

Bianca McHale

***The Educational Children's Stories
of Comtesse de Ségur***

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Last updated: 4 November 2010

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I got to thinking about how I would teach my children not to pull up wild flowers by the roots and destroy things, and then I wondered how I had learned myself. I decided I had learned from books to respect the world.[Hun00, pg. 53]

1.1 Historical Children's Authors

Alongside other nineteenth century children literature's authors, such as Oscar Wilde in England, The Grimm Brothers in Germany or Hans Christian Andersen in Denmark, Comtesse de Ségur continued the tradition of fairy tales that started in France in the seventeenth century by Charles Perrault with his *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* (*Little Red Riding Hood*). The term *fairy tale*, used nowadays as a generic label for magical stories for children, came from the French term *conte de fées*. La comtesse played an important role in generations of French children's imagination. She created an imaginary world based on reality, using moralizing experiences and an uncomplicated sense of humour that brought her characters to life, a characteristic that very few of her contemporaries managed to achieve. It was a combination that had a great appeal to both children and adult readers.

Nevertheless, la comtesse's books, published by Hachette in the famous *bibliothèque rose* series, were best sellers. Indeed, all of her works for children are still in print today. They included a collection of fairy tales, short children's stories, a collection of plays, religious works based on the Bible, and a manual for young mothers entitled *La Santé des Enfants*. While Jules Verne was the most popular writer among young French boys, Comtesse de Ségur was the favourite of French schoolgirls. She influenced many of the important writers of the twentieth century, including Proust and Nabokov. Although few of her works had been translated into English, they are very rewarding to the reader of French, both as documents of her time and as timeless portraits of genuine children.

1.2 La Comtesse's Unique Style

Comtesse de Ségur incorporated some autobiographical details into her fictional stories. She sought inspiration from her own life, using real characters in order to best convey her views on

education. The children's books were written under the pretext of education, where pleasure was only a pretext for transmitting a moral or, in other words, knowledge as it was seen in nineteenth century literature. While the children in other novels of the time were playing the roles of adults, *les enfants du monde ségurien* lived in a protected world in the middle of their families, albeit only an adopted one. Unlike most of her contemporaries, la comtesse did not write stories about perfect children behaving according to adult standards of conduct. Instead, her child-characters behaved like real children: they got dirty, they got hurt, they misbehaved, and they were punished. The books told the story of an authentic world, a domestic life in a true society, with true happenings, and different aspects of educating children, from both good and bad mothers' point of view.

1.3 Focus of This Document

La comtesse's books seemed to have a double goal: to amuse and to teach. She aimed to write enjoyable books for children, while writing useful books for the education of children. At one level it is possible to see how her readers are kept entertained by the adventures described in la comtesse's stories, and on the other hand one can see the deeper meaning to all those happenings, in other words, the extent of her teachings that were drawn from a lifetime of experience. In this document, I am going to examine and discuss Comtesse de Ségur's works from this last point of view. In particular, I will examine the following educational issues that la comtesse incorporated into her books in a subtle way:

- The plots of many of her stories are centred around education. By doing this, la comtesse was telling her young readers that education was good for them.
- Many of the stories focus on obedience and illustrate that if one misbehaves then, one will be punished.
- Through three different mother/educator characters, la comtesse critiqued three educational techniques and promoted one as being superior to the other two.
- La comtesse also inserted into her books some ideas (that were quite radical for the time) about how she felt society could improve.

Chapter 2

Biography

A biography of Sophie de Ségur provides useful insights [Duf00] into her character. She earned her nickname, *la Sophie bouffon*, by being a mischievous girl who invented stories while being brought up by a harsh mother and a loving but, absent father in tsarist Russia. Later, in France she was a mother, grandmother, and an attentive and indulgent educator. As a writer, she created a whole world of children, angels and demons that embodied all the pulses of her extraordinary vitality. Her complex personality can make us laugh and quiver at the same time.

2.1 Life in Nineteenth Century Russia and France

Comtesse de Ségur was born Sophie Rostopchine on 19 July 1799 in St. Petersburg, Russia. She was the daughter of Comte Fédor Rostopchine, an adviser to tsar Paul I (who was Sophie's godfather) and Catherine Rostopchine, a very cruel and strict mother who converted from Orthodoxism to Catholicism, whereas her husband remained an Orthodox. The mother forced some of her children, including Sophie, to convert to Catholicism. Sophie grew up at Voronovo, her father's Russian vast country estate. The father was the governor of Moscow during Napoleon's siege in 1812. Not willing to let Moscow fall into the hands of the invader, he burned down the city and went into political exile. The family moved to Paris, France, in 1817, when Sophie was 18. Sophie's mother arranged for her to be introduced to the handsome Eugène de Ségur who was Catholic and from an old, socially respectable French family, even if the family were no longer very wealthy. At the age of 20, Sophie had an arranged marriage to Eugène.

Sophie and Eugène lived together in an apartment in Paris during the cold season and in the castle of *Les Nouettes* in Aube, Normandy during the warm season, that Sophie's father bought for her. She spent a big part of her life in the castle, and that was where she wrote most of her books. The castle itself was described accurately, under the pseudonym of *le château Fleurville* in her trilogy of books: *Les Petites Filles modèles*, *Les Vacances* and *Les Malheurs de Sophie*. Although hers was an unhappy and unsatisfying marriage, she became the mother of eight children, and began writing only in her mid-fifties, after becoming a grandmother. She suffered 13 years of almost continuous ill health brought on by numerous difficult childbirths. She endured this period by living through and for her children. When

she was bedridden and bored, she often told her children to jump on her bed to entertain her [Duf00, pg. 337].

2.2 La Comtesse's Writing Career

What started out as stories for her grandchildren has transformed into an inheritance that has entertained countless children for 150 years. La comtesse's first book aimed at children, *Nouveaux Contes de fées*, published in 1857, was her only book that contained fairy tales. Her later books contained children's stories. She wrote the fairy tales to please her granddaughters, Camille and Madeleine de Malaret—alias Camille and Madeleine de Fleurville, *les petites filles modèles*—to whom the work was dedicated. When the children had to leave France to follow their parents abroad because their father was named Ambassador to London, the grandmother was deeply saddened, and she promised to write those fairy tales for them. And indeed she kept her promise. La comtesse sent the manuscript to London and a few days later it came back with some words from her eldest daughter, Nathalie Malaret, saying that the girls liked the stories very much, and that it was a pity other children would not have the pleasure to read those beautiful fairy tales. One day, Louis Veuillot, editor of a journal, visited his friend, la comtesse. When he saw the manuscript, he persuaded the writer to publish it.

The use of simple and direct language, and incidents taken from la comtesse's own childhood, brought her immediate success with children. Comtesse de Ségur represented a psychologist, teacher, sociologist and observer of real life. Some of the paragraphs in her stories were controversial due to the excessive violence in beatings administered to some of the characters, especially children. Her publisher, Hachette, asked her numerous times to cut paragraphs filled with cruelty, but the writer replied that those scenes were part of history—indeed many were autobiographical—and she could not possibly remove them.

Her fairy tales brought into light the qualities and the faults of real children: curiosity, disobedience, gratitude, repentance, affection, sincerity and so on. And her children's stories were realistic, rich with actual sentiments and lifetime memories. Located in a castle atmosphere, her books were full of joy and wonder. She depicted daily life such as family, work, and children playing and interacting with each other. One can consider her writings for children like a source of models and values of the society of those times. The adventures of her real and fictional characters take us from towns to countryside, and from a cold Russia, her native land, to a warmer France, her adopted country.

2.3 Dedications

As discussed earlier, Comtesse de Ségur wrote for and about her beloved grandchildren. She even wrote dedications for most of her grandchildren. Here are just a few examples of personalized dedications written under the form of mini-lessons of education:

Chère enfant, je t'offre à toi, charmante, aimée et entourée, l'histoire d'un pauvre garçon un peu imbécile, peu aimé, pauvre et dénué de tout. Compare sa vie à la tienne, et remercie Dieu de la différence [dS90a, pg. 2].

Cher petit, quand tu seras plus grand tu verras, en lisant l’histoire de Gaspard, combien il est utile de bien travailler. Et tu sauras, ce que Gaspard n’a appris que bien tard, combien il est nécessaire d’être bon, charitable et pieux, pour profiter de tous les avantages du travail et devenir réellement heureux. Deviens donc un garçon instruit et surtout un bon chrétien. C’est ce que te demande ta grand-mère qui t’aime et qui veut ton bonheur [dS90b, pg. 198].

Mes très chères enfants, voici le contes dont le récit vous a tant amusées, et que je vous avais promis de publier. En les lisant, chères petites, pensez à votre vieille grand-mère, qui, pour vous plaire, est sortie de son obscurité et a livré à la censure du public le nom de la Comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine [dS90c, pg. 2].

In the Preface of *Les Petites Filles modèles*, Comtesse de Ségur told us about the link to the reality of the characters, Camille and Madeleine. The dedication that was written for *Les Malheurs de Sophie* was also very special as it showed us who Sophie really was:

Mes Petites Filles modèles ne sont pas une création ; elles existent bien réellement : ce sont des portraits ; la preuve en est dans leurs imperfections mêmes. Elles ont des défauts, des ombres légères qui font ressortir le charme du portrait et attestent l’existence du modèle. Camille et Madeleine sont une réalité dont peut s’assurer toute personne qui connaît l’auteur [dS90c, pg. 119].

Chère enfant, tu me dis souvent : ‘Oh ! grand-mère, que je vous aime ! Vous êtes si bonne !’ Grand-mère n’a pas toujours été bonne, et il y a bien des enfants qui ont été méchants comme elle et qui se sont corrigés comme elle. Voici des histoires vraies d’une petite fille que grand-mère a beaucoup connue dans son enfance ; elle était colère, elle est devenue douce ; elle était gourmande, elle est devenue sobre ; elle était menteuse, elle est devenue sincère; elle était voleuse, elle est devenue honnête ; enfin, elle était méchante, elle est devenue bonne. Grand-mère a tâché de faire de même. Faites comme elle, mes chers petits enfants ; cela vous sera facile, à vous qui n’avez pas tous les défauts de Sophie [dS90c, pg. 272].

Chapter 3

Education of Middle Class Girls

A critic once asked the following question that sums up Comtesse de Ségur's work:

“Educatrice, mais de qui, des enfants ou des leurs parents ?” tout en refusant de séparer les uns des autres, “d’autant que pour une grand-mère les parents sont eux-mêmes encore des enfants.” [Mar99, pg. 23]

3.1 Education in Nineteenth Century France and Russia

Middle class society in nineteenth century France and Russia separated boys and girls for the purpose of education. Most boys learnt academic subjects such as history and mathematics at boarding schools (although Sophie's own brother, Serge, was educated at home). In contrast, girls were taught at home by their mothers and focused on less academic skills such as how to play the piano and sew. This educational separation reflected the separate roles of the sexes. Boys were expected to become wage earners while girls were expected to become wives and mothers.

When reading la comtesse's stories, the interaction between mothers and daughters is much more common than interaction with husbands or sons. This reflects the social norms of the times, but particularly la comtesse's own life in which her father frequently travelled on business and her husband preferred living in Paris while his wife stayed in the countryside castle. The educational lessons contained in her stories are those that she felt were suitable for girls: sewing, playing the piano, dancing, foreign languages, some mathematics (though less than boys were taught), reading, elegant handwriting, and good moral behaviour.

The ages of 4, 7 and 15 were considered important. Children were taught to do household chores from the age of 4; it was believed that at age 7 a child could distinguish good from bad (the *age of reason*); and 15 was the age of maturity. Sophie the author was sewing her clothes when she was only four years old as did Sophie de Réan, the autobiographical character in la comtesse's stories: “Elle aura bientôt quatre ans, dit Mme de Réan, il est temps qu'elle apprenne à travailler” [dS90c, pg. 296].

3.2 The Theme of Education in Fairy Tales

Many of the fairy tales touch on education directly. For example, in one fairy tale an evil king and queen did not love their daughter, princess Rosette, and did not want to burden themselves with her education. Their solution was to send her and her nanny to live in the countryside just a few days after her birth:

Rosette eût été mal élevée et ignorante, si sa bonne marraine la fée Puissante ne lui avait envoyé des maîtres et ne lui avait fourni tout ce qui lui était nécessaire. C'est ainsi que Rosette apprit à lire, à écrire, à compter, à travailler ; c'est ainsi qu'elle devint très habile musicienne, qu'elle sut dessiner et parler plusieurs langues étrangères [dS90c, pg. 41].

Rosette was also taught life lessons like being modest, keeping the faith and persevering when put to trial, and that doing bad to other people meant bad things would happen in return and be punished accordingly. Therefore, even within the fairy tales, the children were described as having received the education that was in accordance with their age.

Another fairy tale starts with the birth of a princess called Blondine. However, la comtesse was not very interested in writing about early childhood and the narration quickly jumped to the point where the princess was 7 years old (the *age of reason*). At this age, Blondine's pageboy, Gourmandinet, accepted a bribe of a large crate of sweets from Blondine's evil stepmother to abandon Blondine in the Forest of Lilacs. An accident with the heavy crate caused Gourmandinet's death, thereby imparting the moral lesson that bad deeds are punished. While in the forest, Blondine was looked after by some good fairies who educated her in an unusual manner. Not wishing to bore her with years of studies, they put Blondine to sleep for 7 years and they taught her in her dreams. She awoke just before her fifteenth birthday (the *age of maturity*):

[...] et, quand elle se réveilla, il lui sembla qu'elle n'était plus la même que lorsqu'elle s'était couchée ; elle se voyait plus grande ; ses idées lui semblèrent aussi avoir pris du développement ; elle se sentait instruite ; elle se souvenait d'une foule de livres qu'elle croyait avoir lus pendant son sommeil ; elle se souvenait d'avoir écrit, dessiné, chanté, joué du piano et de la harpe [dS90c, pg. 12].

Unfortunately, soon after awakening, Blondine fell under the influence of an evil fairy who encouraged her to pick forbidden flowers. She had to repent for many months before she found forgiveness and was reunited with her father. Through Blondine's misfortunes, the readers learn that obedience brings happiness while disobedience brings unhappiness: “[...] la sagesse est toujours récompensée [...] soyez docile et bonne. [...] Le repentir peut racheter bien des fautes” [dS90c, pg. 11 & 19].

In another fairy tale, Violette's basic education was complete by the age of 10:

Violette avait appris bien des choses pendant ces sept années. Agnella lui avait montré à travailler. Quand au reste, Ourson avait été son maître ; il lui avait enseigné à lire, à écrire, à compter. Il lisait tout haut pendant qu'elle travaillait. Des livres nécessaires à son instruction s'étaient trouvés dans la chambre de Violette, sans qu'on sût d'où ils étaient venus [dS90c, pg. 85].

The two other fairy tales in *Nouveaux Contes de fées* also used education as a central theme. This theme also appeared in many of la comtesse's children's stories, as I now discuss.

3.3 The Theme of Education in Children's Stories

In the nineteenth century, dolls were not considered to be just toys as they are today. On the contrary, a doll was a valuable teaching tool for young girls. The doll was looked after, was played with, was given an education, was cured, was fed, and was washed—just like a mother was taking care of her child. That process was not a smooth one though, and sometimes accidents did happen.

Many examples can be seen in *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, where little Sophie de Réan—alias the writer child—wanted to wash her doll because she knew that children were given baths, only to end up in washing away the doll's paint; or another episode when she wanted to have her doll doing aerobics, and accidentally broke the doll's arm; and yet again she wanted her wax doll to sunbathe, which unfortunately partly melted the poor doll. Sophie did not damage just her doll, but herself too when she did experiments on herself. For example, she remembered that one of *les filles modèles*, Camille de Fleurville's hair got curlier when it was dampened; she thought that she could make her own hair curly by standing under the gutters when it was raining. If one should learn some lessons from those episodes, it is that education is never perfect and it is full of risks when you do experiments, but on the other hand, it is often that one learns from such experiments. Child readers, and this category includes mainly girls, learn as well that there is a fundamental difference between a human being and a mere doll.

Nowadays, girls' stories are more and more read by boys of the same age because the gap between what a girl and a boy should know by a certain age gets narrower. In the last series of the trilogy, *Les Vacances*, la comtesse concentrated her writing also on the education of boys putting them into a masculine environment. Men—some cousins and a long lost husband—visited the castle Fleurville, which previously had been inhabited only by women. Cowardly boys were taught how to be courageous, and readers learnt a good lesson from young Paul, the survivor of a shipwreck, who lived for five years among wild people. That particular episode of his life was viewed as a privileged moment in the boy's formation.

A form of exercise in the nineteenth century was physical games such as playing hide-and-seek. Comtesse de Ségur—alias Mme de Fleurville—played a lot with her children and grandchildren on the corridors and on the stairs, and disliked it when they played quiet and boring games:

[...] les mamans leur proposèrent une partie de cache-cache, qui fut acceptée avec des cris de joie ; Élisabeth, Mme de Fleurville et Mme de Rosbourg jouèrent avec elles ; on se cachait dans toutes les chambres, on courait dans les corridors, dans les escaliers, on trichait un peu, on riait beaucoup, et on était heureux [dS90c, pg. 214–215].

To contrast with all that physical exercise, the girls spent a lot of time reading: “[...] Camille et Madeleine, fatiguées de leurs jeux, prirent chacune un livre ; elles lisaient atten-

tivement : Camille, *Le Robinson suisse*, Madeleine, les contes de Grimm [...]” [dS90c, pg. 165].

3.4 Lessons on Misbehaviour and Punishment

A strong sense of right and wrong runs through all of la comtesse’s fairy tales and children’s stories: misbehaviour was severely punished. Sometimes misbehaviour was punished by an act of God. For example, as mentioned in Section 3.2 on page 8, Blondine’s pageboy, Gourmandinet, accepted a bribe of a large crate of sweets to abandon Blondine in the Forest of Lilacs. Soon after, Gourmandinet was killed in an accident with the heavy crate. More frequently, misbehaviour was punished by a mother.

In *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, Sophie was only three years old, and had as a present a penknife from her father; the penknife itself a *rather* dubious gift. “Un jour son papa lui donna un joli couteau en écaille ; Sophie, enchantée de son couteau, s’en servait pour couper son pain, ses pommes, des biscuits, des fleurs, etc” [dS90c, pg. 280]. Sophie also had a miniature tea set and kitchen utensils. When playing, she decided to salt some food. She cut into pieces her mother’s goldfish so she could salt them. Sophie was severely punished for her cruelty. From her action and punishment, Sophie learnt that death was not reversible. Unfortunately she did not learn the lesson about cruelty very well. Later on, Sophie cut the head off a bee for all the stings that she suffered. Finding that so amusing, she continued cutting the poor bee into pieces:

Indignée de la cruauté de Sophie, Mme de Réan lui tira fortement l’oreille [...] “Vous êtes une méchante fille, mademoiselle, vous faites souffrir cette bête malgré ce que je vous ai dit quand vous avez salé et coupé mes pauvres petits poissons” [dS90c, pg. 288].

The punishment was maybe even more cruel than the act itself: her mother made her wear the pieces of the dead bee on a necklace, thinking that would definitely teach Sophie a lesson.

Another time, she tried to be nice in offering her cousins some “play” tea made of chalk and water from the dog’s bowl. She got punished yet again! Her mother, Mme de Réan said that Sophie was not truly a bad girl. In reality, only misfortune happened to her as Sophie herself acknowledged: “moi, pauvre malheureuse” [dS90c, pg. 281].

Usually, the punishments that Mme de Réan was giving Sophie, along with sending her to her room, were in concordance with the mistakes she made. As an example, Sophie was forbidden to eat jam for as long as it lasted only because she ate it first without permission; she also could not ride her donkey for a month because she hurt him; and, as I have mentioned earlier, she had to wear the necklace made out of the dead bee that she brutally killed, until the parts fell off by themselves. These punishments came on top of the suffering that Sophie caused for herself. For example, she got badly hurt when she fell off her donkey; another time her donkey bit into her finger when she tried to feed him only half a piece of bread because she wanted to eat the other half herself.

However, in *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, Mme de Réan’s punishments were not justified because she never explained to Sophie why she was not allowed to do one thing rather than another, for example she did not explain to her daughter why she should not eat the horses’

bread, whereas in *Les Petites Filles modèles*, Mme de Fleurville gave justified explanations, though sometimes Sophie still could not abstain from biting into the pears, for example, even if Mme de Fleurville told the girls not to touch the pears until they were fully ripened. Usually children not lacking food would not misbehave, whereas those suffering from deprivation would cross the forbidden line.

3.5 The Limited Role of Fathers in Children's Education

The fathers were usually not very present in la comtesse's stories; they were either away on business or dead. Therefore, the mothers were responsible of the raising of their children. Perhaps the absence of fathers in Comtesse de Ségur's stories was deliberate because during her childhood, most of the time, her father was away on business due to his demanding governmental job. Partly as well, because after getting married in France, the writer often remained alone with her children due to the fact that her husband preferred the abundant life in Paris to a quiet life in the countryside.

When he was at home, Comte Rostopchine, the writer's father, could not take much care of the education of his children, especially that of his daughters because his wife was very strict in that respect. Even though at that time they were living in Russia, comtesse Rostopchine, the writer's mother, talked only German and French with her children, therefore by the age of 4, Sophie spoke French, English, Italian and German better than Russian, her native language. One of Comtesse Rostopchine's portraits showed her in front of a cage with a parrot, and on her arms she kept a female greyhound. Sophie's father used to hate that picture because his wife seemed to show more love to her animals than to her husband and children. The punishments given by Comtesse Rostopchine, alias Mme de Réan, increased at the time everybody was gathering around the dinner table as the mother revealed to all present the silly things that Sophie, writer/character, had done yet again; and the mother sent her away to her room as usual to eat only some bread with soup for dinner. The father sighed; he could rarely cancel the cruel punishment.

One of Comte Rostopchine's letters showed he did not agree with the punishments that his wife inflicted especially onto Sophie, but he was proud of the general knowledge education that the mother gave to her children. Catherine also took over her son's education, and his patriotism was due to the maternal voice, unlike other families. The boy was good in drawing, mathematics, reading, and he spoke foreign languages like French, English, and German, along with his native language, Russian. The father's presence seemed to soften the mother's toughness. Le comte followed attentively his daughters' progress as well. The girls had to improve their writing because it showed women's elegance. They also studied foreign languages, literature, a bit of mathematics, music and household chores; those were the requirements for a young lady's education. The doll helped with the learning of washing, ironing, and sewing. Therefore, the doll and its accessories were useful for the future mothers.

The letter shows the education of nineteenth century Russia, the extent of the mother's influence on one side, and the lack of responsibility, but not necessarily lack of affection from the father's side on the other hand:

“Serge, écrit fièrement Fédor [Comte Rostopchine], fait des progrès étonnants en géographie et en histoire” [...] Sophie, dès quatre ans, “doit apprendre à ourler un mouchoir et à ranger toutes ses affaires” [...] “Natacha, écrit Fédor, a un joli style et, à l’exemple de sa mère, aime toujours être occupée [...] [Sophie] est remplie d’intelligence et aime à inventer des historiettes auxquelles personnes ne comprend rien” [...] “Ayant fait une fois une faute en copiant un livre, elle [Sophie] imagina de corriger le livre lui-même.” L’encre a fait tache, Catherine découvre *le crime* et l’humilie sur sa vilaine écriture. Sophie ose répliquer avec la vivacité d’un pinson : “Mais qu’avez-vous besoin de lire ce que j’écris ? Vous avez tant des livres !” A cinq ans, elle a réponse à tout [...] “Natacha sait se retenir mais la cadette [Sophie] se laisse aller à des mouvements d’impatience, malgré les sermons qu’on lui prodigue. Serge est entêté comme moi, quand on veut lui faire faire quelque chose de force. Sophie passe du rire aux plus violents désespoirs pour des brouilles. D’avoir laissé passer des mailles en tricotant, elle parle de se tuer : “A présent, je ne peux plus vivre, je doit mourir et je mourrai.” Malgré les remontrances de Natacha “lui ayant fait remarquer que ce qu’elle disait était (...) un grand péché”, Sophie s’obstine et argumente : “Dieu me pardonnera. Je suis une malheureuse.” “Tous les trois, conclut Fédor, sont sensibles au raisonnement et doués d’un couer excellent.” Leur physique et leur santé divergent. Seule, Sophie est solide. Son père s’en émerveille. “Elle a la santé d’une campagnarde robuste, remplit les fonctions de bouffon.” L’éducation à la dure de Catherine aurait-elle eu du bon ? [Duf00, pg. 52–53]

3.6 Revolutionary Ideas of La Comtesse

La comtesse had several ideas that, although they seem tame by today’s standards, were quite revolutionary for her time. She expressed several of these revolutionary ideas in her stories, as I now discuss.

The aristocracy emphasized the wealth of a person. Boys and girls were explicitly encouraged to marry for money. In contrast, la comtesse told her children to marry for love. In her stories too the characters often married for love, for example, at the end of *Les Vacances*.

It was common in households for children to not be allowed to talk at the dinner table. La comtesse’s opinion was quite the opposite: “La promenade leur avait donné bon appétit ; ils mangèrent à effrayer leurs parents. Le dîner fut très gai. Aucun d’eux n’avait peur de ses parents ; pères, mères, enfants riaient et causaient gaiement” [dS90c, pg. 377].

Charity was an activity thought appropriate for middle class women. Therefore it is not surprising that in one of the stories, *Les Petites Filles modèles*, girls demonstrated charity by helping a poor woman and her daughter. However, la comtesse used this incident to mention that the girls had pocket money (which was how the girls planned to fund their charity): “Je crois que nous pourrions leur venir en aide en leur donnant l’argent que nous avons pour nos menus plaisirs. Nous avons chacune deux francs par semaine” [dS90c, pg. 251]. The concept of pocket money was not widespread in nineteenth century France. Indeed, the suitability of pocket money for children was still being debated by the Catholic Church a century later [dS90c, pg. 251].

It was considered unladylike for a woman to earn money. Because of this, la comtesse's publishers wanted to pay royalties for her books to her husband. However, la comtesse successfully fought for the royalties to be paid to her directly [dS90c, pg. LXXVI]. She succeeded in this goal five years after the start of her writing career, and one year after the publication of the *Les Petites Filles modèles*, in which girls were given pocket money. It seems likely that her desire for financial independence inspired the reference to pocket money in the story. La comtesse lived a frugal lifestyle and used the royalties for maintenance on the castle and to buy gifts for her grandchildren [Duf00, pg. 469].

Chapter 4

Comments on Educational Practices

As I discussed in Section 3.1 on page 7, it was common for nineteenth century middle class girls to be taught at home by their mothers. Because of this, women took on dual roles of being both mothers and teachers to their children. In fact, the roles of motherhood and teacher are blended together so much in la comtesse's stories that they are synonymous. Many of la comtesse's stories contain very extreme, almost stereotypical, images of mothers. These extreme characterizations could be thought of as examination of good mothers and bad mothers. However, it is equally valid to view them as examinations of good and bad educational techniques.

4.1 Mothers/Educators in the Trilogy

La comtesse provides a close examination of mothers/educators in the trilogy of books that involve the Sophie character (who is a semi-autobiographical reflection of the author's own childhood): *Les Petites Filles modèles*, *Les Vacances* and *Les Malheurs de Sophie*. The books in the trilogy were written in the order just listed, but should be read in the order: *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, *Les Petites Filles modèles*, and *Les Vacances*. In these books, Sophie has three mother figures. First there is her biological mother, Mme de Réan. After her mother dies, her father remarries and Sophie's stepmother has the name Mme Fichini. Later her father dies and Sophie's stepmother abandons her. Sophie is then looked after by her foster mother, Mme de Fleurville who is the mother of Camille and Madeleine, *les petites filles modèles*.

Sophie's first mother (based on la comtesse's real-life mother, Catherine Rostopchine) is incompetent. The second mother (a fictional character, slightly based on Catherine Rostopchine) is excessively violent. The third mother (based on la comtesse herself) is good. The following sections discuss each of these mothers in turn.

4.2 The Incompetent Mother/Educator

Frequently, Mme de Réan set tasks for Sophie that were beyond the skills or patience of a four-year-old child and then severely punished Sophie when she failed the tasks. In this way,

instead of teaching Sophie positive lessons, she gave Sophie a bad image of herself. On one occasion, Mme de Réan left jars of homemade jam within easy reach of Sophie and then punished Sophie when she ate the jam [dS90c, pg. 320–327]. After Sophie was punished for eating the jars of jam, she had a nightmare. Mme de Réan used the nightmare to make Sophie fear God:

C'est que le bon Dieu, qui voit que tu n'es pas sage, te prévient par le moyen de ce rêve que, si tu continues à faire tout ce qui est mal et qui te semble agréable, tu auras des chagrins au lieu d'avoir des plaisirs. Ce jardin trompeur, c'est l'enfer ; le jardin du bien, c'est le paradis [dS90c, pg. 325].

On another occasion, Mme de Réan left a pretty sewing box within easy reach of Sophie and again punished her when she played with it [dS90c, pg. 333–337].

But perhaps the most incompetent (and certainly the most dangerous) act of Mme de Réan was to take the four-year-old child for a walk in a forest inhabited by wolves:

Sophie, je t'ai promis que, lorsque tu aurais quatre ans, tu viendrais avec moi faire mes grandes promenades du soir. Je vais partir pour aller à la ferme de Svitine en passant par la forêt ; tu vas venir avec moi ; seulement fais attention à ne pas te mettre en arrière, tu sais que je marche vite, et, si tu t'arrêtais, tu pourrais rester bien loin derrière avant que je pusse m'en apercevoir [dS90c, pg. 310].

Sophie stopped to pick some forest fruits and risked being eaten by wolves. Fortunately, her mother's dogs rescued her. But, instead of showing compassion to her daughter, la comtesse Rostopchine, alias Mme de Réan, gave out to the daughter for stopping: “Sophie, dit-elle, crois-tu que j'aie eu raison de te défendre de t'arrêter ?” [dS90c, pg. 312] She then congratulated her dogs, and did not address another word to her daughter all the way home. By any standards, it is quite incompetent for a mother or teacher to take a child to such a dangerous place and then give out when the child behaves like a 4-year-old.

If the writer gave her name to her heroine, Sophie, it was because through describing her misfortunes she was remembering her own ones and showing her many faults: the temptation she could never resist, the anger, the disobedience, and the weakness for good food, *la gourmandise*. The following description of the Sophie character actually describes the portrait painted by Tonci of Sophie Rostopchine at the same age as Sophie de Réan. Does the date of 19 July show that Sophie Rostopchine and Sophie de Réan are one person? It must be yes—the same birthday, the same childhood and the same portrait:

Sophie était coquette, elle aimait à être bien mise et à être trouvée jolie. Et pourtant elle n'était pas jolie ; elle avait une bonne grosse figure bien fraîche, bien gaie, avec de très beaux yeux gris, un nez en l'air et un peu gros, une bouche grande et toujours prête à rire, des cheveux blonds pas frisés, et coupés courts comme ceux d'un garçon. Elle aimait à être bien mise et elle était toujours très mal habillée : une simple robe en percale blanche, décolletée et à manches courtes, hiver comme été, des bas un peu gros et des souliers de peau noire. Jamais de chapeau ni de gants. Sa maman pensait qu'il était bon de l'habituer au soleil, à la pluie, au vent, au froid [dS90c, pg. 289].

Both in real life and in stories, Sophie was always hungry and thirsty. This was because her mother believed that a lot of food and drink was bad for growing children: “[...] trop manger est mauvais pour la santé ; aussi défendait-elle à Sophie de manger entre ses repas ; mais Sophie, qui avait faim, mangeait tout ce qu’elle pouvait attraper” [dS90c, pg. 292].

Writer-Sophie and character-Sophie alike helped her mother give black bread to her father’s horses, but as Sophie was always hungry, she did not miss the opportunity to bite some of the pieces before giving them to the horses. Sophie sometimes dreamt of those days when she could get a bit more food. Her father gave her a pony for her birthday, and she was told to feed him, but one day: “Elle présenta le pain à son petit cheval, qui saisit le morceau et en même temps le bout du doigt de Sophie, qu’il mordit violemment” [dS90c, pg. 293]. At the dinner table, her mother noticed the blood that still came out of Sophie’s injured finger and told off her daughter that time without punishing her too harshly because the suffering of her wound seemed to be enough: “Puisque tu es si sottte, tu ne donneras plus de pain à ton cheval” [dS90c, pg. 294]. Another day, she stole the last piece of bread from her mother’s basket, and her mother discovered the bad deed and punished her accordingly. That time, the father could not do anything against the punishment. Luckily her nanny as usual felt pity for Sophie and, risking being whipped herself, gave the starving girl some cheese and jam that she had hidden in her own wardrobe. Mme de Réan burst into a rage that was still lingering from the previous evening:

Petite gourmande, dit Mme de Réan [alias the writer’s mother], pendant que je ne vous regarde pas, vous volez le pain de mes pauvres chevaux et vous me désobéissez, car vous savez combien de fois je vous ai défendu d’en manger. Allez dans votre chambre, mademoiselle ; vous ne viendrez plus avec moi donner à manger aux chevaux, et je ne vous enverrai pour votre dîner que du pain et de la soupe au pain, puisque vous l’aimez tant [dS90c, pg. 294].

Mme de Réan was presented like an inflexible judge, with no trace of compassion: “Une mère doit être juste, mais n’a pas à tenir le rôle d’un juge ; elle doit avoir quelque faiblesse, et savoir pardonner sans exiger un repentir excessif” [Mar99, pg. 330]. Mme de Réan resembles the writer’s own mother, Catherine Rostopchine:

Serait-elle méchante, cette Catherine Protassov [Rostopchine] qui continue à donner des oiseaux-mouches vivants à ses perroquets ? Pendant les absences de son époux [Comte Rostopchine], et en dépit de sa formelle interdiction, elle fait donner le knout à ses serviteurs. Elle même osé vendre une famille de serfs, séparant la mère des enfants [Duf00, pg. 46].

4.3 The Violent Mother/Educator

The aristocratic code of morals in the nineteenth century encouraged the use of corporal punishment under the form of whipping because a little girl needed to suffer in order to improve herself. In her works, Comtesse de Ségur heavily criticized that type of educational conduct and the excess of severity that she classified as destructive. To exemplify that bad behaviour, la comtesse came up with a grotesque character in the image of Mme Fichini,

Sophie de Réan's stepmother. That woman did everything to shock and horrify the entire world with her explosions of violence towards Sophie. The girl "criant, courant et sautant par excès de souffrance, le corps rayé et rougi par la verge [...]" [dS90c, pg. 153]. Mme Fichini practised her absolute power, and she was proud of that: "Croyez, chère dame, répondit Mme Fichini, que c'est le seul moyen d'élever des enfants ; le fouet est le meilleur des maîtres. Pour moi, je n'en connais pas d'autres" [dS90c, pg. 152].

Everyone disagreed with such "punition aussi injuste que barbare" [dS90c, pg. 152]. And that behaviour did not have the results that the barbaric mothers had hoped, for example, in Sophie's case; she continued to misbehave, becoming even worse. La comtesse did not hesitate in making the parents responsible for the nature and the behaviour of their children, and showing the parents/educators they were wrong even in front of the children themselves: "[...] je tâcherai de vous imiter, de devenir bonne comme vous. Ah ! si j'avais comme vous une maman douce et bonne, je serais meilleure ! Mais j'ai si peur de ma belle-mère ! Elle ne me dit pas ce que je dois faire, mais elle me bat toujours" [dS90c, pg. 149]. Comtesse de Ségur believed that, in Russia just like in France, parents/educators were responsible for the bad behaviour of their children:

[...] il faut dire que le général [Dourakine] est russe, et qu'un Russie les coups de fouet se donnent plus facilement que chez nous. [...] Ces petits malheureux, comme ils sont élevés ! Ce n'est pas leur faute s'ils sont méchants, menteurs, calomniateurs, lâches, hypocrites ! Ils sont terrifiés par leur mère [dS90a, pg. 606 & 678].

4.4 The Good Mother/Educator

The third class of mother/educator were very sure of themselves, with not a trace of weakness, and always in control of their anger like Mme de Fleurville from the trilogy, an incarnation of the writer herself. An education so well managed like that one of Mme de Fleurville brings to mind the model of psychologist Vygotski, in which it is stated that the child does not learn by himself, but in cooperation with the adult, who completes, supports, and helps to organize, before allowing the child to do something [Mar99, pg. 92]. Good mothers find a balance between strictness and indulgence: "L'excès de la sévérité produit la haine. L'excès de l'indulgence affaiblit l'autorité" [Pap99, pg. 7]. The type of mothers that la comtesse agreed with was that of Mme de Fleurville and her friend Mme de Rosbourg:

Elle [Sophie] vivait heureuse chez ses amies ; chaque journée passée avec ces enfants modèles la rendait meilleure et développait en elle tous les bons sentiments que l'excessive sévérité de sa belle-mère avait comprimés et presque détruits. Mme de Fleurville et son amie, Mme de Rosbourg, étaient très bonnes, très tendres pour leurs enfants, mais sans les gâter ; constamment occupées du bonheur et du plaisir de leurs filles, elles n'oubliaient pas leur perfectionnement, et elles avaient su, tout en les rendant très heureuses, les rendre bonnes et toujours disposées à s'oublier pour se dévouer au bien-être des autres. L'exemple des mères n'avait pas été perdu pour leurs enfants, et Sophie en profitait comme les autres [dS90c, pg. 210].

Comtesse de Ségur always preferred gentleness to physical violence of which she sometimes was victim in her childhood. She showed patience and goodness while raising her children and grandchildren. Like the good mothers/educators from her stories, la comtesse hated to raise a hand to a child. Her violent descriptions had a negative connotation. It is known that one gets more from a child if one treats the child with tenderness instead of violent beatings. La comtesse never insulted or whipped any of her children. She raised both her boys and girls with so much kindness. And therefore, she obtained better results. In other words, she obtained the perfect obedience like that one she described in one of her stories:

Quand Jacques avait eu des colères dans sa petite enfance, son papa le mettait dans un coin et le laissait crier, après lui avoir donné deux ou trois petites tapes. Quand Jacques avait été impoli avec un domestique ou maussade avec un camarade, son papa l'obligeait à demander pardon. Quand Jacques avait été gourmand, il était privé toute la journée de sucreries, de gâteaux et de fruits. Quand Jacques avait désobéi, il était renvoyé dans sa chambre, et son papa ni sa maman ne l'embrassaient jusqu'à ce qu'il eût demandé pardon. De cette manière, Jacques était devenu un charmant petit garçon : toujours gai, parce qu'il n'était jamais grondé ni puni ; toujours aimable, parce qu'on l'avait habitué à penser au plaisir des autres et à sacrifier le sien [dS90c, pg. 408].

When Marguerite de Rosbourg in *Les Petites Filles modèles*, wanted to give her mother flowers, she actually picked all the flowers that were in Camille and Madeleine de Fleurville's small garden. The girls got upset but, they did not punish her in the way Sophie would have been punished by her mother or her stepmother. Instead, Marguerite understood by herself what a mistake she made by seeing how much she upset her friends. That was actually the harshest punishment that she could get. That episode ended with a reflection on religion. The following morning the girls got up only to find out that nicer flowers were put in the place of the lost ones. When they asked themselves on who could have brought them there, each of them answered the best they could: "C'est le bon Dieu" said Camille, "la Sainte Vierge" said Madeleine, and "nos petits anges" said Marguerite [dS90c, pg. 135]. Mme de Fleurville gave them the reasonable explanation: "Voici l'ange qui a fait pousser vos fleurs, dit Mme de Fleurville en montrant Mme de Rosbourg. Votre douceur et votre bonté l'ont touchée ; elle a été acheter tous cela à Moulins" [dS90c, pg. 135].

None is to deny that when Mme de Fleurville took over Sophie's education, she did all she could to change the bad behaviour that little girl had due to a bad upbringing. As a last resort, Mme de Fleurville sent Sophie to *cabinet de pénitence*. Sophie stayed there for few days, and she had plenty of time to reflect on her behaviour:

[...] et la voyant si sage, si docile et si repentante, elle lui dit qu'avant de se coucher elle pourrait venir embrasser ses amies au salon et faire la prière en commun. Sophie lui promit de mériter cette récompense par sa bonne conduite, et la remercia vivement de sa bonté [dS90c, pg. 200].

Though she revolted in the beginning, Sophie ended up finding her peace. The effects of that kind of punishment gave good results, as Sophie herself admitted:

[...] quand j'étais méchante et que ma belle-mère me punissait, je me sentais encore plus méchante après ; je détestais ma belle-mère ; tandis que Mme de Fleurville, qui m'a punie, je l'aime au contraire plus qu'avant et j'ai envie d'être meilleure [dS90c, pg. 198].

As we have seen, it was a harsh education that la comtesse had back in Russia, but not an education that she applied to her children and grandchildren. Comtesse de Ségur was more like Mme de Fleurville, while Mme de Réan was a reflection of Catherine Rostopchine, the writer's mother. The author's views on education clearly showed the gap that existed between *good* and *bad* mothers/educators: “[...] la bonté, la piété et la douceur sont des moyens puissants pour corriger les défauts qui semblent être les plus incorrigibles. La sévérité rend malheureux et méchant. La bonté attire, adoucit et corrige” [dS90a, pg. 1292].

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Quand j’aurai des enfants, se jure-t-elle [Comtesse de Ségur], j’écrirai pour eux des contes. Ils pleureront, je les consolerai, nous ne nous quitteront pas. Puis je les régalerai, je les ferai rire à nouveau, enfin, je les aimerai de toute mon âme. [Duf00, pg. 83]

5.1 Educational Impact of the Books

In the introduction to this document, I mentioned that Comtesse de Ségur incorporated several educational issues into her books. Two of these issues—trying to convince young people that education is important for them, and trying to improve obedience—are still as relevant today as they were 150 years ago.

The other issues Comtesse de Ségur addressed—kindness and dedication work better than cruelty and incompetence in teaching, pocket money is appropriate for children, people should marry for love rather than for money, and children should be allowed to engage in conversation at the dinner table—seem almost trivial today. However, their apparent lack of importance is simply due to the widespread acceptance of these ideas in modern society. This clearly indicates how la comtesse was ahead of her time with her liberating ideas about education and social behaviour.

5.2 Entertainment Impact of the Books

In her writings, la comtesse presented a vivid portrayal of nineteenth century French society, with lots of flashbacks to her childhood in tsarist Russia. Her work had a great amount of both fantasy and reality that gave it that special something that kept Comtesse de Ségur’s stories alive for so long: “Son écriture témoigne d’une pensée vive, qui n’a jamais de mal à se bloquer. [...] ‘N’écris que ce que tu as vu’ est sa grande règle” [Duf00, pages 468–470].

The impact of Comtesse de Ségur’s books when viewed as entertainment can be illustrated in two ways. First, all of her children’s books are still in print, almost 150 years after their publication. Second, there was an incident that happened towards the end of her life: la

comtesse was walking to church when a little boy approached her and they had the following conversation:

- Vous êtes la comtesse de Ségur?
- Oui, mon petit.
- Laissez-moi vous embrasser. . . [Duf00, pg. 608]

Her tombstone summarizes her life in only four words, exactly how she requested before she died on 9 February 1874, at the age of 74 and a half: *Dieu et mes enfants*. She became immortal like the stories that she wrote in the name of whom she called her *amourets*, in other words her children and grandchildren. Through her writings, Comtesse de Ségur aimed to give lessons to her readers while entertaining them at the same time.

Appendix A

The Books of Comtesse de Ségur

1855 — *La Santé des enfants*

1856 — *Nouveaux Contes de fées (Histoire de Blondine, de Bonne-Biche et de Beau-Minon; Le Bon Petit Henri; Histoire de la Princesse Rosette; La Petite Souris Grise; Ourson)*

1858 — *Les Petites Filles modèles*

1858 — *Livre de messe des petits enfants*

1859 — *Les Vacances*

1859 — *Les Malheurs de Sophie*

1860 — *Les Mémoires d'un âne*

1861 — *Pauvre Blaise*

1862 — *La Soeur de Gribouille*

1862 — *Les Bons Enfants*

1862 — *Les Deux Nigauds*

1863 — *L'Auberge de l'Ange Gardien*

1863 — *Le Général Dourakine*

1864 — *François le Bossu*

1865 — *Un bon petit diable*

1865 — *Comédies et Proverbes*

1865 — *Jean qui grogne et Jean qui rit*

1866 — *Evangile d'une grand-mère*

1866 — *La Fortune de Gaspard*

1866 — *Quel amour d'enfant !*

1867 — *Le Mauvais Génie*

1867 — *Les Actes des Apôtres*

1868 — *Diloy le Chemineau*

1869 — *Bible d'une Grand-mère*

1871 — *Après la pluie, le beau temps*

Appendix B

Ten Interesting Facts about la Comtesse

In researching the life and works of Comtesse de Ségur, I came across many interesting facts, not all of which fell into the scope of this document. For the reader's pleasure and curiosity, I am providing some of the remaining facts here.

1. Comtesse de Ségur suffered many illnesses such as migraines, loss of her voice for a while, and so on. Her illnesses were due to the numerous births that she had. Her eldest son, Monseigneur Gaston de Ségur, remembered “de longues, de dures et très dures souffrances” that forced his mother to lie “sur un lit de douleur” for thirteen years, but always having “une douceur inaltérable”. Her youngest daughter, Olga, also had sweet memories of her dear mother who always suffered but who was always good, loving and cheerful, except the days of her migraines when “les Nouettes devenaient une succursale de la Trappe pour le silence” [Mar99, pg. 9]. Her works were written under this constant suffering, and were inspired from her *little* world, in other words, her *big* family.

2. La comtesse educated her daughters herself. She taught them mainly from books. However, she also created her own teaching material, such as this amusing little poem she wrote to teach her daughters good spelling [Duf00, pg. 273]:

Si j'étais roi, disait Gros-Jean à Pierre,
Si j'étais roi, voici ce que je ferais, moi :
J'aurais un cheval avec deux panaches
Pour mieux garder mes moutons et mes vaches,
Si j'étais roi, si j'étais roi.

Si j'étais roi, lui répondit Gros-Pierre,
Si j'étais roi, voici ce que je ferais, moi :
J'adoucirais le sort de mon vieux père,
Je donnerais du pain blanc à ma mère,
Si j'étais roi, si j'étais roi.

3. The highway Paris-Cherbourg passed in front of castle *Les Nouettes* (alias castle *Fleurville* from the trilogy). The castle's façade was full of orange trees where la comtesse's children and grandchildren often hid, just like the little girls from the stories of the trilogy.

4. La comtesse's butcher, Hurel from Aube, appeared in the story called *Les Petites Filles modèles*. In adding that little real detail, la comtesse showed how much respect and love she held not only for her family, but also for her acquaintances.

5. In Aube nowadays, there is a primary school named after Comtesse de Ségur, and there is also a museum in her celebration, and the castle *Les Nouettes* in which la comtesse spent most of her adult life was transformed in an orphanage, something that might remind us of *L'Auberge de l'Ange Gardien* or even *le château de Fleurville*.

6. When Paul told the story of his capture after the shipwreck, he used the authentic words of a poem written by Anatole, Sophie's second son: "[...] je sautai aussi pour leur tenir compagnie et je me mis à chanter à tue-tête : Te souviens-tu, brave enfant de la France, etc. que chantaient souvent nos pauvres marins de la Sibylle" [dS90c, pg. 451].

7. In some respect, général Dourakine—who appeared in *L'Auberge de l'Ange Gardien* and *Le Général Dourakine*—resembled his author, la comtesse, as described especially in one of the paragraphs from *Le Général Dourakine*. La comtesse actually said the following sentence, and the sentences before and after were stated by one of her acquaintances: "[...] comme vous êtes drôle ! Vous avez tant d'esprit !" / Vraiment ! c'est drôle ce que j'ai dit ? Je ne croyais pas avoir tant d'esprit. / [...] vous êtes si modeste ! vous ne connaissez pas la moitié, le quart de vos vertus et de vos qualités !" [dS90a, pg. 661–662].

8. The decorations that général Dourakine held were similar to those that Comte Rostopchine, Sophie's father, wore when in service: "Grande tenue de lieutenant général, uniforme brodé d'or, culotte blanche, bottes vernies, le grand cordon de Sainte-Anne et de Saint-Alexandre" [dS90a, pg. 626–627].

9. La comtesse's style of writing was very personal, direct and childish, which made her unique in the world of children's writing. Even the objects in her stories were personified by the projection of the character on the thing itself: "Mes noisettes, mes pauvres noisettes !" says Marguerite [dS90c, pg. 244].

10. Luce Fillol wrote this moving little poem in the memory of Comtesse de Ségur [Fil81, back cover]:

C'était une petite fille russe,
descendante de Gengis Khân.
Elle devint une châtelaine française
mère d'une des dames d'honneur de l'impératrice Eugénie.
Cela ressemble à un conte de fées.
La vie de la comtesse de Ségur,
née Rostopchine ne fut pourtant pas un conte de fée.
Marquée dès l'enfance,
et jusqu'à la fin de sa vie,
de déceptions, de tristesses, d'angoisses,
elle fut aussi faite d'amour, de finesse et d'enthousiasme.

Et c'est parce que ses livres furent élaborés
à partir de ces trois qualités,
qu'ils firent et qu'ils feront —
malgré leurs limites et leurs contradictions —
la joie de milliers de lecteurs du monde entier.
Je fus une de ces jeunes lectrices,
Il y a très longtemps.
C'est pour cela que j'ai voulu connaître la personnalité
de cette femme attachante
et les ressorts psychologiques d'une oeuvre
que l'on ne peut juger uniquement à la lumière de notre temps.

Appendix C

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