

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

## **THE LAST MISTRESS (Une Vieille Maîtresse) 2007**

Catherine Breillat

### OVERVIEW

This historical drama heralded the director's return to form, after a debilitating stroke. Set largely in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris, the story is adapted from a novel of the same title by Jules-Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly. With its sumptuous costumes, historical settings, pistol duel, horse riding and windswept seacoast, the *Last Mistress* shares more with Breillat's two folktale adaptations (*Bluebeard* and *Sleeping Beauty*) than her other films. This film, nevertheless, features her clear-sighted, documentary-like exploration of sexual desire and social convention. The movie was well received by critics and was nominated for the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

### PEOPLE

Vellini	Vellini is a Spanish courtesan.
Marigny	Marigny is her French lover.
Hermangarde	Hermangarde becomes Marigny's wife.
Marquise de Flers	The Marquise de Flers is her grandmother.
Comtesse d'Arnelles	The Comtesse d'Arnelles is the grandmother's friend.
Viscount Prony	Viscount Prony is married to the Comtesse.

### SYNOPSIS

Paris 1835. Young Marigny makes a final visit to his mistress, Vellini, before marrying Hermangarde. Both he and Vellini have scandalous reputations in Parisian society, and Hermangarde's grandmother wants to know all about his liaison with her. Marigny tells her the story (shown in flashback): he fell under her spell, they fled to Algeria, their daughter died and that tragedy poisoned their love with grief. He says he has broken with her and that he loves only Hermangarde, but he must leave Paris after the marriage to avoid Vellini's clutches. After the marriage, the couple live by the sea, where Vellini also takes up residence and once again ensnares Marigny. When Hermangarde learns of his infidelity, she maintains a calm aloofness to her husband. Back in Paris, they carry on the time-honoured convention of a marriage with a mistress.

### SCENES

*Important news* In Paris in 1835, Viscount Prony and his wife (Marquise de Flers) discuss the upcoming marriage of young Hermangarde (the granddaughter of a friend) to a well-known philanderer, Marigny. Hoping to scupper the wedding, Prony visits Vellini, Marigny's lover, to inform her of the marriage and create a fuss. However, when Vellini hears about Marigny's intended marriage, she dismisses the news, confident that Marigny would never end their ten-year long liaison.

*Farewell* After Prony leaves, Marigny arrives, and finds his mistress in tears about his upcoming marriage. They make love, but afterward he tells her that it is goodbye. Shaken, but proud, she is confident that he will return to her. Still, she is disconsolate and refuses to meet other men.

*Advice* The Marquise de Flers consoles her granddaughter, Hermangarde, when her fiancé Marigny doesn't visit their house as promised. The grandmother's friend, the Comtesse d'Arnelles, warns her against marrying the girl to a 'penniless adventurer' who has a long-term mistress, but the grandmother has confidence in her own ability to make the marriage a 'masterpiece.' Later, the two old ladies discuss Vellini's reputation and agree that she must be crafty in order to keep Marigny for ten years.

*Vellini* Accompanied by a flock of admirers, Vellini arrives late in her opera box, from where she sees Marigny and Hermangarde chaperoned by the two old ladies. Her flirtation with her admirers causes a flutter of attention among the audience.

*Promise* That evening, in her house, the grandmother permits Marigny to give Hermangarde a

goodnight kiss before talking to the young man. When she warns him not to trifle with her granddaughter, he swears that the relationship with Vellini has ended. But he admits that Vellini still has the power to bewitch him, and, encouraged by old lady, he tells her the story of how he became her lover.

*First meeting* Marigny begins his story at the opera. Escaping from the flirtations of a married woman, he meets a friend, who introduces him to Vellini at a costume party. She is the mistress of the friend but is married to a foppish Englishman. At the party, she is dressed as the devil, and his initial conversation with her produces fiery sparks, which intrigues him.

*Affront* Smitten, Marigny is desperate to see her again but she refuses. Following his friend's advice, he finds her in a church, but again she rebuffs him. Finally, he chances upon her while both are riding in a park. She insults him, and he forcibly kisses her. Her aging husband sees the affront and challenges him to a duel.

*Duel* The two men meet at first light the following morning. Although it is against convention, Vellini is also present and says that she hopes her husband will kill Marigny. Standing at a distance of four paces, Marigny deliberately fires into the air and walks toward the husband, who wounds him in the shoulder.

*Surrender* While he lies on a doctor's operating table, Vellini bursts in and sucks his blood. Still recuperating, he is visited by Vellini, who admits that she is 'beaten' and makes love to him. For two months, he is close to death but survives.

*Scandal* Vellini leaves her decrepit husband, explaining that she is grateful to him for marrying her but that her love for Marigny is beyond her control. News of her taking up with Marigny creates a scandal in the salons of Paris. The ladies do not approve but because of his high birth, they do not ban him from their circle.

*Grief* Unable to bear the gossip in Paris, Marigny takes Vellini with him to Algeria, where their daughter is born. Disaster strikes, when the child is bitten by a scorpion and dies. Vellini goes mad with grief, and their relationship turns 'from love to an unending fury...a kind of barbarous rape.'

*Separation* They no longer love each other but are bound by the tragedy of their daughter's death, and, in compensation, they have sex even more furiously than before. Finally, they separate as lovers, but he continues to see her as a friend.

*Jealousy* She takes a new lover but is bored because he is too 'devoted and too weak.' She is also jealous of Marigny's new mistresses. Soon, they resume their sexual affair, though it is poisoned with hurt and misunderstanding.

*Mutual admiration* When his story is over, the Marquise de Flers says she understands him and is glad that he will marry her granddaughter, Hermangarde. He, in turn, is grateful that she heard him out and approves of him.

*Wedding* The wedding ceremony is both sumptuous and pious. With bride and groom sitting side by side, a young girl reads from St. Mathew: 'What God has united let no man separate.' A priest then reads the infamous statement from another scripture: 'Man did not come from woman, but woman came from man.' As a smiling Marigny puts a ring on his veiled, blond-haired and angelic bride, a black-robed Vellini watches from the balcony.

*Unwelcome arrival* Four months later, living by the sea in the company of the two old ladies, the newly-weds are happy as clams. Marigny receives a letter from Vellini, which he reads and tosses into the fire. Undeterred, she arrives in person, and when he asks why, she says that he'll fall for her again. Pretending to fall into the sea, she forces him to rescue her. In his arms, she kisses him and he responds. Aroused, he goes home and wants to make love to his wife, who is reluctant to allow his love-making in the front room.

*Infidelity* When the grandmother returns to Paris, she warns Hermangarde against coming with her with her husband because Paris holds temptations for him. Left alone, husband and wife grow fonder of each other when they learn that she is pregnant. One day, though, she takes a walk and sees Vellini, who has taken up residence in the area. Marigny visits Vellini and admits that his love for his wife is motivated by a desire to avoid her: 'I kiss her like a drowning man clings to a floating log.' They make love and he spends the night in her house.

*Cold shoulder* When he returns to his wife in the morning, she is cold and distant, having seen him with Vellini the night before in her house. He begs her to rebuke him, but she remains silent, making him suffer.

*Resignation* Back in Paris, Mr Prony and his wife are riding in a carriage, just as in the opening scene. He says that Marigny has returned to Vellini, while remaining married to his wife. The old married couple shake their heads in resignation that nothing seems to change.

## THEMES

### 1. Society

a) overview The film exposes, but does not condemn, the social mores of the time, including frivolous costume parties, serial infidelity and the keeping of mistresses. It is a culture of the wealthy and powerful, who tolerate sexual idiosyncrasies within their own ranks but despise outsiders, like the Spanish Vellini. The film-maker maintains a cool and ironical perspective on the behaviour of her characters, engendering sympathy for them, despite their narcissism and hypocrisy. Overall, the film shows us how such a society endures over time, despite its decadence and contradictions.

b) social conventions: mistresses The love affair between Marigny and Vellini is acceptable to the grandmother of Marigny's fiancé because the older woman herself had dalliances in her youth. No one in the film condemns the social convention of being married and having a mistress, as long as it conforms to prevailing norms. This is made clear in the opening scene, when an old married couple (Comtesse d'Arnelles and Viscount de Prony) discuss the upcoming marriage of Marigny with Hermangarde, a granddaughter of their friend (the Marquise de Flers). The wife disparages Vellini not because she is married and yet a mistress, but because she is Spanish and low-born. The old married couple also have no respect for Marigny because he is a 'penniless scoundrel, gambler and womaniser.'

c) social conventions: courtship Later, the grandmother, who has arranged the marriage, counsels Hermangarde how to act toward Marigny when he misbehaves. 'Don't let men dominate you,' she advises. 'The most sincere love isn't devoid of conceit. Treat him with cool distance tomorrow. Act disinterested.' When the young girl goes up to bed, the Comtesse d'Arnelles says that the young girl is too young to be capable of deceit...One must never give a man the certainty of conquest. It is a law of our species that young girls and even their mothers are taken in. But when grandmothers [like you] are fooled by this pitiful comedy of seduction, well! How can marry your granddaughter to this man without a title, a penniless adventurer, an unbridled libertine?' The grandmother admits that she has been charmed by the young man and waves away her friend's counsel. 'Things were worse in our childhood. Our mothers had the courage to marry us to some dreadful rascals, and we had the brazen luck to be quite happy. We were born in a time when such matters were easily forgotten.'

d) social conventions: ambivalence This extended debate between the two old ladies reflects the ambivalence concerning the long-established convention of keeping a mistress. On the one hand, boys will be boys and we women must be mature enough to forgive them, assuming that the man is sincerely in love with his wife. On the other hand, one must be cautious when marrying one's granddaughter to a well-known libertine. Parisian society in the early nineteenth century was caught in two minds, and romance had to navigate between desire and convention.

e) social continuity A key moment arrives when Hermangarde realises (first-hand) that her husband has again taken up with his last mistress (Vellini). The next morning, following her grandmother's advice, she treats him with silent disdain. Unnerved and feeling guilty, Marigny tells her to rebuke him. When she says nothing, he begs her to tell him what she's thinking. 'You're worrying about nothing,' she says calmly. 'Everything is fine.' That is clearly not the case, and he says her silence is agonising. She looks at him with clear eyes and says, 'I was thinking of Countess Mendoze [Marigny's former mistress]. She died recently, you know.' He looks aghast and says, 'You mean that I kill everyone I get close to. There's something terrible in my fate.' When she says, 'I always knew it,' he storms out of the room. Left alone with her knitting, her fixed eyes neither angry nor humiliated, she is the symbol of a woman's toleration of male behaviour. She does not forgive him, but neither does she break with him. Like her grandmother, she will countenance the convention of infidelity with mistresses.

f) cynical resignation A similar, cynical attitude is also displayed by the older generation. In

the final scene, which is a near repetition of the opening scene, Mr Prony and his wife are riding in a horse-drawn carriage on a street in Paris. He sighs and says that after a year and a half, his doubt about the marriage has been confirmed. 'That paragon of husbands, Marigny,' he says mockingly, 'has done like the dog in the Bible.' That is, he has returned to his mistress, Vellini. When Prony's wife asks if he is absolutely sure, he says that Marigny was at the opera with his new wife but left after Act Two and went to Vellini's house, leaving his carriage outside for everyone to see. 'Marigny does not like secrecy,' Prony says. 'What I like about him is that if one day he becomes a government minister, he'll revel in being unpopular. I know of no one who defies public opinion better than he.' His wife shakes her head in disapproval and says, 'Just like a man.' But she also admits that she is surprised because, having lived with them for some time by the sea, she was convinced of Marigny's love for his wife. 'I'll never forget his love,' she says. 'That's just as well,' says Prony. 'That way at least someone will remember. Since he probably no longer does.' Those are the final words of the film, after which the old couple look straight ahead silently. Nothing has changed, and nothing will change.

## 2. Love

a) overview An even more dominant theme of this complex historical story is love, especially in its self-destructive form. There is considerable discussion of the niceties of keeping mistresses and how to keep a man's love. The older generation reminisce about the sexual misadventures of their youth and hold differing opinions about the current generation's behaviour. The focus, however, is on the fierce and long-lasting love affair between Marigny and Vellini and its effect on Marigny's marriage. The film neither condemns nor glorifies their sexual adventure, but merely holds it up for scrutiny.

b) meeting The first time Marigny and Vellini set eyes upon each other is at a distance, but it produces resentment in the proud Spanish courtesan. When Marigny's friend points out Vellini, sitting in a carriage, licking her ice cream (an early sign of her voracious appetites), Marigny calls her an 'ugly mutt.' Hearing his unkind remark, Vellini's eyes flash with anger, the first sparks in what will be a tempestuous love affair.

c) pursuit Intrigued by her fiery countenance, Marigny pursues her at a costume dance, where she, typically, is dressed as the devil. Her anger toward him seems, in fact, to provoke him into trying to win her over. During the party, he follows her, says he would marry her if she were free and calls her vain when she rejects him. Next, he tracks her down in a church and then in a park, where the two of them are riding. Their encounter there leads to the duel, in which he is badly wounded.

d) surrender Marigny's pursuit of Vellini finally reached sexual surrender on a doctor's operating table, where the young man is recuperating from the bullet wound sustained in the duel. Seeing him helpless on the table, she sucks the blood from his wound and then, after the doctor leaves, makes love with him. 'I surrender,' she says to him. 'I struggled hard, but I am defeated.' When their love-making is over, she leaves him in the early morning, sliding out with a mischievous smile. She holds up a key with which to lock the door and says, 'I hope you don't have another [key].' He swears that he doesn't and asks, 'Are you locking me in?' Still smiling, she answers, 'Double-locking you.' 'Like your slave?' he asks. 'My prisoner,' she says. 'Later, you'll be my slave.' She has hooked him, and her prediction of his enslavement comes true.

e) sexual stories The physical love between Marigny and Vellini is explicit and energetic. Their poisonous attraction to one another is obvious in an early brief scene, when she makes love to him on a tiger skin, hugging the dead animal's head. Their sexual encounters illustrate the male desire for conquest and the female desire to surrender. The first of two explicit sexual scenes between Marigny and Vellini occurs toward the end of the film, when they have returned from Algeria and remain as friends, but only briefly. Soon, he is drawn back to her and they engage in even more feverish sex than before by telling each other erotic stories. In this particular scene, she challenges him to say that his new lover is better in bed than she. He describes her as cold and prudish, a woman who despises the carnal acts of love, but that is what excites him. 'She doesn't open her legs,' he explains. 'She clenches them. I have to force them. And then she cries, that is impressive. Her surrender, her sacrifice, is what's sublime.' His description arouses Vellini, who wants more and more from him. When they pause for a moment, she says, 'It flatters your little pride [his conquest]. But that's not love. Most women refuse to know what it is to give oneself to a man.' Here, Vellini agrees with Marigny that surrender is erotic, but she adds that only a woman who gets pleasure from surrender can truly love a man.

f) habit of sexuality Marigny finds that he is powerless to extricate himself from the liaison with Vellini. 'I found myself unable to resist the burning feelings of the past,' he says, contritely. He goes on to make a distinction between true love for his fiancé and bad habits with his mistress. The pull of habit is so strong that he must leave Paris; if he stays, despite his love for Hermangarde, he fears that the old embers may burn again. Now, his love is like a disease, an infection that is difficult to cure. It has taken hold in the body, where it lingers, perhaps dormant for a while, before leaping up and creating havoc.

g) suffering The sadomasochistic streak in their relationship emerges slowly, with various cuts and wounds, but it is fully apparent after the tragedy of their daughter's death in Algeria and they return to Paris. Now, their affair has lost most of its mad ecstasy and feeds on their shared grief and raw sexual desire. Grief has poisoned their relationship, but she wants to continue to make love, which, he says, disgusts him. At one point, Marigny explains his bond with Vellini as 'like a drowning man clinging to a floating log.' Moments later, while making love to her, he uses another metaphor to explain his destructive love for her. 'Horses slightly injured by a bayonet in battle and are urged forward,' he says, 'and impale themselves right to the heart.' He is that self-destructive horse. Once wounded, he is so crazed that he hurtles toward tragedy.

h) marriage and flight Marigny marries Hermangarde in an attempt to quell his poisonous desire for Vellini. The newlyweds leave Paris, in order to avoid contact with Vellini, and live in a house by the sea. For a time, the married couple are happy and rejoice in the conception of a child.

i) infidelity Their marital bliss is, however, short-lived. Vellini is now in pursuit of Marigny and takes up residence near them. When he learns of her presence, he goes to her one night, unable to avoid what he knows is a relationship of pain as much as pleasure. Defeated, he submits to her, and she places him in a Kama-sutra like position to heighten her pleasure. Panting and groaning, she kisses his feet and grabs his thigh, shoving him further inside herself. It is animalistic abandonment, wild and desperate, she clawing at him and he unable to resist.

j) return to Paris Hermangarde discovers his infidelity and cold shoulders him, not even allowing him to play the victim of her anger. The married couple return to Paris, where Marigny takes up where he left off, having love affairs, only now he is married.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**VELLINI** Vellini is a mesmeric character, full of fiery lust and few delicate feelings. What can we expect of an illegitimate child of an Italian woman and a famed Spanish matador? She has 'been rescued' from the low-status of a courtesan by her marriage to a wealthy, elderly Englishman. Denigrated by Parisian society, she has a chip on her shoulder and is quick to take offense. Her dark flashing eyes cast a spell on Marigny.

*Hateful* Vellini herself describes her relationship with Marigny as 'unusual, filled more with hate than love.' We observe her anger when they first meet. She is sitting in a carriage and he is with her lover, his friend, at a table outside a café. She overhears him call her an 'ugly mutt' and, later at the costume party, turns her ire on him. She is dressed in flaming red, which prompts someone to ask if she is dressed as the she-devil. 'No,' she says, 'as the devil. I hate anything feminine.' At that moment, Marigny drinks from her glass. 'That's mine,' she says angrily and goes to snatch it back, but it breaks and cuts her hand. She accuses him of being vain and leaves the table in a huff. Intrigued, Marigny follows and tells her that, if she weren't already married, he would marry her. She sneers at him and says that he's too young to indulge in such folly. He tries to play her game and says that Spanish women are as vain as French women. Flashing her flaming eyes at him, she concludes their conversation by saying, 'Spanish women can hate better than they can love.' It is a warning, but one that Marigny does not heed.

*Vindictive* Vellini is proud and vengeful, as well as hateful. We see this aspect of her character during the scene when Marigny has sex with her and then says farewell because he is getting married the next day. At the door, he says sincerely that he loves his fiancé more than he has loved anyone, 'even you, Vellini.' He also says that he will not cheat on 'the woman he loves with someone he no longer loves [her].' Those words wound Vellini's pride. With a haughty look, she says, 'Is that what you believe? You'll come back to me...You'll trample on the girl you're marrying and return to me.' She is not only vindictive, she is right.

*Blood-thirsty* The semi-monstrous nature of Vellini's character is hinted at in several ways—she's

the child of a matador, she dresses as the devil and more than once she draws blood from her lover-victim. But the most sensational scene is that which inaugurates their physical love affair. Marigny lies on a doctor's operating table, his open chest wound oozing blood, when she bursts in and begins to lick his wound. The doctor grabs her, but she shakes him off, saying, 'I want to drink his blood. No one can stop me.' And that is what she does, sucks the life-blood of the man she now loves. In the next shot, a woman collects the blood of a chicken, which is then poured into the broth that is fed to the recuperating patient. Catherine Breillat, the director, is fascinated by blood, and Vellini is one of her most captivating characters. Her frenzied blood-sucking illustrates her perverse lust.

**MARIGNY** Marigny is a handsome man aged about thirty. Part of the upper crust of Parisian society, he has sampled all its delight—women, opera, food and drink. But he is trapped in a long and self-destructive liaison with Vellini, who matches and then surpasses his outrageous behaviour. He is jaded by indulgence, but he also possesses remnants of sincerity and attempts to be a faithful husband.

*Blasé* The key to Marigny's character is the world-weary indifference that he feels before he meets the fiery Vellini. He is the embodiment of the young aristocrat of 1830s Paris: he is bored with decadence and amorality. This attitude is articulated during an early scene, when he leaves the amorous attentions of a married woman in the Opera House and goes outside, where he runs into a friend. They sit down and the friend asks where he was going. 'I was fleeing,' Marigny says with an indulgent smile. 'If faithful husbands who envy us knew how unhappy we are when their wives, who idolise us, yield to us. If they only knew the disillusion and boredom that result from their surrender.' Poor Marigny! He is adored by women and he conquers them, but he is incapable of feeling any pleasure. The film begins with a statement that the story takes place 'in the age of Choderlos de Laclos' (author of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*), when scandal, seduction and malice were performed with perfect etiquette, leaving the characters indifferent to life. That is Marigny.

*Honourable* Part of the role of the aristocrat of that age was to act honourably in public, while behaving abominably in private affairs of the heart. Again, Marigny plays that role admirably, especially in the scene when he is challenged to a duel by Vellini's jealous English husband. The old fop and the young blade meet at dawn, with their witnesses (including Vellini), and are handed pistols. Standing back to back in the grey light, they each take four paces, turn and face each other. Marigny raises his pistol high and fires, harmlessly, into the air. Never moving a muscle of his face, he walks slowly toward the husband, who fires and wounds him. Marigny would not take advantage of his greater skill in firearms to kill an old man. That would be unseemly.

*Sensitive* For all his narcissism, Marigny is not without the capacity to feel genuine grief and remorse. A good example of his sensitivity occurs when he attempts to explain his feelings to the grandmother after the death of his daughter in Algeria. He is sad as he describes how Vellini went mad after the death yet still insisted on having sex with him. His voice almost cracks with emotion when he says that their affair 'turned from love to an unending fury...a kind of barbarous rape.' He disapproved of their continuing a sexual relationship but he permitted it, which made him 'feel disgusted' with himself. Now, speaking to the old woman, he breaks down in tears, when he describes how their daughter's death 'placed a wall' between them. We can almost sympathise with Marigny, who feels powerless in the hands of a *femme fatale*, a woman whose lust knows no bounds. But then we want to ask, does he have no choice? Is he so bewitched as to be helpless? The nuanced characterisation of Marigny provokes such questions.

*Weak* However we answer those questions, there is no doubt that Marigny is a weak character. Vellini is certainly powerful, and he lacks the determination to resist her. Fascinated by her wilfulness at the beginning, he is unable to escape her sexual allure at the end. That fact is dramatised when he goes to her house on the seashore, leaving his innocent wife at home. When he enters her stone house, she immediately embraces him, and he pushes her away, but only for a moment. He sits down, head in hands, already contrite for an infidelity he has not yet committed. 'As God is my witness,' he says, 'your kisses cause me to be more tender to my wife than if you'd never existed.' In other words, he loves his wife in a desperate attempt to stifle his passion for Vellini. But he has failed, and he knows it. When Vellini pulls him down with her on a bed, he submits like a drugged patient to an operation. He is powerless.

**MARQUISE DE FLERS** The Marquise de Flers is ancient but also fascinating. She has seen it all, survived seductions in her childhood and ended up a sweet, optimistic old woman. She even fancies that young men might find her attractive, at least as a person. Like Marigny, she embodies the spirit of the age, a certain cavalier indifference to the petty morality of others.

*Vain* For all her grandmotherly gentility, the Marquise de Flers holds a high opinion of herself. This aspect of her character is evident during the long conversation she has with her friend, the Comtesse d'Arnelles, about the upcoming marriage in the beginning of the story. While the Comtesse is afraid that the chosen husband is a ne'er do well and will make his young bride suffer, the Marquise smiles sweetly and claims that she will not allow her granddaughter to be compromised. 'She is what I cherish most,' she says. 'Would I let her navigate alone the ocean of perfidy that is men's hearts? No. This marriage will be my masterpiece!' Her companion sighs, 'Your masterpiece? You're even madder than people say.' We might well agree with that assessment. The nice old lady is confident that she has the ability to provide her granddaughter with marital happiness. Indeed, the Marquise has a lot of experience, and she is not a prude, but only vanity can inflate her lungs so fully as to claim that she will create a 'masterpiece.'

*Naïve* Her vanity is allied to her folly. Fancying herself as a woman of the world, she has a grudging admiration for young Marigny, despite his unsavoury reputation in high society. She is impressed by his ten-year-long attachment to a mistress, and she also has a kind thought for Vellini, whom others look down on as 'vulgar.' Again, speaking to her friend, the Comtesse, she says 'vulgar or not, that creature must be crafty. To prise him away from all those other women.' A moment later, she is praising Marigny himself. The old woman even admits that the young man has charmed her. Defending herself, she says, 'It's because I'm much younger than my age. I was charmed and mesmerised by him, like so many others.' When her companion expresses disapproval, the Marquise can only offer a tiny wicked smile, savouring a naughty pleasure. As events later prove, she is as naïve as her granddaughter.



(The lovers)



(Vellini)