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The life and work of Colette

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I  The Childhood and Youth.

The place of women in literature having improved in proportion to their social condition, the last quarter of the nineteenth century in France has experienced a remarkable blossoming forth of women writers. In DeBacourt and Cunliffe's "French Literature During the Last Half Century" we read: - "Mdme Colette shares with the Comtesse de Noailles and Gerard d'Houville the favor of the elite. She began writing in collaboration with Willy, the clever humorist, then her husband, the famous series 'The Adventures of Claudine.' At the first attempt they created a type the success of which was enormous and lasting. But in 'Dialogues de Bêtes'(1897) she signed alone and has since proved herself one of the greatest prose writers of our time."  

Sidonie Gabrielle Colette was born January 28, 1873, at Saint-Sauveur. Bourguignonne as she was from the place of her birth, southern on her father's side and Parisian on her mother's, possessing colored blood from her maternal grandfather, Colette was subjected to complex influences.

Her father, Jules Joseph Colette, a member of the Zouaves, having been wounded at Crimes, and in command at Alger, was active in Italy under MacMahon. After he was made chevalier of the Legion of Honor he came to Saint-Sauveur where he married the young and rich widow, Sidonie Landoy.

Life in Saint-Sauveur soon proved too quiet for him. He turned to politics and wrote: "A l'armée", "Au Peuple de France", "Aux Chambres", political pamphlets, in which he proposed urgent reforms for defense. With his little daughter, Colette, he went from hamlet to hamlet with his magic lantern and material for propaganda. In running for office he met repeated defeats. In fact the only result of his campaigning seems to be an infatuation for Mme. Bruneau who loved him in secret. In domestic life, he was a kind of savant, over-ruling his wife who adored him, ruining his children whom he wished to be rich. He seems courageous and intelligent but totally lacking in a practical sense.

Colette's mother, Adèle Eugénie Sidonie Landoy, was the daughter of a Belgian chocolate manufacturer, Henri Landoy. Losing both parents at an early age, Adèle was brought up by her two brothers, both French newspaper men, in Belgium where she led a gay, Bohemian life, among painters, musicians and poets. At the age of eighteen, she married her first husband, nicknamed "Le Sauvage" and lived in Belgium where she suffered in silence for M. Robineau was always elsewhere than at home. He died in August, 1865, leaving her with two small children and a large fortune. In December of that same year she married Jules Colette. From then on she busied herself with her husband, her children, and her garden. Her other cares were the animals about her. She had a tender regard for everything living, - dogs, cats, plants, flowers. She had a heart of gold towards the poor or unfortunate. She was regular at church but not a bit intellectual. In January
I am forwarding some documents for your review. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. The documents include updated policies, financial reports, and some legal contracts. I encourage you to review them thoroughly and make any necessary updates or amendments. If you need any assistance or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,
[Your Name]
28, 1873, she gave to the world her last child, Sidonie Gabrielle, who was to make the name of Colette famous.

Saint-Sauveur, being the centre of a canton of some 1700 inhabitants, has become a place of many curiosities dating back to the eleventh century. The one thing there of interest to students of Colette is the house of Claudine, a modest house of the old village with two gardens.

Twice a year Gabrielle would go with her father outside of the town. Her first trip was to Brussels in 1879. It was of short duration and she recalls only the noises of trains, cabs and buses. Three years later she accompanied her father on an election campaign, riding with him in an old victoria, listening to discussions and arguments, drinking with these politicians and learning to deride them. Then she would fall asleep, intoxicated, her head on the table and later go home rolled in coverings in the bottom of the victoria. Her youth was passed amid flowers and animals. Sometimes wandering comedians settled in the village. The theatre was an old building, lighted by smoky lamps and had hard seats. All Saint-Sauveur attended and Gabrielle Collette attended too. Tragedies seemed to sadden her and instill horror in her as she began to discern the suffering of the wretched.

Her schooling was at the private school of Mme. Viellard. The primary school seems to have been the day school while the older pupils boarded at the principal's house on the grounds. Mme. Viellard was succeeded by Mlle.
Olympe Terrain whom the pupils liked to tease and play pranks upon. Colette writes herself of abusing the piano so that the piano-tuner from out of town "who wore nose glasses of gold" would have to come to repair it. At seventeen she began to talk of leaving school. She had read much. At seven she knew Labiche and Daudet. At eight she read Mérimée and later Musset, Voltaire and Larousse. When permitted to read Zola, she became aroused to the mysteries of reproduction; she seemed incredulous and frightened as if threatened by the destinies of her own sex. From then on she began to question and ponder greatly. She was prepared for graduation under Mlle. Terrain for whose anniversary in 1888 her father composed a poem for Gabrielle to recite. In 1889 she received her elementary diploma and a certificate from the higher school. A leader in French she was weak in sciences but later took honors at the public examinations at Auxerre. She seemed to have an insatiable taste for nature, a timid sense of shame and a suppressed sadness. With this we can detect a sort of premonition that she was unusual or extraordinary, while a love for her childhood and the country is evident in all her later works.

II  The Marriage of Colette.

In 1890 her family moved to Chatillon-Coligny to be near her brother, Dr. Robineau-Duclos. For three years Colette led a quiet bourgeois life at Chatillon where her brother practised and here she longed for the woods of Saint-
of which I myself have been the object. It is immense, this thing to think of.

But what matters any of that? What has all this to do with the course of history? It is not the business of the historian to ask such questions. The historian is concerned with the record of events, not with the reasons why they happened. He is content to let the past speak for itself, and to let the future decide what it means.

And yet... somehow... it does matter. It matters because it is a part of ourselves. It is a part of who we are, and who we will be. It is a part of our heritage, and it is a part of our future. It is a part of our legacy, and it is a part of our duty to pass it on to the generations to come.

But how can we do this? How can we ensure that our history is not lost, that our story is not forgotten? How can we make sure that the lessons of the past are not forgotten?

Perhaps we can learn from the mistakes of the past. Perhaps we can use our history as a guide for the future. Perhaps we can make our history a part of our identity, a part of who we are.

And so, I must ask you this: what will you do with your history? Will you let it be lost, or will you use it to shape the future?

For me, I will hold onto my history, I will cherish it, I will use it to guide my actions. I will not let it be forgotten, I will not let it be taken away from me. I will hold onto it, and I will ensure that it is passed on to the future.

For this is our history, and this is who we are.
Sauveur and her school friends. She travelled around the neighboring country with her brother until she met Henri Gauthiers-Villars, the son of a scientific editor with whom her father, a member of the Société de Géographie, was associated, and in 1893 they married. Studying her life and works makes one ask if this was a union of love, she at twenty and he at thirty-four. "He was very Parisian and had many names" writes Jean Larnac, "Maugis by the symbolists, Willy by the lovers of puns, Gauthiers-Villars by lovers of music."¹ He was a great lover of music. Such is the man who took Colette to Paris in 1893. He was proud of his young wife, and was heard to remark jokingly that he expected to be stopped for eloping with a minor. However, one can readily see that this simple country girl was not polished enough to suit him at Paris. Her conversation turned to incidents of her school life at Saint-Sauveur and made live portraits of the teachers whom she knew there. This was for Willy the germ of a novel, so they went to Saint-Sauveur in 1895 to realize this dream in the places where Colette had passed her childhood. They visited the old school where they lunched with old teachers and friends. In reviewing her childhood, Colette visited the dormitories, classes, and new buildings gathering news. Willy's enthusiasm was so great that he addressed the school, and distributed prizes.

They traveled for a short while through Lons-le-Saulnier, Besancon, Bale, Munich, and Nuremberg. The young Bour-

¹Larnac: "Colette, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre," page 54.
guignonne was much impressed by the mountains, woods, forests and the Neckar winding its way like a serpent. Colette wrote with amusing ardor to her friends about all she saw. Willy, meanwhile, was pursuing his study of Wagner. They returned to Paris in October amid receptions, dinners and social functions. They frequented the Café de la Côte d'Or with Moreas, Tinan, Lebey, Toulet, Desrousseau. One day Colette met an old friend, Marie Duban, whom she invited to a performance of Aïda and Marie Duban found herself hidden in the shadow of Colette. From the reviewing of old friendships with Marie Duban, Colette prepared to start her first book. After all, it was only natural for her to take up writing. Her mother's brothers had been journalists. Her father composed endless pages of pamphlets. And as for her husband, he was writing, too. So in January, 1896, Colette got together the material for her first book.

III Colette as Author.

In July of that year, they went to Germany, thence to Jumièges, Barbizon and Châtillon to visit her mother. At this time they were invited to Saint-Sauveur to the distribution of prizes but declined. They had begun "Claudine à l'École." Perhaps they foresaw a little scandal and a break between Saint-Sauveur and the Willys. From this time on Willy relied upon his young wife to arrange and revise his work. In 1900 was published "Claudine à l'École." The book met with immediate success due to all sorts of means invented by Willy.
Larnac says that Willy gave more time to putting his book before the public than to his writings and that the editions of this book went like cake with cream.\(^1\) It can hardly be classed as a novel since so many of the characters are recognizable. Claudine is none other than Colette. In the setting at Montigny-en-Fresnois one recognizes the church, the old school and the castle ruins of Saint-Sauveur. Like Colette, the Claudine of the book is skilled in French and music. She, too, recites on her graduation day. It is of interest to note the mention of Jules Colette but not of his wife. The heroine, Claudine, is an orphan. Some characters retain their real names; others have names similar to and suggesting their own.

Ex: - Lerouge, in reality Legouge; Mlle. Sergent, directrice of the school, is really Mlle. Olympe Terrain. The book interests us as a sort of little chronicle and shows the budding talent of a young writer. Although the book came out under the name of Willy, most of it was written by Colette. While the plays on words and questionable stories were probably inspired by Willy, Colette had lived in what Larnac calls "a Willy pendéé atmosphere.\(^2\) For us the book is like a painting of a young girl at the beginning of the century, loving liberty and the great outdoors, without fear of danger. Here Colette shows for the first time her magnificent talent of observation.

The year 1901 saw the publishing of "Claudine à Paris."

\(^1\) Larnac "Colette, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre," page 59

\(^2\) Larnac "Colette, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre," page 67
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This seems to be a combination of the incidents preceding Colette's marriage. The Claudine à Paris lives on Jacob St. with Colette married. The two characters experience the same things. Both have a sudden passion for Francis Jammesto whom we find Colette later dedicates her "Dialogues de Bêtes."

"Claudine à Paris" is a story of the heart of Colette. Claudine having come to Paris is dissatisfied. She longs for Montigny and soon becomes acquainted with Renaud, a friend of her father and of her son. Renaud loves Colette who permits him to love her and to marry her. In Renaud the author gives us a portrait of Willy and the theme echoes a scandal raised at Saint-Sauveur by the publishing of their previous book which had contained attacks against the mayor, the curate, and the directrice of the school.

In "Claudine en Ménage," published in 1902 we get the recollections of Colette's own marriage. The analogy or parallelism between Claudine and Colette may still be followed. Claudine has just arrived in Paris, and is plunged into literary circles, theatres, dinners, matinées and concerts until one and two a.m. at the beck and call of Renaud. The voyages of Claudine in Germany and around the Mediterranean are those of Colette. Her visit to Montigny is identical with that of M. and Mme. Gauthier-Villars to the school of Saint-Sauveur in July, 1895. Here Colette is at her best in reminiscing of her youth. The book is really a precious collection of memories many pages of which are marked by sincere remembrances. All her heroines seem to be related and unite with some other character. No matter how fantastic and independent her hero-
ines are, underneath there always exists the heart of a little girl. The hero of "Claudine en Ménage" is a person of more experience and many prejudices. The heroine lacks experience. "Colette à l'École" centered around a feminine inversion. "Colette à Paris" centered around a masculine inversion. "Claudine en Ménage" has been termed a "Saphic love."

The last and least good of the Claudine series is "Claudine S'en Va" published in 1903. The theme, the story of Annie, is almost forgotten. Annie resembles Colette and lived as she did. We find a portrait of the grandfather, Captain Colette. The conclusion of the story has a prophetic value for the reader by foretelling her divorce of two years later. This was a common method of Colette's. From a literary point of view the book is not worth so much.

Les Claudines are a product of collaboration. Colette by her temperament tends to make things true while Willy tries to make them gay and impressive. Two methods stand out plainly, - (1) she builds her characters around those living people whom she knows and (2) she sees first by anticipation in her books what she would see later in reality. Claudine is finished as a heroine in "En Ménage." She appears later in "La Retraite Sentimentale," but quite transformed as Colette seems to take on the influence of her husband. While these four volumes are far from being equal to the rest of her work, they created a type the success of which was enormous and lasting. For twenty years commercial advertisements showed the vogue of Claudine. There were Claudine lotions,
Claudine ices, Claudine perfumes, Claudine hats, and Claudine cigarettes.

IV Colette's Divorce.

Freed in 1904 from having work imposed upon her by her husband, she published under her own name, "Les Dialogues de Bêtes." She feels a tender love for all animals. Her dogs and still more her cats, are truly human and Larnac says in this respect she may be compared to Kipling, Maeterlinck and Fabre.1 By her has been transmitted the names of celebrated cats: - César, the cat of the duchess of Mirepaix; Dorothea, the cat of Mme. de Recamier; Cochon, the dog of M. le Maréchal de Vivonne; Grisette, the cat of Mme. Deshoulières. We see them live, discuss, love, sleep, eat, and meditate.

In 1906 Colette was divorced because, according to her faithful Toby-Chien, her husband's happiness required a woman of the world. With her reputation already established in the literary world, she was attracted to the theatre. After long lessons and hard work, she became a mimic and comedian doing much work in pantomime. In "La Vagabonde," "L'Entrave", and "L'Envers du Music Hall" she tells of her experiences in that special world whose inhabitants were hardly on the borders of regular society and who either through talent or money succeed in becoming part of it. She gives pleasing descriptions of what goes on behind the scenes of the music halls. In these three books she has outlined the torments of a woman, once famous, who feels her youth escaping every day and her

Larnac: "Colette: La Vie, son Œuvre" page 57
In 1930 our nation was not ready to hazard an uncertain future to

the hope of small political gains. We can only imagine the

terror in the eyes of the men who stepped forward to

try their luck. We cannot know how they weighed the costs

and benefits. As the trial proceed, we read with wonder and

admiration of the courage of those who gave their lives for

the cause.
heart being gradually isolated. For six years she lived the daily life of the artists of the music halls in France or in Europe. She played much with George Wague and Paul Frank. In stage performances she was noted for her promptness and was often ahead of time. She had an originality of expression which had never been known before.

While playing in pantomime and on the stages of Europe, she continued to write. After the success of the Claudine series and the "Dialogue de Bêtes" she gained confidence. In 1906 Paul Reboux recognized her as a writer of genius. A desire to continue the mémoires of Claudine is probably responsible for "Le Retraite Sentimentale," a book which was almost finished before Colette's divorce but which seems by anticipation to picture the troubles of a young divorcée, becoming lonesome. This book is certainly a "going backward" that Colette makes after her divorce, - Larnac calls it "a retreat in the mystical sense of the word." After the whirlwind into which her married life brought her, she finds herself like a lonesome child, liking the solitude of the country where she "listens without discerning a thousand noises." She settled at Cazamène-en-Fresnois, a commune of Besançon, where she wrote of enjoying the life of the outdoor things, - toads, bats, etc. In this book Claudine appears for the last time, more mysterious perhaps but more attractive than in the four Claudine books. To the reader who has followed the transformation of the character step by step and Larnac: "Colette, Sa Vie, Son Œuvre," page 104.
The text is not legible or clear enough to transcribe accurately. It appears to be a page of text, possibly discussing a topic related to education or policy, but the content is not discernible from the image provided.
step this seems to be the end of the evolution. This fifth Claudine is so much like Colette that there is no danger of any confusion. Behind any seeming disguise there always rises the profound truth. Colette says herself: "I was born alone; I grew up without mother, brother or sister and I have lived without friends." The element of intrigue enters into "La Retraite Sentimentale." Claudine's one-desire grips the reader, - to see Renaud return from Switzerland, to know what would be his attitude towards his wife, what sentiments would develop within her when he would return changed, thin and grown old. Other interest centres around the influence of Annie over Marcel. Will she succeed in seducing him? Claudine reminisces upon her voyage made to Belle-Isle eight years before and to Bayreuth. She notes the hidden torments of a woman's soul. Thus ends Claudine whom we have followed from her youth up and learned to love little by little as we observed her in her follies, in her loves, in her sadnesses. The reader cannot help feeling attached to her.

V Colette Becomes Prominent.

Regularly for the next four years, Colette published a book each year: - in 1907 "La Retraite Sentimentale"; in 1908 "Les Vrilles de la Vigne"; in 1909 "L'Ingénue Libertine;" and in 1910 "La Vagabonde." Then followed three years of silence in preparation for the sudden appearance in 1913 of three of her best books, "L'Envers du Music Hall", "L'Entrave" and "Cheri."

1Larnac: "Colette, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre," page 106.
"Les Vrilles de la Vigne" is a series of short stories related by a common subject. The author's mind dwells upon marriage and the divorce which has freed her. She is dwelling in the country which is to her the most beautiful place in the world. This book shows a new Colette who revolts against the literary tasks imposed upon her by her husband and against newspaper men who criticise her. "I have had enough of it," she cries to her dog, Toby. "I want, I want, I want to do what I wish. I want to play in pantomime and even in comedy."1 The book analyzes the feelings of one who lives alone. She traces here her plan of "La Vagabonde." In "La Retraite Sentimentale" and "Les Vrilles de la Vigne" Colette seems to want to rid her whole being of the constraint of Willy. She revolts against vice, worldliness and falsities. She is anxious to resume again for herself freedom of flesh and spirit. The result of this freedom was admirable pages of great works.

"L'Ingenue Libertine," 1909, is merely a remodification of two works, "Minne" and "Les Egarements" written respectively in 1904 and 1905 in collaboration with Willy. There is no realism here. Minne personifies a woman who cherishes dreams of romantic love only to be deceived by ordinary marriage.

"La Vagabonde," the biography of a music hall performer, published in 1910 is Colette's first great work. It is not Claudine now nor Minne who is confessing her distress

1 Colette: "Sept Dialogues de Betes," page 54
that it is "in the end, no good"

hole of a situation. The implication is that the solution may lie in trusting the process and allowing things to unfold as they will. The author gives an anecdote about a man who was asked if he had any advice for the person who wrote the book. The man replied, "Never take seriously what you read in a book until you've experienced it for yourself."

The book concludes with a call to action, stating, "Do not pursue happiness, for it will not find you. Pursue excellence, for it will seek you out."
and her weaknesses. Neither is it Colette but a new and complex character who resembles her as a sister - Renée Nére'. Renée is married to a type of Willy, by name Taillandy. The latter is a portrait painter whose models are his mistresses. For eighteen years Renée is deceived by him. What shall she do, if not separate? Once divorced, she finds herself alone, abandoned by her former friends who scorn her so that in order to earn her living she becomes a dancer and a mimic.

Earning favor in a music hall she meets one who really loves her. Now what shall she do? She cries: "Oh to throw my arms around the neck of a being, dog or man, a being who loves me!" The lover remarks: "The woman who will make me walk is not yet born,"¹ so Renée decides to remain alone - and free.

Vagabond she is and vagabond she wishes to remain rather than find herself captive of a second husband. Thus, this first great book of Colette's is an intimate analysis, - a study of the soul of a wronged woman written by a wronged woman. Much of the charm of the novel is due to the portrayal of that sensitiveness which retains the emotions.

VI Second Marriage of Colette.

The next three years were spent not in publishing books but in building up for herself a second home by her marriage with Bertrand Henri Leon Robert de Jouvenel des Ursins by whom she had a daughter in August, 1913. Leaving her profession of dancer and mimic she busied herself only

¹Colette: "La Vagabonde," page 62.
with literature and journalism and in 1913 published "L'Entrave", "L'Envers du Music Hall", "Prrou", "Poucette", and other dialogues to be found in "La Paix Chez les Betes" published in 1916. In "L'Envers du Music Hall" Colette deals with the same theme as in "La Vagabonde" - the life of a mimic, dancer and a comedian - and calls attention to the misery as well as the greatness of music hall artists.

In "L'Entrave" we find Renée living at Nice three years after her resolution to remain a vagabond. Enabled to live an idle life as the result of an inheritance she makes her home near a couple of young lovers, Jean and May, and their companion, Masseau, a great smoker of opium. Released from daily tasks she has nothing to do but watch these young lovers live as she contemplates the outcome of their lives.

VII Colette at Her Height.

Up to the outbreak of the World War Colette was receiving little attention compared to the Comtesse de Noailles or Marcelle Tinayre. Five years later the Bookman in a study of feminine literature failed to include Colette. With courage Gaston Chérau took her on the staff of "Le Matin" stipulating that at first she should not sign her writings. Soon she was leading the life of a reporter and a woman of the world, haunting the courts of assises, the chamber of deputies and salons of artists. In June, 1912, she went up in a dirigible. In September of the same year she ascended
in a balloon. In January, 1913, she attended the presidential election at Versailles. April, 1914, found her mingling with the crowds in the street to see the English sovereigns pass.

When her husband enlisted, she followed as volunteer nurse. To reach her husband, she disguised herself and got to Verdun. She spent New Year's Day in the Argonne, distributing toys to the children. Soon she returned to Paris where she was active in war work. In 1915, she went to Italy where she wrote for newspapers in Rome, Venice and Lugano and was reminded of her father's military experience in Italy.

At the end of the war she resumed her regular life and travelled about France with her husband. Her reviews and newspaper writings form the major part of her work. She became active as journalist, short story writer, novelist, actress and dramatic author. Not content with this varied life she conducted discussions on animals, music-halls and reproduction, describing at some length experiments done with serum.

Her work as a journalist began on "Le Matin" in company with Maurice Martin du Gard. At once she was successful and by describing the reflections of women, of artists, of travelers, of mothers, etc., she created a certain type of work. In "Les Heures Longues" she wrote of the war as seen through her own lorgnette. In articles entitled "Dans la Foule" she carries the reader from the boxing match of Carpentier and Sam MacVea to the Chamber of Deputies and Congress at Versailles. In doing this she brings out new sensa-
tions and hidden sources of the soul.

It is to live and experience these new sensations that she scrutinizes the recesses of her being with a power of analysis due to that ever present habit of watching herself live. For the same reason she went up in a balloon. To penetrate the hidden sources of our acts she followed up law suits, went to boxing matches and to popular meetings. Especially in her latest collection, "Les Aventures Quotidiennes," we see the value of her talent. Everything is subject to deep reflection: the sights on the street on the eve of the election; her impressions of La Duse; of Sarah; of a horse whipped by a driver; of an exhibition of flowers; of the Landru law-suit. She also deals with men, animals and plants. Her educational topics are treated with forethought, and she indicates lines in education to be followed through the cinema.

Because Colette had a horror of becoming tedious or too long drawn out, she developed excellent ability in the short story. She paints landscapes, pictures, faces and sentiments. By the fitting use of a verb or epithet she knows how to fix a picture. Her observations are so keen and her style is fairly chiseled with so much art that it is sure to interest the most exacting reader. She never ceased to observe the familiar animals that surrounded her. In "L'Entrave du Music Hall" she expressed pity for "the learned beast forced to labor without pay."¹ Cats, dogs,

butterflies, fish, bears, tigers, lions, panthers, leopards, squirrels were made by Colette to seem intelligent, crafty, and foresighted. She earned a place among the great writers of animals, - Jules Renard, Pierre Loti, Anatole France, Maeterlinck and Kipling.

In 1922 was published "La Maison de Claudine." This time an affection for her home and childhood fills Colette's heart and instead of writing long dissertations or subtle analyses, she draws a series of pictures. She recalls the old house at Saint-Sauveur with its disorderly garden where everything grows freely and wild, where those long since passed away live and speak; - the father with a wooden leg, the little, alert mother, her brothers, sisters, and friends of her childhood. All this makes the book unique. It has been hard to tell which feature of the work was more to be admired, - (1) the perfection of form which makes this as fine a work as a sonnet, or (2) the intimate personal emotion which affects the reader. This book resists the supreme test of being read and reread without fatigue for each reading reveals new interests.

"La Femme Cachée," 1924, is not truly autobiographical since it was written some years before the second divorce of Colette. The book is said to reveal a mutual admiration between Colette and Marcel Proust. Their work, too, is the pursuit of a hidden woman. "There are one thousand individuals in each of us. Jules de Gautier has shown us what we are and what we pretend to be. Psychologists and
novelists try to dissociate two others, one which shows itself and one which is hidden.\(^1\)

Colette was late publishing the true or impersonal novel. "Les Claudines", "La Retraite Sentimentale", "La Vagabonde" and "L'Entrave" presented a principal heroine, either Claudine or Renée Néré, who was a Colette more or less changed, telling us of her sentimental life and daily adventures. This kind of work earned for her the place of a creative novelist with the result that Claudine became a social type. Why was she so late in beginning this work? She seems to have wanted to establish her reputation before she dared to penetrate the soul of others. For nearly twenty years she had shown meticulous observation of plants, animals and even of herself. Then having established her reputation she began to observe those with whom she came in contact.

Her first novel of this kind was "Mitsou" published in 1917. It is a kind of fairy story with characters drawn by paraphrase or a name which is only a surname: - le lieutenant-bleu, le lieutenant-kaki, l'homme-bien, la vieille-dame. In her attempt to create characters here, she seems powerless to give them life. She presents a little dancer of the music-hall, whom they call Mitsou. The beginning of love in the heart of this little girl is the subject of the book. The novel often turns into a dialogue. The descriptions are in the style of the theatre. Instead of picturing the particular beings whom she meets, she creates characters

\(^1\)Larnac: "Colette, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre," pages 147-148.
which are true types.

According to M. Benjamin Crémieux, Colette expressed her philosophy of life in "Le Blé en Herbe" in 1923. Crémieux goes on to say that this is not a psychological novel but the beginning of a story of the sexes. It shows us woman's endowment of a keen sensibility, realizing everything before finding it out. In contrast it shows man provided with reasoning and obedience but obliged to learn everything in order to know it.

In "Chéri," published in 1920, Colette began a study of a situation exploited by post war writers: - the gigolo loved by an older woman. Like the Freudian books it aims to teach that the attraction of adolescence for an older person is the most natural thing in the world. The sequel of this came out in 1926, "La Fin de Chéri." In this there is no action. The book merely paints the suffering and death of Chéri.

After the Chéri books Colette realized her fame. Newspapers sought her; young writers bowed to her. She was recognized by such critics as René Lalou in his "Histoire de la Litterature Contemporaine." André Chaumeix gives her first place among feminine writers in Joseph Bédier's "Histoire de la Litterature Française." In Eugene Montfort's "Vingt-cinq Ans de Litterature," Henriette Charasson gives her a considerable write-up.

To calm her desire for stage work she begins to write plays: - "En Camarades," a comedy in two acts was played by
herself at the "Theatre des Arts" in 1909. Her two greatest plays were based on her novels, "Chéri" 1923, and "La Vagabonde" 1925. In dramatizing these two novels she received help from Léopold Marchaud. Colette herself selected the actors and arranged the settings. No detail escaped her. In the play of "Chéri," the leading character was Léa, not Chéri. This was played by Colette with Paul Poiret as Wague. Her acting received commendation from Claude Berton, Mme. Gérard d'Houville and Albert Flamant. It had been her intention to write a fairy-like play of some sort. This she accomplished by writing "L'Enfant de les Sortilèges," a musical play in two parts, with music by Maurice Ravel.

VIII Colette's Genius as a Psychologist.

Whether or not Colette can be ranked as a real novelist depends on the definition one chooses. She is a novelist like Anatole France or Loti who weave according to fancy the threads of their plot without care for the story which constructs the essential theme of the novel. It is the freedom taken with the rules of the novel which pleases us. While Loti deals with the sights of the world, France with the results of human effort, Colette aims to translate emotions and passions. "No other writer is so absolutely subjective," says Paul Blanchard.¹ This seeming inability to get away from self is scorned by her opponents. She makes use of all the senses, - visual, auditory, olfactory -

¹Keller and Lautier, page 56.
and it must be admitted that the senses make an indelible imprint on the mind of Colette. The treasures of her memory grow with her and she is always in quest of new sensations. She looks at, listens to, breathes with and touches the flowers, trees, animals and people who surround her. In observing the plants and animals she reveals the force of instincts. She initiated herself into psychological analysis by first observing animals and then watching herself live. This shows up in the order of her writings, - "Les Dialogues de Betes," then the autobiographical kind, more or less disguised, - "Les Claudines," "La Retraite Sentimentale", "La Vagabonde", "L'Entrave." Thus, it seems as mentioned before, that she waited to know herself well before observing others. She felt the need of experience to appreciate what was around her. This was like an apprenticeship to the art of novelist. Only when she was confident of her ability did she risk her impersonal novels, - "Mitsou", "Le Ble en Herbe", "Chéri" and "La Fin de Chéri." She wrote no long paragraphs of psychology with analyses and deductions like William James or Dumas. With an originality all her own, she revealed the emotional and physical sides of life, expressing emotions by actions and passions by state of health. Even when she abandons the 'Ego' to write what has been called the impersonal novels, it is by the action of the characters that she depicts their emotions and sentiments. This gives her characters the mystery and life of human beings. It makes them speak, feel, and move for us.
The reader understands them, judges them, and feels the unknown forces hidden in the subconscious. Because Colette became initiated into this human psychology by her study of animals, she has shown a keener appreciation of female instincts. Her characters seem controlled by a force which they do not suspect and cannot resist. Colette does not depict men as cleverly as she does women. Her men are simply drole fellows, while her women may be traced from the young girl, abounding in instincts (Claudine, Minne), the married woman subordinating herself to a master ("Claudine en Ménage"), the abandoned woman (Claudine in "La Retraite Sentimentale" or Renée in "La Vagabonde"), the woman of the world seeking pleasure as her only possible happiness (Renée Néré in "L'Entrave"), and finally the aged woman in "La Femme Cachée."

No other author produces a collection of feminine portraits as rich as that of Colette.

IX Colette's Style.

In childhood, Colette named herself Bel Gazou which is the first evidence she gives of creating musical sounds. Later she develops originality of expression: - apricots of plush, a skin as shiny as a silk doublet, a skirt of rose leaves, seeming to borrow vocabulary for effective comparisons and contrasts. She effectively coins verbs to suit her needs: - "Annie s'en Claudine";¹ "Annie est enlinceulée de mousseline";² "Les sorbiers sont grappés de fruits verts."³

¹ and ² Colette: "Claudine S'en Va," pages 56 and 57.
She gives verbs different meanings according to the use needed. The verb 'froncer' ordinarily indicating concrete action, she uses with an abstract meaning: "Me devine-t-il," dit Claudine, "tendue, froncée, mauvaise, etc." Again, "L'hirondelle fauche l'air," and "La lampe est juponnée de vert."

Her books are rich in epithets and by this means she expresses differences of thought and opinion. She chooses adjectives which are picturesque and artistic, those which paint rather than reveal something. When adjectives of color are not sufficient she compounds: - "la violette d'un mauve-azure", "l'ardoise neuve d'un violet-orageux." "Le ciel semble fait d'Étain-Jaspe."

Thus the work of Colette becomes a treasure of French language. Hers is a culture of words with artistic precision. One does not read Colette but sees what she sees, breathes what she breathes, touches what she touches, as if revealing the genius "of a poet, the most instinctive and at the same time the most artistic of French literature."  

1 Larnac: "Colette, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre," page 225.
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