



# Emotions and adulterous love in 19th century Paris: The letters of Adèle Schunck and Aimé Guyet de Fernex (1824–1849)



Paula Cossart <sup>1</sup>

Institut Universitaire de France, CeRIES - Université Lille III, Sociology, 3 Rue du Barreau, 59650 Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 26 November 2014

Received in revised form

24 July 2015

Accepted 26 July 2015

Available online 25 August 2015

### Keywords:

Love

Epistolary love

Nature

Romanticism

Turmoil

## ABSTRACT

In Paris, between 1824 and 1849, Adèle Schunck and Aimé Guyet de Fernex had an illicit relationship in perfect secrecy. This article discusses the place of emotion in the 1500 letters of the two lovers. Analysis, in their words, of the experience and epistolary expression of feelings of love and of the deep emotional turmoil that this generates, leads to describe them as characteristic figures of the Romantic rhetoric. Because of society's disapproval of their love, they are not allowed to express their emotions openly: hence, it is in Nature that the lovers find a link to their feelings.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

"For lovers, everything is emotion. Sorrows, memories, all have their magic. My love for you often makes me suffer, but bliss is close by. The least glimmer is sweet, reality carries [one] away! Pain, pleasure, all lift the soul burning with love". These were the words of Adèle Schunck on 12 April 1830, in a letter to her lover, Aimé Guyet de Fernex. This article is based on my study of the extensive correspondence between these two lovers and addresses the question of experience and expression of love during the early Romantic period and the emotions linked to it. For twenty-five years, from 1824 to 1849, in Paris, Adèle and Aimé had a secret, adulterous love affair. A quarter of a century of clandestine love, recalled in the 1500 letters they wrote to one another, constitutes a rich source for the historical analysis of emotions under the Restoration and the July Monarchy.

This intense correspondence, which I discovered in 1996, was still untouched. It was deposited in the two boxes where Aimé had kept them with great care until his death.<sup>2</sup> On the lid of one of them, he wrote: "After me. This carton and the wooden box

(1829–1845) shall be given as they are to Madame Schunck. I particularly entrust this task to my daughter Aglaé. September 1857". Yet when Aimé dies in March 1871, before Adèle, the letters are not passed on to her. They were discovered when his home was closed up, and they were deposited in the registry office of the civil court of the Seine, where they remained until they were transferred to the Paris Archives. Alongside the letters, there were a few other papers belonging to Adèle. This suggested, erroneously, that it was on her own death that the papers were deposited in the registry office, that Aimé's wish had been respected, and that at his death, the correspondence had been given to Adèle. Indeed, when the boxes were first opened, the judge saw the nature of the papers they contained, and decided: "Taking into account that the greater part of these papers are such as to damage the honor and social esteem of several people we declare that all of them will remain deposited in the registry office of the court until some other decision might be taken".<sup>3</sup> The secret was thus preserved for the sake of honor. I have since published part of their correspondence, but not without asking myself whether it was appropriate to disclose such an enduring and carefully kept secret (Cossart, 2005).

The relationship between Adèle and Aimé was not entirely

E-mail addresses: [cossart.paula@free.fr](mailto:cossart.paula@free.fr), [paula.cossart@univ-lille3.fr](mailto:paula.cossart@univ-lille3.fr).

URL: <http://www.paula-cossart.com>

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Claudina Cossart and Clare Tame.

<sup>2</sup> Paris Archives: 26 W. Deposited at the registry office of the Civil Court of the Seine, 17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>3</sup> National Archives/MC/ET/XC/808. Extract of the records of the office of the clerk of the Civil Magistrates' Court of the Department of Seine, 7 September 1871 (pinned to the inventory drawn up after Aimé's death on 23 August 1871).

epistolary. They often managed to meet at least once a week and even more. But their love was nonetheless hindered — as the two lovers could not see each other as freely or as often as they would have liked, and had to conceal their relationship from society. Adèle had been married to Philippe Henri Schunck, about thirty years her elder, since 1812. Apparently, they did not marry for love. On 26 September 1827, Adèle wrote to Aimé: “I told you all about the circumstances preceding and following my marriage. Everything at that time contributed to destroy my happiness. Everything was dark and dismal”. Adèle also had a son, Charles, who was twelve years old at the time his mother's affair began. Charles's birth came close on the heels of Adèle's marriage, and her parents may have married her off to Philippe Henri Schunck because she was pregnant by another man. Schunck had divorced in 1802, was childless, and lived at the house of Adèle's parents. Moreover, unlike her, he had then no personal fortune: in the marriage contract<sup>4</sup> I read: “the future spouse declares that he has only his talent and his linen and worn clothes”. As for Aimé, he was a widower and the father of three daughters. In 1824, when their relationship begins, both Adèle and Aimé are a little over thirty years old.

Adèle, her husband, and to a lesser extent, Aimé, whilst neither aristocrats nor great celebrities, nevertheless belonged to the new “Tout-Paris”, the few hundred people who made up Parisian “society” (Martin-Fugier, 1990: 96–97). The Schunck family was also well connected in artistic circles, mainly that of painters, and to the French Court. Until 1830, Adèle was linked to the House of the duc de Bordeaux, posthumous son of the duc de Berry, and to that of his sister, Louise Marie-Thérèse. She attended the family at the Tuileries chateau, but she sometimes had to follow the Court to Saint-Cloud. After the Revolution, and the departure of Charles X, Adèle left the Court and went to live in Paris on her private income. From time to time, she went to the countryside, generally without her husband. Philippe Henri Schunck was a composer and piano teacher, and keeper of the collection of paintings belonging to the daughter of Louis XVI. He was also known as the person who restored the hearts of Louis XIII and Louis XIV to the royal family, after they were removed from the church of Saint-Paul-Saint-Louis during the Revolution.<sup>5</sup> As for Aimé, he was a teacher in several royal colleges, in particular that of Louis-le-Grand, in the Latin quarter where he lived, with his mother and his daughters. Because of his teaching qualifications, Aimé was called on several times by Adèle and her husband to supervise their son's education, and this is probably how the two lovers first met.

On 21 July 1829, Adèle writes to Aimé: “I went to bed before ten o'clock, with the intention of having a long night's sleep, but I had the idea of poking my nose into the first page of *Werther* and I could not stop reading until the end of the book, it was then almost one o'clock in the morning. My soul is still weary and I have slept badly. Nothing gives me more pleasure than this book and each time [I read it] it wounds me in the same way”. Published in 1774, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, was one of the most well-known texts in the early period of Romanticism, and soon became a great success throughout Europe. It describes the inner tortures of Werther, ailing with an impossible love for a young woman who is already engaged to be married. Faced with the hopelessness of finding happiness for a sensitive being like himself, Werther commits suicide. In a letter sent to her lover three years earlier, Adèle compared their situation to that of Julie and Saint-Preux, the two

characters in Rousseau's *New Heloise*, published in 1761, who also share a forbidden love. On 16 January 1826, Adèle writes: “I understand Saint-Preux's happiness on discovering that cruel small-pox which he contracted from Julie. I feel that it would be sweet for me to suffer the same malady as the one I love: love has a thousand pleasures. It never cares about danger, and after all, would it not be good to die in the arms of one's lover? Aimé, I have one wish: that the same blow take us both”. Indeed, from about 1760, more and more novels have heroes presenting their passion as their own nature, and who rebel against the moral conventions of society, on behalf of Nature (Luhmann, 1990: 143; about the excessive and uncontrolled emotion in Rousseau's writings, see: Babbitt, 1919; Chai, 2006; more largely, on his contribution to pre-Romanticism: Furst, 1968: 119–20).

These included the books which most impressed Adèle. The letters of the two lovers, like those of the heroes of Goethe's and Rousseau's epistolary novels, highlight the basic clash between Nature and Society: a society that does not acknowledge their love and makes it impossible for them to live according to their true nature. Adèle and Aimé point to the conflict between the conventional lives that they must live in society and their own true nature which blossoms in their passion. It is in Romanticism — which triumphs as the principal literary trend under the Restoration and the July Monarchy — that the lovers find the rhetoric enabling them to express their love, restoring beauty to their liaison, a beauty which was threatened by society's disapproval. This does not mean that romantic subjects have influenced all lovers in the first half of the century. Both Adèle and Aimé were very cultured people, who read a great deal and discussed literature. They are part of the relatively small group of people over which the wave of romantic love unfurls its banner. It is necessary “to consider the process of the descent of romantic love downwards in the social pyramid” (Corbin, 1999: 527–528). Nevertheless, “romanticism's actual impact, as a social as well as a literary phenomenon, was exerted not solely as a new sensibility among elites, but as a popular form affecting the age-old cultural distinctions among social classes in Paris of the early nineteenth century” (Allen, 1979: 255; see also: Crubellier, 1974: 125–141; Goblot, 1968: 86–103).

Apart from the fact that it challenged the neoclassical tradition (Havens, 1940: 10), defining Romanticism is not an easy task. “Romanticism has been notoriously difficult to define”, writes Peter L. Thorslev (1975: 563). “The difficulties of defining romanticism are as old as romanticism itself”, confirms Gabriel Lanyi (1980: 141). “No subject in the whole field of comparative literary studies has provoked as much critical writing as Romanticism”, declares Lilian R. Furst (1968: 115). First, because “the romantic manner of perception and expression appeared in various literature at different times and in different guises” (Furst, 1968: 135; see also: Young, 1932; McGann, 1992). Second, because what characterized the romantic spirit is a “tradition of dissent”: the “reign and succession of Romanticism in France, even in the years of its triumph” was always, or by definition, “insecure” (Jones, 1929: 299). Even if the subject has been debated passionately (see for instance: Peckham 1951), some characteristic features of the “romantic spirit” have been underlined: “the importance accorded to the demands of the heart, the revolt of the individual against convention, the intensity of the emotional expression” (Cornell, 1954: 93); the fact that “the Romantic artist is haunted by scenes of solitariness” (Hartman, 1970: 242). As for Edwin Berry Burgum, he considers that there are three different definitions of Romanticism depending from the country which is considered: in Germany, “medievalism” would predominate; in France, “individualism”; and in England, “naturism” (Burgum, 1941: 482–83).

In 1846, Charles Beaudelaire has aptly described Romanticism as “an alternate ‘way of feeling’” (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 1993: 18).

<sup>4</sup> Archives of the Department of Seine-Saint-Denis/CXXXVII/66: Marriage contract, Saint-Denis, 23 December 1811.

<sup>5</sup> National Archives/O3/629: Record of a request for the Legion of Honor award. Account about the discovery of the hearts of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, Paris, 15 June 1822. See also: Lenôtre, 1934: 281–287; Chaudronnet and Pougetoux, 1989: 34–35.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/946622>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/946622>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)