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SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION WITH GUILLAUME DE LORIS, JEAN DE MEUNG, JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, MARIVAUX

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Abstract: *Referring to the novels prior to Flaubert's* L'Education Sentimentale *as instances of 'sentimental education', two types of narration can be identified: one postulating that the essential is to be found in discontinuities and looking at the 'sentimental education' as a romantic invention, the other — on the contrary — discovering the cult of the beloved woman, according to the medieval pattern. These two opposing perspectives — discontinuity vs. permanence — are equally valid. The birth of the novel corresponds to the position of women in society, with an obvious interest in her and a freely-consented masculine subordination. Since the advent of* Roman de la Rose *(13th century), the novels have illustrated or merely suggest an 'education of the feelings' or, rather, an 'education through feelings'. The deadlock of the idea of sentimental education can be encountered both in Rousseau's work and in Marivaux's retrospective, first-person novels.*

Keywords: *sentimental education, courtly love, courtesy, autobiography.*

1. Introduction

It is undeniable that whenever we may come across the collocation 'sentimental education', we cannot fail thinking primarily of Flaubert's world-famous novel *L'Education Sentimentale*, with its remarkable reply: "*Oui, peut-être bien, c'est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur, dit Deslauriers*", but there are many other great novels — so popular with the reading public — which can be considered as instances of 'sentimental education'. From *Roman de la Rose (The Novel of the Rose)*, initiated by Guillaume de Loris in the 13th century, all the way to Proust, André Breton or Boris Vilan, the novels illustrate or merely suggest an 'education of the feelings' or, rather, an 'education through feelings'. As someone once noticed, the plot of the novels can be compressed to an essential pattern: a man meets a woman, they fall in love and — eventually — part with each other. Fréderic Moreau, Werther, Heathcliff, Swann are characters that only avow this *time lost* with a woman "who was not their type".

2. *Roman de la Rose:* Guillaume de Loris and Jean de Meung

The so-called novel 'of the rose' (*Roman de la Rose*) consists of two distinct parts — one written by Guillaume de Loris in about

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1230, the other being a sequel of the former, by Jean de Meung, who, after forty years, continues the story in a thoroughly different narrative style. Modern readers might be surprised at the manner of this sentimental education. Guillaume de Loris recounts an allegorical dream vision in what has been regarded as a notable instance of courtly literature. In short, the storyline describes the attempts of a courtier to woo his beloved (Badel 57). While walking in the field one May morning, the Lover reaches a walled garden (the Garden of Delight). Among its many splendours, he sees a bush of blossomed roses reflected in the mirror-like water of a fountain, and particularly remarks one Rose — the symbol of his beloved lady. He instantly falls in love. Wounded by Beau Semblant's (Fair Appearance's) arrows, the pain is somehow alleviated by Amour (Love). She will warn the Lover on the risks of passion: the suffering from absence, the craving shaded by presence, shyness, nocturnal solitude. At this point, a whole system of allegorical characters is set into motion by the medieval French poet. The Lover hesitates to break down the wall that separates him from his beloved Rose. Fortunately, Bel Accueil (Kind Reception) encourages and helps him through, but the Rose is 'guarded' by Danger, Malebouche (Gossip), Honte (Shyness) and Peur (Fear) — significant of the young lady's resistance to erotic overtures. The Lover ventures to ask Bel Accueil to pick up the Rose for him and is thus abandoned. Raison (Reason) tries to persuade the Lover into giving up — an unsuccessful endeavour — and accuses Oiseuse (Laziness) of being the cause of all misfortunes. The Lover prefers taking Ami's (Friend's) advice: to ingratiate himself with Danger, so sensitive to words of flattery. Franchise (Honesty) and Pitié (Pity) join efforts to help the miserable man (there is a visible thaw on the part of the lady in her relationship with the lamenting Lover). Eventually, after the first kiss, Malebouche (Gossip) will spread the news high and low. Sooner or later, all the characters (including Jealousy and Sensuality) find out about the unfortunate incident and, consequently, the 'guilty' Lover is locked in a tower, guarded by Danger, Shame, Fear and Gossip, and closely watched by an Old Woman with a rather questionable loving history. This is the end of Guillaume de Loris' story, disrupted, most likely, by the author's death.

Without thoroughly neglecting the thread of the story — yet giving less credit to the plot itself — Jean de Meung approaches such issues as society, the origin of power, free will, various scientific matters of the time — that will turn his work into a genuine encyclopaedia. From time to time, however, the author resumes the romantic adventure in which opponents continue their confrontation.

Amour (Love) decides to lay siege to the tower alongside Courtesy, Honesty, Pity and False Appearance (Faux Semblant). Venus interferes amid hostilities and incinerates the tower. As a result, the prisoner escapes and picks up the Rose. The moral of the story could be summarised as follows: It is not enough to win a woman's heart — you have to know how to keep it.

Jean de Meung states principles inspired by a tolerant, realistic spirit: to turn a blind eye to your lover's infidelity, to assure her that she stands out as the most beautiful creature on Earth, to let her do things her way, etc. We are here far from Guillaume de Loris' moderate tone (whose allegorical technique, however, could not avoid the risk of barren abstractions).

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Roman de la Rose remains the bestseller of the Middle Ages, preserved in about 250 manuscripts (as compared, for instance, with *Le Conte du Graal — The Story of the Grail*, which has survived in a number of approximately 50 manuscripts). Its success is largely due to both of its authors, who are fully acquainted with the human nature.

Essentially, *Roman de la Rose* includes a twofold educational process, the reader being transported through the erotic tribulations of both the Lover and his beloved, from incipient desire to thorough accomplishment (Batany 147).

The denouement is ever delayed throughout the 18,000 lines of Jean de Meung's sequel. But the allegorical action is triggered by inner impulses — a chain of reactions which unfold from the first encounter of beauty, through love at first sight, to the full crystallization of desire. Lady's inner torments are enhanced by outer obstacles: the care of preserving reputation, the fear of calumny, a certain decency required by social etiquette — all these lay great pressure upon her. Initiation in the art of courtly love is partly normative. No other proof is needed, except for the commandments dictated by Love: to avoid any villainy, to speak no harm of anyone, to be on amiable terms with everyone, to refrain from any instance of violent language, to respect women and protect them when in distress, to avoid pride, to be well-groomed and cheerful, to display his talent of mounting a horse, to be skilled at playing an instrument and dancing, to repudiate avarice etc.

Such education reflects the doctrine of *fine amor* (courtly love), presented by André le Chapelain in 1185, in his work *De arte honeste amandi (The Art of Courtly Love).*

The term of 'courtesy' — Courtoisie is the son of Bel Accueil (Kind Reception) — denotes the art of loving, and equally the art of living, both being social markers of aristocracy (Mauzi 158).

With Guillaume de Loris — in keeping with all prerequisites of courtly love — the Lover worships his beloved, fulfils all her wishes, and — after a long time of patience — gathers the fruits of his relentless effort.

There is, in terms of love, an essential difference between Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale* — the starting point of our discussion — and *Roman de la Rose*: the former approaches love from a wedlock perspective, the married woman asking for total discretion, while the latter illustrates love for a young lady, the only barrier between the two lovers being natural hesitations, specific of novices in the art of love.

If the antique novel *Daphnis and Chloe* deals with awakening senses, Guillaume de Loris' work is a remarkable initiation in sensitivity, combined with a masterful cultivation of the intellect proposed by Jean de Meung.

3. *Confessions, L'Art de jouir, La Nouvelle Eloise, Emile:* Jean-Jacques Rousseau

No one more than Jean-Jacques Rousseau has proved the deadlock of the idea of sentimental education (Burgelin 330). It is difficult to understand how we can possibly learn to love, rejoice, be happy — to live, in one word — if not by experience, by living our own lives. But only in the end do we get to know what we should have known from the very beginning.

Rousseau's reflection in *Reveries* speaks of the discrepancy between this

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sentimental education and one's life spent through learning: "Is it time, since we have to die, for learning how we should have lived?" Thus, the ultimate consolation rests on the belief that, by writing, nothing has been futile, that some of the art of loving can be transferred to others, that — finally — the art of reaching pleasure can be learnt (Starobinski 97).

L'Art de jouir (The Art of Enjoyment) is the title chosen by Rousseau for his last work, imagined as a secret key that might open any lock. And if it did not, we may refer to the author's own words: "All our projects of happiness into this world are mere chimeras". All his life, Rousseau felt himself "consumed by the desire to love, without ever being able to fulfil it" and, paradoxically enough, he will utter the most certain truths about love. This is the great secret of his major works: *The Confessions (Les Confessions)* and *Reveries of a Solitary Walker (Rêveries du promeneur solitaire)* on the one hand —, *Julie, or the New Heloise (Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse)* and *Émile: or, On Education (Émile ou de l'éducation)* on the other hand. The former category includes autobiographical works that disclose the misfortunes of erotic failure; the latter comprises works on how love and happiness should be, or what measures should be taken since early childhood so that love become possible ("I have raised Emile neither for craving, nor for waiting, but solely for rejoicing…").

The answer to the question "What is love, pleasure, happiness?" can be found throughout Rousseau's entire work. Love is before us, and we are heading towards it. Writing makes happiness last, thus delaying the ultimate pleasure. Love cannot find its real nature, consistency, limitations and intensity unless it preserves its untouchable side. Thus, the one who suffers from the absence of love actually enjoys its many delights in *The Country of Chimeras (Le Pays des Chimères)*, or a very refined love in *Julie, or the New Heloise (Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse)*.

Through writing, Rousseau gains access to the memory of M-me de Warens and, consequently, to the known pleasure. Thus we might ask ourselves whether love, with Rousseau, is nothing else but a matter of writing. Could love be conceived without writing or romance novels? Sophie, prior to loving Emile, had a real crush on Télémaque, the hero of Fénelon's book. She loved before loving, amid the book. Things are rather different with Rousseau: from his *Confessions*, we learn that the author's mother died while giving birth to him, and the reading revives her within the covers of the book. Rousseau fails to understand a complete fusion between two lovers, hence his propensity to triangular relationships (M-me de Warens shares her love with both Jean-Jacques and the loyal Claude Anet). The *trio* is also present in *The New Heloise*: it is certain that Saint-Preux loves Julie, but the adorable cousin Claire encourages and equally forbids his desire for Julie. An erotic triad is further encountered in *Emile*, when the governor interposes between Emile and Sophie.

If with Rousseau *three* is the lucky number in love, happiness can only be attained in solitude: existence between expectation and love-struck elation, between possible and impossible, between the covers of the book, or even between the book and the reader.

4. *La Vie de Marianne:* Marivaux

Another type of novels featuring a process of 'sentimental education' is that illustrated by retrospective, first-person narrations in the form of the protagonist's

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autobiography. *The Life of Marianne (La Vie de Marianne)* by Marivaux belongs to this pattern: a mature lady in her fifties starts telling the story of her life to a 'dear friend'. The first part of the novel is published in 1731, when its author was 43 years old, the other ten parts following in rather discontinuous issues until 1742. The work will be left unfinished.

From happiness to despair, from success to failure, the heroine's life is not lived as a sequence of improvisations, but as a cold-hearted exercise of gaining one's love. Marianne would not have been distant with Lovelace if her intelligence had not made her understand the risk of vice and the profit of virtue. In her view, a noble name has to be gained, that will provide her social status, richness and power. The complete title of the book—*The Life of Marianne, or The Adventures of Countess …(La Vie de Marianne ou Les Aventures de la Comtesse de …)*—informs the reader that she started writing when the enigma of her origin had already been solved, but nonetheless warns her fictitious correspondent to keep the secret. Her adventures however do not reinforce her education, nor do they alter her nature in any way, as she possesses an inborn nobleness. Being an orphan, she has no social status. And apart from this, she has yet a greater flaw: she stirs no sympathy, but passion. Without protection, Marianne is a genuine object of temptation. Her education rests on stubbornness: she passes from the stage of possible prey to that of nonchalant dominatrix. She moves across various social groups in search of her own place, as to find her name means to regain her identity. Marianne does not make her apprenticeship in using rules and signs, but in discovering herself. This quest leads to the unmasking of a society which hesitates to adopt her, displaying sentimental disorder behind the thin veil of respect for moral codes and etiquette.

5. Conclusion

We can state about *Roman de la Rose* that its great success at the time and the good renown as 'love mentors' for Guillaume de Loris and Jean de Meung are explainable, since the whole story unfolds inside a dream. Stendhal, Flaubert and Proust will continue this direction opened up by the two medieval French writers. Rousseau never abandons his quest for pleasure in his writings, and eventually discovers and offers it to the reader in its sweet or bitter nature. Pleasure is no more than the representation of pleasure; it is found or rediscovered through memory—"telling myself that I felt pleasure, I can still feel it" (it is similar to Proust's *Time Regained/Le Temps retrouvé*)—or it remains eternally promised. Marivaux initiates the series of 'sentimental educations', employing the convention of autobiography.

Referring to the novels prior to Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale* as instances of 'sentimental education', two types of narration can be identified: one postulating that the essential is to be found in discontinuities and looking at the 'sentimental education' as a romantic invention, the other—on the contrary—discovering the cult of the beloved woman, according to the medieval pattern. These two opposing perspectives—discontinuity vs. permanence—are equally valid. What strikes us, in this mixture of inertia and discrepancy, is the moral and religious censorship from the classic period throughout the 20th century. The birth of the novel corresponds to the position of women in society, with an obvious interest in her and a freely-consented masculine subordination.

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