentorship

The story of *Thérèse Philosophe* is told, like many other eighteenth-century libertine novels, through the firsthand account of a young woman on a journey towards sexual awakening. Like the story of the gallant "belle allemande" discussed in chapter one, this Thérèse's story is introduced as an experiment in writing, the goal of which is, as described by the eponymous narrator, to disclose to the reader "des vérités utiles au bien de la société" (15). These "useful truths" will be depicted through the narrator's account of her philosophical journey towards sexual enlightenment which leads her to become a mistress to a wealthy count. In this chapter, I use the term "mistress" because unlike the courtesan heroine of *La Belle Allemande,* this Thérèse focuses on one long-term patron rather than on a succession of many patrons.[107] Furthermore, in *Thérèse Philosophe* the narrator does not attend public events with patrons or develop a courtesan persona as the main character does in *La Belle Allemande.* Her relationship with her patron is primarily hidden from public view, at least in the context of this novel.

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[107] Kushner uses the term "*dame entretenue"* (kept woman) to describe courtesans – or women who engaged in elite prostitution – but she also uses the term "mistress" to refer to these women. The three terms appear interchangeably in *Erotic Exchanges.* Griffin, on the other hand, distinguishes between courtesans and mistresses, arguing that "unlike the mistress of a married man, who is often kept hidden, just as the courtesan was proud of her jewelry, she too was proudly displayed" (Location 1115).

Despite these differences, *Thérèse Philosophe* depicts a courtesan artform that is learned through woman-to-woman mentorship. The courtesan arts in this novel focus on her philosophical sexual development while facing eighteenth-century social financial limitations imposed upon women. The artistic element of this erotic practice, then, reflects Foucault's notion of *ars erotica's* adherence to pleasure for the sake of pleasure.[108] While she does, like the "belle allemande" from chapter one, seek out a patron to financially support her, her sexual pleasure plays a key role in the development of her philosophical consideration of sex as only a means of physical gratification. Put otherwise, her beliefs about sexual pleasure defy the reproductive function of sex that largely defined women's sexuality in eighteenth-century France. In the novel, this philosophy is coupled with Thérèse's innate sexual proclivities which manifest as a child. Her natural voluptuousness, in other words, lends itself to a libertine philosophy of pleasure that is established throughout the narrative.

During Thérèse's journey, she will be sent to a convent to learn (unsuccessfully) how to stifle her voluptuous behaviors, live with philosophical mentors who teach her to balance sexual pleasure with moderation, seek out a husband to support her after the death of her mother, and ultimately become a mistress to a wealthy count. Throughout the entirety of this story, she grapples with sexual urges that lead to what is depicted as uncontrollable bouts of self-pleasure. Meeting with a variety of characters along the way, Thérèse's journey involves three woman-to-woman mentorships in *ars erotica,* each of which are depicted as confidantes– a form of female intimacy that queers the sexual

[108] Foucault contends that knowledge about the erotic is transmitted in *ars erotica* through experience and "la vérité est extraite du plaisir lui-même" (77).

content as well as the structure of the text. These three mentors, Éradice, Mlle C, and Mlle Bois-Laurier, will guide Thérèse's development of a libertine materialist philosophy that results in her companionate mistress relationship at the end of the novel.

Scholars of eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy have discussed at length the materialist philosophies that appeared during this era and their association to libertinage. [109] My approach to the materialist overtones in *Thérèse Philosophe* borrows from both Thomas M. Kavanagh and Natania Meeker's analyses of the Epicurean and Lucretian roots of eighteenth-century libertine materialism. Kavanagh takes up this discussion by framing libertine materialism as a form of "Epicurean Stoicism" which created a "radical materialism that rejected any transcendence separating the virtuous exercise of the mind from the sentient pleasure of the body [and] grounded its secular morality in nature as it was experienced by the senses" (8). Meeker acknowledges the influence of the Epicurean materialist doctrine, adding that in the eighteenth century, Epicureanism is combined with a Lucretian "voluptuous philosophy" which emphasizes the role of poetic form to incite responses in readers. In using the term "libertine materialism" I echo Natania Meeker's contention that the eighteenth century bore witness

[109] Libertine materialist philosophies were continuously developing throughout the eighteenth-century and are another common feature of libertine fiction of this era. In her analysis of the "materialist world of pornography," Margaret C. Jacob highlights how a key concept of the enlightenment's scientific revolution, the "mechanical vision," heavily influenced materialist philosophies of the eighteenth-century and argues that "Among the many genres of literature presumed to shed light on the world that permitted the mechanization of nature, one, pornography […] may have more to tell us about the world that gave rise to the new push-pull metaphysics of bodies" (157-158). Thérèse's attention the mechanics of sex throughout the novel highlight this focus on the "mechanical vision" of libertine materialist philosophy.

to a growing "fascination with the perceptible substance of experience" (*Voluptuous Philosophy* 2). In sum, libertine materialism in this chapter refers to the symbiotic relationship between physical pleasure, philosophical thought, and sensual arousal.[110] This philosophy is woven into the narrative of *Thérèse Philosophe* through theatrical descriptions of sexual exchanges which are detailed by the narrators (both Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier) who pay particular attention to the motions, fluids, bodies, and overall mechanics of sexual acts.

In other words, libertine materialism in the novel is evoked through the narrators' attention to the relationship between sensation and matter, something that is articulated on the final pages of Thérèse's narrative in which she declares, "l'âme n'a de volonté, n'est déterminée que par les sensations, que par la matière. La raison nous éclaire; mais elle ne nous détermine point" (148).[111] This philosophy will be a crucial function of her mistress relationship with the count at the end of the novel who adheres to her desire for sensual stimulation combined with sexual pleasure. Importantly, this relationship will uphold the key tenet of Thérèse's *ars erotica* – pleasure for pleasure's sake – through a commitment to nonreproductive sex. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how this relationship is made possible thanks to her mentorship in the courtesan arts. While existing scholarship on the erotic and philosophical lessons intertwined throughout

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[110] By "sensual arousal" I am referring to the sexual arousal triggered by excitement of the senses.

[111] Meeker also points out that the novel's libertine materialist philosophy is reflected in this quote by Thérèse at the end of her narrative, arguing that the materialist philosophy expressed by Thérèse requires her acquiescence to "feminine compulsion" to make room for male philosophy." Female acquiescence," Meeker argues, is demonstrated through penetrative sex – a matter I will discuss at the end of this chapter (*Voluptuous Philosophy* 141).

Thérèse Philosophe has primarily focused on the novel's promotion of libertine materialism, I add to this this discussion that queer feminist mentorship in *ars erotica* is the driving force behind Thérèse's development of this philosophy.

The end goal of Thérèse's story – her mistress relationship with the count –is the final product of what I consider in this dissertation to be a courtesan art, or a form of *ars erotica* that combines sexual pleasure, social mobility, and financial independence. Although Thérèse does not become a courtesan *per se*, her story does exhibit an end goal that is similar to other courtesan stories explored in this project: she manages to find a patron who shares her sexual philosophy and financially supports her, liberating her from the constraints of marriage and pregnancy. Though the novel portrays Thérèse's philosophy as a libertine materialism, this philosophy is only achievable through mentorship in *ars erotica.* In that sense, the novel's libertine materialist philosophy is facilitated through female intimacy and queer mentorships in *ars erotica.*

Libertine materialism in the novel is emphasized through the theatrical recreations of sexual acts between characters. This theatricality within the narrative highlights another link to the courtesan arts portrayed in the novel. Although performance is not linked to a courtesan persona in the way that we saw in chapter one, it will nonetheless play an important role in the novel insofar as Thérèse's writing of the novel is, itself, a performance. Kavanagh posits that Thérèse's writing of her story is a testament to her transformation from "thinking self to writing self – a transformation that explains the genesis of the novel we are reading" (63). I add to this that her writing denotes the performance of her courtesan art, especially considering it is her lover who requests that she write this story to begin with. She is performing this art in writing for her patron in a

similar way that the "belle allemande" from chapter one socially and privately performs her courtesan art in the presence of patrons. Thérèse's performance of her story is especially articulated in the novel through her voyeuristic observations of the sexual encounters of her first two confidantes and mentors – Éradice and Mlle C. Theatrically reenacting the erotic scenes for the count (and the reader). She narrates what she is witnessing through a combination of description and dialogue that mirrors the actions of a play unfolding for an audience.[112]

The use of theatric-style narration, meant to incite arousal in the reader, also highlights Thérèse's sapphic desire, which, like her libertine materialist philosophy, builds over the course of the novel and is inextricably linked to her mentorships in *ars erotica*. Sapphic desire in her relationships with her first two mentors – Éradice and Mlle C – is relegated to the sphere of fantasy and manifested through Thérèse's masturbation. This desire, however, becomes fully realized through her sexual relationship with her third mentor, Mlle Bois-Laurier. In framing these confidante mentorships as examples of queer female intimacy, I apply Susan S. Lanser's notion of sapphic desire which is especially prevalent in the confidante relationship between women in fiction. Borrowing from Lanser, my use of the term "sapphic" is meant to signify "'lesbian-like' discourses and representations like those sometimes signaled by "romantic friendship" that are

[112] This theatrical style of narrating sexual scenes was a common method for French writers of eighteenth-century erotic fiction. Peter Cryle cites novels such as Andréa de Nerciat's *Les Aphrodites* (1793) and the Marquis de Sade's *Histoire de Juliette* (1797) to argue that libertine fictions often incorporate a series of erotic "theatrical tableaux" (108). Cryle further contends that "in eighteenth-century writing, the notion of the act [of sex], insofar as it is present, owes much to theatrical discourse" (272).

plausibly if not provably sexual: desires and habits that give primacy to same-sex bonds through words amenable to an erotic rendering" (*The Sexuality of History* 16). At the same time, this term echoes early modern anxieties and intrigues surrounding women's same-sex desire that might explain why sapphic desire in *Thérèse Philosophe* is couched in vague language and expressed only in brief scenes compared to the detailed portrayals of heteronormative sexual desire. The sapphic subject, as Lanser reminds us, threatened to destabilize eighteenth-century gender hierarchies that placed women in subordinate roles to men by undermining – if not eradicating – men's sexual and companionate place in women's lives.[113] My use of the term sapphic to describe Thérèse's desire and her intimate friendships with women implies a resistance to these eighteenth-century gender hierarchies.

Important to my analysis of sapphic desire in this chapter is the role of the confidante as a structurally queer figure in the novel. As such, I consider Lanser's theorization of the confidante in eighteenth-century literature, especially her argument that "the device of the confidante through whom the transmission of letters, journals, or conversation places two women in a structurally erotic relationship" ("Novel (Sapphic) Subjects" 498). However, the relationships that Thérèse shares with Éradice, Mlle C, and Mlle Bois-Laurier stand out in comparison to other popular literary confidantes in the

[113] Lanser explains early modern fascinations and fears surrounding sapphic desire in *The Sexuality of History.* She contends that, "while a profound challenge to gender hierarchy is its most obvious implication, the early modern preoccupation with sapphic subjects points to a wider disruption of the imaginary that exposes the sign *woman* as a critical social anchor. The resulting episteme suggests not only the radical autonomy of a subordinate caste but the potential demise of the caste itself" (49).

eighteenth century, often depicted in the epistolary genre. Their difference is rooted primarily in the proximity of Thérèse to her confidantes compared to how this queer relationship is structured in epistolary novels. To offer two notable examples, Julie and Claire in Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), as well as Claire and Elise in Sophie Cottin's *Claire d'Albe* (1799) both represent confidante relationships that lack physical proximity. In both of these eighteenth-century novels, the main characters are confronted with the choice between virtue and passion, a dilemma detailed in their letters to their female friends. However, the actions that these confidantes take to help their friends are limited by the timing and logic of the epistolary form due to the "double movement between text and context that a novel of letters requires" (Lisa Disch 28). Put otherwise, confidantes in epistolary novels such as *Claire d'Albe* and *Julie* are limited in their mentorship roles due to both the time it takes for their letters to reach their confidantes as well as the actions taken by the characters during this lapse.[114]

The temporal and geographic limitation of confidantes in the epistolary genre often problematizes the effectiveness of the actions taken to advise, help, or otherwise influence their female friends. This problem is eradicated in *Thérèse Philosophe* as her proximity to female confidantes in her story renders their actions more direct. For instance, the heteroerotic scenes involving Thérèse's mentors are framed through the confidante relationship, meaning that conversations with her mentors occur both before

[114] In *Julie,* for instance, Claire does not reach Julie in time to save her from drowning given her physical distance and the separation of time between letters. In *Claire d'Albe,* we hardly ever hear Elise's voice until she writes not to Claire, but to Claire's husband, to help him reconcile his marriage with his wife who has fallen passionately in love for another man. In the case of both, the intervention of the confidantes is ineffective.

and after these erotic encounters. This framing highlights Lanser's notion that the figure of the confidante queers the heteroerotic text by filtering heteronormative sex through the lens of female intimacy.

It is important to note, however, that the three mentorships in *ars erotica* that are depicted through the confidante relationships are each distinct from one another and do not share the exact same goals. Éradice, for instance, represents an unwitting mentor in *ars erotica.* Her guidance of Thérèse in the erotic arts is clouded by religious devotion. She invites Thérèse to voyeuristically witness a "miracle" which turns out to be her sexual exploitation and rape by a priest. Confusing orgasm for spiritual phenomenon, Éradice's naivety nonetheless guides the development of Thérèse's sapphic desire as well as the anti-clerical facets of her libertine materialist philosophy.

Mlle C, on the other hand, represents a more enlightened version of Éradice, and her consensual sexual relationship with another male religious leader – the abbé T – informs the narrator's understanding about free will in sexual exchanges. This mentorship encompasses overt lessons about sexual pleasure and regulation intermingled with clandestine observations of heteroerotic scenes, the latter of which reinforces Thérèse's sapphic desire. Indeed, Thérèse's voyeurism in the novel affirms her sapphic desire through her attention to women's bodies in the act of sex and her later fantasizing about her friends during masturbation. It is not until she meets her final mentor, a former prostitute, that Thérèse's sapphic desire is fully realized. Mlle Bois-Laurier's mentorship combines the lessons that Thérèse has learned in physical sexual pleasure and philosophical principles of regulation to become the ultimate guide for Thérèse in *ars erotica*. Where Thérèse's experience of sexual pleasure up until she meets Mlle Bois-

Laurier is limited to masturbation, this confidante and mentor shares with Thérèse the experience of pleasure through partner sex – an important feature of her erotic art and her final relationship in the novel. [115] Furthermore, it is Mlle Bois-Laurier who will officially introduce Thérèse to the Parisian *demimonde* and provide her with an alternative to marriage. [116]

Like the whore (auto)biographical narrative style of *La Belle Allemande,* Thérèse's story is told using the "erotic I' to create the illusion of truthfulness – whether that means that these events really happened, or that there is a possibility of them happening.[117] The first-person narrative in *Thérèse Philosophe,* however, shifts three quarters of the way into the novel to a second narrator, Mlle Bois-Laurier. During this shift in narrative perspective, the former prostitute shares some details of her past profession signaling the didactic undertones of her conversation with Thérèse who learns

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[115] The "abandoned daughter" is a frequently used trope in libertine fiction of this era that incorporates prostitute characters. Kathryn Norberg indicates that many prostitutes in French erotic fiction, especially in the latter part of the eighteenth-century, appear as vulnerable young women left to fend for themselves who are forced by life circumstances to enter the sexual marketplace (usually in Paris). Norberg offers the famous example of Zéphire in Restif de la Bretonne's *Le Paysan perverti* (1784) as an example of this literary trope which she calls the "virtuous courtesan" (227).

[116] I use the term "*demimonde*" in this chapter in the same vein as in chapter one to represent the Parisian sexual marketplace. The *demimonde* in *Thérèse Philosophe* represents the same sexual marketplace and community that is depicted in *La Belle Allemande.* The eighteenth-century Parisian *demimonde* was the setting of many libertine and erotic fictions, so the use of the same setting in both novels is less of a coincidence and more of an indication of trends in libertine fiction during this era.

[117] Goulemot reminds us that the "Erotic I' represents "the presence of that voice, of a subject who speaks […] The implementation of the mechanism that gives such an effect of presence in the narrative, and thus an impression of realism" (122).

through these pornographic vignettes the various sexual pleasures and perversions of men in the *demimonde*. It is within this narrative shift that the text exhibits the most overt form of female intimacy and mentorship, with the former two mentors taking up comparatively little space or voice in the novel. This narrative shift also portrays a queering of the structure of the erotic narrative. Thérèse shares the narrative space with Mlle Bois-Laurier, and the shift of one female narrative to another mimics the sharing of intimate space between women within the structure of the text itself.

In reading the relationships between Thérèse and her confidantes as queer mentorships in *ars erotica,* I apply Tracy Rutler's notion of reading queerly, expertly explained in her book *Queering the Enlightenment.* Framing her approach through the application of Lacanian psychanalysis, Rutler theorizes that:

> Reading queerly […] means paying attention to the gaps between form and content that allow us to assess the disjunctions between the Symbolic and the Real […] reading queerly then means seizing these disjunctions between the part (the subject) and the whole (the Order) by paying attention to the fruitful fractures between and within narration and language. Analyzing these moments when the content of literature becomes unhinged from its form will allow us to uncover queer, utopian impulses even in works of seemingly heteronormative literature. [118] (21)

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[118] Rutler refers to the Symbolic and the Real in terms of how these concepts exist in the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of the symbolic order of language, which is composed of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. I borrow from Kirsten Campbell's explanations of the "Symbolic" which denotes "a practice of signification of the unconscious" or, in other words, the category of the symbolic order which is associated with language (42). Campbell describes the Real as

My reading of queer mentorships in *ars erotica* in *Thérèse Philosophe* considers the narrative shift from Thérèse to Mlle Bois-Laurier, the obscurity of female intimacy in the text, and the framing of heteroerotic scenes through female intimacy/fantasy, all to represent the types of disjunctions between narration and language that Rutler contends helps us to uncover queerness in a seemingly heteronormative erotic text. If heteroerotic language underscores the novel's libertine materialist philosophy, then these confidante relationships and their queer structure within the text represent a disruption to the heteronormative order. My queer reading of this novel, then, focuses not only on the contextual queerness demonstrated through Thérèse's sapphic desire in the story, but also on the structural queerness of the text itself.

Furthermore, all the examples of same-sex female intimacy that Thérèse experiences through her mentorships in *ars erotica* are examples of queer modes of feeling woven into the narrative. Christine Varando calls attention to identifying queer modes of feeling and expression in early modern literature, arguing in her book *The Shapes of Fancy* that they "are made queer by a twist to their shape – by their strange proliferations, their unaccountable excesses of intensity, their atypical and errant crossings" (3-4). I specifically consider Varando's notion of "atypical and errant crossings" in my reading of queer female mentorship in *Thérèse Philosophe,* as each of the three women that the narrator befriends leads her astray of her intended path towards marriage. These confidante mentors each highlight how this path – which was chosen for

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"lack in language […] that which the Symbolic cannot symbolize […] a hole in the Symbolic order" (131). Where the Symbolic is associated with language, the Real is associated with a lack of language, that part of the unconscious that exists outside of linguistic capacities and structures.

her – may not satisfy her ultimate sexual (and financial) needs. Consequently, all three of Thérèse's intimate friendships build upon each other to lead her to the *demimonde.* In other words, these "errant crossings" queer the heteronormative trajectory of the novel's plot.

All the confidante relationships in the novel play an important role in Thérèse's sexual philosophy. However, one final question remains: why does a young woman's sexual coming of age story make for such a compelling erotic literary tool in the eighteenth century? Mary McAlpin expertly details the answer to this question, explaining in her analysis of medical treatises of the era that the sexuality of young girls was a key focus of many doctor's theories on puberty and sexual desire. She explains that, "the ideal postpubescent girl as presented in these treatises is primed for the (necessary) physical experience of sexual intercourse but is to remain absolutely ignorant of the mechanics of sex until her wedding night" ("The Rape of Cécile" 4). Since Thérèse's philosophical sexual journey in the novel heavily focuses on the mechanics of sex – of which the narrator is clueless – d'Argens seems to be playing off of the eighteenth-century cultural insistence on girl's sexual ignorance.

Additionally, the growing popularity of erotic fiction like *Thérèse Philosophe* correlates with the gradual increasing interest in medical sexual discourse in eighteenth-century France.[119] As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the linking of girls' and

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[119] Scholars of eighteenth-century French literature have long discussed the libertine and erotic literary market and the implications of censorship regulations in the distribution of these literatures. Goulemot, for instance, highlights the proliferation of erotic literature in eighteenth-century France, noting that "buyers came from all levels of society […] They [obscene publications] were sold on thoroughfares and places where prostitutes plied their trade, such as the Palais

women's sexuality with morality is an important feature early modern notions of virtuous womanhood. Philosophical and medical texts which discuss women's sexuality are not only wrought with contradictions that make the accomplishment of virtuous womanhood difficult – if not impossible – to fully achieve, but they also serve as excellent outlines for libertine fictions that center on a girl's sexual coming of age story. The works of eighteenth-century medical doctors such as M.D.T de Bienville and Samuel-Aguste Tissot provide some insights into how women's and girl's sexuality shaped the French cultural imaginary, including the writing of erotic fiction.

Bienville, like many other doctors of this era, focuses heavily on women's sexual "suffering" which results from an overstimulation of their sexual passions. For instance, he contends in *La nymphomanie* (1771) that women are more in danger of suffering from the negative effects of nymphomania than men because "les sentiments et les désirs sont dans les femmes beaucoup plus violents que dans les hommes" (31). Tissot likewise asserts in *L'Onanisme* (1760) that women are more susceptible to overwhelming sexual urges leading them to masturbation which can result, he argues, in extreme physical illness. He writes, "les femmes sont plus particulièrement exposées à des accès d'hystérie ou de vapeurs affreux; à des jaunisses incurables […] à des fureurs utérines" (60). However, women's sexuality did not just threaten people on an individual level, but on a societal one as well.

Royal, the entry to the Tuileries, and the Opéra" (17). Robert Darnton, also, discusses at length the role of censors and the the underground book trade in *The Literary Underground* and *Censors at Work.*

Many scholars have pointed to the eighteenth century's linking of women's sexuality to social destruction. Anna Maria Marchini provides an excellent summary of the fear of the social ramifications of women's unrestrained sexuality, arguing that "the threat is that women will come to resemble men, surpassing them in anatomical structures and discovering pleasure without male concurrence" (84). In a similar vein, Lisa Jane Graham highlights how medical and philosophical treatises focused heavily on marriage – a societal structure that required men – as a means of regulating women's sexual desire. She notes that, "physicians promoted marriage as a salutary way to manage libido for men and women" (464). Even reading, Graham argues, posed a threat the eighteenth-century patriarchally constructed sexual economy between men and women because "reading and masturbation alike rendered men impotent and women indifferent to the 'legitimate pleasures of marriage'" (464). In sum, sexuality – especially that of women – was something that needed to be controlled and contained within the institution of marriage, lest it destroy French society altogether.

In order to contain women's sexuality, it was important to identify the cause of women's sexual corruption. Medical doctors like Tissot and Bienville rooted the sexual depravation of women in early childhood. McAlpin explains that these and other medical treaties were written for public consumption and thereby helped to diffuse the theorizations of these doctors to the general public. Furthermore, the idea that women's sexuality was a threat to the social order if left untamed also featured in several philosophical publications of the time, and is notably mentioned by Rousseau in his

reflections on women's subordination in *Émile.*[120] The danger that came to be associated with women's sexuality was linked to childhood and puberty, a time period when exposure to sexual influences could lead to the "eruption of early puberty" and therefore their sexual debauchery (*Female Sexuality* 2).[121] With these kinds of ideas surrounding women's and girl's sexuality spreading throughout the eighteenth century, it is no wonder that libertine fiction might find inspiration in these medical and philosophical texts for the creation of their sexually driven female heroines.

James A. Steintrager contends that the intermingling of the erotic with medical and anatomical knowledge was a common thread in eighteenth-century libertine materialist fiction in which, he contends,

> We see that pleasure is understood in terms of "mechanical" actions, of "force" and the flow of "juices." This is a clear indication of the extent to which materialist natural philosophy, often underpinned by medical and anatomical knowledge, had penetrated libertinage. (184)

Thérèse Philosophe attributes many of the traits described by Tissot and Bienville to the eponymous main character, especially her childhood nocturnal masturbation and her

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[120] Rousseau's ideas on women's sexuality are especially contentious in his considerations of sexual assault which, he argues, occurs due to a woman's lack of control of her sexual urges. He writes, "pour que l'attaquant soit victorieux, il faut que l'attaqué[e] le permette ou l'ordonne" (*Émile* 468). For more information on Rousseau's ideas about sexual assault, see *Émile* especially book five where he discusses sexual attacks.

[121] McAlpin explains this danger, noting that "the danger for prepubescent girls was the eruption of early puberty due to exposure to lascivious influences, but even girls going through puberty had to be carefully protected in order to keep them quite thorough ignorant of the sexual nature of the (quite powerful) physical stirrings they were said to be experiencing (*Female Sexuality* 2).

irresistible desire to both witness and experience sexual pleasure. Her sexual actions throughout the novel also emphasize a certain mechanics of pleasure, depicted through the language of "forces" and "juices" in her voyeuristic observations of sex.

Given this historical context, it is not surprising that d'Argens would depict his heroine's sexual coming of age story through the lens of a libertine materialist philosophy. My discussion in this chapter on libertine materialism, however, is not on its existence in the novel but rather on how its expression is made possible through structurally queer relationships between Thérèse and the women that mentor her throughout her journey –Éradice, Mlle C, and Mlle Bois-Laurier. Each of these women act simultaneously as confidantes and mentors for Thérèse – a homosocial and homoerotic relationship dynamic that is, in this novel, couched in heterosexual erotic language. They likewise teach Thérèse important lessons that help her to develop her sexual philosophy. *Ars erotica* and libertine materialism are intricately linked in this novel, tied together through woman-to-woman mentorship, female intimacy, and sapphic desire. To that end, female intimacy through the confidante/mentor relationship is the driving force behind the erotic libertine materialism depicted in the novel. In what follows, I will analyze how each mentor in Thérèse's life helps to build her libertine materialist philosophy through mentorship, identifying how sapphic desire manifests through Thérèse's voyeurism and her sexual relationship with Mlle Bois-Laurier. I will likewise analyze the structural queerness depicted through each of these intimate female relationships through their placement in the text and the obscurity of the language that attempts to hide them.

Éradice: A Mentor Unbeknownst to Herself

It may seem unconventional to describe someone a an "unwitting" mentor, but Éradice in *Thérèse Philosophe* takes on a mentorship role in the novel that is, at first, antithetical to *ars erotica* in that it focuses on religious devotion rather than sexual experience. Éradice is, from the beginning of their relationship, a close friend and confidante for Thérèse. I consider her an "unwitting" mentor in *ars erotica* because her sexual mentorship of Thérèse is fueled by her own obliviousness to the sexual abuse taking place on her body.[122] In order to analyze how Éradice's mentorship is transformed from religious guidance to *ars erotica*, it is important to understand the setting of this confidante relationship as these two characters meet in a convent – a common setting of eighteenth-century erotic fiction.

The convent in d'Argens text represents a place of sexual repression, exploitation, and discovery for Thérèse. After demonstrating voluptuous behaviors as a child, including masturbation in her sleep and erotic games with other children, Thérèse's mother sends her to a convent to eradicate these sexual behaviors. [123] Ironically, this is where Thérèse will first take the position as a voyeur of heteroerotic sex. The convent as

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[122] Although Éradice experiences sexual pleasure during this event, confusing it for a spiritual phenomenon, it is important acknowledge that this is a sexual assault as she never consents to the sex. This "spiritual practice" is a ploy used by Dirrag to rape religiously devout young women.

[123] Thérèse explains that her childhood nightly masturbation began at the age of seven, and that her mother, upon discovering this habit, started binding Thérèse's hands at night to prevent her from self-pleasuring in her sleep. Her mother essentially inhibits the mechanics necessary to the libertine materialist realization of pleasure. In sending her to the convent, she also inhibits the development of the ideological and imaginative components of libertine materialism.

a setting of sexual debauchery is a common occurrence in eighteenth-century erotic fiction.[124] However, many scholars of erotica of this era have also pointed to the convent as a setting for sapphic desire. Steintrager, for instance, considers the convent "the setting par excellence for Sapphic pleasures" (92).[125] A private, all-female space, the convent provides the secrecy and opportunity for the exploration of women's same-sex desire. It is also in convent settings that confidante relationships thrive and sapphic desire is constructed in resistance to heteronormative pairings in erotic fiction. As Lanser argues, the convent is a space where "the sexual and the political converge in women's interests" (*The Sexuality of History* 206). In other words, convents in erotic fiction are sexually transgressive as depicted either queerly through same-sax desire, or perversely through transgressive heterosexual acts between members of the cloth meant to represent religious virtue. In *Thérèse Philosophe*, the convent is a sexually transgressive space in both of these ways.

While at the convent, Thérèse befriends Éradice. Although Thérèse, at this point, is twenty-five and no longer lives at the convent, she continually visits it in an attempt to rid herself of her voluptuous desires through religious devotion. It is Éradice's extreme piousness that establishes a connection between these two women and initiates their bond

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[124] Steintrager points out that the convent has a long history as a setting for sexual debauchery in erotic fiction even before the eighteenth century. In the eighteenth-century, however, the convent comes to represent "the standard enlightened position on religious celibacy and the cloistered life as unnatural and pernicious" (90).

[125] Lanser also argues that the convent serves as a common setting for sapphic desire in literature, describing it as a "common circumstantial setting" especially for women passing as men to seduce other women. In this sense, the convent blurs both sexual and gendered boundaries (*The Sexuality of History* 47).

as confidantes. Éradice's spirituality is also the catalyst of her mentorship relationship with Thérèse. During one of their private conversations, Thérèse describes being jealous of her friend's close connection to a spiritual leader, Father Dirrag. Impressed with Éradice's piety, the priest takes up private lessons with her in spiritual devotion which triggers Thérèse's jealousy of the happiness her friend exhibits at experiencing the "miracles" of these lessons. Thérèse writes:

> Éradice s'aperçut que j'étais jalouse de son bonheur, et que même je paraissais ne pas ajouter foi à ce qu'elle me disait […] vous verrez, me dit-elle avec feu, quelle est la force de mes exercices spirituels, par quels degrés de pénitence le bon Père me conduit à devenir une grande sainte […] Que mon exemple, ma chère Thérèse, ajouta-t-elle en se radoucissant, ne peut-il opérer dans vous, pour premier miracle, la force de détacher entièrement votre esprit de la matière par la grande vertu de la méditation, pour ne les mettre qu'en Dieu seul ! (30-31)

After this conversation, Éradice invites Thérèse to hide herself in the former's bedchambers to witness what she believes to be a truly sacred ritual which turns out to be a sexual assault of Éradice by the Father Dirrag. The priest has tricked the young devout Éradice into believing that their sexual exchange is an act of piety. Thérèse's memory of this encounter demonstrates both the theatricality of the erotic scene as well as the libertine materialist overtones:

> – Votre esprit est-il content, ma petite sainte ? dit-il en poussant une sorte de soupir. Pour moi, je vois les cieux verts ; la grâce suffisante me transporte ; je…
> – Ah ! Mon Père, s'écria Éradice, quel plaisir m'aiguillonne ! Oui, je jouis du bonheur céleste ; je sens que mon esprit est entièrement détaché de la matière :

> chassez, mon Père, chassez tout ce qui reste d'impur dans moi. Je vois…les…an..ges ; (39-40)

This scene, like all of the sexual scenes in the novel, is explicitly described by the narrator using typical erotic stylistic devices such as sexual exclamations, sighs, ellipses, and disjointed utterances that portray the sexual acts on the page. Peter Cryle argues that these features render the erotic narrative both thematic and stylistic because "erotic narrative does not simply refer to exclamatory utterance but often seeks to perform it textually" (125). As an observer of sex rather than a participant in it, Thérèse is watching these scenes unfold much in the same way an audience member watches a play. The theatricality of erotic scenes is an important feature of Thérèse's journey of sexual discovery in the text because her position as a voyeur makes her both a spectator and an active participant in the scene unfolding before her as is evidenced through her arousal. The erotic scenes Thérèse witnesses, however, not only arouse her sexually, but also inspire philosophical reflection.[126]

The scene between Dirrag and Éradice leads Thérèse to question the religious dogma that encourages the repression of her sexual desire and voluptuous behaviors, building towards the novel's anticlerical philosophical message and the secular libertine materialism that underscores Thérèse's philosophy. This anticlerical stance is portrayed not only through Dirrag's deception, but also through his emphasis on what Kavanagh

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[126] Colas Duflo argues that the mixture of sexual experience, learning, and reason in the novel from Thérèse's narrative point of view creates a new "experimental philosophy" in which ""il ne s'agit pas non plus de dépeindre la débauche pour elle-même […] car l'expérience ne produit sa fonction libératrice qu'accompagnée du raisonnement" (436). In other words, erotic scenes are not just meant to arouse, but also to teach an underlying philosophical principle.

refers to as a "rhetoric of Queitist ascentism" which the priest uses to convince Éradice that "the most eloquent proof of her spiritual progress is a total obliviousness to her physical body – a delusion he does not hesitate to exploit by raping his star pupil" (55).[127] Éradice's exclamations, which denote the feeling of separation of her spirit from her physical body call attention to the religious ploy used by Dirrag to manipulate the young devotee.

Religious critique is further enunciated in this exchange through the use sexual utterances, ellipses, and disjointed speech intermixed with eroticism, debauchery, and abuse. The incorporation of spiritual terms such as "*sainte*," "*les cieux*," and "*celeste*," in this scene combines religious language with theatrical erotic description. Through the use of erotic linguistic devices, Thérèse is recreating the auditory sensual arousal that she experienced, denoting the importance of sensation in her libertine materialist philosophy. Furthermore, her use of the language of piety combined with erotic depravity highlights Éradice's naivety, as is evidenced through the devotee's orgasmic declaration at the end of the scene. This auditory sexual declaration is recreated through a disjointed utterance as she sees "*les..an..ges*," confusing her orgasm for a "spiritual epiphany."[128]

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[127] In the erotic scene, this separation of spirit and body is iterated by Éradice's exclamation that: "je sens que mon esprit est entièrement détaché de la matière." She describes feeling detached in this scene from her body, interpreting sexual pleasure as a spiritual phenomenon.

[128] Peakman describes that this erotic scene between Éradice and Dirrag was actually a reference to a real-life scandal that was transformed in *Thérèse Philosophe* into a fictional account that presents a "series of sexual scenarios – masturbation, voyeurism and flagellation. Orgasms are represented as spiritual epiphanies" (*Mighty Lewd Books* 152).

Crucial to the portrayal of religious debauchery in *Thérèse Philosophe* is the naivety of Éradice. Her obliviousness to the sexual assault taking place on her body represents the common trope in erotic fiction of the young novice who, Julie Peakman explains, is "portrayed as innocent and gullible, and easily won through flattery, yet the writers are more sympathetic to these women" (*Mighty Lewd Books* 151). The novel depicts Éradice as a victim not only of the priest's sexual abuse but also of society's regulations of girls' knowledge about sexuality in the eighteenth century. She is ignorant of the fact that Dirrag is sexually abusing her, or that she is experiencing sexual pleasure rather than a spiritual awakening, because society limits her access to knowledge about sex. In order to make this kind of social and religious critique, Thérèse must consider Éradice to be a gullible victim.

Éradice's naivety, however, serves as more than just a tool for religious critique. It is also fundamental to her confidante and mentorship relationship with Thérèse. Although her naivety leads to her being deceived and sexually abused, her goal in inviting Thérèse to witness this scene was to help the narrator achieve joy through religious devotion. Éradice unwittingly steers Thérèse in the opposite direction, and through the narrator's witnessing of the priest's sexual abuse, a kindling of antireligious sentiment is sparked which will later influence her libertine materialist philosophy and her considerations of virtue and vice. This is especially important to Thérèse's refusal of the religious and social institution of marriage. If not for Éradice's unwitting mentorship, she would never have developed this crucial aspect of her materialist libertine philosophy. In this sense, rather than being a religious mentor, Éradice is transformed into a mentor in *ars erotica.*

Recalling Peakman's contention that authors of anticlerical erotica are more sympathetic towards naïve young women such as Éradice, Thérèse's later explanation of this event is evidence of her continued fondness of her friend. She emphasizes Éradice's ignorance of the sexual coercion of the priest and highlights his trickery, clearly more critical of Dirrag than of his victim:

> Que de réflexions sur l'abus qui se fait des choses les plus respectables établies dans la société ! […] Il lui échauffe l'imagination sur l'envie d'être sainte; il lui persuade qu'on n'y parvient qu'en détachant l'esprit de la chair. De là il la conduit à la nécessité d'en faire l'épreuve par une vigoureuse discipline: cérémonie qui était sans doute un restaurant du coût du cafard, propre à réveiller l'élasticité usée de son nerf érecteur […] elle croit tomber dans une extase divine, purement spirituelle, lorsqu'elle jouit des plaisirs de la chair les plus voluptueux. (41-42)

Éradice, according to Thérèse, had fallen prey to a devious priest who manipulated her piousness for sexual gratification. She is sympathetic to her friend, painting her – rightly so – as a victim of sexual abuse. The narrator's fondness of Éradice, however, goes beyond the level of sympathy. Although she is critical of the pseudo-religious ritual that she witnessed, it nonetheless triggers her arousal. Directly after she observes this event, she returns to her own room to masturbate while fantasizing about what she saw. It is in her fantasies that sapphic desire is articulated and her fondness for Éradice takes on sapphic sexual undertones. She writes:

> Je me jetai sur mon lit. L'entrée de ce membre rubicond dans la partie de Mlle Éradice ne pouvait sortir de mon imagination […] Machinalement, je me plaçai

> dans la même attitude que celle où j'avais vu Éradice, et machinalement encore, dans l'agitation qui me faisait mouvoir, je me coulai sur le ventre jusqu'à la colonne du pied du lit […] l'évacuation de la céleste rosée me laissant l'esprit plus libre, je fis quelques réflexions sur tout ce que j'avais vu chez Éradice et sur ce qui venait de passer dans moi, sans en pouvoir tirer aucune conclusion raisonnable (48).

Thérèse's emphasis on the mechanics of sex and masturbation are meant to highlight the novel's libertine materialist messaging, but they also hint at the narrator's sexual fantasizing about her friend. Although Thérèse's understanding of sexuality is, at this point, still convoluted and blurred by religious devotion, she nonetheless reflects on her own sexual pleasure which is inextricably tied to her erotic imaginings of Éradice.[129]

Thérèse's erotic fantasizing about Éradice creates what Lanser suggests is a secondary – and sapphic – erotic effect in the narrative. The effect of Thérèse's voyeuristic arousal stems from watching her friend, and not the priest, in the act of sex. This renders the narrative, to borrow a term from Lanser, heteroglossic, or "capable of being turned into a homoerotic text – and the renowned "male gaze" effectively rendered female" ("Novel (Saphhic) Subjects" 497). Thérèse's arousal is triggered by what she witnessed "*chez Éradice*," and the repeated mention of her friend's name and not the

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[129]Meeker explains that Thérèse, at this point in the novel, is in a struggle between religious morality and her innate sexual urges. She contends that "her experiences of sexual delight as a young woman […] are marked by an unhappy shuttling between two forms of compulsion: the one, unavoidable, exerted upon her will by her ''nature,'' and the other, unsuccessful, enacted upon her body by the religious and social institutions that attempt to govern her behavior. (*Voluptuous Philosophy* 133).

male participant in the sexual act reflects the underlying sapphic desire that fuels the feelings that she cannot describe. The heteroerotic act, therefore, is rendered queer through Thérèse's sapphic erotic imaginings. Furthermore, Thérèse's inability to name the desire that leads to her fantasizing and subsequent masturbation denotes one of the instances that Rutler describes as a "fruitful fracture between and within narration and language" (21). Thérèse, as a speaking subject, is able to describe who is performing the act that leads to her arousal (Éradice), she can detail the mechanical movements of her and her friend's body in the act of sexual pleasure, but because her arousal is fueled by sapphic desire which defies the heteronormative social order, she does not have the vocabulary to name it.

The silence surrounding Thérèse's homoerotic arousal reflects Eve K. Sedgwick's notion of "closetedness" which "itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence" (3). Throughout the novel, sapphic desire is closeted through textual obscurity that masks same-sex desire and privileges heteroerotic scenes. The closeting of sapphic desire is reflected in Thérèse's relationships with all three of her mentors, depicting a pattern of heteronormative masking of homoerotic desire in the text. However, the structural queerness of the text allows us to identify sapphic desire even through its silences.

Applying Lanser's theorization of the sapphic being embedded into eighteenth-century narratives as a central plot device rather than as a tangential or marginalized event, I consider the structural framing of female intimacy within the novel to depict a

queer female narrative structure.[130] For instance, the heteroerotic scene between Éradice and Father Dirrag finds itself in between scenes of female intimacy depicted through the confidante relationship. Before Thérèse takes her position as a voyeur in Éradice's room, she discusses with her friend her desire to experience the same kind of spiritual happiness that Éradice enjoys. She then witnesses the erotic act, becomes aroused, pleasures herself, reflects on the indescribability of her feelings, and then the narrative immediately shifts to her introduction to her second mentor, Mlle C. The structural framing of female intimacy through the confidante relationship and the placement of these relationships in the text allows for the identification of sapphic desire. Without these instances of female intimacy, the novel's plot would stagnate, unable to shift to new heteroerotic scenes and philosophical ruminations. In other words, in addition to facilitating Thérèse's sapphic desire and her mentorship in *ars erotica,* female intimacy is essential to driving the novel's plot forward.

Mlle C's Philosophical Mentorship

Like the clandestine witnessing of sexual acts between Éradice and Father Dirrag, Thérèse secretly observes a series of sexual exchanges that inform her libertine materialist philosophy and also signal the sapphic undertones of her confidante

[130]Lanser's argues in her article "Novel (Sapphic) Subjects" that eighteenth-century novels depict sapphic structures and articulates that she reads narrative form as a site of sexual content to argue "for a sapphic story not only *in* novels but *of* novels, a story embedded more firmly in narration than in event, or what often amounts to a contest between the two" (498).

relationships. These sexual scenes occur between her second confidante and mentor in the novel, Mlle C, and the abbé T – a priest who is portrayed as an expert and advisor on the interfusing of philosophy and pleasure. Thérèse spends a month at the home of Mlle C, a young widow who she quickly befriends. She is convinced by this new confidante to disclose all that she witnessed between Éradice and about her continuous, compulsive self-pleasuring. In what follows, the abbé T tutors Thérèse in a philosophy of physical and spiritual balance which Kavanagh summarizes as follows:

> According to the Abbé, the true philosopher is the individual who has achieved a balance of body and mind such that neither impedes nor perverts the work of the other. The needs of the sensate body must not, as in the convent, be denied and, because of that repression, perverted into dangerous passions that threaten both the self and others. (58)

Part of this balance of the physical and spiritual includes the moderation, rather than the repression, of masturbation. The abbé explains to Thérèse that masturbation and sexual desire are both natural urges:

> Ce sont des besoins de tempérament, aussi naturels que ceux de la faim et de la soif: il ne faut ni les rechercher ni les exciter; mais dès que vous vous en sentirez vivement pressée, il n'y a nul inconvénient à vous server de votre main, de votre doigt, pour soulager cette partie par le frottement qui lui est alors nécessaire. Je vous défends cependant expressément d'introduire votre doigt dans l'intérieur de l'ouverture qui s'y trouve; il suffit, quant à présent, que vous sachiez que cela pourrait vous faire tort un jour dans l'esprit du mari que vous épouseriez. (58)

Still insisting on saving penetration for marriage – to avoid both pregnancy and devaluing herself in the marriage market – the abbé encourages Thérèse to masturbate in moderation.[131] Although she heeds his advice, Thérèse nonetheless continues her voyeuristic habit and observes Mlle C and the abbé's sexual exchanges twice in secret. Positioned once again as a voyeur of heteroerotic sex, her sapphic desire is aroused through her later fantasizing about Mlle C. These exchanges mirror those that Thérèse witnessed between Éradice and Dirrag, save for the religious rhetoric elucidated by the licentious priest which is swapped for philosophical discussions between the abbé and Mlle C. Additionally, Mlle C is not depicted as a naïve follower of the abbé but rather as a woman of reason who enjoys intellectual conversation and debate:

> Mlle C…avait beaucoup d'esprit; elle était ferme dans ses sentiments, qu'elle n'adoptait qu'après les avoir mûrement examinés. Elle lisait beaucoup et aimait à s'entretenir sur les matières les plus abstraites. Sa conduite était sans reproches. Amie essentielle, elle rendait service dès qu'elle le pouvait. (56)

Mlle C's appeal to reason in the novel positions her as a free and willing agent in the sexual exchanges that she has with the abbé T, unlike the deceived and naive Éradice.

Scholars who have discussed this text frequently consider the relationship between Thérèse, Mlle C, the abbé, to be a turning point in Thérèse's philosophical

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[131] Meeker adds that the abbé's insistence on avoiding penetration during masturbation speaks to the material function of the hymen on the marriage market, noting that "this interdiction, unlike the one delivered by her earlier confessor, is presented as a happy compromise between the requirements of her individual temperament and the demands of a patriarchal society (in which the hymen retains its synecdochic function as the invisible yet material vehicle of feminine value on the marriage market)" (133).

development, with the two lovers acting as mentors. I echo Meeker's analysis of this tutelage, and how it allows Thérèse to "extricate herself fully from the world of the convent and finally begin her unofficial – and clandestinely pursued – education in the principles that will come to characterize her philosophy" (*Voluptuous Philosophy* 133). Kavanagh posits of this time in Thérèse's story that it helps her to achieve "her first contact with the truth of the sentient body" (61). Importantly, as Colas Duflo reminds us, Thérèse learns from the abbé and Mlle C that "dans la mesure où le besoin est naturel, sa satisfaction, si elle n'est pas nuisible par ailleurs pour soi-même ou pour autrui, n'est pas condamnable" (440). While I do consider the abbé to be a mentor, his lessons to Thérèse focus on her philosophical reflections and what Meeker refers to as an "abstract science" of sex which focuses on the mechanics of sex.[132] Mlle C, on the other hand, informs Thérèse's continued development of her erotic art as well as her sapphic desire. If Éradice represents a woman with a lack of knowledge about sex but a fantastical religious imagination that incites sexual pleasure, Mlle C is essentially her opposite. She is aware of the "abstract science" – the method of sex – and she has no fantastical illusions about the act. Sex, for her, models an *ars erotica* based on pleasure for the sake of pleasure.

The abbé's tutelage on the mechanics of sexual pleasure highlights a limitation that he places on sexual pleasure that is antithetical to mentorship in *ars erotica*. He instructs Thérèse to use her hand and her fingers for pleasure but to never penetrate herself so as to preserve her hymen for the marriage market. Mlle C, however, implies no such limitations on the range of sexual pleasure that she believes Thérèse should

[132] See *Voluptuous Philosophy* pp. 136 for Meeker's description of this "abstract science" taught by the abbé.

experience, even encouraging the abbé himself to offer Thérèse "une petite leçon dans la volupté" explaining to him that "vous gagnerez l'un et l'autre de cet épreuve" (66). Mlle C's approach to Thérèse's mentorship models Foucault's notion that *ars erotica* as a sexual practice encourages the discovery of truth about sex through experience and does not rely on an absolute law of what is permitted or defended in the sexual act.[133] The abbé refuses Mlle C's suggestion, and although he guides most of Thérèse's philosophical lessons, Mlle C's articulation of this important tenet of the limitless range of sexual pleasure hints at her influence on the development of Thérèse's erotic art in the novel.

Mlle C's contention that Thérèse should explore sexual pleasure outside of masturbation also highlights her resistance to the abbé's insistence on the importance of marriage which, "was intended to control women's sexuality in the service of morality" (Heidi Bostic 36). Where the abbé adheres, at least in part, to eighteenth-century prescriptions of the idealized virtuous woman, Mlle C resists the social and moral restraints placed on women's sexuality through marriage. Not only does she pursue her own sexual adventures, but she also insists that Thérèse, too, would benefit from the lifting of the sexually repressive social expectations of virtuous womanhood.[134] Ultimately, Thérèse will follow the advice of Mlle C and choose to become a mistress.

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[133] I reiterate Foucault's contention in *Histoire de la Sexualité* vol. 1 in which he describes that, "dans l'art érotique, la vérité est extraite du plaisir lui-même, pris comme pratique et recueilli comme expérience; ce n'est pas par rapport à une loi absolue du permis et du défendu, ce n'est point par référence à une critère d'utilité, que le plaisir est pris en compte" (77).

[134] It is important to note here that although Mlle C insists on Thérèse's sexual freedom and exploration, she does so from the position of a wealthy young widow who falls outside of the social constraints of the marriage market. She has no need for sexual purity because she has no need for marriage. She is, therefore, speaking from a position of sexual privilege in comparison to Thérèse.

This shift away from the abbé's lessons is rooted in Thérèse sapphic desire and the intimacy that she shares with Mlle C through the confidante relationship.

Mlle C's mentorship of Thérèse also emphasizes the importance of curiosity in women's sexual pleasure. Curiosity is common theme in eighteenth-century erotic fiction – especially those that critique the church and depict pedagogical themes of "sexual awakening."[135] Mlle C highlights Thérèse's sexual curiosity and lack of sexual experience in conversation with the abbé, describing of Thérèse that, "sa curiosité est sans égale. Il y a de quoi faire par la suite un très bon sujet; et sans les inconvénients dont je viens de parler, je n'hésiterais pas à te proposer de la mettre de tiers dans nos plaisirs" (65). Mlle C's evocation of Thérèse's curiosity is intermixed with her desire to invite the young mentee to have sex with both her and the abbé. This suggestion to the abbé hints at an underlying sapphic desire to personally mentor Thérèse in the physical experience of shared sexual pleasure – mediated, of course, through the heterosexual male fantasy of group sex with women. Although all of these conversations about Thérèse's sexuality occur with the abbé and are indirectly passed to Thérèse's through her clandestine observation of their discussions and sexual acts, they nonetheless depict a mentorship in *ars erotica* that informs Thérèse's development of her sexual philosophy.

Aside from her insistence on Thérèse's sexual curiosity, Mlle C also provides one of the most important lessons to the narrator that becomes an integral part of her libertine materialist philosophy: an aversion to pregnancy. Thérèse describes Mlle C's personal

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[135] Peakman contends that a common trope in anti-catholic erotica is "women who actively seek sexual knowledge and experience through curiosity" (*Mighty Lewd Books* 151). Thérèse represents one of these "curious women."

experience with pregnancy writing that, "Mlle C…enceinte d'un garçon qui, en venant au monde, faillit faire perdre la vie à celle qui lui donnait le jour. Cet enfant mourut au bout de trois mois" (55). While the abbé T also warns Thérèse about the dangers of pregnancy, his cautionary advice is more focused on the social ramifications of pregnancy outside of marriage which he frames through the story of Dirrag's rape of Éradice. He states, "ce Père a trompé sa pénitente, il a risqué de la rendre mère […] Est-ce aimer son prochain que de mettre, comme il l'a fait, Mlle Éradice dans le hasard d'être perdue de réputation et déshonorée pour toute sa vie ?" (59). Aside from the obvious trauma both physical and psychological that the abbé ignores in framing the consequences of rape through the loss of social reputation, his warning to Thérèse about sex – including sexual assault – outside of marriage is relegated to the realm of the physical evidence of the loss of virtue that pregnancy can display on her body.[136]

Mlle C's harrowing tale of a difficult pregnancy and the death of her baby, on the other hand, depicts the physical danger that Thérèse faces in pregnancy –within or outside of marriage – that the abbé's warnings ignore. Although pregnancy outside of marriage is commonly depicted as a negative consequence of unrestrained female sexuality in eighteenth-century pornography, it can also, as Manuela Mourão suggests, depict an emphasis on issues of particular importance to women made visible only

[136] The abbé's focus on the loss of reputation reflects eighteenth-century notions of sexual virtue that were largely based on public reputation which, if sullied, could destroy a woman's chances for marriage. Joan B. Landes cites Rousseau as an example of ideas surrounding women's reputation, noting that he "insists that women must always live in the opinion of others, that a woman's reputation weighs as heavily as her deeds" (69). Rousseau's controversial ideas about rape identify victims of assault as "responsible" for the consequences (loss of reputation) of their unbridled "sexual passions" (sexual assault).

through the female narrator and her confidante.[137] Mlle C's story of near-death during childbirth mirrors the experience of Thérèse's mother shared at the beginning of the novel in which she renounced all sexual pleasure after she also nearly died in childbirth. Thérèse describes that "ma naissance lui donna une incommodité qui fut peut-être plus terrible pour elle que ne l'eût été la mort même" (17). Her mentor's confiding of her own near-fatal experience, in conjunction with her memory of her mother's horrific birthing story, leaves Thérèse with, as Kavanah posits "a morbid fear of pregnancy" (66). Having a morbid fear suggests that Thérèse fears the physical dangers of pregnancy more than the social ramifications. It is therefore Mlle C's mentorship, and not the abbé's that guides her aversion to pregnancy in the narrative. Avoidance of pregnancy will serve as a key function of her libertine materialist philosophy which combines sexual pleasure with contraceptive practices iterating the importance of sexual gratification balanced with physical regulation– in this case of her reproductive capacities.

In addition to examples of mentorship in *ars erotica* scattered throughout Thérèse's recollection of her time living with Mlle C, the text also portrays the continued development of her sapphic desire. Like in the example of Thérèse's intimacy with Éradice, sapphic desire is blurred in this part of the narrative, veiled by the author's privileging of heteroerotic scenes between Mlle C and the abbé T. However, Thérèse's homoerotic fantasies, the queer structure of the text, as well as her general preference for

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[137] Mourão analyzes the depiction of pregnancy and risks of pregnancy in *L'école des filles* (1655) arguing that "the formal juxtaposition of issues of particular importance to women, such as pregnancy and sexual double standards, with arousing images and appeals to male and female readers' sexual imagination, suggests with remarkable clarity the rhetorical complexity of the feminine in such pornography" (586).

Mlle C compared to her male mentor all help to make sapphic desire visible despite its narrative obscurity. For instance, before Thérèse secretly watches her friend's erotic encounter with the abbé T, the narrator indicates a preference for the company of Mlle C over her male mentor, denoting her privileging of female over male intimate friendship. Thérèse writes:

> Je m'apercevais que Mlle C était contente de ma façon de penser et de raisonner, et qu'elle se faisait un plaisir de me conduire, de conséquence, à des preuves claires et évidentes. Quelquefois seulement j'avais le chagrin de remarquer que l'abbé T lui faisait signe de ne pas pousser ses raisonnements sur certaines matières. Cette découverte m'humilia. (62)

Where Mlle C has no qualms with sharing her ideas, the abbé warns her not to overshare with Thérèse. If his prohibition of penetrative masturbation is any indication, then this interdiction is likely a hint at his adherence to certain eighteenth-century prescriptions of virtuous womanhood which dictate, as McAlpin reminds us, that women should remain sexually ignorant until marriage.[138] Additionally, these interdictions embarrass Thérèse, and his authoritative position leads the narrator to develop a closer relationship with her female mentor. Her preference for Mlle C is reiterated through her observations of her

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[138] In some ways, the abbé T is defying the notion of women's sexual ignorance until marriage in tutoring Thérèse in the mechanics of the sexual act. McAlpin cites Rousseau's *Émile* as an example of eighteenth-century philosophical arguments for ensuring that women are "absolutely ignorant of the mechanics of sexual activity – yet physically primed for intercourse" (*Female Sexuality and Cultural Degradation* 50). The abbé's materialist lessons in the mechanics of sex defy this notion, but his sexual prohibitions of certain forms of self-pleasure is indicative of his continued belief in the regime of marriage in controlling women's sexuality.

new friend's sexual encounters with the abbé in which her focus is once again on the female form and female sexual pleasure.

The sexual encounters between Mlle C and the abbé T mirror those that Thérèse witnessed between Eradice and Dirrag, but with a noticeable difference in both consent and the topic of conversation that ensues during the sexual act. Kavanagh aptly summarizes these scenes, explaining that "the freely chosen sexual play between [Mlle] C and Abbé T is accompanied by a constant dialogue between them which frankly enunciates all the flows and ebbs of desire as they seek to maximize their own body's pleasure and that of their partner within limits agreed upon by both" (57). Thérèse's descriptions of both Éradice's and Mlle C's sexual encounters likewise resemble each other, emphasizing bodily positioning and movements, as well as how Mlle C reacts to sexual pleasure. Positioning herself in a hiding place in Mlle C's bedroom, Thérèse recounts what she sees as if she were a spectator choosing the best seat from which to view a play:

> Jamais tableau ne fut place dans un jour plus avantageux, eu égard à ma position. Le lit de repos était disposé de façon que j'avais pour point de vue la toison de Mlle C…Au-dessous se montraient en partie ses deux fesses, agitées d'un mouvement léger de bas en haut, qui annonçaient la fermentation intérieure, et ses cuisses, les plus belles, les plus rondes, les plus blanches qui se puissent imaginer, faisaient avec ses genoux un autre petit mouvement, de droite et de gauche que l'on fêtait, et dont le doigt de l'abbé, perdu dans la toison, suivait tous les mouvements. (79)

As Thérèse is watching the scene unfold, she is again placed in the theatrical position of spectator. In the above excerpt, she is "setting the scene," so to speak, of her voyeuristic pleasure. However, she also becomes a physically active participant in this erotic encounter, writing that "*j'imitais tous les mouvements de mon amie*" which indicates that she is simultaneously pleasuring herself as she is viewing the scene before her. Where Thérèse's masturbation after the sexual exchange between Éradice and Dirrag calls attention to the important mechanics of self-pleasuring, this act highlights the crucial role of imagery in sexual fantasy. The aesthetic components of her libertine materialist philosophy – a visual sensual arousal – are accentuated through her presentation of this scene as an artistic tableau as well as her attention to the shapes and colors illuminated through the sexual act that she observes.

Like in the example of her witnessing of Éradice's sexual pleasure, Thérèse's focus on Mlle C during this scene reflects a sapphic desire that drives her arousal. In other words, the imagery that sensually arouses her is specifically feminine. Where she hardly describes the abbé, Thérèse notices Mlle C's body, including her buttocks, her thighs, describing them as "the most beautiful, round, white thighs one can imagine." One noticeable difference between her descriptions of Éradice and Mlle C is Thérèse's specificity of the parts of her friend's body that trigger her desire. Where her sapphic desire for Éradice remains vague and clouded by religious morality, now that Thérèse has been mentored by Mlle C and listened to her mentor's conversations with the abbé, she has expanded her ability to articulate her sexual desires. As her libertine materialist philosophy develops, so does her sapphic desire.

While it is true that the focus on women's bodies during sexually explicit scenes appeals to the male gaze and a predominantly male audience that this novel targets, Thérèse's sapphic sexual desire is combined with an emotional, non-sexual affection for her mentors. In the case of Éradice, this is portrayed through her sympathy for her friend and defense of her vulnerability in the wake of her sexual assault by Dirrag. Affection for Mlle C is even more explicitly portrayed through Thérèse's devastation at having to part with this dear friend and mentor. Lamenting this parting, she writes,

> Nous dinâmes encore, ma mère et moi, chez l'aimable Mlle C…, que je quittai en versant un torrent de larmes. Cette femme adorable, peut-être unique dans son espèce, m'accabla de caresses et me donna les conseils les plus sages, sans y mêler des petitesses accablantes et inutiles. M. l'abbé T…était allé dans une ville voisine où il devait passer huit jours. Je ne le vis point. (92)

Thérèse mentions, rather curtly, that the abbé T was out of town and that she never saw him again, attaching no emotion to her parting with him. Instead, her emotional anguish stems from her separation from Mlle C who, in true confidante fashion, gives her some parting advice that is not specified in the text. To echo Varnado's rethinking of queerness in literature as a "collection of affective stances" I consider Thérèse's emotional attachment to Mlle C – described in the same breath as her apathy towards leaving the abbé – as indicative of her queer connection to this female mentor (7). The difference in her reaction to leaving Mlle C versus the abbé highlights the sapphic desire that underlies the confidante relationship, amplifying the intensity of her attachment. Her emotional connection to Mlle C, in other words, reflects her embodied desire for her friend that

remains largely unspoken in the novel, but manifests through the confidante relationship and her devastation at their parting.[139]

The structural queerness of Thérèse's mentorship and intimate connection with Mlle C follows the pattern of female intimacy preceding and succeeding heteroerotic scenes, structurally framing heteronormative sex through the queer confidante relationship. Mlle C is the first and last person who interacts with Thérèse in the part of the novel that is focused on her philosophical mentorship. Her tutelage in libertine materialist philosophy in this portion of the novel, then, both begins and ends with Mlle C. Although her voyeuristic pleasure is situated in a heteroerotic setting, it is filtered through her sapphic intimacy with Mlle C made manifest through her self-pleasuring while fantasizing about the aesthetically pleasing features of her friend's body. Additionally, it is Mlle C who offers the last bit of mentorship advice to Thérèse before her transition to Paris (and subsequently the Parisian *demimonde*) – albeit the specificity of her council is ignored in the narrative. The hidden advice reflects the hidden queerness of Thérèse's mentorship in *ars erotica* under the care of Mlle C. Although her sapphic desire in this portion of the novel remains isolated to private fantasy and self-pleasuring, it will be made manifest through a physical sexual relationship with her third and final mentor.

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[139] Varnado iterates the importance of affect in reading queerly in the introduction to *The Shapes of Fancy,* articulating that she performs in her book "a queer reading of the language of early modern affect [taking] a rich, complicated vocabulary for constructing embodied feeling in the past, and connect it to a history of desire that is now called sexuality, a history that includes the present" (3). My reading of the sapphic desire between Thérèse and Mlle C combines the language of emotion and affect in female friendship with a queer reading of embodied desire.

Mlle Bois-Laurier's Hilarious Perversity

After a month of mentorship with the abbé T and Mlle C, Thérèse moves to Paris with her mother, and at this point in the novel she is still seeking a husband. However, a sudden change in events initiated by her mother's death and her subsequent destitution changes her focus from marriage to the *demimonde*, as she now lacks a dowry which, as Nina Kushner contends, was a prerequisite for marriage in eighteenth century France.[140] With a lack of dowry and no skills to find work, Thérèse laments her situation, writing, "me voilà donc au milieu de Paris, livrée à moi-même, sans parents, sans amis, jolie, à ce qu'on me disait, instruite à bien des égards, mais sans connaissance des usages du monde" (92).[141] Fortunately, her mother was able to leave her just enough money, whatever she had on her (*400 louis d'or*) to be able to afford a room in a *hotel garni* next door to a woman who took care to check on her during her mourning period – Mlle Bois-Laurier.

Thérèse's initial introduction to Mlle Bois-Laurier is no doubt during a very vulnerable point in her life, and she describes that she confided in her new friend some of

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[140] Kushner contends that "in principle, marriage had two prerequisites: sexual honor and a dowry. Although women were able to marry without either, this was rarely their intent from the outset" (49).

[141] The "abandoned daughter" is a frequently used trope in libertine fiction of this era that incorporates prostitute characters. Kathryn Norberg indicates that many prostitutes in French erotic fiction, especially in the latter part of the eighteenth-century, appear as vulnerable young women left to fend for themselves who are forced by life circumstances to enter the sexual marketplace (usually in Paris). Norberg offers the famous example of Zéphire in Restif de la Bretonne's *Le Paysan perverti* (1784) as an example of this trope, which she calls the "virtuous courtesan" (227).

her concerns about the future. She writes, "l'avenir me fit peur; je m'en ouvris à mon amie; je lui confiai l'état de mes finances et ce que j'envisageais d'affreux dans ma situation. Elle avait un esprit solide et affermi par l'expérience" (93). The confidante relationship is quickly established between the two women as a result of Thérèse's need for support to quell her growing anxieties about the future. However, Mlle Bois-Laurier's past as a prostitute lends itself to developing a new plan for Thérèse, which is to find a patron rather than a husband. Promising Thérèse that she can help her secure what she needs to ensure financial stability, she asks:

> Est-ce qu'avec du mérite, une taille, une mine comme celle que vous portez là une fille est jamais embarrassée, pour peu qu'elle y joigne de la prudence et de la conduite? Non, mademoiselle, ne vous inquiétiez point: je vous trouverai ce qu'il vous faut, peut-être même un bon mari; car il me paraît que votre manie est de vouloir tâter le sacrement. Hélas! Ma pauvre enfant, vous ne connaissez guère la juste valeur de ce que vous désirez là! Enfin, laissez-moi faire; une femme de quarante ans, qui a l'expérience d'une de cinquante, sait ce qui convient à une fille comme vous. (94-95)

This exchange between Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier sets the scene for her mentorship in *ars erotica,* because her friend does not necessarily guarantee that she can find her a husband (*maybe* a husband) but she does ensure her that she can help her financial situation. [142] While Thérèse may think that marriage is the only option, she will soon find

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[142] Kushner describes that this was a common feature of the *demimonde* – young women of modest financial means going to Paris in search of work to save up for a dowry to be eligible for marriage. Many of these young women entered the sexual marketplace, which is exactly the direction that Thérèse's story will take

out that becoming a mistress not only solves her financial troubles but also better suits her sexual philosophy of pleasure for pleasure's sake. Becoming a mistress, for instance, would allow her to avoid pregnancy in a way that marriage likely would not. Whereas a husband would expect children, the patron-mistress relationship, as Kushner reminds us "was temporary and meant to be a site of pleasure, in which the production of children was problematic" (222). Mlle Bois-Laurier even attempts in this early conversation with Thérèse to dissuade her from marriage, denoting that her young friend is not even aware of the limitations that this institution would place on her (*ma pauvre enfant, vous ne connaissez guère la juste valeur de ce que vous désirez là*).

Mlle Bois-Laurier plans a meeting with two men, one of whom she claims is in the position to help solve Thérèse's financial troubles, and the narrator is completely unaware that instead of an interest in marriage, he is seeking a prostitute, and that Mlle Bois-Laurier is taking on the role of a madam to broker this deal. It is not until he takes her into a room and attempts intercourse – depicted more as an attempted rape – that she becomes aware of the circumstances of the solution that Mlle Bois-Laurier had found for her.[143] During the attempted rape, Thérèse and the patron are interrupted after the former

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after meeting Mlle Bois-Laurier. See Kushner *Erotic Exchanges* especially her chapter "Leaving Home" for her detailed historical analysis of the financial background of young women moving to Paris for work and/or to enter the sexual marketplace of the *demimonde*.

[143] While this may seem like a grave manipulation on the part of Mlle Bois-Laurier, it is more a reflection of Thérèse's naivety about the *demimonde*. Mlle Bois-Laurier assumed Thérèse was aware of what kind of arrangement she was making, as Thérèse herself confirms: "on se rassura dès qu'on fut persuadé, par les réponses qu'on m'arracha finement, que je connaissais la valeur des plaisirs de l'amour et que j'en avais tire un honnête parti" (97). Because Thérèse indicates that she is aware of the *plaisirs de l'amour*, Mlle Bois-Laurier assumes she

starts screaming, and Mlle Bois-Laurier runs into the room. After chastising Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier the patron leaves, leading the two friends to discuss the events of the night. This event signals an important moment in the queering of the mentorship relationship between Mlle Bois-Laurier and Thérèse in terms of their emotional and physical attachment as well as the narrative structure of the text.

Directly following this attack, the two women return home and Thérèse writes, "je ne résistai pas longtemps à l'agitation de mes sens. En arrivant, je versai un torrent de larmes. Ma chaste compagne qui n'était pas tranquille sur les idées qui me restaient de mon aventure, ne me quittai point" (101). The intimacy between Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier is heightened following this traumatic experience.[144] The two women decide to share stories of their past, and Thérèse foreshadows what is missing from her tutelage in the erotic arts: partner sexual experience. She writes, "de propos en propos, la rusée de Bois-Laurier sut tirer de moi toute mon histoire […] si je lui avais paru peu instruite des manières, des usages du monde, elle ne fut pas peu surprise de mes lumières dans la morale, la métaphysique et la religion" (102). Thérèse, in other words, details what she

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understands the situation that she is setting up to take care of Thérèse's financial burdens.

[144] Thérèse and Mlle-Bois-Laurier's bonding in this scenario resembles the types of homosocial bonds between women that Elizabeth S. Wahl describes were common in the eighteenth-century due to women's sexual vulnerability. She writes "A woman's vulnerability to any form of sexual innuendo also proved a powerful motivation for many women to seek ties of friendship among their own sex in order to escape the rigid constraints of expectations about female modesty and comportment in any heterosocial setting" (77). Where Wahl details homosocial bonds that avoid the social repercussions of women's sexual vulnerability, Thérèse and Bois-Laurier's bonding hints at why women might also turn to each other to escape the violent, physical threats tied to women's sexual vulnerability in heterosexual relationships during this era which position women as sexually subjugated to men.

has learned from her past two mentorships in *ars erotica*, and details what could transform her current knowledge about sexual pleasure (her current *ars erotica*): physical experience with another person.

This newfound intimate bond between Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier after the attack signals the establishment of the confidante relationship between the two women. The solidifying of the confidante relationship also triggers a shift in narrative structure as Mlle Bois-Laurier takes up the position of first-person narrator to share with Thérèse the explicit details of her life as a prostitute. While we do hear – through Thérèse's recollection of events in the novel – the voices of her other mentors and confidantes, Mlle Bois-Laurier's first-person account is an excerpt that is set apart as it interrupts the plot and the larger narrative of the novel.

In what follows, Bois-Laurier presents a series of obscene and humorously ridiculous sexual vignettes of her time as a prostitute that depict the perversity of men in the Parisian *demimonde*. These scenes are reenacted by the new narrator using the same theatric narrative style that Thérèse's employs to recreate homoerotic scenes for the reader. However, instead of creating a sense of arousal, Mlle Bois-Laurier's theatrical recreations of explicit sexual scenes from her past incites laughter. The descriptions of the sexual perversions that Mlle Bois-Laurier bore witness to in her time as a prostitute certainly do not lack in their crude detail, encompassing "stories of clients who are impotent or otherwise made out to be ridiculous, dependent upon the singing, farting, and flagellation for their sexual enjoyment" (Meeker, *Voluptuous Philosophy* 139). Mlle Bois-Laurier's narrative is only interrupted by Thérèse once, when the humorous scenes shared by the former prostitute lead to the women's uncontrollable laughter. Catherine

Cusset argues that the women's laughter underscores the true perversity of the text itself because it signifies "the derision of male desire and male power" (107). Indeed, none of the erotic scenarios that Mlle Bois-Laurier shares evoke images of male sensuality or virility.[145]

Crucial to Mlle Bois-Laurier's ability to humorously reenact these scenarios by ridiculing male virility, as Cusset reminds us, is her physical impenetrability. Mlle Bois-Laurier became known during her career as the "virgin prostitute" – a reputation she gained through the tension between her work as a prostitute and a physical birth defect described as an impenetrable hymen. She explains that:

> La nature capricieuse à mon égard, a semé d'obstacles insurmontables la route des plaisirs qui font passer une fille de son état à celui de femme: une membrane nerveuse en ferme l'avenue avec assez d'exactitude pour que le trait le plus délié que l'amour ait jamais eu dans son carquois n'ait pu atteindre le but. (105)

The contradictory nature of being a virgin and working as a prostitute echoes eighteenth-century notions of women's sexual virtue being linked to the presence or absence of penetration in sexual acts. The abbé T, for instance, insisted on Thérèse's avoidance of penetration during masturbation so as to protect her sexual virtue for marriage. Mlle Bois-Laurier is only considered a virgin because of her physical inability to be penetrated. Meeker suggests that the virgin prostitute's impenetrability compared with Thérèse's resistance to penetration during her attempted rape scene "represents an attempt to explore the thorny problem of feminine acquiescence" (*Voluptuous Philosophy*

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[145] Cusset explains that "Bois-Laurier recounts only scenes of impotence or scenes in which the male member appears ridiculous or disgusting" (106).

137). In Meeker's theorization, Mlle Bois-Laurier represents the difference between the physical impossibility to be penetrated versus the will to resist penetration through self-regulation, denoting the important balance of sexual pleasure and moderation that constitute the novel's proposed libertine materialist philosophy.[146]

In addition to providing a material juxtaposition of will versus inability to be penetrated, Mlle Bois-Laurier's impenetrable hymen carries sapphic undertones. The combination of virginity with prostitution evokes a libertine sexualization of chastity that links women's sexual virtue to homoerotic desire. Though the reader would hardly consider Mlle Bois-Laurier to represent female "chastity" given the explicit content of her autobiographical account, her impenetrability sets her up as a sapphic subject. Elizabeth S. Wahl explains that erotic acts between women in libertine fiction "serve the interests of women in preserving a semblance of chastity – that by engaging in sex with one another they avoid the risk of pregnancy, which might endanger their reputation" (207). Wahl reminds us that this libertine view of female homoeroticism recasts sapphic desire as "supplementing rather than supplanting heterosexual relations" (207). Despite chastity being a tool for depicting homoerotic sexual desire through a heteronormative framework, Mlle Bois-Laurier's "virginity" nonetheless sets her up as a sapphic subject whose impenetrability is intertwined with sexual perversion rendering her an ideal subject to critique male sexual practices in the *demimonde*.

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[146] Meeker is not suggesting here that Thérèse would have been able to control the sexual assault (she is not "victim-blaming" Thérèse). Rather, in referencing the "will to resist" she is calling attention to eighteenth-century social conceptualizations of rape perpetuated by philosophers such as Rousseau that consider rape to be, essentially, non-existent or primarily a "woman problem."

Mlle Bois-Laurier's impenetrable hymen, rather than deterring clients, attracts them by the hundreds. She describes that upon entering the *demimonde* she saw twenty clients in the span of a month, and that "ces vingt athlètes furent suivis de plus du cinq cents autres pendant l'espace de cinq ans. Le Clergé, l'Épée, la Robe et la Finance me placèrent tour à tour les attitudes les plus recherchées (111). Her critique of the *demimonde* spans the perversities of men from the upper echelons of society. In this sense, the sapphic subject provides a means of critiquing heteroerotic perversion linked to the elite, serving as a criticism of social hierarchy as well as male sexual practices in the *demimonde*. Her stories of sexual perversion are antithetical to the novel's goal of portraying a libertine materialist philosophy, and the humor that underscores her reenactment of these erotic scenarios pits perverse sexual excess against the novel's proposed sexual philosophy. In other words, the novel's primary philosophical message of a regulated libertine materialism is not depicted through male-dominated or heteroerotic sexual encounters, as the men in Mlle Bois-Laurier's narrative depict perversions and excess that work against this philosophy. Instead, the novel's primary philosophical message is facilitated through the confidante relationship between Mlle Bois-Laurier and Thérèse as the two share these stories and laugh at their perversities. Consequently, the novel's libertine materialist philosophy as depicted in Mlle Bois-Laurier's anecdotal narrative is only made legible through the sapphic subject.

Mlle Bois-Laurier is not only cast as a sapphic subject in the novel through her impenetrability, but also through the manifestation of sapphic desire between herself and Thérèse which is made manifest through their sexual relationship. When Mlle Bois-

Laurier ends her narrative and Thérèse reprises the role of first-person narrator, she describes that:

> La Bois-Laurier, qui état d'une humeur charmante, et qui peut-être était bien aisé de ne pas me laisser seule livrée aux réflexions de mon aventure du matin, m'entraîna dans son lit. Il fallut coucher avec elle; on hurle avec les loups : nous dîmes et nous fîmes toutes sortes de folies. (129)

The revelation of the sexual relationship between Mlle Bois-Laurier and Thérèse stands out from the rest of the novel in its brevity compared to the explicit erotic scenarios that have been reenacted by both narrators up to this point. This scene, likewise, does not incorporate any of the theatrical components of erotic narration that have been scattered throughout previous heteroerotic sexual scenarios. It includes neither the linguistic elements of erotic narrative (sexual utterances, ellipses, and disjointed speech) demonstrated in Éradice's erotic encounter with Dirrag, nor the aesthetic descriptive setting portrayed in Mlle C's sexual encounter with the abbé T. While the vagueness of the sexual relationship between Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier reflects another example of the "closeting" of sapphic desire within the text, it also represents Thérèse's transition from voyeur to recipient of and participant in sex. Furthermore, the two women's sexual relationship hints at the possibility of sexual pleasure outside of penetrative sex. If Mlle Bois-Laurier has an "impenatrable hymen," this does not prevent her from experiencing sexual pleasure through clitoral stimulation – a feature of her sexualized body that is wholly ignored during her time as a prostitute. For Thérése, this transition from observer to participant in sex denotes the final evolution in her apprenticeship in *ars erotica* that

will help her to become a mistress, rather than a wife – a lifestyle that is more fitting to her overarching sexual philosophy.

While her previous mentorships with Éradice and Mlle C focused primarily on viewing and learning the mechanics of the sexual act, followed by philosophical ruminations on topics such as clerical hypocrisy and the dangers of pregnancy, Mlle Bois-Laurier offers an important lesson in physical intimacy which will be crucial to Thérèse finding a patron. Recalling Mlle C's interest in inviting Thérèse to experience partner sex, it seems that Mlle Bois-Laurier picks up where the previous mentor left off. However, it is not just through the physical act of homoerotic sexual intimacy that this mentorship is queered, but rather that this relationship underscores the importance of nonreproductive sex in Thérèse's libertine materialist philosophy. Nonreproductive sex, as Wahler reminds us, threatens "a sexual economy predicated on women's willingness to fulfill the reproductive role demanded of them by a patriarchal family system" (71). The physical sexual components of Thérèse's mentorship in *ars erotica* as overseen by Mlle Bois-Laurier, then, provide an avenue for resisting patriarchal compulsory motherhood for women in eighteenth-century France which is enforced through societal expectations of marriage. Put differently, Mlle Bois-Laurier teaches Thérèse a loophole to compulsory motherhood that allows her to satisfy her sexual desires while avoiding pregnancy.

Mlle Bois-Laurier's anecdotal side story is often considered an interruption to the novel's primary narrative.[147] However, if we consider Mlle Bois-Laurier as a sapphic

[147] Meeker posits that this is why this portion of *Thérèse Philosophe* often receives little scholarly attention, even noting that Robert Darnton does not

subject who critiques the perversions of the heteronormative social order, then this shift in narrative voice depicts a structural queerness that aligns with the queer mentorship that she is providing for Thérèse. To demonstrate the structural queering of this part of the text, I return to the notion of the "erotic I" which shifts in this portion of the novel from Thérèse to Mlle Bois-Laurier. The incorporation of varied first-person narrative voices in pornographic fiction is, according to Jean Marie Goulemot, "a sign of an ever-present possibility of beginning the tale again with a new inset narrative, the arrival on the stage of new partners, a redistribution of couples and figures" (Goulemot 123). In other words, Goulemot contends that the narrative shift of the "erotic I" in pornographic novels provides for the reader a more diverse tableaux of arousing sexual scenes that avoid the stagnation of the erotic effects of the text. The multiple perverse scenarios presented by Mlle Bois-Laurier after she takes up the position of first-person narrator certainly provides a compelling example of erotic variation created by narrative shifts in pornographic writing. This shift, however, is facilitated through the intimate female bonds of the confidante relationship that is established just before Mlle Bois-Laurier takes over the narrative.

This narrative shift from Thérèse to Mlle Bois-Laurier, then, depicts a queering of the narrative structure that I consider to be a sapphic shift, a sharing of narrative space between women made possible only through female intimacy. Put differently, Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier share intimate narrative space in the novel in the same way that they share intimate physical space. Reading the exchange of narrative voice as a sapphic

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include it in his English translation of the novel. See *Voluptuous Philosophy* pp.138 for Meeker's analysis of the scholarly void surrounding Mlle Bois-Laurier.

shift, therefore, allows us to deconstruct "centuries of critical erasures and misreadings of early modern representations of female homosexuality, particularly for a culture in which such desires have been rendered 'invisible' for so long" (Wahl 55). In this sense, the sapphic shift in narrative gives voice to the same-sex desire and physical intimacy that is otherwise obscured – or closeted – not only in the novel, but also in scholarship which largely ignores the sapphic relationship between Thérèse and Mlle Bois-Laurier.

Erotic Paintings, Sapphic Endings

Throughout this chapter, I have highlighted how the three confidante relationships that Thérèse establishes with Éradice, Mlle C, and Mlle Bois-Laurier impact the simultaneous development of her libertine materialist philosophy and her sapphic desire throughout the entirety of her story. To that end, I have attempted to show how these confidante relationships depict queer mentorships in *ars erotica* that lead to Thérèse's choice to become a mistress instead of a wife by the end of the novel. The overarching goal of this chapter, then, has been to argue for a queer reading of *Thérèse Philosophe* in which the development of the main character's libertine materialist philosophy is only made possible through female intimacy which manifests through the confidante relationship.

Each of the confidantes in Thérèse's life acts as a mentor in *ars erotica* as well as an object of Thérèse's sapphic desire. These "errant crossings," to borrow Varnado's phrasing, lead Thérèse to "wander into attachments" to her mentors, rerouting Thérèse's virtuous path of marriage to a libertine mistress relationship (4). While these sapphic

"errant crossings" with her three confidantes are not intended to be the focus of the novel, they do drive the narrative's plot forward and each of confidante relationship provides important lessons in *ars erotica.* Éradice (unwittingly) informs Thérèse's anticlerical libertine stance at the same as she represents the first person to homoerotically arouse Thérèse, as evidenced through the narrator's voyeuristic observations of her friend's sexual encounter (assault) and later self-pleasuring while fantasizing about her friend's body. Similarly, Mlle C informs Thérèse's acceptance of her voluptuous tendency and renunciation of religious shame regarding her masturbation, while also reifying her fear of pregnancy. Mlle C is the second object of Thérèse's sapphic voyeuristic desire, inspiring such strong arousal that Thérèse cannot control herself as she self-pleasures while watching her friend's body during sex. Mlle Bois-Laurier combines mentorship and sapphic erotic pleasure by, on one hand, teaching Thérèse about the crude and perverse practices of men in the *demimonde,* and about how to satisfy her sexual pleasure and avoid pregnancy through partner sex with women. Thérèse's sapphic desire is finally physically realized through this mentorship.

Of course, the focus on women during sex and the imagining of women's bodies during sexual pleasure can be attributed to the male gaze, as pornographic novels such as *Thérèse Philosophe* were written by and for heterosexual men.[148] As Margaret C. Jacob reminds us, female narrators in erotic fiction "were invented to serve the needs of their invariably male, always anonymous authors" (165). While Jacob makes a valid point, I

[148] To reiterate Kathryn Norberg's contention that the "libertine whore" is a completely fictional figure who "mirror's man's lust" (230), we can consider the heroines of sexual coming of age stories to likewise be a fictional creation that reflects male libidinous desire rather than women's sexual empowerment.

would add that due to the narrative being driven by female intimacy, there is an underlying sapphic desire that likewise drives to novel's plot forward. Female narrator's, then, serve their own needs in addition to appeasing the predominantly male audience. I read sapphic desire, therefore, both within and outside of the confines of the voyeuristic male gaze as facilitated by the female narrator. My reading of the confidante relationship, likewise, refocuses the male gaze and shifts it to a sapphic gaze as expressed through the erotic reenactments and fantasies about sexual exchanges performed by the female narrator on the page.

Thérèse Philosophe is not only queer in its sapphic sexual content, but also in its narrative structure. Each episode of heteroerotic sex is framed by female intimacy identifiable through the confidante relationship. This culminates in the narrative shift from Thérèse to Mlle Bois-Laurier which transfers the "erotic I" from one female narrator to another, denoting the only shift in narrative voice throughout the novel. It is notable that this shift occurs with the only mentor with whom Thérèse shares a physical sexual relationship. This important distinction in this mentorship versus the two others is reflected through the sapphic shift in which shared intimacy is mirrored through shared narrative. A queer reading of the structure of the narrative in *Thérèse Philosophe* highlights how female intimacy, and not heterosexual desire, facilitates the heteroerotic tableaux scattered throughout the text. Thérèse's confidante relationships, and therefore her mentorships in *ars erotica,* make visible the sapphic desire that is otherwise blurred through heteroerotic scenes.

The *ars erotica* that Thérèse ultimately builds up to is one that focuses on pleasure for the sake of pleasure, which is depicted through her final relationship as a

mistress. This relationship with the count sexually satisfies her, provides her financial support, and allows her to avoid pregnancy – a driving force behind her avoidance of penetrative sex. On the surface, it seems that Thérèse finds in the count – the man that becomes her patron – a relationship which can sustain her sexual philosophy. However, does a heteronormative relationship as the end goal of the novel eradicate the queerness of the mentorships in *ars erotica* that led her there? To answer this question, we must consider her relationship with the count as depicted at the end of her story.

Thérèse first encounters her future patron while attending the opera – the hub of the Parisian *demimonde* – with Mlle Bois-Laurier.[149] Right away, we see a direct correlation between Thérèse's sexual mentor and her introduction to the count. Mlle Bois-Laurier, being familiar with the innerworkings of the *demimonde*, knows that if Thérèse wants to find a patron, the opera would be a central location to start looking. Although this meeting is not framed through the lens of a courtesan seeking a patron, the setting of the opera alludes to the sexual marketplace and the courtesan (or mistress)/patron relationship. In what follows, the count invites Thérèse to be his mistress and she hesitantly accepts, though she refuses to engage in penetrative sex due to her fear of pregnancy. The count, in response, makes a wager with her that involves his filling her apartment with his collection of libertine literature and paintings and, if she is unable to resist masturbating for fifteen days in the presence of this licentious material, she will

[149] Kushner describes the Opera in eighteenth-century France as "a central institution in the *demimonde*" (67).

have to relinquish her virginity.[150] Thérèse takes the bet, lasts five days, and exclaims finally: "Ah! Cher amant! Je n'y résiste plus!" (146). Thérèse ultimately gives into temptation and has sex with the count but in a way that avoids risk of pregnancy through the classic method of *coitus interruptus.*

This final scene can be interpreted in different ways, but overwhelmingly, scholars have pointed to it as the culmination of the novel's libertine materialist philosophy in which imaginative fantasy is sparked by visual stimulation, leading to sexual pleasure that is controlled through the act of nonreproductive sex. In other words, it depicts the ideal manifestation of the balance between sensual arousal (visual stimulation), erotic pleasure (penetrative sex), and sexual control (*coitus interrupts).* The notion of control, however, takes on gendered meanings in this scene. Meeker contends that the count's wager highlights Thérèse's compulsion rather than her consent, which renders the materialist libertine notion of self-mastery achievable only for men.[151] Thérèse is, at the end of the novel, essentially taken back to square one and becomes, as Kavanagh describes, "a consciousness at war with herself, [who] struggles to reconcile the demands of her senses and the illusions of her imagination" (56). Although Thérèse has spent the entire novel building her libertine materialist philosophy, the novel nonetheless reiterates sexist tropes that situate the heterosexual man as the ultimate

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[150] I use "virginity" here to denote the eighteenth-century sense of the term which indicates that Thérèse has not engaged in penetrative sex, not to ignore that she has already had a sexual partner (Mlle Bois-Laurier) at this point in the novel.
[151] Meeker especially highlights how penetrative sex is indicative of male control and female passivity, notions common to gendered theories of sex in the eighteenth century. See Meeker, *Voluptuous Philosophy* especially her chapter "I resist no longer!" – which focuses on libertine materialism and acquiescence to penetrative sex in *Thérèse Philosophe.*

"enlightened," "philosophical," and, importantly, sexually in control person in the relationship.

That being said, this final scene does reinforce, in part, Thérèse's sapphic desire which has been developing, along with her materialist libertine philosophy, throughout the novel. This is evidenced through the painting that causes Thérèse to no longer be able to resist sexual temptation, *Fêtes de Priape,* which noticeably privileges the sexualized female form. [152] Thérèse describes her reaction to this painting as follows:

> Chaque figure m'inspirait le sentiment que le peintre y avait donné. Deux athlètes qui étaient à la partie gauche du tableau des *Fêtes de Priape* m'enchantaient, me transportaient, par la conformité du cout de la petite femme au mien. Machinalement, ma main droite se porta où celle de l'homme étaient placée, et j'étais au moment d'y enfoncer le doigt, lorsque la réflexion me retint. (145)

While Thérèse might not have been able to resist, her acquiescence to heteronormative penetrative sex is queered through her arousal while viewing the women in the painting. The sapphic desire that drives her arousal as she views the painting draws parallels to her voyeuristic observations of and subsequent fantasizing about Éradice and Mlle C in the act of heteroerotic sex. In this sense, the structure of the text mirrors the queer structural pattern that we see earlier in the novel as penetrative sex is introduced only when sapphic

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[152] Although there is a slight prepositional difference in the title, it seems that Thérèse is referring here to the early modern painting, *Fête à Priape* by Michel Corneille II (1642-1708), a painting which depicts multiple (primarily female) figures in an erotic garden setting. As the title of the painting suggests, the "fête" depicted is an erotic celebration of the Greek fertility god Priapus (*Priape* in French). See appendix A for a visual depiction of this painting.

desire directly precedes it. In this final example of heteroerotic pleasure, sapphic desire facilitates the plot's progression and conclusion.

Thérèse's mentors in *ars erotica* play a fundamental role in bringing her to the conclusion of her story not just through their role in developing her sapphic desire in in conjunction with her libertine materialist philosophy, but also through her acceptance of transgressive sex. Throughout the entire novel, Thérèse witnesses and partakes in sexual relationships that defy eighteenth-century notions of sex being reserved for marriage, especially for women.[153] Her sexual relationship with the count at the end of the novel, likewise, depicts an act of transgressive sex in that it, as Suzanne Clisby reminds us, "is seen to violate the norms of monogamous, long-term, reproductive (and middle-class) heterosexuality" (65). The act of nonreproductive transgressive sex at the end of the novel depends on Thérèse's trust – and passivity – in penetrative sex. However, this transgressive sexual act echoes, ever so slightly, a resistance to heteronormative sexual constructs of the eighteenth century that is modeled by her mentors and manifested through her sapphic desire throughout the novel.

Finally, sapphic desire is portrayed through the count's request for Thérèse to write her story after the act of penetrative sex at the end of the novel. This request occurs, however, at the beginning of the novel in accordance with the temporal structure of the story – Thérèse is writing her memoir after the completion of her sexual philosophical journey. Thérèse grants the count's request, and in so doing, as Kavanagh argues, "this

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[153] McAlpin even posits that "marriage" in the eighteenth-century can be conserved a useful euphemism for "sex" in Bienville's medical treatises. (*Female Sexuality* 30)

narrative taking her from pleasure discovered to pleasure repressed, and from pleasure deluded to pleasure shared, finally coincides with the promises made in the novel's opening paragraph that it would offer 'truths useful to the good of society'" (69). It is in this notion of "truth" that I locate the sapphic undertones of Thérèse's promise at the beginning of the novel.

Discovering the truth about sex is a key tenet of *ars erotica* wherein truth is derived from pleasure. As we have seen, pleasure, in this novel, is tangled up in sensory arousal, and so the truth about Thérèse's pleasure that she will write throughout her story is that her pleasure is rooted in sapphic desire, as evidenced through her episodes of voyeurism both of her friends and of the female-centered erotic paintings at the end of the novel. Recalling my contention in the introduction to this chapter that Thérèse's courtesan art manifests through her writing and the performativity of transgressive sexual acts reenacted on the page, Thérèse's writing of her truths about pleasure could be seen as her final transformation in the novel into a mentor of *ars erotica.*[154] Her mentorship is directed, of course, towards the readers of her story for whom she theatrically recreates erotic scenes throughout the novel and whom she addresses at the beginning of her story, declaring:

> Imbéciles mortels! Vous croyez être maîtres d'éteindre les passions que la nature a mises en vous ! […] Vous voulez les détruire, ces passions, est les restreindre à des certaines bornes. Hommes insensés! (16)

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[154] I reiterate Marine Ganofsky's contention that "The most crucial education taking place [..] is that of the reader […] libertine fiction investigates voluptuousness in order to share with readers lessons on how to best reach it" (232).

This declaration to her readers that man (society) has tried to repress natural passions is a reflection of the libertine materialist philosophy that the novel seeks to portray through Thérèse's story which is fully realized in the final heteroerotic scene between her and the count. This philosophy does not "constrain natural passions" as Thérèse accuses society of in her above declaration, but rather centers a sexual practice whose only restriction is ensuring that sex serves only pleasure (and not, for instance, reproduction). However, if the final sexual scene depicts the epitome of the novel's philosophical message, then the message is rooted in a sexually transgressive act that defies heterosexual norms surrounding sexual pleasure in the eighteenth century. The truth that Thérèse's reveals, then, is that transgressive sexual acts are rooted in natural sexual passions, including the sapphic desire that drives the novel's plot forward consistently throughout the text. Her lesson to her readers, then, is one of resistance to the oppressive, heteropatriarchal social structures that restrain transgressive sex.

CHAPTER THREE

Jezebel: Navigating the Sexual Marketplace of Eighteenth-Century Saint Domingue Through Song

"Roulé tant comme moy ma chere, To va gagner tout ça to vlé (Roll Like me, my dear; you will have everything you want).[155] These final words of the Creole courtesan song "Zabet" were originally transcribed by hand in the unpublished document *Notes Historiques,* by the eighteenth-century travel writer Moreau de Saint-Méry. This chapter engages in an analysis of the feminist *ars erotica* depicted in two versions of this song titled "Zabet" and "N'a rien qui dous," as well as in a third song titled "Chanson pour les Mulâtresses du Cap." The singer/narrator's invitation to "Roll like me" in the first two songs highlights the mentorship relationship between herself and the song's title character, Zabet. [156] The use of the verb "rouler" in the singer/narrator's invitation denotes a double meaning, as rolling signifies both a solicitation to join the sexual marketplace as well as the erotic notion of physically rolling during the types of sexual

[155] All song titles, transcriptions in Creole and translations into both French and English are taken from Deborah Jenson's works "Relire l'histoire littéraire et le littéraire haïtiens" and *Beyond the Slave Narrative.* Lyrics for "Zabet" and "N'a rien qui dous" are taken from Jenson's "Relire l'histoire" pp. 40-43; lyrics for "Chanson pour les Mullatresses du Cap" are taken from Jenson's *Beyond* pp. 282. See appendices B, C, and D for Creole, French, and English lyrics to all these songs. Because I am borrowing translations, I only included the French and English versions of the third song ("Chanson pour") because these were the only versions available.

exchanges inherent to the courtesan arts. Through woman-to-woman mentorship in *ars erotica*, the song's singer/narrator, who is an experienced courtesan and woman of color in colonial Saint-Domingue, invites a younger courtesan, Zabet, to learn the customs and practices of courtesan life in a colonized space.[157]

The *femmes galantes* in this chapter, like in the past two, practice feminist mentorship in the courtesan arts (*ars erotica*). The lessons passed from the signer/narrator to Zabet encompass the importance of learning to manipulate the racialized and gendered stereotypes of the sexual marketplace in Saint-Domingue to better serve the physical, material, and social needs of courtesan women of color. Pleasure, in this chapter, is modeled off of Audre Lorde's notion of the erotic as a source of knowledge and power for women. Rather than a sexual sensation, pleasure is rooted in her notion of the "joy of sharing."[158] For the courtesan *mulâtresses*, pleasure is rooted in their capacity to share through song knowledge about how the courtesan arts can act as a form of resistance to racist, sexist, and imperial oppression. The "joy of sharing" that I identify as pleasure in this chapter is a sharing specifically between women that is inextricably intertwined with the courtesan art of performance, especially considering the fact that the literature being examined are songs that are dispersed to an audience through the singer/narrator. The art of song, in other words, allows for a feminist mentorship in *ars erotica* that helps women

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[157] I use the term "woman of color" here because the race of the singer/narrator is not overtly specified, it is only contextually hinted at that she is not white.
[158] Lorde describes that for her, the erotic functions "in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference" (56).

teach one another not only how to survive in this colonized space, but how to transcend social class and racial barriers that would otherwise limit their social and financial mobility.

In her book *Beyond the Slave Narrative,* Deborah Jenson highlights the importance of oral literature and musical tradition in the study of the literary history of pre-revolutionary Haiti. Thanks to her research, "Zabet", "N'a rien qui dous" and "Chanson pour les Mulâtresses du Cap," amongst other Creole courtesan songs have been brought to the attention of scholars seeking to give voice to the silenced histories and literature of women of color in colonized spaces. In the eighteenth-century literary archive, these voices have long been omitted or erased, and my intervention into this conversation examines how these three songs provide insights into the lives of courtesan women of color in Saint-Domingue. Jenson argues that these songs depict a "Creole literary tradition" that manifests through Black and mulatta women's voices.[159] In my exploration of these songs, I echo Jenson's attention to the importance of the specifically non-white and female voices that are depicted in these songs' lyrics. The singer/narrator of these songs depicts a non-white female subjectivity that was often denied to women of color in this eighteenth-century slave colony through the violence committed against their bodies and the silencing of their voices. These songs help to bring those voices to light.

Pleasure is linked to mentorship in this chapter and represents a sharing of knowledge about the courtesan arts between the singer/narrator and the young courtesan

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[159] Jenson discusses what she considers a Creole literary tradition depicted through this series of songs in part II of *Beyond the Slave Narrative*, "Authorizing the Libertine Sphere."

mulâtresse character (named Zabet). Because these texts are songs, the singer/narrator is also engaging in a mentorship with the audience who might be listening. In this sense, the songs that I examine in this chapter depict a lyrical/musical version of Marine Ganofsky's contention that "the most crucial education taking place in the libertine novel is that of the reader" ("The Libertine Novel" 26). If we consider these lyrical transcriptions to be a form of libertine musical expression, then perhaps we can apply notions of libertine readership to libertine listenership. In other words, the lessons being taught by the singer/narrator are being transmitted to an eighteenth-century public in Saint-Domingue who can hear, through her songs, overt advice about being a courtesan in the sexual marketplace of Saint-Domingue. This is especially important given the nature of music as what Jodie Taylor terms a "tactical device" in the transmission of narratives.[160] Importantly, the erotic is woven into the singer/narrator's lyrics through innuendos and subliminal messages that teach lessons in how to defy the patriarchal, imperial, and racist social order of this colonized space – a defiance that is shared with her audience through her performance.

Mixed-race women such as those depicted in these songs caught the attention of white male inhabitants and visitors to Saint-Domingue who documented their observations of the inhabitants of the island which were often riddled with gendered and racial prejudice. A colonist of Saint-Domingue named Dubuisson, for instance, described

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[160] Taylor contends that music "is a well-established tactical device in the production, transmission, and maintenance of self-narratives, genders, sexualities, and other forms of identification such as race, ethnicity, class, age, and locality" (605).

women of color as "objects of unbridled debauchery who can inspire love and all of its frenzy, but who will never be capable of the delicate emotions of a tender heart." (qtd. in Garraway 28). Many researchers have linked the hypersexual portrayal of women of color, and specifically Black women, to the perpetuation of the Transatlantic slave trade. Patricia Hill Collins, in her iconic work *Black Sexual Politics,* contends that the systematic abuse of Black women through slavery "spawned the controlling image of the jezebel or sexually wanton Black woman" (56). Though Hill-Collins specifically focuses on slavery in the United States, Francophone feminist scholars have identified similar links between the slave trade and myths about Black women's sexuality. Françoise Vergès, for instance, locates the origins of capitalism in "le ventre des femmes Africaines" calling attention to a history of colonization that used Black women's bodies for the (re)production of slavery (62). Arlette Gautier, like Hill-Collins, contends that myths about Black women's sexuality were an attempt to justify the violent sexual abuse of enslaved women, and were even written into medical books.[161] This treatment and perception of Black women not only served to maintain slavery in colonies like Saint-Domingue, but it also led to a reputation of libertinage in the French-occupied islands that was rooted in myths surrounding Black women's sexuality.

As courtesans, the *mulâtresse* characters that I examine in this chapter are involved in a sexual economy within this colonized space that perpetuates these kinds of racist and

[161] Gautier argues that, "à partir de 1750 […] les livres de médecine de l'époque prétendent que leur tempérament les rapproche des prostituées. Cette représentation justifie l'appropriation sexuelle en la légitimant doublement: non seulement les femmes noires aimeraient le sexe avec n'importe quel partenaire mais, de plus, elles en tireraient un bénéfice économique" (324).

sexist beliefs about Black women's bodies in the eighteenth century. However, it is important to distinguish exactly what kind of economy this entails because, within and outside of this marketplace, sexual violence against women of color abounds. Jenson contends that Creole courtesan songs like "Zabet, "N'a rien qui dous" and "Chanson pour les Mulâtresses du Cap" depict the libertine economies of colonial Saint-Domingue through comparisons of courtesan's work with slavery. She contends that these comparisons suggest "[a] transition from the status of laborer to a more entrepreneurial career, in which resources are mustered from a position of the master's "natural" needs" (*Beyond* 285). Indeed the "procurer" – or the slave master – will be evoked in these songs as a violent threat against women of color whose victimization is rooted in white male libidinous desire.

Slave labor, in fact, plays an important role in these songs despite the free status of their singer/narrator. Jenson points out the singer/narrator's use of allusions to the many pitfalls of indigo farming and its association with slave labor are incorporated to demonstrate that becoming a courtesan, according to the singer/narrator, is an upgrade from the status of laborer either slave or freed. This is one of the lessons that she teaches Zabet that reflects her mentorship in a feminist *ars erotica.* The positionality of Zabet and the singer/narrator as fictional women of color and as courtesans provides a unique standpoint from which to critique the intersecting oppressions of racism, sexism, and imperialism that marginalize women of color – both free(d) and enslaved – in Saint-Domingue. This is because within this slave colony they represent an in-between space of identity where they are not navigating a binary but rather a myriad of different categorizations of identity associated with their race, their gender, and their sexuality. As

such, they are faced with the multiple intersecting oppressions that construct those categories. The singer/narrator's lessons to "Zabet" depict important, sometimes subliminal, messages of resistance.

The lessons shared by the singer/narrator to her audience and to Zabet subvert what Gayle Rubin refers to as "sex law" or the "heteropatriarchal moral evaluations of sexual conduct [that] incorporate a very strong prohibition against mixing sex and money, except via marriage" (289). Mixing sex and money is the basis of the financial aspect of the courtesan arts discussed in this chapter, as the courtesan *mulâtresses* in these songs manipulate white male libidinous desire to their advantage. Wealth, status, and social mobility are prominently featured in these songs. Mentorship in and practice of the courtesan arts is the vehicle through which these mixed-race women circumvent stereotypes meant to oppress them and instead use them as tools for their resistance.

My analysis of these songs engages in Marisa Fuentes' methodological approach that she describes as "stretching the archive" in which she models Saidiya Hartman's practice of using archival sources, at times, for "contrary purposes" (7). Hartman explains that to read for contrary purposes requires,

> Excavations at the margins of monumental history in order that the ruins of the dismembered past be retrieved, turning to forms of knowledge and practice not generally considered legitimate objects of historical inquiry or appropriate or adequate sources for history making and attending to the cultivated silence, exclusions, relations of violence and domination that engender the official accounts. (*Scenes* 11)

The singers of these creole courtesan songs certainly find themselves in the margins of a monumental history of colonialism fueled by the Transatlantic slave. However, in "stretching the archive," Fuentes suggests that the historical archive is replete with violence, and that in reading *along the bias grain* we are able to "actively resist the perpetuation of their [enslaved persons'] subjugation and commodification in our own discourse and historical practices" (12). I, similarly, seek to acknowledge the violence of the colonized space that the *mulâtresses* within these songs inhabited, while also allowing space for their resistance, artistic expression, and the sharing of joy between them through mentorship in *ars erotica*. In other words, this chapter seeks to use archival sources not to continue to subject these women to violence, but to identify their agency within the space that they inhabited through an analysis of these Creole courtesan songs and the travel narratives that depicted mixed-race women.

In order to fully capture the resistance of the courtesan *mulâtresses* discussed in this chapter, I juxtapose a detailed reading of the songs' lyrics with the eighteenth-century travel writings of Saint-Méry in which he describes and promotes the racial taxonomies and gendered stereotypes that women of color faced in this colonized space.[162] My reading "along the bias grain," therefore, identifies how these songs, in addition to portraying their resistance, are also a performative tool for attracting patrons and young women to the sexual marketplace. To engage this methodological approach, I echo Hartman's call for the critical fabulation of historical – and in this case literary – stories that have been omitted, erased, or ignored. This method guides my writing of this

[162] See appendix E for an example of Saint-Méry's Racial taxonomy taken from *Description Topographque* pp. 83.

chapter so that I might highlight the joys and successes of the courtesan *mulâtresses* within the violent slave society that they inhabit. Hartman explains that her application of critical fabulation does not seek to "give voice" to the enslaved whose histories have been eradicated from the historical archive, but instead "to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death—social and corporeal death—and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance" ("Venus" 12). Where Hartman does not seek to "give voice" to the slave, I do consider these Creole courtesan songs to amplify voices that have been lost in the eighteenth-century literary archive.[163] That the literature examined in this chapter is a series of songs calls attention to the presence of a voice – a singer/narrator who performs and tells the songs' stories. In this chapter, I identify both how these songs highlight the violences of the sexual marketplace and the overarching slave society of Saint-Domingue, while also critically fabulating how they might portray joy amidst this tumultuous social and political landscape. Mentorship in the courtesan arts, like in the previous two chapters, is a tool by which we can identify how the courtesan *mulâtresses* depicted in these songs express guidance, art, resistance, and joy through their lyrics.

Courtesan arts in this chapter are tied up in both the racialization of these women, and the coloniality of gender – both of which are "processes by which meanings are made

[163] It should also be noted that where Hartman uses critical fabulation as a method to write about slavery/enslaved persons, I am using this method to write about free(d) women of color (the courtesan *mulâtresses*) who are nonetheless largely obscured in the eighteenth-century historical and literary archive.

and power is structured around racial [and gendered/sexual] differences."[164] Both of these processes are at work in Saint-Méry's descriptions of the *mulâtresses* which paint them as the mixed-race offspring of the lascivious (Black) Jezebel – a figure who encompasses the "forceful pornotropic gaze and grammar connecting black venus to enslaved African women and girls forced to breed for the expansion of plantation capital" (Tamura Lomax 47). There is a tension between the colonial process of racialization and gender construction that creates a "pornotropic" gaze. The tension lies in the white male racialization and sexualization of her body and the inherent sexual nature of the courtesan's means of accumulating wealth and status- or in other words, her sexual trade.

To address this tension, I echo Mireille Miller-Young's approach to Black women in pornography. She argues that "pornography did not create these racial stories, these fraught imaginings of black being and taboo interactions across racial difference, but it uses them" (9).[165] Although the courtesan *mulâtresses* are not porn stars and nor are their songs pornographic, Young's argument differentiates the *source* of racialized/sexualized tropes about Black women from the (voluntary, consensual) *use* of those tropes by Black women. What I am addressing in this chapter, therefore, is how courtesan *mûlatresses* in these songs both embrace and defy the Jezebel stereotype.[166]

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[164] Maria Lugones defines the coloniality of gender as a process wherein "women racialized as inferior were turned from animals into various modified versions of "women" as it fit the processes of Eurocentered global capitalism" (13).
[165] Where Miller-Young focuses on how pornography uses racial difference, I am focused on how the courtesan *mulâtresses* themselves use stereotypes about their sexuality and race.
[166] It is important to note that the Jezebel trope still exists today. Lomax covers the legacy of this trope in *Jezebel Unhinged.*

Mentorship in *ars erotica* – the courtesan arts – helps mixed-race women like Zabet navigate these stereotypes in an environment of hostile white male aggression against women of color and teaches them how to use them to their financial and social advantage. For courtesan *mulâtresses* such as those depicted in these songs, surviving this politically and socially brutal landscape required a form of solidarity. This solidarity manifests in the form of woman-to-woman sexual mentorship which highlights how to use pleasure as a tool for achieving financial and social autonomy. The singer/narrator of these songs represents this limited yet important independence of women of color in colonial Saint-Domingue. She can choose rich lovers to ensure her financial freedom in a society which limited her social and professional opportunities. With a resource that never runs out, the courtesan *mulâtresse* has everything she physically needs to succeed in the sexual marketplace. Furthermore, her songs highlight how pleasure, in the form of joy, might be uncovered and shared between women even in the oppressive environment in which they live.

The Slave, The Free(d), and all those In-Between

Imperative to an analysis of the woman-to-woman mentorship in *ars erotica* in these Creole courtesan songs are the racial and gendered dynamics which influence how women like Zabet and the singer/narrator engage with the sexual marketplace in eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue. Inextricable from this context is the inherent sexual violence produced by slavery in this colonized space. Although the singer/narrator and "Zabet" are not slaves, they do exist as women of color within this social, political, and

historical context. Though the specific race of the two women involved in these songs is not overtly mentioned, there are references to the race of patrons, specifically white patrons, which suggests that these are women of color.[167] The racial difference between the courtesan women and their patrons in the setting of a slave colony evokes notions of white male libidinous desire and sexual violence against women of color – either enslaved or free(d). The dynamics of power that define the dichotomous eighteenth-century categories of master/slave, male/female, white/black manifest in the establishment of the "libertine colony."[168] The *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue are the products of the libertine colony, embodying the contradicting stereotypes of lasciviousness and excessive luxury all rooted in their presumed opposition to white, patriarchal definitions of womanhood in the eighteenth century.

The singer/narrator of "Zabet" and "N'a rien qui dous" calls attention to the abuse endured by enslaved Black women in these songs in a way that differentiates free mulatta courtesans from captive women. She proclaims in one lyric of "N'a rien qui dous" that, "Les procureurs ôtent ce qui est à nous." In this lyric, the singer/narrator references the "procurer," or the white plantation owner, who takes the profits made off the labor of people of color –which is properly theirs. She indicates that unlike agricultural labor in the countryside, the city poses more fruitful opportunities for Zabet in the sexual

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[167] I use the term "patron" here as a designation for the white male (paying) clients of these courtesans.

[168] Garraway's theory of the libertine colony "posits a relationship between white elite sexual engagements (coerced and consensual) with nonwhite women, slave and free, and the extreme segregationist regime that reached its apogee in the exceptionally brutal slave society of late-eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue" (xiii).

marketplace, where the "procurer" – or white male patrons– cannot take what belongs to her. As long as she ensures that her patrons pay, the courtesan *mulâtresse* is in the unique position as a woman of color of being the sole owner and manager of her material wealth.

Evocations of the procurer taking what is not his differentiates the *mulâtresses* from enslaved labor while simultaneously calling attention to the violence perpetrated against enslaved women in Saint-Domingue. Given the inability of an enslaved person to consent, any sexual relations between slave women and procurers can be considered an inherently violent "taking" of the Black female body for the purpose of male libidinous pleasure.[169] Gautier calls attention to gendered sexual violence on plantations, arguing that this creates a dual form of labor specific to enslaved women arguing that "qu'elles le veuillent ou non, les femmes sont obligées de se soumettre et la dépossession de leur sexe vient redoubler celle de leur travail alors " (210). Therefore even "consenting" Black women who sought sexual relationships with white slave owners to benefit themselves or their children could not consent to their sexual exchange due to the inherent lack of personhood required for consent that slavery dispossesses them of.[170] Garraway

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[169] In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman analyzes the possibility of consent for slave women who experience forced, coerced, or "consensual" sexual encounters or rape by slave masters. She provides numerous legal examples of instances of rape or "consensual" relationships between enslaved women and slave masters. See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* especially chapter 3, "Seduction and the Ruses of Power."

[170] Garraway discusses the notion of concubinage and the potential benefits for slave women of establishing sexual relationships with white men noting that these benefits and the legalities surrounding the possibilities of manumission changed over the course of the eighteenth century. She notes, for instance that "whereas slave women's associations with free men on the plantation in some cases resulted in access to better living and working conditions and the possibility of manumission or marriage, eighteenth-century legal measures increasingly acted to eliminate any sexual agency on her part" (238).

highlights various forms of interracial sexual acts that occurred in this colonized space, noting that they ranged from "whites' taking of African slaves as concubines to sordid attacks on the plantation and the luxurious indulgences in colonial cities, where free women of color rivaled their white competitors for the richest men, as well as accumulating a great deal of wealth themselves" (196). In her characterization of the "libertine colony," Garraway links the sexual economy of women like the courtesan singer/narrator to the sexually aggressed enslaved women on plantations, rooting them both in white male desire for Black women's sexualized bodies.

When the singer/narrator, then, evokes the notion of "taking what is ***ours***" (*les procureurs ôtent ce qui est à **nous***), she is highlighting her connection to this legacy of sexual violence. I use the term "legacy" here, purposefully, as the *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue are the embodied result of this violence, linked to slavery through their matrilineal heritage which represents a lineage of sexual trauma inscribed on the racialized bodies of mixed-race women whether or not they are free(d).[171] Inherently, then, Zabet is included in this designation "ours" as the singer/narrator is speaking directly to her in the song. Likewise, she is making a connection to the listeners of her song, especially any women of color. In other words, she is setting up a system of solidarity with her listeners and the community of women of color in Saint-Domingue with whom she can directly communicate through her song.

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[171] Jenson argues that courtesan *mûlâtresses* represent both the "the "sign" and "product" of colonial hierarchies and their lascivious deconstruction" (278). This designates, otherwise put, their position as objects of desire and the product of that desire that induced anxieties about racial mixing in the colony.

Jessica-Marie Johnson articulates the specifically matrilineal legacy of slavery in her discussion of the free status of mixed-race children positing that "free status required the wombs and labor of black women" (12). In other words, the pathway to free status of mixed-race children is located in their mother's enslaved womb. This notion is codified in law in law in Saint-Domingue through the *Code Noir,* which dictates that the status of children of enslaved persons followed the status of the mother:

> Les enfants qui naîtront du mariage entre esclaves seront esclaves et appartiendront aux maîtres des femmes esclaves […] voulons que si le mari esclave a épousé une femme libre, les enfants tant mâles que filles suivent la condition de leur mère et soient libres comme elle, nonobstant la servitude de leur père et que si le père est libre et la mère esclave, les enfants seront esclaves pareillement. (*Code Noir* article XIII, 35)

With legal status so intricately tied to Black women's sexualized bodies and reproductive capacities, the singer/narrator's emphasis on agency and consent is crucial to her resistance to this violence. Her evocation of consent is iterated through the use of the verb "prendre" in the lyrics of "Zabet" that read "Il faut prendre un dombo [un amant] qui est riche." These lyrics, then, take on important subliminal undertones.

Mirroring the earlier version of this song's notion of "taking," for the courtesan *mulâtresses* to "take" a lover denotes a sense of autonomy over their bodies and their choice in sexual partners that is denied to enslaved women. "Taking" a lover implies that there is a possibility of rejecting one as well. The dual iterations of "taking" – once in each version of the song – pits the procurer's taking against that of the courtesan's. Where his taking is one of violence, hers is one building – of wealth, of status, and of

knowledge of the sexual marketplace. Most importantly, it is one of building solidarity as evidenced by her inclusive usage of "us" to designate all of the women of color in Saint-Domingue who might have what is theirs taken from them. As the singer/narrator speaks to Zabet in the song, the subliminal undertones of her lyrics evoke lessons of caution about who to take as a lover in order to avoid the ubiquitous violence of white men in this slave colony.

Although the courtesan *mulâtresses* depicted in this song are free women of color, this does not eradicate the potential for violence in the sexual marketplace of Saint-Domingue in which the dangers of sexual assault were multiplied by virtue of the courtesans' race.[172] Tamura Lomax, citing Kimberlé Crenshaw, argues that Black women are especially vulnerable in cases of sexual assault because "when black women are raped they are not raped as women but as black women: 'their femaleness [makes] them sexually vulnerable to racist domination, while their blackness effectively [denies] them any protection" (123). This vulnerability applies to the courtesan *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue who were subject to stereotypes that depicted them as hypersexual, wanton women which intensified the threat of sexual assault due to popular eighteenth-century conceptualizations of women's sexuality and sexual subordination.[173] Courtesan *mulâtresses* in Saint-Domingue faced these masochistic notions of women's sexual

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[172] In addition to the dangers mentioned here it is important to remember that as elite prostitutes, courtesans, in general, were at risk for sexual and other forms of physical assault, venereal disease, and the general societal devaluation of their personhood linked to the sexual nature of their work.

[173] For instance, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, Jean Jacques Rousseau's position on rape against women as expressed in Émile is essentially that it does not exist because "pour que l'attaquant soit victorieux, il faut que l'attaqué le permettre ou l'ordonne" (*Émile* 468).

subordination to men in addition to the racist stereotypes associated with mixed-race women.

The singer/narrator of "n'a rien qui dous" captures the danger of the sexual marketplace – and of Saint-Domingue in general for women of color, especially those who are enslaved – by proclaiming what will happen if Zabet does not ensure that her patrons pay for her sexual and companionate courtesan services: "Elle ne sait pas faire payer les blancs/Avec une femme qui est sotte, c'est comme ça qu'ils font/Ils vont la rosser, ça nous fait pitié." Ensuring that patrons pay, therefore, provides physical protection for courtesans, as women who neglect to ensure payment for their services are "idiots" who are beaten by their patrons. The singer/narrator's warning to Zabet denotes the very real threat of violence against courtesan *mulâtresses* while also alluding to a distinction between themselves and female slaves. The distinction she makes between courtesans and enslaved women is derived in the autonomy to refuse. If Zabet heeds the singer/narrator's advice by demanding payment– or refusing the patron – she can avoid physical danger. Enslaved women in Saint-Domingue, on the other hand, have no such liberty to refuse or demand things from white male aggressors. This lyric then, serves to both depict white male violence against women of color in Saint-Domingue while simultaneously differentiating the courtesan *mulâtresses* from enslaved women.

This differentiation from slave women is a tactic employed by the courtesan singer/narrator to resist the equivocation of her profession with slavery – a parallel often drawn by travel writers like Saint-Méry. He writes, for instance that, "c'est donc réellement à l'état de courtisane, que les mulâtresses sont presque généralement condamnées, et elles y sont associées avec les femmes esclaves" (95). Here, not only is

Saint-Méry iterating the presumed voluptuousness attributed to *mulâtresses* – most of whom he designates as courtesans – but he also links courtesans with slavery. That Saint-Méry considers a sexual trade – the courtesan profession – to be equivalent to slavery speaks volumes about the ubiquity of sexual violence perpetuated against enslaved women in Saint-Domingue. What he is clearly missing – or ignoring – is the agency of courtesans to refuse patrons that is denied to enslaved women.

The singer/narrator's attempt to distance herself from slavery, furthermore, indicates the racial caste system that developed throughout the eighteenth-century in Saint-Domingue in which slaves represented the most marginalized and oppressed group.[174] The development of discriminatory segregation policies in Saint-Domingue was the result of anxieties surrounding the gradually increasing population of free people of color. This proliferation of free people of color is linked to legal loopholes to manumission built into the *Code.* For instance, article nine of the *Code* stipulates that if a couple is married, the enslaved spouse, as well as the children that resulted from the marriage, would attain free(d) status,

> N'entendons toutefois le présent article avoir lieu, lorsque l'homme libre qui n'était point marié à une autre personne, durant son concubinage avec son esclave, épousera dans les formes observées par l'Église sa dite esclave, qui sera

[174] Jeffrey Lewis Stanley explains that "after mid [eighteenth] century, a series of discriminatory laws in Saint-Domingue sought to form a rigid color line in colonial society and subject free people of color to a host of humiliating restrictions […] To undercut social status, sumptuary laws attempted to prevent free people of color from making ostentatious displays of wealth, and public spaces were racially segregated" (23).

> affranchie par ce moyen, et les esclaves rendus libres et légitimes (*Code Noir,* article IX, 34).[175]

In addition to this stipulation in the *Code,* there was a significant increase throughout the eighteenth century of mixed-race marriages that contributed to the expansion of a population of free people of color in Saint-Domingue.[176] Dominique Rogers contends that the growing trend in interracial marraiges can also be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that "le faible nombre de femmes blanches favorise les femmes de couleur, qui sont le plus souvent l'unique compagne de leur partenaire blanc" (251). All of these circumstances combined to establish a free population of people of color who triggered anxieties in French authorities who were fearful of the potential threats to racial hierarchy in Saint-Domingue that they posed.[177] Dayan posits that these anxieties stem from a mixed-race subject's proximity to whiteness, resulting in the necessity for mixed-race people in Saint-Domingue to be "recolored" in order to maintain what she terms the "fiction of whiteness." She explains that,

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[175] Garraway identifies other loopholes for manumission in the *Code* that involved military conscription (for men). See *The Libertine Colony* especially chapter five, "Race, Reproduction, and Family Romance in Saint-Domingue."

[176] Rogers also identifies the frequency of these marriages by region, noting that "les mariages mixtes restent assez fréquentes à la fin de l'Ancien Régime: ils représentent 17% des unions légitimes dans le Sud […] 7% des contrats de mariages à Port-au-Prince et 11% au Cap-Français" (251).

[177] These anxieties did not stem only from the existence of the free population of color in Saint-Domingue but also from their considerable wealth. Stanley notes that "Saint Domingue's free population of colour was among the wealthiest in the Americas […] But this group was far from monolithic. Sharp divisions existed between those who shared European and African ancestry, known as *gens de couleur*, and those born into slavery and later manumitted, referred to as *nègres libres"* (22).

> The techniques of degradation depended on social segregation and judicial inequality, all of which read as if they were castigation for the sin of blurring the "demarcation line" between castes (that is, between colors) in Saint-Domingue. Those believed to be passing as white were called "suspects" and, once exposed, suffered an excommunication so extreme that a fiction of whiteness became a cult of purity. (226)

This "cult of purity" and the racial caste system that resulted from it highlights the in-between space that the courtesan *mulâtresses* inhabited. The singer/narrator, in distancing herself from slavery, is reiterating her social position as a free woman of color in Saint-Domingue amidst a racial caste system that sought to classify and separate people not within a racial binary, but within several different categories of racial classification. These categories signified a combination of race and class and created, as Stanley explains, divisions within not just the population of color and the white population, but also divisions amongst these populations themselves.[178] In addition to this, racial taxonomies such as those proposed by Saint-Méry's in his *Description* continued to perpetuate racial and gendered stereotypes especially in regard to mixed-race women.

In terms of the proliferation of sexualized stereotypes about women of color in the eighteenth century that appeal to the white male gaze, Saint-Méry is unmatched in his detailed descriptions of the *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue.[179] Like many travel writers

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[178] Stanley notes that there was an especially sharp division that existed between "those who shared European and African ancestry, known as *gens de couleur,* and those born into slavery and later manumitted, referred to as *nègres libres*" (22).
[179] The intersection of racial and sexual prejudice in Saint-Méry's *Description Topographique* are so prominent that Garraway considers his racial taxonomies to be "a sexual allegory whereby whites imagined their own political, racial, and

of the era, Saint-Méry not only describes his perception of race but also attributes behaviors to different racial categories. For the *mulâtresses,* he specifically denotes a gendered behavioral pattern that he links to their mixed-race identity. He details that these women are "naturally" lascivious, linking this libertine behavior to their physical appearance, placing the blame for what he describes as a libertine moral degeneracy in Saint-Domingue rooted in the object of white male sexual desire. Saint-Méry describes the *mulâtresses* as follows,

> L'être entier d'une mulâtresses est livré à la volupté, et le feu de cette déesse brûle dans son cœur pour ne s'y éteindre qu'avec la vie […] Charmer tous les sens, les livrer aux plus délicieuses extases, les suspendre par les plus séduisants ravissements: voilà son unique étude; et la nature, en quelque sorte, complice du plaisir, lui a donné charmes, appas, sensibilité, et ce qui est bien plus dangereux, la faculté d'éprouver encore mieux que celui avec qui elle les partage, des jouissances dont le code de *Paphos* ne renfermait pas tous les secrets. (92)

Not only does Saint-Méry indicate that *mulâtresses* are hypersexualized, but he also dehumanizes them through the use of the term "*déesse"* insinuating that these women have supernatural traits linked to their physical appearance. Evoking the image of the goddess denotes clichés about mixed-race women and their otherworldly power to seduce white men. It is an imagery that, as Jacqueline Couti reminds us, "minimizes the abuse of black bodies and emphasizes the posture of black woman as seductress – not victim –

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sexual supremacy over nonwhites while at the same time repressing the reproductive consequences of white male libertinage" (245).

who threatens the white man and the established order" (166). The *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue – courtesan or not – faced these kinds of gendered racial characterizations.

This otherworldly power, however entrenched in stereotype it may be, appears in the lyrics of the courtesan's song through the manifestation of her ability to seduce. She describes of her patrons, for instance, "quand je veux une portugaise, tout de suite il court m'en donner" ("Zabet"). That her lover runs immediately to get her money when she asks for it underscores the role of seduction that is tied into eighteenth-century notions of the courtesan *mulâtresses'* supernatural-like abilities. Pierre Saint-Amand describes this otherworldly talent of seduction as a detachment from reality noting that "seduction requires a sort of fetishistic detachment of the object from the whole. The body must be concretized in separate signs, broken off from the ideal totality, in order to provoke desire (55). If the courtesan is the object of her patron's desire, and she holds power over him through seduction, then she is also "detached" from herself as a whole. In other words, even though the courtesan holds power through seduction, it is a power that is rooted in the same types of objectifications that Saint-Méry iterates through his metaphor of the goddess. However, the courtesan *mulâtresse* in this song manipulates her objectification to her benefit. As Jenson reminds us, in Saint-Domingue "women's sexual vulnerability [...] was simultaneously a nexus of their mobility" (278). Although the courtesan is being objectified by her patron, his fantasy about her serves her interests, at least financially. This, if anything, is the true mystical power of these women – to transform stereotypes rooted in violence into opportunities for self-advancement.

In addition to these stereotypes, *mulâtresses* had to battle both the threat of white male violence as well as policies of social segregation that threatened their livelihoods

through the policing of garments.[180] Haitian writer Jean Louis Vastey observes these policies in his 1814 essay *Le Système coloial dévoilé* noting that,

> Il leur [les hommes de couleur] était défendu par les ordonnances les hommes de s'habiller comme les blancs, et les femmes [de couleur] comme les blanches; une mise un peu relevée, des étoffes au-dessus du commun, c'était s'assimiler aux blancs, un noble maintien, une tournure élégante, c'était le comble de l'audace, un horrible scandale, c'était sortir des bornes de la simplicité, de la décence, et du respect, apanage essentiel de leur état. (83)

The singer/narrator of "Chanson pour les Mullatresses du Cap" likewise highlights the segregation and mistreatment of free women of color, particularly by police, lamenting the following: "D'où vient donc la tristesse des pauvres mulâtresses /Elles gémissent sans cesse/et soupirent tout bas ah ah/ La police traîtresse avec impolitesse/leur coupe au ras des fesses rubans et falbalas ah ah." In this lyric, the singer/narrator combines a critique of French colonial authorities with sexual innuendo. She describes the mistreatment of *mulâtresses* who are harassed by police. The police are also described as patrons as they are cutting the ribbons, frills, and flounces of the courtesans down to their buttocks (*fesses*). Unlike the courtesans of Paris described in chapter one, this police force is not dedicated to investigating the goings on of courtesans in the *demimonde*. Rather, they are enforcing a code of segregation that, as Vastey recounts, dictates what mixed-race women (and men) can wear in public.

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[180] Nathalie Battraville highlights the policing of clothing, arguing that, "the colonial administration worked to police the parameters of conspicuous consumption of an aesthetic seduction, such that luxury against Black skin constituted an afront to 'decency and respect,' a 'frightful scandal'" (69).

For courtesan *mulâtresses,* fashion was a crucial component of their public persona. Saint-Méry references this crucial feature of the courtesan's public image, noting that: "le luxe des mulâtresses est poussé au dernier terme, et depuis 1770 il a fait des progrès qui paraissent incroyables à ceux qui ont pu comparer les deux époques […] Ce luxe consiste, presque entièrement, dans un seul objet, l'habillement" (92-93).[181] The cutting of the courtesan's ribbons and flounces (*coupe au ras des fesses rubans et falbalas*) in the song, then, denotes a cutting off of one of the sources of their public identity as courtesans which was, aside from a symbol of their wealth, a means of attracting patrons. In other words, in policing the courtesan's wardrobe, French colonial authorities are interfering not only with their freedom of self-expression and adornment through clothing, but also their livelihoods.

The singer/narrator of "Chanson pour les Mullatresses du Cap" denotes a sadness at the beginning of the song (*la tristesse des mulâtresses)* at the mistreatment of mixed-race women by colonial authorities. The end of the song, however, might suggest a more subversive message. The singer/narrator ends her song with an utterance resembling either a sigh of exasperation or a laugh (*ah ah*). Considering the slightly crude humorous undertones of the rest of the song, notably the mention of cutting ribbons down to their bottoms, it would be safe to assume that this final utterance denotes a laugh. As such, it

[181] Kimberly Snyder-Manganelli notes that many eighteenth-century travel writers observed the fashion of the *mulâtresses* in their texts reporting on "the mixed-race women's ostentatious display of clothing and jewelry" (22).

represents the "subversive tactics of humor," or, put otherwise, the ways in which humor can subvert social orders.[182]

The combination of the erotic undertones of the song's lyrics through the mention of clothes being cut off, buttocks being exposed, and the laughter of the singer/narrator resembles the perverse laughter of the women discussed in chapter two, which undermines notions of white male dominance symbolized, in this song, by the police.[183] Her laughter represents, therefore, a humorous resistance to colonial segregationist practices in Saint-Domingue by recasting the oppressive tactic of clothing control as a semi-erotic, laughable scene. Since this song is, presumably, meant to be performed, the singer/narrator disseminates this message to an audience, inviting them to laugh in resistance with her. Although she does not speak directly to an interlocutrice in the way the singer/narrator of the other two songs does, she nonetheless mentors an audience in acts of resistance through the performance of her song.

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[182] Synthia Willet and Julie Willet discuss in "The Seriously Erotic Politics of Laughter" how humor can be a tool for the subversion of the social order and for creating systems of solidarity amongst women. They argue that, "the 'unity' of this intersubjectivity – of laughing together – occurs through suspending reified positions of identity […] comedy can create a new kind of temporary community, not based on homogeneity or rigid identities, but rather on a shared dislocation out of the customary lines of identity" (24).

[183] Catherine Cusset discusses the perversity of women's laughter in libertine fiction in *No Tomorrow,* arguing that the women's laughter in erotic fiction makes a mockery of male virility, thereby perverting the heteroerotic overtones of the text.

Singing of Resistance

Combining themes of resistance with song and eroticism is a recurring theme throughout the creole courtesan songs analyzed in this chapter. Through subliminal messaging, sexual imagery, and references to colonial oppression. the singer/narrator teaches her interlocutrice and her audience how the courtesan arts can provide not only lucrative opportunities through patron relationships but also how their performance can resist imperial, racist, and sexist subjugation.

Themes of slavery, as we have already seen, are iterated in the singer/narrator's lyrics through evocations of the *procureur* and references to sexual violence against women of color. In another example, the singer/narrator masterfully evokes an image of slavery and a sexual innuendo all through the use of a single verb: "Rouler." She sings:

> Tout indigoterie sans la pluie n'aura pas un brin d'indigo /Tout habitant [cultivateur] sans source crie à la sécheresse de sa canne/Nous n'allons pas avoir cette misère puisque nous sommes toujours en train de rouler/Roule comme moi, ma chère/Tu auras tout ce que tu veux. ("Zabet")

The singer/narrator invites her young interlocutrice to "roll like her" in order to have everything she wants. Her use of the term "roll" at the end of the song indicates a courtesan *mulêtresses'* preparedness for the sexual marketplace but suggests, as Jenson posits, a double meaning. On one hand, it refers to the grueling task of producing indigo, signaling another comparison of slave labor with that of the courtesan. Jenson contends that "rolling" here has "clearly transitioned from a verb describing onerous activity in indigo processing to a verb with gleefully masterful and illicit connotations" (288).

Rolling, in other words, refers to both the courtesan's sexual labor and the grueling physical labor of indigo production and is another example of the narrator's differentiation between these two forms of labor performed by women.

Though indigo farming and being a courtesan were certainly not the only work available to *mulâtresses* in Saint-Domingue at the time, the singer/narrator's reference to the *indigoterice* calls attention to an important crop produced through the labor of slaves in this colonized space.[184] As Voss and Weber point out, indigo and sugar-cane farming made up a majority of Saint-Domingue's slave labor in the eighteenth century. [185] The production of indigo increased throughout the eighteenth century because it served as an important wartime crop used in dyes to make French military uniforms. Thus, as French imperialistic projects increased, so did the production of indigo. In one portion of the song, the singer/narrator chastises Zabet for having taken a stingy lover and uses the term *indigoterice* as an insult: "Tu es restée là comme une niaise, Abandonnée! Indigoterice, toi" ("Zabet"). This insult presents a twofold indignity. First, if Zabet reduces herself to the level of an indigo worker, she is allowing white men to use her resources (her body) for free, which the singer/narrator associates with slavery. However, this is not to say that she is suggesting that enslaved women "allow" for their bodies to be used. Rather, for

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[184] Dominique Rogers and Stewart King extensively discuss in "Housekeepers, Merchants, Rentières" the various forms of women's work outside of the courtesan profession in eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue. They describe that women worked as *ménagères* (housekeepers) as well as in trade and retail.
[185] Voss and Weber describe the use of indigo in military uniforms explaining "production of military uniforms stimulated demand for the blue dye indigo […] indigo had been produced on the French islands on a larger scale since the 1680s. During the war [of Spanish secession], it was traded at up to 270 Livres *tournois* per hundredweight […] Indigo and refined sugar were important sectors for employing slaves during the crisis" (pp. 225-226).

Zabet to fail to ensure payment signals a loss of agency. Describing Zabet as "abandoned" by her lover indicates that this non-paying patron left *her*, and not the other way around. In other words, she allowed herself to be used by staying with a lover (not patron) who does not take care of her needs.

The second indignity inherent in the appellation *indigoterice* involves the symbolism of indigo as a wartime crop used to make uniforms which helped to support military conquests. Enslaved persons on indigo farms were forced to produce a crop which served the colonizer's imperial pursuits and the continued oppression of both enslaved and freed people of color in Saint-Domingue. Unlike the enslaved indigo worker, though, Zabet can avoid being taken advantage of by following the advice of the singer/narrator, "Il faut prendre un dombo [un amant] qui est riche" ("Zabet"). If Zabet fails to do this, however, she could not only lose out on money by taking on lovers who do not pay, but, furthermore, this kind of careless behavior threatens to ruin her chances of future gains.

The singer/narrator calls specific attention not just to making patrons pay, but to specifically making whites pay in her song: "elle ne sais pas faire payer les blancs" ("Zabet," "N'a rien qui dous"). While I mentioned earlier that this is advice offered to Zabet to protect her from physical violence in the sexual marketplace, it also takes on another meaning when considered through the lens of the capitalist slave system that fueled Saint-Domingue's economy. The singer/narrator's insistence on making whites pay distinguishes the courtesan profession from slave labor and encourages resistance to white imperial control. Indeed, courtesan *mulâtresses* profit from white colonizers, and thus symbolically reverse the economic power dynamic between the colonizer and the

colonized. I consider this reversal to be symbolic in that the courtesan *mulâtresse* is not depicting in her song a reversal of the *overarching* colonizer/colonized economic power dynamic Saint-Domingue. Rather, this reversal is a microcosm of the larger capitalist economic power dynamics that fuel the economy of this slave colony.

Anjibal Quijano's model of the capitalist function of the coloniality of power identifies binaries that are established in colonized spaces, especially in slave colonies such as Saint-Domingue. These binaries are established through the structure of capitalism as "a system of relations [that] links of all forms of control on labor and its products under the dominance of capital" (Quijano 531). In slave colonies, the colonizer controls the means of production – slaves – and therefore the colonizer is in an economically dominant position over the colonized who are exploited. In relation to "Zabet," the colonizer profits off the slave or low-paying labor of indigo farmers, which, in a twofold injustice to slave laborers, also supports imperial pursuits through the production of French military uniforms.

The symbolic colonizer/colonized power dynamic thus shifts in the singer/narrator's lyrics in terms of sources of profit – the colonized profiting from the colonizer – and hints at the destabilization of the capitalist system that drives imperial economic control through the exploitation of labor and resources. The reversal of the colonizer/colonized financial power dynamic depicts a specifically gendered form of resistance through the rooting of colonial capitalism in, as Françoise Vergès argues, "le ventre des femmes africaines" (62).[186] Enslaved women in Saint-Domingue played an

[186]Vergès explains that "c'est en ayant organisé de manière industrielle une ponction sur les sociétés africaines pendant plusieurs siècles que le capitalisme a

involuntary role in the development of capitalism as a global system through their forced captivity and the reproduction of slave labor that served as the genesis, Vergès argues, of the capitalist system as we know it today.[187] In taking money from the colonizer to build her own wealth, the courtesan *mulâtresse* defies the oppressive gendered system of capitalism that serves as the economic foundation of this colonized space. The colonizer's money is not going into the hands of just a colonized person, but a colonized woman of color whose ancestor's wombs produced, against her will, the system established to perpetuate her oppression.[188] The courtesan *mulâtresse,* on the contrary, profits from the colonizer and is in control of the labor and resources necessary for the accumulation of her own capital. She is, in other words, in charge of the means of production and, indeed, *is* the means of production in her own sexual economy.

The singer/narrator highlights this important symbolic reversal of the colonizer/colonized economic power dynamic in the opening lines of "Na rien qui dous," where she encourages Zabet to join her in the courtesan arts, mentoring her to resist the exploitation of white colonizers by choosing a form of labor which allows her more control than other forms of work available to women of color. She declares that, "il n'y a rien qui est aussi douce que la ville ! Viens à côté de moi, Il n'y en a pas [d'aussi doux] à

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pu se construire. Et la source invisible de cette ponction n'est autre que le ventre des femmes africaines, dont les enfants sont capturés pour être déportés." (62). Vergès contends that this is not just reflected in Africa, but through the slave trade as a Transatlantic system of captivity and forced labor.

[187] See Vergès, pp. 62 for her analysis of how the modern-day capitalist system is directly linked to African women's (re)production during the Transatlantic slave trade.

[188] Here I am referring to the womb of the Black woman, not specifically the womb of the singer/narrator.

la campagne, ma chère ! Justement comme il y a deux métiers qui sont doux. Les procureurs ôtent ce qui est à nous." As I have already mentioned, the procurer cannot take from the *mulâtresse* what she has labored to earn. So long as she ensures that her patrons pay, the courtesan *mulâtresse* is in a unique position as a woman of color in colonial Saint-Domingue of being the sole arbiter, producer, and manager of her material wealth.[189]

The wealth and status of courtesans in Saint-Domingue should not be understated because, as, Jenson reminds us, some of them attained what we would consider today to be a celebrity status.[190] Kimberly Snyder Manganelli notes that the courtesan *mulâtresses* were, in fact, so successful that at times, they were not only sought after by white men for pleasure but also to increase the men's own wealth.[191] In this sense, courtesan *mulâtresses,* rather than being the seekers of wealth became the sought-after. Not only, only is she reversing the colonizer/colonized economic power dynamic, but also the financial dynamic between courtesans and patrons by switching these roles from courtesan seeking patron (for wealth) to patron seeking courtesan (for wealth).

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[189] While it is true that she would technically need a patron for the "production of labor," as it were, it is important to remember that she is in control of who this patron is and has the crucial right refuse a patron.

[190] Jenson contends that: "courtesans had many different class positions, from vulnerable prostitutes to wealthy celebrities, as did their European counterparts, based on their renown, familial standing, and other factors" (*Beyond* 280).

[191] Manganelli highlights that "free women of color were so adept at managing the expenses of the households provided by their "keepers" that, toward the end of the eighteenth century, many colonists began to seek out wealthy free women of color with financial independence, but the only way a white colonist could gain access to her fortune was to marry her" (25).

While some courtesans may have been sought after by patrons, they by no means had to share their wealth with men. Manganelli argues that "because her wealth was not legitimized by marriage but passed on to her as gifts or an inheritance from her white lover, the financial autonomy of mixed-race women undermined the patriarchal social order in the colony and threatened the imperial project" (24). The mixed-race courtesan's independent access to wealth signals an important distinction between herself and many white, unmarried European women in Saint-Domingue. Nathalie Battraville highlights the restrictive nature of marriage for white Western women in Saint-Domingue, noting that, faced with the threat of a growing population of free people of color, French imperialist powers imported poor white women who were often prostitutes or prisoners (or both) to marry white colonists in hopes of repopulating the island with people of white European descent.[192] For courtesan *mulâtresses* such as the singer/narrator and Zabet, marriage was not a requisite for accessing wealth and subjecthood, as they created and controlled these on their own through the management of their income, their means of production of labor, and their reputations. Financial, social, and legal independence outside of marriage also separates the courtesan *mulâtresses* from the enslaved women of color for whom access to marriage would be an avenue for manumission. Indeed, this liberty to be free uniquely by their own means highlights, once again, how the courtesan *mulâtresses* find themselves in an in-between space in this colonized, segregated society.

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[192] Battraville contends that for these white women, "in many ways, the colonial order simply recast the capitalist patriarchal order that had incarcerated them [white women]; yet at the same time, it allowed them to cross class barriers and access subjecthood through marriage and property in ways that had been unimaginable for those assigned female and poor at birth in France" (72).

Reputation and Performance: Pleasure is Pure Joy

Reputation plays a critical role in the lessons that the singer/narrator is teaching to Zabet and to her audience. For instance, she makes sure to emphasize to her interlocutrice in "Zabet" and "N'a rien qui dous" that if she does not ensure payment from her patrons, others will call her an idiot, which would threaten her social reputation: "Comment veux-tu avoir la cote? Si tu ne gagnes pas d'argent/ Ils vont dire, cette femme-là est sotte/ Elle ne sait pas faire payer les blancs." Reputation, therefore, is tied to a courtesan's adherence to the financial aspects of her art. However, the notion of reputation encompasses more than just being paid for services, as publicity is a crucial function of the courtesan arts that is tied to a courtesan's social status as well as the seduction of patrons through the display of her luxurious attire – her *luxe*.

Mangenelli contends that many travel writers, including Saint-Méry, reported "on the mixed-race women's ostentatious display of clothing and jewelry, which offered a visual symbol of their fallenness" (Manganelli 22). Here, "fallenness" refers to mixed-race courtesans' association with the sexual marketplace and the display of both their sexual availability as well as their expectations of material wealth in return. The true measure of a courtesan's fallenness, however, is the destruction of her reputation in the sexual marketplace by not receiving payment from patrons. In other words, she risks being labeled as cheap or worse, a *fille publique*.[193] When the singer/narrator of "Zabet"

[193] Joan Dayan details the distinction between "prostitute" and "courtesan" in eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue, both of which Evoque publicity. She notes that "*filles publiques*" were prostitutes and *"femmes publiques"* were courtesans according to descriptions in travel writings like Saint-Méry's (297).

warns that people will think that the younger courtesan is an idiot for not knowing how to make whites pay, she is also detailing a threat to Zabet's future and livelihood. The singer/narrator's emphasis on gaining status and earning money throughout the songs demonstrates the connections that she makes between money, autonomy, and reputation that are inextricably intertwined in her courtesan art.

Reputation is intricately tied to publicity in the courtesan arts, especially in the case of the courtesan *mulâtresses.* Publicity serves to entice patrons and also highlights the pleasure of the courtesan's trade. Saint-Méry's description of publicity underscores its importance for the courtesan *mulâtresses.* He observes,

> Cet orgueil consiste surtout à montrer ses triomphes […] La publicité, […] est une de leurs plus douces jouissances, et c'est au plaisir qu'elles y trouvent, qu'on doit l'usage qui fait que, chaque soir, à l'heure du coucher, on voit sortir les filles de couleur de chez elles, souvent éclairées par un fanal, porté par une esclave, et allant passer la nuit chez celui qu'elles aiment le plus, ou qui les paye le mieux. (97)

From Saint-Méry's observation, we can make a connection between publicity and pleasure that underscores the role of pleasure in this courtesan art. However, pleasure as it manifests for these women in their art – through Lorde's notion of the joy of sharing – is likely different from how Saint-Méry was considering the usage of this term. Pleasure, therefore, takes two forms in the courtesan *mulâtresse's* performance. On one hand, it is a tool for seducing patrons through the sexually erotic performance of her song, and, on the other, it is a tool for mentorship that underscores pleasure through the erotic sharing of joy.

Sexual pleasure is iterated in "Zabet," as I mentioned earlier, through double *entendres,* specifically articulated through the use of the verb "roll" (rouler) which – to recall Jenson's notion of the dual meaning of this verb –depicts the rolling of indigo labor and the allusion to "rolling" during sex. This polysemantic nature of the verb "roll" here is crucial to the solicitation of patrons during the courtesan's performance because she is not just speaking to Zabet in this song, but to her audience. "Rolling," for instance, invites patrons to join her as part of the seductive aspect of her performance. The solicitation of patrons through her performance highlights what Gordan and Feldman describe as the permeability of art in courtesan's lives. They posit that "art [such as singing] is never an extracurricular activity but one that permeates their lives. Always negotiating a complex dynamic, courtesans are forever producing themselves and being reproduced by the fantasies of their consumers" (8). Courtesans can channel the fantasies of their potential patrons into an artform to elicit their attention, and for the singer/narrator and other courtesan *mulâtresses* of Saint-Domingue, this is made possible through the very nature of the song as a performative and artistic form of expression and self-promotion. Or, to reiterate Taylor's terminology, the song is a "tactical device" for the transmission of the courtesan's message.

However, because this is a performance, I propose a third meaning symbolized by this verb which depicts another performative feature of the song associated with the courtesan's singing – her dancing. Although we cannot be certain of the actual movements of the singer/narrator, if the reader and listener can imagine a sexual movement that is elicited through the verb "rolling" then certainly they could also imagine dancing. Dancing to her song iterates Lorde's notion of the erotic as power. She

writes that "when I speak of the erotic, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our love, our work, our lives" (55). Dancing and singing are both expressions of joy that the courtesan singer/narrator shares with her audience.

Joy is expressed in other ways in this lyric as well. The use of exclamation points and terms of endearment in this invitation denotes a sense of joy and excitement in her speech. Because, as Lorde reminds us, the erotic is rooted in feeling, these expressions of positive sentiment highlight the erotic aspects of her courtesan art. Her courtesan art, in other words, is rooted in the sharing of joy with Zabet – who she is mentoring within her song – and her audience– who she is mentoring through her performance of the song. Recalling Ganofsky's notion of libertine readership, the courtesan *mulâtresse's* messages of pleasure – both sexual and joyful –and resistance is transmitted to her audience through the manifestation of her *ars erotica* in song. In this mentorship relationship, the most important lessons being taught by the singer/narrator are directed at the audience themselves. Young women who wish to become courtesans in the sexual marketplace of Saint-Domingue can learn from the song how to avoid Zabet's mistakes. More importantly, they can learn how to manipulate the racialized and sexualized stereotypes created by the white male colonizer's gaze to their benefit.

Jezebel's Stage

The creole courtesan songs analyzed in this chapter represent, to echo Jenson's phrasing, a "Creole literary tradition" that centers the voices and experiences of mixed-race women of color in a colonized, eighteenth-century slave society. She carries both the stigma and legacy of slavery on her body by virtue of her race and her gender, which are defined through the lens of the white colonizer's libidinous gaze. As such, *mulâtresses* such as the singer/narrator of these songs are portrayed in eighteenth-century travel narratives as immoral and lascivious. Saint-Méry, in fact, even directly ties the *mulâtresses* to "*l'état de courtisane*." In other words, according to these travel-narratives, the *mulâtresse* is a Jezebel.[194]

As a courtesan, she is caught in the tension between her sexual labor the racial stigmatizations that associate her with this labor. Nonetheless, she finds a means of resisting the intersecting oppressions of racism, sexism, and imperialism by embracing the pleasure – or, the sharing of sharing of joy – of her courtesan art. This pleasure manifests through her singing, dancing, and cheerful expression in her song. Her resistance within the sexual marketplace to the stereotypes that tie her to it reflects Miller-Young's notion of pornography as a site of resistance. Miller-Young contends that, "in many ways porn is a political theater where—in addition to gender, sex, and class—racial distinctions and barriers are reiterated even as they may also be manipulated

[194] Tamura Lomax reminds us that the Jezebel stereotype is one of many through which "black women are miswritten into religious and cultural history as sites of ultimate human and sexual deviation" (13).

or transformed" (8). The Creole courtesan songs examined in this chapter depict a similar political theatre. In this vein, I consider the singer/narrator's stage to represent a space in which she can not only manipulate but also transform racial and gender stereotypes against women of color into a means of seduction, a source of her wealth, and an expression of her joy in defiance of the social and political structures that seek to oppress her. In other words, her stage is a space of resistance.

In evoking the imagery of the stage, I call attention to the singer/narrator's performance, the place from where she mentors her audience in a feminist *ars erotica.* The mentorship connection that is established between the singer/narrator and her audience facilitates resistance to the racist, imperial, and patriarchal institutions that define mixed-race women as both the embodiment of white men's desires as well as a menace to whiteness and white colonial domination. If the Jezebel is "pornotropic" – meaning she embodies pornographic, hypersexualized stigmas that link her to the gendered legacy of slavery – then the singer/narrator, on one hand, defies this trope by symbolically reversing the colonizer/colonized economic power dynamic within the courtesan/patron relationship. At the same time, she weaponizes this trope in her courtesan art, through her performance. Her stage – that is, the position from which she performs – is the place from which she employs a feminist *ars erotica* to invites Zabet and her audience to "roll like her" – to join her in in the sexual marketplace and to express pleasure through the joy of sharing lessons in the courtesan arts with an audience.

Reading the singer/narrator's resistance in this way suggests, perhaps, a literary version of critically fabulating meanings that can be deciphered within her lyrics. Hartman reminds us that, in seeking out the invisible voices of the historically

marginalized and oppressed, we need not always lean into violence and misery. She contends, in fact, that "the necessity of trying to represent what we cannot, rather than leading to pessimism or despair, must be embraced as the impossibility that conditions our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future" ("Venus" 13). In framing pleasure through the lens of joy in the singer/narrator's lyrics, I echo Hartman's call for identifying the impossibility of filling in some of the historical and literary gaps in the archive. My analysis of the songs in this chapter weaves together historical context and literary analysis to highlight not only how the songs' lyrics depict the inherent violence of this colonized space, but also how mentorship in feminist *ars erotica* opens up the possibility for the singer/narrator to express the pleasure and joy that can be read within her lyrics in spite of this violence.

Considering Hartman's suggestion to avoid letting archival lacuna lead to "pessimism or despair" in our scholarly reflections on the literary past, I suggest that the singer/narrator's joy, as expressed in her lyrics, is a reclaiming of Jezebel – a way of "making and attending to the cultivated silence, exclusions, relations of violence and domination that engender the official accounts" (Hartman, *Scenes* 11). In attending to the "cultivated silence" of a female and/or feminist Creole literary tradition from eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue, this small archive of courtesan music allows us the opportunity to see how these songs and their stories might provide insights into acts of resistance against oppression in these colonized spaces. The singer/narrator's reclaiming of Jezebel is a way of acknowledging the trauma, violence, and continued legacy of slavery while also celebrating the defiance and subversion of racist, sexist, and imperialist oppressions that the singer/narrator portrays in her songs through her laughter, excitement, dancing

and – of course – her singing. Jezebel's stage, therefore, is a liberatory space that allows for her resistance to these intersectional oppressions through the manipulation of stigmas that her oppressors attempt to inscribe on her body. In other words, the singer/narrator embraces Jezebel– with joy – through her *ars erotica* in a way that acknowledges her past while not completely stagnating her in its despair.

CHAPTER FOUR

Where are the *Signares?* Tracing Literary Representations of Influential Women of Color in Eighteenth-Century Gorée and Saint-Louis

In 1776, an official concession of property was made to the *signare* Ouadramé, a habitant of Gorée, Senegal. The land she had requested, legal records indicate, had been promised to her verbally by the administrator general of Gorée.[195] Ouadramé's concession denotes her legal recognition – according to French colonial authorities – as the proprietor of this land as well as her right to pass this land down to her inheritors. This document is unique in that it refers to a *signare* by her title, includes her name, and mentions her legal authority and rights to property in eighteenth-century Gorée. However, this concession of land was one in a series of many in 1776, a time in which, as Marie-Hé1ène Knight-Baylac points out, several *signares* demanded legal land concessions to validate under French colonial authority their proprietorship which had previously only been verbally recognized. Knight-Baylac argues that although these land concessions did not change much about everyday life in Gorée, they demonstrate that "dès le dix-huitième siècle l'île de Gorée était une véritable colonie dans laquelle le statut des indigènes était directement régi – au moins en ce qui concerne la possession de la terre – par la métropole (41).

[195] See appendix F for Ouadramé's 1776 land concession, digitized through the *Archives d'Outre-Mer* in Aix-en-Provence, France.

While I would agree that these concessions are indicative of the presence of French colonial authorities in Senegal, I find that they highlight another very important aspect of Goréen society in the eighteenth century. If, as Knight-Baylac posits, these land concessions changed nothing about quotidian life, then they are indicative of the socioeconomic power and influence of the *signares* in this trade-port city. They symbolize the status and power of these influential women of color in the face of French colonial oppression.

Ouadramé's land concession, in addition to recognizing her property ownership, also indicates an important feature of *signare* culture – the passing on of land and wealth to inheritors named by the *signare* herself, and the use of colonial legal systems to solidify these contracts. It was the *signares*, rather than French colonial powers, who held authority over not only these land concessions, but the entirety of the economic marketplace in the important eighteenth-century European trade outposts of Gorée and Saint-Louis. The significance of the identification of the *signares* and their elite positions in early modern Senegambian society is a story that has, in the past few decades, garnered the attention of historians seeking to uncover the culture, traditions, and influence – social, economic, and political – of these women. Importantly, historians have sought to uncover why these highly influential women hold such an obscure – if not invisible – place in the early modern historical archive. Hilary Jones, for instance, discusses this obscurity in her book *The Métis of Senegal,* noting that the invisibility of the *signares* in the historical archive is directly linked to who was documenting these women and how. She specifically points to eighteenth-century European visitors to Gorée and Saint-Louis who "wrote of their fascination and attraction to *signares*, but their

accounts rendered African women as the anonymous objects of male desire" (4). These eighteenth-century accounts, therefore, situate the *signares* as objects of white male desire rather than as active agents in a local economy and international trade system that grew increasingly more violent in the era of the Transatlantic slave trade.

As a result of their historical archival obscurity the *signares* have received limited scholarly attention in literary studies. That is to say, the presence of literary representations of the *signares* in the early modern archive are, indeed, scarce. This scarcity in the literary archive is surprising considering that today, the *signares* are celebrated in Senegal as cultural and historical icons. De Jong notes that they are even represented yearly in the *Fanal de Saint Louis* (the Lantern Festival of Saint Louis).[196] But who are these iconic women? James F. Searing suggests that the *signares* are linked to "three separate currents of emigration to the islands," the first of which consists of tradeswomen who expanded their market activities through their relationships with European merchants, followed by women from mainland Africa whose trade with the Portuguese signals the etymological origins of their honorific title, and a final migratory group who were captive women brought to Saint Louis and Gorée through the slave trade and were chosen by European traders as mistresses.[197] The *signares,* in other words, represent a racially and culturally diverse class of expert tradeswomen whose commercial

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[196] De Jong explains that the *Fanal* is a cultural event linked to the *signares* that was revived in 1998, explaining that "The revival of the Fanal is part of a burgeoning interest in Senegal's heritage of métissage and in particular of its signares, a brand of métis women known for their wealth and extravagance who dominated the social and economic life in the European trade posts of the eighteenth century" ("Shining Lights" 39).

[197] See Searing pp. 100 for his full analysis of the cultural/ethnic origins of the *signares.*

dealings and connections to European merchants built their wealth and status throughout the early modern era.[198]

In this chapter, I seek to broaden the scope of existing scholarship on the *signares* by engaging in a literary analysis of a nineteenth-century fictional representation of these women as told through the story of Maïssa the *signare* and her two daughters, Sléma and Mzaouda, who feature in Gabriel de la Landelle's fictional series *Les Princes D'Ébène* (1852). Following a similar methodological approach as chapter three, I engage in a stretching of the literary archive by using a variety of source materials to draw connections between eighteenth-century travel narratives, nineteenth-century fiction, and current scholarship that explores the cultural practices and historic memory of the *signares*.

My engagement with Landelle's fictional series links *signare* representation to eighteenth-century travel narratives by identifying parallels between Maïssa's fictional portrayal and depictions of the *signares* in Dominique Lamiral's *L'Afrique et le Peuple Africain* (1789) and Antoine Edmé Pruneau de Pommegorge's *Description de la Nigritie.* (1789). Because the *signares* are frequently considered in these works to be mixed-race women, I also incorporate Moreau de Saint-Méry's racial taxonomies as defined in his *Description Topographique* (1789) in my analysis of the literary representation of Maïssa

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[198] Guillaume Vila provides an excellent summary of the cultural-linguistic significations of the term *signare* in Senegalese history, explaining that: "au depart, le terme [*signare*] signifiait *dame* ou maîtresse, signalant une autonomie d'agissements et une prépondérance socio-économique indéniables, puis il en vient à désigner les femmes métisses, partie du groupe, devenu englobant, des métis qui affirment leur différence ' raciale' au sein de la communauté des habitants du comptoirs" (141).

and her biracial children. These texts depict what Doris Garraway calls a "sexual allegory" of white male desire that allowed whites to imagine "their own political, racial, and sexual supremacy over nonwhites while at the same time representing the reproductive consequences of white male libertinage" (247).[199] Where Garraway specifies the racial taxonomies of Saint-Méry to be a sexual allegory, I consider all of these travel narratives to collectively depict a sexual allegory tied to the white male gaze that fetishizes a combination of colonial domination, women's sexual vulnerability, and white racial superiority. The white male desiring gaze on the mixed-race woman's body manifests through the focus of the travel narratives and Landelle's series on the physical appearance of the *signares*. My analysis finds traces of *signare* subversion of the white male gaze of the authors and readers of these texts.

In identifying the sexual allegory of white male desire and its subversion, I contend that within these eighteenth-century travel narratives and Landelle's fictional series there are not only references to *signare* culture, but hints of *signare* resistance to French colonial oppression to be found within – and despite – their racist and sexualized portrayals in these works. The overarching goal of this chapter, then, is to identify what travel narratives and fiction might tell us about *signare* culture and the resistance of these women to the intersecting oppressions of racism and sexism inherent to colonial oppression in eighteenth-century West Africa.[200] I am proposing, therefore, a resistant

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[199] Where Garraway considers the racial taxonomies of Saint-Méry to be a sexual allegory, I consider the texts (of Saint-Méry, Lamiral, and Pommegorge) in full to depict a sexual allegory that is tied to the white male gaze that fetishizes colonial.
[200] Lisa Ze Winters covers at length the intersectional oppressions of racism and sexism under imperialist oppression in Senegal in her book *the Mulatta Concubine.* Her analysis of *signares* in art, mythology, and the historical archive

reading of these eighteenth and nineteenth-century materials that subverts the while male gaze on the *signares* by identifying traces of mentorship between women that link them to a specifically female form of cultural resistance to European oppression. This reading is resistant in that I identify the stereotypical and prejudicial portrayal of the *signares* within these texts while simultaneously analyzing how these depictions actually (unintentionally) highlight how these women – both in their historical and fictional manifestations – resist white European cultural oppression.

Crucial to a resistant reading of these texts is an understanding of the context in which the *signares* maintained social, financial, and political influence in a colonized space as women of color. In fact, mixed-race identity plays an important role in my analysis of *signare* identity not only because it is indicative of these women's diverse African and European origins, but also how they were regarded by white European men as *mulâtresses* – a racial category that carried a litany of racist and sexist connotations in the eighteenth century. As we saw in the previous chapter, Saint-Méry perpetuated notions of hypersexuality associated with *mulâtresses* which fueled white libidinous desire for these women.[201] The *signare* character that I examine in this chapter represents a second or third generation *signare* by virtue of her mixed-race heritage. Aissata Kane Lo explains the racial variations in different generations of *signares a*nd when they appear in Senegal, noting that, "de la deuxième moitié du XVIIe à la fin XVIIIe siècle, une première génération constituée pour l'essentiel des femmes noires, qui se rapprochent

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identifies, amongst many things, the "sexualized and racialized terror endured by the enslaved *and* free(d) women of color in Atlantic slave entrepôts" (71).

[201] Saint-Méry claims, for instance, that "L'être entier d'une mulâtresse est livré à la volupté" (92).

plus de l'aristocratie sénégalaise; de la fin du XVIIIe siècle à 1854 […] une seconde génération dominée par les métisses" (14). The mixed-race heritage of Maïssa combined with her generational distinction demonstrates both the *signare* sexual economy with European men as well as the matriarchal system of mentorship in *feminist ars erotica* that maintained the proliferation of *signare* status and wealth in eighteenth-century Senegal. Traces of matriarchal mentorship in *signare* culture, then, are alluded to through the *signare* practices modeled by Maïssa, her mother, and her daughters in Landelle's series.

Mixed-race identity also underscores the series' reliance on the trope of the tragic mulatta to drive Maïssa, and her daughters' – Sléma and Mzaouda – respective plots forward. This literary figure, as Eva Allegra Raimon reminds us, is often depicted in as "an educated light-skinned heroine whose white benefactor and paramour […] dies, leaving her to the auction block and/or the sexual designs of a malevolent creditor" (9). The tragic mulatta is the literary embodiment of white European anxieties about miscegenation, and she is "almost always portrayed as the beautiful victim of her own perverse breeding" (Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus 60). My analysis of Maïssa's and her daughters' portrayals in *Les Princes D'Ébène* offers a resistant reading of Landelle's series, as well as the eighteenth-century travel narratives that informed it, in two ways. First, although I identify Maïssa and her daughters as tragic mulatta figures, my reading of this text highlights how their tragic stories reflect their connection to each other and their *signare* heritage. Second, a resistant reading allows not only for the identification of the *signare* cultural connection between Maïssa and her daughters, but also how these characters' stories specifically depict a matriarchal system of mentorship in *ars erotica* linked to the *signare* cultural practice of *mariage à la mode du pays.*

Mentorships amongst the *signares* helped solidify their influence in Gorée and Saint-Louis, and therefore helped them to manipulate the racial and gendered prejudices that they encountered through their business dealings with European merchants, aiding them in becoming a powerful force in the colonized spaces that they inhabited. I highlight in this chapter how these mentorships reflect a feminist *ars erotica* similar to the courtesan arts seen in other chapters. Although the *signares* bear their own honorific title, their unofficial marriages – or *mariages à la mode du pays* – to European merchants resembles the sexual commerce of courtesans.[202] In this sense, the *signares* follow and ethos of courtesan artistic practices that lead to their expansion of wealth and social status through connections to lucrative European trade markets. In sum, the feminist *ars erotica* that I am referring to in this chapter encompasses the cultural and economic practices that make up what I refer to as *signare* culture. This culture includes their business dealings, their marriage practices, and their artistic forms of self-expression. Importantly, this *feminist ars erotica* is based off a matriarchal system of mentorship that reflects the ways in which, to borrow Sarah Zimmerman's phrasing, "*signares* folded mainland African traditions of matriarchy, matrilineality, and female entrepreneurialism into the island's sociocultural practices" (22).[203] Mentorship, as I conceptualize it in this chapter, reflects

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[202] Searing actually refers to the *signares* as courtesans explaining that "[As] Courtesans and caregivers, the intimacy of the *signares* with European traders offered them lucrative opportunities for private gain, as Europeans accepted the cultural role of male providers and paid for the privilege of marriage like local men" (100).

[203] Ferdinand de Jong explains that that children born out of *marriages à la mode du pays* were given the surname of the French father and also a small inheritance from him (*Decolonizing Heritage* 76). What Zimmerman points out is that the *signares,* additionally, maintained matriarchal systems of inheritance. In this

one way in which *signares* wove African traditions of matriarchy into their sexual economy with European men.

However, *signare* mentorship goes beyond their sexual and commercial economy with white men, encompassing an artistic practice of resistance through self-adornment. Depictions of *signares* in the travel narratives and Landelle's series, focusing heavily on the appearance of these women, reference self-fashioning frequently. Although these portraits of *signares* reflect the white male gaze upon these women, they also signal what Aissata Kane Lo refers to as part of the "arsenal séducteur des *signares*" (131). Jewelry not only symbolizes the *signares'* social distinction but represents a crucial feature of their art and their performance which attracts the attention of white male observers at the same time as it privileges the expression of their African – rather than European – culture. Like the courtesan *mulâtresses* from chapter three, public performance (in the form of self-fashioning) helps the *signares* to maintain social/political/economic influence and mobility. I link performance in this chapter to the art of self-adornment as public displays of wealth through fashion are a form of social performance that distinguishes the *signares* from other women of color in Gorée and Saint-Louis. Although, historically, the *signares* displayed various forms of self-fashioning unique to their culture – such as clothing and headdresses – I focus in this chapter on jewelry as this form of self-fashioning appears prominently in both the fictional series and the travel narratives that I examine. In sum, self-adornment serves in this chapter as a manifestation of the *signares'* performance of a feminist *ars erotica* which resists European cultural

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sense, the *signares* also "folded" African traditions into French colonial systems – such as patriarchal inheritance – as well.

oppression while also attracting the attention of European men – all of which helps them to build their elite social status.

In what follows, I will examine Landelle's depiction of *signare* culture through the three main female characters in the novel – Maïssa, Sléma and Mzaouda. Throughout my analysis I will intertwine representations of mixed-race women that appear in the works of Saint-Méry, Lamiral, and Pommegorge to draw connections between these texts and the fictional representation of *signares* in *Les Princes d'Ébène.* Each character analysis will highlight both the racist and sexist overtones of these texts associated with the white male gaze of the author and reader as well as a resistant reading of these oppressive narrative tactics which identifies the matriarchal system of *signare* mentorship in feminist *ars erotica* through the relationality of Maïssa and her daughters expressed in the series.

Maïssa, la *signare*

G. de la Landelle does not shy away from the tragic mulatta plotline in his writing of Maïssa's story in *Les Princes d'Ébène.* Her story begins with the death of her husband, followed by her home being taken upon and burned by pirates, then being separated from two of her three children. She is subsequently sold into slavery with one of her daughters, finds out her son has been killed, and, finally, she and her daughter are rescued by an African prince who her daughter marries. The role of gender cannot be dissociated from the tragic mulatta figure because, as Raimon reminds us, "the very tragedy of the figure's fate depends upon her female gender. The sexual vulnerability of a female light-skinned

slave is essential to propel the plot forward and to generate the reader's sympathy and outrage" (5). Maïssa and her daughter's captivity will echo notions of sexual vulnerability attributed to the tragic mulatta figure, and it will be sexual capital that leads them out of slavery through her daughter's marriage.[204]

Tragic indeed, Maïssa's story spans five volumes of *Les Princes D'Ébène,* with her first appearance occurring in the second section of volume one, titled "La Case aux Palmes."[205] The title of this section of the series references a piece of land which contains a primary residence where Maïssa and her family reside, as well as smaller residences for those who work, as slaves (*griots*/*griottes*) in the surrounding areas of the property.[206] The "Case aux Palmes," as the starting location of Maïssa's story, signifies the contentious place that *signares* occupy in historical memory. As many historians have pointed out, the *signares* – as expert merchants and business owners in the early modern era – were involved in the slave trade both through commercial exchange and by owning slaves themselves.[207] Slavery played a significant role in the economic and social makeup

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[204] Mzaouda's marriage is not what saves the two women, but the prince who buys their freedom does seek to marry Mzaouda and so I consider her sexual capital a pathway towards freedom in this scenario.

[205] I analyze five volumes of *Les Princes d'Ébène* in this chapter because these are the ones available digitally. As this is a somewhat obscure series, I am not aware of any additional volumes and, due to limitations on archival research that I was able to engage in during this project, I have not been able to locate any outside of the five studied in this chapter. If any further volumes exist, I am not sure if Maïssa and/or her daughters appear in them.

[206] Searing indicates that *griot/griotte* was a category of slaves in the Wolof caste system, and that *griots* often were featured as musicians and performers in *signare* ceremonies (39; 56). He also indicates that the Wolof term *griot* is be akin to a bard (10). As the slave women are performing a song in honor of Maïssa, it is likely that they fall into this caste.

[207] Jessica Marie Johnson explains of the slave trade in Saint-Louis that "by the 1740s both the annual convoy and productive activity within Saint-Louis were

of Gorée and Saint-Louis, and the *signares* utilized slave labor for domestic and agricultural work in these cities to perpetuate the growth of their material wealth and social influence.

In considering the *signares* role in slavery, it is important to distinguish between the transatlantic slave trade and local slavery in Gorée and Saint-Louis in the eighteenth-century. Searing describes local slavery in Gorée and Saint-Louis as a caste system rooted in Wolof cultural practice which essentially ranked slaves by type of labor.[208] Zimmerman explains that within this caste system, manumission from local slavery was possible and that nineteenth-century visitors to the islands often described affective kinship-like ties between slaves and slave owners. However, Zimmerman reminds us, this "did not eliminate the precarity and violence of slavery [as] enslaved Goréens could be sold into the Transatlantic world and were more affected by food shortages and epidemics" (23). The *signares*, therefore, had a hand in both the proliferation of chattel slavery through the Transatlantic slave trade and local slave systems that served to maintain Goréen and Saint-Louisan social caste hierarchies. The notion of kinship-like bonds between the *signares* and their slaves also hints at the moralization of slavery

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dominated by slaves owned mostly by women called *signares* […] who were crucial to the local economy, the export economy, and the development of Saint-Louis (41). Sarah J. Zimmerman likewise points out the role of the *signares* in the Goréen slave market, noting that "the "decline" of the *signares* was tethered to slave abolition" (21).

[208] Searing explains this caste system, including the different ranks of slaves and the types of labor that provided for the free population of Gorée and Saint-Louis. He indicates that the *signares* participated in both local slavery as well as the transatlantic slave trade. See his chapter "Merchants and Slaves: slaver on Saint Lous and Gorée" for more detailed historical analysis of the slave caste system as well as the role of the *signares* in chattel slavery in the eighteenth century.

which Naomi J. Andrews posits pervaded pro-slavery arguments. The image of the nuclear family was a key component of these pro-slavery ideologies that argued for the "civilizing" of slaves through patriarchal notions of nuclear family systems.[209] In other words, associating slavery with notions of family softened the blow of the inherent violence perpetuated by slave owners.

In *Les Princes d'Ébène,* Maïssa is introduced by a song being sung by *griottes,* or female slaves, whose role was to sing and perform for the wealthy, free population of Gorée and Saint-Louis. The song praises Maïssa's beauty:

> Parmi les dames de N'dar en est-il une aussi belle que Maïssa la signare; Maïssa est un collier d'ambre et de corail; les fleurs de rote sont moins parfumées que son haleine; son sourire à la fraicheur de la brise du large; son chant est le roucoulement de la tourterelle, sa voix descendue sur mon cœur comme une rosée d'amour!" (vol. 1, 210-211)[210]

The inclusion of slave women singing a song of praise about Maïssa – a slave owner – reflects a certain romanticization of slavery, especially as idealized female slaves were often portrayed in nineteenth-century literature as obedient.[211] The *griottes* singing about Maïssa demonstrates not only submissiveness, but a veritable worship of their mistress,

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[209] Naomi J. Andrews explains that pro-slavery arguments in the nineteenth century (the *esclavagistes*) "relied on a construct of family unity to make their case, imagining the nuclear family as a means of domesticating and civilizing both workers and slaves, thereby bringing them into the fold of the larger French family" (662).

[210] *N'dar* is the Wolof name for this region in eighteenth-century Senegambia.

[211] Marcus Wood argues in his analysis of William Blake's *Visions of the daughters of Albion*, for instance, that in Blake's work "the slave woman is shown as an idealized masochist whose obedience extends to the positive worship of her persecutors" (185).

as the omniscient narrator describes that: "Les jeunes négresses de la Case-aux-Palmes s'animaient au travail en répétant les strophes composées à la louange de leur maîtresse" (vol. 1, 215-216).[212] Situating Maïssa from the beginning as a benign slave owner whose adherence to the local caste system separates her from the violent, cruel market of chattel slavery helps to build the reader's sympathy for her later tragic plight. This is especially important as Maïssa herself will be sold into slavery, further differentiating the cultural practice of caste slavery in Gorée and Saint-Louis from the terrors of the Transatlantic slave trade.

Aside from this song signaling Maïssa's position as a slave owner, it calls attention to the beauty of this *signare* character. She is, for instance, metaphorically described as a "necklace of amber and coral" (*un collier d'ambre et de corail*). This description of Maïssa as a necklace reflects the novel's essentializing of gender through the patriarchal association of women with adornment. This is an example of what E. Claire Cage describes as the practice of invoking nature to "reify femininity" through "the dominant paradigmatic understandings of gender and fashion at the time [which] held that "natural" sexual difference should also be reflected in dress" (199). Landelle's use of the metaphor of the amber and coral necklace, in other words, transforms Maïssa into an object of patriarchally-defined femininity.

The association of *signares* with jewelry is reflected in Pommegorge's observations of these women, as he describes that they have an affinity for gold and

[212] *Négresse* in this quote refers to the aforementioned *griottes* who were singing, denoting not only their slave status but also specifying the race of these slaves (Black African women).

"avec cet or, ces femmes font fabriquer une partie en bijoux, et l'autre partie est employée à acheter des vêtements, car elles aiment, comme partout ailleurs, la parure. Leurs habillements, quoique très élégants, leur sied très bien" (4). Lamartine, likewise, makes this connection between the *signares* and European women in terms of their love of adornment, noting that, "leurs oreilles sont chargés de joyaux d'or très-artistement travaillés en filagramme par des orfèvres Maures; mais elles sont aussi capricieuses et aussi changeantes que nos élégantes" (47). Both authors reflect the prevailing eighteenth-century association of *parure* (self-adornment) with patriarchal conceptualizations of sexual difference that link self-adornment to femininity and cast it as "one of the principals, innate, and relatively unimportant concerns of all women" (Jennifer M. Jones 949). The association of women with *parure* in these texts essentializes femininity through a white Western patriarchal definition of gendered difference manifested through material modes of adornment. Maïssa's textual objectification as a necklace not only essentializes her femininity but does so through a white male European lens that ignores any cultural significance of self-adornment outside of this framework.

If, however, we read the metaphor of the amber and coral necklace as a transformation rather than only an objectification of femininity, then Maïssa's metaphorical description as a piece of *signare* adornment represents resistance rather than submission to European cultural oppression. Put differently, *signares* used self-adornment to publicly display wealth on their bodies in a way that celebrates African tradition. While it is true that white Europeans likewise used jewelry to symbolize

wealth, these displays of elite status take on different meanings in a colonized space.[213] For the *signares,* self-adornment represents a crucial feature of the performative function of feminist *ars erotica.*

In terms of public performance of *signare* culture, fashion and jewelry are important aspects of artistic self-expression. Anne Lafont contends that self-fashioning is form of "female art" that reclaims women's adornment from its patriarchal clutches and designates it as an artform that is created and curated by women.[214] Considering their *parure* in this way recasts self-adornment as an "Afropean" artform unique to the *signares*.[215] This artistic expression, furthermore, cannot be abstracted from the *signares* public presence. Displays of *signare* wealth and culture through jewelry and fashion were more than just a way to bedazzle the body. This practice took on a political meaning in the context of the growing presence of French colonial authorities when "appearance, in its sophistication and distinctiveness, proves to be a political technique addressed at once to the women and men already subject to the *signares* and those they seek to conquer in order to consolidate a superior social, political, and economic position" (Lafont 1001). At the same time, *signare parure* captured the attention of European men, as evidenced through observations of these women by European travel writers who overwhelmingly focused on their appearance.

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[213] Jones discusses the luxury associated with fashion and jewelry in eighteenth-century France, noting that this was a source of tension amongst many philosophers such as Rousseau who worried about the moral degradation associated with excess luxury.
[214] See Lafont, 993-994 for her analysis of the fashion of the *signares* as well as photographs/visual analysis of their adornments.
[215] I borrow the term "Afropean" from Lafont who uses this term to describe specifically *signare* self-fashioning practices.

If the *signares* can reclaim for themselves their art of self-adornment and pry its signification from the white European male gaze, then their *parure* symbolizes their differentiation from both African captives and the white Europeans living in Gorée and Saint-Louis. Self-adornment, rooted in the *signares* "Afropean" culture, then, becomes a way to actively resist the influence of European culture as it is expressed on the *signares'* bodies. If we consider *signare* self-adornment as an artform that defies European cultural oppression, then Landelle's objectification of Maïssa transforms her into an object of *signare* resistance.

Maïssa's appearance continues to be the focus of her initial introduction as the narrator takes over the story to describe her racial appearance, emphasizing her mixed-race heritage:

> Maïssa, fille et petite-fille d'Européens, était, par sa mère, d'origine mauresque; elle avait le teint légèrement brun d'une Andalouse, les traits d'une pureté antique, les cheveux noirs et lisses, les yeux noirs, chatoyants, et fréquemment violé par une mélancolie contemplative. Rêveuse et nonchalante, elle ne s'animait qu'à l'approche d'un danger réel ou imaginaire. (vol. 1, 214)

In this description, Maïssa's connection to European heritage is referenced twice, both in her familial ties to Europe (*fille et petite-fille d'Européens*) as well as the comparison of her skin tone to that of an *Andalouse.*[216] This repeated emphasis on her race denotes an attention to the sexual economy between *signares* and European men that was often the

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[216] "*Andalouse*" here is a reference to Andalusia, the southernmost peninsula of Spain and likely a reference to the Spanish colonization of North Africa, which occurred on and off starting in the sixteenth century.

focus of eighteenth-century travel narratives. Pommegorge, for instance, describes that "les femmes de cette île, en général, sont fort attachées aux blancs" (3). Maïssa's race represents the illicit union that led to her birth, symbolizing white male desire for mixed-race women in colonized spaces and echoing eighteenth-century stereotypes about the sexuality of women of color.[217]

In addition to the sexual and racial undertones evoked through her description, we can also decipher a hint at the racial diversity of the *signares* as a group and their inextricable association with *métissage,* or the intermixing of races. Maïssa, for instance, is likely of North African and European parentage. As Kano Lo explains, *métissage* was a key feature of the *signares* as a group that linked them generationally. She contends that "de la deuxième moitié du XVIIe à la fin XVIIIe siècle, une première génération constituée pour l'essentiel des femmes noires, qui se rapprochent plus de l'aristocratie sénégalaise; de la fin du XVIIIe siècle à 1854 […] une seconde génération dominée par les métisses, qui correspond à l'affirmation d'une identité signare originale" (14). *Métissage*, in other words, represents a core aspect of *signare* identity which is emphasized through the narrator's portrait of Maïssa.

Evoking her métis heritage calls attention to the important cultural fluidity and adaptability of the *signares.* As Jones reminds us "*signares* gave birth to an intermediary class who had the cultural dexterity to move between British, French, or African

[217] In chapter three, I called attention to the hypersexuality associated with mixed-race women citing Saint-Méry's description of *mulâtresses* in Saint-Domingue as inherently voluptuous (95). Doris Garraway explains these stereotypes extensively in *The Libertine Colony,* as does Lisa Ze Winters in *The Mulatta Concubine.*

authorities" (20). This flexibility to move between colonizing cultures and understand both external European and internal African cultural and economic practices lends itself to the *signares'* significant influence on the trade economy of Gorée and Saint-Louis. *Métissage*, as evoked through Maïssa's portrait, symbolizes this cultural fluidity which becomes an essential tool during her time in captivity in the novel. When Maïssa and her daughter, Mzaouda, are saved from slavery by an African Prince – the founder of the fictional empire of Diangol in the series –Maïssa makes note of his race, accent, and demeanor upon meeting him. The narrator describes of this initial meeting that the prince at first hides his face and his royal status from the women:[218]

> Maïssa essayait en vain de pénétrer le sens de ces paroles; elle supposa que l'inconnue avait été, comme elle-même, réduit en esclavage et vendu au centre de l'Afrique; mais il semblait être zélé musulman, le roi lui-même s'inclinait devant lui; sa puissance et sa richesse paraissaient être sans égales d'après ses propres discours; il parlait d'expédier des caravanes et d'acheter des captives en tout pays comme d'une chose facile; pourquoi donc se cachait-il la figure, et que signifiait son langage? (vol. 5, 293)

Maïssa's stream of consciousness in this scene reflects a *signare* subjectivity that highlights her ability to navigate cultural contexts foreign to her own.[219] Her ruminations

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[218] It is later explained that the prince hides his face to hide that he is Black because he has purchased Maïssa and Mzaouda to free them from their bondage in hopes of marrying the latter. However, he is aware of, as he puts it "la répulsion des femmes de leur couleur pour les hommes de la mienne" calling attention to the *signare* habit of marrying white Europeans or wealthy métis men (vol. 5, 201).

[219] I use "subjectivity" in the vein of Chris Weedon's definition of subjectivity in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* which she summarizes as "the

over the behavior, wealth, freed status, religion, and language of this stranger alludes to the cultural fluidity of *signares* which was a necessary element of their success as elite tradeswomen. *Signare* subjectivity, in other words, requires conscious reflection on the cultural and economic backgrounds of the people that they meet and do business with for their commercial dealings to be successful. These same considerations are echoed in Maïssa's contemplations in the above quote. Her *signare* subjectivity is tied to her mixed-race identity which symbolizes her connection to both European and African cultural and economic practices.

Métissage in the novel not only plays an important role in Maïssa's story but in those of her children whose destinies are tethered to their race in the series. The narrator describes her children as follows:

> Sléma n'était encore qu'une enfant blanche comme l'ivoire; ses cheveux châtains et ses yeux noirs tranchaient vivement sur les nuances délicates de son teint; elle tenait de son père une vivacité plus française, un sourire plus enjoué que celui de Mzaouda, la brune enfant du Sénégal. Mais Saïbolé, à peine âgé de huit ans, conservait dans toute sa pureté le type maternel. Enfant farouche et sérieux, il était Africain par le regard, par les teintes bronzées de sa peau, par son opiniâtreté patiente, par ses jeux sauvages. (vol. 1, 225)

The varied combinations of racial characteristics attributed to each of Maïssa's children reflects the importance of the generational heritage of *métissage* associated with the

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conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (32-33).

signares that signaled, as Jones reminds us, a mark of prestige especially in the nineteenth century.[220]

Although the *métis* population of nineteenth-century Senegal may have considered the linking of their racial identity to a *signare* a point of distinction, the narrator of *Les Princes D'Ébène* uses the mixed-race identities of Maïssa's children to reflect French cultural anxieties surrounding racial mixing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The narrator differentiates between darker and lighter-skinned *métis* children by incorporating increasingly racist associations with each darker skinned child. These racist distinctions between skin tones reflect eighteenth-century racial taxonomies that identify the categories of "white" and "black" as origin points of miscegenation, with white representing the superior of the two. Saint-Méry iterates this notion in *Description Topographique :*

> Les Affranchis […] sont des individus offrant une grande variété dans les nuances par leur mélange avec les Blancs, avec les nègres et entre eux-mêmes; Mélange qui pouvant se faire avec des différentes combinaisons de nuances, donne, à son tour, naissance à des combinaisons nouvelles. Les deux extrêmes sont pour ces Affranchis d'un côté le nègre et de l'autre des individus dont la couleur ne montre aucune différence sensible, lorsqu'on la compare à celle du Blanc. (70)

Saint-Méry specifies that even biracial people who appear physically white are only in proximity to whiteness. They are not, so to speak, "purely" white. Although Saint-

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[220] Jones explains that "For the métis, tracing one's ancestry to an eighteenth-century signare and a European soldier or merchant conferred respectability and acceptance within the upper echelons of the group" (14).

Méry's pseudo-scientific system of racial classification attempts to describe the population of Saint-Domingue, Lamiral and Pommegorge each reflect a similar white Euro-supremacist attitude towards race mixing in Gorée and Saint-Louis. Pommegorge, for instance, attempts to identify a series of supposed categories of race in his observations of the inhabitants of eighteenth-century Senegal, using terminology similar to that found in Saint-Méry's racial tableaux: "de chaque côté du fort est un grand village; celui qui est situé à gauche, se nomme le côté des chrétiennes, où sont retirées toutes les métives, métis, mulâtres, mulâtresses, quarterons, quarteronnes, et les négresses libres avec tous les captifs" (2-3). Furthermore, for these eighteenth-century travel writers, race was not only a matter of appearance but also a matter of behavior. Lamiral asserts his racist belief in the behavioral degradation that he attributes to race-mixing, stating that:

> Au comble où est porté parmi nous la corruption des mœurs de l'un et de l'autre sexe, il est moralement démontré que le mélange du sang Africain influera bientôt dans nos actions, en infectant de plus en plus la source pure de notre origine. Ce germe pestilentiel, attaquant également notre moral et notre physique, deviendra en cela plus funeste que cette maladie honteuse et meurtrière que nous a procuré la découverte du nouveau monde. (210-211)

Lamiral's contention that African blood could cause detrimental effects to the presumed superiority of white morality reflects Saint-Méry's notion that mixed-race Africans, no matter how "visibly white," can never really attain the same measure of whiteness – or the privileges associated with it – as their European counterparts. In *Les Princes d'Ébène,* the descriptions of Maïssa's children reflect these pseudo-scientific racial classifications

that were used to reify notions of white European superiority in an era of increasing French imperialist projects.[221] The children's narrative trajectories are intricately tied to their racial representation, and as their pigmentation gets darker so do their stories.

After their home is taken upon by pirates and Sléma and Saïbolé are separated from Maïssa and her middle daughter Mzaouda (who remain together for the rest of the story), the narrative shifts back and forth between Sléma's and Maïssa/Mzaouda's stories. Saïbolé, who is described as the most "African" of the children (*il était Africain par le regard*) and who likes to play "savage games" (*les jeux sauvages*), no longer features as a main character in the story except in his mother and sisters' memories as he, sadly, is killed. Mzaouda, described as the only "brown" one of the children (*la brune enfant du Sénégal*) is sold into slavery with her mother, though the two are later freed from bondage. Finally, Sléma, the "whitest" of the three children (*qu'une enfant blanche comme l'ivoire*) is rescued by Victor, her father's (white, French) cousin, and taken to France to live with her aunt. Landelle, in other words, organizes the level of tragedy in this narrative according to the varying degrees of noticeable distance from whiteness that each character embodies. Maïssa, like her mother, becomes a *signare* and marries a wealthy European captain, named Armand who, in the tradition of the tragic mulatta story, dies at the beginning of her tale.

While there are clear racist overtones to the novel when considering the trajectories of each of these characters in combination with their racial characterization,

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[221] As I discussed in chapter three, these racial taxonomies represented French anxieties surrounding racial mixing. Doris Garraway discusses these anxieties at length in *The Libertine Colony.*

there is also an important symbolism attached to the notion of *signare* generational heritage that is portrayed through Maïssa, her children, and references to Maïssa's mother in the narrative. The gradually negative outcome of Maïssa's mixed-race children reflects their embodiment of the taboos associated with the "forbidden desire" that encompassed biracial relationships in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[222] Mixed-race children, as the products of these illicit unions between women of color and white European men, carry the stigma of race mixing on their bodies which they inherit from their mothers, not their white fathers. The taboos associated with race, then, are generationally linked through maternal lineage and are portrayed in *Les Princes d'Ébène* in the increasingly troubling racist depictions of each darker skinned child as well as those children's respective tragic paths in the series.

However, a resistant reading of this maternal lineage in the novel allows for a focus on the how these racialized maternal lines might also symbolize a maternal lineage of *signare* mentorship. For instance, it is made clear in the series that Maïssa's mother is also a *signare*. Although this is hinted at in Maïssa's introduction to the story (*Maïssa, fille et petite-fille d'Européens, était, par sa mère, d'origine mauresque),* in volume five of the series the narrator more overtly identifies her mother as a *signare* describing that "suivant l'usage ordinaire des *signares*, la mère de Maïssa avait contracté successivement plusieurs mariages temporaires" (vol. 5, 227). What the narrator highlights here is the

[222] Garraway notes that mixed-race children became in the eighteenth-century "the new objects of taboo, considered not only to embody the forbidden desire but to tempt the white community into sexual immorality" (209).

signare practice of *mariage à la mode du pays*.[223] These marriages, as Jones reminds us, were temporary and gave *signares* the agency to choose new husbands once their union with their previous one ended – as in the example of Maïssa's mother who had a series of temporary marriages. Maïssa, then, follows the example of her mother in becoming a *signare* – a lineage uniquely passed down through the maternal line, as it was women (*signares*) entering into these temporary unions.

These temporary unions, importantly, has distinct roots in Wolof culture, thus the French designation for this type of union *à la mode du pays*. Jones explains that these marriage practices had "more in common with marriage practices of Wolof society than in the Western European Ideal" (36). Tracing elements of matriarchal systems of *signare* mentorship through this shared practice of *mariage à la mode du pays* amongst these women serves to highlight how they privilege, at least in this practice, African over European cultural traditions. However, simply becoming a *signare* does not indicate that this generational connection implies mentorship. Mentorship involves guiding a future *signare* in practices of *signare* culture including marrying for financial and social benefit as well as publicly performant an artistic self-expression rooted in African culture. Although it is not overtly stated that Maïssa mentors her daughters in these customs, their fidelity to these aspects of *signare* culture suggests that these are traditions passed on from their mother, as her mother passed them on to her. Parallels made between Maïssa and her daughters include hints at the continued *signare* practice of *mariage à la mode du*

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[223] Jones explains that "*mariage à la mode du pays"* was the name given for the unions between *signares* and European men which "typically ended upon the death or permanent departure of the husband from Senegal, thereby allowing the signare the freedom to remarry" (19).

pays as well as artistic forms self-expression – both of which allude to a matriarchal system of mentorship in *signare* culture in Sléma and Mzaouda's stories.

Sléma, "*L'enfant blanche*"

In tracing parallels between Maïssa and her daughters, I focus primarily on the themes of marriage and race as these are the two most visible features of *signare* culture in the historical archive that are reflected in Landelle's series. Sléma's marriage occurs after she has been sent to France following her rescue from pirates by Victor, her father's cousin. While in France, her aunt, la Comtesse de Mareulles, arranges a marriage for Sléma against her will. Luckily, Victor steps in and offers to marry her instead. Although the marriage to Victor stems from extenuating circumstances within the novel, it underscores the important tenet of choice in *signare* marriage practices built into the conditions of *mariage à la mode du pays.*

Mariages à la mode du pays were a staple of *signare* culture and are frequently mentioned in eighteenth-century travel narratives. Saint-Méry, Lamiral, and Pommegorge each discuss these unofficial marriages in their writings. Lamiral, for instance, identifies the benefits of this arrangement for both parties involved: "[il] avait lui-même un bâtiment à lui sous le nom d'une belle Mulâtresse, son épouse à la mode du pays, où l'on traitait pour son compte" (294).[224] A mutually beneficial union, these unofficial

[224] Saint-Méry describes marriages *à la mode du pays* in his explanation of the polygamous tendencies of women from Africa which he describes as a "commerce illégitime avec les Blancs" (95). Pommegorge likewise iterates the notion of illegitimate commerce in his anecdotal account of priests who marry

marriages helped the *signares* to retain agency within their relationships and their households. It is because these marriages were not legitimate in the eyes of the French government that the *signares* were able to build and maintain their wealth and their economic influence.[225] If these marriages were legitimized by French law, however, the *signares'* wealth and property, as well as inheritance decisions, would transfer to their husbands. *Mariages à la mode du pays* protected the *signares* from the patriarchal system of financial and familial control exerted within French marital structures. [226] Searing contends that these unofficial marriages helped to maintain matriarchal systems of familial authority as "European fathers often gave their names to their children, but rarely exercised any authority over them. The *signare* household was female dominated" (95). Unlike their French counterparts, then, the *signares* maintained control of their households even in cases when their children took the names of their European fathers.

In *Les Princes d'Ébène,* the *signare* traditions of marriage are completely eradicated in the marriage arrangement that the Comtesse makes for her niece.

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mixed-race women in Senegal, noting that "à la mode du pays, chacun d'eux a deux ou trois maîtresses" (252). However, as Searing points out, these relationships were monogamous at least while the husbands were in Senegal so Pommegorge seems to be hyperbolizing here.

[225] Zimmerman points out that, "these women retained the property and movable goods of foreign male conjugal partners who died or transferred off the island. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, women owned most of the moveable and immovable property on the island" (22).

[226] As Anna Maria-Marchini notes, women in France were consistently under familial patriarchal authority, legally inferior to their fathers, and later their husbands. She writes that "The woman is subject to the authority of her husband even more than a minor is subject to his guardian. The wife takes her husband's surname and becomes part of the same social class. Under the regime of community property, the husband also administers his wife's property and can squander the commonwealth (126).

Furthermore, because this marriage would happen in France, it is likely that Sléma would have no access at all to the property and financial assets that resulted from this union without the consent of her husband. Sléma recounts her time living in France with her aunt, describing that this marriage arrangement was nothing more than a ploy by Mareulles to officially rid herself of her "shameful" niece. She laments,

> Ma tante de Mareulles n'est pas méchante; mais, pour elle, j'étais malheureusement une enfant de sang africain, la fille de la *signare* Maïssa, un objet de mépris! Elle tenait à se débarrasser de moi; on m'aurait mariée malgré ma volonté, malgré mes antipathies! (vol. 3, 73).

Unsurprisingly, Sléma's aunt – the Comtesse de Mareulles – regards *signares* like Maïssa with disdain. This contemptuous attitude is rooted in how the *signares* were considered in the eighteenth-century French cultural imaginary – as wanton women of color who stoked fears of miscegenation.[227] French aversion to race mixing in marriage – a common theme in nineteenth-century literature portrayed in canonical texts such as Mme de Duras' *Ourika* – is blatantly displayed through Mareulle's attitude towards Sléma. During a conversation with Esméril – the husband that the Comtesse has chosen for her niece – Mareulles tries to convince him to marry Sléma by attempting to erase all traces of her African heritage. She claims that "Maïssa la *signare* soit, dit entre nous,

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[227] Barbara Traver describes this as a perpetual inferiority associated with Africans and people of African descent, noting that the French insisted not just on the inferiority of free people of color, but on their *perpetual* inferiority, on an "indelible stain" (*tâche ineffaçable)* marking them, which generations of intermarriage and a white physiognomy could never erase" (8).

n'était pas précisément une fille de couleur, le point est contestable au moins" (vol. 2, 129). Following this, Esméril replies that: "à cet égard-là, je ne me fais point illusion, [elle] a du sang nègre dans les veines" (vol. 2, 129). This exchange reiterates racial taxonomies promoted by authors such as Saint-Méry and Lamiral who view miscegenation as an assault on whiteness. However, the specific association of Sléma's mixed-race heritage linked to her mother draws another parallel between the two that depicts why *mariages à la mode du pays* can only exist in colonized spaces. The very idea that Sléma has any African heritage at all deters this potential husband because they are in France rather than in Gorée or Saint-Louis where this kind of match would be considered normative – at least temporarily.

The attempted erasure of Sléma's African heritage, passed down from her mother, is indicative of French attitudes about interracial marriage during this era which sparked cultural fears amongst the white French population. These fears were not rooted in interracial desire or coupling per se, but rather in the "social consequences of those desires, especially where offspring were concerned" (Garraway 209). Erasing Sléma's race by referencing her mother's appearance echoes anxieties surrounding the mixed-race children that resulted from interracial marriages. However, the connection drawn between Sléma and her mother cannot be understated here, as the implication of Esméril's response is that Sléma's children will inevitably bear the same proof of African heritage the she and her mother embody. Regardless of who Sléma marries, white European stereotypes about mixed-race children will be reproduced, literally, in the children of a *signare.* Maïssa carries this *signare* inheritance from her mother, denoting another generational lineage of *signare* identity passed down from mother to daughter.

While the contempt for Maïssa and Sléma is rooted in a Eurocentric assumption of white superiority, it is important to acknowledge that there are gendered undertones to Mareulle's dislike of *signares*. French women like the Comtesse de Mareulles, especially, had more personal reasons to regard mixed-race women with contempt. After all, it was French wives who were left at home while their merchant husbands left for Gorée and Saint-Louis only to engage in sexual relationships with these women and father mixed-race children.[228] For Sléma's aunt, her niece is not only symbol of racial impurity, but she also represents this stark inequality between men and women in their extramarital affairs. Additionally, Sléma represents an authority and agency that *signares* exerted in their *mariages à la mode du pays* that was unattainable, at least legally, for French women during this era. However, this agency is limited to a choice between two men in marriage because Maïssa is in France and not Senegal, and therefore cannot form a union that exactly models the *signare* marriage practices. Put otherwise, *signare* culture is not transferrable from Senegal to France because French legal codes surrounding marriage limit women's legal authority in conjugal unions in a way that *signare mariages à la mode du pays* do not.[229]

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[228] This is an especially vexing scenario for women in eighteenth-century France, who were severely punished for adultery while their husbands were not. Marchini argues that adultery represented one of the most obvious inequalities between men and women: "The case in which the inequality of rights between husband and wife is most evident is that of adultery. While adultery by the husband carries no penalty, that of the wife is severely repressed and punished through a real procedure of incrimination if it is denounced by the husband" (126).

[229] Susan Desan argues that these legal limitations were the basis for many calls for marriage and divorce reforms in the eighteenth century leading up to the French Revolution. See *The Family on Trial* for her detailed analysis of women's legal limitations in marriage.

Notwithstanding the racial prejudice underlying her aunt's cruelty at attempting to marry Sléma off against her will to get rid of her (*elle tentait à se débarrasser de moi*), Sléma's shock at the idea of being married against her will emphasizes that her right to choose a husband – a right that she would have been afforded as a *signare* – is an important facet of her conceptualization of marriage that she has seen demonstrated through her mother. Luckily, she avoids this marriage, and instead chooses to marry Victor. Sléma recounts to Victor that through their union, he saved her twice and has shown "true love" towards her. She proclaims, "loin de rougir de mon origine, tu semblais m'en féliciter, tu m'appelais ta blanche mauresque […] Mon bon Victor […] tu t'es offert avec joie, et tu m'as encore sauvée" (73). In this declaration of her love and gratitude to Victor, Sléma iterates two very important aspects of *signare* culture and the practice of *mariage à la mode du pays.*

First, Sléma articulates the interconnectedness of race and gender that defines the sexual economy of *signares* with white European men that is manifested here through her marriage to Victor. She notes that he has called her his "white *mauresque*" (*blanche mauresque*) and that he is not embarrassed of her origins, meaning both her *signare* and African origins. Race, in her declaration of gratitude, is tangled up in his desire for her and his proposition to marry her. The appellation *blanche mauresque* evokes the white male libidinous gaze on the gendered mixed-race body of Sléma. Put differently, the evocation of Sléma's "nearly white" race echoes the same sexual allegory of white male

desire that authors of eighteenth-century travel narratives used to portray mixed-race women as sexual objects.[230]

While the reference to Sléma as a *blanche mauresque* reflects an appeal to white male libidinous desire for mixed-race women, it also denotes a connection to her mother whose racial description parallels that of her daughter's. In fact, the designation *mauresque* is an exact replica of how Maïssa is described in volume one of the series (*d'origine mauresque*) signifying a direct correlation between the *signare* and her daughter. This parallel calls attention to the heritage of *signare* culture passed down from mother to daughter that is likewise depicted through Sléma's access to choice – albeit limited in this instance – in marriage. [231] Sléma is, after all, the mixed-race – or rather "*mauresque*" – result of Maïssa's own *mariage à la mode du pays.* Victor, furthermore, celebrates Sléma's origins (*loin de rougir de mon origine, tu semblais m'en féliciter*) and while this is linked in the text to her race, "origins," here, can likewise refer to her *signare* background, especially considering that directly preceding this declaration she references this heritage (*la fille de la signare Maïssa, un objet de mépris*).

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[230] Winters contends that white male European travel writers reminded their readers that "no matter how closely the *signares* may have approached white womanhood, at the end of the day, they were sexual objects reduced to their use-value in a heteropatriarchal transatlantic slave economy" (96).

[231] It is important to add here that the notion of "choice" in Sléma's marriage is complicated by the fact that Victor, throughout the series, seems to groom Sléma, and shows an attraction to her even as a child. She is also the only one of Maïssa's children that he saves from the pirate attack and is described as the "whitest" of all three children. His affection for Sléma is described in volume one of the series. The narrator details that "Victor avait voué une affection fraternelle à la femme et aux enfants de son cousin, mais c'était surtout la petite Sléma qu'il aimait. Elle était sa préférée" (229).

The second important feature of *mariage à la mode du pays* evoked in Sléma's expression of gratitude is her familial relationality to her new husband. Victor, after all, is her father's cousin, which reflects the *signare* tradition of marrying within familial lines to maintain wealth within households that were tied through kinship and marriage.[232] This practice became so common in later *signare* generations that, Jones argues, "by the late nineteenth century, virtually all of the métis were related by marriage" (87). Though veiled through the trope of the white savior, Sléma's marriage to Victor reveals traces of *signare* mentorship that are visible through parallels drawn between Maïssa and her daughter in this scene including similarities in evocations of their race, the presence of choice in marriage, references to her *signare* (and racial) cultural origins, and the common practice of marrying withing elite familial lines. In other words, Sléma's marriage story highlights the important function of matriarchal mentorship in sharing important tenets of *signare* culture between mother and daughter.

Mzaouda, *La "Perle" du Sénégal*

Where Sléma is faced with an unwanted arranged marriage, her sister's story is far more tumultuous, but likewise ends in her being saved through marriage to a husband of her "choosing." After the attack on their home in volume one of the series, Maïssa and Mzaouda are both captured by Spanish pirates and sold into slavery. Their tale continues

[232] This does not always mean that *signares* married children off to relatives, but rather that children of *signares* often married within the elite social echelons of society.

with mother and daughter together, never being separated during this turbulent time and ends when the enigmatic African prince discussed earlier in this chapter purchases their freedom in hopes of marrying Mzaouda. Like in the case of Sléma, there are traces of *signare* culture interwoven into Mzaouda's character that create parallels to her mother and hint at a matriarchal system of mentorship. Once again, I look to the example of Mzaouda's marriage as well as her association with jewelry – an important feature of *signare* identity – to locate these traces according to their representation in Landelle's series.

The parallels between Mzaouda and Maïssa are even more clear than those between this *signare* mother and Sléma. Mzaouda shares with her mother the visible mark of *métissage* on her skin, described as more "brown" than her sister but lighter in complexion than her brother. Her resemblance to her mother is so strong, in fact, that she is described as *appearing* like the younger sister of Maïssa: "Maïssa […] l'ardente Sénégalaise semblait être la sœur aînée de sa fille Mzaouda" (vol. 1, 224). The appellation "brown child of Senegal" (*Mzaouda, la brune enfant du Sénégal)* calls attention to her *signare* roots both through her mixed-race heritage and through the association of *signare* culture with this geographic region. Being a brown child of Senegal, in other words, is a metaphor for being the daughter of a mixed-race *signare.*

Landelle's use of jewelry to transform Maïssa into what I argue is a symbolic object of *signare* culture – a necklace that symbolizes the practice of self-adornment – is repeated in objectifications of Mzaouda. She is described, for instance, as having "un cœur de diamant" (vol. 5, 248) and later as "la perle du Sénégal" (vol. 5, 295). If Maïssa is the complete necklace (*un collier d'ambre et de corail),* then her daughter represents

pieces of this adornment shared between mother and daughter. The metaphorical use of jewelry to transform Maïssa and Mzaouda into the embodiments of *signare* culture underscores the importance of adornment to distinguish *signares* in the societies that they inhabit. The role of jewelry as a mark of distinction and elite status is especially iterated when Maïssa and Mzaouda are deprived of these material objects upon being sold into slavery. When their captors attempt to deprive them of all their material possessions – including their clothing – in an act of sexual aggression, Maïssa pleads with them to let herself and her daughter maintain their modesty:

> Charge-nous de parures, de perles, de pierreries précieuses et d'or fin, ou couvre-nous de haillons, peu nous importe; mais que nos vêtements soient aussi chastes que ceux de ta femme et de ta fille. (vol. 5, 244)

The slavers that take Mzaouda and Maïssa into captivity are described as Spanish, thereby transmuting white French fantasies of sexual aggression against women of color onto a non-French villain.[233] In dispossessing them of their adornments, the slavers are violently eradicating Maïssa and Mzaouda's elite *signare* status through the theft of these important symbols of *signare* culture, which are also symbols of *signare* resistance.[234]

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[233] Fantasies of sexual violence are inextricably linked from the legacy of the Transatlantic slave trade and White European imperialism. Garraway explains that "interracial sexual fantasies were the primary means through which white men legitimated their desired social and racial supremacy while at the same time repressing the brutality and sexual violence of racial slavery (24).

[234] Monica L. Miller contends that jewelry holds an important place in the history of slavery because "pieces of jewelry and other accessories hold within them the power of memory, a place of autonomy as the only material retention of former lives" (4).

At the mercy of the slave market, and away from their home in Senegal with no recourse to the privileges and agency that their *signare* status affords them, Maïssa and Mzaouda's only request is to not be separated. Luckily, they are not, no thanks to their rescue by ar-Aramana, the aforementioned African prince and ruler of the fictional empire of Diangol whom Mzaouda subsequently agrees to marry. On the surface, Mzaouda's marriage to the African prince seems to stray from *signare* traditions primarily due to his race. Traver reminds us that the *signares* followed a practice of marriage that "formed a tight, self-perpetuating community as their children typically married Frenchmen or the children of other *signares"* (2). In this sense, the prince would be excluded from the marriage pool by virtue of his race.[235]

Abdulle-Aramana's blackness becomes an important factor in Mzaouda's considerations of his marriage proposal primarily because he declares his love for her before mentioning that he is a prince.[236] Furthermore, he has hidden his extravagant clothing so as to win Mzaouda's heart with love rather than fortune. Although Abdulle-Armana has bought both women's freedom, Maïssa, especially, is hesitant about his motives and the origins of his wealth. This hesitation leads to her overt mentoring of her daughter as she considers the declaration of love from this very generous stranger. She

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[235] This reflects both the Wolof practice of social caste systems combined with European racial segregation practices, depicting another, perhaps more unsavory, "Afropean" aspect of *signare* culture.

[236] It should be noted that although I am explaining Maïssa's hesitation about Abdulle-Armana's race, I am doing so as a means of analyzing this work as fiction and not to reflect a historical accuracy. In other words, if Maïssa depicts racism in her considerations of Abdulle-Armana's marriage proposal to her daughter, it is because she was written this way by a white European author, not necessarily because I am arguing that this is a common practice of *signares* (although they did, as I mentioned earlier, live in a social caste society).

says to Mzaouda "ce seigneur généreux est de race nègre; il connaît l'aversion des femmes de notre sang pour des hommes du sien" (vol. 5, 299). Through her attention to Abdulle-Armana's race, Maïssa highlights the important tradition in *signare* marriage customs of specifically entering into unions with European men in order to maintain wealth and social influence in the slave-port cities of Gorée and Saint-Louis.[237] Since Abdulle-Aramana does not fit the traditional standard of marriage material by virtue of his Black – and therefore African – heritage, Maïssa is wary of this marriage proposal. This is because she cannot be sure if this union will bring her daughter the necessary material and social benefits that underlie the foundational value of the *signare* practice of *marriage à la mode du pays*

Maïssa's apprehension, however, is quelled once she guesses that a man of Abdulle-Armana's wealth and demeanor must be a prince, or some form of royalty, thereby presenting her daughter with a clear and important qualification for marriage – access to wealth and social privilege. As Maïssa is ruminating over this mysterious man's identity, she guesses – after having listened to his manner of speech and benefitted from his generous purchase of her and her daughter's freedom – that he must be royalty. She declares, "prince! […] car vous ne pouvez être qu'un prince ou un roi puissant." (vol. 5, 300). Abdulle-Armana, still seeking a love match, refutes this assumption, insisting, "hélas! Je ne suis qu'un noir…un noir de sang illustre et de grande famille, à la vérité!" (vol. 5, 301). Although Abdulle-Armana is still attempting to hide his royal status from

[237] The importance of marrying European men was more than just a "preference" for a certain racial or national origin, but rather "*signares* and their métis offspring had more access to capital than grumets [free citizens of color] and also derived their social status from their familial ties to European men" (Jones 30).

the women, Mzaouda – who is present for this entire conversation – has taken both the prince's proposal and her mother's advice into consideration. Mzaouda, knowing that Abdulle-Armana seeks a devoted spouse, declares "ce n'est point une belle esclave qu'il veut, c'est une épouse tendre et dévouée, pour être l'unique compagne de ses jours de gloire et de ses jours de deuil!" (vol. 5, 302). Mzaouda, having listened to her mother's advice and to Abdulle-Armana's declarations of love, has come upon her own decision, and ultimately decides to marry Abdulle-Armana and it is only then that the prince reveals his extravagance: "à ces mots, le jeune sultan rejeta loin de lui le burnous qui le voilait; il se montra dans un costume d'une rare magnificence" (vol. 5, 302). Where one could read Mzaouda's acceptance of the marriage proposal before the prince's revelation of his identity as an act of virtuous love, I once again consider a resistant reading of this scenario.

Throughout this scene between Maïssa, Abdulle-Armana, and Mzaouda, the latter has been listening in, paying attention to her mother's and her potential betrothed's words. In fact, Mzaouda's distinct silence during this exchange between Maïssa and Abdulle-Armana is evidence of her contemplations, as she speaks only once during this three-page dialogue. She has heard her mother both hesitate about this man's race and guess that he must be a prince. This, above all else, informs her decision to marry Abdulle-Armana as her mother's *signare* background lends itself to identifying people from different societal ranks. The *signares,* to borrow Searing's wording, were "intermediaries in the Atlantic trade," and, as such, were familiar with cross-cultural and cross-linguistic exchanges (100). If Maïssa, despite calling attention to Abdulle-Armana's race, can use her skill as a cultural intermediary to identify the royal demeanor

of the prince, then Mzaouda – being familiar with *signare* social traditions – heeds her mother's observations.

Furthermore, this proposal models the *signare* tradition of *marriages à la mode du pays* wherein "the man negotiated a marriage contract with the family of a young woman. He presented her family with gifts to seal the agreement and provided a house where his bride could establish their household" (Jones 35). In this sense, counsel from the potential bride's family is necessary for Mzaouda to make an informed choice. Her mother being the only family present, Mzaouda's decision to marry Abdulle-Armana is informed by her mother's counsel (both overtly hesitating about his identity and ruminating over his elite status). Additionally, if the potential husband is meant to offer a gift to the family (and not just the bride), then what better gift could Abdulle-Armana offer than freedom to both mother and daughter? It is only after being offered this gift, and listening to her mother's counsel that Mzaouda ultimately decides to accept the marriage proposal and Abdulle-Armana reveals himself as a prince. This revelation would come, I would argue, as no surprise to either of these *signare* women who have already begun to suspect that he holds some form of elite status.

This interaction between Maïssa, Abdulle-Armana, and Mzaouda highlights one final important feature of *signare* marriage traditions – the presence of choice in marriage. Maïssa does not try to force or manipulate Mzaouda either way, but rather – in true *signare* fashion – allows her daughter to decide the benefits of this union on her own after having provided her with counsel to help her consider the prince's gift (freedom) and subsequent marriage offer. Bringing this scene – and their story – to a close, Maïssa's final words depict the importance of choice in *signare* marriages. She exclaims,

> Mzaouda! Ce que tu viens de faire, ta mère l'eût fait à ta place! Ce n'est point parce qu'il était blanc, mais parce qu'il était brave et généreux, que la fille de N'dar donne son amour à ton père […] s'il eût été noir […] ta mère Maïssa aurait également bravé les Anglais pour leur arracher son amant ! (vol 5., 504)[238]

In one final parallel drawn between mother and daughter, Maïssa compares her marriage to that of Mzaouda, creating a direct link between *signare* marriage traditions and her daughter's union. Both Maïssa and Mzaouda *choose* their husbands on the merits of their *generosity.* Her focus on generosity echoes the important facet of *signare* marriage customs which ultimately privilege wealth (generosity) and social status in marriage choices.

The Death of Saïbolé

Throughout the story of Maïssa la *signare* and her tumultuous journey with her children, there are hints of eighteenth-century observations of *signare* culture, and small reflections of the matriarchal system of mentorship that create the foundation for a sexual economy that led to the *signares'* elite social and financial status in Gorée and Saint-Louis. Their *feminist ars erotica* is linked to their cultural practices and is especially reflected in the tradition of *mariages à la mode du pays.* Self-adornment, likewise, represents one of the material manifestations of the *signares* erotic artform that serves to

[238] Maïssa references here a scene from the first volume where she aids her husband during an English attack in Gorée.

both attract the attention of potential (temporary) husbands as well as resist European cultural and economic imperial oppression.

The eighteenth-century travel narratives of Lamiral, Saint-Méry, and Pommegorge along with Landelle's fictional series portray the *signares* in a way that appeals to the white male desiring gaze of the authors and their readers. These texts each represent Garraway's notion of travel narratives as sexual allegory of white male libidinous desire for women of color. It is because of the focus on the white male desiring gaze that Maïssa's son, Saïbolé, is swiftly taken out of the narrative in an untimely death at the hands of pirates. Saïbolé's death, though sad, provides an excellent lens through which to consider the intersection of race and gender manifested through the stories of Maïssa and her daughters. Saïbolés death, for instance, is a useful tool for Landelle to focus the three women's stories on the fetishization of their sexuality and of violence against women of color. His death eliminates the necessity to focus the white male gaze away from the three women's stories, each of which underscore their sexual vulnerability and availability through an emphasis on forced marriage and the inherent sexual violence of slavery.

Furthermore, Saïbolé poses a threat to the racial hierarchies proposed by these authors through his access to French gendered hierarchies of privilege. The mixed-race child of a wealthy French merchant and a *signare,* Saïbolé certainly faces racial stereotypes related to his mixed-race origins, but male privilege grants him access to freedoms in France that women are denied. Garraway points out that mixed-race men in the eighteenth-century sometimes moved to France and even married into high-ranking families. She notes that, "by the end of the century, prominent mulattoes were demanding

recognition and integration by means of titles of nobility, military honors, and access to the high offices and social entitlements enjoyed by whites of comparable means" (212). Saïbolé's death marks a strategic elimination of the problem of men of color accessing privilege and destabilizing the myth of white supremacy that features prominently in Landelle's series.

In addition to the racist overtones of the series, descriptions of Maïssa and Mzaouda incorporate appearance-based objectification through their metaphorical portrayal as material adornments. Jewelry was a symbol of the *signares* economic and social status and was also worn as a both a form of self-fashioning and an accessory to attract European men in public. Self-fashioning was, in other words, a prominent facet of the *signares'* public performance. In describing Maïssa and Mzaouda as the material objects that *signares* were notorious for wearing and displaying, Landelle evokes a male gaze that is linked not only to the women's appearance but also the sexual economies that these objects represent. Furthermore, gendered notions of the *parure* of women described in the travel narratives and in Landelle's series essentialize the role of jewelry in *signare* culture by attributing white western notions of the frivolity of female ornamentation to the mixed-race women of Gorée and Saint-Louis.

A resistant reading of Landelle's series provides a chance to "eke out" – to borrow a turn of phrase from Marisa Fuentes – what is missing from his representation of the *signares* and from the observations of travel writers such as Saint-Méry, Lamiral, and Pommegorge. Adornment is an aspect of *signare* culture that just so happens to feature prominently in these texts and is also historically documented to represent the rootedness of *signare* fashion in African tradition. I consider self-adornment to represent and

important aspect of the performance of *signares* that serves to both attract potential husbands and display their elite status in the societies that they inhabit. Importantly, the art of self-adornment represents an act of resistance against European cultural dominance through the visual and public display of a unique *signare* "Afropean" art on the bodies of the women that are fetishized by white European men.

Despite this fetishization, *mariages à la mode du pays* to white European men remained an essential part of *signare* culture especially in maintaining their elite connections to trade markets. In fact, Zimmerman contends that the dissolution of the *signare* practice of *mariage à la mode du pays* was a prominent strategy for France to diminish *signare* control and influence in Senegal:

> With the imposition of French civil statutes, patrilineal descent and patriarchal authority increasingly determined inheritance and paternity legitimacy. Goréen men became more visible in the archive as household heads. They served as intermediaries between the increasingly private sphere of the household and public sphere of the state. (26)

In other words, as men became more visible and powerful under French civil law, the *signares* simultaneously became invisible, lost to the archive only to be found in the remnants of their obscured representation in limited travel narratives and fictions, and what remains of their material properties today in Gorée and Saint-Louis. Thanks to the work of historians such as those cited in this chapter, gaps in the historical archive are beginning to close and more light is being shed on the traditions and practices of these influential women. However, in the literary archive, their obscurity remains and ever-present limitation to scholarly work, which is why resistant readings of materials such as

those covered in this chapter might be necessary for continued scholarship on the *signares* and their matriarchal mentorships in feminist *ars erotica.*

The matriarchal system of mentorship practiced by the *signares* reflects the matrilineal African traditions that they preserved despite the increasing French colonizing presence in Gorée and Saint-Louis. More than just an inheritance of property like in the example of Ouradramé's land concession from the beginning of this chapter, these matriarchal mentorships were a way to share traditions, cultures, and – importantly – practices of resistance with their daughters – the next generation of *signares.* Recalling Tanya Augsburg's definition of a feminist *ars erotica* as a, "diverse range of aesthetic sexual expressions, practices, identities, and cultures opposed to patriarchal sexual oppression and violence" (496), I would argue that the *signares'* avoidance of a complete European cultural dominance in Gorée and Saint-Louis – as well as their dominance in the market economies of these eighteenth-century cities – demonstrates their resistance to the ever increasing threat of patriarchal and imperial oppression. Identifying this resistance in eighteenth-century travel narratives and Landelle's series might take a little bit of creativity – and the patience to read through these racist and sexist depictions – but they do provide traces of the matriarchal mentorships, if you look close enough.

One method that I use for locating these mentorships within these texts is identifying *mariages à la mode du pays* as an example of how *signare* daughters modeled their choice in marriage partners after the traditions passed on by their mothers. This is evidenced through the very presence of choice for both Sléma and Mzaouda in marriage, as well as the importance of some sort of financial and/or social benefit that comes with the union. Additionally, I identify self-adornment as a symbol of resistance that connects

Maïssa and her daughters to acts of *signare* resistance that is taught through mentorship. This mentorship link is symbolized especially in Maïssa and Mzaouda's depictions in Landelle's series as pieces of jewelry – paralleling the practice of self-adornment between mother and daughter.

Furthermore, jewelry helps to create a *signare's* persona that portrays her wealth, elite status, and participation in a sexual economy with white men. It is for this reason that the *signare folgars* were events where, as Pommegorge describes "les femmes parées de leur mieux" (122). The *folgars,* were akin to balls and "provided *signares*, aspirant-*signares*, and other women in the community with the opportunity to display their beauty, richest garments and jewelry, to observe and be observed" (George E. Brooks 83). In other words, the *folgars* were, in some respects, a meeting grounds for *signares* to interact with potential temporary husbands. It is at events like the *folgars* that the *signares'* art of self-adornment becomes most visibly performative as fine dress and jewelry helped to attract the attention of white men seeking *signare* unions. The performative features of *signare* culture, furthermore, demonstrate how *signare* self-adornment as a performance is rooted in African traditions that not only attracted the attention of European men but also actively resisted the influence of European culture as it is expressed on their bodies.

In Winters' discussion of the *signare folgars,* however, she argues that these events symbolized more than just a meeting place for match making.[239] While she acknowledges the social role that the *folgars* played in the sexual economies of the

[239] Winters is specifically analyzing Édouard Nouveaux's 1844 work *Un bal de signares.* See appendix G for a visual representation of this artwork.

signares, she also considers them an example of *signare* diasporic practice that can be identified through the very existence of the *folgars* (a tradition rooted in Wolof culture) in the colonized spaces of Gorée and Saint-Louis. She contends that,

> If the *signares'* performance at the balls was thus intricately embedded in a specific Wolof cultural and social context, then we must at least ask how the *signares'* apparent and perhaps deliberate incorporation of indigenous practices, movement, and rhythm might reflect a diasporic practice, a negotiation of the strange, "artificial society" that constituted the slave societies of Gorée and Saint-Louis. (64)[240]

Winters highlights how the performance of the *signares* – in this case the performance of song and dance – embeds African tradition in a colonized space. I echo Winters' argument in my analysis of *signare* jewelry as both a symbol of their cultural practices as well as of their resistance to European domination both economic and cultural through the preservation of African traditions.

Like the incorporation of African traditions in the *signare folgars* that Winters identifies, this chapter has been an analysis of the preservation of *signare* practices of matriarchal systems of mentorship. The difficulty of locating the *signares* in the literary archive of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cannot be overstated. Preserving *signare* practices also means preserving their literary, cultural, and historic memory not only as the mistresses of wealthy European men, but as women of color with power,

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[240] The "echo across the Atlantic" that Winters is referring to here is the appearance of balls like the *folgars* in other diasporic spaces in the trans-Atlantic world such as the quadroon balls of Louisiana.

agency, and – admittedly – an unsavory historical connection to the slave trade. That being said, this does not render them any less worthy of analysis and inclusion in the literary archive.

Engaging in resistant readings of texts like eighteenth-century travel narratives and Landelle's fictional series might provide an opportunity for literary scholars to highlight how fiction can serve as a medium for depicting the resilience, social and economic intelligence, and matriarchal authority of *signares* like Ouadramé who had enough power and influence to obstruct the total economic and cultural dominance of European powers in eighteenth-century Gorée and Saint-Louis. To engage in this kind of resistant reading might provide an opportunity for a more nuanced understanding of the diasporic space that these women inhabited, and the tactics that they utilized to preserve African social and cultural structures within these spaces. Mentorships in feminist *ars erotica* represent one of these tactics, but through continued efforts to uncover *signare* representation in literature, I have no doubt that many more *signare* strategies for resistance might be uncovered in the literary archive of the long eighteenth century.

CONCLUSION

Of Mentorships Present and Future

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored how *femmes galantes* in eighteenth-century literature engaged in feminist mentorships in *ars erotica.* My goal was to identify how these mentorships help women to resist a variety of intersecting oppressions including sexism, racism, heteropatriarchy, and imperialism. *Ars erotica* as I conceive of it in this project applies Michel Foucault's notion of erotic art as a truth-seeking practice in which knowledge is shared through experience passed on to a disciple from a mentor. I combined this with Tanya Augsburg's emphasis on the artistic elements of *ars erotica* as well as her position that feminist erotic art encourages resistance to oppression. Finally, through an emphasis on performance I engaged Gautam's notion of the courtesans' arts as an example of an *ars erotica* that is performative in both private and public spheres.

My framing of a feminist *ars erotica,* then, focused on how this erotic artform is expressed through feeling and sensation, is passed on through mentorship specifically between women, and defies oppressive structures that limit, degrade, dehumanize, or otherwise devalue people based on their race, gender, sexuality, or cultural background. Importantly, I framed the courtesan arts as an example of *ars erotica* that, in the literature I examined, was expressed through performance. In each of my chapters, then, I identify who is participating in the mentorship, how this mentorship is framed as an erotic art, and what forms of oppression this mentorship helps women to resist. And resist, they did.

In chapter one, Thérèse "*la belle allemande*" learned from her gallant mother and demimondaine neighbor how to avoid marriage – a patriarchal institution in eighteenth-century France that centered on women's domesticity and submission. The *belle allemande* instead enters the sexual marketplace of the Parisian *demimonde*. Juxtaposed at the end of the novel with her patron's wife, Thérèse herself becomes a mentor which gives her a feeling of inexpressible satisfaction. This notion of inexpressibility echoes my application of Audre Lorde's notion of the feminine erotic as a feeling that is difficult to capture in words.

In chapter two, another Thérèse, "*la philosophe*" likewise avoids marriage and experiences three different mentorships in a queer feminist *ars erotica* that are expressed not only through female intimacy in the novel, but also in the queer structure of the text itself. I demonstrated how the novel's overarching libertine materialist philosophy is filtered through sapphic desire. In this chapter, the female philosopher avoids marriage and pregnancy – a key element of her materialist libertine philosophy that is embedded in sapphic desire.

Chapter three explored women in a different geographical space, shifting to Saint-Domingue to identify how a series of Creole courtesan songs depict a feminist mentorship in *ars erotica* that resists imperial, racist, and sexist oppressions. The singer/narrator of these songs guides not just the woman that she speaks to in her lyrics, but also her audience, thereby centering the performance aspect of the courtesan arts.

Finally, in chapter four I traced representations of the *signares* of eighteenth-century Senegal, a group of influential women of color whose practice of matriarchal mentorship in feminist *ars erotica* led to their resistance to European cultural dominance.

My investigation of these elite mixed-race women covered analysis of eighteenth-century travel narratives and a nineteenth-century fictional series, drawing connections between portrayals of the *signares* and mixed-race women in both. Specific articulations of their jewelry and adornments highlighted the role of art and performance in these women's resistance.

My intervention in this dissertation and – broadly speaking – in the scholarly conversation surrounding representations of race, gender and sexuality in eighteenth-century French and Francophone literature is centered on the use of mentorship as a tool to identify feminist *ars erotica* even in the most seemingly heteroerotic, or unlikely texts. As this dissertation covered representations of cultures from three different French-speaking countries, I seek to explore in my continuation of this work the literatures of these places, and others, around the French-speaking world. My overarching goal is to see if there is a transnational component to the expression of feminist *ars erotica* in eighteenth-century literature.

This dissertation is the product of many years of searching for what is "missing" in the eighteenth-century French and Francophone literary archive. This is why – with the guidance of my own (academic) mentors – I was able to focus this dissertation on predominantly rare literary texts that depict, in half of my chapters, even more marginalized communities of women (the courtesan *mûlatresses* and the *signares).* As I move this project forward, I hope to continue to fill the gaps of the literary archive to increase the visibility of those cultures, people – and especially – *femmes galantes* who have been omitted or forgotten in eighteenth-century literary studies.

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Appendix A

Fête à Priape, Michel Corneille II, 1642-1708

Appendix B

Lyrics of "Zabet"

Creole lyrics (qtd. in Jenson, *Beyond* pp. 287-288)	**French lyrics** (qtd. in Jenson, "Relire l'histoire" pp. 42-43)	**English Lyrics** (qtd. in Jenson, *Beyond* pp. 287-288)
Zabet ma chere Prend-Dombo pour samitié Fille qui sotte comme ça y a faire Aussi-y-a faits nous pitié Comment to vlé gagner cotte Si to pas gagné d'argent Yo va dire Zabet la sotte Qui pa conné faire payé blanc Faut prend gnion dombo qui riche Qui ba toy tout ça to vlé Car si quine a moy-te chiche Ben vite nous cété brouillé Quand mo vlé yon portugaise Tout suite li couri bas moy To resté la tant comme gnion niaise Bandonné! Di go te ris a toy Tout digoterie sans la pluye Pa gagné gnion brin digo Tout sabitant san chource Criée sech pour canne a yo Nous gnioune pas gagné misere Pis-que nous toujours pres roulé Roulé tant comme moy ma chere To va gagner to ca to vlé!	Ce n'est pas assez, Zabette ma chère, De prendre un Dombo [un amant] dans l'esprit de l'amitié; Une fille qui est sotte fait ainsi, Et ça fait nous pitié. Comment veux-tu gagner de la cote Si tu ne gagnes pas d'argent? Ils vont dire, cette Zabette est sotte Qui ne sait pas faire payer les blancs. Il faut prendre un dombo [un amant] qui est riche, Qui te donnera tout ce que tu veux. Car si quelqu'un à moi était chiche, Bien vite ce serait brouillé entre nous. Quand je veux une portugaise, Tout de suite il court m'en donner. Tu es restée là comme une niaise, Abandonnée ! Indigoterice, toi… Tout indigoterie sans la pluie N'aura pas un brin d'indigo; Tout habitant [cultivateur] sans source Crie à la sécheresse de sa canne; Nous n'allons pas avoir cette misère Puisque nous sommes toujours en train de rouler. Roule comme moi, ma chère; Tu auras tout ce que tu veux.	It is not enough Zabet my dear To take a Dombo for friendship That's what the stupid girls do And so we pity them How do you expect to gain status If you don't make money They will say Zabet is an idiot Who doesn't know how to make whites pay You have to take a lover who is rich Who will give you everything you want If a lover of mine was stingy It would be over between us very fast When I want a Portuguese He runs to get it for me You are sitting there like a ninny Abandoned ! You indigo worker, you An indigo farm without rain Will not make a drop of indigo. Colonists without wells Cry that it is dry for their sugar cane. [But] we are not going to live in [such] misery Because we're always ready to roll ; Roll like me, my dear ; You will have everything you want

Appendix C

Lyrics of "N'a rien qui dous"

Creole lyrics (qtd. in Jenson, *Beyond* pp. 285-286)	**French lyrics** (qtd. in Jenson, "Relire l'histoire" pp. 40-41)	**English Lyrics** (qtd. in Jenson, *Beyond* pp. 285-286)
Na rien qui dous tant comme la ville ! Vini bouger coté moin[s], N y en a dans morne, ma chere ! Azinque deux métiers qui doux. Sila procureur yo fait l'ote la ce quin à nous. Tous digoteris qui sans la pluie Yo roulé toujour sencése…(bis) Comment toi vlé gagner cote ? Si tos pas gagner largent Yo vas dit, femme la li sotte Li pas connait fair paiyer blanc Femme qui sote cé comme sa yo fair Yo raussé yo, sa fait nou piquié Comment toi vlé gagner côte Si tos pas gagne[r] largent ? Yo vas dis femme la li sôte Li pas connait fai paiye[r] blanc	Il n'y a rien qui est aussi douce que la ville ! Viens à côté de moi, Il n'y en a pas [d'aussi doux] à la campagne, ma chère ! Justement comme il y a deux métiers qui sont doux. Les procureurs ôtent ce qui est à nous. Les indigoterices qui manquent de pluie, Elles roulent toujours sans cesse…(bis) Comment veux-tu avoir la cote ? Si tu ne gagnes pas d'argent Ils vont dire, cette femme-là est sotte Elle ne sait pas faire payer les blancs. Avec une femme qui est sotte, c'est comme ça qu'ils font, Ils vont la rosser, ça nous fait pitié. Comment veux-tu avoir la cote Si tu ne gagnes pas d'argent ? Ils vont dire cette femme-là elle est sotte Elle ne sait pas faire payer les blancs.	Nothing is as sweet as the city ! Come over here by me, There is nothing this good in the countryside, my dear! Likewise, there are two trades that are sweet. There are two trades that are sweet. The procurer takes away what is properly ours. Any indigo worker who doesn't have rain They roll without cease …[refrain] How do you expect to gain status? If you don't earn money They will say that woman there is an idiot She doesn't know how to make whites pay Women who are idiots, that's what they do They [men] beat them, which makes us pity them How do you expect to gain status? If you don't earn money They will say that woman there is an idiot She doesn't know how to make whites pay

Appendix D

Lyrics of "Chanson pour les Mullatresses du Cap"

French lyrics (qtd. in Jenson, *Beyond* 282)	**English lyrics** (qtd. in Jenson, *Beyond* 282)
D'où vient donc la tristesse Des pauvres mulâtresses Elles gémissent sans cesse Et soupirent tout bas ah ah La police traîtresse Avec impolitesse Leur coupe au ras des fesses Rubans et falbalas ah ah	Whence this melancholy Of our poor mulattas [refrain] How they groan And sigh and moan oh oh The treacherous police With consummate impoliteness Have trimmed their ribbons, frills and flounces To the level of their bottoms oh oh"

Appendix E

Example of Saint-Méry's Racial taxonomy

montre aucune différence sensible lorsqu'on la compare à celle du blanc.

C'est pour mieux faire connaître cette localité colorée, que je vais parcourir les degrés divers de mélange.

RÉSULTAT

de toutes les nuances produites par les diverses combinaisons du mélange des blancs avec les nègres, et des nègres avec les Caraïbes ou Sauvages, ou Indiens occidentaux et avec les Indiens orientaux.

I.

Combinaisons du Blanc.

D'un Blanc et d'une	Négresse, vient	un Mulâtre.
—	Mulâtresse.	Quarteron.
—	Quarterone.	Métis.
—	Métisse	Mamelouc.
—	Mamelouque	Quarteronnée.
—	Quarteronnée	Sang-mêlé.
—	Sang-mêlée. . . .	Sang-mêlé qui s'approche continuellement du Blanc.
—	Marabou.	Quarteron.
—	Griffonne.	Quarteron.
—	Sacatra	Quarteron.

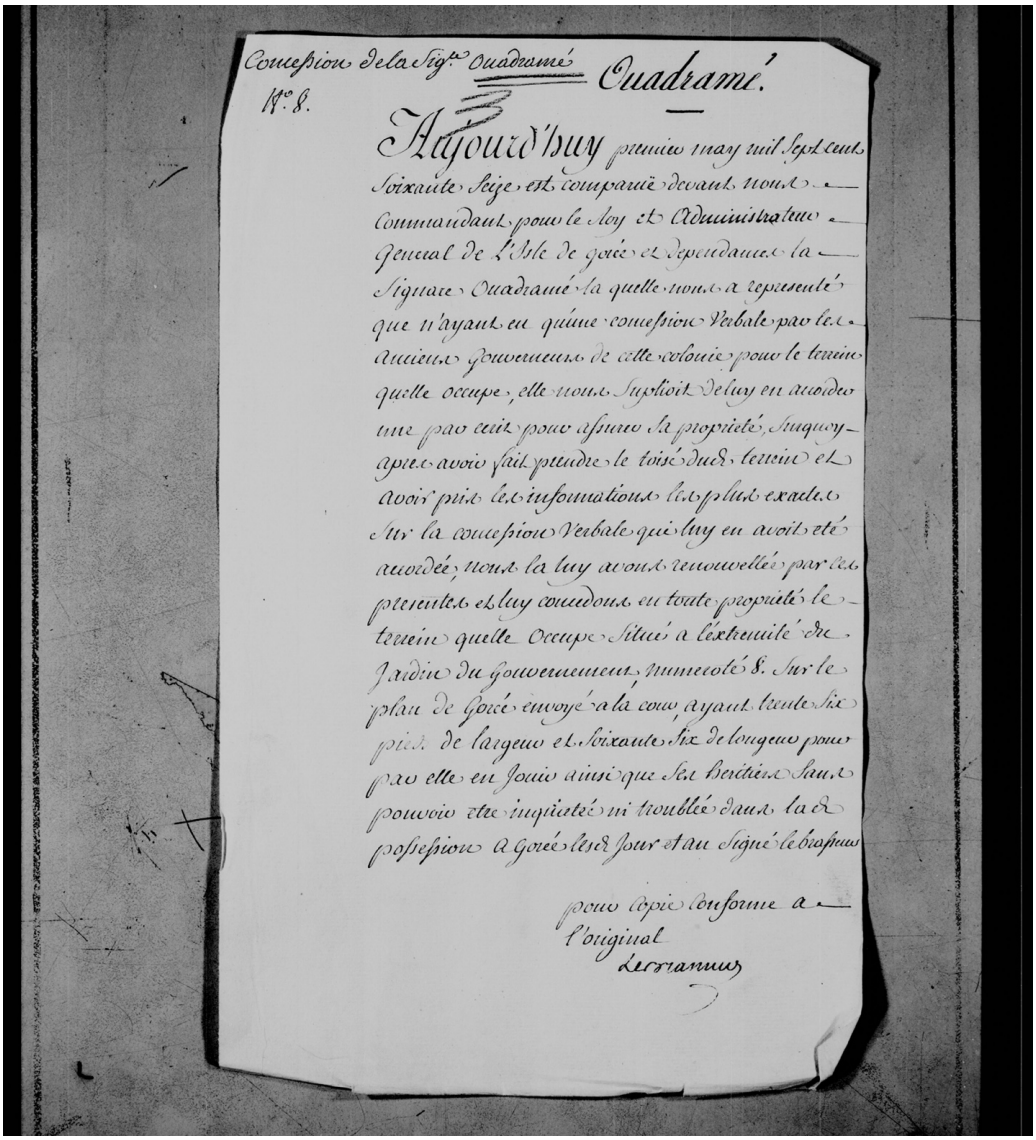
II.

Combinaisons du Nègre.

D'un Nègre et d'une	Blanche, vient.	un Mulâtre.
—	Sang-mêlée.	Mulâtre.
—	Quarteronnée.	Mulâtre.
—	Mamelouque	Mulâtre.
—	Métisse.	Mulâtre.
—	Quarteronne.	Marabou.
—	Mulâtresse.	Griffe.
—	Marabou.	Griffe.
—	Griffonne	Sacatra.
—	Sacatra	Sacatra.

Appendix F

Land Concession of the *Signare* Ouadramé, 1776.



Concepion de la Sig.re Ouadramé

N.o 8.

Ouadramé.

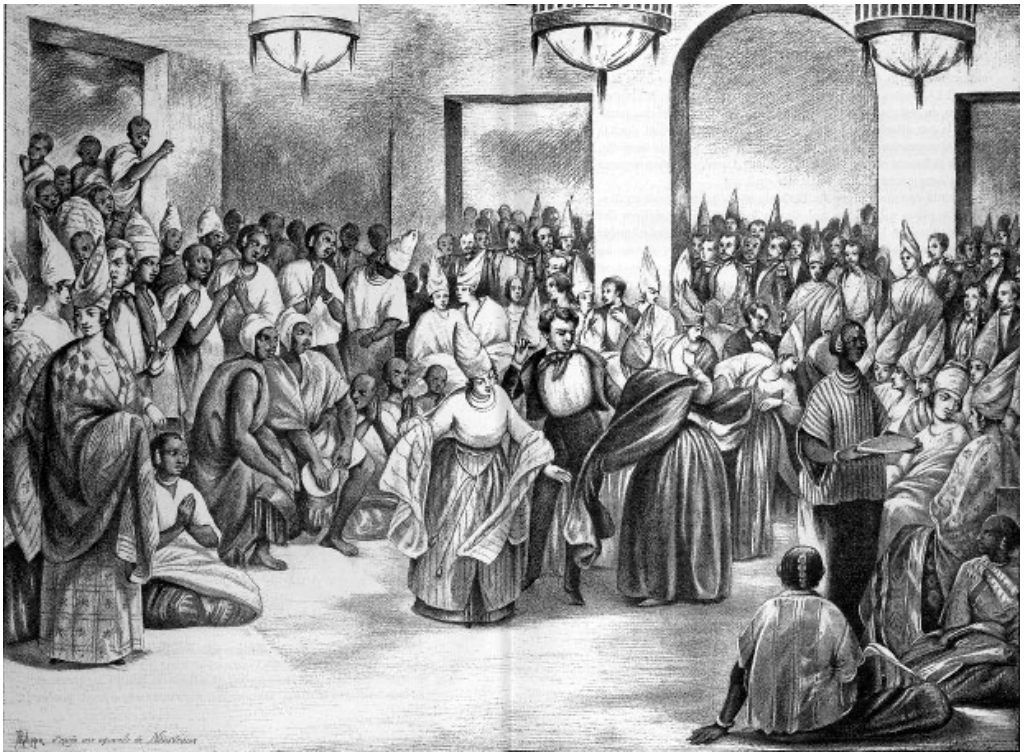
Aujourd'huy premier may mil sept cents soixante seize est comparuë devant nous Commandant pour le Roy et Administrateur general de l'Isle de Gorée et dependances la Signare Ouadramé laquelle nous a representé que n'ayant eu qu'une concepion Verbale par les anciens gouverneurs de cette colonie pour le terrein quelle occupe, elle nous supplioit de luy en accorder une par ecrit pour assurer sa proprieté, Auquoy apres avoir fait prendre le toisé dudt terrein et avoir pris les informations les plus exactes sur la concepion Verbale qui luy en avoit eté accordée, nous la luy avons renouvellée par ces presentes et luy comedons en toute proprieté le terrein quelle occupe situé a l'extremité du Jardin du Gouvernement, numeroté 8. sur le plan de Gorée envoyé a la cour, ayant trente six pieds de largeur et soixante six de longueur pour par elle en jouir ainsi que ses heritiers sans pouvoir etre inquietés ni troublés dans la possepion a Gorée les d.t jour et an signé le brasseur

pour copie conforme a l'original

Lerrannus

Appendix G

Un bal de signares, Édouard Nousveaux, 1884



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