

Madame de Villedieu's *Le Portefeuille*: Toward a New Esthetics of *La Coquette* and *La Prude*

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ABSTRACT

A popular and prolific writer at the time of Louis XIV, Mme de Villedieu wrote *Le Portefeuille* in 1674. In this short narrative told in ten letters, the female protagonists differ from the stereotyped mid-century images of coquette and prude that structure the conventional dichotomy of moral opposites – coquettish permissiveness and prudish abstinence. Exploiting an appearance of the inherited female roles, they place themselves in a position of control over their love lives. In essence, the narrative represents a condemnation of the esthetics of “fausse galanterie” and exposes the shallowness of an “art de vivre” based on the practice of pretence.

RÉSUMÉ

Bien connue à l'époque de Louis XIV pour sa production romanesque étendue, Mme de Villedieu a écrit *Le Portefeuille* en 1674. Dans cette *nouvelle* formée de dix lettres, l'auteur s'approprie des “types” de femme qui répondent à la classification établie par les moralistes du temps. Elles se présentent d'abord en rapports d'opposition: l'une coquette sans scrupule, l'autre d'apparence honnête et prude. Or, les personnages de femmes exploitent cette apparence de catégories morales pour se mettre en position de contrôler leurs liaisons amoureuses. Ce récit condamne l'esthétique de fausse galanterie en exposant l'égoïsme de cet “art de vivre” basé sur la duplicité.

J'estime la sincérité,
C'est de toutes les Loix la plus indispensable;
Mais souvent la félicité
Aurait quelqu'intérêt qu'on fût moins véritable.
Mme de Villedieu
LOIX D'AMOUR: “Solon”

Villedieu was “avec Madeleine de Scudéry justement, la seule femme pensionnée par Louis XIV” (1970, p. xiv). Madame Desjardins de Villedieu, who wrote for her living, was paid by the page by the publisher Barbin for her literary works.²

BEFORE COMMENCING THIS ANALYSIS OF THE transformations taking place in the representation of women in her short narrative *Le Portefeuille*, a brief note of introduction to Mme de Villedieu and her works would seem appropriate in order to understand the times and circumstances in which she wrote. Marie-Catherine Desjardins¹ was a well-known and popular author of the seventeenth century whose writings continued to be reedited throughout the eighteenth century. Playing a prominent role on the literary scene of France during the reign of Louis XIV, she was privileged in 1676 to receive a pension from the King. Micheline Cuénin observes that

The creative activities of this prolific writer comprise over ten volumes of works that include plays, poetry, letters and narrative fiction. One of her plays, *Le Favori*, was presented by Molière at the Palais-Royal with great success. It was the first play by a woman author to receive a command performance at the French court, where it was produced one year after the inauguration of Louis XIV's great show-place, Versailles (Gethner, p. 407). The many works by Madame de Villedieu reflect the social and literary life of women at that time. The concerns of women and the social constraints imposed on their lives and social behavior form part of the overarching narrative framing of her stories.

Recently, Mme de Villedieu's writings have generated considerable interest among modern critics, who find in her works "une image nouvelle de l'amour," a new "langage du coeur," "le premier dessin d'une esthétique du sentiment" (Pelous, p. 510). Antoine Adam offers the following view of her poetry: "Ses églogues et ses élégies s'efforcent d'exprimer avec force, et jusqu'à l'impudeur, des amours passionnés. [...] et si l'on songe à quel point les moeurs de l'époque interdisaient aux femmes un aveu qui les déshonorait, on comprendra le scandale que firent ses vers" (3, 174). In her *nouvelles*, Madame de Villedieu sets into place this new language to express a woman's feelings of love and transports of passion. The traditional courtly expressions, frequently reflecting a reserved, idealistic and passive behavior for women in aristocratic circles, are no longer legitimized.

Mme de Villedieu integrates this new language into an innovative category of fiction. Today's critics attribute to her the creation of a new genre, that of the *nouvelle galante*, of which *Le Portefeuille* is an example. First published in 1674 as part of a volume of diverse short writings entitled *Oeuvres mêlées* by Mme de Villedieu, this short narrative is considered by Cuénin to be "sans doute le chef-d'oeuvre de la romancière" (1979, p. 134).

This article proposes to examine the roles of the female protagonists who portray *la coquette* and *la prude* in Madame de Villedieu's short narrative *Le Portefeuille*, determining that the heroines' behavior and language in this *nouvelle galante* indeed point toward a significant modification of the usual representation of these seventeenth-century types. The love relations of the characters in the story set in motion the process of "educating" the principal male protagonist. This act of education incorporates the female protagonists' own message conveying resistance to a social order that considers women as objects to be exploited. At the same time, Mme de Villedieu appropriates the "Rules of Love" for *amants* as outlined by such contemporary authors as Sorel and Molière, and inscribes a woman's position that indicates adherence to values implying a positive mutual respect of the two sexes.

The coquette of the seventeenth century traditionally was considered in terms of her ability to please. Cuénin quotes the Abbé de Pure (1979, p. 581, note 90), who twenty years earlier than Mme de Villedieu's writing, defined the coquette in the following words:

La coquette [...] a l'art de contenter les coeurs et de ravir les esprits. Elle sait aimer et se faire aimer, allumer des flammes et puis s'en consumer [...] Elle aime d'une façon particulière et toute ravissante qui, outre les plaisirs du raffinement et des ragoûts de l'art, élève l'idée de l'amour et fait aimer tout autrement que les autres. (*La Précieuse*)

The Abbé de Pure thus offers an ideal of amorous behavior, as prescribed for a refined and generous coquette. In this definition the focus is placed on the pleasures of love occasioned by the coquette's skill in knowing how to love her companion, and how to cause herself to be loved. Sorel, writing *Les Loix de la galanterie* (1664), points out that the laws he has articulated emphasizing the importance of the lover's social appearance and conduct, are not appropriate for women, although not because of their lack of galantry. He explains his reason in a postscript: "Il ne faut pas que les Dames s'étonnent de ce qu'il a eu ici aucune ordonnance pour elles, puisque leur Galanterie est autre que celle des hommes, et s'appelle proprement Coquetterie, de laquelle il n'appartient qu'à elles de donner des règles" (p. 30).

It would appear that Mme de Villedieu took up this challenge when she wrote a collection of four pseudo-historical narratives entitled *Les Amours des grands hommes* (1671). Recounting the love adventures of famous men who lived in ancient times, she appropriated the image of the wise Solon. Villedieu claims that at the same time Solon wrote his famous civil laws, he wrote his/her "Loix d'Amour" for "qui veut aimer parfaitement." A major shift in the codes of behavior is set in place when she places the emphasis on the lover's consideration and respect for his mistress's feelings rather than the appearances of a dress code or social protocol. In Villedieu's *nouvelle galante*, sincerity is advocated as the most indispensable of the laws.

In her narrative *Le Portefeuille*, written thirty years after the publication of Sorel's laws, Mme de Villedieu seems to propose laws of gallantry for women, using the strategy of portraying a contemporary coquette in a negative manner. The characters themselves, through their discussions and performances, collectively contribute to the formulation of an evolving meaning and dimensions for gallantry. Offered as his or her personal experiences occur, their observations and reflections when grouped together could constitute Mme de Villedieu's "Loix de la coquetterie" as practiced by the noblewomen of the 1670's.

In order to understand the strategies involved that bring about the changes in the projected stereotypes of women, the following brief resumé of the plot is offered. Ten letters written by the Marquis de Naumanoir to his friend Monsieur le comte furnish the structure or schema for recounting the adventures in the *nouvelle*. The Marquis, who is on leave from military duty in Holland, wishes to entertain his provincial friend with an account of the events taking place during the social season in Paris: concerts, the opera, meetings at Saint-Cloud, dinner at Deschamps, marriages and so forth. The Marquis also reproduces for his absent friend the "conversation mondaine" that takes place in the aristocratic milieu he frequents. Thus the chronicle of Parisian social life from November 1673 to Easter 1674 is woven into the web of the imaginary love plot that unfolds in the series of letters. A sense of immediacy and contemporaneity is imparted to the story, emphasizing the present-day character of the personages. At the same time the reader follows the chronicle of the Marquis de Naumanoir's love affair, its vicissitudes and final degradation. The letters afford the opportunity for the Marquis to relive his love adventure in retrospect, remembering his happiness, apprehensions and self-admonishments. The first person singular used in the epistolary form imparts an intimacy to the Marquis' anger and anguish. The ten letters take the form of a dialogue with the absent confidant, and chart the progress in the gallant education of the Marquis de Naumanoir, as he is instructed in the fine art of deception by members of the elegant society that include *la prude* and *la coquette*.

A comparison of gallantry as perceived in the past and as expressed in contemporary society, provides the central theme of *Le Portefeuille* and produces the underlying tension of the plot. The motivations, resolutions, and declarations of four principal characters generate the action of the narrative and provide the context in which the female protagonists function.

In a Preface to the narrative, Jean-Paul Hamond offers the opinion that the characters in *Le Portefeuille*, without ever falling into caricature or abstraction, could be classified as *la coquette*, *la prude*, *l'honnête homme*, and *l'homme galant*, types resembling those frequently portrayed in the literature of the period (p. xii). The Marquis de Naumanoir is the *honnête homme* who falls in love with the prude, Mme de Vareville, a widow. Mme de Vareville, recovering from a love affair with the Marquis' close friend, the gallant Chevalier de Virlai, offers the Marquis her friendship instead of the love he desires. Mme de Montferrier is the coquette, courted by each of the male protagonists at one time or other in the narrative.

The female protagonists, at first view, seem to offer the stereotyped mid-century images of coquette and prude that structure the conventional dichotomy of moral opposites – coquettish permissiveness and prudish abstinence; but eventually their actions transcend the boundaries that these stereotypes impose on erotic relations between the sexes. Naumanoir is first attracted by Mme de Vareville's appearance of moderation, sincerity and honesty. Her false appearance of prudery deceives him. He eventually discovers that she is indeed just as dissimulating and cunning as the others. She plays the role of a retiring widow uninterested in offering him love, but she subsequently uses the naive Marquis to influence her former lover Virlai to return to her arms, all the while mocking Naumanoir's behavior. Naumanoir finally comprehends her sham, accusing her of dissembling "une sincérité exemplaire" (Letter VII). Her actions represent a refinement in the art of deception.

Mme de Montferrier, in her role of a coquette, seems in opposition to the apparently prudish Mme de Vareville. Mme de Montferrier, in Naumanoir's

words, "fait profession ouverte de coquetterie." According to the Marquis, Mme de Montferrier values her reputation as a beautiful woman: "la coquette qu'elle est n'agit jamais que par ce motif: ce n'est ni par amour ni par compassion qu'elle fait et qu'elle souffre des amants, c'est seulement pour voir sa beauté plus vantée que celle d'une autre" (Letter II). The coquette exploits her femininity and her lover's feelings of jealousy to win him back; her mincing ways send an open message to all who are present. To incite Naumanoir's return to her, she makes the supreme gesture of offering herself in marriage; "Mets un prix au retour de ta confiance et je l'achèterai de tout ce que tu voudras" (Letter II).

Both female protagonists exploit appearances, motivated by feelings of vanity, jealousy and self-love; they purposefully project false impressions of love to achieve their ends; the prudish Mme de Varenville feigns sincerity; the coquette Mme de Montferrier, tenderness. Mme de Montferrier, however, is motivated by sensuality and vanity rather than love. She takes pride in her success in attracting multiple lovers. Cuénin expresses the view that in *Le Portefeuille* coquetry is exploited as: "*une fausse monnaie en amour pour laquelle Villedieu est sévère*" (1979, p. 571). Mme de Villedieu's condemnation of this behavior surfaces in an extraordinary statement on the part of the chevalier de Virvai who complains loudly to the Marquis of this lack of sincerity on the part of women:

Point de quartier pour les coquettes, poursuivit-il, on ne saurait trop sévèrement les punir de leurs trahisons. Je leur pardonnerais si elles devenaient inconstantes de bonne foi, on n'est pas toujours maître des caprices de son cœur, et il ne faut sur cela s'en prendre qu'aux astres; mais que, sans amour pour personne, ces trompeuses-là fassent des entreprises sur les cœurs de tout le monde, c'est ce qui ne peut être trop rigoureusement puni. (Letter IV).

The Chevalier Virvai thus censors the lack of sincerity displayed in the amorous manipulations by the female protagonists, although such strategies are practiced by the male characters to achieve success in their affairs.

In *Le Portefeuille*, Mme de Villedieu's all-important semes of sincerity and tenderness are expressed in her guidelines for social behavior. Her negative portrayal of a contemporary coquettish behavior evidenced in the actions and decisions taken by both male and female characters reinforces her authorial condemnation of the pervading superficiality and falseness of the social mores. In fact, the negative form of the verb occurs with relentless frequency, and serves to intensify the portrayal of this dark side of human experiences. Laws and rules are not clearly formulated or observed in this narrative, nor is the lesson to be learned prominently displayed, as frequently occurs in her other narratives as in *Les Désordres de l'amour*: "Que l'amour est le ressort de toutes les autres passions de l'âme." On the contrary, in *Le Portefeuille*, each character contributes to the educational process as it evolves in the story. For example, during one discussion the Chevalier de Varenville, a minor character who has also been victimized by the coquette Mme de Montferrier, blames women for the current predicament and resulting conduct of contemporary cavaliers:

La bonne foi est devenue un vice auprès des dames, qu'elles mesurent leurs conquêtes par le nombre de victimes qu'on leur sacrifie et que, pour en obtenir des préférences et triompher de tous ses rivaux, il n'est plus question d'être le plus sincère; il faut seulement être le plus habile en l'art de tromper (Letter VI).

The narrative *Le Portefeuille* appears to portray the consequences of an affair in which caprices are no longer involuntary, sincerity is lacking and "éclat" is a desirable reaction for a lover. The reverse side of the laws of gallantry that designate guidelines of mutual respect and sincerity for "qui veut aimer parfaitement" in the Villedieu's *nouvelle galante* "Solon" is represented in *Le Portefeuille*: "l'art de tromper."

The final letter, X, brings to a conclusion the episodes of the Parisian adventure. Naumanoir has withdrawn to the country, having found it impossible to put into practice his ideals of *honnêteté* that are scorned by his friends. His observations of rural

customs have served to supplement and complete his Parisian *éducation sentimentale*.

To communicate his provincial experiences to his friend the Count, he chooses the device of *une petite historiette*, entitled "La Galanterie sans éclat," that he includes in his last letter. In this brief tale the role of the widow, Mme d'Albimont, functions to illustrate Naumanoir's culminating lesson that articulates the supreme refinement in the art of deception.

Mme d'Albimont's virtuous behavior was considered to be exemplary. She used prudence in all her actions and activities. Her simple and modest appearance reflected an impression of coolness, austerity and severity. Husbands advised their wives, mothers would counsel their daughters: "Etudiez et imitez bien Madame d'Albimont."

The widow's excessively strict example of a prude, and consequently "l'ennemie de l'amour," occasioned the despair of the principal male protagonist, the Marquis d'Altevois, who found her illustrious example an obstacle to his love for Mlle de Saint-Ormin. He formulated a project to render the widow's example a little less authoritative; in fact, the success of his venture far exceeded his expectations.

The Marquis disseminated throughout the land false love letters and notes of gallantry purportedly written to Mme d'Albimont. One fell into the hands of a friend, Coursivaux, a sincere man who confessed to the Marquis d'Altevaux that he had been carrying on an intrigue with Mme d'Albimont since before her widowhood. He loved her ardently but they had never married because they enjoyed the "plaisir du secret de leur aventure." Additional love letters found uncover the fact that "notre fine veuve" deceived not only her husband when he was alive, and the public, but also her lover: "elle a une intrigue de coeur et sa sévérité n'est qu'une fausse apparence dont elle cache ses véritables galanteries." Such an exemplary woman, whose severe appearance protected a reputation of prudery no one dared to tarnish, was in fact an example of contemporary gallantry: "elle se ménageait tout ce que la fine galanterie a de plus agréable et de plus ragoûtant."

In this story, "La Galanterie sans éclat," the principal female protagonist projects the art of dissimulation to the heights of refinement. Cuénin suggests that the hypocrite Mme d'Albimont is "la maîtresse du genre": "Experte en plaisirs de toute nature, elle s'offre à la fois ceux de la réputation, de la clandestinité et des amours multiples" (1979, p. 623). Finely capitalizing on her image of virtue and honorable chastity, she tricks everyone in order to achieve her own satisfactions. Her character differs from that of the widow Mme de Vareville in the principal story, in that no weakness nor feelings of love motivate her acts. Mme d'Albimont never acts out of generosity, whereas the one factor that redeems the profound immorality of the characters in *Le Portefeuille*, in Bruce Morrissette's view, "is that they are capable of friendship and forgiveness" (p. 137). The opposing roles of false prude and coquette that are essential to the central plot of *Le Portefeuille* do not function in "La Galanterie sans éclat." The full focus and force of the narrative are placed on the character of Mme d'Albimont who, unlike the coquette Mme de Montferrier, has no desire for "éclat" in her gallant relationships. On the contrary, her role portrays "la galanterie secrète" in which the female protagonist turns to her advantage the severe *bienséance* prescribing the proper behavior necessary to maintain her reputation of an honorable widow.

In essence, the narrative *Le Portefeuille* represents a condemnation of the esthetics of this "fausse galanterie," and exposes the shallowness of an *art de vivre* that is based on the practice of pretense. In this story, gallantry designates a common liaison in which feelings of sincerity and good faith displayed for a mistress or lover are conspicuously absent. Naumanoir is witnessing a decadence that has invaded the worldly ideal of *l'art de vivre*. In Cuénin's words, "le substantif [galanterie] s'engage irréversiblement dans une voie étroite et sombre, désertée par l'esprit" (1979, p. 392). Sarcasms, not the witty repartee of courtly conversations, are prevalent in the discussions that are reproduced in the text. Cuénin offers this further observation concerning the lessons exemplified in the narrative: "*Le Portefeuille*, malgré l'apparence, ne contrevient pas à la règle: le fin persiflage de l'inconstance, l'étendue de ravages,

la tranquille bonne conscience de ceux qui la pratiquent n'en instruisent que plus sévèrement le procès" (1979, p. 487). The characters all impart to the meaning of sincerity a degree of pretense and shallowness.

It soon becomes evident in the story that Mme de Villedieu's narrative tactics involve a manipulation of stereotyped roles. On the one hand, the two prudes and the coquette in the story offer a traditional solution to social and/or sexual exploitation of women; they tend to exert some control over their own choices and bodies. On the other hand, there is little differentiation between the images of the prude and the coquette in the story; they no longer signify moral opposites. The three female protagonists Mme de Vareville, Mme de Montferrier, and Mme d'Albimont represent, in their differences, a form of coquetry that makes a mockery of marriages grounded in social position, and of the virtue of fidelity so dear to husbands, and promoted in the conventional seventeenth century female protagonist.

The traditional attributes of silence and passivity allocated to the female character in stories of this period also deviate from the norm in *Le Portefeuille*. Opposing the conceptualization of a female/object with its sexual implications, the character of the widow Mme d'Albimont in the *historiette* manipulates the passive image of a prude, as a device to project an adjusted representation of the stereotyped coquette. These tactics produce a different image of a coquette, that of a character who exploits an appearance of silence and passivity. In so doing, Mme d'Albimont places herself in a position to initiate her amorous endeavors for the purpose of eventually savoring the fruits of mystery. This innovative image of coquetry, far from being condemned in the *nouvelle galante* as violating acceptable patterns of behavior prescribed for females, is instead held up as exemplary by the Marquis who tells the story, because Mme d'Albimont perpetrates the proper image of a prude: she is discreet. He prominently displays the following lesson to be learned from her example at the beginning of his *historiette*:

La réputation de grande vertu est de soi une chose très désirable; mais on l'achèterait trop cher, si elle coutait une renonciation sincère à la galanterie. Il faut ménager l'une et l'autre, et tâcher d'accommoder une intrigue secrète avec les apparences qui lui sont contraires (Letter X).

At the end of the tale, the widow's reputation of virtue and restraint is apparently preserved. The *historiette* thus effects a narrative closure that advocates a return to the control of *les bienséances*, although with an important shift in meaning: Mme d'Albimont savors the secrecy of being in a position of control, not only in her private sexual life, but also in her projected public image.

In *Le Portefeuille*, as in many of Mme de Villedieu's *nouvelles galantes*, the performance of the female protagonist imparts a sense of cohesion to the plot by representing a gradually evolving notion of gallantry. The male "loix de la galanterie" such as those prescribing the proper dress code for men (Sorel, *Les Loix de la galanterie*), or the proper place to meet one's mistress (Molière, *Les Précieuses ridicules*) have been appropriated and incorporated into Mme de Villedieu's narratives with a distinct shift in message. The Villedieu/Solon laws emphasize a respect for the mistress' choices in matters of love. In Mme de Villedieu's *Récit en prose et en vers de La Farce des Précieuses*, she composes her own version of the rules of gallantry as expressed in Molière's play to dignify rather than mock the social conduct of the ladies. The laws and rules discussed and exemplified in *Le Portefeuille* produce another important shift to an emphasis on "la liberté de dire qu'on aime" on the part of the female characters, rather than the emphasis on the socially esteemed importance of appearances as prescribed by Sorel and Molière. The emphasis on love is conducive to an elaboration of the heroine's point of view and thus to the expression in this narrative – as well as in Villedieu's other stories – of distinctly feminine concerns. For example, in a note written to the Chevalier de Virlai, Mme de Montferrier openly reveals her concerns of the moment: "Je ne veux point de votre estime: il faut à ma tendresse quelque chose de plus fort, et vous ne sauriez croire combien on offense une femme quand

elle demande de l'amour et qu'on ne lui donne que l'amitié" (Letter I). In *Le Portefeuille* as well as in other *nouvelles galantes* by Mme de Villedieu, the heroines assume a position of control over the love relationships in their lives.

Through the integration of men's and women's viewpoints in *Le Portefeuille*, it would appear that a new semiotic system is being set in place that includes the formulation of a language other than that of elliptical silences to represent the expression of the emotional and physical transports of women in love. The feminine feelings revealed and reproduced in the letters that form this *nouvelle galante* contrast vividly with the formal stilted eloquence of the sonnet written by Naumanoir who uses a stylish pseudonym to address his mistress: "Iris, je ne suis point de ces amants jaloux/Qui, voulant raffiner sur la délicatesse/S'érigent en tyran du coeur d'une maîtresse."

The role of the female protagonists in this story incorporates into the dynamics of the narrative a challenge to the masculinity of the hero. Mme de Villedieu positions male protagonists who are not heroes and who do not always succeed in their amorous endeavors. The "heroes" in her stories are often portrayed in more realistic, life-sized dimensions than the exemplary heroes represented in many contemporary tales. A rationale for devising a non-hero is offered in the dedicatory letter of one of her narratives entitled *Cléonice*: "Accommodez s'il vous plaît, vos idées au vraisemblable." In articulating this viewpoint, the author insinuates the possibility of a lack of superiority into the notions of prowess inscribed in the image of the "galant homme." The role of the principal male character Naumanoir does not project any superiority in his amorous abilities or defensive skills. In an "Apostille" to the ten letters he has addressed to his friend, he makes the following concluding observation: "j'ai regardé le malheur d'être trahi des dames comme un mal commun qui se soulage par le nombre de gens qu'on y voit avoir part."

Indeed, one finds in *Le Portefeuille* an intriguing plurality of characters provided as objects for the erotic gaze. A standard love plot of the mid-

seventeenth century is usually based on two male protagonists who are rivals for the female protagonist's love. In an article entitled "Looking Like a Woman: The Female Gaze in Sappho and Lafayette," Joan DeJean discusses the triangulation of desire in the following terms:

In [René] Girard's theory, male desire is never original, but is inspired by the desire of a male rival [...]. The gaze has been forbidden to women, but that does not mean they have not used it. It may be that readers have not been sensitive to Woman's invasion of "the dominant scopoc economy" because the female erotic gaze does not function according to the model that male representations have schooled us to expect (p. 34).

DeJean goes on to suggest that stories by female writers may contain a female variant or variants of the triangulation of desire (p. 35). A careful examination of Mme de Villedieu's *Le Portefeuille* does in fact indicate a deviation from a standard sequence of events that projects the female as the object of the hero's desire. In this narrative, the focus of desire is constantly shifting on the part of the four male and female protagonists to form new erotic patterns. The male is the object of multiple female gazes in a plot portraying three females who are "rivaless" for Virlai's attentions.

Another possible feminine perspective emerges that directly affects the role of the female protagonists. Many of Mme de Villedieu's *nouvelles galantes*, such as *Lisandre*, *Cléonice*, or *Anaxandre*, incorporate into the discourse of gallant love an ethics based on the consideration for the female protagonists' choices. On the other hand, the narrative examined in this analysis projects an image of a noble society that exploits the superficiality of a social system in which love adventures are considered to be both a commodity and a game by both male and female protagonists. With the absence of the sexes' tenderness and sincerity in the narrative sequence, the plot turns more on a thematics of indifference that mutes the characters' conception of love.

Of special import is the fact that Mme de Villedieu's heroines, who frequently function within

the freedom of imaginary lands and without the constraints of the order of reality in many of her *nouvelles galantes*, perform in *Le Portefeuille* without moral or sexual constraints during the winter social season of Paris in 1673. Upon entering into this structuring order of contemporary reality, the female protagonists as well as the male characters contribute, by their discursive analysis, to a general impression of mocking the existing practices of polite dissimulation that take place in upper echelons of the social hierarchy. Homand comments on the effects of this narrative strategy in the following words: "Le désenchantement, sinon le pessimisme qui transparait sous l'intrigue, une espèce de désillusion, de tristesse sans éclat seront l'impression dominante du *Portefeuille*" (p. viii). He perceives in this narrative the origins of an analytical technique that will have far-reaching effects:

Mme de Villedieu tente de décrire tous les états de la sensibilité; c'est ce que le XVIII^e siècle

appellera la "métaphysique du sentiment," attitude d'origine précieuse, née dans l'entourage de Mlle de Scudéry, tournée vers l'analyse: analyse du je-ne-sais-quoi, du presque rien, c'est-à-dire de l'essentiel, du romanesque, de la tristesse sans cause (p. viii).

Homand goes on to concur with Versini's viewpoint expressed in *Laclos et la tradition*, who justly saw in the character of Mme d'Albimont a probable prefiguration of the Marquise de Merteuil in the *Liaisons dangereuses* (p. xiii).

The literary importance of *Le Portefeuille* is emphasized by Morrissette in the following opinion: "Once again, Mlle Desjardins is seen in the role of precursor, this time of the gallant novel of the eighteenth century. Her theory was sound: to present in unadorned terms a picture of upper-class society as reflected in its love intrigues" (p. 138).

NOTES

1. VILLEDIEU (Marie-Catherine-Hortense Desjardins ou Des Jardins, Mme Antoine Boesset de), puis Mme Claude-Nicolas de Chaste. This is the listing for Mme de Villedieu as it appears in the Catalogue (210,35) of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Micheline Cuénin disputes the name Hortense: "Marie-Catherine et non Hortense. L'erreur vient de Beauchamps (*Recherches sur les théâtres de France*, 1735) et s'est propagé par les ouvrages d'Henri Chatenet et Emile Magne. Mme de Villedieu signe *Marie-Catherine* et est ainsi prénommée dans les pièces d'archives" (1,25, note 1).
2. Bernard Magné: "Barbin, qui n'avait pourtant rien d'un philanthrope, accepte de payer un manuscrit de Madame de Villedieu cent sols par page" (1, 94).

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