JEANNE MARIE LEPRINCE DE BEAUMONT :

WOMEN'S EPISTOLARY AND PEDAGOGICAL FICTION

IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

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presented by Victoria Pine,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Carol Lazzaro-Weis

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my family. Most importantly, I would like to express my gratitude to my husband, Darren, for his support not only throughout the dissertation process but for his constant encouragement during my undergraduate and graduate studies. Without you, my life would be incomplete.

I would also like to thank my son, Samuel Noah, for taking his naps when I needed him to, especially when he slept for 4 hours at a time allowing me to be extremely productive.

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ABSTRACT

Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont (1711-1780) dedicated her life to writing and teaching young women. In all, she wrote 70 volumes of prose including several articles in magazines she founded and edited, novels, fairy tales and epistolary novels. Although Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont could be considered one of the most prolific women writers of her time who championed women's education and famously rewrote Gabrielle de Villeneuve's La Belle et la Bête, her name has been forgotten over time.

Most analysis of Mme de Beaumont's works concentrates on her fairy tales, most notably the above mentioned La Belle et la Bête. Now, I suggest turning a more critical eye to two of Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels: Lettres de Madame du Montier and Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, to see how such a prolific writer fits into the eighteenth-century, amongst male and female authors of epistolary novels. I will examine how Mme de Beaumont's choice of genre along with her gender and historical situation shaped the content of her epistolary fiction.

Chapter 1:

Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont and the Epistolary Novel

Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont was a singular woman who had a passion for writing and dedicated her life to teaching young ladies. In all, she wrote 70 volumes of prose which include several articles in magazines she founded and edited, novels, fairy tales and epistolary novels. Moreover, she was one of the few self sufficient women of her time due to her magazines: Le Nouveau Magasin français, Le Magasin des Enfants, Le Magasin des Adolescentes, all of which were translated into many languages, notably English, German and Russian. Yet her name and work have largely been forgotten over the centuries. Although Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont could be considered one of the most prolific women writers of her time who championed women's education and who famously rewrote Gabrielle de Villeneuve's La Belle et la Bête, as Joan Hinde-Stewart asserts:

> Any currency that her name retains, however, is chiefly owing its appearance on the cover of editions of *La Belle et la Bête*…The fairy tale was first

> published in 1740 by Gabrielle de Villeneuve, but Le Prince de Beaumont condensed the story from nearly two hundred pages to twenty-two…*La Belle et la Bête* is today without doubt the best-known work of fiction published by any woman in the eighteenth century. (25-26)

Despite a recent recovery of some of Mme de Beaumont's writings the emphasis of study is solely on her fairy tales and didactic *magasins*. Little work has been done on her epistolary novels, and in fact they have not been reprinted since the eighteenth-century. However, thanks to the internet, her epistolary novels can be found in online databases as well as Google Books.

Jeanne Marie le Prince de Beaumont was born to a bourgeois family in 1711, in Rouen. At the age of 14, she entered a convent where, like many young ladies from the middle class, she received her formal education:

> Jeanne Marie entre avec sa soeur cadette, Catherine Aimée, au couvent d'Ernemont, près de Rouen. Cette institution formait de jeunes filles à l'enseignement dans les écoles gratuites. (Kaltz, viii)

After finishing her education Mme de Beaumont remained at the convent where she taught young girls from poor families, who otherwise would have had no formal education. She taught them reading and writing, arithmetic and, of course, catechism. Most importantly, as Barbara Kaltz

suggests, Mme de Beaumont had not only first-hand experience learning from a convent, but also became an instructor, which would form her opinion on the state of women's education: "Les années passées à Ernemont lui inspireront de sérieuses réserves sur l'éducation des filles au couvent" (ix). Finally, in 1735, at the age of 24, Mme de Beaumont left the convent and became a governess at the court of Lunéville.

> Son départ du couvent ressemble à une fuite, mais elle est bien recommandée et devient lectrice et gouvernante de la princesse Elisabeth-Thérèse, fille de la Régente duchesse de Lorraine. Ensuite, toujours à Lunéville, à la cour de Stanilas cette fois, elle donne des leçons de musique, court le cachet, enseigne aussi aux petites filles. (Deguise, 158)

It is there that Mme de Beaumont met her first husband, Antoine Grimand de Beaumont, an officer. They were married in 1743, and their daughter, Elisabeth, was born the following year. However, since in 1745, Mme de Beaumont petitioned to have her marriage annulled, one can only assume that her marriage to Antoine was an unhappy one. It is rumored that M. de Beaumont enjoyed gambling, was not faithful to his wife and lost their fortune due to gambling debts. In the end, he died of venereal disease. Mme de Beaumont was ruined financially after her short marriage

and decided to leave France and start over in London.

In 1748, Mme de Beaumont began her career of writing by publishing her first novel, Le Triomphe de la vérité where she declares the truth of Christianity. She also published her response to Coyer, La lettre en réponse à "L'année merveilleuse", a defense of women and a declaration of women's superiority to men, along with a brochure, Arrêt solennel de la nature. In the same year, Mme de Beaumont moved to London, leaving her daughter in a Parisian convent. It is in London where Mme de Beaumont published her *magasins* and established herself as a renowned governess of aristocratic English families.

In 1750, she began publishing Le Nouveau Magasin français, a monthly periodical that lasted about three years.[1] Mme de Beaumont published Éducation complète in 1752, a history textbook. Two years later she published a novel, Civan, roi de Bungo, before she began in 1758 to publish Magasin des Adolescentes. On a personal note, Mme de Beaumont found love once more when she met and married Thomas Pichon in 1760. Their marriage did not end in divorce nor was it annulled, however, after Mme de Beaumont returned to France in 1763, her husband never rejoined her

and he died in England in 1781. Due to health problems, Mme de Beaumont left London and moved to France in 1763. It is in Savoie where Mme de Beaumont became very productive and wrote the following epistolary novels: Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie (1765), Mémoires de madame la baronne de Batteville (1766) and La Nouvelle Clarisse (1767).

It is believed, but not certain, that Jeanne Marie le Prince de Beaumont died in 1780. There are conflicting documents and letters that put her death anywhere from 1778 to 1784: "La date exacte de la mort de l'auteur est inconnue. La plupart des sources donnent 1780 comme l'année de son décès, sans autre précision" (Kaltz, xiv). What is certain is the legacy Mme de Beaumont left behind. Her writings for the improvement and equality of women's education have certainly left their mark, in England and throughout Europe. Mme de Beaumont did not back down from confrontation, as she began her writing career with her Lettre en réponse à "L'année merveilleuse" and continued to write in defense of and for women.

As a governess, Mme de Beaumont took it upon herself to reject the frivolous and invoke women's ability to

reason and think for themselves. She rejected the values of the aristocracy and emphasized those of the middle class.[2] She therefore created her own texts from which she taught young aristocratic English girls. Those texts were published monthly in Le Nouveau Magasin français beginning in 1750 then later in Le Magasin des Enfants (1756) and in Le Magasin des Adolescentes (1758). As Patricia Clancy points out,

> Mme le Prince de Beaumont was nevertheless the first woman to found a magazine and then to turn the periodical essay to the propagation of feminist ideas, all of which probably makes her the mother of the modern women's magazines. (199)

Patricia Clancy asserts that Mme de Beaumont's magazines can be considered the precursor to modern day women magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Ladies Home Journal*. Yet still, Mme de Beaumont is not studied often, if at all, even though she certainly left her mark on literature as a whole and even our everyday lives.

Most importantly, as a woman writer, Mme de Beaumont championed women's right to education and she continued the debate of the importance of marriage for women, which can be traced back to Christine de Pisan (1365-1430) during the Middle Ages. Moreover, Mme de Beaumont was a strong

believer in woman's capacity to reason, to think and to create. She put her beliefs into practice in her question and response lessons found in her *magasins*: Mme de Beaumont used the character, Mlle Bonne, an older, wiser woman, who raised questions with the younger female characters, Ladi Spirituelle, Ladi Tempête, Ladi Sensée and Miss Frivole, all of which lead to lively debates amongst her pupils that forced them to reason and think for themselves. Mme de Beaumont also emphasized humanity in her lessons, to treat others well and to look past the exterior appearance of a person, which does not always reflect the goodness of a person's soul. Everything Mme de Beaumont wrote had a lesson. This is true in her fairy tales, novels and her epistolary novels.

Critics can no longer ignore the writer behind the words on the page, and the gender of the author of an epistolary novel is a crucial element in understanding the text as a whole. The epistolary novel was a very intimate form of story-telling because its origins were found in real correspondence that revealed true feelings and passions. The eighteenth-century was the Golden Age of the epistolary novel for both men and women writers. Like

other women writers of her time, Mme de Beaumont was exploring common themes of the eighteenth-century and touching particularly on the philosophical debate of the Enlightenment. With that said, clearly there is a need to examine the complete *oeuvre* of Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont. She did more than write fairy tales; she was an accomplished epistolière.

Until recently, the assumption has been that the gender of the author is neutral and should have no effect on the text. In Jean Rousset's Forme et Signification, he discusses the epistolary novel and analyzes the following novels: La Nouvelle Héloïse, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, and Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées. All three epistolary novels Rousset chose for discussion were written by male authors: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Choderlos de Laclos and Honoré de Balzac respectively. Furthermore, Rousset ignores the differences between epistolary novels written by male and female authors. Instead, he lumps male and female authors together and suggests the demise of the epistolary novel was the fault of women writers:

> Le roman par lettres n'est plus qu'un journal camouflé, la forme épistolaire ne garde plus que les apparences; en réalité, elle se modifie gravement et va vers son extinction. C'est sur ce nouveau modèle que sont

> construits les romans de Mme de Charrière, de Mme de Krudener, de Mme de Souza... (70)

Rousset even made a mistake when referring to Mme de Graffigny's epistolary chef-d'oeuvre, Les Lettres d'une péruvienne: "Absence de tout contact: ce sont les Lettres portugaises et, beaucoup plus tard, au milieu du XVIIIe siècle, les Lettres péruviennes, qui combinent le souvenir des Portugaises à celui des Lettres persanes" (77). Rousset's error shows the lack of interest in and attention to epistolary novels written by women. It was no mistake on Mme de Graffigny's part to title her novel as she did, to make it clear and set it apart from the epistolary novels written by Guilleragues, Les Lettres portugaises, and Montesquieu, Les Lettres persanes. Mme de Graffigny was emphasizing the individual female voice in her title on purpose. Women writers of epistolary novels were, by and large, ignored until the late twentieth century which, in part, explains how Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont's epistolary novels received so little attention until recently.

It is now acknowledged that gender is a major analytical tool in literary theory. In the case of the epistolary novel, its importance is paramount. When

examining these novels, it is obvious that epistolary novels written by male authors and those written by female authors are two separate, yet contingent traditions. However, previously, distinctions made between male and female epistoliers served to classify female works as “non-literary”. For example, Laurent Versini dedicates an entire chapter to epistolary novels written by women, “Travaux de dames” in his work: Le Roman épistolaire. In it Versini emphasizes the woman writer’s “natural” ability to write letters in statements like: “Tous ces jeux ont le naturel de la vie, d’une vie ordinaire sans être plate, qui continue une fois le livre refermé...” (185). In the above quote, Versini seems to emphasize the mundane elements of the plot. This suggests that Mme de Charrière writes only about what she knows firsthand, as opposed to careful study of a given subject. By underscoring the mundane nature of Mme de Charrière’s intrigue, Versini devalues her work as a whole. Moreover, Versini repeats the adage since women writers of the epistolary novel are natural writers, their works are not held in the same esteem as those written by male authors. When Versini concludes his section on Sophie Cottin, author of Claire d’Albe (1799), he simply states:

> Malgré ces curiosités, Mme Cottin propose des romans rudimentaires qui doivent à ses déceptions personnelles une violence incapables de passer pour de la force et un héroïsme qui reste bourgeois et grandiloquent. (195)

Versini's judgement that Mme Cottin's epistolary novel is underdeveloped and pompous clearly devalues her work.

If on the one hand, critics ignored the existence of women writers and those that reviewed them on the other, then critics discredited their works and placed them outside of the canon by claiming their art to be non-literary. In the past twenty to thirty years, critics who have been focused on women writers have uncovered rich source material for study. It is thanks to their work in academia that has allowed the rediscovery of women writers such as Mme de Beaumont including her epistolary novels which are important to any examination of her didactic writings as a whole.

In Technologies of Gender Teresa de Lauretis argues that gender is an analytical category to be examined more closely and in doing so, de Lauretis has helped open the door to the examination of many forgotten women writers. She begins with an essay, "The Technology of Gender" where she discusses the danger of defining gender based on the

differences between male and female:

> The notion of gender *as* sexual difference has grounded and sustained feminist interventions in the arena of formal and abstract knowledge, in the epistemologies and cognitive fields defined by the social and physical sciences as well as the human sciences or humanities…But that notion of gender as sexual difference and its derivative notions—women's culture, mothering, feminine writing, femininity, etc.—have now become a limitation, something of a liability to feminist thought. (1)

Here, de Lauretis points out that women have been defined as existing outside of the perceived universal norm, which is based in what men have done causes most attempts to define women as different from men to result in assumptions and judgments that women and their writings have been defined in a negative manner. The emphasis on the sexual difference between man and woman has become a *liability* and de Lauretis proposes a new way of defining woman:

> …we need a notion of gender that is not so bound up with sexual difference as to be virtually coterminous with it and such that, on the one hand, gender is assumed to derive unproblematically from sexual difference while, on the other, gender can be subsumed in sexual differences as an effect on language, or as pure imaginary—nothing to do with the real. This bind, this mutual containment of gender and sexual difference(s), needs to be unraveled and deconstructed. (2)

In the above quotation, de Lauretis asserts the necessity of using gender as an analytical category to deconstruct

erroneous assumptions that have been accepted over time and are considered unquestionable truths. The gender of the author is equally important to a text as is its social and historical context since perceptions of gender derive from these very contexts and change with them. de Lauretis deemphasizes the “essential” difference between male and female as the means to define gender. By debunking the notion of universal tenets that lead to canonization, de Lauretis places texts written by men as well as women on the same level. One is not inferior to the other because it is different. Rather, women’s works participate in the canon in ways that need to be “unraveled and deconstructed”.

With that said, works written by women in a response to or imitation of those written by men do not devalue the literary value of their writings. Both women and men writers respond to one another in their works. That does not mean that these responses or imitations are any less important, nor does it delegitimize a woman author’s art. It is not a question of male versus female. Rather it is a question of how the gender of an author affected the genre—in this case, the epistolary novel. This is a valid examination, just as analyzing the affect of an author’s

social class is a legitimate analytical category.

The fact that Mme de Beaumont was a woman writer in the eighteenth-century, working as a middle-class governess should not be forgotten when examining her works, especially her epistolary novels. Joan Hinde-Stewart has analyzed how Mme de Beaumont took on women's issues of the eighteenth-century, such as the question of marriage and woman's role in the family. Barbara Kaltz affirms the following :

> Fidèle à ses principes, Mme de Beaumont souligne dans ses romans [épistolaires], dont la visée est moralisatrice, l'importance de l'éducation des filles. D'autre part, elle valorise nettement le discours maternel et le rôle de la mère. (xvii)

I propose taking this a step further by analyzing in detail how Mme de Beaumont's gender affected her epistolary novels and how her social class affected not only the didactic tone of her epistolary novels, but more importantly, the type of values she asserted in her texts. Both texts that I have chosen to analyze, Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie and Lettres de Madame du Montier, give the example of an older, wiser woman instructing a younger woman entering marriage.

In both volumes of Marie Reynaud's Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont: La vie et l'œuvre d'une éducatrice,

there is little examination of her epistolary novels. In an early reference to Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels, there is a reference to Marie-Antoinette:

> Notre bibliothèque conserve quatre exemplaires de ses ouvrages, dont les reliures de maroquin rouge sont frappées aux armes de Marie-Antoinette. Ce sont: *Éducation complète*, 1762; *Magasin des adolescentes*, 1768; *Mémoires de Madame de Batteville ou La Veuve parfaite*, 1766; *La Nouvelle Clarisse*, 1767. En somme, le choix porte sur deux traités d'éducation, puis sur la résolution chrétienne d'une situation presque aussi scabreuse que celle des héros de la *Nouvelle Héloïse*... (7)

Even with its detailed work on the life and works of Mme de Beaumont, Reynaud pays little critical attention to Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels. Instead she concentrates on different moments of Mme de Beaumont's life, emphasizing Mme de Beaumont's fairy tales, Chéri, Les Fagotiers, La Belle et la Bête and her *magasins*, Le Nouveau Magasin français, Magasin des Enfants and Magasin des Adolescentes.

Interestingly, Marie-Antoinette figures as one of many "lectrice" amongst aristocratic children who received their education from the manuals of Mme de Beaumont:

> Avec l'*Éducation complette*, Mme de Beaumont visait un public en premier lieu aristocratique. Parmi les lecteurs de la noblesse française et allemande figuraient Marie-Antoinette, Gaspard de Pingo de Prangin, chanoine-comte de la Primatiale de Lyon, la duchesse Augusta Sophia de Hanovre et la comtesse Henriette von Pfeil. (Kaltz, 25)

One should not underestimate Mme de Beaumont's influence in children's education, not only in England where she worked as a governess, but across Europe, thanks to the many translations of her texts and their wide distribution. Moreover, a large portion of her pupils were from aristocratic families. What indeed was Mme de Beaumont teaching these future leaders of Europe? What values was she passing on and what was she expecting her young aristocrats to learn?

In Servanne Woodward's article, "Definitions of Humanity for Young Ladies by Madame le Prince de Beaumont", she explores how Mme de Beaumont defined humanity for her students particularly in La Belle et la Bête which first appeared in Le Magasin des Enfants in 1756. Woodward points out the following:

> Beaumont wants to implement principles by which her pupils do not reproduce learned motions. Her young ladies are able to generate rational thoughts, that is, to create in their turn…Thus, *Le Magasin des Enfants* easily differentiates between humanity and mechanism… (185)

Mme de Beaumont's style in her *magasins* was in the form of question and response. She would present characters in certain situations then Mlle Bonne, Mme de Beaumont's voice

within the *magasin*, poses questions that allow for discussion and debate amongst her students. Mme de Beaumont does not necessarily give the students direct instruction on how to act, rather she debates with her students so that they can be the ones to come up with the correct way of being. The Socratic method is repeated in her other fairy tales. Perhaps the most important example of how Mme de Beaumont demonstrated humanity was in Beauty's decision to marry the Beast: "Beauty elects to marry the Beast despite her sensual perception which reveals a monstrous appearance. Her understanding of the Beast lets her see his goodness" (186). This ability to look beyond the exterior appearance of a person so that one can truly know the goodness or even the lack of goodness of a person is exactly what Mme de Beaumont strives to teach her young ladies. By looking past the frivolous, her young ladies are able to appreciate others more, and in return they themselves will be regarded with higher respect. In practical terms, Mme de Beaumont's students learn to respect others so that those who work for her, for example, her servants, will then respect and care for her more. However, Woodward's discussion is limited to Mme de

Beaumont's fairy tales and does not include her epistolary novels, which also appeared in Le Magasin des Enfants. At this point, one can only assume that Mme de Beaumont reinforces her definition of humanity in those works as well.

Patricia Clancy has done extensive research on the life and works of Mme de Beaumont. She has written several articles that examine Mme de Beaumont's *magasins*, particularly Mme de Beaumont as a journalist. Also, Clancy has examined Mme de Beaumont's role as an educator and writer of children's literature. In the article: "A French writer and educator in England: mme Le Prince de Beaumont", Clancy examines Mme de Beaumont's role in women's education in England during the eighteenth-century. In it, Clancy states that:

> In the case of mme de Beaumont, it was the revelation of the pitifully low education and status of Englishwomen that turned a moderately progressive French teacher into an ardent defender of women as a sex and their right to education. It was also England that turned a third-rate novelist into one of the founders of women's magazines and the originator in France of literature written especially for children. (195-196)

Thanks to Mme de Beaumont's decision to move to London to work as a governess, she found herself in a different

culture, one that was ardently holding women back. For Mme de Beaumont, this was unacceptable and she did something about it. Writing and publishing her *magasins* not only added to the material uniquely for women's education but it also allowed Mme de Beaumont to direct the content and the type of education young ladies received. It is important to note that in England Mme de Beaumont was instructing young ladies who

> were destined to take charge of a household and occupy an important place in society, she taught them 'les devoirs de leur état': the solid middle-class virtues of goodness, simplicity, generosity and affection which Rousseau would make popular in the sixties with *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. (Clancy, 196)

Mme de Beaumont rejected the practice of raising young ladies to be frivolous and vain, to be nothing but a commodity on the marriage market, all of which are values of the aristocracy. Instead, Mme de Beaumont instilled in her young ladies the purported values of the rising middle-class: *goodness, simplicity, generosity and affection*. Clancy concludes:

> [Mme de Beaumont's] essentially pragmatic nature and her deep religious faith lead her to accept a middle-class conservative view of society, so that the kind of liberation she preaches is the liberation of the mind. To Mme de Beaumont this is one of the most important things she can teach. Religion and reason go hand in hand. If they cannot guarantee happiness,

> they can at least form a woman who can live with herself…and provide a rich inner life. (204-205)

We see examples of this especially in Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels. Often she concludes her novels with a woman in her 30s who has been through difficult times, a troubled marriage, the death of her children or more. She comes out of it wiser and is able to find peace with her new found freedom and solitude, all thanks to the guidance of an older, wiser woman, such as a mother.

As mentioned before, one critic who has specifically explored some of Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels is Joan Hinde-Stewart. She dedicated an entire chapter to Mme de Beaumont in her book, Gynographs. In the chapter, "Saint and Saintliness", Joan Hinde-Stewart briefly examines two of Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels: Lettres de Madame du Montier (1754) and Lettres de Madame la baronne de Batteville (1766). From Hinde-Stewart's analysis of these novels we see that Mme de Beaumont was examining the question of marriage, its necessity and the possibility for women to find happiness within such an institution, marriage was a common theme in women's writings in the 17th and 18th centuries although most opposed it. Furthermore, in both Lettres de Madame du Montier and Lettres de Madame

la baronne de Batteville, Joan Hinde-Stewart concludes:

> …these novels...explore the implications for women and the Enlightenment's linking of reason and virtue while they suggest...that the mind's emancipation is the freedom most to be cherished. (38)

Joan Hinde-Stewart demonstrates the importance of Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels in conjunction with not only other women of the 18th century, but also shows that Mme de Beaumont actively participated in the debate of women's education, a debate of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment.

In conclusion, when Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels have been examined, analysis is mostly limited to a brief description of the plot and a few references to other women writers of the eighteenth-century. The main focus of study on Mme de Beaumont has been on her didactic fairy tales, which to her credit became the foundation of children's literature in France. Now I suggest turning a more critical eye on Mme de Beaumont's two equally important works, her epistolary novels, Lettres de Madame du Montier (1750) and Letttres d'Emérance à Lucie (1765), to see how such a prolific writer fits into the eighteenth-century, amongst both male and female authors of epistolary novels. The fact that Mme de Beaumont made the conscious decision

to use the most popular genre of the eighteenth-century cannot be a mistake. I would like to further examine her choice of genre and how her gender and historical situation shaped the content of her writings.

[1] Barabra Kaltz confirms that it is thanks to this work that Mme de Beaumont became widely known throughout Europe: “ce mensuel, qui paraîtra pendant trois ans, établit la reputation internationale de l’auteur” (ix).

[2] For this study eighteenth-century aristocratic values as opposed to those of the nascent middles-class are defined in relation to young women’s education. For more, see Edmond and Jules de Goncourt.

Chapter 2

The Tradition of the Epistolary Novel and its Evolution during the eighteenth-century

The tradition of the epistolary novel dates back to antiquity with Ovid's Heroides also known as Epistulae Heroidum, *Letters of Heroines.*[1] This situation became one of the main characteristics of the epistolary novel and persists in love letters, real and fictive such as Héloïse et Abélard (12th century) and Les Lettres portugaises (1669), both of which have served as models for subsequent epistolary novels, including those written during the genre's height of popularity in the eighteenth-century.

> Les années 1760-1780 sont l'âge d'or du roman épistolaire français, par le nombre d'abord…genre sentimental dès l'origine, il a enrichi de finesses et de forces nouvelles, de rythmes et de cadences l'expression du sentiment; il véhicule non seulement la sensibilité, mais l'idéologie des Lumières qui annexe un roman épistolaire philosophique…il est devenu un art subtil avec les éclairages complémentaires qu'autorise une polyphonie bien dirigée… (Versini, 148)

In the eighteenth-century, women writers expanded on a genre that was popular and well received by its readers to

protest against arranged and loveless marriages, to militate for issues of importance to them, such as the improvement of women's education.

During the seventeenth century, the issue of loveless marriages and economic dependency motivated aristocratic women to create the fairy tale genre in the salons. According to Vicki Mistacco, among others, women's role in the creation of the literary fairy tale in France has been overlooked:

> L'histoire littéraire qui réserve à Perrault la première et souvent l'unique place, qui va jusqu'à lui attribuer faussement la paternité de certains contes composés à l'origine par des femmes, mérite d'être revue. De toute évidence, de par ses origines et ses propagatrices, le conte de fées est un art féminin. Car les conteurs furent surtout des conteuses. (323)

Just as women writers have been overlooked and discredited for their writing in the fairy tale genre, so have many women writers of the epistolary novel. The fairy tale genre was important to the women of the Salons because it provided not only an escape from reality but an opportunity to express how they would reshape it. In reality, women knew they had little chance at obtaining their own happily ever after but still desired more choice and control over their own lives. For a woman writer of the epistolary

novel, to write another epistolary love story was not going to change a woman's current situation. It would only reinforce the well-known image of the female protagonist of the epistolary novel: weak, dependant, love sick women.

More well-known epistolary novels in the canon are those written by men, most notably: Lettres persanes (1721) by Montesquieu, Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse (1761) by Rousseau, and of course, Les Liaisons dangereuses (1782) by Laclos. As we have stated on several occasions, one reason for the loss of interest in epistolary novels written by women, particularly Mme de Beaumont's works, was the lack of interest in studying novels of women writers until recently. However, epistolary novels written by women are a special case. Women writers were marginalized from this specific genre by male critics with a very specific argument based in essential and immutable gender differences, they cited women's natural ability for language and letter writing and emphasized that male authors had to study the form to become its masters. Katharine Jensen cites the example of Abbé Cotin:

> The Abbé Cotin, in his 1665 letter manual, situates women's emotional letter writing in the social domain, while his own is carefully shown to belong to the literary realm. (16)

An epistolary novel written by a woman was not considered literary because women wrote without having to do careful study. Furthermore, Abbé Cotin argues that women write from the *Coeur* whereas men write from the *Esprit*:

> …women remain limited to natural, emotional expression, men do not. The productions of the *coeur* do not attain the status conferred upon those of the *marvelous esprit*…By extolling woman's natural epistolarity, Cotin retains the literary letter for men. (19, emphasis in the original)

Again, Cotin highlights a woman's natural ability for letter writing so that he can dismiss their works from the realm of literature. A male author must work from the *esprit* to attain mastery over the genre, whereas a woman writer can only write from her *coeur.* A natural outlet by definition, inferior, women's epistolary writing, was necessarily derivative and could not reflect literary invention.

As opposed to continuing to ignore or excuse the works by women authors, I can argue that there are two separate yet contingent traditions within the genre: the tradition of letter-writing by men and the tradition of letter-writing of women. One is not solely influenced by the other; rather the two traditions exist independently yet

they both could not exist without the other. Women authors read epistolary novels written by men, just as the same is true for men. Because of this, there is often an apparent influence or response within an epistolary novel by an author to a previous work; sometimes this was a means for women writers to set the record straight, or to offer the feminine perspective. And, due to its long tradition, the genre does have themes, conventions and stock situations found in works by men as well as women. Moreover, the epistolary genre as a whole does have a model to which subsequent novels are held, such as the previously mentioned Les Lettres d'Héloïse et d'Abélard and Les Lettres portugaises.

Katharine Jensen has examined extensively the epistolary novel written by women in the eighteenth century. In her work, Writing Love, Jensen closely analyzes two types of epistolary works: love-letters and letter-novels written by Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu, Anne Ferrand, Françoise de Graffigny, Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, and Julie de Lespinasse.[2] For Jensen, the difference between these two types of epistolary works is paramount. On the one hand, love-letters have a tradition

of marginalizing women writers and continuing a negative stereotype of women: the “Epistolary Woman”. An epistolary novel composed of love-letters is categorized as being written spontaneously, without much reflection on the part of the author who fills the pages with a woman’s lamentations to her lover who has abandoned her, as seen in Lettres portugaises. On the other, letter-novels have a tradition of reversing the negative stereotype of women and redefining femininity from within the genre.[3] In these epistolary novels the woman writing letters no longer depends on her lover and the intrigue is not based on her abandonment. Instead, she is able to find her happiness in solitude and friendship, as seen in the example of Les Lettres d’une péruvienne (1747) by Mme de Graffigny.

Beginning with love-letters, Jensen defines the typical female character writing love-letters:

> In the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, one of the ideals of femininity, which women were encouraged/compelled to realize, was what I term Epistolary Woman. Seduced, betrayed, and suffering, this woman writes letter after letter of anguished and masochistic lament to the man who has left her behind. (1)

The example *par excellence* of an “Epistolary Woman” is Mariane from Les Lettres portugaises, according to Jensen.

A woman full of passion and pain caused by the abandonment of her lover writes to her absent lover. She is dependant, suffering, alone and her writing reflects this by being emotionally charged and unselfconscious (2-3).

The second type of epistolary novel examined by Jensen is what she calls the letter-novels, the first being Les Lettres d'une Péruvienne. According to Jensen, letter-novels undo the damage of the love-letter by redefining a woman's role in writing letters. As Jensen points out:

> …[other women writers] began to write novels out of feminine love letters. In so doing, these women writers dismantled a repressive ideology of femininity from within. They took advantage of the novel's narrative structure in order to rewrite the female plot of seduction, betrayal, and reiterative masochism, the *raison d'être* of the love letter. (xvii, emphasis in the original)

Thus, from within the genre, these women authors worked to deconstruct the negative stereotype of women being promoted by male authors of the time to advance a more positive, independent and capable image of women. However, Jensen also argues that these women also subverted the accusation that their writing was natural, hence, non-literary:

> When Graffigny and other eighteenth-century women writers chose to write letter *novels*, then, they were doing nothing less than dismantling Epistolary Woman

> from within. If woman's purportedly natural talent for letters located her writing in an unselfconscious emotional zone, then women's move into letter novel defied this constraint and broke the laws of epistolary femininity by defining women's letters as consciously plotted constructions rather than spontaneous and accidental outbursts of feeling. (92)

Mme de Graffigny's letter-novel was much criticized for its *invraisemblance*, or its believability. Many readers had a hard time coming to terms with its unconventional ending, the heroine neither marries, nor dies. Subsequently, there were many rewrites or *suites* to Les Lettres d'une Péruvienne, to "make right" or make an ending that was more *vraisemblable* or believable to the eighteenth-century audience. One such ending has Zilia marrying Déterville and another has Zilia and Aza reunite and marrying (Douthwaite, 126). The fact that French readers of the eighteenth-century had difficulty believing the "happy" ending as proposed by Mme de Graffigny, demonstrates how the love-letter tradition controlled the form and content of the genre.

It is important to note that Jensen concentrates her analysis on epistolary novels that have love as the central theme along with the stereotype of the "Epistolary Woman". Jensen wants to move away from the model of Les Lettres

portugaises and turn toward a study of love-letters written verifiably by women, as opposed to novels written by men who they claimed were written by women, as is the case of Les Lettres portugaises.[4] In so doing, Jensen places her emphasis of study on women authors of love-letters and letter-novels. She sheds light on lost authors, such as Villedieu and Ferrand, by examining how these women writers of love-letters attempt to dismantle the "Epistolary Woman".

With this in mind, Jensen examines Les Lettres et billets galants, a collection of love-letters written by Marie-Catherine Desjardins[5] to her lover, Antoine de Villedieu. These were private love-letters that were published by her lover and her editor, without the consent of the author, Desjardins:

> The wording of the *privilège* was calculated to get around the writer's authority over her text, for the *Lettres et billets gallants* were published without Desjardins' consent, and in fact, against her will. (36)

Desjardins' efforts to keep her private letters private were in vain. Barbin, her editor, published the letters against Desjardins' wishes. Desjardins supported herself from her writings (37)[6] and did not want to make her private love letters public for fear that those private sentiments would

ruin her reputation as a serious writer. "As a woman who lived by her pen, she had a stake in establishing and maintaining an identity as a skilled and serious writer" (37-38). Indeed, in a letter to Barbin, Desjardins explains that one of her reasons for protesting against the publication of her love-letters was that she did not write carefully, or consciously, which made the letters unrepresentative of her professional writings.[7]

Desjardins never intended for anyone but her lover to read her love-letters and she therefore wrote in the style dictated by Antoine de Villedieu:

> A further warp in this story of female masochism concerns that language of amorous self-representation itself. Villedieu, we find, not only demands that Desjardins write him love letters but also that she write in a particular style. He wants her letters to be in line with salon *galanterie* and *précieux* rhetoric, full of *esprit*. (51, emphasis in the original)[8]

He makes her write for his love and attention. Desjardins attempts to resist Villedieu's demands because the *galanterie* style and the *précieux* tradition contradict her own style of writing. By writing in the style demanded by her lover she represents herself masochistically. Desjardins is not a part of the salon culture, but rather associated herself with the Port Royal writers:

> From the beginning of her writing career and before her pact with Villedieu, she was influenced by a new rhetorical tradition codified by the Port Royal writers, which, in contrast to the linguistic subtleties and indirections of *préciosité*, emphasized the sincere expression of deep emotion. (52, emphasis in the original)

In the end, Villedieu betrays Desjardins by publishing love-letters that the author never intended to be read by anyone other than the addressee and were determined by his expectations. The only winners in the publication were her lover and her editor who profited greatly from Les Billets.

Desjardins is unique in that she fought to regain her reputation as a serious writer by publishing at a later date under the name Mme de Villedieu, taking the last name of her former lover. These letters, Les Désordres de l'amour (1675), were her way of recapturing authority over her literary writing.

> In this novel, in contrast to her love letters, Villedieu shows that women are not the only victims of love's ravaging power, for a man, too, will suffer the consequences of love. Moreover, while she represents a *grande amoureuse* like the self she depicted in the *Billets*, she also offers a more empowered model of a woman writer. (57, emphasis in the original)

Jensen argues that Mme de Villedieu uses this novel as a way of rewriting her own history, especially the private

love letters where Mme de Villedieu is depicted as being rather dependant on her lover and subservient to him.

> Whereas Desjardins's dependence on Antoine de Villedieu in the *Billets* overdetermined her masochism and precluded her questioning of masculinity, in the *Désordres*, Mme de Villedieu, while creating a masochistic double, uses this double to demonstrate the inequitable division between men's and women's experiences of love. She also creates a female who remains free of passion's disorder and whose writing changes the course of male desire – something Desjardins's letters were powerless to do. (58)

It is important to examine both Billets and Désordres together to fully understand Desjardins' motives behind writing Désordres. The first was written privately and Desjardins exemplifies the "Epistolary Woman" within its pages. In the later publication of Désordres, Mme de Villedieu, Desjardins takes the surname of her now dead lover, has matured and regained authority over her epistolary works and uses it as a way to set the record straight. We see that Desjardins' heroine in Désordres is no longer the "Epistolary Woman". Her letters have control over "male desire" and she is "free of passion's disorder". Mme de Villedieu flips the stereotype and now she creates a sort of "Epistolary Man", for argument's sake. Mme de Villedieu is not writing a letter-novel, however in her

love-letter novel she changes the plot-line and redefines the role of a woman in love. The fact that Mme de Villedieu was so compelled to rewrite her own history with Désordres exemplifies how conscious she was of the negative stereotype of the "Epistolary Woman" and how this interfered with her perception of herself as a "writer". Mme de Villedieu wanted to be taken seriously and Billets discredited her professional writings. In order to no longer be overshadowed by her private love-letters, Mme de Villedieu had to rewrite the plot-line of love-letters. As Jensen states earlier in her text, "…a woman must write rather than be written and furthermore must represent herself or else her story will be told for her——and against her" (14). This is exactly what Mme de Villedieu was setting out to do when she wrote Désordres.

Jensen concludes her study of epistolary novels written by women with Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni and Julie de Lespinasse. Although the letter-novel tradition is in full bloom in the eighteenth century, beginning with Graffigny's chef d'oeuvre and continuing with Riccoboni's Lettres de Mistress Fanni Butlerd (1757), there are still women writers who continue the "Epistolary Woman" in their love

letters, as does Lespinasse in her letters dated between 1773 and 1776 to Comte Jacques-Antoine Hippolyte de Guibert.

> Whereas Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, in line with Graffigny, writes a letter novel and in so doing rewrites the love letter's circular dynamic of female masochism, Julie de Lespinasse embraces all the emotional excess and negativity associated with this epistolary form. Writing real letters of apparently unequaled love and suffering to the man who betrays her, she indeed surpasses the other women writers in this study, literally dying, she says, "of love". So while Graffigny and Riccoboni rework an epistolary tradition, building on the subversive efforts of Desjardins de Villedieu and Ferrand and redefining femininity in significantly more positive terms that the love letter allows, Lespinasse testifies to a distinct devolution, bringing us back to the beginnings of the tradition by combining the mortality of Ovid's fictional heroines with the element of authenticity popularized in the seventeenth century. (128)

As Jensen argues, Lespinasse's love letters are a "devolution" within the genre. Lespinasse returns to the traditional image of "Epistolary Woman" by filling her letters with her own passion and pain. As if that alone was not enough, Lespinasse is overcome with agony with Guibert's marriage to another woman: so to further establish herself within the love letter tradition, Lespinasse dies several hours after writing her final letter to Guibert (143).

According to Jensen, an explanation of Lespinasse's desire to revert to the love-letter model is due to her desire to be noticed. Jensen argues the following:

> …Lespinasse, despite her desire to be unique, internalizes a culturally valued image of the woman in love. Whereas a long history defines and extols female plot as impassioned emotional dependence, suffering, and death, no tradition either defines the role of *salonnière* as self-negation or valorizes it as such…In terms of cultural consecration, then, the figure of the *grande amoureuse* holds out a seductive lure with which the *salonnière* cannot compete. (150-151, emphasis in the original)

Lespinasse held a well respected salon frequented by the *philosophes*, but this role of *salonnière* did not replace her need to play the part of a love sick woman to Guibert. Nonetheless, Jensen argues that letter writing allowed her a "degree of independence" and control over her self objectification (151).

> Through writing, that is, Lespinasse is her own mirror. She can project herself as a woman in love in pain, matching her reflection with that of the *grande amoureuse*. (151, emphasis in the original)

Lespinasse clung to a negative image of femininity that had been advanced with the epistolary novel and perhaps more importantly, defined by male authors.

Jensen convincingly demonstrates that women writers of the eighteenth-century epistolary novel were active

participants in the development and continuation of the genre. Julie de Lespinasse's love-letters full of passion and pain may seem outmoded to modern readers, but to her eighteenth-century readers they were not. She was not the only author at the time writing love-letters. Sophie Cottin, for example, also wrote her epistolary novel, Claire d'Albe (1799), full of passion and pain, concluding her novel with the death of the heroine. Although some women writers had moved forward within the genre to write letter-novels that rejected the "Epistolary Woman" others still held firmly to the love-letter romantic plot-line with the dramatic death of the heroine. In the end, both types of epistolary novels were well received.

The shift from writing love-letters to writing letter-novels became a way for some women writers to refute the artless domain of epistolary novels written by women. Letter-novels contained a developing plot (conscious writing) whereas love-letters were a collection of correspondence between separated lovers (spontaneous writing). To write letter-novels, women writers did not always use love as a central theme but instead, advanced the importance of women's education by providing an example

of a woman learning and changing throughout the novel. One way of concluding such an epistolary novel is with a happy, intelligent woman who chooses a life of independence and friendship. This is in stark contrast to the typical conclusion of epistolary novels written with love as the central theme. In those works a common means of concluding the story was with the death of the woman. Be it by suicide or by her own guilt which somehow caused many women to become susceptible to spells of unconsciousness and eventually die, such as we have seen in the endings of works written by Mme de Lafayette, La Princesse de Clèves (1678), Julie de Lespinasse, Lettres de Mlle Lespinasse (1773-1776), Sophie Cottin, Claire d'Albe (1799) and Montesqueieu, Les Lettres persanes (1721).

It is clear that the eighteenth-century epistolary novel written by women evolved so that women writers found a genre in which they could focus on issues that directly impacted the lives of women, such as the improvement of women's education. It is thanks to the development of what Jensen terms letter-novels, where women wrote consciously and abandoned the stock character of a love-sick, dependent woman for a more thoughtful, independent woman, that women

writers were able to find a way to provide the feminine perspective while entering the debate amongst the *philosophes*.

During the eighteenth-century one of the many debates among the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment centered on the education of women. This debate was of enormous importance to women writers of the time. In the curriculum of the eighteenth-century aristocracy, young ladies were taught needle point, singing and how to play the piano. As it is summed up by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt in The Woman of the Eighteenth Century, "To make a child play the lady—that, in a word, is the whole aim of the education of the eighteenth century." Goncourt describes a young lady's formal education:

> The pursuit of studies begun at home, the visits of the masters, dancing lessons, music lessons, singing lessons, gave zest and occupation to their days, the monotony of which was relieved by so many fêtes, the length of which was tempered by so many frolics. There was embroidery, there was knitting, or else some housekeeping, or some dainty to be nibbled, or a convent cake to be baked… (15)

With this type of education, women were exposed to neither science nor mathematics, as were their male counterparts. Instead, the emphasis was on rearing a young lady to become ornamentation to her husband. A woman

needed only to learn the art of social etiquette, how to be frivolous and they were discouraged from learning too much so they would keep their place as a wife and understand their role as producers of male heirs as defined by the aristocratic lifestyle.

But women writers of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries challenged women's education. Many championed the importance of improving women's education. Women had the capacity to learn and develop critical thoughts if only they were given the opportunity. In Mme de Graffigny's epistolary novel, Les Lettres d'une Péruvienne, Zilia becomes a model example of a woman having the ability to learn, think critically and most importantly, think for herself. Zilia, a Peruvian prisoner, in the beginning of the novel spoke no French, wrote by using "quipus", a method of communicating by tying knots in a rope and she was quite dependant on her communication to Aza, her fiancé from Peru, from whom she was separated. Arriving in France, she becomes a blank slate. In one of her first letters to Aza, Zilia plays the role of the abandoned woman and declares she is nothing without him and perhaps more importantly, her role in life is to please him:

> Dans l'abandon de moi-même, je ne craignais que pour tes jours; ils sont en sureté, je ne vois plus le malheur. Tu m'aimes, le plaisir anéanti renaît dans mon coeur. Je goûte avec transport la délicieuse confiance de plaire à ce que j'aime; mais elle ne me fait point oublier que je te dois tout ce que tu daignes approuver en moi. Ainsi que la rose tire sa brillante couleur des rayons du Soleil, de même les charmes que tu trouves dans mon esprit et dans mes sentiments ne sont que les bienfaits de ton génie lumineux; rien n'est à moi que ma tendresse. (23)

Zilia finds solace in the knowledge that she will one day be reunited with Aza. In the meantime, she constantly thinks about him, and dreams of the day that they are reunited. In the above citation, Zilia is more than happy to be defined by her love for Aza, which means she is willing to live according to his will. He is clearly the object of her affection. "Je goûte avec transport la délicieuse confiance de plaire à ce que j'aime." Zilia can not yet imagine her life without Aza and she even considers suicide as a means to end her torment,

> C'est toi, chère lumière de mes jours, c'est toi qui me rappelles à la vie; voudrais-je la conserver, si je n'étais assuré que la mort aurait moissonné d'un seul coup tes jours et les miens! (28)

Zilia is unwilling to end her life, only because of the prospect of a reunion with Aza.

By the end of the novel, Zilia has transformed herself. Not only can she understand French, but she can speak and write it rather eloquently. She finds herself free of Aza, whom she learns has been unfaithful and she is also finally free from needing to depend on anyone, including her caretakers, Céline and Déterville. When Zilia is given a home with riches from her homeland, she achieves financial independence. This allows her to choose. At the very end of the novel, instead of choosing a life of marriage and depending on a man, as she was more than willing to do in the beginning, Zilia has grown and developed into an intelligent and independent woman. She now prefers a life of solitude and friendship. She rejects marriage to Déterville and in paraphrasing Descartes she declares: "*je vis, j'existe*" (168). In her last letter she writes to Déterville the following:

> Le plaisir d'être; ce plaisir oublié, ignoré même de tant d'aveugles humains; cette pensée si douce, ce bonheur si pur, *je suis, je vis, j'existe,* pourrait seul rendre heureux, si l'on s'en souvenait, si l'on en jouissait, si l'on en connaissait le prix.
>
> Venez, Déterville, venez apprendre de moi à économiser les ressources de notre âme, et les bienfaits de la nature. Renoncez aux sentiments tumultueux, destructeurs imperceptibles de notre être; venez apprendre à connaître les plaisirs innocents et durables, venez en jouir avec moi, vous trouverez dans

> mon coeur, dans mon amitié, dans mes sentiments tout ce qui peut vous dédommager de l'amour. (168, emphasis in the original)

Zilia now invites Déterville to learn from her, a complete reversal of roles. She has come full circle and has developed into an intelligent and independent woman.

By use of a foreign heroine, Mme de Graffigny provides us with an example of a woman who aspires to more than a life of becoming a wife and mother, a woman who had a choice, and most importantly, a woman who was able to learn and mature when she was given the opportunity. Indeed she has been called the first fictional female intellectual in French literature.[9] Aurora Wolfgang discusses the final letter from Zilia to Déterville:

> Graffigny, like her predecessors, invokes the fairy-tale model only to overturn it. Graffigny's princess will not live happily ever after with her prince. On the contrary, this letter describes the enchantment of a woman coming into possession of her dream castle which will eventually allow her to live independently of a husband. (113)

In addition, Mme de Graffigny's heroine does not die at the conclusion of the story. Instead, the readers are left with a sense that Zilia will live her own happily ever after. It may not be the standard fairy tale version, but it is a version of her choosing.

This positive conclusion represents an important shift in the genre. Mme de Graffigny's epistolary novel can not be categorized as a love-centered novel; it is more than that. Mme de Graffigny does use the theme of love, between Zilia and Aza, between Déterville and Zilia and even love in the form of friendship between Zilia and Céline. But most importantly, Mme de Graffigny uses the genre as a means to demonstrate her knowledge of contemporary philosophical theories to reject the formulaic ending. Her major underlining theme is found in the development of Zilia, in other words, Zilia's education. We, as readers, are witnesses to how Zilia turns her condition as a blank slate through her ability to understand the foreign world around her, master a new language and develop critical thought. This learning process is crucial to what I believe is Mme de Graffigny's argument: women are as capable of learning and thinking for themselves as men when not hindered by a faulty education.

As Sylvie Romanowski argues, Mme de Graffigny was using her foreign heroine much like Montesquieu used his in Les Lettres persanes, to critique French society (156). When it comes to her critique of women's education, Mme de

Graffigny goes much further and she discusses in detail the problems with it. Romanowski summarizes Mme de Graffigny's problem with women's education in France:

> Their education does not make sense, as they are educated in a convent and then asked to live in the world; they are asked to exist only for show, taught how to put on a good face, and not taught anything of substance. They are expected to be virtuous without being taught or shown what virtue is; they are not even properly instructed in their native language, so that, in an ironic reversal, the Peruvian princess who had to learn language from the ground up knows French better that they do… (170)

Romanowski points out the impossible situation in which women are placed because the goal of the content of their education was to non-educate them. In her novel, Mme de Graffigny argues that women's education was without any real substance. The emphasis was on the exterior, the ornamentation of women as opposed to the interior, their ability to form critical thoughts. Mme de Graffigny uses a foreigner to prove her point that women are just as capable as their male counterparts and therefore deserve the right to receive an equivalent education that was more useful to them.

As discussed earlier, the debate of women's education was ongoing during the eighteenth-century. However, as

Dena Goodman points out, this quarrel had been developing since at least the fifteenth century:

> …in the eighteenth century there was no established system of education and no standard method of instruction for girls. Indeed, the question whether women should be educated, and if so, what they should be taught, was at the center of the *querelle des femmes* or the debate about women that had been percolating throughout Europe at least since Christine de Pizan wrote *Le Livre de la Cité de dames* at the beginning of the fifteenth century. (Becoming a Woman, 63)

The debate grew during the seventeenth century with the development of the salons, as Goodman notes: "The initial and primary purpose behind Salons was to satisfy the self-determined educational needs of the women who started them" ("The Enlightenment Salons", 98). The debate persisted amongst the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment and one *philosophe* who stoked the fire was Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his work Émile ou de l'Éducation (1762). Goodman notes how Rousseau's work brought back the debate in the subject of women's education to the forefront:

> Rousseau's treatment of female education in chapter 5 of *Émile* was one of the factors that stimulated interest in that subject—often by those who disagreed with him, such as his former friend and patron, Louise d'Épinay, who published her own treatise on female education, *Conversation d'Émilie*, in 1774. (Becoming a Woman, 64)

The debate continued into the nineteenth-century, but climaxed during the eighteenth-century, especially in the epistolary novel, a genre dominated by women writers.

Even as women were in favor of the improvement of female education, there was not a consensus amongst women as to the type of education young ladies should receive. The role of the mother continued to become more important in a girl's education but often the mother herself was not adequately educated. In the article, "Le rôle des mères dans l'éducation des pensionnaires au XVIIIe siècle", Dena Goodman maintains the following:

> Pendant la seconde moitié de XVIIIe siècle, les pédagogues exhortent, encouragent et inspirent les femmes des élites sociales à jouer un rôle actif dans l'éducation de leurs filles. (33)

Another problem with women's education was far too often excessive education in a woman was considered to be dangerous.

> As Bernardin de Saint-Pierre noted in his submission to the Besançon prize competition, even if a girl were only given useful knowledge, her education might still be a cause of marital discord…Even if a girl's education did not produce outright disagreement, one of the pleasure of marriage (for men) was threatened by an educated wife…" (Becoming a Woman, 65)

In sum, women should be educated, but the extent of that education was still in question. One thing seemed certain: women should not learn Latin for fear that they would become the ridiculous and oxymoronic *femme savante*.[10]

Both Mme de Graffigny and Mme de Beaumont used the epistolary novel to voice their stance on the education of women. Love as the main theme driving the intrigue of the epistolary novel is usurped by the theme of women's education. Furthermore, the type of epistolary novel that Mme de Beaumont wrote continued the significant shift within the genre, just as Lettres d'une Péruvienne did in 1747. The ideal of the independent female heroine is replaced by a domestic, more dependent, female heroine. Both Mme de Graffigny and Mme de Beaumont believed women should receive an education that challenged them to overcome frivolity. But this is where the similarities end. Mme de Beaumont is more conservative in her improvement of women's education; in fact, she was more pragmatic in her didactic teachings. Perhaps, she is more realistic within the constraints of the society in which she lives. Whereas Mme de Graffigny presented an idealized

vision of improving women's education, her vision was unattainable to most women of the eighteenth-century.

Mme de Beaumont was an active participant in female education as a governess and knew first hand the shortfalls of the eighteenth-century curriculum for aristocratic girls. Because of this, Mme de Beaumont took it upon herself to change the content and type of education her young ladies received. To do so, she had to write her own texts which, as we know, became quite popular in Europe. This is not to say Mme de Beaumont was revolutionizing women's education through her Magasins. Instead, Mme de Beaumont was creating an education that was more useful to an aristocratic young lady that will marry and be in charge of a household and servants. Whereas Mme de Graffigny championed a woman's independence, Mme de Beaumont realized that within eighteenth-century French society, a woman most often found independence in widowhood, after suffering through difficult times in marriage (for example the loss of children, an abusive husband and/or an unfaithful husband). However, she never condemned marriage but rather endeavored to change women's role in that institution.

Mme de Beaumont filled a void by writing her Magasins. She believed strongly that women were not just a commodity on the marriage market but that they were capable beings, self-sufficient and reasonable. Mme de Beaumont was overtly teaching young aristocratic ladies how to act by various tools in her Magasins, but most notably in her didactic epistolary novels. She was not just providing her readers with a feminine perspective, nor was she just setting the record straight. Instead, Mme de Beaumont used her epistolary novels to instruct her pupils. She championed reason and self-sufficiency and rejected frivolity. She wrote specifically to women while providing them with examples of female friendship in the form of confidantes in her epistolary novels.

Mme de Beaumont was not advocating the creation of *femmes savantes*. She did not teach her pupils Latin, for example. Instead Mme de Beaumont emphasized a woman's capacity to reason, to think for herself all the while underscoring the values of the middle-class. It is important to remember that Mme de Beaumont was not an aristocrat; she was of the bourgeois class, worked for the aristocracy as a governess and held strong catholic beliefs

which were often reflected in her moral teachings, especially in her fairy tales.[11] Mme de Beaumont was bringing nascent middle-class values of domesticity to her aristocratic young ladies.[12] She was not equalizing a young ladies' education with her male counterpart. However, Mme de Beaumont was recommending a different education for young aristocratic ladies to prepare them for their future domestic life. She was instilling young ladies with values of compassion, generosity and reason and she was working to create less frivolous and less selfish aristocratic women. Mme de Beaumont is "revolutionary" in the sense that she is arguing for a new role for women in a changing politico-economic era.

Mme de Beaumont was not alone in her valorization of middle-class values. As Anna K. Striedter argues, Rousseau also encouraged, what she calls, the new ideal of domesticity. Aristocratic women began to admire the model of Sophie from Émile ou de l'Éducation (1762) but even more so with Julie from Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse (1761):

> Rousseau presents Julie and Wolmar as an ideal enlightened couple, practicing a voluntary middle-class lifestyle in a serene, pastoral setting, where Julie ends up preaching the virtues of motherhood and domesticity to her former lover, Saint-Preux. (41)

We must ask what could cause such a shift within many women's epistolary novels. Striedter points out that the 1760s was a time of economic difficulties for the aristocracy in France which "contributed to the success of Rousseau's ideal of middle-class domesticity" (42).

> Around 1760, a cultural shift occurred which introduced a new ideal of femininity – the domestic woman. The majority of French women writers were still aristocrats, but French women writers now saw empowerment in motherhood and childrearing, or more precisely, in advocating such domesticity in their novels, education manuals and conduct books. This transformation has often been associated with the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau… (41)

Moreover, according to Streidter, Rousseau advocated a simpler lifestyle that, as Streidter explains, was perceived to be "exotic" by aristocratic women, and perhaps equally important, less expensive during a time of financial difficulties for many aristocrats[13]:

> This "natural" lifestyle had an exotic appeal for aristocratic women, whose etiquette was as complicated as it was costly, and who knew neither marital fidelity, nor family life, nor childrearing. (42)

In this new environment the domestic woman was glorified in epistolary novels. Striedter states the following:

> Childcare, education, adoption, and mentoring in domestic matters were portrayed as difficult but

> empowering tasks which could liberate a woman from the emptiness and frivolity of the aristocratic lifestyle. (59)

Mme de Beaumont certainly provided her young aristocratic ladies an education of domesticity so that they could expect a life enriched by motherhood, and all that it entails, as opposed to leading a superfluous life of frivolity.

Moreover, the new domestic woman was seen as a way to reform society from within the family, in order to improve a woman's status in French society.

> The political message addressed to the predominantly aristocratic female readership in domestic novels, was that social reform should be initiated by aristocratic women, that in seizing the power over the new private sphere they could infiltrate a new, middle-class value system, which would eventually replace an already economically unstable aristocratic culture. (47-48)

Mme de Beaumont provided many examples of domestic women in her pedagogical epistolary novels. Women's education should help to valorize woman's role in French society. Streidter asserts that by regaining control over the domestic, private sphere, Mme de Beaumont, like other contemporary female authors of domestic epistolary novels, believed the idealization of the role of wives and mothers would allow

women to change society from within the walls of family life.

As Striedter further explains,

> These new domestic plots arrived as suddenly and unexpectedly in the history of the novel as Rousseau's ideas of social reform had arrived in the history of philosophy. None of the earlier women novelists, neither Haywood in England, nor Graffigny, Riccoboni or Bénouville in France, had written about marriage and childrearing. Instead, they had chosen unmarried foreign women as their protagonists, and often glorified their independence. As it turned out, however, the earlier self-sufficient young heroines came to be perceived as unconvincing, impracticable, even threatening models of femininity when domesticity became the new ideal of femininity. (44)

To a reader of the twenty-first century this idealization of domesticity appears to be a step backward within the evolution of the genre and in the improvement of female education. However, I contend that we must view this new glorification of the domestic ideal, where the focus shifted to the family as opposed to the individual as a way to empower aristocratic and bourgeois women. Perhaps more importantly, as opposed to the female protagonists of Mme de Graffigny and Mme de Riccoboni of the first half the century, the practical domestic protagonist provided a model that was within the reach of its largely female, aristocratic and bourgeois readers. The foreign female

protagonists as presented by Mme de Graffigny and Mme de Riccoboni now appeared less realistic within the changing constraints of eighteenth-century French society. However, women could recapture and reinvent the "natural" state of married life. By doing so, the woman's role within the family became more powerful.

Mme de Beaumont takes part in another redefinition of a woman's role in writing letters. No longer is the woman exemplifying the "Epistolary Woman" as seen in Lettres portugaises, nor is she the ultra-independent woman of Lettres d'une Péruvienne. Now, Mme de Beaumont refocuses the woman writer's role in letter writing to educate other women in practical matters of eighteenth-century French society. She provides her largely female audience moral lessons and alternative means of handling typical situations of marriage, childrearing and everyday life. She bases her instruction on middle-class values and on her Catholic beliefs. Mme de Beaumont was providing her young, mostly aristocratic female readership with an education that was more pragmatic than the one they were already receiving. By writing epistolary novels that contained examples of women advising younger women on everyday

matters, she proposes a new, more empowered matrilineal function.

What is clear in both Lettres de Madame du Montier and Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, the two epistolary novels to be examined in the following chapters, is that Mme de Beaumont is writing didactically. She does not write solely to entertain her readers. Instead, Mme de Beaumont uses the epistolary novel to instruct her readers on middle-class values. As Patricia Clancy argues, Mme de Beaumont was writing for a specific audience, young women who

> were destined to take charge of a household and occupy an important place in society, she taught them 'les devoirs de leur état': the solid middle-class virtues of goodness, simplicity, generosity and affection … (196)

Anna K. Streidter defines a domestic epistolary novel as one that exemplifies the importance of domesticity for aristocratic and bourgeois families alike. She uses the epistolary novel to warn her female readers of the dangers of imitating aristocratic women. By emphasizing domesticity, Streidter believes Mme de Beaumont was revolutionizing French society from within the walls of a home now run by an informed domestic woman. For Streidter,

Mme de Beaumont was one of many women writers of her time that found it

> … liberating to stop mirroring the aristocratic society in which they had grown up and to envision instead a middle-class ideology, which, they hoped, would grant them authority over the private sphere and would allow them to reform French society. (49)

Mme de Beaumont was a revolutionary woman. She wrote specifically for women, and she defended women, as in her early writings, for example her response to Coyer, La lettre en réponse à “L’année merveilleuse” (1748). She also took it upon herself to create a women’s magazine while working as a governess in England. Perhaps most importantly, Mme de Beaumont wrote to inform and instruct her female readers. Mme de Beaumont taught what she knew; she knew middle-class values very well, being from that social class herself. Moreover, Mme de Beaumont was a religious woman and passed along her beliefs to her pupils. Mme de Beaumont was not idealizing middle-class values as Rousseau did in his domestic novel, Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse. Rather, as we will see, she presented middle-class values as being attainable and useful for young women who were destined to marry and raise a family.

Because of Mme de Beaumont's emphasis on middle-class values, Streidter argues that she was writing a domestic novel, which is true. She was instructing her readers to be virtuous women. Mme de Beaumont believed devoutly in God, she passed on the tools with which women could maneuver through society and come out on top. In the end, Mme de Beaumont was providing a realistic alternative to the superficial, unhappy, unfulfilling life of those who may have to remain within the confines of a loveless marriage, often between a young woman and an older man. Furthermore, Mme de Beaumont was using characters that closely resemble her readers, as opposed to foreign women, such as Zilia in Lettres d'une Péruvienne.

Like her predecessors, Mme de Beaumont preaches against passion and advocates personal happiness. But unlike those who emphasized this was only possible after they survived a marriage. She demonstrates its necessity in society and shows how women can navigate such an institution. Still, in every circumstance, Mme de Beaumont's exemplary characters chooses a life of solitude, after the end of their marriage, to continue to find fulfillment in their lives.

Whereas Streidter sees Mme de Beaumont's domestic novels as revolutionizing French society, I believe Mme de Beaumont was reforming society from within. Mme de Beaumont provided her students with examples of women who are virtuous and who follow the practice of being kind, generous and affectionate. I contend that Mme de Beaumont was providing her readers, who were often her students, a positive alternative to the superficial lifestyle of the eighteenth-century aristocracy. Mme de Beaumont militated against uninterested or inadequately educated mothers for her readers. Her virtuous protagonists served as a way to instill in her female readers a compassionate and loving heart.

Mme de Beaumont was interested in instructing her students and her readers how to live by a different standard, which reflected middle-class values as opposed to aristocratic lifestyle. It is important to remember that Mme de Beaumont was first an instructor and focused her writings on improving the education of women. She found little use for artifice in her instruction manuals for her female pupils. The solution was to provide her students

with practical advice that would help mold young women into compassionate, charitable and loving wives and mothers.

It is within these “instruction manuals” that Mme de Beaumont was revolutionizing the genre. She was not only presenting domesticity as a positive lifestyle for women, but more importantly, she was demonstrating that a woman’s role in writing letters is to instruct other women. It is clear that with Mme de Beaumont’s epistolary novels, beginning with Lettres de Madame du Montier (1750) love is unavoidable, but female education takes center stage.

In conclusion, during the second half of the eighteenth-century, the epistolary novel undergoes a major reformation. Love is removed as the central theme, along with the male correspondents. In the second half of the century, in writing domestic epistolary novels, women turn to other women for advice and guidance. These new domestic novels set the stage for the continuation of the genre into the twentieth- and even twenty-first-centuries. A genre once steeped in passion’s pain now forges a new tradition driven by women writers. Mme de Beaumont creates a pedagogical epistolary novel in which the main focus is on a woman’s self-improvement. This is in stark contrast to

Ovid's Heroides and especially to Mariane from Lettres portugaises. Women writers are taking charge of the genre, in particular with the epistolary novels written by Mme de Beaumont. By recapturing the genre from male writers, women writers reject the "Epistolary Woman" and advocate a new domestic ideal in the last part of the eighteenth-century.

Women writers of eighteenth-century epistolary novels created a new positive image of women by using the epistolary novel, a genre that increasingly reinforced negative stereotypes of hapless women. In changing the central theme of the epistolary novel, beginning with the shift from love-letters to letter-novels, and then ending with novels of domesticity, where the focus is clearly on education, these women writers created a genre that has the ability to develop, change and adapt. It is thanks to this that the epistolary novel continues to be a genre used by women writers throughout the centuries since its height of popularity in the eighteenth-century. In the following chapters, the examples of pedagogical epistolary novels written by Mme de Beaumont will be closely examined as well as the type of education offered within its pages.

[1] The exact date of this work has not been established. However, a consensus as to the possible composition of the work is anywhere between 25 and 16 B.C.

[2] Lettres et billets galants (1668), Désordres de l'amour (1675), Lettres d'une Péruvienne (1747), Lettres de Mistress Fanni Butlerd (1757), Lettres de Mademoiselle Lespinasse (1773-1776)

[3] Katherine Jensen discusses this in greater detail: "When women in *ancien régime* France, for example, acted femininity by writing love, they adopted an impassioned and supposedly spontaneous style that rehearsed in letter after letter…an oppressively heterosexual dynamic of seduction and betrayal" (2). Further on she states: "Certain women in *ancien régime* France, however, in their lives and in their writing, responded to the lure of Epistolary Woman by subverting both the form of her writing—turning from love letters to novels—and the plot of seduction and abandonment—turning from men to solitude and independence" (3).

[4] For more on this, see Katherine Jensen's Preface.

[5] Another author whose work was never intended to be published, Mme de Sévigné, wrote letters to her daughter. In her private letters, Mme de Sévigné did not instruct her daughter but rather she wrote of how much she missed her. These epistolary novels are seen as a forerunner of epistolary fiction in the late seventeenth-century.

[6] She wrote novels, poetry and plays.

[7] Here Katherine Jensen cites a letter written by Desjardins to her publisher, Barbin. Desjardins does not want her love-letters published explaining the following: "But, monsieur, those letters are permitted only to my heart, and if my hand dared to steal some, then publishers must not be the guardians of these thefts" (37-38). Further on, Jensen cites another letter to Barbin from Desjardins where she argues that the writing in these love-letters is bad writing: "No, monsieur, there are certain mistakes in love letters that are their greatest beauty, and the irregularity of the sentences is an effect of the heart's disorders, which is much more pleasing to people in love that the cold sense of a well thought-out letter" (39).

[8] Katherine Jensen further discusses the contradiction of galanterie style in Desjardins' love letters. Galanterie love letters would position the woman in love with power whereas Desjardins is powerless.

[9] Clifton Cherpak discusses Zilia's growth through education and the development of her mind in further detail pp 147-151. Specifically he states: "Zilia, the heroine, ultimately comes to admire French civilization and to prefer the cultivation of the mind to the viccitudes of passion" (148). Further in his analysis he states: "Her concern for the life of the mind is epitomized by her obsession with language and communication…But she is also deeply disturbed by the

intellectual isolation forced upon her by her ignorance of the language of her captors" (149).

[10] For more on women's education and the concern of creating *femmes savantes* see Dena Goodman, Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters (66).

[11] For more on this, see Servanne Woodward.

[12] See Patricia Clancy.

[13] Anna K. Streidter discusses this further on pp 42.

Chapter 3:

Lettres de Madame du Montier : Women's Education and Domesticity

Even though the works of Mme de Beaumont are not widely studied or known, critics who have examined Lettres de Madame du Montier do not always approach their analysis of the text from the same perspective. Instead, there seems to be a variation of ideas and approaches when it comes to Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels. Some elements common in all criticism of Lettres de Madame du Montier is that Mme de Beaumont is writing for women, her epistolary novels are didactic in tone, and she attempts to provide a portrait of a woman who strives to perfect herself by rejecting passion and embracing reason. These lessons, in Lettres de Madame du Montier, are closely directed through correspondence between the mother, Madame du Montier, and her daughter, Marquise de ***.

As both Barbara Kaltz and Barbara Rebstock point out in their separate works, Mme de Beaumont is clearly accentuating the importance of a mother's influence on her daughter. First, Kaltz states:

> Fidèle à ses principes, Mme de Beaumont souligne dans ses romans, dont la visée est moralatrice, l'importance de l'éducation des filles. D'autre part, elle valorise nettement le discours maternel et le rôle de la mère. (xvii)

Rebstock also highlights the importance of a mother's advice in Lettres de Madame du Montier:

> …sous la tutelle de sa mère, la marquise a reconnu de bonne heure que la mort n'est pas le plus funeste de tous les accidents ; au contraire, pour une âme vertueuse, la mort est une grâce infinie, qui l'unit à Dieu dans un éternel bonheur. (90-91)

In both of these citations, the mother's role and influence in her daughter's life is paramount for Mme de Beaumont. In Lettres de Madame du Montier, she develops this theme by showing how the correspondence of a mother and daughter greatly influences and shapes the daughter's life, reactions, and virtue through reason.

Often when reading criticism of any of Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels, a résumé of the plot generally dominates the analysis, as it does in Rebstock and in Alix Deguise's article, "Madame Leprince de Beaumont". Both seem to just touch the surface of examining the text closely, and fall short of an in depth analysis. This is too often the case, due in large part to the scarcity of

availability, until recently, of Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels. Critics feel a need to overshadow commentary on the text with too much plot-line information.

Deguise discusses many epistolary works of Mme de Beaumont. For each one, he gives a general synopsis and compares Mme de Beaumont's work to another work. He compares Lettres de Madame du Montier, to both La Nouvelle Héloïse and La Princesse de Clèves. In the aforementioned comparison, Deguise states:

> La marquise, devenue veuve, refuse d'épouser un homme qui l'aimait depuis longtemps et vers qui elle s'était sentie attirée autrefois lorsque son mari lui était infidèle; elle en avait éprouvé du remords. C'est un dénouement prévisible, à la suite de *La Princesse de Clèves* et de nombreux romans féminins. (166-167)

Deguise fails to find a reason for the Marquise's decision. Mme de Beaumont is not merely following the example of other women writers, she is presenting a woman in conflict who strives to be nothing but virtuous. For the Marquise, it would be useless for her to give in to or to avoid her passion. She therefore rejects love because she fears she cannot control it. Unlike the ending of La Princesse de Clèves, the Marquise does not choose seclusion and death. Instead, she returns to her mother and devotes her life to

charity. The readers are left with the conclusion that the Marquise has learned from her many hardships during her marriage and is now living contentedly alone.

Joan Hinde-Stewart also compares the ending of Lettres de Madame du Montier to La Princesse de Clèves:

> While other heroines of the period moan and groan about their troubles, this one displays an inner strength that enables her to follow the advice of her mother…When at thirty she is widowed and free to marry Mastrilli, she prefers, like the widowed princesse de Clèves, to dismiss the man she loves; she arranges his union with a younger sister and adopts a life of charitable works. (39)

Unlike Deguise, Stewart gives a more detailed analysis of Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels in her work Gynographs. Stewart gives a clearer account of the story and reveals an important point that separates this epistolary novel from other works written by women. The Marquise's refusal to retire completely from life, means she has learned that there is life after marriage, a choice not previously available to her.

For Stewart, Mme de Beaumont is not merely repeating common themes found in the women's novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Deguise seems to suggest. Instead, Stewart points out that:

> Novels, of course, are generally concerned with the possibility of happiness, and endings are conventionally labeled happy or unhappy. In the eighteenth-century novel, outcomes tend to be highly stylized; either a happy marriage or retirement, typically to a convent. Instead, Le Prince de Beaumont's heroines emerge from highly problematic marriages to end up alone, enjoying a transcendent solitude. (41)

This is certainly true in the case of the Marquise. To find her own happiness she had to first survive a difficult marriage. The Marquise then chooses to reject the man she loves, Mastrilli, continues her life free from marriage and finds happiness on her own.

Stewart states that while discussing Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels she chose to examine

> …these novels strategically explore the implications for women of the Enlightenment's linking of reason and virtue while they suggest, ultimately, that the mind's emancipation is the freedom most to be cherished. (38)

Stewart focuses her analysis on how Mme de Beaumont is exploring a woman's capacity to reconcile reason and virtue while, at the same time, arguing for the importance of an education for women. The conclusions of both Lettres de Madame du Montier and La Princesse de Clèves are similar due to the rejection of passion after the death of a husband. But the similarities end there. As Stewart

points out, the Marquise is rejecting passion; however, she chooses a different path from the Princesse. As an alternative, Mme de Beaumont takes the typical ending of the death of the heroine and transforms a formulaic plot into a developmental one. The Marquise has survived her marriage and decides to find happiness in her solitude, much more like the conclusion of Lettres d'une Péruvienne. With the example of her heroine, Mme de Beaumont refuses to pass on the message of resignation from life after marriage to her female audience. As an alternative, she demonstrates how a woman can remain virtuous, while at the same time, find her own happiness.

In Anna K. Streidter's examination of Lettres de Madame du Montier, she approaches Mme de Beaumont's novel differently from these critics. Instead of focusing solely on its similarities or dissimilarities to various works, Streidter sees in Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novel a domestic novel in which a woman's role in the domestic sphere can change her role in the public sphere. Streidter explains this by discussing the importance of middle-class values over aristocratic values in Mme de Beaumont's works:

> Writers like Leprince de Beaumont…seem convinced that if women only dissociated themselves from aristocratic culture (and weakness, capriciousness, artifice, etc) they would occupy a powerful and important place in the new republic. (51)

According to Streidter, Mme de Beaumont offered an example of a woman who does not exemplify the stereotypical aristocratic woman to her predominantly female readers. The Marquise is not weak, nor is she capricious. As an alternative to aristocratic values, Mme de Beaumont highlights middle-class values to contradict the typical female plot of eighteenth-century epistolary novels.

> From the perspective of authors like Leprince de Beaumont, Poulain and Elie de Beaumont it was liberating to stop mirroring the aristocratic society in which they had grown up and to envision instead a middle-class ideology, which, they hoped, would grant them authority over the private sphere and would allow them to reform French society. (49)

Glorifying the domestic life led by women was one way in which women could gain some control over their own lives and therefore influence French society. To highlight middle-class values is to provide an example of a woman working to perfect herself by balancing reason and virtue and to succeed by following the advice of her mother.

In her own life Mme de Beaumont had seen the dangers of following such an aristocratic lifestyle. As a

governess, she teaches her young ladies to follow the more conservative lifestyle of the middle-class.[1] Mme de Beaumont was born to a middle-class family. She later supported herself by publishing her Magasins and working as a governess in England. It is therefore logical that Mme de Beaumont would be writing about a lifestyle she herself had adopted. For Mme de Beaumont, a woman held more power within the domestic sphere and she could change her society from within that box of domesticity.

I argue that Lettres de Mme du Montier is one of the earliest domestic novels. Not only is Mme de Beaumont providing her readers an epistolary novel that is didactic in tone, but she is also, perhaps most importantly, advocating a lifestyle, that, according to the theory of domesticity, would empower women and eventually reform French society.[2] In effect, Mme de Beaumont's conservative theme of the importance of the private life for women were radical and appropriately revolutionary for her time. Whereas Rousseau presented the same themes eleven years later as an unattainable utopia in his masterpiece, Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse, Mme de Beaumont found a way to

present her domesticity as attainable and practical for women.[3]

Even though Mme de Beaumont was writing domestic novels which were popular at the time, critics have tried to explain the reason for the loss of interest in her epistolary works. Her novels were translated into several languages and published well into the nineteenth century. However, with the rise of popularity of the novel during the nineteenth century by such authors as Balzac and Flaubert, realism and a variety of different types of narrative voice, the epistolary novel as a genre lost its hold on the reading public's interest. Today, not one of Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels has the same popularity of other rediscovered eighteenth century female writers, such as Lettres d'une Péruvienne (Françoise de Graffigny, 1747), Claire d'Albe (Sophie Cottin, 1799) or Lettres de Mistress Henley (Isabelle de Charrière, 1784). Mme de Beaumont's one success is her fairy tale, La Belle et la Bête (1757), which remains popular and is read today.

In Rebstock's conclusion of her analysis of Lettres de Madame du Montier, she finds that Mme de Beaumont may have tried to include too much in her epistolary novel:

> En effet, le grand défaut de ce roman…est qu'il essaie d'être trop à la fois: la juxtaposition de tant d'éléments divers dans une intrigue qui semble vouloir explorer la totalité de l'expérience féminine, produit une impression surchargée. (120)

Perhaps this overload of elements found in Lettres de Madame du Montier explains the most important reason the novel has not been recaptured by modern readers. It spans approximately 12 years of correspondence, in which the readers follow the story of a married woman, how she navigates married life, with all of its difficulties and happiness, through the guidance of her mother. Not to mention the length, for the modern reader, Lettres de Madame du Montier is not a quick nor is it an easy read. It was published in two volumes numbering seven hundred and forty one pages total. Additionally, it is a story about an already virtuous woman who strives to perfect herself through difficult situations. For the modern reader, the heroine can be unbelievable and unconvincing.

Lettres de Madame du Montier first appeared serialized in her Nouveau magasin françois in 1750. It was published in two volumes in 1756. Because of the original serialization of the work, Rebstock points out that

> …la cohésion n'est pas la vertu principale des Lettres

> de Madame du Montier. On peut attribuer ce défaut, en partie, au fait que le roman a été publié en livraisons dans le Nouveau magasin françois, et maquait donc une ferme conception d'ensemble. De là viennent les 'conclusions' et les rebondissements soudains qui les suivent, nous lançant dans des situations tout à fait nouvelles. (80)

However, Mme de Beaumont does, at the same time, keep the structure of her novel simple: a letter is sent and the response appears in the next letter. She presents her letters as authentic: on the title page the letters are stated to be "Recueillies par Madame Le Prince de Beaumont", in other words, collected, not written, by Mme de Beaumont. In addition she writes in the preface: "…je n'ai fait que copier" (xj). As the editor, Mme de Beaumont, only copied the letters to be published, according to her preface; she did not invent nor create the story that is to follow.

In describing the plot of Lettres de Madame du Montier Stewart concludes that

> Le Prince de Beaumont does not lose sight of the fact that this is the story of a marriage: it begins when the bride goes from France to Savoy with her husband and ends when, newly widowed, she returns to her mother. (39)

The premise is simple. The book consists of an exchange of letters between mother and daughter during a time in the daughter's life when she should seek needed counsel. The

Marquise therefore turns to her mother, whose advice she follows meticulously.

The letters begin when the daughter is newly married at the age of 18 to an old friend of her father, Marquis de ***, who happens to be a wealthy man. After their marriage, the two move to the court at Turin where the Marquis is in service to the king of Sardinia (vij-x).[4] An exchange of letters begins between mother and daughter and frequently the mother freely gives counsel to her somewhat naïve but virtuous daughter.

The Marquise suffers through many trials during her marriage: her husband's infidelity, birth, sickness and death of two children, her inner conflict when she learns she loves another man, Mastrilli, whom she dismisses immediately once her mother explains to her that what she is feeling is passion and the result will be gossip, political disgrace, exile, widowhood, and finally, financial difficulties. Mme de Beaumont places her heroine in these dire situations so that the Marquise may improve upon her already virtuous comportment.

A recurring fictional technique Mme de Beaumont uses in Lettres de Madame du Montier, and in her later

epistolary novels, is two opposing characters, in this case, the Marquise has a sister that is completely different from her, Matilda. In the novel, we follow some of Matilda's life and her character is also developed throughout the story. Matilda is not a principal character in the novel and her story is told indirectly, by way of letters exchanged between Mme du Montier and the Marquise. What we learn due to the opposing example of Matilda is that the Marquise clearly makes the correct decisions. Mme de Beaumont uses the character of Matilda to reinforce her main theme: follow the guidance of your mother and you will remain virtuous. In the end, Matilda follows the guidance of her virtuous sister, the Marquise, and begins on a path of perfection as seen in the example of her sister.

In the entirety of the novel, there are letters exchanged between the mother and daughter, but also between the mother and the Marquis and the mother and the Comte, who marries one of Mme du Montier's daughters. We also see letters written by a few of the Marquise's sisters, but the emphasis remains on the correspondence between Mme du Montier and her daughter, the Marquise. The letters do not necessarily move the action forward; instead, by recounting

what has occurred, the exchange of letters is the action. The Marquise often tells her mother of her troubles and then receives advice in the following letter from Mme du Montier. The first exchange is initiated by the Marquise, newly married, and humbly asking her mother for guidance:

> Je serais rassurée, si je pouvais me flatter de vous avoir pour Pilote sur une mer si agitée; mais je sais trop que je ne dois point l'espérer : vos infirmités, ce que vous devez à mon Père & à votre famille, tout m'annonce que vous ne pouvez me donner que des conseils trop rares pour mes besoins. Ne me les refusez pas, ma chère Mère, dictez-moi le chemin dans lequel je dois marcher. (3, I)

The Marquise recognizes that her mother, Mme du Montier, has many responsibilities as a wife, and we learn in the *Avertissement*, she is a mother of twelve other siblings, but still writes to her newly married daughter offering advice on how to conduct herself in her new situation. The Marquise pleads for the smallest amount of time that her mother can offer.

The following letter is the response from Mme du Montier to the previous letter. In it, she is reassured by her daughter's letter and promises to guide the Marquise in her newfound situation:

> …puisque mes conseils vous paroissent nécessaires, je me ferai toujours un plaisir de vous les donner & je

> prierai le Tout-puissant de vous parler de ma bouche. (5, I)

It is clear that Mme du Montier undertakes this new role as a guide for her daughter seriously. We learn early in the letters the importance of God, “le Tout-puissant”, for the mother. We also learn that she will use his guidance in her advice to her daughter. Mme de Beaumont sets the stage for the remainder of the letters in the opening correspondence between mother and daughter: the daughter asks for guidance and the mother offers it willingly and freely. This is the model to be copied by her readers, both young and old. Moreover, this is the model that we will see again in later epistolary novels, especially in Lettres d’Emérance à Lucie, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The didactic tone is established early in the novel. Not only is the mother, Mme du Montier, advising her daughter, she is also advising the readers. In addition, the Marquise serves as a model which readers should emulate.

In a letter to her mother, the Marquise describes her life at the court in Turin. This is the opportunity for the Marquise to criticize aristocratic women:

> Il m'eut été facile d'être la dupe de ces fausses femelles; mais grâces aux soins qu'elles se donnent pour s'entrenuire, je les vois sans masque…je vous avoue, ma chère Mère, que je me fais une vraie peine d'écouter tant de médisances ; j'ai beau paroître distraite, ennuyée, glacée, ces femmes livrées au plaisir de déchirer leurs rivales, ne soupçonnent pas le chagrin qu'elles me causent. Ne pourrois-je pas, sans manquer à ce que je leur dois, leur dire une fois pour toutes que je suis chrétienne, & que la charité ne me permet pas d'écouter ces forts discours ? (58-59, I)

The Marquise finds herself in a difficult situation amongst so many women with whom she has nothing in common. First, she believes them to be fake, "fausses femelles" but declares that she is capable of seeing past their artifice, "je les vois sans masque". Further on she explains to her mother how she handles being around these fake women, by pretending to be "distraite, ennuyée", distracted or annoyed. But, in reality, she complains to her mother how she would like to be completely honest with these women and explain to them that her status as a Christian does not allow her to listen to their gossip. It is clear that the Marquise needs some help in navigating court life and someone in whom she completely trusts and with whom she can share everything.

In the following response from Mme du Montier, she tells her daughter that

> La bienséance ne vous permet pas d'imposer silence à des personnes au dessus de vous, mais rien n'empêche qu'en leur présence, vous ne fassiez tomber adroitement le discours sur la médisance, & alors vous pouvez, tout à votre aise, exprimer l'horreur que vous avez pour ce vice. Continuez toujours à laisser voir par votre air distrait & ennuyé, le peu de plaisir que vous cause le récit des actions d'autrui, & peu à peu l'on entendra ce langage muet. Vous n'avez encore rien vu par rapport à l'hypocrisie qui règne à Turin; la religion est un masque dont on essaie de couvrir les actions les plus criminelles. (64-65, I)

Mme du Montier reminds her daughter of her "devoir", that she is not to keep silent with those of a higher rank, "des personnes au dessus de vous". However, the mother does include the following piece of advice when the subject turns to "la médisance"; she tells her daughter to express her distaste for gossip, "exprimer l'horreur que vous avez pour ce vice". She also encourages the Marquise to continue her distracted and annoyed expressions, "Continuez toujours à laisser voir par votre air distrait & ennuyé". Eventually they will get the hint: "peu à peu l'on entendra ce langage muet". Mme du Montier proposes action rather than avoidance.

Mme du Montier finishes her advice with the warning of what is to come for her daughter. Witnessing the hypocrisy that reigns at the court in Turin, “la religion est un masque dont on essaie de couvrir les actions les plus criminelles”. Mme du Montier does little to explain her last statement besides telling her daughter further in the letter that her father had the opportunity to spend some time in the region: “Votre Père a fait quelque séjour en ce pays-là & connoît parfaitement les Piémontois…” (65, I).

In the above exchange of letters, Mme de Beaumont criticizes the uselessness of gossip that often occurs amongst aristocratic women. Not only is Mme de Beaumont providing an example of a real-life situation from which her readers can learn, she is also setting the stage for a more active lifestyle for women of the court, and that of the middle-class. In addition, the mother’s advice to not engage in gossip reflects the catholic, middle-class values that Mme de Beaumont is promoting in her novel.

Mme de Beaumont uses every opportunity to warn her readers of the vices of the world they will soon enter. She uses the naïve heroine, the Marquise, to demonstrate some of the pitfalls of such naïveté, (her lack of

knowledge of how to navigate through Court life while remaining virtuous and true to herself), while also safeguarding her heroine by keeping her under the close tutelage of her mother. Mme de Beaumont's readers should look to their mothers for counsel so that they too may follow in the virtuous footsteps of the Marquise.

The Marquise is influenced by her mother's advice which often follows the main goal of domesticity: a woman reigns within her household. In the case of her husband's infidelity, the Marquise witnesses firsthand her husband's love for another woman. The Marquise suffers a "fausse couche", a miscarriage, and while it is believed that she is resting, in a risqué scene, the Marquis and his lover sit together in her room:

> Ils se sont éloignés de mon lit, après avoir fermé soigneusement les rideaux, & se sont assis auprès du feu. Cette fille avait la tête appuyée dans ses deux mains, & comme elle avait le dos tourné du côté de mon lit, il ne m'a pas été possible de voir les mouvements de son visage, mais ceux du Marquis n'étaient point équivoques. Lorsqu'il m'a cru endormie, il s'est mis aux pieds de cette fille; il y a resté longtemps, avant de la résoudre à quitter son attitude, & pendant ce temps il était pâle, tremblant, agité, & lui parlait avec action, mais fort bas. Sans doute qu'il est parvenu à l'apaiser, car elle lui a donnée sa main qu'il a baisée avec les plus vifs transports. Quelques mouvements que j'ai faits, ont mis fin à cette scène,

> qui a été bien douloureuse pour moi. Je ne puis plus douter de mon malheur; la pitié seule avait causé les craintes du Marquis à mon égard. A mesure que ma santé se rétablit, ses empressements sont moins vifs, moins naturels, & un coup d'oeil qu'il jette sur ma rivale lorsqu'il me les rend, semble l'avertir qu'elle n'en doit rien craindre. (129-130, I)

From the scene that the Marquise describes to her mother while recovering from a miscarriage, it is clear to the Marquise that her husband is in fact unfaithful and that any signs of tenderness he had shown shortly after her miscarriage was only out of pity, "la pitié seule avait causé les craintes du Marquis à mon égard".

The Marquise continues her letter to her mother recounting her chambermaid's resolution to the situation:

> ...elle vient de me conseiller d'essayer de ramener le coeur de mon époux, en lui donnant de la jalousie. A Dieu ne plaise, a-t-elle ajouté, que je vous conseille rien de contraire à la vertu. Non, Madame, je connais trop la vôtre; mais ne pourriez-vous pas sans crime feindre d'être sensible aux empressements du Comte? Il vous aime, je n'en puis douter; le Marquis ne s'endort dans votre possession, que parce qu'il n'a jamais senti la crainte de perdre votre coeur. Que ne m'en a-t-il coûté, ma chère Mère, pour modérer la colère où m'a mise le discours de cette femme… (132, I)

Here, the chambermaid suggests that by making her husband jealous, he will leave his lover and become faithful to the Marquise. The chambermaid is aware of the Comte's obvious

affection for the Marquise, and therefore sees an opportunity for the Marquise to pretend to be open to the Comte's advances, "mais ne pourriez-vous pas sans crime feindre d'être sensible aux empressements du Comte?" At the end of her letter to her mother, the Marquise states how difficult it was for her to hide her anger caused by the chambermaid's suggestion.

In the following response from Mme du Montier, she encourages her daughter to continue to remain virtuous by not following the advice of her chambermaid:

> [Les sentiments du Marquis] pour vous existent au fond de son coeur, & votre femme de chambre raisonne juste lorsqu'elle pense que la jalousie les réveillerait ; mais ce moyen, quelque efficace qu'il soit, est indigne de vous. Il ranimerait à coup sûr l'amour de votre époux, car tel est l'homme, il ne connaît le prix d'un bien qu'il possède, que lorsqu'il est en danger de le perdre ; mais vous perdiez son estime, ou du moins vous mériteriez de la perdre. Le manège d'une coquette n'est point fait pour une femme vertueuse ; elle doit attendre du temps & de la patience, le remède à ses maux. (133-134, I)

The mother agrees partly with the chambermaid, that indeed jealousy is an efficient means to reanimate the Marquis' love for his wife, "Il ranimerait à coup sûr l'amour de votre époux, car tel est l'homme, il ne connaît le prix d'un

bien qu'il possède, que lorsqu'il est en danger de le perdre". However, Mme du Montier reminds her daughter that as a virtuous woman, she is above such means: "mais vous perdiez son estime, ou du moins vous mériteriez de la perdre", the Marquise would lose the esteem of her husband, but if she is patient, her husband will eventually come around and see the error of his ways.

In the above letters, Mme de Beaumont gives her readers an example of a woman remaining in control of her emotions while at the same time remaining virtuous. Granted, the Marquise now knows that her husband is unfaithful and loves another woman, so she has lost direct control over her husband. However, how she handles the situation demonstrates her control over him and herself. The Marquise does not allow her husband's infidelities to ruin her own virtue. Instead, by remaining faithful to her husband and having patience, the Marquise demonstrates control over the situation. She is knowledgeable of the Marquis' infidelity yet remains virtuous. This is how she gains control over her husband. She is confident that her husband will eventually see the error of his ways and come back to her, finally rejecting his mistress. A husband's

infidelity was a common occurrence in married life during the eighteenth century; Mme de Beaumont tackles this situation and provides her readers a way of dealing with such circumstances virtuously. An aristocratic woman would be advised to take on a lover, but Mme de Beaumont is not writing about how to be an aristocrat. She is providing her readers with real-life examples of how to be a virtuous woman, with middle-class values serving as a basis for her teachings.

In a letter from Mme du Montier to one of her daughters, the Comtesse, she writes about the new found peace and happiness that both the Marquis and Marquise have found in the country, away from the court:

> …leurs jours sont pleins, & l'activité avec laquelle ils s'emploient à s'enrichir par des bonnes oevres, me fait souvent gémir de ma lâcheté. Tout a changé de face dans le lieu qu'ils habitent. L'affreuse pauvreté, la discorde, l'ignorance & l'oisiveté, mère du crime, ont disparu. Le respect des Seigneurs dans le lieu Saint contient les plus libertins; tout le monde travaille, est à son aise, parce que la charité supplée à la médiocrité des gains. J'ai souvent le plaisir d'accompagner votre soeur dans les hameaux, où elle va s'instruire elle-même des vrais besoins des pauvres : je dis des vrais besoin; elle est sans pitié pour ceux qui ne sont occasionnés que par la fainéantise; c'était le grand mal de ces quartiers avant qu'elle y arrivât. (4-5, II)

Not only have the Marquis and his wife changed for the better, according to Mme du Montier, but their presence and influence in the region has improved the lives of the inhabitants: “Tout a changé de face dans le lieu qu’ils habitent. L’affreuse pauvreté, la discorde, l’ignorance & l’oisiveté, mère du crime, ont disparu.” Further in the letter, Mme du Montier describes visiting hamlets with the Marquise and how these acts of charity has changed her daughter : “J’ai souvent le plaisir d’accompagner votre soeur dans les hameaux, où elle va s’instruire elle-même des vrais besoins des pauvres…” Here, the Marquise has a chance to interact with the poor and to learn firsthand what they really need to survive from day to day, hardly a priority at the court at Turin. Now that both the Marquise and her husband have moved to the country, they can affect the lives of the less fortunate and by doing so they can come together as a couple and improve their own lives.

During her and her husband’s exile from court, they find themselves discovering happiness and peace in the country: “leur exil est source d’enrichissement moral et le bien-être s’installe autour d’eux” (Deguise, 164). Away from the artifice of the court, they are able to focus on what

is most important in their lives and in their marriage. It is an example of Mme de Beaumont encouraging middle-class domesticity by presenting an aristocratic couple who adopt a middle-class lifestyle. During their time away from the court, outside of the influences of aristocratic life, the couple becomes happier and their lives are enriched by the experience.

In the above letter, Mme du Montier describes the Marquise's new lifestyle. She is no longer living at court; she is now immersed in the country, experiencing life in a natural setting. This is similar to Rousseau's later depiction of life in a pastoral setting found in Julie or la Nouvelle Héloïse, written eleven years later. The main difference between the two presentations of country life is that Mme de Beaumont portrays the natural lifestyle as a pragmatic and realistic way of living, whereas Rousseau's description of the same lifestyle is seen as being out of reach because of its utopian elements.[5]

This principal difference between the two authors demonstrates how Mme de Beaumont used her epistolary novel to teach a practical alternative lifestyle to her readers. She wanted to present domesticity as something attainable

for her audience so that they may emulate what they have read and put it into practice in real-life. By doing so, Mme de Beaumont calls for a social reform within French society, a reform led by women of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. By educating themselves in the art of domestic life which included fidelity, family life and perhaps most importantly, childrearing, women were recapturing their dominant role within the private sphere and therefore gaining control over their lives. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that by becoming more powerful at home, the woman's overall situation would improve.

No longer would female education center around needle point and singing lessons. Instead it would be practical, useful and no longer superfluous. In the example of Mme de Beaumont's fairy tale, La Belle et la Bête, Belle spoke very little, but when she did say something, it was always of interest and relevance. Mme de Beaumont believed, as many other women writers of her time, that women were not meant to be mere ornamentation to her husband. By promoting this seemingly conservative lifestyle found in domesticity, Mme de Beaumont militated for a new powerful role for women

within the private sphere which would elevate a woman's status in French society as a whole.

Lettres de Madame du Montier concludes with the newly widowed Marquise. She is in the middle of financial woes, due to her late husband's debts and the story ends with the news that the Marquise has won her trial, she is vindicated and her late husband's debts have been erased. Mme du Montier's letters finishes with this happy news and her daughter's decision to raise two orphaned children. We are left with a sense of happiness, because of the new status of the Marquise. She is a widow with financial security and a purpose. She now has the opportunity to choose how she will live her life. She does not take on another husband; and chooses to find happiness in her charitable works. The conclusion is that of the continuation of life and shows how a woman can survive many hardships and still find happiness in the end.

This is an early example of a domestic novel. Some themes of domesticity are not fully developed and explored. In the following chapter we will explore how Mme de Beaumont's domestic novel has changed and developed in her later epistolary novel, Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie (1765).

We will see many of the same themes. However, Mme de Beaumont uses two opposing sets of women: two domestic women in contrast with two non-domestic women to validate the middle-class values she was trying to pass on to her readers.

[1] For more on this see Patricia Clancy.
[2] See Anna K. Streidter, Chapter 2.
[3] See Anna K. Streidter pp 52.
[4] It is not by mistake that Mme de Beaumont situates the action in Turin, a foreign court, to avoid censure.
[5] See Jean Starobinski.

Chapter 4:

Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie : The Virtuous Woman *par excellence*

Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie was published in 1765, fifteen years after Mme de Beaumont's first epistolary novel, Lettres de Madame du Montier, when Mme de Beaumont was just beginning to experiment with the domestic novel. In Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie she further develops her ideas for the domestic plot, as well as how to instruct her readers. Moreover, she had also reached a new period in her own life. Mme de Beaumont wrote Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie after she returned to Savoie in 1763 due to illness, while her husband remained in England. She plunged herself into her writings producing three notable epistolary novels.[1]

Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie is a cautionary tale centered on the lives of four friends, three of whom are just entering the social world: Lucie, Victoire and Henriette. The main character, Emérance, serves as a sort of guide to all three young ladies. Mme de Beaumont establishes two sets of contrasting women: Emérance and

Lucie, the virtuous, stand in opposition to Victoire and Henriette. It is clear that Mme de Beaumont wants her readers to emulate the example of both Emérance and Lucie as opposed to that of Victoire and Henriette.

Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie is composed of two volumes; the first contains thirty-one letters and the second thirty-three. The letters are primarily exchanged between Emérance and Lucie with a handful of letters from secondary characters, such as Victoire and Henriette. In their correspondence, both Emérance and Lucie describe current events in their lives while also discussing the lives of their friends.

Lucie turns to Emérance, an older, wiser woman who at one point served as a sort of tutor in the art of conversation to Lucie and her friends. Emérance lives in the country amongst a group of young women with whom she helps by giving advice. Barbara Rebstock summarizes the set-up of the novel in the following way:

> Parmi ces jeunes filles, elle en favorise trois-Lucie, Victoire, et Henriette-qui vont bientôt la quitter pour entrer dans le monde. Leurs histoires se reflètent et s'entrecroisent au cours du roman ; le destin de chacune est la conséquence de la personnalité qu'elle a développée et l'attitude qu'elle a formée envers son rôle de femme et de chrétienne. Et chacune des trois aboutit à une

> situation très différente de celle des autres, bien qu'elles aient toutes commencé au même « endroit » physique et psychologique. (126)

Mme de Beaumont uses her three young women, Lucie, Victoire and Henriette, to demonstrate throughout the novel how one's choices and character directly influence the outcome in their lives. A young woman's comportment greatly affected her choices and those choices often led to dire consequences.

Rebstock further states:

> Nous avons donc, dans les histoires parallèles de Lucie, de Victoire, et d'Henriette, trois peintures différentes de la jeune femme qui se marie et qui entre dans la société. Appartenant toutes trois au même rang social, ayant reçu à peu près la même éducation, ayant subi les mêmes influences, elles partent, comme nous avons dit, du même point. Leurs sortes différentes paraissent provenir surtout des personnalités différentes qu'elles ont possédées dès la naissance, développée ensuite : la modération raisonnée de Lucie, la vivacité de Victoire, l'indolence d'Henriette. (134)

Mme de Beaumont demonstrates how it is within the ability of each individual woman to make decisions in her life although she must suffer the consequences of those decisions. It is clear that the "modération raisonnée de Lucie" is preferable to the "vivacité de Victoire" and "l'indolence d'Henriette".

Mme de Beaumont's characters are becoming "novelistic", in that their choices determine their lives. When defining the novel, theorists often underscore the genre's realism as does Ian Watt:

> With the help of their larger perspective the historians of the novel have been able to do much more to determine the idiosyncratic features of the new form. Briefly, they have seen 'realism' as the defining characteristic which differentiates the work of the early eighteenth-century novelists from previous fiction. (10)

Realism is not new in fiction but Watt defines realism in conjunction with the development of the individual which is demonstrated by his or her ability to put what is learned into practice. "Modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses…" (12). In the novel it is the individual who controls his fate, still an outside source but not a definitive one.

Throughout Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie the characters make decisions that often have profound consequences. Mme de Beaumont emphasizes the importance of the individual's choices so that her characters are not solely victims of excess external causality. Mme de Beaumont uses more novelistic techniques in Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie than in her previous epistolary novel. Her characters control

their fate by making choices: who to marry, how to raise children, and how to improve their current situation.

In Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, Lucie is the first of the characters to make an important decision in her life. For the remainder of the correspondence the readers learn how that personal choice determines her life. Lucie is the exemplary virtuous young lady who chooses an older man for a husband instead of his son, who is deeply in debt. We observe that Lucie has chosen well: she has a happy marriage, "une union calme et heureuse", (Deguise, 168) in which she has a daughter whom she breastfeeds, rather than employing a wet-nurse.

Lucie also serves as an example of a caring mother who is concerned with how her daughter is raised. In a letter from Lucie to Emérance, Lucie talks about teaching the importance of beauty to her daughter.

> Encore un mot de ma petite Lucie; je prendrai de bonne heure des mesures pour lui faire éviter un danger dont vous m'avez avertie dans votre dernière lettre. S'il plaît à Dieu elle ne regardera pas la beauté comme un avantage qui doive être estimé beaucoup ; je commence dès-à-présent à rectifier mes propres idées sur cet article ; je conseille que j'ai fait jusqu'ici trop de cas d'un mérite aussi frivole, & sans la leçon que vous m'avez donnée, j'aurais peut-être tombé dans le défaut ordinaire, & laissé apercevoir à cet enfant combien elle est aimable ; mais comment le lui cacher ? C'est peut-être prévoir de trop loin, je

> l’avoue de bonne foi, aussi ne suis-je occupée uniquement qu’à me mettre en état de la bien élever… (Beaumont, Emérance, 147-148, II)

Lucie acknowledges to Emérance that as a mother she had been placing too much emphasis on her daughter’s beauty: “…je conseille que j’ai fait jusqu’ici trop de cas d’un mérite aussi frivole…” Furthermore, it is Emérance’s advice in a previous letter that has prompted Lucie to change her approach with her daughter concerning the importance of exterior ornamentation, a superficial quality: “…sans la leçon que vous m’avez donnée, j’aurais peut-être tombé dans le défaut ordinaire…” Lucie wants her daughter to learn that external beauty is not the most important quality for a woman is in contrast to the aristocratic emphasis than on the artificial for measuring one’s worth. Lucie ends her letter by remarking how much she is concerned with her daughter’s instruction; she wants to be able to raise her daughter well, “…je l’avoue de bonne foi, aussi ne suis-je occupée uniquement qu’à me mettre en état de la bien élever…” This is important because it is an example of a mother taking charge of raising her daughter instead of sending her away to a convent.

This bit of information in one letter shows a mother who is very active in her daughter's education. It also demonstrates what type of education the mother is trying to provide her daughter: one based on nascent middle-class values and religion. These domestic values can be defined as "…virtues of goodness, simplicity, generosity and affection…" (Clancy, 196). As an anti-aristocratic, virtuous woman, Lucie takes an active role in her daughter's education. This is the ideal situation between mother and daughter according to Mme de Beaumont.

As for the opposing characters of Victoire and Henriette, neither is concerned with domestic values, or religion. First, let us examine the case of Victoire. She ends up marrying the son of Lucie's husband, the young Marquis de Villeneuve. Quickly the marriage is full of unhappiness. The young Marquis is completely in debt; he ignores his wife, is unfaithful and is overall an unpleasant man. Due to Victoire's unwise choice, which was based on passion and not reason, her life continues in a downward spiral. She has a son with her lover, Montaigu, flees to England, where, after the birth of her son, finds herself alone and abandoned by Montaigu. However, Victoire

completely turns her life around, devotes herself to God and enters a convent.

> La naissance de son fils, qu'elle baptise elle-même, l'amène à un de ces repentirs soudains et profonds qui sont un thème favori de Mme de Beaumont. De pécheresse et de débauchée, elle se transforme tout d'un coup en sainte, dont le seul désir est d'abandonner le monde et d'expier ses fautes dans la solitude. (Rebstock, 131)

Henriette, the other impetuous woman in the novel suffers from her choices, or lack thereof. "Henriette, nonchalante et indolente, ne se soucie pas du tout de son avenir" (Rebstock, 132). Her lack of conviction and lack of decisiveness leads her to make bad choices. Henriette, unlike Lucie and even Victoire, is a follower and does not take charge of her own life. She drags her feet when it comes to choosing a husband, not because she doesn't want to marry, but rather, because she doesn't know what she wants and she prefers that someone else makes her decisions. She finally chooses to marry a decent man, M. de Sauveboeuf. Unfortunately, the marriage comes to an untimely end when, due to Henriette's enormous gambling losses, her husband places her in a sort of "prison". Victoire enlists the help of Montaigu to free Henriette. M. de Sauvebeouf is killed by Montaigu; Henriette is then

forced to flee to England where she eventually marries a rich Englishman and dies in childbirth.

Mme de Beaumont is teaching her readers to reject passion and embrace reason. She warns her readers of the perils of making decisions based on your feelings as opposed to thinking things through completely. Mme de Beaumont rejects uncontrolled behavior in all of its forms, from passion, to gambling, because it leads to problems.

The two novels examined in this study, Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie and previously Lettres de Madame du Montier, differ in many ways. For example, the correspondence in the former is between two confidantes, a wise, older woman and a young lady, as opposed to being between a mother and daughter. Barbara Kaltz compares the two novels:

> Son roman le plus populaire, réédité pendant un demi-siècle et traduit en sept langues, les *Lettres de madame Du Montier*, décrit une rélation exemplaire entre mère et fille. Dans les *Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie*, l'auteur aborde le thème de la maternité illégitime et fait l'éloge de l'allaitement. Ce roman, en partie autobiographique, connut onze rééditions et fut traduit en allemand, anglais, espagnol et suédois. (xvii)

As Kaltz notes, Mme de Beaumont takes on different subjects in Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, such as the importance of a

mother breastfeeding her own children, as opposed to sending them off to a wet-nurse, and she discusses the subject of illegitimate children. Moreover, Mme de Beaumont delves deeper into previously examined themes, such as marriage.

Alix Deguise also observes some of the same differences as Kaltz noted in Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie: "Les *Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie*, récit en partie autobiographique, contiennent d'autres réflexions sur le marriage avec plusieurs cas très differents" (168).

Barbara Rebstock devotes an entire chapter to Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie where she begins by discussing the differences between it and Lettres de Madame du Montier:

> Dans Les Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie...la simplicité du titre (qui suggère qu'il y a seulement deux correspondantes) est un peu trompeuse. Le receuil contient non seulement les lettres du personnage principal, Emérance, à sa jeune amie Lucie, et celles de Lucie à Emérance, mais aussi un nombre d'autres envoyés à l'un à l'autre par d'autres personnages. (123)

Rebstock also points out that the epistolary novel at times seems more similar to a memoir, a form that included more romanesque-type adventures:

> En plus, dans une des lettres (98 pages en tout), Emérance donne l'histoire de sa vie entière; dans une autre (48 pages), elle raconte les malheurs de sa

> fille Annette, qu'elle n'a pas vue depuis sa plus tendre enfance…la dernière lettre du roman (65 pages) est le récit des voyages faits par l'infortuné Marquis de Sainville au Canada et dans le Maroc. On peut aisément voir qu'une telle structure ne peut que créer une atmosphère confuse et changeante; à plusieurs reprises, on passe de la forme épistolaire (où il y a d'ordinaire des échanges assez succinct d'information entre deux ou plusieurs individus) à la forme des "memoires" (où un seul personnage révèle en détail sa vie et ses sentiments). (123-124)

Romanesque situations allow Mme de Beaumont to include topical situations to pique the reader's interest. For example, in two of Emérance's longest letters she recounts her husband's adventures working as a trapper in New France (Canada) and the disappearance of her daughter. The memoir romanesque sections of Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie is also most certainly related to its serial publication which added suspense to keep the reader's interest.

Joan Hinde-Stewart briefly discusses Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie in her chapter on Mme de Beaumont, "Speech and Saintliness". Stewart points to the example of Lucie to show that Mme de Beaumont often uses her heroines to demonstrate how important it is to reject not only adulterous love but also any form of passion:

> The young heroine of *Lettres d'Émerance à Lucie* explains that she is satisfied to feel only friendship for her older husband and that remaining virtuous "tires her" not at all. Like Lucie, the others are

> not so much psychologically resilient as Christianly docile. In an era whose literature enshrined the ideals of sensibility, including the conviction that legitimate passion ennobles both subject and object, these novels contend that virtue lies squarely in the refusal not just of adulterous love, but ultimately of all passion. (43)

The rejection of passion is the only way for women to remain virtuous, according to Mme de Beaumont. Passion does not ennoble characters rather, it leads to suffering later in life, as Mme de Beaumont demonstrates through the examples of the impetuous women in this epistolary novel. Both Henriette and Victoire, the two impetuous women, embrace passion and suffer from that choice, whereas Lucie is able to find contentment in an initially loveless marriage to an older man. It is Lucie whom Mme de Beaumont wants her readers to emulate.

Mme de Beaumont is not presenting her readers with a new character in Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie. Lucie, a young woman who exemplifies virtue, is reminiscent both of the Marquise from Lettres de Madame du Montier as well as Belle from Mme de Beaumont's fairy tale, La Belle et la Bête (1757). Lucie is a stock character on whom Mme de Beaumont relies to demonstrate how a woman is to act in society. Lucie, the Marquise and Belle are virtuous women

placed in difficult situations. By maneuvering through their trials, each becomes even more virtuous as they perfect themselves further.

In Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, Mme de Beaumont uses her stock character, Lucie, to show how one's actions have direct consequences. It is thus evident to readers which example to follow, that of Lucie, as opposed to the other two aristocratic women. Deguise points out how Mme de Beaumont clearly contrasts the two opposing lifestyles through the examples of two traditional (artificial) aristocratic women and two non-traditional (virtuous) aristocratic women.

> Le contraste entre la vie d'Emérance et de Lucie avec celle de Victoire et Henriette est une mise en garde contre les dangers courus par les jeunes filles ou jeunes femmes faibles, désœuvrées, avides de plaisir, entrainées par de mauvaises fréquentations et dont, sans doute, l'éducation morale a été négligée. (169)

As Deguise observes, Mme de Beaumont employs contrasting characters to warn readers against the dangers of following in the footsteps of Victoire and Henriette.

Anna K. Streidter states Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie is a domestic novel by comparing the opposing set of women portrayed in the epistolary novel:

> At the center of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie (1765), a conflict between two domestic women and two traditional aristocratic women is set up, in which the non-domestic women are condemned for preserving aristocratic mores, in particular their sexual independence in marriage. The main correspondents, Emerance and Lucy, are domestic and appalled by their non-domestic friends, Victoria and Henriette, whom they blame for "ambition" and "indolence". (56)

For Streidter, Mme de Beaumont uses the two opposing set of women to underscore her theory that domesticity improves the lives of women whereas those who choose to follow traditional aristocratic behaviors will fall from grace. Both Henriette and Victoire, the two non-domestic women in the novel, suffer from their choices. Both reject establishing a domestic lifestyle by leaving their husbands and eloping to England with their lovers. Henriette dies in childbirth and Victoire enters a convent after being abandoned by her lover.

Once again, according to Streidter, Mme de Beaumont is establishing herself as a predominant writer of the domestic novel. In Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, Mme de Beaumont has had time to further develop her ideas and had clearly received much support from the success of Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse than she had when she wrote Lettres de Madame du Montier. The choices made by both the

domestic and non-domestic women in Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie help to demonstrate clearly Mme de Beaumont's stance on the usefulness of domesticity for women.

Moreover, as Streidter notes, in Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, the female confidante is a more useful didactic tool:

> The existence of female confidantes in particular was an excellent didactic tool, allowing the reader of the novel to learn domesticity by emulation, i.e. by copying the confidante's reaction to the heroine's letters. Since the domestic heroine's letters are usually addressed to another – often younger and slightly less domestic – woman, the reader of the novel, this time clearly expected to be female, is initiated into a developing bond or network between domestic women. The author-reader relationship is expected to mirror this didactic bond. While the more mature correspondent instructs a younger woman in questions of domestic virtue, the same mentoring can thus take place between the author and the reader of the novel. (57)

Not only does Lucie learn from the more domestic Emérance, but so does the reader.

As we will see, Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie is not as clear cut as Streidter presents it to be. Mme de Beaumont presents two very different types of women. However, each woman has different experiences, whether they follow a domestic lifestyle or a non-domestic one. Each woman

suffers in her own way in her search for individual happiness.

In the case of Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, the letters themselves between the two confidantes serve as a teaching tool to its readers. Whereas in Lettres de Madame du Montier the letters from the Marquise recounted the events in the Marquise's life and the letters from her mother, containing advice, served as the principal teaching tool to its readers. In Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, the main correspondents update one another on the recent events in their own lives and in the lives of their friends, Victoire and Henriette. Emérance and Lucie share opinions about each other's decisions in their correspondence while they also comment on the choices made by the aristocratic women. The *raison d'être* behind the correspondence between Emérance and Lucie first is due to the physical separation between the two women and secondly to each woman's desire to share stories and opinions with one another.

And finally, another difference between the two novels is Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie contains stock adventure unlike the earlier Lettres de Madame du Montier. Emérance recounts how her husband, who had disappeared, became a

trapper in Canada, then on his way back to France was captured by pirates, sold as a slave in Morocco before he is eventually reunited with his wife (Deguise, 169). These romanesque elements are dominate in Emérance's letters in which she recounts stories about her husband and her daughter. Both the husband and daughter are at one point separated from Emérance and both eventually return to her by way of great obstacles, adventures and circumstances of luck. Indeed, these events gave a sense of the passage of time while the characters learn and develop.

Just as she did in Lettres de Madame du Montier, Mme de Beaumont insists on the authenticity of the letters in the *avertissement*:

> Après la mort d'Emérance, ses lettres passèrent dans les mains d'une de ses parentes qui ne voulut pas les rendre publiques; mais la mort de cette parente, sa fille ne se crut pas obligé aux mêmes ménagements, parce que les personnes intéressées à la suppression de ces lettres n'existaient plus. Elle les confia donc à un de ses amis, & lui permit d'en tirer copie : c'est de cet ami que je viens de les recevoir ; j'ai cru qu'elles ne pourraient manquer de plaire au Public & qu'elles seraient de quelque utilité aux jeunes personnes qui entrent dans le monde ; c'est de cette vue que je le fais paraître. (Emérance, v-vj, I)

This situation itself is a major "realistic" technique in most eighteenth-century novels.[2] Mme de Beaumont creates a story about the history of the letters, how she was able to

come across a copy of the letters and reproduce them for the *Public*. She insists that the reason behind publishing the private correspondence was due in large part that she felt the letters could be useful to those entering the world for the first time: “elles seraient de quelque utilité aux jeunes personnes qui entrent dans le monde”.

Early in the letter we learn that Lucie does not correspond with her mother because her mother has been largely absent in her life. Lucie has been raised in the country by her aunt and does not know her mother well. In returning to her parents, it is clear to Lucie that her mother is more concerned about marrying her off than knowing what Lucie’s thoughts and feelings are in the situation. However, it is her father who allows Lucie time to get to know the young Marquis, assuring her that they will not force her to marry him.

Lucie seems to be a bit taken off guard by her parents desire to marry her to an unknown man. Perhaps more importantly, Lucie remarks how unjust it is to marry without having any say in the matter: “Je ne vois rien de si cruel que d’être forcée de sacrifier sa liberté dans un choix d’où dépend tout le bonheur ou le malheur de notre

vie” (7, I). Here, Mme de Beaumont has Lucie say what so many women had been saying for centuries: how cruel it was to be forced into marriage, a life-long commitment not based in a choice or love that changes a woman’s life so dramatically. Further in the same letter, we learn that Lucie has no desire to marry and that she would rather become a nun, and she would like to tell her mother exactly what she wants: “…j’avais une répugnance invincible pour le mariage, & que je voulais être Religieuse” (7, I). Lucie prefers a life of devotion to God over married life. For Lucie, this is her only possible “choice” in the matter.

However, Lucie does eventually marry, but thanks to the patience of her father, she is allowed some time to acquaint herself with the man chosen by her parents, the young Marquis de Villeneuve. In that time, Lucie decides to marry the young Marquis’ father, instead as she explains to Emérance:

> Je viens d’être fiancée à M. de Villeneuve le père, & ses quarante-cinq ans m’ont moins effrayée, que les vingt-deux ans de son fils. Ce qui vous êtes surprendra davantage, c’est que vous êtes *la première cause de ce changement*. Ce que vous m’avez mandé de Madame de Villeneuve, ne pouvait manquer d’exciter ma curiosité; je priai mon père de la satisfaire, & il m’apprit que le Marquis dont on admirait aujourd’hui les vertus, avait donné dans tous les excès de la jeunesse, & qu’il n’avait rendu justice au mérite de

> son Épouse qu'après dix années de mariage. Ce qu'on me disait du père me fit envisager ce que j'avais à craindre du fils. (21-22, I, emphasis in the original)

In learning more about the father and how he treated his wife early in marriage, Lucie found herself fearing that she would also be poorly treated if she marries the son. Now that the father is older, he has matured. If Lucie were to marry the son, she would have to suffer through his "excès de la jeunesse", just as Madame de Villeneuve did for the first ten years of marriage to the father.

What is important in this early correspondence is that we have a distinct example of Lucie's learning how to make important decisions in her life. Here, Mme de Beaumont presents her readers with a reasonable young lady who clearly reflects on her choice. She does admit to having the beginnings of feelings for the younger Marquis, but decides to go with the safer, wiser, more virtuous choice: the older, respected father. In fact, in Lucie's decision to marry the father she is not following her heart but instead she is making a decision based on reason.

As for the opposing women, Henriette and Victoire, we learn that Henriette has married and Victoire is interested

in the Marquis de Villeneuve, now Lucie's son-in-law, a situation of great concern to Lucie.

> Toutes les passions de Victoire se sont reunies à l'appui de son amour; l'idée de tenir un rang dans le monde, d'avoir un équipage, des diamants, d'aller à la Cour; tout cela la transporte à un point, qu'elle n'est plus en état d'écouter la raison. (67-68, I)

Here, in a letter to Emérance, Lucie explains why she worries for her friend, Victoire. Victoire is incapable of being reasonable, and seems to prefer concentrating on the superficial. For Victoire, a marriage to a Marquis includes material possessions, which interests her the most: "…tenir un rang dans le monde, d'avoir un équipage, des diamants, d'aller à la Cour…", all of which, according to Lucie, makes her friend unreceptive to reason. Lucie observes that her friend's decision to base her decision to marry the young Marquis on passion and not reason proves her clouded judgement. Mme de Beaumont later demonstrates how this decision making process turns out for Victoire. After her marriage to the Marquis, the passion between the two quickly fades and Victoire's life becomes one tragedy after another: her husband is unfaithful, she has an affair with an Englishman which results in the birth of a son out

of wedlock, and is then abandoned by her lover and left alone to raise her son.

In a letter from Emérance to Victoire, Emérance reveals to Victoire her fears for the young woman.

> Vos passions sont d'une violence qui m'affraye, & malheureusement votre caractère est faible & léger...la médiocrité de votre fortune vous fixait dans cette vie obscure, mais pure & innocente ; une augmentation de bien a réveillé votre ambition, & avec elle toutes vos autres passions. (78, I)

Emérance first explains to Victoire that her own passions are the cause of concern, along with Victoire's weak character. It is clear that Emérance does not believe that Victoire is as mature and reasonable as Lucie, and because of this difference in the two young women, Mme de Beaumont is able to demonstrate clearly how an uninstructed mind will lead a woman to make impulsive decisions. Further in the same letter, Emérance continues to explain to Victoire why she is fearful:

> Je sentis lorsque je vous quittai combien le monde dans lequel vous alliez entrer serait dangereux pour vous, votre situation justifie mes appréhensions. Vous êtes possédée de tout ce que vous avez vu ; vous dévorez par vos désirs les plaisirs qui vous manquent ; vous employez toutes vos lumières à vous justifier ce goût ; vous n'avez plus que du dédain pour les satisfactions innocentes que vous procurait notre solitude ; vous êtes charmée de l'idée de pouvoir vous en arracher pour toujours... (78-79, I)

Emérance does not hold back when she is telling Victoire what she thinks of her character. According to Emérance, Victoire is immature, naïve, and unaware. Because of this, Emérance tells Victoire that she is entering a world full of dangers she is incapable of handling. Emérance continues her critique of Victoire's character and explains exactly why Victoire should not marry a man like the young Marquis:

> Qu'allez-vous devenir avec de telles dispositions, surtout si vous épousez le Marquis de Villeneuve ? Je sais qu'il est ce qu'on appelle aimable, mais cette qualité ne suffira pas pour vous rendre heureuse. Une fille de votre caractère aurait eu besoin de trouver un guide dans un Époux, & il n'est certainement pas propre à vous en servir... (78-79, I)

After Emérance has explained all of Victoire's shortcomings, she emphasizes her need for a husband because the young Marquis de Villeneuve can not guide Victoire. Emérance feels strongly that Victoire needs a husband who will lead and not mistreat her. Victoire, being young and naïve about the world of the Court she is about to enter, needs a man at her side to help her learn how to deal with the dangers of the Court.

This letter foreshadows the events that will unfold in Victoire's life. She does marry the young Marquis de

Villeneuve and does end up following her heart, her passions, instead of listening to reason. Victoire exemplifies the woman who follows her passions instead of reason and how these decisions lead a woman to an unhappy marriage and invite a life full of trials and sadness. This is exactly what happens in the story of Victoire. Her naïveté leads her to marry an immature and selfish man; she eventually takes a lover and has an illegitimate child. The two contrasting stories of Lucie and Victoire underscore the importance of reason over passion. It is through reason, not passion, that a woman will be able to remain virtuous and saintly, as does Lucie.

In a letter from Lucie to Emérance, we learn how things are unfolding for Victoire and Henriette:

> Je ne vous dirai rien de nos deux Amies; l'une ne mérite plus ce nom; & la seconde est en grand danger de marcher bientôt sur ses traces. Victoire n'a pas gémi longtemps de l'infidelité de son Époux qui entretient publiquement une Actrice ; le Duc de *** s'est offert à essuyer ses larmes, & si j'en crois le Public, ses propositions ont été acceptées. (260, I)

Clearly, Victoire's marriage is developing as foreseen by both Emérance and Lucie. The young Marquis de Villeneuve is publicly unfaithful to his wife, and Victoire, according to the rumors, has been seen with another man: "le Duc de

*** s’est offert à essuyer ses larmes, & si j’en crois le Public, ses propositions ont été acceptées”. Not only is Victoire a victim of an adulterous husband, but she avenges her husband’s affair with one of her own. Again, Victoire relies on decisions influenced by her social class rather than her reason.

In a letter to Lucie, Emérance discusses how Victoire and Henriette enjoy passing their time together:

> C’est le jeu qui occupe actuellement nos deux Amies, elles y passent les nuits. Outre que Victoire d’est dévouée aux gouts de sa société qui est toujours la même, elle joue heureusement & gagne de grosses sommes ; ce qui va en faire une joueuse de profession. (34, II)

Emérance clearly does not agree that a family that “plays” together stays together, if by play, one means gambling. Further in the same letter, Emérance explains why:

> De toutes les passions, celle du jeu me paraît la plus dangereuse, parce que les pertes qu’on se met en danger de faire, excitent à se servir de toutes sortes de moyens pour les réparer. (34, II)

Gambling is another addictive passion that promotes a false sense of honor while discouraging reasonable judgment. This is a slippery slope by which too many fall from grace and security has an immediate impact on Henriette’s life.

Indeed, it is Henriette's gambling debts that lead to her husband's death.

Towards the end of the story, Lucie falls ill, and in a letter to Emérance she explains why she is unable to accompany Victoire to the convent:

> …moi pauvre éclopée, qui ai mal par tout sans avoir mal à un endroit fixe, qui peut à peine se soutenir, il a fallu obéir au Médecin qui m'a défendu de quitter Paris. Je passerai le temps de leur voyage dans la retraite ; ma maladie m'apporte ce bien qu'elle m'éloigne des compagnies… (287-288, II)

Lucie is suffering from pains all over her body and there is no explanation of the cause or a cure. Even in the last letter of the novel, Lucie is still suffering. She writes to Emérance: "…en vérité, je suis plus mal que je ne le parais, & j'ai une vraie confiance que le plaisir de vous revoir, sera le meilleur remède à mes maux" (359, II).

Virtuous Lucie is not invincible. She suffers along with the other women in the story, but her suffering is not in direct correlation to any choice she has made. Lucie is suffering not because she followed her passions and ignored reason but because that is how life unfolds.

Mme de Beaumont, the governess who supplied us with volumes upon volumes of writings about virtuous women and how to emulate those women, herself did not have a perfect

life. She instructed her readers against the pitfalls of gambling, because she herself was a victim of its consequences when her first husband found himself in debt. Also, Mme de Beaumont, at the time of writing Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie, was suffering from an illness that brought her back to Savoie where she was able to find some relief due to the pleasant climate. Mme de Beaumont interjected real life situations in her pedagogical epistolary novel. Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie can not be classified as a domestic novel. Mme de Beaumont is doing more than solely advocating a domestic lifestyle. She is instructing her young female readers on how to best remain virtuous by making sound decisions based on reason. Nonetheless she did not write through rose-colored glasses and she did not promise Paradise to those who followed her teachings. Mme de Beaumont used her own experiences in her life to warn her young readers against certain dangers, while, at the same time, she provided her readers the tools necessary to deal with fate as a wife and mother, while being virtuous and true to oneself.

Rebstock concludes that Lettres d'Emérance à Lucie is a story based on ambiguity:

> C’est ici, plus que dans aucune de ses autres œuvres, que la catholique orthodoxe, la moraliste, la gouvernante par excellence, fait face à la réalité de la vie, qui consiste malheureusement dans l’ambiguïté—même dans la vertu, même dans le bonheur. (155)

It is this element of ambiguity within Lettres d’Emérance à Lucie that prevents this novel from belonging to a larger domestic vision, as proposed by Streidter. Indeed, Mme de Beaumont does promote domesticity, but at the same time, Lucie, the domestic model, finds herself physically suffering in the end. It is Victoire who repents and finds solace by devoting herself to God by becoming a nun. In a letter from Lucie to Emérance, she describes the scene of Victoire entering the convent for the first time:

> Aussitot qu’elle fut entrée dans la maison, elle baisa la terre en disant: C’est ici le lieu de mon éternité. Le Marquis l’a vue le lendemain…& il dit qu’elle n’était pas connaissable, tant la joie qu’elle avait de se trouver dans cet asyle… (358, II)

Mme de Beaumont may find a place amongst the devotees of domesticity, but as a woman writer of epistolary novels, she does more than promote a domestic lifestyle in Lettres d’Emérance à Lucie. In it she touches upon the consequences of our choices while at the same time demonstrating how to find happiness within marriage by following middle-class values and rejecting aristocratic

mores. However, Mme de Beaumont does not idealize domesticity. Instead she shows how life sometimes unfolds differently from how we had planned. The ambiguity of the novel demonstrates how much of our lives are completely out of our control. Perhaps life according to Mme de Beaumont is best summed up by Emérance in a letter addressed to Lucie: “Ce n’est point en cette vie que nous sommes destinés à goûter un Bonheur sans mélange de peine” (13, II).

Lettres d’Emérance à Lucie is more than a domestic novel. It is a pedagogical epistolary novel that allows Mme de Beaumont to speak directly to women; she is writing to instruct women how to maneuver their way through the world while remaining virtuous and true to themselves. The women who write to one another about their lives learn and develop as a result of their correspondence. Love as a central theme is eclipsed by the importance of female education and how women can indeed learn from one another in her pedagogical epistolary novel.

Mme de Beaumont’s model of the pedagogical epistolary novel, continues in the works of women writers from the eighteenth-century to present day. In the concluding

chapter, I will discuss examples of different types of epistolary novels written by women since the eighteenth-century with a close examination of a twentieth-century epistolary novel, Lettres parisiennes, a correspondence between two women, and a comment on the future of the epistolary novel.

[1]Lettres d'Émerance à Lucie (1765), Mémoires de madame la baronne de Batteville (1766) and La Nouvelle Clarisse (1767).

[2] Vivienne Mylne discusses this in further detail: "When an eighteenth-century novelist says that his story is 'true', we should in many cases be prepared to substitue the modern equivalent, 'based on fact'" (28). For more see pp 25-26, 27-29.

Chapter 5:

Mme de Beaumont and her Influence on Epistolary Novels Beyond the Eighteenth-Century

Most literary critics contend that after Laclos' chef-d'oeuvre, Les Liaisons dangereuses (1782), the genre declined in popularity. Otis Fellows' opinion resumes that of most scholars until more recently:

> La montée du roman épistolaire avait été lente et presque délibérée. Mais, après *Les Liaisons*, le genre ne pouvait pas atteindre à plus de perfection ni du point de vue psychologique ni du point de vue artistique. La seule direction que pouvait prendre le genre était le déclin progressif. (37)

According to Fellows, writers shied away from the epistolary form because it has already been perfected by Laclos. Perhaps this is true for French male authors of the nineteenth-century who began exploring other forms, most notably the novel. Fellows concludes that: "La méthode épistolaire…n'existe pratiquement plus aujourd'hui" (37).

The epistolary novel did not disappear as a genre after the eighteenth-century. Epistolary novels written by men continued to play an important role in developing

literary canons throughout Europe and the Americas. One needs only to cite the examples of the twentieth-century alone.

Women writers continued to use the genre at the end of the twentieth-century and first decade of the twenty-first has seen a new type of epistolary genre, the digital epistolary novel, linked obviously, as in the case of its popularity in the eighteenth-century, to improvements in communication. Much like the improvements in the postal system in the eighteenth-century, the internet is fueling both an interest in the epistolary genre as well as changes in it. To argue that the genre has practically disappeared in usage during the twentieth-century demonstrates a naïve judgment of the current state of the genre.

One major reason behind the continuation of the epistolary novel amongst women writers is due in large part to the forum that it provides them in a male dominated society. The epistolary novel provides a space where women writers can openly discuss issues that are important to them. Women writers of the eighteenth-century were doing this and women writers of the twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries continue this tradition.

In women's writings, the epistolary novel was never a stagnant genre. As we have seen, its ability to instruct and challenge the male canon has helped to sustain its popularity amongst women writers beyond the eighteenth-century.

The different types of epistolary novels made popular by women writers of the eighteenth-century begins with what Jensen terms the love-letter and the development of the letter-novel which challenged the character of the "Epistolary Woman" on many levels.[1] Then, as Anna K. Streidter discusses in her work, there are sentimental and domestic epistolary novels. Finally, as discussed in the previous two chapters, Mme de Beaumont modifies the form again not only to challenge but to exploit its pedagogical possibilities. It is evident that the tradition of the epistolary novel, rooted in antiquity and then revived by many male authors, during the eighteenth-century has proved to be a versatile genre, which is constantly developing, in large part thanks to the women writers who have taken charge of the form.

During the twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries, the epistolary novel has experienced a resurgence due to women writers, such as Jean Webster, Mariama Bâ, and Alice

Walker.[2] Elizabeth Campbell compares the current resurgence of epistolary novels to what occurred in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries:

> During the last twenty years a significant number of epistolary novels by women have appeared, of the type which first flourished in England and France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (332)

Campbell contends that the contemporary epistolary novel mirrors its eighteenth-century predecessor from France. She also points out that many of the contemporary epistolary novels are written by women from post-colonial countries such as Senegal, India, Australia, Argentina and Canada.[3] This concurs with my thesis that the genre provides a space in which women writers are comfortable and free to express themselves and touch upon issues that directly affect women as well as its important role in emerging canons. The genre continues to give a voice to a previously repressed and ignored group.

> In many contemporary women's novels, women find their freedom and their selves in the act of writing. Women today are doing consciously what women writers have always done, what French feminist theorists call l'écriture féminine, writing in the feminine-that is, writing themselves in a way which reflects their experience as the "other" in a culture in which they have been traditionally voiceless and thus powerless. In the epistolary novel and in the many modern women's novels which play…with epistolary conventions, the writing itself is action and plot, action and plot

> which refuse the kind of closure informing other narratives. The epistolary novel and women's writing subvert the language and values of the dominant culture. In open epistolary fiction, the process of writing, the attempt to be heard, is more important than working toward an ending, than imposing closure. (333)

Campbell equates the epistolary genre with gender and otherness, with feminine writing. Significantly she notes that the epistolary form is used by women living in post-colonial countries emphasizes the function of the act of writing in epistolary novels: "…the process of writing, the attempt to be heard, is more important than working toward an ending…" It is not the act of finding closure in the story, but instead the act of expressing oneself that dominates the contemporary epistolary novel. For women of the eighteenth-century as for many modern women writers, the need to communicate with other women, to share histories and to work with one another through the act of writing letters drives the genre.

As mentioned earlier, recently the genre has seen a rise in a new type of epistolary novel written by both male and female authors due to the technological age of e-mail correspondence and blog entries. This has created yet

another category within the genre, the digital epistolary novel.

Digital epistolary novels (DEN) are novels composed of email correspondence and blog entries. Young novelists are using advances in internet communication to create a contemporary epistolary novel.[4] This is indeed an interesting development in the genre that seems to barely resemble the epistolary novels written during the eighteenth-century. But it demonstrates perfectly the changing relationship between the new age of technology in which we live and how we communicate, which always inspires a rebirth (or return) of the genre.

In the early twentieth-century, an epistolary novel in the form of love-letters, Daddy-Long-Legs (1912) captivated American readers and movie-goers alike. Many films were adapted from the original novel starring Mary Pickford (1919), Fred Astaire and Leslie Carron (1955) and eventually made its way overseas to Japan where it was adapted into an anime musical (1979). This early twentieth-century epistolary novel can be classified as a love-letter novel. The female protagonist, Judy, is initially, the “Epistolary Woman” as coined by Katherine Jensen. Judy is an orphan, is the abandoned woman, and

love is the central theme of the novel. This young orphaned woman writes to her benefactor, whom she calls Daddy-Long-Legs because she's never seen the man, only his shadow as he walks away which made her think of this nickname. In her letters to her benefactor she recounts how she is falling in love with a man during her years in college. The man she is falling in love with just so happens to be her benefactor. It is a love story between a young woman and an older, rich man. But Jean Webster also stresses issues important to women of the early twentieth-century: women's right to vote and their need for independence in a male dominated society.

In 1980, Mariama Bâ, a Senegalese writer, published her epistolary novel, Une si longue lettre, a semi-autobiographical collection of letters between two friends, Ramatoulaye, recently widowed, and her childhood friend, Aïssatou. In it, Ramatoulaye recalls happier memories of a childhood that was filled with a sense of independence and of hopefulness due to the recent Senegalese independence from France. More importantly, she also recalls how her late husband, Moudo, took a younger wife after thirty years of marriage. This betrayal by Ramtoulaye's husband

dominates much of her letters. In the letters between the two women, they discuss the theme of male dominance in Senegalese culture and we learn how each woman handles it differently.

In Une si longue lettre, Mariama Bâ uses the form to criticize the female condition in Africa, just as female writers in the eighteenth-century used the form to criticize contemporary French society in relation to women. The form allowed women of the eighteenth-century to participate in discussions on liberty, equality and women's education; this is also true of twentieth-century women writers, notably women writers from post-colonial countries such as Mariama Bâ, who use the form to criticize publicly contemporary society and discuss issues important specifically to women.

Alice Walker also uses the genre to criticize not only society but sexism among blacks, in her novel The Color Purple (1982). It is composed of diary entries and letters written by a poor African-American woman, Celie, during the 1930s in Georgia. Alice Walker provides a voice to an otherwise voiceless woman. Through the example of Celie's hardships, Walker comments on the female condition,

specifically, the African-American woman's condition, Celie is a victim of her sex and the color of her skin. Moreover, as a woman, she is the "other" within her own African-American community. Walker also explores lesbian love in addition to woman's ability to find independence without a man. This recalls an earlier epistolary novel from the eighteenth-century, Lettres d'une Péruvienne, in which Zilia finds her independence without marriage. The Color Purple can be categorized as a letter-novel, Celie again refutes the typical "Epistolary Woman" that can be found in love-letters, but instead she strives to find her own happiness and independence.

Jean Webster, Mariama Bâ and Alice Walker are similar in that they both militate for change. Jean Webster was interested in women's suffrage and a woman's independence in a male dominated society. Alice Walker challenges both racism and sexism. Although it is not a love story like Daddy-Long-Legs, since it recounts Celie's life: how she came from a poor family, was the victim of rape and incest and married to a man she did not know, she eventually finds female companionship, independence and an understanding of the man she formerly feared and despised.

In another epistolary novel of the twentieth-century, Lettres parisiennes (1986), Nancy Huston and Leïla Sabbar correspond. Each from a different country, Canada and Algeria, they live in Paris and write to each other to discuss their self-imposed exile in France. The epistolary novel is a physical place for them, as Leïla explains in letter XXI to Nancy: "l'act d'écrire m'est vital et constitue aussi *une territoire*" (144, my emphasis).

In the letters between Nancy and Leïla, they discuss their self-imposed exile and their experiences of "otherness". Each woman has chosen to live in Paris, yet their "otherness" causes them to each feel separate from the dominant French culture. No matter how long they live in France or how well they speak the language, there is always something that keeps Nancy and Leïla from fully integrating into French society. For Nancy it is her accent that often betrays her and for Leïla it is her race that withholds her from being accepted by the French.

Nancy and Leïla discuss many themes relevant to women such as children,[5] being a mother,[6] images of women[7] and they also discuss the form in which they are using, the epistolary novel.[8] For both Nancy and Leïla, "une parole

épistolaire" (29)[9] is a way to transcend their isolation and build different identities and homes for themselves.

Throughout the correspondence, Nancy and Leïla discuss the implications of motherhood. In a letter from Nancy to Leïla, Nancy writes about being judged by another woman for leaving her daughter with a babysitter:

> Ensuite j'ai emmené Léa chez sa nourrice. La grand-mère de celle-ci est là en ce moment; elle me trouve, moi, scandaleuse. Elle ne cesse de me jeter des regards désapprobateurs…et de faire des petites remarques du genre : « Comme ça, elle a deux mères, votre fille! »; sous-entendu : « De mon temps, c'était impensable des choses pareilles, qu'une mère abandonne ses enfants à une autre femme – et pendant les vacances, en plus! » De plus en plus souvent, je me fais la réflexion que la maternité est un immense réseau de culpabilisation tous azimuts : « Nous en avons bavé, nous nous sommes sacrifiées, il est donc normal que vous en baviez à votre tour – voyez ce que c'est, ce n'est pas de la tarte, hein? On croit que c'est bien mignon les petits enfants, mais après il faut assumer ses responsabilités, et adieu la jeunesse…! » De nos jours, ce raisonnement est évidemment plus répandu à la campagne qu'en ville. (56)

In the act of writing to Leïla about her experiences of being made to feel guilty by an older woman, Nancy confronts a common experience amongst the rising number of working mothers. By sharing her own experiences in the epistolary novel, Nancy is taking part in the debate, which is the recurring conflict many mothers face: to work or to

stay home, by initiating a conversation about a mother's guilt. For Nancy, it is important for her to continue to work while also raising her children. She finds balance in her life by employing a babysitter while she works. It is clear that the grandmother disapproves of this. Perhaps from her own feelings of guilt Nancy reads between the lines: "…une mère abandonne ses enfants à une autre femme", even though the older woman does not say these words, it is what Nancy hears.

In the above example, the correspondence between Nancy and Leïla, one woman is sharing with another woman her experiences as a mother. In the epistolary novels written by Mme de Beaumont the correspondence is dominated by two women who write about their lives as women, as wives, as mothers. Mme de Beaumont's eighteenth-century epistolary novels can also be described as a "une parole épistolaire" (Huston, Sebbar, 29), a written conversation between women that allow them to construct their identities, homes and difference.

In letter V, written by Leïla to Nancy, Leïla discusses her otherness as a woman exiled:

> C'est ma conscience de l'exil qui m'a fait comprendre et vivre la division, dans le mouvement des femmes en particulier, où j'ai su que je suis une femme dans l'exil, c'est-à-dire toujours à la lisière, frontalière, en position de franc-tireur, à l'écart, au bord toujours, d'un côté et de l'autre, en déséquilibre permanent. Un déséquilibre qui aujourd'hui, après des passages, des initiations amoureuses et politiques, me fait exister, me fait écrire. (28)

Leïla's feelings of exile are twofold: first she is exiled due to her own cultural baggage. Secondly, Leïla's situation of being in another country, her foreignness within the European country, causes her to feel another layer of exile. She describes herself as being separated from the society in which she lives, she is on the edge, *lisière*, on the frontier, *frontalière*, she is at a distance, *à l'écart*. All of which causes her to experience otherness as an impenetrable and unchangeable barrier.

Again, Leïla is contributing to a common theme amongst women writers of the epistolary novel, that of a woman's situation as "other" in a male dominated society. Mme de Beaumont discusses this theme in her epistolary novels. When the Marquise in Lettres de Madame du Montier, learns of her husband's infidelity she writes to her mother to gain advice as to how to handle the situation. Having an

unfaithful husband was a common problem during the eighteenth-century, Mme du Montier advises her daughter to remain virtuous and to not take on a lover to make her husband jealous. The Marquise does not justify divorce in such a situation as a twentieth-century woman can. Mme de Beaumont uses the example of the Marquis' infidelity to demonstrate how women are outsiders in their own society and then provides her female readers with ways of managing their status of "otherness" within the male dominated society.

In Lettres parisiennes and the epistolary novels written by Mme de Beaumont, we have letters composed by women for women to read and from which to learn. The length of the works themselves make them initially seem less approachable but Mme de Beaumont's novels were serialized appearing in her Magasins. Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels were written primarily for women. Most importantly they explored a territory in which women were able to discuss their lives and their opinions openly in a reciprocal fashion. This is exactly what both Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar do in Lettres parisiennes. The themes and criticism have been updated to reflect the 1980s, and this

demonstrates exactly how and why the epistolary novel has not faded away.

The genre itself always functions to reflect on and challenge the times in which it is written. Women writers of the eighteenth-century were using the form to participate in the philosophical debates of their time, Jean Webster was using the form to participate in the debate of women's right to vote, Mariama Bâ used the form to criticize the current female condition in Africa, just as Alice Walker was criticizing the black female condition in the southern United States. Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar show how women try to live up to the ideal image of woman despite new freedoms and the ability to "exile" themselves.

Mme de Beaumont created a territory within the genre with her pedagogical epistolary novels in which women freely converse and share ideas and opinions. Moreover, women are able to critique the world in which they live and they, together, find a way to maneuver through the difficulties of being a woman in a male dominated society. The question of womanhood as discussed in Mme de Beaumont's epistolary novels has continued to dominate the themes of

subsequent novels, especially those written in the twentieth-century by women.

In the end, Mme de Beaumont's specific contribution, creating a new variation of epistolary novels that of the pedagogical epistolary novel, has created a legacy that prevents her works from being forgotten. Women writers of the twentieth-century, such as Jean Webster, Mariama Bâ, Alice Walker, Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar, continue this long tradition to comment on and speak to others. These modern women, like Mme de Beaumont, use the genre to allow both writers and readers alike to reflect on previous and the contemporary female conditions.

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[1] This was discussed in relation to Katherine Jensen.

[2] Daddy-Long-Legs (1912), Une si longue lettre (1980), The Color Purple (1982).

[3] "From Senegal we have Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter (1980); from India, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's Heat and Dust (1975); from Australia, Elizabeth Jolley's Miss Peabody's Inheritance (1983)…from Argentina, Sylvia Molloy's Certificate of Absence (1981); from Canada, Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (1986)" (Campbell, 332).

[4] One example of a digital epistolary novel is "Intimacies" written by Eric Brown. It is intended to be read using DEN software and is composed of instant messages, email messages and Web Sites. See article by Adam Baer.

[5] Letters III, VI, XII, XXI, XXII, XXVI.

[6] Letters X, XI, XVIII, XXII, XXVIII.

[7] Letters XI, XII, XV, XVI, XVIII, XIX, XXI, XXII, XXIV, XXIX.

[8] Letters IV, V, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XXI, XXII, XXVXXVIII.

[9] Leïla to Nancy, letter V.

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