



1977

The Dialectic of Master and Slave: Laclos' Les Liaisons Dangereuses and Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind

Patrick J. O'Brien
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses



Part of the [French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

O'Brien, Patrick J., "The Dialectic of Master and Slave: Laclos' Les Liaisons Dangereuses and Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind" (1977). *Master's Theses*. 2997.

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/2997

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
Copyright © 1977 Patrick J. O'Brien

THE DIALECTIC OF MASTER AND SLAVE:
LACLOS' LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES AND
HEGEL'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF MIND

by

Patrick J. O'Brien

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

June

1977

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank Dr. Anne M. Callahan, Chairman of the Modern Languages Department of Loyola University of Chicago, for the time and encouragement which she so freely gave during the writing of this document. Without her aid, the thesis would have been impossible.

Further he wishes to acknowledge the careful reading and detailed criticism which the paper received from Dr. Ardis B. Collins, Associate Professor of Philosophy.

Finally, the author wishes to thank Dr. Andrew J. McKenna, Assistant Professor of French, for his timely assistance with regard to the final Aufhebung.

VITA

The author, Patrick J. O'Brien, is the son of Patrick O'Brien and Emily (Hacala) O'Brien. He was born July 7, 1946 in Chicago, Illinois.

His elementary education was obtained in both parochial and public schools in Chicago, Illinois, and secondary education at Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Illinois where he was graduated in 1964.

In September, 1964, he entered Lawrence University of Appleton, Wisconsin, and in June, 1969, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a major in French.

In September, 1974, he was granted an assistantship in French at Loyola University of Chicago.

PREAMBLE

J'étais plus maître que
je n'avais cru. Plus maître,
c'est à dire plus esclave.

Marcel Proust
A la Recherche du
temps perdu

Ours is a comparative endeavor; for in placing together two seemingly disparate literary texts we hope to illustrate a mechanism, or better yet, a process, which is common to both. The texts in question are Laclos' les Liaisons dangereuses and Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind, and the process which they commonly mediate is the dialectic of mastery and servitude, and, to a lesser extent, the prestige battle. What we mean by "dialectic" is the process whereby an entity becomes a relation to its opposite so that it is preserved and fulfilled by the opposite.

The course of our enquiry as well as its results will be shaped by our bias, and so it is only fitting that the bias be stated at the outset. What will interest us primarily is the creation of a framework which will heighten and reveal the motives behind the actions of Laclos' characters in such a way as to elucidate a particular problem often manifest in human relationships. Because this is the case, our interest in Hegel's text will be subordinated to our interest in les Liaisons dangereuses, and hence our treatment of the two texts will reflect that difference in emphasis. Furthermore, our reading of Hegel will be literary rather than philosophical insofar as that is the primary direction which our study must take. Consequently, we do not pretend to do

full justice to the Phenomenology by treating that marvelously complex work in a way that would give first priority to the exposition in toto of the complexities of its ontological, epistemological and metaphysical suppositions and ramifications. Such a task is clearly beyond our scope. Rather we shall pick and choose those aspects of Hegel that best illustrate and explain the behavior of Laclos' characters without fully attempting to account for the Hegelian system. To be sure, we will do our best to insure that our use of Hegel's text will be consistent with the principles of his philosophical system. Our hope is that our respect for and of Hegel's integrity will be manifest in the use to which we ~~put~~ him.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

March 17, 1977

THE DIALECTIC OF MASTER AND SLAVE

"Il me semble au moins que c'est rendre un service aux moeurs, que de dévoiler les moyens qu'emploient ceux qui en ont de mauvaises pour corrompre ceux qui en ont de bonnes, et je crois que ces Lettres pourront concourir efficacement à ce but."

Préface aux Liaisons dangereuses (p. 8) 1.

Les Liaisons dangereuses, if we are to believe the editor's Préface, has a didactic purpose: the collection of letters published within the volume will reveal to public scrutiny the methods of the wicked in order to protect les honnêtes gens from falling under their influence and being corrupted by them. But what is presented is much more than a moral tract; the evil characters of les Liaisons will not be denounced by someone who sets himself up as the arbiter of public morality and decency, instead they will denounce themselves much more effectively by means of their own letters.

The use of letters in the novel is consistent with the dynamic of the Hegelian self awareness, since through the letter, its author is able to take himself as the object of his own consciousness and he or she attempts to gain recognition of a particular kind from another. It is the recognition accorded to the letter's author by the reader of the

1. All quotations from Laclos refer to Letter and page numbers in Choderlos de Laclos, OEuvres complètes (Paris, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1967) and will be abbreviated LD.

letter which is the object of the former's desire. The importance of a letter is thus twofold: it allows its author to find himself both in the letter which he has written and in the reaction of the person who reads that letter. The letter is therefore an attempt by its author to captivate the consciousness of the person who receives the letter, and to find in the receiver's consciousness the confirmation of his own being. The effectiveness of this project is indicated by the Chevalier Danceny in his letter to Madame de Merteuil:

Enfin, quel que soit le temps, on finit par se séparer, et, puis, on est si seul! C'est alors qu'une Lettre est si précieuse; si on ne la lit pas, du moins on la regarde... Ah! sans doute, on peut regarder une Lettre sans la lire, comme il me semble que la nuit j'aurais encore quelque plaisir à toucher ton portrait...

LD Lettre CL (p. 355)

Clearly Merteuil's letter has succeeded in completely captivating Danceny's consciousness.

But the letter does more than confront the reader with the fact of the writer's being; for that being is revealed in a certain way, it is painted in a certain light, so that a particular interpretation is forced upon the reader. Unlike a snapshot which determines its subject sometimes all too arbitrarily and binds his reality to the caprice of a specific second of time, the letter allows the writer to carefully control the image of himself created within the letter, for purposes either honest or dishonest. Danceny is too captivated to analyse the deeper implications of this phenomenon, but his description of the letter's function reveal his own awareness that what is represented in the letter is not only Madame de Merteuil's being, but the existence of her

becoming as well:

Ton portrait, ai-je dit? Mais une Lettre est le portrait de l'âme. Elle n'a pas, comme une froide image, cette stagnance si éloignée de l'amour; elle se prête à tous nos mouvements : tour à tour elle s'anime, elle jouit, elle se repose...

LD Lettre CL (pp. 355-356)

There can be no doubt that Laclos intends to make use of the letter's aspect as portrait animé throughout les Liaisons dangereuses in order to unmask his characters. His reliance on the fiction of the existence of collected letters which are to be taken as the work of several distinct writers, rather than the work of a single author, indicates his desire to have his readers believe that the revelations made within the book are being made by separate self-consciousness talking about themselves in different lights for other characters in the novel. What we are asked to witness then is the unfolding of the Geisten of the novel's characters over a period of five months.

The novel's two most important and most captivating characters are the Marquise de Merteuil and her partner/antagonist, the Vicomte de Valmont. The correspondence between these two characters is the stage on which the most important ~~actions~~ and revelations are played out. It is therefore only fitting that this paper treat primarily the letters which these two characters send back and forth to one another. And since it is Merteuil who is clearly the primary force behind the shaping of the novel's events, and the epicenter of the novel's dénouement, it will be on her statements that this paper will be focused.

However an appreciation of the actions and statements of

Merteuil and Valmont is impossible unless the very different social roles to which their respective sexes assign them is understood. The inequality of their given social roles is reiterated again and again throughout the novel, and is perhaps most clearly summarized in the abstract observation on the nature of men and women that Madame de Rosemonde makes to the Présidente de Tourvel:

...L'homme jouit du bonheur qu'il ressent, et la femme de celui qu'elle procure. Cette différence, si essentielle et si peu remarquée, influe pourtant, d'une manière bien sensible, sur la totalité de leur conduite respective. Le plaisir de l'un est de satisfaire des désirs, celui de l'autre est surtout de les faire naître. Plaire n'est pour lui qu'un moyen de succès; tandis que pour elle, c'est le succès même...

LD Lettre CXXX (p. 313)

The social inequality of men and women is a given, and its effect on the respective actions of male and female characters cannot be underestimated. Indeed, ultimately the actions of Madame de Merteuil can only be interpreted as an attempt to redress this monstrous and repressive discrimination on the part of a society which establishes and perpetuates the myth of the innate superiority of men over women. Thus Merteuil's strategy will be to convert the effective servitude and weakness of her social condition to one of mastery and strength. She and all her sex are unequal to a violent struggle which is a more primitive stage or "moment" in the rivalry of Hegelian individuals. The play of forces over which she largely presides in Laclos' novel will mostly concern the master-slave dialectic which follows it.

In the forty-two paragraphs of the eighty-first Letter, Merteuil assails the repressiveness of Eighteenth Century French society with

regard to women, and describes the genesis of her own self-consciousness as a means of circumventing this repression. She begins by vaunting her superiority over Valmont whom she accuses of being in love with the Présidente de Tourvel, and of being afraid to boldly carry out his project of seduction. His enslavement to Tourvel makes him all the more ridiculous in her eyes given the superior position guaranteed him by his masculinity: "Vous avez séduit, perdu même beaucoup de femmes" she taunts him, "mais quelles difficultés avez-vous eues à vaincre? quels obstacles à surmonter? où est le mérite qui soit véritablement à vous?" LD (p. 173). Valmont can behave with relative impunity, since society will not only tolerate his activities, but will even allow him to proclaim them openly as emblems of his socially expected virility. As long as he remains within the wide latitude of behavior which society will tolerate from men, he really risks nothing.

A woman however does not enjoy the same freedom, for to be seduced and to have that seduction become known will in no way bring her greater glory; rather it will result in her ruin. Therefore, the woman who is able to allow herself to be seduced in such a way that her seducer can in no way derive glory from his seduction proves clearly in Merteuil's eyes both her superiority to her seducer and her superiority to all men. The repression of the social system forces her to develop greater talent and finesse than her lover simply in order to survive:

Croyez-moi, Vicomte, on acquiert rarement les qualités dont on peut se passer. Combattant sans risque, vous devez agir sans précaution. Pour vous autres hommes, les défaites ne sont que des succès de moins. Dans cette partie si inégale, notre fortune est de ne pas perdre, et votre malheur de ne pas gagner. Quand je vous accorderais autant de talents qu'à nous, de combien encore ne

devrions-nous pas vous surpasser, par la nécessité, où nous sommes d'en faire un continuel usage!

LD Lettre LXXXI (p. 174)

Valmont himself has admitted that in their "mission of love" Merteuil has made more converts than he LD Lettre IV (p. 16); if the dangers she runs are so much greater, and if her success has still outstripped his own, how then dare he doubt the manifest superiority of her enterprise?

...Si cependant vous m'avez vue, disposant des événements et des opinions, faire de ces hommes si redoutables le jouet de mes caprices ou de mes fantasies; ôter aux uns la volonté, aux autres la puissance de me nuire; si j'ai su tour à tour, et suivant mes goûts mobiles, attacher à ma suite ou rejeter loin de moi

Ces Tyrans détrônés devenus mes esclaves;

si, au milieu de ces révolutions fréquentes, ma réputation s'est pourtant conservée pure; n'avez-vous pas dû en conclure que, née pour venger mon sexe et maîtriser le vôtre, j'avais su me créer des moyens inconnus jusqu'à moi?

LD Lettre LXXXI (p. 175)

It is important to note that Merteuil's effective mastery of her presumed masters---"Ces Tyrans détrônés devenus mes esclaves"---alone is not sufficient for her: her letter betrays her need of Valmont's recognition of that mastery. For it is this recognition, above all, that confirms the master in his or her mastery. It is this need for recognition that betrays the dialectical nature of mastery, "Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or 'recognized'." PM (p. 229)². Thus Merteuil's

2. All quotations from Hegel refer to G. W. F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, J. B. Baillie, trans. (New York, Harper and Row, 1967) and will be abbreviated PM.

actions can in no way be seen as the result of blind hedonism; on the contrary, each is an integral part of a carefully conceived, orchestrated and executed strategy to redress the inequity of her social station. Each is an element in a self-consciously formulated plan which will ultimately demonstrate her freedom from and superiority to the contingent role to which her sex has assigned her. It would be erroneous to interpret her behavior as evidence of mere nymphomania, or even legerté:

Mais moi, qu'ai-je de commun avec ces femmes inconsidérées? quand m'avez-vous vue m'écarter des règles que je me suis prescrites, et manquer à mes principes? je dis mes principes, et je le dis à dessein : car ils ne sont pas, comme ceux des autres femmes, donnés au hasard, reçus sans examen et suivis par habitude, ils sont le fruit de mes profondes réflexions; je les ai créés, et je peux dire que je suis mon ouvrage.

LD Lettre LXXXI (p. 176)

Having entered the world as a young, powerless, defenseless girl, Merteuil rapidly realized that in order to overcome her unequal status she would have to devote great attention to the ways of worldliness, while at the same time carefully concealing her revolutionary project. For her the world was nothing less than a struggle for self-assertion through domination and one in which her sexuality forced her to fight with unequal arms. She describes at length how she carefully cultivated a mask of impassibility in order to repress her true feelings and hide the objects of her attention. Her self-control gave her at the age of fifteen "les talents auxquels la plupart de nos Politiques doivent leur réputation" LD (p. 177). And even then she was only at the beginning of her apprenticeship.

Her early marriage and the premature death of M. de Merteuil left her in an ideal position to carry out her project of vengeance. Under no obligation to remarry, independently wealthy, young, beautiful and possessed of herself, Merteuil felt vividly "le prix de la liberté qu'allait me donner mon veuvage, et je me promis bien d'en profiter." LD (p. 178) She committed a few pas faux in order to let it be known that she was approachable, while at the same time her repentance won her the support of the Prudes who became the watchdogs of her reputation. While focusing public attention on a pretender who meant nothing to her, she was simultaneously able to entertain her real lovers with impunity. She deployed her talents, the talents she had given herself as a result of her long meditation on the nature of human social existence, on the great stage of the world, le grand Théâtre, in order to impose the mask which she had created between herself and public opprobrium while at the same time conducting her amours in such a way that her partners could in no way harm her. Truly her own self-conscious creation, aware of the enmity of society and all of its members to her project of autonomy and self-determination, capable of imposing her imago upon the consciousnesses of her adversaries, Merteuil as she describes herself in Letter Eighty-One can be nothing other than the individual who discovers that in order to obtain independence, "Il faut vaincre ou périr." LD (p. 182)

Merteuil's abilities are appreciated even by Madame de Volanges, in spite of the fact that that staid lady fails to divine the truth of Merteuil's behavior. In a letter warning Tourvel against Valmont,

Volanges mentions that Merteuil is the only woman to escape unscathed from his clutches:

D'abord Madame de Merteuil, en effet très estimable, n'a peut-être d'autre défaut que trop de confiance en ses forces; c'est un guide adroit qui se plaît à conduire un char entre les rochers et les précipices, et que le succès seul justifie : il est juste de la louer, il serait imprudent de la suivre...

LD Lettre XXXII (p. 68)

While she is taken in by Madame de Merteuil, Volanges appreciates clearly what Valmont is doing. Nevertheless, intimidated by his social position and the power which he derives from it, she is forced to receive him socially out of fear:

...Sans doute, je reçois M. de Valmont, et il est reçu partout; c'est une inconséquence de plus à ajouter à mille autres qui gouvernent la société. Vous savez, comme moi, qu'on passe sa vie à les remarquer, à s'en plaindre et à s'y livrer. M. de Valmont, avec un beau nom, une grande fortune, beaucoup de qualités aimables, a reconnu de bonne heure que pour avoir l'empire dans la société, il suffisait de manier, avec une égale adresse, la louange et le ridicule. Nul ne possède comme lui ce double talent : il séduit avec l'un, et se fait craindre avec l'autre. On ne l'estime pas; mais on le flatte. Telle est son existence au milieu d'un monde qui, plus prudent que courageux, aime mieux le ménager que le combattre.

LD Lettre XXXII (p. 68)

These comments by Madame de Volanges indicate her awareness of the ruthless power struggle of social life which have incited Merteuil's project. And they further indicate that the beligerence of Hegelian mastery did not pass unnoticed by Laclos and his contemporaries.

In seeking to validate itself objectively by means of the struggle for recognition by another self-consciousness and by the domination of that consciousness, the Hegelian individual must find a worthy opponent who has the same aspirations to independence and

mastery as itself. The worthy opponent must be one who aspires to the same absolute independence and who is equally willing to risk all, including life itself, in order to act out that independence. So, too, the two magnificent criminals are forced to seek adversaries whose conquest will enhance their glories. Valmont makes this clear at the novel's opening when he rejects Merteuil's order that he return to Paris immediately and undertake the seduction of Cécile de Volanges:

...Que me proposez-vous? de séduire une jeune fille qui n'a rien vu, ne connaît rien; qui, pour ainsi dire, me serait livrée sans défense; qu'un premier hommage ne manquera pas d'enivrer, et que la curiosité mènera peut-être plus vite que l'amour. Vingt autres peuvent y réussir comme moi...

LD Lettre IV (p. 17)

The Présidente de Tourvel is, however, quite another matter; her reputation is unspoiled and her ability to resist the gallant overtures which others have made assure her the undivided attention of the Vicomte. After dismissing Merteuil's proposition, he describes his own, saying:

...Il n'en est pas ainsi de l'entreprise qui m'occupe; son succès m'assure autant de gloire que de plaisir. L'amour qui prépare ma couronne, hésite lui-même entre le myrte et le laurier, ou plutôt il les réunira pour honorer mon triomphe. Vous-même, ma belle amie, vous serez saisie d'un saint-respect, et vous direz avec enthousiasme : "Voilà l'homme selon mon coeur."

Vous connaissez la Présidente de Tourvel, sa dévotion, son amour conjugal, ses principes austères. Voilà ce que j'attaque; voilà l'ennemi digne de moi; voilà le but où je prétends atteindre...

LD Lettre IV (p. 17)

These sorts of descriptions occur again and again in the course of the novel as Merteuil and Valmont, each jealous of the attention the other is lavishing on the victim of the moment, are gradually drawn

towards the final conflict in which each discovers in the other the only real opponent worthy of negation. Merteuil best describes their common attitude toward facile conquests in commenting on Valmont's dalliance with Cécile:

...Or, je ne connais rien de si plat que cette facilité de bêtise, qui se rend sans savoir ni comment ni pourquoi, uniquement parce qu'on l'attaque et qu'elle ne sait pas résister. Ces sortes de femmes ne sont absolument que des machines à plaisir.

Vous me direz qu'il n'y a qu'à n'en faire que cela, et que c'est assez pour nos projets. A la bonne heure! mais n'oublions pas que de ces machines-là, tout le monde parvient bientôt à en connaître les ressorts et les moteurs; ainsi, que pour s'en servir de celle-ci sans danger, il faut se dépêcher, s'arrêter de bonne heure, et la briser ensuite...

LD Lettre CVI (p. 251-252)

An unworthy opponent, Cécile is characterized as a machine, a mere thing devoid of that consciousness which must characterize the worthy adversary who alone brings glory to the conqueror. Valmont expresses much the same sentiment when he refers to those left at his aunt's country house after the departure of the Présidente as those "automates près de qui je végète" LD Lettre C (p. 235). Each of these instances clearly illustrates the necessity of the individual's finding his or her satisfaction in the self-consciousness of another equally assertive individual: "Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness." PM (p. 226)

Not only must the opponent be worthy, but the conqueror must demonstrate his ability to overcome whatever obstacles chance may place in his way. This is illustrated in Valmont's seduction of the Vicomtesse de M...: at dawn she returns to her room only to find that the door has blown shut and is locked from the inside. If Valmont had only

wished to seduce her, he could have easily left her in her dilemma, but then the conquest would have been too easy:

...Il faut convenir qu'il eût été plaisant de la laisser dans cette situation : mais pouvais-je souffrir qu'une femme fût perdue pour moi, sans l'être par moi? Et devais-je, comme le commun des hommes, me laisser maîtriser par les circonstances? Il fallait donc trouver un moyen...

LD Lettre LXXI (p. 147)

To save her momentarily, Valmont concocts a ruse which allows him to break down the door and allows the Vicomtesse to return to her bed before her husband and her official lover are able to arrive on the scene. However, as he makes clear to Merteuil, his interest in the Vicomtesse's honor is only passing. Indeed, if Valmont is to gain anything from the incident, it must be told in full so that all of Paris can appreciate his cleverness:

Si vous trouvez cette histoire plaisante, je ne vous en demande pas le secret. A présent que je m'en suis amusé, il est juste que le Public ait son tour. Pour le moment, je ne parle que de l'histoire, peut-être bientôt en dirons-nous autant de l'héroïne?

LD Lettre LXXI (p. 148)

The struggle for domination which is described in greatest detail is Valmont's prolonged seduction of the Présidente de Tourvel. The Présidente clearly dominates Valmont's consciousness to the point of obsession, and here again is found a parallel with Hegel's Phenomenology. For if "self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness", then the other is a necessary precondition to the master's demonstration of his existence. And this is consistent with the fact that in his first letter to Merteuil, Valmont describes the irresistible attraction the Présidente exercises over him:

...Vous savez si je désire vivement, si je dévore les obstacles : mais ce que vous ignorez, c'est combien la solitude ajoute à l'ardeur du désir. Je n'ai plus qu'une idée; j'y pense le jour, et j'y rêve la nuit. J'ai bien besoin d'avoir cette femme, pour m'en sauver du ridicule d'en être amoureux : car où ne mène pas un désir contrarié?...

LD Lettre IV (p. 18)

As the Présidente dominates Valmont's thoughts and dreams, so does he hope to dominate her consciousness. For the moment her thoughts are turned toward God, the guarantor of her virtue; but if Valmont is able to do anything, he will force her to sacrifice her principles and her God to him: "Je serai vraiment le Dieu qu'elle aura préféré." LD Lettre VI (p. 22) Deification is the goal of the Laclosian hero, and can it not be said that the independence and freedom to which Hegelian consciousness has been seen to aspire is that which has traditionally characterized God alone?

To be assured that he has indeed thoroughly dominated the Présidente, Valmont must captivate her and force her to coöperate in her own destruction. Merely to have her will not suffice: "Pour que je sois vraiment heureux, il faut qu'elle se donne..." LD Lettre VI (p. 22) It will be her act of consciously surrendering herself to Valmont which will assure his divinity and independence:

...The [master] exists only for himself, that is his essential nature; he is the negative power without qualification, a power to which the thing is naught. And he is thus the absolutely essential act in this situation, while the bondsman is not so, he is an unessential activity. ...

PM (p. 236)

The master-slave relationship in the Phenomenology resembles the relationship which Valmont aspires to realize vis-à-vis la Présidente. And

the subordinate, self-effacing relationship of the pious Christian before God, in which he completely loses his own identity in acting out God's will, is precisely the relationship which Valmont seeks to impose upon the Présidente, and which the Hegelian master seeks to impose upon the slave.

To insure that the Présidente does in fact consciously succumb to Valmont, to be certain that her choice is made with complete lucidity, the seduction cannot be hurried; on the contrary, it must be prolonged as much as possible so that her conqueror can reap the greatest glory possible at the moment of her capitulation. Having let an opportunity to force the matter slip by, Valmont justifies himself to Merteuil in the following way:

Quelle est donc notre faiblesse? quel est l'empire des circonstances, si moi-même, oubliant mes projets, j'ai risqué de perdre, par un triomphe prématuré, le charme des longs combats et des détails d'une pénible défaite; si séduite par un désir de jeune homme, j'ai pensé exposer le vainqueur de Madame de Tourvel à ne recueillir, pour fruit de ses travaux, que l'insipide avantage d'avoir eu une femme de plus! Ah! qu'elle se rende, mais qu'elle combatte; que, sans avoir la force de vaincre, elle ait celle de résister; qu'elle savoure à loisir le sentiment de sa faiblesse, et soit contrainte d'avouer sa défaite. Laissons le Braconier obscur tuer à l'affût le cerf qu'il a surpris; le vrai Chasseur doit le forcer...

LD Lettre XXIII (pp. 53-54)

The mastery he aspires to is utterly dialectical, and it is thus described in the Phenomenology of Mind:

The master is the consciousness that exists for itself; but no longer merely the general notion of existence for self. Rather, it is a consciousness existing on its own account which is mediated with itself through an other consciousness, i.e. through another whose very nature implies that it is bound up with an independent being or with thinghood in general. ...

PM (pp. 234-235)

It must be remembered that mediation is the process in which the master comes to know himself through the slave precisely because the slave's enslavement to and dependence upon the master provide the master with the proof of his mastery.

The fact that Valmont finds the confirmation of his being in the Présidente's eyes requires him to almost literally never be out of her sight. To keep from losing the certainty of his existence which her consciousness of him gives, he must constantly remain before her eyes. Since remaining before her in his physical presence all of the time is impossible, he uses the letter, the portrait animé, to continue his seige of Tourvel during those moments when she is physically inaccessible. His purpose is clear: he will surround her with his idea of love until she no longer has the strength to resist and is forced to capitulate:

Pourquoi vous attacher à mes pas? pourquoi vous obstiner à me suivre? Vos Lettres, qui devaient être rares, se succèdent avec rapidité. Elles devaient être sages, et vous ne m'y parlez que de votre fol amour. Vous m'entourez de votre idée, plus que vous ne le faisiez de votre personne. Ecarté sous une forme, vous vous reproduisez sous une autre...

LD Lettre LVI (p. 117)

Thus Valmont's objective is twofold: in keeping himself constantly before the Présidente's eyes, he obtains recognition from her. And, at the same time, he insures that she will not be able to turn her attention from him in such a way as to avoid acting out his will.

The greater the Présidente's agony in succumbing to Valmont's project of seduction and domination, the greater will be Valmont's glory, both before the world and, more importantly, in the eyes of

Merteuil. In order to insure the Présidente's agony and awareness of the fact that she is indeed sacrificing her principles to Valmont, and thereby giving up her freedom to determine her own existence, Valmont must assure himself that her attention is constantly focused on her situation, so that, when she collapses under the force of his prolonged seige, she will be excruciatingly aware of her own conscious complicity in her own destruction. In Hegelian terms, the Présidente will thus negate herself through that complicity, and she will fulfill the criterion for Valmont's mastery. The irresistible charm which Valmont exercises over the Présidente, like the "chain" which captivates the Hegelian slave, prevents her escape through death or any other means. Incapable of resisting Valmont, and unable to flee from him, the Présidente is left with only one course of action: like the Hegelian slave she must bow to the dominant consciousness of her master and by this action show that she has objectively verified Valmont's idea of himself:

...The master relates himself to the bondsman mediately through an independent existence, for that is precisely what keeps the bondsman in thrall; it is his chain, from which he could not in the struggle get away, and for that reason he proved himself to be dependent, to have his independence in the shape of thinghood. ...

PM (p. 235)

The master is willing to risk death to kill the slave. This makes the master independent. The slave, however, fears the master, abandons any attempt to assert his individuality and independence, and surrenders himself to the master's will. The slave's own fear relates to the master: he is in fact that fear and that fear is his identity.

Similarly, the Présidente's identity must be bound up in her passion for Valmont so that that passion alone becomes her identity. In the novel passion plays a role analogous to that of fear in the Phenomenology. Passion causes the Présidente to lose her own identity and independence in capitulating to Valmont. And that is why in order for Valmont's enterprise to succeed, it is not sufficient that the Présidente be destroyed; she must ask, indeed, beg for her own destruction:

Mon project, au contraire, est qu'elle sente, qu'elle sente bien la valeur et l'étendu de chacun des sacrifices qu'elle me fera; de ne pas la conduire si vite, que le remords ne puisse la suivre; de faire expirer sa vertu dans une lente agonie; de la fixer sans cesse sur ce désolant spectacle; et de ne lui accorder le bonheur de m'avoir dans ses bras, qu'après l'avoir forcée à n'en plus dissimuler le désir. Au fait, je vauz bien peu, si je ne vauz pas la peine d'être demandé. Et puis-je me venger moins d'une femme hautaine, qui semble rougir d'avouer qu'elle adore?

LD Lettre LXX (pp. 143-144)

The struggle for recognition permeates all of the behavioral transactions between the two warring consciousnesses fighting to establish mastery. The extent to which Laclos was aware of this is testified to by the profusion of military terms and metaphores throughout les Liaisons dangereuses. One of the clearest indications of the present state of any given struggle between two individuals is the strength or weakness of the ocular contact which one maintains with the other. The novel is full of penetrating stares, distracted looks and averted eyes. Witness Valmont's description of the following ocular skirmish:

Ce spectacle, en éveillant mes désirs, anima mes regards; je sentis qu'ils devaient être tendres et pressants, et je me plaçai de manière à pouvoir en faire usage. Leur premier effet fut de faire baisser les grands yeux modestes de la céleste Prude. Je considérai quelque temps cette figure angélique; puis parcourant toute sa personne je m'amusais à deviner les contours et les formes

à travers un vêtement léger, mais toujours importun. Après être descendu de la tête aux pieds, je remontais des pieds à la tête... Ma belle amie, le doux regard était fixé sur moi; sur-le-champ il se baissa de nouveau, mais voulant en favoriser le retour, je détournai mes yeux. Alors s'établit entre nous cette convention tacite, premier traité de l'amour timide, qui, pour satisfaire le besoin mutuel de se voir, permet aux regards de se succéder en attendant qu'ils se confondent.

Persuadé que ce nouveau plaisir occupait ma Belle toute entière, je me chargeai de veiller à notre commune sûreté : mais après m'être assuré qu'une conversation assez vive nous sauvait des remarques du cercle, je tâchai d'obtenir de ses regards qu'ils parlassent franchement leur langage. Pour cela je surpris d'abord quelques regards; mais avec tant de réserve, que la modestie n'en pouvait pas être alarmée; et, pour mettre la timide personne plus à son aise, je paraissais moi-même aussi embarrassé qu'elle. Peu à peu nos yeux, accoutumés à se rencontrer, se fixèrent plus longtemps; enfin ils ne se quittèrent plus, et j'aperçus dans les siens cette douce langueur, signal heureux de l'amour et du désir; mais ce ne fut qu'un moment; et bientôt revenue à elle-même, elle changea, non sans quelque honte, son maintien et son regard.

LD Lettre LXXVI (pp. 158-159)

Valmont's technique is classic: he lulls his enemy into a false sense of security, peruses the fortifications, probes the defenses until he understands the enemy's situation and intention while biding his time until the moment for the frontal attack presents itself. Here the ocular fencing indicates the gradual weakening of the Présidente's abilities to ward off Valmont's advances; she finds him charming and attractive and wants to look at him. Valmont, sensing this is the case and wanting her attention, allows her to do this without confronting her with his awareness of what she is doing. Thus he draws her out gradually so that she will commit her attention all the more deeply in the end. The temporary failure of the Présidente's defenses is signaled by "cette douce langueur", the momentary release of the tension that holds the Présidente's imago at the center of her own self-consciousness and allows Valmont's imago to occupy her attention entirely.

Her capitulation is only temporary, and when she becomes aware of what she is doing she comes back to herself and, turning away from Valmont, she returns her attention to her own imago: "sa dévotion, son amour conjugal, ses principes austères." LD Lettre IV (p. 17)

This return to herself is the first of many vain attempts by the Présidente de Tourvel to save herself from the "dialectical game of desire"³ into which she has allowed herself to be led. For, by simply beginning to respond to Valmont's advances, she has admitted that there is something lacking in her imago, that there is something in what Valmont offers which corresponds to a need which she feels in herself. Her purity and her belief in a stable ordered universe of enduring laws and principles prevent her from seeing, as do Valmont and Merteuil, the oscillation of the dialectical movement which underlies human psychological reality. Unable to deny her attraction to Valmont, and unable to confide her feelings in anyone except him, she eventually becomes locked in a face-to-face struggle which she does not fully understand, and which she is therefore destined to lose. Trapped by her predator, she fights vainly, a helpless victim whose agony provides an enjoyable spectacle for her tormentor:

Oui, j'aime à voir, à considérer cette femme prudente, engagée, sans s'en être aperçue, dans un sentier qui ne permet plus de retour, et dont la pente rapide et dangereuse l'entraîne malgré elle, et la force à me suivre. Là, effrayée du péril qu'elle court, elle voudrait s'arrêter et ne peut se retenir. Ses soins et son adresse peuvent bien rendre ses pas moins grands; mais ils faut qu'ils se succèdent. Quelquefois, n'osant fixer le danger, elle ferme les yeux, et se laissant aller, s'abandonne à mes soins. Plus

3. See René Girard. Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque. (Paris, Editions Bernard Grasset, 1961).

souvent, une nouvelle crainte ranime ses efforts : dans son effroi mortel, elle veut tenter encore de retourner en arrière; elle épuise ses forces pour gravir péniblement un court espace; et bientôt un magique pouvoir la replace plus près de ce danger, que vainement elle avait voulu fuir. Alors n'ayant plus que moi pour guide et pour appui, sans songer à me reprocher davantage une chute inévitable, elle m'implore pour la retarder. Les ferventes prières, les humbles supplications, tout ce que les mortels, dans leur crainte, offrent à la Divinité, c'est moi qui le reçois d'elle; et vous voulez que, sourd à ses vœux, et détruisant moi-même le culte qu'elle me rend, j'emploie à la précipiter la puissance qu'elle invoque pour la soutenir! Ah! laissez-moi du moins le temps d'observer ces touchants combats entre l'amour et la vertu.

LD Lettre XCVI (p. 216)

The sensation of Valmont's mastery and virility is heightened by the Présidente's futile attempts to save herself from Valmont's charms, and by the fact that her temporary resistance increases his own glory and deification.

Indeed, it is this very experience which leads Valmont to put off the consummation of the seduction, since once that has taken place, the Présidente will have nothing more to offer him. In his own words:

...Voilà pourtant, voilà les délicieuses jouissances que cette femme céleste m'offre chaque jour; et vous me reprochez d'en savourer les douceurs! Ah! le temps ne viendra que trop tôt, où, dégradée par sa chute, elle ne sera plus pour moi qu'une femme ordinaire.

LD Lettre XCVI (p. 216)

Valmont's delight in the game of recognition turns to rage when Tourvel makes her last desperate attempt to avoid capitulation by fleeing Madame de Rosemonde's country house and returning to Paris. This assertion of her own consciousness in an attempt to avoid Valmont's domination enrages him to the point where he openly admits his desire to enslave her:

Quel plaisir j'aurai à me venger! je la retrouverai, cette femme perfide; je reprendrai mon empire sur elle. Si l'amour m'a suffi pour en trouver les moyens, que ne sera-t-il pas, aidé de la vengeance? Je la verrai encore à mes genoux, tremblante et baignée de pleurs, me criant merci de sa trompeuse voix; et moi, je serai sans pitié.

LD Lettre C (p. 232)

And, later in the same letter:

Il n'est plus pour moi de bonheur, de repos, que par la possession de cette femme que je hais et que j'aime avec une égale fureur. Je ne supporterai mon sort que du moment où je disposerai du sien. Alors tranquille et satisfait, je la verrai, à son tour, livrée aux orages que j'éprouve en ce moment; j'en exciterai mille autres encore. L'espoir et la crainte, la méfiance et la sécurité, tous les maux inventés par la haine, tous les biens accordés par l'amour, je veux qu'ils remplissent son coeur, qu'ils s'y succèdent à ma volonté. Ce temps viendra...

LD Lettre C (p. 233)

What Valmont clearly seeks here is the absolute, unequal, and one-sided recognition which characterizes the Hegelian Master. However, even here it will not suffice to destroy her: she still must participate in her immolation. Valmont does not lose sight of this:

...Ce n'est pas assez pour moi de la posséder, je veux qu'elle se livre. Or, il faut pour cela non seulement pénétrer jusqu'à elle, mais y arriver de son aveu...

LD Lettre CX (p. 262)

Ultimately, Tourvel is to be consumed by Valmont, and in much the same way as Cécile:

...Enfin, elle n'aura existé que pour moi et que sa carrière soit plus ou moins longue, j'en aurai seul ouvert et fermé la barrière. Une fois parvenu à ce triomphe, je dirai à mes rivaux: "Voyez mon ouvrage, et cherchez-en dans le siècle un second exemple!"

LD Lettre CXV (p. 275)

The source of Valmont's rage is to be found in the fact that he

really does love Tourvel, and that her escape brings home to him the extent to which his love for her has weakened his resolve to carry out his project. Torn between that love and his desire to measure up to his image in the eyes of Merteuil, Valmont succumbs to his own vanity, to his own desire for absolute freedom and independence which demands that he complete the seduction in order to avoid the ridicule of appearing to be enslaved by the love that he feels. This is evident when he announces the completion of his project to Merteuil:

Ce n'est donc pas, comme dans mes autres aventures, un simple capitulation plus ou moins avantageuse, et dont il est plus facile de profiter que de s'enorgueillir; c'est une victoire complète, achetée par une campagne pénible, et décidée par de savantes manoeuvres. Il n'est donc pas surprenant que ce succès, dû à moi seul, m'en devienne plus précieux; et le surcroît de plaisir que j'ai éprouvé dans mon triomphe, et que je ressens encore, n'est que la douce impression du sentiment de la gloire. Je chéris cette façon de voir, qui me sauve l'humiliation de penser que je puisse dépendre en quelque manière de l'esclave même que je me serais asservie; que je n'aie pas en moi seul la plénitude de mon bonheur; et que la faculté de m'en faire jouir dans toute son énergie soit réservée à telle ou telle femme, exclusivement à toute autre.

LD Lettre CXXV (p. 297)

Valmont's language could not be more Hegelian in its betrayal of the ambiguity, the dialectical character of mastery, or the master's dependence on another enslaved consciousness:

In all this, the unessential consciousness is, for the master, the object which embodies the truth of his certainty of himself. But it is evident that this object does not correspond to its notion; for, just where the master has effectively achieved lordship, he really finds that something has come about quite different from an independent consciousness. It is not an independent, but rather a dependent consciousness that he has achieved. He is thus not assured of self-existence as his truth; he finds that his truth is rather the unessential consciousness, and the fortuitous unessential action of that consciousness.

PM (pp. 236-237)

In reading what is quoted above it must be remembered that the essential consciousness is the independent consciousness of the master. The unessential consciousness is that of the slave, whose identity is determined by his enslavement to the master. The key phrase is "fortuitous unessential action" which describes the recognition of the master by the slave. That recognition is fortuitous precisely because it is not necessary. And the fact that it is not necessary means that, in the end, the master finds himself to be, not independent, but rather dependent upon the slave's recognition. Indeed, in the next paragraph Hegel summarized Valmont's worst fears: "The truth of the independent consciousness is accordingly the consciousness of the bondsman." PM (p. 237)

In seducing the Présidente, Valmont wants to believe that he has demonstrated his autonomous self-sufficiency. But he has not, in his own eyes, satisfactorily established himself as a truly free and independent individual. If the seduction of Tourvel is the project described in clearest terms and at greatest length in les Liaisons dangereuses, it is by no means the most important example of the struggle for recognition. Center stage is reserved for the ultimate conflict between the novel's two most Hegelian characters: the Vicomte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil.

The conflict is evident in the first two letters which the two partners in crime exchange. Merteuil begins her first letter to Valmont in the imperative mode: "Revenez, mon cher Vicomte, revenez... Partez sur-le-champ; j'ai besoin de vous." LD Lettre II (p. 13) The Marquise

clearly wishes to establish herself as the dominant member of the duo, and to cast the Vicomte in the role of her ancillary. He is to come to her and "prendre mes ordres à genoux" LD Lettre II (p. 13) Her desire to see in Valmont her own creation, to cast him as a puppet in her own theater, is also made clear by her desire to have him seduce Cécile and her promise to put the adventure in his memoirs: "oui, dans vos Mémoires, car je veux qu'ils soient imprimés un jour, et je me charge de les écrire." LD Lettre II (p. 13)

Valmont's assessment of the situation, and his unwillingness to enter into a secondary role is evident from the opening of his letter in reply:

Vos ordres sont charmants; votre façon de les donner est plus aimable encore; vous feriez chérir le despotisme. Ce n'est pas la première fois, comme vous savez, que je regrette de ne plus être votre esclave; et tout monstre que vous dites que je suis, je ne me rappelle jamais sans plaisir le temps où vous m'honoriez de noms plus doux. Souvent même je désire de les mériter de nouveau, et de finir par donner, avec vous, un exemple de constance au monde. Mais de plus grands intérêts nous appellent; conquérir est notre destin; il faut le suivre : peut-être au bout de la carrière nous rencontrerons-nous encore; car, soit dit sans vous fâcher, ma très belle Marquise, vous me suivez d'un pas égal; et depuis que, nous séparant pour le bonheur du monde, nous prêchons la foi chacun de notre côté, il me semble que dans cette mission d'amour, vous avez fait plus de prosélytes que moi...

LD Lettre IV (p. 16)

Valmont shows his awareness of Merteuil's ploy for domination in his opening sentence; he even goes on to indicate a certain nostalgia for his former liaison with her in a way that reveals the attraction she still exercises over him. But, intent on preserving his autonomy, he firmly refuses the role she offers him.

Merteuil is clearly piqued by Valmont's refusal, and even more

so by the fact that he justifies it by describing the Présidente in very flattering terms; "votre Lettre est d'une insolence rare" she retorts. LD Lettre V (p. 18) Valmont's refusal to fall in line with her thinking begins the sequence of events which is to result in their mutual destruction.

To whet Valmont's desire, Merteuil describes the attentions she lavishes on her current lover, the Chevalier de Belleruche. LD Lettre X (pp. 28-32) The effectiveness of the strategy is shown by Valmont's reply: he does not mind her having a whole stable of paramours, but he cannot stand the idea that she belong to any one of them exclusively. "Ou reprenez-moi, ou au moins prenez-en un autre; et ne trahissez pas, par un caprice exclusif, l'amitié inviolable que nous nous sommes jurée." LD Lettre XV (p. 37) Unfortunately, however, Valmont then turns the discussion to the matter of the Présidente, making an admission that is certain to infuriate Merteuil: "En effet, si c'est être amoureux que de ne pouvoir vivre sans posséder ce qu'on désire, d'y sacrifier son temps, ses plaisirs, sa vie, je suis réellement amoureux." LD Lettre XV (p. 38)

Merteuil, thoroughly displeased with Valmont's letter, rejects his proposal for a renewal of their liaison, while at the same time goading him about his preoccupation with the Présidente:

...Ce n'est pas que je refuse pour toujours; mais je diffère, et j'ai raison. J'y mettrais peut-être de la vanité, et, une fois piqué au jeu, on ne sait plus où l'on s'arrête. Je serais femme à vous enchaîner de nouveau, à vous faire oublier votre Présidente; et si j'allais, mon indigne, vous dégouter de la vertu, voyez quel scandale!...

This issue of the Présidente occurs throughout the correspondence, with Valmont gradually revealing to Merteuil the depth of his feelings for his intended victim, and Merteuil becoming more and more enraged at the idea that he could prefer someone else to her.

If Merteuil makes use of Valmont to seduce Cécile in her plan of vengeance against the Comte de Gercourt, Valmont, in his turn, exploits her to destroy his rival Prévan. Prévan is making his way in the world by using the same means which Valmont has used to gain his own position. Afraid that Prévan may ultimately prove the more expert seducer, Valmont has tried to keep the younger man from being admitted into his circle and gaining the renown to which his exploits entitle him. But Prévan's abilities overcome the obstacles which Valmont has placed in his way. Valmont's fear of Prévan is made clear in his letter proposing the project of seduction to Merteuil: "C'est enfin aujourd'hui le seul homme, peut-être, que je craindrais de rencontrer sur mon chemin..." LD Lettre LXX (p. 143) And the similarity of their methods is made evident when Valmont, afraid that Merteuil is falling under Prévan's influence, warns her that "c'est à vous de voir si vous voulez ajouter à sa gloire, et vous atteler à son char de triomphe." LD Lettre LXXIX (p. 170) The two criminals of les Liaisons dangereuses are ever alert and constantly surveying the horizon lest some stronger self-consciousness one day appear and enslave them in their turn. The danger in which they live is made clear by Madame de Merteuil when she warns Valmont of the consequences of his failing to seduce Tourvel:

Songez que si une fois vous laissez perdre l'idée qu'on ne vous résiste pas, vous éprouverez qu'on vous résistera en effet

plus facilement; que vos rivaux vont aussi perdre de leur respect pour vous, et oser vous combattre : car lequel d'entre eux ne se croit plus fort que la vertu?...

LD Lettre CXIII (p. 267)

Beyond rendering one another services like these, Merteuil and Valmont perform an even more important function for one another: each reflects back the glory of the other's exploits. Engaged as they are in a criminal enterprise, they are both at the disadvantage of being unable to openly proclaim their activities in society. This is especially true of Madame de Merteuil who, in order to preserve her reputation, must be certain that she is untainted by any scandal. Therefore she must conceal her activities from society at large, and from her lovers in particular, since they are destined to become her envious slaves. Unable to communicate her glory to anyone, unable to find another consciousness to validate her identity and autonomy, she would go mad. But in Valmont she finds the confidant who allows her to display her conquests, and who recognizes her mastery. She in turn is the mirror of his glory, and this reciprocal arrangement allows them both to gain the recognition which each seeks through his exploits while at the same time not revealing their activities to society. For a time they act out a harmonious exchange of recognition, one which Hegel describes at an early stage of his dialectic as a "pure concept of recognition": "They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another." PM (p. 231) Ultimately, however, this mutual reflectiveness will encourage both Merteuil and Valmont to see in one another the only two individuals of worth in the world: "En vérité, plus je vais, et plus je suis tenté de

croire qu'il n'y a que vous et moi dans le monde, qui valions quelque chose." LD Lettre C (p. 235) And therefore Merteuil and Valmont must ultimately find in one another the most worthy adversary:

...They must enter into this struggle, for they must bring their certainty of themselves, the certainty of being for themselves, to the level of objective truth, and make this a fact both in the case of the other and in their own case as well. ...

PM (pp. 232-233)

The Hegelian individuals seek immediate awareness of themselves. The fact that they wish to be "for themselves" means that they want to be absolutely independent, i.e. to stand outside life while finding their independence confirmed by life. Their desire to bring the notion of their absolute independence to the level of "objective truth" means that each Hegelian individual wants the truth of its absolute independence objectified by everything that is outside itself. Essential to the attainment of objective truth is the conflict between the two worthy opponents, each of which aims at the revelation of its absolute independence by the action of the other.

The rivalry between Valmont and Merteuil in which each seeks to outdo the other with sexual exploits of ever greater daring leads to a marvelous parody of the cult of gloire and dignité expounded by Seventeenth Century French literature in general, and the plays of Corneille in particular. Valmont, in reassuring Merteuil that the fears she expresses with regard to his reputation (Lettre CXIII) are groundless, does so in a style truly befitting a Corneillian hero: "Soyez tranquille, je ne reparaitrai dans le monde que plus célèbre que jamais, et toujours plus digne de vous." LD Lettre CXV (p. 275) Valmont and

Merteuil both share the orgueil which characterizes the noble souls of Corneillian tragedy; but their methods for procuring glory, unlike those of the Corneillian hero whose equally narcissistic project is mediated by the code of honneur and the exigencies of réputation and thus ultimately controlled by social pressures, are bound by no law save the pursuit of absolute mastery and unbridled pleasure.

Another characteristic shared by Laclos' main characters and the Hegelian individual is the desire not to be bound to any momentary manifestation of their existences:

The presentation of itself, however, as pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as a pure negation of its objective form, or in showing that it is fettered to no determinate existence, that it is not bound at all by the particularity everywhere characteristic of existence as such, and is not tied up with life. ...

PM (p. 232)

The struggle in which Merteuil and Valmont must each ultimately aim at "the destruction and death of the other" (PM p. 232) is the inevitable consequence of their exhalted individuality, which, as their boasting to one another reveals, is for them indistinguishable from their self-consciousness as masters: "But the other is also a self-consciousness; an individual makes its appearance in antithesis to another individual."

PM (p. 231)

Merteuil's delight with her manipulation of appearance and reality in the Prévau episode (LD Lettres LXXXV, pp. 190-199 and LXXXVII, pp. 200-202), and her final triumph over Valmont in the affair of the Présidente make this clear. Valmont's enjoyment of this sort of changeability is manifest when he describes the numerous roles he has

played vis-à-vis Danceny:

...Que n'aurai-je fait pour ce Danceny? J'aurai été à la fois son ami, son confident, son rival et sa maîtresse!...

LD Lettre CXV (p. 278)

The desire for absolute freedom and domination, fear of being fixed in a form which determines them, of being enslaved by a stronger self-consciousness, the constant vigilance required lest a worthy adversary succeed in dominating and controlling them, and the fact that each can ultimately be the only adversary worthy of the other, all of these things assure the confrontation between Merteuil and Valmont which plays out the end game of les Liaisons dangereuses. In the jockeying for positions of dominance, in the scramble for leverage to force the other person into a position of checkmate, Merteuil and Valmont lock intellects in the final combat which will determine the ultimate mastery of only one of the opponents. Each refuses to defer to the other, and so they become locked in a struggle from which only one of them will emerge alive.

The novel's dénouement is precipitated by Valmont's claim to the favors Merteuil has promised him upon the completion of his seduction of the Présidente; the tone with which he claims his prize is redolent with the same arrogance which characterized Merteuil's summons to return to Paris and undertake the seduction of Cécile:

...Vous voyez que je m'exécute, et que, comme je vous l'ai promis, mes affaires seront assez avancées pour pouvoir vous donner une partie de mon temps. Dépêchez-vous donc de renvoyer votre pesant Belleruche, et laissez là le doucereux Danceny pour ne vous occuper que de moi...

LD Lettre CXXV (p. 304)

Merteuil realizes that to give in to this haughty demand will be to admit Valmont's power over her; that if she does capitulate, she too will be reduced in his eyes to an inferior station like Cécile or the Présidente. She refuses this attempt by Valmont to force her to acquiesce to her passive sexual role, especially in view of the fact that the Présidente will continue to occupy the center of Valmont's attentions:

...Qui, moi! je sacrifierais un goût nouveau, pour m'occuper de vous? Et pour m'en occuper comment? en attendant à mon tour, et en esclave soumise, les sublimes faveurs de votre Hautesse. Quand, par exemple, vous voudrez vous distraire un moment de ce charme inconnu que l'adorable, la céleste Madame de Trouvel, vous a fait seul éprouver ou quand vous craindrez de compromettre, auprès de l'attachante Cécile, l'idée supérieure que vous êtes bien aise qu'elle conserve de vous : alors descendant jusqu'à moi, vous y viendrez chercher des plaisirs, moins vifs à la vérité, mais sans conséquence; et vos précieuses bontés quoique un peu rares, suffiront de reste à mon bonheur!

LD Lettre CXXVII (p. 307)

Merteuil's self-image is clearly incompatible with this sort of behavior, as she informs Valmont quite bluntly: "car j'ai beau me regarder, je ne peux pas me trouver déçue jusque-là." LD Lettre CXXVII (p. 308)

Valmont realizes that he has gone too far and attempts by means of awkward apologies to undo the impression that has angered Merteuil. LD Lettre CXXIX (pp. 310-312) But Merteuil is no happier with the second letter than she was with the first. She realizes that it is the mechanism of the prestige battle itself that makes any sort of capitulation impossible, and tells this to Valmont:

N'avez-vous pas encore remarqué que le plaisir, qui est bien en effet l'unique mobile de la reunion des deux sexes, ne suffit pourtant pas pour former une liaison entre eux? et que, s'il est précédé du désir qui rapproche, il n'est pas moins suivi

du dégoût qui repousse? C'est une loi de la nature, que l'amour seul peut changer; et de l'amour, en a-t-on quand on veut?...

LD Lettre CXXXI (p. 315)

If their battle for prestige is destined to become a Master-Slave relationship in which the partner who loves the most becomes the Slave of the one who loves the least, then there is no question but that such a relationship must be avoided at all costs. The danger which each of them would run in renewing their former liaison is pointed out by Merteuil in the starkest possible terms: "Mais dites-moi, Vicomte, qui de nous deux se chargera de tromper l'autre?", she demands. LD Lettre CXXXI (p. 315) Under these circumstances there can be no question of renewing their liaison, no matter how much they might wish to: "Mais n'oublions pas que ce regret est nécessaire au bonheur; et quelque douce que soit notre illusion, n'allons pas croire qu'elle puisse être durable." LD Lettre CXXXI (p. 315)

Were the situation to be left in this state, the stasis or "pure concept of recognition" (PM p. 231) that has more or less existed between Merteuil and Valmont up to this point might continue. But Merteuil, in a masterful stroke of manipulative psychology, holds out the possibility that the liaison might be renewable, if, of course, certain conditions were met. With the skill of an expert hunter she sets the trap:

...Non, quoi que vous disiez, c'est un retour impossible. D'abord, j'exigerais des sacrifices que sûrement vous ne pourriez ou ne voudriez pas me faire, et qu'il se peut bien que je ne mérite pas; et puis, comment vous fixer?...

LD Lettre CXXXI (p. 316)

Valmont swallows the bait, promising to do whatever she asks:

Quels sont donc, ma belle amie, ces sacrifices que vous jugez que je ne ferais pas, et dont pourtant le prix serait de vous plaire. Faites-les moi connaître seulement, et si je balance à vous les offrir, je vous permets d'en refuser l'hommage. Eh! comment me jugez-vous depuis quelque temps, si, même dans votre indulgence, vous doutez de mes sentiments ou de mon énergie? Des sacrifices que je ne voudrais ou ne pourrais pas faire! Ainsi, vous me croyez amoureux, subjugué? et le prix que j'ai mis au succès, vous me soupçonnez de l'attacher à la personne? Ah! grâces au Ciel, je n'en suis pas encore réduit là, et je m'offre à vous le prouver. Oui je vous le prouverai, quand même ce devrait être envers Madame de Tourvel. Assurément, après cela, il ne doit pas vous rester de doute.

LD Lettre CXXXIII (pp. 318-319)

Mesmerized by the idea that he must have Merteuil, at any price, he is ready to undertake any project, to make any sacrifice, including that of Madame de Tourvel whom he does in fact love, in order to prove his freedom and independence. Merteuil's resistance has now seemingly made her the more desirable prize, and Valmont is determined to enjoy her:

Ne combattez donc plus l'idée ou plutôt le sentiment qui vous ramène à moi; et après avoir essayé de tous les plaisirs dans nos courses différentes, jouissons du bonheur de sentir qu'aucun d'eux n'est comparable à celui que nous avons éprouvé, et que nous retrouverons plus délicieux encore!

LD Lettre CXXXIII (p. 321)

Once again Merteuil protests Valmont's attempt to dominate her, to fix her and force her to agree to a course of action he has chosen for her:

...Une simple idée qui me vient, à laquelle même je vous avertis que je ne veux pas m'arrêter, parce que je vous en parle, vous en abusez pour y ramener mon intention; pour m'y fixer, quand je cherche à m'en distraire; et me faire, en quelque sorte, partager malgré moi vos désirs étourdis! ...

LD Lettre CXXXIV (pp. 321-322)

What is more, Merteuil alleges to have Valmont's best interests at heart, since the sacrifice she will demand will be in contradiction to the love he so clearly has for the Présidente: "C'est de l'amour, ou il n'en exista jamais : vous le niez bien de cent façons; mais vous le prouvez de mille." LD Lettre CXXXIV (p. 322)

Merteuil has indicated where Valmont's interests lie. But she has done it in such a way as to goad his vanity and make him even more disposed to enter into her project. Thus it is his vanity which will make him the victim of her whim. Now in control of the situation, Merteuil makes her demand and states the conditions for her capitulation:

J'exigerais donc, voyez la cruauté! que cette rare, cette étonnante Madame de Tourvel ne fût plus pour vous qu'une femme ordinaire, une femme telle qu'elle est seulement : car il ne faut pas s'y tromper ce charme qu'on croit trouver dans les autres, c'est en nous qu'il existe; et c'est l'amour seul qui embellit tant l'object aimé. Ce que je vous demande là, tout impossible que cela soit, vous feriez peut-être bien l'effort de me le promettre, de me le jurer même; mais, je l'avoue, je n'en croirais pas de vains discours. Je ne pourrais être persuadée que par l'ensemble de votre conduite.

LD Lettre CXXXIV (p. 323)

Valmont is now clearly trapped between his love for the Présidente which demands that he reject Merteuil's proposition, and the desire to prove that he is indeed free and autonomous with regard to her. What he fails to see is that by proving his autonomy with regard to the Présidente as Merteuil demands, he will in fact be affirming his dependence upon Merteuil and allowing her the power to determine and dominate his actions.

The Présidente's capitulation has lowered her in Valmont's

estimation, just as Merteuil had predicted in her observation on the nature of desire, and Valmont is haunted by the idea that Merteuil may have been right. He asks the Présidente to break a previous engagement in order to receive him, but when she demonstrates her submissiveness by doing so, he is unable to appreciate his triumph:

...Le désoeuvrement m'avait fait désirer d'abord de prolonger cette soirée; et j'avais même, à ce sujet, exigé un petit sacrifice; Mais à peine fut-il accordé, que le plaisir que je me promettais fut troublé par l'idée de cet amour que vous vous obstinez à me croire, ou au moins à me reprocher; en sorte que je n'éprouvai plus d'autre désir, que celui de pouvoir à la fois m'assurer et vous convaincre que c'était, de votre part, pure calomnie.

LD Lettre CXXXVIII (pp. 330-331)

Merteuil writes back that Valmont's action has proved nothing, and that in her eyes he still shows himself to be thoroughly infatuated with the Présidente:

Mais ce que j'ai dit, ce que j'ai pensé, ce que je pense encore, c'est que vous n'en avez pas moins de l'amour pour votre Présidente; non pas, à la vérité, de l'amour bien pur ni bien tendre, mais de celui que vous pouvez avoir; de celui, par exemple, qui fait trouver à une les agréments ou les qualités qu'elle n'a pas; qui la place dans une classe à part, et met toutes les autres en second ordre; qui vous tient encore attaché à elle, même alors que vous l'outragez; tel enfin que je conçois qu'un Sultan peut le ressentir pour sa Sultane favorite, ce qui ne l'empêche pas de lui Préférer souvent une simple Odalisque...

LD Lettre CXLI (pp. 336-337)

Indeed, in view of the fact that love and desire are irreconcilable, and that Valmont is more preoccupied with his own self-aggrandizement than with the well-being of the Présidente, the suffering he has caused her can only be seen as an integral aspect of the only possible relationship that can exist between Valmont and any woman: "Ma comparaison me paraît d'autant plus juste, que, comme lui, jamais vous n'êtes ni

l'Amant ni l'ami d'une femme; mais toujours son tyran ou son esclave." LD Lettre CXLI (p. 337) With this statement, Merteuil describes not only the fate of Valmont's relationship with the Présidente, nor is the description simply able to be extended to the only relationship she is capable of having with men: here she is describing the only destiny to which anyone bent on self-aggrandizement, on the attainment and maintenance of absolute freedom, independence and identity with the self, can hope to realize.

Because his desire to possess Merteuil has been enflamed to so great a degree, Valmont ceases to operate with any logical detachment from the situation and throws himself headlong into her trap. He cavalierly sends the "Ce n'est pas ma faute" letter which Merteuil wrote for him and had appended to Lettre CXLI (LD p. 338) to the Présidente, and thereby assures their rupture. By this gesture the Hegelian paradigmatic of master and slave is realized in its fullest, simplest form, the form in which Hegel first presents it:

...The one [self-consciousness] is independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself; the other is dependent, and its existence is life or existence for another. The former is the Master, or Lord, the latter is the Bondsman.

PM (p. 234)

For, by her resistance to Valmont's advances, Merteuil demonstrates her independence. By acceding to her demand, by literally acting out her wish, Valmont shows his dependence on Merteuil.

The Présidente flees to a convent with the determination to hide her disgrace from the world, and deeply wounded by Valmont's betrayal of her trust she dies, half-mad with despair. Valmont,

who is blinded by his desire for Merteuil fails to realize the consequences of his act, which he only sees as yet another victory on the "stage of the world":

Je vous le disais bien, il y a quelque temps, que malgré vos inquiétudes, je ne reparaitrais sur la scène du monde que brillant d'un nouvel éclat. Qu'ils se montrent donc, ces Critiques sévères, qui m'accusaient d'un amour romanesque et malheureux; qu'ils fassent des ruptures plus promptes et plus brillantes : mais non, qu'ils fassent mieux; qu'ils se présentent comme consolateurs, la route leur est tracée. Hé bien! qu'ils osent seulement tenter cette carrière que j'ai parcourue en entier; et si l'un d'eux obtient le moindre succès, je lui cède la première place. Mais ils éprouveront tous, que quand j'y mets du soin, l'impression que je laisse est ineffaçable. Ah! sans doute, celle-ci le sera; et je compterais pour rien tous mes autres triomphes, si jamais je devais avoir auprès de cette femme un rival préféré.

LD Lettre CXLIV (pp. 341-342)

Valmont's error, as the preceding quotation makes perfectly clear, is to have assumed that the rivals in question were other men, and not another Hegelian individual who, regardless of sex, seeks absolute independence from and absolute mastery over all other individuals. He has lost sight of the fact that he has performed all of this in order to satisfy Merteuil, and so has thereby become, in effect, her slave. Indeed, the mention of various aspects of writing (la route tracée, l'impression ineffaçable) recalls Merteuil's statement regarding Valmont's memoirs in Lettre II: "je veux qu'ils soient imprimés un jour, et je me charge de les écrire." LD (p. 13)

That all of these statements in praise of his triumph are more bravado than anything else becomes apparent a little further along in the letter when he feels Merteuil out on the possibility of his being allowed to renew his liaison with the Présidente. He attempts to con-

vince Merteuil that such a renewal would be a joint venture: "ce serait un simple essai que nous ferions de concert". LD Lettre CXLIV (p. 342) The truth of the matter is that the Présidente still exercises a charm which attracts Valmont, whether he will admit it or not.

Upon receiving news of Valmont's rupture with the Présidente, Merteuil replies immediately and openly, revealing to Valmont the extent to which he has been had. On being told that the rupture has taken place, and that Valmont has used the "Ce n'est pas ma faute" letter which she placed in his hands, Merteuil is jubilant:

...J'avoue de bonne foi que ce triomphe me flatte plus que tous ceux que j'ai pu obtenir jusqu'à présent. Vous allez trouver peut-être que j'évalue bien haut cette femme, que naguère j'appréciais si peu; point du tout : mais c'est que ce n'est pas sur elle que j'ai remporté cet avantage; c'est sur vous : voilà le plaisant et ce qui est vraiment délicieux.

LD Lettre CXLV (p. 343)

Now that her triumph is complete, Merteuil can afford to reveal to Valmont her appreciation of aspects of his character which led him so docilely into her trap. In doing so, she proves the extent to which she is the superior and dominant consciousness, since she has been able to control his actions, and to do so in such a way as to force Valmont to admit his dependence upon her:

Oui, Vicomte, vous aimiez beaucoup Madame de Tourvel, et même vous l'aimez encore; vous l'aimez comme un fou : mais parce que je m'amusais à vous en faire honte, vous l'avez bravement sacrifiée. Vous en auriez sacrifié mille, plutôt que de souffrir une plaisanterie. Où nous conduit pourtant la vanité! Le Sage a bien raison, quand il dit qu'elle est l'ennemie du bonheur.

LD Lettre CXLV (p. 344)

What Valmont has proved in throwing over the Présidente is not his

independence and freedom, but his vanity; his proverbial emptiness is revealed in the fear of admitting that he is in love because he would appear ridiculous, inferior and, in a word, conquerable.

Merteuil can afford to make fun of Valmont with impunity, since there is no way that he can avenge his humiliation by going back to the Présidente. By using the letter which she placed in his hands and thinking only of the gesture and the effect it would have on Merteuil, rather than the content and the effect it would have on the Présidente, Valmont effectively eliminated any possibility of a reconciliation with the Présidente. And Merteuil has no qualms about telling Valmont in the bluntest possible terms that she had cleverly foreseen all of this:

C'est dommage qu'avec tant de talent pour les projets vous en ayez si peu pour l'exécution; et que par une seule démarche inconsiderée, vous ayez mis vous-même un obstacle invincible à ce que vous désirez le plus.

Quoi! vous avez l'idée de renouer, et vous avez pu écrire ma Lettre! Vous m'avez donc crue bien gauche à mon tour! Ah! croyez-moi, Vicomte, quand une femme frappe dans le coeur d'une autre, elle manque rarement de trouver l'endroit sensible, et la blessure est incurable. Tandis que je frappais celle-ci, ou plutôt que je dirigeais vos coups, je n'ai pas oublié que cette femme était ma rivale, que vous l'aviez trouvée un moment préférable à moi, et qu'enfin, vous m'aviez placée au-dessous d'elle. Si je me suis trompée dans ma vengeance, je consens à en porter la faute. Ainsi, je trouve bon que vous tentiez tous les moyens : je vous y invite même, et vous promets de ne pas me fâcher de vos succès, si vous parvenez à en avoir. Je suis si tranquille sur cet objet, que je ne veux plus m'en occuper. Parlons d'autre chose.

LD Lettre CXLV (pp. 344-345)

This passage places in evidence the most important aspects which have been found to characterize the Hegelian struggle for recognition. The Slave, in deferring to and recognizing the consciousness of the Master through his own action, has placed an insurmountable obstacle

between himself and what he desires most. The Slave recognizes that he is not free and independent; Valmont recognizes that he is not free and independent also, because his vanity has allowed Merteuil to manipulate him, and her manipulation of his behavior has confirmed her superiority. By directing Valmont's actions in such a way as to eliminate the rival who has usurped her place in the center of Valmont's consciousness, Merteuil has been able to both regain her position of undisputed mastery, and to do so in such a way as to end for once and for all the possibility of any further threat to that position from her rival. Thus, momentarily, she is able to enjoy her triumph in complete tranquility.

Having settled the matter of Valmont, Merteuil goes on to betray him further. Instead of turning herself over to Valmont as she had promised, she continues to cultivate her new liaison with Danceny who has come to occupy Valmont's erstwhile place in the center of her consciousness. And fittingly so, according to the mechanism of desire which dictates that the slave can no longer pretend to be a worthy opponent to the master. But Valmont refuses to be dismissed so lightly. Upon discovering her treachery, he demands that she bind herself to the terms of their agreement; now that his mistake has been pointed out, he will not be fooled again so easily, nor will he acquiesce and accept his humiliation. "Nous nous connaissons tous deux, Marquise; ce mot doit vous suffire.", he warns darkly. LD Lettre CLI (p. 357)

Merteuil refuses to be threatened, however. To capitulate to Valmont's demands would be to step down from the position of mastery by

admitting that Valmont has the power to dictate her actions. Perhaps she was in love with him at that first moment when she summoned him back to Paris; but now she will in no way permit him to have any voice in determining what her behavior should be. And she informs him of this in no uncertain terms:

Savez-vous, Vicomte, pourquoi je ne me suis jamais remariée? ce n'est assurément pas faute d'avoir trouvé assez de partis avantageux; c'est uniquement pour que personne n'ait le droit de trouver à redire à mes actions. Ce n'est même pas que j'aie craint de ne pouvoir plus faire mes volontés, car j'aurais bien toujours fini par là; mais ce qu'il m'aurait gêné que quelqu'un eût eu seulement le droit de s'en plaindre; c'est qu'enfin je ne voulais tromper que pour mon plaisir, et non par nécessité...

LD Lettre CLII (p. 359)

Moreover, Valmont has proved by his actions toward the Présidente that he is inconstant, and that any renewal of their former liaison would only end in Valmont throwing her over to satisfy his own vanity. Thus Valmont has convicted himself by his own words and actions:

...et après tout, une femme n'en vaut-elle pas une autre? ce sont vos principes. Celle même qui serait tendre et sensible, qui n'existerait que pour vous et qui mourrait enfin d'amour et de regret, n'en serait pas moins sacrifiée à la première fantaisie, à la crainte d'être plaisanté un moment; et vous voulez qu'on se gêne? Ah! cela n'est pas juste.

LD Lettre CLII (pp. 360-361)

Valmont is, of course, furious with Merteuil's persiflage. In the interim he has considered the situation and has realized that, in order to redeem himself and regain some kind of value, he must force Merteuil to accept him as her lover at any price:

De longs discours n'étaient pas nécessaires pour établir que chacun de nous ayant en main tout ce qu'il faut pour

perdre l'autre, nous avons un égal intérêt à nous ménager mutuellement : aussi, ce n'est pas de cela dont il s'agit. Mais encore entre le parti violent de se perdre, et celui, sans doute meilleur, de rester unis comme nous l'avons été, de le devenir davantage encore en reprenant notre première liaison, entre ces deux partis, dis-je, il y en a mille autres à prendre. Il n'était donc pas ridicule de vous dire, et il ne l'est pas de vous répéter que, ce jour même, je serais ou votre Amant ou votre ennemi.

LD Lettre CLIII (p. 361)

Valmont is sensible to the fact that this ultimatum will displease Merteuil; but the struggle for recognition and dominance has been exacerbated to such a point by Merteuil's gloating at having made a fool of Valmont, and at refusing to live up to their original agreement, that, for the sake of his own imago, he cannot let her triumph completely:

Je sens à merveille que ce choix vous gêne; qu'il vous conviendrait mieux de tergiverser; et je n'ignore pas que vous n'avez jamais aimé à être placée entre le oui et le non : mais vous devez sentir aussi que je ne puis vous laisser sortir de ce cercle étroit, sans risquer d'être joué; et vous avez dû prévoir que je ne le souffrirais pas. C'est maintenant à vous de décider : je peux vous laisser le choix mais non pas rester dans l'incertitude.

LD Lettre CLIII (p. 361)

The moment of truth has arrived, and the alternatives are clearly delineated. Valmont and Merteuil are two consciousnesses locked in the struggle for recognition. Each is determined to stake all on the outcome of this combat of will from which neither can withdraw without loss of their respective imagos, without loss of their pretensions to freedom and independence, without loss of their claims to absolute mastery. There is no way of knowing what Merteuil's thoughts are when she contemplates the placement of the chesspieces at this, the beginning of the end game. Her decision, however, is

unmistakeable: "Hé bien! la guerre." LD Lettre CLI (p. 362)

It is important to stop at this point and ask why Merteuil chooses the fight to the death over some accommodation which would give her time to destroy Valmont in such a way as to avoid any risk on her own part. Surely, after the numerous threats that each has made, she must know that war can only bring about their mutual destruction. Why then does she choose war?

She does so because time has run out. The series of power struggles upon which she has built her career is in its turn governed by the process of aging. Merteuil is growing old. She is losing her power to infatuate and conquer by means of her sexuality simply because the equipment and the energy which drives it is running down. Her awareness of this is clearest at two moments in the novel. The first is to be found in Lettre CXIII when she is replying to Valmont's allegation that "plus les femmes vieillissent, et plus elles deviennent rêches et sévères." LD (p. 269) Clearly this is not the future she sees for herself. After commenting on those women who, having relied on their appearances to bring them fame in their youth, find themselves old without having cultivated their minds in such a way as to replace what nature has taken away, she goes on to describe another kind of woman:

L'autre classe, beaucoup plus rare, mais véritablement précieuse, est celle des femmes qui, ayant eu un caractère et n'ayant pas négligé de nourrir leur raison, savent se créer une existence, quand celle de la nature leur manque; et prennent le parti de mettre à leur esprit, les parures qu'elles employaient avant pour leur figure. Celles-ci ont pour l'ordinaire le jugement très sain, et l'esprit à la fois solide, gai et gracieux. Elles remplacent les charmes séduisants par l'attachante bonté, et encore

par l'enjouement dont le charme augmente en proportion de l'âge : c'est ainsi qu'elles parviennent en quelque sorte à se rapprocher de la jeunesse en s'en faisant aimer...

LD Lettre CXIII (p. 269)

In her autobiographical letter, LXXXI, Merteuil has shown how deeply she resented the secondary role to which her sex assigned her, and how determined she was to avenge this inequality. However, her plan has never allowed her to see men of equal age and station as anything other than adversaries. But the need to be loved is not so easily renounced, and so she comes to find in the youth and innocence of Danceny something that kindles that need so strongly that she cannot deny it. "Je veux au moins m'offrir à son imagination, pure et sans tache; telle enfin qu'il faudrait être, pour être vraiment digne de lui." she observes at one point. LD Lettre CXIII (p. 272)

Her project to seduce Danceny becomes more complicated by the fact that, by becoming involved with him, she is forced to realize the consequences of the losing battle she is fighting against time. In a letter to him she admits this, saying "Mais vous choisissez vos Maîtresses si jeunes, que vous m'avez fait apercevoir pour la première fois, que je commence à être vieille!" LD Lettre CXXI (p. 287)

No wonder then that she fears being thrown over by Valmont before she has time to protect herself from him. He has clearly demonstrated that, were her age and declining beauty to be pointed out to him by one of his competitors in the game of seduction, he would humiliate her in such a way as to destroy her and save his reputation. And here is expressed the dilemma with which anyone who gives himself

entirely up to the pursuit of desire is eventually faced. If the only possible relationship which can be born out of desire is the relationship of Master and Slave where the Master holds the Slave in bondage by force, or "thrall", then the loss of the power to force or enchant, an inevitable result of growing old, must ultimately trap the Master in a situation where he or she will have to fight to the death.

The destruction of Valmont and Merteuil at the end of les Liaisons dangereuses fulfills the purpose described by the author in his preface. What is more, it validates the interpretation which this paper has attempted to put forth by making explicit the parallelisms between the absolute egoism of the Hegelian individual and that of the two Laclosian heroes. The similarities between the Hegelian mechanisms of self-consciousness, the struggle for recognition, and the tragic consequences of the dialectic of Master and Slave, and the way in which these mechanisms have been shown to structure les Liaisons dangereuses and to clarify and explain the behavior of Laclos' characters has been the point of this discussion. If these parallel phenomena have been developed and treated in such a way as to enrich the reader's appreciation of the novel, and through it, of his appreciation of human interpersonal reality, then this paper can be said to have attained its end.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Patrick J. O'Brien has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Anne M. Callahan, Director
Chairman, Modern Languages, Loyola

Dr. Ardis B. Collins
Associate Professor, Philosophy, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

May 1, 1977
Date

Anne M. Callahan
Director's Signature