

Madame de Genlis: Creating a Model of Virtue

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ABSTRACT

In her novel *Adèle et Théodore* (1782), considered by her contemporaries to be, paradoxically, both too utopian and too worldly, writer/educator Genlis presents her system for raising young people to live virtuously in society. While the novel's main character, the mother/teacher Madame d'Almane, has been criticized as "overpoweringly prescriptive" in her upbringing of her daughter Adèle, there are important elements in her pedagogical system which foster the development of creativity. She makes Adèle a model of virtue by casting her in the strong role of teacher, accomplishing this by means of apprenticeships to techniques of representation: staging, reading, and writing. Each enables Adèle, like her mother, to "represent" virtue for her pupil – and for herself, to discover in the process that teaching is the model for living.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans son roman *Adèle et Théodore* (1782), considéré par ses contemporains comme, paradoxalement, trop utopique et en même temps trop mondain, l'écrivain/préceptrice Genlis présente un système pour préparer les jeunes gens à vivre d'une façon vertueuse dans le monde. Bien que le personnage principal du roman, la mère/gouvernante Madame d'Almane, ait été accusée par les critiques d'être excessivement autoritaire concernant l'éducation de sa fille Adèle, il y a d'importants éléments dans son système pédagogique qui insistent sur le développement de la créativité. Elle transforme Adèle en un modèle de vertu en lui faisant jouer le rôle de gouvernante, rôle pour et par lequel Adèle fait l'apprentissage de techniques de représentation: la mise en scène, la lecture, l'écriture. Grâce à ces apprentissages, Adèle pourra, comme sa mère, "représenter" la vertu pour son élève – et pour elle-même, découvrant au fur et à mesure que le rôle d'enseignant est un modèle pour la vie en société.

LONG ACCUSED OF HYPOCRISY BY CRITICS PREOCCUPIED with the apparent disparity between her worldly lifestyle and the morality she preached so prominently in her works, Stéphanie Félicité de Genlis has more recently been accused of displaying in her writings a didacticism devoid of creativity.¹ This article will examine Genlis's pedagogical novel *Adèle et Théodore*, arguing that there are considerations which warrant tempering that harsh opinion or which at least offer some clues as to the particular type of creativity which inspired Genlis's work.

The three-volume epistolary novel *Adèle et Théodore*, subtitled *Lettres sur l'éducation*, was published in early 1782 just as its author, already *gouvernante* of the daughters of the duc of Orléans for several years, was named *gouverneur* of his sons as well. She was a professional educator, and a fairly notorious one at that, since the designation of a woman as *gouverneur* to sons, let alone royal sons, was highly unconventional and created considerable stir – including speculation as to the role the *boudoir* may have played in her appointment. In addition, she

was already the author of works which demonstrated her interest in the moral education of young people, including a collection of plays, *Théâtre à l'usage des jeunes personnes* (1779), and a history book, *Les annales de la vertu, ou cours d'histoire à l'usage des jeunes personnes* (1781). With *Adèle et Théodore*, she cultivated yet another genre, presenting her system of education via fictional correspondences which recount the travels of the exemplary baronne d'Almane and her husband, a couple who leave Paris for a family estate in the Languedoc in order to devote themselves to the education of their son and daughter.

In a recent article, Malcolm Cook has described the work as long and tedious, with characters who are "irritatingly good and overpoweringly prescriptive" (p. 372). At the time of its publication, the novel enjoyed quite sensational success and was widely discussed. That it was accused of being both too utopian and too worldly may seem somewhat paradoxical, but is understandable, I propose, in terms of the author's objective, which was to imagine education for a

virtuous life in a world where education, especially for women, was so deficient. Whereas literary portrayals of educational deficiency by some of her contemporaries implied a rejection of life in society, Genlis instead offered in her novel a means for virtuous existence *in* society; while the baron and baronne d'Almane indeed remove their children from Paris for formative years of their education, the goal is to prepare them, through a careful upbringing, to return to Parisian society, where they will marry and live happily. Integration of worldly sophistication and ideal virtue was perhaps implausible, but Genlis used her fictional prerogatives to imagine total success and the ways in which it might be achieved.

Adèle et Théodore illustrates a one-on-one educational arrangement not unlike that in *Emile*, reported, as in Rousseau's work, by the tutor rather than the pupil. In Genlis's novel there are, in fact, several pupils and tutors;² however, as the baronne d'Almane writes more copiously than any of her counterparts, her education of her daughter Adèle is the most fully documented and will be the focus here.

At first glance, the mother's procedure seems to resemble closely that of the *gouverneur* Jean-Jacques in *Emile*; like him, she ingeniously stages events to teach her pupil various lessons. Reporting on an occasion in which Adèle had squandered her allowance on baubles only to find herself unable to help an unfortunate woman who asks for money to buy bread for her children, the baronne matter-of-factly explains to her correspondent that this lesson in spending and almsgiving is one of many expedient manipulations which she refers to as "expériences artificielles" (LXXXII, p. 1).

The comparison with Rousseau is instructive, for Rousseau had likewise shown Jean-Jacques staging the events of Emile's life, with what Suzanne Gearhart has called blatant theatricality (p. 277). Citing the incident where Emile learns about property rights by unwittingly planting a garden on someone else's land, Gearhart points out that Jean-Jacques prearranges, indeed scripts, the encounter with the gardener Robert. For Gearhart, the interest of this and other such episodes is that they show Rousseau

exploiting the discrepancy between reality and appearance to allow Emile's tutor to create an illusion just as would the director of a play – and this despite the fact that in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* Rousseau condemns as dangerous the theatrical illusion which causes spectators to confuse events on the stage with events in life. The spectator Emile, taken in by the illusion, "accepts the naturalness or reality of the events he witnesses, and manifests a complementary lack of curiosity as to what Jean-Jacques's function in his life is [...] his attention will be given to the 'represented' and not to the 'representing' element of his existence" (p. 279).

It is significant, however, that the baronne's practice actually comes to differ substantially from Jean-Jacques's in this regard, for *expériences artificielles* are, as she explains to a friend, discontinued in her upbringing of Adèle, and in her system the "representing" element will become as important as the "represented." This crucial feat is accomplished by the ingenious baronne when she adopts Hermine, an Italian orphan girl for whom Adèle will be the mother/teacher. While this is, of course, a staged event, it has the effect of producing a *mise-en-abîme* of staging in which Adèle becomes in her turn a "representer": the baronne is mother/teacher to Adèle who is mother/teacher to the adopted Hermine.

The baronne enunciates a central educational principle as she instructs her daughter in her new duties: "Ils se réduisent tous à ce seul point: 'De donner toujours l'exemple des vertus qu'on exige'" (C, p. 111). In order to set a consistently good example for Hermine, Adèle will have to overcome any faults or weaknesses. She must become a model of virtue.

Adèle's "modeling" for Hermine, however, will produce more than her perfect behavior; as she "acts perfect," she will learn not only perfection, but acting. In her excited but nervous anticipation of becoming Hermine's teacher, it is clear that she already perceives her new duties in theatrical terms, recognizing that she will indeed be playing a role: "Maman, vous lui direz qu'elle doit m'obéir, qu'elle doit m'appeler maman, car peut-être ne me croira-t-elle pas. Je suis fâchée d'être si petite pour mon âge; si vous me

permettez de porter des talons, je parie qu'elle me respecterait davantage" (C, p. 113). Her mother explains, however, that success in this role will be based on attitude and behavior, not on appearances: "Il est vrai que vous n'avez pas une figure bien imposante, mais de la raison, de l'application et de la douceur vous feront bien autant respecter que des talons" (C, p. 113). Furthermore, the baronne explains to a friend, as Adèle plans her *acts* in such a way as to win her pupil's respect and love, she will become more attentive, more perceptive, and more patient. The baronne knows from her own experience that in order to "act" effectively, the teacher has to be able to see the world through her pupil's eyes, thereby enriching, in a sense doubling, her own perception of the world.³ Madame d'Almane understands fully the importance of allowing her daughter to assume this role: "Adèle devient chaque jour plus raisonnable; Hermine contribue infiniment plus que moi à la former" (CII, p. 117).

Being a model of virtue is not "natural,"⁴ but theatrical, involving acting and staging. In contrast to Rousseau, for whom both theatrical and social role playing were of problematic value, Genlis lived and worked comfortably with the theatrical. Indeed, she wrote plays and was an actress in the *théâtres de société*. The actor's craft showed Rousseau that there was an uncomfortable discrepancy between reality and fictional appearances; it showed Genlis that there was an open boundary between reality and fiction which offered promising epistemological and ethical possibilities. Although Rousseau's role playing in his affair with Mme de Larnage allowed him the rare experience of feeling spontaneous and authentically "himself" while he pretended to be an English Jacobite, the fear of being unmasked made him uneasy and disinclined to cultivate further this means of self-revelation. Genlis, by contrast, cultivated fully the potential of scripting and playing roles. Her actress Adèle is not rendered morally suspect by her performance. In fact, for Genlis, the moral problem arises instead when the actor is *not* self-conscious, as illustrated by the regrets expressed by one of the baronne's correspondents: "c'est qu'on ne peut être à la fois acteur et spectateur; voilà pourquoi nous vivons quelquefois vingt ans dans le monde sans le

connaître: [...] nous y sommes aveugles" (CXVII, pp. 184-85). Adèle's education legitimizes self-conscious acting as virtuous.

The extent to which Adèle's education is based on the 'representing' element of existence is further evidenced by the fact that the apprenticeship to representation-through-acting taught by the adoption of Hermine is accompanied by an apprenticeship to representation-through-writing.

One part of this apprenticeship is the keeping of a diary. This is no casual enterprise, but a carefully conceived project. During the family's travels in Italy, the baronne and Adèle both write journals, which they compare each evening as training for Adèle: "Ma fille écrira de son côté et moi du mien, et tous les soirs elle me communiquera ses observations et ses réflexions, que je rectifierai par les miennes; comme nous écrivons sur le même sujet, et que je ne lui lirai jamais mon journal qu'après avoir vu le sien, cette manière doit former également son style, son jugement et son esprit" (XCI, p. 76). The process seems, of course, quite restrictive for Adèle, whose ideas as well as style will be 'corrected' by her mother. Indeed, a major criticism of the baronne's educational system has been such thoroughgoing regimentation of activity and thought. Nevertheless, the mother also makes demands on herself in her journal writing, insisting: "Je l'écrirai avec soin, puisqu'il doit servir de modèle" (XCI, p. 76). Furthermore, there is reason to believe that Adèle's diary is not transformed by this process into a carbon copy of her mother's. When the baronne makes fun of a few pages, Adèle wants to remove them from her diary, but the baronne won't allow it. Adèle's souvenir of her trip will be what she herself has written. The writing – the record of the learning process – is as important as the lesson learned – or perhaps, as we shall see, it *is* the lesson learned.

A second writing exercise involves collaboration on an epistolary novel. Each week the baronne gives Adèle one of forty letters she has composed for the novel, which features a correspondence between a young man from the provinces living in Paris and his sister back home. Having been influenced by bad

examples and dangerous books in Paris, the young man harbors many misconceptions. Adèle's task is to write the sister's letters of reply, combatting these false ideas in order to save the brother. This activity has been methodically prepared by the baronne, who herself surveyed a large number of works she considered dangerous in order to compile a list of false principles and inconsistencies from which to draw the young man's arguments. It is, in a sense, a restrictive activity like the diary, since when Adèle remits her letter, it will be compared to a letter of response already written by the baronne which will demonstrate for Adèle "comment vous auriez dû répondre" (CVI, pp. 132-33). And, the exercise is to be repeated; undertaken at age 14½, the original forty responses will take one year, then at age 16½, a second set of response letters will be generated, this time in a six month period since it is presumed that by then Adèle will write more easily. In this educational utopia, however, Adèle has no complaints; in fact, she is "enchantée." Moreover, the question of restrictiveness should not completely distract us from other considerations. The baronne knows exactly what she is trying to accomplish with Adèle by means of this activity: "Je l'armerai contre toutes les impressions dangereuses qu'on voudra lui donner par la suite; je la mettrai en état de raisonner sensément sur toutes sortes de sujets; je lui donnerai ce que les femmes possèdent si rarement, une excellente logique" (CVI, p. 133). Dealing with abstract arguments but in a concrete context, Adèle learns to deal with dangers she may one day face herself. Furthermore, the design of the lesson is noteworthy for its incorporation of the "acting" principle, in that its novelized form puts Adèle once again into the position of playing a teaching role. She will be teacher not only to the young man from the provinces, but also to herself – the self that her mother imagined in need of answers to potentially confounding arguments. Seeing her daughter in danger of playing an undesirable role, the baronne casts her in the strong role of teacher. The vehicle of this is writing; in both the journal-keeping and the letter-composing lessons, the baronne teaches her daughter not only *how* to write, but *to* write.

Certainly, as a teacher, she is the perfect model for Adèle, thereby ensuring that the daughter will

form a writing habit like her mother. As we have seen, the baronne has imposed on herself the same literary assignments she has given to Adèle. That writing is crucial to her virtuous lifestyle is indicated by her pervasive writing activity – her frequent long letters to her correspondents, and her work as an author of educational books for her children. As Louis Mink has pointed out, "our experience of life does not itself necessarily have the form of narrative except as we give it that form by making it the subject of stories" (p. 133). The baronne gives her life narrative form, setting up a reciprocal relationship between her life and her stories: as in the case of novel-writing with Adèle, she tells a story about a situation in order to figure out how to handle it; conversely, she handles situations so that she can tell the stories about them, and these stories function as her reward. In both cases, the stories help to guarantee virtue. Writing is the means by which she examines events and explores possible outcomes in her life. The stories she wrote for her children when they were younger feature a mother of great wisdom and confidence raising her children at a country estate while her husband is at war. Surely the baronne learned how to raise her own children partly from *imagining* how she would do so as she constructed these stories. As the baronne faces difficult challenges, including her husband's infidelity, she puts these into story form in order to deal with them; the emplotment of her life withstands the analogy to psychotherapy which Hayden White has suggested regarding the emplotment of history, in that her stories seek to detraumatize events which are problematic in the significance they have for her current life (p. 51). When she says of the works she has written for her children's education, "J'avais un besoin indispensable de ces ouvrages; ils n'existaient pas, je les ai faits," we can see that she needed them to model a virtuous life for herself as well as for her children. Writing is a teaching tool which allows the teacher to create new possibilities – not only in her pupil's life, but in her own.

A further and related component of Genlis's educational system is apprenticeship-to-representation through reading and theatre attendance. The baronne's "plan de lecture," carefully conceived to introduce Adèle to a wide range of literary works

according to a schedule which would take into account her stage of development and readiness for each work, brought some attacks from critics, however. The *Année littéraire* declared this a reading program “que les mères chrétiennes se garderont bien de suivre quoiqu’on y trouve la Bible, l’Imitation, Bourdaloue, Massillon, etc. Tout cela est perdu dans une foule de Théâtres et de Romans, qui semblables à de mauvaises herbes, étouffent entièrement le bon grain” (p. 432). Not only is piety offended by many of the books read, but those books of piety included in the reading program will be found insipid by a young woman who has been exposed to *La Princesse de Clèves* and *Cleveland!* Especially derided, moreover, were the writing exercises occasioned by the reading: “C’est après lui avoir fait lire à 13 ans, *La Princesse de Clèves*, *Zaïde*, *Cleveland*, *Le Doyen de Killerine*, *Les Anecdotes de la Cour de Philippe-Auguste*; qu’elle lui donne, à 14 ans, à réfuter le livre de *L’Esprit*, *l’Homme Machine*, *le Système de la Nature*, etc.” (p. 432).⁵ The critic assures us that even with her mother’s help, such an assignment could not be completed, since women’s inherent traits pose limitations: “Les Dames, nous dit-on, ont beaucoup de délicatesse, de finesse: cela est vrai; mais cette délicatesse même, et cette finesse, les empêchent d’avoir une certaine tenue quand il s’agit de raisonnements un peu sérieux” (p. 433). Theatre, where “l’âme est attaquée par tous les sens,” is an even more dangerous proposition, as the critic tries to illustrate by composing a *lettre supposée* wherein he portrays Adèle, after she has attended a performance of *Phèdre*, struggling to resist the sentimental seduction of the play. The baronne, he laments, is oblivious to such risks; in fact, he points out incredulously – although for us it is just one more reminder of the importance the baronne attributes to writing – if Adèle had enough talent, her mother would even encourage her to *become* a dramatic author.

With its inclusion of many and diverse works of literature in the *plan de lecture*, Genlis’s educational system, so often considered sterilely prescriptive, in fact capitalized on the creativity of the interaction between reading and writing. In a modern perspective on that relationship, Jerome Bruner has pointed out that “stories of literary merit are [...] about events in

a ‘real’ world, but they fill [that world] with gaps that call upon the reader, in Barthes’s sense, to become a writer, a composer of a virtual text in response to the actual. In the end, it is the reader who must write for himself what *he* intends to do with the actual text” (p. 24). Like Barthes, Bruner believes that “the writer’s greatest gift to a reader is to help him become a writer” (p. 37). Adèle, we have seen, is helped to become a writer – indeed, a literal as well as a virtual one – as she is encouraged to turn not only the texts of the authors she reads, but her own life and the culture she lives in, into her own text.⁶

Some light is perhaps shed on the baronne’s teaching process by Bruner’s description of an empirical study he conducted to explore Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development as exploited in the tutoring process:

[The tutor], by slow and often dramatized presentation, demonstrated the task to be possible. She was the one with a monopoly on foresight [...]. She set things up in such a way that the child could *recognize* a solution and perform it later even though the child could neither do it on his own nor follow the solution when it was simply *told* to him. In this respect, she made capital out of the “zone” that exists between what people can recognize or comprehend when present before them, and what they can generate on their own – and that is the Zone of Proximal Development. [...] She made things such that the child could do *with* her what he plainly could not do *without* her. And as the tutoring proceeded, the child took over from her parts of the task that he was not able to do at first but, with mastery, became consciously able to do under his own control. And she gladly handed these over (pp. 75-76).

The baronne’s emphasis is always on what interpretation Adèle can generate (what she can “represent”) on her own; yet, as we have seen, when Adèle’s mastery is not yet sufficient, the baronne is there performing the same task, showing the way. Thus the baronne, like Bruner’s tutor, remains on the growing edge of her pupil’s competence.

Adèle’s task is to learn to interpret the culture in which she lives in order to define her own virtuous

role. This task of learning to generate one's own interpretation is, or should be, the heart of the educational process, according to Bruner who, espousing Nelson Goodman's constructivist philosophy, posits that one's world *is*, in fact, a mental construct, that there is no "real world" that preexists independent of human mental activity and language.⁷ Although our constructs, of course, take certain premises for granted, we are building not on "bedrock reality," but on a previously constructed version. The process of objectifying in language what one has thought in order to reflect on it is thus "world making," a crucial metacognitive step according to Bruner, for whom the language of education is properly the language of culture creating, not merely of knowledge consuming or knowledge acquisition. Such a language, he says, is capable of undermining the role of authority that exists generally within the culture.

But does the baronne "gladly hand over" the process or does she "hand down" a product? As we have seen, the process she uses is designed to engender the pupil's interpretations, to make the pupil a "representer," or, in Bruner's terms, a "culture creator." But if she insists on a "right" interpretation, then it is not only a process, but a product, which is being modeled. If Adèle becomes the same "model" as her mother, is it or isn't it a contradiction in terms to declare the process creative?

Bruner's discussion of the Zone of Proximal Development again sheds some light on the question, as he considers the kind of criticism that could be leveled at Vygotsky: "Is the Zone of Proximal Development always a blessing? May it not be the source of human vulnerability to persuasion, vulnerability because the learner begins without a proper basis for criticizing what is being 'fed' to him by ones whose consciousness initially exceeds his own?" (p. 148)

That Adèle is educated to become the *same* "model" as her mother could, of course, be considered proof of the prescriptive nature of Genlis's work, as in this educational utopia virtue reproduces itself. The influence of teachers is enormous on the models students embrace, and that power can indeed be prob-

lematic. Genlis's novel, however, puts would-be critics in the position, not of questioning whether Adèle has been given the means to criticize and interpret, but of complaining that the goal of virtue has been "fed" to a vulnerable pupil. What Genlis suggests is that a virtuous education is best achieved by giving the pupil the means to interpret, or "represent," her world through the creative processes of acting, reading and writing; far from fearing that interpretive skills, once taught, might become libertine, Genlis is convinced that once virtue is demonstrated, reason (developed, as we have seen, through those very processes of representation) cannot help but choose it. A good education, in short, teaches the pupil to create, while making it impossible for her to create anything but virtue.

Nevertheless, even if we accept that virtue is a worthy goal of education (it is morally difficult to sustain the contrary), we must still ask whether virtue hasn't more than one manifestation, and whether Adèle's interpretive powers enable her to create her *own* virtuous life. Two texts written by Adèle will help us to evaluate this and to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the pupil and the teacher.

The first text is a letter to her fiancé, Charles de Valmont.⁸ Adèle writes in this case unprompted by her mother, although the baronne's knowledge of the letter allows her to record it verbatim in her own correspondence. Writing immediately before their marriage, Adèle frees Valmont to make different plans if his newly acquired inheritance leads him to desire a lodging more elegant than the "simple apartment" prepared for them in her parents' house. She is, in fact, issuing an ultimatum: she will not be separated from her mother, to whom she "owes everything!" Given her training in epistolary storytelling, it is not surprising that she makes her point by means of a concisely told story: "[Ma mère] et mon père vous avaient adopté dans le fond de leurs coeurs avant même que votre conduite eût justifié leur choix; vous n'auriez pas la barbarie de leur arracher leur fille, de dédaigner ce logement qui vous est destiné depuis cinq ans, ce logement que ma mère elle-même a fait distribuer, et qu'elle se plut à décorer avec tant de

soin et de plaisir" (CLVIII, p. 336). She then goes on to give her view of her mother's influence on her life: "Sans elle, sans tous les sacrifices qu'elle m'a faits et les soins qu'elle m'a consacrés, que serais-je maintenant? et que deviendrais-je si j'étais privée de ses conseils et de ses exemples? Je lui dois tout ce qui pouvait assurer le bonheur de ma vie; je lui dois un coeur reconnaissant, l'amour de la vertu, les talents qui vous plaisent, et les sentiments que je vous inspire."

Paradoxically, this writing undertaken independently of the mother has as its goal to ensure Adèle's permanent attachment to her. At the same time, however, the letter-writing inspired by the attachment to her mother does constitute an independent movement vis-à-vis her fiancé, and it was that movement, more than the filial attachment, that incited critical comment in Genlis's time. When Adèle's last-minute letter was faulted by the *Année littéraire*, it was not because the critic found the position she took to be shocking or unreasonable, but because he found it willful: "C'était une chose à négocier à l'amiable, et non point à exiger impérieusement, surtout il ne fallait point attendre si tard. Quoi, on est convenu de rendre la place, les articles de la capitulation sont dressés de part et d'autre, et lorsqu'il n'y a plus qu'à exécuter le traité, le Gouverneur s'avise d'ajouter une condition qui tire à conséquence, et sans laquelle il est prêt de retirer sa parole? Certes, c'est compter un peu trop sur la générosité des assiégés" (p. 430). Clearly, the script Adèle writes for her life is not one that conventional fiancés (besiegers?) would be expected to accept; her proposal is "contre le droit commun." Yet Valmont accepts the terms; Adèle's written expression of a desired outcome is thus the instrument by which she creates her world. In this educational utopia where her upbringing makes it impossible for her to choose an unvirtuous course, Adèle can nevertheless chart an unconventional one.⁹

Still, the question of her dependence on her mother remains. To examine it, however, we must consider the possibility that it is the *reader's* dependence as much as Adèle's that concerns us. Since we as readers never see Adèle's writings directly and are totally dependent on the baronne's report, we may be suspi-

cious of the degree to which Adèle's letter, with its spirited portrayal of happiness and gratitude, vindicates Mme d'Almane's educational system. Indeed, the account of the baronne's ideal success and recognition as a teacher was already found unbecomingly self-congratulatory by Genlis's contemporary critics, such as La Harpe, who declared that "Mme d'Almane serait admirable, si elle-même ne s'admirait pas toujours par l'organe de tous les autres personnages, à qui elle fait chanter ses louanges. Il est trop clair que l'institutrice, qui n'est autre que Mme de Genlis sous le nom de Mme d'Almane, n'a pas compté la modestie au nombre des vertus qu'elle veut enseigner à ses élèves" (p. 314). The reader's own dependence makes him more prone to believe in that of Adèle, and to conclude that Adèle's role is limited to that of an adoring subordinate of the baronne.

Such an interpretation, while not altogether unfounded, is incomplete, and should not cause us to overlook signs of a broader, less self-centered perspective. I would submit that neither Genlis's text nor the baronne's represents virtue as a lonely pursuit. Nor is its success portrayed as the exclusive accomplishment of a single individual.

Let us consider a second text written by Adèle shortly before her marriage. Both a continuation and evolution of earlier writing projects assigned to Adèle by Mme d'Almane, it is emblematic of the cooperative nature of learning and teaching virtue as presented by Genlis. The occasion of this composition arises when Adèle, whose education has included classes with a businessman to give her "quelques connaissances générales sur les affaires dont une femme peut se trouver chargée" (CXXXVII, p. 243), resolves to be financially responsible, to avoid indebtedness, and to set aside a sum of five hundred francs every year for the poor. Regarding the latter, she asks her mother's guidance in identifying an ongoing project that would help the unfortunate and, noting that her brother also intends to set aside 500 francs annually, she suggests that perhaps an association of several persons could be formed to pool money for the project. The baronne, having promised "d'y penser et de vous seconder," speaks to several friends and comes up with the idea of establishing a school for "six jeunes

filles bien pauvres [...] auxquelles nous ferons apprendre à lire, à écrire, à compter et à travailler en linge" (CXXXVII, pp. 246-47). It will, indeed, be a sustained project as Adèle proposed, since after seven years, positions will be found for the first group of pupils and a new group of ten-year-olds will be admitted to the school. While it is Mme d'Almane and her friends who apparently devise the plan, it is referred to as "le projet d'Adèle" and, significantly, it is Adèle who puts the project into writing – although, given her youth, her text will again be "corrected" by her older partners: "Adèle est chargée de faire les règlements de l'école et l'instruction chrétienne et morale à l'usage des jeunes filles; les associés seront les censeurs de cet ouvrage, et y feront les corrections qu'ils jugeront nécessaires" (pp. 247-48).

The choice of project – creating a school – is in keeping with Adèle's educational training, which has been predicated on her assuming the role of teacher. And, although the document she produces for the school will be reviewed by others, she nevertheless continues to mature in her role, as becomes evident with later developments in the project.

Adèle's consecration as head of a school occurs on the eve of her wedding at a gift-giving ceremony, this time reported by a family friend. Adèle's *corbeille de noce* from Valmont, unconventionally short on baubles and clothes, features instead a present of *rentes viagères* given to Hermine in Adèle's name and, for Adèle herself, the plans for a second school of which she will be the official founder and which will more than double the scope of her original project by housing ten additional pupils. Citing Théodore's explanation that this constitutes "le présent qu'on a cru qui vous serait le plus agréable" (CLXI, pp. 355-56), the friend narrating the event concludes that "ces présents de noce font encore plus d'honneur à celle qui les reçoit qu'à celui qui les donne" (p. 356). In inspiring such gifts, Adèle has exercised influence of her own. Her fiancé would never have drawn up the documents *he* did without *her* having first written hers. Her language is culture-creating and she is in her turn a model, empowered rather than overpowered by her training in representation.

It is, however, not only the utopian aspects of the novel, but also the accusations of worldliness which were leveled against it,¹⁰ that are traceable to Adèle's training in representation. Having seen the influence of Adèle on her fiancé, we can understand better its mechanism by examining Madame d'Almane's advice to her daughter regarding love and marriage – advice particularly singled out for attack by the *Année littéraire* critic on the grounds that the baronne counsels her daughter *not* to love her husband passionately, thereby demonstrating a cynicism destined to undermine any marriage (p. 431).

A close look at this premarital discussion reveals that it is, in fact, continued training in representation. Reminding her daughter that passion soon cools, the baronne indeed proposes that a wife not allow the full extent of her initial passion to show, in order that the inevitable *refroidissement* not be apparent. This she justifies with what admittedly seems a bit of amorous casuistry: "Feindre des sentiments qu'on n'a pas, c'est de la fausseté; ne point laisser pénétrer tous ceux qu'on éprouve, c'est de la prudence" (CLVIII, p. 341). On the other hand, she makes a distinction between passion and durable love, and in the latter she advises honesty: "Voulez-vous être aimée, laissez-là l'artifice, il subjugué quelquefois, mais n'attache jamais; aimez de bonne foi, et vous serez aimée" (CLIX, p. 346). This enduring love, however, must be based on virtue, which, as we have seen, is not natural, but consciously *acted*. It is, therefore, not surprising to see stage directions for the bride-to-be: "N'exigez jamais les attentions, les soins qui tiennent de la passion; recevez-les avec grâce, avec plaisir, mais n'y comptez point, et *paraissez* plus touchée d'une marque d'estime que d'une preuve d'amour" (CLVIII, p. 341; my emphasis). Adèle must practice representation-through-acting with her husband as she did with her beloved pupil/daughter Hermine. To inspire her husband's virtue, she must again be a model: "Une femme vertueuse peut seule inspirer ce noble enthousiasme; si vous-même n'êtes pas véritablement estimable sur tous les points, votre mari n'attachera jamais un grand prix à votre estime" (CLIX, p. 345). The role of teacher as "representer" of virtue is to be assumed in all loving relationships and, as we

have seen, one educates oneself as well as others to virtue, in the process.

The “worldliness” of which the novel was accused is not cynicism, but Genlis’s energetic exploration of the world’s possibilities. Regarding marriage, the baronne shares her observations of human nature as it is manifested in that institution and invites her daughter, not to reject the institution, but to deal with it creatively and thereby improve it. The well-educated individual sees society’s pitfalls and *ridicules*, but knows how to make her (virtuous) world out of the best aspects and possibilities that exist in society and its institutions. Rather than pitting herself against society,¹¹ she lives in the community and realizes its potential, redeeming its weaknesses. In contrast to the many dysphoric heroines of the century’s novels, Genlis’s woman is thus able to be a savior without being a martyr.¹² The necessity of scripting and acting a role may be seen less as an indictment of society’s imperfections than as a creative mark of civilization.

Nor does Genlis’s well-educated woman pit herself against society on a personal level. Her sense of belonging to a community is practical, not theoretical. Her friendships are strong and sincere. Madame d’Almane’s foremost correspondent is the vicomtesse de Limours who, as the *Année littéraire* points out, is far from matching the baronne’s virtue,¹³ yet the baronne’s love is not diminished and she offers advice and consolation to help her friend in difficult circumstances. As she pursues her virtuous ideal, she wants to take the rest of society with her. In Genlis’s utopian vision, this heroine is an admired model, not a persecuted outcast.

In considering the novel’s reputation as preachy and conservative, we must also take into account that

Genlis’s well-educated individual was *not* judged well-adjusted or uniformly respectful of convention by contemporary critics; in observing the tutor’s prescriptive side and allowing ourselves to entertain suspicions due to the baronne’s privileged voice, we must not overlook Adèle’s importance, which has been announced from the beginning, in the very title of the work.¹⁴ The pupil is, after all, the avowed teacher of the teacher, the catalyst for the creative activities of acting and writing. For Genlis, not only is all the world a stage, but all the world is a school. Life is a work of art, but the model for living is teaching. When Madame d’Almane writes to her friend that “on [dit] que le monde est bien dangereux, mais élevez bien votre fille, et le monde ne sera pour elle qu’une école très utile,” (CXLIII, p. 269) she is suggesting that a good education presents life as a school, and social interaction as a continuous and reciprocal process of learning and teaching. Genlis’s teacher modeled not only the product but the process of becoming a model of virtue; her student learned that education consisted not merely in the transmission of a preexisting body of knowledge, but involved one’s participation in the creative processes of acting and writing in order to interpret one’s world and to produce a meaningful and virtuous existence.

As a writer, Genlis habitually assumed the role of teacher. “Dès qu’elle tenait la plume, [...] elle ne pouvait s’empêcher d’écrire ce qu’il faut toujours répéter de la religion, des principes et des moeurs quand on enseigne,” declared Sainte-Beuve (p. 37). In assuming such a role, Genlis created, through writing, a model of virtue for her readers/pupils – and for herself.¹⁵ At the same time, however, she renders that role transparent in *Adèle et Théodore*, as she exposes her representational techniques to readers, inviting them to become representers of virtue in their turn.

NOTES

1. "Elle écrit comme on exerce un ministère. Le propre de l'auteur n'est pas d'innover mais d'exhorter. L'oeuvre pour elle est apologie et non création." Gabriel de Broglie, *Madame de Genlis* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1985), p. 473. Broglie nevertheless expresses admiration for Genlis and, examining the old accusations of hypocrisy, insists upon her sincerity.
2. In almost all cases the tutor is a parent or family member. Madame d'Almane supervises the education of her daughter Adèle, Monsieur d'Almane that of Théodore, Monsieur d'Aimeri that of his grandson Charles de Valmont; the only exception is in the case of the young prince of ****, who is the pupil of the comte de Roseville, a friend of the baron's.
3. During the family's sojourn in Italy, we see the baronne, in a process similar to that of an actress studying a role, focusing on the experience of another consciousness and allowing it to temporarily displace her own: "Ne songeant qu'à pénétrer, et à lire dans le fond du coeur d'Adèle et de Théodore, cette préoccupation m'absorbe entièrement, de manière qu'il ne me reste qu'une idée vague et confuse de mes propres sensations, tandis que je pourrais dire avec détail tout ce qu'Adèle a éprouvé en entrant à Gênes, à Venise, à Rome, et ce qu'elle a senti et pensé en admirant les différents tableaux que nous avons vus jusqu'ici" (XCIX, pp. 107-8).
4. This point is clearly made on two occasions when other characters are tempted to assume that Adèle is "naturally" perfect. In the first case, a comment made to the baron by Monsieur d'Aimeri, *gouverneur* of Adèle's future husband, is actually a compliment on Adèle's upbringing: "Elle a tellement pris l'habitude et le pli du bien [...] qu'on a peine à se persuader qu'elle ne soit pas entièrement l'ouvrage de la nature" (CXX, p. 192). In the other case, the very unvirtuous Madame de Valcé, spoiled older daughter of one of the baronne's correspondents, refuses to credit Adèle's education at all: "A l'égard de son éducation si vantée, si prônée, je n'en vois pas le merveilleux; il me semble qu'elle ne doit rien qu'à la nature; elle est si obligeante et si bonne enfant, qu'il est impossible [...] de n'avoir pas une sorte de penchant pour elle; du reste, elle [...] parle peu, ne dit que des choses simples et communes, et elle me paraît plus enfant qu'on ne l'est communément à son âge, car elle joue avec [...] sa petite Hermine, point du tout par complaisance, mais pour son compte et pour son plaisir" (CXIV, p. 178). That Adèle's behavior with Hermine is motivated by complaisance as well as by pleasure and that Madame de Valcé is quite mistaken in her assessment is obvious to readers, who have seen the self-conscious efforts by which Adèle will be by age eighteen, according to the baronne, "corrigée de tous les défauts naturels à son sexe" (CL, p. 303).
5. Such exercises are, however, logical extensions of the baronne's practice of having Adèle write notes on what she remembers after her classes are over for the day, in accordance with the philosophy that "l'explication la plus claire, et qu'on n'oublie jamais, est toujours celle qu'on donne soi-même" (CXXXVIII, p. 244).
6. Bruner alludes to the view that "culture itself comprises an ambiguous text that is constantly in need of interpretation by those who participate in it" (p. 122).
7. Cf. Bruner's chapter 7, on "Nelson Goodman's Worlds."
8. Malcolm Cook discusses the intriguing coincidence of the use of the name Valmont in Genlis's novel and in Laclos's (which appeared less than two months later); see pp. 374-76.
9. Madame d'Almane does, in fact, impress upon Adèle that her letter breaches social rules: "Songez-vous à l'éclat d'une telle rupture, après la signature du contrat, après un engagement encore plus sacré, puisqu'enfin vous avez fait l'aveu de la préférence qu'il vous inspire." Respect for social practice is nevertheless firmly established by Adèle's rejoinder: "Cet aveu m'engage, je le sens, à ne jamais en épouser un autre." She declares that remaining with her mother will make her happy, but her tears and the nervousness with which she awaits Valmont's reply demonstrate that she hopes to have a husband as well. With Valmont's prompt acceptance of Adèle's terms, she has managed, thanks to her willingness to risk all, to both respect and overcome social convention.
10. The *Année littéraire* critic complained that piety was prescribed only in vague terms, while noting pointedly that "tout ce qui regarde le monde y est parfaitement expliqué" (p. 433).
11. Jennifer Birkett, examining Genlis's historical novels, finds there an excessive respect for the existing social order: "Though her writings on education pay lip-service to individuality, and urge members of both sexes and all classes to fulfil their physical and intellectual potential, that potential is always expressed within the existing social hierarchy and involves nothing more than the better performance of an allotted role." Jennifer Birkett, "Madame de Genlis: The New Men and the Old Eve," *French Studies* 42 (April 1988), pp. 154-55. Certainly, Genlis was no revolutionary, despite her interest in many social issues concerning the middle and poorer classes as well as the aristocracy. However, I hope to have shown that in *Adèle et Théodore*, the performance is a creative, not just an allotted, process.
12. Ronald B. Hatch has examined the individual pitted against societal constraints in his discussion of the novels of Mary Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Inchbald: "One has the sense of a selfhood aimed against the world and its conventions, its conventional wisdom. As a result, the heroines in these novels seem destined for an early death. What is omitted is the recognition of the very real demands made upon people by community. In rejecting (quite rightly, it would seem) external rational and sentimental sources of morality, these novels also reject the claims of morality which arise simply as a result of people existing as part of a community." Ronald B. Hatch, "'Lordship and Bondage': Women Novelists of the Eighteenth Century," *Actes de la Société du Nord-Ouest pour l'étude du dix-huitième siècle*, 18 (1989-90), p. 117.
13. "On est vraiment étonné qu'une femme de ce caractère soit la meilleure amie de Madame d'Almane, que leurs lettres soient respectivement remplies de ces protestations d'attachement [...] qui supposent toujours de la ressemblance dans la

manière d'agir, comme dans celle de penser. Il me semble que les gens vertueux ne doivent être liés intimement qu'avec ceux qui aiment et qui pratiquent la vertu" (p. 422). Madame d'Almane is aware of the differences in character, but nevertheless feels the importance of the friendship: "Il me serait impossible d'être heureuse sans son amitié. Nos coeurs étaient faits l'un pour l'autre; pourquoi faut-il qu'il y ait si peu de rapport entre nos caractères?" (*Adèle et Théodore*, p. 323)

14. Madeleine R. Raaphorst, in "Adèle versus Sophie: The Well-Educated Woman of Mme de Genlis," noted not only the presence, but the primacy of Adèle's name: "[Her] name appears first in the title, as if to counteract *Emile*, in which Sophie was only secondary and practically ignorant." *Rice University Studies*, 64, 1 (1978), p. 42.
15. It is appropriate that she named the book *Adèle et Théodore* since, in providing her the occasion both to teach and to learn, it was like a daughter or a son to her.

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