WOMAN IN SEARCH OF HERSELF IN THE NOVELS OF FRANÇOISE MALLET-JORIS

by

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INTRODUCTION

In the early stages of French literature, a female character was destined to play a role without the benefit of development as a complex character. The female character began to change, however, in the nineteenth century in, for example, Balzac's Eugénie Grandet. Eugénie is a young woman whose life is controlled by two passions, fear of her father and love of her cousin. There is no indication of logical reasoning in the character. The woman, as the girl, is isolated from the world, used as a pawn, and set aside to rust until she is to be used again. Fitting her female role perfectly, Eugénie never dares to question her father or to challenge his authority until the passion of love overcomes that of fear. After this brief episode of pure, absolute passion, however, Eugénie seats herself submissively in the corner of the foyer as all proper and saintly young women ought. But, although Balzac insists on her virtue and abnegation, the character is relatively elaborate.

Despite her complexity, what a contrast there is between this young woman and Emma Bovary! Gustave Flaubert discarded the habit of using stiltified women to fit into stereotyped female roles. Emma Bovary is no longer a symbol; she has become in fact a novelistic character; that is to say, she has a personality and dilemmas that are her own. Flaubert has taken his character out of a role and placed her in the midst of life, where each day is somehow different from the previous one. The reader is no longer watching a performance; he is instead observing the blossoming of a young woman who is in the midst of confusion, emotions, and sensations.

Emma Bovary loves, fears, and deceives in the course of her life. The reader watches both her interiorized and her outwardly manifest quests for happiness as she recalls the nostalgic moments of a ball, questions her husband's intrinsic worth, defies religious and social conventions, and anticipates her future. Emma Bovary dares to question her own existence, to seek alternatives to it, and finally to end it. At times she is a ridiculous figure, such as when she fires her servant upon her return from the ball.[1] On other occasions, she is an imposing figure, as in the scene with Maître Guillaumin when she cries out: "Je suis à plaindre, mais pas à vendre!" (Bovary, p. 358). Then Emma Bovary has transcended her role to become a real character.

Flaubert's portrayal of Emma Bovary thus marked the advent of diverse roles for female characters in the French novel, an idea which was nurtured and developed by authors of the late nineteenth century and perpetuated by Colette, the first great female author of the twentieth century. The different social, marital, and educational situations of the female characters indicate the diversification of roles in her work. The women in Colette's novels are adolescents, mothers, and career women. They are married or single, unattached or lovers, heterosexuals or lesbians. Some women show evidence of formal education, while others show evidence of innate intelligence. They love and they suffer. Many of Colette's female characters are making a daily effort to support their existence materially and emotionally. Colette's women are neither evil nor saintly. They express their emotions and deal with love and its anguishes as protagonists

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[1] Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, Livre de Poche Classique, 1972), p. 65.

with life or love as antagonist. They are realistic characters: for example, the protagonist of La Vagabonde with her dilemma of continuing her career or marrying. She is at least as fully developed, as true to life as Julien Sorel of Le Rouge et le noir trying to choose his route to success.

Of course the changing roles of woman in society in the twentieth century hastened the development of new roles for women in the novel, yet this is not the only area in which society has altered or influenced the course of literature. For many characters of novels, life is a series of battles, yet more and more the reader finds the action of the novel actually taking place within the character himself. Thus in many early twentieth century novels women are still superfluous in the sense that they are seen only through the eyes of the protagonist in, for example, La Nausée by Sartre. In Colette's works one finds a complicated existence and complex female characters. In the existentialist literature of the twentieth century, the complications of living and the complexities of characters are intensified and magnified, yet men are using male protagonists in their work. Perhaps this exclusion of female protagonists explains why, with the exception of Simone de Beauvoir, even the existentialist authors treated women superficially. Location, furniture, and other people are present as props, but they are not really involved in those novels. The questioning and self-examination of the post-war philosophers are reflected in the protagonists. The wars of the twentieth century wrought havoc in the lives of these French authors. Watching the upheaval of life as they had known it, these young authors began to question: "What is the value of life?" "What is God's role in the world?" "Must one be an active participant in his own life?" The novels of these authors directly relate the impact of

the wars which surrounded them. Their protagonists reveal the authors' confused questioning views of life. The reader sees Camus's Meursault in self-examination and self-accusation in L'Etranger. One witnesses the complete self-absorption of Michel in Gide's L'Immoraliste. Finally, he sees the daily, journalistic account of the destruction of the narrator, whether it be physical or emotional, in Sartre's La Nausée. The use of stream-of-consciousness manifests the author's philosophy, and as the protagonist fulfills his role, the reader sees the development of a novelistic character with very realistic dimensions.

Sartre's companion, Simone de Beauvoir, follows the trend of isolating her protagonist from the other characters in her novels. The environment is seen as it acts upon the protagonist and as it is reacted to by him. Simone de Beauvoir, however, merges the self-examination of the post-war novelists and the female characters. The protagonists of Les Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, La Femme rompue, and Le Sang des autres are either Simone de Beauvoir herself or direct extensions of her own character and personality as emphasized by the first-person narrative form. This is not to imply a lack of imagination on the part of Sartre, Camus, or de Beauvoir, but rather to prove that the enrichment of the roles for women in literature has been effected by history, society, and chance. These authors must be acknowledged for opening the minds of the public, and thus from the nineteenth century on, the public learned to accept the introspective novel, then, the novelistic woman as legitimate in literature.

Such was the state of literature in the middle of the twentieth century, when Françoise Mallet-Joris published her first novel. As she was born in 1930, she is a product of the society described by Sartre and

de Beauvoir. In Le Rempart des Béguines, her first published novel, Françoise Mallet-Joris uses the first person narrative seen in Sartre's La Nausée, and the protagonist who is closely identified with the author as seen in the works of de Beauvoir. Existentialism is a part of her heritage, and while she cannot be classified as belonging to the existentialist school of thought, the effects of existentialism are deeply ingrained in her writing, as they are in the works of many contemporary French novelists. Living through the era of revolution in women's roles, she is able to place characters into situations which the reader experiences daily. Upon first reading the novel, one wonders whether or not Mallet-Joris, like de Beauvoir and Colette, will use the female protagonist as her super-ego. However, upon closer examination, one sees that she has transcended that technique of fiction. Mallet-Joris draws upon the wealth of talents and literary styles found in French literature, and she has integrated them into her own writing. Referring to the theme of Le Rempart des Béguines, some critics have compared her to Laclos. Others, referring to her vital characters in Les Mensonges and L'Empire céleste, have made allusions to Balzac.[2]

As she draws on a heritage rich in both literature and mythology, Mallet-Joris creates characters whose mere names spark life in the mind of the reader, such as Hélène, Elsa, and Mélusine. Then she uses her own talent to give dimension to her vibrant characters. Feminist critics have ignored her work, because she does not write feminist literature as such. She is not using the theme of self against society, as did de Beauvoir, nor

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[2]Jeanne Cappe, "L'auteur de Mensonges cherche 'sa vérité'," Revue Générale Belge, 92, No. 11, (1956), 134.

the theme of self against love, as did Colette. In contrast with Simone de Beauvoir, Mallet-Joris uses both female antagonists and female protagonists, thus one may wonder which of these women can be most closely identified with the author. However, Mallet-Joris's self-examination passes these limitations, and no single character can be said to possess the author's personality uniquely. Nicolas, van Baarnheim, and Robert are no less realistic, no less extensions of Mallet-Joris, than are Tamara, Hélène, and Allegra. Mallet-Joris develops them through their searches:

> Il y a au coeur de tout ce qu'a écrit F. M.-J. la présence d'une perpétuelle étrangère: la sourde angoisse, la solitude mesurée, l'interrogation sans réponse de celle qui n'arrive pas à jouer le jeu quand ce n'est pas pour de bon.[3]

Conversely, one might argue that Marcelle, Alberte, and Catherine are no less the protagonists in their respective novels than are the men, because Mallet-Joris has developed those characters just as carefully, just as distinctly, as she has developed the male characters, in spite of the fact that their searches are supplementary to those of the men. Thus, in considering this elaboration of all her female characters, and by studying them, one finds that Mallet-Joris helps to form a new branch of the novel that could be entitled "woman in search of herself."

Many of the novels by Colette and by de Beauvoir would fit into this classification. For example La Vagabonde, in which the main character must choose between marriage and a career, and La Femme rompue, in which the main character searches for fulfillment in her life after her children have left home. However, Mallet-Joris has created some of the richest characters yet

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[3]Claude Roy, "Françoise Mallet-vérité," Biblio, 34, No. 2, (1966), 4.

to be found in this type of novel, and as Desnues said: "Dans l'un et l'autre volume Fr. Mallet-Joris a réussi un travail de psychologie extrêmement délicat. . . ."[4] Six of her novels will demonstrate this. They range from the beginning of her career, through her conversion to Catholicism, to the most recent of her novels, Allegra. Studied neither chronologically, nor in age groups, but rather as one finds similarities in their searches, these major female characters will be used to derive a method of identification for these women, to determine the method of self-examination, and finally to define the success of a search for self.

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[4]R. M. Desnues, "Etudes d'auteur: Françoise Mallet-Joris," Livres et Lectures, revue bibliographique, mars, 1965, p. 135.

CHAPTER I

THE PSYCHOLOGISTS

As early as the 1940's psychologists had begun to realize that the psychology of women was an entity unto itself. In 1947 Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, M.D. had published their book Modern Woman: The Lost Sex, in which they presented the thesis that:

> contemporary women in very large numbers are psychologically disordered and that their disorder is having terrible social and personal effects involving men in all departments of their lives as well as women.[1]

In this book, the authors recognized that the so-called disorders were in fact reflecting the difficulty of being a woman in modern society.

> Women are a problem not only as individuals . . . but collectively, as a separate group with special functions within the structure of society . . . . Being a woman was never easy . . . but being a woman today is in many ways more of an ordeal than ever. . . . (Modern Woman, p. 1).

The authors also discuss the effects of women's suffrage, the industrial revolution, the feminist movement, and divorce on the roles of women. At the outset of this book it is evident that the authors still hold traditional ideas of "masculinity" and "femininity" from their differentiation of the two terms when they discuss their observations about women. Deeply ingrained, even in the minds of the professional analysts of women in society, is the concept that assertion or aggression

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[1]Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, M.D., Modern Woman: The Lost Sex (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), p. v.

of any type is a "masculine" characteristic.

> The more importance outside work assumes, the more are the masculine components of the woman's nature enhanced and encouraged. . . . we are observing the masculinization of women. (Modern Woman, p. 235).

The authors offer at the end of their book a chapter entitled "Ways to a Happier End" and two appendices in which they define happiness, masculinity, and femininity. There, one finds happiness defined as the ability to adjust oneself to his environment without doing physical or psychical harm to himself or others.

According to the authors, happiness has nothing whatsoever to do with what a person feels, but only how he interacts with his environment. Consequently, happiness is largely dependent upon the person's acceptance of his own "masculinity" or "femininity." While the authors accept that society determines the "masculinity" or "femininity" of a person by outward behavior, such as aggressiveness or docility, they express the point of view that the "masculinity" or "femininity" of a person is an inner feeling of acceptance and an outward manifestation of the assertion of the reproductive function. They view male creativity in the arts and sciences as the manifestation of man's jealousy of woman's role in the reproductive function. In the final analysis, they find that "masculinity" and "femininity" are: ". . . subtly complementary to each other. . . . Neither trait will permit itself to be deflected from some substantial realization of its reproductive goal" (Modern Woman, p. 386).

If "masculinity" and "femininity" are defined by the jobs most men and women have, then "masculine" means being aggressive, "feminine" withdrawn. However, this definition of the terms brings the discussion of "masculinity"

and "femininity" to a different level. It is clear then, that the concept of woman in search of herself today is influenced by psychologists' studies made available to the public through books and television.

However, it is only in the recent past that psychologists have come to the study of women not as the weak image of men, but realizing that their psychological make-up is not abnormal, but only different from that of men, because they had roles which were different from those of men. They acknowledge the physical differences between the two sexes, and due to advanced medical technology they are now able to consider with new insight the role that a woman's body, especially her hormonal changes, plays upon her psyche. They consider more and more the physical side of the woman and her social side. Rare is the modern textbook on the psychology of women which does not discuss the effects of puberty, pregnancy, and menopause on a woman's personality. Equally rare is the book which ignores the differences among the single woman, the woman in the family, and the professional woman. Studies of these women classified by age, profession, and family situation are presently being conducted world-wide, and papers continue to appear evaluating women's self-image, their achievement motivation, and their frustration levels in different aspects of society.

The results of studies indicate that the woman is still in a time of great psychological conflict, being trained for traditionally "masculine" professions, attaining equality with men before the law, and struggling against the deeply ingrained concepts of "femininity." And, yet, she cannot divorce herself from her own sexuality. In a world which pretends she is the equal of men, she still faces a social stigma as she is associated with weakness, gentleness, and superficiality. Following

the mood of their times, psychologists are trying to determine how much of the psychological frustration of women is physical, how much of it is a result of an oppressive society, and how much of it is due to the woman's self-concept.

Unlike boys who begin receiving societal pressures to develop independence as early as age two and thus start a quest for identity at that very early age, young girls usually do not begin to sense an ambiguity about who and what they are becoming until they attain puberty. Studies indicate however that from the beginning the girl's sense of self-esteem is a result of her interpersonal relationships with parents, teachers, and finally peers. Because of the traditional view of femininity, and because of the implicit assumption that regardless of what a girl decides to become she will inevitably become a wife and mother, the girl seldom receives encouragement in becoming an aggressive and independent human being. Thus for the young woman who has not experienced an investigation of self at puberty, the search for self or the development of an independent personality might be postponed for decades until it is triggered by another physical change or a drastic change in her social position. Thus we see key points when a woman might be in search of herself, as pointed out by psychological studies. Definitely at puberty, first pregnancy, and menopause, the physical changes that the woman's body undergoes cause emotional changes and often trigger the search for self. The professional woman might also undergo such an upheaval at the time of her marriage. The sense of loss brought about by divorce, death, and the departure of grown children often motivates the woman to begin a new search for self, in an effort to find a new source of meaning in her life.

Again, the woman's sense of self-esteem is derived from the appreciation of other people, her peers, and above all her mate, or her children. So today's woman is receiving ambiguous signals from all those about her.

> When role definitions for women are no longer clear or restricted, then the freedom of choice can be costly to individual women who are no longer certain of the cultural norms or their own normality.[2]

She receives praise for academic success as a young child, and rejection by the opposite sex, and often from her parents, for the same type of success later in her life. She must be both a seductress and an inhibitor to young men in dating relationships as she spends her teens and her twenties in an important search for a mate. She fears being no more than a sex object, but finds that she is most often evaluated on that basis. Her own sense of self-worth comes to be closely related to her contentment about her physical self. The young mother receives criticism for living vicariously through her children, and again if she leaves the home to develop her own talents and personality. In short, the woman is open to criticism regardless of her choice of method for her personal development, and many women are living with the latent fear of being "abnormal."

The woman must find her identity and develop a sense of self-esteem, so sometimes "marriage is the resolution of one identity crisis and the beginning of another" (Bardwick, p. 210). Some women will use it in an effort to resolve their conflict, others will try motherhood to do the same thing. Men cannot make babies, and "creating a child is a real achievement and its value does not depend on others' responses" (Bardwick, p. 211).

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[2]Judith M. Bardwick, Psychology of Women: A Study of Bio-Cultural Conflicts (New York: Harper, 1971), p. 213.

Some women go back to school, start a career, or do volunteer work. These routes to the end of the search for self are usually worthwhile or constructive, yet there is information which indicates that many women cannot resolve their conflicts. The growth of alcoholism among women in late middle-age, and the fact that many women require therapy to resolve the identity crisis show how roles today are badly defined. Unfortunately, as Lundberg and Farnham stated in 1947, it is becoming progressively difficult to be a woman.

Away from sciences, Mallet-Joris does not collect data and analyze statistics. She does, however, give the reader countless social examples through her characters. She vividly portrays different women searching for different lives. Béatrice in Les Signes et les prodiges is a widow with a grown child searching for a new meaning for her life. Hélène of Le Rempart des Béguines is an adolescent searching for a female model for her life of womanhood. Paule from the novel Allegra is a young adult trying to establish her femininity while conducting a successful career in the business world. The list of characters continues each with different goals, and each is a manifestation of woman in search of herself in the terms of today's psychologists.

In the novels of Mallet-Joris, the reader has an opportunity to deal with the woman in search of herself on a personal basis and to observe the motivations for and methods of her search. The field is not yet exhausted, each woman and each search is unique, as the reader will discover in closely examining the characters of Mallet-Joris's novels, beginning with the portrayal of an alcoholic, Elsa Damiaen.

CHAPTER II

IN A WORLD OF HER OWN

> No one can find a full life without feeling understood at least by one person, . . . no one comes to know himself through introspection. . . . He who would see himself clearly must open up to a confident freely chosen and worthy of such trust.[1]

No one knows when one decides to begin the search, but as a woman begins to change her self-concept, she enters a world of options. First she must decide whether or not to set out upon this quest. No woman is forced to change her self-perception. Once she has begun her search, she has made the most vital decision, regardless of whether or not it was a conscious choice. If a person's decision to search for himself is an unconscious one, that is to say, if he is not totally aware of the objective of his search, it will definitely affect the search itself in so far as he will not consciously choose a method of conducting the investigation. It does not alter, however, the fact that a decision has been made. Yet for the woman who has made a conscious decision, who was been aware of the fact that she is beginning an investigation of her own essence, each new option is directly confronted and carefully weighed before she makes a choice. Once committed to the search, she must then choose her method of search.

In her choice of a method of investigation, a woman must, of course, consider the world in which she functions daily. Thus, in studying woman in

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[1]Paul Tournier, To Understand Each Other (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 1.

search of herself, one can classify the search as either conventional or unconventional. One easily recognizes the difference between the two types. A woman engaged in a conventional search is able to function in her social milieu without attracting undue attention from those around her, either to herself, or to the fact that she is involved in a personal evaluation. Most of the women in Mallet-Joris's novels follow a method of search which could be called conventional in this respect. Those, however, who embark on an unconventional quest do indeed attract undue attention to themselves by their appearance or by their behavior. While they are still functioning in the normal world, they are searching and mentally living in one of their own creation. The people around them consider them as bizarre, eccentric, or ill, but they are women who are trying to find their identity.

Considering such women in these novels, one must definitely include three major characters, Elsa Damiaen from Les Mensonges, Mélusine, or Mlle Sygne, from Le Jeu du souterrain, and, to a large degree, Tamara Soulerr from Le Rempart des Béguines. These are the women who live in fantasies which they have created for themselves, in an effort to escape the reality of the world. These are the women who define themselves for others in terms of their own realities, because they have not been able to accept society's definition of who they are supposed to be. This is the most elementary level of searching, for it acknowledges only the first step, that is the recognition that the character is not who society supposes her to be. Instead of trying to find who she is in terms of the world and society, she denies this world and creates a world in which she does not need to define herself, because she knows her own role in it.

Elsa Damiaen from the novel Les Mensonges is the most obvious example of a woman who is unable to live with society's perception of her.

Elsa Damiaen is a mature, middle-aged woman when she first appears. Her name reminds the reader of Elsa, the beautiful woman accused of killing her brother in the story of "Lohengrin." Although she was once a beautiful woman, Elsa is, as she appears in the novel, only the vestige of that beauty which has been destroyed by a life of poverty, prostitution, and alcoholism. The mother of Alberte, an illegitimate child, she has used not only prostitution but also blackmail to provide for herself and her daughter. One may question her motherly feelings as she uses Alberte to squeeze money from her father Klaes van Baarnheim and finally sells Alberte to him.

Mallet-Joris describes the life of gaiety that Elsa pursued before Alberte was born, the life of poverty to which she submitted after the birth of her daughter, and the life of emptiness she leads after she is cured of her alcoholism. One sees Elsa through the eyes of van Baarnheim, Alberte, the psychiatrist, and Elsa herself. Although Elsa was never witty or intellectually inclined, she was a charming young woman. Her drunken, impoverished state has not managed to cure Elsa of her flamboyant imagination or of her laziness. Elsa remains sensitive to the opinions of others when she is sober, and the reader witnesses her feeble attempts to justify her life-style to the public. On rare occasions, Elsa astonishes the reader with her insight into her own situation. Well-depicted, although a secondary character, Elsa is in fact a proud and modest woman in spite of her life of poverty and degradation. Like her lies, a very concrete symbol of that pride and modesty, her shawl serves as a physical protection against the world, and more abstractly it shelters her from it.

Not only does Elsa Damiaen create her own reality in which she functions and defines herself, she also insulates herself so that she will

not experience the pain of the world. It is this insulation that first renders Elsa's method of search unconventional. While under the influence of alcohol, Elsa wanders through the town relating her version of her child's and her own heritage and their present state of poverty. Society attributes the story to her drunken state, and it considers her a sick woman. Even Alberte hopes to render her mother sane by curing her of her alcoholism. No one recognizes the fact that Elsa remains drunk in order to believe the lies she has created. Elsa is only too aware of the reality of her existence and must isolate herself from those who wish to force its acceptance upon her. Her alcoholism is the result of Elsa's effort to show society that its perception of her is wrong, and that she cannot be forced into their mold. Ironically, her effort only confirms society's judgment.

Pride is the driving force of Elsa Damiaen. Elsa was proud of her beauty, but as she loses her youth and her beauty she must find a new source of pride, and she must combat the shame brought about by the birth of an illegitimate child. So she creates a story about Alberte's birth, she engulfs herself in this story, and she embellishes the crude world with this lie. Her daughter and her name, along with the story about them which Elsa has created, serve to diminish the baseness of her life. In her own self-perception, Elsa lives as a very proud woman.

Even though Elsa is hospitalized and forcibly weaned from alcohol, with sobriety she does not automatically attain awareness of who she is in the eyes of society. In fact, she insists upon her own concept of reality, the one in which she knows her role and her identity.

> "Ils m'ont enlevé mes belles robes, hein?"
> dit Elsa avec un sourire un peu tremblant.

> "Ils veulent me faire croire. . . . Mais patience. Ils verront ce qu'ils verront, quand je toucherai ma part dans la banque. . . ."[2]

It takes the efforts of a psychiatrist to enable Elsa Damiaen to say that she hates her illegitimate daughter, and that being unskilled and a prostitute, she alone must accept responsibility for the poverty in which she and her daughter have lived. Thus Elsa learns to recite her lessons about society's perception of her. Elsa has chosen an unreliable method of dealing with reality, and she is too weak and vulnerable to resist society's efforts to remold her.

Not having tried to find her talents and to develop them, Elsa also lacks the will to shape the world around her. She has not stepped back to see herself from society's point of view, and she has had no valuable communication with other women to learn how they deal with society. Elsa is not intelligent; she is an instinctive and frightened woman.

> "Car ils me font mourir, c'est sûr: ils y ont intérêt . . . il y en a une qui a voulu me faire parler, savoir nos secrets de famille: je l'ai giflée! 'Je ne me laisserai pas entortiller par personne,' je lui ai dit. 'Elsa Damiaen, de la grande Banque Damiaen ne se laissera pas faire.'" (Mensonges, pp. 258-59).

Feeling the disparity between who she was in reality, and who she was internally, Elsa made no effort to merge the two. Instead of searching and testing, Elsa defined herself for society in her own terms, and she found shelter in a wine bottle. Her choice of method for determining her identity forced her to relinquish her right to choose further. Thus, in Elsa Damiaen, the reader sees the ultimate effect of barring a woman from

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[2] Françoise Mallet-Joris, Les Mensonges (Paris: René Julliard, Editions J'ai Lu, 1956), p. 259.

her search for herself, which results in the total destruction of the person.

The cured Elsa Damiaen, acknowledging, confessing, and accepting, on command from her doctor, renounces her fantasy, and, as a direct result of that, loses the will to live. Separated from her self-perception, forced into facing society's perception of her, Elsa Damiaen becomes less than human, non-existent. Society's Elsa Damiaen never existed, she will never become a part of its world, because the real Elsa Damiaen, her essence, died with the dream in which she lived. Through Alberte and the psychiatrist, Mallet-Joris emphasizes the right to a search for self.

> "Mais qu'est-ce qu'il lui restera quand vous lui aurez tout enlevé?" . . . Des facultés qui ne semblaient qu'à peine en rapport avec leurs folies [celles des fous et qui] disparaîssent comme si à force d'en racler la surface on leur avait arraché jusqu'à l'âme (Mensonges, pp. 316-17).

Indeed, they have robbed the person of her identity, they have taken away her pride, and Elsa Damiaen is a destroyed woman.

Contrary to this sad fate, Mlle Sygne, or Mélusine, of Le Jeu du souterrain, is able to escape this annihilation by society. Yet, her search is as unconventional as that of Elsa, and the life-style which she has created for herself is as unacceptable by social standards as is Elsa Damiaen's. There is an ethereal quality about Mlle Sygne which causes Robert to call her Mélusine, the name of the fairy in the book which she is writing, and the name of that mythological creature, half-woman, half-serpent, seems more applicable to this woman than her own. For Mlle Sygne, or Mélusine, has the ability to read people's minds and to control events around her. The name Sygne brings to mind the word "cygne," an animal

identified with fairies throughout history in myths such as "Lohengrin" and works such as "Swan Lake." As her name indicates, Mlle Sygne serves as a sign to Robert of the problems he will encounter in writing his story of the underground search! She stops the underground search.

Mélusine, as she will be called in this paper, has at least one advantage over Elsa in her battle to live in her own reality. That advantage is her age, or rather her agelessness. Mélusine is an older woman than Elsa, or at least she gives that impression:

> Elle a un visage fin, marqué de rides de nervosité plus que d'âge, et les cheveux tirés en arrière en une maigre petite torsade. Elle a pu être jolie à vingt ans. Elle en a trente-cinq ou cinquante, on ne sait plus à cause justement de ce léger tremblement, de quelque chose d'égaré, dans le regard. Pas folle, pas clocharde, mais sur le point de le devenir peut-être.[3]

Mallet-Joris presents Mélusine through the eyes of Robert, of the innkeeper, and of the character herself. She does not give us a specific age for Mélusine, but she shows us the ravages of time. The nervous tic, the palsied, tottering walk, and the shriveled look of an old woman pervade the story when Mélusine is present. There is always an aura of mystery about the woman. The reader, along with Robert, becomes acutely aware of at least two different aspects of Mélusine's existence, again suggesting the fairy who was half-woman, half-serpent. One wonders if there are not even more. Nobody dares to challenge Mélusine's identity because no one really knows who she is. Is she Mlle Sygne, the author, Yvonne Rebec, the Bretonne, Mélusine, the fairy, or Annick, the dead friend? To the innkeeper,

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[3]Françoise Mallet-Joris, Le Jeu du souterrain (Paris: Bernard Grasset, Editions Livre de Poche, 1973), p. 43.

she is Mlle Rebec. To Robert she is Mlle Sygne; is she in fact a sign or a magical swan for him? He confuses her with her fairy and calls her Mélusine, a misnomer to which she does not object. In her own mind, she questions whether she might not be the earthly manifestation of her dear, dead friend Annick.

> Annick avait une intuition. . . . L'amitié entre nous était totale. . . . Mais si notre union n'avait pas été pure, croyez-vous que la communication de l'au-delà serait aujourd'hui si nette (Jeu, p. 94)?

The important thing is that all of this eccentricity is accepted, because Mélusine forces her character on people, she doesn't want to change, and people cannot succeed in forcing her to change. Mélusine frightens people, or perhaps one should say she makes them uneasy and bewilders them. She has the air of a scholar, and the little money she earns comes from doing research for authors like Robert. The alias is not so uncommon among authors, so she uses it without fear of condemnation. Like Rastignac, she maintains an image of respectability, at least in her own mind, through her gloves, an archaic notion that the proper gloves command social acceptance. She speaks of Annick with such candor that those around her are too embarrassed to question the authenticity of her tale. Because they have never experienced supernatural activity they fear it, and they also fear to disturb Mélusine, who appears to have supernatural power. Therefore, Mélusine wanders about in her shawl, as Elsa did, with an involuntary tic, taking shelter from storms in department stores and searching garbage cans for newspapers and magazines. "Elle n'a pas d'amis parmi ceux qui se réchauffent ensemble. Elle ne va pas en bande: Personne, croit-elle, ne lui ressemble" (Jeu, p. 121). Yet instead of forcing her to adjust to

society's point of view, people smile in bemusement or shake their heads in dismay.

Mélusine seems to have chosen her life-style. If she is, as she claims, an educated woman, then she must live in poverty conditions by choice, unlike Elsa. At first it appears as though Mélusine's life centers around her research and her book. It is a book which she will never finish, but that safeguards her from persecution by society. Because of her education, Mélusine has the capacity to better herself in the eyes of society, to move out of the hotel kitchen. That is what she leads society to believe, but she remains in her impoverished existence without manifesting even the desire to improve her situation in this world.

Mélusine is in the midst of a search, she is in the middle of a journey, but she knows where she is going. Her speech and her clothing indicate that she is suspended in time. She is an anachronism searching for her proper element. The beauty of Mélusine resides in her total acceptance of and dedication to that search. She must find the society that fits her, for Mélusine knows who she is, and she refuses to compromise her essence to fit into society. The search is not a driving force in her life, but it is rather her life in itself. The existence of Annick, the quality of her clothes, the completion of her book, these are the realities of Mélusine's world, whether they are in Robert's world or not. It matters little to Mélusine if people scoff at her and mock her:

> elle devait avoir pris l'habitude de l'ironie, des rebuffades, de l'indifférence . . . autant d'oreilles indifférentes, de soupirs distraits, de monosyllables sans chaleur. . . . On ne l'entendait pas. Elle pouvait broder tout à son aise. . . . Elle était bien tranquille dans un sens (Jeu, p. 91).

She hears the remarks and is aware of the odd looks, but in her fantasized world she is insulated against them. Mélusine is so completely entrenched in her own reality that, unlike Elsa Damiaen, she needs neither drug nor device to keep herself insulated. She comes much closer to making her identity work in the world around her than Elsa does, but, like Elsa, she requires the reality she has created in order to function as herself. Thus it is not amazing that Mélusine can live in an over-populated city, yet go through the entire day without communicating with another human being. Mélusine is sufficient unto herself. Not the pathetic woman Elsa Damiaen becomes, she is a powerful woman who has made a definite choice between two worlds; she is cunning enough to survive in them both, and she succeeds in influencing people like Robert to the extent that he stops his project. Her search for herself, through the domination of people or events, must indeed be considered successful.

Perhaps, then, the secret to success is to create a reality for yourself that is so fantastic that other people do not dare to question it. It seems as if society dominates only those who are too weak to defend themselves and who are unsure of their realities. Mélusine's world of literature and the occult, the unknown world, is not violated. Elsa's world of fantasies of riches and of alcoholism is shattered, because society understands the falseness of that world and thus can challenge it. But what then of Tamara Soulerr's world of lesbianism? How does society react to her accessible yet unfamiliar world?

Tamara seems to have fallen by chance into the world of lesbianism. Unable to wield authority in her daily existence, she found the power she so greatly desired in a lesbian world without men. It was not until after

she married that Tamara came to realize the value of education, money, and power. As a divorced woman, Tamara is an outcast in the society of Gers. But her divorced status is not so large an obstacle to overcome as her lesbian activities would be. Society is unaware of this private world of Tamara's. It is because of that ignorance that, as the mistress of the richest man in Gers, Tamara finds herself grudgingly accepted into polite society and begins to experience in the outside world the power she cherished in her lesbian world. Tamara is more aware of the importance of society in her life than are the two preceding characters. She is acutely aware of the boundaries which she must not cross. Thus it is only when outside of the town of Gers that Tamara allows herself to become completely immersed in her fantastic lesbian world. Knowing how society would react to her personal reality, Tamara, unlike Mélusine or Elsa, keeps it completely hidden from those who do not share in it. Tamara realizes that she is losing control of her personal reality, and that it is overpowering her. Knowing that her reality is incompatible with society's, Tamara consciously decides in which of the two she will continue to function.

In search of herself, Tamara differs from Mélusine by choosing to live in the world of the people around her rather than in her own. The perception of those around her does not destroy her, and thus she differs from Elsa. Living in two different worlds, Tamara was unable to be a completed person. By choosing to live in only one society, Tamara allows herself the opportunity to grow and to develop in her chosen world, through a conventional search for her identity, while Elsa and Mélusine deny the opportunity for growth.

Watching the development of these characters, one begins to sense the validity of Dr. Tournier's statement that a person must open up to

someone whom he trusts to attain a full understanding of self. The woman must relate to somebody other than herself in order not to stifle her own growth. Elsa finally opens up, but not to a person she trusts and chooses. Her confidences are forced from her, as if she were a piece of laundry to be wrung out. There is no true interpersonal communication in her therapy, and she leaves therapy in a much worse condition than when she entered it. She leaves it as a shattered person. Mélusine at least communicates with Annick. While the reader strongly suspects Annick is not a living person, Mélusine in any case establishes a very deep emotional relationship with this woman. Through that relationship, she feels that she is understood by at least one person, which according to Dr. Tournier is the key to finding a full life. The problem arises because Mélusine is not communicating with a contemporary in her society. She is, instead, reinforcing her own ideas by believing she is hearing them from a second source. This serves to isolate her even more completely from society. Tamara is the only one of these characters who has any real communication with other human beings. It is through this exposure to other people that Tamara comes to realize the need for a different method in her search. Through her relationships with other people she reaches outside herself. She influences people and events, and thus begins an active search for herself.

CHAPTER III

SUCCESS THROUGH COMPROMISE

> The negative image of the female has also been reflected in their career choices and anticipations of ultimate failure. Sex roles are not as clear-cut for older females . . . acquisition of negative stereotypes regarding femininity occur.[1]

Tamara Soulerr is a foreigner in the town of Gers, which makes it difficult for her to find her place in that society, but which also lends her an aura of mystery and exoticism, especially in the eyes of young Hélène Noris. This inability to blend into society leaves Tamara three positions into which she may fit, beneath society, outside of society, or leading society. At first it appears as though Tamara would be quite happy to remain outside of society. She holds those people, the social elite of Gers, in contempt, especially the women. She feels the strong need to enter that society and, in fact, to dominate it, as a direct result of her feeling that they held her in contempt.

There are two driving forces in Tamara Soulerr, disdain of labor and pride. An illiterate until after her marriage, Tamara quickly learned the value of education, money, and power. At her husband's hands she suffered humiliations, and in order to compensate for that humiliation she was driven to search for someone weaker than herself whom she could dominate. Her negative opinion of women in general leads her into a society where she

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[1]Tom Parrish, et al., "Reversing Effects of Sexism . . ." Journal of Instructional Psychology, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 12.

becomes the domineering force in the lives of other women. "Je notai au passage la manie déplaisante qu'avait Tamara d'appeler toutes les femmes 'la petite'."[2] It is not small coincidence, to be sure, that Tamara is also an excellent horsewoman, and that she is invited to ride the best horses free of charge. A symbol of masculinity, horses are another outlet for Tamara's drive for authority and power, and there is a direct parallel between Tamara's excellent horsemanship and her powerful, manipulative influence on men. From the time of her first marriage, Tamara started developing her manipulative skills, using her first husband as a model and the humiliation which she suffered at his hands as an impetus. Never again was Tamara Soulerr to be found in a similar relationship with a man.

Like Mme de Merteuil of Les Liaisons dangereuses, Tamara makes a science of deceit and allows no one to know her true thoughts and feelings. As a result of the problems in her own life, Tamara becomes an evil character. However, unlike the sinister Merteuil, Tamara is not trying to destroy people. Even Hélène, who thinks she knows the real Tamara, is not certain of what Tamara really believes or thinks. Tamara's disdain for work, established through flashbacks, demonstrates her disgust for conventional life. First Tamara practically begs her husband for money when she is living with Emily, then she is in a state of near starvation when she is taken in by Max. Work, manual labor, simply was not an option that would occur to her. When Hélène's father offers to marry Tamara, there is little need for her to consider her decision carefully. The fact that she does not love him, as Hélène points out, matters little in her decision. It is at

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[2]Françoise Mallet-Joris, Le Rempart des Béguines (Paris: René Julliard, Editions Livre de Poche, 1951), p. 196.

this point that Tamara's complete awareness of both self and society emerges.

First of all, Tamara is aware of her dislike of work and knows that she must find a way of supporting herself. Her role as a mistress is a good means of support, but it has no future. Already in her mid-thirties, Tamara would soon reach the age where she would be unable easily to attract men who could support her. Thus, marriage is, for Tamara, an investment in the future. Marriage to René Noris is especially attractive since his daughter, without his knowledge of the situation, is Tamara's mistress. But perhaps the most impressive factor is René Noris's position in the community of Gers. He is, first of all, the wealthiest man in the town, and thus the most respected, and secondly, he will soon be mayor, the most powerful man in Gers. In this position, Tamara will be accepted by those who will not accept her as the man's mistress. Therefore she will be in a powerful position in the society which she so disdains, and able to manipulate as many people as possible.

Tamara is also aware of what she must relinquish in order to attain that position of power. She must give up a large part of her personal freedom. She will not be able to leave Gers, and she will not be able to continue her affair with Max. She realizes that she is jeopardizing her lesbian relationship with Hélène, but in her final evaluation the gain far outweighs the loss.

Mallet-Joris shows the results of Tamara's decision in the sequel to Le Rempart des Béguines, La Chambre rouge. Tamara continues her friendship with Max in spite of giving up her physical relationship with him. Max still adores her, her husband admires her, and other men find her appealing, all of which serve to satisfy her ego. In terms of her search, she does

things to see how far she can go. Although somewhat disgruntled by the fact that Hélène is free to win Jean's affections, Tamara plays the role of virtuous wife to the fullest and glories in her successful flirtation with the young director. If there is any doubt in the reader's mind as to whether or not Tamara made the proper decision, it is dispelled by one scene in La Chambre rouge. On Christmas Eve, the elite society of Gers follows Tamara to midnight Mass at the church frequented by prostitutes. Tamara is leading the entire society, as a shepherd leads his sheep, and she has realized her dream of power over those whom she despises. She establishes in this manner her superiority to the masses and reinforces her self-esteem. So in spite of her compromises, Tamara has been able to realize her fantasies in the real world, and she no longer needs a created world in her imagination. Is she happy? One would doubt that Tamara is happy, for she is too acutely aware of her personal compromises, and she intensely despises the people who follow her whims. However, Tamara is at peace with her position in the world. Not only is she leading the blind and ignorant society of Gers, but she also has regained assurance of her value in the eyes of men. She is one of the lucky few who is able to end her search for herself successfully.

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> a woman's self-esteem and self-concept are . . . closely linked to the appearance and functioning of her body . . . her self-evaluation will largely depend upon her sexual and maternal success.[3]

[3]Judith Bardwick, Feminine Personality and Conflict (Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1970), p. 3.

Catherine Guibal, the childless wife of Robert in Le Jeu du souterrain, is another woman whose search ends successfully. However, Catherine's search did not begin with her marriage, and she too, in the course of her search tries to establish her sexual attractiveness to other men. Fear of mediocrity impels Catherine to begin her search for herself.

> Elle se souvenait de ces vacances désargentées à Olivette . . . tout à coup elle avait vu ce tableau lamentable . . . ce n'était pas le manque d'argent, c'était le manque de qualité . . . qui l'avait suffoquée. . . . elle avait peur . . . d'en arriver au point où elle ne s'apercevrait même plus de cette médiocrité (Jeu, pp. 108-09).

Trying to live her life through her husband, Catherine soon realized that she could not attain her goal through him. Her first reaction was one of anger, and Catherine made the mistake of trying to hurt him in her efforts to find herself.

> Se consacrer totalement au Robert de l'Olivette . . . était devenu impossible. . . . elle ne lui pardonnait pas de n'avoir pas compris. Elle avait voulu le punir et . . . c'est elle qu'elle avait punie. . . . Et si elle arrivait à se détacher tout à fait de lui, serait-elle encore la seule punie (Jeu, pp. 109-10)?

Catherine feels she has been persecuted throughout her life, but in reality, she brings on her frustration and disappointment herself, through her attitude towards others. "Catherine aurait vraiment de l'affection pour Vivi, . . . si sa soeur aînée ne représentait pas pour elle le symbole même de l'injustice dont elle se sent perpétuellement victime" (Jeu, p. 60). Catherine is like a modern day Emma Bovary whose expectations of herself and those around her are unrealistically high. Catherine must be the best teacher, her husband the best novelist, her proposed lover the best poet, yet, neither she nor they are the kind of people who are capable of succeeding

par excellence. Catherine is a romantic, an idealist, living in a mundane world. So the frustrated Catherine becomes a bitter and cynical woman.

In an effort to combat her frustration and to find herself, she isolates herself in her apartment, she sleeps, reads, smokes, and drinks. This conduct serves only to increase her frustration. "Vivi essayait de 'secouer' sa soeur. . . . 'Moi aussi je travaille, mais je sors. . . . Ça n'est pas une vocation, le chagrin.' 'Je ne sais pas, tu vois,' dit Catherine un jour" (Jeu, p. 49).

Catherine does in fact try to get out more often, she goes to the cinema and to see friends. She recognizes the source of her problems:

> Je suis celle qui n'est pas aimée. . . . A partir d'aujourd'hui je vivrai pour moi. . . . Je ne vis que pour Robert, ne pense qu'à travers lui, je ne suis plus une femme complète. (Jeu, pp. 187, 200, 231).

Even in trying to liberate herself from her life of frustration, Catherine thinks in terms of Robert.

It is, however, her effort to prove her indifference to Robert that leads her to the end of her search for herself. When Catherine determinedly goes to Jean-Francis to establish her physical attractiveness and her emotional independence from Robert, she finds that she cannot carry out her plan. She cannot be unfaithful to her husband. She fails in her final attempt to liberate herself from her life in terms of Robert. It is this failure on her part, however, that enables Catherine to face reality. At last, she has come face to face with her own limitations:

> Je me faisais des illusions. . . . Mais je ne me fais plus d'illusions. . . . Est-ce à cause de mon échec . . . ou du sien . . . il y a entre nous un point commun, l'échec (Jeu, p. 265).

In confronting that reality Catherine finds peace and is at last successful in her search. Her acceptance of her limitations enables her to free herself from her fear of mediocrity. She has not solved all her problems, she still does not like teaching, Robert will still take mistresses, but she has learned to live with herself and reality:

> je me suis rendu compte que mon éducation, mes préjugés, tout ça comptait autant qu'un . . . idéal, . . . dans cette fidélité dont j'étais si fière. Et j'ai cessé d'être fière. . . . Alors elle ne valait pas mieux que Robert (Jeu, pp. 300, 305).

Catherine was in fact forced to search for success through her profession and through her husband, confirming Bardwick's statement that a woman's success and self-concept are related to her success in motherhood and in her sexual relationships. Catherine's self-esteem was destroyed by her husband's many mistresses and by his lack of professional success. She became frigid as a result. The fact that she had no children, possibly was unable to have children, closed the route of maternal success for her in her search for self-esteem. In reuniting with her husband and overcoming her frigidity, Catherine has reopened a possible route to success. Her improved concept of her sexual self helps to improve her total self-perception, as one sees near the end of the book with her optimistic, yet not idealistic comment: "'On pourra toujours reprendre la route demain matin,' dit-elle. 'Dans un sens ou dans l'autre . . .'" (Jeu, p. 305). Now we know she is aware of different choices and thus can shape her life, utilizing her personality, her education, and her environment in her evolving self-perception.

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> We have an educational system that . . . prepares men and women . . . for careers that social and internal psychological pressure limit to men. . . . The social structure . . . provides few, if any, positive incentives . . . for career-oriented women.[4]

Paule, from the novel Allegra, is an example of a woman succeeding in a typically male area. Social and psychological pressures exerted upon her stifle her professional success. She does not have Catherine's problem of illusions of superiority. Paule is an excellent business woman. The eldest daughter in a "matriarchal" family, Paule finds herself, the spinster sister of the model wife and mother, Josephine, and the beautiful, young Allegra. Her femininity has always been a matter of doubt in her family, whose constant concern is when Paule will settle down and marry. It is as if Paule were not a member of a secret society to which all the women in her family belonged. Quite successful as the proprietor of a beauty salon, Paule does not begin her search in earnest until the marriage of her younger sister, Allegra.

The family is scandalized when Allegra decides to continue her work at Paule's salon after her marriage, and they attribute this contrary behavior to the influence of Paule. Thus, Paule's own family perceives her as an enemy. Trapped into the psychology of contemporary society, Paule is one of those women who fears to succeed because success in the business world automatically implies loss of femininity. Her femininity already in question, Paule is almost emotionally destroyed when her lover leaves her to marry another woman, reinforcing the importance of sexual success stated

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[4]Matina S. Horner, Feminine Personality and Conflict (Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1970), p. 45.

by Bardwick. Thus Paule begins to question her values and to re-evaluate her priorities. Unhappy, dissatisfied, and unfulfilled, she wonders if she is a failure, in spite of her very obvious business success.

> elle ne faisait pas de tentative de suicide, . . .
> elle souffrait sans pleurer. Paule doutait que de
> parcourir "les bas-fonds" . . . fût pour elle un
> remède praticable. Se noyer dans le travail,
> lancer sérieusement cette fabrication avec l'idée
> de laquelle elle jouait depuis quelque temps? . . .
> Mais aujourd'hui cette solution lui paraîssait
> aussi romanesque, aussi improbable, que l'idée de
> se précipiter à Avignon et d'égorger Gabrielle.[5]

Paule is aware of the courses which she must not follow, but she is not yet sure of the right path.

It is Allegra's husband, Jean-Philippe, who aids Paule in her search for herself, the first man ever to offer her help of any sort: "Pourquoi sont-ce toujours des femmes qui m'ont dit: Je vous aiderai?" (Allegra, p. 63). An enlightened young man, he appreciates Paule's wit and intelligence and encourages her in her business endeavors. He even helps Paule to secure a contract with a major cosmetics firm, which will make her more secure financially. Most importantly, however, Jean-Philippe restores Paule's faith in her femininity. He enables her not just to feel she is a successful businesswoman, but also to feel she is a successful woman. Their relationship is tainted only by the fact that he is Paule's brother-in-law.

The reader must then deal with, as must Paule, his own moral values. Is Paule's self-fulfillment an important enough end to justify the adulterous relationship, the betrayal of her sister and of her family? Now that Paule is reassured of her femininity, should she not give up her brother-in-law

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[5]Françoise Mallet-Joris, Allegra (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1976), pp. 62-63.

and search for another man who will appreciate all she has to offer both as a woman and as a human being? Those questions bother Paule only when she is not with the man she loves.

This is not so large a dilemma as the previous one. Paule, having been chastised by her family for her independence and success, feels little sense of sisterly fidelity in this matter. Not only is she finally feeling herself to be a worthwhile person, but she is also taking revenge on the very people who caused her feelings of inferiority and insecurity. It is thus a double triumph for Paule to affiliate herself with a large cosmetics firm and to win the husband of her ultra-feminine sister. Paule is not intentionally stepping on anyone, but after having been held down and stepped upon for so many years of her life, she relishes her new freedom and will not give it up for anyone. It is an example of a successful search. Paule finds someone who loves and understands her, and from him she learns to love and understand herself. That is the major concern of a search for self, to learn to accept who one has become and what one's society is and to blend the two harmoniously. "Et Paule épousa Jean-Philippe, et engendra Antoine, . . . puis elle engendra Vanina, du nom de sa mère" (Allegra, p. 410). As if to sanction Paule's search for herself, Mallet-Joris uses Biblical style to legitimize Paule's relationship with Jean-Philippe at the end of the book. Mallet-Joris seems to be saying that success is attainable if one is willing to pay the price, and the price often seems more than one can bear.

In studying these three women, Paule, Tamara, and Catherine, one sees the importance of men in a woman's search for herself. Even after she has attained power, Tamara must assure herself that she is still attractive to men. Catherine perceives her search for herself in terms of her relationship with her husband, Robert. Paule's financial success does little to

appease her distress when she is left by her lover. A woman can be successful in many different areas of her life. She can come to terms with the society in which she lives through many different methods. In spite of her successes, be they monetary, social, or professional, the woman still must come to terms with her own femininity, her own sexuality. In these novels, it would seem that the appreciation of men, or the approval of one special man, is the only means by which she can truly measure her success as a woman.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNFINISHED SEARCH

Often the major factor in the search for self is the time it involves. Becoming familiar with society and self is a long and painful process. It would seem that the younger a woman is when she begins her search for self, the longer it takes, because she does not have the years of experience and observation an older woman has. Even the woman who appears to have resolved her search for self might find herself set upon the quest once again at a later stage of her life with a new upheaval in her life-style. Mallet-Joris presents characters whose searches are far from finished at the end of the story, for whom the period of awakening to the conflict between self and society takes the entire book to develop.

Paule uses other people to help her in her search for self, as does Hélène Noris, yet Paule's search is finished at the end of Allegra, while Hélène's search for self is the subject of two books, and is still unfinished at the end of the second story. There is a definite difference in the age of these two women at the time their searches begin, so the time element differs greatly for the two. Although Dr. Tournier says in his book To Understand Each Other that interpersonal relationships are the key to finding one's identity, sometimes the search for self depends even more on the investment of time. Such is the case with the three young women studied in this chapter.

At the end of La Chambre rouge, Hélène is closer to her goal than she was at the beginning of Le Rempart des Béguines, but the search is far

from ended. Such is the case with most women in reality, and it is especially true of two other characters in Mallet-Joris's novels, Alberte Damiaen of Les Mensonges, and Marcelle of Les Signes et les prodiges. In the searches of these young women, the reader sees once again the important influence of other people upon the woman's search for self-esteem, and how greatly her self-concept is influenced by her sexual self.

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> With only one exception, every woman I have ever interviewed could recall the circumstances of her first menstrual period and how she felt about it. This fact alone attests to the enormous importance of the event in their lives.[1]

Hélène Noris's search first would appear to fit the patterns described by Judith Bardwick. As an adolescent without a mother, Hélène's first task upon reaching puberty is to find a female model for her life. Her natural instinct is to pattern herself on the woman with whom she has most frequent contact, the housekeeper, Julia. In Julia, she finds a loving, generous, maternal figure, and if she were allowed to develop her relationship with Julia, she would no doubt have few problems in establishing her own identity. However, Hélène's efforts in this direction are thwarted by her father specifically, and more generally by her society.

> Je ne voyais pas pourquoi cette pénible distinction . . . m'éloignait de Julia . . . . Et j'en voulais mortellement à cette société de dactylos qui obligeait la bonne Julia à me maltraiter (Rempart, p. 9).

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[1]Judith Bardwick, Feminine Personality and Conflict (Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1970), p. 8.

Thus Hélène develops a resentment of society.

This hatred of society serves only to make the second woman whom Hélène chooses as a model, her father's mistress, even more attractive to Hélène. Her first effort with Julia having been thwarted, through Tamara's guidance, Hélène learns to despise the society in which she lives. Through the abuse and humiliation of Tamara, she learns that a woman can rely only upon her own resources and that she is living in a world of duplicity. Thus her relationship with Tamara, which could have been beneficial in teaching Hélène the importance of education, self-reliance, and the social graces, acts as a destructive force in Hélène's development as a young woman. It forces Hélène to become even more introspective, to isolate herself even more from society, and to develop a cynical attitude toward people and life. After Tamara's marriage to Hélène's father, Hélène reverts back to the rebellious, sullen girl she was before her experience with Tamara, even in her personal appearance: "Et moi voilà, . . . mal habillée, comme il convient à une jeune fille. . . ."[2]

Exactly to what degree her experience with Tamara has warped Hélène is shown in her relationship with Jean in La Chambre rouge. Hélène is living in a household where she is misunderstood by everyone. She has learned from Tamara to feel contempt for those around her, and she despises Tamara. In fact, Tamara is the only person for whom Hélène feels anything more than mild disgust. Hélène's relationship with Jean takes root in much the same manner as Catherine's relationship with the poet Jean-Francis in Le Jeu du souterrain, in order to hurt the person by whom she has been

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[2]Françoise Mallet-Joris, La Chambre rouge (Paris: René Julliard, Edition J'ai Lu, 1955), p. 7.

emotionally wounded. Hélène begins a not too subtle competition with Tamara for the affection of Jean. It is unfortunate that Jean is even more cynical than Hélène. Within that relationship, Hélène should have been able to establish her worth as a woman. Instead, she learns to look upon love and understanding as crutches for the weak. She refuses to accept her own need for compassion and understanding, her own need for other people. In an effort to re-establish her independence from others, Hélène defiantly takes young Stanislas to la Chambre Rouge where she and Jean have learned to love and to depend upon each other. Hoping to prove herself mature and emotionally independent she finds she has only cheapened the relationship that she had with Jean, and only then she admits that she does, in fact, love Jean. Once again Hélène has erred in her course of action, and what she had hoped would be a liberating and positive experience in her relationship with Jean and in her life turns out to have a debilitating effect upon both the relationship and Hélène herself.

The reader met Hélène as a naïve adolescent, he leaves her as a broken, but wiser, woman. Hélène has learned from each of her relationships. She sees the error she made in choosing cynicism.

> Nous avions été imprudents. . . . Nous étions sauvés de l'amour, libres de ses exigences. Nous étions sauvés de la dépendence, de la gravité, de l'aveu, du pardon. Nous étions sauvés des autres et de nous-mêmes (La Chambre, p. 307).

For Hélène Noris, the search for self will take even more time and effort. At the end of La Chambre rouge, the reader sees the wiser Hélène reflecting upon her search thus far and starting out once again on her search for herself, alone:

> dans une église, j'avais presque prié. J'avais demandé la dureté, non l'indulgence, la force, non la mollesse, et le malheur plutôt que le plaisir: tout cela m'avait été donné, puisque j'avais trouvé l'amour . . . et je n'avais pas pu en supporter la charge. . . . Et aujourd'hui j'étais les mains vides, consciente à peine de la valeur de ce que j'avais perdu, et sentant . . . que la perte la plus grave . . . n'était pas tant d'avoir perdu l'amour de Jean que d'avoir . . . étouffée savamment le mien (La Chambre, pp. 308-09).

And thus the reader sees the results of a woman who tries to disguise her spontaneity while trying to discover herself: "Pas une larme ne montait à mes yeux. . . . J'étais seule dans la Chambre Rouge" (La Chambre, p. 309). Hélène finally realizes the foolishness of such a method of search, and might use her new found knowledge to continue the "quest for identity" that all young women must inevitably face.

* * *

> Discovering the self is a significant part of the adolescent task that Erickson (1950) has . . . labelled the "quest for identity." . . . all agree that the changes of puberty initiate the quest.[3]

In the character of Alberte Damiaen, the reader sees another young woman in search of herself, but who does not attempt to mask her naïveté as Hélène did. Alberte is not aware of the people who mock her and treat her with disdain. She is not even aware of what is happening to her as she starts out on her quest for her identity. Moving into her father's house, changing her name, becoming an heiress, Alberte is just a young woman trying

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[3]Elizabeth Douvan, Feminine Personality and Conflict (Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1970), p. 31.

to survive the best way she can in a world that is totally foreign to her.

Alberte Damiaen, née Bertha Damiaen, of Les Mensonges, is another young woman for whom the search lies in the future. Like Hélène, Bertha also lacks a proper female model, although her mother is living. Elsa Damiaen was more of a responsibility than a guiding force in the life of Bertha. One sees the parallel between Bertha of Les Mensonges and Berthe of Madame Bovary in the mother-daughter relationship of Bertha and Elsa. Like Mme Bovary, Elsa has used her daughter to make her life more interesting, she has shown her daughter attention and affection only when it suited her own purpose, and she held her daughter responsible for the many sacrifices she felt she had made in her life. It is not coincidence that their names are so similar. It is without complaint that Bertha leaves her mother to become Alberte in the house of her father, Klaes van Baarnheim.

Like René Noris, Klaes van Baarnheim is also the wealthiest man in town. Once again the reader sees that wealth cannot buy happiness or self-awareness for a woman. In moving to this house, Alberte undergoes a type of cultural shock. Previously, she waited tables in the red-light section of town, the Triangle, in order to help support her mother and herself. She is past puberty and blossoming into adulthood when her father decides to shelter her and raise her, not from feelings of generosity or love, but from a desire to frustrate and to spite the other people who live with him and depend upon him. Alberte's position in the van Baarnheim household is more that of a servant than a daughter, yet it is materially a vast improvement over her life in the Triangle. Not being a very astute young woman, Alberte is not quick to notice that she is being used as a pawn in an undeclared war between her mother and her father. Never having experienced love, Alberte is easy prey for the money-hungry Yves, van Baarnheim's clerk.

Klaes van Baarnheim does give Alberte an education, some cultural and social training, and provides for her material needs. At the same time, however, he uses her to rid himself of her mother and to create discord in his household. As Bertha gradually becomes Alberte, however, she begins to sense her displacement. She becomes aware of the pettiness of those about her and is both frightened and disgusted by the intrigues which surround her.

In her search for herself, Alberte truly has no one to whom she can turn for advice and guidance as she tries to sort out fantasy from reality, appearance from essence, lies from truth. Her search for self is largely conducted through observing the people around her. Mme Nunez, Philippe, and the others in the household view her as a rival. The people of the Triangle see Alberte as an opportunist who has betrayed her mother, and Klaes looks upon Alberte as a possession. Even Yves, whom Alberte loves, is too weak to offer her any help in her search for herself. Finally she returns to her mother, the only person she feels she really knows and understands.

> Alberte était déconcertée. Elle avait tellement l'habitude de trouver sa mère au lit, dans la grande chambre désordonnée, de la gronder, de lui tendre son corset, de lui enlever une bouteille. . . . Alberte s'apercevait avec surprise qu'elle n'avait peut-être jamais eu avec sa mère une vraie conversation (Mensonges, p. 258).

And yet, it is after this visit to her mother, after watching her mother gradually become an empty person, that Alberte becomes aware of a need to find her own identity.

> Alberte est fille d'ordre, et pour la première fois il n'y a pas d'ordre dans ses pensées. . . . Il y a quelque chose en elle qu'elle ne reconnaît

> pas; elle patiente, elle attend. Elle finira bien par le reconnaître. . . . Il faut revenir au début (Mensonges, p. 262).

Thus Alberte begins a conscious search for her identity and for truth.

> Mais quel début . . .? Le début de ce désaccord qu'elle a senti tout à coup se faire en elle, est-ce donc le début de sa vie. . . . Les premiers mots entendus. . . . "Je m'étais sacrifiée" . . étaient déjà des mensonges . . . (Mensonges, pp. 262-63).

Finding nothing but lies at the beginning of her life, Alberte must search her entire past to find any bit of truth to which she can relate her essence, so that she might begin to establish her true identity.

> elle tressaille, de cette vieille honte qui est en elle. Mais elle a commencé à chercher; il faut continuer. . . . Il faut retrouver la rancune qui l'a toujours armée contre Elsa (Mensonges, p. 263).

Alberte continually takes up and then lays aside the task of fitting together the pieces of her life. Constantly, she searches for a means of escaping, yet she is driven by some instinctive force to dig deeper into her soul and to find the essence of her being. She runs first to Yves, then, to the Triangle, and finally to her mother, trying to find some person or place that is familiar, that is a part of Alberte Damiaen. But it was Bertha Damiaen who had lived in the Triangle with her mother, and she is now Alberte Damiaen. On his deathbed, Alberte's father, Klaes, reminds Alberte of her displacement:

> Tu ne veux pas. . . . Tu ne voulais pas non plus, quand tu es arrivée ici, t'appeler Alberte, tu te rappelles? "Je m'appelle Bertha. . . ." Tu n'as rien dit d'autre pendant huit jours: Et maintenant tu es Alberte. Et dans un moment tu seras Alberte van Baarnheim, ma fille (Mensonges, pp. 356-57)!

In the Triangle the waitress in a café understands Alberte easily as she sees in her the memories of her youth.

> Celles qui s'en sortent, il faut qu'elles aient tué père et mère. . . . Et puis tu te tortilles, tu te demènes, tu te forces comme un chat qui veut aboyer, et tu t'embêtes. . . . Et quand tu l'as ta petite vie propre, bien rangée, et que tu es devenue laide comme un pou, à quoi ça t'avance? . . . Frusquée comme une maîtresse de piano, mais tout de même une fille du Triangle, hein? . . . Quand tu as compris ça, tu as la bonne vie. . . . La paix, quoi (Mensonges, pp. 303-05).

And Alberte realizes that indeed she has never been herself, but only what others wanted her to be. In watching the cure, or rather the destruction, of her mother, Alberte is impressed by the devastating effect of living one's life as others see it. She can no longer be molded; in her own mind, Alberte is not yet aware of what has occurred. She can only sense a fear within herself. It is the fear of destruction. Alberte does not refuse the inheritance because she feels that the money is filthy or that it will corrupt her. It is a very real fear of the destruction, the total annihilation, of her personality that causes her to refuse her inheritance. She senses that while she is no longer Bertha Damiaen, neither will she become Alberte van Baarnheim. She must only be herself, Alberte Damiaen, and accept the life that she must face, with the reality of herself as her single point of reference.

Talking to Dr. Franck about her mother, Alberte is also asking about herself:

> Mais comment est-ce qu'elle pourrait recommencer une nouvelle vie? Qu'est-ce qu'elle fera, quand vous lui aurez tout enlevé? . . . Le fin visage de médaille de la doctoresse, s'était durci. "Elle saura la vérité," dit-elle sèchement (Mensonges, p. 315).

In a final surge for life, Alberte refuses her inheritance. The apparently illogical reaction of Alberte towards her inheritance has thus been subtly foreshadowed by Mallet-Joris, as one sees in the scene where Alberte actually refuses her inheritance and in the ensuing results of that act.

> Elle hésitait, cherchait des mots, n'en trouvait pas pour réprimer sa soudaine terreur. . . . La peur, devant cette âme qui voulait prendre, prendre toujours, alors qu'elle se faisait chaque jour un peu plus prisonnière. . . . Son recul instinctif devant l'offre qui ressemblait à un piège. . . . Elle avait voulu fuir, c'était tout. Elle avait eu peur (Mensonges, p. 366).

Thus Alberte has stripped herself of all her fantasies, all her lies, and starts her journey to find herself at the end of Les Mensonges, knowing only who and what she is not. Like Elsa, her mother, and Mélusine from Le Jeu du souterrain, Alberte leaves with a shawl as her only protection from the world she goes out to discover.

> Elle avait jeté un châle sur ses épaules, comme beaucoup de femmes du quartier . . . qui rentraient chez elles . . . elle s'arrêtait au coin de la rue. . . . Puis elle parût se décider, s'enfoncer courageusement, entre les maisons aveugles, dans l'obscurité (Mensonges, pp. 370-71).

She has been forced out into the world on her own, yet she had not bargained for that when she refused the inheritance. Alberte truly believed that Yves loved her and would care for her. But it was Alberte's inheritance that had interested Yves, not Alberte herself. Finally, she enters the world stripped of everything, even her own self-esteem.

* * *

> Anxiety about physiological developments spreads to the interpersonal sphere, where it influences and

> conditions the nature of relationships and conflicts that arise in those relationships.[4]

Marcelle, of Les Signes et les prodiges, like Alberte, begins her search in the middle of the book and is still searching when the book ends. Knowing herself to be sterile, she uses physical intimacy to develop emotional and intellectual relationships with men. Les Signes et les prodiges is a novel concerning Nicolas and his search for truth. Marcelle is a secondary character, and it is her relationship with Nicolas and his search that stimulates her search for herself and truth. Ironically, it is Marcelle who bears all the signs of a realist at the beginning of the novel and who must be stimulated to start the search for herself.

A young career woman, Marcelle has accepted her failures in love and her sterility. She is working on developing herself as a single working woman when she must go on an assignment with Nicolas. In comparison with Nicolas, Marcelle is a shallow and romantic young woman as opposed to the realist she first appeared to be. While her nonchalance and romanticism often disgust Nicolas, they also attract him, for they symbolize complete peace of mind to him. Nicolas's doubt and questioning, on the other hand, perplex and frighten Marcelle.

> Et elle, Marcelle, vivant de si bonne foi, avec une telle plénitude! Vivre dans le mensonge ou ne pas vivre, il n'y avait donc pas d'autre alternative.[5]

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[4]Elizabeth Douvan, Feminine Personality and Conflict (Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1970), p. 37.

[5]Françoise Mallet-Joris, Les Signes et les prodiges (Paris: Bernard Grasset, Edition Livre de Poche, 1966), p. 276.

On her assignment with Nicolas, Marcelle sees the corruption of power and the poverty of refugees. She awakens to the disease and destruction in the world around her. As Marcelle grows closer to Nicolas, she senses his frustration and begins to experience the same doubts and anxieties that she has seen in him. She senses that change in herself, as does Nicolas.

> Elle paraissait amorphe et découragée. . . . Hier, c'était hier, est-ce que cela signifiait qu'elle était . . . revenue de son contentement de la veille, qu'elle en avait percé l'absurdité? . . . elle était capable de lucidité, mais non d'une rancune prolongée . . . elle l'avait rejoint. Comme il l'avait tentée la veille, et presque réussi. . . . Elle n'était pas l'image de Marcelle, mais une Marcelle vivante, souffrant comme lui, du même mal. Cette injustice, cette inutilité du bonheur, elle l'avait percée (Signes, pp. 277, 279, 282).

After Marcelle comes to think and feel with Nicolas, she is aware that it will take time and suffering before they will be able to accept themselves and society:

> Pas prêts. Elle l'avait senti, elle avait été remuée au plus profond d'elle-même par la même peur que lui, et ce souvenir l'effrayait, la ravissait à la fois. . . . "Je deviens folle" mais la folie est essentiellement solitude, et elle avait si profondément communiqué avec lui dans cette frayeur . . . (Signes, p. 303).

Thus travelling the countryside with the man she loves, Marcelle begins her search for truth. And Marcelle becomes pregnant, the sterile Marcelle becomes a fertile womb for Nicolas's seed, just as her mind has become a fertile ground for his questioning. They search for themselves and for truth together, trying to help and support each other and to give each other a sense of stability in an unstable world.

> "Nous réussirons. Il le faut." Elle le comprenait, elle le comprenait! C'était comme un cri de victoire en elle, et pourtant elle avait peur de cette aisance même soudain acquise (Signes, p. 305).

Nicolas, however, kills himself when he learns Marcelle is pregnant, so that he might no infect another human being with this obsession to know truth, and Marcelle is left to continue her search completely alone. In thinking of his child, Nicolas says:

> Que cet enfant du moins ne me ressemble pas. Qu'il soit ce qu'était Marcelle, simple et sans problèmes. . . . Mais Marcelle n'est déjà plus ce qu'elle était. . . . Je l'ai contaminée, corrompue. . . . Il sera l'enfant de Marcelle, et d'elle seule (Signes, p. 507).

Her pregnancy has given her a new dimension for her personality. Although she no longer has Nicolas, she will have a child to love and to nourish. She has friends who support her through her new trials, and with their strength, Marcelle continues her life and her search. Jean-Pierre marries Marcelle in order to give her child a name and to save her from disgrace. Yet Marcelle has a large task ahead of her in trying to find herself, and without Nicolas, she waits for a revelation.

> Marcelle a fort à faire. Entre Jean-Pierre et son enfant elle sera deux fois mère. Une lourde tâche l'attend. Elle non plus ne dit pas: Loué soit Dieu. Mais parfois, elle va s'asseoir dans la petite église, et, elle aussi, patiente, elle attend (Signes, pp. 509-10).

Thus the woman in search of herself, whether she reaches out to others or delves deeply into her own soul, does not always find the truth for which she is searching. She does not always find who she really is and how to function the best she possibly can in this world. Occasionally the search is an immediate success, but most often it is a long and arduous process.

The search for self demands all of a woman's attention, and often it takes a lifetime to complete.

As one sees in studying these characters, sometimes a woman's search for herself is altered by outside influences or a change in personal contacts. The cause for the search may be physical changes in a woman's body, such as Hélène's puberty or Marcelle's pregnancy, but it is the other people whom the woman knows and with whom she lives who help to determine the course her search will follow. Seldom does the search take a short time to complete. Most often, the first few years serve only to make the woman more aware of herself and her relationship to society. This is evidenced most clearly in the case of Alberte, but it also is seen in the characters of Hélène and Marcelle. After that initial awakening, the search begins in earnest with the woman fully and consciously participating in it in order to alter and to definitely establish her identity in society.

CHAPTER V

THE FINAL DECISION

Sometimes a person's search for himself takes a lifetime, and other times the lifetime is too short for the search to be completed. If a person's search for self proves to be more than he or she can withstand, he may kill himself, like Nicolas of Les Signes et les prodiges. Self-knowledge is not easy to attain, and after seeing the truth, some, like Oedipus, put out their eyes so as no longer to see the truth, saying, "The best is never to have been born." Still others, like Allegra, die in the process of their searching. For a woman, the search for self proves to be even more difficult since she is not encouraged to become independent and aggressive as are men.

* * *

> To the extent that girls are not separated from their parents as sources of support and nurturance, they are not forced to develop internal controls and an independent sense of self.[1]

Allegra, Paule's younger sister, is one of those women who has never been encouraged to develop an independent nature, going directly from the protection of home and family into the shelter of a marriage with a husband to depend upon. She is the youngest of the three daughters in the novel,

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[1]Judith Bardwick, Feminine Personality and Conflict (Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1970), p. 4.

Allegra. Allegra is a source of pride to both her husband and her family. From all outward signs, Allegra is a model wife. Although she has continued to work since her marriage, Allegra has managed to create an attractive and pleasant home. It would appear as if she were headed for a lifetime of contentment. However, Paule comments:

> Allegra a eu une vie trop protégée, trop bourgeoise. . . . Ça l'a fermée dans une climat encore trop familial, trop sécurisant . . . . Je crois, conclut-elle, qu'Allegra va encore évoluer beaucoup (Allegra, p. 25).

It is the appearance of Rachid, the mute child who plays in the courtyard, that marks the end of this tranquility for Allegra. Allegra's name has never been indicative of her personality. Although she was not a sullen, somber young lady, neither was she light and carefree. Allegra was always quiet, proper, and withdrawn. When with Rachid, Allegra feels completely understood. Words have always served to complicate her life. And Allegra could seldom find words to express the things she thought and felt:

> mélancolique, sans raison précise . . . Allegra ne disait rien. Allegra ne participait pas entièrement à cet univers rassurant. Oh! la bonne volonté ne lui manquait pas, elle acquiesçait, elle souriait. . . . Elle se pliait avec aisance à tout ce qu'on attendait d'elle (Allegra, pp. 71, 76).

Allegra shows Rachid the city and the countryside. She shows him all of the places she loves, the places where she feels at peace with herself and with the world. Rachid, who does not speak due to neglect at home, seems to accept Allegra, without reservation. In sharing these aspects of her life with Rachid, Allegra begins to understand her own thoughts and feelings, and begins to sense the essence of her being through her relationship with him.

> Maintenant, à cause de l'enfant, elle se souvenait. Le silence était comme une petite chambre où elle se trouvait bien. Les autres s'agitaient dehors. . . . Elle vivait toujours dans cette petite chambre. . . . Ils regardaient ensemble voilà tout (Allegra, pp. 162, 164).

Gradually, Allegra isolates herself from all except Rachid. She continues to go through the motions with her family and her husband, but she moves farther from them emotionally and becomes less and less dependent upon them. Allegra begins to make decisions for herself and Rachid ignoring the advice of those around her or not asking advice at all. Allegra quits her full-time job at the salon to spend more time with Rachid, and she begins taking Rachid out to avoid visits with her sister Josephine. She concerns herself only with Rachid, speaks only of Rachid, and imposes Rachid upon her family. Rachid becomes the single most important person in her life, for he is the instrument through which she is finding herself.

> Elle était toujours la petite fille qui jouait une note, une seule, sur le piano, et qui s'emerveillait que la musique existât. A cause de Rachid, elle regardait cette petite fille, et se demandait si elle devait changer. Jamais elle ne s'était posé autant de questions. Elle vivait dans une sphère sereine, lumineuse, elle ne désirait pas en sortir. Elle n'imaginait pas qu'elle pût en sortir. . . . Peut-être allaient-ils grandir ensemble? (Allegra, p. 197).

Allegra sees Rachid being rejected, and through him she sees her own childhood and reflects upon her own life of feeling unaccepted?

> Elle ne craignait rien pour elle, mais lui. . . . Elle avait peur. Au fond c'est dangereux de se mettre à l'écart, même si c'est pour mieux aimer les autres, mieux les voir. Personne ne lui avait dit "Viens avec nous" (Allegra, p. 238).

It is while she is in the country with Rachid, when he begins to make sounds, to grow away from her, that Allegra realizes that she is truly

alone in her quest. She alone is responsible for her life and her decisions.

> Ce point précis où elle a ressenti . . . une sorte de paix subite, où elle a eu le sentiment de s'ajuster enfin quelque part . . . où elle a rêvé qu'elle venait avec Rachid. . . . Mais tout est différent. L'endroit n'est plus magique, ou il l'est autrement (Allegra, p. 240).

The definitive point in her search then, arrives when Allegra finds she is pregnant, losing Rachid and acquiring another being who is incomprehensible to her.

> Pourquoi pensait-elle "le point de départ?" Si elle avait été Rachid. . . . Elle n'avait aucun besoin de langage. . . . Elle l'avait aimé pour ce courage . . . un individu qui enfin parle et dit son nom, se libère d'une injuste contrainte, ce but, elle le percevait mais ne le comprenait pas, ne le comprendrait peut-être jamais (Allegra, pp. 240, 352-54, 370, 374).

In fact Allegra never understands the sort of liberation that Rachid is achieving. When she decides to abort her child, it is because she has not yet found herself, but she has tasted a freedom of her own. It is that very effort to exercise that newly found freedom which causes her death.

> Tout avait changé. Après tant d'autres indices, la trahison de son corps: comme si lui aussi avait une vie à part, et choisissait de son côté. . . . Sa sérénité, son silence étaient sortis d'elle doucement, comme on perd son sang. . . . Elle était décontenancée par la souffrance, la sienne, celle des autres, qui lui était devenue perceptible (Allegra, pp. 397-99).

Allegra does not make a conscious choice to die, nor would she make a conscious effort to avoid death. Certainly, as the daughter of a doctor, she is aware of the dangers of abortion, but the decision to abort her child is the first decision of major consequence in her life. Allegra must die because she is not yet strong enough to continue her search

alone, nor is she able to stop her search otherwise. Her death, as shown by Mallet-Joris, is not the horrid scene of hemorrhaging that one would see in Zola. It is rather a peaceful, welcome death.

> Elle ne s'en sentait pas coupable. . . . La mort ou la vie, les mots ou le silence . . . elle avait tenté de les suivre: elle n'était pas faite pour cela. . . . S'il n'avait pas fait aussi chaud, si elle avait eu assez de force . . . elle se serait sentie tout à fait bien. Une mort discrète. . . . Et si jolie sur son lit de mort, l'air d'une enfant. . . . Elle aurait aimé ce silence. Personne ne pense plus à elle (Allegra, pp. 409-411).

The struggle was too painful to withstand alone, and the end of life is the end of suffering.

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For some other women in the novels of Mallet-Joris, as for Allegra, death is the solution to their search. Both Renata and Colette, of Les Signes et les prodiges, sensed their entrapment in this world, as does Mélusine. Each has an ethereal quality which removes them from the real world. They look on death as a welcome release from bondage, for they cannot adapt to the world as they know it. They live their lives as aliens here. Death is the only escape for Wanda, Nicolas's mother, in Les Signes et les prodiges also, but she fears death as much as she fears life. Wanda is damned to live a long life of exile in this world. Thus Renata and Colette are the lucky women in Les Signes et les prodiges. But as Socrates said, and as the women in Mallet-Joris's novels proclaim, "the unexamined life is not worth living."

For Renata and Colette, for Allegra, the examined life is too devastating to bear. One sees in these women the sense of futility so

often experienced at the end of a search for self. Total recognition of one's self and one's society, followed by the awareness of the powerlessness of the individual to change the world, offers only the options of death and compromise. Those who compromise, who change their values and personalities to fit the social plan, conduct successful searches. Those who will not change themselves end their searches in death. They too, succeed in finding peace, and society will never again disturb that peace. Renata, Colette, and Allegra no longer need to search, to question, to adapt, if there is nothing beyond this life. That there is a peace, a total acceptance of the self beyond this life, is the final hope for such women.

CONCLUSION

Thus Mallet-Joris underlines the power of the individual. It is within the realm of power of any individual to define his position in society and to use that knowledge to determine the course of the rest of his life. Trying to escape a search for self or to ignore it has the disastrous effect of leaving the individual powerless in the face of his destiny. However, a search well-conducted serves to strengthen the individual in the course of daily living.

The reader of Mallet-Joris's novels has seen many different types of women in search of themselves, young and old, rich and poor, married and single. The methods of search for these women differ greatly. For some, like Tamara, it is interiorized; some, like Elsa and Catherine, turn to drugs; Mélusine looks to the occult, relying upon the spirit of Annick for guidance; others, like Hélène and Allegra, reach out to other people. The ways the searches end are as various as the characters, with Elsa in an institution, Tamara in an established home, Alberte alone on the threshold of a new life, and Allegra lying dead in bed. The reasons for the search, the awareness of it, and the intensity of it, also vary with the individual character.

In reflecting upon the characters discussed, one is acutely aware of the lack of similarity among these women. Obviously, age is not a good indicator of the woman who will be searching. The characters dealt with range in age from fifteen through fifty, and that age group comprises only the major searches in these novels. Jean-Pierre's middle-aged mother,

Béatrice, is also involved in an identity conflict, although it is not one of the major problems presented in Les Signes et les prodiges. Catherine of Le Jeu du souterrain is in her thirties when she begins her search, as is Paule of Allegra, yet, Hélène is fully in the midst of her search in her early twenties, and Allegra's search has ended by that age. Thus the archetype for the woman in search of herself must remain ageless.

Appearance is hardly any better as an indicator than is age. At first glance, one notes the dark and mysterious Tamara, the oriental Catherine, the aquilan featured Marcelle, but then there appears the red-haired, freckled Hélène, or the blond, pale Allegra who is just as involved in her search as any of the svelt dark beauties. Beauty is hardly a pre-requisite if one includes Alberte, Mélusine, and Elsa in the group of women who search for themselves. Again and again the mold is flawed.

Thus there is no surface-level characteristic that these women have in common. Educational levels vary as greatly as appearances. Hélène does not finish her baccalauréat, Tamara was illiterate until her first marriage, Mélusine does literary research, and Catherine has received her licence. So another obvious method of classification fails. If one considers intelligence in trying to find an archetype, the problem increases.

Intelligence is a more ambiguous quality. It is more difficult to isolate and to recognize than the other qualities mentioned thus far. Tamara Soulerr is an intelligent woman, as are Mélusine and Catherine. The author posits the intelligence of these women for us as she describes them through the eyes of the other characters. What of Hélène, and Alberte? Is Marcelle intelligent, or is Allegra? Mallet-Joris leads one to believe that Alberte is not exceptionally intelligent, and neither is Allegra; rather,

they possess an innate, almost animalistic instinct of awareness and of self-preservation. So, even in an area as ambiguous as intelligence, there exists enough variance in personal characteristics that one must say intelligence, or intellectual power, is not an implicit quality of the woman in search of herself. To critics who might argue otherwise one need only point out the character of Elsa Damiaen, who lived by instinct and was unable to pull herself out of the Triangle.

For the critics who claim only middle-class women become involved in these searches, Mallet-Joris has created an entire repertoire of poverty-stricken working-class, middle-class, and upper-class women in search of themselves. Women who must examine their existence are compelled to do so in spite of their social, marital, or economic status. It seems as though most visible or easily measurable characteristics are not traits which are common to woman in search of herself. On a deeper, emotional level, however, there are areas in which these women are identifiable.

Of all the female characters considered, only half of them have mothers that can be seen in the novels. Paule and Allegra have a mother who is domineering and whom neither of them wishes to imitate. Catherine also has a mother of a completely different temperament than her own. Alberte's mother hardly serves as a good model to her. Thus none of the female characters has a female figure after whom to model her life. This lack of a model is perhaps one of the key traits of a woman in search of herself, for those who have no one to watch and to emulate. There is a problem not only in determining their own identity, but also in defining the role of women in general. Mallet-Joris emphasized this lack of a model in her presentation of the conflict between Paule and Allegra with

their mother. She underlines the lack of understanding and communication between Catherine and her mother. She openly states Hélène's search for a model, first in Julia and then in Tamara, and shows how her attempts to use them as models are thwarted. It is safe to say that the woman in search of herself is first a woman who has no proper guidance in her growth into womanhood, and any girl who has been raised by a woman of whom she is ashamed or against whom she rebels is a candidate for this quest for identity. That group should include almost any adolescent girl at some point.

There is also a second area of conformity. Each of these women begins her search for herself after an experience of major consequence in her life. Mélusine's search dates from the rape of Annick, Tamara's from the time of her first marriage, as does Allegra's, Catherine's from a humiliating experience with her husband, Marcelle's from an affair with a questioning author, Alberte's from her change of life-style, and Hélène's from reaching puberty and meeting with Tamara. It takes a change in one's daily life to open one's eyes to the need for self-knowledge. At different stages in a woman's life, it takes a different experience to jolt her to awareness, but the awareness always comes as a shock.

Does this constitute an archetype for the woman in search of herself? Not in the accepted sense of an archetype, it does not. Yet, it does give the reader an image of woman in search of herself. She is a woman of any age, who, due to some outside stimulus, becomes aware that she is not the person she feels herself to be, and who finds no other woman in her immediate surroundings after whom to model her new life. It is a journey which she must make alone. Although she may constantly call on others for

help, she alone can assimilate all the factors to find her identity, and because of this, any woman has the potential of becoming a woman in search of herself.

Is there a best method of conducting the search? Each search is highly individualized. Each woman's search must depend upon her age, her social milieu, and her own personality. It must involve a period of isolation and meditation, but to be truly effective, it must draw on the environment. The results of complete isolation, complete self-absorption, are tragic, as seen in the cases of Hélène and Allegra. The search must include all those with whom the woman must deal. Tamara learns this in time. Marcelle expands her search to avoid destruction. If a woman is to determine her identity in society, the search for self must involve those two participants, the woman and her society. Only after the woman becomes fully aware of her identity within society is she able to set goals which will allow her to develop her full potential as a person.

That is the best definition of a successful search, one in which the woman becomes aware enough of her own personality and individuality and the customs and functionings of her society, to determine how to use that society as an asset in developing her full potential as a human being. That definition immediately eliminates the possibility of Elsa's or Mélusine's searches being successful. An unconventional search, a search in which the woman must develop her own reality in order to reach her full potential is self-defeating. Allegra's search is also by definition unsuccessful, as are the searches of Renata and Colette (Les Signes et les prodiges), for these women were also unable to use society to help them to develop as human beings. Whether living in her own reality or escaping

through death, the woman has unsuccessfully completed her search for she has not used her knowledge to help herself grow.

What of Alberte's, Marcelle's, and Hélène's searches? These three women have not yet attained full awareness of themselves, they must continue their searches to discover more about their individuality, and they must continue to examine their society in order to make the decision to grow or not to grow within the context of this world. Each of them still has the potential of successfully completing her search.

This leaves us with three women who might be considered successful in their searches for their personal identities, Catherine, Paule, and Tamara. Each of these three women has weighed her assets and her deficiencies. Each has, through trial and error, rejected different methods of functioning in this world, and each has finally made what she feels is the proper choice for her. They have chosen roles in society which will help them to develop and exercise their talents. Yet, there is an aura of sadness surrounding each of these women. Each of them is acutely aware of the sacrifices which she is making in order to grow within society. There is a sense of compromise of her personal integrity and a reluctant acceptance of the least of several evils. If these women have indeed conducted successful searches, then Mallet-Joris is making a strong statement about women's lives. Women who are aware of the compromises, the struggles life demands of them, will never be happy.

Why should a woman suffer the agonies and the tensions of such a search? One might see Mallet-Joris as a modern day Ecclesiastes saying, "All is vanity. . . . For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." Still, there is an eternal

hopefulness in Mallet-Joris's novels, which is perhaps a result of her conversion to Catholicism, that all is not vanity. There is an implicit statement that only those who have suffered this struggle can truly live, and that it is only in trying to understand herself and her world that a woman lives as a human being rather than a common beast.

Mallet-Joris's life is an example of this paradox, of this search that leads to pain or compromise. In her answers to the "Marcel Proust Questionnaire," she replies to the questions: "Mon rêve de bonheur?" and "Quel serait mon plus grand malheur?" with the same response: "Ne plus écrire."

> Le don de la nature que je voudrais avoir?
> Me faire comprendre.
> Comment j'aimerais mourir? Dans la paix intérieure.
> Etat présent de mon esprit? La tension.
> Ma devise? Aujourd'hui.[1]

Her characters completely reflect the mood of her responses. As Catherine expresses the tension and conflict she describes, Marcelle represents the constant effort to be understood and the inexplicable joy of finally being understood by someone. The death of Allegra is a peaceful death, without effort, without conscience, without regret. Thus without psychological statistics, through characters, backgrounds, and situations, Mallet-Joris shows the reader the "woman in search of herself" whom psychologists have studied.

The novels of Mallet-Joris continue the trend of the existentialist novelists in emphasizing the importance of the individual in society. Just as Camus analyzes and develops Meursault, to find that living is all that really matters to him, she strips the character layer by layer to find its

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[1] "Marcel Proust Questionnaire," Biblio, 34, No. 2 (1966), p. 15.

essence, its soul. The most crucial statement in her work, though, is that the individual is responsible for his life. In contrast with the Naturalist school of thought, in which heredity and environment mold the person, the individual is responsible for the integration of these influences to determine the course his life will follow. If a person does not take the time and effort necessary to know himself in the context of society, he then forfeits any control over his destiny, as did Elsa. He has no essence, thus no existence, and his life is without meaning. By her many novels and her highly differentiated characters, Mallet-Joris demonstrates the importance of self-knowledge and the power of the individual.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Françoise Mallet-Joris was born in Belgium, the daughter of a Belgian statesman and the author Suzanne Lilar, in 1930. She spent her childhood in Belgium and studied in the United States before finally establishing her residence in France. Mallet-Joris's only exposure to religion was through her Catholic grandmother. Late in life, she chose to join the Catholic church. Married four times, she has four children. Presently, Mallet-Joris resides in an apartment in Paris, and she and her husband also own a summer house in Normandy.

Mallet-Joris does her writing every morning in a café where she often observes people and gathers material for her books. L'Empire céleste is a novel which centers around the lives of people in a café such as the one where she writes. Not only does Mallet-Joris write novels, but also short stories, poetry, songs, biographies, and screen plays.

Writing is an essential part of the life of Mallet-Joris. Her characters portray her own continuous search for self, as one notes in examining her responses to the "Marcel Proust Questionnaire." She has won several awards for her novels. First she was awarded the Prix des Librairies, 1957, for Les Mensonges. In 1958 she won the Prix Fémina for L'Empire céleste, although some critics feel it was a belated award for Les Mensonges. She received the Prix Monaco in 1964 for Marie Mancini, a biography. Most recently she was elected to the Académie Goncourt.

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WOMAN IN SEARCH OF HERSELF IN THE NOVELS OF FRANÇOISE MALLET-JORIS

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The feminist movement, like most major social reforms, has made a large impact on literature in the twentieth century. As women's role in society has grown, its expansion has been recorded in the literature of the time. Change brings new problems with it, and the rapidity of the transformation of women's social position presents the modern woman with an intensification of the problem of finding her identity, her own social position in society, which differs from that of women as a group. Modern authors relate this struggle for independence and individuality that women experience in their daily lives. At the present time, enough literature deals with the individual development of women in society to warrant the consideration of such novels as a separate classification, "woman in search of herself," in the twentieth-century novel.

Françoise Mallet-Joris has written several novels which deal with the individual woman's struggle to establish her identity in society. The study of the female characters in six of her novels will demonstrate how the author, without the use of statistics, creates a realistic presentation of the many problems which confront a woman living in modern-day Western culture and the many different techniques which such a woman employs in order to preserve herself in the midst of the often devastating search for self.