UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Disability and Sensibility:

Reading Trends in Nineteenth-Century Women's Novels (1815-1890)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in French and Francophone Studies

by

Elyse Brusher

2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Disability and Sensibility: Reading Trends in Nineteenth-Century Women's Novels (1815-1890)

by

Elyse Brusher

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Malina Stefanovska, Chair

This dissertation explores the evolution of the representation of physical and mental disability in novels written by French women over the course of the nineteenth century. In this study, I analyze how women authors engage with their precarious status, one that had historically resulted in their relegation to the sentimental genre and the exclusion of their work from consideration as serious texts. The sentimental genre embodies the often-contradictory predicament of women authors: as a potential agent of social upheaval and source of toxic feminine sensibility but also as a frivolous supply of entertainment for bourgeois women. It thus serves as a vector through which women authors engaged with shifting medical and philosophical discourses that asserted theirs and disabled individuals' inferiority, and that this is effected through their depictions of disabled individuals. I examine this through the following research questions: How did nineteenth-century French women novelists write about disability?

How did they select the disability they wrote about and why did they choose it? How did the type of disability chosen shape and inform the narrative structure of their novels?

At the intersection of Literary, Gender, and Disability studies, my dissertation employs a variety of theoretical frameworks to trace the evolving dynamics of French female authorship as they are mediated through nineteenth-century sentimental novels featuring physically and/or mentally 'abnormal' protagonists. I analyze a sampling of novels that best exemplify this phenomenon to identify and study three trends in the type of disability represented in them that occurred over the course of the century: 1). Invisible physical disability; 2). Visible physical defect in women; 3). Neurosis. I contend that French women authors chose disabilities around which they could construct a compelling narrative that would at times transgress conventions of the sentimental genre and conventional representations of gender dynamics therein. While discussions of women-authored sentimental novels preoccupy many scholars (Cohen 1999, Bertrand-Jennings 2005, Louichon 2009, Wang 2011), my dissertation targets the subgenre that emerged when relegated authors (nineteenth-century French women) wrote about relegated people (disabled individuals) in a relegated genre (the sentimental genre) and how it changes over time.

The dissertation of Elyse Brusher is approved.

Helen E Deutsch

Cécile Guédon

Eleanor K Kaufman

Malina Stefanovska, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION **1**

CHAPTER 1: DISABILITY AND FEMALE AUTHORSHIP **21**

A Brief history of the Disabled Body in the Western Tradition 21

The Relationship between the Woman (Author) and the Disabled Body 28

Depictions of Disability in French Fiction 38

CHAPTER 2: INVISIBLE PHYSICAL DISABILITY **43**

The Goals for the Novel 47

Early Nineteenth-Century Conceptions of Invisible Physical Disability 54

The Disability's Effect on the Narrative Structure 60

Crafting a sentimental hero 64

Communication Barriers and Epistolarity 71

Silence and the Agential Ingenue in *Anatole* 73

Olivier, ou le secret and the Doomed Correspondence 79

The Importance of Masculine-Coded Intermediaries 84

Resistance 88

Conclusion 96

CHAPTER 3: A LASTING FASCINATION WITH 'UGLY' HEROINES **99**

The Goals for the Novel 104

Nineteenth Century Conceptions of Ugliness in Women 115

The Disability's on the Narrative Structure 122

Crafting an 'Ugly' Sentimental Heroine 123

Containment and Exile: Managing Ugliness 134

Banishment from the Category of Woman 137

Limited Resistance 147

Conclusion 159

CHAPTER 4: *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* MEDICAL DISCOURSES ON THE NEUROTIC FEMALE BRAIN 161

Fin-de-siècle Cultural and Literary Context 166

The Goals for the Novel 170

Nineteenth-Century Conceptions of Neurosis 176

The Disability's Effect on the Narrative Structure 179

Crafting a Neurotic Heroine 182

Consequences 184

Diagnosis and Treatment: Sites of Masculine Anxieties 192

In Praise of Sensibility 200

Curious Endings 214

Conclusion 220

CONCLUSION 222

BIBLIOGRAPHY 226

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is indebted to many individuals, so it is difficult to know where to begin. Perhaps with my first exposure to the French, singing along to language-learning cassette tapes with my parents in the car on the way to ballet class, establishing it as a permanent part of my life. This appreciation grew throughout my time as an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan under the mentorship and instruction of Dr. Dominique Butler-Borruat and Dr. Elissa Bell Bayrakter, who first taught me to read and analyze French literature. I was also fortunate enough to participate in a fantastic study abroad program through Michigan State University under the direction of Dr. Anna Norris. This afforded me the opportunity to study at the Institut de Touraine while experiencing French culture through my host mother, grandmother, and dog (Germaine, Anne, and Hérmione Turpault). Thank you for your kind, generous, and welcoming spirit.

I credit much of my decision to pursue a Ph.D. in French & Francophone Studies to my undergraduate thesis advisor, Professor George Hoffmann. Your investment in me as a scholar and a person showed me the joys of research and pushed me to go beyond that of which I believed myself to be capable.

At UCLA, I have been afforded the opportunity to work with incredible scholars, particularly my dissertation committee members, Eleanor Kaufman, Helen Deutsch, Cécile Guédon, and my committee chair, Malina Stefanovska. Thank you for bringing your expertise to discussions of my research, for pushing me to sharpen my analyses, and for your empathy, kindness, support, and mentorship. I have also been fortunate to receive numerous grants and fellowships to facilitate my research. Thank you to the Josephine De Karman Fellowship Trust for your generous support, in the form of a dissertation year fellowship, without which this work would not have been possible. Thanks also to Malina Stefanovska and the Center for European and Russian Studies for making my archival research trips possible. Additionally, I am grateful for the assistance I received along the way from professors, librarians, and staff at UCLA, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the École Normale Supérieuere.

I must also express my gratitude to the wonderful individuals with whom I have worked across departments at UCLA throughout my Ph.D. journey, namely Hallie Scott, Kai Monet, and the fantastic team of student educators at the Hammer Museum; Alison Fedyna Villa, Kumiko Haas, Michelle Servan, Beth Goodhue, Caroline Kong, and the rest of the CAT team; Tom Garbelotti and the AY 2021-2022 RITCs; Stella Nair, Alba Menéndez Pereda, and the rest of the Andean Working Group; Joe Bristow and the rest of the Center for 17th- & 18th-Century Studies team; Erin Brown and the rest of the Graduate Career Services office; Marilyn Gray and her fantastic team of writing consultants; and Andrew James McClure, Trisha Mazumder, Zuleika Bravo, Isabel Benvenuti, Letty Treviño, Akash Deep Singh, Ivy Kwok, Julia Bigwood, Caiyun Yu and the rest of my Graduate Student Resource Center family. Thank you for keeping me sane, for serving as trusted confidants, and for giving me the opportunity to contribute to so many professional and personally fulfilling projects that have enriched and been enriched by my research.

Special thanks also to my friends and colleagues at and beyond UCLA. Thanks to Lizzie Collins for your mentorship and help navigating the program. You are and always have been an inspiration! Thank you to Katy Chaffee for helping me find the joy in dancing again through salsa! Thanks to Bethany Schiffmann for your guidance and patience and for being the only other person willing to work(out) with me at 6am. Thanks to Danielle Hanzalik for afternoon walks during the pandemic, rides to church, German practice, and encouragement throughout the dissertation-writing process. Thank you to Denys Cennet Planchard for the informal orientation of the École Normale Supérieure and the surrounding areas and to Kacie Morgan for your friendship during our shared season abroad in Paris. Thank you to my writing group (Anne Le, Kersti Francis, Misho Ishikawa, and Farrah O'Shea) who welcomed me with open arms despite my not being a Medievalist. Thank you for all of the laughs, venting sessions, and trees planted! Thank you also to my forever friends whose love, companionship, strength, and ability to see the bright side of things carried me through my program. Melissa Durante, Simonne Kapadia, Chloe Sprague, and Grace Jones, I am eternally grateful to have you in my life.

To my family, Mom, Dad, and Alex, thank you for believing in my and encouraging me to follow my passions.

To Elias, I do not know how I got so lucky as to meet you in our second year at the French Department TA Orientation or to marry you in the place we fell in love. Thank you for being my rock throughout my dissertation journey and for all of the adventures we have shared along the way. I look towards the future with excitement, knowing that whatever it may hold, we will navigate it together.

VITA

Before attending the University of California, Los Angeles, Elyse Brusher earned a Bachelor of Arts with Highest Honors in French Language and Literature in 2015 from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Elyse taught English culture and language in primary schools in France as Teaching Assistant for the Teaching Assistant Program in France from 2015-2016. During this time, she volunteered, and continues to volunteer in various capacities at Freedom House Detroit. At UCLA, she has taught a variety of courses covering pedagogy and French culture, language, and literature. She has also developed and put on pedagogy and instructional technology workshops for graduate students. In addition, Elyse co-founded community-building and advocacy groups and programs such as the UCLA Graduate and Professional Student Alumni (GPSA) Network and the UCLA InterGrad Dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

What makes an individual (ab)normal? How are these standards determined culturally? How do these codes and depictions of (ab)normality in popular literature shape each other and how does this inform our understanding of what to do with disabled bodies? With these guiding questions, my project aims to think through the potential of disability to subvert cultural and literary norms when employed in nineteenth-century, women-authored French novels. Since the late twentieth century, when studies on movements in women-authored works of fiction in the nineteenth century began to proliferate, research has focused primarily on the sentimental genre, to which women authors of the nineteenth century were often relegated. Nineteenth-century women's novels, then, have historically been studied within the confines of the sentimental genre, and interpreted as responses to trends in men's writing. Books that violated conventions of the sentimental genre, whether stylistically, thematically, or temporally, by being published during the latter half of the century, when the sentimental genre had faded in popularity, have traditionally been considered as outlying and disconnected cases. This is particularly true of nineteenth century women-authored fiction, featuring disabled protagonists.

My project offers a new method for analyzing these texts, by considering them as a cohort that makes use of codes of the sentimental genre. This approach allows me to identify and study three distinct trends in the types of disability the authors of my primary sources employed (1. Invisible physical disability; 2. Visible physical defect [coded as ugliness] in women; and 3. Neurosis) over the course of the nineteenth century to shed light on the extent to which authors of books in this genre strategically used sentimental codes to call attention to the status of women and disabled individuals. It also affords me the opportunity to investigate the effect of the disability depicted and sentimental codes employed on the narrative structure. I do so by

studying the strategic implementation of these elements as a function of the evolving stakes of female authorship over the course of the century.

My aim here is to analyze the results produced by the interactions between sentimental codes and novelistic depictions of disability as employed by women authors in a context particular to nineteenth-century France. Before going any further, it is important to briefly define the sentimental genre and sentimental codes in the nineteenth-century European context. According to Brigitte Louichon, the birth of the sentimental novel dates back to the seventeenth century with *L'Astrée* (*The Star*) (1607), *La Clélie* (*Clelie/Clelia*) (1654), and *La Princesse de Clèves* (*The Princess of Cleves*) (1678). However, key to the nineteenth-century sentimental paradigm is Rousseau's *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (*Julie or the new Heloise*) (1761), which was widely reprinted at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and Sophie Cottin's best-selling *Claire d'Albe* (1799). The nineteenth-century sentimental novel, like its predecessors, "met en œuvre un langage particulier, celui de la sensibilité" ("employs a particular language, that of sensibility") (Louichon, 46).[1] It privileges the expression of sentiment, often through involuntary bodily responses, such as tears. Such displays were thought to reveal a character's virtue and indicate their improvement in this area, a progression that was intended to catalyze a similar response in the reader.[2] As we will see, beginning in the mid-late nineteenth century, authors began to deploy sentimental codes in a satirical manner to demonstrate how these supposedly authentic signs of morality could, in fact, be faked for selfish ends.

In her 1999 study, *Parlez-moi d'amour: le roman sentimental: des romans grecs aux collections de l'an 2000* (Speak to me about love: the sentimental novel: from Greek novels to

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.
[2] Improving the morality of the reader was, to some extent, the goal of the novel genre in general up until the Realist movement, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.

collections from the year 2000), Ellen Constans enumerates three codes, essential to the nineteenth-century sentimental novel: "1. La fable est constituée par une histoire d'amour [...]. 2. L'histoire d'amour se développe entre les deux protagonistes immédiatement désignés comme tels ; le sentiment est durable ; par-delà les péripéties, le dénouement confirme la permanence de cet amour réciproque. [...] 3. Le programme narratif peut [...] s'organiser autour de l'aventure amoureuse" ("1. The tale constitutes a love story […]. 2. The love story is developed between two protagonists immediately designated as such; the sentiment is durable; throughout the twists and turns, the denouement confirms the permanence of this reciprocal love […] 3. The narrative program can […] be organized around an amorous adventure") (27-28). Constans thus establishes the primacy of romantic (mis)adventures in novels of this genre.

Brigitte Louichon then extends Constans' analysis of the narrative structure of the nineteenth-century sentimental novel in her book *Romancières sentimentales (1789-1825)* (Female Sentimental Novelists [1789-1825]) (2009). She argues that the love story unfolds through three obligatory steps: "rencontre, disjonction, conjonction finale dans le bonheur ou malheur" (meeting, separation, final coming together in happiness or misfortune) (Louichon, 130). All these phases, then, primarily focus on the happiness and misfortune of the subject represented. Additionally, the author depicts a small number of characters to preserve the intensity of the tragedy that the protagonist confronts, often an internalized struggle between the imperatives of collective welfare and individual freedom.

Margaret Cohen discusses this at length in her 1999 study, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, stating that a double bind motivates the paradigmatic sentimental plot:

> The sentimental novel catches its protagonists between two moral imperatives, each valid in its own right, but which meet in a situation of mutual contradiction. Collective welfare, which constitutes one term of the double bind is aligned with an unstable cluster of Enlightenment abstractions including the public good, manners, society, reason, and other

> people's well-being. Against this imperative, the sentimental novel asserts the imperative to individual freedom, which it associates with happiness, choice, nature, the private, sentiment, and erotic love. (34)

This definition underscores the attributes of sentimental heroism, namely "moral integrity, sensibility and intelligence" (35). In this context, nineteenth-century female characters traditionally embody their *auteure*'s struggle to balance the contrary socially imposed expectations that they passively avoid committing faults and actively educate those around them in morality. Indeed, as nineteenth-century women were to do for their children, the future citizens of France, sentimental novels were to educate. Specifically, they were to teach readers how to feel noble sentiments, while guarding against vice, excess, and sexual deviancy. A woman-authored narrative featuring disability, then, lent itself to engagement with the social imperative to 'correct' the disability by educating and integrating the disabled person into society through, but not limited to, sentimental codes. I will argue that the authors of my primary source texts employ this framework to highlight the struggles of marginalized individuals both to entice readers by tugging at their heartstrings and to normalize the inclusion in society of people who shared the similar identities to those of the characters depicted in the text.

To do so, I also analyze how the social, political, medical, and literary climate both influenced and was influenced by the formation this subgenre in nineteenth-century France. I consider the evolution in categories of 'abnormality,' such as "*infirmité*" ("disability"), "*défaut*" ("defect"), "*difformité*" ("deformity"), and "*monstruosité*" ("monstrosity"), that occurred during this period. When did these terms come into use in the French language and how were they applied? How did the kinds of disability these authors focused on evolve over time and why? How did these authors leverage their marginalized status as women (authors) and that of disabled people in their novels? How did this affect the narrative form these authors chose? In addressing

these questions, I aim to bring to light a feminine writing of disability in nineteenth-century French novels. I ultimately argue that these novels can productively be read together to understand and identify trends in how their creators at times reinforced and resisted dominant literary forms and conceptions of gender and ability in their competing efforts to establish the merits of their work (and that of women authors at large), cultivate a loyal readership, and innovate.

All of these authors take for their point of departure a protagonist afflicted with a disability. This leads me to a key theoretical apparatus of this project: disability studies. The modern form of disability studies took shape as a discipline in France as "les études du handicap" ("handicap studies") in the latter half of the twentieth century, due in part to the large number of wounded soldiers returning from fighting in the World Wars.[3] However, the interest in understanding and treating disability dates back much further. The term "infirmité" (denoting "disability", "infirmity" and originally "handicap") existed in the French language as early as the seventeenth century and is the subject of a lengthy entry in the seminal *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751) by Diderot and d'Alembert.[4] "Handicap," a word, which came into usage in French in the twentieth century, then absorbed "infirmité" to become the primary referent for disability and Disability Studies, without the negative conations that "handicap" carries in English. The word "normal"[5] did not appear in the *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française* (Dictionary of the French Academy) until 1835, where one of its definitions specifically referred to the body.[6]

[3] See "French Disability Studies: Differences and Similarities" in the *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, vol. 9, Nos. 3-4, p. 138-145, 2007 for further information.
[4] Further referred to as *Encyclopédie*.
[5] Its derivative "*norme*" ("norm") appeared in the *Dictionnaire de la langue française* in 1873.
[6] "*État normal,* État d'un être organisé ou d'un organe qui n'a éprouvé aucune altération ; état ordinaire et régulier. Il s'emploie surtout en termes d'Anatomie" ["*Normal state*, state of an organized being or of an organ that has not

When depicting characters suffering from pathologized corporeal difference, nineteenth-century French writers could choose from a series of terms, some of them newly applied to the human body, that described different levels of severity of the defect with varying degrees of specificity. "Défaut" ("defect"),[7] which denoted the most minor type of flaw, appeared for the first time in the sense of an imperfection of the body in this edition of the dictionary, though it had existed long before in relation to moral vice and continues to be applied that way throughout the nineteenth century.[8] Next, the term "difformité" ("deformity")[9] made its debut in the 1835 *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, in reference to pathologized variation in body parts and features that exceeded those described by the term "défaut."[10] Then, "monstruosité" ("monstrosity")[11] appeared in the *Dictionnaire de la langue française* in 1873 in reference to man. While "défaut" and "difformité" most often described minor, accidental impairments, "monstruosité" referred to a more serious, often congenital disability.[12] "Monstruosité" also

---

felt any alteration; ordinary and regular state. It is employed mainly in terms of Anatomy"] (*Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française.* Sixième Édition. T.2.).

[7] "Imperfection. *Les défauts du corps. Cette femme est belle, mais elle a un défaut dans la taille. C'est un défaut dans un cheval, que d'avoir le ventre gros. Défaut léger. Défaut naturel. Défaut qui vient d'accident*" ("Imperfection. *The defects of the body. This woman is pretty, but she has a defect in her height. It is a defect in a horse, having a big stomach. Slight defect. Natural defect. Defect that come from an accident*") (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1835)

[8] In the eighteenth century, the moral dimension of this term emerged both in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1762) and in the *Encyclopédie*. See d'Alembert's article "Défaut, Vice, Imperfection" (Defect, Vice, Imperfection) in the *Encyclopédie*.

[9] "Défaut très-apparent dans la forme, dans les proportions. *Cela fait une grande difformité. Les loupes, la bosse, sont des difformités…La difformité d'un membre. Corriger une difformité.*" ("Very apparent defect in shape, in proportions. *This constitutes a big deformity, boils, humps are deformities…Deformity of a limb. Correct a deformity*") (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1835).

[10] The adjective, "difforme," from which "difformité" was derived appeared for the first time in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* in the seventeenth century, denoting ugliness and a defect in bodily proportions.

[11] "Nom donné à des anomalies graves dans la conformation, toujours apparentes au dehors, et plus ou moins nuisibles à l'individu qui les présente" ("Name given to serious anomalies in conformation, always apparent on the outside and more or less harmful to the afflicted individual") (*Dictionnaire de la langue française*, 1873).

[12] Indeed, Diderot and d'Allembert had applied the term "monstre," the term from which "monstruosité" was derived, to animals and humans, in reference to congenital defects in their *Encyclopédie*. "*Monstre*" ("monster") entered the language in the seventeenth century, in reference to vice and a cruel nature (*Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que moderne* [*Treasury of the French Language Ancient and Modern*]). "*Monstrueux*" ("monstrous" or "repulsive") appeared in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* in 1798, referring both to corrupt moral character and appearance; "c'est une femme d'une laideur monstrueuse" (it is a woman of a monstrous ugliness).

carried a connotation of spectacle and of immediately visible impairment. However, it lacked specificity about criteria for inclusion in the category. Over the course of this introduction and the subsequent chapters, I will also be dealing with terms such as "*impuissance*" ("impotence"), *boiteux*" ("crippled" or "lame"), and "*névroses*" ("neuroses") and I will define them in context. Indeed, this renewed effort to capture and classify bodily abnormality constitutes a key point of my analysis of the cultural and medical milieu in which the works I study were produced.

At the intersection of Gender, Literary, and Disability Studies, my study analyzes best-selling novels of understudied, female authors, spanning the nineteenth century. I move chronologically to highlight trends in women-authored novels featuring a disabled protagonist, which can be identified through its formal and thematic elements. I see as central to this subgenre a sentimental marriage plot, mediated, interrupted, or redirected by disability. Such a structure creates opportunities for female characters to assume a more active role in the text. Heroines at times pursue heroes, resist arranged marriages, live independently, develop and run salons, and attain increasing amounts of freedom and control over their situations. However, this often fades away in a denouement that reinforces patriarchal and ableist norms.

Stylistically, each primary text in my corpus blurs the lines of the sentimental novel to which their authors, as women, were often relegated: they complicate the romanticized vision of disability integral to this genre to favor the existence of 'deviant' bodies. Thematically, each author focuses chiefly on how a disability can disrupt the social imperative to bear and rear children. In selecting my texts, I sought to include those which did not simply include a disabled character, but rather employed it strategically and repeatedly as a critical narrative device. The disability affects not only the plot, but how the story is told, allowing the authors to explore the inextricably related conceptions of gender and disability.

As Alison Kafer has noted in her discussion of the intersections of queerness and disability, "'Queer' remains a contested terrain, with theorists and activists continuing to debate what and whom the term encompasses or excludes" (16). This ambiguity has had negative consequences, such as the conflation of "queer" with terms such as "difference" or "deviance," causing it to lose some of its power to reveal new levels of meaning in the field of literary analysis. Elucidating a precise definition for the purposes of this study, is therefore imperative.[13] I use the term "queer" to refer to authors/characters whose gender or sexual orientation do not conform to historical or modern norms. I also employ it to designate efforts to resist dominant ideologies, a practice that is related to but more expansive than simply deviating from norms. This definition allows me to leverage the slipperiness of queerness to analyze concepts that overlap theoretically with gender norms, most importantly, disability and literary studies.

Formal elements studied in this dissertation include narrative strategies or devices, such as epistolarity, use of gender coding, and irony. I also study books published during the later years of the nineteenth century, resisting the assumption that best-selling women-authored novels that make use of sentimental codes only occurred prior to that time. As previously noted, since the 1990s, a growing body of research has focused on sentimental novels written by women in the nineteenth century, which, at times, feature disability prominently. However, I believe that these novels can be productively read together within the corpus of nineteenth-century novels authored by women, depicting disability, as they leverage both the transgressive potential of the female and disabled experience, thus enabling sentimental codes to at times disrupt and reinforce dominant social structures.

[13] For further reading on theoretical conceptions of queerness, see Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990); Annamarie Jagose's *Queer Theory* (1996); and, of course, Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013).

I devised my process for case-study selection by reading secondary sources that examined sentimental novels, written by women, first, and the subject of disability in novels, second, without discussing the overlap between this specific authorship and the thematics within this genre, a gap which I seek to fill. In her book, *The Male Malady: Fictions of Impotence in the French Romantic Novel* (1993) American literature scholar Margaret Waller reframes the "*mal du siècle*" as the "*mâles du siècle*" (she replaces "*mal*," signifying "evil or malady" with "*mâles*," meaning "male" to create a play on words, designed to illustrate that the mal du siècle tended to affect men more so than women). This term refers to the idea that the mal du siècle, first 'diagnosed' by Chateaubriand in the eponymous character of *René* (1802) and popularized by Alfred de Musset in *Confessions d'un enfant du siècle* (Confessions of a Child of the Century) (1834), describes feelings of powerlessness as inducing a crisis of identity in the nineteenth century French society.[14] In Waller's reading, the condition affects men more frequently and severely than it does women. She interrogates not only what becomes of men but what becomes of women when gender boundaries dissolve in the realm of sexuality and political agency.

During this period, Waller argues, a series of gentler, Romantic heroes emerges with more traditionally feminine characteristics. She considers Claire de Duras's *Olivier, ou le secret* (Oliver or the Secret) (1822),[15] but does not analyze it within the context of Disability Studies, so much as Literary Studies. Furthermore, she applies the same theoretical approach to it as she does to novels with protagonists who *felt* impotent but did not physically suffer from this medical ailment. This method allows for a productive consideration of the social, political, and economic factors that led to a proliferation of literature in nineteenth-century France centering on

[14] Alfred de Musset attributed this malady to the loss of Napoleon, the father figure of the French Republic.
[15] Though *Olivier, ou le secret* was written in 1822, it was not officially published until the manuscript was rediscovered in 1971 because sharing her work verbally in salons created such a backlash over the content that she decided not to publish it.

melancholy protagonists who felt alienated from society. However, it is limiting in that it does not take into account the way in which the narrative is constructed around protagonist's disability, nor does it examine the crucial importance of the author's positionality, stemming from her status as a woman.

More recently, literature scholar, Margaret Cohen has sought to understand the status of women writers in nineteenth-century French society and how their literary production influenced and was influenced by that of their male contemporaries. In her study, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (1999), Cohen seeks to situate the various novel genres in competition during the nineteenth century (namely Sentimental, Romantic, and Realist novels) in France in their social context. She argues first for those in her field to rethink and question literary history, periodization, and what defines a masterpiece. Cohen also resists the characterization of the Realist genre as being unavailable to women writers solely because of their reticence to draw upon *vraisemblance* in a society that routinely oppressed them. In other words, Cohen was unconvinced by the previously accepted theory that nineteenth-century French women writers avoided Realist depictions of the world around them because they resented their position in it. This is an important addition to Waller's work in that it recognizes the agency of women authors and the strategy behind their use of sentimental codes.

In Cohen's view, women writers such as George Sand (née Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin de Francueil) (1804-1876) and Sophie Cottin (1770-1807) were the main competition of their male contemporaries (such as Stendhal [1783-1842] and Balzac [1799-1850]) who favored Realist codes in their writing. According to Cohen, "while French feminists have related poetics directly to the construction of gender on the level of the whole social formation, the impact of gender on texts is, in fact, mediated by the construction of gender within the social relations of

literary production" (10). Here, Cohen calls attention to the ways in which gender is conceived of, captured, and understood in the writing world, as opposed to in society in general; the way gender construction operates in this specific milieu is important to take into account when studying its impact on literature produced in it. When we examine literary movements through this lens, affirms Cohen, the Realist movement appears as a response to "nonrealist fiction by Balzac and Stendhal's '*consœurs*'" (10). Men reclaim the novel through Realist tropes and women operate within the confines of the sentimental genre.

Cohen's study elucidates the nineteenth-century French discomfort with fluidity within *genres* (both gender and literary). A woman resembling a man, either in her physical or character traits (thinking as a man would or loving a woman as a man should), or, in writerly terms, one that threatens to unravel the very fabric of society as a dangerous form of hybridity. It is also useful to place Cohen's work in conversation with its predecessor David Denby's *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France, 1760-1820* (1994). Denby argues for a more serious consideration of sentimental novels as a genre in exile with transgressive potential due to the way it privileged individual freedom over societal needs. This was a particularly dangerous idea in the post-Revolutionary context of a society trying to rebuild itself based on sacrifice of individual freedom for the common good. The conception of the sentimental genre as frivolous appears, then, as an attempt to contain and diminish a potential threat to the organization of society. Such categorical relegation is effectively no more flexible or nuanced than the refusal of difference we have already observed regarding the disabled.

Taking up Denby's call for greater scholarly study of Sentimental novels, literature scholar, Chantal Bertrand-Jennings explores the way nineteenth-century French women authors employed Sentimental and Romantic codes in their texts. She argues in her 2005 book *Un autre*

mal du siècle: le romantisme des romancières 1800-1846 (Another *mal du siècle*: the Romanticism of Female Novelists 1800-1846) that the Romanticism of women novelists does not present the same level of *ennui*[16] as that of their male contemporaries. According to Bertrand-Jennings, the traditional definition of *mal du siècle* does not apply to Romantic women writers of the period. Furthermore, she links this observation to the social conditions to which these "*femmes auteurs*"[17] are subjected: women in the nineteenth century found themselves legally, politically, and socially marginalized and expressed compassion towards oppressed victims (such as the disabled) in their books. This study lays important groundwork for my intervention in terms of establishing the link between the female author experience and that of her subject matter. However, it all too-often neglects their agency and the strategy behind their use of marginalized disabled characters, and sentimental codes in their novels.

Ying Wang, a doctoral scholar in French and Women's Studies at Pennsylvania State University, sought to fill in some of these gaps in her 2011 dissertation entitled *Deviance and Transgression: "Monstruous" Bodies in Nineteenth Century Women's Fiction*. In it, she expounds upon several cases of early-to-mid-nineteenth-century French women-authored novels that feature a disabled character, drawing out some of the formal and thematic elements that I examine here. This breaks significant ground for my dissertation, which argues for the consideration of nineteenth-century-women-authored sentimental novels that feature disabled characters as a cohesive subgenre. My project studies a larger sample size and publication window to describe and analyze trends in the type of disability depicted as a function of the

[16] In a narrow sense, this term referred and still refers to boredom and worries, but it became the main emotion that encapsulated the sense of powerlessness characteristic of the *mal du siècle*.
[17] In French, until towards the end of the 20th century, the feminine form of many professions either did not exist or was not widely used and accepted. Thus, the qualifier "*femme*" was often added to indicate the gender of the person performing the job. In this sense, the Aristotelian idea of man being the reference and woman being a derivative is evident in the syntax of the French language.

evolving literary, cultural, and socio-political context. This approach also allows me to examine the strategic decisions women authors of the nineteenth century made in terms of their peritexts and texts, such as establishing the ethos of their books by associating themselves with successful women writers and texts that had preceded them. Indeed, my work builds on that of Waller, Cohen, Denby, Bertrand-Jennings, and Wang who paved the way for a consideration of the patterns present in French women's writing.

My undertaking, as previously stated, considers the subgenre of French women-authored works of fiction depicting disability published throughout the nineteenth century. I make this argument through the identification and study of three distinct aforementioned trends: 1. Invisible physical disability; 2. The fascination of 'ugly'[18] heroines, and 3. Neuroses that occur early, throughout, and late in the nineteenth century, respectively. In the first category, I study Sophie Gay's *Anatole*[19] (1815) and Claire de Duras's *Olivier, ou le secret* (1971)[20]. Both novels revolve around a quest to discover the secret (deaf-muteness and impotence, respectively) of a male protagonist who is largely absent from the narrative. At this point, I briefly summarize the events of the backlash that Claire de Duras faced over the subject matter of her manuscript. This allows me to analyze the mid-century shift in women's writing on disability, from books intended to be read to adults, to children's literature as partly a function of the violent attacks to which such texts were subjected as part of the effort to masculinize the novel genre. In the second category, I examine Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis's *Jeanne de France* (*Jane of France*)[21]

[18] As we will see, women designated as 'ugly' during the nineteenth century in France were characterized as such due to a variety of differences in physical appearance from skin tone to defect or deformity of body parts.
[19] This novel was first translated into English in 1841 by the Baroness Hénart. Before this, in 1815, a German translation was published.
[20] While *Oliver, ou le secret* has not yet been translated into English, an Italian translation was published in 1989 by Daria Galateria and a Spanish translation by José Ramón San Juan was published in 2013.
[21] As Genlis was fluent in both English and French, she translated her text to English and published it in 1817.

(1816) and Juliette Lamber's *Laide* (*A Fascinating Woman*)[22] (1878). Both novels are constructed around a female protagonist whose appearance is characterized by such deviance from contemporary beauty standards that it forces her into exile. Here, my analysis operates at the intersection of aesthetics, performance, and gender (including queerness). The spread of this type of literary production over the course of the nineteenth century also allows me to study the evolution of this trend over time. Finally, I consider Georges de Peyrebrune's *Une décadente* (A Decadent Woman) (1886) and Daniel Lesueur's *Névrosée* (A Neurotic Woman) (1890).[23] These last two texts deal with madness and its relationship to the female brain. I propose that these works emerge as a response to scientific discourse that attempted to prove the inferiority of the female brain to that of the male through craniometry and suggested that, for this reason, women could not manage the rigor of a masculine education. As discussed, each section of my analysis takes up a trend that occurs during a different period of the nineteenth century, in the type of disability treated and in usage of sentimental codes.

It is important to note that the authors I have selected did not necessarily face the same challenges as the disabled characters they featured in their novels; they came from a variety of backgrounds. For example, Sophie Gay and Claire de Duras were wealthy heiresses, descended from members of the royal court of the Old Regime, who wrote for pleasure as well as to advance the cause of feminism both through the content of their books and their feminine authorial personas. Some authors resisted this gender-based characterization by writing under a masculine pseudonym, as did Jeanne Lapauze (née Loiseau), penname Daniel Lesueur, or by

[22] Juliette Lamber's novel was first translated into English in 1893 by John Stirling (pseudonym Mary Neal Sherwood) (1829-?), a writer and translator who also translated works of well-known authors of the period, such as Alphonse Daudet's *Jack* (1876) and Émile Zola's *La curée* (1871) into English. It is interesting to note that, unlike the French version, the English translation cannot bring itself to use to word "ugly," indicating that this term would perhaps be too shocking for an Anglophone audience.

[23] Neither of these novels has been translated into English, so all translations of quotes will be mine.

publishing anonymously, as did Claire de Duras[24]. However, this veiling of the feminine identity in writing did not extend into their daily lives as it did for other women authors of the period, such as George Sand and Rachilde (Marguerite Vallette-Eymery).

Other authors of my primary sources, such as Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis and Mathilde Marie Georgina Élisabeth de Peyrebrune Judicis (Georges de Peyrebrune) published out of financial necessity and relied upon this income to support themselves and their families. While Georges de Peyrebrune, and, to some degree Juliette Adam (Lamber) had first and/or second-hand experience with the disabilities they employed in their novels, others such as Daniel Lesueur did not. Intended or not, the authors' opportunistic and strategic use of disability as a narrative device and sentimental codes is integral to this subgenre of literature as is their aim to attain popularity with a feminine bourgeois readership. Women of the nineteenth century faced many obstacles in everyday life as well as in writing and publishing. However, the authors I study here are privileged in that they succeeded in making connections, reaching their target audience, and ultimately publishing best-selling novels.

To provide necessary context for my argument, Chapter 1 surveys the history of women authors' relationship to disability as a literary subject. The idea of female inferiority, which had existed since Antiquity, persisted during the nineteenth century, reinforced by the pathologizing of the heightened sensibility associated with women in the world of medicine and in popular culture. Women novelists therefore felt an affinity towards disabled individuals, which partially motivated their depiction of them. Given the difficulty of conveying a message of social change, especially through the sentimental genre to which they had been relegated, they also took

[24] However, as Margaret Waller notes in *The Male Malady: Fictions of Impotence in the French Romantic Novel* (1993), Duras's 'signature' was still discernable in the *mise en page* of her novels: expensive, high-quality paper, distinctive lithographs, etc.

advantage of the potential of disabled characters to at times transgress conventions. As Mitchell and Snyder have argued, the text "suffers" from the presence of the disabled body and the narrative's transmission through it. The author must then respond to the challenges it poses with creativity and ingenuity, which I study in Chapters 2-4 through an examination of the text, peritext, and epitext of my primary sources, as examples of a broader trend. I also evaluate the evolution and degree of success of the strategies that these authors, and their peers, used to accomplish their goals of advancing the cause of women and/or disabled individuals and gaining recognition as novelists, goals which at times came into conflict with one another.

Chapter 2 examines invisible physical disabilities portrayed in Sophie Gay's *Anatole* (1815) and Claire de Duras's *Olivier ou le secret* (Olivier or the Secret) (1822). Due to the onset of the Industrial Revolution, French citizens were increasingly defined by their capability—what they could *do* in society—as well as organized into heterosexual family units. Knowing this, Gay and Duras depicted a male protagonist afflicted with a type of physical impairment that is not visible (deaf-muteness and impotence, respectively), and constituted an insurmountable obstacle to the love/marriage and procreation plot central to the sentimental novel. That the hero (not the heroine) is disabled in both works affects the way in which the love story unfolds. For instance, Duras's hero's impotence establishes a fundamentally queer romantic relationship between the protagonists. Both texts focus on the heroine's subjectivity and her quest, rather than that of the hero, while at the same time employing familiar sentimental codes, so as not to alienate the reader. Duras and Gay also create subtle, but intentional connections between their texts through techniques such as naming characters after those in novels by their female contemporaries and/or predecessors. This encourages readers to read/consider them together. It also allows Gay and Duras to assert membership in the category of successful women authors and attain more

popularity for their books, a strategy common to their peers. Despite Duras's execution of these strategies, she experienced such severe backlash, exacerbated by the efforts of Stendhal, following readings of her manuscript at salon gatherings that she never published *Olivier ou le secret*. Though Gay and Duras did not define themselves as feminists (that term entered the French language later in the nineteenth century), their choice to demand participation in the literary world and associate themselves with the women who came before them laid the groundwork for feminist literary movements that would follow. Additionally, with their descriptions of the negative effects of mental and emotional distress on the body, Gay and Duras touch on the allure of unwell women that would preoccupy authors throughout the century, as I expand upon in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 studies depictions of 'ugly' women in Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis's *Jeanne de France* (*Jane of France*) (1816) and Juliette Lamber's *Laide* (*A Fascinating Woman*) (1878). While interest in representing invisible physical disability peaked in the early nineteenth century, authors portrayed visible physical defect and deformity and monstrosity throughout the century. Moreover, as vitriol towards women writers increased, intellectual women were often represented (in novels, caricatures, and articles) as monstrous hybrids with feminine bodies and masculine minds. This combination was supposedly associated with physical symptoms, explored in Genlis's and Lamber's writing, as well as mental and emotional problems, studied in the following chapter. Genlis and Lamber's works feature an intellectual female protagonist whose disagreeable appearance, present from birth and caused by typhoid fever respectively, is treated as a barrier to marriage and childbearing, calling into question her femininity. The ensuing hostility that the heroine experiences, prompts her to renounce romantic/procreative relationships and exile herself from her home to achieve independence (in terms of both finances

and autonomy). Indeed, the preface of Genlis's novel constitutes a lengthy deconstruction of the Beautiful and presentation of her goal of shedding light on the circumstances of 'ugly' women through the case study of Jane of France (1464-1505), the historical figure on whom she bases her protagonist. Lamber, who wrote during the latter half of the century, ties her critique more concretely to the nineteenth century and associates her text with a tradition of women writers advancing the feminist cause by dedicating her book to her late mentor, George Sand (1804-1876). Using such strategies, Genlis and Lamber at times resist and succumb to the dominant understanding of beauty as inherent to femininity as well as to conventional sentimental codes. Lamber initially transgresses both by emphasizing the masculine mind of her heroine through the application of masculine pronouns to her and through descriptions of the heroine's enjoyment of the explicit details of the hero's sexual encounters. However, the heroine's rebellion eventually fades into a heteronormative relationship and assimilation into French society, with the restoration of her beauty. Tension between laughter and tears, artifice and genuine expression of emotion, and heteronormativity and queerness pervade Lamber's work and those of the end-of-the-century authors studied in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 focuses on depictions of 'neurotic' women in Georges de Peyrebrune's *A Decadent Woman* (1886) and Daniel Lesueur's *Névrosée* (Neurotic Woman) (1890). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, hostility towards intellectual women became politicized through a debate over education. Numerous medical texts published at this time suggested that women's and men's minds functioned fundamentally differently: women possessed only the capacity to think superficially in response to stimuli, while men could engage in deeper thinking, thanks to their rational and logical minds. On this basis, many argued against women receiving the same education as men, citing concerns that it would constitute undue stress for women and

have harmful effects on their minds, emotions, and reproductive functions. Both Peyrebrune and Lesueur engage with this debate in their novels. In each, the heroine is afflicted with a form of neurosis, which doctors within each text affirm was associated with sexual deviance and incompatibility with the roles of wife and mother. The authors make use of this 'abnormal' perspective of their heroines to resist dominant discourses regarding the roles of women and the disabled in society. In *Névrosée*, for example, when the neurotic female protagonist and her male companion secretly watch an actress's poetry performance, the scene, as observed by her, becomes an exploration of illicit same-sex desire. Because of their treatment of taboo themes, both authors grudgingly adhered to traditional sentimental codes and navigated the publishing process carefully. For instance, Peyrebrune attempted to publish in the *La Nouvelle Revue*, a journal run by her friend and confidant, Juliette Lamber. However, Lamber, understanding the political landscape and opinions of her readership determined that Peyrebrune's work would not receive the attention it deserved were she to published it there, which she explains in a letter to her. This, I argue, indicates a development that occurred over the course of the century in how women viewed publishing: not only considering feasibility (a question Claire de Duras struggled with in the beginning of the nineteenth century), but effectiveness of publication methods.

Throughout these chapters, I argue that my primary sources represent a cohort of novels whose authors make use of a disability, to at times reconceptualize the sentimental genre and thereby highlight the depth and agency of their female protagonists and disabled individuals and at times reify harmful stereotypes about them. This technique is at once a resource for gaining popularity and a genuine attempt to reimagine the status of women and disabled individuals in society. Furthermore, by looking at the trends in the type of disability depicted in the novels and how they evolve over the course of the century, I assert that the end-of-the-century interest in

depicting madness more closely can be seen as the culmination of the early nineteenth-century's interest in invisible physical disabilities rather than the mid- century interest in depicting physical deformity.

CHAPTER 1: DISABILITY AND FEMALE AUTHORSHIP

The goal of this project is to study the types of novels produced during the nineteenth century when women wrote about disabled characters in the sentimental genre. My analysis is informed by nineteenth-century French perceptions of the sentimental genre, women (authors) and disability, and its depictions in literature. I will begin with a history of the disabled body in the Western Judeo-Christian tradition, to then focus on the characteristics of the nineteenth-century French context that made disability a topic of such high interest with writers of the period. Next, I will establish the relationship between the female and the disabled body in nineteenth-century French culture. Finally, I will examine examples and methods of depicting disability in literature that laid the groundwork for the texts in my corpus, and the movement they represent.

A Brief history of the Disabled Body in the Western Tradition

The notion of a bodily norm can be traced back to the Classical period (4th century BC) in Ancient Greece with the philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC), who conceived of the male body as whole, and the female body as somewhat less so, that is, as a "mutilated and imperfect" male body,[25] an idea that would persist well into contemporary times in the Western conception of gender and disability. Throughout Antiquity, such versions of corporeal deficiency and other forms of disability were seen as a sign of the gods' anger across disciplines and nationalities.[26] This idea also existed in the Jewish tradition, where physical defect was linked to sin. In Genesis

[25] "la femelle peut être considérée comme un mâle qui à certains égards est mutilé et imparfait" ("The female can be considered a male who in certain aspects is mutilated and imperfect") (Aristote, De la Génération des Animaux, Livre II, ch. IV).

[26] Nancy Tuana notes in her study, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature* (1993), that such ideas appeared in the writings of Sophocles, Plutarch, and Plato (6).

4, for example, after killing his brother, Cain was stripped of his ability to grow crops and cursed to be a "restless wanderer." To exact this, God created a visible mark on Cain's skin to both permanently and visibly signal Cain's sin to others and to warn them not to harm him.[27] This is also an often-cited passage to justify white superiority by associating darkness with dirtiness and sin, and light with purity. Such usage of this passage lies at the intersection of race and disability, a node that I will study further in the third chapter.

However, the connection between disability and individual fault was transformed in the New Testament with the arrival of the figure of Christ, or the prophet named Jesus, who chose to dispense miracles to redeem the less abled and restore them to full ability. He also preached the elevation of those who were marginalized on earth, such as the humble, dispossessed, or poor, in Heaven. Leaving behind the rigid codes of conduct and hierarchy of the Old Testament, the integration of disabled people into society relied on the New Testament value of Christian charity. This dynamic continued into the Middle Ages.[28] Towards the end of this period, Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (c. 1490), defined "ideal" proportions of the human body that would hold profound influence over normative, aesthetically appealing conceptions of the body after the Renaissance, well beyond da Vinci's intent to apply the golden ratio to the organic world. Da Vinci calculated the proportions in the drawing, originally known as *Le proporzioni del corpo umano secondo Vitruvio* (The Proportions of the Human Body According to Vitruvius), based on measurements of male models in Milan.[29] This method codes normal

[27] "The LORD said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.'" (Genesis 4: 10-12, NIV).

[28] For more on the shifts in conceptions of the disabled body, see Hénri-Jacques Stiker's *Corps infirmes et sociétés* (*A History of Disability*) (1982).

[29] Other scholars have noted similar phenomena. Lennard Davis, for example, begins Chapter 2 of *Enforcing Normalcy*, with an account of the history of the Venus Appelles, in which a work of art gains cultural capital and exercises great influence over conceptions of beauty and bodily norms.

physical proportions as male, casting the female body as well as bodies whose measurements differ from those de Vinci idealized as abnormal. According to Hénri-Jacques Stiker, French anthropologist, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, physical deviance became re-associated with God's punishment for sin, namely that which threatened social order and stability. Likewise, many attributed mental troubles to demonic possession.

During the sixteenth century, modern psychiatry took shape, under the influence of Swiss physician and professor Félix Platter's (1536-1614) classification of psychiatric diseases.[30] Consequently, the medical community began to treat physical as well as mental deviations from the norm as jointed medical problems. By the seventeenth century, the mind-body split,[31] theorized by René Descartes (1596-1650), surpassed Hippocrates's (c. 460-377 B.C.) theory of the leaky body and humors, gaining broad acceptance among the medical and scientific community, though humoral theory did persist. Medical practitioners and researchers thus initiated a new process of envisioning and attending to only specific body parts, rather than the body as a whole. They also viewed the mind as more prone to shifts in equilibrium due to external stimuli than its counterpart. This allowed for more rigorous categorization of people with like disabilities during the seventeenth century's "*grand enfermement*" ("great confinement"), theorized by Michel Foucault in his *Folie et Déraison : Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (*Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*) (1961). During this time, disabled people were grouped together in hospitals, along with those deemed sinners, those afflicted with sickness, and the destitute, in the name of social order. In this milieu, an association between the Beautiful and the Natural reemerged under influence of classical ideals and changing criteria for the Natural. The idea of "la belle nature" ("beautiful nature," to

[30] See Platter's *Praxeos medicae Tomi Tres* (1602).
[31] Theory elucidated in Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* (1637).

perform a word-for-word translation, which leaves much to be desired) emerged, catalyzing an aesthetic practice of imitating nature in art by accentuating its most pleasing elements, alongside a medical theory of moral hygiene that relied on a similar foundation of a person strengthening praiseworthy qualities to approach their natural state, uncorrupted by vice.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, influenced by the changing social stakes and status of medicine, medical researchers increasingly targeted understanding how certain forms of sensory deprivation could inhibit one's sensibility and developing treatment options for them.[32] The notion of "sensibility" during this period in France supplanted other concepts such as "irritability" (the inability to moderate one's reaction to external stimuli),[33] thus strengthening a connection between the physical and moral domain. This was particularly apparent in the French context. In fact, Anne Vila, an oft-cited American comparative literature scholar working at the intersection of the French Enlightenment and the Medical Humanities, enumerates three characteristics that set the French notion of sensibility apart from the broader European notion during the eighteenth century:

> First, sensibility and sentimentalism were closely associated in France with the process of secularization that the philosophes were intent on advancing. Second, French writers did not polarize sensibility in relation to sex and gender nearly as much as their British counterparts…Finally, sensibility was standardly imbued by French writers with a pronounced physicalist or materialist undertone, without provoking any major outcry from the defenders of morality and religion. (Vila, 3)

[32] See Lennard Davis's analysis of the interest in sensory deprivation of the period *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (1995).

[33] See Hénri Fouquet's *Encyclopédie* entry on "sensibilité, sentiment, (Médecine)" : "L'*irritabilité* n'est autre chose que la *mobilité* ou *contractilité* dont il a été question au commencement de cet article, & que nous avons dit être une des deux actions comprises dans l'exercice de la *sensibilité* ; c'est toujours l'expression du sentiment ; mais une expression violente, attendu qu'elle est le produit de la *sensibilité* violemment irritée par des *stimulus*"
("*Irritability* is nothing other than *mobility* or *contractility* which was the question at the beginning of this article and that we have said to be one of the two actions comprised in the exercise of *sensibility*; it is still the expression of a sentiment, but a violent expression, whereas it is the product of *sensibility*, violently *irritated* by a *stimulus*").

To highlight a few key nodes of Vila's dense but succinct argument, the conflation of the terms sensibility and sentimentalism marks the French tradition and necessitates a clear distinction between the two. Additionally, nineteenth-century French writers characterized sensibility as intimately linked to the body and its physical reactions across the gender spectrum. The capacity to *feel* was considered an essential characteristic of human beings which distinguished them from animals and allowed society to function. French writers also conceived of deformity as unnatural and jarring to the nerves, and thus, to one's sensibility, a trend which persisted in the nineteenth century. This concern over interactions between deformity and sensibility led to more rigorous study of the origin of deformity through the newly instituted discipline of teratogenesis, which applied statistics to the human body. It also inaugurated deformity as an area of interest in popular culture in spaces such as freak shows. 'Extraordinary' bodies were presented as embodiments of a blurred line between man and beast. In taking in the shows, the public could feel the frisson, emotions such as surprise, excitement, bewilderment, and fear coupled with acceleration of the heart rate and other physical responses, that came from encountering a being that was both different from themselves and yet uncomfortably similar. They could then be comforted by their reaction, which served as evidence of their own sensibility.

The rise of sensibility[34] in France, then, at times encouraged compassion towards the disabled and at times denied their humanity by raising the question: could those afflicted, for example, with diminished sensory capacities possess sensibility? Diderot engaged with this question in his pioneering study of the physical and philosophical experience of blindness, *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient* (*Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who Can*

[34] As Anne Vila notes in *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (1998), in the French tradition, philosophers proudly declare their sensibility as a part of what makes them (hu)man, more clearly than in the English tradition.

See) (1749), which affirmed the possibility of a pathway for disabled people's participation in society by breaking down the causal link between sensory deprivation and mental deficiency or insufficient sensibility. According to Stiker, Diderot's text sought to usher in an era when "aberrancy, monstrosity, diminished faculties, and deformity would be addressed as simple impairments" (Stiker, 103). This way, the individuals affected would be able to overcome these barriers and cultivate the sensibility necessary to fully participate in society. However, for Diderot, excessive sensibility could prove just as harmful and debilitating as a deficiency thereof, a concern shared by medical practitioners, philosophers, writers, and the public in the nineteenth century.

In post-Revolution context, medicine and statistics served not as neutral methods of investigation and scientific discovery, but as socially situated instruments that doctors and medical institutions wielded with increasing clout to reinforce constructs of every segment of society that would drive people to seek out their services. The application of statistics to health by Belgian astronomer, mathematician, statistician, and sociologist, Adolphe Quetelet, in his 1844 essay *Sur l'appréciation des documents statistiques, et en particulier sur l'application des moyennes* (On the appreciation of statistical documents and in particular on the application of averages) established bodily norms and treated disability as a central concern for society. In this seminal work, Quetelet developed the idea of the "*homme moyen*" ("average man"), according to which falling within a standard deviation of measurements of physical and mental aspects became the goal, the ideal. This theory pathologized tendency towards the extremes. Though Quetelet's oeuvre focused mainly on establishing physical norms, it laid the groundwork for later studies on mental and moral norms. Furthermore, these arguments carried even more weight thanks to the newly dominant status of science in society, concretized during this period in the

Positivist movement,[35] now harnessed to defend the physical norm alongside the political and social order.

In Michel Foucault's *Les anormaux* (1974-1975) (*The Abnormals*), he cites three types of people often classified during the nineteenth century as "abnormal," namely the undisciplined, and the masturbator, the human monster. As Foucault notes, nineteenth-century society viewed those in this first category, as correctable, often through education, punishment, or medical intervention. Education was thought to be a particularly powerful tool for producing citizens who could fully participate in their societal duties by teaching disabled individuals strategies to 'correct' their disability. According to Stiker, the nineteenth century was a "*période orthopédique*" ("orthopedic period") (Stiker, 131) during which the medical community read, understood, and applied Diderot's work to their own practice, by treating deformations and re-educating those with formerly 'incurable' disabilities (particularly in cases of sensory impairment such as blindness or deafness) with the goal of reintegrating them into society alongside their fellow citizens.

In cases where this method fails, a second group of "abnormals" materialized, according to Foucault. It involved individuals who elected not to have children, resisting the social imperative to produce new well-educated French citizens. The pathologizing of this life path occurred under the influence of the Industrial Revolution in France during the nineteenth century, which placed the productive body and the pleasure-seeking body in opposition to one another. It also implicated caregivers in any failure of their those they raised to conform to these

[35] According to this philosophy knowledge is gained through sensory experience of natural phenomena, as it is interpreted by logic and reason. For more information on Positivism, see W.M. Simon's *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century: an Essay in Intellectual History* (1963).

expectations. As we will see, this type of alterity forms the basis of Claire de Duras's *Olivier, ou le secret*, which we will study in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Finally, Foucault cites a third group, which covered individuals who represented an impossible or forbidden combination of traits. He discusses, for example, intersex individuals (then referred to as hermaphrodites), whose embodied an unnatural coexistence of the masculine and the feminine. In *Monstrous Imagination* (1993), Marie-Hélène Huet also takes up the nineteenth-century interest in understanding more extreme deviations from the norm, often denoted as monsters, and how they came to occur in nature. Indeed, she notes, "Teratogenesis, or teratogeny, the systematic production of monsters in the laboratory, was first constituted by a series of exclusions and reductions. The reductions were: reduction of the unusual, of deviation and *dissimilarity*, to a series of variations of the recognizable laws of nature; and reduction of the extraordinary character of the monster" (112). "Reduction" here refers to the effort to reduce a monster to its essential traits to understand what made it a monster. As Huet notes, "teratology," an attempt to classify monstrosities, was founded by Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844) and his son Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (who coined the term in 1830 and expounded upon it in his *Traité de tératologie* [Treaty of Teratology]) (108). "Teratogeny," the study of monstrous embryology, was founded by Camille Dareste (1822-1899) and expanded upon in his *Recherches sur la production artificielle des monstruosités ou essais de tératogénie expérimentale* (1877). One of the major advances to come out of this field was the demystification of monsters and the shift toward viewing them as a lower level of human, a hierarchy that I discuss in greater detail in the following section.

The Relationship between the Woman (Author) and the Disabled Body

According to dominant nineteenth-century medical discourses, certain irreducible differences between the male and female body served as proof of woman's inferiority and determined masculine and feminine social roles. Woman was considered colder, more fragile, and weaker than man and her brain was thought to be less developed. Furthermore, her perceived corporeal deficiencies were linked to corresponding mental deficiencies, namely her hyper-sensibility and a predisposition to hysteria. As Anne Vila and Evelyne Ender note, sensibility was pathologized (especially when gendered female) and associated with a toxic feminization (hysteria) during the nineteenth century.[36] This illness was no longer associated just with the uterus and its "*vapeurs*" ("vapors"),[37] as it had been prior to and during the eighteenth century,[38] but with the whole body and mind. The woman's physical symptoms reflected the violence that her excessive sensibility waged on her mind. Her symptoms could range from manic episodes of excess and indulgence to a comatose state to problems with fertility and conception. These could include sterility and miscarriage, a motif which, as we will see in the following section, appears often in eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature.

Such conceptions of feminine inferiority and susceptibility to various health conditions created further restrictions for women in terms of their mobility and education, both that which women received and passed on. Based on widely circulated medical texts of the period, a fear

[36] In 1835 in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, "hystérique" is defined as "maladie chronique particulière aux femmes : elle est due à l'extrême sensibilité du système nerveux, et se manifeste par des convulsions générales, plus ou moins fréquentes, accompagnées de suffocation et d'une perte presque complète de connaissance" ("chronic illness that belongs to women : it is due to extreme sensibility of the nervous system, and manifests itself through more or less frequent general convulsions, accompanied by suffocation and an almost complete loss of awareness").

[37] "L'irritation des fibres nerveuses des viscères contenus dans le bas-ventre, tels que le foie, la rate & la matrice, qui affecte sympathiquement le cerveau par la communication de la huitième paire de nerfs avec le grand nerf intercostal" ("The irritation of nervous fibers of the viscus contents in the lower stomach, as well as the liver, spleen and uterus, which affects the brain sympathically through communication via the eighth pair of nerves with the great intercostal nerve") ("Vapeurs," *Encyclopédie*).

[38] In the *Encyclopédie*, "hystérique" is defined as "une épithete qui s'applique en général à tout ce qui rapport à la matrice" ("an epithet that is applied in general to all that is related to the uterus") ("Hystérique [*Med.*])."

that overstimulation could drive a woman to hysteria emerged,[39] promulgating the idea that women should remain in a controlled environment (the home) to lower the risk of hysterical episodes. The same principle also found a foothold in the realm of education. A chorus of nineteenth-century scholarly and popular culture literature affirmed that an overly stimulating education, too, could drive a woman to madness and other physical problems.[40] Hysteria, like ugliness in women,[41] was often associated with sexual deviance, a threat to the reproductive organization of society. Furthermore, since women provided the first form of education children received and wielded enormous influence over their first steps toward French citizenry, they were expected to serve as vectors for the transmission of normative gendered codes of behavior. This conception of feminine social roles then combined with the medical community's increased interest in craniometry[42] towards the end of the century, to legitimize nineteenth-century French society's marginalization of women.

The ancient connection between the female body and the disabled body was thus renewed through innovative scientific methods and outlook. Freud's twentieth-century work on the unconscious and the proliferation of desire and envy that women feel as, essentially, mutilated men would reaffirm this. This body was defined, determined, and captured by the male gaze and the discourse of a patriarchal society that excludes it from full participation in public and

[39] As Evelyne Ender has noted in her study, *Sexing the Mind*, the works of renowned French medical practitioners Félix Voisin (1794-1872), Julien-Joseph Virey (1775-1846), Jean-Louis Brachet (1789-1858), and Paul Briquet (1796-1881), which reached peak popularity from 1826-1859, ascribed the origins of hysteria to a predisposition to overstimulation, present most often in female bodies (Ender, 31).

[40] Jean-Marie Guyau's 1889 text *Éducation et hérédité* (Education and Heredity) enumerates reasons why women should not receive a rigorous education, many of which relate to concerns about its effects on their fertility.

[41] In her article on *The Ugly Heroine* (1991), Linda Kraus Worley discusses how the nineteenth-century emphasis on romantic love added to the importance of beauty in women to attract a husband and have normal procreative relations with him as opposed to living the sexually deviant life of a single woman.

[42] Pierre Paul Broca (1824-1880) popularized the theory of anthropometry by using measurements of the skull to determine brain size and intellectual ability. These results often served to reinforce the inferiority of women and people of color to Caucasian men.

economic life. According to Elizabeth Grosz in her study, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), "The way Man fantasizes that woman differs from him makes her containable within his imagination (reduced to his size) but also produces her as a mystery for him to master and decipher within safe or unthreatening borders" (Grosz,191). Conceiving of woman as an embodiment of sensibility and man as one of reason would become a method for man to assert his masculinity and combat the sense of powerlessness characteristic of the nineteenth-century mal du siècle, as discussed in the introduction of this dissertation. Sensibility thus became the victim of a broader cultural anxiety about the feminization of society that emerged in the aftermath of the 1815 exile of Napoleon, a father figure for the new nation.[43]

During the period immediately following the Revolution, women and other marginalized populations experienced a brief window of greater freedom and social mobility. However, this relatively liberal culture was supplanted by the Napoleonic Code, established in 1804, under the French Consulate, as an attempt to reform the French legal system in response to the Revolution. This code rigidly structured society, relegating women to their homes and pushing the disabled out of sight to compartmentalized areas such as mental institutions. Indeed, many scholars have extended the Foucault's work on the aggressive enforcement of norms in nineteenth century French society. Lennard Davis, for example, has asserted that the able body played an important role in the construction of a nation, citing its tacit status as an essential characteristic of French citizens and the related expectation that the disabled find means of assimilating into an able-bodied social order.[44] Lynn Hunt has similarly argued that constructing the French nation during

[43] See Hunt's *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (1992).
[44] Davis expands upon this idea with regard to deafness in the third chapter of his study, *Enforcing Normalcy*, entitled "Nationalism and Deafness: The Nineteenth Century," arguing that the deaf community represented a threat to nineteenth-century able-bodied society due to their ability to operate similarly to an ethic minority with their own linguistic system, ontologies, and organization. We will return to his claims in greater depth in Chapter 2.

the nineteenth century involved imagining it as a macrocosm of the family, an assertion reaffirmed by Brigitte Louichon in her study, *La Littérature en bas-bleus: Romancières sous la Restauration et la monarchie de Juillet (1815-1848)* (*Bas-Bleus* Literature: Novelists under the Restoration and the July Monarchy [1815-1848]) (2010). Common to all of this scholarship is the idea that nineteenth-century French citizens needed first and foremost to have the ability to perform familial duties. Deviation in bodily norms, including but not limited to disability, would then become a broader concern for the new nation throughout the nineteenth century and have lasting consequences on the afflicted individual's participation in society.

Scrutiny intensified, particularly for women who attempted to penetrate the male dominated space of writing, a phenomenon encapsulated by treatment of the *bas-bleus* (*femmes de lettres*, perceived as aberrations for their forays into masculine topics of discussion via masculine-coded modes of expression). In the adynaton "*femme auteur*," for example, the qualification "*femme*" contrasts with the noble and admirable status of "*auteur*" to create a monstrous hybrid, in and of itself. It describes a being with a feminine body and masculine mind, an aberration that was stigmatized, rejected, and marginalized in the nineteenth-century French literary world. However, this 'explanation' also served to reinforce male superiority: any success of the "*femme auteur*" could be attributed to her masculine mind.[45]

For this reason, some women writers of the period, such as Germaine de Staël (1766-1817), felt strongly that a woman should write under her own name to advocate for equal rights for women in the literary sphere. Others, such George Sand (Amantine Aurore Lucile Dupin) and Daniel Lesueur (Jeanne Loiseau) chose to employ a masculine pseudonym or publish

[45] It should be noted that over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, the idea of creating a feminine version of the term "auteur" gained traction in the public arena. However, it was only in 2012 that the Académie française officially adopted the term.

anonymously (as Claire de Duras did) to allow for their books to be considered under a 'neutral' gender marker. As Nancy K Miller suggests in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (1990), female author positionality during the nineteenth century in France comes with high stakes. Miller conceives of authorship as a complex "contextual activity" that involves agency, that shows the "marks of a producing subject" (16). She argues for the signature of the woman writer for political reasons: it enables "resistance to dominant ideologies;… [it] is the site of a possible political disruption" (17). The choice of an author to sign her novel as a woman, then, becomes ever more significant and, in part, determines the story of her work and challenges the opposition of subject and text, theorized in Barthes "La mort de l'auteur" ("The Death of the Author") (1967). For Miller, subject and text are inextricably and intimately intertwined. I consider how the authors of each of my primary sources sign their pieces as a function of their goals and life experiences to better elucidate the material conditions of French female authorship in the nineteenth century.

Equally important when analyzing the female authorship in France is the complicated etymology of the term *féministe*. French contemporary history scholar Christine Bard affirms in *Féminismes: 150 ans d'idées reçues* (Feminisms: 150 Years of Received Ideas) (2020) that the word "féministe" appeared for the first time in Alexandre Dumas's *L'Homme-femme* 1872. In his text, Dumas notes,

> Les *féministes*, passez-moi ce néologisme, disent, à très-bonne intention d'ailleurs : Tout le mal vient de ce qu'on ne veut pas reconnaître que la femme est l'égale de l'homme et qu'il faut lui donner la même éducation et les mêmes droits qu'à l'homme ; l'homme abuse de sa force, etc., etc…Nous nous permettrons de répondre aux féministes que ce qu'ils disent là n'a aucun sens. La femme n'est pas une valeur égale, supérieure ou inférieure à l'homme, elle est une valeur d'un autre genre, comme elle est un être d'une autre forme et d'une autre fonction. (Dumas, 91-92)
>
> (*Feminists*, pass me this neologism, say with good intention by the way: all of the evil comes from that which we do not want to recognize, that woman is the equal of man and

> that it is necessary to give her the same education and the same rights as man; man abuses his strength, etc., etc…We will allow ourselves to respond to the feminists that what they are saying there makes no sense. Woman is not of equal, greater, or lesser value than man, she is of another type of value, like she is a being of another form and function.)

Here, Dumas cites the "feminist" impulse to consider woman the equal of man the source of friction between men and women and of discontentment for the latter. He also suggests that this is a fundamental misunderstanding of gender differences and the implications they have for a functioning society, an opinion shared by many of his fellow writers as well as medical professionals, philosophers, politicians, and the general public. Given Dumas's pejorative usage, we can only assume that he did not invent it himself and wonder from where it originated. In any event, neither term was used widely until the end of the nineteenth century. However, this does not mean that feminist writing did not exist before then. In *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing*, Nancy K. Miller says this of feminist writing:

> At the first level…feminist writing articulates as and in a discourse a self-consciousness about woman's identity. I mean by this both an inherited cultural fiction and a process of social construction. Second, feminist writing makes a claim for the heroine's singularity by staging the difficulty of her relation as a woman in fiction to Woman. Third, it contests the available plots of female development or *Bildung* and embodies dissent from the dominant tradition in a certain number of recurrent narrative gestures, especially in the modalities of culture that Rachel Duplessis has called 'writing beyond the ending.' Finally, through an insistence on singularity, feminist writing figures the existence of other subjective economies, other styles of identity. (Miller, 8)

By this broad definition, the author of this type of work could be a man or a woman. However, in their text, they must acknowledge and meditate on the concept womanhood. They create a character who acts out of and gains life experiences specific to this identity and its intersections with others she may hold (social class, race, ability, etc.). Authors must also emphasize and evolve female characters' subjectivity throughout their texts. This, Miller argues, in and of itself, constitutes an act of resistance of the patriarchy and of conventional codes of the novel genre, as

French novels, in contrast to their British counterparts, tended to focus on male subjectivity and develop plots that relied on this as well. In other words, the choice of centering female agency and subjectivity in writing necessitates a transgression of the novel form. When we speak of feminist literature written by women, then, the stakes are heightened. Such a piece constitutes not an intellectual meditation on the position of women in narrative or in society, but the act of defining one's identity in the face of what was at times intense criticism.

Writing as a woman meant claiming authorial space as one's own in a similar manner to the heroine of one's texts. In this tradition of female writers who "understand and stage the drama of female signature for their heroines and authors," (8) Miller cites Françoise de Graffigny's (1695-1758) *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (*Peruvian Letters*) (1747), Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (*Corinne, or Italy*) (1807), George Sand's *Valentine* (1832), and Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette's (1873-1954) *La Vagabonde* (*The Vagabond*) (1910) as well as novels by Marie-Catherine de Villedieu (1640-1683), Claudine Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin (1682-1749), Marie Jeanne Riccoboni (1713-1792), and Claire de Duras (1777-1828). She also acknowledges that the gap between Sand and Colette remains largely unexplored by history, and it is this gap that my study seeks to address. As scholars such as Miller and Elaine Marks, have noted, that women's writing has been understudied is due to the limitations of the conventional ways in which writing by women has been historically analyzed: as afflicted with the negative characteristics attributed to women by men and needing to be in some way exceptional (resembling men's writing) to be worthy of further examination. Furthermore, the works of successful women authors, viewed as anomalies, were not studied together as part of a larger movement. In this dissertation, I resist this restrictive and unproductive framework by excavating the history of the sentimental genre and the strategies women authors used when they wrote in it.

As has been noted by scholars such as Louichon, the sentimental novel of the nineteenth century was inaugurated by the renewed production and popularity of Rousseau's *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) at the turn of the century. Perceived as one of his more frivolous and non-political, therefore non-threating, texts, Rousseau's text, already a best-seller in the eighteenth century, was published and distributed in abundance during the early nineteenth century (especially under the repressive Consulate and First Empire).[46] Louichon has argued that the association of Rosseau's text with 'feminine' frivolity pointed to a way for women writers to enter the conversation. With the shift to mass, modern publishing, thanks to advances in technology, writing became available to a larger section of the population. Additionally, bookbinders began printing the title on the spine of the book, rendering the half title page useless and giving rise to a debate over whether to include it and what information it should contain.[47] This afforded authors and printers more freedom to make the decision based on marketing and promotion. Women-authored books included a half title page which omitted their name more often than their male contemporaries to mitigate the negative effects of their gender on the chances of their literary production being taken seriously and gaining popularity in the literary world. This is also evident in the other choices made with regard to the front matter of women-

[46] The First Empire (1804-1814), like the Consulate, was headed by French military commander Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), though he now held the title of Emperor. During this time, he maintained many of the rigid policies enacted by the Consulate and aggressively tried to build French national identity, establish its capital, and spread its influence through a series of military campaigns (the Napoleonic Wars) in Western Europe.

[47] Up until the mid-nineteenth century, printing and bookbinding constituted two separate lines of work. Printers would furnish the pages and sell them to the public. Individuals would then take them to their personal bookbinders to be bound. Since the materials would spend a great deal of time in transit, exposed to the elements, printers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries would often include blank pages before the title page to protect the title page and the text following it from dust and other destructive substances. By the seventeenth century, printers began producing larger quantities of books and delivering them (still unbound) to booksellers. These booksellers would then store them in bins in their shops. To assist booksellers, printers then began including what became known as a half title page, which contained the short title of the work and sometimes the author's name. Publishers saw this as an opportunity: by the eighteenth century, they began cutting out the title from the half title page and pasting it on the spine of the book, which they then began storing with the spine facing out, to make it easier to organize their inventory. For more on this topic, see American historian Christine Haynes's 2010 study, *Lost Illusions: The Politics of Publishing in Nineteenth-Century France*.

authored books, which tend to delay revelation of the author's name until after establishment of ethos through association with other well-known authors or reminders of their previous successes. I analyze these and other techniques evident in the paratexts of these pieces as part of a larger, and ultimately successful, strategy to establish the merit of their sentimental novels. Indeed, as numerous scholars have noted, women began to overcome their exile from the literary sphere particularly in the sentimental genre, thanks to an opening between 1789 and 1815. Though the domestication of Rousseau and the sentimental genre could serve to relegate it and its authors to representations of love stories that reinforced the patriarchy, it also contained enormous transgressive potential at the time when implemented with attention to all aspects of the work.

However, this is not to say that the sentimental novel ceased to exist in the later years of the nineteenth century. In her study, *Parlez-moi d'amour. Le roman sentimental, des romans grecs aux collections de l'an 2000* (1999), Ellen Constans cites the example of Georges de Peyrebrune. A French female author of the late nineteenth century, Peyrebrune employed a frequently used strategy among female writers of the period "[l'emprunt des] codes du roman sentimental et [leur intégration] dans les structures d'autres genres" ("[the borrowing] of the codes of the sentimental novel and [their integration] in the structures of other genres") (179).[48] As we will see in the following section, this technique afforded Peyrebrune and her female contemporaries access to a female bourgeois readership, which craved romance in fiction and, at the same time, access to a powerful tool to disrupt and critique social structure through their texts.

[48] As noted in the Introduction of this study, Constans argues that these codes include the following elements of the plot (romantic encounter, disjuncture, and denouement [whether ending in marriage or tragic separation]) as well as formal elements (precious language designed to stimulate noble emotions of compassion and joy in the reader, while protecting them from immoral titillation) (168).

Depictions of Disability in French Fiction

As we have seen, the notion of disability has existed since Antiquity and the presence of the disabled body in literature can be traced back to Ancient Greece, to texts such as *The Iliad* (c. 762 B.C.), *The Odyssey* (800 B.C.), and *Oedipus Rex* (430-420 B.C.). In this section, however, we will examine how the disabled body functions as a plot device, metaphor, and vector for social commentary in the text. Debate over methods of integrating the disabled into able-bodied society raged in literature leading up to and during and after the Enlightenment. Modern Disability Studies scholars (beginning in the 1980s and 1990s) have begun revisiting cultural objects of this period with new theoretical approaches. The novel has thus emerged as an object of study for research on the connection between the somatic and literary body, that is, the ways in which the conditions of the bodies of characters in the narrative affect the formal elements of the novel. I also employ this theoretical lens when analyzing my primary source texts, opening a rich new terrain of analysis of their paratexts as well as texts.

With regard to texts, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, European authors recognized the value of disability as a device to both motivate the plot and increase the drama of the text. According to Victor Hugo in his "La Préface de *Cromwell*" (1827), the presence of the abnormal in literature enriches the text and allows for a more multi-faceted and dramatic depiction of the world. In this text, Hugo concretized the Romantic movement in France, by collecting a series of codes he had observed that functioned to promote diversity in representation in literature and theater (a rejection of classical ideals of the unity of time and place). This, he argued, was effected through depiction of the grotesque and the sublime and served not to generate a copy of reality, but to create a sort of mirror that would render the

images it reflected more vibrant. This movement also encompassed a desire to reject uniformity and take advantage of the infinite types of ugliness and the various attributes ascribed to it. Hugo's work speaks to the interest of the period in engaging with, and at times challenging, the principles of physiognomy. His conception of the grotesque resists Lavater's association of beauty and virtue. Indeed, Hugo highlights several characteristics of monsters: hybridity and excess ("la combinaison […] de deux types, le sublime et le grotesque […] l'harmonie des contraires" ["the combination (…) of two types, the sublime and the grotesque […] the harmony of opposites"] [223]). These features correspond to the dual manner in which a monster can be identified (by its image and reception) as well as the dual nature of its reception (the attraction-repulsion reaction that the monster inspires).

Authors depicted disability across major literary movements and genres throughout the nineteenth century. Victor Hugo's Quasimodo (*Notre Dame de Paris* [*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*] [1831]) and Gywnplaine (*L'homme qui rit* [*The Man who Laughs*] [1869]) are perhaps the most famous examples of nineteenth-century Romantic heroes with a physical disability. However, disability also appeared in realist novels, such as Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) as well as Naturalist novels, such as Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1873). Additionally, during the mid-century, there was a proliferation of moralizing stories, destined for children, featuring disability: Joséphine Marie de Lille's *Le sourd-muet* (The Deaf-Mute)[49] (1850); Lesbassu d'Elf's *La fille du paralytique* (The Paralytic's Daughter) (1853), and *Frédéric ou le petit bossu* (Frederic or the Little Hunchback) (1853); Mathilde Bourdon's *Les deux aveugles* (The Two Blind People) (1855) and *Gérard l'aveugle* (Gerard the Blind) (1865); George Sand

[49] I have provided word-by-word translations of the titles for readers' convenience, but it should be noted that English translations of these stories have yet to be published.

Les ailes de courage (The Wings of Courage) (1876).[50] I propose that women increasingly published children's literature during this time, to help educate children and especially young girls about their role in society. Though this mid-century shift to children's literature could be seen as a retreat, such a characterization neglects the agency that these authors display in targeting youth and in encouraging them to conceive of disabled groups' participation in society as unthreatening. While this strategy served to somewhat destigmatize disability, it also reified ableist notions of social organization to which the disabled were expected to conform. Indeed, the works of fiction in this genre, as evidenced by the previous examples, made particularly frequent use of the principles of physiognomy as a hermeneutic device to emphasize a character's virtue or vice.

In addition to its role in revealing character traits, the disabled body embodies suffering in the text. In his study, *Sur le corps romanesque* (1968), Roger Kempf explains that suffering has its own language which is at once captured, translated, and transmitted by the disabled body. This pain is related not only to the physical pain associated with the disability, but also to the consequences of social exclusion and exile. Davis builds upon these claims in *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (1995) by examining specific characteristics of the nineteenth century that create a culture in which almost every literary text of the period referenced disability or physical deformation linguistically or in terms of the plot (12). Davis associates this with the nineteenth-century emphasis on norms, as previously discussed. In this context, he affirms Kempf's argument that the disabled body constituted an ideal vessel for a critique of the ills of society, which are the source of its suffering. Mitchell and Snyder further develop the principles of the disabled body's function in narrative construction by arguing in

[50] Published posthumously in *Contes d'une grand-mère* along with twelve of her other children's stories.

Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse (1999) that "the body's weighty materiality functions as a textual and cultural other—an object with its own undisciplined language that exceeds the text's ability to control it" (49). This again points to the disabled body's unpredictability and transgressive potential, as its very existence lies outside of the societal norms. It also expands upon the ways in which the text itself "suffers" from the presence of the disabled body and the transmission of the narrative through it, necessitating that the author engage in literary innovation to respond to the challenges it presents.

The disabled body in literature, then, both responds to its cultural contexts and affects it, rendering the abstract material through embodiment.[51] According to Mitchell and Snyder, disability "serves as a metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse. Physical and cognitive anomalies promise to lend a 'tangible' body to textual abstractions" (47). They enumerate four steps often employed in a narrative of disability: 1. Exposition of the disability 2. Reinforcing the need for explanation of this deviant body 3. Explanation of the origins and consequences of this deviance 4. Rehabilitation or healing of the disabled body (55). The last point would suggest that these narratives tend towards normalization of deviance to maintain social order, but this is not always the case. In fact, in Michael Bérubé's "Disability and Narrative" (2005), he builds upon Snyder and Mitchell's work by expanding upon the effect that cognitive disability can have on a narrative. He argues that "certain kinds of disability make one a more able participant in certain kinds of narrative" (569) and, conversely, that a narrative can suffer from the same cognitive disability as a character as a function of his capacity, or lack thereof, to narrate his story. This in turn creates opportunities for authors to explore innovative methods of narration. Anne Vila also writes in *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the*

[51] For more on this topic, see Judith Schlanger's *Les métaphores de l'organisme* (1971) and Mary Douglas's *Natural Symbols* (1973) and *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966).

Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France (1998) that over the course of the nineteenth century the transgressive potential of sensibility became clearer and had to be contained within the female body and sentimental genre. I argue that the authors of my primary sources represent a cohort of women authors who wrote in this domesticated form of sensibility and used it to craft compelling narratives that would at times challenge and reify normative conceptions of gender roles and disability.

CHAPTER 2: INVISIBLE PHYSICAL DISABILITY

In this chapter, I study formal and thematic elements of Sophie Gay's *Anatole* (1815), which recounts the 'impossible' love story between a nonverbal deaf hero and the woman he saves from being crushed by a carriage outside of the Paris Opera House, and Claire de Duras's *Olivier, ou le secret* (Olivier, or the Secret) (1822), which tells the story of an impotent hero's 'doomed' relationship with his love interest. This method allows me to respond to the following questions: How did nineteenth-century women novelists write about invisible physical disability? How did they select the disability they wrote about and why did they choose it? How does the type of disability chosen affect, in turn, the narrative structure? And how does this choice reinforce and/or resist dominant medical and philosophical discourses on the inferiority of women (authors) and disabled individuals? I argue that Gay and Duras's interest in depicting invisible, physical disabilities can be analyzed not an isolated instance, but, rather, as an emobdiment of a trend that emerged in response to conceptions of certain types of abnormality as insurmountable obstacles to integration into society that were specific to the nineteenth-century French context. The third and fourth chapters of this dissertation, then, explore two other trends that emerged as conceptions of disabilities, and the degree to which certain types were pathologized, evolved.

In *Anatole*, Gay constructs the novel around the mysterious identity of a nonverbal deaf character, Anatole.[52] At the beginning of the novel, Valentine, Anatole's love interest, is recently widowed—her elderly and sickly husband has passed away—and she travels to Paris to spend time with her brother and his wife (M. and Mme de Nangis). As they introduce Valentine into

[52] The previously mentioned German translation of Gay's work, which was published by Haas Wien in 1817 translates the title as *Anatole: oder der unbekannte Geliebte* ("Anatole: or the unknown lover"), emphasizing Anatole's mysteriousness and absence from the text.

society, she attracts attention from those such as the loquacious and worldly chevalier d'Émerange who admire her beauty but feels disconnected from those around her until she meets Anatole. Following Anatole and Valentine's encounter at the Paris Opera House, during which her saves her life, the two become enamored of one another. Valentine seeks to discover Anatole's identity to thank him. This task proves difficult because though he appears to be wealthy, handsome, and kind, none of M. and Mme de Nangis's society contacts can provide Valentine with any information on him. Undaunted, Valentine continues to make inquiries about Anatole, which eventually reach his ears via his friend and confidant, the Commandeur de Saint-Albert. Valentine becomes even more devoted to her investigation when she receives a letter from Anatole thanking her for her concern and expressing his feelings for her. In closing the letter, he entreats her to stop looking for him because he claims that an insurmountable, unnamed obstacle, would prevent a romantic relationship between them. Valentine responds with a letter of her own, extending a correspondence that continues throughout the text and is facilitated by the Commandeur de Saint-Albert. A third-person heterodiegetic narrator recounts Valentine's thoughts and actions but seems to ignore or withhold information on Anatole, focusing on Valentine's mission to discover the reason for Anatole's retreat. This quest becomes more urgent and perilous when Émerange proposes to Valentine and she attempts to resist the pressure from her brother to accept. In the end, Anatole's secret (his deafness) is revealed to Valentine, and she responds by learning sign language to communicate with him. With Anatole's mother's blessing of their union, the story ends happily.

Like Gay's work, Duras's *Olivier, ou le secret* (1822) is set before the French Revolution. This epistolary novel opens with a letter from Olivier (le comte de Sancerre) to his childhood friend and current beloved, Louise (la comtesse de Nangis). They grew up in the

country on neighboring properties and were inseparable as children. A marriage between them was presumed to be inevitable. Indeed, unbeknownst to Louise, Olivier's mother's dying wish was for him to marry her. However, at the age of seventeen, Olivier fell mysteriously ill and seemed to despair of the possibility of an amorous relationship with Louise thereafter. In the present day, Louise and her husband (le comte de Nangis)[53] are experiencing marital difficulties; Louise extols the expression of genuine sentiment, while her husband sees little value in it. Though theirs is a romantic marriage between partners of similar ages, in contrast to Valentine's first marriage in *Anatole*, Louise cannot bring herself to adopt her husband's perspective. Consequently, she begins to doubt her fitness as a *femme* (woman and wife). When Louise's husband passes away suddenly, she mourns the loss and struggles with feelings of guilt and insecurity that prevent her from embracing a romantic relationship with Olivier. These feelings sharpen when Louise becomes the object of attention of the handsome and wealthy M. de Rieux, an objectively desirable suitor in whom she has no interest.

The rest of the novel unfolds through exchanges of letters between Louise, Olivier, and Adèle (Louise's sister-in-law).[54] A series of signs pointing to a lack or deficiency on the part of Olivier function as clues for Louise, Adèle, and the reader, as they strive to solve the mystery that pervades the text, but is never explicitly mentioned, sexual impotence. Though Olivier's secret remains so to Louise, Adèle, and the reader, M. de Rieux unravels it. He proceeds to repeatedly taunt Olivier with the possibility that he might share his knowledge in a failed attempt to eliminate the competition for Louise's hand in marriage. Louise and Olivier grow desperate to be together—Louise even suggests that she become Olivier's mistress when their attempts at a

[53] It should be noted that Duras's character bears the same name as Valentine's sister-in-law, Mme de Nangis, in *Anatole*.

[54] As Denise Virieux has noted, the names Louise and Adèle may be a reference to Madam de Tercy's epistolary novel, *Louise de Sénacourt* (1817), in which an unhappy heroine (Louise) confides in her friend (Adèle).

platonic relationship fail. Olivier, unable to bear the thought of destroying his idealized relationship with Louise through a socially unacceptable union and pushed to the breaking point by M. de Rieux's barrage of threats, takes his life with a pistol on the banks of the river that runs next to their childhood homes. Though Louise survives this episode, she is trapped in a catatonic state. We learn in the epilogue from the doctor treating her that this condition is irreversible. Any hope Louise had for her future died with Olivier, so she remains at their childhood home, reminiscing and awaiting her reunion with Olivier in death.

As we can see from these summaries, both novels depict a protagonist afflicted with a type of physical impairment that is not visible. Particularly in the case of Olivier, capability appears as a key concern, in alignment with early nineteenth-century cultural values; impotence was viewed not just as invisible, but as intentionally and unethically hidden. Furthermore, in each work the hero (not the heroine) is disabled, which affects the way in which he pursues his love interest or, perhaps more accurately, the way in which his love interest pursues him. Indeed, Gay and Duras create an unusual amount of space for women to occupy in the text. These narratives, then, flip the proverbial script, telling the story of the heroine's quest, rather than that of the hero. At the same time, Gay and Duras create subtle, but intentional connections between their texts, and those of other women authors, through techniques such as naming characters after those who appeared in the books of their female contemporaries and/or predecessors. This technique serves to offer new modes of interpretation within their texts, that I will explore throughout this chapter. Furthermore, it drives readers to explore the sources from which these authors draw inspiration and thus encourages readers to consider them together as a subgenre. In what follows, I examine Gay's and Duras's goals and vision for their literary interventions. I

then analyze type of disability depicted as a function of these objectives, as well of as the early nineteenth-century French context and explore its effect on the structure of each novel.

The Goals for the Novel

Sophie Gay (1776-1852) rose to prominence in the early nineteenth-century literary world as a *salonnière* and author of popular novels, memoirs and children's books. Politically liberal, though a member of the Restoration[55] aristocracy, Gay was known as a *bas-bleu.*[56] She married Gaspard Liottier in 1794 but divorced him to marry Jean Sigismond Gay in 1799.[57] Their daughter, Delphine Gay de Girardin (1804-1855), would go on to become a celebrated poet and novelist.[58] Gay's second marriage, like Valentine's first marriage in *Anatole*, was rumored to be a marriage of convenience that allowed her the independence to run her successful literary salon. In this context, she formed relationships with other women writers of the period, such as Germaine de Staël (1766-1817). In fact, Gay's first foray into the publishing world came in the form of an open letter to the *Journal de Paris* (Paris Journal), defending Staël's *Delphine* (1802).

Gay published her first novel *Laure d'Estell* (Laure of Estell) (1802) anonymously and her second, *Léonie de Montbreuse* (Leonie of Montbreuse) (1813), as Madame S…G… (cover).[59] She published her third novel, *Anatole*, in 1815 as the "l'auteur de *Léonie de*

[55] The Bourbon Restoration (1815-1830) is the period of French history between the fall of Napoleon (beginning in 1814 and culminating in his final defeat in the Hundred Days in 1815) and the July Revolution of 1830.
[56] This was a pejorative term that emerged during the eighteenth century in England to describe learned women writers involved in salon life. In the nineteenth century, it made its way to France and was used to stigmatize women writers who were deemed, by their critics, prone to displays of literary or intellectual pretention unbecoming of a woman. For more on this subject, see Andrea Del Lungo and Brigitte Louichon's *La littérature en bas-bleus* (Blue Stocking Literature), vols. 1-3 (2010-2017).
[57] See Chantal Bertrand-Jenning's *Un autre mal du siècle* (Another *mal du siècle*) (2005) for more on Sophie Gay's life and other works.
[58] Perhaps following in her mother's footsteps, Girardin constructs the narrative around a disabled protagonist in one of her most popular novels, *Monsieur le marquis de Pontanges* (Mr. Marquis of Pontanges) (1835).
[59] The second edition of this work, published in 1823, bore her full name.

Montbreuse" ("the author of Leonie of Montbreuse") (cover). This and other peritextual elements[60] of the first edition of *Anatole* indicate that Gay hoped to capitalize on *Léonie de Montbreuse* while dissociating her book from a feminine authorial persona. Gay also includes a note to the reader in which she remarks that "le fond de ce roman est vrai" ("the basis of this novel is true") (vol. I, 5). However, she suggests that she altered some details of the story on which her novel is based with the goal of matching the success of her last novel *Léonie de Montbreuse* ("puissé-je l'avoir rendu vraisemblable par les détails et assez intéressant dans l'ensemble pour mériter à ce dernier Ouvrage l'accueil indulgent dont le public a bien voulu honorer *Léonie de Montbreuse*" ["that I was able to make more believable with details and interesting enough for this most recent work to merit the indulgent welcome with which the public honored Leonie of Montbreuse"] [*ibid.*]).

As we will see, both Gay and Duras render real-life historical figures in their texts, but they take creative liberty with this and other aspects of their narratives. In a departure from the budding Realist literary movement,[61] Gay's novel seeks not to confront readers with a brutally honest depiction of the ugliness and crushing banality of the world, but to invite them to escape by immersing oneself in a tragic love story that is motivated by the hero's disability. She caters to a bourgeois female audience but hopes that her *Anatole* will gain acceptance and praise from a wider audience, as her previous book did. As Chantal Bertrand-Jennings notes in her study, *Un autre mal du siècle* (Another *mal-du-siècle*), the fact that Napoleon Bonaparte[62] supposedly read

[60] In his foreword to the English translation of Gérard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (1997) Richard Macksey defines peritextuality as "those liminal devices and conventions…within the book…that mediate the book to the reader: titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and afterwards" (Macksey, xvii).

[61] For more on the origins of the Realist movement in France in the nineteenth century, see Bernard Gendrel's *Le roman de mœurs* (The Novel of Manners) (2012).

[62] Napoleon Bonaparte would later become an important figure in the field of disability studies as scholars noted a pattern of nineteenth-century French psychiatric patients who were convinced that they were Napoleon Bonaparte.

Anatole on the eve of his exile from France because its powerful and faithful rendering of the theme of social exclusion resonated with him is a testament to the broad success and recognition of it (56).

That Firmin Didot, the most well-known and respected French publishing house of the period, published *Anatole* also signaled Gay's success and aligned with her goals for her novel. The Didot typeface, used in *Anatole*, is characterized by increased stroke contrast, condensed armature, hairline strokes, vertical stress, and flat, unbracketed serifs (Jammes, 26-27).[63] This Neoclassical serif typeface embodies the movement away from the overly decorative tendencies of the Rococo and Baroque and towards imitation of the idealized Greek and Roman artwork through mathematical precision, discovery, and innovation. Accordingly, the layout of the first edition of *Anatole* is characterized by minimal decoration, wide margins, and linear borders. It serves not to cover or add embellishment to the text, but to reveal it. The text, then, appears as the climax to which peritext builds. Indeed, this type of aesthetic supports Gay's goal of treating the book as a neutral vector through which her story could be told. Sophie Gay, thus, took great pains to characterize *Anatole* as part of the body of work of a successful author, by gesturing to the impact of her oeuvre and engaging a printer with a simple style that would allow her text to speak for itself, a strategy used by many of her peers.

Another commonly employed technique appears in Claire de Duras's *Olivier, ou le secret*. When presented with the dilemma of publishing as a woman, Duras elected to focus her efforts on writing *Olivier, ou le secret* into a tradition of women-authored literature as part of a strategy to navigate the challenges posed by her scandalous choice in topic. Duras (1777-1828)

For more on this, see Laure Murat's 2013 study, *L'homme qui se prenait pour Napoléon: Pour une histoire politique de la folie* (The Man who Took Himself for Napoleon: A Political History of Madness).

[63] See the first page of volume 1 of the first edition of *Anatole* in the Gallica database: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k620162.texteImage

came from a wealthy family. However, her carefree youth was cut short in 1792 by the beheading of her father, a navy admiral who refused to denounce Louis XVI. At this time, Duras took charge of the family's finances and she and her ailing mother lived briefly in Philadelphia and Martinique (her mother's country of origin) before settling in London. Duras went on to marry the Duke of Duras in 1797, and Louis XVIII appointed him to be his chamberlain. She then leveraged her new position to establish her literary salon, which was frequented by François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and other celebrated writers of the period. At this time, Duras set about writing *Ourika* (1823), *Édouard* (1825), and *Olivier, ou le secret*, which deal with the theme of exclusion on the basis of social class, race, and disability respectively.

Using women-authored fiction as a source of inspiration, Duras creates subtle connections between her oeuvre and theirs. For example, in *The Male Malady* (1993) Margaret Waller notes that Duras's Olivier expands upon trend of a series of melancholic heroes of early nineteenth-century literature who display certain common characteristics.[64] Several of these powerless protagonists, including Duras's Olivier, share names beginning with the letter "O," which Waller argues symbolizes the narrative void created by these heroes' mental and/or physical afflictions. In Stäel's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807), a novel from which Duras takes inspiration on several fronts, the hero, Oswald, suffers from debilitating indecisiveness regarding his love life, with which Olivier struggles as well. Oswald and Olivier's marital plans are complicated by promises they made to a parent on their deathbed to wed a specific woman, who bears the name Louise in both works. Both encounter what they perceive to be insurmountable obstacles to this match going forward. However, they feel trapped due in part to their sense of

[64] Waller also mentions Chateaubriand's René in *René* (1802), Staël's Oswald in *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807), and Stendhal's Octave in *Armance* (1827).

filial obligation, which intensifies in the aftermath of their respective parent's passing. Indeed, these texts highlight a loss of power that affects the older generation in the wake of the French Revolution.

Duras's novel also replicates the structure of Staël's title, which seems to indicate a choice between the main character and the second element of the title. It should be noted that this is also a strategy that many of Duras's contemporaries, across genres, author gender spectrum, and national literary traditions, used to dramatize the conflict faced by their protagonist. Other examples include Scottish author Catherine Eliza Richardson's (1777-1853) *Adonia – A Desultory Story* (1801), which was translated into French in 1801 by François Soulès (1748-1809) as *Adonia, ou les dangers du sentiment*; the anonymously published, *Amanda, ou les apparitions nocturnes* (1801) (Amanda or the nocturnal appearances); French author Félicité de Choiseul-Meuse's (1767-1838) *Coralie de Beaumont, ou la piété filiale* (1801) (Coralie de Beaumont or filial piety) and *Amélie de Saint-Far, ou la fatale erreur* (1802) (Amélie of Saint-Far or the fatal error); British author Mary Charlton's (1794-1824) *Rosella, or Modern Occurrences* (1799), which was translated into French by an anonymous translator as *Rosella, ou les effets des romans sur l'esprit des femmes* in 1801; Charlotte de Bournon Malarme's (1753-1830) *Héléna Aldenar, ou le bigame* (1810) (Héléna Aldenar or the bigamist); Mademoiselle Fleury's *Aglaure d'Almont, ou amour et devoir* (1820) (Aglaure d'Almont, or love and duty). In each case, we can see that the author begins the title with the name of the protagonist and a second component that describes an aspect of their character that will serve as the basis for the central conflict they face in the narrative.

In the case of *Olivier, ou le secret*, Louise is intrigued by Olivier and his secret, and she endeavors to understand it. However, this secret, if revealed, would effectively end the

possibility of their relationship and have fatal consequences for them both. Louise must choose between loving Olivier and unraveling the mystery of his disability. The development of the plot through the unveiling of a secret disability appears as a device not only in Gay's *Anatole*, but in other novels of the period, as evidenced by the previously mentioned *Armance* (1827) and *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807). As we will see, Duras also draws on fellow female French sentimental novel authors' works, including Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres de Mistress Henley* (*Letters from Mistress Henley*) (1785), Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni's *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby* (*Letters from Milady Juliette Catesby*) (1759) and *L'histoire du Marquis de Cressy* (*The History of the Marquis of Cressy*) (1758).

While she was writing *Olivier, ou le secret*, Duras struggled with various health problems, for which contemporary medicine failed to determine the cause or provide a cure (Virieux, 20). She also struggled with well-founded anxiety about her choice of subject matter (male impotence). In an oft-cited letter dated 15 May 1824, Duras writes of *Olivier, ou le secret* to Rosalie de Constant (1758-1834), a dear friend who shared her passion for botany, "puis j'ai fait un autre roman dont je n'oserais vous dire le sujet, c'est un défi, un sujet qu'on prétendait ne pouvoir être traité" ("next I made another book of which I would not dare tell you the subject, it is a challenge, a subject that they claim cannot be treated") (Abbé Pailhès, 462). Despite her close relationship with her trusted female friends, Duras "dares not" spell out the subject of her manuscript in her private correspondence. This taboo status is also apparent in the way that only male characters in the book discover the truth of Olivier's disability. Even within the world of her novel, feminine penetration of this secret is refused.

Duras débuted her text in small sections to her friends and colleagues[65] at her literary salon in Paris. However, in spite of Duras's best efforts, this limited view of her draft of *Olivier, ou le secret* before a carefully selected audience made noise that reached the ears of male contemporaries who would seek to punish her for depicting male impotence in her novel. Most notably, Stendhal and Hyacinthe (Hénri) de Latouche (1785-1851) notoriously orchestrated a plot to silence her by ruining her reputation.[66] In short, this project culminated in the publication of Hénri de Latouche's *Olivier* (1825), a parody of Duras's work that Stendhal promoted through reviews in various newspapers. Latouche's book fanned the flames of public outcry to such a degree that Duras did not publish her piece nor any text thereafter. Instead, her manuscript of *Olivier, ou le secret* was passed down through her descendants and published for the first time in 1971. Additionally, Stendhal published, *Armance* (1827), the story of an impotent hero, which he claimed was written by a woman[67] and edited by him, to instruct women authors on how they should approach such sensitive topics.[68]

As we have seen, Gay and Duras sought to write books that would be recognized for their value by all layers of society by carefully considering their positions as women authors. They came from wealthy families and wrote both for pleasure and to attain success and renown, a life experience that they shared with many of their peers who were able to publish novels at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Though they engaged with feminist issues, neither claimed

[65] In her 1971 commentary on *Olivier, ou le secret*, Denise Virieux notes that Sophie Gay was among the first people to hear Duras read her manuscript (34).
[66] In ch. 5 of Margaret Waller's *The Male Malady* (1993), she discusses this episode at length.
[67] Though it was never openly stated, Margret Waller notes that the implication is that it is Duras. Additionally, it is worth noting that this technique, wherein a male author frames his novel as publishing a found manuscript of a female author, was already in use during the eighteenth century in novels such as Pierre-Antoine de La Place's novel, *La laideur aimable et les dangers de la beauté* (*Agreeable Ugliness and the Dangers of Beauty*) (1752). The precedent set by this novel will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.
[68] This was a particularly important issue to Stendhal, as he famously expressed fear of being impotent, himself, in his journals.

to be a part of the budding feminist movement in France, in the sense that advancing the cause of women was not the primary goal of their work. However, both, like many of their peers, sought the consideration of their novels as worthy of merit in the literary world, which meant a careful negotiation of their positionality. As discussed, Gay distanced *Anatole* from a feminine authorial persona and Duras wrote on the subject of male impotence and shared her book with only a small sample group at her literary salon. They also had to take into account contemporary conceptions of disability. In the following, I examine at how the disability chosen impacts the narrative structure of the text.

Early Nineteenth-Century Conceptions of Invisible Physical Disability

During the eighteenth century, medical and philosophical discourses tended to place deafness and the cultivation of morality in opposition to one another because, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), at times argued, the deaf did not have access to oral language and therefore might lack the capacity to reason. However, Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient* (*Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who Can See*) (1749) and the opening of l'Abbé Charles Michel de l'Épée's school for the Deaf in Paris in 1760, motivated a change in French conceptions of sensory deprivation and deficiency. Deafness was still classified as a disability, but as one that could be mitigated through specialized education. Indeed, the nineteenth-century oralist movement emphasized rehabilitating deaf individuals' verbal skills and prioritizing training them to express themselves through spoken French, rather than sign language. This medical model focused on treating the condition rather than the social processes and policies that restricted the rights of the disabled.

Though different forms of sign language have existed since Antiquity, l'Abbé de l'Épée's school constituted one of the first attempts of the hearing community to understand, recognize, and standardize the deaf community and their system of communication. However, l'Abbé de l'Épée established his curriculum without understanding how developed sign language, known as the Vieille Langue des Signes Française (VLSF), already was. He began by taking examples of exchanges between members of the deaf community he encountered in France. Then, he rewrote the language he observed to make it more closely resemble spoken French, creating what is referred to as Ancien Français Signé (AFS). His work, thus, served primarily to assimilate the deaf community into that of the hearing in a manner that privileged the latter. In the context of Gay's novel, Anatole does not seem to be able to express himself verbally (at no time does he do so), which separates him to a greater degree from the rest of the characters, all of whom are hearing. However, he is proficient in l'Abbé de l'Épée's sign language system. Indeed, Valentine learns this language at the conclusion of the text to communicate with him. The narrator reveals of Valentine, "depuis trois mois les leçons de l'abbé de l'Épée l'ont rendue très-savante dans le langage d'Anatole" ("for three months the lessons of l'Abbé de l'Épée made her very knowledgeable of Anatole's language") (vol. II, 288). Here, Gay reproduces, rather than resists, medical and philosophical discourses that surrounded deafness at the time. Anatole's portrayal follows a well-defined pattern that David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder elucidate in *Narrative Prosthesis*, wherein a disabled character is treated as an "anomaly," something to be "integrated" (or not) into the collective human experience rather than something integral to it (Mitchell and Snyder, 30).

Davis goes as far as to argue that in the nineteenth century, there was not only separation, but animosity between the hearing and deaf, due to the latter's potential as a subgroup that could

threaten national identity. Davis explains in *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (1995) that the "Deaf" fulfill many characteristics of "ethnic group" (84). As a cultural and linguistic minority, they operated, in a sense, as their own separate nation, which had the potential to disrupt the cohesion of a society based on the primacy of French citizenship in individuals' identities as well as eugenics. Furthermore, the language used by the Deaf community, inscrutable to hearing individuals, evoked other ways of communicating that facilitated the commission of illegal activities, such as secret codes used by criminals, to those who did not understand it.[69]

Additionally, Davis notes that though the French Industrial Revolution took root later in France than in other areas of Western Europe, it quickly gained momentum during the early nineteenth century. Consequently, during this time in France bodies were increasingly defined by their productivity and what they could *do* in society (87). This meant that the referential post-Revolutionary 'French citizen' gained another implicit qualifier that tended to exclude disabled populations: able-bodied. Though, given this context, a tragic ending seems inevitable in *Anatole*, it emerged as one of the few works in this category of women-authored novels of the nineteenth century depicting disability to feature a happy ending in which the disabled person is more or less successfully integrated into society. As we will see, the text overcomes these challenges to a successful integration into society by depicting Anatole as the perfect sentimental hero. This is also a concern in the novels of Gay's contemporaries who depicted non-verbal deaf characters in their novels, such as in Mme la Comtesse de Mallarme's (née Charlotte de Bournon) *Sourde et muette ou la femille d'Ortemberg* (1819). However, the strategies used in the

[69] Davis explains that he chooses to capitalize the "D" in deaf to emphasize the existence of this distinct community of deaf people with its own language (84).

novel to establish a character's sensibility vary due to the fact that Mallarme's afflicted protagonist identifies as female.

It is also worth noting that the interest in narrative depictions of blindness that had taken off during the eighteenth century persisted during the first half of the nineteenth century. However, this manifested most often in the French women-authored pieces of children's literature, as previously discussed, and through French women writers completing translations or pseudo translations of works of fiction by their European counterparts. Some notable examples include German author Christian Leberecht Heyne's (1751-1821) text, which was translated into French as *Le pauvre aveugle, par le professeur B**** in 1805 by Swiss writer Marie Élisabeth de Polier (1742-1817); An anonymous British author's book, translated into French by Mademoiselle de Montrond as *Le fermier aveugle et sa famille* in 1822; and J.C. Salzmann's work, translated in French as *Marie la fille de l'aveugle* by J. de Civrey in 1827. This is certainly a fascinating phenomenon that bears further consideration in future research, but, as previously stated, the focus of this study is on narrative depictions of disability as produced by woman authors in the nineteenth-century French milieu.

This category includes not only Sophie Gay, but her contemporary, Claire de Duras, who faced even higher stakes than Gay with her depiction of male impotence, currently known as erectile disfunction, or the inability to get and/or maintain an erection firm enough for sexual intercourse. To understand the status of male impotence in the nineteenth century, it is important to consider its longer history and French-specific context. Descriptions of impotence date back to 2000 BC in Egypt and continued to develop in culturally specific ways over time. In his 1999 article, "Anatomy and physiology of the penis," Tom Lue characterizes the centuries-long evolution of medical theories of impotence in the Western tradition as mired in stigmatization of

its physical, psychological, and emotional aspects, particularly as they related to clandestine desire. This was particularly true of the French context. In 1587 in France, the *congrès* was established to determine the capacity of men to perform their conjugal duties, requiring those accused of impotence to consummate their marriage in front of a panel of judges. If the man's impotence was confirmed through this dubious process, the woman could file for divorce. According to seventeenth-century French discourse, an impotent man, unable to procreate or even have marital relations, necessarily sought to love and lust after a woman, or worse, a man, outside of the institution of marriage, forging an association between his body and sin. By the eighteenth century in France, impotence trials had ended, and the medical community was moving toward a deeper understanding of the biological processes involved in impotence. In the *Encyclopédie raisonnée* (*Encyclopedia*) (1750-1771) article "Impuissance" ("Impotence"), written by the well-known French physician Menuret de Chambaud, impotence is defined as an exclusively male phenomenon related to the inability to copulate. Chambaud cites biological (poor circulation and/or muscle strength, deformation or defect of the sex organ) and physiological ("state of melancholia" or even excessive "modesty") difficulties as potential causes. He also treats melancholia as both a potential cause and consequence of impotence.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this text held profound influence over science and medicine and combined with changing social factors to stigmatize impotence on a societal level. For instance, the falling birth rate and fertility problems behind it emerged as a key concern in French consciousness. Though post-Revolutionary society decried the rigid rules of arranged marriages for political alliances of the Old Regime, it developed a code of eugenics, vitalism and medicine and applied it just as uncompromisingly to the party viewed as the most

active participant in sexual relations: men.[70] The element of sin faded away somewhat from this discussion. However, as Robert A. Nye argues in his article "Honor, Impotence, and male Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century French Medicine," the language of honor replaced it, shaming men for 'knowingly' entering a marriage that, due to their impotence, could never lead to progeny.

Indeed, writers of medical literature and fiction took inspiration from one another during the nineteenth century, creating a body of work that mocked the impotent via literary devices in use since the Roman Empire (27 BC-AD 286) in famed poet Ovid's (43 BC-17/18 AD) poetry. These codes appeared during the nineteenth century in medical treaties (J.J Virey's *De la puissance vitale considérée dans ses fonctions physiologiques* [On Vital Potency Considered in its Physiological Functions] [1823]), self-help books (Dr. Jean-Alexis Belliol's *Conseil aux hommes affaiblis* [*Advice for Weakened Men*] [1829]), and narratives of 'failed' wedding nights. Unsatisfied, cheating wives appeared as somewhat of a joke in nineteenth century *romans de mœurs*[71] such as Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage* (*Physiology of Marriage*) (1829). When it came to the novel form, however, invisible physical disabilities posed an interesting dilemma in terms of narrative construction because they tended to resist action and bring the plot to a halt: if the lovestruck characters cannot deny or communicate and consummate their love, the text risks devolving into a purgatory, where the characters wait for resolution that will never come. How then, could a narrative be constructed around it? How can the *manque* created by invisible

[70] It should be noted, however, that discussions of female impotence appeared in texts such as French physician, Félix Roubaud's (1820-1878), *Traité sur l'impuissance et de la sterilté* (1855), which acknowledged more clearly the active role that women played in marital relations and thus the possibility that physiological barriers could exist that would make it difficult or prevent her from doing so. See p.5 of his *Traité* for a longer discussion of the specific factors that play a role in female impotence.

[71] This was a popular literary genre during the nineteenth century in France that allowed authors to critique and mock society. For more on the *roman de mœurs* and how it emerged as a genre in the nineteenth-century French context, see Bernard Gendrel's *Le roman de mœurs* (The Novel of Manners) (2012).

physical disability be filled? What is the transgressive potential of how these authors fill the void?

The Disability's Effect on the Narrative Structure

The remainder of the chapter examines the two texts that best exemplify the early nineteenth-century trend of depicting invisible physical disability to draw out complexities in goals and strategies of early-nineteenth-century French women novelists. Namely, I study how Gay and Duras describe their main character's disability, the strategies they use to insist upon the validity of that character as a sentimental hero, the narrative challenges that the disability creates (problems in communication), and how this problem at times leads to opportunities to assert the agency of female characters. While Wang has studied these texts in a similar manner, I believe that it is important to revisit them here to establish a baseline for comparison against which future trends will be measured. This will also allow me to interrogate the changing socio-political and cultural landscape and its effect on conceptions of women (authors) and the disabled over the course of the century.

Though Gay and Duras wrote about different types of impairment (deafness and male impotence, respectively) depicting invisible physical disabilities results in some common narrative challenges to which these authors respond in their novels, which constitute varied examples of formal strategies that women authors writing about disability used at this time. Specifically, since Gay and Duras chose disabilities that were viewed as an obstacle to integration into society through marriage, they had to consider how the afflicted character would function in the narrative. Indeed, both authors include just one disabled character in their novels and juxtapose his experience with that of other able-bodied individuals, coded as 'normal.' They

depict a disabled protagonist who exists at the margins of society, waiting to be either assimilated or eliminated as a threat. As Alison Kafer suggests in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* "How one understands disability in the present determines how one imagines disability in the future; one's assumptions about the experience of disability create one's conception of a better future" (2). The disabled protagonist's fate is thus determined by his ability to adapt to normative expectations.

Rich, noble, and handsome, Sophie Gay's protagonist, Anatole, is endowed with all manner of talents and charms, except for his lack of hearing and speech. Valentine, his love interest, reflects after receiving her first letter from Anatole that "La nature semblait l'avoir comblé de ses faveurs" ("nature seemed to have filled him with its favors") (vol. I, 125). This makes his retreat after saving her perplexing. As the narrative unfolds, Anatole 'speaks' through infrequent letters and deliberate and measured actions in contrast to his adversary and foil, Émerange, another suitor of Valentine's. A talkative musician and the socialite *par excellence*, Émerange makes his presence obnoxiously known, while Anatole operates quietly at the periphery of society, cultivating masculine intellectual pursuits such as writing and painting.

Similarly, in *Olivier, ou le secret*, Louise, Olivier's beloved, describes Olivier as someone, who, like Anatole, should be happy because he possesses so many qualities that are valued by society, but suffers instead. As Louise remarks, "Je ne lui connais aucun sujet de chagrin…personne au contraire ne possède tant de moyens de bonheur" ("I do not know of any reason for his grief…on the contrary, no one possesses so many means of happiness") (Letter III). Anatole and Olivier's persistent melancholia, then, poses a mystery to be solved, an outcome that each affected character seeks to avoid by remaining at a distance from prying eyes. This forces them into an exile of self-preservation and limits their means of communicating with

their love interests to sporadic letters and intermediaries. Indeed, these barriers to communication can be analyzed as stemming from their disabilities: Anatole cannot speak in verbal French to Valentine and Olivier's impairment cannot be spoken of, choking off his ability to express himself to Louise. This has enormous ramifications for the narrative construction because, in contrast to the typical path and gender dynamics of a love story, which centers on the active quest of the hero, this plot concerns how the heroine responds to the mystery of the hero's retreat.

In *Anatole*, the hero's impairment is attributed to his mother's feminine incapacity to control her emotions. Her marriage to Anatole's father was one of convenience, but while she was pregnant with Anatole, she fell in love with another man, and the subsequent impossibility of being with her beloved tortured her. When recounting this story to Valentine, the Commandeur de Saint-Albert (Anatole's friend and confidant) reflects, "je crois que c'est à cette maladie qu'on doit attribuer l'infirmité d'Anatole" ("I believe that it is to this illness that we must attribute Anatole's infirmity") (vol. II, 204). Here, the blame for Anatole's condition lies squarely with his mother, so that his masculine qualities of strength, determination, and intellect can remain untarnished by it. Indeed, the plot of *Anatole* adheres to a pattern studied in *Narrative Prosthesis* by Snyder and Mitchell. In it, they note the unique relationship that disability has to time and how it lends itself to structuring a narrative: there is a peaceful, happy time before the onset of the disability, then a moment of crisis when it strikes, finally a period during which the afflicted individual and those around them respond to the disability. Gay's novel necessitates a focus on the tension over whether Anatole will assume his role in society, as Anatole was born deaf. He is, therefore, in a position to concentrate on how he will deal with it in the future, never knowing anything different than life on the periphery of the hearing community.

Duras's novel, on the other hand, centers the generational sense of powerlessness that stems from events that occurred before the beginning of the first narrative. As Wang has noted, the text overflows with nostalgia for the period before the onset of the disability because it occurred around the time that Olivier became an adult. In a letter to Louise, Adèle, Louise's sister-in-law, recalls "Tu aimais Olivier comme un frère et plus qu'un frère : lorsqu'à l'âge de dix-sept ans il eut cette fièvre maligne dont il pensa mourir, oublies-tu que tu fus plus malade que lui ? Pâle, anéantie, je te vois d'ici, attendant la vie ou la mort, de sa vie, ou de sa mort" ("You loved Olivier like a brother and more than a brother: until at the age of seventeen he had that malignant fever of which he that he would die, do you forget that you were sicker than him? Pale, destroyed, I see you from here waiting for life or death, of his life or of his death") (Letter VIII). Here, without knowing it, Adèle forges the connection between disability and illness. Whereas here fever imposes the disability, it also serves as a means of purifying the body of disability, as we will see in Chapter 3 in the case of *Laide.*

Marriage seemed to be certain before the onset of Oliver's malady. He and Louise had strong feelings for one another, and Olivier felt a sense of filial obligation because his mother had entreated him to marry Louise while on her deathbed but passed away before being able to facilitate this match. However, after Olivier began to suffer from impotence, though the nature of his ailment was unbeknownst to Louise and Adèle, he despaired of the possibility marrying Louise. By the beginning of the novel, then, the events that will determine Olivier and Louise's fate have already taken place. To craft a compelling narrative when the outcome has been decided from the outset, Gay and Duras, then, present their male protagonists as the epitome of the sentimental hero, a common strategy among their peers. As we will see in the following section, Gay and Duras begin by inoculating their heroes against the more controversial

implications of the origins and lived experience of their conditions and then work to associate them with laudable French sensibility.

Crafting a sentimental hero

We first meet Anatole in chapter VIII. As Valentine departs from the Paris Opera House, she glimpses Anatole's *remarkable face* (vol. I, 81) for the first time. She blushes and averts her gaze, noting his beauty, especially his facial features, which recall those of heroes of Greek Antiquity (*ibid.*). This is not someone that either Valentine, or her well-connected sister-in-law knows, so she assumes he must be an "étranger," a term that in French denotes both "foreigner" and "stranger." Indeed, Anatole is a foreigner in that he is the son of the Spanish Ambassador, and spent parts of his childhood there, as well as a stranger, one who is unknown by this society due to an ailment that they cannot understand. However, in a moment of crisis, Anatole springs into action to rescue his damsel in distress in a display of admirable strength and masculinity. From Valentine's perspective, shortly after seeing Anatole for the first time, she is saved from being crushed by a horse drawn carriage when "un homme se précipite sur le timon de cette voiture, en reçoit un coup violent, repousse avec effort les chevaux que les cris animaient, et relevant Valentine, il la porte évanouie sous le vestibule" ("a man throws himself on the beam of the carriage, receives a violent blow from it, pushes back the horses that the shouts stirred up with effort, and lifting up Valentine, he brings her passed out under the vestibule") (vol. I, 84). Even without the capacity to speak, Anatole proves himself as the hero of this story during his first appearance in the novel.

Olivier, on the other hand, suffers from a crippling sense of powerlessness due to his disability, as Waller has noted, and performs no such demonstrations of masculinity to offset his

'feminine' qualities. In fact, Duras's text criticizes Olivier's overly feminine upbringing at the hands of his and Louise's mothers as a possible cause of his inability to fulfill his role in society. Louise explains in a letter to Adèle, "Tout paraît hostile, après cette douce société de bienveillance, de paix, d'amitié" ("everything appeared hostile, after this sweet society of kindness, of peace, of friendship") (Letter XVI). According to Louise, Olivier is troubled by the harshness of the world in contrast to the idyllic childhood her shared with Louise, which again, casts dispersions on the women who raised him. The implicit critique is that perhaps if Olivier had been raised by a man or at least in a more masculine manner, he would not be suffering from his unnamed ailment.

Louise also suggests that Olivier's melancholia could stem from his English sensibility in a letter to Adèle, wondering

> Lord Exeter me dit "Quelle peut être la cause de la mélancolie d'Olivier ? Il y a certains sujets auxquels on ne peut toucher avec lui ; il ressemble à la sensitive"…Alors, nous commençâmes à parler du spleen, et de tous ces dégoûts et ces ennuis qui sont les malheurs de ceux qui n'en ont pas, et dont les Anglais sont souvent la proie. (Letter III)
>
> (Lord Exeter says to me "What could be the cause of Olivier's melancholia? There are certain subjects which on cannot touch with him; he seems sensitive"…so we started to talk about the melancholy and all of these disgusts and these worries that are the woe of those who do not have any, and of which the English are often prey.)

In this passage, the name "Lord Exeter" is likely inspired by the hero of the same name in *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby à Milady Henriette Campley, son amie* (1759).[72] Madame Riccoboni's Lord Exeter cannot marry the woman he loves because of a secret, not a disability, that he cannot reveal to her. Referencing this character, then, allows Duras to reveal a piece of Olivier's personality to the reader well-versed in women-authored novels. As Wang has noted, Olivier's affinity for England is apparent even in his first letter. He writes to Louise of England,

[72] As Denise Virieux remarks in her 1971 critical edition of *Olivier, ou le secret*, Duras greatly admired Riccoboni's works, which had been reedited in 1818, and makes references to several of her novels throughout hers.

"C'est un pays que je voudrais que vous connussiez ; c'est celui de tous où l'on apprend le plus la vérité des sentiments et celle du caractère" ("it is a country that I would like for you to know; it is where one learns the most the truth about emotions and of character") (Letter I). The fact that Olivier embodies a pathologized English sensibility guards France against the threat of queered gender dynamics.[73] Olivier embodies the predicament of sensibility as the trait that makes one fully human and, if felt and displayed in excess, a toxic source of over-feminization, a key concern of early nineteenth-century French society. Indeed, Olivier is portrayed without the traditional masculine qualities of Anatole and Staël's Oswald. In both *Anatole* and *Olivier, ou le secret*, the disability is characterized as an imported phenomenon that must be 'resolved' within the confines of French society. If characters exhibit more fluid gender expression, they must flee to other areas of Europe, such as England, Spain, Germany, or Italy or perish.[74]

Also important to Anatole's heroic qualities is proof of his admirable French sensibility, which Gay establishes by juxtaposing him with his foil and adversary, the chevalier d'Émerange. The narrator reveals of Émerange's first encounter with Valentine that "[il] fut d'abord séduit par le son de sa voix, et, sans trop écouter ce qu'elle disait, il remarqua les plus belles dents et le plus gracieux sourire" ("he was first seduced by the sound of her voice, and, without really listening to what she was saying, he observed the most beautiful teeth and the most gracious smile") (vol. I, 36). In contrast to Anatole, Émerange does not value Valentine's sensibility, but her beauty.

[73] It is likely that Duras took inspiration from the events of the dissolution of the engagement of her younger sister, Clara, and Astolphe Custine, a man whose homosexuality became a scandal in nineteenth-century France. For more on this, see *Lettres à Claire de Duras (1814-1828)* (2016).

[74] Such strategies of gender equivocation are present in other works of the period, notably Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1831), which tells the story of a young man who travels to Rome and falls in love with a beautiful performer, who is revealed to be a castrato. In this case too, the illicit romance, which develops under the guise of thinly veiled same-sex attraction can only occur outside of the French context. It is also present in Madame la Comtesse de Mallarme's (née Charlotte de Bournon) *La sourde et muette, ou la famille d'Ortemberg* (1819) (The Deaf and Mute girl, or the Ortemberg Family), in which the deaf and nonverbal protagonist is found in Germany by a wealthy man who welcomes her into his family and brings her along with them as they travel the country.

He prides himself in his ability to use his gift with words to seduce women. Valentine, however, finds herself both instinctively drawn to Anatole and repulsed by Émerange. For example, when Émerange attempts to engage Valentine in conversation at a party, his approach inspires fear in her, and she quickly removes herself from his presence (vol. I, 214). However, when Anatole approaches, she feels only intense curiosity and amorous attraction, another sign that points to Anatole as the hero of this story and Émerange as the antagonist.

The tension between Anatole and Émerange reaches a boiling point when the latter composes a mocking version of the story of Anatole's love for Valentine, or as he terms it, "les amours discrets d'un sourd muet de naissance" ("the discreet love of a deaf mute[75] from birth") (vol. II, 252), and performs it publicly. Consequently, Anatole and Émerange engage in a duel during which the former permanently disfigures the latter's face with his sword, while sustaining only a minor injury to his arm. The story of this encounter and the events leading up to it are transmitted to the audience by the Commandeur de Saint-Albert as he summarizes and interprets them during a conversation with Valentine. He entreats Valentine to view the results of the duel as a form of due process, imploring her "ne vous reprochez pas la blessure qui vient de défigurer pour toujours un visage moins joli qu'insolent; c'est un trait de la justice divine, dont la gloire était réservée à l'adresse d'Anatole" ("do not reproach the injury that just permanently disfigured a face that is less pretty than insolent; it is a characteristic of divine justice, of which the glory was reserved for the skills of Anatole") (vol. II, 252). In this way, Émerange's exterior at last reveals the ugliness of his interior while Anatole emerges effectively unblemished, a symbol of his unimpeachable character. In the end, Émerange's silver tongue proves no match for

[75] While the term "muet" ("mute") is now considered to be an offensive and outdated term, it was the widely accepted term to refer to those who did not or could not communicate verbally from its first appearance in the 1606 edition of *Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que modern T.2*, to the mid twentieth century.

Anatole's decisive response, physical prowess, and honorable intentions. Additionally, such a victory for Anatole again serves to resolve concerns about how his disability could affect his participation in society. He clearly distinguishes himself from the powerless hero that we see in *Olivier, ou le secret*, embodying vitality, as a man of action. The threat of his disability to his capabilities as a man, future husband, and father is neutralized, a determining factor in his positive outcome at the end of the novel and reason for which he fares better than Olivier.

The latter's sensibility is also established through juxtaposition with that of other characters in the novel. Olivier contends with a foil and an adversary, though in the form of two separate characters: the le comte de Nangis and M. de Rieux, respectively. Le comte de Nangis, Louise's husband at the beginning of the novel, does not understand Louise. He writes to her, exasperated, snapping "Que puis-je répondre à votre dernière lettre ? Je vous ai dit mille fois que je ne comprenais rien à tous ces raffinements de sensibilité" ("How can I respond to your last letter? I told you a thousand times that I did not understand anything to do with all of these refinements of sensibility") (Letter II). Evidently, the language of sensibility emerges as a barrier to communication between Louise and her husband. While she and Olivier speak it fluently, le comte de Nangis does not, nor does he see any value in becoming proficient in it.

As Virieux has noted, such a characterization evokes Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres de Mistress Henley* (1783). This short epistolary novel details the marital tensions between a young bride who struggles to satisfy the demands of marriage and motherhood, under the judgmental eye of her cold indifferent husband. Mistress Henley is made to feel that her perspective is unreasonable and that she is less of a woman for not fitting naturally into her new role,[76] a

[76] In the face of Mr. Henley's incomprehension, Mistress Henley falls ill and laments her situation: "Quoi ! me disais-je, aucune de mes impressions ne sera devinée ! aucun des mes sentiments ne sera partagé ! aucune peine ne me sera épargnée ! Tout ce que je sens est donc absurde, ou bien M. Henley est insensible et dur" ("What! I saying

dynamic that Duras recreates in her depiction of Louise's marriage. Le comte de Nangis writes of their relationship, "je ne suis ni exigeant ni jaloux, aucune femme que je sache n'est plus indépendante que vous" ("I am neither demanding nor jealous, no woman that I know of is more independent than you") (Letter II). For the le comte de Nangis, whose mindset Duras critiques here, marital happiness stems from space between the husband and wife.[77] Furthermore, in his consternation, le comte de Nangis criticizes Louise's attitude as unrealistic, noting "C'est dans les romans ou dans les tragédies que vous trouverez les caractères qui vous plaisent" ("it is in novels or tragedies that you will find characters that please you") (*ibid.*). This perspective prefigures a theme that will be brought to the fore in works such as Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) as well as in the *fin-de-siècle* texts studied in the third chapter: the idea that overstimulation through reading and education constitutes a dangerous pastime for women because it excites their imaginations and erodes their contentment with their real lives. This in turn supposedly transforms them into less capable as wives and mothers.

When faced with the competition for Louise's hand in marriage, in the form of M. de Rieux, Olivier reacts in much the same way that he reacted to Louise's first husband (with childish jealousy): he taunts Louise, suggesting that her acceptance of M. de Rieux's proposal is a foregone conclusion because "il vous offre mille avantages, il les réunit tous : un beau nom, une grande fortune, de la grâce, de l'esprit; sans doute il obtiendra de vous ce qu'il vous demande" ("he offers you a thousand advantages, he has all of them together: a good name, a large fortune, grace, intelligence; without a doubt he will obtain from you what he is asking from

---

to myself, none of my impressions will be guessed! None of my sentiments shared! I will be spared from no pain! All that I feel is thus absurd, or perhaps Mr. Henley is insensitive and hard") (Charrière, 239).

[77] This attitude mirrors that of the couple in *Anatole* whose name he bears: M. and Mme. de Nangis in *Anatole* valued their independence from one another and touted this as a pillar of a strong marriage, an idea about which Sophie Gay seemed, at the very least, skeptical.

you") (Letter XXIV). However, Louise harbors no romantic feelings for M. de Rieux. Like Valentine's sensibility, Louise's leads her towards Olivier, the true hero of the story. Indeed, Olivier and Louise often frame their union in terms of a permanent connection between their souls—alone, incomplete, and together, whole. Olivier writes of their relationship to Louise, "nos deux vies, nos deux âmes ne sont-elles pas unies par une chaîne indissoluble !" ("our lives, our two souls are they not united by an indissoluble chain!") (Letter XXIV). This quest for wholeness provides direction and momentum for the plot. However, when Olivier's disability is taken into account, the form of their love becomes a source of tension. As Waller has noted, since Olivier cannot enter a procreative marriage with Louise, the only socially acceptable type of love he can express towards Louise is that of a brother. Louise, too, approaches their love this way on multiple occasions and this dynamic serves as the basis for their doomed attempt at cohabitating platonically towards the end of the novel.

Unsurprisingly, given the strength of Louise and Olivier's bond, M. de Rieux cannot compete for Louise's affections. The most pressing threat he poses remains his ability to reveal Olivier's secret to Louise, a fact he uses to provoke him. In an oft-cited passage, Louise recalls in a letter to Adèle that during one of M. de Rieux and Olivier's verbal altercations, "Olivier dit 'il y a de la lâcheté à prétendre à ce qu'on ne peut jamais obtenir.—Cela dépend, répondit monsieur de Rieux, de quel côté se trouve cette impossibilité" ("Olivier says, 'there is cowardice in claiming something that one can never obtain.'—'That depends,' responds Mr. Rieux 'on which side this impossibility is found'") (Letter XXVIII). Here, Olivier implies that M. de Rieux is a coward for attempting to win Louise's hand, because he will never succeed. M. de Rieux, however, suggests that it is in fact Olivier who is deceiving himself in a cowardly manner by acting as though he could carry on a relationship Louise, given his disability. Though this

comment troubles Olivier, it fails to damage Louise and Olivier's connection, as Louise fails to grasp its true meaning. M. de Rieux thus proceeds to allude increasingly less subtly to Olivier's disability in front of Louise, in an attempt to definitively end their relationship. Consequently, Olivier challenges M. de Rieux to a duel, which he wins, injuring M. de Rieux. However, this is not the complete victory that Anatole had over Émerange in *Anatole*: M. de Rieux's survival, symbolizes Olivier's inability to overcome or forget the obstacles to his and Louise's union. Of course, Anatole and Olivier struggle not only with these adversaries but also with persistent obstacles to communication with their beloved, which stem from their disability. In the next section, we will study how Gay and Duras respond to these narrative challenges, using strategies employed by both their peers and French women authors who would follow them.

Communication Barriers and Epistolarity

With regard to their barriers to communication, Anatole cannot express himself verbally and Olivier cannot speak of his affliction for fear of rejection and ostracization. This need to hide the true nature of one's disability and the resulting self-perception of not being a viable man and husband plagues Anatole as well, but to a lesser degree than it does Olivier. To respond to these narrative challenges, Gay and Duras make use of epistolary elements commonly used structure in French (sentimental) novels since the eighteenth century.[78] While only Duras's novel is composed entirely of letters (save for the epilogue), Gay's novel, too, incorporates epistolarity, by privileging the perspective of Valentine as the reader and interpreter of Anatole and his letters.

[78] The most famous example of a French epistolary novel of the eighteenth century is Cholderlos de Laclos's *Les liaisons dangereuses* (1782). However, this form became a staple of the sentimental genre in works such as Madame de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une péruvienne* (1747); Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres de Mistress Henley* (1783); and Madame de Riccoboni's *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby à Milady Henriette Campley, son amie* (1759).

To provide necessary context on the epistolary form, it often juxtaposes friendships (between confidents) and romantic relationships (where the man seduces the woman) and involves the loss or gain of confidence in both. In the case of Gay's and Duras's novels, the question of who can be trusted with the truth about the hero's disability is brought to the fore. This also places readers in a unique position because, in an artificial sense, they are not the intended audience. In this construct, they are merely privy to a private correspondence between two characters who struggle to navigate their relationship with one another. In both the cases of *Olivier, ou le secret* and *Anatole*, the hero and his beloved avail themselves of the letter writing as it constitutes the only means of communication left open to them. As American-born French literature scholar Janet Gurkin Altman argues in her 1982 study, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, the letter "both maintains and bridges a physical gap across which the two can gradually reveal to each other their inner selves and their daily existences before the shock of physical contact would render such spiritual communication impossible" (27). Letters allow the star-crossed lovers to create space where their relationship can exist outside of the purview of social norms. However, by using this form they are already acknowledging their separation from those around them. In both *Anatole* and *Olivier, ou le secret*, the epistolary elements can be interpreted as both a symptom of and a remedy for problems in communication stemming from the disability being depicted. Additionally, as we will see, it has the effect of emphasizing female subjectivity. Since women characters compose and interpret most of the letters it creates the illusion of their participation in the writing process of the novel.

Silence and the Agential Ingenue in *Anatole*

Even in his letters, Anatole cannot speak freely about his affliction. His communications, opaque as they are, require the interpretation of a reader of unquestionable sensibility who can discern the meaning behind the words. Gay thus introduces Valentine as the interpreter of Anatole's sporadic letters, a strategy which also allows her to assert Valentine's agency. Indeed, we hear from Anatole directly on rare occasions through notes that he sends primarily to Valentine, as well as through a painting of his, depicting his love for Valentine. Eight of Anatole's letters are sent to Valentine; one is sent to the Commandeur de Saint-Albert; and one is sent to Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801)[79] via the Commandeur de Saint-Albert. Anatole's initial letter to Valentine is short, comprised of just four sentences. However, each subsequent one becomes longer, more poetic, and more effusive than the last, as Anatole gradually opens up to Valentine. Indeed, each new communication with her constitutes a great risk for him. Should his secret be revealed to an untrustworthy individual, he could face serious social and economic consequences. Though his profession is not explicitly stated, he seems to work in diplomatic relations between France and Spain, as his father did. A person in such a position must command respect and display strength. Becoming the object of ridicule and being associated with this type of 'weakness' could then severely damage his livelihood. For this reason, in his first letter, he seeks to briefly address Valentine's questions about the injuries he sustained during their encounter at the Opera House and prevent further inquiries on her part.

Anatole assures Valentine that he has healed and that he considers their meeting the happiest moment of his life. If she must lament for something, he notes, it should be that a

[79] Johann Kasper Lavater was a Swiss philosopher, physiognomist, poet, theologian and writer known for his seminal work *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-1778), in which he argued that a person's physical attributes, and particularly their eyes, could serve as indicators of their character traits. Here, he appears as a character in Gay's novel.

"fatalité" ("fatality") prevents him from coming to thank her for her concern for him (vol. I, 123). In fact, Anatole sustained a grave injury to his shoulder that required him to remain "completely immobile" (vol. II, 224) and consequently deprived him of the ability to sign. In addition to his congenital deafness, Anatole suffers from a temporary disability that further inhibits his ability to communicate. He cannot go to Valentine in person, nor can he communicate with her in sign language (due to his injury and her lack of fluency in it). However, the Commandeur notes that Anatole is still able to write letters, making it his only means of communication with Valentine and the outside world in general during his recovery period.

Based on the aforementioned letter, we see that Anatole holds Valentine in high esteem because of her uncommon kindness and care for a stranger, albeit one who had recently saved her life. He also yearns for closeness with her but views it as an impossibility for a reason that he does not reveal. At the end of the letter, he signs his name, "Anatole" (vol. I, 124), finally allowing Valentine to learn his name and the reader to discover whom the title references. Valentine rejoices in this knowledge repeating his name to herself "Anatole…je sais enfin son nom, et je connaîtrai bientôt celui de sa famille…Mais que m'importe le secret de sa naissance, j'aimerais mieux savoir celui de ses chagrins" ("Anatole…I finally know his name and I will soon know that of his family…but what importance does the secret of his birth hold for me, I would rather know that of his woes") (*ibid*). Here we catch our first glimpse of Valentine's reading process; she mines Anatole's letters for clues as to his identity to discover the source of his pain and heal him from it.

In keeping with the sentimental tradition, inviting the reader to perceive a character through the perspective of a sentimental heroine (and establishing her as such) functions as a strategy to instill a sense of empathy in the reader while still asserting Valentine's agency.

Integral to Valentine's sentimental interpretation is her sensibility, which Gay establishes through physiognomic analysis and the juxtaposition of Valentine's sensibility with that of those who surround her. For instance, *Anatole* opens with a direct speech conversation between Richard and Julie (relatives of Valentine's) who are discussing her arrival. Here, in the second line of the novel, we receive the first physical description of Valentine: "une belle provinciale" ("a beautiful small-town woman") (vol. I, 7), "une personne charmante" ("a charming person") (vol. I, 11), "Artemise" ("Artemis") (vol. I, 33). This characterization casts her in the role of the sentimental heroine. Gay signals this by insisting on Valentine's beauty, which a trait which nineteenth-century French society considered essential for a woman, especially one seeking to become a wife and mother. Her appearance also serves as a measure of her sensibility. However, Gay also problematizes it through the Commandeur de Saint-Albert, who remarks upon seeing Valentine for the first time, "Je me méfie des Beautés si régulières" (vol. I, 53) ("I am wary of such regular beauties"). Valentine overhears this comment and instead of feeling slighted, finds her curiosity piqued. She initiates a conversation with him during which he clarifies that, in his estimation, only physiognomy, not physical attractiveness or pretty words, constitutes a simple and effective method to discern the truth about a person's character.[80]

Valentine registers her surprise at this declaration, given that she had always heard it said that the most "spirituelle" ("intellectual") women were often deceived by untrustworthy men (vol. I, 108). However, the Commandeur de Saint-Albert specifies that "il faut bien se prêter aux ruses d'un trompeur pour en être séduite" ("one must really give oneself over to the ruses of a deceitful person to be seduced by them") (vol. I, 109). Such a suggestion that women could their

[80] "Depuis que l'on s'écoute des yeux, personne ne s'abuse ; car rien n'est aussi franc que la physionomie ; et je puis vous assurer que, si dans le monde on ment beaucoup, on trompe fort peu" ("since we listen to each other with our eyes, no one is induced in error; because nothing is as frank as physiognomy; and I can assure you that, if in the world we lie a lot, we deceive very little") (vol. I, 107).

judgement, informed by their sensibility, through intellectualism prefigures currents of thought about the inferiority of the female brain that become a flashpoint of debate at the end of the century. As we will see, Valentine's visible eagerness and lack of guile when presented with the opportunity to know Anatole more deeply, eventually convinces the Commandeur de Saint-Albert of her superior sensibility, which informs her approach to reading and interpreting Anatole's letters. However, the Commandeur de Saint-Albert refuses the premise that Valentine's beauty or any intellectual interests and prowess she might possess would have a direct correlation to her sensibility.

The third-person heterodiegetic narrator of the novel supports the Commandeur de Saint-Albert's definition of sensibility and its importance in the development of Anatole and Valentine's relationship. He or she insists on the disparity between the two protagonists' taciturn sentimental nature and the exchanges Valentine observes between the elite of Parisian society, which rely, as Wang has noted, on frivolous verbosity (58). For instance, he or she provides a description of high society's first impression of Valentine, noting "Elle était pale et fatiguée de son voyage; on la trouva sans fraîcheur. Sa robe n'était pas nouvelle, et il fut décidé qu'elle avait l'air provincial ; du reste, on était sûr qu'elle manquait d'esprit et d'usage, car elle avait l'air étonné de tout, et ne parlait de rien" ("She was pale and tired from her trip; she was found to be without freshness. Her dress was not new, and it was decided that she seemed provincial; anyhow, she was surely lacking in intellect and experience, because she seemed surprised by everything, and talked about nothing") (vol. I, 34). Here, the narrator translates the thoughts of those in attendance at the party and presents them as a collective "on" or "one." This fashionable-society collective mind draws superficial conclusions about Valentine based on her somewhat worn-out appearance, lack of outward signs of wealth, and silence, to exploit as

gossip. They seem to take specific issue with her apparent naïveté. This quality, however, is the key to Valentine's agency. It is her lack of knowledge that drives her to discover more about Anatole and that which separates him from society.[81]

Indeed, Valentine's ingenue status drives her to consult with an expert in physiognomic analysis to verify her preliminary findings about Anatole's letters. The Commandeur de Saint-Albert has already suggested that Valentine can see clearly, thanks to her sensibility, saying, "Le danger est tout entier pour celle que la vanité aveugle : la femme qui ne cède qu'aux impulsions de son cœur est rarement trompée" ("The danger is entirely for the one whom vanity blinds: the woman who only cedes to the impulses of her heart is rarely deceived") (vol. I, 111). However, Valentine seeks confirmation from Johann Kasper Lavater, who appears as a character in the novel. She asks for his counsel when she discovers a bust meant to represent Hector of Troy at a party at the Commandeur de Saint-Albert's house that bears an uncanny resemblance to Anatole. When she asks him what kind of character the man after whom it was modeled would have, he responds:

> Un homme doué de cette physionomie doit posséder un esprit élevé, indépendant, mais trop prompt à s'exalter ; un cœur généreux et passionné, sensible jusqu'à la faiblesse, jaloux jusqu'à l'emportement, timide et courageux, modeste et fier, docile dans ses habitudes, inébranlable dans ses résolutions ; on peut l'occuper vivement, mais jamais le distraire ;…son imagination ardente, modérée par un sentiment profond de mélancolie, lui promet de brillants succès en poésie et en peinture, et de vifs chagrins en amour. (vol. I, 158-159)
>
> (A man endowed with this physiognomy surely possesses a high intellect, independent, but too quick to exalt himself; a generous and passionate heart, sensitive to the point of weakness, jealous to the point of being carried away, timid and courageous, modest and proud, docile in his habits, unbreakable in his resolutions; he can be occupied in a lively manner, but never distracted;…this ardent imagination, moderated by a profound feeling

[81] More scholarly attention is currently being dedicated to theorizing and understanding this type of agential naïveté, which we see in both male and female protagonists in sentimental novels across both the British and French literary traditions. For example, British literature scholar Lillian Lu discusses this phenomenon in her article "Assuming Innocence: The Ingénue's Satire in Frances Burney's *Evelina*" (2020).

of melancholia, promises him brilliant success in poetry and in painting, and intense grief in love.)

Hearing such an analysis from the person who popularized physiognomy, lends credibility to Valentine's initial impressions of Anatole as intellectual, creative, sensitive, and grief-stricken, especially after the Commandeur de Saint-Albert reveals that Anatole had indeed served as a model for the bust. This depiction of Anatole also serves as a metaphor for his place in society: he stands alone, strong and silent, unable to communicate with those around him, particularly Valentine. The stone of the bust is also impermeable/impenetrable, like Anatole's secrets. Were it to be forcefully penetrated, cracks in the stone would form that the whole sculpture, the illusion of strength and steadiness, could crumble, as Anatole suggests in his second letter, "encore un mot de vous, et le mystère qui me dérobe à vos yeux cesserait bientôt; mais alors tout serait anéanti pour moi" ("another word from you, and the mystery that hides me from your eyes would soon cease; but then all would be destroyed for me") (vol. I, 184). Thus, consulting with Lavater validates and deepens the modes of analysis that Valentine brings to her reading of Anatole's letters. It also centers Valentine's agency as the primary investigator of this mystery.

This is a risky strategy on Gay's part that appears to pay off in the short term. However, it should be noted that over the course of the century, physiognomy lost credibility and became viewed as a pseudo-scientific spectacle that practitioners would perform in front of an audience. While an interesting pastime, it was thoroughly debunked as a method of accurate analysis of one's character, to the point that it faded from use as a hermeneutic device in fiction, and, in fact, was already beginning to do so by the time Gay published *Anatole*. Readers of Gay's work who lived later in the nineteenth century, thus, likely cringed at the serious use of it as an investigative tool, perhaps offering one explanation for the decline in her book's popularity over the course of the century. As we will see in the following section, the barriers to communication

represented a challenge common to authors depicting disability. In Duras's novel, they are amplified due to the 'unspeakable' nature of his affliction.

Olivier, ou le secret and the Doomed Correspondence

Like the hero of Gay's novel, Duras's Olivier struggles to communicate with his beloved; he feels torn because he loves her and wants to tell her, but he knows that their relationship is doomed because of his inability to procreate. So, if he told her he loved her, he would also have to address the question of why he will not marry her, a secret which, once revealed, would definitively end their relationship, which he cannot bear. He instead remains paralyzed in the purgatory of friendship and fraternal bonds, trying to deny his feelings to maintain some level of contact with Louise. As Waller has noted, Olivier's inability to act consequently creates a narrative void, which the female characters fill. Indeed, letters from Louise dominate the novel, though it opens and closes with masculine voices. There are seven letters from Olivier, eight from Adèle, and twenty-six from Louise. Most of Louise's letters, however, are sent to Adèle; each time Louise receives a letter from Olivier, she sends a flurry of letters to Adèle in which she tries to decipher it and decide how to respond.

Their communication is further complicated by Louise's marital status. Though, as we have seen, Louise and her husband struggled to relate to one another because of the differences in their temperaments, they still respected each other and valued their partnership. Thus, when M. de Nangis passes away, Louise suffers a crisis of conscience and of identity as a woman and wife. In Letter X, Louise informs Adèle that M. de Nangis, her husband, has died inexplicably. In a letter to Adèle, Louise writes, "Et pourquoi, au lieu de lutter ainsi, n'ai-je pas adopté sa manière de voir ? La nature a donné aux femmes la flexibilité du caractère pour qu'elles puissant

se plier aux goûts du compagnon de leur vie" ("And why instead of fighting thus, did I not adopt his way of seeing? Nature gave women flexibility of character so that they may bend to the tastes of their life companion") (Letter X). Here, Louise laments her intransigence as a sign of her deficient feminine nature that corresponds to her failure as a spouse. Like the heroine of *La Princess de Clèves*, she seeks to redeem herself by honoring her late husband's memory; this would mean renouncing her feelings for Olivier. In Lafayette's classic novel, the female protagonist loved another man while married and, out of guilt over these feelings, refused to allow herself to be with him even after her husband passed away. Her husband's passing served, in fact, as a nail in the coffin of the possibility of her relationship with the man she loved. This type of widowhood is different than the one we see in *Anatole* because Valentine experienced her relationship with her husband as primarily practical and transactional, more of a business arrangement than a marital union.

However, Louise's description of her marriage is radically different. She mourns her husband's loss to Adèle, reflecting "J'étais sa femme, son amie ; je trouvais qu'il manquait de confiance en moi, et cependant il ne me cachait rien d'important : nous avions tant d'intérêts communs !" ("I was his wife, his friend; I found that he lacked confidence in me, and nevertheless he did not hide anything important from me: we had so many common interests") (*ibid.*). Indeed, M. de Nangis treated Louise as an equal and they had a real partnership. However, the pressure to wed, and to such an undesirable candidate, M. de Rieux, eventually causes her to reevaluate her decision, unlike the Princess of Clèves. Louise chooses not to allow her 'defective' sensibility to determine her future, a carefully crafted plotline that had proved popular among early-nineteenth-century readers, particularly bourgeois women. She decides to do everything in her power to pursue a romantic relationship with Olivier.

Olivier, however, remains resigned to his fate, seeking only to postpone the inevitable by carving out a few more moments he can spend with Louise. Indeed, in an oft-cited passage, Louise writes to Adèle about the moment when she tried tell Olivier the name of her beloved, to make sense of his reaction. Before she could get the words out, Olivier covered her mouth with is hand, crying "Ne le nommez pas ! Ne le nommez pas ! Louise, je ne veux pas le savoir, laissez-moi vivre quelques jours encore" ("Do not name him! Do not name him! Louise, I do not want to know it, let me live for a few more days") (Letter XIX). He anticipated that Louise would name him as her beloved, causing his time to run out: this would be the death of him. Olivier's reaction of covering Louise's mouth appears childish, as though he regresses when confronted with the impossibility of assuming his role in society as an adult man. Olivier's problems in communication stem from his ticking clock: he can continue to live in the present, sustained by his memories of his childhood with Louise. However, as soon as his interlocuters discover his secret, his is certain that this fragile foundation will crumble. Denise Virieux suggests that such descriptions of Olivier's secret are reminiscent of passages in Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816), which Duras was in the process of translating to French. In this novel, the hero keeps a terrible secret from his beloved and Duras's descriptions of Olivier's secret bear a resemblance to them.

Indeed, as Waller and Wang have noted, Olivier and Louise struggle to define their relationship throughout the novel and slip into referring to each other as *frère et sœur* (brother and sister). In his first letter to Louise, Olivier describes his sadness about her marriage to M. de Nangis and illustrates his difficulty expressing adult romantic feelings for her, saying "je regrette ces mots que je n'ai jamais prononcés sans me sentir presque votre frère" ("I regret these words that I have never said out loud without feeling almost like your brother") (Letter II). Here,

Olivier suggests that he cannot tell Louise that he loves her without evoking their affection for one another as siblings. This is the only way Louise and Olivier know how to share intimacy. In the face of the complications presented by their romantic feelings and the social pressure to marry and procreate, this label encapsulates the closeness Louise and Olivier have felt since childhood—a time when their bond was simpler and easier to define. They cling to these labels because if they were to exchange them for those that would more accurately sketch out the contours of their adult, romantic and sexual feelings for one another, they would have to admit the impossibility of their relationship going forward. They seek instead to return to this idyllic phase of their lives, even attempting and ultimately failing to live together platonically at their childhood home.

By framing her main characters in this way, Duras places her novel alongside others of this period, which blur the lines between socially acceptable romantic love and idealized incest. Indeed, novels such as Rousseau's *Émile* and, later, Chateaubriand's *René* emerged as the most famous examples of the tension between fraternal and romantic love from the period. Nevertheless, Duras attained similar recognition for her following work, *Ourika*, which depicts a similar type of relationship between her two protagonists as they explore their romantic feelings for one another. On the level of phrasing in *Olivier ou the le secret*, the term of endearment "frère chéri" (cherished brother), echoes Riccoboni's protagonists' manner of referring to one another in *l'Histoire d'Ernestine*. This appellation is also reminiscent of the letters that Duras exchanged with François-René de Chateaubriand during this period, in which Duras would regularly refer to Chateaubriand as "cher frère" (dear brother) as they would discuss their mutual disgust for the harshness of the world and desire to return to their childhoods. Furthermore, it

complicates Olivier and Louise's feelings for one another: does Duras seek to highlight their pure, childlike love for one another or a more sinister type of incestuous desire?

We see this also through Olivier's use of the "vous" and "tu" subject pronouns. Throughout the novel, correspondences between Adèle and Louise use the "tu" subject pronoun, indicating a level of familiarity and intimacy in their relationship. However, Olivier uses the formal "vous" pronoun when writing to them and they use the same. To a French reader, this seems somewhat jarring, given their history and strong bonds of friendship. However, it becomes clear that in doing so, Olivier attempts distance himself from Louise and resist his attraction to her. At certain moments, though, Olivier loses control and "tu" pronouns begin appearing in his letters to Louise. In Letter XXIV, for example, he writes "Ah ! Louise, il ne fallait pas te revoir ! Te revoir et te quitter était au-dessus des forces d'un homme. Tu ne sais pas avec quel effort je reste éloigné de toi" ("Ah! Louise, I should not have seen you again! Seeing you and leaving you went beyond the strength of man. You do not know how much effort it takes for me to stay away from you"). Later in this same letter, Olivier regains some of his composure and returns to the "vous" pronoun, but this slip evidences his new level of agony over their separation. From this point forward, both Olivier and Louise gradually shift to using the "tu" pronoun regularly in their letters, as their resolve to resist their connection crumbles. In this epistolary format, no narrator intervenes to reframe the conflict or introduce alternative paths. We are immediately plunged into the depths of the main characters' inner thoughts and their adherence to mores shaped by their social context, which so intensely stigmatized impotence in men. As we will see in the following section, through our continued examination of Gay and Duras's texts, the communication problems that permeate novels of this subgenre that depict invisible, physical disability are so intense that they rely on an intermediary to facilitate their exchanges.

The Importance of Masculine-Coded Intermediaries

Both Gay and Duras employ intermediaries to facilitate communication between characters whose exchanges are stunted by the disability of which they cannot speak. In particular, Gay and Duras use masculine-coded characters who explain and verify the sensibility of the love interests, the basis of a sentimental romance. Indeed, in Gay's novel, different characters compete with the narrator to recount the events of the novel, a narrative strategy that results in productive fiction. For example, the Commandeur de Saint-Albert often intervenes to analyze Valentine's words as a sign of her sensibility and relates it to Anatole's corresponding moral character, stemming from his own sensibility. In this role, he works to protect Anatole from becoming the subject of cruel and unrelenting gossip in society (vol. I, 104). For this reason, when Valentine asks him questions about Anatole's identity, the Commandeur de Saint-Albert initially rebuffs her. However, he quickly perceives her extraordinary sensibility and deems her worthy of his and Anatole's trust. He repeatedly explains Valentine's sensibility to her and to the reader, saying "Aimable personne ! … Votre bon cœur ne peut supporter l'idée du malheur d'un autre ! même l'être le plus indifférent pour vous !" ("Kind person! … Your good heart cannot tolerate the idea of misery of another! Even the being who matters the least to you") (vol. I, 112). This strategy, then, is meant to encourage the reader to interpret Valentine's thoughts and actions as evidence of her sensibility as well as levy a scathing critique of those who surround her. However, it is important to note that Gay's technique was risky and not entirely successful.

The hyperbolic nature of the Commandeur's praise as well as the shaky logic he relies on to establish parity between Anatole and Valentine's sensibility give an ironic valence to his

words. Indeed, when Anatole saved Valentine, she constituted "l'être le plus indifférent" for him. She was a stranger to him, and he had no time to notice or appreciate her beauty during their split-second encounter, assuring the purity of his motives, stemming from a reflex to protect a woman from being killed or, at the very least, severely injured. We can only wonder if Anatole felt a greater sense of duty to intervene as a person with a disability, seeking to protect others from suffering physical trauma that could result in disability and, consequently, a life of ostracization at the hands of the able-bodied. The Commandeur's shock that Valentine would care what happened to the person who changed the course of her life or even recognize the weight of their encounter falls short of the critique Gay intends to levy towards the type of people with whom he interacts. As we will see in the following chapters, women writers and their audiences began to resent the precious language inherent to sentimental novels that served as an ode to sensibility. It thus becomes more common for women novelists to employ this type of language ironically over the course of the nineteenth century. However, as evidenced by the early success of Gay's book and the praise of its ability to move readers, Gay's contemporary audience is unfazed by a momentary and perhaps unintentional display of irony towards sensibility in service of supporting the development of Valentine and Anatole's relationship. Once Duras establishes Valentine's sensibility, more or less to the reader's satisfaction, it adds clout to Valentine's impressions of Anatole as the ideal sentimental hero and points to possibilities for his successful integration into society.

In *Olivier, ou le secret*, likewise, Adèle, who appears as a masculine-coded character, facilitates communication between the star-crossed lovers. Indeed, in a letter to Louise, she declares "De nous deux, je suis un peu la Raison, comme tu es l'imagination" ("Of the two of us I am a bit Reason, as you are imagination") (Letter VIII), associating herself with the masculine

quality of logical thinking. Like the Commandeur de Saint-Albert, she establishes early on that both Olivier and Louise are endowed with strong senses of sensibility, which make them compatible. She writes in a letter to Louise, "ton cœur, chère Louise, pur comme l'or qui sort du creuset et sans alliage comme lui, ressemble à ces beaux phénomènes de la nature dont on est longtemps sans vouloir admettre la possibilité" ("your heart, dear Louise, pure as gold that comes out of a crucible and without alloy like it, resembles these beautiful phenomena of nature of which do not want to admit the possibility") (*ibid.*). In Letter XI, Adèle writes to Olivier, offering to serve as his confidant, saying "votre vie est remplie de tout ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler du bonheur. Je sais qu'on peut le posséder sans en jouir, mais alors on voit cet obstacle, j'ai beau le chercher en vous hors de vous mon cher cousin, je ne saurais le trouver. Confiez à ma vieille amitié ce qui cause la mélancolie où vous paraissez plongé" ("your life is filled with all that one is likely to call happiness. I know that one can possess it without enjoying it, but then one sees this obstacle, I really searched for it in you outside of you my dear cousin, I do not know how to find it. Confide in my old friendship what causes the melancholy into which you seem plunged") (Letter XI).

Adèle does not understand the source of Olivier's sadness, so she deduces that an obstacle to his happiness that is unknown to her exists and she asks him to share it with her. She evokes their "old friendship" to play on his sense of nostalgia and feelings of safety and security that only existed for him in childhood. Additionally, Adèle criticizes Olivier for refusing to deal with his pain by sharing it and instead choosing to nourish it (*ibid.*). In this sense, and as Wang has noted, Adèle represents the voice of rational society that seeks Olivier's integration into it and views it as a moral failing that he would choose to remain at a distance, wallowing in self-pity. For this reason, she continues to encourage Olivier to share his secret with her and with

Louise. At times, Adèle seems to grow frustrated with her role, and writes this to Olivier "Des amis s'éloignent-ils ainsi sans essayer de s'entendre? Est-ce moi qui jouerai le rôle de Louise ? Faudra-t-il que je vous explique à vous-même ?" ("do friends distance themselves thus without trying to understand each other? Is it me who will play the role of Louise? Is it necessary that I explain yourself to you?") (Letter XV).

However, for Olivier, confiding in a female friend cannot solve his problem. Though he spoke freely with her as a child, as a man, he cannot reveal to her the secret plagues of his gender. As Olivier explains to Adèle, "il y a des souffrances dont il faut s'éloigner ; elles ne sont pas contagieuses comme les maladies du corps, mais elles répandent la tristesse autour d'elles, et c'est un mal incurable que celui que l'amitié ne peut guérir" ("there is suffering from which it is necessary to distance oneself; it is not contagious like bodily illnesses, but it spreads sadness around it, and it is an incurable evil that friendship cannot cure") (Letter XII). In his attempt to hint at his malady, Oliver distinguishes it from "maladies du corps" ("bodily illnesses") to emphasize both the fact that he does not risk transmitting it to others and the negative impact it has on all areas of his life, including his relationships. Though Adèle attempts to distance herself from her gender to recreate some of their childhood closeness, she ultimately fails. Instead, she serves as an intermediary, attempting to untangle the loaded messages between the star-crossed lovers and give voice to Olivier's repressed desires, as the Commandeur de Saint-Albert did for Anatole. Adèle, thus, fills the traditionally masculine role of reason, and encourages Olivier to fulfill his duty to society (marrying and having children). She so vigorously because, from her point of view, his money, status, and virtue, should make this path readily available to him. Like that of the powerless paternal figures we will see in *Jeanne de France*, *Laide*, *Une décadente* and

Névrosée, Adèle's imperfectly masculine influence fails to 'correct' the disability at play and facilitate a marital union.

Resistance

Effectively, the transgressive potential of early nineteenth-century women-authored novels depicting characters with invisible disabilities lies not only in the authors' rendering of afflicted characters as the perfect sentimental protagonists, but in the effect this narrative structure has on the women in the texts. Over the course of the century, we will see a downward trend of transgression of conventions as women authors' relationship to the sentimental genre becomes more complicated. However, at the beginning of the century, in works such as *Anatole* and *Olivier, ou le secret*, authors take on average more risks. In Gay's book, for example, Anatole, incapable of telling his own story orally, and ashamed of his disability, retreats throughout the novel, a passive role. Valentine must pursue him, taking on a more active role in her love story, seeking out Anatole and resisting an arranged marriage she does not desire (one to the Émerange).

Indeed, Valentine's brother pressures her intensely and unceasingly to marry, despite her wishes. Valentine "ne douta plus que son frère, instruit de l'amour d'Anatole, ne conçut le projet de surmonter tous les obstacles pour assurer son bonheur. Mais cette douce idée s'évanouit bientôt, lors qu'elle entendit M. de Nangis faire un grand éloge de M. d'Émerange et ajouter ces mots : 'Tant d'agréments réunis méritaient votre préférence'" ("no longer doubted that her brother, informed of Anatole's love, understood the project of overcoming all of the obstacles to assure his happiness. But this sweet idea fled quickly as soon as she heard M. de Nangis praise Émerange and add these words: 'so many charms united in him are worthy of your preference'")

(vol. II, 15-16). M. de Nangis suggests that among all of the women vying for Émerange's affections, Valentine alone has won them. Valentine diplomatically outlines the reasons why she they would not constitute good match, ending with "je suis fort honorée de son choix…mais je ne saurais me décider aussi promptement à former un nouveau lien" ("I am very honored by his choice…but I would not know how to decide so quickly to form a new bond") (vol. II, 18). With this, Valentine also hints that she may not feel mentally and emotionally ready to marry again after losing her husband. In response, her brother admits that he lacks the power of a brother or father to force her to marry. However, he then proceeds to suggest that she has no right to resist the match when she had encouraged (not resisted) Émerange's affections. Indeed, he also argues that the society set assumes that they will get married and that a man as proud as Émerange would not react well to being publicly rejected. Finally, he warns Valentine that Émerange will return shortly and that Valentine should think carefully about how she will respond to his proposal: "pensez surtout qu'on ne refuse pas impunément d'aussi grands avantages" ("consider most importantly that one does not refuse with impunity such great advantages") (vol. II, 22).

At this ominous reminder, Valentine springs into action, exploring new strategies of resistance that would not result in untrustworthy people looking into Anatole's secret (though she does not yet know the exact nature of it). She informs Émerange that she feels she must refuse his proposal out of sensitivity towards her sister-in-law (Mme de Nangis), who has feelings for him. This method, according to the narrator, succeeds: Émerange "s'affermit dans l'idée que la crainte de désespérer madame de Nangis était le seul motif de refus de Valentine" ("was bolstered by the idea that the fear of driving Mrs. Nangis to despair was the only reason for Valentine's refusal") (vol. II, 53). Valentine also enlists the Commandeur's help—planning a trip to Italy with him and his wife so that she can escape the pressure from her brother without

being accused of partaking in immoral behavior. Once again, Valentine expertly navigates the societal constraints for a woman in her position and finds a way to exploit them. However, Mme de Nangis disrupts these plans by intercepting a letter from Anatole to Valentine that reveals the true nature of their relationship and tells her husband, M. de Nangis, "l'esprit, la ruse, la trahison, la fausse pitié, tout fut employé pour abuser la tendresse d'un frère, et le porter à la plus coupable injustice" ("wit, ruse, betrayal, false pity, all was employed to abuse the tenderness of a brother, and bring him to the most shameful injustice") (vol. II, 88). Such a revelation provokes a terrible fight between M. de Nangis and Valentine.

This, along with the realization of Émerange's manipulative nature, causes Mme de Nangis to repent of her actions and endeavor to help Valentine. They work together to create a socially acceptable position for Valentine: a teacher. Valentine takes over the education of Mme Nangis's daughter, Isaure, a much-needed service as Mme de Nangis is in poor health and living apart from her husband. She wants to ensure that her husband will not discover that Valentine is residing with her, so before accepting this proposal, Mme de Nangis stipulates that Valentine must take the name Mrs. Saint-Hélène and take on the identity of "une de ces personnes qu'un revers de fortune oblige à fuir le monde pour se consacrer à l'éducation des enfants" ("one of these persons that a reversal of fortune obliged to flee the world to dedicate herself to the education of children") (270-271). Even in this conventional role, Gay creates space for her to experience motherhood in an unexpected way. Valentine has a much closer relationship with Isaure than Mme de Nangis does and is able to experience the joy of caring for a child outside of traditional family structures.

At the end of the novel, Anatole prepares to abandon their relationship for the good of the social order (which is a traditionally feminine role), but Valentine entreats him to stay,

expressing her love for him, using the sign language she has learned to communicate with him: "Il n'ose en croire ses yeux ni reconnaître le langage qu'il parle, qu'il entend, et que Valentine vient d'apprendre pour lui; un second signe ajoute, *je vous aime*, et il tombe anéanti sous le poids de sa félicité" ("he does not dare believe his eyes nor recognize the language that he speaks, that he understands, and that Valentine just learned for him; a second sign adds, *I love you*, and he falls, destroyed under the weight of his happiness") (vol. II, 262). This reaction on Anatole's part serves to emphasize his sensibility: he falls to the ground in a genuine expression of his powerful emotions. Fainting also constitutes a traditionally feminine response, which causes the sequence to appear as a symbolic death and rebirth of Anatole as the man that he was meant to be. The word "anéanti" ("destroyed") also recalls Anatole's third letter, in which he predicted that he would be thusly affected by the revelation of his secret. In the end, the destruction was not of his life, but of the walls he had built around himself and, in this way, it freed him to be with Valentine. This scene also depicts a transgressive strategy for performing an otherwise traditional integration of a disabled person into French society: Valentine creates space for him to maintain his social status while continuing his linguistic and culturally divergent practices. The narrative thus consists of a series of unveilings that occur over the course of her search. The void in the narrative created by Anatole's absence is filled by an active, traditionally masculine role on the part of the female protagonist. Thus, Gay creates space for experimentation with the bounds of gender roles.

Duras also transgresses traditional representations of romantic relationships in her work. As we have seen, Olivier struggles to fulfill his gender role throughout the novel. Louise, at times resists her role as a woman and wife as well. We have seen that Louise struggled with her identity after 'failing' to adapt her way of thinking to that of her husband, which caused her a

great deal of guilt in the aftermath of his passing. She also found herself incapable of entering an arranged marriage with M. de Rieux, preferring instead to pursue a romantic relationship with Olivier, that could not lead to marriage. Additionally, at the end of the novel, Louise offers to become Olivier's mistress, an extremely transgressive move that centers pleasure and sexual relations at the expense of normal family structure. In a declaration, which Denise Virieux has noted, recalls that of Riccoboni's heroine in *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butlerd* (1735),[82] Louise writes to Olivier, "Je serai ta maîtresse, ton esclave, tu disposeras de moi à ton gré, mais je dois toujours t'appartenir" ("I will be your mistress, your slave, you will use me as you want, but I must always belong to you") (XLI). This statement suggests that Louise would pursue an amorous relationship with Olivier to non-procreative ends and prioritize this over fulfilling her designated role in society as a wife and mother. Given the nineteenth-century context, such a suggestion poses a threat to the social order.

Nonetheless, Louise is faced with a similar dilemma to that of Valentine in *Anatole*. With her love interest in retreat and pressure to remarry after being widowed, Louise and Valentine choose to resist undesirable suitors in the pursuit of a love match. Louise, insulted by Olivier's suggestion that she would be so easily seduced by worldly advantages defends herself, retorting "Vous savez bien…que si je me décidais à risquer encore une fois la paix de ma vie, ce n'est pas monsieur Rieux que je choisirais" ("You know well…that if I decided to risk the peace of my life again, it would not be Mr. Rieux that I would choose") (Letter XXIII). Here, Louise describes her single life as peaceful—she enjoys her independence. Duras, via Louise, gestures toward the transgressive concept of a woman living happily independent of men. In a narrative double-bind, Louise must marry, but the man she loves cannot marry her because his impotence

[82] Fanni Butlerd writes to her romantic interest "Je suis donc votre maîtresse, votre chère maîtresse, votre amie, votre première amie" (I am thus your mistress, your dear mistress, your friend, your best friend) (Letter 224).

represents an insurmountable obstacle to their union. However, within this framework, Duras, like Gay, creates moments where her heroine stands on her own two feet, unattached to a man, working to build the kind of life she desires.

Indeed, according to codes of Romanticism, the woman must sacrifice herself (through exile or death, typically) to preserve the social order. In this case, the roles are reversed. Olivier sacrifices himself. Margaret Waller notes of Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie*, a popular French woman-authored Romantic novel, "The challenge to Staël's heroine and text is, precisely, to resist this premise of female guilt and defer the fatal causal logic of this traditional plot" (57) that we see in contemporary texts, such as Chateaubriand's *René*. Both Gay and Duras similarly engage with this theme of female guilt and struggle to resist its influence throughout the narratives they occupy. However, as Wang has noted, given Olivier's intention to be with Louise in death, his sacrifice takes on a more transgressive valence: he chooses to leave the society where his and Louise's love cannot exist to find a place where it can. The agony of the two protagonists, then, constitutes a form of resistance because they refuse to conform to society's expectations of their roles in it.

In the following letter, from Adèle to Louise's mother, we learn that Olivier has killed himself and that Louise has fallen into a comatose state because of it: "Le médecin attribue à la maladie l'espèce d'égarement où elle est, mais ma sœur n'a point de fièvre, elle ne semble pas souffrir, elle n'a pas de délire ; mais elle regarde sans voir, elle agit sans penser, et cependant, il ne paraît pas que l'événement horrible qui la plonge dans cet état soit présent à son souvenir" ("The doctor attributes this illness to the type of turmoil she feels, but my sister has no fever, she does not seem to suffer, she does not seem delirious; but she looks without seeing, she acts without thinking, and yet, it does not seem that the horrible event that plunges her into this state

is present in her memory") (Letter XLI). Adèle is not completely convinced by the doctor's diagnosis because she observes that what seems to ail Louise is emotional numbness, rather than pain. She further notes of Louise, "elle n'a pas pleuré, elle n'a donné aucun signe de douleur, ce n'est pas de l'affliction qu'elle éprouve, ah !" ("she has not cried, she has not given any sign of pain, it is not affliction that she feels, ah!") (*ibid.*). Here, Adèle casts doubt on the doctor's diagnosis and later expresses that she wishes she could take Louise to see Dr. Tronchin.[83]

This letter focuses mainly on Adèle's worries about Louise's state. Only in the following letter do we receive an explanation of the circumstances of Olivier's death. Julien, a servant of the property, writes to Louise's mother with more details. According to him, Olivier was restless because of his fever and refused to go to sleep, growing violent and incoherent when Julien tried to help him to his chambers. He seemed more subdued in the days that followed, but also closer to death. Louise then wrote about her terrible suffering associated with Olivier's to Adèle, which prompted Adèle to hastily call on her out of concern. However, when she arrived at the house, Julien could not locate Louise and Olivier. Julian and Adèle then searched the grounds until they ran came across Olivier's distraught goddaughter (the young Suzette). She led them to the banks of channel of Beauval where Louise lay unconscious on the ground, in a white dress, drenched with blood next to a dead Olivier with a pistol in his hand and a mortal wound to his heart. He had shot himself through the heart in front of Louise. As Wang has noted, this scene is heavy with symbolism. Olivier chooses to kill himself by the banks of the river where he and Louise used to play as children. It is a symbol of their childhood, to which he seeks to return in death

[83] Dr. Théodore Tronchin (1709-1781) was a real historical figure and well-known physician. He was known for inoculating rulers' children and the efficacy of his cures for vapors, as well as for his charm. This figure embodies the sympathetic and compassionate medical professional that can be juxtaposed with more extreme versions that appear in these narratives to pathologize the female body and mind as a whole. A depiction of him also appears in Duras's *Édouard* and *Ourika*.

(Wang, 101-102). He shoots himself through the heart to end the pain that he feels there. When he does die, Louise does figuratively as well (fainting). Suzette finds them, embodying the failed potential of their union. Were it not for Olivier's infirmity, the two could have married and had a child like Suzette to call their own.

The novel ends, with an epilogue, which focuses on the perspective of Dr. Tronchin as he treats Louise. (Evidently Adèle was able to secure an appointment for her sister-in-law.) Dr. Tronchin originally worried that Louise suffered from a brain lesion and prescribed gentle exercise in the form of promenades as well as a routine. Louise thus walks down to the river each day. According to Dr. Tronchin, "elle se rendait à son rendez-vous solitaire, elle ne paraissait pas sentir le changement des saisons" ("she took herself to her solitary appointment, she did not seem to feel the changing of the seasons") (epilogue). She has caretakers who work mainly to keep her comfortable, as her condition remains unchanged: "Jamais une teinte de vie ne vint colorer ses joues, jamais un sourire n'effleura ses lèvres" ("Never a shade of life came to color her cheeks, never a smile brushed her lips") (*ibid.*). Louise seems lifeless without color in her cheeks or a smile on her face. After months of observing her continue this routine, Dr. Tronchin informs Adèle that damage to her health may be permanent. Understanding that there is little more they can do for her and called away to attend to other matters, Dr. Tronchin and Adèle leave Louise alone at the estate. Though Louise's mother visits for a bit, she too departs, called away to take care of her husband and children. This could, perhaps, be interpreted as an early critique of the medical community and its abandonment of female patients by even the best doctors.

In the end, Julien continues updates to Louise's mother on her state. The narrator has the last word, informing us of Louise's fate: "Le monde oublia bientôt jusqu'à son existence" ("the

world soon forgot her very existence") (*ibid.*). Here, we see that though those who surround Louise return to society to fulfill various obligations, Louise is free of that. She succeeds in living out her days in peace, outside of traditional societal structures. In this way, her sickly state can be considered an act of resistance. It also alludes to a theme dealt with into the next chapter because, after Olivier's passing, Louise technically becomes eligible for marriage again, an implicit requirement of her gender. However, no suitors come forward and none of Louise's friends and family try to arrange one for her. This could perhaps be attributed to her pale, gaunt appearance. Her own fitness to bear children is brought into question and this excludes her from inclusion in the category of suitable romantic partners, a problem that represents a trend with which the authors of the novels studied in Chapter 3 engage.

Conclusion

How can these authors craft the compelling love story essential to a sentimental novel while representing a hero in a 'weakened' state? I argue that the task begins with the selection of a disability that represents an insurmountable obstacle to the relationship and motivates the plot—characters seek to uncover the mystery of the disability. This process is informed by the cultural milieu in which the book is produced, catalyzing trends in the type of disability depicted. Gay and Duras's novels, then, exemplify strategies French women novelists of the early nineteenth-century employed as they wrote about inviable physical disabilities.

In the paratext and text, then, Gay and Duras make use of works by other women to forge invisible connections between their texts and take advantage of their success and increase their readership. For Gay, this involves referring to her oeuvre, while Duras links her book to that of Gay as well as several other women authors that preceded her. In the text, both authors displace

the ‘blame’ for the onset of disability onto female characters (the mother) and cultural contexts outside of France in their quest to portray their afflicted protagonists as the true hero of the novel. Gay depicts Anatole as a man of action (and few words), establishing his superior sensibility through juxtaposition with his foil, the chevalier d’Emérange, as well as through his connection with Valentine, a woman of unimpeachable sensibility. Duras, on the other hand, emphasizes Olivier’s melancholia and feminine-coded sensibility, attributing both to his upbringing as well as to his English temperament.

In either case, both authors must deal with a queered relationship dynamic in which the hero is feminized, and the heroine assumes a more active, traditionally masculine role in the text. These authors, then, work to represent romantic relationship dynamics, which transgress gender norms, between their protagonists without alienating their audience. Gay emphasizes Anatole’s other traditionally masculine qualities, but Duras’s novel ends in tragedy (with Olivier’s suicide), perhaps because she deems a happy ending for the story of a fundamentally queer relationship to be too great a deviation from socially accepted models of amorous relationships. Most importantly though, in both novels, these strategies create space for the female characters in the novel to assert their subjectivity and assume traditionally masculine roles. However, they are not entirely successful, at times displaying discomfort with the constraints of the sentimental genre and its rigid codes as a vector for their narrative, and thus undercutting certain elements of their texts’ framework.

As we will see in the following chapter, this trend in depicting invisible physical disabilities was supplanted by the interest in depicting physically deformed bodies, and specifically women, as beauty was deemed an integral part of being a woman. Furthermore, we will see that this fascination with ugliness in women endures and evolves over the course of the

nineteenth century. The type of alterity that I will discuss in the following chapter also differs from those treated in the present chapter in the way that it relies more on a social construction of biological inferiority rather than a true deficiency. Namely, skin pigmentation (particularly paleness) emerges as a marker of ugliness and, therefore, inferiority in women. However, I will argue that it is treated similarly in that it puts in question these women's ability to fulfill their social roles as wives and mothers.

CHAPTER 3: A LASTING FASCINATION WITH 'UGLY' HEROINES

In this chapter, I examine a trend embodied by Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis's *Jeanne de France* (*Jane of France*) (1816), which is based on the true story of the good works, romantic misfortunes, and marginalization of the 'ugly' Jane/Joan of France/Valois (1446-1505), and Juliette Lamber's *Laide*[84] (*A Fascinating Woman*) (1878), which tells the story of an 'ugly' heroine who is exiled from her father's home because of her appearance. This method allows me to respond to the following questions: How did nineteenth-century women novelists write about women whose appearances did not correspond to beauty standards of the period? How did they select and depict stigmatized variation in bodily appearance and function? How does the type of 'deviance' affect, in turn, the narrative structure? And how does this choice reinforce and/or resist dominant medical and philosophical discourses on the inferiority of women (authors) and disabled individuals? I argue that Genlis and Lamber's interest in depicting physical defects in women can be analyzed not as an isolated instance. Rather, it serves as an indicator of a trend that emerged in response to nineteenth-century French conceptions of certain types of abnormality as insurmountable obstacles to integration into society. I study Genlis and Lamber's to draw out strategies used by authors writing in this genre, the effect on the narrative, and their efficacy.

This trend, in contrast to the one studied in the previous chapter, involves visible pathologized variations in appearance. However, again, nineteenth-century medical and popular discourse associated this type of impairment with reproductive issues and thus presented a barrier to the afflicted person's inclusion in society. Additionally, though authors published

[84] "Laide" translates to "ugly" or "the ugly one." The "e" at the end of the word indicates that that this is the feminine form, so another possible interpretation of the title could be "the ugly woman." However, the persisting English translation, *A Fascinating Woman*, underscores the power of ugliness to pique human curiosity, a central theme of the novel.

works that depicted various types of physical abnormalities in men, the majority, especially women, featured female characters who suffered from what nineteenth-century French society considered to be visible physical defects in their novels. I analyze this phenomenon as a response to and interrogation of the socio-cultural and political milieu in which it occurred.

Before studying the context of Genlis and Lamber's works, it is important to consider a summary of each. Genlis's novel, *Jeanne de France* (1816), is based on the historical figure Joan of France (Jane of Valois) (1464-1505). In it, a heterodiegetic narrator tells the story of Jane of France (Jeanne de France), a woman described as lacking in beauty, but not in character. At the age of twelve, she marries her second cousin, the duc d'Orléans (later King Louis XII),[85] in obedience of her father, King Louis XI,[86] who arranged the match. Jeanne falls in love with her husband but conceals her feelings from him. Ever practical, Jeanne surmises that Louis will not return her affections, given her 'ugliness' and his weakness for beautiful women. Indeed, Louis appreciates Jeanne's friendship as well as her sensibility, but does not share romantic feelings for her nor does he consummate their marriage. Thus, while Louis becomes enamored of a series of beautiful women, Jeanne martials her financial resources to do the acts of service she longs to accomplish. For example, she sells the jewels presented to her on her wedding day to purchase a charity house for single mothers, which she runs when she is not resolving the political crises created by Louis's romantic entanglements.

In these moments, Jeanne leverages the good will she has amassed to expertly navigate complicated diplomatic relations and achieve her desired result. She finds purpose and consolation in her acts of service to the community. This does not go unnoticed by Louis; at several junctures in the novel, he is struck by an epiphany that Jeanne's angelic nature outweighs

[85] Also based on the historical figure.
[86] See previous note.

her ugliness, awakening his desire to be her husband and all that this entails. However, he unfailingly succumbs to his preference for beautiful women, as Jeanne anticipates when she rejects his proposals. When Jeanne's brother (who took to the throne after their father passed away) dies, Louis becomes the new king. Louis invites Jeanne to serve as his queen, an offer which she refuses, discerning that this commitment is as meaningless as the ones that preceded it. In the final pages of the novel, Jeanne writes Louis a letter, affirming the depth of her love for him and saying goodbye; she plans to end her life. Jeanne reasons that while she cannot provide Louis with an heir or a happy relationship, she can liberate him from their sham of a marriage so that he may take a wife well-suited who will be able to do so.

Lamber's work, unlike Genlis's, is set during the nineteenth-century and is not based on historical events. However, in *Laide* (1878), like in *Jeanne de France*, a heterodiegetic narrator relates the story of an 'ugly' heroine. As we learn through a homodiegetic analepsis, Hélène, the protagonist, lost her beauty through a bout of typhoid fever during her childhood and, following her recovery, her mother, whom she had resembled before falling ill, passed away. This loss devastated Hélène's father (Martial)[87] because his wife had served as his muse, and he finds himself unable to create in the presence of the 'ugly' Hélène. Martial thus orders Hélène (now an adult) to leave the family home to free him of the creative block caused by her ugliness. She acquiesces, moving into her own apartment and transforming it into the site of a successful literary/intellectual salon. During this time, she also enters a marriage of convenience with her childhood friend and embodiment of the libertine archetype, Guy de Romain. This union allows Hélène to gain social standing in Paris by achieving a marriage into a good family and it enables Guy to continue consorting with his Italian lover while appeasing his father (Romain), who

[87] This choice of name could be interpreted as a reference to the Roman satirist, Marcus Valerius Martialis "Martial" (c. 40 AD-103 AD).

wishes for him to lead a more traditional life in France. Like Jeanne, Hélène falls in love with her husband, but despairs of telling him because of his lust for beautiful women. Succumbing to depression, Hélène wanders into the forest near her home, planning to kill herself there. Instead, in a series of fantastic scenes, she experiences a sensuous encounter with nature and contracts typhoid fever again. This time, when Hélène recovers, her beauty returns. Then, in a twist of situational irony, a letter arrives from Guy, informing Hélène that he has become disillusioned with his beautiful, but superficial Italian lover and prefers Hélène in all of her ugliness, casting doubt on the future of the couple. However, the novel ends happily with Hélène accepting Guy's proposal for them to live together as husband and wife.

These summaries reveal several key lines of interrogation that will serve as points of departure for my analysis throughout the rest of the chapter. Firstly, Jeanne and Hélène both experience a relatively happy childhood that was cut short when they began to transition into womanhood and attempted to fulfill the expectations associated with it regarding marriage, sexuality, and childbearing. Secondly, both heroines, due to their appearances, are marked for the simultaneous, attraction/repulsion reaction that they inspire as well as their power to disrupt social norms. Consequently, Jeanne and Hélène are subject to both a literal and a figurative form of exile. Both are forced to vacate their homes, and both are excluded from consideration as viable wives and mothers. This concern with the intersection of gender and ugliness intensifies over the course of the century in tandem with the cultural insistence on the ideological connection between women's writing and ugliness intensifies. In *Laide*, the characterization of women of letters as a monstrous hybrid between masculine mind and female body is embodied by Hélène. Since this conflict intensified during the mid-century period, it is not as apparent in *Jeanne de France*. Thirdly, women and disabled individuals operate in liminal spaces to assert

greater freedom and control in both books. This includes the female character positioning herself as a confidant, rather than a heroine, to assert greater control over her relationship with her husband. Furthermore, each heroine takes control of her finances, a trope that served to model self-sufficiency and freedom for a majority female readership.

Though still transgressive, this strategy was hardly untried. Financially independent women appeared throughout eighteenth-century novels, particularly those in the British tradition, by male and female authors alike.[88] Indeed, many parallels exist between Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747) and *Jeanne of France* with regard to their treatment of the question of female financial independence and its consequences in their works. In the case of *Clarissa* (1747), the heroine, like Jeanne, becomes a victim of the avarice of those around her, who seek to her as a pawn to attain higher social status. When Clarissa does not behave as her family desires, continuing to correspond with Lovelace, she is confined to her room. Jeanne suffers similar treatment (imprisonment) at the hands of her husband's rivals, amid family power struggles over rights to the throne and other political alliances. Indeed, both Clarissa and Jeanne refuse to compromise their morals despite intense pressure, and this unwavering stance begins to positively influence their partners, otherwise led astray by attraction to power, money, and beauty. Lovelace and Louis's hearts become a battleground of sensibility and immoral desires, as one or the other periodically gains the upper hand throughout the novel. This causes Clarissa and Jeanne to realize that their respective love interests will never permanently evolve into the *sensible* people of whom they occasionally catch a glimpse. They thus take action to remove themselves from the untenable situation. However, the consistently practical heroines both organize their affairs first by explaining their wishes and intentions in writing to those concerned

[88] Some notable examples include Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762) and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747).

through will-like letter expressing their wishes for when they disappear from society. Indeed, in the case of both *Jeanne de France* and *Clarissa*, the heroine's outcome, specifically whether she ends her life, is debated.

Over the course of this chapter, I will examine Genlis and Lamber's goals for their novels and how this informs the choices they make about their intervention, including the type of disability about which they write. Next, I will consider the period's conceptions of ugliness in women, both in popular culture and in literature. Finally, we will explore how the exile of Genlis and Lamber's heroines, due to their appearances, affects the narrative structure. I will also study how the nature of their 'defects' calls into question their status as *femmes* and analyze the extent to which this creates space for these women to assert their independence and subvert traditional formal elements.

The Goals for the Novel

Actress, harpist, writer, and educator Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis (1746-1830) came to prominence among the elite of the Old Regime, thanks to her musical talent. She married Charles Alexis, Count Bruslart of Genlis, in 1763 and had three children with him: Caroline (1765-1786), Pluchérie (1767-1847), and Casimir (1768-1773). Genlis also 'adopted' two English girls, Pamela and Hermione in 1777. Indeed, since this occurred during her years-long affair with the duc d'Orléans[89] many speculated that the girls were the lovers' illegitimate children.[90] During this time, Genlis also served as a tutor for his children, as well as those of other prominent

[89] Genlis's lover happens to bear the same title as the male protagonist in her text. We can only assume that this held significance for her and affected her writing process.
[90] Laura Mather has called this into question in her 2017 study, *The Life and Networks of Pamela Fitzgerald, 1773-1831*.

families. In fact, one of her students, Louis Philippe (1773-1850), reigned as the King of the French[91] from 1830-1848.

Though Genlis had received little formal education (mostly dancing, music and acting), she became known as an excellent pedagogue. She authored several books, which drew on her teaching experiences, in response to Rousseau's *Émile*.[92] Based upon these, the French Academy offered her membership and Oxford University in England awarded her an honorary degree. Though her educational programs were discriminatory with regard to sex and social class, they also contained remarkably modern ideas, such as dedicating equal attention to the mind and body, emphasizing civic engagement, mathematics, and foreign language, and offering the opportunity to attend school to all citizens. According to Marie Naudin's biographical essay on Genlis in *French Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, though Genlis attained best-selling author status in her day, her reputation as an "educationalist" damaged her reputation as a novelist (180). While the education system she outlines in *Adèle et Théodore*, which emphasizes the powerful role mothers play in raising and instructing their daughters, served as a source of inspiration for British women authors of the late eighteenth century,[93] Genlis's critics, including Jane Austen, felt that her romantic plots at times left a great deal to be desired. Genlis's narratives often emphasized problems that arose when the protagonists were carried away by their passions in order to critique. Indeed, as we will see in *Jeanne de France*, when it came to love, Genlis favored practicality and opposed passion.

---

[91] This was a title he gave himself to emphasize his close relationship with the French people, rather than to the French territory, a shift in discourse from previous monarchs and an indication of his regime's comparatively kinder, compassionate, and more liberal policies.

[92] *Théâtre à l'usage des jeunes* (*Theater of Education*) (1779) ; *Adèle et Théodore ou Lettres sur l'éducation* (*Adélaide and Théodore or Letters on Education*) (1782).

[93] Some authors include Anna Barbauld (1743-1825), Clara Reeve (1729-1807), Adelaide O'Keeffe (1776-1865), and Jane Austen (1775-1817).

By the time she published *Jeanne de France*, Genlis had already established herself as an author. She published her first epistolary novel, *Adèle et Théodore*, in 1782. The novel, an exploration of how children should be educated through a friendship between a young man and woman, bears such a striking resemblance to Rousseau's *Émile* that Naudin has suggested that Genlis wrote it as a response to Rousseau's text. *Adèle et Théodore* was widely known and read in both France and England—Jane Austen even referenced it in *Emma* (1815).[94] That being said, the formatting of the initial few pages of the first edition of *Jeanne de France*, like those we saw in Chapter 2, serves to highlight the content, rather than the author. The first page (a half title page) displays the title, the next the publisher, and the following the title and the author's name ("Jeanne de France, nouvelle historique, par Mme la Comtesse de Genlis")[95]. This is noteworthy because, in books of canonical male authors who were Genlis's contemporaries, the half title page was excluded in favor of a single title page containing the title, subtitle, author's name, and publishing information.[96]

Genlis also includes a dedication to her daughter (Madame la Comtesse de Valence), in which she notes that she prefers this novel to her others because she is dedicating it to her daughter, and it is a testimony of her affection for her. She also hopes that it can bring her

---

[94] Following the birth of her former governess's daughter, Emma declares of Mrs. Weston "She has had the advantage, you know, of practising on me…like La Baronne d'Almane on La Comtesse d'Ostalis, in Madame de Genlis's Adelaide and Theodore, and we shall now see her own little Adelaide educated on a more perfect plan" (503).

[95] See the title page and half title page of vol. 1 of the first edition of *Jeanne de France* (1816).

[96] See the first page of the first edition of Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1836) on the Gallica database: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1065296z.image. This is not to say that all male authors operated this way. First editions of male-authored works were occasionally laid out in the same format as Genlis's novel, again with the purpose of highlighting the work. However, I argue that to further the found manuscript premise of the novel, Stendhal's *Armance* (1827) includes a half title page, which omits his name. (In the forward of it, he claims that this book was written by a woman, and he is merely publishing it on her behalf). The aforementioned pages from the first edition of his text are available on the Gallica database: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8623293c/f13.item. Though the title and subtitle of the book are displayed, when normally the subtitle is only included on the title page, we can still refer to this first page of Stendhal's work as a half title page. The title page, which follows the half title page in Stendhal's work, also excluded the author's name, as part of his presentation of the novel as a found manuscript, written by a female author.

comfort in her "absence"[97] like one of her earlier novels, *Véillées du château* (*Tales of the Castle*) (1784) does. In this dedication, she also draws attention to her substitution of book for mother, upsetting readers expectations. Especially towards the end of the century, women writers suffered harsh criticism for neglecting their motherly duties in favor of publishing novels. However, Genlis takes the calculated risk of using her dedication direct readers to her oeuvre, while also firmly establishing her motherly concern and care for her daughter, asserting her identity as both a woman and a writer. She also demonstrates the relevance of the themes treated in her historical novel to a contemporary female audience. Additionally, this dedication hints at some of the traumatic events that marked the years leading up to the publication of this novel. Indeed, throughout the creation of this work, the rumors about her daughter's, Pamela's, parentage continued to haunt Genlis. Furthermore, in 1793, during the Reign of Terror, the Duke was executed, as was Genlis's husband. Genlis fled through Germany and Switzerland in search of protection, while her grown and married children remained in France. During this time, the task of writing became even more urgent, as she was left alone and destitute with only her pen to provide for herself and her grown brood of children and grandchildren. She was only allowed to return to France, from where she would write *Jeanne de France*, in 1800. However, the lengthy separation from her children as well as the rumors surrounding her infidelity caused a rift between them that would never fully heal, despite the hope she expresses here that it would.

A lengthy preface follows this dedication. In it, Genlis elucidates the logic behind her choice of subject and the goals for her novel: "en présentant une héroïne disgraciée de la nature, en décrivant les douleurs d'un amour légitime sans espérance, d'une passion que la vertu même ne pouvait guérir, j'ai voulu opposer la beauté morale à la beauté physique, et la reconnaissance

[97] This is likely a reference to the time she devoted to her affair, her writing, and her tutoring commitments, all of which took her away from her own children.

à l'amour" (vol. I, vii) ("in pourtraying a heroine disgraced by nature, and describing the afflictions attendant on a legitimate but hopeless attachment—a passion which even virtue itself could not overpower—it has been my object to oppose moral and physical beauty") (Genlis and Sherwood, vol. I, i). Genlis further explains the differences she sees between these two concepts, asserting "Il y a *un idéal* dans la beauté physique, parce qu'elle ne peut être véritablement parfaite sans l'assemblage d'une infinité de choses qu'il est impossible de trouver réunies dans un seul objet" (vol. I, x) ("There is something ideal in physical beauty, because it cannot be quite perfect without an assemblage of a host of circumstances, which it is impossible to find united in one object") (Genlis and Sherwood, vol. I, iii). However, for Genlis, there is no ideal in moral beauty because only one characteristic is needed to establish it: "une piété véritablement éclairée" (vol. I, x) ("truly enlightened piety") (Genlis and Sherwood, vol. I, iii). Genlis juxtaposes the intangible, ephemeral, and illusive concept of physical beauty with what she asserts is the concrete and clear-cut idea of moral beauty. This focus on educating readers' morality through her novel by depicting the struggles of a marginalized protagonist reflects contemporary views on the purpose of the sentimental genre that we also see in Gay in Duras's books. Indeed, Genlis's text explores the discrimination that a woman of unfortunate appearance faced during the fifteenth century and the sensibility needed to overcome it, a theme that would resonate with her audience. To conclude her preface, Genlis discusses the approval with which her manuscript has been met and how much it means to her. This, again, indicates her goal of attaining and maintaining success in the literary world.

While the historical facts of the case of *Jeanne de France* seem harsh and unforgiving, Genlis invites the reader to discover the depth of emotions beneath them. In both Genlis's novel and the real Jeanne of France's life, shortly after Jeanne's birth, Louis XI, her father, signed an

agreement for her to marry her second cousin, Louis (the duc d'Orléans, later King Louis XII of France), which she did at the age of twelve. Jeanne then briefly reigned as the Queen of France, wife of King Louis XII, before the annulment of their marriage. She then founded the monastic order of the Sisters of the Annunciation of Mary. According to Kathleen Jones in her book *Women Saints: Lives of Faith and Courage* (1999), Jeanne, the historical figure, had a curvature of the spine (due to a hump on her back) and walked with a limp (179). These 'faults' in her appearance caused those around her to doubt her ability to conceive and bear children in addition to her overall fitness to serve a queen. For these reasons, the duc d'Orléans resented being married to her. Jones notes that King Louis XI in fact counted on the veracity of the rumor of Jeanne's infertility when he arranged the marriage to extinguish the duc d'Orléans's branch of the House of Valois (182). When the duc d'Orléans ascended to the throne in 1498, he requested that the pope annul his marriage to Jeanne so that he could marry Anne of Brittany, for the political goal of annexing Brittany and the personal goal of having a more physically attractive wife who could bear his children. Instead of arguing for the dissolution of the marriage on the grounds of consanguinity, he argued that the marriage had never been consummated, due to Jeanne's deformity (181). He also reiterated that, regardless, Jeanne's impairment would prevent her from bearing children. Jeanne fought the charges, stalwart in her conviction of her fertility and capacity to give birth, as well as in the bona fide nature of her marriage to Louis. She produced witnesses who testified to Louis's boasting about their sexual relations, but Pope Alexander VI decided in favor of Louis for political reasons.

In contrast to these historical accounts cited by Kathleen Jones, Genlis's novel excludes mention of Jeanne de France's hunchback and the rumors of her sterility. This could indicate that Genlis viewed these two attributes as too transgressive to rehabilitate the image of Jeanne de

France and depict her as a sentimental heroine, capable of inspiring pity and compassion instead of revulsion in the reader. Images of hunchbacks have a long history of representation in literature across cultural traditions, as both marginalized and central figures. These fictional depictions often took inspiration from historical figures such as Richard III (1452-1483) and Louis I de Bourbon (1530-1569), whose deformities were incorporated in the category of "hunchback." Before the advent of modern medicine, this category covered conditions ranging from scoliosis to damage to the vertebrae resulting from polio or tuberculosis. Perhaps the most famous example of a hunchback in French literature appeared later during that period in the figure of Quasimodo in Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831). In it, Hugo describes Quasimodo's appearance—its cacophony of deformities—as the "idéal du grotesque" ("ideal of the grotesque") (Hugo, 88). The depiction of Jeanne's physical characteristics is certainly less extreme than this. However, the questions raised throughout the work about Jeanne's capacity to reproduce and whether she would pass on her deformity to her child play into key concerns of the nineteenth century about falling birthrates and the need to produce able-bodied citizens.

Over the course of the century, these anxieties shifted and evolved, continuing to serve as a source of inspiration for writers such as Juliette Lamber. Since Lamber published *Laide*, during the second half of the century, it is useful to consider additional context that will be important to my argument in the rest of Chapter 3 and in Chapter 4, which discusses texts written at the end of the nineteenth century. In between Genlis's work and Lamber's the publishing landscape for female authors changed drastically. The anxieties surrounding women and their potential to disrupt society with their excessive sensibility narrowed to specifically target women's education and rising literacy rates among them. The fight for equality between men and women in terms of education advanced, particularly in the form of the Falloux Law of 1850, which required the

creation of primary schools, albeit religious ones, for girls in villages with more than eight hundred inhabitants (Horvath-Peterson, 39).[98] However, medical experts of the day worried that reading, writing, and studying complex subjects in school could do damage to a woman's fragile health, even leading to sterility.

This fear specifically targeted *bas-bleus*.[99] During the July Monarchy, this term was applied satirically to the woman writer in the outputs of humorists, journalists, and caricaturists.[100] This disparaging depiction of the *bas-bleu* revealed broader cultural anxieties about figures of female intellect and independence who would prioritize their writing aspirations over their duties as wives and mothers. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, as Christine Planté notes in *La petite sœur de Balzac: essai sur la femme auteur* (1989), the *bas-bleu* was viewed as a threat to the organization of French society and women writers consequently became the subject of more violent and personal attacks.[101] During this time in France, a shift took place towards disillusionment with traditional Republican values, a crisis that would be magnified from the 1880s until the end of the century and reflected in the novel. The end of the nineteenth century, then, emerged as a second, more concentrated wave of the *mal du siècle* of the early nineteenth century and the Romantic movement, which provided fertile terrain for the growth and development of the Decadent movement, as I will examine further in Chapter 4. Novelists

[98] This law would be extended in 1867 by the Loi Duruy to include villages with a population of more than 500 and improved the working conditions of female teachers.

[99] The term "bas-bleu" comes from the British term "Bluestocking," which originally referred to women who belonged to the Blue Stockings Society, led by Elizabeth Vesey (1715-1791), Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806), Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800), and Hester Chapone (1727-1801). This group was first dedicated to the ideals of education and cooperation but later began to delve more deeply into literary scholarship and other non-traditional female pursuits. The term thus became a derogatory way of referring to intellectual women and the French equivalent took on a similar connotation. For more on Bluestocking history and culture, see Elizabeth Eger's *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance, and Patronage, 1730-1830*.

[100] See both Frédéric Soulié's *Physiologie du Bas-Bleu* (1841) and Jules Janin's *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1842) for categorization and definition of the *bas-bleu*. See also Honoré Daumier's forty caricatures of the *bas-bleu* in the satirical journal *Le Charivari*.

[101] In fact, in 1878, the year of *Laide*'s publication, Jules Barbey D'Aurevilly published his book, *Les Œuvres et les hommes V: Les Bas-Bleus*, a harsh condemnation of over thirty female authors that he deemed to be "*bas-bleus.*"

consequently looked for beauty and truth in the past, often Antiquity, as we will see embodied by Martial in *Laide*. They also searched for it is separation from reality and society through depictions of drugs, alcohol, and neurosis (including hysteria), which we will also see in Chapter 4. Though these characteristics became more pronounced and codified beginning in the 1880's, precursors appeared in *Laide*.

Juliette Lamber (1836-1936), made name for herself as a writer, advocate for women's rights, and frequenter of Paris's most prestigious literary salons during the mid-nineteenth century. In her capacity as founder and director (for twenty years) of the *Nouvelle Revue*, Lamber developed friendships and collaborated with well-known writers such as George Sand, Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) and Léon Daudet (1867-1942). In fact, she dedicated *Laide* (1878), the first novel of her Greek trilogy (*Laide*, *Grecque*, and *Païenne*) to Sand, her friend and mentor who had passed away not long before the book's publication and who had a profound influence on her ideas and creative activities. Lamber also gained a reputation for taking a chance on young writers during her tenure at the *Nouvelle Revue*.[102]

Furthermore, Lamber intervened in various ways in the political and intellectual world of her period, a then overwhelmingly masculine sphere. While some women writers of the period shied away from the label of "feminist," Lamber claimed it proudly. As Ying Wang has noted, Lamber's first well-known piece, *Idées antiproudhonniennes sur l'amour, la femme et le mariage* (*Antiproudhonian Ideas on Love, Woman and Marriage*) (1858) condemned Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's (1809-1865) misogynistic theories (specifically the attacks on George Sand and Daniel Stern [la Comtesse d'Agoult]), elaborated in his *De la justice dans la Révolution et*

[102] Writers such as Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), Pierre Loti (1850-1923), Paul Bourget (1852-1935), and Maurice Barrès (1862-1923) published early-career pieces in the *Nouvelle Revue* before attaining widespread success.

dans l'Église (*Of Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*) (1858), and argued for the equality of men and women. The little-known publishing firm, Jules Hetzel, accepted the risk of publishing her manuscript, which she signed as Juliette Lemassine. When she published her first novel, *Mon Village* (1860), she signed her name as "Lamber," omitting the *t* at the end of her last name, following the advice of Hetzel, to prevent Alexis Lamessine (her husband) from claiming authorial rights (Hogenhuis-Seliverstoff, 26). She continued using this penname when she published *Laide*.

At a time when the ideology of female inferiority reigned in society, Lamber's stance on women's rights stood out as bold, progressive, and transgressive. Furthermore, as Saad Morcos notes in his book *Juliette Adam* (1968), *Idées antiproudhonniennes sur l'amour, la femme et le mariage* set a feminist agenda for which she fought in her future oeuvre. After the success of this first work, Lamber published short stories, novels, historical and political studies, travel narratives and plays. However, her novels earned her the most critical acclaim. Thematically, her they were politically engaged, serving as a vector for her to transmit her political and literary positions (Morcos, 14). They featured female protagonists of greater strength, intelligence, and/or higher moral standing than their male counterparts, a technique Lamber used to resist the idea of female inferiority. In addition to her goal of advancing the cause of women, Lamber may have also been interested in exploring conceptions of female beauty, as she, herself, was considered to be exceptionally physically attractive.[103]

Notwithstanding the previous remarks about Lamber's success and renown, the presentation of her novel privileges a focus on the text itself, as opposed to the gender of the

[103] In her study, *Juliette Adam: Instigatrice*, Anne Hogenhuis-Seliverstoff notes that Juliette Lamber "est parvenue au faîte de la célébrité parce qu'elle était d'une beauté éblouissante, dotée d'une intelligence rapide et qu'elle avait beaucoup de cœur" ("reached the pinnacle of celebrity because she was of a dazzling beauty, endowed with a quick intelligence and she had a lot of heart") (Hogenhuis-Seliverstoff, 9).

author. In the initial pages, we see first the half title page, bearing the title (*Laide*). The following pages contains a list of pieces "du même auteur" (from the same author). Only after, on the title page, do we learn the name of the author: Juliette Lamber. As discussed, she chose to publish under a name different from her married name (Adam) to protect her earnings from her husband. Additionally, like Gay and Duras, Lamber sought out the most prestigious publisher of the moment to publish her novel, Calmann Lévy.[104] This section is followed by a dedication to George Sand:

> Malgré ses encouragements, je n'avais point osé dédier un seul de mes livres à mon maître George Sand.
>
> J'ose dédier celui-ci à sa mémoire, comme témoignage de l'éternelle reconnaissance que j'ai vouée à la plus grande et à la plus tendre de mes amitiés féminines. (Lamber, 1)
>
> (Despite her encouragements, I had never dared to dedicate even one of my books to my master George Sand.
> I dare to dedicate this one here to her memory, as a testimony of the eternal gratitude that I owe to the greatest and most tender of my female friendships.)[105]

This dedication serves not only to pay tribute to Lamber's mentor, but also to associate Lamber with the prolific woman writer who preceded her and assert her work as a continuation of Sand's. The appellation of Sand as "maître" is also significant because the feminine form "maîtresse" existed at the time. However, I argue that Lamber chose the masculine form to highlight Sand's masculine-coded intellect that she, as Sand's protégé, has also benefited from and makes use of in her book. By emphasizing the masculine, intellectual nature of Sand's and her mind, Lamber seeks to convince her audience of the gravity and importance of her literary

[104] By 1875, Calmann Lévy had become one of the foremost publishing houses in Europe and emerged as the publisher of some of the most well-known and esteemed European authors of the second half of the nineteenth century, including Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), René Bazin (1853-1932), Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938), Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870), Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), Victor Hugo (1802-1885), Lamartine (1790-1869), Ernest Renan (1823-1892), George Sand (1804-1876), and Hénri Beyle (Stendhal) (1783-1842).
[105] Sherwood does not include Lamber's dedication in his translation, so I have provided the translation myself.

intervention, by divorcing it from association with the female mind and insisting on its connection with masculine-minded women who came before her.

Lamber likely also takes inspiration from Swiss-born author and translator Isabelle de Montolieu's (1751-1832) *La jeune aveugle* (1819), by naming her main character Hélène, like Montolieu's beautiful, witty, and precocious protagonist, and by adapting some of the major plot points to her needs. In Montolieu's text, Hélène is not born blind. Instead, she loses her sight through a childhood illness. However, in the end, her sight is restored through a curative surgery. As we have seen, the onset of Lamber's Hélène's disability also occurs during childhood and is restored at the conclusion of the novel, though through a second bout of illness, rather than through successful medical intervention. This difference in methods of restoring the heroine's beauty can be interpreted as an indication of the declining confidence in medicine that occurred over the course of the century, a problem that medical professionals practicing during Lamber's lifetime attempted to combat by more forcefully asserting the essential nature through the pathologizing of 'toxic' femininity.

Nineteenth Century Conceptions of Ugliness in Women

Now that we have examined each author's background and goals for her novel, we must consider the broader socio-cultural context of the nineteenth-century French fascination with 'ugly' women and how it developed. As Georges Vigarello notes in his study, *Histoire de la beauté* (2007), throughout Antiquity, the ideal female body was thin and muscular. During the Middle Ages, Christianity governed beauty standards: makeup was strictly forbidden. The Virgin Mary, thin and pale, radiating purity, became the standard for female beauty. The Renaissance signaled the return of femininity through humility, modesty, and chastity, but also through bodies

with accentuated feminine curves. The classical period favored delicate bodies with large bosoms and small waists (thanks to the invention of the corset) and these women wore makeup. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, natural beauty experienced a renaissance in France: new types of corsets were adopted that allowed women more mobility (fuller figures also gained acceptance); makeup became more subtle; and hairstyles came to favor a *décoiffé* look. Hair then gained a newly important status with regard to beauty during the nineteenth century: long, lustrous, wavy locks came to denote attractiveness. Additionally, full-length mirrors became commonplace in homes. One's body was meant to be seen by others and by the self. Indeed, we will often see the heroines of the novels studied in this chapter struggling with their reflection in a mirror or avoiding them all together with difficulty.

Though women had faced scrutiny of their appearance throughout history, it increased in the aftermath of the French Revolution in response to the renewed emphasis on marriages based on romantic love, as opposed to political or material gain. The emphasis on marriage as an essential element of femininity even emerged on the lexical level. The word "*femme*" denoted "the female, the companion of man" as well as one who is "nubile or already married" (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1835). Furthermore, as Linda Kraus Worley discusses in her article "The Body, Beauty, and Woman: The Ugly Heroine in Stories by Therese Huber and Gabriele Reuter," beauty represented a form a power for women in narratives in the Western tradition. Worley goes as far as to argue that it created opportunities for them to attain financial security by attracting a wealthy husband. Patricia A. McEachern goes further in *Anorexia Nervosa in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (1998), claiming "Success for the nineteenth-century woman necessitated marrying well: she had no good economic or social alternative. Her body was her sole source of power. She had to remain svelte yet maintain the curves necessary to

attract" (3). Genlis and Lamber, then, at times resist contemporary discourse surrounding the relationship between women and beauty through depictions of 'ugly' heroines who attain freedom precisely because of their ugliness.

Indeed, the term "*laide*" [ugly] is often applied to Jeanne and Hélène (the heroines of *Jeanne de France* and *Laide*, respectively) by the narrator and other characters. They also both self-identify as *laide*. According to the 1835 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, *laide* denotes "qui a quelque défaut remarquable dans les proportions, dans les formes ou dans les couleurs qui constituent la beauté naturelle de l'espèce humaine" ("that which has some noteworthy fault in proportions, forms or colors that constitute the natural beauty of the human species"). This term operates based on the association of the Beautiful with the Natural. The *Dictionnaire*'s definition also enumerates three types of physical characteristics, which, if they lie outside of the norm, denote ugliness.

Regarding color, the most salient characteristic of ugliness for the works studied in this chapter, both excessively dark and pale skin were pathologized during the nineteenth century. Indeed, Charles Baudelaire famously illustrated the curious allure of 'ugly' pale women in well-known poem, "L'amour du mensonge" ("The love of lies"), included in his 1857 anthology, *Les fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*). Here, Baudelaire weaves together the grotesque and the sublime in the pursuit of his morbid curiosity about such a diminished woman. The intrigue lies in the originality of her appearance; she is unlike other healthy women. In a perversion of the love sonnet that seeks to praise and elevate angelic women, this poem expresses the desire to defile the object of its sexual attraction. He likens a woman's beauty to the process of a fruit ripening, gesturing toward the dynamic nature of female beauty; it can be lost over time. This trope of integration via male approval of a woman's appearance builds upon patterns, which

existed in eighteenth-century literature especially in books written by men. One of the most famous examples of this occurs in Pierre-Antoine de La Place's novel, *La laideur aimable et les dangers de la beauté* (*Agreeable Ugliness and the Dangers of Beauty*)[106] (1751). Predictably, the 'ugly' white heroine, juxtaposed with her beautiful sister, initially succumbs to pressure from her father and accepts an undesirable marriage proposal because, given her appearance, she is deemed unlikely to secure another. However, when this husband dies, she marries a man who truly loves her despite her ugliness. It is worth noting that authors explore this theme not only in French literature of the period, but also in British literature in works such as Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1817), in which the faded white female protagonist, Anne Eliot, reunites with her love interest, thanks to his willingness to forgive the faults in her appearance.

As we will see, differences in color (skin pigmentation) come under intense scrutiny in *Jeanne de France* and *Laide* in terms of overly pale, gaunt-looking heroines. As previously noted, in the texts explored in this chapter, the heroines both fascinate and repulse those who gaze upon them, in accordance with the principles of sensibility. Like Anne Eliot, they suffer exclusion from the category of potential wives, with both their ability to attract a man and bear children being called into question. This reflects the nineteenth-century context in which certain types of deviations from the norm, particularly in physical appearances in women, presented obstacles to the fulfillment of one's social role, as determined by gender. While nineteenth-century French society did not only apply "*laid*" and "*laideur*" to women's bodies[107] during the nineteenth century, the sole examples usage of the term in the 1835 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* sentences described women's appearance. The term "*laideron*" then enters this lexical

[106] This work was translated into English by Sarah Scott (1720-1795), an influential eighteenth-century English novelist, translator, social reformer, and member of the Bluestockings.
[107] They are also applied to animals' physiques as well as faults in moral character.

field to specifically refer to a young woman or girl who is 'ugly' (*ibid.*). Though this noun came into the language specifically for the purpose of capturing females of unfortunate appearance, its gender is masculine. Even on a lexical level, ugliness is distanced from femininity.

In addition to the above stigma, nineteenth-century women of color in France also had to contend with the fear of racial mixing that their sexual maturity represented, a conflict dramatized in Claire de Duras's *Ourika* (1824). In this novel, a young black Senegalese woman who was brought to France and raised and educated by a wealthy white family comes of age and struggles with the obstacle (framed as such by her internal discourse and those who surround her) that her dark skin represents to her marriage to her adoptive brother.[108] While Ourika's situation as a Black woman clearly differs from that of Jeanne and Hélène as white women, there are also important commonalities in their stories. All three are deemed unsuitable for marriage and procreation on the basis of the implications of their skin color. They are subject to a tacit rule of eugenics: only a woman whose appearance falls closer to the norm could be fit to reproduce. In Ourika's case, the conflict is presented thusly: she could marry a Black man. However, since she was educated in France, her 'white' sensibility would be better suited to a marriage with a white man. However, no white man would take her because of the color of her skin.[109] In the

[108] Though Duras's work was lauded as progressive and transgressive by scholars throughout the 1990s, it has been criticized by 21st-century scholars for its premise that racial mixing presents an insurmountable obstacle to marriage. Indeed, in her article, "Race and Gender in *Ourika*," Adelaide Koh notes that Duras's dramatization of the central marriage conflict (that Ourika cannot marry and procreate in France) ignores her options of marrying a white man of a lower class or a free man of color in France. Koh also observes that Duras, through Ourika, romanticizes slavery, wishing that she had never been taken from Senegal because a life in slavery would have been better than being alone. Finally, Koh affirms that "all social change is depicted as dangerous and ineffective" (26), all of which reifies, rather that resists contemporary conservative notions of racial mixing. Duras's views also seem more conservative when compared to the work of her contemporaries, whose work we now know better. For instance, French novelist and essayist Sophie Doin (1800-1846) advocated for abolition of slavery throughout her fiction and non-fiction works and promoted interracial marriage in her short stories, "Blanche et noir" and "Noire et blanc" as early as 1825.

[109] As noted in the previous chapter, neither in her novels nor in her personal correspondence does Duras acknowledge the ethics at stake in her depictions of disabled characters or characters of color and she has been criticized in recent scholarship for her opportunistic use of these types of life experiences.

case of Jeanne and Hélène, the marriage and procreation plot is interrupted and redirected by various physical defects that point to an overall lack of vitality.

It is also worth noting that *Jeanne de France* and *Laide* are far from the only French women-authored nineteenth-century novels to target female ugliness. Others include Eugénie Foa's *La Laide* (The Ugly Woman[110]) (1839); Zénaïde Fleuriot's *Sans beauté* (1862) (translated as *Without Beauty; or the Story of a Plain Woman* in 1883); George Sand's *Consuelo* (1842) and *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (The Countess of Rudolstadt) (1843). These novels join the ranks of those of their male counterparts which also depicted ugliness in women, such as Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) and *Pour une nuit d'amour* (*For Night of Love*) (1883). Indeed, in the domain of literature, Romantics, Realists, and Naturalists depicted 'ugly' characters throughout the nineteenth century. The rise of these 'ugly' protagonists was intimately linked to literary and sociocultural developments, as evidenced by Chateaubriand's scathing critique in *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* of 1836. His text which uses language now considered ableist, racist, and incredibly offensive. However, I have included it here along with a translation because it encapsulates early nineteenth-century views on visible physical defects and their inclusion in narratives, a key point of analysis of this study. Chateaubriand argues:

> Cette passion pour les bancroches, les culs-de-jatte, les borgnes, les moricauds, les édentés, et cette tendresse pour les verrues, les rides, les escarres, les formes triviales, sales, communes, sont une dépravation de l'esprit; elle ne nous est pas donnée par cette nature dont on parle tant ! Nous préférons naturellement une rose à un chardon, la baie de Naples à la plaine de Montrouge, le Panthéon à un toit à porcs ; il est de même au figuré et au moral. (Chateaubriand, 167-168)
>
> (This passion for cripples, legless people, one-eyed people, dark-skinned people, toothless people, and this tenderness for warts, wrinkles, bedsores, trivial dirty forms, common are a depravity of the mind; it is not given to us by this nature of which we speak so much! We naturally prefer a rose to a thistle, the Bay of Naples to the plain of Montrouge, the Pantheon to a pig stye; it is the same in a figurative and moral sense.)

[110] Foa's work has not been translated into English, so I have provided a word-for-word translation of the title.

Here, Chateaubriand critiques a trend among Romantics of attributing disagreeable physical attributes to their characters. He argues that the opposition of the Natural and Unnatural functions together with the opposition of Beauty and Ugliness; humans naturally prefer Beauty to Ugliness. This argument assumes an objective sense of beauty and ugliness that Genlis and her peers problematize in their works. Ugliness was also ideologically linked to female authorship during the nineteenth century. In 1844, Honoré Daumier famously published a series of caricatures entitled *Les Bas-Bleus*, dedicated to the representation of what Janis Bergman-Carton has called "the woman of ideas." Daumier depicts Bas-Bleus as 'ugly,' ill-tempered women, deserving of condemnation. Indeed, his caricatures suggest that they have abandoned their feminine roles (as mothers and homemakers) to penetrate the masculine sphere of writing with their mediocre creations. It is not surprising, then, that women writers would feel directly concerned by this topic and seek to explore it in their writing.

Throughout the remaining sections of this chapter, I examine how Genlis and Lamber's text to investigate the strategies they and other authors writing in this subgenre used. Indeed, I will begin by analyzing the exile Genlis and Lamber's heroines (Jeanne and Hélène) suffer due to their appearance, including how they use this to take control of their surroundings, day-to-day activities, and finances. I will then study how Jeanne and Hélène are exiled not only from physical spaces in the novel, but also from the category of women. Here, Genlis and Lamber must continue to guard against the threat of queer desire while still maintaining an enticing love story. Finally, I will consider the ending of both books in view of the degree to which each protagonist accomplishes her duty of taming the hero of the story through marriage.

The Disability's on the Narrative Structure

The rest of this chapter examines the two books that best exemplify the nineteenth-century trend of depicting visible physical disability in women to consider nuances in goals and strategies of French women novelists and how they developed as this trend persisted. Namely, I study how Genlis and Lamber describe their main character's disability, the strategies they use to insist upon the validity of that character as a sentimental heroine, the narrative difficulties that her 'ugliness' introduces, and the extent to which Genlis and Lamber grant or deny their protagonists' subjectivity. While Wang has considered of these aspects within Lamber's novel in a similar manner, I study it here alongside *Jeanne de France* to compare techniques used in early- versus relatively-late-nineteenth-century novels. Engaging with *Laide* here also allows me to examine the ways in which is lays the foundation for fin-de-siècle novels studied in the following chapter.

Though Genlis and Lamber wrote and published sixty years apart from one another, their choice to depict 'ugly' female protagonists results in some common challenges to which each author responds in her text. Each work illustrates formal strategies used by women authors writing about disability as well as the evolution of the techniques employed when writing in this subgenre over the course of the nineteenth century in the French tradition. Specifically, since Genlis and Lamber chose disabilities that were viewed as an obstacle to integration into society through marriage, they dealt with the question of how the afflicted character would function. Accordingly, both authors focus on a single 'ugly' female character in their novels and juxtapose her experience with the 'normal' experience of other women endowed with the beauty thought to be essential to their sex.

As we will see, the narrators and secondary characters treat the protagonists as simultaneously less and more than the women that surround them. Less, because of their ugliness

and more because the fascination they hold and the intellect they possess; they recall the dream of the perfect union of masculine and feminine qualities in one person. Indeed, Genlis and Lamber employ and modify notions of Romantic androgyny, introducing their heroines not as embodiments of the *androgyne romantique* but highlighting the ways in which those around them appropriate this archetype to marginalize them. Consequently, Genlis and Lamber depict a disabled protagonist who faces exile due to her aberrant physical appearance. This allows them to interrogate conceptions of ugliness and the ways in which they were applied to women, and particularly women authors, during the nineteenth century.

Crafting an 'Ugly' Sentimental Heroine

In both Genlis and Lamber's novels, the sentimental hero operates differently than those in the texts studied in the previous chapter. Instead of a dynamic in which both the hero and the heroine pine for one another and mutually imagine a future together, here, the heroine falls in love with the hero who remains unaware of and does not share her feelings. He excludes her from consideration as a romantic option because he feels attracted to beautiful women, who from his perspective, constitute true women. The heroine, by contrast, grapples with the illicit nature of her feelings. However, unlike the traditional heroines of sentimental and Romantic novels, she struggles with guilt not over moving on too quickly from a previous relationship, but over the existence of doomed romantic feelings, to which she feels that, as an 'ugly' woman, she has no claim. Yet, the heroine fascinates the hero precisely because of her physical defects. This fascination remains her only hope for integration into society, as her capacity to bring the prodigal son back into the proverbial fold ultimately determines her fate. Indeed, as Bram Dijkstra notes in "The Androgyne in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature,"

> A pure, virginal woman represented all the humanistic and moral universals the male needed to prove his value before God, but with which he could not be expected to concern himself in the realm of purely male affairs. In marriage he absolved himself from previous as well as subsequent wrongdoing in the moral sphere by taking to himself that portion of the universal humanist values necessary for his salvation. (65)

As women, Jeanne and Hélène were expected to lead their love interests away from a life of libertinage and toward fulfilling their role in French society as fathers and husbands. This process relied on the myth of the separation of masculine and feminine qualities into men and women, respectively, which required reunification through marriage to produce a functional family unit. As we will see, Genlis and Lamber at times oscillate between reifying and resisting such notions of gendered traits and roles.

In *Jeanne de France*, Genlis's initial description of Jeanne in the preface recalls the tropes of the sentimental novel, which serve to entice readers with an impossible love story; one which cannot exist given the constraints of society. Like Gay and Duras, Genlis works within traditional frameworks that rigidly sort women into the categories of fit or unfit for marriage based upon their appearance. As established in the previous section, the historical figure, Jeanne de Valois, was treated as a monster, a characterization that Genlis seeks to understand and challenge. Indeed, throughout the narrative, Genlis assumes the role of a first-person heterodiegetic narrator to insist on the juxtaposition of Jeanne's inner beauty and outer ugliness:

> Jeanne fut élevée avec un soin particulier : la nature lui avait refusé les grâces et la beauté ; mais elle lui prodigua des dons plus précieux. On n'eut besoin de cultiver ni la sensibilité, ni la bonté ; au contraire, il fallut souvent les modérer…On lui enseigna l'histoire et les langues savantes : elle étonna ses maîtres par la rapidité de ses progrès, par son goût pour l'étude, et par le développement précoce de sa raison. (Genlis, vol. I, 5, 1816)
>
> (Jane was educated with great care. Nature had denied her beauty and the graces, but lavished on her gifts of greater value. There was no occasion to cultivate her sensibility or amiable qualities—on the contrary, it became often necessary to moderate them…She was taught history and the learned languages. She astonished her tutors by the rapidity of

her progress, her taste for study, and the precocious development of her mental faculties.) (Genlis, vol. I, 4-5, 1817)

Here, Genlis notes that though Jeanne lacks physical beauty, she possesses much more valuable sensibility and intellect. Even her capacity to reason, a traditionally masculine quality, exceeds expectations. This strategy of highlighting aspects of the heroine's character and physique that do not align with 'normal' feminine ones while insisting on her undeniable feminine sensibility allows Genlis to interrogate gender construction while orienting her readers with a series of contemporary landmarks that would comfort and appeal to them. Genlis's treats education, for instance, as a means of reducing the harm of disability and cultivating productive members of society, a viewpoint shared by many of her contemporaries. In Jeanne's case, 'nature' granted her certain strengths, and her education was tailored to cultivate her talents and abilities. Though nothing could reverse her ugliness and its negative impact on her marriage prospects, her sensibility could still be cultivated to permit her to contribute to society. Again, working within these capitalistic frameworks, which governed both mid and post-Industrial Revolution nineteenth-century French society, as discussed in Chapter 2, Genlis establishes Jeanne's value through her actions.

This is not to say that Genlis glosses over the 'faults' in her heroine's body. In fact, Genlis, as her novel's narrator, approaches descriptions of Jeanne's physical traits with a farcical methodical curiosity. In parody of the *blason*,[111] she analyzes each individual aspect of Jeanne's appearance to isolate the 'ugly' quality, a task that ultimately 'frustrates' her best attempts. When introducing Jeanne's defects, the narrator remarks, "Quoique Jeanne n'eût rien de difforme, elle était néanmoins si disgraciée de la nature, que la flatterie même n'osait tenter de l'abuser à cet

[111] A blason is a type of sixteenth-century poetry that first appeared in the epigram of Clément Marot's *Beau Tétin* (1535). A love poem form, it sought to praise one's beloved by describing in great detail all of the appreciable aspects of her body. Soon after its introduction into the French tradition, writers began satirizing it.

égard" (Genlis, vol. I, 6, 1816) ("Though Jane was in no respect deformed, she was nevertheless so disgraced by Nature, that flattery herself dared not have attempted to deceive her in this respect") (Genlis, vol. I, 5, 1817). The insistence on the type of ugliness with which Jeanne is afflicted underscores its ambiguity; untouched by deformity, a "défaut très-apparent dans la forme, dans les proportions" ("Very apparent defect in form, in proportions") (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1835), but instead by a collection of defects, Jeanne's appearance presents a mystery. It provokes a reaction of displeasure in the viewer, but resists attempts to identify the source of the 'problem.' The narrator's extended description of Jeanne affirms and extends this initial assessment:

> La taille de Jeanne, au-dessous de la Moyenne, était irrégulière sans être visiblement défectueuse. Elle boitait un peu ; mais cette démarche chancelante, en accord avec la langueur répandue sur toute sa personne, paraissait moins en elle un défaut naturel que l'effet de la faiblesse et de l'abattement. Son visage n'avait rien de difforme ; mais on n'y trouvait pas un seul trait agréable. Ses longs cheveux blonds auraient fait l'ornement d'une belle tête, et, sur la sienne, ils semblaient rendre plus terne encore son extrême pâleur. (Genlis, vol. I, 22, 1816)
>
> (Jane's figure, which was above the middle height, was irregular, without being visibly defective. She was rather lame, but this unsteady pace accorded so well with the languor of her whole person, that it appeared I her less a natural defect than the consequence of weakness and dejection. Her countenance exhibited no deformity, but there was not a single good feature in it. Her long auburn hair would have constituted the ornament of a fine head, but on hers it only served to increase the dull cast of excessive paleness.) (Genlis, vol. I, 20, 1817)

In the first sentence of the narrator's description, the word "Moyenne" ("middle" or "average") is capitalized, indicating its novel status in nineteenth-century French society as the ideal for aspects ranging from sensibility to bodily proportions.[112] Deviation from the norm, then, constituted a defect. Examining the above passage through this lens consequently reveals that the

[112] This usage of the word average predated Adolphe Quetelet's 1844 essay *Sur l'appréciation des documents statistiques et en particulier sur l'application des moyennes*, a text which, as we saw in Chapter One, is often credited as the first in the French tradition to apply and popularize applying statistics to the human body.

defects in Jeanne's appearance supposedly constitute areas in which one of her physical traits deviates from the norm. According to the definition of "laide" from the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, as referenced earlier in this section, the "faults" in Jeanne's appearance seem to be those of form (given her limp) and of color (given her extreme paleness). Indeed, the narrator notes that the combination of Jeanne's small stature and limp project an image of weakness and overall lack of vitality. Even features that could have redeemed her appearance fail to realize their potential; Jeanne's hair, for example, tragically accentuates her disagreeably pale complexion. Together, the numerous aspects of Jeanne's body that differ from the 'average' body cause a sort of visual cacophony that jars the viewer's nerve strings (perceived by the *sensible* mind as 'ugly'). This reinforces Genlis's theory of ugliness, as elucidated in her preface, as an amalgamation of many irreducible traits.

Initially, it is unclear how Jeanne's collection of somewhat displeasing traits will affect her life. At the time of Jeanne's birth, to ensure his legacy, her father arranged for her to marry the duc d'Orléans (Louis) as soon as she reached marriageable age, and sees this plan through to fruition:

> Lorsque Jeanne eut atteint l'âge de douze ans, on la conduisit en pompe dans la chapelle du roi son père, où l'on célébra son mariage avec le jeune duc d'Orléans, qui venait d'entrer dans sa quinzième année. Après la cérémonie, on reconduisit Jeanne dans son appartement, qu'elle ne devait quitter que dans cinq ans, pour se réunir à son époux, Louis. (Genlis, vol. I, 8, 1816)
>
> (When Jane had attained the age of twelve years, she was conducted with pomp into the chapel of the king, her father, where her nuptials were celebrated with the young Duke of Orleans, who had entered his fifteenth year. After the ceremony, she was re-conducted to her apartments, which she was to quit in five years, for the purpose of being re-united with her husband.) (Genlis, vol. I, 7, 1817)

The narrator's dispassionate description of the exchange of property involved in their marriage and the way in which it was arranged by Jeanne's father reflect late-fifteenth and early sixteenth-

century views of such affairs. As James Brundage notes in *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (1987), children would wed after going through puberty, which generally meant that girls could marry earlier than boys. They were not expected to immediately have sexual relations or procreate, but to commence those activities after maturing over the course of several years. Genlis, thus, indicates that Jeanne lives separately from Louis initially but will reunite with him when at the appropriate time for them to consummate their marriage. In the upper classes of society, to which Jeanne and Louis belonged, marriage functioned as a transaction devoid of the romantic interest and sexual desire that Genlis's nineteenth-century audience had come to associate with the institution. Readers therefore would likely to identify more with Jeanne, who falls in love with her husband, than with the other characters. However, in contrast to the rest of the novel, the narrator does not offer any insights into Jeanne's feelings or state of mind in the above passage. Instead, Genlis introduces the problematic aspects of Jeanne's appearance through the perspective of the wedding guests as well as Louis:

> Le jour solennel de son mariage, [Louis]…regarda [Jeanne], ou, pour mieux dire, il l'examina pour la première fois, et ce fut avec un pénible étonnement. Le contraste malheureux de la beauté des traits et de la taille de Louis avec toute la personne de sa jeune épouse, frappa tout le monde. (Genlis, vol. I, 9, 1816)
>
> (But on the solemn day of his marriage [Louis] looked at [Jane], or more properly speaking, he examined her for the first time, and it was with painful astonishment. The unfortunate contrast between the handsome form and features of Louis and the whole person of his young consort struck every beholder.) (Genlis, vol. I, 8, 1817)

Here, the social component of Jeanne's impairment becomes evident. Jeanne's experience of her defects stems not only from her own sense of them, but from the way others' expectations and treatment of her pathologize them. Genlis's use of the word "frapper" ("strike"), highlights the jarring nature of the realization of Jeanne's ugliness as juxtaposed to Louis's handsome figure. Both Louis and the attendees try to understand what they are seeing through staring at Jeanne. As

Rosemarie Garland-Thompson notes, "stares are urgent efforts to make the unknown known, to render legible something that seems at first glance incomprehensible" (Garland-Thompson, 15). The guests are not accustomed to seeing a royal couple with such different physical appearances and must inspect it more closely to understand it. Louis stares at Jeanne, his wife, here and throughout the novel with dismay and morbid curiosity, his hopes and expectations dashed.[113] This realization on Louis's part foreshadows Jeanne's awareness of her impairment. Though Louis and Jeanne had grown up together and he had seen her regularly throughout his life, he had never considered her as his spouse and the future mother of his children. The moment he does so, unbeknownst to Jeanne, he perceives her abnormal appearance as problematic. This serves as an obstacle to his developing romantic feelings for her and, consequently, to them having children together.

Though Jeanne fails to notice Louis's reaction to her during their wedding, over the course of the next few years, she observes a change in him: when people discuss the talents of a woman whom he does not know in his presence, he asks "Est-elle jolie?" (Genlis, vol. I, 11, 1816) ("Is she pretty?") (Genlis, vol. I, 10, 1817). Jeanne "apprit ainsi, et ce fut avec surprise, que Louis, avant tout, admirait la beauté ; c'était donc un grand malheur d'en être entièrement dépourvue" (vol. I, 12) ("thus learnt [and it was with surprise] that Louis admired beauty above every thing") (Genlis, vol. I, 10, 1817). In this moment, Jeanne realizes that she can never become object of Louis's desire because she does not possess the quality that he values most. As we will see, Genlis's text differs from Lamber's with regard to the evolution of the heroine's appearance throughout the narrative. Jeanne's ugliness persists throughout the entire novel, unlike Hélène's. Indeed, Jeanne was born with 'faults' in her appearance that she retained

[113] According to Kathleen Jones's recounting of the historical account of Jeanne de France's life, Louis's mother, upon seeing Jeanne, lamented that her son was to marry "this deformed girl" (Jones, 179) and fainted.

throughout her life. As Genlis notes in her preface, she aims to explore the feelings of a woman, 'ugly' from birth as she navigates the expectations of an adult woman. Jeanne enjoyed an idyllic childhood during which she excelled in her schooling and enjoyed studying. During this brief period, her appearance did not yet constitute an impairment.

However, once she reached a marriageable age, her ugliness posed a problem because it impeded her ability to fulfill her duties: consummate her marriage and bear children. Here, Genlis emphasizes the role of social constructions of beauty and femininity in the designation of her disagreeable appearance, a technique that Lamber also employs in *Laide*. Ultimately, as we will see, both authors adhere to the uncompromising codes of the sentimental genre described in the previous chapter. Namely, they employ a language of sensibility intended to evoke an emotional response in the reader while protecting them from base urges, such as lust. The plots also follow the protagonist's romantic relationship with her love interest through the stages of encounter, disjuncture, and tragedy when the relationship cannot come to fruition. Indeed, since the 'ugly' female body presents a threat to both the fabric of society and the construction of the novel, in the end, it must be eliminated (whether through death or restoration of beauty) or assimilated through masculine approval.

Like Jeanne, Lamber's writes about a heroine, Hélène, whose 'ugliness' has left her incapable of fulfilling societal expectations of a woman (namely marriage and motherhood). Indeed, standing in the presence of women whose bodies adhere to the beauty norms of the period brings into sharp relief the faults in Hélène's appearance:

> Jamais peut-être elle n'avait été plus laide qu'au milieu de ces fleurs, de ces statues, de cet apparat. Osseuse et blême, … [s]es yeux trop grands avec des cils blonds qui paraissaient blancs sur des paupières aux teintes noirâtres, sa bouche trop petite au milieu d'un ovale terne et démesurément allongé, son nez diaphane, tout son visage couleur de cire vieillie, était désagréable à voir sans qu'on pût lui trouver un trait contourné ou

> disgracieux. La maladie seule avait enlaidi une figure que la nature avait faite primitivement belle. (Lamber, 68)
>
> (Never, perhaps, had she been more absolutely ugly than amid all these flowers, these statues, and these lights…[her] eyes were out of proportion with her face; her lashes looked almost white against the blackness of her pupils, her mouth looked too small, the oval of her face was unnaturally elongated, her nose was transparent, and her whole face the color of old wax. All this made a *tout ensemble* which was most disagreeable, without there being any one feature that was ugly or imperfect. Illness alone had marred a face which Nature had intended to be lovely. [Sherwood, 68])

When comparing Hélène's appearance to that of the beautiful women surrounding her, the narrator highlights the faults in Hélène's appearance, according to nineteenth-century French beauty standards. Indeed, the narrator insists that Hélène does not possess inherently 'ugly' physical traits. Instead, her faded features, stemming from a childhood bout of typhoid fever, connote sickness and decay, negatively impact her socially-perceived potential as a wife and mother. In this way, the loss of Hélène's beauty appears as a sort of castration. The essential physical marker of femininity was stripped from her, leaving her unable to fulfill her social role as a wife and mother, in contrast to her peers. The narrator and secondary characters associated Hélène's former beauty with the Natural, and her current ugliness with the Unnatural. Such a paradigm recalls Lamber's contemporaries' waning confidence in Revolutionary values such as progress and Positivism; they too have been corrupted.

However, Lamber entices her readers by leaving a trail of clues throughout the novel, suggesting that Hélène might one day evolve into the sentimental heroine that they expect. This often comes in the form of conversations between Hélène and her governess, Joséphine. While helping Hélène to dress for a party, Joséphine reminds her: "Ce teint de cire, vos cheveux décolorés, vos lèvres toutes blanches qui font paraître vos dents jaunies, cette maigreur effrayante, tout cela peut changer encore. Votre vieux médecin me le disait autrefois" (Lamber, 59) ("Your waxen skin, your hair that is, I admit, without lustre—your pale lips which make

your teeth look yellow—and more especially your excessive and almost alarming thinness, may yet all change. Your old doctor has said so over and over again" [Sherwood, 61]). Here, Joséphine reminds Hélène that the aspects of her appearance that makes her ugly could still change for the better.

Conversely, like the descriptions of Jeanne, this description of Hélène highlights the disagreeable nature of her pigmentation. Hélène's faded complexion and overall coloration not only dull what could have been physical attributes but distort her other features. The contrast between the color of her lips and teeth, for example creates the illusion of yellowing teeth, normally a marker of age. This association notably reinforces the narrative of decay. Indeed, Hélène's extreme paleness and skinniness causes her to resemble a corpse. Such a lack of vitality calls into question her ability to bear children. In a society that valued one's ability to contribute to it through the fulfillment of specific, gendered roles, possible infertility constitutes a threat. In this way, Hélène's experience of her impairment resembles that of Olivier in Claire de Duras's *Olivier, ou le secret*. However, Hélène's case constitutes a more optimistic narrative arc than Jeanne's and Olivier's. Hélène can hope to recover the beauty that she lost, by having her spirit bolstered by a feminine-coded interlocutor (Joséphine). With Olivier's impotence, the narrator and secondary characters argue stems from his proclivities as an Anglophile and his feminine upbringing. Further, he is left without a male confidant with whom he can share his troubles. Conversely, Hélène's abnormality is treated as a tragic, potentially reversible accident, albeit one that has a strong negative impact not only on her life, but on the lives of the men who surround her.

Specifically, Hélène's warped traits cause her father, Martial, to suffer a creative block. Lamber highlights the pain, frustration, and sense of loss that Hélène's ugliness causes her father

to feel throughout the novel. In the first scene in which he appears, Martial converses with his friend, confidant, and fellow artist, Romain, about his difficulty rendering his late wife as a sculpture, and suddenly explodes:

> "Dis-le !" s'écria Martial avec éclat, "elle ressemble à ma fille ! Ce supplice est le mien ! La vivante laide se dresse entre moi et le souvenir de ma belle morte. Cher ami, je me suis longtemps efforcé de te cacher la plaie béante de mon cœur, mais elle saigne trop, elle est trop grande ouverte" (Lamber, 19)
>
> ("Say it," exclaimed Martial, "it resembles my daughter! And this is my constant torture—this living ugliness rises perpetually between me and the remembrance of my wife's dead beauty. Dear friend, I have done my best to conceal this wound in my heart, but it bleeds to fiercely and yawns too deeply to be longer concealed" [Sherwood, 34-35])

Martial suggests that Hélène's appearance, which should have evoked her mother's beauty and made it possible for him to keep her alive through his art instead distorts his memory of her. Indeed, Sherwood's translation highlights the idea that Martial laments the loss of his wife's beauty more than the loss of his wife as a person. Though Martial tried to suppress his pain, he can no longer hide from the truth that Hélène's ugliness has robbed him of his ability to recollect and render his wife in his art. Hélène disrupts the masculine sense of self which, in the context of *Laide*, is defined in relation to art. As Wang has noted (160), Martial has constructed his home as a sort of temple where he worships great art: "Derrière les vitraux qui font de la maison du XVIè siècle une sorte d'église chez soi, le respect du sacré voltige encore, mais la pensée, en méditant sur les belles formes humaines des sculptures tressaille à l'amour renaissant de la beauté antique" (Lamber, 5) ("Behind the stained, which makes of this Sixteenth Century mansion a sort of church, there is an evident appreciation of sacred things, but at the same time a lingering recollection of all the beauties of the antique" [Sherwood, 24]). Loving Hélène, his daughter, accepting her appearance, goes against every fiber in his being. For him, ugliness is the enemy against which he has been fighting for his entire life (Lamber, 23). He believes that he

must be allowed to defeat his adversary by any means necessary, even if it means evicting Hélène, an action that, as we will see in the following section, creates space for Lamber to develop Hélène's sentimental and anti-sentimental qualities as an independent heroine.

Containment and Exile: Managing Ugliness

Both Jeanne and Hélène's 'ugliness' cannot go unnoticed. The men in their life thus employ various strategies to contain their 'ugliness' and prevent it from negatively affecting other aspects of their home and work life. This begins with an attempt at containment—relegating the 'ugly' heroine to specific areas of the home. When this technique fails, the male characters employ more aggressive techniques, that force the heroine, and the harmful impact of her defects, out of their home, an exile that ultimately allows her to attain greater financial and personal independence.

Jeanne's journey of exile begins when her father sends her away from his home to marry Louis. At the age of twelve she must leave her residence, where her appearance was considered, not a disability, but a simple curiosity. Indeed, after their wedding ceremony, Louis spends several years traveling, performing his diplomatic duties, while Jeanne remains at their home. Though her friend Agnès visits with her, she is primarily alone. When Louis finally returns home, he hastily informs Jeanne that "je puis vous promettre l'attachement d'un frère…mais je ne puis vivre avec vous comme époux" (Genlis, vol. I, 45, 1816) ("I can promise you the attachment of a brother—but I cannot live with you as a husband") (Genlis, vol. I, 41, 1817). Louis establishes the physical and emotional boundaries of their relationship. They will not share a bedroom, but instead maintain separation between them when they both occupy their home. While he travels, which will be often, Jeanne may move about as she pleases. However, even

then, Jeanne experiences the limitations of her condition. Since realizing Louis's preference for beautiful women, "elle ne jeta jamais les yeux sur un miroir sans éprouver une sensation douloureuse : c'était le pressentiment de toutes les peines qui devaient troubler sa vie" (Genlis, vol. I, 12, 1816) ("she never cast her eyes towards a mirror, without experiencing a mournful sensation—it was the presentiment of all the troubles which were to cloud her life") (Genlis, vol. I, 10-11, 1817). Jeanne thus feels rejected not just by Louis, but by her home itself, and she begins to search for meaning and purpose outside of her residence.

As Wang has noted, Hélène is similarly marginalized in her family home due to her appearance. The third-person heterodiegetic narrator informs us, "Aujourd'hui les panneaux cachent leurs miroirs et s'enferment dans l'ombre en deuil d'une beauté qui ne revivra plus, car madame Martial est morte, ne laissant qu'une fille, Hélène, qui est laide" (Lamber, 7) ("To-day these panels conceal the mirrors now vailed in mourning for the beauty that has vanished, for Madame Martial is dead, leaving only one child, Hélène, who is ugly as her mother was beautiful" [Sherwood, 25]). Through the final clause of this initial description of Hélène, the narrator implies that her ugliness effectively negates her status as a daughter. It prevents her from replacing her mother as her father's muse and entering a marriage worthy of her family's status.

This conflict is further dramatized by Martial's strict adherence to Neoclassicism, an aesthetic characterized by the depiction of Classical themes with austere linear design. Followers of Neoclassicism, such as Martial, sought to imitate art created in Greece and Rome during antiquity, which emphasized clarity, idealism, and harmony.[114] This meant rejecting discord,

[114] This movement emerged in France during the mid-eighteenth century as a rejection of the ornate Rococo style that had dominated European art since the early eighteenth century and as an enthusiastic response to new excavation of ancient Greek and Roman architectural ruins as well as sculptures. Neoclassicism remained popular through the beginning of the nineteenth century, declining due to the corresponding rise in Romanticism. As Rolf Toman notes in his study, *Néoclassicisme et Romantisme : architecture, sculpture, peinture, dessin* (2000), during the early years of the nineteenth century, Napoleon I (1769-1821) promoted Neoclassicism as the style of his empire in an imitation of the Roman Empire.

which Hélène embodied, by virtue of the contrast between her interior and exterior. Early in the novel, when Martial speaks with Romain, who favors the Renaissance aesthetic, he laments,

> "Je la voudrais amère, implacable avec un je ne sais quoi d'infernal. Elle aurait sa raison d'être alors, elle jouerait son rôle, tiendrait sa place, serait au destin la figure qu'il lui a faite ! Une grimace, le satanique, la laideur méchante, c'est d'un art inférieur, mais c'est encore de l'art." (Lamber, 26-27)
>
> ("She would interest me more and please me better were I to see her bitter and sarcastic. She would, at least, have a right to be that, and she would then play her own rôle, and make a place for herself in the world and give to Fate the face and form it created. Ugliness if it be sufficiently strong in type is still Art, but Art of an inferior grade." [Sherwood, 38])

The juxtaposition of his daughter's 'ugly' exterior to her sentimental interior jars Martial's nerves. In his opinion, the highest form of art depicts perfect beauty. However, representations of pure evil and horror also meet his criteria for art, albeit of a much lower form. A mix of the two, as in the case of Hélène, does not constitute art, and, for Martial, creates an obstacle to his creative process. In her father's eyes, Hélène remains a monster. What was supposed serve as the incarnation of his wife's beauty brought back to life transformed into something hideous and unnatural. This view, however, does not go unchallenged. Hélène's inner beauty serves as a foil to Martial's inner ugliness. Romain, his best friend, remarks, "Hélène était aussi belle que tu étais monstrueux" (Lamber, 36) ("Hélène was as beautiful just now as you were repulsive" [Sherwood, 45]), when assessing their behavior since Martial's wife's passing. Here, he implicates Martial's attitude as the true culprit of his creative block.

Martial rejects this argument and continues to pursue his strategy of mitigating the negative effects of Hélène's appearance on his art by maintaining a strict division between the masculinized world of art, and the place of the female body, as captured and defined according to the standards of beauty as determined by the male gaze. As Wang has noted (160), the structure of Martial's house serves both as an ode to Antiquity and a monument to the beauty of man's

(masculine) thought and creativity and as a reflection of Martial's soul ("L'artiste and son intérieur se ressemblent" [Lamber, 4-5] ["The artist and his Interior resemble each other very strongly"] [Sherwood, 24]). Composed of several sections, the house includes Martial's workshop, a masculine space of intellectual pursuits and creativity, his *maison grecque*, and the gynaeceum, to which Hélène is relegated (Lamber, 5). The women's space in the house is separated from the creative and intellectual space, since Hélène's father had hoped to contain her ugliness to her apartment so that it would not affect his work. It is only once Martial admits to Romain that these efforts failed, as evidenced by his persistent creative block, that he takes the step of expelling Hélène from the family home.

Banishment from the Category of Woman

As is common for novels of this subgenre, engaging with this trend, this exile from the home is linked to a corresponding exile from one's gender. In both books, as we will see, Genlis and Lamber craft a narrative in which the hero labels the 'ugly' heroine as an angel. This provides an explanation for his fascination with her: it does not stem from normal earthly markers of attraction, such as physical beauty. It also simultaneously serves to refuse her participation in social institutions such as romantic love, marriage, and childbearing. Such a strategy on the part of Genlis and Lamber can be understood through an examination of nineteenth-century views on androgyny. A long tradition of androgyny exists in France that evolved over the course of the nineteenth century. Under the pressure to conform to and depict rigid roles, writers of the period, such as Genlis and Lamber, turned to the archetype of the *androgyne*—the incarnate of a perfect union of masculine and feminine gender identities—to explore possibilities of more fluid sexuality, including asexuality, and more flexible social

customs that could disrupt the very foundation upon which relations between people were built at the time.[115]

We see this at play in Louis and Jeanne's relationship in *Jeanne de France.* After witnessing her father's long and painful passing,[116] Jeanne's health suffers greatly due to trauma and grief induced insomnia. Louis reflects that Jeanne too may soon die as he gazes at her practically lifeless body while she rests:

> Cette touchante figure, rendue plus délicate encore par la maigreur, paraissait être celle d'un enfant, et l'intérêt que lui donnait cette illusion, était augmenté encore par son excessive pâleur, et par l'expression de douceur et d'innocence que ne pouvaient voiler sur ce visage les ombres même de la mort. (Genlis, vol. I, 179, 1816)
>
> (Jane, rendered still more delicate by the effects of her disorder, looked like an infant; and the interest, excited by this illusion, was increased by her excessive paleness, and by the gentle innocent expression of countenance, which even the shade of death could not conceal.) (Genlis, vol. I, 165, 1817)

Here, when Jeanne is essentially on her deathbed, Louis finds her appearance pleasing because of her delicate features, which at last seem to match the purity of her personality. This observation leads Louis to observe "quelque chose de céleste dans la physionomie de Jeanne ; il la contemplait avec une douloureuse admiration…Ange ! dit-il, que j'ai trop long-temps méconnu, ou du moins négligé, toi que le ciel m'avait donné pour me faire adorer la vertu" (Genlis, vol. I, 179, 1816) ("something heavenly in the look of Jane—he contemplated it with mournful admiration…'Angel', said he, 'that I have been so long in knowing, or at least have so long

[115] In his article "The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century," A.J.L. Busst, defines the "androgyne" as a person "who unites certain of the essential characteristics of both sexes and who, consequently, may be considered as both a man and a woman or as neither a man nor a woman, as bisexual or asexual" (Busst, 1). Similarly, Carolyn Heilbrun defines androgyny in theoretical and ahistorical terms as "a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes" (Heilbrun, x) in her book *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*. In her analysis of contemporary images of "androgyne" in her book *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, Marjorie Garber highlights a different aspect of androgyny, demonstrating how it is imagined in both sexualized and asexual terms: it describes at times a state of transcendence that leaves the body behind to attain equilibrium and perfection beyond gender, sexuality, and desire, but it also connotes a pansexuality, a "sexiness" that presents itself as desiring and desirable.

[116] The narrator notes that Jeanne's father was on his deathbed for several days, in agony and suffering convulsions. Jeanne remained at his side throughout his passing, and he died in her arms (vol. I, 174).

neglected—though, whom Heaven bestowed upon me that I might learn to reverence virtue'") (Genlis, vol. I, 165, 1817). In the past, Louis had expressed lukewarm appreciation for Jeanne's appearance ("il n'était pas impossible d'aimer une femme dépourvue de beauté…après tout, sa figure, loin d'être repoussante, avait quelque chose de si intéressant!" [Genlis, vol. I, 48, 1816] ["it was not impossible to love a woman who was destitute of beauty…after all, too, her face, far from being repulsive, had something in it extremely interesting"] [Genlis, vol. I, 45, 1817]) Here, however, Louis sees for the first time, not the disagreeable aspects of Jeanne's appearance, but something greater and more spiritual could lead him to righteousness.

Indeed, the duties of a wife included representing morality in her marriage as a means of redeeming and justifying her husband and his actions. In this moment, faced with Jeanne's undeniable good nature, Louis sees her as the source of virtue to complete him. The elements of her physique that he used to condemn as a sign of a lack of vitality and femininity, he now sees as evidence of celestial wholeness and perhaps Romantic androgyny. His insistence on the childlike qualities of her features serves to circumvent the problem of social obligations of fully grown women. He perceives her as whole by coding her as celestial. Following this shift, he resolves to re-commit to Jeanne and entreats her to return to him. Jeanne then awakens, dramatically, to answer his 'prayer' (Genlis, vol. I, 183, 1816). This, again, constitutes a departure from historical accounts of Jeanne's life, wherein Louis's resentment towards Jeanne's father, and, by extension, Jeanne, never softened. Genlis, true to the intentions she announced in her preface, seeks to demonstrate the allure of Jeanne's kindness that attracts Louis.

Indeed, when Louis stumbles upon Jeanne's charity house, he discovers the truth. In a sentimental response, "les plus douces larmes s'échappent de ses yeux, et il s'écrie : 'J'ignorais cette action touchante ; c'est un ange, c'est madame la duchesse d'Orléans qui seule est votre

bienfaitrice'" (Genlis, vol. I, 57, 1816) ("Tears of joy escaped from his eyes, and he exclaimed: 'I was ignorant of this affecting action. It is an angel, it is the Duchess of Orleans alone who is your benefactress.'") (Genlis, vol. I, 53, 1817). Louis's usage of the term "angel" emphasizes her uncommon goodness and charity. Additionally, the idea of an angel harkens back to Platonic notions of genderless celestial beings that were the perfect union of both masculine and feminine qualities. Repeatedly likening Jeanne to an angel, then, also serves to assert her androgyny as a function of her appearance. This type of optimistic conception of gender recalls conceptions of Romantic Androgyny. As Pratima Prasad notes, "the Romantic androgyne embodied a metaphysical ideal of originary wholeness and a utopian ideal of social equality" (Prasad, 333). Assigning Jeanne to the category of angel also necessitates denying her sexuality and guarding against the threat of any kind of fluid gender dynamics in romantic and sexual relationships.

Jeanne, skeptical of Louis's sudden change of heart towards her, worries that he will quickly loose interest in her, expressing to her confidant Agnès, "je ne pense pas sans crainte que…quand ma santé sera parfaitement rétablie, je ne serai plus pour lui cette amie qui, dans son imagination et dans ses souvenirs n'avait rien de commun avec ces femmes brillantes de fraîcheur et de beauté, objets de ses attachements passagers" (Genlis, vol. I, 203, 1816) ("it is not without fear that I think, when my health shall be re-established in a few months hence, of no longer being the friend who, in his imagination, had nothing in common with those brilliant and blooming beauties, the objects of his fleeting attachment") (Genlis, vol. I, 186, 1817). Jeanne, in her pragmatism, acknowledges the role of her illness in Louis's sudden interest in her and the likelihood that it will fade when she recovers. She also reiterates the ideal physical attributes of a women, which radiate youthfulness, fertility, and vitality in contrast to hers.

Agnès tries to bolster Jeanne's spirit, reminding her that she will be the mother of Louis's children, and that such a bond cannot so easily be broken. However, Jeanne replies, "des enfants ! Hélas ! Avec une taille défectueuse, une si mauvaise complexion, une santé si délicate, en aurai-je ? Ou vivront-ils, ou ne seront-ils pas plus difformes encore que leur malheureuse mère ?" (Genlis, vol. I, 203, 1816) ("children! Alas! With a defective form, a bad complexion and delicate health, shall I have any? Or, if I have, will they not, perhaps, be sill more deformed than their unfortunate mother") (Genlis, vol. I, 186, 1817). Through Jeanne's dialogue, Genlis highlights a key anxiety that plagued eighteenth and nineteenth century audiences: how were monsters created and could they procreate? Worse still, if they could reproduce, would their offspring be even more monstrous that those who spawned them? Jeanne initially experiences this realization of her possible infertility or worse, fate to pass on her defects to her children, as inability to satisfy a key requirement of her gender. Additionally, her fears about how the lives of her potential children would be affected by a disability (both that she could transmit it to them and that she would be physically and mentally ill-equipped to raise them) demonstrate the moral implications of her decision. For Jeanne, she could not, in good consciousness, risk sentencing her children to the same type of discrimination that she faced for her disagreeable appearance. It is not until later in the text that she begins to embrace the liberatory possibilities of her '*impuissance*,' a theme that George Sand would later take up in her seminal work *Lélia* (1833).

In *Laide*, Hélène suffers a similar form of banishment due to the perceived incompatibility of her ugliness and her gender identity. The masculine gaze in this novel, embodied by Martial among other male characters, captures her as a potentially dangerous hybrid not only in terms of the clash between her physical traits and personality, but in terms of her gender. Hélène's "disability" leads her friend, Guy de Romain, to propose a marriage of

convenience to her in which he would continue to live as a libertine, frequenting his mistresses in Italy, while never fearing developing feelings for Hélène, and ruining their arrangement. For Guy, marriage serves to provide comfort and placate his father. Such a contract is best undertaken with an androgynous friend, while love, or more accurately an amorous relationship, exists outside of this institution. Indeed, as Wang as noted, Hélène's appearance, as captured and defined by Guy's gaze, is often masculinized (170). For example, greeting Hélène at her salon, Guy declares "les anciens avec les anciens, les garçons avec leurs pareils" (Lamber, 65) ("old people with the old ideas should live together, and young men with their comrades" [Sherwood, 66]). Guy attempts to compliment Hélène and their amicable relationship as well as the soirée that she has put together, but he instead embarrasses her. She blushes and turns her head away at these cruel words, which deny her femininity. Guy's father, ever compassionate and empathetic, intervenes on Hélène's behalf, admonishing his son with a whispered reminder that Hélène is, in fact, a woman.

However, this does not temper Guy's enthusiasm or conviction of the truth of his words: he reflects that he was always convinced that Hélène "avait en elle-même l'horreur de son sexe" (Lamber, 66) ("she had a dislike to her sex and wished that she had been born a man" [Sherwood, 66]), which Hélène affirms with a quip and a laugh "je suis plus garçon que jamais" (Lamber, 66) ("I am more of a boy than when you left" [Sherwood, 66]). Though it mostly captures the meaning of the French text, I disagree with Sherwood's extrapolation of Guy's understanding of Hélène's feelings about her gender to include a desire to have been born as a man. While Hélène does, on multiple occasions, discuss her inability to relate to other women and characterizes herself as something different, in some ways more than and in some ways less

than, she does not go as far as to suggest that she would have preferred being a man, nor does Guy assert this about her explicitly.

This passage also illustrates a way in which, Lamber introduces tension between tears and laughter, between the expression of genuine sentiment characteristic of the sentimental genre and an ironic tone that seems to mock this mode of expression. This mirrors Lamber's exploration of femininity and questioning of the type of qualities that were associated with women. Hélène, at several moments in the novel, begins laughing only to dissolve into tears and vice versa. The role of her ironic attitude must be underscored. For instance, when her father expels her from his home, she writes a letter to him in response, announcing her plans to live happily independently of him and establish her own salon. She writes, "Lorsque je serai assez résolue pour me gausser de ma laideur, pour me moquer du monde et pour rire au nez de votre cruauté, j'inaugurerai mon vieil hôtel et ma nouvelle existence" (Lamber, 40) ("When I have gained resolution enough to laugh at my own ugliness, to sneer at the comments of the world, and to make game of your cruelty, I will take possession of my old Hôtel and my new life" [Sherwood, 48]). In her crushing grief, Hélène responds with irony to her father. She only allows herself to express her true pain when she settles into her own space in the hotel: "Hélène chassée de la maison grecque s'enferma dans son grand hôtel, s'abandonna sans contrainte, sans mesure, sans résistance à son chagrin" (Lamber, 41) ("Hélène driven from the Greek mansion, shut herself up in her Hôtel and abandoned herself to the unconstrained indulgence of her boundless grief" [Sherwood, 49]). This scene reveals a pattern that continues throughout the novel: Hélène endeavors to satirize her father's opinions of her, but ultimately succumbs to a tearful, sentimental response.

Hélène and Jeanne react to the messaging they receive with regard to their gender by positioning themselves not as heroines (potential wives and mothers), but as confidants to the respective heroes of the novels. Indeed, when Louis tells Jeanne that he can only care for her as a brother, not a husband, she responds "Je veux être votre amie, votre confidente, et rien de plus" ("I want to be your friend, your confidant, and nothing more") (vol. I, 47). Similarly, Hélène agrees to a marriage of convenience with Guy, in which he would be able to travel freely to consort with his Italian lover, on the condition that he writes to her and tells her of his exploits. Jeanne and Hélène both had the expectation that their husbands would share the details of their lives, including their sexual and romantic exploits, with them, as friends would, so Jeanne feels betrayed by Louis's secrecy: "Quoi! Ce n'est plus vous qui m'apprenez vos secrets ? Je suis reconduite à la découvrir ! Que craignez-vous d'une amie qui ne veut que votre bonheur ?" (Genlis, vol. II, 15, 1816) ("It is no longer from yourself that I learn your secrets. I am reduced to the situation of being obliged to discover them. What can you fear with respect to a friend, who wishes nothing but your happiness?") (Genlis, vol. II, 14, 1817). This letter is striking because, just before writing it, Jeanne had broken down and screamed at a portrait of Louis, using "tu" instead of "vous." In the letter, though, to emphasize the rift his actions have caused, she reverts to "vous."

Hélène takes this arrangement one step further, elucidating the pleasure she derives from learning the details of her husband's liaisons:

> "Tu croyais donc, ajouta-t-elle que je t'avais donné gratuitement les soins de mon amitié, ma plus reconnaissante tendresse, que je t'aimais, pour toi-même, plus que je n'aime mon père et le tien? Je te chéris, frère, par haine des jolies femmes que tu fais souffrir, et donc je suis d'autant plus l'ennemie jalouse qu'elles sont plus belles ! Va poursuis ton chemin, mon allié, ne t'attendris pas, ne faiblis point, ne sois jamais vaincu ; toi qui obligeais autrefois tes conquêtes à se livrer sans condition, à merci, te verrais-je donc capituler ? Épargne à celle qui depuis dix ans t'approve, t'honore, t'admire et te glorifie, épargne-lui le spectacle de ta lâcheté !" (Lamber, 95)

> ("Did you think, then," she said, "that I had given you gratuitously all my friendly cares, and my sisterly tenderness; that I loved you for yourself more than I loved my own father or yours? I cherish you brother, out of hatred for the fair women whom you cause to suffer and of whom I am the jealous enemy. The fairer they are the more jealous I am. Go on my friend. Pursue your self-appointed task, but do not falter nor flag on your way. Never lay down your arms and never mortify me by capitulating. I implore you never thus to pain her for who ten years has watched, glorified, and approved of your course. Again, I say, spare her the spectacle of your defection" [Sherwood, 86-87]).

Hélène begins by reminding Guy that her affection is not given freely. She expects him to repay her with his confidence in her and reminds him that she, too, is capable of withdrawing her affection for him at a moment's notice, should he fail to continue leaving a trail of broken-hearted attractive women in his wake. When appealing to Guy's affection for her based on their enduring friendship, Hélène refers to herself in the third person, creating distance between herself as the author of this letter, imperiously commanding Guy to behave in a certain way, and herself as the person for whom he would feel compelled to act. The intimacy she seeks comes from the sharing of Guy's libertine adventures as well as their content. In Hélène's case, she detests beautiful women who, with ease, incarnate feminine qualities, as they were defined during the period. She derives pleasure from hearing tales of how Guy used them and then abandoned them. Out of this amity and a lack of romantic and sexual fulfillment in her own life, Hélène seeks to live vicariously through her husband's exploits.

Jeanne and Hélène also turn to celestial beings for assistance with navigating the effects of their defects on their gender and social identity. Jeanne prays, "O Dieu !...délivrez-moi des tourmens d'un attachement passionné; laissez-moi toute la générosité d'une amitié véritable, et le zèle et l'activité que peut donner une pitié profonde; laissez-moi toutes les vertus de la sensibilité; daignez m'en ôter l'exaltation, qui se porte et se fixe sur un seul objet!" (Genlis, vol. II, 163, 1816) ("Oh God, deliver me from the torment of an impassioned attachment. Leave me

all the generosity of real friendship, with all the zeal and activity which profound piety can inspire. Leave me all the virtues of sensibility. Deign to remove me from the exaltation which leads me to fix my thoughts and wishes upon one object") (vol. II, 146-147, 1817). Hélène, similarly, lifts up a request "Tu n'es pas toujours cruelle, ô Artémis, et tu te plais parfois à guérir les blessures. Jette sur moi, dans cette nuit que toi seule éclaires, un regard compatissant. Fais-moi connaître l'orgueil Joyeux d'une pudeur farouche, éteins en mon cœur la passion qui le consume. Je me livre à ta vertu purificatrice pour qu'elle chasse de mes sens jusqu'au désir de l'amour" (Lamber, 198). ("If thou receivest this vow, O Diana, soothe my madness, calm the agony I feel. Thou art not always cruel, and sometimes it pleases thee to pour balm into wounds. Deign, then, to look upon me with compassion, this night. In mercy extinguish in my heart the passion by which it is consumed. I abandon myself to thy care and implore thee to drive from my heart this absorbing desire" [Sherwood, 156]).

Here, Jeanne and Hélène pray to deities (the Christian God and Diana [known as Artemis in the Roman tradition], respectively) to relieve them of their doomed romantic feelings and the bitterness with which their unrequited love poisons their hearts. They ask instead to find fulfillment in chastity and platonic relationships. At this point in each novel, both women have found that those around them classify them as androgynous and react more positively to their presence when coding them as otherworldly, with sensibility, wit, and intellect beyond a normal woman. This reveals a pathway, albeit an undesirable one, for their integration into society, which they then actively seek, in moments of desperation. Parental power has failed to correct or even mitigate the effects of the disability, so the heroines turn to other means of resolving their problems. Lamber seems to target specifically paternal impotence in this scene of prayer. Hélène notes that she prays to Diana because her mother had always adored her; she remembers lifting

up requests to Diana with her mother as a child and decides to do so again in her moment of need. Jeanne gains strength not only from her supplication, but from the empathy and prayers that she receives from a young nun who overhears her supplications. Jeanne thus eventually succeeds in her mission of prioritizing a platonic relationship over a romantic one with Louis, though her desire for her romantic feelings to be taken away remains unrealized. Diana does not grant Hélène's wish to be freed of romantic desire either. However, she does cause Hélène to become sick with typhoid fever, an experience that purifies her of her 'ugly' attributes, clearing her pathway to marriage and childbearing.

Limited Resistance

As we have seen, both Genlis and Lamber's text exemplify the trend of depicting 'ugly' protagonists in the subgenre of nineteenth-century women-authored novels featuring a protagonist with a visible physical disability. They then leverage the power of the disability selected to sustain queer relationship dynamics in their novels. They also deliver their narrative via a sentimental vector to appeal to their public. In the final section of this chapter, we will consider ways in which these strategies combine to at times resist and reinforce contemporary views on women and disability.

To make Jeanne more appealing as a protagonist, Genlis emphasizes her sensibility at every turn, using sentimental codes and creating unexpected moments of freedom and control for her. The novel opens with an impassioned monologue from the omniscient first-person narrator that functions as an extension of the preface. In it the narrator reiterates the goals of the novel, declaring "Je veux montrer enfin que tout n'est pas effort et combat dans ces nobles victoires, et que la vertu, la raison, l'amitié, ont aussi leur attrait" (vol. I, 2, 1816) ("Finally, it is my wish to

show that those noble victories are not entirely gained by efforts and by combats; that virtue, good sense, and friendship have also their attractions") (vol. I, 1-2, 1817). Here, the narrator continues Genlis's mission of demonstrating the attractiveness of inner qualities as well as challenging the superiority of romantic relationships over platonic ones. This, too, is a controversial idea in a cultural context where women were expected to marry and bear children. Suggesting that women could find joy and fulfillment in relationships that exist outside of this familial structure could threaten the social order based upon it. The sentimental genre, then, appears as the ideal vector to transmit this message of unapologetic individualism because Genlis's characters do so in the name of love.

This succession of events demonstrates several characteristics common to nineteenth-century French women-authored novels featuring protagonists afflicted with physical markers of difference that were treated as disabilities, in that they were presented as impediments to participation in 'normal' aspects life, such as marriage and procreation. First and foremost, Jeanne's condition interrupts the marriage plot. In this case, Louis refuses to consider Jeanne as his wife and constantly looks elsewhere for beautiful women, particularly Anne de Bretagne (Anne of Brittany), with whom he may spend his time. "Sans doute, se disait Jeanne, pour cet objet séducteur est digne…d'exciter la plus juste admiration, il va prendre une passion dont rien ne pourra le guérir. Il va aimer comme je l'aime" (vol. I, 211-212, 1816) ("Alas', said Jane to herself, 'this fascinating woman, worthy as she is of exciting every one's admiration, will doubtless inspire him with a passion which nothing can overpower. He will love her as I love him.'") (vol. I, 194, 1817). Like Hélène, Jeanne defines herself against other women, these objects of masculine desire. The way she describes Anne de Bretagne denies her agency. She is

the object of Louis's desire and the receiver of it, should Louis decide to act on his attraction to her.

This allows Jeanne the opportunity to purchase a property and live there independently, while pursuing her passion of performing acts of charity. Jeanne strives to make her charity house successful: beneficial to the population it serves and financially solvent. Passersby, including Louis, notice the "élégante décoration, qui représentait un portique illuminé, orné de guirlandes de lis et de roses, et portant le chiffre de Louis avec cette inscription, en lettres de feu, *Reconnaissance*" (vol. I, 55, 1816) ("elegant decorations of which they had been admiring. These represented an illuminated portico, ornamented with garlands of lilies and roses, and bearing the cypher of Louis, with this inscription in letters of fire: *Gratitude*") (vol. I, 51, 1817). Indeed, the house's beauty piques Louis's interest, causing him to enter with his royal court and request a tour. Inside, the house contains rooms converted into workshops where the young girls work on different projects that are then sold. The proceeds support the poor occupants of the house (vol. I, 58, 1816). Louis is so impressed by the house and its functioning, that he makes a large donation of flowers and food the following day. Such a living situation constitutes an unprecedented level of freedom for a woman at that time. Genlis's depiction of an 'ugly' heroine who attains independence, particularly financially, precisely because of her ugliness, then, appears as a transgressive act of resistance.

At the climax of the novel, a shift in tone occurs as Genlis interrogates the bounds of the sentimental novel, writing hyperbolic sequences demonstrating the effectiveness of Jeanne's sensibility and highlighting her disabled body as the ultimate vector for it. In this section of the text, Louis is taken from his home and imprisoned by a group of men sent by his rival, Charles (Jeanne's brother and Anne de Bretagne's husband). Jeanne, however, is placed under house

arrest and confined in her room until “une multitude de pauvres, de vieillards, de jeunes femmes portant de petits enfans dans leurs bras, [viennent] tout à coup entourer le palais de Jeanne, en demandant à grands cris leur mère et leur bienfaitrice” (vol. II, 59-60, 1816) (“a multitude of poor people, young and old, among whom were women, carrying infants in their arms, suddenly surrounded Jane’s palace, and loudly demanded their benefactress”) (vol. II, 55, 1817). Following this display, Jeanne is able to secure a transfer to her second home, where she will have greater autonomy, by playing on the sensibility of her captor who, moved by the public support for Jeanne, reflect that “il y a aussi dans la vertu et dans la bonté une puissance que les méchans doivent ménager” (vol. II, 62, 1816) (“this impressive scene taught Madame the degree of power attached to virtue”) (vol. II, 57, 1817). Here, Genlis reveals a hint of cynicism towards the traditional sentimental plotline according to which, society’s most vulnerable are transformed into a powerful tool to fight against injustice by “suddenly” arriving at precisely the right time and instantly convincing antagonists to right wrongs in which they have been complicit.

Genlis’s skepticism towards sentimental denouements continues to show through during the following sequence. Once settled at Louis’s and her second property, Jeanne works with her network (members of the crowd who came to the castle in the previous section) to furtively exchange information through letters about the deplorable conditions of the prison in which Louis is being held and to plot Louis’s and her release. However, Jeanne’s attempt to sneak away from the estate is foiled by guard dogs who alert their masters to her presence. As she tries to slip by the guard stationed outside of her room, he awakens and brandishes his sword, injuring Jeanne’s arm and causing her to fall to the floor in pain. He is horrified by his actions because he was forbidden from harming Jeanne and could suffer severe consequences for doing so, even though it was accidental (vol. II, 95, 1816). However, when the other guards arrive, Jeanne

defends him noting that she was sneaking downstairs and startled him. Jeanne's kindness moves the guard to tears and he offers his services to her. She asks simply that he and his colleagues bring her to Charles so that she may make her case to him about why she and Louis should be released, and they agree. Jeanne's body functions as a vessel for the sensibility that reigns supreme in the novel. Genlis sacrifices her heroine's body for the sake of creating a sentimental encounter, one that could only occur because of Jeanne's impairments; given Jeanne's limp, she could not move silently enough to evade the dogs' hearing, nor could she return to her room quickly enough to avoid the guard once they began barking. What ensues will leave another scar, another defect on Jeanne's body, and create another opportunity to preach the gospel of sensibility and convert her enemies into allies.

Indeed, once before Charles, Jeanne offers him a detailed description of the unconscionable treatment of Louis as a prisoner. This comes as a surprise to Charles who had "Constamment ordonné qu'on le traitât dans sa prison avec tout le respect et tous les égards possible" (vol. II, 106, 1816) ("constantly given orders for him to be treated in prison with all possible respect and attention") (vol. II, 94, 1817). He then agrees to drastically reduce Louis's sentence to make up for the oversight. Again, this portion of the text takes on an ironic valence: the proverbial dominos fall in an exaggeratedly quick manner as different actors in the novel are exposed to Jeanne's sensibility, as brought into sharper relief by its contrast to her unfortunate appearance. With a kind word or action, she provokes a strong emotional response in those who would do harm to Louis and her, which allows her to impose her will (whether it be to relocate, to have an audience with her brother, to reduce Louis's punishment).

This, however, is weakened by Genlis's conventional ending in which Jeanne commits suicide to allow Louis to pursue the beautiful and kind woman he loves, Anne de Bretagne, and

to free herself from the torment of loving someone who will never return her affections. Even when Charles died, Louis had refrained from pursuing Anne out of a sense of duty to Jeanne, though it causes him significant health problems. As the narrator notes, "Pâle, abattu, farouche et silencieux, il n'espérait plus ni pitié ni consolation. Consumé par une passion devenue insensée autant que criminelle, il se jugeait lui-même avec une extrême rigueur" (vol. II, 169, 1816) ("pale, dejected, silent, fierce! He no longer hoped for pity or consolation. Consumed by a passion, which was become as insensate as it was criminal, he passed sentence on himself and with excessive rigour") (vol. II, 152, 1817). Unable to bear being the source of Louis's unhappiness, Jeanne makes the decision to remove herself from the situation to allow him to marry Anne who, as she writes to Louis in a goodbye letter, would be the "modèle des reines" (vol. II, 195, 1816) ("pattern of queens") (vol. II, 174, 1817), unlike her. Once again, Jeanne is sacrificed so that sensibility can prevail.

Tension between Hélène's ugliness and sensibility, similarly, motivates the plot of *Laide*, resulting in a series of banishments and abandonments that she must overcome. However, like Jeanne, Hélène turns this to her advantage to gain control and independence. When Martial can no longer tolerate Hélène's presence and tells her to leave, she uses her sizeable inheritance to secure lodging. At twenty-five years-old, Hélène has the power to take control of her finances and use them in an unexpected way to create space for herself to live independently and follow her passions. Consequently, she chooses to claim her new space in her recently acquired abode by redecorating it, a process that changes her as well:

> Cette liberté cette tenue de maison, cette autorité transformèrent Hélène en quelques jours. Elle devint exigeante, impérieuse, fantasque, et porta non sans quelque insolence une laideur dont elle avait souvent paru embarrassée. Elle fut ce qu'elle était pour Guy Romain seul, et ce qu'il lui conseillait sans cesse d'être pour tous : un garçon. (Lamber, 44)

> (This liberty, this large house, the authority now vested in her transformed Hélène into a totally different being within a very short time. She became exacting, imperious, and fantastic, and bore with a certain dashing insolence an ugliness which at times must have been very oppressive. She was to Guy Romain just what he had advised her to be to every one—a man, not a woman. [Sherwood, 50-51])

In this pivotal section, Hélène displays some character traits unbecoming of a woman, that are in fact coded as masculine. Up until this point, she had been treated as deficient, lacking the essential characteristic of beauty. However, here we see a quality that she possesses in excess: a masculine mind that thrives as she asserts her independence. The perception of Hélène as 'ugly' is intimately linked to her fluid gender identity.

Hélène seeks to alleviate her suffering and find her independence through mocking laughter at her ugliness, the world, and the cruelty that she has faced because of it. Due to her ugliness, she is banished from her home and able to gain her freedom, surrounding herself with masculine intellectual pursuits (art) and waging the war of gender equality from her salon. She seeks to prove to her father that the juxtaposition between her 'ugly' exterior and the beautiful art with which she surrounds herself, can be productive instead of jarring, by way of using it to create a spectacle for her audience. In this way, Hélène's feminine victimization transforms into greater self-awareness and power to live independently. Through this exile, she penetrates the masculine intellectual and artistic world that ostracized her because of her appearance, though this unfortunately falls short of attracting her husband's affections. Indeed, he leaves to consort with his Italian lover on their wedding night.

After a month of waiting for Guy to write to her, Hélène begins to despair and succumb to a sense of hopelessness. In a suicidal state of hysteria, she wanders into the woods and proceeds to have a sensuous encounter with nature: "Dès que la jeune femme a pénétré dans la profondeur du bois, son émotion augmente, la fièvre des nuits d'été envahit son cerveau, soulève

sa poitrine, brûle ses lèvres et ses mains" (Lamber, 196) ("As soon as Hélène entered this spot her heart began to beat to suffocation. The fever of summer nights invaded her brain, and burned her lips and hands" [Sherwood, 153-154]). Delirious, Hélène wades into a pool of water and submerges herself, intending to drown there. She is only saved by her beloved maid, Joséphine, and her son Césaire, who drag her out from the pool and transport her quickly back to her residence to receive medical attention. The doctor, the same man who cared for Hélène when she fell ill as a child, informs her that she has once again contracted typhoid fever (Lamber, 198).

This illness, however, has the unexpected consequence of restoring her beauty: "Lorsque la fièvre faisait briller les yeux d'Hélène, que ses joues brûlantes rougissaient, son visage plus d'une fois se transfigure" (Lamber, 218) ("When Hélène's eyes glittered with fever and the color mounted to her cheeks, her face could hardly have been recognized" [Sherwood, 169]). Her metamorphosis remains, however, incomplete. To allow the purifying illness to take its full effect, Hélène's doctor prescribes a three-month-long chrysalis stage during which Hélène must live a "vie végétative, sans causerie, sans lecture, sans lettres, sans occupation d'aucune espèce" (Lamber, 222) (she needs "simply to vegetate. She must not talk, read, or think. She must be thoroughly indolent" [Sherwood, 172]). Such medical advice foreshadows main concerns that emerge in France towards the end of the century: the ways in which intense intellectual stimulation ravages a woman's mind and body. This discourse served as a means of preventing women from engaging in pursuits deemed masculine to maintain the status quo of social order. It is also a form of the "rest cure" that we saw in *Olivier ou le secret* and will see in *Une décadente* and *Névrosée* in the following chapter.

Indeed, Hélène interprets the doctor's prescription as a call to behave in a more traditionally feminine manner, which she does, albeit ironically. The narrator reveals that Hélène

begins performing good works in the hopes "que sa charité envers les malheureux provoquerait la charité de la nature envers son malheur à elle" (Lamber, 227) ("Hélène, with her intelligence quickened by daily observation, said to herself that exchange is the law of the Universe. She hoped, therefore, that her charity toward the unhappy would arouse the charity of Nature toward herself" [Sherwood, 176]). She believes that a transformation of her interior will correspond to one of her exterior, bringing them into harmony with one another. For this reason, she tries to maintain anonymity, "[déployant] toutes les ressources de son intelligence pour échapper aux remerciements de ses protégés" (Lamber, 228) ("taking infinite pains, therefore, to remain unknown, she expended all the resources of her intelligence to escape the ardent thanks of her protégés" [Sherwood, 176]). Though, Hélène's actions are motivated by selfish desires, her beauty is restored.[117] This sequence of events upends the sentimental trope of the selfless, unfortunate heroine that we see in *Jeanne de France*.

It also reinforces the superiority of Neoclassicism within the text. Upon seeing herself transformed, Hélène "rend grâce à Diane Artémis, bienfaisante et guérisseuse, [murmurant] des louanges passionnées envers la généreuse nature, envers ce mystérieux divin, épars sur toutes choses, qui se fixe dans la beauté" (Lamber, 220) ("dropped on her knees and offered thanks to the great goddess, Diana, for her generous bounty and prompt response to her appeal" [Sherwood, 180]). Furthermore, this transformation brings about changes in Hélène's worldview. For example, she announces to those looking after her during her recovery, "Je prie donc chacun de vous en rentrant chez soi de dire à sa femme, à sa mère ou à sa sœur : Madame Guy de Romain ne hait plus les jolies femmes parce qu'elle est devenue leur égale" (Lamber, 249) ("I beg that each of you, on returning home, will say to his wife, to his mother, or to his sister,

[117] The idea of sensibility as being in some ways selfish was also a common point of interest in the eighteenth-century British tradition, notably in texts by Mandeville and Adam Smith.

Madame Guy de Romain, now that she has become the equal of pretty women, no longer hates them" [Sherwood, 189-190]). She even begins to appreciate companionship with other women.

Ironically, Hélène then receives a letter from Guy, informing her of his feelings for her. He writes, "Chère originale, durant les semaines que j'ai passées près de toi, ton humeur, aussi changeante que belle, me ravissait" (Lamber, 263) ("You, dear comrade, during those weeks which I spent near you enchanted me with your originality and your endless diversity" [Sherwood, 199]). Here, Guy refers to Hélène with feminine adjective forms, a fact that is lost in Sherwood's translation, a rare occurrence in the novel, indicating a moment when he considers her as able to fulfill her gender role. He then quickly reverts to the masculine form, when entreating her to summon him with her "main fraternelle" ("brotherly hand") (Lamber, 263). However, the message is clear: Guy prefers Hélène's original and surprising mind to the empty, physical beauty of the women with whom he had surrounded himself throughout his life. Briefly, Hélène regrets her transformation. Nevertheless, she soon comes to her own realization: Hélène "rit d'un air dédaigneux, dont elle écouta le son pour bien se convaincre que le retour de Guy, au lieu de l'attendrir, provoquerait ses inimitiés les plus résolues" (Lamber, 267-268) ("laughed disdainfully, and listened to the echo of this laugh with delight, for it proved to her that Guy's return, instead of arousing her tenderness only strengthened her positive determination that their relations should continue to be the same as now" [Sherwood, 202]). Overcoming her ugliness by laughing at it is an objective that she laid out in her letter to her father when she was expelled from his home. She never sought to be assimilated into society and accepted, but to be her own master and mock the conventions that had relegated her to exile for so long. Now that Guy has come to appreciate her despite her former ugliness, he becomes the object of Hélène's mockery as well.

Instead of telling Guy the truth, Hélène decides to reveal to him that she now has both the beauty and originality that he craves in a manner that will publicly humiliate him. She begins by omitting the revelation of her restored beauty and inviting Guy to attend a party of hers. The other guests eagerly await Guy's arrival and the drama that will ensue when he discovers Hélène's transformation. When he arrives, his friends try to warn him about the surprise that awaits him, showing him Martial's statue, now complete—an indication that his creative block has been resolved through the restoration of Hélène's beauty—but Guy remains unconvinced. Each time Guy voices his certainty that the guests are joking, they become more raucous, delighting in delicious tension that he unwittingly builds.

Hélène then slowly emerges from the crowd, beautiful, terrible, and prepared to relish Guy's reaction. Guy senses the hostility of her performance, crying out "arrête, Hélène…arrête, si c'est toi. Je deviens fou ! Oui je te retrouve, ma première tendresse, mais grandie, ressuscitée, embellie. Recule ! Ce que je ressens m'épouvante par sa violence. Vous me faites une joie affreuse, vous êtes tous sans pitié. Vous auriez dû me prévenir autrement de ce miracle !" (Lamber, 279-280) ("Hélène! Can this be you?...Am I in my right mind? Yes, I see you again fair as I first remember you, nay, fairer and lovelier than my wildest imagination could have pictured you. I do not know whether I feel pain or pleasure. I am terrified at the violence of my emotions. You are pitiless: why could you not have informed me of this miracle?" [Sherwood, 211]). Again, Sherwood's translation abandon's a word-for-word rendering of the text in English, in favor of capturing the general meaning and highlighting specific aspects of it, devoting an entire sentence to the painful joy that Guy feels when confronted with Hélène's transformation. Guy then proceeds to draw his dagger from his scabbard and destroy his painting of his Italian lover,

Julia, symbolizing the fact that she means nothing to him in light of his passion for the beautiful Hélène.

However, when he offers his love to her, Hélène responds scornfully, "si je t'avais aimé, camarade…lorsque tu étais pour moi un raisin trop vert, j'aurais perdu le goût de cet amour depuis qu'ayant trop muri au soleil italien tu m'as paru dévoré par les guêpes et gâté !" (Lamber, 283) ("If I loved you, comrade…when you were in my eyes but unripe fruit, I lost all relish for that love since you ripened in that Italian sunshine and became the prey of wasp and gnats" [Sherwood, 213]). Guy argues that her fever had a restorative effect on her and that the burning passion that he feels for her now is having a similar effect on him, in that it is healing his moral corruption. Hélène, however, does not accept his words. She warns him that his love has lost its appeal and that now she seeks to be "une amante" ("a lover") (Lamber, 285). Now, she will be the one taking advantage of their marriage of convenience to claim her sexual and romantic liberty with whomever she chooses.

Eventually, though, Hélène accepts Guy's love and, in doing so, dramatically resolves the crisis of masculine impotence that haunted the novel. Her initial refusal when confronted with Guy's feelings brings him to tears, a long-awaited genuine expression of sentiment. Guy promises his father, "J'ai cherché tous mes plaisirs hors de la famille. Maintenant je désire être votre fils, je désire être père, être mari, puisque j'aime ma femme" (Lamber, 297) ("I wish now to be such a son as you deserve. To be a husband and a father—I love my wife and I hope to win her heart" [Sherwood, 223]). Sherwood's translation omits the first sentence in which Guy admits to the error of his ways, seeking pleasures outside of family. The contrast he establishes between his former and current passions and priorities highlights his transformation, which mirrors Hélène's. Following this exchange, Guy and Hélène waltz around Martial's statue,

modeled after Hélène's mother, further evidence of the resolution of paternal impotence that is featured prominently in the denouement. Here, the novel begins to resemble the Romantic plot wherein a hero's quest for love ends in his commitment to a traditional family lifestyle through his commitment to one woman. Nevertheless, Hélène reclaims her identity as both a woman and a wife, a status that had been denied to her for most of her life. Her independence fades into the conventional ending of a curative illness, restoration of her beauty, and conformation to traditional family structure. And yet, this does not negate the unusual freedom and control over her sexuality that Hélène was able to attain throughout the novel thanks to her ugliness.

Conclusion

Jeanne de France and *Laide* serve as examples of a subgenre of writing in which nineteenth-century French women authors accentuate an aspect of physical deviance in their main characters. This trend, I argue, occurs throughout the nineteenth century. It also opens possibilities for subverting the traditional convention of female beauty in a radical way. The abnormality of the body in these two works manifests itself immediately and visibly. It significantly disrupts the afflicted person's ability to participate in society. However, instead of leading to her destruction, this disfigurement of the heroine motivates her independence as well as her actions. The 'ugly' protagonist faces her "difference," using it to express her suffering and critique patriarchal injustice. Over the course of the century, such critiques become more vehement. The figure of this resistance embodies the transgression of traditional roles of women on a symbolic and social as well as sexual level. The narrative seeks to resolve the imposed disability in order to integrate the female protagonist into society. Over the course of the novel, the element of corporeal deviance emerges as an ideologically motivated construction. When a

woman writer incorporates the image of an 'ugly' woman in her novel and depicts her suffering, power, and desire for love, she reveals, in fact, her own resistance of the canon of beauty and to the constraints the society has imposed upon her sex. The authors of *Jeanne de France* and *Laide* create space through their literary discourse, to call upon their readers to take back their rights as women, a call that becomes most evident in *Laide*.

Unlike the trend of depicting invisible disabilities, this fascination with ideals of female beauty lasted over the course of the entire nineteenth-century, and, one could argue, until the present day. Though women faced scrutiny of their appearance throughout history, I argue that it increased in the aftermath of the French Revolution in response to the renewed emphasis on marriages based on romantic love, not just arrangement for political gain. A woman's power to attract a husband and attain power lied in her beauty, though, as we have seen, conceptions of beauty and what constituted a threatening sign of difference evolved over the course of the century. This was directly correlated to anxieties regarding a woman's role as a wife and, more importantly, mother, and to budding conceptions of heredity (if and how defects could be passed from mother to child). The authors of the novels studied in this chapter create unexpected space for their 'ugly' heroines to gain independence and freedom, thanks to their 'ugliness.' As we will see in the following chapter, at the end of the century this interest in depicting the monstruous focuses more on conditions affecting the female brain than on that of her outward appearance.

CHAPTER 4: *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* MEDICAL DISCOURSES ON THE NEUROTIC FEMALE BRAIN

In this chapter, I study Georges de Peyrebrune's *Une décadente* (1886) (A Decadent Woman), in which the intellectual female protagonist is driven to madness by doctors who convince her that she is mentally unstable because of her Decadent[118] lifestyle and Daniel Lesueur's[119] *Névrosée* (1890) (Neurotic Woman), in which an academic-minded young woman becomes increasingly neurotic[120] due to her extreme dissatisfaction with her married life. This approach allows me to respond to the following research questions: How did nineteenth-century women novelists engage with contemporary medical understanding of women's limited, by comparison to that of men, capacity to reason, through their portrayal of female characters? How and why did they depict mental difference? How does the type of mental abnormality affect, in turn, the narrative structure? And how does this choice reinforce and/or resist dominant medical and philosophical discourses on the inferiority of women (authors) and disabled individuals? Indeed, Peyrebrune and Lesueur's interest in depicting neurosis in women can be analyzed not as an isolated instance. Rather, it illustrates a trend that emerged in response to fin-de-siècle concerns about the hyper-feminization of

[118] The Decadent movement was a late nineteenth-century artistic and literary movement in Western Europe. Followers adhered to an aesthetic ideology of excess and artificiality. It was characterized by self-disgust, sickness at the world, general skepticism, delight in perversion, use of crude humor, and a belief in the superiority of human creativity over logic and the natural world. Indeed, this movement was opposed to nature, both in terms of biological nature and norms relating to morality and sexual behavior. However, most experts agree that it appeared in France when Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) used the word to capture a rejection of Positivism. (First articulated in the early nineteenth century by Auguste Comte (1798-1857), Positivism describes a philosophical theory that every rationally justifiable assertion can be scientifically verified, and therefore, it also constitutes a rejection of metaphysics and theism.)

[119] "Daniel Lesueur" is the nom de plume of Jeanne Lapauze (née Loiseau).

[120] In the *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1873), "névrose" ("neurosis") is defined as a "maladie qu'on suppose avoir son siège dans le système nerveux, et qui consiste en un trouble fonctionnel sans lésion sensible dans la structure des parties. Les névroses portent aussi le nom de maux de nerfs, d'état nerveux, de vapeurs et de névropathie" ("illness that is understood to originate in the nervous system, and which consists of functional trouble without a sensitive lesion in the structure of its parts. Neuroses are also known as damaged nerves, a nervous state, vapors, and neuropathy").

society. Indeed, both medical research and popular culture suggested that over-exertion of the nervous system, through neurosis, could have extreme side effects, such as infertility and miscarriages in women. This trend resembled the one studied in Chapter 2 in that it involves an invisible disability whose main 'threat' lies in the behavioral and psychosomatic symptoms caused by it. Additionally, though works were published that depicted mental health problems in men, the majority focused on women, as a means of engaging with the ongoing debate over whether women should receive the same education as men.

Before examining the context in which these novels were published, we must consider a summary of each. In *Une décadente*, a heterodiegetic narrator relates the story of a female protagonist (Hélione) who is convinced by male doctors (Dr. Thiébaut and his colleague, Marcus) that she must abandon her obsessive writing habits and the other aspects of her Decadent lifestyle because of their negative effects on her brain. At the beginning of the novel, Hélione enjoys excess, smoking, spending her nights consorting with "effeminate men" (Peyrebrune, 54), and writing, a traditionally masculine career. Her sister (Marguerite) and her brother-in-law (Dr. Thiébaut) find this behavior concerning, because she has an ideal, masculine, option for a husband, Marcus, Dr. Thiébaut's colleague. The two men implore Hélione to change her ways, warning her that her lifestyle will lead to her premature death and prescribing fresh air and interaction with mentally healthy, feminine women to heal her. Hélione reluctantly obeys her doctors' orders and appreciates the simple happiness that these women enjoy. Then, during a moment of crisis, she acknowledges her alleged mental illness, to Marcus and begs him to save her. He instead asks for her forgiveness, revealing that he and Dr. Thiébaut had lied to force Hélione to give up her Decadent lifestyle; her life had never been in danger. In the final scene of the novel, Hélione throws the translation of the

manuscript that she had been working on with her childhood governess turned friend and colleague, Miss Holten, to the ground, where they are torn up by her dog. Marguerite then gives birth and Hélione holds the baby for the first time in a pose reminiscent of the adoration painting of Mary holding baby Jesus, her transformation from neurotic to sentimental heroine complete.

A heterodiegetic narrator also recounts the story of *Névrosée*. In the first scene, the handsome Maxime Delaure, a professor, comes across an old friend, Lucien Gerbier, in Paris and tells him about his disillusionment with the Positivist views he once espoused, due to his inability to overcome his intense feelings for one of his students, Étiennette (Nénette). At the age of nineteen, Étiennette began attending Maxime Delaure's lectures on experimental psychology at the Collège de France, for intellectual stimulation. He immediately felt drawn to her for her physical beauty[121] and that of her mind, despite himself. The two marry happily, but soon grow discontent with their life together, realizing that they had fallen in love with the idea of one another. Étiennette remains a sheltered woman of delicate health who idolizes wealth and status, a trait that causes her to feel discontent with the incremental progress of Maxime's research and causes Maxime to doubt her intellect and its value. Indeed, Maxime and the narrator often juxtapose Étiennette and her sister, Suzanne, who contributes to society's economy by running a sawmill with her philandering husband, while giving birth to their many children. The troubles in Maxime and Étiennette's marriage intensify when Étiennette miscarries. Following this, Étiennette begins an emotional affair

[121] "Il lui sembla que, de cet angle sombre, un peu en arrière de lui, venait un rayon doux qui était le reflet de ses cheveux, *à elle*—très blonds, du blond délicieux des chevelures norvégiennes qui, par leur nuance presque immatérielle, divinisent une tête de femme" ("It seemed to him from this from this gloomy corner, a little behind him, came a soft ray that was the reflection of *her* hair—very blond, a delicious blond of Norwegian hair which, by its almost immaterial shade deifies a woman's head") (Lesueur, 25).

with her cousin, Norbert. After a night out at the Opera that awakens Étiennette's queer desire for a female performer, Norbert and Étiennette plan to give in to their lust for one another. Suzanne then saves them from being caught in the act and killed by Maxime. However, Maxime intuits the truth. After this episode, alone in her bedroom with her stormy thoughts, Étiennette decides and proceeds to kill herself by overdosing on the morphine that had been prescribed to her following her miscarriage.

These summaries reveal several key elements that will form the basis of my analysis. Both novels depict a female protagonist afflicted with a type of neurosis; exceptional ability (intellectual prowess) is rendered as disability[122]. The protagonists receive similar advice from a doctor, which is reinforced by their friends and family, for how to combat the illness. Namely, they must abandon their intellectual pursuits, which exacerbate for their problems, in favor of a simple life as a wife and mother. Additionally, both novels highlight the association between the heroines' mental health problems and their queer identities, in terms of gender and sexuality. Hélione does not define herself as a woman and Étiennette's mind leads her to an exploration of her attraction towards another woman. A foil who seemingly effortlessly fulfills expectations of her gender, Marguerite, and Suzanne, respectively, then brings the heroines' deviance into sharper relief. Furthermore, both novels exhibit a fraught relationship with the sentimental genre: a friction mockery and grief, duplicity, and authentic communication of feeling, and rigid and fluid sexual and gender expression, reminiscent of Lamber's *Laide*.

[122] Such a characterization recalls eighteenth century discourses on the "disease of the learned," as Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, David Hume (1711-1776) called it, which was thought to afflict primarily intellectual men.

Indeed, the sentimental novel is based on the idea that, much like a tuning fork guides a practiced musician to the perfect pitch, a woman's sensibility, when properly cultivated, leads her towards compassion and other noble sentiments. It further serves as a means of discerning the truth of others' characters. The sentimental hero and heroine find each other through the physical reactions, such as a female character being moved to tears by her empathy towards characters experiencing moments of crises, that belie her rare sensibility. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, as the century progressed, authors began to view the sentimental genre as confining, artificial, and an unworthy vector for expressing anything beyond a trite romance plot. Despite this, and unlike their male contemporaries, women authors could not completely disentangle themselves from it. Despite its imperfections, the sentimental genre constituted a means of publication for women authors that came with an avid audience with income security and a decreased risk of retribution. Indeed, writing in such a female-coded genre protected women authors from being perceived as a threat to the masculine institution of authorship. Thus, these women wrote with a sense of irony and a grudging adherence to certain features of the genre. In her vivid descriptions of the soiled underbelly of the female experience, particularly the grotesque characterization of pregnant bodies, Peyrebrune renounces the carefully curated precious language of sensibility. However, both she and Lesueur also adhere to the major plot points of meeting, disjuncture, and final coming together in happiness or misery, that Constans identified as being inherent to the sentimental genre. Indeed, the ending of both novels seems to reinforce the idea of the precarious condition of the female mind.

Over the course of this chapter, I will provide context on cultural and literary milieu at the end of the century in France before describing dominant views during the period on women's

minds and why neurosis was thought to disproportionately and gravely affect them. Next, I will analyze Peyrebrune and Lesueur's goals for their novels and how this informs the choices they made regarding narrative construction (including the type of disability they write about) as well as publishing. Finally, I will examine how the nature of the heroines' 'defects' (neuroses) calls into question their status as *femmes* and study the extent to which this creates space for these women to assert their independence and subvert traditional sentimental genre forms.

Fin-de-siècle Cultural and Literary Context

At end of the nineteenth century, a period of social and scientific change occurred that left France grappling with the slippery state of modernity. Out of this context rose decadence, an artistic and literary movement, which became widespread in Western Europe during the 1880s and 1890s but faded away by 1900. Historians agree that Decadence as a movement eludes capture through a unified definition, as it remained inherently fluid. Therefore, my task here is not to provide such a definition, but to enumerate a few common aspects of Decadence that held profound influence over French literature and culture at the time when Peyrebrune and Lesueur wrote. As Mary Gluck has noted, the discourse of involved a strong sense of self-identification with Ancient Rome before its decline. Essentially, it suggested that the current historical moment was unprecedented and had created a milieu such that Europe could no longer aspire to the perfection of classical culture, a view which represented a reversal of Enlightenment discourse on progress.

The Decadent movement was equally concerned with understanding the ways in which urban city centers, such as Paris, had transformed the everyday lives of Europeans. In 1892, German psychiatrist, Max Nordau, argued in his influential text *Entartung* (translated as

Degeneration in 1968) that such metropoles had erased boundaries between public and private spheres, promoting a culture of 'excessive individualism,' a clear reference to Paul Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1882-1885). In his essays, Bourget famously wrote,

> Par le mot de décadence, on désigne volontiers l'état d'une société qui produit un trop grand nombre d'individus impropres aux travaux de la vie commune. Une société doit être assimilée à un organisme…elle se résout en une fédération d'organismes moindres, qui se résolvent eux-mêmes en une fédération de cellules…L'organisme social…entre en décadence aussitôt que la vie individuelle s'est exagérée sous l'influence du bien-être acquis et de l'hérédité. (Bourget, 24-25)
>
> (By decadence…we mean the state of being in a society which produces too few individuals adapted to the communal life. A society should be compared to an organism…It is made up of a federation of lesser organisms, which are, in their turn, made up of a federation of cells…The social organism becomes decadent the moment that individual life becomes exaggerated under the influence of learned well-being and heredity.)

Essentially a society, like an organism, goes through stages of development: youth, maturity, decline, and death. A society moves into a state of decline when elements of the maturity phase are exaggerated to a pathological degree as a function of both nature and nurture. Such a definition evokes concerns about the changing ways in which people viewed their social roles and obligations.

These fears became particularly acute with regard to women and were exacerbated by changes in education policy. In 1880, for example, the Camille Sée law mandated the creation of public, secular high schools for young women. Then, in 1882, the government enacted the Jules Ferry legislation, requiring free, secular education for girls from the ages of six to thirteen. The curriculum focused on reading and writing, essential skills to create informed cultivated citizens of the French Republic. Women and girls also experienced unprecedented access to novels and periodicals thanks to the rotary printing press and the resulting mass-printing capacity. Such advancements meant that women of all socio-economic levels were reading and writing at much

higher rates than before and seeking related work. For this, they faced forceful resistance from a variety of sources in the literary, medical, and legal fields as well as from a few vocal female critics. No one knew exactly how an increasingly strenuous education would interact with the female mind and many feared grave consequences for the social structure. In the context of Bourget's commentary on the Decadent organism, this meant the worst degeneration stemming from a woman asserting her subjectivity and prioritizing her needs and desires over those of society and raising children who would do the same, specifically through abandonment of family values, sexual deviance, nervous crises, infertility, and drug usage.

Indeed, the usage of opium to facilitate access to all parts of the mind, including the unconscious, became a regular part of Decadent writers' practice. Earlier in the nineteenth century, opium had become a tool in the rebellion against the bourgeoisie and the culture of capability and production, promoted by the Industrial Revolution, as users would become isolated and withdrawn in their thoughts. By the late nineteenth century, opium use increased exponentially in France due to the discovery of a new method of ingestion. As Howard Padwa has discussed in his 2012 study *Social Poison: The Culture and Politics of Opiate Control in Britain and France, 1821-1926*, French soldiers returning from French Indochina, began bringing smokable opium (*chandu*) with them[123]. The ritual of smoking then solidified opium as the drug of choice for artists seeking inspiration in the dreamlike state induced by its ingestion. While this was an accepted and romanticized aspect of the life of a male writer as well as being legal, it remained taboo for women. Indeed, fractures, as exemplified by the at times contentious relationship between Peyrebrune and Rachilde, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, appeared within the community of late nineteenth-century women authors due

[123] Padwa also notes that Britain did not suffer from the same opiate crisis as the government responded differently to this public health issue.

to disagreements over the lifestyle, particularly this recreational drug use, associated with their profession.

In terms of their literary production, authors of Decadent texts (most often novels and poems)[124] adhered to an aesthetic ideology of excess and artificiality both in content and form. In content, Decadent novels were permeated by self-disgust, sickness at the world, general skepticism, delight in perversion, use of crude humor, and assertion of the superiority of human creativity over logic and the natural world. They often opposed nature, both in terms of biological nature and norms relating to morality and sexual behavior. Novels written in a Decadent style were characterized by exaggerated formal elements, namely vocabulary and syntax. Some viewed this as an overly ornamented attempt to compensate for a sore lack of content, while others considered it the "only style capable of expressing the super-refinements of an old civilization" (Smith, 644). As Bourget noted, such an overemphasis on form led to the disintegration of the novel as a whole: "Un style de décadence est celui où l'unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance de la page, où la page se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser la place à l'indépendance du mot" ("A decadent style is one where the unity of the book decomposes to leave space for the independence of the page, where the page decomposes to leave space for the independence of the sentence, and the sentence to leave space for the independence of the word") (Bourget, 118). Other techniques often used in Decadent literature included transposition of art and synaesthesia,

[124] Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) and his circle popularized the elements and advantages of Decadence in literature. Verlaine self-identified as a "décadent," a term that had already been the subject of a collection of parodies, *Les Déliquescences d'Adoré Floupette* (The Delinquencies of Adoré Floupette) (1885), by Adoré Floupette (1871-1949), Gabriel Vicaire (1848-1900), and Hénri Beauclair (1860-1919). He then went on to contribute to a review, *Le Décadent* (The Decadent) (1886-1889), founded by Anatole Baju (1861-1903), defending decadence. The aforementioned authors claimed Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) as their inspiration and counted Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), and Tristan Corbière (1845-1875) among their community. They also saw themselves in conversation with their English counterparts, such as Arthur Symons (1865-1945), Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Ernest Dowson (1867-1900), and Lionel Johnson (1867-1902).

the latter of which was seen by critics as a symptom of neurosis,[125] a condition that we will discuss in greater detail a bit later. While neither *Névrosée* nor *Une décadente* constitutes a Decadent novel, both respond to the context of literary and cultural Decadence in which they were written.

The Goals for the Novel

Mathilde Marie Georgina Élisabeth de Peyrebrune Judicis (George[s] de Peyrebrune) (1841-1917) was born an illegitimate child to a wealthy land-owning father in Pierrebrune, France (from which she created her family name, Peyrebrune). Due to her origins, she resented men who seduced and abandoned their victims and, consequently, chose a marriage of convenience over a romantic one. Despite dissatisfaction with her husband, she never took a lover, though not for lack of opportunity. Traditional as she was, she dreamed of being a mother, not a professional writer. However, years into her unhappy marriage, childless, and drowning in debt, Peyrebrune decided to take control of her life by earning a living as a novelist.

Despite the humiliations she suffered at the hands of her husband, financially ruined by the costs associated with his infidelity, she continued to assume responsibility for paying their debts and spend time with him at their family home. Over the course of her career, Peyrebrune published over thirty novels under at least three different pseudonyms, all of which were coded masculine,[126] and served on the Prix Femina jury. She is often characterized as a problematic

[125] According to French writer André Barre in his 1911 study, *Le symbolisme: essai historique sur le movement poétique en France de 1885 à 1900* (Symbolism: Historical Essay on the poetic movement in France from 1885 to 1900), "Seuls en nos temps d'intensifs névrophathes ont la faculté de percevoir des sons colorés" ("Only in our time extreme neuropaths have the capacity to perceive colors in sounds") (307).
[126] Ellen Constans has noted that in addition to publishing under variations of her given name such as George[s] de Peyrebrune and Judicis de la Mirandole, Peyrebrune published as Hunedelle, Marco, and Petit Bob (*Ouvrières des Lettres*, 47).

figure whose feminism was undeniable and contradictory in equal measure. She strove to shed light on the hardships of being a woman writer but often reified conservative and traditional stances in her work. Peyrebrune never lost sight of the reason she started writing: to earn money. However, the compromises she had to make to appease her editors weighed on her. They also served as the inspiration for her novel, *Le Roman d'un bas-bleu* (1892). In it, she expounded upon several key difficulties inherent to being a woman writer. Notably, women often had to complete most of the housework when hiring help was not a financially feasible option, which reduced their writing time and made what little time they had to write less productive because of the energy it took. Furthermore, Peyrebrune notes that women also assumed most caregiving duties for those around them. She, herself, cared for her elderly, handicapped mother, who needed constant attention. Later, she looked after her young friend, Henry Colas de Malvost, a painter, who was ill with tuberculosis. She also cared for her husband whose health was delicate.

Additionally, Peyrebrune, along with her friend Camille Delaville (1833-1888), a journalist and novelist who founded two periodicals (*Le Passant* and the *Revue Verte*), served as mother figures for their younger colleague Marguerite Vallette-Eymery, better known as Rachilde (1860-1953). Indeed, a correspondence between and Delaville and Peyrebrune confirms that the two women were concerned for Rachilde's mental health. As Camille Delaville puts it:

> Je n'ai plus entendu parler [de Rachilde] depuis des temps infinis, depuis sa maladie et son départ pour le Périgord, je vais lui écrire, je la secoue ferme et la blâme fort, lorsqu'elle fait des machines comme *Monsieur Vénus* et surtout lorsqu'elle se complaît à en parler avec délice chez moi à tous les hommes, je la blâme aussi lorsqu'elle va au *Chat Noir*, jadis aux *Hirsutes*, en lire des chapitres mais je l'aime bien et c'est surtout à sa mère que j'en veux. Si on peut en vouloir à un être humain d'être fou. (Letter 18)
>
> (I have not heard from Rachilde for a long time since her illness and her departure for Périogord. I am going to write to her. I shake her firmly and blame her strongly, when she makes machines like *Monsieur Vénus* and especially when she indulged herself to speak of it with delight at my home with all the men. I also blame her when she reads chapters

> of it at *Black Cat*, formerly *Hirsutes*, but I love her and it is mainly her mother that I resent, if one can resent a crazy person.)

In this passage, Delaville blames Rachilde for exacerbating her condition through her obsession with Decadent novels. She also lays culpability at the feet of Rachilde's "crazy" mother, presumably for not having educated her in a 'proper' manner. In doing so, Delaville parrots what constitute, as we will see in the following section, dominant end-of-the-century discourses surrounding the female brain, which warned against the vicious cycle of woman partaking in excessive and rigorous intellectual activity that would damage their mental health and leave them ill-equipped to raise well-adjusted daughters, and thus passing their afflictions on to them. In keeping with her more conservative perspective, Delaville also expresses discomfort with Rachilde's disruption of gender norms both through her career interests and her manner of behaving around men, daring to discuss the contents of her novel, *Monsieur Vénus*, which deals with themes of sex, marital infidelity, and reversal of gender roles, with them. Beneath her reactionary views on gender, though, lies genuine concern, which Peyrebrune seems to share, for a person whom she considers a surrogate daughter. Indeed, Michael R. Finn goes as far as to argue in his article, "Physiological Fictions and the Fin-de-Siècle Female Brain," that "Peyrebrune chose to employ in *Une décadente*, a transparent *roman à clefs* as a way of warning Rachilde that her lifestyle was potentially a danger to herself and very troubling for her friends" (322). As we can see, this was a difficult time to be working as a female author in France, when women struggled with the at times competing needs of taking care of one another and themselves and becoming successful in a male-dominated field.

For this reason, Peyrebrune developed a deep understanding of and ability to navigate the literary world. In terms of publishing, Peyrebrune made her debut thanks to the stamp of

approval of her recognized writer friends, such as Arsène Houssaye (1815-1896)[127] and Tony Révillon (1832-1898), which allowed her to establish her legitimacy as an author and quickly gain notoriety. However, she still encountered resistance to supporting her publication from other sources. Peyrebrune attempted to publish in the *La Nouvelle Revue*, a journal run by her friend and confidant, Juliette Lamber, the author of *Laide* (1878), but Lamber, refused to publish Peyrebrune's *Gatienne* (1884) because she found it to be too shocking. This decision seems out of character for Lamber, who presented herself as a fierce defender of women's rights and one who did not shy away from confrontation nor from shocking her audience. As discussed in the previous chapter, the title of her novel *Laide*, is designed to shock the audience by subverting expectations about female protagonists. Interestingly, Lamber never published any of Peyrebrune's manuscripts in *La Nouvelle Revue*. She did, however, hold Peyrebrune in high esteem, as a talented writer who did not shy away from the discussion of difficult topics.

Lesueur, a recipient of the *Légion d'honneur*, also made strategic publishing decisions. She often engaged with the Decadent movement and late nineteenth-century medical discourses surrounding the inferiority of the female brain in her text. Like Georges de Peyrebrune, she was known as a moderate conservative who disliked the term "feminist," by then a widely used term and concept, but still worked for marriage reform and equal pay for women. She grew up in Paris and England, allowing her to become bilingual. Though she did not have the opportunity to further her studies through higher education, she educated herself by reading novels and poetry from authors such as Victor Hugo and Alfred de Musset (1810-1857) and she formed a lasting friendship with Juliette Lamber. The death of several of her siblings and the disappearance of her father and the financial difficulties that followed for her family, made it necessary for her to find

[127] After reading the manuscript for Peyrebrune's *Marco* (1881), Houssaye vouched for her work by speaking to the editor of the *Revue des deux mondes* on her behalf.

a means of supporting herself. She thus found a job as a reader for August Cuvillier-Fleury, member of the Académie française, and tutor for young girls from wealthy families, like Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis did.

Lesueur spent the next several years writing and publishing her novels, winning three awards from the Académie française. However, despite her literary achievements, she was refused admission to the Société des Gens de Lettres in 1890. This decision provoked public outcry in the press and she was consequently accepted by the committee the following year, becoming the first woman to join it.[128] To this day, she has received less scholarly attention than her female contemporaries, due in part to perception of her as an 'incomplete feminist'. This critique refers to both thematic and formal elements of her writing. Like Peyrebrune, she privileges traditional themes and use of sentimental codes in her writing, particularly as they relate to love plots and male and female protagonists' roles in them. However, Lesueur's work may be read alongside that of her female contemporaries to reveal how she uses disability and sentimental codes in her novels to create moments of resistance to dominant discourses on the inferiority of the female (brain). This aim is particularly apparent in *Névrosée*, which, as Michael Finn has noted, can be seen as an engagement specifically with Jean-Marie Guyau's 1889 text *Éducation et hérédité* in which he enumerates reasons why women should not partake in intense scholastic study and the harm such an education could do to their minds and bodies, especially their reproductive systems (322-323). Guyau's text was hardly the first to make these types of claims about the perils of women engaging in intellectual and political pursuits, but Loiseau may have chosen to respond to his text because it was published posthumously, and therefore offered her more protection from retribution.

[128] George Sand had previously been invited but did not attend general meetings.

Lesueur attempted to position her book for consideration apart from her gender by writing under a pseudonym. Calmann-Lévy, the editor of her first novels, required her to publish as "Daniel Lesueur." This appellation combines the name of one of her maternal ancestors, Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847), with the name of her mother Marie-Henriette Lesueur (1799-1890). The choice of a masculine pseudonym was common among her female contemporaries, such as Georges de Peyrebrune, George Sand, and Rachilde.[129] However, in contrast to Rachilde, who incorporated a masculine authorial persona into her daily life, Peyrebrune and Lesueur elected to limit it to their signatures on their published novels.[130]

For Nancy Miller, this constitutes, perhaps, a lost opportunity. As she argues in her study, *Subject to Change*, the gender of the author is part of the story and the act of signing one's literary production as a woman enables "resistance to dominant ideologies;…[it] is the site of possible political disruption" (17). However, the choice of publishing under a masculine pseudonym while maintaining the open secret of their gender identity allowed Peyrebrune and Lesueur to shed light on the contradictions inherent in the contemporary discourses surrounding women authors. As previously discussed, literature was an intellectual, and therefore masculine, space. A woman's success in it, was thus attributed to her 'masculine mind.' However, as a woman she was still relegated to the less threatening sentimental genre. Nevertheless, the choice of three such prominent female novelists to masculinize their signatures evidences the vitriol to which they were subjected for their choice to write.

[129] In her article on Rachilde in *French Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book* (1991), Melanie Hawthorne notes that Rachilde often dressed as a man and referred to herself with masculine pronouns in her correspondences, leading many to believe that she was a man. She also occasionally published under a second masculine pseudonym, Jean de Childra, an anagram of Rachilde (347).
[130] Peyrebrune routinely addresses Lesueur as "Mme D. Lesueur", as Nelly Sanchez notes in her 2016 critical edition of Peyrebrune's correspondences, *Correspondance de la Société de lettres au jury prix Vie heureuse*.

Nineteenth-Century Conceptions of Neurosis

As Michael Finn has noted in his 2017 study, *Figures of the Pre-Freudian Unconscious from Flaubert to Proust,* by the nineteenth century, the field of medicine had become fixated on the idea of the duality of the mind; the idea that there was a part of the mind (the un/sub-conscious[131] mind), over which one could not exert control, that influenced aspects of human thinking and behavior. The dual mind was cited as a contributing cause to most forms of mental illness and also served as a baseline assumption for doctors seeking to treat the insane. Indeed, Philippe Pinel's (1745-1826) landmark "traitement moral" ("moral treatment") was based on the idea that insanity could be cured by reaching and supporting the part of the affected person's mind still governed by reason.[132]

One of the most common conditions thought to arise out of the duality of the mind during the nineteenth century was neurosis. The term "neurosis" was coined by William Cullen, a Scottish doctor, in 1769 to refer to "disorders of sense and motion" caused by a "general affection of the nervous system," including hypochondria, neurasthenia, and, of course, hysteria. J.M. Lopez Pienero has argued that when Philippe Pinel translated Cullen's book into French during the early years of the nineteenth century, he introduced the functional interpretation that is often misunderstood to be part of Cullen's original definition.[133] That is to say that though it was initially not defined as such, thanks in part to Pinel, neurosis came to serve as a catch-all term for disorders and symptoms that could not be explained physiologically. There were attempts during the mid-nineteenth century to introduce general pathologizing properties of the nervous system,

[131] Medical professionals displayed a certain ambivalence towards terminology, to the point where they used such terms interchangeably within the same medical text.
[132] In this context, bourgeois family values became the norms against which pathologized conditions were measured.
[133] "Pinel's view of the neuroses, although transitional and only partially anatomoclinical, was influential on their evolution in that it made them lose their character of 'general disease.' Despite this transformation, the neuroses proved resistant to anatomical reduction and remained as an island of functional pathology in the midst of the new morphological programme" (Pienero, 49-50).

such as Benjamin Travers's notion of "constitutional irritation," but none gained a strong enough foothold to displace the understanding of neurosis as a functional disorder. There were also attempts to revive the association between neuroses and unstable nerve tissue.[134] Strong feelings could upset the nervous system, causing it to constantly produce dysfunctional bodily sensations. Individual neuroses then followed a trajectory of degeneration and extinction at the turn of the twentieth century as discoveries in the field of neurology led to greater understanding of the anatomical basis for illnesses such as epilepsy, leading to their removal from the parent category of neurosis. Those in the field of psychiatry began engaging with the concept of neurosis during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, at the same time as it disappeared from neurology. It changed from denoting serious diseases of the nerves to less severe psychiatric disorders. Psychiatrists of this period associated neuroses with a wide range of symptoms from obsession with certain tasks, general listlessness, a lack of appetite, paleness, deviance in sexual behavior and gender presentation, to infertility and increased risk of miscarriage for women. These symptoms varied in severity depending upon the psychic conflict the afflicted individual experienced.

The treatment for neurosis evolved over the course of the nineteenth century as developments in the domain of psychiatry lead to an increased awareness of individual desires, motivations, and fears, hidden in the recesses of the human mind. Often, individuals diagnosed with neurosis were committed to asylums.[135] This was a necessary course of treatment, according

[134] See Hughlings, Jackson, J.'s 1873 article, "On the Anatomical and Physiological Localisation of Movements in the Brain."

[135] It is worth noting, however, that not all patients receiving treatment in asylums for neurosis actually suffered from it. The French asylum system was heavily critiqued by contemporary activists for the rampant abuse of it by scheming relatives looking to secure an inheritance or dispense of 'troublesome' relatives—those who did not adhere to bourgeois family values, namely heteronormative expectations of marriage and child-bearing—by institutionalizing them. Jessie Hewitt has noted in her 2020 study, *Institutionalizing Gender: Madness, the Family, and Psychiatric Power in Nineteenth-Century France* that women were much more likely to be institutionalized by men, than by other women, and that they petitioned (unsuccessfully) for release at a much higher rate than men.

to leading experts in the field of psychiatry during the nineteenth century, such as Philippe Pinel (1745-1826), Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol (1772-1840) and Étienne-Jean Georget (1795-1828), because while risk factors such as gender and heredity played a role in susceptibility to mental illnesses including neurosis, toxic family dynamics often triggered it. While most psychiatrists at the time practiced re-immersing patients in 'healthy' bourgeois family dynamics by playing the role of the father figure, during the mid-century Esprit Blanche (1796-1852) pioneered the technique of treating patients by fully assimilating them into a functioning bourgeois family (his own).[136]

Patient interactions with the outside world continued to be a point of contention towards the end of the century with some, such as Charles Féré (1852-1907), suggesting that strict separation should be maintained between patients and their families to protect the patients' families from contamination. However, others, such as Évariste Marandon de Montyel (1851-1908), believed like Esprit Blanche that maintaining contact between patients and functioning society would have a positive effect. The stakes of this debate were heightened by Jean-Martin Charcot's (1825-1893) work on hypnosis and its penetration into popular French consciousness. This was due, in large part, to novelists' widespread use of it as a plot device[137] and Charcot's public demonstrations of hypnosis on hysterical patients. Charcot's research represented a shift towards understanding brain chemistry that formed the foundation of modern neurology. Indeed, Charcot argued that hysteria and other types of neurosis could affect both male and female

[136] In his emphasis on family dynamics, Blanche also created unique opportunities for women to hold leadership roles and interact with patients from a position of medical authority, couched as it was in the rhetoric of women as caregivers, drawing on their healing experience in the home. Blanche's technique was also remarkable in that it gave patients more freedom than they could acheive in other state-owned institutions.

[137] In novels, hypnosis often operated as a tactic used by villains to carry out crimes or force others to perform criminal acts for them. One of the most famous examples is George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), which depicts a male character using hypnotic techniques to influence a young female character so that he may profit off of her career. The novel, originally published in England with large portions of dialogue in French, became a cultural phenomenon in Western Europe.

brains. However, he and his contemporaries still insisted upon the increased susceptibility of the female brain to such problems. Indeed, the female herself, in her biological and mental unknowability to male physicians and writers, had come to embody this unconsciousness. In a constant state of reaction to external stimuli, women were thought to not understand the motivations behind their actions any more than the men who surrounded them. Thus, with such diminished capacity to reason, they remained increasingly susceptible to suggestion to abandon their feminine nature, triggering psychic conflict and neurosis. Similarly, any man suffering from similar symptoms was thought to be experiencing the ill-effects of a feminized mind. As previously discussed, this narrative then became entangled with the concern over the legacy of Romanticism, contributing to widespread concern over the supposed ill effects of the feminized, sensitive, emotional rhetoric employed by Romantic artists on the vulnerable minds of their audience and the artists themselves.

The Disability's Effect on the Narrative Structure

The remainder of the chapter examines the two texts that best exemplify the fin-de-siècle trend of depicting neurosis in female characters to explore the evolution of techniques employed by French women novelists writing in this subgenre. Namely, I study how Lesueur and Peyrebrune describe their protagonist's condition, the strategies they deploy to establish them as at times sentimental and anti-sentimental, and the obstacles the disability creates within the world of the novel. This allows me to interrogate the degree to which each author leverages the disability depicted to assert the agency of female characters. Furthermore, this method affords me the opportunity to probe the increasing vitriol that women authors faced towards the end of the century.

Both Peyrebrune and Lesueur depict a type of neurosis in their female protagonists, resulting in some common narrative challenges to which these authors respond in their novels. The narrator and secondary characters of each text describe the neurotic heroine as a beautiful blonde woman with uncommon intellect, cultivated from an early age through indulgence of a passion for reading about science and philosophy. Her academic prowess immediately attracts the attention of the hero. Her experience is then interpreted through the lens of contemporary theories on the inferiority of the female brain. Indeed, in *Une décadente*, Marcus notes, "Hélione s'achemine visiblement vers un détraquement de tout son organisme…grâce à l'excitation nerveuse que son cerveau surchauffé communique à tous son être" ("Hélione is visibly making her way towards her entire organism becoming unhinged…thanks to the nervous excitation that her overheated brain communicates to her entire being") (Peyrebrune, 11-12). Similarly, in *Névrosée*, the narrator laments, "L'exaltation systématique du cerveau, très malsaine chez la femme, avait déformé de bonne heure ses conceptions de la vie, de l'amour, du mariage, et même de la science. La réalité lui paraissait comme la banqueroute de ses rêves" ("The systemic excitement of the very unhealthy brain of the woman, had warped her conceptions of life, love, marriage, and even of science early on. Reality appeared to her as the bankruptcy of her dreams") (Lesueur, 141-142). As we can see, in each work, the heroine's neurosis is classified, by a medical professional and the narrator, respectively, as a problem that begins in the mind, as the weaker, susceptible female brain succumbs to the ill effects of constant excitement. This then has negative consequences for her entire body as well as for her capacity to fulfill her social role. While neither of the protagonists in the novels studied in this chapter are formally institutionalized, each finds herself under the care of physicians who make use of techniques

enumerated in the previous section, particularly as it relates to immersing her in 'healthy' bourgeois family dynamics to restore her mental equilibrium.

Furthermore, as neurosis had come to embody the dangers of extreme sensibility, Peyrebrune and Lesueur's relationship to the sentimental genre, which was based upon the value of inherent sensibility, was even more fraught than that of writers who came before them. While both authors recognized the need to adhere to sentimental codes in their novels to publish successfully and avoid the worst of the fin-de-siècle vitriol directed towards intellectual women, they, like their predecessors, employed a neurotically disabled character to push the boundaries of the genre. In accordance with sentimental codes, the love story between the two protagonists becomes clear early in the novel and operates as a plot device throughout the entire book. The cast of characters also remains small throughout the novel to intensify the emotions expressed. The heroine's focus, though, is constantly taking her away from this. While a *sensible* woman was endowed with superior powers of discernment and compassion, an overly *sensible* (or neurotic) woman would be led astray by all manner of curiosity and predisposition to neurosis that could lead her to prioritize a rigorous course of study traditionally reserved for men over marriage and motherhood. This could lead to discontentment in relationships, gender and sexual deviance, and physical health problems, such as infertility; all elements with the potential to disrupt the traditional sentimental genre. Indeed, a neurotic heroine creates inherent problems for the narrative structure that is constructed based on a heteronormative love story: the protagonist's perspective comes into conflict with that of the narrator, as she becomes convinced that her desires cannot be satisfied through marriage with the hero of the novel. This tension over whether the heroine will fulfill her role as a wife and mother plays out differently in each work. The remainder of the chapter will look at how the authors describe their main character's

'disability,' the strategies they use to deploy her neurosis to disrupt the codes of the sentimental genre, and how this creates opportunities to critique contemporary discourse on the female mind, but ultimately recedes into a curious, but largely conventional ending that reinforces them.

Crafting a Neurotic Heroine

In the case of Peyrebrune and Lesueur's heroines, they indulge the most 'dangerous' type of neurotic impulse; that which drives them towards intellectual pursuits from a young age, as an external analepsis informs us.[138] Doctors and the narrator in both texts quickly denounce those who raised the heroines: aging grandparents with outdated Positivist views on education and what was best for the young girl in their care. Hélione and her sister, for example, were orphaned and raised "sous la tutelle impuissante d'une vieille grand-mère très infirme" ("under the powerless care of an elderly and very sickly grandmother") (Peyrebrune, 27). Though they had an English governess (Miss Holten), the narrator suggests that, as a withdrawn person interested in philosophy, she did not constitute the sort of caregiver Hélione needed. In fact, she encouraged Hélione's obsessive scholarly activities, allowing her to read "quelque œuvre cabalistique, quelque grimoire d'alchimie, pour s'aider à commenter le *Faust* de Gœthe, dont elle lisait et relisait jusqu'à la fièvre les pages d'amère, décevante et mystique philosophie" ("some cabalistic work, some alchemy grimoire, to help her to comment on Gœthe's *Faust*, of which she read and reread the pages of bitter, disappointing and mystical philosophy to the point of fever") (30). Here, Peyrebrune also returns to a tried and true early-nineteenth-century strategy that we see in *Anatole* and *Olivier, ou le secret*: implicating foreign influence (England and its infamous melancholia), rather than failing French social values, as a contributing factor to the heroine's

[138] A term coined by Gérard Genette, which describes events that began and ended before the beginning of the first narrative. See Genette's *Nouveau Discours du récit* (1983).

mental health problems, via the character of Miss Holten. Étiennette and her sister faced similar challenges in *Névrosée*. They were also orphaned and raised by their aristocratic grandparents in Paris (a city that embodies modernity and the new stimulation it continually provides), an environment in which "rien n'a contrôlé, restreint pour elle, cette passion des livres" ("nothing controlled, restrained for her, this passion for books") (Lesueur, 218).

The mistake of these respective caregivers, the narrators note, placed these young women in the state of constant stimulation that came with a demanding education at a crucial time for their brain development, pushing them down the path of neurosis by instilling in them a false sense of hubris. According to the narrator in *Une décadente*, Hélione gives in to "cette poussée funeste d'un désir incomplet et faux d'émancipation qui jette toutes les femmes de la jeune génération hors du gynécée, à la poursuite d'une gloire artistique quelconque, d'une célébrité, d'une renommée qui les classent ou, mieux, les déclassent en les consacrant 'artistes'" ("this doomed drive of an incomplete and false desire of emancipation that throws all women of the young generation out of the gynaeceum, in the pursuit of some artistic glory, of celebrity, of a renown that categorizes them or, rather, downgrades them by calling them 'artists'") (Peyrebrune, 31-32). Here, the narrator displays contempt towards Hélione's individualistic mindset, according to which she seeks to set herself apart from other women, by defining it as a problem that affects many women of her generation. Similarly, the narrator in *Névrosée* laments that Étiennette's "facile intelligence l'avait fait se prendre à ce piège d'orgueil" ("effortless intelligence had caused her to fall into this trap of pride") (Lesueur, 122). Indeed, being raised in this environment, the narrators affirm, resulted in the production of two women ill-equipped to navigate the rapidly evolving nature of modern life, and thus predisposed to neuroses. However, by laying a portion of the blame with Hélione herself, the narrator of *Une décadente* foreshadows

hope for her integration into society. In contrast to the narrator of *Névrosée*'s matter of fact account of the factors that led to Étiennette's undoing, the narrator of *Une décadente* utilizes a more urgent tone, implying that Hélione has the power to change her fate, which is, indeed, what occurs.

Consequences

The symptoms of neurosis in each work appear wide-ranging both in terms of type and severity, making the character experiencing them unpredictable; a useful narrative device for women authors seeking ways to disrupt the stale conventions of the sentimental genre. Instead of relying on her sensibility as her true north to maintain her morality, each neurotic heroine is driven by mysterious and ever-shifting internal desires illegible to those who surround them. These desires cause physical, behavioral, and mental/emotional changes that cast her not as a sentimental heroine, but as an anti-sentimental one.

By examining the general symptoms of neurosis in each heroine, we can see the barriers they represent to her fulfillment of her social role as a wife and mother. In *Une décadente*, for instance, the narrator describes Hélione, in her state of progressed neurosis, as "Languissante, distraite, bougeant à peine, le regard perdu, la pensée absente, envolée à la poursuite de quelque abstraction, pendant que ses doigts fins, très pointus caressaient nerveusement la fourrure électrique d'un jeune chat aux yeux d'or cruels" ("Languishing, distracted, barely moving, staring off into space, absent-minded, taken away in the pursuit of some abstraction, while her thin, very pointy fingers nervously petted the electric fur on a young cat with cruel golden eyes") (Peyrebrune, 42). The narrator in *Névrosée* highlights a similar deterioration in Étiennette's mental state and behavior that accompany negative effects on her overall appearance: "ses

grands yeux bleu sombre se bistraient ; ses traits paraissaient tirés ; sa fraîche peau blanche se marquait, vers les tempes, de légères taches plombées. Et une langueur toute nouvelle, chaque jour plus invincible, la retenait constamment étendue sur le sofa de son petit salon" ("Her somber big blue eyes turned bister; her traits appeared drawn; her young white skin became marked, near the temples, with subtle dark spots. And an all new languish, each day more overwhelming, kept her constantly stretched out on the sofa of her little sitting room") (Lesueur, 195). She also begins having "des journées entières de mutisme et de larmes, des colères folles, des fantaisies insensées" ("entire days of mutism and tears, crazy fits of anger, mad visions") (222). As we can see, Hélione and Étiennette's, general symptoms involve "languishing;" specifically emotional volatility, a decline in physical appearance (color fading from her eyes, fatigue, skin problems, etc.), distraction, and fidgeting, all of which recall the contemporary medical beliefs about neuroses as we saw in the previous section. The description of Étiennette also recalls Decadent aesthetics of rotting—her eyes change color from blue to a brownish-yellow (bister) and her previously flawless skin becomes spotted with blemishes, a shift which would also indicate aging and cast doubt upon her ability to conceive and bear children.

Indeed, neurosis presents not only mental and emotional obstacles to marriage and motherhood, but also physical ones. Étiennette's condition, consistent with contemporary medical understanding of the consequences of neurosis, has negative effects on her reproductive system. When Étiennette continues to experience symptoms of her neurosis during her pregnancy, her seasoned physician, Dr. Berger-Ricard, reveals to Maxime "Eh bien, le corps frêle de votre jeune femme est mal préparée pour la maternité. Elle a dû recevoir une éducation trop sédentaire, trop intellectuelle…C'est extrêmement mauvais pour les jeunes filles" ("Well your young wife's frail body is not well prepared for maternity. She must have received too

sedentary, too intellectual an education…It's extremely bad for young girls") (141-142). When she later suffers a miscarriage in her fifth month of pregnancy, a late-term miscarriage, Maxime summarizes it as an unavoidable consequence of the damage Étiennette's education inflicted on her tense reproductive system during her youth, lamenting, "la cause est lointaine, et nous n'y pouvions plus rien depuis longtemps. Étiennette a trop travaillé de la tête au moment où la femme, chez elle, se formait" ("The cause is in the distant past, and the time when we could have done something is long gone. Étiennette worked with her head too much at the moment when the woman, within her, was being formed") (218). The use of "la femme" in the second sentence of this passage serves both as an exaltation of an ideal and a refusal to recognize the individuality of women and their desires. Indeed, in his 1860 text *La Femme*, Jules Michelet (1789-1874) discusses the duality of women as the weaker sex that simultaneously contains the enormous potential, which is tragically not always realized, to give life.

The narrative trope of miscarriage appears in many texts in the tradition of French fiction, notably in Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres de Mistress Henley publiées par son amie* (1784) and in Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782), which, of course, takes inspiration from Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748). It is often associated with a fall from grace and a failing of Enlightenment values,[139] as it is in *Névrosée*: Étiennette was thought to be an exceptional woman of extraordinary intellect but the exertion of her mind causes her to fail as a woman in failing to produce a child. Scientific theories about the female mind were intimately linked to conceptions of the uterus, as evidenced by the evolution of the term "hysteria," which evolved

[139] As Julia K. De Pree notes in her article "La Fausse couche: Failed Potential and the Anti-Enlightenment": "In both French and English, the terms in and of themselves connote anti-Enlightenment notions. The English prefix *mis* in miscarriage marks negativity and failure, as in *mistake*, *misuse*, and *misunderstanding*. In French, the term *fausse couche* implies a false act that somehow lies on the other side of the real act, as if the miscarriage would be a ghost version of some past or future creation. The contrast of falseness versus truth is inscribed semantically in both languages" (31).

from a reference to a malady tied specifically to the uterus to one associated with the entire female body and mind. Both the female mind and uterus concealed activity which refused complete penetration by masculine scientific discovery and understanding, though Freud and Breuer's 1995 *Studies in Hysteria* would begin to address this gap.[140]

The question remains, if these heroines cannot serve as wives and mothers, what becomes of their relationship to their gender? As we will see with Hélione and Étiennette, both engage in non-heteronormative behaviors, coded at the time as gender and sexual deviance. In *Une décadente*, for example, Hélione is initially described as displaying masculine mannerisms and wearing a mix of masculine and feminine-coded clothing:

> Ella salua de la tête, d'un geste masculin, et vint secouer cavalièrement la main des deux hommes. Elle avait grand air, en dépit de la bizarrerie de son costume : jupe noire, étroite et courte ; veston noir, serré, ouvert sur un gilet de satin noir où pendait le bout sombre d'une cravate de dentelle épinglée d'un lis d'or. Les cheveux très ramassés, tassés autour de la tête ronde, petite et fine, blondissaient le front d'une nappe dorée coupée droit au-dessous des sourcils. Très pale, les paupières à peine soulevées, la lèvre dédaigneuse, le cou long, comme la Vénus de Milo. Un brin de lilas blanc fleurissait sa boutonnière masculine. (13-14)
>
> (She nodded her head, in a masculine gesture and brusquely shook the hands of the two men. She had an imposing demeanor, despite the oddity of her outfit: black skirt, narrow and short; tight black jacket, open over a black satin waistcoat from which pinned the somber end of a lace tie with a gold lily. Her hair, collected and pulled back around her small, dainty, and round head colored her forehead gold with a golden blanket, cut right above her eyebrows. She was very pale, her eyelids barely open, her lip scornful, her neck long, like Venus de Milo. A sprig of white lilac blossomed in her masculine buttonhole.)

Several times in this initial description, the narrator emphasizes Hélione's masculine qualities, both in terms of her mannerisms and clothing choices (the way she nods her head, her demeanor). However, the narrator also underscores her feminine physical traits, likening aspects

[140] For more on nineteenth century conceptions of hysteria and the inferiority of the female brain, see Evelyne Ender's *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Hysteria* (1995) as well as Janet Beizer's *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (1994) and Rachel Mesch's *The Hysteric's Revenge: Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (2006).

of her appearance to that of the *Venus de Milo*, a Hellenistic marble statue thought to represent the beautiful goddess of love Aphrodite. Such a reference held even more clout with a contemporary French audience; shortly after the statue was discovered in 1820, French authorities executed an extensive public relations campaign to promote the *Venus de Milo* as a greater national treasure than the *Venus de' Medici*, which France was forced to return to Italy in 1815 after it had been looted by Napoleon. As part of this French propaganda effort, artists and critics in turn praised the *Venus de Milo* as the epitome of female beauty. Peyrebrune, then, asserts Hélione's possession of the requisite feminine aesthetic characteristics by leveraging the newly powerful status of the *Venus de Milo*. Hélione defies categorization according to the rigid gender binaries enforced during the nineteenth century in France.

Furthermore, Hélione has no intention of marrying and her morbid descriptions of her sister's "difformé" ("deformed") (Peyrebrune, 119) pregnant body, make her revulsion at the idea of motherhood clear. Indeed, Hélione adheres to Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) philosophy on reproduction:[141] love is an illusion that the mind creates to establish a balanced environment in which to raise children, thereby satisfying the unconscious imperative present in human minds to carry on the species. She repeatedly distances herself from the negative stereotypes associated with women's brains declaring "Le hasard a fait de moi une femme ; ma volonté a fait de moi un homme" ("Chance made me a woman; my will made me a man") (20). Like Hélène in the previous chapter, Hélione does not attempt to resist the characterization of women as weak-minded, but instead aligns her mind with that of men. However, she also insists "J'ai la double jouissance de ma forme, de ma beauté, de mon intelligence virile et de ma liberté de penser et d'agir" ("I have the double enjoyment of my form, my beauty, my virile

[141] See Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, originally published in 1818.

intelligence, and my freedom to think and act") (*ibid.*), casting her hybridity (masculine mind and feminine body) as an asset of which she plans to take full advantage.

Hélione's attachment to Decadent trends, a culture which was associated with gender fluidity and sexual liberation, the crumbling of Republican values, also quick becomes apparent. She wears black clothing, alluding to the Decadent interest with the morbid. She also wears a floral pin as well as organic flowers, underscoring the tension between nature and artifice that motivated the rejection of Positivism characteristic of this movement. The narrator also notes that Hélione's eyes remain partially closed in this circumstance, which, when combined with her extreme paleness and Decadent clothing, serve as a sign that she is under the influence of drugs. Dr. Thiébaut pathologizes all of this elsewhere, in a tirade, that laments Hélione's inability to appreciate the virile Marcus, who stands apart from the "effeminate" (55) artists with whom she consorts. His assertion that Marcus constitutes objectively a perfect male specimen in whom any sane woman would be interested approaches the unspeakable specter of Hélione's queer desire.

In Étiennette's case, her curiosity drives her to read, observe, and desire new romantic and sexual encounters with individuals who are not her husband. Étiennette appears at first as the incarnation of the ideal sentimental heroine: an ingenue eager to learn, with a tender heart and dreams of love, marriage, and motherhood. However, shortly after marrying Maxime, she realizes that her life does not measure up to her expectations. After reading and learning about scientific discoveries throughout her childhood, she believed that being married to a scientific researcher would be exciting and that he would be making grand discoveries and contributions to human knowledge regularly. When she sees that this is not the case, she becomes restless and depressed, symptoms that worsen in the aftermath of her miscarriage. However, the possibility of

discovery of new experiences and sensations via a romantic liaison with her womanizing cousin, Norbert, revitalizes her.

Étiennette's sexual curiosity awakens when she witnesses Norbert discreetly kiss his lover on the ear mere steps away from her husband, a memory she returns to as a means of escaping her marital dissatisfaction (Lesueur, 181). From that point on, when Maxime lectures her during one of their disputes about all women suffering from the weakness of their sex being inferior to men, Étiennette "revoyait, dans sa pensée Norbert baisant l'oreille de la Comtesse. Tout ce qui détournait de cette image son regard intérieur l'excédait…Elle pourrait s'isoler à son aise, s'hypnotiser pour ainsi dire en face de ce petit acte, si rapide à peine entrevu, et qui bouleversait pour elle tout ce qu'elle croyait connaître de la vie" ("would see in her mind Norbert kissing the Countess's ear. All that distracted her inner gaze from this image, irritated her…She could keep to herself at her leisure, almost hypnotize herself when thinking of this small act, so quick, barely discernable, and which upset in her everything that she thought she knew about life") (Lesueur, 179). This description recalls Charcot's theory of the relationship between hypnosis and hysteria, namely that the latter arises when a person (usually a woman) enters a state of autohypnosis. In doing so, she makes herself vulnerable to further suggestion. It also evokes key masculine anxieties about the inner workings of the female mind. Eager to learn more about the taboo world of extra-marital affairs, Étiennette also begins reading *Autour de l'Adultère, psychologie d'une Névrosée*, a novel with a yellow cover that Étiennette describes as speaking to "les subtilités infinies" ("the infinite subtleties") (191) of women's feelings that Maxime's science fails to capture. Indeed, this process of exploration opens Étiennette up to all manner of curiosity and desire.

While out for a night at the Opera, Étiennette and Norbert steal away from the rest of their group with the intention of physically consummating their relationship. However, before departing they take in a rehearsal of a scene from an upcoming production from a hidden alcove; a monologue by "Une jeune femme, à figure de garçonnet vicieux, qui portait une perruque de cheveux blonds courts et plats avec un costume d'homme" ("A young woman, with a licentious, little boy face, who was wearing a wig of short, flat blond hair with a man's suit") (262). Watching this spectacle, Étiennette "se sentait prise, en face de toute cette scène bizarre, par une curiosité âpre, malsaine. Un vertige d'imagination la saisissait, la tenait penchée vers d'obscurs abîmes, plutôt pressentis qu'entrevus, dans une demi-fièvre où elle se trouvait bien" ("felt taken, in the face of all of this bizarre scene, by a cruel, unhealthy curiosity. A dizziness of imagination seized her, held her leaning towards, a more sensed than glimpsed, obscure abysses in a half-fever where she felt well") (264). She wonders aloud to Norbert if one of the men in the audience is Andréa's lover and he laughs, saying that she does not have "*un* amant" ("a *male* lover") (*ibid.*). Étiennette does not understand the implication of his words—that Andréa is a lesbian. She instead assumes that Andréa is "sage" ("wise") (*ibid.*) enough not to have one.

Norbert, finally sensing Étiennette's interest in Andréa, takes her by the arm and leads her out of the building and to his pavilion, saying "Partons…C'est très dangereux pour une femme de regarder Andréa si longtemps" ("Let us leave…It is very dangerous for a woman to look at Andréa for such a long time") (265), to reorient her sexual desire and curiosity towards him and away from the threat of homosexuality. Norbert's pavilion recalls a key symbol from one of the first sentimental novels in the French tradition, the pavilion in *La Princesse de Clèves*

(1678).[142] In Lafayette's novel, the Princess of Cleves would go to this sanctuary to resist temptation and find the will to fulfill her duty to her husband and then to his memory. In contrast, in *Névrosée*, it is associated with depravity because Norbert brings Étiennette there to seduce her and tempt her into beginning an extramarital affair, though this plot does not come to fruition because Suzanne arrives in time to interrupt it.

Diagnosis and Treatment: Sites of Masculine Anxieties

At this point, we have examined in detail the characteristics of Peyrebrune and Lesueur's neurotic heroines as well as their potential to disrupt and reroute the codes of the sentimental genre. Indeed, the genre revolves around a heroine whose sensibility serves as her compass, helping her to navigate the twists and turns of her life experiences in accordance with bourgeois values, the act of including a heroine of dubious sensibility. However, she increasingly debilitating symptoms of neurosis, which creates some narrative challenges to which the author must respond. Peyrebrune and Lesueur cannot focus on the heroine's perspective alone because it refuses containment within a sentimental novel structure. Thus, both authors turn to the trope of the prognosticating doctor to advance the sentimental plot by explaining and revealing the subconscious desires in the 'mentally incompetent' heroine and foreshadowing her decline, albeit a much less severe one in the case of Hélione.[143] In both texts, masculine voices open the novel with a discussion of the heroine's mental state and the problems it has caused. As we will see, in the case of *Une décadente*, a close reading of a portrait of Hélione that offers a window into her psyche catalyzes the conversation, one that continues throughout the novel. Hélione's sister

[142] More explicit references to the Princess of Cleves's pavilion can be found in novels published earlier in the nineteenth century, such as Georges Sand's *Valentine* (1832). Valentine also creates a space for herself, where she goes to resist her attraction to an 'unacceptable' suitor.
[143] See Peter Cryle's 2006 article, "Foretelling Pathology: The Poetics of Prognosis."

suggests that Hélione's inability to see the romantic appeal of one of her doctors, Marcus, will cause her to miss out on a perfect potentially husband and, more importantly, it will drive Marcus to madness. In *Névrosée*, Maxime's struggle to resist the allure of a female student in his class (Étiennette) motivates the discussion of issues introduced by Étiennette's aberrance. Despite his best attempts, he ultimately loses control, the first step down his path of suffering. Interestingly, in both works, the concern for the female protagonists' mental state always returns to how it affects the men that surround them.

As previously mentioned, *Une décadente* opens with a lengthy description of a painted portrait of the heroine, Hélione d'Orval, the heroine, as interpreted by Dr. Thiébaut and his colleague, Marcus, with occasional interventions from a third-person narrator who seems to share and reinforce their views. Dr. Thiébaut specializes in medical research and theory, while Marcus practices medicine in a clinical setting, benefitting from the former's discoveries (Peyrebrune, 10). Both are intrigued by the painting, an excessively ornate piece that depicts Hélione in luxurious clothing and expensive jewelry that brings into sharp relief her sickly pale skin and delicate frame. As previously discussed, this physical description recalls Peyrebrune's friend and mentee, Rachilde and her Decadent tastes. Indeed, the foggy mixing of colors gives the piece a sense of fantasy, reinforced by the presence of an apocalyptic beast in the corner that extends its claws towards Hélione. Dr. Thiébaut declares the spectacle "affreux" ("awful") (5), but Marcus responds: "c'est seulement étrange. Peut-être même est-ce très beau" ("it is only strange. Maybe it is even very beautiful") (6). Dr. Thiébaut considers Marcus's judgement to be clouded by his affection for Hélione and warns him:

> Ce portrait est moins encore l'œuvre du peintre que [celle d'Hélione propre]. C'est elle qui a imaginé ce dévergondage de blancheurs, ces effacements de teintes, ce vêtement dont la forme est copiée sur les vitraux byzantins, ce dragon et ce lis, parce que tout cela rentre dans le formulaire des préfaces artistiques du groupe des décadents, des

> déliquescents, des avancés dans le sens morbide du mot. Et parce qu'elle a tourné sa névrose de ce côté, elle s'est affolée de ce nihilisme transcendant que quelques jeunes fous ont mis à la mode au quartier Latin. (6-7)
>
> (This portrait is still less the work of the painter than [Hélione's own work]. It is she who imagined this excess of whites, this erasing of shades, this clothing of which the form of which is copied on byzantine stained-glass windows, this dragon and this lily, because all of that goes into the form of artistic prefaces of the group of decadents, of degenerates, of the spoiled in the morbid sense of the word. And because she directed her neurosis this way, she has gone mad with this transcending nihilism that some crazy youths made fashionable in the Latin Quarter.)

Dr. Thiébaut argues fells disturbed by the painting because, for him, it clearly reflects Hélione's worrying mental state, as though it sprung into existence directly from her imagination. This evokes an interruption and rerouting of the male creative process by her, not unlike that which took place in *Laide*. Once again, the final product reflects the heroine's 'deficiency' instead of the artist's vision. Immediately, the power of disability to disrupt traditional narratives becomes clear, announcing a key mode of construction of the novel itself. The situation also worries Dr. Thiébaut, as it sheds light on the fragility of 'scientifically'-supported position on the superiority of the male brain. Indeed, the masculine mind of the artist was bested by that of its feminine object in this piece.

While throughout the novel, Dr. Thiébaut and Marguerite insist that they want to protect Hélione, Dr. Thiébaut makes a telling admission about his other motivations, suggesting that nothing can cure Marcus of his love for Hélione, and that Marcus will go mad if he loses Hélione (53). Here, he seems more concerned about the effect on the masculine mind than on that of the feminine. When Hélione resists the match, Dr. Thiébaut loses his temper with her.

> "Ce n'est pas un efféminé, un gâteux, un pommadé comme les jeunes abrutis de vos cercles soi-disant artistiques ; il ne porte ni collier ni bracelets sous ses vêtements, ne se farde point comme une fille, ne se grise ni de morphine ni de haschisch, et ne marche point avec mollesse, les yeux mi-clos, les hanches balancées. C'est un homme. Mais il est évident que ce type de beauté virile, fort puissant, plein de santé et de vie ne pouvait plaire à une jeune fille comme vous, qui prêche le renversement des rôles et des sexes,

> s'habille au masculin, ligote ses formes délicates dans des vestons et des gilets, salue du cou, secoue les poignets d'un *skake hand* brutal, tire l'épée, chasse, fume la cigarette…C'est évident, c'est évident !" (55-56)
>
> ("He is not effeminate, spoiled, soft like the young half-wits in your so-called artistic circles; he does not wear a necklace or bracelets under his clothes, or makeup like a girl, does not intoxicate himself with morphine or hashish, and does not walk with indolence, eyes half-closed, hips swaying. He's a man. But it is obvious that this type of virile beautiful, very powerful, full of health and life, would not be able to please a young girl like you, who preaches the reversal of roles and of sexes, dresses in a masculine manner silences her delicate forms in jackets and sweaters, greets from the neck, shakes the wrists with a brutal *skake hand*, draws a sword, hunts, smokes cigarettes…It's obvious, it's obvious!")

The syntax of this passages reveals Dr. Thiébaut's attitude towards 'real' men and effeminate men/women. His first sentence, which describes the latter category, runs on with clause after clause of what for him constitute unsavory traits and tastes. This gives the reader the sense that he becomes more agitated as he speaks. However, he regains it to declare that Marcus bears none of the characteristics that he has just mentioned. In the final section of his monologue, Dr. Thiébaut again produces a lengthy list of unladylike behaviors in which Hélione engages, seemingly growing angrier and angrier. According to Dr. Thiébaut, Marcus would make a good husband based on his traditionally masculine qualities. As he pathologizes what he perceives as a feminization of men and masculinization of women effected through the Decadent movement, he also takes pains to tie this movement to drug usage, though, as we have seen, the morphine addition epidemic in nineteenth century spread widely throughout France, largely due to the irresponsible ways in which doctors prescribed it and their powerlessness to control it. As this movement represents an existential threat to the reputation of the medical profession, and thus to Dr. Thiébaut's livelihood, he seeks to frame it as a collection of depraved individuals. His suggestion that Marcus objectively constitutes a perfect male specimen in whom any sane woman would be interested also approaches the unspeakable idea of Hélione's queer desire.

In *Névrosée*, for example, a prognosticating doctor, Dr. Berger-Ricard, also explains Étiennette's condition. He laments to Suzanne:

> "Étudier n'est pas la seule cause de la névrose chez Étiennette : Les névrosées de notre temps n'ont pas toutes pris leur brevet de bachelier. L'excès de civilisation, qui se condense dans les livres, ne s'y trouve pas exclusivement renfermé. Il est partout : dans les conversations, dans les pièces de théâtre, dans l'air pour ainsi dire…la femme des classes populaires et moyennes échappe généralement à cette influence, qui ne descend pas jusqu'à son milieu. Mais la femme des classes riches, éclairées instruites, sceptiques y baigne tout entière, s'en imprègne par toutes les pores. Or, comme son crâne est développé à peu près autant que celui d'une Polynésienne, il en résulte qu'elle s'affole, la pauvre créature, qu'elle prend toutes nos grandes idées par leurs petits côtés, qu'elle déraisonne avec nos méthodes, qu'elle se corrompt ou se désespère avec nos négations, sans être capable de saisir, pour s'y appuyer, nos trop rares affirmations. Ajoutez à cela les effroyables fatigues de la vie mondaine, l'excitation perpétuelle des nerfs, l'épuisement physique de nos vieilles races…" (Lesueur, 306-307)
>
> ("Studying is not the only cause of Étiennette's neurosis: neurotics of our time have not all graduated from high school. The excess of civilization, that is condensed in books, is not exclusively found there. It is everywhere: in conversations, in plays, in the air, so to speak…low- and middle-class women generally escape this influence, which does not descend to their milieu. But an upper-class woman, enlightened, learned, skeptical, is submerged in it, soaking it in through all her pores. But, as her brain is about as developed as that of a Polynesian woman, the result of it is that she goes crazy, the poor creature, begins to take in all of our great ideas in such detail, that she goes mad with all of our methods, that she becomes corrupted or loses hope with our denials, without being capable of grasping them, based upon our too rare affirmations. Add to this the frightful fatigues of worldly life, the perpetual excitement of the nerves, the physical exhaustion of our old races…")

The doctor, whose seem to take inspiration from Guyau's text, affirms that not only has Étiennette received an overstimulating education, but she comes from a family of aristocrats, which predisposes her to nervous weakness when she deals with artifacts of modernity. His diagnosis appears not as a neutral, objective report, but as an ideologically, and at times, selfishly, motivated construction that functions to inculcate the patient with the disability that it claims to describe. Indeed, his intercessions reify harmful stereotypes about the inferiority of the female brain as well as that of non-Europeans. However, they also constitute a woman-authored remarkably detailed synthesis of contemporary medical theories about neurosis.

Indeed, Lesueur plays with the taboo idea of women's understanding of neurosis throughout Dr. Berger-Ricard's conversation with Suzanne. At the end of his monologue, Suzanne proceeds to accurately sum up Dr. Berger-Ricard's medical advice. She also details its implications for Étiennette and for how she (Suzanne) will raise her daughter. Essentially, she surmises, the solution would have been for Étiennette to not have studied so intensely and to have spent more time outdoors, socializing with other women. She further notes that while the time for preventative and/or curative care in Étiennette's has passed, she can learn from this experience and raise her daughter according to Dr. Berger-Ricard's advice. To this, Dr. Berger-Ricard responds, "Vous n'avez rien compris à mes tirades, —avouez-le, —et cependant vous arrivez, grâce à votre exquis bon sens, que les livres n'ont pas gâté, exactement à la même conclusion que moi" ("You understood nothing of my monologues, —admit it, —and yet you arrive, thanks to your exquisite good sense, that books have not spoiled, exactly at the same conclusion as me") (308). Despite proof to the contrary, Dr. Berger-Ricard refuses to acknowledge Suzanne's ability to understand his diagnosis, preferring to frame it as a consequence of her natural sensibility. This reaction also serves to underscore his insecurity: with her questions and summary, Suzanne sheds light on the fact that he is incapable of intervening effectively to heal Étiennette and would prefer to blame her and dismiss Suzanne, rather than admit to the shortcomings of medical knowledge and to women's ability to understand it. To the reader, this interaction appears thick with irony, when we remember that a woman penned this novel. Indeed, it constitutes a study of both feminine and masculine fin-de-siècle anxieties.

Marcus grapples with a similar failure to treat Hélione in *Une décadente*. In Peyrebrune's work, Hélione emerges as an anti-sentimental heroine, rejecting her motherly duties (in fact

displaying no maternal instincts whatsoever) and preaching nihilism. As she says to Dr. Thiébaut when discussing the portrait of her "tout est apparence ; il faut rendre ce qui apparaît ; cela seul est réel. Le réel convenu n'existe pas" ("everything is appearance; it is necessary to render what appears; that alone is real; the conventional 'real' does not exist") (Peyrebrune, 15). When Marcus presses her on this assertion, hoping to break through her posturing, by asking her if she feels that even science is not real, she responds "La science dément elle-même le lendemain ses affirmations de la veille" ("Science contradicts tomorrow its affirmations from last night") (17). Following this back and forth, Hélione takes out a cigarette from her gold case and begins smoking it. When Marcus protests, Hélione offers him one. However, he declines saying that he does not smoke in front of a woman out of "convenance et…respect…de sa féminité, de sa délicatesse…de ses goûts, qui sont généralement d'un sensibilité nerveuse, raffinée" ("decency and…respect for her femininity, for her delicateness…for her tastes, which are generally of a nervous, refined sensibility") (*ibid.*). Here, Marcus employs the language of sensibility, carefully crafted to protect Hélione from the vices it describes. It also serves to reinforce the connection between women and sensibility. Like Hélène in *Laide*, Hélione does not resist this association, but claims to be different from that class of women. This interaction between Marcus and Hélione resembles a failed attempt at recreating a moral treatment for neurosis, by applying psychological pressure. He designs his questions to lead her to the 'logical' conclusion that she must change her ways and accept the supremacy of the patriarchal institution of medicine.

In both works, voices of medical authority, in the form of male doctors who repeatedly dismiss the heroine's experiences based upon her supposed illness, also confirm her aberrance. Indeed, in addition to personal masculine anxieties, professional ones feature prominently in each novel. Doctors in both books felt incentivized to pathologize the Decadent movement to

deflect blame aimed at the medical community for the raging morphine crisis.[144] By the 1880s in France, *morphinomanie* (morphine mania) had become an epidemic, whose rapid spread could not be explained through mere hedonistic curiosity. Indeed, in his 1889 text *Le morphinisme*, Dr. Georges Pichon asserts that "au-dessus de la civilisation, au-dessus des appétits instinctifs et quasi-impulsifs des héréditaires dégénérés, au-dessus de la curiosité malsaine, au-dessus des mauvais conseils de l'imitation…il y a un coupable, un grand coupable. Ce coupable, ne craignons pas de le dire, c'est le médecin" (451) ("above civilization, above the instinctive and quasi-impulsive appetites of hereditary degenerates, above unhealthy curiosity, above poor guidance of imitation…there is one culprit, a large culprit. This culprit, I am not afraid to say, is the physician") (Black, 114-115).[145]

By this time in France, the medical community could not ignore its culpability in the spread of morphine addiction. Whether due to the pressure to provide immediate relief to patients or to respond to the demands of a competitive urban market, the naïve desire to believe in a miracle cure, or the lapse into addiction themselves, doctors were prescribing morphine with reckless abandon during the majority of the nineteenth century. They thus and needed someone, such as adherents to the Decadent movement, to scapegoat to preserve the reputation of their profession. Indeed, doctors tied excess and inability to moderate one's urges to this epidemic to advance the narrative that morphine dependence stemmed from a weak mind and delicate constitution that one would find in a woman or in effeminate men, known to embrace a Decadent

[144] Morphine falls into the class of opiates. Indeed, it was first isolated from opium by the German pharmacist Friedrich Wilhelm Sertürner in 1804, naming it morphium, after Morpheus, the god of dreams. Sertürner published several papers on his work, which were then translated into French by 1817. In 1821, the French physiologist François Magendie published his popular text *Fomulaire pour la preparation et l'emploi de plusieurs nouveaux médicamens* (*Formulary for the Preparation and Use of Several New Medicines*), which included recipes for morphine syrups and 'calming drops.' This drug was treated as a miracle cure during most of the century.
[145] Sara E. Black includes her English translation of the original French quote in her 2016 article, "Doctors on Drugs: Medical Professionals and the Proliferation of Morphine Addiction in Nineteenth-Century France." In my research, I also consulted the original French text.

lifestyle. However, as Sara E. Black notes in her article, doctors too suffered from morphine addiction in great numbers. The morphine epidemic illustrated a loss of control on the part of physicians. They could not control their patients' use of morphine, nor could they, in the end, control their own. Hélione and Étiennette's involvement with this group of artists and intellectuals that enjoyed partaking in the use of a drug that exposed a crisis in the medical profession certainly would have posed a threat to a doctor, such as Dr. Thiébaut. Thus, their supposedly neutral medical advice resembles instead desperate attempts to protect their reputation and that of their profession as well as the heteronormative structure of society.

In Praise of Sensibility

Throughout these novels, the narrator acts as an advocate for 'healthy' female sensibility. This perspective can at times be difficult to distinguish from the voices of doctors in the text, which focus on the damage the heroine has inflicted upon her sensibility. However, when characters within the text denigrate all women, the narrator comes to the defense of feminine sensibility. The anti-sentimental heroine is then contrasted with sentimental characters in the novel. This serves as a method of elevating sensibility, a staple of the sentimental genre. In both novels, the heroine's sister appears as a foil, embodying the natural feminine sensibility that the heroine is encouraged to develop and embrace.

In *Une décadente*, the constant vocalizations of concern from those surrounding her begins to wear on Hélione, causing her resolve to stay in Paris to waver. As the narrator recounts, "elle était douce au fond et la lutte qu'elle luttait depuis près d'un mois lui laissait une lassitude attendrie. Ce mal qu'elle ne sentait point, on s'en effrayait autour d'elle et ils en souffraient tous : sa sœur, son frère, Marcus plus que personne, semblait-il" ("she was soft deep down and the

fight that she had been fighting for close to a month left her a tender weariness. This malady that she did not feel, everyone around her feared, and they suffered from it, all of them: her sister, her brother, Marcus more than anyone, it seemed") (Peyrebrune, 65-66). Hélione does not see her lifestyle as harmful the way that everyone around her seems to. In this sense, her confidence in her perspective diminishes, also reducing her capacity to serve as a vector of her narrative, an option that, as we will see, the narrator advances. In fact, she has found this environment, where she is surrounded by fellow researchers and interlocutors, to be incredibly mentally stimulating, allowing her to focus all her energy into her work. Losing her mental acuity is a fate worse than death for her, but she decides to try leaving Paris for the Touraine region, and embracing the rest cure, because she no longer has the strength to refuse.[146]

According to the narrator, even making this choice has an immediate positive effect on her: "une douce pensée de sacrifice l'occupait comme un désir plus féminin que de coutume de se parer, pour ces derniers jours, d'une grâce de complaisance et de soumission. Sans qu'elle en eût conscience, la certitude de quitter bientôt cette vie amollissait déjà la rudesse virile de son humeur si extraordinairement tendue depuis des années dans le sens contraire à ses véritables inclinations" ("a gentle thought of sacrifice occupied her like a more feminine desire than usual to attire herself, for these last days, with a complacent and submissive grace. Without her being conscious of it, the certainty of leaving this life already softened the virile harshness of her mood, so extraordinarily tensed for years in a sense contrary to her true inclinations") (66). The narrator's intervention here is striking. After revealing Hélione's thought process without

[146] This trope of the hysterical woman being transported away from the city and isolated also appears in other works of fiction of the period even transnationally. Notably, American author Charlotte Perkins Gilman takes up this device in her 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," in which her protagonist, based on Gilman, is taken to the country, and locked away in a room by her husband, a doctor, as a treatment for what he calls a "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency" (1). Indeed, the doctors 'caring' for Peyrebrune and Gilman's protagonists exert increased control over them, as they wield both the authority of medicine and patriarchal familial relationship dynamics.

comment or judgement, the narrator reaffirms the inferiority of the female brain and pathologizes Hélione's mental state. The narrator suffocates Hélione's lucid reflections on her mental state by claiming that something occurs in her mind that she does not understand or is not aware of. The narrator effectively acknowledges Hélione's incapacity as a narrator and taking the initiative to override her, deny her subjectivity, and reframe the story.

In *Névrosée*, the narrator often clashes with Maxime, due to the latter's regular vocalization of his low opinion of women and, by extension, of sensibility. In the first scene of the novel, Maxime Delaure, a professor at the Collège de France, comes across an old friend, Lucien Gerbier, in Paris and the two share updates about their lives. When Lucien speaks of his marital bliss, Maxime cannot resist the opportunity to deliver a diatribe about the inferiority of women whom he feels remain stuck in the past, unable to evolve and progress, unlike their male counterparts. As a consequence, he argues, a man can only at best experience fleeting happiness with a woman. However, as their conversation reveals, Maxime's vehement rejection of marriage stems not from a rational analysis of the situation, but from his unsuccessful attempts to repress his feelings for a young woman (Étiennette), who has been auditing his classes at the Collège de France:

> *Elle*, cette jeune fille inconnue, qui avait le courage d'assister à des leçons tellement difficiles, demandant pour être comprises des années de travaux antérieurs, et qui semblait les suivre avec aisance, avec intérêt, son petit cahier de notes sur les genoux…Non, il ne regarderait pas. (Lesueur, 24)
>
> (*Her*, this strange young girl, who had the courage to attend such difficult lessons, asking to be included in work of years passed, and who seemed to follow them with ease, with interest, her little notebook on her knees…No, he would not look.)

Maxime's entrancement with Étiennette's beauty (inner and outer) casts her as the ideal sentimental heroine to Lesueur's sentimental hero. However, as the narrative proceeds, we discover that first impressions can be deceiving, and that the archetype of the ideal sentimental

heroine appears as a foil to the figure of the intellectual woman. Maxime finds Étiennette so fascinating because, as a scientist specializing in psychology and biology, he believes in the superiority of the male mind over that of the female one and would not have thought it possible for a woman to understand his work. He supports his theory of female inferiority with his observations of the other women who attend the class and seem to have great difficulty understanding the material in contrast to Étiennette.[147] As a biologist, Maxime's interests concern experimental psychology and he espouses many of the medical discourses of the period on the defects of the woman and of the female mind and of the dangers of over-educating women, as well as a certain contempt for sensibility. For instance, he describes his love for Étiennette as a "méprisable maladie" (despicable illness) (6) and vows to Lucien:

> "Je te montrerai la puissance de la volonté et de la raison…Je les ferai triompher en moi de la sensibilité impulsive, aveugle, de cette sensibilité qui domine chez les femmes, chez tous les êtres inférieurs, et qui nous rapproche de l'animal." (20)
>
> ("I will show you the power of will and reason…I will make them triumph over the impulsive, blind sensibility in me, over this sensibility that dominates in women, in all inferior beings, that which brings us close to animals.")

Maxime views sensibility as a weakness, characteristic of the more fragile sex, and resists his own. As a man, he considers himself capable of dominating his sensibility, through the power of will and reason, traits of the stronger and superior male mind. He also likens the female brain to that of an animal, incapable of higher powers of reasoning and resisting the pull of their sensibility. This characterizes the female brain as constantly reacting to stimuli without

[147] "Il était impossible qu'elles comprissent. Elles pouvaient saisir des mots, l'énonciation de certains faits ; mais pénétrer au fond des choses, l'organisation même de leur cerveau, aussi bien que leur éducation première, le leur interdisait" ("It was impossible that they understood. They could pick out words, the utterance of certain facts; but penetrate the depths of things, even the organization of their brains, as well as their first education, refused this to them") (Lesueur, 26).

processing them logically. This connection to such a state, however, will, in the end, allow Étiennette to reach her intellectual potential.

Maxime expresses such views throughout the novel and the narrator repeatedly rebukes him for it, qualifying his comments to valorize Suzanne's 'healthy' sensibility. Indeed, the narrator seems frustrated with Maxime's inability to see the value in it. For example, in the opening scene of the novel, when Maxime and Lucien chat about their lives, Maxime repeatedly steers the conversation towards his and Lucien's boyhood antics, which, according to the narrator, leads them to explore more and more memories, "au lieu d'entamer le récit de ce qu'ils ignoraient" ("instead of beginning the story they were ignoring") (13), until finally, "malgré ces digressions infinies" ("despite these infinite digressions") (14), Maxime reluctantly confesses his dilemma (his feelings for Étiennette) to his friend. The narrator's tone is dripping with irony and frustration at Maxime for delaying the unfolding of the sentimental plot by refusing to discuss his emotions. He constitutes a poor narrative vehicle indeed for a sentimental novel. This sensibility-related friction between the narrator and Maxime persists throughout the novel as Maxime denigrates it while the narrator seeks to elevate it.

This becomes especially evident when Suzanne enters the story. When she shows Maxime a portrait of one of her ancestors whom Étiennette closely resembles, she explains that Étiennette takes after their noble relatives while she looks more like their working-class family members. Following this explanation, the narrator offers a window into Maxime's thoughts as well as a scathing indictment of his views: Maxime "regarda plus attentivement Mme Gerbier, qui commença presque à compter pour lui. Une femme sachant reconnaître son infériorité désarmait tout de suite la méfiance et le dédain de ce philosophe misogyne" ("looked more closely at Madam Gerbier, who almost started to count for something with him. A woman who

knew how to acknowledge her inferiority disarmed the suspicion and distain of this misogynistic philosopher right away") (48). We see the narrator's irony in his/her use of "presque" ("almost") and "compter pour lui" ("to count for him") as well as in the qualifier "misogyne" ("misogynistic"). The narrator challenges not only Maxime's evaluation of Suzanne, but his competence as an evaluator, as he lacks the basic capacity to understand the value of sensibility, which leads him to underestimate the women in his life. In a sense, the texts reinforce the incapacity of these doctors to treat female patients and suggest that the only path to positive outcomes lies in the intervention of women and 'healthy' feminine sensibility. Such a technique saves Hélione, and it is denied to Étiennette in the sense that Maxime struggles to see the value in it and prefers to treat her with masculine medical care.

Only Marguerite and Suzanne's perspectives do not come into conflict with those of the narrators because they embody the sensibility that the narrator praises. In this way, they serve as a foil to the heroines, Hélione and Étiennette, and as arguably the most effective providers of medical attention, within the world of the novels. Hélione's sister, Marguerite, in contrast to Hélione, embodies natural feminine sensibility despite the lack of a strong female role model they experienced growing up. As previously discussed, Hélione and her sister Marguerite lost their parents at a young age and were sent to live with their elderly grandmother, who passed away soon after they arrived. An English governess, Miss Holten, who had a passion for philosophy and encouraged Hélione's passion for learning, thus raised them. Marguerite, as the narrator phrases it, "charmait uniquement la vie de famille" ("uniquely charmed family life"), dedicating herself to her "jeune maternité" ("young motherhood") by organizing shared family meals, which Hélione "fuyait avec les dédains méprisants de sa philosophie schopenhauérienne" ("would flee with the condescending distain of her Schopenhauerian philosophy") (Peyrebrune,

28). Here, the narrator establishes a clear hierarchy in the sisters' sensibility: despite a lack of direction from her mother figure, Marguerite follows her natural inclination towards domesticity, a quality that the narrator valorizes. Though seemingly delicate, *marguerites* (daisies) are surprisingly hardy flowers that can withstand inhospitable climates, like Marguerite. They also have come to symbolize childhood innocence, simplicity, and joy. In other words, Marguerite's name serves as a sort of hermeneutic device that reveals her personality traits, specifically her sensibility. Hélione, by contrast, gave herself over to a nihilistic belief system ignoring and suppressing her feminine impulses.

When Marguerite becomes a wife and mother at a young age, Hélione resists following this path. She instead devotes herself with even greater intensity to her scholarly passion: a research project she had initiated, tracing the origins and contours of the Decadent movement. Elsewhere, as she contemplates suicide, Hélione notes that if she were to die, she would solely regret not leaving something behind: a text that she produced (61). In this instance, the thought of seeing through her life's work, not the thought of her family or a love interest, motivates her to continue living.[148] However, the description of Hélione's activities underscores what the narrator considers to be the unhealthy and obsessive side of her pursuits that will lead to nothing but her deterioration. In Hebrew, the name Hélione means "God is my light," a fitting description of Hélione that raises the question, who or what does she worship? The response to this question shifts over the course of the novel as she embraces her sensibility, eventually replacing knowledge with marriage and motherhood.

[148] In *Névrosée*, Étiennette feels similarly devoted to continuing her studies and to being involved in her husband's work. Her eagerness convinces him to allow her to grade papers from the class he is teaching. However, she fails, demonstrating such a lack of understanding of understanding of the material that he throws away her work without telling her. Discovering it in the trash, causes Étiennette's symptoms to worsen. What could have given her purpose instead hastens her decline (Lesueur, 150).

In *Névrosée*, Suzanne also serves as a foil to Étiennette, a status of which she remains acutely aware and on which she comments frequently. Étiennette and Suzanne are the granddaughters of the marquis and marquise d'Épeuilles, an old aristocratic family. The marquis and marquise's daughter (Étiennette and Suzanne's mother), however, married a commoner, a musician. As discussed, when both parents passed away, Étiennette and Suzanne went to live with their grandparents. Despite such similarity in the sisters' heredity and environment growing up, little overlap exists in their sensibility. Suzanne attributes this to differences in which side of the family they take after. She suggests, Étiennette is "une d'Épeuilles pur-sang" ("a pure-blooded d'Épeuilles"), noting, "Elle tient de ma mère, tandis que moi, j'ai pris toute l'écume bourgeoise de mes grands-parents paternels" ("She takes after my mother, while me, I took all of the bourgeois scum of the paternal grandparents") (Lesueur, 53). From this perspective, Étiennette's family name also serves to highlight contributing factors to her neurosis, namely her aristocratic heritage and the duality of her mind (the combination of masculine and feminine traits). Étiennette and Maxime's first meeting, in a classroom context where he can evaluate her intellectual competencies, sets the tone for the entire novel, placing scientific observation of the 'deficiencies' of the female brain at the center and reinforcing this through the labels applied to Étiennette. Maxime does not even learn Étiennette's name and nickname until fifty pages into the novel. Her nickname, Nénette, is particularly jarring to a modern reader because of its current slang usage as a childish reference to the vulva. Though the term had a different connotation at the time of the novel's publication, it still served to create a sense of discontinuity and disjuncture in the audience as well as center the narrative on the female brain.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the nickname "Nénette" was used to abbreviate names ending in -ette, specifically those of young girls. However, Maxime, views the diminutive

nickname “Nénette” as incompatible with Étiennette’s aristocratic heritage, evident in her appearance, personality, and mannerisms. He describes Étiennette’s nickname as a “surnom de grisette” (“a working girl nickname”) inconsistent with her origins (63). Furthermore, this term also referred to the brain, specifically the meninges, which line the skull and spinal cord to protect it from external physical forces. This connection between Étiennette and the physiology of her brain remains important to the story in which her fitness to receive a demanding education and to be a mother are put into question. The narrator as well as the secondary characters treat two aspects of Étiennette, her aristocratic heritage and her female nature, as the main contributing factors to her neurosis throughout the novel. Étiennette’s genetics and her upbringing also influence the way the story unfolds when it focuses on her ‘defective’ female brain. Her name, a diminutive of the masculine name Étienne, also suggests the duality of her being that will serve as a source of cognitive dissonance throughout the novel. As we will see, the world as perceived by her neurotic mind, particularly as it relates to the language of sentiment and sentimental codes, appears distorted, conferring new meaning to otherwise mundane moments. In *Névrosée*, a love plot unfolds, placing Étiennette in a situation where she must choose between her duty as a woman to marry and have children and her love of biology and learning. However, the disability remains unresolved with no path towards integration into society available to Étiennette; society itself is revealed to be diseased and broken.

Suzanne, instead, embodies the ideal feminine sensibility that Maxime grudgingly comes to admire and finds to be lacking in his wife. Maxime grows disillusioned with Étiennette and her intellect. Both his disdain for women and his increased appreciation of Suzanne’s simplicity and kindness become apparent in the dinner invitation he extends to Suzanne. Surprised, she responds:

-Mais c'est votre "dîner des grands hommes ?"
-C'est bien pour cela que j'y veux voir une femme supérieure.
-À côté de la vôtre ?...Quelle ironie !
-Je ne parle pas de femmes *savantes*, je parle de femmes *supérieures* ?... Réellement, Suzanne, viendrez-vous ? (157)

(-But isn't it your "dinner for great men?"
-It's precisely for that reason that I would like to see a superior woman there.
-Next to yours?...How ironic!
-I am not speaking of *learned* women, I am speaking of *superior* women?…Really, Suzanne, will you come?)

Maxime invites Suzanne to this event with those whose intellect he respects because he judges her to be a "femme supérieure." Despite his earlier fascination with Étiennette and her uncommon thirst for knowledge, Maxime establishes a hierarchy in which Suzanne ranks first, though he seems to struggle at first to define what differences he sees between Étiennette and Suzanne. He labels the former as a "learned" woman and the latter as a "superior" woman, though his phrase ends in a question mark, indicating his uncertainty. From his choice of words though, we can deduce that he holds Suzanne in higher esteem than Étiennette because of the role she plays as the dutiful wife and mother. She has produced several children successfully and spends her days catering to her husband's whims, despite his numerous affairs. Suzanne also achieves a greater level of independence and contributes more materially to French society through her sensibility than Étiennette. For example, Suzanne frequently and adeptly oversees operations and responds to workplace issues at the sawmill that her husband owns (101). Given these attributes, Maxime even goes as far as to indicate that he hopes for Suzanne and Étiennette to spend more time together so that the former may positively influence the latter (58).

However, Lesueur maintains focus on their differences. Indeed, the traits of a "femme supérieure," embodied by Suzanne, are contrasted with those of a "femme savante" or "bas-

bleu," embodied by Étiennette, several times throughout the novel. The first reference comes when Norbert, her cousin, teases her about her study of philosophy. He says:

> -Pourquoi ne veux-tu pas venir visiter mon atelier, Nénette ? C'est très chic, tu verras. Et c'est très convenable, jusqu'à cinq heures.
> -Ah !... Et après ?
> -Nénette ! … s'exclama la marquise.
> -Oh ! grand'maman, fit Norbert, un bas-bleu comme Nénette doit avoir toutes les curiosités. (79)
>
> (-Why do you not want to come visit my workshop, Nénette? It is very chic, you will see. And it is very appropriate, until five o'clock.
> -Ah!...And after?
> -Nénette!...exclaimed the marquise.
> -Oh! Grandma, said Norbert, a *bas-bleu* like Nénette must have all manner of curiosities.)

Norbert and Étiennette's exchange evokes the image of a bas-bleu, sickly and weak from staying inside and studying but also prone to sexual transgression. This association motivates Étiennette's allusion to 'after-hours' activities at Norbert's workshop. The shocking nature of this suggestion becomes evident through the marquise's reaction. Norbert, however, finds such a combination of excessive sexual and intellectual curiosity in a woman to be an essential and interesting characteristic of a bas-bleu. This passage, then, foreshadows Étiennette's acts of sexual deviance, namely experiencing sexual attraction in response to a performance of a risqué poem by a woman dressed as a man during a party and later agreeing to an affair with Norbert (though it is never consummated) (262).

Indeed, the narrators' valorization of sensibility as well as the contrast between Marguerite and Hélione and Suzanne and Étiennette, respectively, serve to lead the reader to the conclusion that the cultivation of feminine sensibility as performed by women remains the most effective course of treatment for neuroses. The supposed cure for Hélione's state—a stay in Dr. Thiébaut's country house in Touraine—gives insight into the Naturalist tendencies of the novel. Indeed, the narrator describes Hélione's trip to the country, on the orders of Dr. Thiébaut, as an

attempt to cure her "fièvre parisienne" ("Parisian fever") (Peyrebrune, 82). At this time, Paris had come to symbolize the vices of the big city and was often characterized as such in popular literature.[149] In the 1873 version of the *Dictionnaire de la langue française (Littré)*, Paris is mentioned by name in the dictionaries' figurative definition of *fièvre* (fever).[150] The idea of a fever denoted not just an elevated temperature, but also the frenzied pace of life in the city and the relentless pressures of production. The country exists as a liminal space where people can momentarily escape the pressures that wreak havoc on their minds and systems, at times resulting in disability. However, once the pressure is relieved, they must return to work. The narrator describes the effect of the country on Hélione's mind: "Ce qui l'impressionnait surtout, c'était le silence presque mystique des champs ; ce silence tout rempli et troublé du seul cri d'un oiselet, du seul bourdonnement d'une abeille, et dans lequel les rumeurs du cerveau s'apaisent et s'endorment, s'évanouissent plutôt, laissant l'esprit allégé flotter, avec de vagues délices, comme tombé aux limbes grises du néant" ("What made the strongest impression on her, was the almost mystical silence of the fields; this silence filled and disturbed by the lone cry of a baby bird, the lone buzzing of a bee, and in which the murmurings of the brain are calmed and fall asleep, faint instead, letting the lightened mind float, with vague delight, as if fallen into gray limbos of nothing") (84). It is ironic that the intervention to prevent Hélione from dying bears such a striking resemblance to death in its poetic description. (The narrator, too, adopts a more lyric form, breaking free of the traditional prose structure.) Étiennette's soul seems to find peace, while her mind goes to sleep. This is indeed the intention behind Dr. Thiébaut's prescription

[149] To name a few, Honoré de Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* (1834-1835); Eugéne Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-1843); Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867); Charles Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869), published posthumously)

[150] "Émotion, trouble violent de l'âme…Agitation des esprits. Cette fièvre de rébellion n'était pas encore apaisée. Durant ces jours de commotion, Paris avait la fièvre" ("Emotion, violent trouble of the soul…Agitation of minds. This fever of rebellion was not appeased. During these days of commotion, Paris had a fever") (*Dictionnaire de la langue française [Littré]*, vol. 2. 1873).

(“des promenades au grand air, des distractions douces” [“walks in the fresh air, gentle distractions”] [85]).

While in this space, Hélione lowers her guard and confesses to Marcus that she may have damaged her ability to feel romantic love in her adherence to Decadence (79). This novel is, in essence, a love story, which makes Hélione’s admission so interesting. She serves as the sentimental heroine, but she does not experience romantic feelings. Others around her, including the narrator, then intercede to explain the desires of which she supposedly remains unaware as the sensibility that she has repressed trying to come out. Her repression of her sensibility thus bears the blame for the totality of her condition. We, as readers, do not receive the expected meet-cute and romance plot points, nor the traditional flirtatious and amorous exchanges between the main protagonists. Instead, we see Hélione’s mind and body as the site of conflict between sensibility and Decadence. Indeed, Marcus states that during this period of increased freedom for women, they become intoxicated with their freedom, wanting to try everything that had been denied them for so long all at once, and in the processes ceasing to be women, while still not conquering the power of men (74). When Marcus says goodbye to Hélione, he kisses her hand, stirring new feelings in her (79). Peyrebrune plays ironically with a traditional sentimental novel trope: the *frisson.* In the early nineteenth-century context, this constitutes the type of involuntary response that was said to serve as a sort of compass, powered by a woman’s sensibility, leading her towards truth and away from deceit. Contact with an untrustworthy individual, such as the chevalier d’Émerange in *Anatole* or M. de Rieux in *Olivier, ou le secret* did not inspire a frisson while interactions with Anatole and Olivier did. However, over the course of the century, such narrative strategies came under fire as modes of artifice themselves. Accordingly, Hélione’s frisson leads her not to discover Marcus’s manipulation, but to believe

his words and fear for her life in a way that she never had before. However, Marcus's interventions alone remain insufficient as a cure.

In following her course of treatment, Hélione meets and socializes with other women living in the country. At first, Hélione's mannerisms create friction with her new companions. As the narrator notes "son attitude, ses gestes brusques de jeune garçon, ses toilettes bizarres, son langage donnaient de l'inquiétude aux mères très correctes et formalistes, et intimidaient les fillettes, qui ne pouvait s'imaginer qu'Hélione fût une petite créature comme elles, vrais anges de missel, à l'âme ingénue et toute blanche" ("her attitude, her brusque gestures of a young boy, her strange outfits, her language made the very correct and formalist mothers worry, and intimidated the little girls, who could not imagine that Hélione had been a little creature like them, true missal angels, with the all-white soul of an ingenue") (86). From the outset, the narrator notes that Hélione has nothing in common with the simple women who surround her. The insistence on her masculine gestures and odd clothing suggest that Hélione's queerness is what is being pathologized here. The other women do not know what to make of her because she defies their expectations. Even the young girls cannot identify with her. Hélione notices this as well and complains about it to Marguerite, claiming that she would prefer solitude to continuing to try to talk to these women when they do not speak the same language (87). However, Marguerite implores her to "study them" (87) as a means of discovering the key to passion:

> Ignorantes, certes, elles le sont, les provinciales ; mais est-ce un mal ? Je ne le crois pas. La science détruit la foi et je suis persuadée que, pour être heureux, il est indispensable de croire d'abord au bonheur. Le moyen d'être heureux, quand on a fait cette découverte que le bonheur n'existe pas ! Et cette constatation est le fruit amer des connaissances trop approfondies de la vie et de l'être. (87-88)
>
> (Ignorant, certainly, they are, the small-town girls; but is that bad? I do not believe so. Science destroys faith and I am persuaded that, to be happy, it is indispensable to believe first in happiness. The way to being happy, when one has made this discovery that

happiness did not exist! And this observation is the bitter fruit of too deep knowledge of life and being.)

Marguerite appeals to Hélione's inquisitive mind, encouraging her to see her interactions with these women as an experiment. She must withhold judgement until she has collected enough data through her conversations with them to determine what depth these women might have and what insight they could offer as to the way to happiness, advice that Hélione follows. Though it is veiled, Marguerite's reference to the "fruit amer des connaissance trop approfondies" evokes Eve's original sin of tasting an apple from the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden in Genesis 3 of the Old Testament. This implies that Hélione might also learn to walk along the pathway to righteousness by integrating herself within the group of women who surround her. As we will see in the following section, Lesueur's references to Christianity become even more pronounced through the conclusion of her text.

Curious Endings

The denouement of each novel seems, on the surface, to obey conventions of the sentimental genre: the neurotic heroine either transforms into the sentimental heroine she was meant to be, embracing love and marriage, or she is eliminated through death. However, over the course of the final pages of each novel, the author subtly challenges the reader to reconsider his/her definition of real and artificial. In a 'perfect' sentimental ending, Hélione breaks down to Marcus finally expressing her desire to marry and bear children. Hélione dissolves into tears, begging Marcus to save her life: "Je veux vivre!...Je suis jeune, je n'ai pas vécu; je ne veux pas mourir; je veux, je veux ma part de bonheur, ma part de soleil et de joies…J'étais folle; j'ai menti; prenez pitié de moi; sauvez-moi, si vous m'aimez" ("I want to live!...I am young, I have not lived; I don't want to die; I want, I want my share of happiness, my share of sun and of

joy…I was crazy; I lied; take pity on me; save me, if you love me") (111). She then cites the specific life experiences she wants to have: "Est-ce qu'elle ne me siérait pas, à moi la blanche robe des fiancées? Est-ce que mes cheveux ne seraient pas beaux sous la couronne nuptiale ?...Oh! ces gens heureux qui m'entourent, ils me tuent ! Marguerite avec ses enfants !...Mais j'ai des entrailles, moi aussi, et je veux, je veux…" ("Is it that the white dress of fiancés would not suit me? Is it that my hair would not be beautiful under the nuptial crown?...Oh! These happy people who surround me, they kill me!...Marguerite with her children!…But I, too, have a womb and I want, I want…") (111-112). In response to this speech, Marcus reveals that Hélione was never in any danger of dying; he and Dr. Thiébaut had convinced her of her illness to trick her into loving life. He asks her to forgive him, and she bursts out laughing: she "éclata d'un rire fou, saccadé, nerveux, prolongé, inextinguible qui était de la joie débordante" ("let out a crazy laugh, halting, nervous, prolonged, inextinguishable, that was of overflowing with joy") (114) as she searches for the words to thank him for his intervention. Marcus and Hélione then formalize their engagement and go to share the news with Marguerite and Dr. Thiébaut. Marguerite immediately notices the change in Hélione and asks "Et la décadente?" ("and the decadent?") (*ibid.*) to which Hélione responds "La décadente a fait son temps…et son œuvre d'où la Renaissance est sortie comme d'une tombe" ("The decadent had her day…and her work from which the Renaissance came out like from a tomb") (116). At this moment as well, Miss Holten arrives with the completed translation of Hélione's manuscript, ("un livre de haute philosophie" ["a book of high philosophy"] [31]), which Hélione promptly takes from her and throws to the ground. There, the family dog tears it up. All gathered, except for Miss Holten, seek to celebrate Hélione's transformation, but struggle to name it. To what has she converted? Optimism? Positivism? Marguerite suggests "maternité" ("maternity") (119), handing her child to Hélione. Hélione sits

down carefully with the baby, in a pose reminiscent of the Adoration, a rendering of Mary holding and gazing lovingly at baby Jesus after his birth.

This ending, though conventional, comes across as overly simplistic and too easy. In the matter of a few pages, Hélione completely overhauls her worldview and fulfills her expected role in society, unfazed by Marcus's admission of his and Dr. Thiébaut's deception. These inconsistencies, make the reader wonder if she has truly embraced her role as a sentimental heroine, or if she is playing along as a form of self-preservation. These doubts come to the fore in the narrator's description of Hélione's attempt to follow Marguerite's advice and test her theory that the 'simple' women who surround her might hold the key to happiness:

> Elle s'habillait comme les petites provinciales, de jolies toilettes claires, très féminines ; on lui voyait au corsage et dans les cheveux poignés de fleurettes tendres comme des aveux, avec de belles révérences lentes et moqueuses qui la rendaient adorable. Ses gestes étaient souples et câlins ; elle s'amusait à paraître épeurée comme une femmelette et à se trainer, indolente, au bras des jeunes hommes qui la promenaient. Cela la divertissait de se sentir séduisante à rendre fou et de voir pâlir Marcus quand elle le regardait un peu longuement, les paupières battantes, tout à fait comme une petite pensionnaire naïve, mais intimidée. Le jeu lui plaisait ; elle-même s'y laissait prendre ; et il lui arrivait parfois d'être secouée d'un brusque frisson à la subite pensée du mal qui l'emportait, qui lui enlevait cette jolie façon de vivre si douce, si languide. (101-102)
>
> (She dressed like the young provincial girls, in pretty, pale, very feminine outfits; one would see her in a blouse, her hair adorned with a handful of flowers, tender like confessions, with beautiful slow and mocking curtseys that made her adorable. Her gestures were supple and affectionate; she enjoyed appearing frightened like a young lady, while dawdling lazily, in the arms of young men who walked with her. It amused her to feel seductive and make Marcus go crazy and pale when she would gaze at him, batting her eyelids exactly like a naive, but intimidated schoolgirl. The game was pleasing to her; she, herself, was taken in by it; and it sometimes happened that she was shaken by a brusque shiver at the sudden thought of the illness that was taking this pretty way of living so sweetly and languidly away from her.)

Here, we see the tension between the sentimental and anti-sentimental tendencies. When Hélione dons this costume of the sentimental woman, she does so in a mocking manner. Being able to imitate this way of behaving and dressing to perfection, would indicate that the long-touted

concept on sensibility as a natural, biological impulse was in fact constructed and artificial. And yet, she finds herself transformed by playing this character, in a moral evolution not unlike that theorized by Pascal in *Pensées* (1670). Peyrebrune plays with the concept of masquerade, leaving the reader to wonder whether Hélione's mask is her intellectual self or her sentimental self.[151]

Though Peyrebrune and Lesueur remain largely neutral towards the medical community and its stance towards women and their health, they occasionally offer criticism. For instance, Étiennette's death reads as a critique of the medical community's role in this crisis, as her death was a direct result of having access to an underregulated supply of morphine, a notion that goes unchallenged by the narrator. In an ending that evokes that of *Madame Bovary*, Étiennette tragically realizes her potential. She, like Emma Bovary, poisons herself, though she does so with morphine. In creating the poison, Étiennette relies heavily on her impulses to guide her. There are moments where she feels that her body is doing things without her conscious volition. She is surprised to find that she drank the poison (Lesueur, 322). Michael Finn has even interpreted Étiennette's experience in *Névrosée* as evidence that a woman's brain was considered to be a representation of the unconscious, in that she was thought to be incapable of reasoning, only of reacting to stimulation, in his study *Figures of the Pre-Freudian Unconscious from Flaubert to Proust* (2019). However, this novel was published before Freud's work on the unconscious, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), so I would hesitate to apply it so readily in this context.

Over the course of this scene, a meta-narrative construction process takes place as Étiennette contemplates her story: the events that led to this point as well as the possible plots it

[151] Judith Butler also discusses the idea of the masquerade with regard to gender performance at length in her seminal study *Gender Trouble* (1990).

could take in the future. She could become Norbert's mistress or apologize to Maxime. She could take a small dose of morphine to help her to fall asleep or she could take a larger dose to end her life. Then, she mixes the morphine and sugar into a cup of water, like the chemist she will never become. As she falls asleep, she wonders, "Mais si je ne me réveille pas…que pensera-t-on ? Croira-t-on que j'ai voulu me tuer ou que je me suis trompée sur la dose de morphine ? Après tout, je ne sais pas si j'en ai pris assez pour mourir" ("But if I do not wake up…what will they think? Will they think that I wanted to kill myself or that I was wrong about the morphine dose? After all, I do not know if I took enough of it to die") (Lesueur, 322). The narrator, then, informs us in the final line of the book "Elle ne se réveilla jamais" ("She never woke up") (*ibid*.). At this moment, tragically, Étiennette realizes her intellectual potential by correctly mixing the quantities of ingredients.

In this instance, Lesueur gives her protagonist a temporary illusion of control; the narrator withholds commentary on the inferiority of the female brain in favor of a stream of consciousness-style recounting of Étiennette's thought process. For a few fleeting moments, it appears as though Étiennette seizes the opportunity to craft her own narrative, by deciding how her story will end. Étiennette's experience alone occupies the space of the final pages of the novel; the reactions of those who discover her body, and the aftermath of her death remain notably absent. Indeed, in a reflection, presented by the narrator, that recalls Hélione's philosophy from the first pages of *Une décadente*, the narrator reveals Étiennette's thought process as she despairs of the possibility of happiness:

> Quelle fatalité s'attachait donc à son âme comme à sa chair pour qu'elle éprouvât l'angoisse des passions sans en connaître les assouvissements ? Était-elle différente des autres, ou seulement plus franche en face d'elle-même et de la vie ? Le bonheur existait-il quelque part, ou bien les hommes et les femmes s'en donnaient-ils mutuellement la comédie pour se figurer qu'ils y pouvaient atteindre ? Être heureuse…Cela ne lui

> arriverait jamais ! Non, jamais !...C'était sans doute une faculté qu'elle ne possédait pas. (312)
>
> (What fatality then was attaching itself to her soul like to her skin for her to feel the agony of passions without fulfillment? Was she different from others, or just franker in the face of herself and of life? Did happiness exist somewhere, or was it that men and women mutually gave themselves over to pretending that they could achieve it? To be happy…That would never happen to her! No, never!...It was without a doubt a skill that she did not possess.)

Étiennette begins to deconstruct sensibility and the gendered construction of society. As she continues restlessly exploring these thoughts, the narrator begins to subtly undermine her highlighting inconsistencies in her perceptions. As Étiennette debates whether to attempt to mend her relationship with Maxime, she wonders why he has not yet come to bed: "Ne-peut-il même plus supporter de dormir à côté de moi?" ("Can he no longer stand sleeping next to me?") (313) However, the narrator quickly intervenes, noting, "elle croyait la nuit beaucoup plus avancée oubliant qu'elle s'était couchée très tôt. Maxime travaillait souvent jusqu'après minuit" ("she believed the night to be much more advanced, forgetting that she went to bed very early. Maxime would often work until after midnight") (*ibid.*). Étiennette bases her conclusion, that Maxime cannot bear to share a bed with her, on the false premise that it is past the time when he normally comes to bed and that this is positively correlated to his negative feelings toward her. The narrator's correction of this detail serves to chip away at the reliability of Étiennette as an interpreter of events, a strategy that her/she continues with increasing frequency as Étiennette's assertions become more radical.

As Étiennette's gathers her final thoughts before drinking her homemade poison, she grows more resolute in her stance that she has no place in society and that everything that had happened in her life led to this moment. The narrator, however, again intercedes, noting "Chaque image se détachant hors du passé exaspérait la souffrance d'Étiennette, par le contraste des folles

espérances de son orgueil avec les désappointements et les humiliations de la vie réelle. Car elle exagérait ses malheurs comme elle avait exagéré ses rêves" ("Every image emerging from the past exasperated Étiennette's suffering, through the contrast of the crazy hopes of her pride with the disappointments and the humiliations of real life. Because she exaggerated her unhappiness like she had exaggerated her dreams") (320). Again, the narrator suggests that Étiennette is guilty of hyperbole and distortion of facts, advancing the idea that of her perception of the world as problematic instead of the myth of feminine sensibility. This ending recalls the tragic demise of sentimental heroes and heroines alike in texts we saw earlier in this dissertation such as Olivier and Ourika from *Olivier, ou le secret* and *Ourika*, respectively. The protagonist, torn between love and duty perishes because of this internal conflict. Here, this code operates a bit differently: on the surface, it seems that Étiennette kills herself due to the conflict she feels over her duty to Maxime as a wife and future mother and her sexual desire for Norbert. However, she reflects on her suffering, arriving at the conclusion that the agony that drives her to suicide stems not from an inability to be with the man she loves but the incompatibility of her thirst for knowledge and her place in society.

Conclusion

It is important to consider these works together to better understand the tension apparent in fin-de-siècle women-authored novels about disability, which at times resist and reproduce medical discourses that confirmed the inferiority of the female brain. *Une décadente* and *Névrosée* represent the fin-de-siècle focus on the 'defects' of the female brain in women-authored French novels on disability. Both engage with the idea of the woman's supposed hyper-sensibility and its effect on the narrative. This idea is inextricably tied to fin-de-siècle notions

about the risks of an overly strenuous education on the *sensible* female mind and body, as enumerated in *Névrosée*. Education not only fails to 'correct' the disability and facilitate the affected individual's integration into society but worsens the condition and makes it unbearable.

Like novels in this subgenre from earlier in the century, they employ sentimental codes, along with disability, as a vector for a feminist message that at times lapsed into reifying reactionary stances about women. Indeed, these authors struggle more than their predecessors with resisting, as opposed to reinforcing the dominant medical and political discourses of the period, given the heightened stakes. The novel functions as the battleground for a faltering sense of masculinity in a diseased and depraved society. The act of writing appears as a torturous endeavor, at times a symptom and a cause of madness. In *Une décadente*, for example, the protagonist writes obsessively. We can compare this to *Laide* because both deal with a tempestuous relationship between creator and muse and the tortuous act of creation that results from it. Both muses are monstrous. They demand fulfillment but only monsters come out of it. For this reason, we see women in *Névrosée*, for example, engaging actively in the construction of their narratives within the text. Here, like in chapters 2 and 3, the monstrous aspect appears as a personification of that which lays dormant, hidden in the recesses of the mind only to rear its ugly head when it is least expected.

CONCLUSION

With the turn of the nineteenth century, the sentimental novel faded into obscurity and was largely ignored by scholarly study. However, twentieth-century French (women) authors continued to grapple with the conditions of nineteenth-century female authorhood by taking inspiration from legal, scientific, and literary discourses surrounding sexual perversion, gender subversion, and monstrosity. An examination of the intersection between the developments in these areas reveals a complex discursive, theoretical, and aesthetic relationship between female authorship, the sentimental novel, and disability that evolved over the course of the nineteenth century in France.

During this period, women authors in France experienced heightened levels of scrutiny and barriers to participation in the literary world. As we have seen, thanks to the July Monarchy, women authors gained ground during the early part of the century, especially in the sentimental genre, due to its supposed alignment with their sensibility. Indeed, it privileged educating the reader's own sensibility by evoking a noble emotional response and protecting the reader from more base urges, such as sexual desire. Since nineteenth-century French society viewed women as responsible for children's education, it accepted more readily the 'natural' association between women and this genre.

However, the medical community and public worried that women authors could present several risks to society. Firstly, authors of sentimental novels had to maintain a delicate balance, as contemporary discourses pathologized hyper-sensibility and characterized women and their literary works as being vulnerable to it. Infecting a novel with hyper-sensibility could similarly infect the reader, resulting in an Emma Bovary-esque reaction: dissatisfaction with life and societal role, resulting in inability to fulfill gendered expectations, and ultimately, mental health

crisis and suicide. As we have seen, these concerns increased sharply over the course of the century due to new developments in the fields of psychiatry and neurology, particularly with regard to neuroses, with which women supposedly became afflicted at a much higher than men. Though modern scholars have demonstrated that the measures used to determine this were dubious at best, these results served as compelling arguments in the debate over women's education, which intensified over the course of the century. Additionally, since women-authored novels tended to highlight the injustices to which the most vulnerable in nineteenth-century French society (the poor, the disabled, orphaned children, victims of abuse, illegitimate children, immigrants, and individuals who identified as mixed race or Black) were subjected, they contained the potential to galvanize larger social changes. In a related concern, women authors might forget their place in society, abandoning their children and husbands, or even refusing to marry and procreate all together, to toil feverishly, writing their novels, unraveling the fabric of post-Revolutionary French society. As I previously noted, this became such a widespread concern that it inspired Daumier's infamous caricatures and served as a punchline in parodies of women-authored novels, such as Hénri Latouche's *Olivier.*

Sophie Gay, Claire de Duras, Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, Juliette Lamber, Daniel Lesueur, and Georges de Peyrebrune, like their peers, maintained awareness of the stakes of their literary pursuits. They embody the broad spectrum of motivations women authors of the nineteenth century held for writing novels. Some, such as Juliette Lamber, did so to advocate for women's rights aggressively and unapologetically and to raise awareness about the untenable conditions in which they lived, worked, and learned. Others, such as Claire de Duras did so out of necessity, to support themselves and their families and recover from personal tragedy. Furthermore, few of these authors had personal experience with the disabilities they depicted,

raising questions of the ethics involved. Did their texts serve to shine a light on the need to tear down normative conceptions of disability and ability, or did they see including a disabled character as a simple and effective strategy to engage readers? Often, it is both. Even throughout one novel, these authors periodically resist and reinforce harmful stereotypes applied to disabled individuals and women. Women-authored sentimental novels that feature disabled characters are at times marked by literary innovation. This includes creative merging of many genres and disciplines (medicine, art history, philosophy, physiognomy, etc.), irony and humor, and a masterful understanding of the relationship between the literary and somatic body, as demonstrated by the use of inventive techniques to convey the narrative. Authors also tend to choose to craft characters with disabilities that had become the subject of intense medical, philosophical, and political debate. This afforded them the opportunity to draw in readers and encourage them to reconsider their views on people with these disabilities, by humanizing them and demonstrating their points of commonality with, what they seemed to imagine, was a purely able-bodied readership. Since their point of departure remained an able-bodied society, they often focus novels on a disabled person unable to marry and or procreate due to their disability. However, this did not signify their characters' lack of romantic and sexual desire. Such a dynamic, then, allowed these authors to gesture towards the liberatory possibilities of non-heteronormative romantic and sexual relationships as well as that of androgyny and asexuality.

Especially during the latter years of the nineteenth century, authors of novels in this cohort display ambivalence towards the sentimental genre. During the early part of the century, the sentimental genre represented freedom and possibility, a way to publish and gain a foothold in the literary world. Conversely, towards the end of the century, to many women authors, it felt like a straitjacket, an outmoded style that served mainly to reinforce the hegemony of gender and

able-bodied norms to which they, as women, were relegated. For this reason, in the novels of Lamber, Lesueur, and Peyrebrune, we see interrogation and even mocking of the sentimental codes they employ in their works. However, this common desire to challenge norms in the pursuit of new ways of thinking about women, their writing, and disabled individuals overwhelmingly disappeared into conventional endings. The disabled individual either achieved 'rehabilitation' and was successfully integrated into able-bodied social frameworks (through marriage), or they were eliminated (through death) and with them, the threat to French society.

The ideas explored in this dissertation open pathways for exploration for literary, gender, race, and disability studies. Though the sentimental has received more scholarly attention in recent decades, there is more to understand about the contours of it as well as other trends in women's writing during the nineteenth century and beyond in France. Furthermore, while this project focused specifically on French literature, generative possibilities exist in a comparative study of nineteenth century women's writing featuring disabled characters across national traditions. One thing is certain, women-authored sentimental novels represent a fruitful and understudied terrain and merit further scholarly attention.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adam, Juliette. *A Fascinating Woman*. Translated by Mary Neal Sherwood, W.L. Allison Company, publishers, 1893.

Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Ohio State University Press, 1982.

André, Valérie. Seth, Catriona. With contributions from Hensher, Jonathan; Halleux, Chanel de; Lacôte, Fanny, and website developer swingtree, https://cat19.ee.ulb.be/en. CAT 19 database.

Aristotle, and Stephen Everson. *The Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Balzac, Honoré de. "Physiologie du mariage." *Œuvres Complètes de M. de Balzac*, Furne, 1842.

Balzac, Honoré de, and Éric Bordas. *Sarrasine*. Librairie générale française, 2001.

Barbey d'Aurevilly, Jules. *Les bas-bleus. Les œuvres et les hommes*. Victor Palmé, vol. 5, 1878.

Bard, Christine. *Féminismes: 150 Ans d'idées Reçues*. 2nd ed., Editions le Cavalier Bleu, 2020.

Barre André. *Le symbolisme : essai historique sur le movement poétique en France de 1885 à 1900*. Paris: Jouve et Cie, 1911, p.307.

Bassler, Markus, et al. *Neoclassicisme et Romantisme: architecture, sculpture, peinture, dessin 1750-1848*. Konemann, 2000.

Baudelaire, Charles, and Théophile Gautier. *Les Fleurs du mal*. Lévy, 1868.

Beauvoir, Simone de, and Simone Beauvoir. *Les faits et les mythes*. Gallimard, 2012.

Beizer, Janet L. *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France*. Cornell University Press, 1994.

Bergman-Carton, Janis. *The Woman of Ideas in French Art, 1830-1848*. Yale University Press, 1995.

Bertrand-Jennings, Chantal. *Un autre mal du siècle: Le Romantisme des romancières 1800-1846*. Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2005.

Bérubé, Michael. *Disability and Narrative*. no. 2, Mar. 2005, pp. 568–76.

Black, Sara. "Doctors on Drugs: Medical Professionals and the Proliferation of Morphine Addiction in Nineteenth-Century France." *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 114–36.

"Boiteux, euse." *Le dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 6th ed., vol. 1, Didot, 1835, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/12/4993. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois Project.

Bourget, Paul. *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*. Alphonse Lemerre, 1884.

Dijkstra, Bram. "The Androgyne in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature." *Comparative Literature*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1974, pp. 62–73.

Brundage, James A. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Univ. of Chicago Pr, 1990.

Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc. *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière avec la description du cabinet du roi*. 5th ed., Imprimerie Royale, 1752.

Busst, A. J. L. "The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century." Romantic Mythologies, 1st ed., vol. 9, Routledge, 1967, pp. 1–95, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315641300-1. Taylor & Francis.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

Callaghan, Karen A., editor. *Ideals of Feminine Beauty: Philosophical, Social, and Cultural Dimensions*. Greenwood Press, 1994.

Charlton, Mary. *Rosella, ou les effets des romans sur l'esprit des femmes*. J.-J. Fuchs, 1801.

Charrière, Isabelle de, et al. *Lettres de Mistress Henley publiées par son amie*. Modern Language Association of America, 1993.

Choiseul-Meuse, Félicité de. *Amélie de Saint-Far, ou la fatale erreur ; par Mme de C***, auteur de Julie, ou j'ai sauvé ma rose*. Les Marchands de nouveautés, 1802.

---. *Coralie de Beaumont, ou la piété filiale, histoire véritable, recueillie par Me. L. F.* Le Prieur, 1801.

Cohen, Margaret. *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*. Princeton University Press, 1999.

Colette. *La Vagabonde*. A. Michel, 1946.

Constans, Ellen. *Ouvrières des lettres*. PULIM, 2007.

---. *Parlez-moi d'amour: le roman sentimental ; des romans grecs aux collections de l'an 2000*. PULIM, 1999.

Cryle, Peter. "Foretelling Pathology: The Poetics of Prognosis." *French Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, Feb. 2006, pp. 107–22.

D'Alembert, Jean le Rond. "Défaut, vice, imperfection." *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, etc., eds. Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond D'Alembert, Robert Morrissey, and Glenn Roe, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/encyclopedie0922/navigate/4/3661. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Autumn 2022 Edition).

Dareste, Camille. *Recherches sur la production artificielle des monstruosités; ou essais de tératogénie expérimentale*. Reinwald, 1877.

Daumier, Honoré. "Les Bas-Bleus." *Le Chiavari*, 30 Aug. 1844, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34452332k/date1844. Gallica.

Davis, Lennard J. *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. Verso, 1995.

De Girardin, Delphine. *Monsieur le Marquis de Pontanges*. Dumont, 1853.

De Pree, Julia K. "La Fausse Couche: Failed Potential and the Anti-Enlightenment." *Romance Quarterly*, vol. 49, 2002, pp. 30–35.

Del Lungo, Andrea, and Brigitte Louichon, editors. *La Littérature en bas-bleus: Romancièrees sous la Restauration et la monarchie de Juillet (1815-1848)*. Classiques Garnier, 2010.

---. *La Littérature en bas-bleus: Romancières en France de 1848 à 1870*. Classiques Garnier, 2010.

---. *La Littérature en bas-bleus: Romancières en France de 1870 à 1914*. Classiques Garnier, 2017.

Delaville, Camille. *Lettres de Camille Delaville à Georges de Peyrebrune, 1884-1888*. Edited by Nelly Sanchez, Publications du Centre d'Étude des correspondances et journaux intimes, Université Européenne de Bretagne, 2010.

Denby, David J. *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France, 1760-1820*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Descartes, René, and Jean-Marie Fataud. *Discours de la méthode*. Bordas, 1996.

Diderot, Denis, et al. *Lettres sur les aveugles: à l'usage de ceux qui voient ; Lettre sur les sourd et muets : à l'usage de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent ; présentation, notes, dossier, chronologie, bibliographie par Marian Hobson ... [et al.* Flammarion, 2000.

"Difforme." *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, vol. 1, Coignard, 1694, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/3/8071. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois Project.

Doin, Sophie. *Nouvelles blanches et noires: par Madame Sophie Doin*. Achille Desauges, libraire, 1828.

Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. Routledge, 2003.

---. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge, 2005.

Dumas, Alexandre. *L'Homme-Femme: Réponse à M. Hénri d'Ideville*. 19th ed., Michel Lévy frères, 1872.

Duras, Claire de. *Il segreto*. Translated by Daria Galateria, Sellerio, 1989.

---. *Olivier o el secreto*. Translated by José Ramón San Juan, El Desvelo Edisciones SC, 2013.

---. *Olivier, ou le secret. Texte inédit, établi, présenté et commenté par Denise Virieux.* Edited by Denise Virieux, J. Corti, 1971.

---. *Ourika. Edouard. Olivier, ou le secret*. Folio, 2007.

Eger, Elizabeth. *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Ender, Evelyne. *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Hysteria*. Cornell University Press, 1995.

"Femme." *Dictionnaire de la langue française (Littré)*, 6th ed., vol. 1, Didot, 1835, University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois Project, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/12/18454

Finn, Michael R. *Figures of the Pre-Freudian Unconscious from Flaubert to Proust*. 2019. *Open WorldCat*, https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781316882153.

Flaubert, Gustave, and Yvan Leclerc. *Madame Bovary*. [Repr. der Ausg.] Paris 1857, Droz, 2011.

Fleuriot, Zénaïde. *Sans beauté, par Mlle Zénaïde Fleuriot (Anna Edianez).* C. Dillet, 1862.

---. *Without Beauty; or The Story of a Plain Woman. Translated from the French ["Sans Beauté"] of Mlle. Z.F. by A.W. Chetwode.* Dublin, 1883.

Fleury, Mademoiselle. *Aglaure d'Almont, ou amour et devoir*. Hubert, 1820.

Floupette, Adoré D', et al. *Les déliquescences: Poèmes décadents*. Lion Vanné (Byzance), 1885, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k113350w.texteImage. Gallica.

Foa, Eugénie. *La Laide, par Mme Eugénie Foa.* C. Vimont, 1832.

Formey, M. "Monstre (Zoolog.)." *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers par une Société de Gens de lettres*, Chez les Sociétés Typographiques, vol. 10, 1772 1751, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k3236841. Gallica.

Forster, Ann M. C. *The Good Duchess; Joan of France (1464-1505)*. Burns, Otes & Washbourne, 1950.

Foucault, Michel. *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Gallimard, 2007.

---. *La volonté de savoir*. Gallimard, 1997.

---. *Le souci de soi*. Gallimard, 1996.

---. *L'usage des plaisirs*. Gallimard, 1994.

---. *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*. Gallimard, 2008.

Foucault, Michel, and François Ewald. *Les anormaux: cours au Collège de France (1974 - 1975)*. Gallimard [u.a.], 1999.

Fouillée, Alfred. "La psychologie des sexes et ses fondements physiologiques." *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Sept. 1893, pp. 397–429.

Fourier, Charles. *Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales*. Leipzig, 1808.

Freud, Sigmund, et al. *Studies in Hysteria*. Neeland Media LLC, 2013.

Furness, Ray, and M.A.R. Habib. "Decadence and Fin de Siècle." *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 6, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 340–56.

Garber, Marjorie B. *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*. Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Staring: How We Look*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

---. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. Twentieth anniversary edition, Columbia University Press, 2017.

Gautier, Théophile. *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. 1836, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1065296z.image. Gallica.

Gay, Sophie. *Anatole 1 (1815)*. Didot, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k620162.texteImage. Gallica.

---. *Anatole 2 (1815)*. Didot, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k620220.texteImage. Gallica.

---. Translated to German by unknown, possible Sophie Gay. *Anatole 1-2*. Didot. 1815.

Gendrel, Bernard. *Le Roman de Mœurs: Aux Origines Du Roman Réaliste*. Hermann, 2012.

---. *Le roman de mœurs: Aux origines du roman réaliste*. Hermann, 2012.

Genette, Gérard. *Nouveau discours du récit*. Éditions du Seuil, 1983.

---. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Genlis, Stéphanie-Félicité de. *Adelaide and Theodore; or Letters on Education*. 1st ed., C. Bathurst and T. Cadell, 1873.

---. *Jane of France an Historical Novel*. Published by Wells and Lilly. Sold by Van Winkle and Wiley, New-York; Websters and Skinner, Albany; and M. Carey, Philadelphia, 1817.

---. *Jeanne de France, nouvelle historique*. 1st ed., vol. 1-2, Chez Maradan, 1816.

---. *Théatre à l'usage des jeunes personnes*. De l'imprimerie de Luc White, 1784.

Ghezzi, Bert. *Voices of the Saints: A Year of Readings*. 1st ed, Doubleday, 2000.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, et al. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Rutgers University Press, 1993.

Gluck, Mary. "Decadence as Historical Myth and Cultural Theory." *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire*, vol. 21, no. 3, May 2014, pp. 349–61.

Graffigny, Françoise de. *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*. A Peine, 1747, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9812017x/f20.item. Gallica.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies*. Hachette, 1994.

Guyau, Jean-Marie. *Education and Heredity*. Edited by Havelock Ellis, Translated by W.J. Greenstreet, Walter Scott, 1891.

---. *Education et hérédité: etude sociologique*. FORGOTTEN Books, 2015.

Halperin, David. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford University Press, 1995.

Hammon Clarke, Edward. *Sex in Education: A Fair Chance for Girls*. Arno Press, 1972.

Hawthorne, Melanie. "Rachilde." *French Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, edited by Eva Martin Sartori and Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman, Greenwood Press, 1991.

Haynes, Christine. *Lost Illusions: The Politics of Publishing in Nineteenth-Century France*. Harvard University Press, 2010.

Heilbrun, Carolyn G. *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*. Norton, 1993.

Hewitt, Jessie. *Institutionalizing Gender: Madness, the Family, and Psychiatric Power in Nineteenth-Century France*. Cornell University Press, 2020.

Hogenhuis-Seliverstoff, Anne. *Juliette Adam, 1836-1936: L'instigatrice*. L'Harmattan, 2002.

Horvath-Peterson, Sandra. *Victor Duruy & French Education: Liberal Reform in the Second Empire*. Louisiana State University Press, 1984.

Huet, Marie-Hélène. *Monstrous Imagination*. Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hughlings, Jackson, J. "On the Anatomical and Physiological Localisation of Movements in the Brain." *J. Hughlings Jackson, Selected Writings I-II*, vol. 1, Basic Books, 1873, pp. 37–76.

Hugo, Victor. *L'homme qui rit*. 1866.

---. *La préface de Cromwell (Introduction, Texte et Notes)*. Edited by Souriau, Maurice, Société Française d'Imprimerie & de Librairie, 1897.

---. *Notre Dame de Paris*. Folio Classique, 2017.

Humboldt, Alexander Von. *Lettres à Claire de Duras (1814-1828), Correspondance Inédite*. Edited by Marie-Bénédicte Diethelm, Éditions Manusius, 2016.

Hunt, Lynn. *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. University of California Press, 1992.

"Infirmité." *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, etc., eds. Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond D'Alembert, Robert Morrissey, and Glenn Roe, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/encyclopedie0922/navigate/8/3130. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Autumn 2022 Edition).

Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory*. Melbourne University Press, 1996.

Jammes, André, and Françoise Courbage. *Les Didot: Trois siècles de typographie et de bibliophilie, 1698-1998*. Agence culturelle de Paris, 1998.

Janin, Jules. "Bas-Bleus." *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes : Encyclopédie Morale Du Dix-Neuvième Siècle*, L. Curmer, 1842.

Jones, Kathleen. *Women Saints: Lives of Faith and Courage*. Orbis Books, 1999.

Jourde, Pierre. *Littérature monstre : études sur la modernité littéraire*. L'Esprit des Péninsules, 2008.

Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press, 2013.

Kempf, Roger. *Sur le corps romanesque*. Éditions du Seuil, 1968.

Koh, Adeline. "Marriage, 'Métissage,' and Women's Citizenship: Revisiting Race and Gender in Claire de Duras's 'Ourika.'" *French Forum, University of Pennsylvania Press*, vol. 38, no. 3, Fall 2013, pp. 15–30.

Køppe, Simo. "Neurosis: Aspects of Its Conceptual Development in the Nineteenth Century." *History of Psychiatry*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2009, pp. 27–46.

La Place, Pierre-Antoine de. *La laideur aimable, et les dangers de la beauté*. Chez Rollin, 1752.

Laclos, Choderlos de, et al. *Les liaisons dangereuses*. Gallimard, 2008.

LaFayette, Marie-Madeleine de, and Antoine Adam. *La princesse de clèves*. Flammarion, 1995.

Lamber, Juliette. *Laide*. Calmann-Lévy, 1878, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6495896v.texteImage#. Gallica.

Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. 10. print, Harvard University Press, 2003.

Latouche, Henri de. *Olivier*. 1826.

Lavater, Johann Caspar. *Physiognomische Fragmente, zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniss und Menschenliebe/ von Johann Caspar Lavater; Erster [-Vierter] Versuch, mit vielen Kupfern*. Leipzig und Winterthur: Bey Weidmanns Erben und Reich, und Steiner und Compagnie, 1775.

Le fermier aveugle et sa famille, traduit de l'anglais. Translated by Mademoiselle de Montrond, Paschoud, 1822.

Lesueur, Daniel (J. Loiseau). *Névrosée*. Alphonse Lemerre, 1890, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k68762m/f6.item. Gallica.

"Laid, Laide." *Le dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 6th ed., vol. 2, Didot, 1835, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/13/2143. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois Project.

"Laideron." *Le dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 6th ed., vol. 2, Didot, 1835, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/13/2146. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois Project.

Littré, Émile. “Défaut.” *Dictionnaire de la langue française (Littré)*, vol. 2, Hachette, 1873, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/15/1145. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois Project.

---. “Difformité.” *Dictionnaire de la langue française (Littré)*, vol. 2, Hachette, 1873, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/15/3872. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois Project.

---. “Fièvre.” *Dictionnaire de la langue française (Littré)*, vol. 2, Hachette, 1873, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/15/12728. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois Project.

---. “Monstruosité.” *Dictionnaire de la langue française (Littré)*, vol. 3, Hachette, 1873, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/16/10063. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois Project.

---. “Névrose.” *Dictionnaire de la langue française (Littré)*, vol. 3, Hachette, 1873, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/16/11648. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois Project.

---. “Norme.” *Dictionnaire de la langue française (Littré)*, vol. 3, Hachette, 1873, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/16/12073. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois Project.

Liu, Tuo. *Pretty Ugly: The Poetics and Politics of Ugliness in Nineteenth-Century French Literature*. Harvard University, 2018.

Louichon, Brigitte. *Romancières sentimentales: 1789-1825*. Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2009.

Lu, Lillian. “Assuming Innocence: The Ingénue’s Satire in Frances Burney’s Evelina.” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 33, no. 1, Fall 2020.

Lue, Tom. “Anatomy and Physiology of the Penis.” *Handbooks in Health Care Co.*, Contemporary diagnosis and management of male erectile dysfunction, 1999.

M. Fouquet. “Sensibilité, Sentiment, (Médecine).” *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers par une société de gens de lettres*, Chez les Sociétés Typographiques, 1772 1751.

Magendie, François. *Formulaire pour la préparation et l’emploi de plusieurs nouveaux médicamens*. Hachette, 2022.

Malarme, Charlotte de Bournon. *Héléna Aldenar, ou le bigame*. J. Chaumerot, 1810.

Marion, Hénri. *Études de psychologie féminine. L'éducation des jeunes filles*. Colin, 1902.

Marks, Elaine, and Isabelle De Courtivron, editors. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Schocken Books, 1981.

Marquand, Louis-Antoine. *Amanda ou les apparitions noctures*. Tiger, 1801.

Mather, Laura. *The Life and Networks of Pamela Fitzgerald, 1773-1831*. Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, 2017.

McRuer, Robert, et al. *A Cultural History of Disability in the Long Nineteenth Century.* 2020.

Mesch, Rachel. *The Hysteric's Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2006.

Michelet, Jules. *La Femme*. 10th ed., Calmann-Lévy, 1870, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5596481c.texteImage. Gallica.

Miller, Nancy K. *Subject to Change. Reading Feminist Writing*. Columbia University Press, 1988.

Mitchell, David and Snyder, Sharon. *Narrative Prothesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. University Press of Michigan, 2000.

Montolieu, Mme la baronne Isabelle de. *La jeune aveugle, suivie de la poupée bienfaisante*. A. Bertrand, 1829, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5700934k/f8.item. Gallica.

"Monstrueux, euse." *Le dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 5th ed., vol. 2, Smits, 1798, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/11/2788. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois Project.

Morcos, Saad. *Juliette Adam.* Librairie Philosophique J, 1962.

Murat, Laure. *L'homme qui se prenait pour Napoléon: pour une histoire politique de la folie*. Gallimard, 2013.

Naudin, Marie. "Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis." *French Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, edited by Eva Martin Sartori and Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman, Greenwood Press, 1991.

Nicot, Jean. "Monstre." *Thresor de la langue françoise tant ancienne que moderne*, vol. 2, Douceur, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/2/2338. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'autrefois Project.

---. “Muet.” *Thresor de la langue françoise tant ancienne que moderne*, vol. 2, Douceur, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/2/2338. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois Project.
NIV Bible. Bible Gateway, 1993, https://www.biblegateway.com/.

Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. University of Nebraska Press, 1968.

“Normal, ale.” 6th ed., vol. 2, Didot, 1835, https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic4.7/publicdicos/navigate/13/6464. University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d’autrefois Project

Nye, Robert. “Honor, Impotence, and Male Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century French Medicine.” *French Historical Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1989, pp. 48–71.

O’Connell, David. “Ourika: Black Face, White Mask.” *The French Review. Special Issue*, vol. 47, no. 6, Spring 1974, pp. 47–56.

Padwa, Howard. *Social Poison: The Culture and Politics of Opiate Control in Britain and France, 1821-1926*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

Pailhès, Abbé Gabriel. *La Duchesse de Duras et Chateaubriand d’après Des Documents Indédits*. Perrin, 1910.

Pascal, Blaise. “Pensées / Pascal ; présentation et notes par Gérard Ferreyrolles ; texte établi par Philippe Sellier.” *Pensées*, Librairie générale de France, 2000.

Peyrebrune, Georges de, and Nelly Sanchez. *Correspondance: de la Société des gens de lettres au jury du prix Vie heureuse*. Éditions Classiques Garnier Numérique, 2016. *Open WorldCat*, https://doi.org/10.15122/isbn.978-2-8124-3323-8.

---. *Le roman d’un bas-bleu*. P. Ollendorff, 1892.

---. *Une Décadente*. L. Frinzine, 1886.

Pichon, Georges. *Le morphinisme : impulsions délictueuses, troubles physiques et mentaux des morphinomanes, leur capacité et leur situation juridique : cause, déontologie et prophylaxie du vice morphinique*. Octave Doin, 1889, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k76750b/f8.item. Gallica.

Pienero, J. M. Lopez. *Historical Origin of the Concept of Neuroses*. Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Planté, Christine. *La petite sœur de Balzac: Essai sur la femme auteur*. Seuil, 1989.

Platter, Felix. *Praxeos medicae opus : quinque libris adornatum & in tres tomos distinctum* .. 3. hac ed. ... locupletatum, ... Emendatum a Felice Platero ... Fel. nep. Huic accessit, Ejusdem

Quaestionum medicarum paradoxarum&Endoxarum, Centuria posthuma, Opera primum Thomae Plateri ... edita, nunc Ab eodem nep. Th. fil. revisa&Recusa, Impensis Emanuelis König, typis Viduae Joh. Jac. Genathii, 1656.

Prasad, Pratima. "Deceiving Disclosures: Androgyny and George Sand's Gabriel." *French Forum, University of Pennsylvania Press*, vol. 24, no. 3, Sept. 1999, pp. 331–51.

Quetelet, Adolphe. *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés, ou Essai de physique sociale*. Bachelier, 1835.

Riccoboni, Marie-Jeanne. *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby à Milady Henriette Campley, son amie*. Francfort & Leipsic, chez Knoch & Eslinger. M. D. CC. LIX., 1759, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9791964b/f9.item.r=Lettres%20de%20milady%20Juliette%20Catesby.

---. *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butlerd à Milord Charles Alfred de Caitombridge*. 3rd ed., La Société des Libraries. M. DCC. LXVII., 1767, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6553653x/f5.item.texteImage.

Richardson, Catherine Eliza. *Adonia, ou les dangers du sentiment*. Translated by François Soulès, André, 1801.

Richardson, Samuel, and Angus Ross. *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*. Penguin Books, 1985.

Roubaud, Félix. *Traité de l'impuissance et de la stérilité chez l'homme et chez la femme comprenant l'exposition des moyens recommandés pour y remédier*. 1st ed., Librairie J.-B. Baillière et fils, 1855.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. Edited by Judith H McDowell, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968.

Sand, George. *Valentine*. Meylan : Éditions de l'Aurore, 1988.

Saint-Hilaire, Geoffroy. *Histoire générale et particulière des anomalies de l'organisation chez l'homme et les animaux, ou, traité de tératologie: ouvrage comprenant des recherches sur les caractères, la classification, l'influence, les rapports généraux, les lois, et les causes de monstruousité, des variétés et vices de conformation*. Baillière, 1832.

Schlanger, Judith. *Les métaphores de l'organisme*. L'Harmattan, 1995.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. Translated by Judith Norman et al., Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Scott, Sarah. *A Description of Millenium Hall*. Edited by Gary Kelly, Broadview Press, 1995.

Simon, Walter Michael. *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century: An Essay in Intellectual History*. Kennikat Press, 1972.

Smith, James M. "Concepts of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century French Literature." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1953, pp. 640–51.

Soulié, Frédéric. *Physiologie du bas-bleu*. Aubert, 1841.

Staël, Germaine de. *Corinne, ou l'Italie*. Edited by Simone Balayé, Champion, 2000.

Stead, Evanghélia. *Le monstre, le singe et le fœtus: tératogonie et décadence dans l'Europe fin-de-siècle*. Droz, 2004.

Stendhal. *Armance*. U. Canel, 1827, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8623293c/f13.item. Gallica.

Stiker, Henri-Jacques. *Corps infirmes et sociétés*. Aubier Montaigne, 1982.

Thulié, Hénri. *La femme, Essai de sociologie physiologique*. Delahaye and Lecrosnier, 1885.

Toman, Rolf. *Néoclassicisme et Romantisme : architecture, sculpture, peinture, dessin*. Könemann, 2000.

Tuana, Nancy. *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature*. Indiana University Press, 1993.

Tyler, Graeme. *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes*. Princeton University Press, 1982.

Vigarello, Georges. *Histoire de la beauté: le corps et l'art d'embellir de la Renaissance à nos jours*. Éd. du Seuil, 2007.

---. *Histoire du corps*. 2011.

Vila, Anne C. *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Ville, Isabelle and Ravaud, Jean-François. "French Disability Studies: Differences and Similarities." *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, vol. 9, no. 3–4, 2007, pp. 138–45.

Virey, J. J., and Hugues-Marie Feugueray. *De la puissance vitale: considérée dans ses fonctions physiologiques chez l'homme et tous les êtres organisés; avec des recherches sur les forces médicatrices, et les moyens de prolonger l'existence*. Crochard, 1823.

Waller, Margaret. *The Male Malady: Fictions of Impotence in the French Romantic Novel*. Rutgers University Press, 1993.

Wang, Ying. *Deviance and Transgression: "Monstruous" Bodies in Nineteenth Century Women's Fiction*. Pennsylvania State University, 2011.

Worley, Linda Kraus. "The Body, Beauty, and Woman: The Ugly Heroine in Stories by Therese Huber and Gabriele Reuter." *The German Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 3, Summer 1991, pp. 368–78.

Zola, Emile, and Robert Abirached. *Thérèse Raquin*. Nouvelle éd, 2001.