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THE EGALITARIANISM ISSUE IN EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY FRANCE: MARIVAUX

By

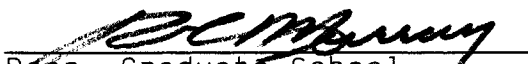
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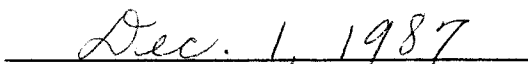
B. S., Eastern Montana College, 1973

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University of Montana
1987

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French

The Egalitarianism Issue in Eighteenth-Century France: Marivaux (85)

Director: Roman Zylawy *RZ/MCC*

As a frequenter of the stylish Parisian salons of the first half of the eighteenth century, Marivaux made penetrating observations about the social condition of women of elite society. At no other time in French history had women exercised such widespread social and political influence, an influence which was not reflected in their legal status in the social or economic spheres. As an extremely sensitive individual with deep empathy for women, Marivaux, through keen analysis, came to understand the woman of his day.

In the Age of Enlightenment, of which Marivaux is an early spokesman, the power of reason was heralded and then exercised to combat religious and social injustices. Marivaux fits well into this framework as a committed defender of women whom he viewed as victims of the social ills of his day.

Under the guise of lighthearted drama, Marivaux presented what are considered to be progressive and innovative ideas for his century. The egalitarian issue and the eminence of reason are addressed in his three island utopia plays, L'Ile des esclaves (1725), L'Ile de la raison (1727), and La Colonie (1750).

Marivaux was able to expand his penchant for analysis through the literary genre of the novel. La Vie de Marianne (1731-1741), one of the first French novels to have a female narrator and to be told from a feminine point of view, provides insight into Marivaux's depiction of strong female characters as well as penetration into the author's personal attitudes toward women, religion, and the convent life of the period.

Through examination of primary and secondary sources of Marivaux's aforementioned literary works, Marivaux is substantiated as a non-radical, eighteenth-century women's advocate with growing appeal in the twentieth century.

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CHAPTER I

MARIVAUX'S BACKGROUND AND THE WOMEN WHO INFLUENCED IT

Do the eighteenth-century plays and novels of Pierre de Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux still hold interest for the twentieth-century reader? If not, why are some of his plays, ignored for 200 years as failures, receiving new attention today? What is the common thread that runs through many of these thirty plays and two novels that appeals to the social and esthetic consciousness of the twentieth century?

Perhaps the answer lies in the realization of modern critics that Marivaux had a singular gift for analyzing human nature. He seems to have known himself well as he himself attests: "J'ai été mon propre spectateur . . . je me suis connu autant qu'il est possible de se connaître."¹ Through the keen observation of others as well as through his own experience, he came to know his fellow man just as well. In addition to his capacity for understanding human nature, Marivaux demonstrated a deep concern for the human condition and had empathy for women in particular. It seems natural therefore, that in this age of social awareness and some feminist ideals, the works of Marivaux should have strong appeal.

It is difficult to know this man from any actual accounts he left of himself, for they consist of only three letters and three brief notes.² His contemporaries hardly discussed him. Even details about his birth are few and found only in legal documents.

Marivaux was born in Paris on February 4, 1688. His father held a government post in Riom where young Pierre spent his childhood, and then in Limoges where Marivaux probably grew to adulthood. Due to the nature of his father's position, Marivaux was undoubtedly introduced to society at an early age. In 1712, at the age of twenty-four, Marivaux left the province and moved to Paris where he saw drastic changes occur in the political and social fibre of France. Three years later, in 1715, on the death of Louis XIV, the Regency was established in France. Though it lasted only eight years, it marked a complete transformation in the moral conduct of French society. Signs of cynicism toward religion in general and toward the Gallican Church in particular began to take root. This cynicism would later loosen the grip of the Jesuits in the affairs of government. An appeal for egalitarianism challenged the practice of granting favors and high positions to those with royal favor. The Regency also paved the way for a new monetary system, founded by John Law, which encouraged investment, thereby making fortunes for some, while leaving others destitute.³ Marivaux left no direct evidence of the extent

of influence that these eight explosive years may have had on him personally. For he discussed himself even less than did his contemporaries. He states:

Je ne ferai point mon portrait . . . il serait ou trop beau ou trop laid; car les hommes sur eux-mêmes, grâce à l'amour propre, ne savent pas saisir le point de justesse; l'on aime bien mieux en dire infiniment moins, que de n'en pas dire⁴ trop, ou bien en dire trop que de n'en pas dire assez.

What is known of Marivaux, therefore, must come mostly from the analysis of his literary work, wherein lie the keys to his perceptions of himself and the eighteenth-century society in which he lived.

The little that is known about Marivaux's private and personal life seems to point not to strong personal passions but to a sensitivity that allowed him to identify with the sentiments of those he observed. "Les coeurs tendres et delicats se font mille chagrins qu'un coeur ordinaire ne connait pas; la moindre chose les blesse et les afflige."⁵ This tendency toward strong feelings permeates Marivaux's works and characterizes his writing.

To the extent that sentimentality and sensitivity can be regarded as traits more characteristic of women than of men, a presentation of the women in Marivaux's life might provide insight into the development of his own sensitive nature.

Who were the women in Marivaux's life, and what imprint did they make in his formative years, in the developmental stage of his career and in his personal life?

It is interesting to note in fact that Marivaux did not write any plays depicting relationships between mothers and sons, but rather between fathers and their children.⁶ This is not surprising when one considers the paternalistic framework of eighteenth-century society. However, Paul Gazagne in Marivaux par lui-même, suggests two other possibilities for Marivaux's restraint in portraying mother-son relationships. Either Marivaux had little if not negative regard for his mother or, having such respect for her, he did not want to dishonor her memory by portraying her on the stage. Both possibilities are in keeping with Marivaux's reservations about making private aspects of his life public. Gazagne suggests that the attitude reflected in the following excerpt from Marivaux's Le Spectateur français represents, on a personally psychological level, Marivaux's own feeling of devotion toward his mother.

Je ne me souviens pas d'avoir regardé ma mère comme une personne qui avait de l'autorité sur moi; je ne lui ai jamais obéi parce qu'elle était la maîtresse et que je dépendais d'elle; c'était l'amour que j'avais pour elle qui me soumettait toujours au sien. Quand elle me disait quelque chose, je connaissais sensiblement que c'était pour mon bien; je voyais que c'était son coeur qui me parlait; . . . Si quelquefois, je n'observais pas exactement ce qu'elle souhaitait de moi, je ne la voyais point irritée; . . . Non, ma mère ne tombait pas dans ces fautes-là et ne me donnait pas de nouveaux défauts en me reprenant de ceux que j'avais; je ne lui voyais pas même un air sévère; . . . Elle me disait doucement

que je l'affligeais, et me caressait même en me montrant son affliction; c'était là mon châtement, aussi je n'y tenais pas; un jeune homme, né avec un coeur un peu sensible, ne saurait résister à de pareilles manières; . . . Son coeur, que je ne perdais jamais de vue, tenait le mien en respect et je n'aurais pas goûté le plaisir de la voir contente de moi si je m'étais dit intérieurement qu'elle ne devait pas l'être⁷

A great deal of heartfelt devotion is expressed in this account, but Marivaux elaborates further regarding the source of sentiment itself that he says is derived from a certain instinct which appears to be well developed in some but rather retarded in others.

. . . je le répète, il ne faut pour cela qu'un peu de sentiment. Et qu'est-ce que ce sentiment? C'est un instinct qui nous conduit et qui nous fait agir sans reflexion, en nous présentant quelque chose qui nous touche, qui n'est pas développé dans de certaines gens, et qui l'est dans d'autres; ceux en qui cela se développe sont de bons coeurs qui disent bien ce qu'ils sentent; ceux en qui cela ne se développe pas, le disent mal et n'en font pas moins.

Not only does the writer reveal a strong attachment to his mother, but he also expresses esteem for the capacity to experience as well as to communicate feelings of love and tenderness. This sensitivity, developed at an early age in Marivaux, pervades his plays and novels. From it flows his empathy towards mankind and his compelling desire to analyze the intricacies of the sensitive and sentimental feminine personality. As an adolescent, Marivaux depended on his mother for a moral and social guidance which he sorely missed after her death.

La mort me ravit ma mère dans le temps ou j'avais le plus besoin d'elle. J'entrais dans un âge sujet à des

égarements que je ne connaissais pas encore et où ce tendre égard que j'avais pour elle m'aurait été plus profitable que jamais.

At the time these words were written, Marivaux had just moved to Paris and had been introduced to salon society and to the theatre which were to serve as cornerstones for a literary career.

One woman who was to contribute enormously to Marivaux's success as a playwright was the actress Rosa Benozzi, who Marivaux had the good fortune to meet in 1720. Rosa, better known by her stage name, Silvia, was a member of the Italian bouffe players who were originally invited to perform in France by Henry III. Initially, they performed for his court in Blois; then they moved to Paris where they established themselves in the Hotel de Bourbon. In 1697, they were expelled from France by Louis XIV who considered them immoral and who resented what he perceived as satirical references to his mistress, Madame de Maintenon. The Italian troupe was recalled to France, however, by the Regent. In 1723, after his death, they received a royal pension along with the title, "Comédiens italiens ordinaires du roi."

It is to Silvia's adept interpretation of Marivaux's comedies that Marivaux owes much of the success that certain plays received. Like Marivaux himself, Silvia had a sensitive nature, and like him she was intelligent and kind. It was with her in mind that Marivaux wrote most of his master-

pieces.¹⁰ Her talent was particularly suited for roles in which she was called upon to reveal her character's motives and feelings through gestures and mannerisms in a dialogue which masked them to her interlocutor. Silvia had the artistic adeptness to convey the subtleties and nuances of human behavior which Marivaux endeavored to analyze and portray in his plays.

There is no evidence to indicate the extent of Marivaux's attachment for Silvia nor of her for him. Marivaux leaves only one account of a personal love affair. It appears in Le Spectateur français, which is a collection of philosophical reflections and anecdotes published by Marivaux himself. In this account, he describes his adolescent infatuation with a young lady whom he perceived to be completely natural and free of artifice.

A l'âge de dix-sept ans, je m'attachai à une jeune demoiselle à qui je dois le genre de vie que j'embrassai. La sagesse que je remarquais dans cette fille m'avait rendu sensible à sa beauté. Je lui trouvais d'ailleurs tant d'indifférence pour ses charmes, que j'aurais juré qu'elle les ignorait. Quel plaisir, disais-je, en moi-même si je puis me faire aimer d'une fille qui ne souhaite pas d'avoir des amants, puisqu'elle est belle sans y prendre garde et que par conséquent elle n'est pas coquette! Était-elle assise ou debout, parlait-elle ou marchait-elle, il me semblait toujours qu'elle n'y entendait point finesse, et qu'elle ne songeait à rien moins qu'à paraître ce qu'elle était. Un jour j'aperçus la belle de loin, qui se regardait dans un miroir, et je remarquai, à mon grand étonnement, qu'elle s'y représentait à elle-même dans tous les sens où, durant notre entretien, j'avais vu son visage, et il se trouvait que ses airs de physionomie que j'avais crus si naïfs n'étaient, à les bien nommer, que des tours de gibecière. Ah! mademoiselle, je vous demande pardon, lui dis-je,

d'avoir mis jusqu'ici sur le compte de la nature des appas dont tout l'honneur n'est dû qu'à votre industrie. Vous parlerai-je plus franchement? je viens de voir les machines de l'Opéra; il me divertira toujours, mais il me touchera moins.

Discovering so much artifice in someone he thought to be so natural was a blow to Marivaux's sense of trust and brought him face to face with a contradiction which would affect him all his life--that of the ideal versus the real. He admits that this incident instilled in him a distrust of human nature. "C'est de cette aventure que naquit en moi cette misanthropie qui ne m'a point quitté et qui m'a fait passer ma vie à examiner les hommes."¹² Fortunately, he neither became bitter nor turned to public debasement of women in retribution as others have before and after him. "Fort à cet égard, il ne saisit pas l'arme des faibles qui cherchent leur revanche dans la moquerie et l'ironie."¹³ However, the sense of distrust which resulted from this first and perhaps most heart-wrenching love affair may have undermined his desire to ever love passionately or completely again. There is no evidence to suggest that he ever did either. He did, however, marry a woman by the name of Colombe Bologne who after very few years of marriage, died in 1723 leaving a young daughter, Colombe-Prospère. Regarding his family life, Marivaux is once again silent.

Coupled with the death of his wife was another tragedy which was to befall Marivaux. He had invested heavily in John Law's Louisiana speculations. When Law's system went

bankrupt, Marivaux was ruined financially. He was forced for the first time to earn his living from his pen. Added to this embarrassment was the excruciating realization that he would not be able to provide an ample dowry for his daughter and consequently could not arrange a suitable marriage for her. At the age of thirteen, Colombe-Prospère entered a convent and thereafter lived out her life as a nun. Marivaux addressed the issue of eighteenth-century convent life in his novel, La Vie de Marianne. If the novel accurately reflects his personal attitudes toward the convent life of his day, he must have truly agonized over the prospect of delivering his daughter to an institution which in his opinion, promoted social retardation and idleness.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the sale of manuscripts and plays could earn some subsistence for a writer, but rarely a lucrative profit. Copyright laws were non-existent. The author was paid one time only and this before the manuscript was published. After a piece was sold, it belonged to the publisher who could reprint it as many times as he wished according to demand. The author received no royalties. Publishers were often regarded as shifty and greedy exploiters of the written word. Voltaire alludes to them bitterly when in 1752 he writes, "Booksellers are the hell of writers."¹⁴

The most lucrative of literary pursuits during this era was writing for the theatre. It was possible for a

playwright to find immediate fame if his play was well received; however, fortune came less readily. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the "Théâtre français" had a veritable monopoly on the plays performed in Paris with some secondary but non-threatening competition from the Italian theatre. Consequently, the actors and actresses were in a position to decide which plays they would accept or reject. They also dictated the price that they were willing to pay for a play. The poor playwright thus sometimes found himself in the compromising position of having to cater to their arrogance. He received payment for a play only after it had proven successful, and even then he received only partial proceeds from the first run which usually consisted of between fifteen and thirty performances.

Such were the conditions to which an eighteenth-century writer was subjected.¹⁵ Marivaux seems to have fared no better. He remains "the only playwright of the first half of the eighteenth century whose works still live on the stage today."¹⁶ Yet he appears to have earned only moderate sums for his plays. "His earnings from his plays, novels, and other writings appear to have been meager and . . . he appears to have led a poverty stricken existence in the last part of his life when he had virtually ceased to produce new novels or plays."¹⁷

As to whether Marivaux experienced personal suffering seems to be answered in the remark made by one of Marivaux's contemporaries, Grimm: "Les mots les plus innocents pouvaient souvent le blesser."¹⁸ One might suppose that suffering is essential to genius or at least contributes to it in that through suffering the artist matures and broadens his perceptions. "Le génie comique ne s'achète qu'au prix de bien des souffrances morales; c'est vrai de Molière, c'est vrai de Marivaux."¹⁹ This phenomenon is further illustrated in the counsel of a salon hostess to an amateur playwright.

At your age you can write good verse but not a good comedy; for comedy is not only the work of talent but also the fruit of experience. You have studied the theatre, but, fortunately for you, you have not yet had leisure to study the world. You cannot paint portraits without models. Mingle in society.²⁰

In her ensuing comment she aptly describes Marivaux's particular aptitude.

Where the ordinary man sees only²¹ faces, the man of talent distinguishes characters.

Regardless of his literary skill, the man of letters, if he had no other occupation, was forced to depend on the patronage of the wealthy. As John Lough states in An Introduction to Eighteenth Century France, "Literary patronage was certainly needed in these years to supplement the modest sums which a writer could count on receiving from publishers or the theatre."²² So Marivaux returned to the patronage of the salons of his close friends, Madame de

Lambert and Madame de Tencin. These two women are most representative of the sophistication and influence of women in general in the Parisian society of eighteenth-century France. At no other time in French history had the intelligence of women been so widely manifest. Their interests were diverse, ranging from literature, philosophy and science and influencing the politics and government of the era. Says Luthi:

Si l'on peut dire que la littérature a fait son entrée dans le monde par le salon de Madame de Rambouillet, la politique, la science, la philosophie y font la leur par celui de Madame de Lambert, où Marivaux était un hôte fréquent.²³

The significance of the salons was acknowledged by certain literary giants of the era. It is to the institution of the "salons" that Rousseau refers when he confesses: "A point of morals would not be better discussed in a company of philosophers than in that of a pretty woman of Paris."²⁴ An interesting commentary coming from one who is known to have felt awkward and ill at ease in the company of women and whose educational views regarding girls are considered by many to be restrictive at best.

Diderot, too, acknowledged salons as a refining and civilizing institution:

Elles nous accoutument encore à mettre de l'agrément et de la clarté dans les matières les plus sèches et les plus épineuses. On leur adresse sans cesse la parole; on veut en être écouté; on craint de les fatiguer ou de les ennuyer; et l'on prend une facilité particulière de s'exprimer, qui passe de la conversation dans le style.²⁵

Intellectual life merged with social life in the salons where woman reigned supreme. Her genius was conversation. "C'est en grande partie sous la forme parlée que la pensée du XVIIIe siècle a pénétré dans les hautes classes."²⁶ A writer's reputation and fortune could be made or lost at her hand of favor or disgrace. Fortunately for Marivaux, he was well received into Parisian salon society. Madame de Lambert became a life-long friend, and the unremitting efforts of Madame de Tencin on his behalf resulted in his election to the French Academy in 1742.

It is primarily the women of the aristocracy and of high society that Marivaux chose not only to observe but as the focus for his plays and novel, La Vie de Marianne. How are the socially elite ladies of Marivaux's era described?

Historians of the period describe women in positions of great power behind men, women pursuing knowledge, women of great energy and wit. But they also found that these same women were searching for deeper meaning in life, women who were unfulfilled and restless. Although some historians concluded that their sense of boredom resulted from a lack of spiritual depth, it has also been suggested that it was a natural consequence of the societal dictate that feminine ingenuity must be cultivated with the sole purpose of inspiring and/or pleasing men. Eighteenth-century woman's intelligence, curiosity, sense of discernment, manner of

articulation, wisdom, wit and charm were exercised primarily to promote men, to wield more power in the world of men, or to make themselves more acceptable to men. The essence of the feminine personality was still defined only in relation to man. As Simone de Beauvoir declares in the twentieth century, "L'humanité est mâle et l'homme définit la femme non en soi mais relativement à lui;..."²⁷ Eighteenth-century women were primarily inspirations for, promoters of and protectors of men. It was virtually impossible for these women, imprisoned as they were in the prestigious cage of leisure, to have an identity of their own.

To demonstrate that Marivaux recognized the dehumanizing plight of woman is the goal of this thesis. The women he portrays in literature have independent personalities and think for themselves as the salon hostesses he so admired attempted to do.

It is interesting to note that the decline in the popularity of salons hosted by ladies such as these marked a decline in Marivaux's literary appeal. When the order they represented crumbled, Marivaux began to feel out of place in society.²⁸ With age Marivaux lost most of his close friends who had predeceased him and he narrowly restricted his social engagements. Nevertheless, not surprisingly, he spent his last years enjoying the companionship of yet another woman, Mademoiselle de Saint-Jean with whom he lived until his death in 1763.

Having died in poverty, Marivaux nevertheless left what is becoming a long lived literary tribute to the women whom he loved and respected in life.

FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER II

THE THEATRE OF MARIVAUD: SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Innovation in Style

Although Marivaux wrote his first play at the age of nineteen in answer to a challenge made by his schoolmates and to demonstrate how easily it could be done, its immediate success must have provided him with an exhilarating taste of literary fame as well as encouragement to continue writing. Though Marivaux contended that he wrote for his own pleasure without deliberately seeking out public recognition, he must have realized early in his career that if indeed he was to make his mark in the literary world, this would be a difficult task in the wake of the three literary giants of the preceding century, Corneille, Racine and Molière. Whatever his motives, Marivaux did in fact, create a new literary genre which distinguished him from the traditional writers of the day. Though he was criticized for a style which screamed noncompliance with the classical tradition that served as a model well into the early eighteenth century, he was praised by some who appreciated his original literary finesse and innovative flair. How then did Marivaux manage to distinguish himself from the three aforementioned seventeenth-century master playwrights?

One means to this end lies in his opting for major roles for women. Since love was a frequently used topic for Marivaux's plays, and since love can be described as a sentiment very often associated with women, it is not surprising that Marivaux devoted much attention to the development of female protagonists. Historically, up to the time that Marivaux was writing, and for some time after, women were designated primarily only secondary dramatic roles. This tendency is reflected in Corneille's drama as well as in Molière's. Marivaux, like Racine before him, went against this established trend and created his most important roles for women. In so doing, he gave women unique recognition. He portrayed women as strong, independent though eternally feminine creatures who rely on their intelligence and self respect as a means of defense. "L'esprit est un moyen intellectuel de se défendre."¹ They resist the prejudices and opinions of society and act according to their own convictions which spring from the heart. "Whether this sensitivity of nature serves to expand the heart or to weaken it, it is often the source of unhappiness because men regard it as a mark of inferiority."² Fortunately, Marivaux's heroines react with courage. They readily respond with action when necessary. They have definite opinions which they express openly to the reader if not to other characters.³ In spite of their strength of personality, they are eager to be pleasing to men and are

enchantingly feminine to the point of being coquettish. "Une femme veut toujours plaire, sans le vouloir par une reflexion expres."⁴ Marivaux respected women because he felt that they are concerned to a larger degree than men with their consciences, and more introspective in general, thus worthy of deferential regard.⁵

The emphasis on women inherent in Marivaux's drama, but lacking in Corneille's tragedies, represents a stylistic distinction separating the two playwrights. There is an additional distinction. Honor is the supreme value for Cornelian heroes which they are compelled to uphold first and foremost before satisfying any personal desires. Marivaux's protagonists, on the other hand, exemplify a different aspect of honor which manifests itself as pride in self or to use Marivaux's own phrase, as "amour-propre."

In its legitimate state, "amour-propre" serves to protect the dignity and respect of Marivaux's female protagonists who realize that they are vulnerable to the possibility of being humiliated and even ruined by the men who pursue them. Cloaked in "amour-propre," they are typically very much in control of themselves, often distrusting the motives of the men who desire them. "Marivaux montre chaque femme enveloppée de résistances morales, qui sont limitées à ce que l'amour propre exige."⁶

Unfortunately, like the women Marivaux observed in real life, his heroines have the tendency to push

"amour-propre" past the point of what could be viewed as legitimate or reasonable. In short, they border on extreme vanity. Not a single woman in any of Marivaux's works escapes coquettishness.⁷ Indeed, when self-love is not tempered by reason, it becomes selfish. "Cette faiblesse, déterminant aussi bien la coquetterie que l'inconstance, est un des traits les plus caractéristiques des héroïnes de Marivaux."⁸ Thus, the women portrayed by Marivaux are not the perfect, selfless beings of Corneille, who are always noble to the point of perfection.

Although Marivaux applauded the psychological analysis inherently characteristic in both Corneille's and Racine's tragedies, literary critics agree that Marivaux identified with Racine in respect to his portrayal of heroines as unique individuals. According to Kathy Luthi, both Racine and Marivaux created heroines that are difficult to classify in terms of particular personality type.⁹ They are not incarnations of ideas as Molière's female characters seem to be, i.e. in Le Misanthrope Célimène personifies coquetry and Arsinoé, prudishness.¹⁰ Both Marivaux and Racine possessed the gift of analyzing love, they both depicted the inner lives of their protagonists and they reduced the emphasis on exterior events.

A primary differences between Racine and Marivaux, however, lies in their individual treatment of human emotions. Passion and its torments serve as the main

thrusts of Racine's tragedies. Marivaux's comedies, on the other hand, focus on the analysis of the more subtle intricacies of love. For the Marivaudian heroine, love is not so much a sensual experience as it is sentimental. She does not love unconditionally, sacrificing everything for the beloved. Andromaque's blind exaltation for Ulysses is replaced in Marivaux's heroines with natures characterized by delicate sensitivity which gives them a sense of their own uniqueness. Marivaux felt that "plus on a de sensibilité, plus on a l'âme généreuse, et par conséquent estimable. . . ." ¹¹

Marivaux admired the classical elegance of Corneille and Racine's tragedies. His perspective differs from theirs, however, in that Corneille and Racine portrayed tragedies as win-all/lose-all propositions. Marivaux's characters, in contrast, look for a reasonable compromise as a solution to conflict. ¹²

Even though the tradition of Molière was still very much alive in the 1720's and 1730's, and although many dramatists blindly followed it, Marivaux was unimpressed with Molière's comic style. ¹³ In fact, most of Molière's comedies abound in scathing satire of human foibles often staged in garishly funny spectacles. He demonstrated that any topic or person, with the exception of the king himself, might make a worthy subject for comedy. His style was explosive. Racine's torments of passion were highly

dramatic. Marivaux, however, chose to use suggestion rather than emphasis.¹⁴ He preferred it in fact. Through light-hearted, veiled inference, he hoped to convey his philosophical and moral views more effectively. In addition, as Paul Gazagne puts it: "Au lieu de marquer les grands traits du coeur humain, comme l'a fait Molière, Marivaux y veut saisir les mille accidents secondaires."¹⁵ Whereas Molière emphasized the major character flaws of human nature, Marivaux focused on the seemingly insignificant details of the human heart. He was not as interested in the flagrant transgressions of men, as in the subtle nuances and intricacies of love relationships. Herein lies Marivaux's literary finesse.

His literary endeavor incorporated the psychological analysis of elusive gestures and mannerisms with their precise description. At the same time, Marivaux managed to reveal the underlying motives of the characters manifesting them in a genial and innovative style.

In this stylistic break with tradition, Marivaux was bold enough to establish dialogues between his characters in prose, at a time when most plays were being written in verse. He used a language which resembled the daily discourses of real people, whether refined or precious as in the salon tradition, or in the coarser idiom of the bourgeoisie. As a technique to enhance the comic effect of some of his plays, Marivaux would often set up a pattern of

opposition contrasting the elegant and elevated speech of an aristocrat with the unrefined, farcical speech of a bourgeois.¹⁶ In La Colonie, for example, the refined aristocrat, Arthenice, majestically declares, "Je vous garantis un nom immortel."¹⁷ Madame Sorbin, a bourgeoisie, attempts to match her elegance in this reply: "Nous, dans vingt mille ans, nous serons encore la nouvelle du jour."¹⁸ This sort of verbal realism offended some of Marivaux's contemporaries, yet he insisted that he was merely copying nature. Other innovations in Marivaux's theatre consisted of plot simplification and of actual lack of completion when the expected conclusion seemed to him to lack intrigue. His goal was to amuse his audience, who could always be assured that whatever the conflict in his plays, his characters would find an amicable solution in the end. But stylistics aside, numerous humanitarian concerns permeate Marivaux's comedy. An examination of three of Marivaux's island plays, as they are commonly known today, l'Ile des esclaves (1725), l'Ile de raison (1727), and La Colonie (1750) provides the reader with examples of how Marivaux experimented with the issue of egalitarianism, an idea which was taking root in the 1720's and which would reach its pinnacle in the French Revolution. The egalitarianism issue was a popular topic for discussion at the time Marivaux wrote his first utopian-island play. The discussions he heard or took part in undoubtedly encouraged him to examine the problem and

perhaps served as a catalyst for forming a personal point of view. In setting the action of the three plays on remote islands, in a natural and pure atmosphere far from corruptible society, Marivaux provides an ideal setting for a re-examination of the established social order. The roles of the strong and the weak are reversed so that the abuse of power is seen for what it truly is in an atmosphere where the downtrodden are free to express themselves.

L'Ile des esclaves

L'Ile des esclaves represents the first of the three island plays to be published and one of the most successful of all of Marivaux's plays as reflected in the length of its initial run of twenty-one performances. Although this comedy in one act, written in prose, has very little plot, it does depict a radical situation involving social upheaval. The central theme does not go so far as to advocate egalitarianism, the doctrine of equal, political, economic and legal rights for all citizens, but suggests rather that antagonism among the social classes can be alleviated through mutual respect and cooperation. Imperious Iphicrate and haughty Euphrosine are Greek aristocrats washed ashore on a remote island with their respective servants, Arlequin and Cléanthis. They discover that, one hundred years previously, a new form of government was established on the island by escaped Greek slaves. Their current head of

state, Trivelin, informs the newcomers that slavery has been abolished and that equality reigns on the island.

Quand nos pères, irrités de la cruauté de leurs maîtres, quittèrent la Grèce et vivrent s'établir ici, dans le ressentiment des outrages qu'ils avaient reçus de leurs patrons, la première loi qu'ils y firent fut d'ôter la vie à tous les maîtres que le hasard ou le naufrage conduirait dans leur île, et conséquemment, de rendre la liberté à tous les esclaves"19

The islanders, they are told, no longer seek vengeance against the aristocracy. Instead, they seek to rid the nobility of its belief in an inherent right to govern cruelly and irresponsibly with impunity. Tyranny, according to the islanders, afflicts the aristocracy like a dread disease. Fortunately, a cure can be effected by an exchange of master/servant roles with the intent of teaching the arrogant aristocrats a lesson in humility, which once learned will render them cured.

Nous ne nous vengeons plus de vous, nous vous corrigeons; ce n'est plus votre vie que nous poursuivons, c'est la barbarie de vos coeurs que nous voulons détruire; nous vous jetons dans l'esclavage pour vous rendre plus sensibles aux maux qu'on y éprouve; nous vous humilions, afin que, nous trouvant superbes, vous vous reprochiez de l'avoir été . . . vous voilà en mauvais état, nous entreprenons de vous guérir; vous êtes moins nos esclaves que nos malades"20

Thus Iphicrate and Euphrosine are relegated to the degrading and, from their point of view, insufferable position of servants to their own servants.

One notices that Trivelin does not admonish Arlequin and Cléanthis to be kind to nor patient with their newly acquired domestics. Instead, he gives them full vent to

their pent-up resentment which surges forth when unrestrained. Effectively, it is from Arlequin's and Cléanthis' mouths that pour the diatribes against Iphicrate's and Euphrosines's insensitivity, arrogance and cruelty. Cléanthis seems to be speaking for the entire downtrodden lower class when she delivers an acid tongue-lashing to her mistress. In effect, she appears to be accusing, not only Euphrosine, but the entire egotistical upper class which, in Marivaux's opinion, refused too often to recognize the common humanity shared by all classes.

Trivelin is compelled at this point to stress to Arlequin the reason for the role exchange between masters and servants: "Souvenez-vous en prenant son nom, mon cher ami, qu'on vous le donne bien moins pour réjouir votre vanité, que pour le corriger de son orgueil."²¹ Trivelin asks Arlequin and Cléanthis to assist in their masters' cure by providing detailed accounts of the aristocrats' transgressions which they do in a scathing but hilarious manner. They strike nerves in confronting Iphicrate with his cruelty and Euphrosine with her coquettishness.

Through the biting description of Euphrosine's vanity and coquetry, Marivaux gives vent to his own irritation with the artifice he felt was often employed by women to achieve their own ends. Ironically, he is quick to forgive this shortcoming so typical of the socialite of his day. He

maintains that because women are the weaker sex, they succumb to such faults more easily. Trivelin declares:

Mais comme vous êtes d'un sexe naturellement assez faible, et que par là vous avez du céder plus facilement qu'un homme aux exemples de hauteur, de mépris et de dureté qu'on vous a donnés chez vous²²

As for Arlequin, he has the mannerisms of a flippant cavalier or "jeune extravagant" which announce the cadence of style of Beaumarchais.²³ Figaro's bold, self-sufficient spirit is foreshadowed in Arlequin: ". . . les revendications égalitaires de Figaro se trouvent annoncées, des 1725, dans l'Ile des esclaves."²⁴

Once Iphicrate and Euphrosine can admit their respective failings, the play moves quickly to a happy ending, as was expected from the beginning. Having had the opportunity to express to their masters the suffering they have been subjected to at their hands, Arlequin and Cléanthis, being good-natured souls, reaffirm their loyalty and devotion to their masters. Iphicrate and Euphrosine, in their turn, have learned consideration for and appreciation of their servants. Once the rights of the servants have been established, each of the four characters returns to his or her former position. Marivaux, in so doing, restores the status quo.²⁵

In choosing to end the play in this manner, Marivaux seems to be declaring that he is no revolutionary. When the play was performed at court on April 21, 1731, however, it

was not well received, contrary to the acclaim it received by the Parisian populace. The cool reception at court suggests that it might have been perceived as a statement in favor of the overthrow of the traditional social system. It is understandable that a play toying with the idea of social overthrow would not be well accepted by the aristocracy which would have the most to lose from such a change of events. In spite of the fact that some critics have suggested that the play has revolutionary intentions, others maintain it to be merely an attempt to draw attention to the antagonism between social classes. Paul Gazagne in Marivaux par lui-même maintains that it has no other aim than to show that Marivaux believed that social peace can be obtained when the members of different social classes replace antagonism for one another with mutual cooperation.²⁶ For according to Marivaux, man is naturally good. In this sense, he is a forerunner of Rousseau. Whereas Rousseau purported that man is born in a state of natural goodness and is corrupted by society, Marivaux also seemed to believe that man is born in a state of natural goodness, and that from this goodness springs the capacity to rid mankind of its social ills.

In summation, many critics believe that Marivaux was suggesting in this play that when natural goodness, inherent in man, is encouraged, strides in social equality result. Social injustice can be diminished. Sadly, Marivaux the

realist realized that the self-serving aspect of human nature impedes social progress.

L'Ile de la raison

L'Ile de la raison, ou Les Petits hommes, written in 1727, was a delight in the salons where hostesses regaled their guests by reading it aloud. It quickly gained favor with the general populace as well.

Marivaux explains in the preface that he wrote this play with relative ease and that although one could readily imagine, while reading the play, the change in physical stature experienced by the characters as they developed their power of reason, this essential comic effect was impossible to stage. Consequently, the play was a horrible failure, the third for Marivaux at the Théâtre Français, and doomed to near oblivion for a period of two hundred years until it made a smashing comeback when performed in Paris in 1950 by an amateur troupe, L'Equipe.

The three-act play, just as in L'Ile des esclaves, is situated on a remote island. Eight Europeans appear, though one envisions that they can barely be seen, for they are tiny in stature. They are captives of the islanders who are anxious to determine whether the tiny creatures are of the human species and capable of thought. It is discovered that the visitors' physical size is in direct proportion to their ability to reason intelligently. The islanders, in

sympathy, undertake to enlighten the little people as to their individual character flaws which are preventing each of them from attaining natural stature. The play seemed to be fashioned after Gulliver's Travels by Swift, which had been recently published and well received by the public. L'Ile de la raison has virtually no plot and little action. Nevertheless, it had great literary appeal primarily because of its preponderance of innovative ideas.

Among these, and perhaps most importantly in light of the political philosophies which would erupt in the second half of the eighteenth century through spokesmen such as Montesquieu, Locke, Rousseau and Voltaire, is Marivaux's presentation of the island's governor as an enlightened despot.

When Marivaux wrote this play in 1727, the absolutism of what was criticized as a tyrannical monarchy was still predominant. Marivaux was bold enough to infuse the enlightened despot ideal into his amusing play, and he did so in a provoking though non-threatening way. As the primary authoritative figure on the island, the governor considers the enlightenment of his subjects as essential to their well being and his primary responsibility. This attitude extends to his concern for the eight Europeans as illustrated in the following passage wherein the governor charges his advisor, Blectrue, with their care.

Blectrue, c'est vous à qui je les confie. Je vous charge du soin de les éclairer; n'y perdez point de temps; interrogez-les; voyez ce qu'ils sont et ce qu'ils faisaient; tâchez de rétablir leur âme dans sa dignité, de retrouver quelques traces de sa grandeur. Si cela ne réussit pas, nous aurons du moins fait notre devoir...²⁷

Marivaux is actually one of the first in eighteenth-century France to herald the age of reason and enlightenment.

. . . et si ce ne sont que des animaux, qu'on les garde à cause de leur figure semblable à la nôtre. En les voyants faits comme nous, nous en sentirons encore mieux le prix de la raison, puisqu'elle fait la différence de la bête à l'homme.²⁸

There is a second issue addressed by Marivaux in this play in which he questions the presumed right of members of the nobility to special consideration because of their chance circumstance of birth. He challenges the idea that aristocrats deserve preferential treatment due to their royal bloodline. For special consideration breeds conceit, and conceit is a vice that heads of state can little afford themselves. They alone have no one to correct them. It is imperative, therefore, that they conduct themselves in as virtuous a manner as possible as Parmenès, the governor's son, emphatically declares:

Vous et les vôtres, vous m'appellez Prince, et je me suis fait expliquer ce que mot-là signifie; ne vous en servez plus. Nous ne connaissons point ce titre-là ici; mon nom est Parmenès, et l'on ne m'en donne point d'autre. On a bien de la peine à détruire l'orgueil en le combattant. Que deviendrait-il, si on le flattait? Il serait la source de tous les maux. Surtout que le ciel en préserve ceux qui sont établis pour commander, eux qui doivent avoir plus de vertus que les autres, parce qu'il n'y a point de justice contre leurs défauts!²⁹

Marivaux admonishes the nobility and even the king to uphold their responsibility of wise government which should always be in the best interests of those they actually serve. Any advantage of birth, according to our author, should be extolled in selflessness. "L'usage le plus digne qu'on puisse faire de son bonheur, c'est de s'en servir à l'avantage des autres."³⁰

It is with the purpose of serving the interests of the captives that Blectrue interrogates each one, hoping to discover the shortcoming which prevents each from reattaining his or her natural height, thereby enabling them all to become truly "de grands hommes" as well as "des hommes grands."

The first European to be interrogated is the poet who the "gossipmongers of the day liked to think was a caricature of Voltaire."³¹ Marivaux had reason to resent Voltaire who sarcastically criticized his sentimental style saying, "Qu'il passait sa vie à peser des riens dans des balances de toiles d'araignée."³² In any event, Marivaux has a great deal of fun with this conceited character who relishes his description to Blectrue of a poet's illustrious profession. He conjures up for Blectrue the mental image of:

. . . des tragédies que l'on récite en dialogues, où il y a des héros si tendre, de nobles coupables . . . dont les crimes ont quelque chose de si grand, des hommes qui ont de si respectables faiblesses, qui se tuent quelquefois d'une manière si admirable et si auguste,

qu'on ne saurait les³³ voir sans en avoir l'âme émue et pleurer de plaisir.

He continues, confident that Blectrue is duly impressed, elaborating on comedies, Molière style, that portray the vices and absurdities of human nature. Blectrue understands how the audience might feel sorrow in watching these comedies, and he is totally amazed to learn that they were designed to make people laugh. "Pleurer où l'on doit rire, et rire où l'on doit pleurer! les monstrueuses créatures!"³⁴ Marivaux is doing more here, however, than making good natured fun of poets and playwrights. He is calling for a new genre which combines the serious with the burlesque and nobility of sentiment with the realism of traditional comedy.³⁵

The poet, who admits his wrongdoing but refuses to change, along with the philosopher who is convinced he is already great, are the only two of the Europeans who refuse to concede that they have shortcomings which prevent them from reaching their potential. In the end, they are given up for lost and placed in "small homes" or in a place for "incurables."

There is a happy ending for the other six Europeans who learn a lesson in the importance of good judgement. Their group is comprised of a courtier and his secretary, a countess and her servant, a doctor and a peasant. Marivaux crowns the success of the courtier by having him fall in

love with the governor's daughter. The countess, in her turn, falls in love with the governor's son. Herein lies another of Marivaux's innovations.

Blectrue explains to the Europeans a social custom which the islanders view as so important as to make it law. It concerns romantic advances which if they are to be instigated, must be done so by the women. At first, this seems strange to the Europeans, but Blectrue explains that it is most logical. Women are the weaker sex. Therefore, it should not fall upon their shoulders to withstand improper advances from men.

Que deviendra l'amour, si c'est le sexe le moins fort que vous chargez du soin d'en surmonter les fougues? Quoi! vous mettrez la séduction du côté des hommes, et la nécessité de la vaincre du cote des femmes! Et si elles y succombent, qu'avez-vous a leur dire? C'est vous en ce cas qu'il faut déshonorer, et non pas elles.³⁶

Gallant Marivaux benevolently comes to the defense of women who historically, up to the sexual revolution of the 1960's, have received the blame and have been castigated for sexual improprieties when these improprieties were often inflicted on them, and which for countless reasons they were not able to resist. Marivaux places the burden for moral virtue on men who are naturally, in his opinion, of a stronger constitution and consequently better suited to resist injudicious romantic liaisons.

Marivaux ends his play with an interesting twist for the twentieth-century reader. It pertains to the ensuing

marriages of the aristocrat to Floris and of Parmenès to the countess. The curious thing about the marriage ceremony is that no contract is necessary to make the marriages valid. Marivaux, according to critics, is suggesting that where there is reason, there is no need for conventions. "Nous n'en avons point d'autre ici que la présence de ceux devant qui on se marie. Quand on a de la raison, toutes les conventions sont faites."³⁷

As Gazagne states, "L'union libre remplace le mariage au pays de la raison, le matriarcat y a forcé de loi, de même qu'y a cours une morale sexuelle très digne et très humaine."³⁸ It is interesting to note that in the latter part of his life, Marivaux, himself, formed a relationship with Mademoiselle de Saint-Jean. Gazagne maintains that Marivaux lived with her without official sanction because he believed that "l'union-libre" was preferable to traditional marriage. This attitude was truly beyond the thinking of his own day. Marivaux would find many more sympathizers for it in the Twentieth century.

La Colonie

The third and final play in the series of utopian island plays used by Marivaux to experiment with the restructuring of society, is entitled, La Colonie. This play was the 1750 version of a play Marivaux had written twenty-one years previously which he called La Nouvelle

Colonie ou La Ligue des femmes. What is known about this three-act play, written in 1729, is limited to a short synopsis which appeared in the Mercure. It was poorly received and withdrawn after only three performances. Marivaux returned to the subject of the play in 1750, however, probably because he felt strongly about the feminine question which was a poignant topic of discussion at the time of the writing. Marivaux used the play as a forum for issuing his strongest pro-feminist appeal. La Colonie, in one act, depicts the power struggle which ensues between men who assume an exclusive and unchallengeable right to authority in matters of government versus women who demand equal representation.

As with l'Ile des esclaves and l'Ile de la raison, La Colonie describes the restructuring of the prescribed social order. In this case, a band of Europeans have fled their homeland which has been overtaken by foreign invaders. They seek refuge and freedom on a remote island. As the first scene unfolds, it is apparent that the refugees are in the formative process of choosing new leaders whose responsibility will be the establishment of a new government. Timagène has been elected by the men to represent the aristocrats, while M. Sorbin has been elected to represent the bourgeoisie.

The first scene portrays the encounter between two women--Arthenice, a noblewoman, and Madame Sorbin, wife to

the bourgeoisie leader, M. Sorbin. The two women have come together in the realization that the catastrophe which has forced them on the island may ironically afford them a unique opportunity to participate in the establishment of the new government. Since such participation has historically been denied to women in general, Arthenice expresses her hope that the women's aspiration will be realized.

Nous voici chargées du plus grand intérêt que notre sexe ait jamais eu, et cela dans la conjoncture du monde la plus favorable pour discuter notre droit vis-à-vis les hommes . . . nous voici en place d'avoir justice, et de sortir de l'humilité ridicule qu'on nous³⁹ a imposée depuis le commencement du monde

The two heroines are dealt a crushing blow when they learn that the men on the island intend to elect only other men to positions of leadership. Arthenice and Madame Sorbin readily confront the men declaring that women should also be consulted in the lawmaking process. The men respond in utter astonishment at the very idea which they purport to be ridiculous. Their seeming incapacity to understand the women's assertion of their right to representation is expressed in raucous laughter. Says M. Sorbin: "Ah bien, tant mieux, faites, amusez-vous, jouez une farce; mais gardez-nous notre drolerie pour une autre fois, cela est trop bouffon pour le temps qui court."⁴⁰

What Marivaux illustrates here, is his concern for the blind prejudice exercised by the men against the women. He declares through the words of Madame Sorbin that sexual

stereotyping has been ingrained in the minds of men for countless generations and that fathers instill this prejudice in their sons. "C'est l'ancienne coutume d'être impertinent de père en fils, qui leur bouche l'esprit."⁴¹ He goes on to point out the negative impact made by this kind of prejudice on the feminine psyche. One of the women exclaims:

He! que voulez-vous? On nous crie dès le berceau: 'Vous n'êtes capables de rien, ne vous mêlez de rien, vous n'êtes bonnes à rien qu'à être sages.' On l'a dit à nos mères qui l'ont cru, qui nous le répètent; on a les oreilles rebattues de ces mauvais propos; nous sommes douces, la paresse s'en mêle, on nous mène comme des moutons.⁴²

The reference to women being good at nothing except to "behave," suggests that men regard women as merely grown-up children and predicts the same notion which was to be promoted a decade later by Rousseau in Emile:

Ceux qui regardent la femme comme un homme imparfait ont tort, sans doute, mais l'analogie extérieure est pour eux. Les femmes semblent, à bien des égards, n'être jamais autre chose . . . que des grands enfants.⁴³

Marivaux further illustrates the long-term, male notion that women can't be acknowledged as thinking adults in a remark made by Madame Sorbin and its response from one of her friends. "Vraiment, c'est de la friandise qu'on donne à ces enfants." The response: "Friandise, dont il y a plus de six mille ans que nous vivons."⁴⁴

The women, rebuffed but hardly dejected, regroup indignantly. They determine to join forces under the

leadership of Arthenice and Madame Sorbin. In a notice of emancipation, they declare their independence and their intentions to live apart from the men. This plan is upsetting, to say the least, to Lina, Madame Sorbin's daughter. For she is in love with a young man, Persinet, whom she desires to marry. At the mention of this wish, Madame Sorbin severely rebukes her daughter and forbids her her love for Persinet, declaring, "Non, ma fille, nous sommes dans une occurrence où l'amour n'est plus qu'un sot."⁴⁵ She lambasts marriage in general as a state of subjugation of women. "Et le mariage, tel qu'il a été jusqu'ici, n'est plus aussi qu'une pure servitude que nous abolissons, ma belle enfant; . . ."⁴⁶

One wonders whether Madame Sorbin reflects Marivaux's own attitude toward marriage. It would be helpful to this study to probe Marivaux's personal views concerning the conjugal state.

Kathy Luthi purports that in spite of the legerity with which eighteenth-century society viewed marriage, Marivaux regarded it very seriously.⁴⁷ His was an era of marriages of convenience, arranged by parents to enhance the family's wealth and social prestige. Such marriages were usually loveless; Marivaux must have observed not only the void of true sentiment between such husbands and wives, but the predictable infidelity of the marriage partners. Says

Marivaux in La Voiture embourbée: "Le siècle est corrompu; la plus noble passion aujourd'hui n'est qu'une bagatelle."⁴⁸

Concerned about the corruption of such an honorable institution, Marivaux took a stance against arranged marriages. He believed, rather, that marriage should be a union of love and he felt that dignity could be restored to the wedded state if unions could be based on mutual love and respect. He ended many of his comedies with happy marriages of this nature.⁴⁹ (However, one wonders if Marivaux would have arranged a marriage for this daughter if he had had the means.)

Luthi also suggests that Marivaux looks to women to uphold the virtue of marital fidelity which uplifts the marriage state. Marivaux witnessed the ease with which women of high society so quickly cast away old lovers and encouraged new liaisons. Many of them experienced the inconvenience of being held more accountable for sexual promiscuity than men. Arthenice represents these women of elite society when she calls for equal accountability of men and women in matters of love.

. . . toute infidélité deshonne une femme; je veux que l'homme soit traité de même.⁵⁰

Madame Sorbin quickly retorts:

Non, cela ne vaut rien, et je l'empêche . . . l'homme n'est pas de notre force, je compatis à sa faiblesse, le monde lui a mis la bride sur le cou en fait de fidélité et je la lui laisse, il ne saurait aller autrement . . . plus nous serons honorables, plus on connaîtra la grandeur de notre vertu.⁵¹

Madame Sorbin is of the opinion that marital infidelity when practiced by men is an indication of their natural weakness just as marital fidelity when exercised by women is a sign of feminine superiority. Madame Sorbin prefers the double standard as she considers it to her advantage.

Which viewpoint reflects Marivaux's personal feeling on the matter? Does he advocate equal accountability for sexual misconduct or does he admonish women to uphold the virtue of marital fidelity in spite of the failure of many husbands to do so? Luthi suggests that Marivaux looks to women to uphold the virtue of the conjugal fidelity. According to her, Marivaux holds women accountable for the relaxation of moral values which began under Louis XIV and which worsened during the Regency. This contention, however, seems to contradict the implication made by Marivaux in l'Ile de la raison that since men are the stronger sex and thus better suited to withstand the "fouges de passion," they should be primarily responsible for the maintenance of high moral standards.

Luthi supports her claim however, in citing the following excerpt from Marivaux's Le Spectateur français in which Marivaux says of women: "C'est d'elles que l'amour reçoit ses moeurs; il devient ce qu'elles le font."⁵²

A solution to the problem may be found in the premise that Marivaux felt that idealistically, men, being of a stronger constitution, are better suited to withstand passion's impulses than women, but due to their lack of restraint in this regard, the burden to uphold virtue falls on women's shoulders. Once again, Marivaux's idealism is set in opposition to his sense of reality.

In addition to the issues of love and marriage, Marivaux, in La Colonie, addresses an element of the controversy referred to as "la querelle des femmes." One of the points of contention in "la querelle," concerned the level of women's intelligence which was assumed by some to be inferior to that of men. Marivaux addresses this question in the appeal by Arthenice to her feminine supporters: "Dans l'arrangement des affaires, il est décidé que nous n'avons pas le sens commun."⁵³ For Marivaux, however, "le bons sens est de tout sexe."⁵⁴ Presumably, Arthenice is speaking for Marivaux when she refutes the claim, insisting that men undermine the intelligence of woman because they fear it. Consequently, they channel her energy and creativity into nonthreatening household activities.

Venons à l'esprit, et voyez combien le nôtre a paru redoutable à nos tyrans; jugez-en par les précautions qu'ils ont prises pour l'étouffer, pour nous empêcher d'en faire usage; c'est à filer, c'est à la quenouille, c'est à l'économie de leur maison, c'est au miserable tracas d'un ménage, enfin c'est à faire des noeuds qui ces messieurs nous condamnent.⁵⁵

Without the benefit of the education provided to many men, it is a wonder that women could manifest their intelligence of mind to the extent that they did. The education that women of society did receive was acquired in convents where the desire "to please" was ever instilled in young girls. This desire to please developed into an attitude of submission towards the husband chosen for a girl by her parents in an arranged marriage. Although the manipulation of a pliable and docile young woman was convenient to family purposes, the development of a compelling desire in her to please authority figures was a disservice to the young woman, for it constricted her self image to one viewed first and foremost as relative to the man, the epitome of authority of the age. Rousseau promoted this idea a few years later in Emile: "Toute l'education des femmes doit être relative aux hommes."⁵⁶

This cultivated eagerness to be pleasing to men, visually and otherwise, promoted vanity and coquetry in women who were encouraged by men to spend countless hours on grooming because it served the twofold purpose of appealing to men's notion that women are objects designed for their pleasure and at the same time occupied women's time which kept them out of the so-called masculine affairs of business and government. "Nous avez-vous laissé d'autre ressource

que le misérable emploi de vous plaire?",⁵⁷ cry some women in La Colonie.

Marivaux understands this basis for coquetry, and he views "amour-propre" as a sometimes necessary means of self defense against an overrated attitude of submission. Nevertheless, he admonishes women for their flagrant coquetry and for their vanity. But if he is quick to admonish them, he is also quick to forgive them for, "si la coquetterie des femmes est un défaut, qui doit-on accuser sinon les hommes?"⁵⁸ As one of the women in La Colonie exclaims in response to accusations of coquettishness: "Est-ce notre faute? Nous n'avons que cela à faire."⁵⁹

Arthenice rebels at the thought that she exists to please men. She suggests that the women on the island do all they can to make themselves physically unattractive to men, an idea that is, interestingly enough, quickly rejected by the other women. Their indignation, however, is not so easily squelched. Marivaux gives magnificent expression to the anger felt by many women whose talents have not been developed and whose intelligence has been ignored due to restrictions imposed by a patriarchal society. He speaks on their behalf in Arthenice's following eloquent discourse:

Quand je songe à tout le génie, toute la sagacité, toute l'intelligence que chacune de nous y met en se jouant, et que nous ne pouvons mettre que là, cela est immense; il y entre plus de profondeur d'esprit qu'il n'en faudrait pour gouverner deux mondes⁶⁰ comme le nôtre, et tant d'esprit est en pure perte.

She goes on to chastise men for their failure to govern wisely, citing their primary weakness as a refusal to recognize and incorporate the feminine faculties of intelligence, namely, intuition and imagination:

Monsieur, . . . il n'y a point de nation qui ne se plaigne des défauts de son gouvernement; d'où viennent-ils, ces défauts? C'est que notre esprit manque à la terre dans l'institution de ses lois, c'est que vous ne faites rien de la moitié de l'esprit humain que nous avons et que nous employez jamais que la vôtre, qui est la plus faible.⁶¹

The women claim that with practice they could function in various legislative and judicial functions. They would be fine lawyers. Hermocrate sarcastically replies: "Vous n'y songez pas, la gravité de la magistrature et la décence du barreau ne s'accorderaient jamais avec un bonnet carré sur une cornette."⁶² This retort brings to mind Luthi's words in reference to, ". . . des faibles qui cherchent leur revanche dans la moquerie et l'ironie."⁶³ Arthenice, in reply to Hermocrate, argues that women have a gift for articulation in speech, a point which would be readily confirmed by salon frequenters of the era.

Regardless of the eloquence of their appeals, the women see the demise of their liberation movement. Hermocrate is able to play on the personality flaws of the two women resulting in their project's undoing. His appeal to Arthenice's pride and Madame Sorbin's sensitivity to her lower-class status drives a wedge of class consciousness between the two leaders.

. . . mais à vous parler franchement, le caractère de Madame Sorbin, qui va partager avec vous le pouvoir de faire les lois, nous a d'abord arrêtés, non qu'on ne la croie femme de mérite à sa façon, mais la petitesse de sa condition, qui ne va pas ordinairement sans rusticité, disent-ils. . . .⁶⁴

Hermocrate's statement strikes the intended nerve. Madame Sorbin calls for a new government void of class distinctions and social privilege: ". . . il y en a un qui me déplait, et que je retranche, c'est la gentilhommerie, je la casse pour ôter les petites conditions; plus de cette baliverne-là."⁶⁵

Class distinction, rearing its ugly head, is too much for the women to ignore.

As a final blow, Hermocrate invents a story that the colony is about to be attacked by savages. This sends the women reeling on their heels to the protection of their homes, leaving the men to do the fighting. They forget their feminist aspirations, at least for the moment, and forgive their men as reflected in Madame Sorbin's comment to her husband: "Viens, mon mari, je te pardonne; va te battre, je vais à notre ménage."⁶⁶

The failure of their misadventure can not be blamed entirely on the men's sexist attitudes, however. As Peter Conroy points out in Marivaux's Feminist Polemic, Arthenice and Madame Sorbin defeated their own purpose by giving way to their own egos and hunger for power. They fall prey to

these vices to an equal extent as the men whose corrupt and selfish dictates have oppressed them for so long.⁶⁷

The play ends abruptly leaving the audience's feminist advocates with mouths agape in astonishment. Why did Marivaux, when he was building such a fine case on behalf of women's rights, allow it to fall so suddenly apart? Seeds of doubt as to Marivaux's pro-feminist stance are planted. Indeed, Oscar Haac in Marivaux and the Honnête Homme claims that Marivaux's profeminist stance is marginal at best. He claims that, "La Colonie is more of a burlesque of equal rights than a plea for them."⁶⁸ He also claims that because many of the women's demands addressed in the play have been realized and surpassed, that the play is outdated. He contends that Marivaux considered women as members of the weaker sex who are unable to govern as well as the men upon whom they depended. He describes most of the women of the play as silly and even absurd. He concludes, "We can see how far Marivaux stands from women's liberation,"⁶⁹

Susan Baker Read disagrees with Haac. She argues that Haac's judgement overstates Marivaux' intentions. Such a judgement, she says, insinuates that La Colonie contradicts the pro-feminist attitudes taken by Marivaux in his other works: "For the sincerity of Marivaux's admiration and empathy for women, as expressed not only in his theatre, but in his novels and moral writings as well, is beyond dispute."⁷⁰

She does admit that there is a conservative side to Marivaux which she contends is represented in *Hermocrate*. It is *Hermocrate*, the self-styled philosopher, who manages to bring out the underlying class conflicts which undermine the women's solidarity in La Colonie. Read concedes that if one probes this play, one will discover that Marivaux's feminism is not of a radical nature. The women do not seek to overthrow the established system but desire to be allowed to take part in its reformation. Their wishes are far from being realized when the play abruptly ends.

Although the ending seems unfulfilling and far from satisfying, if one has paid close attention, he remembers that some of the men were moved to tears by the women's plight and their supplications for reform. Herein, according to Read, lies the key to the search for a meaningful ending. For Marivaux prefers social reform, based on understanding and mutual cooperation to drastic change of the status quo. He is consistent in this preference as the endings for the two other island plays, previously discussed in this text will confirm. In l'Ile des escalves, in l'Ile de la raison, as well as in La Colonie, Marivaux hopes to establish social reform through mutual respect and benevolence. Baker quotes V.P. Brady, drama critic, to define the essence of Marivaux's sentimental feminism.

The kind of feminism revealed by Marivaux in his philosophical writings is not manifested by a strictly rational support of women's rights in the social and political sphere, it is not the conviction of a "philosophe" regarding the equality of the sexes, but the sympathy, kindness and benevolence of a sensitive human being towards the weak and unprotected.⁷¹

An understanding of Marivaux's brusque and disappointing ending is enhanced by the insight offered by Peter Conroy in "Marivaux's Feminist Polemic: La Colonie." Conroy views the ending as a "traditional comic finale, voluntarily illogical."⁷² It is the expected ending, possibly the only acceptable one to the audience of Marivaux's day and age. Says Conroy:

Such an ending, then, would not betray Marivaux's feminist sympathies. Rather, it would be a wink of complicity to the perspicacious. This is unreal, impossible, Marivaux would be saying; but this is what the genre demands, and therefore it is how I must end the comedy. Or it is what the audience⁷³ demands or the social prejudices of the time require.

Indeed, Marivaux may have learned from the negative reception of La Nouvelle Colonie that there are limits to an audience's willingness to accept seemingly radical ideas.

In conclusion, the views of Roman Zylawy express the light in which Marivaux would probably have wished to be viewed. Zylawy concludes in "Marivaux's Feminism in La Colonie":

. . . let us not dismiss Marivaux too lightly as regards his stand in favor of woman. The very fact of having raised some very just questions behind a satirical camouflage indicates that our author sincerely believed woman's fate to be open for much needed improvement. . . With time, he felt, some of⁷⁴ his ideas would possibly fall on more fertile soil.

Marivaux, a man ahead of his times, predicts the eventual progress of the women's movement through the words of Arthenice: "Et quand même nous ne réussirions, nos petites filles réussiront."⁷⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. Paul Gazagne, Marivaux par lui-même, Ecrivains de toujours Series (Bourges: Editions de Seuil, 1954), p. 39.
2. Peter V. Conroy, "Marivaux's Feminist Polemic: La Colonie," Eighteenth Century Life, 6 (October 1963), p. 54.
3. Ibid.
4. Oeuvres Complètes, cited by Kathy Luthi, Les Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux (Bienne: Les Editions du Chandaliier, 1943), p. 17.
5. Oscar A. Haac, Marivaux (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), p. 130.
6. Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 33.
7. Ibid., p. 17.
8. Ibid., p. 34.
9. Ibid., p. 54.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 33.
12. Haac, Marivaux, p. 16.
13. Kenneth N. McKee, The Theatre of Marivaux (New York: New York University Press, 1966, p. 7.
14. Haac, Marivaux, p. 17.
15. Gazagne, Marivaux par lui-même, p. 39.
16. Conroy, "Marivaux's Feminist Polemic: La Colonie," p. 54.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Marcel Arland, ed., Théâtre Complet (Bruges: L'Imprimerie Sainte-Catherine, 1955), p. 430.
20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p. 429.
22. Ibid., p. 432.
23. Gazagne, Marivaux par lui-même, p. 76.
24. Le Figaro, cited by Kenneth N. McKee, The Theatre of Marivaux, p. 85.
25. Haac, Marivaux, p. 21.
26. McKee, Theatre of Marivaux, p. 83.
27. Arland, Théâtre Complet, p. 497.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 529.
30. Ibid.
31. McKee, Theatre of Marivaux, p. 93.
32. Correspondance littéraire, cited by Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 23.
33. Arland, Théâtre Complet, p. 504.
34. Ibid.
35. Haac, Marivaux, p. 63.
36. Arland, Théâtre Complet, 518.
37. Ibid., p. 545.
38. Gazagne, Marivaux par lui-même, p. 142.
39. Arland, Théâtre Complet, pp. 642-643.
40. Ibid., p. 645.
41. Ibid., p. 647.
42. Ibid., p. 653.
43. Emile, cited by Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 147.
44. Arland, Théâtre Complet, p. 655.

45. Ibid., p. 649.
46. Ibid.
47. Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre of Marivaux, p. 139.
48. La Voiture embourbée, cited by Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 206.
49. Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 140.
50. Arland, Théâtre Complet, p. 670.
51. Ibid.
52. Le Spectateur français, cited by Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 139.
53. Arland, Théâtre Complet, p. 653.
54. La Vie de Marianne, cited by Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 147.
55. Arland, Théâtre Complet, p. 655.
56. Emile, cited by Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 133.
57. Le Cabinet du Philosophe, cited by Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 140.
58. Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 140.
59. Arland, Théâtre Complet, p. 655.
60. Ibid., p. 656.
61. Ibid., p. 663.
62. Ibid.
63. Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 14.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., p. 671.
67. Conroy, Marivaux's Feminist Polemic, p. 62.

68. Oscar A. Haac, "Marivaux and the Honnête Homme," Romanic Review, 50 (December 1959), p. 624.
69. Ibid., p. 114.
70. Susan Baker Read, "Sentimental Feminism in Marivaux's La Colonie," In To Hold a Mirror to Nature: Dramatic Images and Reflections, ed. Karelisa Hartigan (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), p. 3.
71. Ibid., p. 8-9.
72. Conroy, "Marivaux's Feminist Polemic," p. 56.
73. Ibid.
74. Roman Zylawy, "Marivaux's Feminism in La Colonie," of Pacific Northwest Conference on Foreign Languages (Corvallis, Oregon: n.p., 1974), p. 211.
75. Arland, Théâtre Complet, p. 643.

CHAPTER III

LA VIE DE MARIANNE

Ill-fated Heroines

The heroines of eighteenth-century French fiction seem destined to a common fate. They are required to live lives of innocence and purity or to die in reparation for their failure to do so.¹

L'Abbé Provost's Manon Lescaut is one such case in point. She was torn by societal dictates which insisted on purity yet materially rewarded promiscuity. Her death, which had no apparent physical cause, somehow served as retribution for having chosen a promiscuous lifestyle in lieu of a "virtuous" one.

For Roxane, a concubine in Montesquieu's Lettres persanes, the death of her master and lover, Usbek, foreshadows her own. She too sees only one solution to her dilemma of facing life without her lover, which to her would be a life without purpose. Consequently, she commits suicide.

Whether Manon and Roxane die out of a sense of duty or loss, their sacrifice is made to the male and to his code of moral accountability.²

There exist in eighteenth-century French literature, however, a few heroines who refuse to follow the male dictates of acceptable conduct. Suzanne Simonin of Diderot's La Religieuse, and of particular interest to this study, Marianne of Marivaux's La Vie de Marianne, are two such individuals. Both find themselves entangled in circumstances which threaten to destroy them physically, materially and morally. Since the subject of this study is Marivaux, primary focus will be placed on his heroine, Marianne.

Marianne's Story

As the sole survivor of an attack of bandits on a coach, Marianne, who is orphaned as a result, is taken in by a country priest and his kind sister. The couple raise her through her adolescence at which time they both die leaving Marianne stranded alone in Paris, too young and inexperienced to be self sufficient. She turns to a distant friend of her deceased aunt, Father Saint-Vincent, for help. He, in turn, unwittingly places her in the clutches of a wealthy hypocrite, Monsieur de Climal. Attracted by Marianne's youthful beauty and portly demeanor, Monsieur de Climal lends himself willingly to be her "protector." Hoping to seduce her, he lavishes her with presents and attention. After some time, he suggests that Marianne move to a country residence where he could see her regularly. Marianne,

although quick to paint herself as an ingénue, has no difficulty in understanding that such a move will ruin her reputation and threaten her future. She decides to break off her relationship with Monsieur de Climal. So she returns to Father Saint-Vincent in the hope that he can provide her with the support she needs to end the relationship. Unable to convince the priest of Monsieur de Climal's debauchery, Marianne seeks solace in a chapel where her sobs are heard by Madame de Miran, quite coincidentally, Monsieur de Climal's sister. Moved with pity for Marianne and being of a generous nature, Madame de Miran arranges for Marianne's care in a convent. Madame de Miran in a sense becomes Marianne's mother substitute. With daughterly trust, Marianne reveals to Madame de Miran, that she is in love with her son, Valville. (Another coincidence which doesn't bother Marivoux in the slightest.) Marianne, realizing that as a penniless orphan she has no right to aspire to marriage to a member of such a wealthy and prestigious family, expresses her willingness to renounce Valville's love for the sake of the family name. Her display of unselfish virtue wins for Marianne, Madame de Miran's love and devotion, in addition to her blessing on the young couple. On learning of the impending marriage of Valville to Marianne, a penniless orphan, family members have Marianne abducted and restrained in another convent. A family council is convened with the sole object of confronting Marianne with her

presupposed aspirations and ridding the family of her. Her gift of articulation, however, proves a victorious defense. She renounces all claim to Valville's love thereby disarming her accusers. She vigorously rejects the proposal that she marry simple Villot, an unknown, to appease the family. Ultimately she protects her freedom.

Though the obstacles to the couple's marriage are removed, Marivaux chooses not to satisfy their love but to aggravate it still further. When Valville proves unfaithful, Marianne retreats to a convent to reflect on the prospect of renouncing the world in taking the veil. (It is the rejection of worldly matters, essentially characteristic of convents that agitates Marivaux. Most young women of good society were educated in convents where the prevailing attitude was one of repudiation of the very society these young women would be called upon to function within.) At the convent, Marianne hears an account which ultimately determines her decision of whether or not to become a nun.

Subplot to La Vie de Marianne--Tervire's story

At this point in the novel, Marivaux interrupted his story about Marianne, or rather fused it with that of Tervire, whose own sad, life story serves as a warning to Marianne to consider her decision to join a religious order very carefully. The reader notices that Marivaux's tone changes in this miniplot. The action is rapid and

emotional; the long reflexions disappear. At the time of the writing of this portion of the novel in 1734, Marivaux's only child, Colombe-Prospère, at the age of thirteen, was also considering entering a convent. Though upset at the prospect, Marivaux was hardly in a position to prevent its taking place. Due to the financial ruin he experienced under John Law's system of financial speculation, Marivaux was faced with the extremely painful realization that he did not have the means to arrange a suitable marriage for her. Marivaux's preoccupation with this dilemma is revealed through Tervire's story, particularly in her description of convent life.

Tervire's childhood was marked by a void in the relationships with people who are usually very significant in children's lives. Her father, who was disowned for marrying her mother, died prematurely, hiding Tervire's existence from her grandfather and leaving her to her mother's care which can only be described as indifferent bordering on negligent. Tervire's mother remarries, moves to Paris, leaving Tervire in the hands of neighboring farmers. The neglect characterizing the formative years of Tervire's upbringing creates in her what today might be referred to as a negative self-image. Translated into terminology used in reference to Marivaux's eighteenth-century novel, one would say that Tervire lacked "amour-propre." Unlike Marianne who

thrives under a healthy sense of self love, Tervire is lacking it to the point of self-effacement.³

Enter Madame Saint-Hermières on the scene. A "fausse dévôte," she occupies herself with religion like other people take up a hobby. Her primary motivation is the enhancement of her own prestige. As a means to this end, she is intent in fashioning Tervire into a saint and thereafter receiving the credit for her "creation." She has no trouble filling the void of motherly love which exists in Tervire's heart. The wealthy widow seduces Tervire with pleasant little soirées, where a circle of pious devotees lavish her with affection and attention. "Ma prédestinée, . . . que la piété d'une fille comme vous est un touchant spectacle! Je ne saurais vous regarder sans louer Dieu, sans me sentir excitée à l'aimer."⁴ Tervire's undeveloped ego is too immature to perceive the selfish and self-seeking motives behind the religious club's attention. She can not resist their flattery and is willing to become what they would have her become. The trap to entice Tervire into the convent has been set. The attraction becomes even stronger when she is very warmly received by the sisters of the convent that it is intended for Tervire to join.

On ne saurait croire combien l'amitié d'une religieuse est attrayante, combien elle engage une fille qui n'a rien vu, et qui n'a nulle expérience. On aime alors cette religieuse autrement qu'on n'aimerait une amie du monde; c'est une espèce de passion que l'attachement innocent qu'on prend pour elle; et il est sûr que l'habit que nous portons, et qu'on ne voit qu'à nous,

que la physionomie reposée qu'il nous donne, contribuent à cela, aussi bien que cet air de paix qui semble répandu dans nos maisons, et qui les fait imaginer comme un asile doux et tranquille. . . .

Marivaux is suggesting in the above passage that the feminine friendships formed between women in a convent were distorted; however, he does not go as far to infer that they were perverse as Diderot does in La Religieuse.

The convent, according to Janet Whatley in Nun's Stories: Marivaux and Diderot, had threefold charm: an appeal to vanity, the warmth of friendship, and the safety of retreat. The convent, she maintains, encouraged adolescent infatuations to motivate one of the most critical decisions of one's future in favor of taking the veil. The aspects of the nuns' outward appearance alone were enticing. The habit appealed to the childish desire to dress up. Even though the nun's outward appearance which was one of "la physionomie reposée," seemed calming, according to Marivaux it more aptly reflected the bearer's lack of any practical social experience, and the narrowness of a life limited to rote exercises of piety evidenced by a dull facial expression which was mistaken for one which reflected peace.⁶

Although the convent itself seemed like a place of refuge and tranquility, Marivaux viewed it disdainfully as a place of escape from life's responsibilities. Kathy Luthi points out that young eighteenth-century women of good society were almost always educated in convents. However,

this education did little to prepare women for their role in society.

L'éducation que les religieuses donnent à la femme ne saurait ni développer ses aptitudes, ni la préparer à ses devoirs d'épouse et de mère. Elle acquiert même dans ces maisons un esprit de frivolité qui la détourne d'eux.

This point of view is affirmed by Janet Whatley:

The nuns, protected from the harassments and solicitations of husbands and children, and from all the burdens of freedom, are utterly available for the delights of a friendship which is evoked in its infantile simplicity by 'la douceur des petits noms qu'elles⁸ me donnaient, et par leurs grâces simples et dévotes!

Tervire is saved from her fate of a "prédestinée" by the honesty of one young nun who is struggling to maintain a semblance of balance in the gushing convent atmosphere. According to Tervire, this nun is "la seule qui ne m'eut point donné de petits noms, et qui se contentait de m'appeler mademoiselle,"⁹

The essential ingredient missing in the devotional aspect of the convent, she confides to Tervire, is God Himself.

Dieu me parassait si aimable . . . j'allais le servir dans un paix si deliceuse. Hélas! mademoiselle, quelle enfance! Je ne me donnais pas à Dieu, ce n'était point lui que je cherchais dans cette maison; je ne voulais que m'assurer la douceur d'être toujours¹⁰ chérie de ces bonnes filles et de les chérir moi-même.

Suddenly Tervire sees her situation in respect to Madame de Saint-Hermières for what it really is--the willingness on Tervire's part to trade her personal control

over her own destiny for the warmth of approval and acceptance from those who she is too eager to please and too apt to trust.

This issue of women's right to maintain individual freedom is of paramount importance to Marivaux and manifested throughout the novel.

Tervire's story continues to the point where she finds and befriends her mother in Paris. Then the novel abruptly ends with the unfinished account of her destitute and repentant mother's death. The reader knows that Tervire eventually became a nun because it was in this state that she related her story. The reader also knows that Marianne recounts her life story as a wealthy dowager. Apparently for Marivaux, the novel had served its purpose at the point where he chose to end it. It is said that Marivaux disliked obvious endings. Perhaps he grew bored with the novel. In choosing to end it so abruptly, however, Marivaux is making a stylistic statement, that is, he is lifting the traditionally heavy emphasis on plot.

Marianne's Virtue--Sincere or Self-Serving?

The story of Marianne's search for her parentage is recounted years after it takes place, by Marianne herself, and from her own feminine point of view. It is apparent that her status has risen in the world, for she relates her story as a countess though other circumstances of her actual

situation are not provided. It is known that she is relating the story to a dear friend who Marianne seems intent on convincing of her virtuous conduct in the affair.

A close analysis might reveal, however, that Marianne falls short of being selfless and in reality is closer to being self-serving. Oscar Haac takes this point of view in his study titled Marivaux. He suggests that although Marianne portrays herself as a beautiful soul who weeps from tenderness or despair, she also weeps because it suits her purposes, in her prettiest dresses and in manner to attract attention. Though she depicts herself as a defenseless ingénue, she refrained from discouraging Monsieur de Climal's attentions and gifts until she saw that the relationship would threaten her reputation and consequently her future. Having broken off her relationship with Monsieur de Climal, she kept the dress he provided and wore it to impress a wealthy church congregation one member of which was Valville. Marianne's self-serving attitude can also be exposed, according to Haac, in her renouncement of Valville's love when confronted with the supposed reality that a man of Valville's social position could never marry a penniless orphan. Her renouncement of any claim to his love would presumably be with Valville's best interest in mind and an act of selflessness on Marianne's part. Yet Haac maintains that Marianne, as the intelligent young woman she is depicted to be, would have realized that any endeavor to

win Valville would have been futile. She was no match against the opposition of his wealthy and influential family. The only logical recourse for her was to renounce her love for him and in so doing win the favor of Valville's mother. Marianne is indeed amply rewarded for her, "so-called" sacrifice. She receives not only Madame de Miran's devotion but her material support as well.

Kathy Luthi claims that Marianne is the most complicated of Marivaux's heroines.¹¹ Haac affirms her claim, maintaining, that it is almost impossible to disentangle Marianne's motives.¹² Both assertions serve as further support for the premise that Marivaux's characters are a blend of the virtue and vice typical of real people.

Haac's perception of Marianne's self-serving motives echoes La Rochefoucauld's cynicism toward human nature in general which is illustrated in the following statement: "Even our loftiest aspirations are steeped in our ego!"¹³

Marivaux's heroines have egos which are saturated with self-love, that is, "l'amour-propre." Although self-love can be harmful if overindulged, Marivaux maintains that it can have a positive influence if tempered by reason. Not only does "l'amour-propre" give Marianne a sense of her own uniqueness, it enhances her personal charm as well. She delights in the beauty of her own emotions. This account for the novel's profusion of exclamations, sighs, blushes and transports of joy. In addition, her self-love allows

her to stand apart from her own experiences and to rise above them. It serves, as well, as a defense which serves to protect her own interests. Most importantly, it frees her from a self-identity that is defined by others, whether those others be women or men. This is the most crucial advantage of "l'amour-propre," for it allows her to define herself in her own terms and to ultimately take control of her own destiny.¹⁴

Though she is independent, Marianne, is by her own admission, the eternal coquette. She remains delightfully feminine. "Je menacais déjà d'être furieusement femme. Un ruban de mon goût, ou un habit galant, quand j'en rencontrais, m'arrêtait tout court, je n'étais plus de sang-froid."¹⁵

La Vie de Marianne as a Reflection of Lay Morality

The positive attitude of Marivaux's heroines towards themselves is closely tied to the belief in the beauty of sentiment. Marivaux, as a transitional writer, bridged the age of reason with the age of sensibility.

Reason and sentimentalism, the two great forces of Eighteenth-Century philosophical thought, appear side by side in this society. They are not yet in conflict because the former is dominant. There is as yet no conscious revolt against the rule of reason; sentiment is accorded only a supplementary value to the individual and to society.¹⁶

The beauty of sentiment does not minimize the power of reason but seeks to compliment it and coexist with it. The

blending of these two elements is apparent in the philosophy prescribed by Marivaux and known as a lay morality.

Lay morality as defined by Daniel Mornet, is a way of life, "which seeks its guiding principle not in renunciation and asceticism but in the pursuit of delicate pleasures, in a wise and generous organization of personal happiness."¹⁷ The primary goal of those who adhere to this belief is the acquisition of real and immediate happiness.¹⁸

Having taken root in the Renaissance, this philosophy flourished in the early years of the eighteenth century. The essential principle was not antireligious, but it refused to allow religion to prevent worldly people from actualizing their pleasures and plans. Lay morality exalted reason, "le bon sens," which was regarded as a natural attribute shared by all.¹⁹

When Cartesianism established the premise that nothing should be accepted without being proved, it dealt a harsh blow to the authoritarianism of Christian dogma.²⁰ Reason came to be regarded by the philosophers as a more dependable guide than ecclesiastical law. Pierre Bayle in Les Pensées sur la Comète de 1680 examined the relationship between religion and morality, and concluded that there are atheists who have lived more honorably than certain religious Christians.

Montesquieu, in his turn, referred to a universal spirit of justice which existed before the establishment of organized religion.²¹

Once reason is recognized as a natural guide to human conduct, it can be concluded that man, exercising reason, is basically and naturally good. Thus human instincts and passions are not inherently evil as proclaimed by the Church, but rather a source of happiness if tempered by reason. Happiness lies not in denying natural inclinations but in giving way to them under reason's wise counsel.²²

The concept of lay morality was promoted by Madame de Lambert and the frequenters of her salon, Marivaux included.²³ He personified the basic tenant of lay morality in La Vie de Marianne, through his portrayal of Marianne's personality as well as in the distinguished personalities of Madame de Miran and Madame de Dorsin.

Other Female Characters

Marianne, in spite of her elevated position as a single heroine around whom Marivaux concentrates his powers of analysis and reflection, is not the only woman portrayed in the novel who merits the author's recognition and commands our attention. La Vie de Marianne represents Marivaux's indirect tribute to his maganimous mentors, Madame de Lambert, whose salon Marivaux frequented, and

Madame de Tencin, who rallied forces to procure Marivaux's election to the French Academy.

In the novel Madame de Lambert is portrayed as the fictitious Madame de Miran. She is characterized primarily as "une femme de sentiment," sensitive, caring and blessed with a nature unmarked by selfishness. Madame de Tencin, on the other hand, portrayed as Madame de Dorsin, is depicted as "une femme d'esprit." She is not only charming, witty and kind; her most outstanding characteristic happens to be her intelligence.

"Le sentiment" of Madame de Miran complements "le bons sens" de Madame de Dorsin, further illustrating the transitional nature of Marivaux's novel from the age of reason to the age of sentimentalism.

Marivaux does not only laud Madame de Tencin and Madame de Lambert, but he describes with affection and esteem the excellence inherent in the type of individual who frequented their salons. Marivaux's novels are essentially reflections of salon society because it was in the salons that Marivaux chose to observe the feminine nature. Indeed, Marivaux focused his attention primarily on the women of the French upper social strata who were responsible for the feminist movement of the era. The language of Marivaux's characters was often that of the salons.

In the following passage from La Vie de Marianne, Madame de Miran (Madame de Lambert) prepares Marianne for

her first social encounter in Madame de Dorsin's (Madame de Tencin) salon.

I am going to introduce you child . . . into the most choice and valuable company; they are all persons of wit and good sense; I won't direct you how to behave; I can carry you to no place where you will be less in danger of criticism on this account; for these²⁴ persons ridicule nothing but what is really ridiculous.

Marianne, through Marivaux's eyes, discovers the wit and vibrancy of those persons of distinction.

I heard them say many excellent things; but their address and manner enabled me to form a right judgement of them: they delivered themselves in a natural and familiar way without the least mixture of art or stiffness; and their conversation was as free and easy as if they had been discoursing on the most familiar subjects. They had a delicacy of sentiment which appeared unacquired, and entirely natural to them. They did not seem to think they spoke better than others, they had only greater minds, and by that means they discoursed more elegantly and more to the purpose. Here was nothing like an ambition of shining, though they shone in all they said. Such a conversation so excellent, so delicate, though so simple and natural, could not²⁵ fail of charming me and striking me with admiration.

Although the published authors of the eighteenth century were almost exclusively men, it is women who were recognized by Marivaux and by others as well, as master craftsmen of the spoken language. They knew how to manipulate a conversation, so as to manipulate the interlocutor. They can say many things with a smile. Through subtle changes of facial expression, they can encourage, disarm or devastate. The women Marivaux so graciously acknowledges know how to say both yes and no in glance. They can skillfully encourage a suitor without promising him anything.

Marianne characteristically spoke in the refined salon language referred to by some as "ce charmant bavardage de la femme de VXIIIe siècle,"²⁶ and by others as "prolixes . . . typical of the terms in which women are considered."²⁷

Does Marianne reflect the "bavardage" attributed to women of the era or is she Marivaux's "porte-parole" representing his own penchant for reflection and analysis? The technique employed by Marivaux for in-depth analysis and reflection confined to a single heroine, in his own words, was an overwhelming endeavor. "An exact portrait as I promised you is an endless task."²⁸ Marivaux spent seven years composing the first three parts of the novel; yet they describe only three days in Marianne's life. Marivaux began the novel in 1728 and completed it in 1741. He portrayed seven weeks in Parts IV and V, two days in Part VIII, and in the last three parts Marianne listens to Tervire's story which could be told in a few days.²⁹ Larroumet, a celebrated nineteenth-century French critic, is of the opinion that because Marivaux was writing from the viewpoint of a female narrator, he was compelled to use a verbose conversational style which during the eighteenth century was considered to be uniquely characteristic of the female of the species.

Mais ce style, assez alerte et rapide dans le Paysan parvenu est souvent babillard et trainant dans la La Vie de Marianne. Il semble ici que Marivaux, parce qu'il faut faire parler une femme, se croie obligé de reproduire, non seulement les qualités, mais aussi les défauts de la

conversation feminine. Il trouvait, paraît-il que le style a un sexe.

If Larroumet is correct, Marivaux believed women to be characteristically longwinded!

He criticized the verbosity of Marianne's detailed analysis of numerous topics. It seems to Larroumet that she is continually airing her opinion on every subject which presents itself.

. . . en effet, on dirait que la Vie de Marianne est l'oeuvre d'une femme emportée et comme étourdie par sa propre parole; c'est le décousu, la confusion d'idées, les brusques tours et détours habituels en pareil cas. Ce ramage d'oiseau fatigue. . . .³⁰

Larroumet elaborates further:

En tirant la philosophie de toutes choses, Marianne veut trop montrer qu'elle comprend et devine tout, qu'elle n'est dupe de rien; l'air de sagacité qu'elle affecte irrite, comme toute affectation; elle fait trop parade de cette pénétration toujours éveil, et comme elle parle à la première personne, son "moi" devient haïssable.³¹

The novel borders on pedanterie declares Larroumet due to the fact that Marivaux wrote actual dialogue for Marianne rather than describing her thoughts as was done traditionally.

Mais c'est justement parce que Marianne parle que ces réflexions sont parfois trop nombreuses et déplaisantes de ton; en elles-mêmes, on les trouve agréables et justes; c'est leur profusion et leur légère pedanterie qui sont ennuyeuses.³²

The novel's major weakness then, according to Larroumet, lies in its constant and unrelenting analysis which ways heavy on the reader.

Le défaut de ce genre de roman est ailleurs; défaut assez grave, il faut le reconnaître. Tant que les sentiments des personnages et les phases de l'action ne sortent pas de la région moyenne des passions sans orages, nous marchons volontiers au pas du narrateur, si lent qu'il soit; . . . l'impatience nous prend: . . .³³ alors nous voudrions plus d'action et moins d'analyse.

Research confirms that Larroumet was hardly the only critic of Marivaux's ideas or of his wordy style.

In his own day, Marivaux was attacked by critics such as Voltaire, who attempted to demean Marivaux's sensibility through sarcasm; Geoffroy, who deplored Marivaux's influence on young writers; Faguet, who condemned his dramatic style as leading to "marivaudage;" and Lièvre, who accused Marivaux of concealing infamous traits in his elegant style.³⁴

Although Marivaux's style was characteristically untraditional, and indeed in regard to La Vie de Marianne could be described as verbose, it nevertheless suited Marivaux's personality in terms of his love of conversation, and offered then, as it does now, a refreshing change from accepted style.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ruth P. Thomas, ". . . et je puis dire que je suis mon ouvrage: Female Survivors in the Eighteenth-Century French Novel," The French Review 60 (October 1986), p. 7.
2. Ibid.
3. Janet Whatley, "Nuns' Stories: Marivaux and Diderot," Diderot Studies 20 (1981), p. 301.
4. La Vie de Marianne, cited by Janet Whatley, "Nuns' Stories: Marivaux and Diderot," p. 302.
5. Ibid., p. 303.
6. Whatley, "Nuns' Stories," p. 303.
7. Kathy Luthi, Les Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux (Bienne: Les Editions du Chandaliier, 1943), p. 17.
8. Whatley, "Nuns' Stories," p. 304.
9. La Vie de Marianne, cited by Whatley, "Nuns' Stories," p. 304.
10. Ibid., p. 303.
11. Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 101.
12. Oscar A. Haac, Marivaux (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), p. 71.
13. Ibid., p. 74
14. Thomas, "Female Survivors in the Eighteenth-Century French Novel," p. 7.
15. La Vie de Marianne, cited by Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 102.
16. Ruth K. Jamieson, Marivaux, A Study in Sensibility (New York: Octagon Books), p. 16.
17. Origines intellectuelles de la révolution française, cited by Jamieson, Marivaux, A Study in Sensibility, p. 18.

18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Lettres persanes, cited by Jamieson, Marivaux, A Study in Sensibility, p. 19.
22. Jamieson, Marivaux, A Study in Sensibility, p. 19.
23. Ibid.
24. Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux, The Virtuous Orphan, trans. Mary Collyer (London: J. Robinson, 1743; reprint ed., New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), p. 83.
25. Ibid., p. 85.
26. Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 100.
27. Béatrice Didier, "Parole et féminité dans La Vie de Marianne." In Au Bonheur des mots. (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1984), p. 223.
28. La Vie de Marianne, cited by Haac, Marivaux, p. 69.
29. Haac, Marivaux, p. 69
30. Gustave Larroumet, Marivaux, sa vie et son oeuvre (Paris: Hachette, 1882), p. 341.
31. Ibid., p. 343.
32. Ibid., p. 342.
33. Ibid., pp. 337-338.
34. Kenneth N. McKee, The Theatre of Marivaux (New York: New York University Press, 1966), p. 261.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

It seems cruel and ironical that many of the great geniuses in the fields of art, literature and music, throughout the ages, did not experience in their own lifetimes the renown that is attributed to them by the generations which followed them. Instead, many of them spent a good deal of time answering critics, involving themselves in petty rivalries and struggling for financial subsistence. Although Marivaux did receive some popular acclaim and was elected to the French Academy, he essentially outlived his fame and died a poor man.¹ Like other famous authors, he was vexed by the flagrant criticism of his contemporaries. According to Kathy Luthi, too often the criticism was not justified: "Ses contemporains au contraire n'ont fait que critiquer sa subtilité, et, tout au long de sa carrière littéraire, ils tournaient ses qualités mêmes en défauts."²

Foremost among his critics was Voltaire who with characteristic sarcasm mocked Marivaux's penchant for depicting the subtle nuances of love: "Il a connu tous les sentiers du coeur sans trouver la grande route."³ On another occasion Voltaire concluded that Marivaux, ". . . passait sa vie à peser des riens dans des balances de toiles d'araignée!"⁴

Marivaux's plays were not always well received and in fact were sometimes failures when staged. Their lack of success had a basis in the failure of the actors themselves to appreciate and/or to understand Marivaux's style which they consequently had a tendency to misinterpret. In addition, it has been suggested that Marivaux's style was unsuited to the declamation of the French actors of his day.⁵ The fact that the tradition of Molière was still strong during Marivaux's formative years as a writer was also an impediment to the success of Marivaux's drama. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, many of Marivaux's innovations were largely ignored by the critics of this day.⁶

Not least among the criticisms of Marivaux's style is one which associates him with the term "marivaudage," frequently used in a pejorative sense to refer to the "précieux" and affected phraseology and exaggerated analysis of sentiment. Research suggests that "marivaudage" is less descriptive of Marivaux's style than of that of his imitators. McKee states:

When Marivaux uses a precious figure of speech reminiscent of the seventeenth-century novel, when he pursues love into hitherto unexplored regions of the heart, when he dwells on subtle nuances of feeling, or when he enters the realm of elfin gaiety, he does so with complete mastery and without affectation. Yet when his successors during a good part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries imitate these same artifices, they drift into the silly verbiage and clumsy hyperbole known as "marivaudage."⁷

McKee feels that these imitators have tended to associate their own faults with Marivaux and have thereby cast disrepute on his name; upon close examination of his style, one realizes that Marivaux was realistically portraying the "powdered elegance and beribboned grace" of eighteenth-century drawing rooms.⁸

Paul Gazagne is even more emphatic in his wish to sever the tie which binds Marivaux to the "marivaudage" label: "Le marivaudage," he declares, "est une fois de plus, le grand responsable de la trahison constante dont au théâtre Marivaux est l'objet."⁹ He maintains that if the critics who labeled Marivaux as the "father of marivaudage" would have penetrated Marivaux's mind, they wouldn't have made such a mistake. He substantiates his opinion by pointing out that an essential ingredient lacking in "marivaudage" is sensuality. Marivaux's works, in contrast, are full of sensuality. Whereas "marivaudage" is superficial, the profound thought, characteristic of Marivaux, pervades his works. Gazagne maintains that the critics who defined his style in the term "marivaudage," didn't look beyond the coquettishness of Marivaux's characters to perceive what Marivaux was really saying. Just as Marivaux's characters often intend something different than what they say, Marivaux's intent differs from the surface presentation of his characters.¹⁰

Now that revivals of Marivaux's plays are more and more popular, critics are more readily defending the author from the negative connotation that springs from the term "marivaudage."

In addition, critics are finding new qualities in his writing.¹¹ Among these is the discovery of a rhythmic beauty apparent in the elocution of the spoken lines on the stage, as well as a musical quality in Marivaux's prose that has previously gone unnoticed.¹²

It is not only Marivaux's form that twentieth-century critics admire, however; research indicates that the innovative ideas which make up the content of his plays and novels are substantial. Collectively, these ideas comprise a philosophy of moral analysis which Marivaux was bold enough to present in a straightforward manner. Although he cloaked his ideas in lighthearted humor, he avoided the satire and caricature which were common techniques used by his contemporaries to present their lessons to society. Marivaux had ideas concerning the responsibility of a monarch towards his subjects at a time when the theory of the divine right of kings was still accepted in France and when the Regency displayed little regard for the welfare of the people. These ideas were later encompassed in the concept of the enlightened despot.¹³

Of primary interest to this study are Marivaux's ideas on equality. As a central theme in L'Ile des esclaves,

Marivaux tells us that equality springs from natural goodness. Social injustice is a malady that can be cured. Even though the women's aspirations toward equality remain unfulfilled in La Colonie, their bold attempt toward its realization and even its expression is courageous in eighteenth-century terms. In L'Ile de la raison, Marivaux stresses the importance of reason which predicts the Age of Enlightenment. It is Marivaux's attitudes such as these that place him generations ahead of this fellow dramatists, and are the basis for his popularity in the twentieth century.¹⁴

During past decades, appreciation for Marivaux's style and innovation has steadily increased. McKee feels that Marivaux is greatly appreciated in the twentieth century and explains why:

. . . today in the mid-twentieth century, he is hailed as one of the great classical writers of the French theatre, and many critics place him immediately after Corneille, Molière and Racine The secret of Marivaux's popularity in the twentieth century, like that of Shakespeare and Molière, rests on the simple fact that he faithfully depicted the society in which he lived and at the same time endowed his characters with universal and enduring truths of human nature.¹⁵

Referring to Marivaux's modern-day appeal, Oscar Haac states: "Marivaux speaks to us more pertinently and more clearly than to any generation since his own."¹⁶ Attesting to this belief is the fact that Marivaux's plays are currently produced more frequently on the French stage than any others besides those of Molière.¹⁷

The issues addressed by Marivaux which were considered radical in the eighteenth century, were issues which needed to be examined and which seem almost conservative today. One cannot help but applaud Marivaux's courage and to be touched by his concern for humanity. This humanitarianism constitutes Marivaux's ultimate contribution.

In addition, Marivaux has special appeal for many women today due to the positive light in which he portrayed women, and due also to his appreciation of their sensitivity. He gave credence to feminine sensibility to which he gave adept literary expression; he acknowledged women in an age where the hard logic of a patriarchal society was predominant. Truly, as Gazagne has so aptly put it, "Marivaux connaissait les femmes et les aimait."¹⁸

FOOTNOTES

1. John Lough, An Introduction to Eighteenth Century France (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1960), p. 236.
2. Kathy Luthi, Les Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux (Bienne: Les Editions du Chandaliier, 1943), p. 23.
3. Kenneth N. McKee, The Theater of Marivaux (New York: New York University Press, 1966), p. 256.
4. Correspondance littéraire, cited by Luthi, Femmes dans l'oeuvre de Marivaux, p. 23.
5. McKee, Theater of Marivaux, p. 7.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 261
8. Ibid.
9. Paul Gazagne, Marivaux par lui-même, Ecrivains de toujours Series (Bourges: Editions de Seuil, 1954), p. 83.
10. Ibid., p. 37.
11. McKee, Theatre of Marivaux, p. 261.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 259.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 267.
16. Oscar A. Haac, Marivaux (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), p. 18.
17. Ibid., p. 15.
18. Gazagne, Marivaux par lui-même, p.76.

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