

LA PRINCESSE DE CLEVES

AND THE MODERN READER

Curby 1971

---

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of Foreign Languages  
and the Graduate Council  
Emporia Kansas State College

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science


---

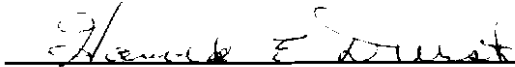
by

Janet Curby Hubbell

August 1971

Texas  
1954  
1

  
Approved for the Major Department

  
Approved for the Graduate Council

3523230

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my deep appreciation to Dr. David Travis for his assistance in this study.

Acknowledgment and appreciation are also expressed to my husband for his understanding and encouragement while this study was in progress.

## CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	iii
PREFACE . . . . .	iv
Chapter	
1. THE AUTHOR . . . . .	1
2. CONSTRUCTION AND CONTENT . . . . .	19
3. MOTIVATION OF MAIN CHARACTERS . . . . .	42
4. <u>LA PRINCESSE DE CLEVES</u> FOR TODAY . . . . .	62
5. CONCLUSION . . . . .	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	84

## PREFACE

Since publication in 1677, the elusive meaning of La Princesse de Clèves has both troubled and tantalized its scholars. In spite of the considerable success of the novel, manifested immediately in no less than eight editions appearing between 1678 and 1698, an equally considerable critical uproar reflected the controversy that Emile Magne has called the "querelle de la Princesse de Clèves." Modern critics continue to be disturbed by excesses as well as insufficiencies in the plot and subject matter, and the often questionable motivation of the characters, particularly in the implausible scène de l'aveu and later in the Princesse's rejection of Nemours.

In turn, however, the barrage of criticism has engendered some very elaborate defenses of the novel's greatness as a genuine chef d'oeuvre, and its universality in revealing through the characterization and action those qualities that have been in man forever. The problems of love are, after all, constant, and we

are all seeking happiness in some form, like the Princesse. Thus the novel continues to speak in many voices to the modern reader in spite of its flaws. The intense emotions of its characters, far from having become outmoded over the centuries, depict the soul's anguish and failing values common to our age of political and moral uncertainty.

It is the purpose of this paper to confront the novel's construction, subject matter and characterization in terms of the modern reader who has come to expect realism and relevance from contemporary fiction. La Princesse de Clèves is admittedly a puzzling masterpiece, but a masterpiece nonetheless. Its realism lies in the description of l'ange et la bête in its characters, its relevancy comes to light in the penetrating psychological analysis worthy of Tolstoy and Proust, and its narrative portrays "one of the finest images of man in one of the finest languages."<sup>1</sup> We can, at least, be grateful to Mme de La Fayette for this.

---

<sup>1</sup> André Maurois, Seven Faces of Love (Garden City, N.Y.: Dolphin Books, 1962), p. 11. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

## Chapter 1

### THE AUTHOR

Of the main literary talents which contributed to the success and fame of Louis XIV and his court, it is noteworthy that only three were of hereditary nobility: Saint-Simon, La Rochefoucauld, and "d'une famille de très petite noblesse," Mme de La Fayette.<sup>1</sup> The woman whom the Sun King himself would one day escort on a personal tour of Versailles in his own carriage was from the beginning in close contact with the fashionable literary and social milieu of the seventeenth century, in spite of her family's lesser degree of nobility.

Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, Comtesse de La Fayette was born in Paris on March 14, 1643, probably at the Palais du Petit Luxembourg where her mother was lady-in-waiting to the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, niece of Louis'

---

<sup>1</sup> William A. Nitze and E. Preston Dargan, A History of French Literature, rev. ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 1927), p. 276. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

chief minister Cardinal Richelieu. Her father was tutor to Richelieu's nephews, her house was visited by such distinguished figures as the poet Voiture and Pascal's father, and her tutor was the erudite secretary of Cardinal Retz, Gilles Ménage, whose verses publically flattered the young girl's reputation. She received a better than average education for girls of her day, especially in Latin to which she may have later owed the firmness of her style,<sup>2</sup> but her knowledge of French excluded both spelling and punctuation, and there is little evidence, according to such recent biographers as H. Ashton and Stirling Haig, that she was of anything other than average critical ability. Thus it was that the literary career of the écrivain-amateur whose novel was to have such an impact on that genre actually had a rather inauspicious beginning. She seemed in many ways better qualified to grace the court and salon society than to produce the most distinguished novel of the seventeenth century, much less the first modern French psychological novel.

Marie-Madeleine's social debut occurred about age

---

<sup>2</sup> André Maurois, Seven Faces of Love (Garden City, N.Y.: Dolphin Books, 1962), p. 11. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.



sixteen shortly after the Fronde, France's "tragi-comic civil war."<sup>3</sup> Through her godmother, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, she gained entrée to the Louvre as lady-in-waiting to Anne d'Autriche, the Queen Mother, and began frequenting the more celebrated salons of Paris, including those of Mlle de Scudéry and the Hôtel de Rambouillet. However, she must have had to move carefully at times after her father's death and mother's remarriage to a Frondeur and close acquaintance of the scheming Retz, the Chevalier Renaud-René de Sévigné (Haig, p. 21). But this union does not seem to have noticeably damaged Marie-Madeleine's position in society, for it marks the beginning of her intimate and lasting friendship with a kinswoman of the Chevalier, the beautiful and witty social leader of the Hôtel Carnavalet, the Marquise de Sévigné. Evidence of the sincerity and intensity of their forty-year relationship is found in Mme de La Fayette's words written shortly before her friend's death: "Croyez, ma très-chère, que vous êtes la personne du monde que j'ai le plus véritablement aimée."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Stirling Haig, Madame de La Fayette, Twayne's World Authors Series (New York: Twayne, 1970), p. 20. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Benjamin F. Sledd and J. Hendren Gorrell, ed., La Princesse de Clèves, by Mme de La Fayette (Boston: Ginn, 1896), p. v. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

Although Mme de La Fayette was what H. Ashton describes as a "mild précieuse, her background as a salon habituée is "the perfect illustration of the culture which moulds the literary masterpieces of the age."<sup>5</sup> It was essential in the formation of her delicate good taste and aversion to extravagances of any kind, because she absorbed only the best of the précieus qualities: a passion for clarté, raison, simplicité, délicatesse, and above all, le naturel. She liked what pleased her contemporaries, but generally opposed over-ornamentation of style, verbosity, and high-flown sentiments.<sup>6</sup> "No one could pass through such a society with impunity, says Boissier; but Mme de La Fayette seems to have escaped lightly" (quoted in Sledd & Gorrell, p. v). Also of great interest to her must have been the précieus preoccupation with moral and psychological analysis and realism as well as the searching salon debates "of what were called 'questions d'amour': hypothetical problems which provided serious

---

<sup>5</sup> Peter H. Nurse, Classical Voices (London: Harrap, 1971), pp. 189-90. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>6</sup> Madame de La Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves, intro. and notes by H. Ashton (New York: Scribner's, 1930), p. xii. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

topics of intelligent discussion"<sup>7</sup> that were much in vogue by the middle of the century.

The importance of the years Mme de La Fayette spent in intimate contact with the court and its luminaries rivals the effect of the précieux influence on her literary career. Given the plot of La Princesse de Clèves, it is reasonable to assume that Marie-Madeleine's own godmother was a woman whose affairs were to make no small impression on the future novelist (Haig, p. 19). Although in love with a certain M. Béthune, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon had been forced into a "mariage de convenance" with M. Combalet, Duc d'Aiguillon. After his death, however, she inexplicably refused to marry Béthune in much the same manner as La Fayette's Princesse de Clèves would one day reject the Duc de Nemours.

By the age of twenty, young Marie-Madeleine had already become acquainted with the future superstar of the glittering galaxy of seventeenth century courtiers, Henriette d'Angleterre. This exiled princess, daughter of England's executed Charles I, later came to be known as "Madame," the charming but promiscuous wife of "Monsieur"

---

<sup>7</sup> W. D. Howarth, Life and Letters in France: The Seventeenth Century (New York: Scribner's, 1965), p. 130. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

the king's brother, Philippe d'Orléans. Several years after her own marriage, Mme de La Fayette was drawn into Court as friend and confidante of the ill-fated Henriette. Here she was to witness first-hand the intrigue, envy, rivalries, hypocrisies, social pressures, and moral forces that lurked beneath the surface sparkle and obligations of courtly bienséance (Nurse, p. 201). It is just such a backdrop of social ritual and pageantry, under guise of Henry II's sixteenth century court, against which the tragedy of La Princesse de Clèves takes shape. Henriette's brief, unhappy reign at court before her mysterious illness and death perhaps further confirmed Mme de La Fayette's prejudiced, précieux views of love and liaisons dangereuses. According to Stirling Haig, they "made of her a novelist who could inform fiction with the stuff of experienced reality, her greatest accomplishment and contribution to the progress of Classical prose" (p. 23).

Two sets of memoirs resulted directly from Mme de La Fayette's frequent presence at the Louvre, Palais-Royale, Fontainbleau, and later at Versailles: the Histoire d'Henriette d'Angleterre (composed 1665-1670), and the Mémoires de la Cour de France, covering the years 1688-1689. Haig also lists La Princesse de Montpensier (1662) as having drawn on the novelist's court experiences, further

proposing that the work was not largely fictional. Rather, it was an "imaginative transposition of Madame's [Henriette d'Angleterre's] passion" for one of her favored suitors (not the least of whom was Louis XIV himself), the soon-to-be-exiled Comte de Guise (Haig, p. 25).

Sorel and a few others saw through the thinly-veiled transposition at the time, although the work was published under the name of Segrais<sup>8</sup> to preserve the anonymity of Madame's confidante. But the two women could scarcely know how prophetic the short novel's conclusion was to be; the heroine dies "dans la fleur de son age. Elle était une des plus belles princesses du monde, et en eût été sans doute la plus heureuse, si la vertu et la prudence eussent conduit toutes ses actions."<sup>9</sup>

Marie-Madeleine was, at twenty-one, in spite of her grace and intelligence, long past the usual marriageable age of French girls at the time. But her dowry was sizeable, thanks to her two younger sisters who had entered convents, and a marriage was "arranged" with a pro-

---

<sup>8</sup> "Portrait de la Marquise de Sévigné" is the only published writing of her lifetime that gave Mme de La Fayette's name as the author.

<sup>9</sup> Madame de La Fayette, Romans et nouvelles de Madame de La Fayette, ed. L.-S. Auger (Paris: Librairie Garnier Frères, n.d.), p. 465. Subsequent reference to this edition will appear in the text.

vincial nobleman and widower twice her age. Soon Jean-François Motier, Comte de La Fayette was to become so obscure a husband that La Bruyère's passage can be applied to their relationship: "We find now and then a woman has so obliterated her husband that there is in the world no mention of him, and whether he is alive or whether he is dead is equally uncertain" (quoted in Sledd & Gorrell, p. vii).

The Comte de La Fayette must have considered himself a fortunate man indeed to be the husband of this unusual woman whose social and financial position was to be so useful in settling the numerous lawsuits in which his family's estates had become mired. By Mme de La Fayette's own report, he "adored" her, but her biographers almost universally acknowledge that what was contracted in 1655 between the colorless widower and the attractive, well-educated précieuse was simply a "mariage de raison" or "convenance" in accordance with seventeenth century custom.

Scarcely a year beforehand, Marie-Madeleine had confided to her friend and tutor, Ménage: "Je suis si persuadée que l'amour est une chose incommode que j'ai de la joie que mes amis et moi en soyons exempts" (quoted in Nurse, p. 193). Given this opinion of love, and in view of the conspicuous obscurity to which she rendered the

Comte in her correspondence,<sup>10</sup> Mme de La Fayette's marriage could scarcely be called a success by today's standards. Cut off from the vitality and intellectualism of her Parisian milieu, she endured several years in Auvergne, resigned to making the best of things and bearing the Comte two sons.

But whatever affection she may have held for her husband was surely based more on esteem than true love. Following the few short visits to Paris with his wife, M. de La Fayette returned alone to the provinces in 1660, leaving her permanently in residence in the capitol to see to the education of their children and to look after the family lawsuits. Evidently it was an arrangement suitable to both, for there is nowhere any mention of a quarrel to explain the separation, and when in Paris the Comte invariably stayed at his wife's townhouse.<sup>11</sup>

There is much disagreement among the critics as to the precise nature of the causal relationship of this amicable, yet estranged marriage to Mme de La Fayette's

---

<sup>10</sup> There is, according to Haig, p. 16, but one document among her letters in which Mme de La Fayette speaks of her husband and her life in the provinces.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Turnell, The Novel in France (New York: New Directions, 1951), p. 28. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

writing. Did the author's premarital, précieux revulsion from love predispose her to attack all passion as a deadly emotion, categorically destroying its victims in the face of even the strongest moral resistance? Clearly the Comtesse had had ample opportunity, as discussed earlier in this chapter, to observe the disruptive effects of passion on the lives of her closest friends at court, where adultery was sanctioned by the king himself and marriage "served mainly to advance the political or economic interests of family dynasties" (Nurse, p. 193).

Or on the other hand, did she become disillusioned with her own "mariage de raison," using it as the starting point of the moral dilemmas caused by the marriages of the heroines in La Princesse de Montpensier and La Comtesse de Tende as well as in La Princesse de Clèves? (Howarth, p. 126). Perhaps Turnell's analysis is sufficient:

Mme de La Fayette's unsatisfactory marriage certainly left its mark on her art. Her three principal works are all accounts of people who find out too late that they have married the wrong person and who try, not always successfully, to "clip love's wings." The note of sexual frustration which runs all through them bears the stamp of personal experience (Turnell, p. 28).

It should also be stated at this point that although La Fayette's experience of a more or less satisfactory marriage may have lent color to the view of marriage put



forward in La Princesse de Clèves, there is not, according to Howarth (p. 126) any autobiographical basis for the principal events of the plot.

The small circle of intimes in Paris whose social and intellectual companionship Mme de La Fayette sought appropriately nicknamed her "le Brouillard," or "the fog." She was reserved to the point of aloofness, a woman who preserved throughout her life an aristocratic dignity that caused her to remain an exceedingly private person, leaving her novels unsigned and her literary reputation unknown to the general public. Even Ménage never knew until two years before her death that she was the author of La Princesse de Clèves (Haig, p. 18). But by 1670 there had become public one intimate detail of La Fayette's life that was to be perhaps the most significant to her career as a novelist. Her "belle sympathie" for the brilliant Duc de La Rochefoucauld, described in a letter to Ménage as having developed as early as a year after her marriage to La Fayette, had become an open liaison.

The Prince de Marcillac, soon to be Duc de La Rochefoucauld, had had a stormy youth, unlike Mme de La Fayette. His royal romances resulted in an illegitimate son of the Grand Condé's sister, Mme de Longville, a sentence in the Bastille for attempting to abduct Queen

Anne of Austria from Louis XIII and Richelieu, and a bullet wound during the Fronde that nearly cost him his sight. But the aging Don Juan, admittedly grown mélancolique and brooding, had returned to the Paris of précieux pastimes and literary games, engaging his wit and experience in composing maxims at Mme de Sablé's salon.

Although appalled at the pessimism of the early Maximes, Mme de La Fayette was nonetheless fascinated by the Byronic cynic. She did not relish living alone, in spite of her apparent lack of enthusiasm for marriage (Turnell, p. 28). Deliberately and adroitly maneuvering La Rochefoucauld away from the fascinating Mme de Sablé and Mlle de Sévigné, La Fayette sent him a manuscript of La Princesse de Montpensier as an appetizer and was thus able to draw him into a writing project in which she and Segrais were to join. The three must have been greatly delighted and entertained in "concocting the shipwrecks and rescues, dalliances, infidelities and battles, the questions d'amour, and the whole metaphysics of love that fill the pages of Zaïde" (Haig, p. 35).

Thus it was with Mme de La Fayette that the disillusioned romantic found the consolation that softened both his loneliness and the severity of his later Maximes. It seems that she could say with good reason, "M. de La

Rochefoucauld m'a donné de l'esprit, mais j'ai réformé son coeur" (quoted in Turnell, p. 29).

The couple were the subject of some unavoidable gossip among their contemporaries, including Mlle de Scudéry and the cynical Bussy-Rabutin who exchanged letters debating the exact nature of their relationship:

Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld vit fort honnêtement avec Madame de La Fayette. Il n'y paraît que de l'amitié. Enfin la crainte de Dieu, de part et d'autre, et peut-être la politique, ont coupé les ailes à l'amour (Turnell, p. 27, Mlle de Scudéry to Bussy).

Similarly, today's critics find the question somewhat controversial, and opinions, for that is all their findings are based on in the absence of any documented evidence, are as divergent as the ages of the strangely assorted couple. However, Turnell points to the real significance of their liaison without insisting on classifying La Rochefoucauld's status as either ami or amant:

The spectacle of the disillusioned moralist, very gouty and rather blind, setting up house with the great lady of impeccable virtue who was twenty years his junior is a curious one, but it had a far-reaching influence on the development of the modern novel. Whether La Rochefoucauld and Mme de La Fayette slept in the same bed matters less to us today than the fact that they lived under the same roof at the time when La Princesse de Clèves--the finest novel of the seventeenth century--was written (Turnell, p. 27).

It was to be some six or seven years after work had

begun on La Princesse de Clèves before it would be ready for publication. During this interval Mme de La Fayette's readings were extensive in preparing the documentation for her historical novel, and she once again interested the fretful, morose La Rochefoucauld in assisting her. He suffered terribly from gout, and had taken to raising white mice and to "calling on death to deliver him . . . from the chronic affliction of the nobles, boredom" (Haig, p. 42). The project may have been conceived as a diversion for the couple, but the resulting chef-d'oeuvre is the lone survivor of the prodigious seventeenth century genre whose counterparts remain dust-covered and unread today.

Public rumor immediately attributed the Princesse to La Fayette and La Rochefoucauld, according to Ashton (cited in Haig, p. 84), but the critics have been frustrated since the day it appeared in print by the question of La Rochefoucauld's participation in its actual writing. Mme de La Fayette complicated matters in her penchant for anonymity by denying that either she or the Duc had had anything to do with it whatsoever. In the absence of a definitive answer, modern scholars still remain divided. Emile Magne, for example, flatly states that all of La Fayette's fictional works were the product of a group effort (cited in Haig, p. 44), while Marcel Langlois

claims that the credit should go to Fontenelle rather than to La Rochefoucauld or La Fayette (cited in Haig, note 29, p. 146).

Although the controversy continues, perhaps it is most reasonable to assume that La Rochefoucauld's influence was direct only in terms of polishing and retouching the manuscript, as Dédéyan suggests (cited in Haig, p. 44). Therein lay La Fayette's literary weakness by common consent, for stylistically the work has enjoyed a very mediocre reputation.

Indirectly, however, La Fayette's extra-marital liaison surely added dimension and intensity to the characterizations in her novel. M. de Nemours plainly recalls the romantic young Prince de Marcillac and his loves, and the destiny of the Princesse de Clèves evokes the life of Mme de La Fayette herself. It has already been pointed out that there exists what Ashton calls a "curious unity" in La Fayette's works treating the problems of a woman who finds love after marriage and outside it. Her own life's experiences would therefore appear to have been uppermost in her mind in creating the sensitively human love story that allows passion and jealousy for the first time in the history of the genre to destroy the artifices and illusions of "happily-ever-after." One

wonders if relying solely on her observations at court could have elicited such a response from the author's heart in the form of this novel which, she told her secretary, should have been entitled Mémoires (Haig, p. 48).

There is one final aspect of La Rochefoucauld's influence on Mme de La Fayette's novel that must not be overlooked. A number of critics find his Maximes of considerable importance to the theme of La Princesse de Clèves. The psychological drama which is played out in the heart of its heroine is quite effectively summarized by two of the maximes:

La même fermeté qui sert à résister à l'amour sert aussi à le rendre violent et durable. (477)

Qu'une femme est à plaindre, quand elle a tout ensemble de l'amour et de la vertu! (548)<sup>12</sup>

According to Nurse, Mme de La Fayette apparently found in Pascal's Pensées, which she admired greatly, and in the Maximes profound truths that echoed her own convictions. Emphasized in both is the hidden self-interest of the human ego that "lurks behind our façade of social gestures" (Nurse, p. 210). With regard to love, La Rochefoucauld launches a full frontal attack on its violences which

---

<sup>12</sup> André Lagarde et Laurent Michard, XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle: Les Grands Auteurs Français du programme, Collection Textes et Littérature (France: Bordas, 1964), p. 356.

escape our control and leave us vulnerable to more destructive, chaotic emotions. Similarly, all three protagonists in La Princesse de Clèves illustrate the different facets of the theme that La Fayette in the opening sentence of her first nouvelle, La Princesse de Montpensier, calls "les désordres de l'Amour" (Nurse, p. 211):

Pendant que la guerre civile déchirait la France sous le règne de Charles IX, l'amour ne laissait pas de trouver sa place parmi tant de désordres, et d'en causer beaucoup dans son empire (Auger, p: 432).

Turnell cites the same désordres that hasten the death of the Princess' mother, who is broken by the failure of her moral "system," and the Princess' concern in the final analysis for her own repos. Turnell states that "it is precisely the hollowness [of the concepts of devoir and règles] that the novelist sets out to reveal" (Turnell, pp. 42-43), in the same spirit as the maximist. Dédéyan, on the other hand, sees the moral of the novel as an example of virtue, "disinterested" though it may be. For Dédéyan the thrust of La Princesse de Clèves is an antidote or reaction to the moral pessimism of the Maximes that had so shocked La Fayette on first reading them (cited in (Haig, p. 44).

Thus the exact nature and extent of La Rochefoucauld's

influence remains in dispute, but it is impossible for biographers and critics alike to ignore him in discussing both La Fayette's life and her writing. The pre-publication rumors attributing La Princesse de Clèves to the couple rather than to La Fayette alone were certainly inconclusive, if not actually in error, Emile Magne's theory notwithstanding. But the spectre of the half-blind moralist refuses to evaporate completely, leaving chimeric traces of one of the most fascinatingly inscrutable legends in the history of French literature.



## Chapter 2

### CONSTRUCTION AND CONTENT

The on-going controversy which has characterized criticism of La Princesse de Clèves for almost three hundred years is significantly less vigorous today than in Mme de La Fayette's time, but the twentieth century still seems to find the novel a fascinating one. Recent opinions remain as varied as they were during the first year following publication, when Valincourt immediately launched a witty assault on the novel's construction and Bussy-Rabutin fired a letter to Mme de Sévigné attacking both short-comings and extravagances in the subject matter as he saw them. First evaluating the unity of construction, this chapter then addresses itself to major problems which emerge as specific excesses or deficiencies in the eyes of the modern reader vis à vis the novel's content.

Today's critic is not alone in fretting over the construction of the Princesse. Settling down to page one, the reader gradually finds himself laboring through a

tiresomely textbookish, historical introduction that was at the time a very fashionable background form for a story. Although in the seventeenth century the confession scene elicited the liveliest comments, critics since Valincourt<sup>13</sup> have objected to the concentrated dose of historical description that must be choked down before the reader can get his teeth into the action of the plot. A typical passage is cited below to illustrate the tedium of detail:

Marie Stuart, reine d'Ecosse, qui venait d'épouser M. le Dauphin, et qu'on appelait la reine Dauphine, était une personne parfaite pour l'esprit et pour le corps: elle avait été élevée à la cour de France; elle en avait pris toute la politesse, et elle était née avec tant de dispositions pour toutes les belles choses que, malgré sa jeunesse, elle les aimait et s'y connaissait mieux que personne. La reine, sa belle-mère, et Madame, soeur du roi, aimaient aussi les vers, la comédie et la musique: le goût que le roi François I<sup>er</sup> avait eu pour la poésie et pour les lettres régnait encore en France; et le roi, son fils, aimant tous les exercices du corps, tous les plaisirs étaient à la cour (Ashton, p. 4).

But we must remember that the novel is at least in part an historical one, although the twentieth century is simply not as interested as La Fayette's contemporaries in the Guises, the Medicis, the Stuarts and the other

---

<sup>13</sup> Richard J. Hyman, "The Virtuous Princesse de Clèves," French Review, 38, No. 1 (Oct. 1964), 16. Subsequent references to this article will appear in the text.

notables of Henri II's court in the Europe of 1558. The opening description of court society along with the continuing threads of historical events are woven into the fabric of the heroine's story not with the "seamless realism of a modern historical novel" perhaps, but nevertheless in such a way that "the presence of one determines or justifies that of the other."<sup>14</sup> The character of the Princess is set apart very early on from that of her peers, and the credibility of her actions would suffer greatly, were not her social milieu adequately established.

Further, the character sketches of court personalities introduced at the beginning serve more pragmatic purposes. A composite picture of the various personal and political relationships is established from the start--a literary device that this modern reader has wished more than once to see implemented, particularly by the Russian school. Subsequent references grow progressively briefer and farther apart as the novel's overall emphasis and movement shift from "the broad characterization of a period to the detailed tracing of a single life, from the world of the external to the inner world of the mind" (Kaps, p. 57).

---

<sup>14</sup> Helen Karen Kaps, Moral Perspective in *La Princesse de Clèves* (Eugene: Univ. of Oregon Books, 1968), p. 57. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

The historical novel thus begins to merge with the psychological.

In another way, Mme de La Fayette also resolves the problem of history in proportion to fiction that had so confounded writers of the nouvelle historique up to that time (Haig, p. 109). Through her use of the historical digression, which may at first appear superfluous and a threat to the novel's unity, the author very subtly sets the tone for revelations to come. Intended for the Princess' instruction in the ways of the court, all four digressions involve prominent members of the royalty and nobility in love stories that followed contemporary traditions among novelists at the time. But more importantly, they also function as variations on a theme of conspiracy, treachery, and infidelity as La Fayette skillfully orchestrates the events of the Princess' own experience of love.

H. Ashton tends to dismiss the digressions rather abruptly, and it is true that they have drawn much critical attention in modern times. Crediting Mme de La Fayette for taking great pains to collect her historical material and for remaining unusually faithful to the accounts she used, Ashton then accuses her of merely sandwiching them in wherever possible to satisfy her contemporaries' penchant for histoires d'amour (Ashton, p. xxii). Actually,

the tradition is far from outdated, as the phenomenal popularity of Erik Segal's maudlin Love Story has recently demonstrated.

But many modern critics, including Martin Turnell, view the digressions as essential to the theme of love intrigues. Howarth further asserts that instead of being randomly included, the love stories are carefully placed, unlike the episodic digressions of the pastoral tradition (Howarth, p. 125). Appearing early in the story, they eventually lead into the Princess' own story and all involve duplicity.

The final digression narrows the distance between history and heroine. In it the Princess reads a letter from a woman who has been deceived by a lover and breaks off with him. It is the Princess' fear of just such inconstancy that will figure significantly in the ultimate rejection of Nemours, her own lover. Could the parallel be anything less than a deliberate move once again from the general to a particular case? The Princess is no longer the passive listener to a mother's instruction, but an interested participant herself in the digression. Such is the "consummately unobtrusive art" of Mme de La Fayette (Haig, p. 123).

Having treated the historical introduction and di-

gressions separately, there are other grounds for defense of the overall unity and structure of La Princesse de Clèves. Earlier novels in France had for the most part been formless, lengthy, episodic, and generally lacking in artistic focus. Beside these rambling literary productions, among which are those of La Calprenède, Mlle de Scudéry and d'Urfé, the Princesse appears to be a "masterpiece of concentration and conciseness" (Howarth, pp. 124-25).

Breaking sharply with the tradition of the romanesque literature that was proliferating rapidly in the 1660's, La Fayette's novel contains nothing extraneous to the principal action. In its brevity (less than 200 pages), its recounting of a single événement in the life of a married woman, its limited number of characters, the elimination of such traditional incidents as battles, shipwrecks, kidnappings and duels, together with the rapid narrative and simple plot, the Princesse is the finest definition of the novel's form produced in the seventeenth century and is therefore justified in being called a landmark in the history of the genre (Nitze & Dargan, p. 288). More than any preceding generation of readers, the modern one should appreciate most fully La Fayette's renunciation of the "aventures invraisem-

blables" and the "réalisme grossier" of the Princesse's predecessors.<sup>15</sup> It is the sobriety and restraint characteristic of La Fayette's technique and applied to structure as well as content that help raise the novel to a plane of realism never before attained among the gaudy, pretentious romances of the seventeenth century (Maurois, pp. 10-11).

Leaving the broader issues of structure and unity, there are some specific incidents and relationships in La Princesse de Clèves which may seem excessively bizarre or coincidental to the reader whose preference for consistency and verisimilitude has been established by the contemporary fiction to which he is more accustomed. However, some of these extravaqances, as Bussy-Rabutin referred to them, emerge more from the novel's fundamental motif of the Chivalric code and courtly love tradition than from any ineptness on the part of the novelist (Hyman, p. 16).

The Princess is an exceptional woman in many respects, set apart from the adulterous court at the outset by what others expect of her, particularly her mother, and by what she expects of herself:

---

<sup>15</sup> Henri Peyre and Elliott M. Grant, ed., Seventeenth Century French Prose and Poetry (Boston: Heath, 1937), p. 250. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

Elle était néanmoins exposée au milieu de la cour; . . . mais elle avait un air qui inspirait un si grand respect et qui paraissait si éloigné de la galanterie que le maréchal de Saint-André . . . était touché de sa beauté, sans oser le lui faire connaître que par des soins et des devoirs. Plusieurs autres étaient dans le même état; et Mme de Chartres joignait à la sagesse de sa fille une conduite si exacte pour toutes les bienséances qu'elle achevait de la faire paraître une personne où l'on ne pouvait atteindre (Ashton, pp. 25-26).

Yet this charming court favorite fails completely to convince critic Richard J. Hyman that she possessed any attributes, other than physical, that could have rendered her an exceptional social being: "We wonder why she should be the favorite of Mme la Dauphine unless a supernatural beauty makes her an indispensable addition to the entourage. Otherwise, is she not a bore?" (Hyman, p. 16.)

Further, for all the vigorous claims as to the Princess' unassailable virtue, is she not a confidante in a court whose social and moral marrow are infected by a feverish atmosphere of intrigue and dissimulation? This dangerous milieu is described very early in the novel:

L'ambition et la galanterie étaient l'âme de cette cour, et occupaient également les hommes et les femmes. Il y avait tant d'intérêts et tant de cabales différentes, et les dames y avaient tant de part, que l'amour était toujours mêlé aux affaires, et les affaires à l'amour. Personne n'était tranquille, ni indifférent; . . . ainsi il y avait une sorte d'agitation sans désordre dans cette cour, qui



la rendait très agréable, mais aussi très dangereuse pour une jeune personne (Ashton, pp. 16-17).

Although Mme de Chartres has warned her daughter repeatedly against the galanteries she faced in daily contact with the ambitious, pleasure-seeking courtiers, the Princess never seems to be shocked or even disapproving of what is going on around her. Her own husband can find no higher praise for her than, "Je vous aime comme ma maîtresse" (Ashton, p. 146), and evidently she is not offended by the compliment. Why, then, all the uproar about the Princess' virtue?

If Mme de Clèves does not qualify on intellectual grounds for any "Woman of the Year" awards, charming courtier though she may have been, and if her moral conscience appears to suffer convenient lapses of memory, perhaps it is La Fayette's "final attempt to preserve a medieval tradition" and the background of knightly love which are to blame for these kinds of inconsistencies (Hyman, p. 16). The liaisons described in the Princesse are vivid reminders of the knight-errant's love dedicated to someone else's wife that was altogether proper and acceptable by the chivalric code of behavior.

There remains one question, however, unanswered by the medieval justification of the Princess' relationship

to her husband and to Nemours, her would-be lover. Assuming that M. de Clèves was at least as worldly-wise as his wife, though not actually involved in galanteries himself, why does her confession of a mere inclination devastate him so completely? He has compared his love for her to that of a man for his mistress, yet dies determinedly after learning that another man, infamous Don Juan of the most distinguished boudoirs in England and France, has captured his wife's fancy but left her honor intact. Surely the chivalrous response would have been a grudging indulgence of her whim, or even a certain pride in her being included in such an illustrious company of mâitresses as Queen Elizabeth I and the Reine Dauphine. Dying appears to be a slight over-reaction.

Furthermore, it is difficult at first for the "hip" modern reader to sympathize with Clèves. If, knowing the truth, he cannot then live with it, why does he not look for another way out? Although divorce was not the panacea in the seventeenth century that it is all too frequently touted to be today, separation was a viable solution for many mariages de convenance, including that of the author herself.

But from an emotional or psychological point of view, the reaction of the devoted husband to his wife's honesty

is far from extravaqant. Clèves's jealousy and anguish, the strain of the situation once it became public knowledge among the courtiers, are too great a burden.

Panic-stricken, he accepts the circumstantial evidence of Nemours' night-long presence in the Princess' garden and is taken ill with a fever immediately thereafter. His world had already come unhinged by the confession itself:

Je vous aimais jusqu'à être bien aisé d'être trompé, je l'avoue à ma honte; j'ai regretté ce faux repos dont vous m'avez tiré. Que ne me laissiez-vous dans cet aveuglement tranquille dont jouissent tant de maris? (Ashton, p. 160.)

M. de Clèves's unhappiness is irreparable, and he lets himself die, according to Doubrovsky's existential interpretation, to free himself from the doubts and fears that would have tormented him eternally: "Voyant soudain la vie à la lumière de la mort, il recouvre comme par enchantement le 'calme' et la 'raison' qui lui étaient si chers et qui l'avaient déserté."<sup>16</sup> His death is a plaintive

écho de cette [seventeenth century] morale des Cours d'Amour, qui déclarait l'amour incompatible avec le mariage. . . . Ici il y a visiblement démesure, mais c'est

---

<sup>16</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, "La Princesse de Clèves: Une Interpretation existentielle," La Table Ronde, No. 138 (June 1959), 48. Subsequent references to this article will appear in the text.

justement ce qui touchait alors le lecteur.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, several critics justify Cleves's death in terms of requirements of the plot and characterization. According to Saintsbury, his death is perhaps the only ending consistent with keeping up the tension of the situation, yet at the same time not making him look ridiculous.<sup>18</sup> Ashton agrees:

The rapidity with which he is removed, his complete acceptance of circumstantial evidence that is not considered conclusive even by the "gentilhomme qui était très capable," his determination to go on dying even when he knows the truth--all call our attention to the fact that, as a character in the novel, he cannot be saved--whereas in real life there would be no reason for his death (Ashton, p. 205, note 163).

But it is even more important for the logical working out of the Princess' character that her husband die. A later chapter provides a close examination of the Princess' motivation for admitting her inclination to Clèves, as well as her rejection of Nemours after Clèves dies.

The central incident in the novel is the confession scene between husband and wife that is overheard by the

---

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Mille, Le Roman Français (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1930), pp. 18-19. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>18</sup> George E. B. Saintsbury, Essays on French Novelists, 2nd ed. (London: Percival, 1891), p. 123. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

lover--a striking coincidence in the tradition of pastoral conventions and a nagging reminder of La Fayette's précieux background. But Saintsbury points out the ingenuity of it:

While it "knots the intrigue," it leaves all the persons concerned in ignorance of the exact state of the case. M. de Clèves, receiving his wife's well-meant but very unpleasant confidence, perceives that he has lost her heart, whether anybody else has gained it or not. Madame de Clèves is unaware that her lover has overheard her, and Nemours himself, though of course delighted at the confession of weakness, is by no means sure (since no names are mentioned) that he is the subject of her doubts. This eccentric but not wholly unnatural situation is admirably treated (Saintsbury, p. 122).

In contrast to some of the so-called extravaqances of La Princesse de Clèves, there are several shortcomings or deficiencies in the novel over which critics have expressed concern. Among those of interest to the modern reader is likely to be the author's apparent refusal to establish moral absolutes in the book.

Helen Karen Kaps, one of the most recent scholars to devote an entire publication to the moral perspective of La Fayette's novel, states that "critics who look for the establishment of ultimate values within the Princesse de Clèves find only ambiguity" (Kaps, p. 83). Similarly, Peter H. Nurse flatly accepts moral ambiguity as a "feature of Mme de La Fayette's presentation of character"

(Nurse, p. 219), and Stirling Haig places considerable emphasis on the inwardness and obliqueness of the novel's form and content which lead to "moral ambiguousness in our judgment of the heroine" (Haig, pp. 108-109).

In even sharper criticism of the novel, Harriet Ray Allentuch accuses the Princess of moral negligence in exerting her alleged virtuousness to destroy Clèves and Nemours while speaking nothing but the truth, thus retaining her own innocence.<sup>19</sup> This position is a fairly popular one among today's existential critics, including Doubrovsky, who have declared that La Rochefoucauld and La Fayette were among the first apostles of what has since become known as a "morale laïque": a code of behavior whose practical, worldly ethics and virtues are based on pride and appearances, conformity to society's standards, and the avoidance at all costs of the désordres of passion. "Le moi est à l'origine de toutes les valeurs, il les invente et les crée, il est la source même de la morale" (Doubrovsky, p. 37). One of the book's most important passages reveals the shallowness of such a moral code in the following description of the heroine's moral education:

---

<sup>19</sup> Harriet Ray Allentuch, "Pauline and the Princesse de Clèves," Modern Language Quarterly, 30, p. 177. Subsequent references to this article will appear in the text.

Mme de Chartres . . . avait donné ses soins à l'éducation de sa fille; mais elle ne travailla pas seulement à cultiver son esprit et sa beauté; elle songea aussi à lui donner de la vertu et à la lui rendre aimable. . . . Elle faisait souvent à sa fille des peintures de l'amour; . . . elle lui en contait le peu de sincérité des hommes, leurs tromperies et leur infidélité, les malheurs domestiques où plongent les engagements; elle lui faisant voir, d'un autre côté, quelle tranquillité suivait la vie d'une femme honnête, et combien la vertu donnait d'éclat et d'élévation à une personne qui avait de la beauté et de la naissance; mais elle lui faisait voir qu'elle ne pouvait conserver cette vertu que par une extrême défiance de soi-même, et par un grand soin de s'attacher à ce qui seul peut faire le bonheur d'une femme, qui est d'aimer son mari et d'en être aimée (Ashton, pp. 10-11).

It is with just such slender moral armament that Mme de Chartres launches her daughter into the pleasant but very dangerous atmosphere of the Court. According to Turnell, it is not surprising that this armament proves inadequate (p. 37). But rather than subscribing to Doubrovsky's theory that La Fayette herself accepted the moral laïque, Turnell feels that the novelist was concerned with showing the inadequacy of contemporary moral values. Mme de Chartres

is clearly the symbol of a bankrupt system of morality. The "tranquillity" which she preaches is a neutral state; it can only be preserved by the exclusion of passion; and so far from being a solution of the problem of passion and existence, it simply evades it (Turnell, pp. 39-40).

Still another explanation can be offered in defense

of La Fayette's indefinite moral stand. Given the present-day paucity of public standards, today's novelists, according to Kaps, are expected to persuade their readers of the values that they wish to be accepted. Mme de La Fayette, however, was writing "within the framework of an established consensus and was able to take for granted values which a present-day writer would have to establish within the work" (Kaps, p. 83). Granted, the narrator's tolerant attitude toward court life and the actions of the characters is matched by a certain neutrality where the characters' emotions are concerned. But the reader should not feel that he is witnessing what anyone would or should do under the same circumstances.

Rather than judging or moralizing, the novel remains objective with its rather indulgent, even ambiguous moral perspective. "Emotions are neither right nor wrong. They simply are" (Kaps, p. 49). Thus La Fayette can be moral without moralizing. Furthermore, the subtlety with which she achieves this objective is an asset rather than a liability, enhancing and enriching the novel throughout. As Maurois points out, "a fine novel is not a moral treatise. It describes a special case and does not propose rules for us" (Maurois, p. 32).

The contemporary reader may also find disappointing



the lack of social panorama in La Princesse de Clèves.

The concerns of La Fayette's characters seem remotely related at best to the twentieth century's problem-oriented consciousness. The repos prized above all other states by the heroine is the very antithesis of the passionate activism which characterizes today's world as well as the agitation of Henry II's court which she sought to escape.

Turnell, in fact, sees agitation sans désordre as a central theme in the novel:

It is impossible not to be struck by the way in which words like agitation, inquiétude, tranquillité and repos seem, mockingly, to echo and answer one another all through the novel (Turnell, p. 35).

But perhaps the Princess' detachment from worldly concern can be viewed as a moral value in itself, thus compensating partially for the exclusion of a sweeping social commentary (Haig, p. 133). If repos must be defined negatively as an absence of all passions--love, jealousy, fear--that impinge upon the sanctity of its inner serenity, then so must Stoicism: "The vertu which assures this peace is . . . empty, sterile, and unnatural only if one tosses . . . Stoicism into the same trashcan."<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Francis L. Lawrence, "La Princesse de Clèves Reconsidered," French Review, 39, No. 1 (Oct. 1965), 18. Subsequent references to this article will appear in the text.

It is, after all, the Princess' honorable desire to avoid the diversions and resulting agitation that occupied the Court and the dangerous necessities of galanterie that set her apart from others. In the entire novel, for example, only Mme de Chartres and her daughter regard an adulterous passion as an unequivocal misfortune.

If the activist reader still feels shortchanged, Maurois would call attention to the fact that Mme de La Fayette was the first to paint what may be called a society of leisure. Although the characters are slaves of the conventions and manners they impose on themselves, they possess an "extreme delicacy of sentiments that can develop among men and women of noble soul when they have no other concerns but love" (Maurois, pp. 28-29). In this manner, La Fayette foreshadows such recent social observers as Marcel Proust, who described the passions of the pre-war idle in France that had both the time and the discrimination to analyze their feelings:

It might be said that the characters of In Search of the Past (Remembrance of Things Past) are direct descendants of those of The Princess of Clèves. They belong to the same world; they live in the same drawing rooms. . . . (Maurois, p. 152).

The confusion and anxieties of today's generation may cause us to smile cynically at the sentiments of a simple, trusting M. de Clèves who had enough time to die of love. But

it should be recognized that "a society composed of such men represented quite a triumph of humanity over the human animal" (Maurois, p. 29).

Since the present-day passion for realism in the minutest, most explicit detail tends to spoil the imagination's tastebuds for the Classicists, the modern reader may find the Princesse bland indeed in comparison to the more descriptive narrative styles that developed after the seventeenth century. The writers of the ancien régime took little account of physical circumstances, whether dealing with people or places. Horatio Smith has remarked interestingly enough that Racine's noble heroines neither dine nor sit down.<sup>21</sup> Such a seventeenth century hero as Corneille's Don Rodrigue in Le Cid is presumably a marvelous specimen of manhood, but there are no specifications as to face or figure, and nothing is told about the material setting for the drama.

In a striking example of this Classical refusal of concrete detail, in the historical introduction Mme de La Fayette refers to the great Prince de Condé, in reality a hunchback, with a characteristic use of litotes: "Le

---

<sup>21</sup> Horatio Smith, Masters of French Literature (New York: Scribner's, 1937), p. 198. Subsequent reference to this edition will appear in the text.

prince, . . . dans un petit corps peu favorisé de la nature, avait une âme grande et hautaine, et un esprit qui le rendait aimable aux yeux même des plus belles femmes"

(Ashton, p. 5). Several equally vague descriptions of the main characters further illustrate the novelist's unconcern with physical appearances:

Le Prince de Clèves était digne de soutenir la gloire de son nom; il était brave et magnifique, et il avait une prudence qui ne se trouve guère avec la jeunesse (Ashton, p. 5).

Le duc de Nemours . . . était un chef-d'oeuvre de la nature; ce qu'il avait de moins admirable était d'être l'homme du monde le mieux fait et le plus beau (Ashton, p. 6).

Il parut alors à la cour une beauté [Mlle de Chartres] qui attira les yeux de tout le monde, et l'on doit croire que c'était une beauté parfaite puisqu'elle donna de l'admiration dans un lieu où l'on était si accoutumé de voir de belles personnes (Ashton, p. 10).

Mme de Chartres . . . dont le bien, la vertu et le mérite étaient extraordinaires . . . (Ashton, p. 10).

A similar degree of abstraction is evident in La Fayette's treatment of character and setting. M. de Clèves finds Mlle de Chartres to be "d'une qualité proportionnée à sa beauté" (Ashton, p. 14), and Nemours is said to have "un agrément dans son esprit, dans son visage, et dans ses actions que l'on n'a jamais vu qu'en lui seul" (Ashton, p. 6). As for the manner of locating the action, it takes

prince, . . . dans un petit corps peu favorisé de la nature, avait une âme grande et hautaine, et un esprit qui le rendait aimable aux yeux même des plus belles femmes"

(Ashton, p. 5). Several equally vague descriptions of the main characters further illustrate the novelist's unconcern with physical appearances:

Le Prince de Clèves était digne de soutenir la gloire de son nom; il était brave et magnifique, et il avait une prudence qui ne se trouve guère avec la jeunesse (Ashton, p. 5).

Le duc de Nemours . . . était un chef-d'oeuvre de la nature; ce qu'il avait de moins admirable était d'être l'homme du monde le mieux fait et le plus beau (Ashton, p. 6).

Il parut alors à la cour une beauté [Mlle de Chartres] qui attira les yeux de tout le monde, et l'on doit croire que c'était une beauté parfaite puisqu'elle donna de l'admiration dans un lieu où l'on était si accoutumé de voir de belles personnes (Ashton, p. 10).

Mme de Chartres . . . dont le bien, la vertu et le mérite étaient extraordinaires . . . (Ashton, p. 10).

A similar degree of abstraction is evident in La Fayette's treatment of character and setting. M. de Clèves finds Mlle de Chartres to be "d'une qualité proportionnée à sa beauté" (Ashton, p. 14), and Nemours is said to have "un agrément dans son esprit, dans son visage, et dans ses actions que l'on n'a jamais vu qu'en lui seul" (Ashton, p. 6). As for the manner of locating the action, it takes

place amid the élégance and grandeurs of Louis XIV's court, but detail must be supplied by the imagination. When the action shifts to Coulommiers, the Cleves's country-house, the novelist goes so far as to supply two or three lines of description: "Il s'en alla sous des saules, le long d'un petit ruisseau qui coulait derrière la maison" (Ashton, p. 154).

Clearly what Mme de La Fayette is interested in is moral and psychological truths rather than physical ones. Thoughts become the substance of the action, and the interior monologue discloses their effects, usually unsettling, on the characters (Haig, p. 108). Perhaps the novel's most significant achievement is this internalization, with stress laid on the complexities of human emotions and motives.

Reflecting the intense interest of the seventeenth century salons in moral and psychological analysis, the Princesse succeeds where other novels of the time failed:

Mme de La Fayette contributes the more detailed scrutiny of moods that falls within the province of the properly psychological novel. Thus, with all her classical restraint, she points the way to a fertile territory of modern literature that writers<sup>22</sup> of fiction have not yet ceased to explore.

---

<sup>22</sup> L. Cazamian, A History of French Literature, 4th ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 200. Subsequent references to this article will appear in the text.

If the work shows an excessive indifference to verisimilitude and specific detail, it nonetheless is the first novel worthy of being called "psychological" by all but unanimous critical assent. Devoted to the study of the human heart, the story is one that has reverberated through all French psychological novels:

"M. de Clèves ne trouva pas que Mlle de Chartres eût changé de sentiment en changeant de nom. La qualité de mari ne lui donna pas une autre place dans le coeur de sa femme. Cela fit aussi que pour être son mari, il ne laissa pas d'être son amant." De cette phrase-là, dont le trait est net et subtil, et qui a quelque chose de pudique dans la précision, date le roman français.<sup>23</sup>

The relationship between reality and appearance, the private being and the public person, is judged by many critics to be the secret weave of La Princesse de Clèves. Mme de Chartres's remark on truth and appearance is only the first step in the Princess' instruction in the ways of the court, but it establishes a major theme in the novel: judging by outward forms will seldom lead to the truth. "Si vous jugez sur les apparences en ce lieu-ci, . . . vous serez toujours trompée: ce qui paraît n'est presque jamais la vérité" (Ashton, p. 31).

To be more specific, it is the inside story, the one that gradually discloses the heart's secrets, which emerges as the only true one. The suggestion that nearly all court

relationships are a façade should begin drawing the reader's interest away from the artificiality of the purely historical episodes, the bothersome bizzareries and coincidences, and the narrator's disregard for physical detail. Thus prepared for the unfolding of the real drama, the Princess' own, the reader discovers that Mme de La Fayette arouses more than his curiosity. For, in fact, she touches his heart.



## Chapter 3

### MOTIVATION OF MAIN CHARACTERS

Criticism of Mme de La Fayette's characterization in La Princesse de Clèves focuses most keenly on the decisions and conduct of the classical heroine herself. The thorniest issues have traditionally been those involving the scène de l'aveu (does a wife have the right to her own peace of mind at the expense of that of her husband?), and the renunciation of Nemours (with the husband out of the picture, why reject the lover any longer?). The earliest of critics had both of these incidents squarely in their censorious sights. But there are further complaints from more recent critics in response to the general remoteness of M. de Clèves's thoughts and actions from those of the modern reader, and there is considerable disagreement over Nemours' idealized character.

Taine remarks somewhat disparagingly in a nineteenth century essay on the Princesse that "each century produces modes of sentiment peculiar to it, and which become emotionally obsolete through historical remove" (quoted in

Haig, p. 141). More recently still, Maurois describes a curve of sentiments that has been rising and falling since Christianity first placed woman's soul on the same plane as man's, thus recognizing her as a person with the right to choose and refuse herself. He cites the Princesse as a peak rising "to a love too pure for human nature" (Maurois, p. xiii). The character of M. de Clèves exemplifies this popular seventeenth century sentiment.

The Prince de Clèves rather than the Duc de Nemours is almost unanimously declared to be the "honnête homme" of the novel. Ashton, for one, calls him the only real hero, deeply in love, yet sensitively aware of the Princess' inner struggle: "Vous ne me l'expliquerez jamais, et je ne vous demande point de me l'expliquer: Je vous demande seulement de vous souvenir que vous m'avez rendu le plus malheureux du monde" (Ashton, p. 147). Clèves soon falls ill, however, defeated by his powerlessness in the situation and determined to die. The passion described by the seventeenth century masters is thus discernable as an irresistible force whose effects are disastrously irreparable. "For Mme de La Fayette, as for Racine, passion is destiny" (Turnell, p. 41).

But to agree with Taine's condemnation of the characters as difficult to understand today is to ignore the

fearlessness with which they scrutinize their own feelings and the subtleties of wit and pathos that off-set their "somewhat high-flown sentiments" (Saintsbury, p. 122). The modern reader will scarcely find sec or froid<sup>24</sup> the anguish of a husband expressed in this agonized confrontation with his beloved, but unloving wife:

Je ne me trouve plus digne de vous; vous ne me paraissez plus digne de moi. Je vous adore, je vous haïs; je vous offense, je vous demande pardon; je vous admire, j'ai honte de vous admirer. Enfin, il n'y a plus en moi ni de calme ni de raison (Ashton, pp. 146-47).

Arguments against Mme de La Fayette's characters as failing completely to be convincing as people can be refuted on grounds that Stirling Haig and Richard Hyman both state in defense of the novelist:

If our sensibilities and intelligence are no longer attuned to a sincerity of conduct--like the Princesse de Clèves's--that is anything but surrender to emotion, to "natural" impulses (Haig, p. 18),

it must not be forgotten that the love examined and extolled by the classicists manifested itself far differently in the seventeenth century, and literary personae reacted equally differently to it.

Maurois theorizes that during the relatively stable

---

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Mornet, Histoire de la littérature française classique, 1660-1700, 3rd ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1947), p. 317.

political and religious era of the précieuses and Louis XIV, sentiments of great complexity could be analyzed and scrutinized ad tedium.

Love must become, for harassed creatures, a repose and an appeasement; it must therefore be simple and trusting. In order to die of love like Monsieur de Clèves one must have time on one's hands (Maurois, pp. 173-74).

Love and reason were antitheses in the works of the seventeenth century, pulling the characters in excruciatingly diverse directions, often rending their physical as well as mental beings in the process. For Mme de La Fayette, to write of love was to write against it (Haig, p. 18). A failure to surrender to natural impulses, a preference for "repos" over the terrible conflicts of passion permitted to ravage the soul freely, is nothing more or less than an authentication of the précieux tradition. To attack M. de Clèves's self-determined death would deny the whole code of heroic behavior and idealism of the age.

Although present social and literary trends are at best only remotely related to the concerns of La Fayette's characters (Haig, p. 143), the twentieth century's problem-oriented consciousness should not sneer too cynically at the ineffectual Prince de Clèves who surrenders before the battle lines are even vaguely defined, or at the fun-

damentally inconstant Nemours who forgets the Princess in time, just as she feared he would. For all their conventionality and self-concern, these rivals represent a remarkable refinement over the characters of an Astrée, for example, whose sentiments are those of a galanterie rather than a passion. With the Princesse, the novel as a genre is lifted to a plane of reality previously unknown, and for the first time we hear the sound of unreturned love that is the stuff of which all French psychological novels are now made (Chardonne, p. 113).

To what depths has a civilization plummeted that cannot experience a moment, no matter how brief, of exaltation in the greatness of the despairing husband,

abandonné à son désespoir. . . . M. de Clèves ne put résister à l'accablement où il se trouva. La fièvre lui prit dès la nuit même, et avec de si grands accidents que dès ce moment sa maladie parut très dangereuse (Ashton, pp. 158-59).

After an impassioned outpouring of grief and anger to his wife, "il languit néanmoins encore quelques jours, et mourut enfin avec une constance admirable" (Ashton, p. 163).

Suffering from what the précieux might have called an "excess of emotion" (Kaps, p. 37), and thus no longer able to maintain his feelings within the forms imposed by reason, the Prince prefers death.

The Duc de Nemours is held by Kaps to be as impor-

tant to the novel as the Princess herself. Staunch in her defense of the Duc as "made" for Mme de Clèves, Kaps describes him as "indeed a worthy object" of the Princess' love and esteem (Kaps, pp. 40-41). However, it would be a gross injustice to La Fayette's characterization of this quintessence of knighthood to categorize him so perfunctorily. He is generally and justifiably criticized for being less idealized than it would seem at first glance, and he is often guided by his own selfish interests:

It is relatively easy to excuse in the name of love the taking of a portrait, the indiscretion of revealing an overheard conversation, or a surreptitious entry into a garden by night; but it is more difficult to forgive his feelings on learning of the illness of M. de Clèves-- "l'extrémité du mal de M. de Clèves lui ouvrit de nouvelles espérances"--the coldness of his calculations when he discovers that he is the cause of his rival's death, or the vanity of his reaction to the heroine's confession--"Il sentit pourtant un plaisir sensible de l'avoir réduite à cette extrémité (Kaps, pp. 41-42).

Ashton is considerably more callous in his censure of the Duc:

Nemours, of course, is a cad. . . . He is sufficiently handsome, skilful and clever to be able to make the Princess love him--but sufficiently fickle, vain and thoughtless to prevent her marrying him and living unhappy ever after (Ashton, p. xxiv).

As in the case of M. de Clèves, however, Nemours

loves the Princess "à la folie" (Mille, p. 17), and goes so far as to give up a queen (Elizabeth I in real life) for this "passion . . . si violente qu'elle lui ôta la goût et même le souvenir de toutes les personnes qu'il avait aimées" (Ashton, p. 36). Would not a man "si éperdument amoureux" become easily convinced in his own mind that to rob a man of a mere portrait of his wife is no crime? Does not his prowling about the garden of his lady-love all night show a lack of discretion rather than an absence of real love? Could not a man who had given up a queen deem eavesdropping not beneath him?

Rather than belying a general carelessness or selfishness in his attitudes and actions, therefore, it can be legitimately argued that Nemours is all the more likeable--even laudable--for the honesty with which he displays his jealousy and covetousness. His emotions and motives are infinitely human, painted in the truest hues. In the end, "le temps et l'absence ralentirent sa douleur et éteignirent sa passion" (Ashton, p. 184), reasserting the ephemeral nature of passion that even the most skeptical modern reader would likely recognize, if not actually remember.

For all their egocentricity, Mme de La Fayette's characters remain sympathetic. Their self-interest might best be considered "normal" or at least typical of the

weaknesses and failings of human nature (Kaps, pp. 15-16). Mme de Clèves is no exception, in spite of the lively controversy surrounding her motives in confessing her liaison, not as yet dangereuse, with Nemours.

The whole book hinges on the scene in which the Princess tells her husband that she is in love with another, but refuses to name her lover, insisting that the affair is not an adulterous one. It was an incident that set tongues awagging scarcely one month after the novel's appearance in 1678. The public reaction was overwhelmingly critical, according to the write-in enquête conducted by the Mercure Galant. No doubt "Dear Abby" herself would have shaken a censoring finger at the Princess' thoughtless, callous act.<sup>25</sup> It isn't, after all, the heroine's passion that offends us, but her consummate insensitivity toward the man who has always suffered intensely from the knowledge that she does not really love him.

Monsieur de Clèves ne trouva pas que mademoiselle de Chartres eût changé de sentiment en changeant de nom. La qualité de mari lui donna de plus grands privilèges; mais elle ne lui donna pas une autre place dans le cœur de sa femme. Cela fit aussi que, pour être son mari, il ne laissa pas d'être son amant, parce qu'il avait toujours quelque chose à

---

<sup>25</sup> "Dear Abby" refers to a currently popular, advice-to-the-lovelorn newspaper column that is nationally syndicated.



souhaiter au delà de sa possession, et, quoiqu'elle vécût parfaitement bien avec lui, il n'était pas entièrement heureux (Ashton, p. 25).

How could a wife who genuinely cares for such a husband's wellbeing (and there is no reason until the aveu itself to suspect that the Princess does not) make a confession that could only destroy him as well as their marriage? This is precisely the problem that interested the readers of the Mercure Galant who questioned not the Princess' sincerity or fidelity, but the disruptive social and emotional consequences of the aveu (Haig, p. 120).

Ashton is one of the few recent authorities to praise the Princess' frankness and loyalty which, he maintains, "make possible, even probable, the open confession to her husband, and guard her to the end against the wiles of Nemours" (Ashton, pp. xxiii-xxiv). Saintsbury treats it even more lightly, calling the confession "eccentric" but not wholly unnatural (p. 122). Chardonne finds it the simple étourderie of a woman who does not love her husband (p. 114). But most modern critics search more deeply for insight into the Princess' action.

The view that the confession is a calmly deliberate attempt by Mme de Clèves to regain her self-possession is represented by Richard Hyman, Stirling Haig, and H. H. Kaps, among others. Presenting the act as one of courage,

the Princess' words reveal, however, that she is placing more emphasis on outward appearances than on any projected repentance and reform (Haig, p. 120). The last sentence of the following quotation is of particular interest:

Je n'ai jamais donné nulle marque de faiblesse, et je ne craindrais pas d'en laisser paraître, si vous me laissiez la liberté de me retirer de la cour, ou si j'avais encore Mme de Chartres pour aider à me conduire. . . . Je vous demande mille pardons, si j'ai des sentiments qui vous déplaisent; du moins je ne vous déplairai jamais par mes actions (Ashton, p. 112).

Armed with the sense of values and moral principles which she acquired from her mother, the Princesse remains constant to them in confessing. Her conscience, no matter how suspect we believe its motives, directs her through a sense of her devoir to seek counsel from her husband when her mother is no longer alive to provide moral guidance (Kaps, pp. 19-20). After the aveu scene, she finds a strange solace and self-satisfaction in having confessed to him:

Elle passa toute la nuit, pleine d'incertitude, de trouble et de crainte; enfin le calme revint dans son esprit. Elle trouva même de la douceur à avoir donné ce témoignage de fidélité à un mari qui le méritait si bien, qui avait tant d'estime et tant d'amitié pour elle, et qui venait de lui en donner encore des marques, par la manière dont il avait reçu de qu'elle lui avait avoué (Ashton, p. 116).

It is merely an illusory sense of peace, however. The momentary repos soon gives way under the weight of the Prince's suspicions that are aroused by his wife's partial disclosures.

On the other hand, critics including Howarth, Turnell, and Nurse are persuaded that the aveu is a psychological, or "gut" reaction to an impossible situation made unbearable by her husband's refusal to let her escape it and flee from the Court to Coulommiers. "One might say that the confession is forced from her as a desperate last expedient, once her husband has rejected her plea for 'solitude' and 'repos'" (Howarth, p. 132). Perhaps this interpretation of the Princess' motives is more palatable to the modern reader than the one based on devoir.

Similarly, Nurse states that "Mme de La Fayette presents her heroine as the victim of a growing panic which robs her of the lucidity necessary for any objective decision" (Nurse, p. 217). Traumatized by the belief that Nemours might eventually resume his Don Juanesque career, she cries out for help, attempting to convince M. de Clèves that she must leave the Court in order to be saved from her own passion (Turnell, p. 41).

Clearly the central, catastrophic incident of the story, the confession, is of major psychological importance

to the novel. The psychological repercussions of the event not only precipitate Clèves's death, but irreparably damage the Princess' relationship with Nemours as well. Her guilt-ridden reaction to Clèves's death accounts for some of the most moving effects achieved by the novel:

Mme de Clèves demeura dans une affliction si violente qu'elle perdit quasi l'usage de la raison. . . . Quand elle commença d'avoir la force de l'envisager, et qu'elle vit quel mari elle avait perdu, qu'elle considéra qu'elle était la cause de sa mort, et que c'était par la passion qu'elle avait eue pour un autre qu'elle en était cause, l'horreur qu'elle eut pour elle-même et pour Monsieur de Nemours ne se peut représenter (Ashton, p. 163).

The Princess' renunciation of Nemours is as controversial an incident today as the confession scene was among Mme de La Fayette's contemporaries. Through the nineteenth century the rejection was looked upon most often as "a moral victory, a triumph of duty over passion somewhat in the manner of Corneille" (Kaps, p. x). Although this view is no longer widely held, there remain some present-day critics who still subscribe to it. But a more accurate evaluation of twentieth century thought on the subject reveals the difficulty modern scholars have had in dealing with the complexity of motives and intertwining circumstances that came to bear on the Princess' ultimate decision to refuse Nemours. "This percep-

tion of a certain ambiguity in the novel is in itself a contribution of the twentieth century" (Kaps, p. x) to the still very lively "querelle de La Princesse de Clèves." Interestingly, support for almost every argument can be found in the Princess' renunciation speech itself, which is generally regarded as a masterful piece of self-analysis for any century.

Favergeat, who wrote the "Notice" in the Classiques Larousse edition of the novel, finds agreement with several other critics in his explanation of the Princess' decision as being one dictated by her conscience. Her determination "reste ferme de ne point épouser, même innocent, celui par qui de Clèves est mort."<sup>26</sup> Mme de Clèves states very clearly that from her point of view, Nemours is her husband's murderer:

Il n'est que trop véritable que vous êtes cause de la mort de monsieur de Clèves; les soupçons que lui a donnés votre conduite inconsidérée lui ont coûté la vie, comme si vous la lui aviez ôtée de vos propres mains. Voyez ce que je devrais faire, si vous en étiez venus ensemble à ces extrémités, et que le même malheur en fût arrivé. Je sais bien que ce n'est pas la même chose à l'égard du monde; mais, au mien, il n'y a aucune différence, puisque je sais que c'est par vous

---

<sup>26</sup> Maurice Favergeat, ed., La Princesse de Clèves: Extraits, by Mme de La Fayette (Paris: Classiques Larousse, n.d.), p. 7.

qu'il est mort, et que c'est à cause de moi  
(Ashton, p. 173).

With the moral position of the heroine thus defined by her own words to Nemours, Kaps supports the "conscience argument" by pointing out a further impediment:

To marry her husband's assassin would not only be personally repugnant, but specifically forbidden by Church law--a law which was formalized in the Middle Ages and which must certainly have been before the minds of the aristocracy of the seventeenth century. . . . Thus the immorality of her love for Nemours--at least as far as her subjective interpretation is concerned--is no less clear-cut than before the death of her husband (Kaps, p. 21).

The Princess may fear no social stigma attached to such a match--"le public n'aurait peut-être pas sujet de vous blâmer, ni moi non plus" (Ashton, p. 175)--but she resists nonetheless on grounds of personal conscience: "Je sacrifie beaucoup à un devoir qui ne subsiste que dans mon imagination" (Ashton, p. 178).

There is another negative force at work within the Princess' mind that is recognized by several major critics as her main motive for refusing Nemours. Harriet Ray Allentuch calls attention once again to the renunciation speech, in which the Princess lays the burden of their separation squarely on the would-be seducer's untrustworthy character (Allentuch, p. 179). Her own experience and the examples of others enumerated by her mother have amply

demonstrated that "having conquered Rhodes, one does not ordinarily settle down there" (Lawrence, p. 17). The wary Princess, dreading the destruction that passion can bring about, tells Nemours that she will take no such risks on the sort of man he is (or was):

Je crois même que les obstacles ont fait votre constance. . . . Vous avez déjà eu plusieurs passions, vous en auriez encore; je ne ferais plus votre bonheur. . . . Dans cet état, néanmoins, je n'aurais d'autre parti à prendre que celui de la souffrance; je ne sais même si j'oserais me plaindre. on fait des reproches à un amant; mais en fait-on à un mari, quand on n'a qu'à lui reprocher de n'avoir plus d'amour? (Ashton, pp. 175-76).

Fearing that her inclination can bring only unhappiness because of its uncertain future with such a chef-d'oeuvre de la nature as Nemours, the Princess opts for the repos that has dangled just beyond her reach throughout the novel:

Quoique je me défie de moi-même, je crois que je ne vaincrai jamais mes scrupules, et je n'espère pas aussi de surmonter l'inclination que j'ai pour vous. Elle me rendra malheureuse, et je me priverai de votre vue, quelque violence qu'il m'en coûte (Ashton, p. 177).

Rejection of the frightening spontaneity of passion for the inner serenity which she prizes so highly is, according to Stirling Haig, an act of pathetic grandeur, aristocratic in nature (Haig, pp. 130-32). Her mind and

her heart are at odds for the last time when she vows to Nemours that she will not be blinded by love: "Les passions peuvent me conduire, mais elles ne sauraient m'aveugler" (Ashton, p. 176). She aspires to coherence, but her actions lead to death when she withdraws to a semi-religious life. Ironically, time and absence gradually reduce Nemours' grief as he resumes a "normal" life. It is the Princess whose life, for all its austerity and virtue, is "assez courte."

It is at this point that virtue may become suspect to the modern critic:

What bothers post-Classical readers is that the Princess' ethical urges are as real as her sexual ones, a state we are not willing to accept. Thus Stendhal: "The Princesse de Clèves should have said nothing to her husband, and given herself to M. de Nemours" (Haig, p. 133).

It is difficult to accept repos in the manner that it is presented by the novel: as "an ethical imperative which no amount of reasoning will undermine" (Haig, p. 133). One may even be tempted to wonder, in fact, whether the Princess believes in love at all.

J. W. Scott and Claude Vigée are included by R. J. Hyman among the recent critics of the Princesse who have for some time suspected her motives to be other than altruistic. Scott maintains that because her refusal of the



Duc de Nemours was based more on fear of future infidelity than present loyalty, "the motive is by any name, essentially self-centered" (Hyman, p. 19). Hyman also quotes Vigée's conclusion in discussing the Princess' "moi": "le refus final la confirme dans le choix passionné d'elle-même" (Hyman, p. 19).

Serge Doubrovsky finds himself in agreement in dealing with the renunciation. Rather than label the Princess' reliance on virtue, duty, and sincerity as so many hypocritical "crutches or stratagems to thwart incursions upon her repos" (Haig, pp. 132-33), Doubrovsky views the Princess' decision as "fondée sur l'exclusive considération d'elle-même," thus manifesting "un égoïsme total" (Doubrovsky, p. 48). But he goes on to suggest that perhaps the twentieth century reader is best able to judge and appreciate Mme de La Fayette's work because of its affinity with that of the existentialist writers of our time. This interpretation is offered in his article, "La Princesse de Clèves: Une Interprétation existentielle," which has received considerable critical attention and agreement.

Doubrovsky points to the total absence of God in the novel, its overtones of pessimism and despair so rarely sounded in the seventeenth century, and the suicidal bent of both the Prince and the Princess who give themselves

over to the ultimate calme and repos rather than endure an impossible situation. The following quotation from Doubrovsky discussing the Princess' motivation could just as easily apply to one of Sartre's characters as to Mme de La Fayette's: "Elle retrouve finalement sa liberté au moment où elle décide de regarder le monde avec les yeux de quelqu'un prêt et même résolu à le quitter" (Doubrovsky, p. 49).

Realizing that she is incapable of overcoming her sentiments, she becomes quite lucid, and in the manner of an existential heroine, chooses to preserve her own freedom rather than submit it to Nemours and become passion's pawn.

The Princess' refusal of the "open perspective for a fully controlled, defined ending" (Lawrence, p. 21) should not be misinterpreted as a destructive, anti-heroic selfishness, however. In "La Princesse de Clèves Reconsidered," Francis L. Lawrence would not go so far as Martin Turnell, whose appraisal of the Princess attacks her "attitude of complete negation" and "refusal to take any further part in life" (Turnell, p. 44). Lawrence, instead, recognizes the renunciation as

the triumph of Mme de Clèves . . . and a triumph of western thought. Passion is not always an all-consuming fatality; it is even possible to reject love for other than extraordinarily heroic reasons. The individual . . . may freely choose and work out his happiness (Lawrence, p. 21).

Regardless of what may be said today in defense or criticism of Mme de Clèves's motivation, the dust of several centuries has not as yet settled on the controversy. And among authorities there are few who seek neutral ground in the dispute. Opinions are for the most part at opposite poles, and emphatically so. Harriet Ray Allentuch is particularly harsh on the Princess, for example, characterizing her as a model of sacrificial suicide who craved sainthood but who won no converts with her heroism. Unfortunately, the reader who would accept Allentuch's position would be "left with a lingering and inescapable sense of loss" (Allentuch, p. 182). Those who argue that Mme de Clèves is unintelligible to the twentieth century because it does not share her faith, have no faith themselves in the power of self-respect and strength of character that overcome violent passions and account for the triumph of humanity over the human animal. Maurois explains that because "we have been so long nourished, through the Romantics, on the doctrine of giving free rein to the passions," we are unable to accept a value system which finds the ideal not in what one desires, but in what one owes oneself. "If one can deny the wisdom of the post-humous obligation in which Madame de Clèves shuts herself up, one cannot deny its grandeur" (Maurois, p. 32).

In the Princesse Mme de La Fayette may have drawn some character types that are fallible in many ways, but they do not fail to fascinate and deeply interest us. Today we may say that what drives the Princess is a powerful, ego-centered desire for the most ideal happiness, but at the same time she is perceptive enough to pause on the precipice of "the bottomless hedonism of a supposedly naïve search for the pure and unattainable romantic ideal" (Hyman, p. 20). The anguished inner life of the characters is given major importance in the novel, and this is part of the greatness and universality of La Fayette's work examined in the last chapter of this study. But if these classical heroes and heroines ultimately submit their passions to honor or duty, conscience or coherence, freedom or frankness; if we encounter in later novels manifestations of love closer to those forms of it experienced today; nevertheless,

we shall find none that have more grace, or modesty, and we shall not cease to think with respect and sympathy of those somewhat feverish evenings . . . where . . . souls that were at once savage and tender engendered a heroic world (Maurois, p. 33).

Theirs is not our world, but in it are discernable both the heroic and the unheroic passions that propel man along the uneven course of his destiny.

## Chapter 4

### LA PRINCESSE DE CLEVES FOR TODAY

In previous chapters this study has referred to and directed itself to many of the issues volleyed back and forth across several centuries as critics from Valincourt to Turnell have engaged each other in the on-going "querelle de La Princesse de Clèves." Above the dissonance of disagreement, however, there emerges a single note in unison with that sounded by some of Mme de La Fayette's loudest and most ardent defenders: this novel of unfulfilled passion in its seventeenth century setting is the first modern psychological novel written in France deserving of the name. Even Martin Turnell, not known for his gentle treatment of the Princess' behavior, mollifies his tone abruptly when evaluating the overall importance of the novel to the genre:

The discovery that great love affairs simply peter out because one of the parties has reached the point at which he or she cannot go on any longer is, perhaps, Mme de La Fayette's chief contribution to psychology and stamps her as a modern novelist (Turnell, p. 46).

If one accepts the all but unanimous accolades, it becomes apparent that the Princesse has much to offer the modern reader as matriarch in the grand tradition of the French psychological novel. But beyond the gifts of psychological insight and analysis that Mme de La Fayette so generously offers in her work, there are many universal chords struck by the narrator and characters of the novel whose overtones and nuances would be recognized by the most critical contemporary reader.

Castex and Surer in their Manuel des études littéraires françaises set up La Princesse de Clèves as the "modèle du roman psychologique" for its remarkable "analyse des mouvements secrets du coeur."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, one of La Fayette's greatest merits is her ability to convince the reader of the psychological importance behind her characters' actions. But first she must describe real human relationships. In the Princesse she chooses the variation on a triangular theme that is so prominent in French psychological novels: the pitiable husband whose wife loves another man.

"M. de Clèves ne trouva pas que Mlle de Chartres eût changé de sentiment en changeant

---

<sup>27</sup> Pierre Castex and Paul Surer, Manuel des études littéraires françaises: XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1947), p. 97.

de nom. La qualité de mari ne lui donna pas une autre place dans le coeur de sa femme. Cela fit aussi que pour être son mari, il ne laissa pas d'être son amant." De cette phrase-là, . . . date le roman français (Chardonne, p. 113).

All of the intimate uncertainties which complicate the actions and reactions of the people involved are transmitted to the reader by means of the often excruciating self-analysis undergone by the characters themselves. Fearing that the Duc de Nemours will eventually be unfaithful, it is the Princess rather than the narrator who explains why she has to refuse him:

Quand je pourrais m'accoutumer à cette sorte de malheur, pourrais-je m'accoutumer à celui de croire voir toujours monsieur de Clèves vous accuser de sa mort, me reprocher de vous avoir aimé, de vous avoir épousé, et me faire sentir la différence de son attachement au vôtre? Il est impossible . . . de passer par-dessus des raisons si fortes: il faut que je demeure dans l'état où je suis, et dans les résolutions que j'ai prises de n'en sortir jamais (Ashton, p. 176).

At other times it is the narrator who explains the characters' behavior. Ashton cites the following description of Nemours as "one of the best psychological analyses in the novel" (Ashton, p. 206, note 167):

Ce prince se présenta à son esprit, aimable au dessus de tout ce qui était au monde; l'aimant depuis longtemps avec une passion pleine de respect et de fidélité; méprisant tout pour elle [la Princesse]; respectant jusqu'à sa douleur; songeant à la voir sans

songer à en être vu; quittant la cour, dont il faisait les délices, . . . pour venir rêver dans les lieux où il ne pouvait prétendre de la rencontrer; enfin, un homme digne d'être aimé par son seul attachement, et pour qui elle avait une inclination si violente, qu'elle l'aurait aimé quand il ne l'aurait pas aimée; mais, de plus, un homme d'une qualité élevée et convenable à la sienne (Ashton, p. 167).

The above passages are indeed remarkable for their psychological insight, even for the twentieth century. But the fearlessness with which Mme de La Fayette's characters scrutinize their feelings is also worthy of notice, going far beyond the earlier attempts of the salon society to study deliberately the inner man. The victims of love's tragedy are, as Martin Turnell sees it, "constantly making fresh and disturbing discoveries" about themselves with "astonishing clairvoyance" (Turnell, p. 41). He further traces the main characters' actual destruction to this clairvoyance or self-knowledge. For example, were the Princess not so desperate to be saved from her own passion, perhaps she would not have blurted out the disastrous confession to her husband. He begins to go to pieces at that moment, his tranquillity as well as hers thus having been irreparably destroyed. And when the Princess is later confronted by the decision to marry Nemours or not, her own uncertainties about a future with him constitute the very real pressure on her conscience and consciousness that



culminates in renunciation of the glamorous lover. She knows all too well that she could never survive in a state of flux, and decides to take her chances alone, comforted only by the "monotony of repos" (Ashton, p. 4).

Peter Nurse in his study of Classical Voices clearly hears that of Mme de La Fayette as true to the twentieth century in its emphasis on the enigmatic ego whose complexity defies categorizing (Nurse, pp. 218-19). Nurse quotes from Janet Riatt's Madame de La Fayette and 'La Princesse de Clèves' (1971) to make the point that what some critics have viewed as inconsistencies in character behavior are really not to be faulted. Rather, such waverings reflect the psychological vicissitudes of a Princess, for example, who comes to life as a real person, torn first by one course of action, then another:

Her emotions and motives are noted according to their importance at any given moment and they may easily contradict what she was feeling a few pages before. In this way, Madame de La Fayette, without departing from her role as objective narrator of facts, suggests the chaos and indecision of the Princess' mind (quoted in Nurse, p. 221).

Actually, such narrative perspective is not too far removed from that of a William Faulkner. Just shy of employing a stream-of-consciousness technique, Mme de La Fayette gives the reader, according to Riatt, "the impression of really living the Princess' final days in the world with her and

not of observing them from some remote, omniscient viewpoint" (quoted in Nurse, p. 222).

Defending La Fayette's ability to "generate significant relationships which can be studied for laws of behavior" (Hyman, p. 17) by any generation, Richard J. Hyman accordingly finds the emphasis of the novel to be in those laws rather than in the characters themselves, whose anguished inner lives preach the pre-eminence of psychology from all sides (Hyman, pp. 17-18). The Duc de Nemours exemplifies the soundness of Mme de La Fayette's psychology by forgetting his Princess with time. There has been no final decision and no open break between them, yet Nemours still hopes, making several futile attempts to see her again. But those hopes gradually wane, the whole affair dissolving into an out-of-sight-out-of-mind conclusion: "Enfin, des années entières s'étant passées, le temps et l'absence ralentirent sa douleur et sa passion" (Ashton, p. 184).

Furthermore, according to Howarth, Mme de La Fayette refuses to indulge "in the optimistic psychology in vogue in the middle of the century" (Howarth, p. 129). Consider Descartes' claim "qu'il n'y a point d'âme si faible qu'elle ne puisse . . . acquérir un pouvoir absolu sur ses passions"<sup>28</sup> and Corneille's concept of "l'amour volontaire" governed

by the lover's free will (Howarth, p. 129). None of Mme de La Fayette's characters assume any such absolute power over his passions. Quite the contrary, it is the realization that they are unable to resist the strength of their emotions that creates the psychological conflicts upon which the novel is founded.

A significant number of critics maintain that the long-run success of the Princesse is jeopardized by a certain moral ambiguity in the novel. Representative of this point of view, Stirling Haig gives more credit to the artist's hand than to the moralist's, and Howarth simply takes the position that the novel is more concerned with psychology than morals. If these criticisms seem somewhat less than vigorous, perhaps it can be concluded with H. H. Kaps that a moral perspective is constructed within the work itself rather than imposed from without by the narrator's omniscience. If there is any ambiguity in the moral structure, it "applies principally to the intensity of the heroine's struggle, and not to the moral standards of the work as a whole" (Kaps, p. 87).

Pierre Mille is astounded by the Princess who resists

---

28 Descartes, Traité des passions de l'âme (1649), art. 50.

an adulterous passion, yet who professes no adherence to Christian morals whatsoever. There is not one reference in the entire novel to the Ten Commandments, the fires of Hell, nor even to God Himself. It is never a question of "sin" with the Princess; the word "adultery" does not appear anywhere in the text. "Pas un mot évoquant l'idée de christianisme--jusqu'à la dernière phrase" (Mille, p. 21). But the reader is made aware of the heroine's moral stature nonetheless. In contrast to the other characters in the novel, the Princess "disregards the public view of her situation to follow a different course of action in which she is able to succeed through an extreme défiance de soi" (Kaps, p. 84). At this point it is possible to agree with Stirling Haig that the novel is moral rather than moralistic (Haig, p. 142)--hardly a disappointing conclusion to the modern reader weary of wallowing in the seventeenth century didacticism of a Bossuet or uninspired by the matter-of-fact maxims of a La Rochefoucauld.

However, Mme de La Fayette's patrician friend La Rochefoucauld should be cited for the underlying assumption of his philosophy that human nature does not vary notably from period to period or place to place. Perhaps Mme de La Fayette was influenced by her contemporary, at

least to the extent that her characters, for all their shortcomings, are still fascinating today precisely because they are human and therefore weak. The Princesse continues to be widely read, according to Horatio Smith, by lovers of delicate character delineation (Smith, p. 321). Three centuries later, the novel's survival probably rests as much on the author's ability to analyze human behavior patterns in love as on any other single achievement of La Fayette's as a writer. When even the most perfect of courtiers can be guilty of eavesdropping, of revealing what he has heard, of trying to cast the blame subtly on his rival, then of denying any attempt to profit later on his knowledge, the drama touches us all directly. "Les hommes, à toutes les époques et dans toutes les sociétés, ont toujours possédé la même somme à peu près d'instincts bons ou mauvais" (Mille, p. 19). It is one thing to be a keen observer of the bon ou mauvais in the human heart, but quite another to control and mold these insights into an imaginative whole by what Virginia Woolf called "the single vision, . . . the immense persuasiveness of a mind which has completely mastered its perspective" (quoted in Nurse, p. 187). Mme de La Fayette was able to do both.

Jacques Chardonne subscribes to the theory that the Princesse is the first roman humain simply because it is

autobiographical--a theory supported by Mme de La Fayette's own suggestion that the work be entitled Mémoires.

C'est . . . le premier roman où l'auteur a exprimé plus de choses qu'il ne croyait dire, parcequ'au lieu de s'en tenir à une pure fiction, au lieu de peindre des sentiments imaginés, des incidents surprenants, il nous fait une confidence sur la vie, sur sa vie (Chardonne, p. 113).

It is an intriguing thought, although some critics including Maurois believe it to be La Fayette's and La Rochefoucauld's youth relived rather than their romance recounted. But whether the Princesse is actually autobiographical or not does not detract in the least from its universal appeal. It is La Fayette's ability to draw character that contributes so immeasurably to the reader's conviction "from the outset that the whole story--character and incidents--was true" (Ashton, p. xxvi).

The situation is as eternal as the characterization in La Princesse de Clèves, adding still another dimension to the work's greatness. Peter Nurse applies the same formulation to Richardson, the first truly tragic English novelist, and to Mme de La Fayette as both having

re-enacted the eternal human confrontation between the ideal world of the human spirit and the fatal pressures of material reality which is, in some degree, at the centre of all human experience (Nurse, p. 187).

Also the problems of love dealt with in the novel are as ageless as adultery itself, retaining meaning for us as

long as marriage remains a viable social institution. Sentiments may differ from age to age, but even the most ancient dramas of love reveal what is and has long been in our own innermost thoughts.

It is evident that new forms of society, changes in the distribution of wealth, unforeseen external influences, have a great deal to do with the formation of characters; but I think that it is very easy to exaggerate their effect and importance: I think they are simply revelatory. Everything has always been in man, but more or less apparent or hidden, and what a new age discovers may unfold under our eyes but slumbered there since the beginning of time. . . . I believe that a *Princesse de Clèves* still lives in our day.<sup>29</sup>

In penning the first modern psychological novel, *Mme de La Fayette* necessarily broke with both tradition and the times. But in so doing, she thereby established a link with future generations of readers. For all the universal appeal of *La Princesse de Clèves*, it is undeniable that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have felt *Mme de La Fayette's* influence much more directly than did her contemporaries, on whom recent critics feel it was apparently quite weak. Daniel Mornet has remarked that the novel's seventeenth century imitations, including Du Plaisir's *Duchesse d'Estramène* (1683), Mlle Durand's

---

<sup>29</sup> André Gide, *Pretexts: Reflections on Literature and Morality*, ed. Justin O'Brien (Greenwich Editions of Meridian Books, 1959), p. 70.

La Comtesse de Mortane (1699), as well as several novels thought to have been written by Gatien de Courtilz in the same period, were pale and eventually obscured by time.

Stirling Haig finds that

curiously enough, Mme de La Fayette is much closer to Proust than to Prévost, and a Raymond Radiguet deliberately set out to create, in Le Bal du Comte d'Orgel, a Princesse de Clèves of the twentieth century (Haig, p. 141).

Also, Jean Cocteau made a film of the Princesse, and in 1965 Jean François wrote an opera based on the story.

In all likelihood, the twentieth century has not yet seen the last of the novel's influence, not to mention its distinction as the only roman de société still read today (Mille, p. 17).

But the on-going popularity of La Fayette's work may not really be as "curious" as Haig would have us believe. A fundamental moral uncertainty has long been the treacherous reef on which even the greatest of societies have foundered. The aristocratic, highly civilized social order in La Princesse de Clèves is no exception. The magnificence, galanterie, and bienfaits of the age, while admirable in the brilliant court society described by La Fayette, are opposed from the outset by the very absence of other virtues that would make the society a durable one (Turnell, p. 33).



In the opening sentences of the novel we are dazzled by descriptions:

La magnificence et la galanterie n'ont jamais paru en France avec tant d'éclat que dans les dernières années du règne de Henri second. Ce prince était galant, bien fait et amoureux: quoique sa passion pour Diane de Poitiers, duchesse de Valentinois, eût commencé il y avait plus de vingt ans, elle n'en était pas moins éclatants (Ashton, p. 3).

But only a few pages later:

L'ambition et la galanterie étaient l'âme de cette cour, et occupaient également les hommes et les femmes. Il y avait tant d'intérêts et tant de cabales différentes, et les dames y avaient tant de part, que l'amour était toujours mêlé aux affaires, et les affaires à l'amour. Personne n'était tranquille, ni indifférent; on songeait à s'élever, à plaire, à servir ou à nuire; on ne connaissait ni l'ennui, ni l'oisiveté, et on était toujours occupé des plaisirs ou des intrigues (Ashton, p. 16).

Today's reader who cannot identify in some way with this disintegrating world does not fully understand his own. Turnell's analysis of the social and moral truths implicit in the Princesse could well be applied to today's unhinged world of Watergate and related political outrages:

Political corruption and intrigue, ambition and licence were sapping the foundations of society and gradually infecting even its soundest members. They were too intelligent to be unaware of the danger; they might make heroic efforts to resist the disintegrating influences; but a fundamental uncertainty about all moral sanctions made them exceptionally vulnerable, so that when the test came they simply collapsed (Turnell, p. 47).

Reference to the existential interpretation which Serge Doubrovsky gives the Princess' characterization is once again appropriate when measuring the precedent-shattering impact of La Fayette's novel. He finds that, in spite of the aristocratic milieu and narrative techniques so foreign to today's fiction, we still discover

les affinités spirituelles les plus intimes entre le pessimisme de Mme de La Fayette et le désespoir de notre propre temps. Cela devrait suffire à nous redonner l'intérêt le plus vif et la sympathie la plus profonde pour cette magnifique et cruelle analyse de la perdition humaine (Doubrovsky, p. 36).

Even the rather traditional Ashton, without specifically labeling La Princesse de Clèves as existential in any way, calls attention in the footnotes of his edition of the novel to the preventative nature of the Princess' education which was very rare at the time:

There is no question of religious training here and no mention of divine aid elsewhere in the novel. Mme de La Fayette wished to work out her psychological study as a struggle between love and duty--with no possible help from without (Ashton, p. 188, note 10).

It is also worthy of note that Mme de Chartres is ahead of her time in the education of the Princess by striving to be both mother and friend to her daughter. Her choice of a husband for the Princess is, of course, the primary tragedy of the novel, yet she remains a likeable and forgivable character, even modern in some respects.

It is not difficult to identify with her as she goes about the performance of her duty as a mother not only in accordance with the ideas of her day, but well in advance of her time (Ashton, pp. xxiv-xxv). Her relationship with the Princess is enviable for the openness of communication between them; no generation gap stifles personalities on either side. There is mutual respect for and understanding of each other that even Dr. Spock<sup>30</sup> would deem admirable.

Another example of Mme de La Fayette's amazingly independent spirit as a novelist is exhibited in the controversial renunciation of Nemours. Many defenders of the Princess' refusal, looking to character motivation for support of their theories, seem to ignore or underplay the artist's craft which is displayed here at its best. By allowing her heroine to choose for herself and against Nemours, La Fayette thus avoids the banality of the "happy ending" so popular among other seventeenth century novelists (Favergeat, p. 97, note 1). It is only quite recently, in fact, that the fiction reader has become accustomed, albeit grudgingly, to expect "the worst" from dénouements. Considering that it has taken several hundred years to

---

<sup>30</sup> A popular but controversial pediatrician whose "spare the rod" philosophy of child-rearing has not yet ceased being both defended and defamed.

adjust to this kind of literary letdown, La Fayette was leveling at her contemporaries an undeniably courageous volley whose reverberations were still to be echoing well into the twentieth century.

An entire study could be developed around Mme de La Fayette the iconoclast, her style and use of the language notwithstanding. Many editors dutifully devote dozens of footnotes to words in the text whose meanings are no longer current. But the reader, on the other hand, should not lose sight of the fact that the many expressions that were new and fashionable at the time, the very limited vocabulary, and the aversion to words that might have offended seventeenth century sensibilities were all the direct result of the précieuses' efforts to refine the language. Ashton feels that modern French has even gained in clarity as a final result of the classical reformers' style exemplified by Mme de La Fayette:

La Princesse de Clèves was to make the French language clear and exact so that, nowadays, when treaties are drawn up in more than one language it is generally noted that, in case of dispute as to the meaning of a clause, the French version shall be taken as authoritative. If some of the recent . . . novelists had studied carefully the methods of Mme de La Fayette their novels would be easier to read, their analysis of character clearer and their books much less bulky (Ashton, p. xxvi).

There are some very liberal attitudes reflected and revealed in La Princesse de Clèves that border at times on what might be called "feminism" today. It has already been pointed out in this study that the Princess is evidently neither shocked nor disapproving of the adulterous atmosphere that pervades the Court. Nor does Mme de La Fayette play the suffragette demanding a single standard of sexual morality for her characters.

Her novel can mingle such disparate elements as a heroine successfully at home in an immoral society and a worldly dying mother who warns her daughter against adultery as unalloyed disaster (Hyman, p. 17).

W. D. Howarth is similarly convinced of the novel's relevance today as he discusses "the feminist aspirations of the précieuses derived from their revulsion from the 'mariage de convenance' with its inequality and injustice" (Howarth, p. 125). He makes reference to a character in the Abbé de Pure's novel La Précieuse (1656) who is led to wonder "s'il fallait dire se marier contre quelqu'un ou à quelqu'un" (quoted in Howarth, p. 125). A woman of Mme de La Fayette's background, unhappy after her experience with an older husband chosen for her rather than by her, no doubt came to wonder much the same thing. She discovered first-hand that marriage in the pastoral tradition which had always provided such a convenient

dénouement to round off a story was as far-fetched and contrived as the emotional adventures of the pastoral characters themselves.

On the other hand, the "mariage de convenance" was quite incompatible with the lofty précieux ideal of equality between the sexes. Therefore, a novel like La Princesse de Clèves in which the heroine's idea of marriage is based on "relations between the sexes as a free and unconstrained exchange between equal partners" (Howarth, pp. 125-26) retains à tremendous topicality in the time of Women's Lib and the Equal Rights Amendment. Even though the Princess decides to seek refuge in the platonic "honnête amitié" rather than in an extra-marital relationship, it should be remembered that she is trying to escape many of the same inequalities of the familiar double standard imposed on the male/female relationship in society today. She argues with her lover:

Par vanité ou par goût, toutes les femmes souhaitent de vous attacher; il y en a peu à qui vous ne plaisiez; mon expérience me ferait croire qu'il n'y en a point à qui vous ne puissiez plaire. Je vous croirais toujours amoureux et aimé, et je ne me tromperais pas souvent; dans cet état, néanmoins, je n'aurais d'autre parti à prendre que celui de la souffrance; je ne sais même si j'oserais me plaindre. On fait des reproches à un amant; mais en fait-on à un mari? (Ashton, p. 176)

Mme de La Fayette's break with tradition is evident

well beyond the modern mother and feminist heroine. Psychological analysis was not unknown to La Fayette's readers when the Princesse appeared in 1678. D'Urfé's L'Astrée had already been reflecting over two decades (1607-1627) the tastes of the polished salon society which the preciosity had developed and which gave such a prominent place to the study of the psychology of love. But unlike the shapeless, episodic ramblings of d'Urfé and his successors, Mme de La Fayette narrowed her sights, offering instead "a detailed analysis of a single case, presented soberly and without the artificialities of the tradition prevailing in the novel" (Howarth, pp. 124-25). Nitze and Dargan credit her for substituting psychology for heroics, thereby literally salvaging the genre from near destruction by Clélie and its long-winded counterparts (Nitze and Dargan, p. 235).

According to Hyman,

the force released by Mme de La Fayette shattered the outdated mold of medievalism. . . . We see that force wielded by her descendants. The adulterous passions . . . of Madame Bovary . . . expire in despair. . . . Proust's world tortures itself with an unquenchable lust for possession. The supremacy of the individual is both the source and fatality of our civilization (Hyman, p. 22).

La Princesse de Clèves leaves no question at its conclusion as to the capability of that supremacy in its resolute,

unconventional, seventeenth century heroine.



## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

Mme de La Fayette early recognized the importance of psychology to the novel as a genre. This is what most critics claim is her unique contribution to French literature and, of course, it is also what qualifies her as a modern novelist. But there are many contemporary themes central to La Princesse de Clèves that speak more audibly perhaps to the twentieth century reader than to any other before him.

Serge Doubrovsky, essentially critical of the Princess' behavior and motivation, nonetheless offers a convincing analysis of the novel as it is appreciated by the existential critic. The closing paragraphs of his article are replete with references and comparisons to such modern men of letters as Sartre, Camus, and Nietzsche. And his conclusion is unmistakably in favor of the Princesse: "Les thèmes centraux du livre--l'échec de l'humanisme, l'impossibilité de l'amour, l'absence de Dieu, et le vertige du suicide--ont un accent des plus contemporains" (Doubrovsky,

p. 51).

Mme de La Fayette's work continues to stimulate today's scholars of the seventeenth century French novel to defend, define, and debate its merits. In spite of Doubrovsky's contention that there remains now only admiration for the Princesse where once there were curiosity and controversy (Doubrovsky, p. 36), scholarly articles and lengthier studies of the work are still appearing with surprising frequency. It is as though the "querelle de La Princesse de Clèves" were being perpetuated by an unmistakable affinity with our own time and its social and moral uncertainties. Mme de La Fayette was, of course, a remarkable observer of social, moral, as well as psychological truths. But more than this, La Princesse de Clèves presages the present. To ignore its affinity with our own age is to deny its greatness.

.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allentuch, Harriet Ray. "Pauline and the Princesse de Clèves." Modern Language Quarterly, 30, 171-82.
- Ashton, H. Madame de La Fayette, sa vie et ses oeuvres. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1922.
- Bailly, Auguste. L'Ecole classique française; les doctrines et les hommes. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1929.
- Bénichou, Paul. Man and Ethics; Studies in French Classicism. New York: Anchor Books, 1971.
- Bénichou, Paul. Morales du Grand Siècle. Paris: Gallimard, 1967.
- Carré, Marie-Rose. "La Rencontre inachevée: Etude sur la structure de La Princesse de Clèves." Modern Language Association, 87, No. 3 (May 1972), 475-82.
- Castex, Pierre and Paul Surer. Manuel des études littéraires françaises: XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1947.
- Cazamian, L. A History of French Literature. 4th ed. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965.
- Chardonne, Jacques. "Madame de La Fayette." Tableau de la littérature française, Vol. 2. France: Editions Gallimard, 1939, 112-14.
- De La Fayette, Madame. La Princesse de Clèves, intro. and notes by H. Ashton. New York: Scribner's, 1930.
- De La Fayette, Madame. Romans et nouvelles de Madame de La Fayette, notice par L. -S. Auger. Paris: Librairie Garnier Frères, n.d.

- De La Fayette, Madame. La Princesse de Clèves: Extraits, notices et notes par Maurice Favergeat. Paris: Classiques Larousse, n.d.
- De La Fayette, Madame. La Princesse de Clèves, ed. Benjamin F. Sledd and J. Hendren Gorrell. Boston: Ginn, 1896.
- Deloffre, Frédéric. La Nouvelle en France à l'âge classique. Paris: Didier, 1967.
- Descartes, René. Traité des passions de l'âme (1649), art. 50. Paris: Classiques Larousse, n.d.
- Doubrovsky, Serge. "La Princesse de Clèves: Une Interprétation existentielle." La Table Ronde, No. 138 (June 1959), 36-51.
- Doumic, René. Histoire de la littérature française. Paris: Librairie Classique Paul Delaplane, 1919.
- Gide, André. Reflections on Literature and Morality, ed. Justin O'Brien. Greenwich Editions of Meridian Books, 1959.
- Haig, Stirling. Madame de La Fayette. Twayne's World Author Series. New York: Twayne, 1970.
- Howarth, W. D. Life and Letters in France: The Seventeenth Century. London: Nelson, 1965.
- Hyman, Richard J. "The Virtuous Princesse de Clèves." French Review, 38, No. 1 (Oct. 1964), 15-22.
- Jones, Shirley. "Examples of Sensibility in the Late Seventeenth Century Feminine Novel in France." Modern Language Review, 61, 199-208.
- Kaplan, David. "The Lover's Test Theme in Cervantes and Mme de La Fayette." French Review, 26, 285-90.
- Kaps, Helen Karen. Moral Perspective in La Princesse de Clèves. Eugene, Ore.: Univ. of Oregon Books, 1968.
- Lagarde, André and Laurent Michard. XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle: Les Grands Auteurs français du programme. Collections Textes et Littérature. France: Bordas, 1964.

- Lawrence, Francis L. "La Princesse de Clèves Reconsidered." French Review, 39, No. 1 (Oct. 1965), 15-21.
- Maurois, André. Adrienne: The Life of the Marquise de La Fayette. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.
- Maurois, André. Seven Faces of Love. Garden City, N. Y.: Dolphin Books, 1962.
- Mille, Pierre. Le Roman Français. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1930.
- Mornet, Daniel. Histoire de la littérature française classique, 1660-1700. 3rd ed. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1947.
- Nitze, William A. and E. Preston Dargan. A History of French Literature. rev. ed. New York: Henry Holt, 1927.
- Nurse, Peter H. Classical Voices; Studies of Corneille, Racine, Molière, Mme de La Fayette. London: Harrap, 1971.
- Raitt, Janet. Mme de La Fayette and La Princesse de Clèves. London: Harrap, 1971.
- Saintsbury, George E. B. Essays on French Novelists. 2nd ed. London: Percival, 1891.
- Saisselin, Rémy G. The Rule of Reason and the Rules of the Heart. Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve, 1970.
- Scott, J. W. "Le Prince de Clèves." Modern Language Review, 52 (July 1957), 339-46.
- Seventeenth Century French Prose and Poetry, ed. Henri Peyre and Elliott M. Grant. Boston: Heath, 1937.
- Smith, Horatio. Masters of French Literature. New York: Scribner's, 1937.
- Sweetster, Marie-Odile. La Princesse de Clèves et son unité." Modern Language Association, 87, No. 3 (May 1972), 483-91.

- Tilley, Arthur Augustus. The Decline of the Age of Louis XIV. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1929, rpt. 1968.
- Turnell, Martin. The Novel in France. New York: New Directions, 1951.
- Updike, John. "Books: More Love in the Western World." New Yorker (Aug. 24, 1963), 90-104.
- Van Rutten, Pierre. "Style et signification dans La Princesse de Clèves." Français Monde, 56 (avril-mai 1968), 16-21.