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The language of Madame de Lafayette:

a study of the literary function of key-words

A thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Glasgow

by

John Campbell

April, 1979.

Volume I

I declare that this thesis has been entirely composed by myself, and has never previously been submitted for a Higher Degree at this or at any other University.

John Campbell,

Glasgow, April, 1979.

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Summary

The variety of critical opinions which continue to be held as to the significance of certain aspects of the fictional work of Mme de Lafayette creates a subsequent need to examine the lexical basis of the author's world-picture. This thesis is an attempt to clarify the meaning and function of some important word-groups in La Princesse de Montpensier, La Comtesse de Tende, Zafde and La Princesse de Clèves. The Introduction, having outlined the necessity for such a clarification, explains which terms are to be examined and sets out reasons for the choice of these words. Chapter One considers the group of terms relating to amour. It is found that the connotation of these words is usually restricted to that of a violent, irrational passion. They are shown to be associated with words describing danger, fear, suffering, bitterness, revenge and despair. This love is akin to civil war, bringing anarchy into self and society. The historical material interwoven with the fiction shows the same language being used in the same way, and with the same lesson: the world's rulers are ruled by love. Love-vocabulary is very often accompanied by terms connoting human weakness, while love is everywhere linked with a pattern of behaviour involving hypocrisy and deceit. In Madame de Lafayette's fiction only two characters, Bélasire and Mme de Clèves, successfully resist passion, and this, significantly, because they renounce the world. Chapter Two examines three particular word-groups associated with love in the works studied, and headed jalousie, violence and mal. It points out the frequency of words relating to jealousy and shows how jealousy is inseparable from love. Terms connoting violence are also associated with love to a degree which sets love firmly in a perspective of emotional and physical disorder. In addition, this passion dominates characters who for the most part lack all ethical bearings. The use of terms such as mal does not imply for them a sense of right and wrong, but it sometimes is suggested that love is a disease, through the association of words such as mal and maladie with amour. Chapter Three studies word-groups which deal with social aspects of passionate love, amitié, cour, mariage. Love is here

shown to be the sole arbiter of human relationships. Terms such as ami and amitié are part of the appearance of social life, but are proved to be meaningless, the more so in that what is important for a character is invariably concealed even from the person labelled his best friend. Friendship exists only as and when love permits. Equally, an examination of the set of terms connected with Court society shows how an apparent graciousness and brilliance conceals a poisonous reality, the daily intrigues and treacheries which love provokes. Nor does marriage ever offer a haven of mutual affection. The terms associated with this idea show it to be either a purely social institution, favouring adultery, or else a relationship fractured by jealousy and suspicion. Chapter Four is concerned with the lexical patterns formed by the vast number of terms relating to appearances, which are examined under the headings paraître, croire, catcher, vérité. Items of vocabulary constantly place the emphasis on the image given: the word paraître occurs over 150 times in La Princesse de Clèves alone. At the Court, parade is king, and to appear there is to appear other than one is. The falsity of appearances makes it inevitable that beliefs and opinions rarely reflect reality: a whole cluster of terms points to this parallel of appearance and illusion. In the depiction of this society of false images it is not surprising to find many terms denoting secrecy. This is the very atmosphere of the love-relationships in the works studied. In a society, therefore, where the choice is often between suspicion and illusion, terms connoting truth and certainty can have no more than an apparent meaning. Mme de Clèves's final certainty is necessarily one which rejects the images and illusions of the world of appearances. Chapter Five shows Mme de Lafayette's interest in the relationship between the image man projects and the dark passion within, investigating the implications of her use of terms such as trouble, surprise, voir and avouer. Terms of embarrassment and surprise emphasize the distance which separates appearance and reality in each character, and show to what extent the irrational power of love composes that reality. The frequency of visual terms suggests that, because the appearance is only an appearance, each character is constantly being scrutinized by all the others. This suggests that trust is only an appearance of trust. Though relationships

of trust, involving confiding, confessing, revealing, abound in the author's fiction, an examination of the vocabulary involved reveals that there is never an example of mutual trust, and that avowals are neither frank, spontaneous nor complete. One exception, Mme de Clèves's final declaration to Nemours, precedes withdrawal from a world in which sincerity is an empty word. The final chapter studies the terms réflexion, résolution, raison, vertu, repos, and shows that there is nothing in the use of these words to suggest the existence of values which enable characters to transcend the world of passion and appearances. Thus apparent human resources - lucidity, will, reason and ethical norms - are shown in most cases to have only the appearance of reality. The mind's role is usually limited to recording the progress of passion, while the will is strong only when it refuses any demonstration of its weakness. Ideals of reason, virtue and duty are seen to have no influence on the behaviour of most characters, despite an apparent acceptance of these ideals. In the case of Mme de Clèves, the ethical norms which gradually come into focus for her are shown to be incompatible with the society in which she lives. This refusal of the world is an essential element in her invocation of repos. The Conclusion underlines to what extent the world-picture which emerges from the different word-groups studied is a world of death, but shows how no hint of religious belief is involved in this rejection of the behaviour and values of human society.

Abbreviations

Mme de Lafayette is named throughout as ML. Her works are abbreviated as follows:-

<u>Corr.</u>	<u>Correspondance</u>
<u>CT</u>	<u>La Comtesse de Tende</u>
<u>HA</u>	<u>Histoire de Madame Henriette d'Angleterre</u>
<u>Mém.</u>	<u>Mémoires de la cour de France pour les années 1688-89</u>
<u>PC</u>	<u>La Princesse de Clèves</u>
<u>PM</u>	<u>La Princesse de Montpensier</u>
<u>Z</u>	<u>Zafde</u>

References to these works are given in full in
the Bibliography.

Introduction

In the conclusion to his magisterial examination of three hundred years of criticism of PC¹, J.W. Scott drew attention to the wide variety of critical disagreements aroused by this one short novel. What could be done, he asked, to reach for some sort of 'objective correlative'? His answer was to suggest a return to the text: 'En premier lieu l'on pourrait étudier à fond la langue et le style de l'oeuvre.'² One year before Jean Pommier had made a similar suggestion, prefacing his remarks with a quotation from Baudelaire: 'Pour deviner l'âme d'un poète... cherchons dans ses oeuvres quel est le mot ou quels sont les mots qui s'y représentent avec le plus de fréquence.'³ Emphasizing the need for lexical studies on Racine, Pommier cast his net wider: 'Aussi, nonobstant la différence des genres, ne serait-il pas déraisonnable d'étendre l'enquête à un roman comme la PC. Il conviendrait de relever, non seulement la présence ou l'absence, mais la fréquence relative des termes.'⁴

Almost twenty-five years later much work remains to be undertaken in the vast field of research suggested by Scott and Pommier. Critical divisions remain as sharp. In recent years readers of ML have not lacked the valuable but traditional kind of study, relying on biography and literary history.⁵ A shift away from this stance may perhaps be noted in Francillon's liminal declaration that his analysis of ML's works has been made 'à partir d'une critique interne de ses différents ouvrages.'⁶ But beyond purely lexical compilations⁷, short articles

(normally on PC alone)⁸, and Janine Kreiter's important thesis on the implications of a particular term⁹, there as yet exists no general work seeking to clarify the meaning and function of some of the terms which form the basic structure of ideas in the fictional work of ML.

Yet it seems futile, as Scott pointed out, to persist in critical controversy over, for example, amour or repos in PC, without first carrying out a study of the various levels of significance of these terms both throughout PC and, most importantly, in the other fictional works.¹⁰ This thesis is thus an attempt to clarify the meaning and function of some important terms in ML's fictional work. It has an essentially preliminary and corrective function. It may be regarded, first, as a very modest but necessary preface to what might be achieved on the broader canvas of a more general literary and cultural study. Second, it seeks to correct ideas of the text not rooted in the text, but based on the general ideas of literary history, impressionistic surveys, or the constraints of ideology. Corbinelli's aside to Bussy sounds a useful warning note in this respect: 'Je trouve qu'on se sert de mots dans la conversation qui, étant examinés, sont ordinairement équivoques, et qui, à force de les sasser, ne signifient point, dans la plupart des expressions, ce qu'il semble à tout le monde qu'ils doivent signifier.'¹¹

For this study the four *traditionnally-accepted* fictional works of ML have been chosen: PM, CT, Z, PC. La vie d'Henriette d'Angleterre was not retained for examination. Its character of personal and political memoirs places it apart from

the other works. In these fictional works, history is used - and where necessary invented - to form a convincing backcloth to the main plot, and to reiterate certain themes.¹² In these works the author creates a fictional world: in Henriette d'Angleterre she re-tells, from the inside, contemporary historical events.¹³ Neither Henriette d'Angleterre nor the Correspondance have of course been ignored, and references to them are made in the footnotes at appropriate moments.

Other works exist, the authorship of which has been accorded by some critics to ML. The hypotheses of these critics have been hotly contested.¹⁴ It has been judged unwise to embark on such controversies in this present study, and the works in question have not been examined along with the four already quoted. This is not to deny the interest of such an examination, if only to ascertain whether the works at issue have similar lexical characteristics to those generally admitted to the canon.

Three of the four texts chosen present no problems of chronology, and are examined in chronological order: PM(1662), Z(1670-1), PC(1678). CT, however, was published posthumously, in 1718.¹⁵ Much critical speculation has been given to dating the work precisely.¹⁶ The bare fact is, that no-one knows, even to within ten years. Once again, the wish not to enter into this well-worn controversy in this particular work has led to CT being studied after the other nouvelle, PM. The texts themselves are those of the edition given.¹⁷ Emendations, of words or phrases, suggested for these texts have been noted.¹⁸ Such

possible changes, however, do not change patterns which depend on many hundreds of examples.

The area of investigation has been limited to seventeen word-groups, labelled thus: Amour, Jalousie, Violence, Mal, Amitié, Cour, Epouser, Apparences, Trouble, Surprise, Voir, Avouer, Réflexion, Résolution, Raison, Vertu, Repos. These terms have been grouped into six chapters. Why these terms, and why such a grouping?

As some critics have already suggested¹⁹, and lexicographers confirmed²⁰, the two most significant word-groups in ML's fiction deal with Passion and Appearances. Around these two groups, entitled Amour (Chapter One) and Apparences (Chapter Four), all the other terms have been organized. The questions posed are straightforward. What is the meaning and function of words such as amour or paraître? With what other terms are they associated? What do terms such as, for example, galanterie or catcher imply for an understanding of ML's work as a whole? It will be admitted that it is difficult fully to understand Mme de Clèves's refusal of Nemours unless the idea of love is examined through the multitude of terms and associations through which it is expressed.

The same questions are asked in each word-group. These groups are chosen firstly because of their relationship to the two most important word-groups, Amour and Apparences. This gives a sense to the chapter headings. The other groups are chosen, secondly, because of the frequency with which certain terms recur (e.g. Voir), and/or

because of critical differences which an examination of the term in its various contexts might help to clarify (e.g. Repos). The terms chosen, while important in themselves, act often as a necessary focus for a wide semantic area, drawing together a number of related words. What is important in Voir, for example, is not one particular word, but the author's stress on the visual element.

The reasons for choosing each word-group can be summarized here:-

Chapter One: Passion. As stated above, terms connected with love recur with great frequency: love is at the very heart of ML's fiction, the basis of each plot and the centre of dramatic interest. Is it possible to determine a regular series of connotations of love in all these works?

Chapter Two: Aspects of Passion. Here are examined terms inseparably associated with love in ML's fiction, and significant enough to merit separate treatment. Why is jalousie such an important phenomenon? Why the recurrence of terms relating to violence? What is the significance of terms such as mal? (i.e. is moral comment being made?).

Chapter Three: Passion and Society. The nature of each plot draws attention to social aspects of passionate love. How does this love affect the ways in which characters relate to each other in society? Has a term like amitié any substance in such a society? What is the relationship between the public setting (Cour) and personal relationships? And between love and marriage (Epouser)?

Chapter Four: Appearances. As stated earlier, the theme of Appearances is, with Amcur, the dominant word-group in ML's works. This umbrella-term

covers four main strands of words, which could be labelled paraître, croire, cachez, vérité.

Chapter Five: Appearances and Reality. ML's continual use of terms such as trouble, surprise, voir and avouer (each naturally grouping similar words) shows her interest in the relationship between the social face of man and the reality of his passion. It is difficult, again, to discuss Mme de Clèves's aveu without studying a context where the problem of appearance and reality is ceaselessly touched on.

Chapter Six: Beyond Passion and Appearances? This section deals with terms which on the face of it suggest that, within ML's work, there are values which enable characters to transcend the world of passion and appearances outlined in the preceding chapters. Each term has given rise to critical differences. Do réflexion and the terms associated with it suggest the possibility of lucidity? Does the frequent use of terms such as résolution imply that characters can will to act against passion? Is ML, as one critic among many has put it, 'l'avocat de la raison'?²¹ What is the significance of the term raison in ML's works? What is the meaning and function of the various terms implying ethical values, such as vertu? And finally, can a meaning be assigned to repos, a word which is self-evidently important in PC, and which has led to many quite different interpretations?

Within the chapters described above, each section is ordered in a similar way. A short introduction, under (a), explains the reasons why this word-group has been chosen. A second part, under (b), provides a brief lexical introduction. Dictionary definitions are given for the main terms to be examined, and their pattern of associations

is outlined. The criterion of selection of these terms is thus association by connotation or collocation with the key-term chosen. Amour, for example, presents a semantic area of terms similar to amour such as passion, inclination, galanterie, and then the words associated in different contexts with these terms, such as vaincre, entraîner, s'abandonner. The main part of each section, under (c), is an examination of the meaning and function of these terms, in each one of the four works chosen, PM, CT, Z, PC. As far as possible, enough examples are selected to make clear how the terms are used, whether there is any variation in their use from one work to the next, and what their use implies within ML's work as a whole. 'Ceux qui ont l'esprit de discernement savent combien il y a de différences entre deux mots semblables, selon les lieux et les circonstances qui les accompagnent.'²²

It is certain that this thesis is not an exhaustive compilation, that it makes no claim to scientific linguistic method or universality, and that what is personal judgement for me may to others seem an arbitrary and idiosyncratic procedure.²³ But from the beginning this work has been guided by Scott's warning to those who, as he hopes, will study the text of ML's works: 'Dans toutes ces recherches il serait indispensable qu'on fasse acte de soumission au texte et qu'on se garde, dans la limite du possible, de tout esprit de système.'²⁴

It will therefore be for the reader to judge to what extent this work carries out its avowed intention, that of clarifying certain terms, from the text itself. The example of repos is a clear illustration of this point. Faced with the difficulties such

a term provides, some critics have sought to explain it from without the text, illustrating religious uses of the term²⁵, or going to Greek philosophy for an answer.²⁶ However tempting such a procedure may be, the object of this study is to examine a word such as repos and its associated terms in the various contexts in which they are used, in all the fictional work of ML, and to clarify its meaning and function in this light.

This thesis is therefore based entirely on the text, and with all the textual evidence presented is still one person's view of the text. This leads to obvious dangers. First, ML is not writing in a vacuum. Her preoccupations are those of her contemporaries. Her very vocabulary is part of a common cultural inheritance. Second, no-one can pretend now to be writing in a critical vacuum. A third danger, on the other side, is to interlard a textual study with too much outside material.

The solution to these problems was sought in the footnotes.²⁷ Here are placed appropriate comments from ML's contemporaries, showing in what way the language she uses and the problems she raises are mirrored in their writings too. In the footnotes, also, is placed modern critical support for points made in the text and on the text, or else, as in the case of highly controversial questions such as the aveu or repos, a range of viewpoints, with my own conclusions in the body of the text taking account of these.

The consigning of such 17th Century and modern material to the footnotes is in no way intended to undervalue their witness. But it does, one hopes, keep the main study as free from glosses as possible. No outside quotation must be allowed to obscure the main purpose of the thesis: to examine the meaning and function of certain key terms within the text itself.

Chapter One

PASSION - amour

AMCUR

a) Structurally and thematically, love is at the heart of ML's fictional works.¹ Structurally, each story follows the evolution of a love-relationship. Thematically, each page is marked by a desire to explore the world of love. It is inevitable, therefore, that critical attitudes will largely depend on an appreciation of the meaning and importance of passionate love in these texts.

b) Love is given many names. Not all of them are as transparent as amour: 'Se dit principalement de cette violente passion que la nature inspire aux jeunes de divers sexes pour se joindre.'²

Passion here has a limited meaning. It is not the general term of philosophers and moralists.³ With rare exceptions⁴ passion and amour are largely synonymous.⁵ Inclination, too, is used most often in the sense of 'love'.⁶ These terms are to be found in each of the four works. Only in Z is any overt distinction made between passion, inclination and amour, and that in a very few cases. Passion here indicates the most extreme degree of love: 'une passion qui ôte la raison à ceux qui en sont possédés...'⁷; 'il n'y avait qu'une passion qui pût assez aveugler...'⁸ This explains Bélasire's protest, where inclination is visibly something less than this passion: 'bien loin d'avoir eu de la passion, je n'ai même jamais eu d'inclination pour personne.'⁹ Such distinctions, however, are few and fleeting, perhaps inevitable in a novel which contains a debate on love which is worthy of Mlle de Scudéry. Within the work as a whole they are the exceptions which underline the normal connotations of the terms.

Galanterie is a term which occurs frequently only in PC.¹⁰ The senses of the term which do not connote different aspects of love are not to be found in ML. This narrowing of connotation reveals the author's interests: the exploration of human behaviour will be focused on passionate love and its consequences.

Despite this narrowing of connotation, the term galanterie is still difficult to pin down precisely. One aspect is that of the love-intrigue, of love as a kind of social game.¹¹ This sense is clear in Z, in Consalve's distinction between galanterie and real passion: 'Vous aimez, leur disais-je, ces sortes de galanteries que la coutume a établies en Espagne, mais vous n'aimez pas vos maîtresses.'¹² In PC the same term is used several times of the Vidame. When he admits ~~to~~ being accused 'd'avoir plusieurs galanteries à la fois'¹³, when he breaks off, to please the Queen, 'un commerce de galanterie'¹⁴, or when he is presented as 'également distingué dans la guerre et dans la galanterie'¹⁵, the term galanterie seems to connote this idea of love-intrigue, not necessarily serious. In this sense there is obviously control by will and mind.

A second aspect of galanterie must however be taken into account. The term may connote an illicit and serious love-relationship¹⁶, with dangerous consequences. This aspect is clear in Mme de Chartres's warnings to her daughter.¹⁷ No distinction is made here between galanterie and amour. Both are equated with danger and unhappiness. The same sense can also be found in CT: 'Cette trahison lui fit horreur. La honte et les malheurs d'une galanterie se présentèrent à son esprit; elle vit l'abîme où elle se précipitait.'¹⁸ This is no mere social game, at least not on both sides.

Chapelain put his finger on the ambiguity of the term: 'la galanterie est un terme équivoque qui signifie tantôt l'art de plaire aux dames pour s'en faire aimer, tantôt l'amour qu'on a pour elles sans amour et sans art.'¹⁹ In PC this ambiguity is only one element in a complex pattern of appearances and reality.²⁰ The term galanterie is

worn like a mask and can hide a simple fact: passionate love. Thus for all his apparent ability to flit from one love-relationship to another, the Vidame has to admit that 'je tenais à Mme de Thémis par une inclination naturelle que je ne pouvais vaincre.'²¹ The control by will and mind is purely nominal. Mme de Clèves asks, 'Veux-je m'engager dans une galanterie?'²² before admitting to being 'vaincue et surmontée par une inclination qui m'entraîne malgré moi.'²³ Can galanterie any longer be called a game?²⁴

'(In Mlle de Scudéry)...la galanterie est un jeu que l'on peut maîtriser...ML fait tomber les masques et la galanterie apparaît alors avec toutes ses douloureuses conséquences.'²⁵ The appearance may still be a game. The reality is often different. 'Quelle idée donne le mot de galanterie, l'idée de quelque chose d'agréable à l'esprit et aux sens; et cependant on couvre sous ce mot les plus grandes infamies.'²⁶ Bourdaloue asks how it can be possible to 'qualifier de simple galanterie un crime de cette conséquence.'²⁷ ML has given her own answer by inviting the reader to examine the reality behind the appearance. In reality, within the novel, galanterie is in the same semantic area as amour and passion. References to the term, however seemingly innocent, as in the first sentence of the novel²⁸, are inescapably associated with the reality of passionate love which the novel depicts.

Besides those terms already cited, there are many other nouns directly connoting love, e.g. liens,²⁹ attachement,³⁰ sentiment,³¹ penchant³², impression³³, and a variety of verbs, e.g. aimer³⁴, s'attacher³⁵, (s')engager³⁶, toucher³⁷. While some of these terms are to be found in PM, CT and Z, they all occur in PC, which has by far the richest selection

of love vocabulary. This includes adjectives and adverbs such as amoureux, passionné, tendre³⁸, aimable, passionnément, tendrement, ardement³⁹.

In all four works the above words are invariably associated with the idea of love's strength and man's weakness. The shortest of the four, CT, has naturally enough the least variety of such terms: (s')abandonner⁴⁰, céder⁴¹, se laisser surmonter⁴². PM contains these and a surprising number more, given its length: empire⁴³, force, maître, faiblesse⁴⁴, ne pouvoir. PM also contains the vocabulary of struggle linked to love (e.g. guerre civile, désordres⁴⁵), a theme which both novels have the space to develop (e.g. résister⁴⁶, (se)défendre, (s')arracher⁴⁷, combattre, s'opposer, obstacle.) This is of course a well-worn literary convention, as can be judged from a glance at, for example, love poetry since Petrarch.⁴⁸ But here the vocabulary inevitably associated with this struggle shows a marked emphasis on defeat, e.g. entraîner⁴⁹, dominer, conquête, vaincre, réduire⁵⁰, gouverner⁵¹, affaiblir. The reiterated malgré of PC chants the same theme. The crushing of man by the irrationality of passion is a constant reality, not just a literary convention. A constant in both novels, too, but especially in Z, is the emphasis on the mutability of love, e.g. infidélité⁵², légereté⁵³, inconstance⁵⁴, tromperie⁵⁵, trahison⁵⁶.

Suggested in PM and Z, it is in PC that the paradox of love is most completely outlined. For on the one hand love can be associated with terms such as plaisir, bonheur, joie, félicité, agrément, douceur, while it may not be unmingled with reconnaissance⁵⁷, respect⁵⁸, estime⁵⁹, honneur⁶⁰. But on the other hand such sentiments are never experienced or shared in any durable fashion. And love is invariably

linked with a plethora of terms connoting danger (e.g. danger, péril, précipice), fear (peur, Crainte, appréhension, inquiétude⁶¹) and suffering (épreuve, extrémité⁶², douleur, poison, peine, cruauté, maltraiter, souffrance⁶³, horreur.)

Finally, only in PC may be found a significant number of terms relating to a withdrawal from love, a withdrawal both physical (e.g. absence, éloignement, retraite⁶⁴) and moral (e.g. se détacher⁶⁵, indifférence⁶⁶, rigueur⁶⁷, sévérité, froideur, guérir⁶⁸). And only in the context of such a withdrawal may be found the word sûreté⁶⁹ in a non-physical sense. The idea of self-preservation is never associated with that of love.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

The opening lines of ML's first published fictional work indicate clearly the context in which she wishes to set passionate love:

'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 désordres⁷⁰ et d'en causer beaucoup dans son Empire.'⁷¹

From the beginning love is placed under the sign of violent disorder. The image recalls Nicole⁷² or Bourdaloue.⁷³ Love is assimilated to civil war. Its fruits are devastation and disintegration. Its Empire is the human personality and human relationships, its government neatly summarized by the single word déchirait. The whole course of the story illustrates the force and completeness of this tyranny. Of the main characters, not one escapes its hold. And this, whatever they say, think or resolve.

Though not the only victim of passion, Mme de Montpensier is the central one. She has resolved not to let her girlhood love for Guise revive, but when he gains fame, 'elle était bien aise de voir qu'il méritait les sentiments qu'elle avait eus pour lui.'⁷⁴ This last sentence provides an ambiguous contrast between past feelings ('sentiments qu'elle avait eus') and present satisfaction ('elle était bien aise'). It is suggested that a supposedly dead passion is lurking within Mme de Montpensier, beyond the reach of her conscious mind. From the outset love is presented as something over which she has no control.⁷⁵

Mme de Montpensier soon realizes that she is sensitive to the charms of Guise⁷⁶. When he declares his continuing love, her own passion silently re-surfaces: 'elle commença à sentir dans le fond de son coeur quelque chose de ce qui y avait été autrefois.'⁷⁷ Despite her avowed lack of interest, she is jealous. Soon she sees that 'elle prenait plus d'intérêt au duc de Guise qu'elle ne pensait.'⁷⁸ The language emphasizes how slowly the conscious mind registers the fact of love. The mind is the last on the scene.⁷⁹

Only now does Mme de Montpensier, stung by a jealous and wounded pride⁸⁰, try to rebuff Guise. She asks how he can dare 'faire l'amoureux d'une personne comme moi',⁸¹ and 'sur le fondement d'une faiblesse dont on a été capable à treize ans.'⁸² Is passion then merely an adolescent weakness, an indignity for someone 'comme moi', in her social position? If so, weakness and indignity are what she accepts. Her pretended rigour vanishes⁸³. Earlier she had declared that 'l'inclination qu'elle avait eue pour M. de Guise...était presque éteinte.'⁸⁴ With hindsight presque seems a clear sign of the insidious nature of passion. One is reminded of Mme de Sévigné's comparison of passion to a viper, stirring restlessly in the soul, most poisonous when most apparently dead.⁸⁵

Mme de Montpensier's resolutions are futile.⁸⁶ Even her jealous pique against Guise cannot keep the wolf of passion from the door.⁸⁷ The wolf is already within. It is ironic that she should scorn Marguerite de Valois's faiblesse for having fallen in love with Guise.⁸⁸ The irony becomes stridently apparent with Mme de Montpensier's own weakness. When Guise expresses a desire to visit her secretly by night, she makes a vain attempt to resist her passionate longing to see him.⁸⁹ Her confidant

Chabanes sees clearly how delusory this resistance is: 'votre passion est la plus forte.⁹⁰...vous ne délibérez plus que sur les moyens.'⁹¹

'La plus forte...' The language insists on the continuing irony of faiblesse. Mme de Montpensier believes for a moment that she can reverse her decision to invite Guise, but 'elle n'en eut pas la force.'⁹² She then imagines, with what is a certain degree of unconsciously ironic symbolism, that she only has to keep the castle drawbridge raised to prevent Guise's entry.⁹³ But when the hour comes, 'elle ne put résister davantage à l'envie de voir un amant qu'elle croyait si digne d'elle.'⁹⁴ A recent critic has pointed out the frequency of ne pouvoir constructions in PM and how they suggest the overwhelming power of passion.⁹⁵ The whole story of the Princesse de Montpensier's reawakening to love illustrates how passion, always lurking within, cannot be resisted.

A similar pattern can be traced elsewhere. The other characters are blinded and crushed by love. Chabanes is told by Mme de Montpensier that 'elle n'était capable que d'avoir du mépris pour ceux qui oseraient avoir de l'amour pour elle.'⁹⁶ The irony is all the greater because he believes her.⁹⁷ But he is powerless: 'il ne put se défendre de tant de charmes qu'il voyait tous les jours de si près. Il devint passionnément amoureux de cette princesse; et, quelque honte qu'il trouvât à se laisser surmonter, il fallut céder et l'aimer.'⁹⁸ Like an Atlantic breaker passion crashes on his head. 'Il ne put se défendre... charmes.⁹⁹ passionnément amoureux...se laisser surmonter...céder': each item of the language chants the weakness of man and the power of the passion which controls him.

Chabanes manages to keep up appearances for a year.¹⁰⁰

Then 'L'amour fit en lui ce qu'il fait en tous les autres; il lui donna l'envie de parler...'¹⁰¹ This rare authorial comment underlines the perspective in which love has been seen from the opening lines: as a tyrannical force which commands obedience. Ironically Mme de Montpensier, herself a victim, exults in the pouvoir which love gives her over Guise and Chabanes.¹⁰²

In fact, in order to persuade Mme de Montpensier 'combien la passion qu'il avait pour elle était sincère et désintéressée'¹⁰³, Chabanes goes from self-abnegation to self-humiliation. 'Comme sa passion était la plus extraordinaire du monde'¹⁰⁴, he even agrees to become the messenger for love-letters between his mistress and Guise. 'L'on est bien faible¹⁰⁵ quand on est amoureux.'¹⁰⁶ This second authorial comment is a pithy restatement of the story's central theme, and throws an ironic light on the 'passion...désintéressée' of Chabanes. Love comes without being asked, and obliges all to stoop low in its service. With love there can be no idea of human dignity based on the freedom to choose and the will to act. In these circumstances it is curious that some critics have accepted Chabanes's self-mutilation for love as proof of a sublime generosity.¹⁰⁷ The truth is that he submits without choosing to every humiliation, rather like Anjou, 'traité avec une rigueur étrange et capable de guérir toute autre passion que la sienne.'¹⁰⁸

This explains the irony of Montpensier's pathetic appeal to Chabanes, whom he assumes to have caught in adultery: 'Est-il possible qu'un homme que j'ai aimé si chèrement choisisse ma femme

entre toutes les autres femmes pour la séduire?'¹⁰⁹ In PK choisir and aimer are not in the same semantic area. It is perhaps significant that the idea of love is expressed three times by adorer.¹¹⁰ Chabanes does not so much séduire as to submit: 'L'on est bien faible quand on est amoureux.' When he discovers that Mme de Montpensier still loves Guise, he imagines that this will efface his own love for her.¹¹¹ But 'il trouva cette princesse si charmante...qu'il sentit qu'il l'aimait plus que jamais.'¹¹² The term liens is therefore more in this novel than the empty gesture of a traditional love-vocabulary.¹¹³ It is one of the many reminders of the opening image of love's Empire.¹¹⁴

Love being all-powerful, considerations other than love are seen to be minor: 'Le duc de Guise, ne connaissant plus de grandeur ni de bonne fortune que celle d'être aimé de la princesse...'¹¹⁵ Guise is well aware of the difficulties that face him if he follows the path of love. He falls out first with Anjou¹¹⁶ and then with the king¹¹⁷, refuses the possibility of a brilliant marriage so as to appease Mme de Montpensier's jealousy¹¹⁸, and hazards life and honour in a nocturnal visit to her bed-chamber. 'Je m'en vais faire pour vous ce que toute la puissance royale n'aurait pu obtenir de moi.'¹¹⁹ Just as faiblesse has been coupled with someone in love, true puissance is inevitably associated with love itself.

One of the many ironies of PK is the recurrence of the word joie in association with love.¹²⁰ Love promises happiness and fulfilment. Invariably it leads to bitterness and violence, and in the case of Mme de Montpensier herself, to disaster. 'Elle ne put résister à la douleur d'avoir perdu l'estime de son mari, le cœur de son amant et le plus parfait ami qui fut jamais. Elle mourut en peu de jours, dans

la fleur de son âge.¹²¹ Happiness is as some mocking shadow of love.

The substance is disgrace and death.

One final, bitter twist is given to this treatment of love. Guise, having wrecked three lives by his love for Mme de Montpensier, falls (the word seems exact) for the Marquise de Noirmoutier: 'il s'y attacha entièrement et l'aima avec une passion démesurée et qui dura jusqu'à la mort.'¹²² S'attacher...entièrement...démesurée: the violence and completeness of passion's hold is matched by its spontaneous, eruptive nature.¹²³ We have come full circle from the Empire, guerre civile and désordres of the first lines.

The terms connected with amour in PM present, therefore, a very sombre vision of man.¹²⁴ It is fitting that the story's historical events should lead up to the St. Bartholemew's Day Massacre.¹²⁵ Love, too, has been seen throughout as a bloody civil war. Passion is disorder, an irrational, blinding violence which in the name of joie sows hatred and division.¹²⁶

La Comtesse de Tende

This story is a short, bitter tale of passionate love. The author presents three love-relationships. Each one reinforces the most pessimistic view of man, as in PM.

The first of these is a case of cynical exploitation.

The penniless Navarre 'jeta les yeux sur la Princesse de Neufchâtel... comme sur une personne capable d'un attachement violent et propre à faire la fortune d'un homme comme lui.'¹²⁷ The contrast between fortune¹²⁸ and attachement violent is striking; on the one side calculation, on the other genuine passion. 'Dans cette vue il s'attacha à elle sans en être amoureux et attira son inclination.'¹²⁹

At first Mme de Neufchâtel 'n'était pas contente de la passion qu'il avait pour elle.'¹³⁰ But love sweeps her doubts aside and she decides to marry: 'La passion de la princesse surmonta enfin toutes ses irrésolutions.'¹³¹ The term surmonter translates the imperious character of love. Ironically, Navarre no longer wishes to conclude the match. He himself is caught up in the same kind of violent passion as Mme de Neufchâtel, and this for Mme de Tende. With bitterness his new wife realizes how love has blinded her: 'J'ai épousé un homme par passion...et celui que j'ai préféré à tout en aime une autre.'¹³² To her cost she has discovered the irrational and gratuitous nature of passion. The author presents love as erupting from nothing. In his relationship with Mme de Tende, Navarre passes very rapidly to the stage of 'une passion violente.'¹³³ There is no reason. Passion is a fact.

Mme de Tende, too, early discovers this gratuitous nature of love. At first she loves her new husband 'avec passion'¹³⁴, but 'il fut bientôt amoureux d'une autre.'¹³⁵ For the first and only time in the book, passion slowly drains away: 'elle fut occupée d'elle-même et guérit insensiblement de sa jalousie et de sa passion.'¹³⁶ Ironically, it is at this moment that her husband falls in love with her again, 'aussi

amoureux d'elle que si elle n'eût point été sa femme.'¹³⁷ Once again the stress is placed on the spontaneous combustion of passion, the more bizarre here in that Tende had already known his wife for some time. This strange husband-wife relationship serves to give a crude, ugly colouring to passion. When the husband obsessively tries to conquer his wife and is spurned, he cites his marital droits¹³⁸ to back up his claim. Mme de Tende is filled with cold rage, 'blessée et offensée.'¹³⁹ On the one side there is the wounded spite of sécheresse¹⁴⁰, on the other a haughty dureté.¹⁴¹ One critic has suggested that such harshness cannot be love.¹⁴² What seems apparent is that for the author love is no sweet rose. A second ironic reversal in this relationship comes when Mme de Tende discovers that her lover Navarre has made her pregnant. Where before she had opposed her husband's advances 'avec une force et une aigreur qui allaient jusqu'au mépris'¹⁴³, she now looks forward to her husband's expected return.¹⁴⁴ 'Love' has become for her a mechanism to save face, and to preserve her love-relationship with Navarre.

When Tende learns of his wife's adultery, he becomes violently and revengefully jealous. And yet 'il sentait encore, malgré lui, une douleur où la tendresse¹⁴⁵ avait quelque part.'¹⁴⁶ Love - but tendresse is not tenderness - cohabits with jealousy and bloodthirsty spite: 'il ne songea qu'à faire mourir sa femme.'¹⁴⁷ Nothing could more strikingly underline the totally irrational nature of passion, than this set of contradictory fears, desires and obsessions.¹⁴⁸

Mme de Tende's love for Navarre begins when she realizes

that he has fallen in love with her: 'elle se sentit un amour violent pour lui.'¹⁴⁹ Self-interest seems at first to check this love. Navarre sees that it will spoil his lucrative marriage-plans, and his feelings are divided 'entre l'amour et l'ambition.'¹⁵⁰ Mme de Tende is not blind to 'la honte et les malheurs d'une galanterie',¹⁵¹ or 'l'abîme où elle se précipitait.'¹⁵² So he 'ne s'y abandonna pas d'abord'¹⁵³, and she 'résolue de l'éviter.'¹⁵⁴ Even with self-interest at stake, however, resistance to passion is short-lived, both with Mme de Tende¹⁵⁵ and with Navarre, who 'devint éperdument amoureux de la comtesse.'¹⁵⁶ She may plead with him not to forgo his prospects of fortune and to renounce 'une passion aussi déraisonnable'¹⁵⁷, but at the same time she assures him that 'Vous aurez mon coeur.'¹⁵⁸ They are in the grip of something which leaves them no choice.

From this moment on the story illustrates above all the overwhelming power of passion. Everything else - marriage, fortune, friendship, reputation - is sacrificed to this exclusive love. Navarre is willing to throw away his chance to become rich by marriage.¹⁵⁹ 'Il lui témoignait de l'indifférence pour tout, hors d'être aimé par elle.'¹⁶⁰ He enters into love as into religious vows: 'Je renonce à tout le reste.'¹⁶¹ This tout le reste includes fidelity to his new wife and the trust of his friend Tende; neither of these will stand in his way. On his very wedding-night he can then leave his wife and write 'je ne pense qu'à vous'¹⁶² to a mistress who is his whole raison d'être. The various difficulties which Mme de Tende and he encounter only increase their inter-dependence, to the exclusion of all else.¹⁶³

The author summarizes this chapter of passionate fury

in another rare aphorism: 'L'on cède aisément à ce qui plaît.'¹⁶⁴ Aimer and céder are one and the same movement. But if love is a quest for pleasure, the conclusion is bitterly ironic. Navarre having been killed, his pregnant mistress is left exposed to the wrath of a vengeful husband: 'Son âme était...noyée dans l'affliction...'¹⁶⁵;...elle ne voyait de remède à ses malheurs que par la fin de sa malheureuse vie.'¹⁶⁶

This illustration of love's progress is thus, once more, darkly pessimistic.¹⁶⁷ The cause of passion is gratuitous, its eruption spontaneous, its control absolute. Everything else is sacrificed for something which leads to emptiness and death. Mme de Tende's still-born child is a symbolic representation of passion's fruit. Is the author saying anything fundamentally different from the sternest moralists of the time?¹⁶⁸

Zafde

However much Z may differ structurally from the other works, passionate love still remains its centre of interest.¹⁶⁹ The exotic setting, coincidences, non-linear narrative sequence and other trappings of earlier prose fiction do not alter the author's vision of passion as a dark destroyer, weaving its deceits within and between men.¹⁷⁰ In Z battles are fought against the hoors. But the real enemy is love.

Z is exceptional among ML's works for containing an open debate about the nature of love, of the sort that Mlle de Scudéry interspersed throughout her prose fiction. The question at issue is a favourite one: is love blind or is it based on esteem?¹⁷¹ Consalve and Don Garcie expose directly conflicting views. Like Clélie¹⁷², Consalve preaches l'amour-estime. His ideal is to 'n'aimer qu'une personne que je connaîtrai assez pour être assuré de trouver en elle de quoi me rendre heureux quand j'en serai aimé.'¹⁷³ For Don Garcie such relationships, if indeed they exist, have nothing to do with love.¹⁷⁴ As with Horace in Clélie,¹⁷⁵ passion for him is something spontaneous and irrational: 'si je ne suis surpris d'abord, je ne peux être touché.'¹⁷⁶ Passion is not of the same order as knowledge: 'Je crois que les inclinations naturelles se font sentir dans les premiers moments, et les passions, qui ne viennent que par le temps, ne se peuvent appeler de véritables passions.'¹⁷⁷

The debate between Consalve and Don Garcie is of the utmost importance, not only in the context of Z but for the whole of ML's thought. It is true that such debates are commonplace in 17th Century prose fiction.¹⁷⁸ But what happens in the narrative, especially to the sceptical Consalve, is a clear indication that for the author no real debate is possible. Love here is as Don Garcie described it, a violent and spontaneous passion which needs neither knowledge nor respect to burst into sudden flame¹⁷⁹: 'j'adore Zafde, dont je ne connais rien, sinon qu'elle est belle.'¹⁸⁰ Passion is as strong as the will is weak. The real pouvoir is shown to be passionate love.¹⁸¹ Consalve is, inevitably, undecieved. He meets Mugna Fella and 'il s'alluma entre nous une passion qui fut depuis très violente.'¹⁸² Despite his past strictures, he now bows to a superior force: 'mon âme s'y abandonnait.'¹⁸³ Neither knowledge nor esteem are

present at the surrender. This gives a certain irony to the king's command that Consalve and Mugna Bella should, as though it were simple, 'ne plus penser l'un à l'autre.'¹⁸⁴

Nugna Bella deceives Consalve. When he finally realizes to what extent, he determines 'par une retraite entière, me dérober...au dangereux pouvoir des femmes.'¹⁸⁵ Already the thesis of Don Garcie has gained acceptance. Pouvoir has become dangereux pouvoir. Consalve sees that there is no way of resisting passion, and that knowledge and love are not of the same species: 'on ne connaît point les femmes, elles ne se connaissent point elles-mêmes, et ce sont les occasions qui décident des sentiments de leur coeur.'¹⁸⁶

Consalve is now far from his original viewpoint. He doubts the very possibility of a balanced, reasonable relationship between man and woman. Ironically, for a past theoretician of love based on knowledge of the other person, when he meets Zaïde it is love at first sight. The terms charmer¹⁸⁷ and surprendre¹⁸⁸ provide the key to his experience, which is similar to that which Don Garcie has outlined, and he himself refuted. He now finds himself acting 'avec cet empressement que l'on a pour les choses qui nous surprennent et qui nous charment.'¹⁸⁹ He knows what lies in store for those who surrender to passion: 'je ne regarderai ses charmes que comme une chose dont elle ne se servira que pour faire plus de trahisons et plus de misérables.'¹⁹⁰ But neither lucidity nor resolution influence passion: 'que je suis faible!'¹⁹¹

The time has come to admit the truth of what Don Garcie has said:

'Ah! Don Garcie, vous aviez raison; il n'y a de passions que ceux qui

nous frappent d'abord et nous surprennent; les autres ne sont que des liaisons où nous portons volontairement notre coeur. Les véritables inclinations nous l'arrachent malgré nous et l'amour que j'ai pour Zaïde est un torrent qui m'entraîne sans me laisser un moment le pouvoir d'y résister.'¹⁹²

The vocabulary here develops the theme, already illustrated largely in PM, which is suggested by 'que je suis faible!' Passion is seen to be spontaneous and gratuitous (frapper...surprendre), free choice a fiction (arracher malgré nous...torrent), and resistance futile (entraîner...sans...le pouvoir d'y résister.) Passion alone decides, with the numbed mind a spectator, and the firmest resolution a piece of history. Remorse comes later to Consalve¹⁹³, but this does not influence the course of his passion. Don Garcie at least cannot be disillusioned, when he himself cannot resist the love he feels for Hermensilde, even if this means deceiving Consalve: 'il avait fait ce qu'il avait pu pour s'en défendre.'¹⁹⁴ Alongside terms such as torrent and entraîner, the ce qu'il avait pu does not count for much.

Passion is viewed in this same perspective with all the characters of the novel. Unlike Consalve, Alphonse knows that when love comes, 'il était difficile de se garantir de le désirer.'¹⁹⁵ Bélasire, though previously untouched by love, is caught up in a 'violente passion'¹⁹⁶ which leaves her no longer 'maîtresse d'elle-même' and with 'des sentiments sur quoi elle n'avait point de pouvoir.'¹⁹⁷ Alphonse becomes 'amoureux sans le savoir.'¹⁹⁸ They both know that passion can lead to disaster.¹⁹⁹ But the passion which drives them on is 'si forte qu'aussitôt que nous nous étions quittés nous ne pensions plus qu'à nous revoir.'²⁰⁰ Terms such as pouvoir and forte show where the real power lies. Only when disaster comes, in the shape of Alphonse's neurotic jealousy, can Bélasire react to passion,

by choosing a total retreat from the world: 'le seul parti que je prends me pouvait mettre en sûreté contre l'inclination que j'ai pour vous.'²⁰¹

Indeed, Bélasire is unique among the characters of Z in her final refusal of passion. But her very refusal demonstrates passion's strength; she must leave the world in order not to succumb to her overpowering love for a jealous maniac. And at every moment she feels herself 'prête à vous parler et à vous dire que je ne pouvais vivre sans vous.'²⁰²

'Avons-nous du pouvoir sur le commencement ni sur la fin de nos passions?'²⁰³ Nugna Bella's plaintive question echoes round the whole of ML's work.²⁰⁴ Don Ramire's reply is also an expression of what is enacted throughout Z: 'Vous avez raison, Madame... nous ne pouvons rien sur nos passions; j'en sens une qui m'entraîne sans que je m'en puisse défendre....; il ne dépend pas de nous d'y résister.'²⁰⁵ Once more the language is of brutal attack and immediate submission: ne pouvoir rien...entraîner...sans pouvoir me défendre...ne pas résister. Love, previously seen as a rushing torrent carrying everything with it, now bears the image of a rapacious enemy which seizes the citadel of the heart before the worthy citizens - friendship, honour, respect - have the time to react. Thus Don Ramire, in order to pursue his love for Nugna Bella, must gravely deceive his best friend, Consalve, who loves her as well. The decision has already been taken out of his hands: 'il trouva que son coeur était engagé...; enfin il connut son amour et qu'il avait commencé bien tard à le combattre.'²⁰⁶ The same is true of Nugna Bella's treachery: 'elle était déjà engagée, et par son coeur, et par ses paroles quand elle crut s'y déterminer.'²⁰⁷

'Avons-nous du pouvoir sur le commencement ni sur

la fin de nos passions?' Time and again in Z this theme returns. It acts as one of the focal points of the text, giving it thematically what it lacks structurally, a unity and strength. One by one Naria,²⁰⁸ Zoromade²⁰⁹ and Elsí/béry²¹⁰ fall victim to this all-devouring passion. Even the slave Zabelec, whose past experiences have left her no illusions about the infidelities of men²¹¹, cannot advise her companion Elsí/béry to resist her passion for Alamir: 'je sais, par une cruelle expérience, combien il est inutile de s'opposer à ces sortes de sentiments; mais je la plains...'²¹² No-one has power enough against the pouvoir of passion.²¹³

At first sight Alamir seems to be an exception to this general rule. All his life he has played at love as at a game, the pleasure being in proportion to the height of the obstacle to be cleared.²¹⁴ Now, suddenly, 'la beauté de Zaïde, sans le secours de l'espérance, l'entraîna entièrement.'²¹⁵ It is as though his whole nerve-centre were paralysed: 'l'amour n'a jamais eu de pouvoir sur moi qu'autant que j'ai voulu lui en donner... et il faut qu'(e) il me domine avec un empire si absolu qu'il ne me reste aucun pouvoir de me dégager.'²¹⁶ The terms used once more underline the central harmonizing theme of the text. Man is weak, and weakest at the heart of his strongest desires (entraîner... pouvoir). Freedom and strength are illusions (dominer... empire absolu). A 'dark power'²¹⁷ rises to control the soul. No amount of previous disillusionment about love can prevent the citadel from falling: 'il trouva de la honte à lui avouer qu'il était encore amoureux après avoir été si maltraité par l'amour.'²¹⁸

In Z, as in the previous works, passion is seen to involve, by its nature, trahisons²¹⁹ and infidélités.²²⁰ Concalve speaks

bitterly of being 'trompé, trahi et abandonné de tout ce qu'on aimait davantage.'²²¹ He seeks an explanation in 'la légèreté des femmes.'²²² Men and women are alternatively criticized for their faiblesses²²³ and tromperies.²²⁴ Passion and trust are mutually exclusive. Thus Alphonse speaks of having experienced 'tout ce que l'infidélité et l'inconstance des femmes peuvent faire souffrir de plus douloureux.'²²⁵ And Almaric can persuade the helpless Maria of 'une fidélité éternelle'²²⁶ at the very moment he is losing interest in her. Love's promises have only 'un charme trompeur et inévitable.'²²⁷

Another aspect of love which the author underlines is its curiously egocentric character. It is never viewed as the marriage of true minds, but always seen in terms of conquest and personal satisfaction. Don Ramire proclaims that 'ma gloire et mon amour se trouveraient satisfaits d'avoir été une maîtresse à un rival.'²²⁸ Nugna Bella sees the gaining of Consalve's love as a step up the social ladder.²²⁹ As for Alphonse, he is encouraged by the fact that Bélasire has never yet fallen into the trap of love: 'cette impossibilité dont on me parlait me fit imaginer quelque plaisir à la surmonter'²³⁰; 'je fus frappé dans ce moment du désir d'avoir la gloire de toucher ce coeur que tout le monde croyait insensible.'²³¹ It is suggested, too, that love can mingle easily with the basest emotions: 'C'était un tel charme pour sa gloire et pour son amour d'avoir détruit un rival tel que je lui paraissais...'²³² Even Consalve, caught up completely in his passion for Zaïde, finds irresistible the call of the ego: 'Son amour, sa jalousie et sa gloire ne pouvait se satisfaire d'une inclination qu'il n'avait pas fait naître.'²³³ Passionate love is never seen to enhance human nature.²³⁴

Here we are brought far from the world of Madeleine de Scudéry, where love can be innocent and ennobling.²³⁵ Yet this same lady, though many years after her novels, outlined what is the strange paradox of passion: love, which destroys, is sought as the essence of life itself.²³⁶ Thus, in the same perspective, for Consalve the love of Zaïde is 'un bonheur sans lequel il m'est impossible de vivre.'²³⁷ Compared with this love, military exploits²³⁸ and public renown²³⁹ mean nothing to him. Don Garcie finds that the love of Hermenesilde becomes his only aim, an aim which must be pursued even if all else is wrecked.²⁴⁰

One cannot then be fooled by the 'happy end', the conventional end of that part of Z which is conventional intrigue.²⁴¹ The author's view of passion, throughout, is unrelievedly bleak. Love is almost seen as an addictive drug, save that it is not sought, but thrust upon the person, till no life becomes worth living without it. But with it, no life is really worth living either. Few ironies could be more bitter, few commentaries on human nature more pessimistic.²⁴²

La Princesse de Clèves

The very variety of terms relating to love indicates its omnipresence in PC. The central structure of the novel is organized around the theme that passion totally subverts a world where appearance and reality only too rarely coincide. From the opening sentence the whole work is placed under the sign of galanterie.

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From such historians as Brantôme, Mézeray, Matthieu and Le Labourcur, the author has selected detail in such a way as to make passionate love the hidden driving force of kings and courtiers.²⁴³ PC is a 'historical novel' in so far as the author uses history to show that passionate love has always ruled the affairs of men.²⁴⁴

Henri II, Henry VIII and François I are three historical figures seen in this perspective.²⁴⁵ The treatment of the first king's relationship with Mme de Valentinois is an obvious example of this interplay of passion and history. At the outset the author presents a king who has had the same violent passion for his mistress for twenty years and more²⁴⁶: 'elle le gouvernait avec un empire si absolu que l'on peut dire qu'elle était maîtresse de sa personne et de l'Etat.'²⁴⁷ She has a 'pouvoir...absolu'²⁴⁸, she is 'maîtresse absolue de toutes choses.'²⁴⁹ The vocabulary ironically reflects the absolutism of which the monarch is victim. Empire and pouvoir continue a theme which has been present since the opening lines of ML's first fictional work.

This royal submission to love is not exceptional. The other minor characters of the novel reflect the total dominance of passion. Guise, for example, is so stricken by his failure to break down Mme de Clèves's resistance to his love, that he finally leaves the Court and attempts to storm Rhodes instead.²⁵⁰ The author uses the historical event and invents the motivation: 'ce fut en la voyant souvent qu'il prit le commencement de cette malheureuse passion qui lui ôta la raison et qui lui coûta enfin la vie.'²⁵¹

In the course of the novel passion comes to imply

promiscuity, deception, hypocrisy; all the so-called 'digressions' serve to reinforce this point.²⁵² Mme de Tournon pretends to lead a life of the strictest seclusion²⁵³; all the time she is having an affair with Sancerre.²⁵⁴ She professes her deepest feelings of love to Sancerre²⁵⁵, while having a truly passionate relationship with Estouteville, one of Sancerre's best friends.²⁵⁶ The term 'treachery' seems an understatement for the kind of deception which these interlocking love-relationships have entailed. Ironically, even the revelation of Mme de Tournon's deception cannot take away from Sancerre the love he feels for her still.²⁵⁷ Love is stronger than the disgust it can arouse.²⁵⁸

Other peripheral episodes show passion as a dark force which moves men to every kind of deceit. For example, however much the Vidame might enjoy the prestige of his ambiguous liaison with the Queen²⁵⁹, he cannot give up his mistress: 'Je tenais à Mme de Thémis par une inclination naturelle que je ne pouvais vaincre.'²⁶⁰ Like Mme de Tournon, he promises total fidelity: and like her, he is totally unfaithful. Even when one mistress leaves him, this does not attach him any more to the Queen, since he falls in love with someone else. 'On n'est pas amoureux par sa volonté.'²⁶¹ In the Vidame's aside on the powerlessness of will in the face of passion, a whole idea of man's dignity is denied.

Ironically, though seeming to defend such an idea, Mme de Chartres subverts it in her turn. She expects her daughter to conquer passion by an act of the will: 'ne craignez pas de prendre des partis trop rudes et trop difficiles...'²⁶²; 'il faut de grands efforts et de grandes violences pour vous retenir.'²⁶³ But her very insistence

on the force and dangers of love helps to accredit the idea of the will's weakness. Unlike other mothers, she talks about love to her daughter:²⁶⁴

'elle lui montrait ce qu'il y a d'agréable pour la persuader plus aisément sur ce qu'elle lui en apprenait de dangereux.'²⁶⁵ The pleasant side of love is seen as a trick, an allurement. Her young daughter is told what the pleasure hides: 'elle lui contait le peu de sincérité des hommes, leurs tromperies et leur infidélité, les malheurs domestiques où plongent les engagements.'²⁶⁶ From the very beginning Mme de Chartres stresses the difficulty of resisting love,²⁶⁷ as well as the deception it involves (peu de sincérité...tromperies...infidélité) and the anguish it inevitably brings (malheurs). Her vision is no different from that of the novel as a whole, or from that of the previous works.²⁶⁸

There are, however, some contradictions in Mme de Chartres's attitude. She is glad to see that her daughter has not fallen in love with M. de Clèves²⁶⁹, yet encourages her attachment to him in order that her young virtue might be safeguarded.²⁷⁰ Married love is implicitly condemned, but the institution of marriage is praised as offering social protection from love. In both cases passion lurks behind as the guilty, powerful force which must be resisted. Another paradox in the mother's attitude has been neatly summarized: 'There is something contradictory in Mme de Chartres's desire to see her daughter a dazzling social success, while at the same time urging her to abstain from following patterns of behaviour admitted and even encouraged by society.'²⁷¹

One after another Clèves, Guise, Anville and Nemours are attracted by the very physical, intellectual and moral qualities which Mme de Chartres has so assiduously cultivated in her daughter.²⁷² This cannot fail to be a source of later conflict.²⁷³

Mme de Chartres's attitude to love is central to the narrative structure of the novel, and to its structure of ideas. The education of her daughter, the presentation of her at Court, the attempts to find an acceptable marriage-partner and the death-bed speech, are all critical moments in the life of the young Princess. The memory of that final speech, together with the education she has received, obviously influence Mme de Clèves's reaction to Nemours. In the last analysis Mme de Chartres's attitude to love is that with which the novel as a whole is coloured. Her death-bed speech treats her daughter's passion for Nemours in terms: such as péril,²⁷⁴ sur le bord du précipice,²⁷⁵ les malheurs d'une galanterie.²⁷⁶ For Mme de Chartres death is preferable to passionate love.²⁷⁷ Nothing in the novel, or in the previous works, belies this final statement of belief.

It is in this perspective of an omnipresent, violent and all-powerful passion that the relationships of the main characters evolve. Clèves's love for the young Mlle de Chartres is as sudden and irrational as all the other examples of passion in the novel.²⁷⁸ As with both Nemours and Mme de Clèves, it is love at first sight²⁷⁹, a love so powerful that, though he seeks to marry her, 'il eût préféré le bonheur de lui plaire à la certitude de l'épouser sans en être aimé.'²⁸⁰ He deceives himself that Mlle de Chartres's reconnaissance is love.²⁸¹ He is so 'éperdument amoureux' that 'il se flatta d'une partie de ce qu'il souhaitait.'²⁸² Love and self-deception are inseparable. Only after their engagement does he realize the distance separating inclination²⁸³ from the reconnaissance and estime²⁸⁴, the sorte de bonté²⁸⁵, his wife feels for him. She has not been swept by the relentless force of passion: 'Je ne touche ni votre inclination, ni votre cœur, et ma présence ne vous

donne ni de plaisir, ni de trouble.'²⁸⁶ Conjugal privilèges²⁸⁷ do not give him access to his wife's heart.²⁸⁸ She has 'ni impatience, ni inquiétude, ni chagrin'²⁸⁹ in her attachment to him.

Clèves's fatal illusion is contained in ~~embryo~~ these last phrases. For he sees that passionate love must entail an emotional, irrational pattern of behaviour, not answerable to the will's beckoning (impatience²⁹⁰...inquiétude...chagrin²⁹¹...plaisir...trouble.) He himself experiences for his wife 'une passion violente et inquiète qui troublait sa joie.'²⁹² Yet the whole burden of his complaint to her is that she does not love him in this way, and later, that she is passionately in love with Nemours, as though the love which he knows and wants to be spontaneous and irrational could depend on the efforts of mind and will. This fundamental self-delusion will inevitably lead Clèves to his doom.

After his wife's avowal of her passion for another man, his own love does not diminish.²⁹³ If anything, jealousy makes him more keenly aware of it. His abiding obsession is his wife's refusal of his love: 'je n'ai jamais pu vous donner de l'amour...'²⁹⁴; 'je ne suis affligé que de vous voir pour un autre des sentiments que je n'ai pu vous donner.'²⁹⁵ The repetition of donner stresses the extent of this self-deception. He asks that his wife might restrain her own passion for Nemours²⁹⁶, and that she might love him rather than Nemours because he has 'une passion plus tendre'²⁹⁷ et plus violente que celui que votre coeur lui préfère.'²⁹⁸ Préférer continues the logic of donner. The supposition is that this wild irrational force which has seized them both is answerable to reason or can be tempered by free-will.

The irony of the situation is all too patent and painful. Clèves is lost in the blind unreason of jealousy and wounded pride.²⁹⁹ Yet he demands rational choices from a partner equally held in passion's grip. Only when jealousy takes a complete hold of him does he despair of his wife overcoming her love for Nemours.³⁰⁰ His despair is as intense as his love: 'Vous êtes ma femme, je vous aime comme ma maîtresse.'³⁰¹

Clèves is hounded into an early grave by a jealousy inseparable from the passionate love he has always had for his wife. In his downfall we are given yet another insight into the volatile, destructive force of passion: 'je n'ai que des sentiments violents et incertains dont je ne suis pas le maître...'³⁰²; 'je vous adore, je vous hais...'³⁰³; 'il n'y a plus en moi ni de calme ni de raison...'³⁰⁴; 'je vous aimais jusqu'à être bien aise d'être trompé.'³⁰⁵ Until the very end there persists in Clèves the burning delusion that his wife has consciously refused him: 'Enfin, je méritais votre coeur.'³⁰⁶ The irony is keen: aimer and mériter are worlds which touch only by accident. It little matters that Clèves's love is 'véritable et légitime.'³⁰⁷ Only with his last breath does he seem to admit that his wife has been powerless in the face of love. He begs to have the consolation of thinking that 's'il eût dépendu de vous, vous eussiez eu pour moi les sentiments que vous avez pour un autre.'³⁰⁸ S'il eût dépendu de vous: the admission is too late. His own passion has made him unable to understand what passion is.

The novel's obvious embodiment of passionate love is Nemours. From the first encounter, he has for Mme de Clèves 'une

inclination violente'³⁰⁹ which seems only to increase in intensity;³¹⁰ in their final interview he declares 'une passion dont je ne suis plus le maître'³¹¹, a love which is 'la plus véritable et la plus violente qui sera jamais.'³¹² Indeed, what is striking in the characterization of Nemours is how he abandons all else to pursue this one love. He has the reputation of a Don Juan, and the disposition:³¹³ 'ainsi il avait plusieurs maîtresses.'³¹⁴ These other affairs he lets drop, to the astonishment of a Court which knows him to be a womanizer: 'La passion de M. de Nemours pour Mme de Clèves fut d'abord si violente qu'elle lui ôta le goût et même le souvenir de toutes les personnes qu'il avait aimées.'³¹⁵

The author stresses continually how Nemours has channelled his whole life's energy into seeing his love fulfilled. For this he surrenders Court influence, a close relationship with the Dauphine and the chance of marrying Elizabeth of England.³¹⁶ He begins to live 'fort retiré du commerce'³¹⁷ des femmes.'³¹⁸ No change could be more complete, from his having so many liaisons with women that 'il était difficile de deviner celle qu'il aimait véritablement.'³¹⁹ This total submission to one passion gives to the presentation of his personality an intensity and dynamism which seem to be that of love itself.

Thus what will be Nemours's singleminded pursuit of Mme de Clèves is perhaps already implicit in the introductory portrait of him: 'peu de celles à qui il s'était attaché, se pouvaient vanter de lui avoir résisté.'³²⁰ Henceforth Nemours's love is seen in terms such as résister which imply attack and continual pressure. The manner of his first encounter with Mme de Clèves, at a Court ball, is symbolic: '(il) passait par-dessus quelques sièges pour arriver où l'on dansait.'³²¹

The same kind of symbolism is present when he breaks into Mme de Clèves's garden at Coulommiers: 'Les palissades étaient fort hautes, et il y en avait encore derrière, pour empêcher qu'on pût entrer....M. de Nemours en vint à bout néanmoins.'³²² He exerts unbroken pressure: 'il ne laissait échapper aucune occasion de voir Mme de Clèves.'³²³ This prompts an understandable suspicion on her part: 'je crois même que les obstacles ont fait votre constance. Vous en avez assez trouvé pour vous animer à vaincre.'³²⁴

It is not difficult to share the suspicion. Nemours's love has an egoistical, triumphalist colouring: 'Il sentait tout ce que la passion peut faire sentir de plus agréable; il aimait la plus aimable personne de la Cour; il s'en faisait aimer malgré elle.'³²⁵ The term malgré elle shows how will and even a certain kind of desire are absent from Mme de Clèves's love. Nemours knows this, and persists; the shackles will be forced on. At one point he bitterly regrets having, by his tactical mistakes, given Mme de Clèves 'de meilleurs moyens pour se défendre contre moi que tous ceux qu'elle cherchait.'³²⁶ And he expresses open disbelief that she can, having at last admitted her love, resist him any longer: 'Hé! croyez-vous le pouvoir, madame?'³²⁷ He admits how pleasant it is, if not to have seen a quick surrender, 'd'avoir du moins donné la peur de l'aimer.'³²⁸ Her fear is a sign of triumph for his love.

It is also a sign of what kind of love it is: a pitiless quest for personal fulfilment, if necessary to the detriment of others. Nemours's love is thus no different in essence from passion as it is depicted in all of FL's works: self-seeking, ruthless, obeying only those rules which might hasten its success. Thus Nemours forgets

the interests of his friend the Vidame, leaving him to be disgraced at Court³²⁹; he attempts to destroy M. de Clèves's image in his wife's eyes, imputing to him a fault he has himself committed³³⁰; his sorrow for Clèves's illness, which he has indirectly caused, comes only from his sense that it might draw husband and wife together.³³¹ Indeed, 'l'extrémité du mal de M. de Clèves lui ouvrit de nouvelles espérances...Il ne pouvait soutenir cette pensée, tant elle lui donnait de trouble et de transports.'³³² At no moment does Nemours consider Mme de Clèves in any other light than that of an object to be won, whatever her own feelings might be.

This exclusive quest to satisfy passion is inseparable from feelings of pride that the most beautiful and virtuous lady at Court might soon fall to him: 'Il sentit pourtant un plaisir sensible³³³ de l'avoir réduite à cette extrémité. Il trouva de la gloire à s'être fait aimer d'une femme si différente de toutes celles de son sexe.'³³⁴ He cries out mentally to Mme de Clèves: 'Je sais mon bonheur; laissez m'en jouir.'³³⁵ Only her blind obstinacy, in his eyes, prevents him from acceding to a happiness which is his by right: 'Vous seule vous opposez à mon bonheur!³³⁶ ...'une pensée vaine et sans fondement vous empêchera de rendre heureux un homme que vous ne haïssez pas.'³³⁷

The character of Nemours is then very much the character of passionate love itself, as it is presented throughout the novel and the other works. He is the most handsome, talented and brilliant member of a glittering Court, and in every gesture seems to promise happiness to the woman who loves him: 'M. de Nemours avait un agrément dans toutes ses actions...Sitôt qu'elle le vit paraître au bout de la lice elle sentit une émotion³³⁸ extraordinaire.'³³⁹ Yet this love

is also a threat, overwhelming the whole personality of Mme de Clèves.

The image of Nemours is as confused for her as the disturbing, ambiguous phenomenon of love: 'Le discours de M. de Nemours lui plaisait et l'offensait quasi également.'³⁴⁰ He can be at one moment indigne of her love³⁴¹, at another 'digne d'être aimé par son seul attachement.'³⁴² She only has to think that Nemours's charme³⁴³ is winning her over despite herself and 'il s'en fallait peu qu'elle ne crût le haïr par la douleur que lui donnait cette pensée.'³⁴⁴ Passion, as expressed in Nemours, gives Mme de Clèves 'un trouble confus, dont elle ne savait pas même la cause.'³⁴⁵ It creates an area of darkness within her. She is torn between the desire to fulfil her love and her complex fear of what this love is. Sometimes Nemours seems to her admirably self-sacrificing.³⁴⁶ At other moments he is seen as the ruthless womanizer of old.³⁴⁷ But finally Mme de Clèves cannot be convinced that this wild, irrational force of love can be unique or more than ephemeral: 'Par vanité ou par goût, toutes les femmes souhaitent de vous attacher...Je vous croirais toujours amoureux et aimé et je ne me tromperais pas souvent.'³⁴⁸ Love in Nemours cannot, in some mysterious way, be any more sincère et durable³⁴⁹ than in every other human being. Her reply to his plea for happiness is dry and incontrovertible: 'Vous avez déjà eu plusieurs passions, vous en auriez encore; je ne ferais plus votre bonheur.'³⁵⁰

In Mme de Clèves the study of passion is given a new dimension because of the subject's consciousness, however imperfect, of what is happening.³⁵¹ When she finally renounces passion, both she and the reader have gained a new awareness of what passion is, as with the discovery in tragic drama. It has already become apparent that love and jealousy are inextricably mingled³⁵², that love entails deception and

self-deception³⁵³, that love can come and go spontaneously, making a mockery of social relationships³⁵⁴ and supposed moral values.³⁵⁵ Mme de Clèves's consciousness of this grows too, naturally but paradoxically, as her awareness of love increases. So that while in one way she is never nearer Nemours than during her final conversation with him³⁵⁶, in another she could not be further from all that he represents, since her awareness of what passion is has never been more acute.

It is in the light of this conflict between passion's hold and awareness of what passion is, that the central distinction between sentiments and conduite can be appreciated. For the main struggle is in the heart. Mme de Clèves has some degree of control over her actions. It is true that she does grant Nemours certain favours, such as refusing to go to a ball from which he will be absent³⁵⁷, letting him steal her portrait³⁵⁸ or even closeting herself with him to forge a letter for the Vidame.³⁵⁹ These slips, soon followed by bitter remorse, are the only three occasions on which her conduct fails her resolution to resist passion, at least in the presence of Nemours.

This explains Mme de Clèves's repeated distinction between what happens in her heart and the public attitude she maintains. To her husband she asserts that 'si j'ai des sentiments qui vous déplaisent, du moins je ne vous déplairai jamais par mes actions.'³⁶⁰ Later she cries out: 'La vertu la plus austère ne peut inspirer d'autre conduite que celle que j'ai eue.'³⁶¹ Crucially, she assures Nemours that 'ma conduite n'a pas été réglée par mes sentiments.'³⁶² Her avowal of love, she tells him, 'n'aura point de suite.'³⁶³ Her final words are a poignant restatement of this vital distinction: 'croyez que les sentiments que j'ai pour vous

seront éternels et qu'ils subsisteront également, quoi que je fasse.'³⁶⁴

This tempts one to invert Mme de Clèves's famous statement, taken so often as proof of her Cartesian lucidity: 'les passions peuvent me conduire'³⁶⁵; mais elles ne sauraient m'aveugler.'³⁶⁶ Passion can blind her, and does.

Lucidity is a constant struggle, an intermittent light. But she does refuse to give outward assent to passion. Unlike so many other characters in the novel, her conduite is not determined by her sentiments.³⁶⁷

Thus for Mme de Clèves the real battle is in the heart.

'(Nemours) fit, en peu de temps, une grande impression dans son coeur.'³⁶⁸

Passion is stealth. It takes Mme de Clèves some time to realize

'l'intérêt'³⁶⁹ qu'elle prenait à Monsieur de Nemours.'³⁷⁰ Suddenly she

awakens to the fact that 'les sentiments qu'elle avait pour lui étaient ceux que M. de Clèves lui avait tant demandés.'³⁷¹ From this moment on

love for her means a constant struggle to preserve her inmost self against a force that, from deep within her, clouds her mind and saps her strength of will.

The struggle begins in earnest once she has admitted its reality: 'Elle ne se flatta plus de l'espérance de ne le pas aimer.'³⁷²

She feels fully 'la violence de l'inclination qui l'entraînait vers

M. de Nemours.'³⁷³ She sees that 'il n'y avait plus rien qui la pût

défendre et qu'il n'y avait de sûreté pour elle qu'en s'éloignant.'³⁷⁴

The language here places in sharp focus the nature of passionate love as Mme de Clèves experiences it. Her whole being and personality are attacked (violence); she is left with no will of her own (entraîner):

her sense of helplessness (rien qui la pût défendre) instinctively

makes her realize that self-preservation (sûreté) means absence from a

society where love rules supreme (s'éloignant). The novel's conclusion is already outlined here. In no sense can it be seen as surprising or illogical.

The threat of this aggression to Mme de Clèves is all the more real because she longs for the aggressor to succeed. The moments she spends alone with Nemours before their final conversation have given her 'une joie pure et sans mélange qu'elle n'avait jamais sentie.'³⁷⁵ When she refuses to see him she thwarts her own dearest wish.³⁷⁶ She gazes privately at a portrait of Nemours 'avec une attention et une rêverie que la passion seule peut donner.'³⁷⁷ This whole scene³⁷⁸ captures all the intensity of her suppressed desire for Nemours.³⁷⁹

Here we are brought to the very centre of the paradox of passionate love in the novel, a paradox glimpsed already in the character of Nemours, as in the previous works. Love is also, after all, the desire for happiness, the yearning for union with the loved-one.³⁸⁰ For Nemours, Mme de Clèves has 'une inclination si violente qu'elle l'aurait aimé quand il ne l'aurait pas aimée.'³⁸¹ Her heart is filled to overflowing with love.

Yet accepting this same love means accepting jealousy and all that it implies³⁸²; it means putting herself on a level with 'les autres femmes'³⁸³, that is to say, with the poisonous amorality of Court life; it means surrendering to what killed her husband, sullyng his memory, breaking her promise of faith and going against a devoir which must, in the end, be taken into account³⁸⁴; it means opening wide the gates to inevitable infidelity and bitterness³⁸⁵; it means deceiving herself that love is an eternal flame, when all the evidence shows the contrary.³⁸⁶ 'Love' means

all of this. Above all, love means disintegration of the inmost self. Heart, will, reason, personality, all become servants of this blind, violent energy which so suddenly takes a person in its grasp : 'Je suis vaincue et surmontée par une inclination qui m'entraîne malgré moi.'³⁸⁷ Nemours's success is 'malgré elle.'³⁸⁸ The succession of verbs, vaincre, surmonter, entraîner, with the preposition malgré, reveals once more the total opposition between passion and any idea of human dignity founded on the freedom and the will to act. The aggressive connotations of the verbs indicate passion as an invading force, and thus foreign to the self, whose methods are brutal and whose aim is totalitarian: complete possession of that self.

Thus the author's treatment of love is clear, to the extent of departing from a quasi-total abstention from direct comment: 'elle se faisait un crime de n'avoir pas eu de la passion pour lui (= Clèves), comme si c'eût été une chose qui eût été en son pouvoir.'³⁸⁹ There is no curbing this wild, autonomous force. Even Mme de Clèves's persuasion that it would be criminal to accept Nemours's love³⁹⁰ 'n'entraînait pas son coeur. Il demeurerait attaché à M. de Nemours avec une violence qui la mettait dans un état digne de compassion.'³⁹¹ Passion is alienation. For Mme de Clèves, to accept love is to lose her being.³⁹²

To the very end, then, love is deeply rooted in Mme de Clèves's heart, 'un coeur aussi touché que le sien et aussi nouvellement abandonné aux charmes de l'amour.'³⁹³ Even after her serious illness 'elle trouva néanmoins que M. de Nemours n'était pas effacé de son coeur.'³⁹⁴ The coeur has become an almost autonomous entity, seat and symbol of passionate love. Little by little, however, this passion weakens: illness,

absence and distance have their effect.³⁹⁵ Then the memory of her dead husband 's'imprima fortement dans son coeur.'³⁹⁶ For the very first time the coeur is not wholly attached to Nemours.

This influence on her own sentiments, rather than just on her conduite, marks the end of the road for love: 'Les passions et les engagements du monde lui parurent tels qu'ils paraissent aux personnes qui ont des vues plus grandes et plus éloignées.'³⁹⁷ The alienation of passion is overcome only through a vision of life which refuses life itself. The choice is stark: self-disintegration or self-annihilation. For the only rest from passion is absence, distance, death.³⁹⁸ 'Mme de Clèves vécut d'une sorte qui ne laissa pas d'apparence qu'elle pût jamais revenir.'³⁹⁹

Chapter Two

ASPECTS OF PASSION

- jealousie

- violence

- mal

JALOUSIE

a)

'Pour ML l'amour, souvent inséparable de l'inconstance, l'est toujours de la jalousie. De leur accouplement inévitable elle est aussi persuadée que Proust.'¹ No study of passionate love is possible without a study of jealousy.² In the texts studied amour and jalousie are terms which are necessarily linked.

b)

Richelet's definition of jalousie³ mentions crainte and désespoir⁴, two among many of its characteristics in these four works.

Other associations include the idea of irrational behaviour, which can become angry and violent obsession, e.g. caprice⁵, bizarrerie⁶, folie⁷; degrees of suspicion, e.g. curiosité⁸, envie⁹, souçon¹⁰, défiance¹¹, inquiétude¹², rival, ennemi; anger, hatred and thirst for revenge, e.g. rage¹³, fureur¹⁴, dépit¹⁵, horreur¹⁶, haine¹⁷, colère¹⁸, emportement¹⁹, vengeance; and, in Z and PC, torture and suffering, e.g. tourment²⁰, persécution²¹, douleur, affliction, déplaisir²². Lastly, jalousie is associated with terms suggesting disorder of body and mind, e.g. dérèglement²³, incurable, poison.

It is in this perspective that jalousie, and thus amour, is seen.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

Jealousy is here one of the main springs of the action. Montpensier's jealousy makes him keep his wife away from the Court.²⁴ This in turn leads to Guise's dramatic night entry into her bed-chamber and thus to the dénouement.²⁵ For it is Montpensier's jealousy which provokes a surprise visit to his wife's room²⁶, ~~producing~~ the final series of disasters. Though Montpensier is jealous by temperament,²⁷ the microbes of jealousy lurk in all of the main characters.

This omnipresent jealousy is characterized first by its extreme nature and by the violence which accompanies it. It is furieuse²⁸, and is expressed in terms such as haine²⁹, rage³⁰, dépit³¹, emportement³² and chagrin.³³ It incites to vengeance³⁴; Anjou's first impulse is to give his rival 'quelque marque sanglante de son désespoir.'³⁵ Montpensier is 'possédé'³⁶ de fureur.³⁷ This image of possession has a certain fitness: Montpensier becomes one with the fureur which seizes him.³⁸

Jealousy also means treachery. Anjou, bitterly envious of Guise's love for Mme de Montpensier, whispers in her ear that his rival's only thought is to deceive her.³⁹ This is sufficient to give complete credence to the story.⁴⁰ Ironically, the only person not to deceive is Guise, the one accused of deception. Anjou pursues Mme de Montpensier with his love, yet does not show his feelings in public, 'de peur de donner de la jalousie au prince son mari'⁴¹, or because the time is not yet ripe to try anything against Guise.⁴² When he slanders his rival in love in front of the king, the real motive is not politics, but simple jealousy.⁴³

The 'effroyables malheurs'⁴⁴ of jealousy are a kind of disease for which a cure is tried, but never found.⁴⁵ It is seen as a poison⁴⁶, corrupting heart and mind. Love cannot be removed from the shadow of this image.

La Comtesse de Tende

In this story, jealousy is inseparable from love, existing even when feelings of love seem not to, thus revealing a depth in relationships which appearances belie.

Mme de Tende passes through an early phase of jealousy for a husband she loves, but who ignores her.⁴⁷ Narcissism replaces wounded love⁴⁸, but love for Navarre re-awakens her jealousy, this time for her lover. The more she urges him to be faithful to her friend, Mme de Neufchâtel, the more he obeys⁴⁹, and the more she is jealous.⁵⁰ She is caught in a circle made vicious by her own jealousy: 'leur (= Navarre and Mme de Neufchâtel) mariage, qu'elle avait souhaité, lui fit horreur; elle ne voulait pourtant pas qu'il le rompît, et elle se trouvait dans une cruelle incertitude.'⁵¹

When this marriage ceases, however, Mme de Tende is 'prête à expirer de douleur'⁵² and 'abandonnée à tout ce que les remords, l'amour et la jalousie peuvent faire sentir de plus cruel.'⁵³ She cannot tear herself away from feelings of spite, envy and wounded pride, inextricably linked to her love for Navarre.⁵⁴ Jealousy is the natural expression of this love. On the wedding-night Mme de Tende, 'agitée par

ses inquiétudes'⁵⁵, is calmed only by a letter from Navarre. In this situation both women are alternately jealous: each new assurance to the one makes the other's jealousy increase in venom.⁵⁶ A single love-affair is at the heart of this tangled web of warped relationships.

Through focusing on jealousy, therefore, the author demonstrates the extent to which people will hate, injure and betray one another in the name of love. In Tende's fury of jealousy⁵⁷ there is ironically 'une douleur où la tendresse avait quelque part.'⁵⁸ The very ferocity of his feelings is proof of his love.⁵⁹ To passionate love and to human relationships in general, jealousy thus gives a certain morbid, obsessive colouring.

Zaïde

Ashton's summary of this novel applies most clearly to the story of Alphonse, a veritable case-history of jealousy seen as a neurosis.⁶⁰ But all the main characters, except Bélasire, are affected by jealousy; as Alphonse declares, love unmixed with it is not really love.⁶¹

Jealousy is portrayed from the outset as a violent, irrational force: 'il crut être frappé de quelque douleur que les autres hommes ne connaissent point.'⁶² Jealousy surges unexpectedly and inexplicably from within⁶³; love, imagined as joy, becomes suffering⁶⁴, so much so, that jealousy becomes the main symptom of love: 'la jalousie seule m'a fait sentir que j'étais amoureux'⁶⁵; 'elle ne peut plus me regarder sans me donner de la jalousie.'⁶⁶ Love and jealousy are necessarily intertwined⁶⁷:

'on est jaloux sans sujet...quand on est bien amoureux.'⁶⁸

The jealous torture⁶⁹ and are tortured.⁷⁰ Don Ramire is happy to give his own feelings of fear and anxiety⁷¹ to his rival Consalve, by using Nugna Bella: 'Ainsi il avait le plaisir de voir son rival se venir plaindre à lui des mauvais traitements qu'il recevait par ses ordres.'⁷² Jealousy co-exists with a perverse, unadmitted pleasure in giving pain, which tears Don Ramire apart.⁷³ Consalve himself finds the same thing with Zalde⁷⁴; he wants to wound her, to let her know what he is suffering: 'ma jalousie serait vengée par le dépit que vous en recevriez.'⁷⁵

The case of Alphonse shows that this emphasis on torture is no empty figure of speech. Bélasire pleads with him to think of the wounds he is opening: 'Considérez, je vous en conjure, sur quoi vous me tourmentez et sur quoi vous vous tourmentez vous-même.'⁷⁶ But Alphonse is helpless, and the torture continues, with his pathetic apology for 'le tourment que je vous donne.'⁷⁷ His only defence is a pitiful plea: 'Je me fais plus de mal qu'à vous.'⁷⁸ The fact that this tourment is caused by interrogation is a subtle reminder of the literal meaning of the term, 'les douleurs et les souffrances physiques qu'endurent les accusés soumis à la question.'⁷⁹ Alphonse is only too conscious of the harm he is doing, but he cannot escape from his own fears and suspicions.⁸⁰ It is as if Bélasire must be punished for his own jealousy: 'Je recommençai bientôt à la tourmenter...'⁸¹ Each time, it is supposedly to put an end to the suffering that Alphonse asks for the last assurance, the final detail: 'j'ai assez souffert...'⁸² He even imagines that it is Bélasire who is torturing him.⁸³

The moment inevitably comes when Bélasire cannot take any more: 'Vous avez perdu la raison...ou vous voulez me tourmenter à dessein, comme vous dites que je vous tourmente.'⁸⁴ She realizes that the more intense love is, the greater is the jealousy and the more painful the suffering.⁸⁵ Life becomes a persécution⁸⁶, filled with souçon⁸⁷, chagrin⁸⁸, inquiétude⁸⁹, douleur⁹⁰. Love becomes one long, elaborate torture. Or perhaps, simply, it becomes what it is. The characters seem helpless spectators of their own fate: 'Je me tourmente plus que je ne dois.'⁹¹ Jealousy is, in Bélasire's words, 'de la folie et du dérèglement.'⁹² Thus Alphonse cannot help becoming obsessed: 'Mais quand ce qu'elle me répondait était comme je le pouvais désirer, je croyais qu'elle ne me parlait ainsi que pour me plaire...; enfin la jalousie, avec toutes les horreurs dont on la représente, se saisit de mon esprit.'⁹³ From this moment on reason can only parody itself. The twists and turns of Alphonse's investigations become 'un labyrinthe'⁹⁴ where the monster of jealousy pursues his easy prey. What for Bélasire are caprices⁹⁵ and bizarreries⁹⁶ are for Alphonse reasonable doubts: he is lost.⁹⁷

And yet Bélasire is mistaken in thinking that jealousy is destroying some otherwise pure love.⁹⁸ Later she is undeceived, and withdraws from the world. For throughout the novel jealousy springs from love as branches from trees. It is a 'mal incurable.'⁹⁹ Alphonse becomes so absolute in his demands that he wishes Bélasire actively to dislike anyone but himself¹⁰⁰, and regards this totally unrealistic wish as so normal that he can present it to Bélasire almost as proof of his love: 'ainsi, Madame, accordez-moi ce que je vous demande, et considérez combien ma jalousie est éloignée de vous devoir offenser.'¹⁰¹ He wants Bélasire, body and soul, for 'moi seul.'¹⁰² Since complete possession by one

person of another is a futile dream, jealousy must always be the expression of this frustration.¹⁰³ If Alphonse has been seen as exceptional, even (by Bussy) as incredible¹⁰⁴, this is perhaps because the author has, in this one character, brought to full hideous growth what every case of jealousy contains in embryo. Alphonse is everything jealousy can become.

The mal incurable of jealousy in this novel is then seen as provoked by the virus of passionate love: 'on est jaloux sans sujet quand on est amoureux.'¹⁰⁵ In these circumstances, is it not better to withdraw from the society of men, rather than torture and be tortured?¹⁰⁶ Such is the choice made by Alphonse and Bélasure. Whatever the answer, the world-vision which the question supposes is dark and disquieting.

La Princesse de Clèves

Jealousy is an intrinsic part of the central action of this novel, Mme de Clèves's struggle with passion. At the end of this long struggle she realizes that if she gives way to love she must make way for jealousy as well.

The Court scenes, intertwining with this main action, present a society where love and jealousy are inseparable, and where both are together inseparable from the lust for favour.¹⁰⁷ Even Mme de Valentinois, who has 'rien à craindre auprès du roi'¹⁰⁸, has any other possible royal mistress chased from the Court.¹⁰⁹ The Queen seems unruffled at the king's liaison¹¹⁰, but is in reality violently jealous.¹¹¹

Indeed, the Queen's own relationship with the Vidame makes her obsessively suspicious of all those with whom he comes into contact, such as the Dauphine¹¹², whose beauty and favour at Court give the Queen 'une jalousie qui va jusques à la fureur.'¹¹³ S'imaginer and fureur here imply the violent, brooding suspicion which turns fear into certainty:¹¹⁴ 'il n'y a rien qu'elle n'ait lieu de penser et il n'y a rien que je ne doive craindre de ses pensées.'¹¹⁵ In this case the Queen is so convinced that the Dauphine is the Vidame's mistress 'qu'elle ne lui pardonna jamais et qu'elle la persécuta jusqu'à ce qu'elle l'eût fait sortir de France.'¹¹⁶ It is not enough to say, as the Vidame does of the Queen, that 'la jalousie est naturelle aux personnes de sa nation.'¹¹⁷ Elizabeth of England has the same disease¹¹⁸, while both Henri II and his father are convulsed with suspicion on account of Mme de Valentinois.¹¹⁹ Kings can resolve their jealousy in a way no others can: Brissac is banished by Henri¹²⁰, while Henry VIII has simply executed, not just the wife he deems to be unfaithful, but any who fall foul of his jealousy.¹²¹

The author thus makes it clear from the outset that love and jealousy always intermingle. Passion inevitably means fear, suspicion and rancour.¹²² Guise's unrequited love for Mme de Clèves, which embitters his whole life¹²³, means that Nemours and himself become personal enemies: 'la connaissance qu'ils avaient de leurs sentiments leur donnaient une aigreur¹²⁴ qui paraissait en toutes choses.'¹²⁵

Our judgement of passionate love is thus continually influenced by its concomitant, jealousy, and the poison which it injects into all relationships. The case of Sancerre reveals all of this in its tragic absurdity. Only after his mistress's death does he learn of her

secret liaison with Estouteville¹²⁶: 'j'ai la même affliction de sa mort que si elle m'était fidèle et je sens son infidélité comme si elle n'était point morte.'¹²⁷ Suddenly the spite and vengeance of jealousy have no object: 'si elle vivait, j'aurais le plaisir de lui faire des reproches et de me venger d'elle.'¹²⁸ Sancerre cannot reasonably be jealous of Estouteville, who knew nothing of his feelings and who can no longer hurt him. But he is: 'Tous mes sentiments sont injustes...'¹²⁹; 'je ne saurais m'empêcher de le haïr.'¹³⁰ Jealousy is not, in this novel, a corruption of love, but love seen in the perspective of corruption. It is what love must always lead to.

Thus jealousy is always taken as a proof of real love.¹³¹ Nemours sees the evidence of Mme de Clèves's jealousy as a good sign¹³²: 'l'aigreur que M. de Nemours voyait dans l'esprit de Mme de Clèves lui donnait le plus sensible plaisir qu'il eût jamais eu.'¹³³ Mme de Clèves realizes later on that 'elle lui avait fait paraître des sentiments de jalousie qui étaient des preuves certaines de passion.'¹³⁴ Nemours has shrewdly seen that jealousy so bitter must mean passionate love.

As the novel's action evolves Mme de Clèves can only become more aware of this poison within love. Apart from a slight moment of aigreur¹³⁵, she at first feels no jealousy. In other words, she does not really know what love is. All this changes when she reads what she takes for a letter from Nemours's mistress: 'Jamais affliction n'a été si piquante'¹³⁶ et si vive.'¹³⁷ At first she cannot come to terms with this new and painful dimension of her experience. She tries to believe that her pain is caused by having given Nemours a mark of her love: 'Mais elle se trompait elle-même; et ce mal, qu'elle trouvait si insupportable, était la jalousie avec toutes les horreurs dont elle peut être accompagnée.'¹³⁸

Mal...insupportable...horreur: the vocabulary constantly emphasizes the same point, that love finds its natural expression in the pain and darkness of jealousy. Jealousy shows not only that there is love, but what love really is.

This jealousy lifts the veil between appearance and inner reality. For on the surface Mme de Clèves refuses to admit the possibility of a liaison between Nemours and herself. Yet now she feels that Nemours 'la trompait'¹³⁹, while the worst torture is 'de connaître qu'il en aimait une autre.'¹⁴⁰ This proof of her love is also proof that love is not the simple joyful aspiration of a loving heart. She has 'l'esprit aigri et agité de tristes pensées.'¹⁴¹ In listening to Nemours's explanations she has 'l'air assez sec...l'aigreur...une froideur'¹⁴²¹⁴³¹⁴⁴. And yet these feelings melt like ice in the sun of his presence. When she looks back with astonishment at these 'cuisantes douleurs'¹⁴⁵, in a situation where love is neither declared nor accepted, she is brought to realize for the first time the dark complexities of passion: 'Elle avait ignoré jusqu'alors les inquiétudes mortelles de la défiance et de la jalousie.'¹⁴⁶ This jealousy has been enough to 'lui ouvrir les yeux sur le hasard d'être trompée.'¹⁴⁷ Mme de Clèves discovers that to love, she must love all the time with the idea that it cannot be 'sincère et durable'¹⁴⁸, especially with a man who 'avait toujours fait paraître tant de légèreté parmi les femmes.'¹⁴⁹ A moment of jealousy, and all has changed: her idea of love, her image of Nemours, her own knowledge of herself. In her final decision, this must weigh heavily on her mind.

Mme de Clèves will be unable to forget, either, the case of her husband, who has died poisoned by suspicion. Before the aveu

Clèves showed no trace of jealousy, and even swore that he could not be jealous if such a confession were ever to come.¹⁵⁰ With the aveu, however, comes a storm of spite and suspicion. Clèves wants to know who, what, why, when: 'Et qui est-il, Madame, cet homme heureux...? Depuis quand vous plaît-il? Qu'a-t-il fait pour vous plaire? Quel chemin a-t-il trouvé pour aller à votre coeur?'¹⁵¹ The rapid succession of question-words here mimes perfectly Clèves's obsessive curiosity. Joined to this is a wounded pride, the spite that his wife's love has been given to Nemours and withheld from him¹⁵²: 'un autre fait ce que je n'ai pu faire. J'ai tout ensemble la jalousie d'un mari et celle d'un amant.'¹⁵³

The author insists on the inexorable nature of jealousy. Clèves's mind slips into a dark night of no return, far from the light of reason. He is in the grip of passion. There is nothing that he can do. Try as he might he cannot stifle the suspicions that assail him. He does assure his wife that she has given him 'une sûreté entière'¹⁵⁴, and that 'je n'abuserai pas de cet aveu.'¹⁵⁵ But Mme de Clèves has not told him everything. He questions her relentlessly to find the name of the person she loves, despite her assurances that she has never shown any sign of weakness.¹⁵⁶ He wants a detailed account of past behaviour.¹⁵⁷ He knows he is in the wrong.¹⁵⁸ But at the same time he knows that he cannot help doing what he does.¹⁵⁹

From this moment on Clèves is prey to 'une douleur mortelle'¹⁶⁰ and 'l'envie de deviner celui qui avait su lui (= Mme de Clèves) plaire.'¹⁶¹ A mistrust of appearances, the lack of certainty, the impossibility of finding the truth: such themes are general throughout the novel. here they are magnified, given a dark intensity, in Clèves's

jealous suspicions; he has 'une curiosité avec laquelle je ne saurais vivre.'¹⁶²
 His life's desire now is to 's'éclaircir de ses soupçons.'¹⁶³ At one point
 he feels defeated: 'il ne trouvait de tous côtés que des précipices et des
 abîmes.'¹⁶⁴ He decides not to investigate further, fearing publicity.¹⁶⁵
 But this is only a respite. Hearing, from a casual remark, that Nemours
 has been left alone with his wife, 'la pensée qu'il était chez elle, qu'il
 y était seul et qu'il lui pouvait parler de son amour, lui parut dans ce
 moment une chose si nouvelle et si insupportable que la jalousie s'alluma
 dans son coeur avec plus de violence qu'elle n'avait encore fait.'¹⁶⁶
 The progression of ideas here, by the simplest of words, il...chez elle...
 seul...amour...jalousie...violence, is a remarkable example of the author's
 ability to represent the power of passion and the hold of the non-rational
 on the mind.

In an instant Clèves is transformed from a resigned
 husband into a violently jealous lover. Questions fall on Mme de Clèves
 like an arrow-shower: 'Pourquoi des distinctions pour M. de Nemours?
 Pourquoi ne vous est-il pas comme un autre? Pourquoi faut-il que vous
 craigniez sa vue? Pourquoi lui laissez-vous voir...? Pourquoi lui faites-
 vous connaître que...?...Pourquoi faut-il que vous ayez des rigueurs pour
 lui?'¹⁶⁷ The syntax suggests, with the relentless pourquoi, the obsessive
 inquisitorial state of this jealous man. He is no longer in control,
 he is controlled by a dark passion that henceforth will not leave him:
 'Je n'ai que des sentiments violents et incertains'¹⁶⁸ dont je ne suis
 pas le maître.'¹⁶⁹ And it cannot be otherwise: 'vous avez attendu de moi
 des choses aussi impossibles que j'attendais de vous. Comment pouviez-
 vous espérer que je conservasse de la raison?'¹⁷⁰ He has no proof of his
 wife's infidelity. Indeed, he has assurances to the contrary. But jealousy

is its own justification. Clèves knows that he is unreasonable: 'Enfin il n'y a plus en moi ni de calme ni de raison. Je ne sais comment j'ai pu vivre depuis que vous me parlâtes à Coulommiers...'¹⁷¹ It is as if passion creates its own momentum, which nothing afterwards can modify.¹⁷²

Clèves's fever reaches a pitch with the suspicion that Nemours has gone to Coulommiers to see Mme de Clèves. Once again 'il résolut de s'éclaircir de la conduite de sa femme et de ne pas demeurer dans une cruelle incertitude.'¹⁷³ This means sending a spy, who only has to report having seen Nemours enter the garden for Clèves to leap to the conclusion that his wife has been unfaithful.¹⁷⁴ It is almost as if he needs this 'truth': 'c'est assez...je n'ai pas besoin d'un plus grand éclaircissement.'¹⁷⁵ From the suspicion that racks him he has passed to a certainty, which will kill him, though both are equally groundless.

'M. de Clèves ne put résister à l'accablement où il se trouva. La fièvre lui prit dès la nuit même.'¹⁷⁶ Ironically, when his wife sees his coldness towards her, 'elle pensa que c'était peut-être un effet de sa maladie.'¹⁷⁷ His jealousy is a sickness from which he will not recover: 'je meurs du cruel déplaisir que vous m'avez donné.'¹⁷⁸ Not till the very last minute, when there is a moment of hesitation, does Clèves doubt that he has been 'cruellement trompé'¹⁷⁹ by a wife who has become 'une femme qui a passé des nuits avec un homme.'¹⁸⁰ The malady which kills him is jealousy. He is killed by the passion which has been his life.

Witness, victim and survivor, Mme de Clèves is overwhelmed. She has already had her first taste of jealousy, from within. Seeing now the obsessive jealousy which caused her husband's death¹⁸¹, she can clearly

place her passion for Nemours in the perspective of possible jealousy.

(Ironically Nemours suggests that she herself is so virtuous that in marrying her 'rien n'est à craindre'.¹⁸²) If, as seems probable, Nemours at some future time loves someone else, jealousy will be unavoidable: 'Vous avez déjà eu plusieurs passions, vous en auriez encore; je ne ferais plus votre bonheur; je vous verrais pour une autre comme vous auriez été pour moi. J'en aurais une douleur mortelle.'¹⁸³ She puts herself in a position which recalls that of her husband: 'Je vous croirais toujours amoureux et aimé et je ne me tromperais pas souvent.'¹⁸⁴ Never does she wish to experience jealousy again: 'c'est le plus grand de tous les maux.'¹⁸⁵

The fact of jealousy, as an inevitable part of passionate love, thus weighs heavily on Mme de Clèves. She sees her husband's downfall not as the exceptional behaviour of a person deranged, but as a natural process: 'La fin de l'amour de ce prince et les maux de la jalousie qu'elle croyait infaillibles dans un mariage, lui montrait un malheur certain où elle s'allait jeter.'¹⁸⁶ The avoidance of jealousy means a total refusal of love.

Jealousy comes to all who are in love, even to Nemours.¹⁸⁷ In demonstrating that jealousy is inseparable from love, the author affirms that love of its very nature is an already-diseased state.

VIOLENCE

a) A striking element in ML's fictional works is the recurrence of the word violence and associated terms.¹⁸⁸ Sometimes, as in PM, the total context is one of war. Always, in each of the works, terms of violence are closely associated with passionate love. Francillon's observation, on the importance of this word-cluster in PM and CT, is valid for the whole of ML's fictional world: 'Les personnages...des deux récits sont tous, à des degrés différents, des violents...; les mots rage, fureur, haine, violence, emportement et les adjectifs correspondants reviennent de manière insistante.'¹⁸⁹

The coupling of amour and violence is doubtless partly due at least to précieux use, and can be seen in novels such as Le Grand Cyrus.¹⁹⁰ What is new in ML's work is the intensity of this association.¹⁹¹ Violence is here studied as a large word-cluster extending over the four fictional works and suggesting an indissoluble link between dark, irrational behaviour and passionate love.¹⁹² Love cannot here, as in the novels of Mlle de Scudéry, be linked with heroism, virtue and nobility of soul.¹⁹³

b)

The terms violence¹⁹⁴ and violent¹⁹⁵ recur very often. They sometimes refer to physical acts, but more often to emotional states. Associated with them are terms¹⁹⁶ which describe the violent impact of passion on the personality, colère, furcur, s'emporter¹⁹⁷, rage, haine, and its influence on behaviour, vengeance, persécution, désordre, chasser, inhumanité. In PM are to be found terms reflecting the civil strife which accompanies the main narrative action, guerre, massacre, exterminer, sanglant, déchirer. In all the works, but especially in PC, may be found terms descriptive of the power of passion and of the effort entailed in resisting it, e.g. entraîner, s'arracher, surmonter, vaincre.

These related terms form a word-cluster which, as with jalousie, inevitably sets passionate love in a perspective of emotional and physical disorder.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

The idea of violence is particularly associated with love in this text. The first lines introduce a parallel that will be made throughout: '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.'¹⁹⁸ Love and civil war are equated: from both we may expect violent disorder within and between people. Immediately after these opening lines begins the story of Mlle de Mézières. War is the constant background to the struggles of passion.¹⁹⁹ The action switches continually from one kind of battle to another. Peace agreements are only uneasy moments of truce²⁰⁰, motivated sometimes by fatigue.²⁰¹ Violence continually smoulders beneath any appearance of calm.

An example of this is when Chabanes helps to establish an artificial reconciliation between Mme de Montpensier and her husband. The following sentence brings us back to the civil war: 'La paix ne fit que paraître. La guerre recommença aussitôt...'²⁰² With an astute irony, the main story-line thus follows a war of passionate love, marked in turn by truce-like moments of deception and manifestations of violent emotion. 'Les armées étant remises sur pied, tous les princes y retournèrent.'²⁰³ This is the signal for Mme de Montpensier to deceive her husband, for Chabanes and Guise to betray friend and companion-at-arms. These interlinked elements, which form the basis of the plot, come to crisis point and resolution at the same time as preparations for 'cet horrible dessein'²⁰⁴ of St. Bartholemew's Day. Civil war and the désordre caused by passion²⁰⁵ constantly intermingle and reflect on each other.

Human relationships are thus placed in this perspective of war's violence: the implications of the book's first paragraph are developed throughout. Thus Chabanes's passion for Mme de Montpensier is 'la plus violente...qui fût jamais.'²⁰⁶ He surrenders to it, as the vocabulary shows, like a tired army: 'se laisser surmonter... céder'²⁰⁷; 'après tous les combats...'²⁰⁸. Guise assures Mme de Montpensier that the obstacles to his passion 'ne sauraient lui ôter un moment de sa violence.'²⁰⁹ Montpensier's jealous relationship with his wife is marked by haine²¹⁰, violences épouvantables²¹¹, rage and fureur²¹², and the thirst for vengeance²¹³, while Anjou swears that he will kill his rival in love.²¹⁴

Violence is then seen to be the natural expression of passionate love²¹⁵, violence within and between each of the story's characters. Chabanes becomes a theatre of this civil war, 'combattu de ses propres sentiments, mais avec une violence qui lui ôtait quelquefois toute sorte de connaissance.'²¹⁶ Guise lets Mme de Montpensier gradually slip from his mind, because he is 'occupé du désir de venger la mort de son père, et peu après, rempli de la joie de l'avoir vengée.'²¹⁷ One form of violence replaces another.

The vocabulary constantly reinforces the idea that love provokes violence²¹⁸: 'dépit...rage...haine²¹⁹, marque sanglante de son désespoir²²⁰, menaces²²¹, vengeance²²², tout prêt à se porter aux dernières extrémités.'²²³ Montpensier, fired by jealousy, 's'abandonnait à un désespoir et à une rage qui le poussèrent mille fois à donner de son épée au travers du corps de son rival.'²²⁴ This critical episode gives Mme de Montpensier an illness which mirrors the extreme disorder which passion has caused in her: 'La fièvre lui prit si violemment...que...l'on

craignit pour sa vie.'²²⁵ She is killed by the passionate love which she has made her life.²²⁶

Given this emphasis on the violence provoked by passion, the story's 'historical' conclusion could not be more fitting, with 'cet horrible massacre, si renommé par toute l'Europe.'²²⁷ Such a massacre, in which Chabanes himself is killed on account of his Huguenot past²²⁸, is logical for a society where violent passion dominates every aspect of life.²²⁹ This socially-accepted violence produces a final, bitter irony: 'L'ordre qu'il reçut de s'en retourner à la Cour, où l'on rappelait tous les princes catholiques pour exterminer les huguenots, le tira de l'embarras où il était.'²³⁰ Montpensier here does not question this sinister order. He is simply happy at not having to live alongside a wife who loves another man. This simple example, more than any authorial comment, illustrates how completely passion corrupts human behaviour.

La Comtesse de Tende

In this story both violent and violence are used to qualify various stages of love relationships.²³¹ Love is seen as a brutal force: 'Le désir de vous voir s'est saisi de moi ce matin avec une telle violence que je n'ai pu y résister.'²³² Love brings in its train 'pensées violentes'²³³, is a 'violent état.'²³⁴ Thus when Tende learns of his wife's unfaithfulness, he can think only of vengeance²³⁵, and a necessarily violent means of rewarding this adultery: 'il ne songea qu'à faire mourir sa femme.'²³⁶ As for Mme de Tende, she is so marked by her betrayal in love²³⁷ and a rending sense of shame²³⁸ that she 'reçut

la mort avec une joie que personne n'a jamais ressentie.'²³⁹

It cannot then be stressed too strongly how far love here is removed from any idea of happiness or good, when suffering and destruction are the natural expression of love, and death is seen as a better alternative to the world which love creates.

Zafde

In a nouvelle such as PM, violence is all-pervasive. The work's form, the constant allusions to civil war, make it necessary to focus on the parallel between the violence of war and the violence of passion. No such concentration is to be found in Z. The very length of the novel means that episodes of violence have a less symbolic character. In addition, the narrative structure, with the continual breaking-away from a main story-line, leads to a certain dispersal of interest. Given these limitations, it is nonetheless remarkable to note how great a place war and its terrors occupies in the novel as a whole, and to see to what extent the author continues to define manifestations of passion in terms of physical violence. The climate of the novel is one of war, Christian against Saracen, Spaniard against Moor, and Spaniard against Spaniard.²⁴⁰ Violence is seen to be the natural currency of social relationships.

Such is the case, for example, when Consalve's father joins with Don Garcie to overthrow the king: spite and hurt pride join forces with passion and ambition, since war is the only way in which

Don Garcie will win the hand of Hermenesilde.²⁴¹ Even then Don Garcie cannot wait: 'je fis dire à Nugnez Fernando que j'étais résolu d'enlever sa fille...'²⁴² This one act produces internecine strife²⁴³ and general war²⁴⁴, with looting and anarchy.²⁴⁵ Ironically, Consalve manages to check the anarchy of a drunken rabble²⁴⁶, yet the anarchy of passion within him continues without check. By implication, passion has a force and persistence which not even the wildest riot can rival.²⁴⁷ The same term is used for both war²⁴⁸ and passion²⁴⁹: inhumanité.

Passionate love is seen as continually-smouldering violence within.²⁵⁰ A clear example of this is the way in which Consalve reacts when he learns of his betrayal by Nugna Bella. Each term used conjures up images of brutal strife: 'rage...désespoir...poignarder...colère...vengeance...l'excès de l'emportement...me venger...me battre...déclarer la guerre...emporté par la violence.'²⁵¹ Love is désordre²⁵², a désordre de l'esprit.²⁵³ By its very nature it is violent, and ML insistently couples the two terms.²⁵⁴ Jealousy is part of the same phenomenon.²⁵⁵ It is as if some wild beast stalked within each man: 'Cette passion, qui lui était inconnue, se fit sentir en lui, pour la première fois, avec tant de violence qu'il crut être frappé de quelque douleur que les autres hommes ne connaissent point.'²⁵⁶ Alphonse uses the revealing term persécuter.²⁵⁷ Torture and self-torture, passionate love is an unending war within.

La Princesse de Clèves

Passion violente. It is a stock phrase in the novel, and one used in précieux language.²⁵⁸ Often, however, ML gives this phrase a reality, suggesting a love which is uncontrolled and uncontrollable.

It is important, too, to remember the general climate in which the novel's action is played out. Apart from the fact that rumours of war and negotiations for peace form the background to the first half of the story²⁵⁹, the different courts of France and England are depicted as hunting-grounds for the most violent passions and ambitions.²⁶⁰ Henri's love and jealousy are described in terms of bitterness and mad anger²⁶¹, as are the strange fits of barbarity of Henry VIII²⁶² and Queen Mary.²⁶³ In each case jealousy, 'aigre et violente'²⁶⁴ by nature, causes revenge to be taken, usually through executions or banishments. Court life is a struggle between one passion and another, with vengeance, executions and poisons part of its ordinary fabric.²⁶⁵ The Queen has 'une passion violente'²⁶⁶ for the Vidame: this is no mere phrase: it translates a dangerous, volatile state. When she finds out that he has deceived her, for the Dauphine (as she wrongly believes), her hatred is undying, her persecution of this Princess incessant.²⁶⁷ And Sancerre, betrayed by his mistress, is in 'un état si violent'²⁶⁸ that his whole being seethes with hatred.²⁶⁹ For the author, love means violence in a real sense.

With the three main characters violence implies, first, the intensity and authenticity of their unhappy love. Each of them has a passion which is violente.²⁷⁰ This use is perhaps nearest to précieux connotations of the term: 'une inclination si violente qu'elle (= Mme de Clèves)

l'aurait aimé quand il ne l'aurait pas aimée.'²⁷¹ Thus, in the case of Nemours, violent is coupled with passion to indicate the emotional charge of a love into which all his life's energy is now channelled. He has for Mme de Clèves 'la plus violente et respectueuse passion'²⁷², a passion which is 'si tendre et si violente'²⁷³, 'la plus véritable et la plus violente qui sera jamais'²⁷⁴, 'la plus violente...qui ait jamais été.'²⁷⁵ Nemours's reaction to Mme de Clèves's refusal of him is marked by the same depth of feeling.²⁷⁶ Violence here, far from being just a traditional tag of love-literature, translates the way in which passionate love totally possesses and obsesses a person, to the point of Nemours wanting to destroy Clèves in the opinion of his wife. Nemours is as far from the world of Le Grand Cyrus as is the Roxane of Bajazet.²⁷⁷

This distance is even more marked in descriptions of Mme de Clèves and her husband. It may be argued that Clèves's love is violent in the same sense as with Nemours, that it is true and powerful.²⁷⁸ His jealousy, however, is so fierce and obsessive that violence is a literal statement of his feelings: 'la jalousie s'alluma dans son coeur avec plus de violence qu'elle n'avait encore fait.'²⁷⁹ He confesses that 'je n'ai que des sentiments violents et incertains dont je ne suis pas le maître.'²⁸⁰ His death is caused directly by the upsurge of grief and bitterness springing from this state of war within him. He is carried away by what is first 'une affliction...violente'²⁸¹, then 'son désespoir...violent'²⁸², and 'le violent chagrin qu'il avait contre elle.'²⁸³ Each time violent is the term chosen to characterize the fury, bitterness and volatility which is jealousy.

Both Mme de Clèves's love and her reaction to love

are from the beginning described in terms of violence. Indeed, the idea of passion as an overwhelming force comes mainly from the terms used to describe Mme de Clèves's fight against it. Already Mme de Chartres has warned that 'il faut de grands efforts et de grandes violences pour vous retenir.'²⁸⁴ Throughout the novel her daughter's love for Nemours is seen in terms of a mighty force crushing one defence after another. Mme de Clèves's desire for fulfilment of this love draws her to Nemours despite herself: 'elle fit réflexion à la violence de l'inclination qui l'entraînait vers M. de Nemours.'²⁸⁵ The combination here of violence, inclination and entraîner gives the effect of a powerful magnet, drawing irresistibly her very personality away from her resolved ideas, so that she can only refuse to see Nemours 'en se faisant une extrême violence.'²⁸⁶

Often such a struggle seems futile: 'je suis vaincue et surmontée par une inclination qui m'entraîne malgré moi.'²⁸⁷ Again, the succession of terms such as vaincre, surmonter, entraîner, gives a reality to the violence which has described Mme de Clèves's passion. 'Il faut m'arracher à la présence de M. de Nemours.'²⁸⁸ Once again the language stresses the idea of the crushing power of passion, and of the equally brutal efforts required to keep its onslaughts at bay. The aveu is the logical outcome of such an attack, and of such a defence: 'ce remède, quelque violent qu'il fût, était le seul qui la pouvait défendre contre M. de Nemours...'²⁸⁹ Against such a 'folle et violente passion'²⁹⁰, only violent measures can be taken, at the obvious risk of the remedy being worse than the disease.

Mme de Clèves's state is thus one of civil war: the real conflict of PM has here been completely interiorized. Her chagrin at

Clèves's bitterness and death pulls her violently one way²⁹¹, her love for Nemours even more strongly in the other direction.²⁹² Her final decision to separate from Nemours is only taken after a long struggle. Despite her intention to do this, 'quelque violence qu'il m'en coûte'²⁹³, this resolution is 'bien violente à établir dans un coeur aussi touché que le sien.'²⁹⁴ She postpones to the last moment the self-inflicted wound, the violence, of renunciation.²⁹⁵

The term violence has then come to be identified with all that is blind, brutal and uncontrollable in passionate love. Taken together with the various terms which cluster round it, it translates a truth about the nature and effects of passion. Love is here seen not as the union of two hearts and minds, but as a bloody struggle between a ferocious enemy and a garrison that to survive must use the same violence.

MAL

a)

Where the term mal and words associated with it are used by the author, there is a risk of assuming too easily either that direct moral comment is being made, or else that the word-group has little general significance. A useful preface to an examination of mal is Haig's observation on its use in PM: 'This term cannot adequately be rendered by a single English word: for all its apparent banality and literalness, it is really a cluster image that synthesizes a multiplicity of meanings.'²⁹⁶ Again, it is less the single term mal which will be examined - it does not even occur in CT - than a cluster of terms linked to the main connotations of mal.

b)

The term mal has itself three main connotations in ML. With each of these are associated various terms in the different fictional works. First, it denotes sickness, disease, or suffering in general²⁹⁷, along with such words as maladie, fièvre, guérir. Second, it signifies 'misfortune'²⁹⁸, together with malheur, malheureux. Finally, it signifies 'wrong', something blameworthy.²⁹⁹ Associated with this are various terms with moral connotations, grouped around the notions of fault (e.g. mauvais³⁰⁰, crime³⁰¹, criminel, blâmer³⁰², faute³⁰³, coupable³⁰⁴, méchant), of innocence and pardon (e.g. innocence, injustice³⁰⁵, pardonner), and of remorse (e.g. remords³⁰⁶, se repentir³⁰⁷, se reprocher³⁰⁸, honte³⁰⁹, horreur, douleur). This group is the richest in terms, but only takes on a major significance in PC, where the term mal occurs 50 times.³¹⁰

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

In this short story there are not many terms with moral connotations. Mal always has the sense of 'illness', while neither mauvais³¹¹, innocence³¹² nor criminel³¹³ implies any general system of values. The author is not judge. The term mal, however, even within its limited meaning, can have richer associations than these last three words. For example, after the debacle of her love-affair Mme de Montpensier falls ill.³¹⁴ She is traumatized by the loss of her lover, the anger of a jealous husband and the sacrifice of Chabanes, whom she so ruthlessly exploited. 'Le mal de Mme de Montpensier'³¹⁵, however real, suggests an ill which is not merely physical.³¹⁶

The real, underlying disease is seen to be passionate love: 'la fièvre lui prit si violemment, et avec des rêveries si horribles que l'on craignit pour sa vie.'³¹⁷ Fièvre...violemment...rêveries...horribles: as with love, the author insists on the brutal, irrational onset of the fever. Mme de Montpensier dies when she knows for sure that Guise's love for her has died: 'Ce fut le coup mortel pour sa vie.'³¹⁸ Never was the parallel between love and disease more clear. This gives a renewed vigour to the traditional language of love, as the happy ill for which no cure is desired.³¹⁹

In this perspective of love as sickness, the feigned illnesses of Anjou or Montpensier, pretexts to hide their violent reaction to thwarted love, ironically suggest that perhaps only the body is sound.³²⁰

When a jealous, fretting Anjou becomes ill in mid-campaign³²¹, his sickness does not appear to have a completely physical cause. He leaves the army he is leading 'soit par la violence de son mal, soit par l'envie qu'il avait de revenir goûter le repos et les douceurs de Paris, où la présence de la Princesse de Montpensier n'était pas la moindre raison qui l'attirât.'³²²

There is therefore no direct intervention on the author's part. But the use of allusions and parallels makes the term mal highly ambiguous. The implication throughout is that passionate love is a real sickness, with the power to destroy those whom it infects.

La Comtesse de Tende

In this story the term mal is not used. The author as narrator at no time uses language implying a set of values. It remains to be seen whether, despite this, there is any sense of good and evil in the story.

The term malheur is used often, always in the context of love. At first it appears in phrases of the type 'les malheurs d'une galanterie.'³²³ Mme de Tende asks her lover Navarre to renounce a love 'qui nous conduira peut-être à d'horribles malheurs.'³²⁴ Ironically her unsuspecting husband tries to show Navarre 'l'abîme des malheurs où il s'allait plonger'³²⁵ by being unfaithful. At this stage malheur is the mere invocation of a possibility. This soon becomes concrete reality:

Mme de Tende discovers her pregnancy at the same time as her lover is killed in action. Malheur, twice a euphemism for pregnancy³²⁶, expresses also a state of bitterness and waste³²⁷: 'elle ne voyait de remède à ses malheurs que par la fin de sa malheureuse vie.'³²⁸ A necessary link is forged between amour and malheur.

Although the author abstains from moral comment, certain terms with moral connotations are used: '(Mme de Tende) sentit le remords d'ôter à son amie le coeur d'un homme qu'elle allait épouser... Cette trahison lui fit horreur. La honte et les malheurs d'une galanterie se présentèrent à son esprit.'³²⁹ Such terms as remords...trahison...horreur...honte appear to imply, on Mme de Tende's part, a strong sense of evil. But in reality, adultery and treachery are here not regarded as evil in themselves, but only in their consequences for her friendship (ôter à son amie) and for her position as an honourable married lady (La honte et les malheurs d'une galanterie). The terms in question do not imply any sense of right and wrong.³³⁰

Even such a limited display of conscience, however, does not stop Mme de Tende from committing adultery and betraying her best friend. When she realizes the extent of her malheurs, she still has 'un reste de honte'³³¹ which leads to her confession to her husband. Here she talks of 'l'expiation de mon crime.'³³² She wants only the end of her shame: 'je mérite la mort et je la désire.'³³³ Her husband, too, is swallowed up in shame,³³⁴ while Mme de Tende, seeing that she cannot avoid giving birth to an illegitimate child, 'sentit bien que la honte est la plus violente de toutes les passions.'³³⁵ Shame, not the bite of conscience, is what is involved here: réputation plays a large part in

this.³³⁶ Mme de Tende's sorrow is not for having done wrong, but for having brought disaster on herself.

The mal group of words gives then, first, a sense of waste and sorrow to the idea of love, and in addition shows the limits of moral consciousness in someone. The highest moral awareness is here nothing but a keen sense of shame at the unhappy consequences of actions.

Zafde

In this novel a kind of moral emptiness surrounds terms like mal. The deserted land in which we come across Alphonse and Consalve is symbolic. The characters live and struggle in a world from which a sense of moral good has apparently been banished.

The words malheur and malheureux are used frequently in the text, with the sense 'misfortune'³³⁷ and 'unfortunate'.³³⁸ Mal is usually employed in the same sense of 'misfortune'.³³⁹ These three words are normally used of situations where the 'misfortune' has been caused by passionate love.³⁴⁰ A second strand of meaning in this word-group is that of sickness. Mal can be employed to indicate the progress of passionate love.³⁴¹ Alphonse's 'maladie violente'³⁴² and Almir's 'fièvre violente',³⁴³ though physically real, symbolize perfectly the disease of passion. However traditional the language, the reality of the illness is apparent: Alphonse's jealousy, seen as a 'mal incurable',³⁴⁴ is the most obvious example. Despite the author's abstention from direct comment, the use of terms indicating

sickness in conjunction with passionate love gives a certain colouring to the idea of love.³⁴⁵

The idea of moral conscience is notably absent from Z. When remorse is felt, it is simply because something which characters have tried to do has failed³⁴⁶, or that something they have said has misfired³⁴⁷, witness Don Ramire's attempts to tell Nugna Bella of his love: 'Don Ramire se repentit de ce qu'il avait dit; Nugna Bella se repentit de ne lui avoir rien répondu.'³⁴⁸ Don Ramire does feel shame for a moment at betraying Consalve³⁴⁹, but only for a moment: 'Il se résolut donc à suivre les mouvements de son coeur et il n'eut plus de remords sitôt qu'il en eut pris la résolution.'³⁵⁰ Consalve, in his fits of jealousy, has the same experience.³⁵¹ It might be said, therefore, that at best a sense of wrong leads merely to a feeling of shame and confusion which in no way changes the treacheries being perpetrated. Don Garcie deceives his friend Consalve, and consents to his banishment, despite all his shame.³⁵² He can of course speak of his past behaviour in terms of 'fautes...douleur...coupable...repentirs.'³⁵³ But this relates to far-distant actions. Passion has been satisfied. Regrets may safely be expressed later, if only from politeness to Consalve.

From this evidence in Z, two conclusions, apparently contradictory, may be drawn. Firstly, that the characters are not swayed in their actions by any idea of right or wrong. And secondly, that we sense in this novel a world of evil. For men and women surrender time and again to passions which will destroy them, and others with them.³⁵⁴ The irony of evil, in this novel, is that it seems not to exist.³⁵⁵

La Princesse de Clèves

The term mal has three main associations in this text: misfortune, sickness and fault. The third category being by far the richest in words, it seems necessary to ask to what extent an objective idea of evil is suggested in the novel.

The word mal is used, with malheur and malheureux, in this first sense of 'misfortune'.³⁵⁶ Mme de Clèves declares that 'le malheur de la jalousie...est le plus grand de tous les maux'³⁵⁷, and her mother speaks of 'les malheurs domestiques où plongent les engagements.'³⁵⁸ Here no general idea of evil is implied. On the other hand, although a phrase such as 'les malheurs d'une galanterie'³⁵⁹ does not mean that a love-affair is wrong as such, the continual use of such terms implies that love and misfortune go hand in hand.³⁶⁰ Like disease, passion can be seen as an objective evil, un mal, because of the suffering associated with it. Mal indeed often means physical sickness. Usually it is feigned.³⁶¹ This is how Mme de Clèves seeks to avoid Nemours: 'Vous ne vous trouviez donc mal que pour lui, reprit M. de Clèves.'³⁶² The ironic implication of this barb is that Mme de Clèves's malady is love.

At three points in the story, however, a central character is struck down by an illness which, though genuine, has a certain symbolic quality. After Mme de Chartres notices her daughter's hidden love for Nemours, she has 'un peu de fièvre'³⁶³, which becomes 'une maladie considérable'³⁶⁴, leading to death. This sudden illness coincides with the discovery that the microbes of passion have broken through the defences

of carefully-instilled virtue. And Clèves, believing he knows for certain of his wife's adultery, 'ne put résister à l'accablement où il se trouva... La fièvre lui prit dès la nuit même.'³⁶⁵ His real disease, and the cause of his suffering, is morbid jealousy. As with Alphonse in Z, the disease is incurable: 'M. de Clèves était presque abandonné des médecins.'³⁶⁶ A third example is the 'maladie violente'³⁶⁷ which brings Mme de Clèves near to death. This comes after her long debate with Nemours, at a moment when her whole being is rent with conflicting doubts and fears. When she recovers from this illness she is no longer the same person: passion has left her along with the disease itself.³⁶⁸ Once again, passion's association with disease has a definite suggestive power. Love has become the bedfellow, not of youthful happiness, but of the body's sickness. This gives a certain edge to phrases, perhaps otherwise banal in the context of much traditional love-literature, describing Mme de Clèves's earlier hopes that she is 'guérie de l'inclination qu'elle avait pour ce prince'³⁶⁹, 'guérie... de la passion qu'elle avait eue pour lui.'³⁷⁰

The third group of terms in this word-group, such as faute³⁷¹, implies no general moral code in the novel, only a single character's frame of reference. The author takes great care not to condemn any character. Thus injustice and injuste are merely used by one person of another.³⁷² Nowhere does the author make reference to injustice as such. Similarly with orgueil³⁷³, coupable³⁷⁴, vanité³⁷⁵, innocence³⁷⁶, infidélité³⁷⁷, crime³⁷⁸, blâmer...méchante conduite.³⁷⁹ Thus not once does the author give the idea of an objective moral code which it is wrong to breach. If this is natural in a world where values are mainly social³⁸⁰, at the personal level this supposes a kind of moral anarchy, a jungle of particular passions where right and wrong depend on how these

passions are satisfied. When the Vidame seeks 'de l'indulgence pour mes fautes'³⁸¹, the fault in question is to have made Nemours's attempt to win over Mme de Clèves more difficult.³⁸² When Nemours expresses sorrow for his conduct, it is for the same reasons.³⁸³

In this respect Mme de Clèves stands out from the other characters. She constantly refers to the code of conduct instilled by her mother.³⁸⁴ There are, however, two important points to note. One is, again, that the author does not intervene directly. Any idea of the evil of love is built up through the total action of the novel. A second point to note is that, even for Mme de Clèves, ideas of what is wrong and the reasons for remorse are neither clear nor consistent. The shame she feels is often linked to situations that cannot be changed. One example of this is when, realizing that she has feelings of love for Nemours, 'elle trouva combien il était honteux de les avoir pour un autre que pour un mari qui les méritait.'³⁸⁵ And when her husband dies, 'elle se faisait un crime de n'avoir pas eu de la passion pour lui, comme si c'eût été une chose qui eût été en son pouvoir.'³⁸⁶ Her remorse is a futile recognition that she has fallen, like all the other women of the Court, to passion.³⁸⁷

Sometimes this remorse is merely an immediate reaction to a confusing situation, as after the final interview with Nemours: 'Elle fut étonnée de ce qu'elle avait fait; elle s'en repentit; elle en eut de la joie.'³⁸⁸ The ephemeral nature of this needs no comment. Mme de Clèves can be sorry, too, for having brushed Nemours aside.³⁸⁹ The term se repentir is used in both cases, and obviously does not always refer to a deeply-felt sorrow for a fault committed against one's moral code.

Thus Clèves can declare to his wife, 'Vous vous êtes repentie même du peu que vous m'avez avoué',³⁹⁰ implying that her only sorrow is at having made an attempt at frankness. Mme de Clèves is sorry both for having spoken to Nemours³⁹¹ and for having refused to speak to him.³⁹²

Mme de Clèves is thus very confused, and her remorse is often ambiguous.³⁹³ A clear example is when, after reading the letter she believes to be from Nemours's mistress, she is stung into bitter regret.³⁹⁴ She enters into a long examination of her thoughts and feelings: 'Combien se repentit-elle de ne s'être pas opiniâtrée à se séparer du commerce du monde...'³⁹⁵ Yet it only takes a simple change in this position (the discovery that the letter has nothing to do with Nemours) for the clouds of repentance to roll away: 'enfin sitôt qu'elle le crut innocent, elle entra avec un esprit ouvert et tranquille dans les mêmes choses qu'elle semblait d'abord ne daigner pas entendre.'³⁹⁶ What appeared to be remorse for having done wrong was in reality a jealous rage. Nemours is now qualified as innocent where in fact his passion for her has only become more explicit. The culmination of this confusion is when Mme de Clèves realizes 'qu'elle s'était reproché comme un crime, le jour précédent, de lui avoir donné des marques de sensibilité',³⁹⁷ whereas she has just spent hours locked alone with him writing a letter.

The truth is that 'elle ne se reconnaissait plus elle-même.'³⁹⁸ It is evidently too simple an account of the novel to see the heroine battling single-mindedly against the evil of love. Good and evil are not seen by her in clearly-defined terms. Passion has made her unsure of everything: 'il y avait des moments où elle avait de la peine à comprendre qu'elle pût être malheureuse en l'épousant.'³⁹⁹ There are moments when

frankness to her husband seems to be wrong⁴⁰⁰, and others when it seems equally wrong to refuse to avow the truth about her feelings to him.⁴⁰¹ Sometimes what she says of herself is not what she feels. To her husband she declares 'l'innocence de ma conduite'⁴⁰², yet he only has to make an unsuspecting jest about her lover and 'les paroles...lui donnèrent des remords; elle fit réflexion à la violence de l'inclination qui l'entraînait vers M. de Nemours.'⁴⁰³ When her husband is on his death-bed, she pleads that 'il est impossible qu'avec tant de vérité, je ne vous persuade mon innocence'⁴⁰⁴, and cries out 'Moi, des crimes!...la pensée même m'en est inconnue.'⁴⁰⁵ Yet when he dies she can feel nothing but guilt and remorse: 'l'horreur qu'elle eut pour elle-même et pour M. de Nemours ne se peut représenter.'⁴⁰⁶ Her passion is guilty because it has killed her husband,⁴⁰⁷ but she felt it to be guilty before this. She has no compass to show her the opposite poles of moral good and evil.

Mme de Clèves is in this state of confusion when she enters the last stage in her long struggle with Nemours, and with herself. She is as far as ever from any clear idea of right and wrong: 'Je suis dans un état qui me fait des crimes de tout ce qui pourrait être permis dans un autre temps.'⁴⁰⁸ For a moment she almost seems to be absolving from guilt any possible union with Nemours: 'Je sais que...le public n'aurait peut-être pas sujet de vous blâmer, ni moi non plus, quand nous nous engagerions ensemble pour jamais.'⁴⁰⁹ This is yet another illusion. Her reasons for refusing Nemours subsist, well-founded or not. But significantly, she needs to leave life in the world in order to see that same life for the first time with a clear, steady eye.⁴¹⁰

In the end Mme de Clèves refuses passion, because she

feels it to be wrong, something for which she would repent.⁴¹¹ The atmosphere at Court, her husband's jealousy, her own sense of self-disintegration in passion, all confirm this feeling. This refusal of passion, so often in the novel confused and obscure, does not amount to clear moral discernment. But in the sense that passion is seen throughout, as it is judged here by Mme de Clèves, to corrupt and destroy the personality, a certain sense of evil is associated with it. Mme de Clèves's confusion, and the ambiguities of her position, do not take away from the clear insight we are given into the corruption and hypocrisy of a society totally undermined by passion.⁴¹² As spectators caught up in this tragic action, we are enlightened. Passion and evil are indissociably linked.

Chapter Three

PASSION AND SOCIETY

- amitié

- cour

- mariage

AMITIE

a) Friendship is regarded as a normal aspect of human relationships. In the texts studied such words as ami and amitié occur frequently. Is there any reality behind them? Can friendship coexist with love in a society where love is the arbiter of conduct?

b)

This word-group is based on the terms amitié¹ and ami, expressing the idea of friendship, mutual or not.² Other such terms include familiarité³, inclination (in Z)⁴, affection, attachement, intime⁵, and, at Court, faveur⁶, favori and cabale⁷.

A second idea is expressed in terms such as confiance⁸ and confidence⁹. The author explores to what extent trust is possible in social relationships undermined by passionate love. Terms used express varying degrees of trust and esteem: se confier¹⁰, se fier¹¹, estime, respect, considération¹², reconnaissance.

A revealing list of terms is often associated with these two preceding groups: trahir, tromper, tromperie, manquer, abandonner, oublier, se défier, défiance, mépris¹³, infidélité.

These three elements are present in each of the fictional works.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

Friendship occupies an important place in this story, and in the character of Chabanes it is perhaps tempting to see the perfect friend. He is regretted by Mme de Montpensier as 'le plus parfait ami qui fut jamais'¹⁴, while her husband has for him 'une amitié très particulière.'¹⁵ Chabanes even leaves the Huguenot party because of his friendship for Montpensier.¹⁶ For Mme de Montpensier he has respect and amitié.¹⁷ The friendship seems a model of the kind.

The seeming is all. When describing how Montpensier becomes friendly with Chabanes, the author avoids any idea of affection. Friendship is based on mérite¹⁸, estime and confiance.¹⁹ Mme de Montpensier has for Chabanes the same estime²⁰: 'elle n'eut pas moins de confiance et d'amitié pour lui que n'avait le prince son mari.'²¹ He has for her 'un respect et une amitié proportionnés à sa qualité²² et à son mérite.'²³ From the above it may clearly be seen what notions surround this particular friendship: estime, mérite, confiance, respect, qualité. A friend is valued, respected. But no emphasis is placed on the idea of affective ties.

It is quickly seen that even these other ties are more apparent than real, and that passionate love is the only bond which counts. Friendship has the status of an empty gesture. When Chabanes falls in love with Mme de Montpensier, everything is placed at the service of this love. After the final catastrophe, he may declare himself unworthy of Montpensier's friendship²⁴, and be sorry 'd'avoir abusé d'une amitié dont

il recevait tant de marques.'²⁵ But he has been powerless to do otherwise. All that he does for Mme de Montpensier is dictated by his love for her.²⁶

Mme de Montpensier has Chabanes understand very quickly the difference between 'la qualité du meilleur ami du monde'²⁷ and 'l'honneur de prendre garde à celle d'amant.'²⁸ When Chabanes declares his love, she replies to him with open scorn²⁹, yet assures him 'qu'elle ne le regarderait jamais que comme son meilleur ami.'³⁰ A strange irony: friendship and spiteful scorn can coexist, not friendship and affection. Thus in order to facilitate her liaison with Guise, Mme de Montpensier can simply exploit her 'friendship' with Chabanes. The confiance, respect, estime, mérite, are used to provide a go-between for her adulterous affair. It is true that on one occasion she shows great tenderness for Chabanes: 'Elle lui fit mille caresses'³¹ et mille amitiés et lui témoigna une impatience extraordinaire de s'entretenir en particulier, dont il fut d'abord charmé.'³² All this, however, is to persuade him to carry love-letters between herself and his rival Guise, and moreover 'elle lui en faisait la proposition comme d'une chose qui lui devait être agréable.'³³ When Chabanes, outraged, understandably leaves her, Mme de Montpensier's one thought is to bring him back, 'non seulement à cause de l'amitié qu'elle avait pour lui, mais aussi par l'intérêt de son amour, pour lequel il lui était tout à fait nécessaire.'³⁴ The use of terms such as intérêt de son amour and tout à fait nécessaire shows how little amitié weighs in this decision.

Montpensier's friendship with Chabanes counts for just as little. When the Prince finds his friend alone, at night, in his wife's bed-chamber, his jealous rage demands a full explanation: 'Vous devez cet

éclaircissement à mon amitié.'³⁵ Friendship is the excuse, jealousy the motive. Later on, having gone to Paris to help with the St. Bartholemew's Day massacre, Montpensier sees in the street the mutilated body of Chabanes. At first, 'son amitié se réveillant'³⁶, he feels grieved. But then 'le souvenir de l'offense qu'il croyait avoir reçue du comte lui donna enfin de la joie, et il fut bien aise de se voir vengé par les mains de la fortune.'³⁷ His thwarted passion for his wife and his brooding jealousy leave no place for the slightest colouring of friendship. Within the context of the story, this vicious gloating is the natural reaction.

Friendship is thus seen here to be a social appearance, not a human reality. It is a mere shadow of the one relationship which influences human affairs, passionate love.

La Comtesse de Tende

This story is built around relationships between four characters: the Comte de Tende and his wife, the Princesse de Neufchâtel and the chevalier de Navarre. Mme de Tende and Mme de Neufchâtel are united to each other by friendship, as are Tende and Navarre. A history of these relationships shows how ephemeral is friendship, when faced by passion.

After her marriage, feeling isolated from a distant husband, Mme de Tende 'devint l'amie intime de la Princesse de Neufchâtel.'³⁸ The friendship, and the value of the term intime, are soon put to the test. Mme de Tende sees that Navarre, whom her friend is due to marry, wants to

pay court to her. For a moment she is torn between love and 'le remords d'ôter à son amie le coeur d'un homme qu'elle allait épouser uniquement pour en être aimée.'³⁹ And for a moment friendship appears to overcome passion.⁴⁰ But it only appears to. Mme de Tende loses no time in developing a secret relationship with the new husband of her friend.

For the penniless Navarre, friendship is a mere tool, used to procure Tende's help in arranging a marriage with the wealthy Mme de Neufchâtel: 'un seul de ses amis en avait la confidence et cet ami était aussi intime ami du comte de Tende.'⁴¹ Given these relationships, there is an added irony in the scene where Navarre, having been discovered by Tende at his wife's bedside, protests that he was only trying to persuade her to cover up for him with Mme de Neufchâtel, but that 'Elle me refuse de mentir en ma faveur; elle dit qu'elle ne veut pas trahir son amie.'⁴² In this story, friendship does not just fail to materialize. It is ridiculed.

Zafde

Friendship in this novel is rare, except in cases where the relationship is a tool for ambition. Between Consalve and Alphonse,⁴³ between Zafde and Féline⁴⁴, there does indeed seem to be a true friendship. Closer examination, however, reveals that these 'friendships' are, from a purely formal point of view, indispensable. Consalve and Alphonse can tell each other their life histories because they are friends.⁴⁵ And these 'background details' form the first half of the novel. In the second half, Féline's long narration⁴⁶ is only

possible because of her relationship with Zalde. But neither of these relationships shows any development in the course of the novel. These friendships do not have to confront, as do the others, the ill winds of passion. They are in fact what amounts to a strained literary device; how to give a sense of form to a novel which lacks a continuous narrative line.

In this light we are led to concentrate rather on those relationships which develop within each Histoire. Already, after the first part of the novel, we know that any idea of 'true' friendship is singularly lacking. Nowhere is there to be found a balanced relationship. Consalve and Don Garcie, for example, are friends, but Consalve analyses why: 'Mon inclination, mon âge et mon devoir m'attachèrent au prince don Garcie.'⁴⁷ Don Garcie being the king's son, there can never be pure friendship between them, despite what is professed.⁴⁸ On one side there exists 'une inclination naturelle'⁴⁹, on the other, a prince's favour.⁵⁰ Equally, Consalve has friendly relations with Don Ramire⁵¹, who in turn gains the favour of his prince.⁵² At the beginning of the Histoire de Consalve, then, we are presented with a trio of good companions whose greatest pleasure is to confide one in the other.⁵³

This happy union is shattered very quickly. Don Garcie falls in love with Hermenesilde, Consalve's sister, a union which Consalve has already publicly condemned as unthinkable.⁵⁴ But 'je ne prétendais pas aussi que l'amitié qu'il avait pour moi lui fît surmonter l'amour qu'il avait pour elle.'⁵⁵ And Don Ramire? Unable to forfeit the favour of the prince, his friendship with Consalve becomes a smiling hypocrisy.⁵⁶ Consalve's two best friends continue to show him every sign

of affection⁵⁷, while secretly plotting his ruin. Consalve wishes to help his friends 'au delà de ce qu'on pouvait attendre d'un véritable ami'⁵⁸, but all his friendships fade away, because he no longer has Court favour: 'Tout le monde...m'abandonnait peu à peu.'⁵⁹ Men are evidently not swayed by friendship.⁶⁰ Don Ramire imagines for a moment that he can avoid seducing Consalve's mistress, Nugna Bella, out of affection for Consalve, 'à qui il devait une amitié si véritable.'⁶¹ But the friendship exists only in name: 'Il était accoutumé à me tromper...'⁶² So Don Ramire seduces Nugna Bella, 'en lui exagérant la douleur qu'il avait de manquer à notre amitié.'⁶³ At the same time Don Garcie and Don Ramire unite in order to betray Consalve. 'Ainsi j'étais trahi et abandonné par tout ce que j'aimais le mieux, sans m'en pouvoir défier.'⁶⁴

Don Garcie is then only too glad to have Consalve banished from the kingdom. As he explains to the queen, 'J'aime tendrement Consalve; mais...'⁶⁵ The mais introduces the essential: love always has the last word. And friendship is only a word: 'Je suis trahi par mon ami, je perds ma maîtresse, et c'est par cet ami que je la perds.'⁶⁶ Consalve, in his experience of friendship, is the image of man discovering that he is alone on earth: 'après avoir été trompé par tant de personnes, que j'avais tant aimées et dont je me croyais si assuré, de quelle espérance pouvais-je encore me flatter?'⁶⁷ (Even Don Olmond, his faithful henchman, is henceforth open to suspicion.⁶⁸ And Don Olmond himself is not beyond little acts of spite against his master, guilty of...not having trusted him completely.⁶⁹) If Consalve and Don Garcie are reconciled, later in the book, it is because the structure of the novel demands such a reconciliation. Also, friendship is easy when love and ambition no longer threaten it. Consalve's eyes are opened: 'rien ne me portait à la défiance ni sur l'amitié ni sur l'amour.'⁷⁰

In other words, the possibility of any real friendship is seriously called into question.

This theme receives substantial confirmation in the Histoire d'Alphonse et de Bélasure, which follows closely on the first story. From the outset the situation is fraught with disaster. Alphonse develops close ties with Don Manrique⁷¹, a man of 'qualité...mérite...agrément.'⁷² He knows his friend to be on good terms with the woman he loves, Bélasure, but 'leur amitié ne m'avait jamais déplu; au contraire, j'avais pris plaisir à l'augmenter.'⁷³ At first Don Manrique is suspected of having for Bélasure 'plus que de l'amitié.'⁷⁴ Then jealousy submerges Alphonse.⁷⁵ The estime and amitié⁷⁶ which Bélasure has for his friend already seem too much for him. Alphonse knows that love may start like this, and the Histoire de Consalve has shown that suspicion of a friend is only reasonable. Alphonse's burgeoning neuroses are rooted in a very real fear. For him Don Manrique is now 'mon rival'⁷⁷, and friendship has ceased to exist. Everything that has made the friend a likeable man now makes him a dangerous one. The very 'estime...agrément...confiance'⁷⁸ which brought Bélasure and Don Manrique together now make Alphonse suspicious. Thus when Bélasure says, of Don Manrique, 'Je l'estime, je l'aime'⁷⁹, nothing could be more calculated to inflame Alphonse's jealousy.

The same truth is again demonstrated here as above, that love and friendship can never co-exist. Bélasure finally comes to realize this. After struggling to keep alive her friendship with Don Manrique⁸⁰, she is forced to sacrifice it to convince Alphonse of her faithfulness to him.⁸¹ Friendship may be disposed of, however regretfully.

The irony is that Alphonse still refers to Don Manrique as 'mon ami'⁸², even when he ends up by killing him. 'Tuer mon meilleur ami'⁸³ this would not have caused Alphonse so much remorse if Bélasure had not informed him that it was this particular act which led her to abandon him.⁸⁴ It is love which motivates. Friendship exists more in appearance than in reality.

La Princesse de Clèves

In this novel the author places great emphasis on the role of the trusting friend and trusted confidant, but at the same time explores the different elements which ensure that few relationships are based on what would commonly be recognised as friendship.

Favouritism is the most common of these elements at Court, and the king the most important prize.⁸⁵ Such attachments may be reversed overnight.⁸⁶ In such an atmosphere purely friendly relationships are impossible. Friendships are used by monarchs for their own political ends⁸⁷, while Henry VIII is jealous of any relationship which he does not directly control.⁸⁸ Even more striking than this are the multiple attachments formed around each of the powerful ladies of the Court: 'Les inclinations, les raisons de bienséance ou le rapport d'humeur faisaient ces différents attachements.'⁸⁹ The author suggests here how mixed are the motives behind any such bond, and then indicates how little sincere feeling and how much seeming go into each relationship. Thus the Queen attracts those ladies, slightly older, 'qui faisaient profession d'une vertu plus austère'⁹⁰; the Dauphinc's circle is composed of younger spirits 'qui cherchaient la joie et la galanterie'⁹¹; the Queen of Navarre's

friendship is sought for mainly political reasons⁹²; and Mme de Valentinois knows few people 'qui avaient sa familiarité et sa confiance'⁹³, because of her varying jealousies and dislikes. In this whole series of friendships there is little room for the sacrifices of real friendship within or between people who form 'toutes ces différentes cabales.'⁹⁴

Outside this circle of Court pressure, there exist relationships which are obviously based, not on hypocrisy or social ambition, but on some sort of affection. Mme de Chartres pleads with her daughter to confide in her, but rather as 'son amie'⁹⁵, and between the Dauphine and Mme de Clèves enough familiarité⁹⁶ to make them close friends. The Vidame is the 'ami intime'⁹⁷ of Nemours, Mme de Clèves is attached to Mme de Martigues⁹⁸ and Clèves to Sancerre.⁹⁹ Yet in not one of these cases is complete mutual trust present. Mme de Clèves and Mme de Martigues, for example, are 'amies sans néanmoins se confier leurs sentiments.'¹⁰⁰ The sentiments in question are in each case directed towards a particular person they love, yet they are unwilling to confide one in the other about this.¹⁰¹ Similarly Nemours, faced with an overwhelming passion, 'n'en parla pas même au vidame de Chartres...pour qui il n'avait rien de caché.'¹⁰² And Clèves more than anyone is conscious of the limits of friendship. It is impossible, he tells his wife, that I should have talked of your confession: 'A-t-on un ami au monde à qui on voulût faire une telle confidence?'¹⁰³

This last remark illustrates the precise point where friendship breaks down in the novel. What is most important in a person's life is invariably concealed. The trust of friendship is only a word: 'Estouteville, qui est son ami intime, mais qui ne savait pourtant rien de

son amour pour Mme de Tournon...'¹⁰⁴ In this last case Sancerre's hypocrisy towards all his friends finds an ironic reversal in Estouteville's deceit: their mistress is the same without them knowing it. The phrase ami intime rings very hollow. In this light it is perhaps understandable that Mme de Clèves should hide from the Dauphine any idea of her feelings for Nemours. But she also hides these feelings from her mother, despite the latter's status of amie¹⁰⁵ and trusted confidant. Where trust does go hand in hand with friendship, the trust is betrayed, in the novel, almost as a matter of course.¹⁰⁶ Clearly, the presence of love destroys the very basis of mutual confidence. And naturally enough, when there is a struggle between the ties of friendship and the desires of passion, as happens when Guise and Clèves both fall in love with the same person, it is friendship which melts away.¹⁰⁷

In this way the author is able to suggest, at recurring intervals through the book, that there is no such thing as friendship. Trust, respect, affection, these may abound in any relationship just so long as they do not affect either person's vital interests. If they ever threaten to, they can be disposed of very quickly.

The clearest example of this is provided by Nemours. The Vidame asks him for help in resolving the problem of a compromising letter which he has lost. In the end Nemours only resolves to help his friend in order to save his own reputation in the eyes of Mme de Clèves.¹⁰⁸ His pleasure in Mme de Clèves's company, however, is so great that he forgets all about the letter they both have to forge to save the Vidame from royal disfavour and personal humiliation: 'M. de Nemours était bien aise de faire durer un temps qui lui était si agréable et oubliait les intérêts

de son ami.¹⁰⁹ And so the Vidame is definitively compromised, and detested by the Queen.¹¹⁰ Ironically, then, it is the Vidame whom Nemours can accuse of infidélité.¹¹¹ Ironically, again, there is only one occasion on which Nemours defends a friend: 'J'ai été troublé, madame...pour l'intérêt de mon ami et par les justes reproches qu'il me pourrait faire.'¹¹² The friend in question is none other than himself. When he confides his love to the Vidame¹¹³, and most shows friendship to Clèves¹¹⁴, this is because he realizes that there is no other way to see Mme de Clèves. The case of Nemours thus illustrates very clearly the fact that friendship is of no consequence in human relationships, beside the overwhelming fact of love.¹¹⁵

Thus in this novel, as in the three previous works, amitié indicates neither affection, trust nor esteem, despite the appearances. Friendship is seen to belong most firmly to the world of appearances.¹¹⁶

COUR

a) The Court is the public setting where personal relationships are established and played out. But it is more than just a setting or a device for adding colour.¹¹⁷ Through examining what the Court represents in these four works it is possible to study the effect of passionate love in this society.

b) This word-group, headed by Cour¹¹⁸, includes a cluster of terms descriptive of Court life. As might be expected, such terms are most numerous by far in PC, and are of no significance in CT.

Within this word-cluster it is possible to pick out four groups: terms (especially in PC) connected with the lavish spectacle of Court life (e.g. fête, rejouissance, grandeur¹¹⁹, and, in PC, magnificence¹²⁰, éclat¹²¹, libéralité¹²², divertissement¹²³, prodigalité¹²⁴, plaisir); words suggesting hidden dealings (e.g. cabale, intrigue¹²⁵, liaison¹²⁶, trahison); terms relating to the desire for position and power (e.g. ambition¹²⁷, élévation¹²⁸, émulation¹²⁹, s'élever¹³⁰, fortune, envie¹³¹, faveur); and terms describing the disquiet and danger which can lie behind the outward glitter (e.g. agitation¹³², tumulte¹³³, péril, dangereux, ennemi, exterminer¹³⁴, vengeance).

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

The Court in PM is synonymous with bitterness and violence. Court life is spasmodic in this period of civil war. Reconstituted in Paris during periods of truce¹³⁵, it enables the Catholic princes to plot at leisure the downfall of their Huguenot peers.¹³⁶ Underlying every account of Court life is this thirst for blood. The Court will be used as a pretext, as a bait, till this thirst is quenched: 'l'envie qu'on eut à la cour d'y faire venir les chefs du parti huguenot, pour cet horrible dessein qu'on exécuta le jour de la S. Barthélemy...'¹³⁷ The story concludes with the inevitable slaughter: 'L'ordre qu'il reçut de s'en retourner à la cour, où l'on rappelait tous les princes catholiques pour exterminer les huguenots...'¹³⁸ We are invited to associate cour with exterminer.

The author allows only one glimpse of 'Court life' as one might tend to imagine it: 'Le mariage du roi avec la fille de l'Empereur Maximilien remplit la cour de fêtes et de réjouissances.'¹³⁹ But even here the author directs our attention less to the aristocratic glitter of the event than to the jealousy which poisons the relationship of Anjou and Guise.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, the opening presentation of the Court lays bare the insidious rivalry of the houses of Bourbon and Guise.¹⁴¹ This rivalry runs right through the story.¹⁴² Importantly, too, the Court is the place where the constant struggle between public face and private feelings is played out. This is especially true for Mme de Montpensier.¹⁴³ Thus where the appearance says 'Court life', the reality speaks of intrigue, suspicion, jealousy and violence.

La Comtesse de Tende

There are only two references to Court life in CT, and both these are of minor importance.¹⁴⁴ This is inevitable in a story of thirteen pages which concentrates exclusively on three love-relationships set outside the Court.

Zafde

In this novel the theme of Court life is treated only in the Histoire de Consalve and its narrative preface. In these pages the Court becomes symbolic of treachery and intrigue. It is the place where passion and ambition intermingle, poisonously, and where appearance never squares with reality.

The action of the Histoire de Consalve takes place at the Court of Léon, home of an unsteady monarchy, with barons jostling for the throne.¹⁴⁵ Each person is jealous of the other's advancement, and most jealous of all is the king, himself ruled by suspicion and fear.¹⁴⁶ The main relationships at the Court are thus incessantly vitiated by the demands of self-interest and the pressures of power politics.¹⁴⁷ The air is filled with catales and intrigues.¹⁴⁸ All activity is underground. On the surface there are smiles and gestures of affection.¹⁴⁹ The king is even suspicious of his son.¹⁵⁰ The opportunity of eliminating a political rival is taken unhesitatingly.¹⁵¹ Consalve finally leaves for solitary exile with the knowledge that he is unable to reach the same level of deceit as his rivals at Court: 'j'étais jeune, j'ignorais les trahisons de la cour,

j'étais incapable d'en faire.'¹⁵²

In such a milieu it is hardly surprising that personal relationships suffer. Consalve remarks sardonically that it is more difficult to fight off a particular love in his deserted exile than in the Court, where other women, and ambition, call for attention.¹⁵³ At Court, love and ambition inexorably intertwine, so that even the most sincere intentions are suspect. When Consalve shows an interest in Nugna Bella, 'Le roi remarqua cette intelligence et prit pour une affaire d'Etat ce qui n'était en effet que de l'amour.'¹⁵⁴ But sincere intentions are very few. Nugna Bella is also attracted to Consalve because his seems to be a rising star. She cannot separate the desire to love and the need for grandeur.¹⁵⁵ Passion and ambition, dangerous in themselves, form a volatile, explosive mixture. When Consalve's star begins to wane, his personal relationships soon fall victim to hypocrisy and intrigue. Nugna Bella is quick to sense the change: 'Je lui parus moins aimable, elle ne vit plus rien d'avantageux dans l'établissement qu'elle pouvait avoir avec moi.'¹⁵⁶

The Court in Z is thus a hotbed of factions and petty treacheries. It is a place where a lust for power and reputation is only thinly veiled by the ritual of office,¹⁵⁷ where even the most intimate relationships are spied upon as affairs of state¹⁵⁸, and where neither loyalty nor affection mean very much.¹⁵⁹

La Princesse de Clèves

'L'ambition et la galanterie étaient l'âme de cette cour, et occupaient également les hommes et les femmes.'¹⁶⁰ Examined in the context of the novel as a whole, this appraisal stands as an acid commentary on the hothouse existence led by the novel's characters. Cour implies here political intrigue, but intrigue subtly mixed with love interests. Cour represents a world which offers a string of pleasurable diversions, but which has a certain oppressive omnipresence for the courtiers. Cour stands for a world which, at different times, Mme de Clèves will attempt to leave.¹⁶¹

The entire opening section of the novel is a tableau of Court politics, with ambition the term to which the author returns constantly to describe the lust for influence which rages in Court circles. The Queen, of 'humeur ambitieuse'¹⁶², wants to exercise power. To do this, she will even keep on good terms with Mme de Valentinois, whom she hates.¹⁶³ Both the Cardinal de Lorraine, who has 'une ambition démesurée'¹⁶⁴, and his brother spend their time scheming for power¹⁶⁵, a power which comes with the accession of François II.¹⁶⁶ The Court is thus divided into two main groups, 'partagée entre M de Guise et le connétable, qui était soutenu des princes du sang.'¹⁶⁷ There is also the division, before this, between the king's two sons: 'Cela fit deux cabales à la cour, telles que vous pouvez vous les imaginer.'¹⁶⁸ Some semblance of order is maintained in such a society by 'la crainte de déplaire au roi'¹⁶⁹, the sole common interest of the many protagonists.

But rare in this Court are the emotions and desires

which are purely political: 'L'ambition et la galanterie étaient l'âme de cette cour...' Ambition and galanterie are inseparable. The tone is set by the king: 'Ce prince aimait le commerce des femmes...' ¹⁷⁰ Overshadowing the whole Court, however, is the presence of Mme de Valentinois, the king's mistress. She, and she alone, distributes the king's power and favour. ¹⁷¹ Both the Queen and the Dauphine complain bitterly of their powerlessness. ¹⁷² The business of state depends on the whims and jealousies of the king's mistress, 'maîtresse de sa personne et de l'Etat.' ¹⁷³ The whole Court is placed under the sign of passionate love. ¹⁷⁴

This unsettled pattern is further complicated by a criss-cross of different alliances and animosities ¹⁷⁵: '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.' ¹⁷⁶ Knowing what love means in the novel, we can judge how pernicious is this coupling of politics and passion. In addition, each of the main lady protagonists at Court has her own circle of friends and confidants. ¹⁷⁷ Wheels within wheels of spite, jealousy and rivalry are constantly turning within the larger framework of Mme de Valentinois's influence and the Guise-Montmorency divisions: 'Toutes ces différentes cabales avaient de l'émulation et de l'envie les unes contre les autres: les dames qui les composaient avaient aussi de la jalousie entre elles...; les intérêts de grandeur et d'élévation se trouvaient souvent joints à ces autres intérêts moins importants...' ¹⁷⁸

The power of these last phrases comes from the close juxtaposition of those mainly abstract nouns which are scattered throughout the novel to describe different aspects of Court behaviour: cabales...

émulation...envie...jalousie...grandeur...élévation. The pejorative terms envie and jalousie underpin more neutral words like grandeur and élévation. In this context both cabale and émulation have a necessarily pejorative tinge. This association casts a dark shadow over the motives of any ambition, and acts out within the syntax the obscure mingling of passion and power which is the essence of Court life. From this comes the force of the author's conclusion: 'Ainsi il y avait une sorte d'agitation sans désordre dans cette cour...' ¹⁷⁹ The apparent order comes from the same balancing act that keeps so many different factions in operation: the reality is the agitation which is a permanent feature of Court life.

In this context the novel's peripheral episodes, especially those dealing with Mme de Valentinois ¹⁸⁰, Sancerre ¹⁸¹ and Henry VIII ¹⁸², only intensify this sense we have of the powerful currents of passion and self-interest which run below the surface of Court life. On Henri II's accession, Mme de Valentinois becomes 'maîtresse absolue de toutes choses; elle dispose des charges et des affaires...Ceux qui ont voulu éclairer le roi sur sa conduite ont péri dans cette entreprise.' ¹⁸³ But when Henri II dies, 'la duchesse de Valentinois fut chassée de la cour' ¹⁸⁴, and the Guise faction regains favour. ¹⁸⁵ Once more 'la cour changea entièrement de face.' ¹⁸⁶

The use of this historical material, especially this juxtaposition of events which follow two royal deaths, provides a disturbing context for the story of Mme de Clèves's love. ¹⁸⁷ The fact that the young Princess can be shocked at the life of Mme de Valentinois ¹⁸⁸, and be completely ignorant about 'les divers intérêts et les diverses liaisons' ¹⁸⁹ de la cour' ¹⁹⁰, indicates the extent of the enlightenment which is in store for her, and which must play a part in her final choice of life.

This poisonous reality is, of course, not what the Court seems to be. '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.'¹⁹¹ The opening sentence sets the scene for a Court in which priority is given to lavish display and the pursuit of pleasure: 'C'étaient tous les jours des parties de chasse et de paume, des ballets, des courses de bagues ou de semblables divertissements.'¹⁹² There is a countless number of such diversions: 'tous les plaisirs étaient à la cour.'¹⁹³ No expense is spared by king or courtiers, and the terms used by the author to describe this, éclat...magnificence...libéralité...dépense...prodigalité¹⁹⁴, show a subtle gradation from the idea of brilliance to that of wastefulness, 'cette dépense éclatante qui allait jusqu'à la profusion.'¹⁹⁵ At a royal wedding, the king's idea is to find 'des divertissements où il pût faire paraître l'adresse¹⁹⁶ et la magnificence de sa cour.'¹⁹⁷ When all has been thought of, this is still not good enough: 'le roi trouva ces divertissements trop particuliers, et il en voulut d'un plus grand éclat.'¹⁹⁸ Ironically, the result is a tournament where the king will lose his life.¹⁹⁹

But the author's greater irony lies in contrasting this desire for lavish display with the murky, underground passions which make a mockery of magnificence²⁰⁰ and give a sharp focus to the idea of galanterie. The pleasure-parties are strangely mixed with deeper, conflicting motives: '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.'²⁰¹ Here an effect of deep unease is achieved through, once again, the juxtaposition of a neutral term with a more morally suggestive one: s'élever...plaire suggests flattery within ambition, while plaisirs...intrigues implies that these two activities are natural partners.

This is the atmosphere which constantly surrounds the characters of the novel. It is a closed world from which it is very difficult to escape. When Mlle de Chartres is first introduced to Court life, she immediately becomes 'le sujet de toutes les conversations'²⁰², and is sucked into the round of pleasures which make up the surface existence of the Court.²⁰³ She soon discovers that 'il était difficile d'avoir une conversation particulière.'²⁰⁴ Everywhere there are watching eyes and listening ears.²⁰⁵ Few secrets remain hidden for long.²⁰⁶ Mme de Chartres tries to warn her daughter of the less noble aspects of the Court, 'où il y avait tant d'exemples si dangereux.'²⁰⁷ Beneath the glitter lurk many dangers.²⁰⁸ But how is it possible for her 'd'en garantir sa fille?'²⁰⁹ Mme de Clèves breathes the same noxious air as the others. She is 'exposée au milieu de la Cour.'²¹⁰

This last phrase is one which Mme de Clèves will repeat, when trying to convince her husband of the Court's dangers.²¹¹ She feels exposed and vulnerable, crowded in by pressures of all kinds. To avoid appearing at any social gathering needs a grave excuse²¹², and her husband, unconsciously ironic, reminds her of 'ce nombre infini de visites dont aussi bien vous ne sauriez vous dispenser.'²¹³ Even a period of mourning must be limited: 'il fallait qu'elle commençât à paraître dans le monde et à faire sa cour comme elle avait accoutumé.'²¹⁴

Nemours can therefore not be avoided. Mme de Clèves sees him everywhere, she cannot help seeing him.²¹⁵ The Court is a prison. As the preparations for Madame's wedding gather pace, the pressure mounts from Nemours, always present. Mme de Clèves does not want to appear in public, but she must: 'Mme de Clèves n'osa se dispenser de s'y trouver...'²¹⁶;

il fallait qu'elle allât au Louvre et aux assemblées comme à l'ordinaire.'²¹⁷
 The verbal forms alone of the last phrases indicate the pressure placed on her: 'Vous ne sauriez...il fallait...n'osa...il fallait.' It is not surprising, then, that Mme de Clèves should seek to escape the insidious pressures which make capitulation to Nemours seem inevitable. In her mind 'le tumulte'²¹⁸ de la cour'²¹⁹ comes to mean Nemours and the society of which he is an integral part. In many ways Nemours is the living symbol of the Court, 'dont il faisait les délices.'²²⁰

Mme de Chartres's death-bed advice is clear: 'retirez-vous de la cour.'²²¹ This phrase inevitably comes to mind when Mme de Clèves confesses to her husband that 'j'ai des raisons de m'éloigner de la cour' and that 'je veux éviter les périls où se trouvent quelquefois les personnes de mon âge.'²²² The Court, and the passionate love which she feels could destroy her, are inseparable. There comes a moment when Clèves, too, understands this simple truth. Chosen with his wife to accompany Madame to Spain, he sees this 'comme une chose qui éloignerait sa femme de la cour sans qu'il parût de changement dans sa conduite.'²²³ The emphasis on éloigner²²⁴, the past references to péril and dangereux, all give an almost physical actuality to the sense of the Court as a place of danger, only to be approached with the greatest care.

If Mme de Clèves is then to try and renounce her love for Nemours, it is natural for her to cease all contact not only with him but with a Court whose standards are his own, and whose atmosphere implies surrender to passion.²²⁵ For in this novel the Court is passion, is its logical extension, its social embodiment.²²⁶ It is difficult to accept the assertion that the Court system is a necessary evil keeping anarchy at bay.²²⁷ When Mme de Clèves renounces her love, she renounces just as utterly the whole system to which she has been introduced, not long before, by a cautious mother.

MARRIAGE

a)

The relationship between love and marriage is an important factor in each of the fictional works. In PC it becomes crucial. In the texts studied, love and marriage are depicted as having clearly different natures. Yet in society they apparently co-exist. The situations examined by the author stem from this paradox, which once again demonstrates the gap opened up by passionate love between appearance and reality.²²⁸

b)

The term mariage²²⁹ heads a group of words which, first, relate directly to marriage: épouser, alliance, mari, femme, époux, divorce, liens, engagement, éternel, faire épouser. In PC the term éternel is used in the same context as miracle.²³⁰

A second group includes terms which place marriage in its social context: élévation, fortune, crédit²³¹, bienséance²³², héritière, avantage, profiter, grandeur, parti, abaisser, considération. Marriage is indissolubly linked to ideas of ambition, personal fortune and worldly success.

A third group comprises terms implying suffering, suspicion and betrayal: supplice²³³, infidélité, sacrifice, souçon, mépris, aversion, aveugler, souffrir, crainte, tromper.

PC alone contains a fourth group of terms stressing sense of duty, respect and affection: devoir²³⁴, mériter²³⁵, estime, tendresse, fidélité²³⁶. It remains to examine what reality lies behind these terms.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

All four marriages in this story are arranged for social and/or political reasons.²³⁷ Love plays no part in them. The resulting tension between loveless marriage and adulterous love provides one of the main springs of the story's action.

A preface to the main narrative is provided by the account of Mlle de Mezières's marriage. Her hand has been promised to M. de Maine²³⁸, though she secretly loves his brother, Guise.²³⁹ But things are not so simple: 'la maison de Bourbon, qui ne pouvait voir qu'avec envie l'élévation de celle de Guise, s'apercevant de l'avantage qu'elle recevrait de ce mariage, se résolut de le lui ôter et d'en profiter elle-même en faisant épouser cette héritière au jeune prince de Montpensier.'²⁴⁰

These few phrases alone are richly revealing of social attitudes. Envie, élévation, avantage, mariage, ôter, en profiter, faisant épouser, héritière:

the succession of related terms sets marriage firmly in the sole context of fortune and social prestige. Each marriage is necessarily scrutinized by the various social factions, and considered either as a threat to their own social position, or as a means of increasing power and influence.

Indeed, the terms avantage and avantageux²⁴¹ are used in this story only in connection with marriage. Finally, there is obviously no question of personal choice of a marriage-partner (ôter...faisant épouser). Fortune

and social position are all. In the end Mlle de Mezières is obliged to refuse a member of the Guise family and accept the hand of M. de Montpensier.²⁴²

Adultery with Guise is the not very surprising outcome of this process.²⁴³

The marriage of Madame, though a peripheral episode, is described in the same light. It is above all a political arrangement, 'une chose qui devait donner la paix à la France'²⁴⁴, where Madame has no say in the matter.²⁴⁵ The fact that she loves Guise²⁴⁶ makes it seem certain that the two will not be married. Revealing, too, of the status of marriage is the sacrifice²⁴⁷ made by Guise. This sacrifice consists, not in marrying without love, but in marrying someone of lower social rank. To calm Mme de Montpensier's jealousy, Guise renounces any idea of marrying Madame, and thus 'la grandeur où ce mariage pouvait l'élever.'²⁴⁸ He makes the extent of his sacrifice clear: 'Il m'en coûtera ma fortune.'²⁴⁹ Mme de Montpensier's heart goes out to 'un homme...qui venait de tout abandonner pour elle.'²⁵⁰

In this text therefore there is no case of love being a motive for marriage, which is a purely social arrangement, a chance to gain in rank, fortune and prestige. Marriage inevitably implies adultery, not love.

La Comtesse de Tende

The story opens with Tende's marriage. It ends with his vow never to marry again. This one fact gives a clue to the treatment of the marriage theme in this short nouvelle.

The first pages present a classic situation: a rich heiress, Mme de Neufchâtel²⁵¹, and a penniless nobleman, Navarre, who is casting round for a profitable match. 'Il jeta les yeux sur la princesse de Neufchâtel...comme sur une personne capable d'un attachement violent

et propre à faire la fortune d'un homme comme lui.'²⁵² Just afterwards, however, Navarre falls violently in love with Mme de Tende. What he had so eagerly sought is now a torture to him: 'il alla, comme au supplice, à la plus grande et à la plus agréable fortune où un cadet sans bien eût été jamais élevé.'²⁵³ It is an ironic reversal for one whose main preoccupation was fortune²⁵⁴ and grandeur.²⁵⁵ An equally bitter reversal occurs to Mme de Neufchâtel: 'J'ai épousé un homme par passion; j'ai fait un mariage inégal, désapprouvé, qui m'abaisse; et celui que j'ai préféré à tout en aime une autre.'²⁵⁶ To wed from love, and expect love in the marriage, is an obvious illusion in a world where marriage and love are poles apart.²⁵⁷

The marriage between Tende and the young Mlle de Strozzi starts off on the wrong foot: he feels she is too young, ignores her, and falls in love with someone else.²⁵⁸ Ironically, again, the situation is reversed. Her husband 'devint aussi amoureux d'elle que si elle n'eût point été sa femme.'²⁵⁹ In this phrase lies the whole opposition between love and marriage: one naturally excludes the other. Mme de Tende refuses, 'avec une force et une aigreur qui allaient jusqu'au mépris'²⁶⁰, this sudden husband, who has no scruples about preaching conjugal fidelity to Navarre.²⁶¹ But when she discovers that Navarre has made her pregnant, she can think of only one solution: 'elle conçut quelque légère espérance sur le voyage que son mari devait faire auprès d'elle.'²⁶² In order to save face she is ready to play at married love, for a single night. This is the nearest their marriage comes to being consummated.

'La jalousie et les soupçons bien fondés préparent d'ordinaire les maris à leurs malheurs.'²⁶³ That marital turmoil and jealousy are natural is the assumption behind this phrase: Tende is a clear example of the case. There is a double irony in his informing

Navarre that his mistress 'ne mérite pas que vous troubliez un aussi grand bonheur que le vôtre.'²⁶⁴ He not only ignores the fact that Navarre is marrying into anguish rather than happiness, but also that the mistress he deems so unworthy is the ~~one that~~ he has chosen to be his wife.

Marriage, then, in this text, symbolizes unhappiness, cynical calculation, social pressure and broken faith. Love and marriage cannot co-exist. Yet when they are separated, marriage is seen as a cold social contract, enslaving one person to another through social pressure and legal restraint.²⁶⁵ Both marriages in CT begin, continue and end in jealousy, bitterness and pain. Tende's own conclusion is perhaps close to the theme of the whole: 'Quoiqu'il fût fort jeune, il ne voulait jamais se remarier.'²⁶⁶

Zafde

In Z, exceptionally, there is a tiny élément married love, in the formal 'happy end' of the novel.²⁶⁷ This, however, is submerged by other conjugal ties where social and political pressures are all-important. The choice is bleak. Either marriage is accepted as being concerned merely with fortune and social status. In this case infidelity is the rule. Or else marriage is made from love. In this case the whole structure will come crashing down.

When Consalve, in love, desires to marry Nugna Bella²⁶⁸, the king disapproves: 'la politique'²⁶⁹ ne voulait pas qu'on les laissât unir par mariage.'²⁷⁰ So that when Nugna Bella comes to change Consalve for

Don Ramire, the royal veto is her prime consideration.²⁷¹ The change seems natural and reasonable to her.²⁷² Nor is this viewpoint a minority one. Zabelec actively mistrusts any idea of marrying from love. A husband she once loved has fallen in love with someone else and abandoned her.²⁷³ The worst thing is, she feels, that 'Je rompis, à cause de lui, un mariage très considérable pour ma fortune.'²⁷⁴ Since men are so fickle in love²⁷⁵, one may only reasonably marry for money or social position.²⁷⁶ And despite the happy end, there is hardly a romantic glow attached to Zalde's dealings with marriage.²⁷⁷

Don Garcie's love for Hermenesilde must be seen in this same perspective. His social position is too elevated for her to be able to marry him. Grandeur, and loss of it, is the all-important word here.²⁷⁸ Even when Don Garcie takes Hermenesilde by force, social considerations of a different kind determine a hasty marriage: 'la bienséance et mon amour le voulaient ainsi, et je le devais faire pour engager le comte de Castille dans mes intérêts.'²⁷⁹

Ironically, perhaps, it is Alamir, the Don Juan of the novel, who feels most keenly this link between marriage and social position. He suspects that women only pretend to love him, and really covet his title and position. This explains his horrorstricken reaction to Naria's natural desire to consummate their love in marriage²⁸⁰: 'Naria... aimait mon rang et celui où je pouvais l'élever.'²⁸¹ Women have nothing but 'de la vanité et de l'ambition.'²⁸² When a woman mentions marriage, it is certain for Alamir that she lacks real love.²⁸³ And this will always be Alamir's test of love, so convinced is he that love and marriage are incompatible.²⁸⁴ Given the treatment of marriage in the novel, such a viewpoint is by no means eccentric.

The second factor in Z which makes for the incompatibility between love and marriage is the fact that love cannot survive the marriage-state. At the beginning of the Histoire d'Alphonse et de Bélasire, Alphonse declares a simple philosophy: 'Je n'avais pas de répugnance au mariage; mais la connaissance que j'avais des femmes m'avait fait prendre la résolution de n'en épouser jamais de belles; et après avoir tant souffert par la jalousie, je ne voulais pas me mettre au hasard d'avoir tout ensemble celle d'un amant et celle d'un mari.'²⁸⁵ The amant²⁸⁶/mari contrast is significant. To be in love implies a response to beauty and charm: to be a husband means fulfilling a social role. The two must not be mixed, since marriage binds one partner to the other while love changes ceaselessly, and without warning. When Alphonse first meets the beautiful Bélasire, it seems that he will stick to this philosophy: 'je préférerais le malheur de vivre sans Bélasire à celui de vivre avec elle sans en être aimé.'²⁸⁷ Unfortunately for him, passion decides the contrary. The thought of being bound to Bélasire by the ties of marriage gives him all the jealousy he has predicted. In these circumstances love soon withers and dies.²⁸⁸

Bélasire has equally frank views on the subject of love and marriage: 'Je suis née avec aversion pour le mariage; les liens m'en ont toujours paru très rudes et j'ai cru qu'il n'y avait qu'une passion qui pût assez aveugler pour faire passer par-dessus toutes les raisons qui s'opposent à cet engagement.'²⁸⁹ The equation is simple. Not to marry is associated with raison, marriage with liens rudes and aveugler. Only passion can blind sufficiently to make someone take this step to serfdom: 'je ne comprends pas qu'on puisse se marier sans amour et sans une amour violente.'²⁹⁰ Unhappily for Bélasire, she too is swept away by love into agreeing to marry Alphonse. but the liens rudes of his

jealousy are unbearable: 'Les jalousies des amants ne sont que fâcheuses, mais celles des maris sont fâcheuses et offensantes.'²⁹¹ To marry out of love she sees as madness.

Two very important points about marriage are thus made in Z. Firstly, that marriage can rarely be freed from the kind of social pressures which make its ideals ~~followed~~.²⁹² And secondly, that it is better in any case to burn from passion than to marry out of love.²⁹³

La Princesse de Clèves

This novel poses two questions already raised in the previous works. If marriage is made purely for social reasons, is adultery not then the norm? And if marriage is made from love, can this love ever be mutual, and last for any length of time?²⁹⁴

At Court every marriage is a source of conflict for the rival factions. Crédit...considération²⁹⁵ ...élévation²⁹⁶ are the only aims proposed for matrimony. Both the Guise and the Montmorency parties seek to 'gagner la duchesse de Valentinois'²⁹⁷, *the key to real power*, by arranging marriages with her relatives.²⁹⁸ Questions of political power and social position are the only factors taken into account.²⁹⁹ Marriage is also the means of sealing international treaties, or promoting friendship with countries. In this way Henri II works for good relations with Spain, Savoy and England.³⁰⁰ Thus Mme Elisabeth is obliged, 'après beaucoup de répugnance',³⁰¹ to marry the ageing Philip II. Henri seizes on

the occasion to 'faire paraître l'adresse et la magnificence de sa cour.'³⁰²

The theme of marriage is employed to stress once more the falsity of the world's appearances. A married union is concluded in the name of a love which can only subsist outside the bounds of marriage.³⁰³

In addition, where love is a factor in marriage, this love is never mutual. (Nemours expresses astonishment that Elizabeth of England should want to marry him 'par amour'.³⁰⁴) The case of Mme de Tournon seems to contradict this idea, at first sight. She offers to marry Sancerre, out of love³⁰⁵, despite the social damage this would cause her.³⁰⁶ But she also offers to marry Estouteville, again out of love³⁰⁷, while all the time appearing only to mourn her dead husband. Her marital fidelity is a three-way affair. It is in this context, where the opposition between love and marriage is continually stressed, that the marriage of Mme de Clèves is set.³⁰⁸

The union is arranged by Mme de Chartres, whose attitude to the whole idea of wedded love is disturbingly ambiguous. She declares that 'ce qui seul peut faire le bonheur d'une femme...est d'aimer son mari et d'en être aimée.'³⁰⁹ Yet she attempts to find above all a socially prestigious partner for her daughter.³¹⁰ Ironically, her second attempt to marry her daughter fails because of political in-fighting at Court.³¹¹ Since she has adopted the Court's standards in this particular matter, she can have little cause for complaint. Ironically, again, Mme de Chartres can recommend to her daughter Clèves's bonnes qualités and sagesse.³¹² A further irony, in view of Mme de Chartres's earlier praise of married love, is that 'elle ne craignit point de donner à sa fille un mari qu'elle ne pût aimer en lui donnant le prince de Clèves.'³¹³ The next irony is

perhaps the most bitter: Mme de Chartres is glad that her daughter does not love Clèves³¹⁴, and yet spells out the obligations of marital fidelity.³¹⁵ Mme de Clèves is given a disquieting legacy.

In this society Clèves seems exceptional. He loves Mlle de Chartres and wishes to marry her.³¹⁶ He even resists when his father raises social considerations.³¹⁷ It is love that he seeks, not marriage as such: 'il eût préféré le bonheur de lui plaire à la certitude de l'épouser sans en être aimé.'³¹⁸ His own worst fears are inevitably confirmed. In his new wife he finds only estime and reconnaissance.³¹⁹ He is not happy in marrying the woman he loves³²⁰, complaining bitterly that his wife's feelings are only appropriate for a marriage of convenience.³²¹ For Mme de Clèves, however, it is a marriage of convenience, arising from social demands rather than personal affection.³²² From the outset the situation contains all the seeds of disaster.

The respective feelings of both partners are summed up time and again in two words: amant for Clèves, devoir for his wife. Their relationship is lived at these very different levels: 'Pour être son mari, il ne laissa pas d'être son amant'³²³; 'Vous êtes ma femme; je vous aime comme ma maîtresse.'³²⁴ For Clèves there is a continual tension between his status as mari and his desires as amant.³²⁵ His self-destructive jealousy arises inexorably from his keen sense of the total opposition of marriage and love, and inability to accept this: 'Jamais mari n'avait eu une passion si violente pour sa femme.'³²⁶ The mari-femme relationship is incompatible with that of amant-maîtresse. His wife's supposed adultery fuses these two states together, only in the jealous neuroses of his mind: 'Vous avez donc oublié que je vous aimais éperdument et que j'étais votre

mari? L'un des deux peut porter aux extrémités: que ne peuvent point les deux ensemble?'³²⁷ In this context Clèves's death is convincing. He is swept away by 'la douleur que cause l'infidélité d'une maîtresse et la honte d'être trompé par une femme.'³²⁸ The opposition between love and marriage remains complete.³²⁹ The mari-amant grouping is seen as an impossible pair, negative and positive in the same magnetic field. It is thus futile, and pathetic, for a dying Clèves to insist that his love was 'légitime.'³⁰³

Mme de Clèves can utter no words of passion to her husband. For her, marriage is bound up with an idea of marital devoir³³¹ inherited from Mme de Chartres, who 'prit de grands soins de l'attacher à son mari et de lui faire comprendre ce qu'elle devait à l'inclination qu'il avait eue pour elle.'³³² After her mother's death, she resolves 'de ne manquer à rien de ce qu'elle lui devait.'³³³ The part of filial guilt and obligation in this devoir is obviously preponderant. Thus any amitié and tendresse³³⁴ she has for Clèves come, not from any married love, but from an attempt to fight off her love for Nemours: 'il lui semblait qu'à force de s'attacher à lui, il la défendrait contre M. de Nemours.'³³⁵ One clear illustration of this is the aveu, that 'marque de fidélité'³³⁶ given, or half-given, as the only way out for Mme de Clèves. When we know the consequences of her confession, we can see a bitter and unconscious irony in her description of it as 'ce témoignage de fidélité à un mari qui le méritait si bien.'³³⁷

It is true that after the aveu Mme de Clèves protests her amitié and estime for her husband³³⁸, and regrets having lost 'le coeur et l'estime de son mari.'³³⁹ But such feelings are no match for passion: 'l'amitié qu'elle avait pour lui et ce qu'elle lui devait, faisaient des

impressions dans son coeur qui affaiblissaient l'idée de M. de Nemours; mais ce n'était que pour quelque temps; et cette idée revenait bientôt plus vive et plus présente qu'auparavant.³⁴⁰ Ironically, only with her husband on his death-bed do Mme de Clèves's feelings for him take on a force which can at least diminish her yearning for Nemours, himself quick to realize 'combien cette amitié faisait une diversion dangereuse à la passion qu'elle avait dans le coeur.'³⁴¹ When Clèves dies, she sees 'quel mari elle avait perdu'³⁴², and 'elle repassait incessamment tout ce qu'elle lui devait.'³⁴³ The novel's bitterest irony on marriage is that devoir and fidélité are only a living force when he who inspires them is dead.³⁴⁴ 'Les pensées de la mort lui avaient rapproché la mémoire de M. de Clèves. Ce souvenir, qui s'accordait à son devoir, s'imprima fortement dans son coeur.'³⁴⁵ Only with a dead husband can Mme de Clèves come to terms with married love.

This rejection of marriage as a medium by which love can be expressed is conclusively confirmed in Mme de Clèves's final interview with Nemours. The mari-amant opposition is here vital. Nemours is really speaking against himself, with unconscious irony, when he assures Mme de Clèves that she, alone of all women, would give her husband nothing to fear.³⁴⁶ Her riposte is deadly: 'Mais les hommes conservent-ils de la passion dans ces engagements éternels? Dois-je espérer un miracle en ma faveur?'³⁴⁷ And with this is condemned any idea of marriage as an expression of mutual love. It is a miracle, something beyond the natural laws of human life. '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?'³⁴⁸

Thus it is the mari-amant distinction which is

finally telling. Though Mme de Clèves's resolve to avoid marriage sometimes weakens³⁴⁹, this central insight is never dimmed: 'les maux de la jalousie qu'elle croyait infaillibles dans un mariage, lui montraient un malheur certain où elle s'allait jeter.'³⁵⁰ A structure supposing reciprocity and stability is no place for a passion which by its very nature is volatile and spontaneous.³⁵¹

In this novel, the author casts a cold eye on marriage.³⁵² In appearance it is an expression of love. But in reality, in this society, it is more connected with social status and the lust for power. Where there is love it is never mutual, resulting in jealousy and unhappiness. And even if such a mutual love could exist (Mme de Clèves - Nemours), it would be a miracle if this frail equilibrium were kept in being. Once again the accusing finger is pointed at passionate love. 'Mais les hommes conservent-ils de la passion dans ces engagements éternels?' In the author's perspective of love, éternels is irony at its most pure.

Chapter FourAPPEARANCES- apparences(paraitre - croire - cacher - vérité)

APPARENCES

a)

As two post-war theses¹ and many other studies² have confirmed, the conflict between appearances and reality is, with passionate love, the dominant theme of ML's fictional world.

'Les apparences sont bien fausses': Chabanes's poignant cry could be set in preface to each of the author's works.³ Constant reference is made to what appears, to what seems to be. This is much more than a device to create authorial distance from the text. Each character confronts a world of appearances and masks. The real masks and disguises of L'Astrée⁴ have become figurative, but no less real. If not deceived by what appears, the character is blinded by passion to what is. Passion, then, is inseparable from deception and self-deception.⁵

The ironic corollary of wearing a mask is a consciousness of others' masks, and the desire to go beyond the appearance. But the fact of being scrutinized leads to a redoubling of efforts to keep up the mask. Can one ever see clearly into one's own feelings or those of others? Can a consciousness deformed by passion grasp reality in a society where passion and the demands of passion distort all that is? Given the importance attached to the theme of appearances, such questions are inevitably crucial: 'Est-ce une illusion ou une vérité?'⁶

The central themes of passion and appearances are then indissolubly linked, and form the backbone of ML's fictional works. A reference to one is invariably an allusion to the other.⁷

b)

The term apparences is not in itself an important or frequently recurring word. Indeed, it does not occur in CT. The term is, however, a useful umbrella-word grouping a wide-ranging list of related words, which in each story have been examined in four groups, under the headings paraître, croire, cacher and vérité. Furetière's definition of the term apparence is a useful introduction to the range of words it represents:

' - La surface extérieure des choses, ce qui d'abord frappe les yeux.

Il ne faut pas juger par l'apparence, car souvent les apparences sont trompeuses.

- Se dit aussi de ce qui est opposé à la réalité, qui n'est que faux, feint et simulé.⁸

The significance of the paraître⁹ group is confirmed by Styger¹⁰ and Kreiter¹¹. Indeed, Kreiter points out that 'La fréquence du mot paraître dans la PC est de 1 par page (157 emplois en 154 pages).'¹² Niderst¹³ and Quémada¹⁴ also indicate the importance of the term paraître. With paraître are naturally associated terms such as sembler¹⁵, faire profession de¹⁶, réputation¹⁷, faire paraître, faire voir, air¹⁸, marque¹⁹, mine²⁰, vraisemblable²¹, public²², aux yeux de, and, in PC, terms denoting the surface brilliance of Court life, such as magnificence, admiration²³, éclat²⁴, se parer²⁵.

Living in a world of paraître inevitably leads to illusion and self-delusion, represented by a group of words headed croire. Again, Furetière's definition of croire stresses the ambiguity of the term, and the probability of error which it connotes:

'- Etre persuadé de la vérité de quelque chose qui est certain.

- Se dit aussi de l'imagination qu'on a qu'une chose est vraie, quoi qu'elle soit fausse.²⁶

Other terms in this group include penser²⁷, s'imaginer²⁸, se flatter²⁹, ignorer, aveugler³⁰, illusion³¹, défiance, imagination³². The hazards of judging from what appears to be the truth make croire and illusion fit easily into the same group.

False appearances are caused by secrecy, disguise or deception. The third sub-section (under cache) groups this range of terms: dissimuler³³, secret³⁴, feindre³⁵, prétexte³⁶, faire semblant³⁷, laisser voir, laisser croire, déguiser³⁸, artifice³⁹, affectation⁴⁰, inventer, flatter. In this fictional world, cache seems the most natural instinct, whether reaction of self-defence or as a wish to deceive. Society resembles a masked ball, in which no-one can be sure of the identity of feelings or attitudes.

Can the truth then be known? The terms which suggest the search for a reality beyond false appearance are grouped under vérité: découvrir⁴¹, démêler⁴², éclaircir⁴³, éclaircissement⁴⁴, éclairer⁴⁵, souçonner, savoir, connaître, sincérité⁴⁶, certitude⁴⁷, deviner, preuve⁴⁸, déclarer⁴⁹, lumière⁵⁰. In a society where every gesture and expression is scrutinized, is it possible to go beyond what only seems to be?

This group of terms which has received the general heading Apparences contains a great number of examples in each text, too great for each to be examined. Sufficient among them may be selected, however, to show the importance and the implications of the theme of appearances in these four works.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

In this story society is presented as a world of hide-and-seek. Stress is laid on what appears, on what is shown, on what is allowed to be seen. And yet what appears rarely reflects what is. Illusion, secrecy and deception are constants.

The author's use of the paraître group of words stresses the importance of what is immediately perceivable by each of the characters. What matters, for example, is not the fact of Mme de Montpensier's beauty, but its effect on Anjou and Guise: 'elle leur sembla fort belle'⁵¹; 'Cette aventure.....leur parut une chose de roman'⁵²; 'un trouble qui la fit paraître aux yeux de ces princes dans une beauté qu'ils crurent surnaturelle'⁵³; 'il n'avait encore rien vu qui lui parût comparable à cette jeune princesse.'⁵⁴ Similarly Chabanes, overwhelmed, 'regardait avec admiration tant de beauté, d'esprit et de vertu qui paraissaient en cette princesse.'⁵⁵ The author carefully avoids giving Mme de Montpensier any credentials of virtue. What is emphasized is Chabanes's admiration.

A second point to emerge is how often the appearance (e.g. the vertu just mentioned) is false. 'La paix ne fit que paraître. La guerre recommença aussitôt.'⁵⁶ The use of paraître here indicates how illusory is the semblance of peace in a society to be engulfed by civil war. The same procedure is used on a personal level: 'il leur fit voir une si grande nécessité pour sa fortune à faire paraître qu'il n'avait aucune pensée d'épouser Madame qu'il les obligea...'⁵⁷ Faire voir...faire
paraître: Guise presents one image to his family, and they in turn present an image to society. In each case the image is false: Guise's desire not

to marry Madame arises from his fear of Mme de Montpensier's jealousy. Similarly, when Montpensier speaks to Chabanes, whom he has just discovered in his wife's bedroom, 'd'un ton qui faisait voir qu'il avait encore de l'amitié pour lui'⁵⁸, the image is as false as the friendship: Montpensier merely wants details from Chabanes to satisfy his jealousy.

It is not then surprising that croire normally indicates a state of illusion. Thus 'un homme que toute la France croyait amoureux de Madame'⁵⁹, Guise, in fact loves Mme de Montpensier. A symbolic set-piece of the story is a masked ball at Court. Here Mme de Montpensier mistakenly believes Anjou to be Guise⁶⁰, just as she mistakenly believes Guise's love will not end. Before, she has been unwilling to admit her love, and only gradually realizes 'qu'elle prenait plus d'intérêt au duc de Guise qu'elle ne pensait.'⁶¹ Then, she cherishes the illusion that she has enough moral strength to refuse Guise admittance to her bedroom: 'Elle pensa que, sans le rappeler, elle n'avait qu'à ne point faire abaisser le pont. Elle crut qu'elle continuerait dans cette résolution.'⁶² In the same way Chabanes, concealing his love from Mme de Montpensier, 'crut qu'il aurait toujours le même désir de le lui cacher.'⁶³ In both these cases croire is synonymous with illusion.

Self-deception goes hand-in-hand with deception and secrecy. All the main characters strive to hide their love, or the jealousy which love provokes. Since love is the dominant force within them, the reality of their lives is being hidden. Guise and the young Mlle de Mezières 'cachèrent leur amour avec beaucoup de soin.'⁶⁴ Their love 'n'avait été sue de personne.'⁶⁵ Guise conceals his love from Anjou, his companion-at-arms⁶⁶, while both Anjou and Montpensier resort

to pretexts to hide their jealousy.⁶⁷ (Such terms as feindre and prétexte serve equally, of course, to reveal to us the true nature of the character.⁶⁸) Chabanes's first instinct, having fallen in love with Mme de Montpensier, is to prevent the surfacing of these violent feelings: 'S'il ne fut pas maître de son coeur, il le fut de ses actions.'⁶⁹ This is an entirely typical procedure.⁷⁰ What is important is conduite⁷¹, all that is outward and visible in behaviour. The image is all.

Part of the story is set in the Court, or in Court society. Here, almost as a matter of course, true feelings must be suppressed, and the allotted social role acted out. Thus Guise's early declaration of love to Mme de Montpensier is 'afin de s'épargner tous ces commencements qui font toujours naître le bruit et l'éclat.'⁷² The one exception quite clearly proves the rule: 'comme Mme de Noirmoutier était une personne qui prenait autant de soin de faire éclater des galanteries que les autres en prennent de les cacher...'⁷³ The political intrigues at Court⁷⁴, culminating in the secret plans for the St. Bartholemew's Day massacre⁷⁵, are one manifestation of a wider phenomenon: deception is the coin of the realm.

Departures from expected behaviour (which are usually to serve a love-interest) thus always demand a pretext: 'il inventa une affaire considérable'⁷⁶; 'feignant...des affaires extraordinaires'⁷⁷; 'il feignit un voyage.'⁷⁸ Watching eyes are everywhere. Guise cannot publicly express his gratitude and love to Mme de Montpensier.⁷⁹ Anjou, equally full of passion for her, takes care 'à ne lui en pas rendre des témoignages trop éclatants.'⁸⁰ His actions are dictated by the sole desire to avoid public display of his feelings⁸¹, so that he cannot openly show his jealous hatred for Guise.⁸² The tokens of his love are countless, but always fugitive:

'Il ne se passait point de jour qu'elle ne reçût mille marques cachées de la passion de ce duc.'⁸³ Marques cachées: in these words lies the germ of the tension between appearance and reality which passionate love necessarily produces, especially in the Court atmosphere.

Sometimes the mask slips. Mme de Montpensier finds it difficult to suppress every trace of her feelings for Guise.⁸⁴ Anjou's sharp eye discerns a flash of jealousy: 'Les yeux de cette princesse laissaient voir malgré elle quelque chagrin.'⁸⁵ This is enough to convince him. Similarly, Guise 'ne pouvait si bien cacher son amour que le prince de Montpensier n'en entrevît quelque chose.'⁸⁶ In the Court the slightest change in conduite is a clear signal for the watching eyes.⁸⁷ To paraphrase Pascal's description of imagination, one might say that the appearances are all the more false for not always being so.⁸⁸

Thus the truth is always sought, but rarely found. And what is true one day may be untrue the next. Passionate love erupts spontaneously. When Mme de Montpensier tells Chabanes that she could only have contempt for anyone in love with her⁸⁹, he 'ne douta point de la vérité de ses paroles.'⁹⁰ This vérité is quickly infirmed. An irony of this search for the truth, for the reality behind the appearances, is the devastating effect of revelation. When Chabanes, tormented by jealousy, brings Guise's love-letter to Mme de Montpensier, 'elle ne prit point le soin de la lui cacher et lui fit avaler à longs traits tout le poison imaginable en lui lisant ces lettres et la réponse tendre et galante qu'elle y faisait.'⁹¹ Poison: a diet of falsehood makes poison of the truth.

The various elements of the Apparences word-group are interwoven in the story's dramatic climax, when Montpensier bursts into his wife's bedroom to find Chabanes alone with her. What is he to believe? He does not know that Guise has just taken flight, yet Chabanes is someone he has never suspected. And so he 'ne croyait pas voir ce qu'il voyait, et...voulait démêler le chaos où il venait de tomber.'⁹² In his appeal to Chabanes we are reminded of the traditional quest of the tragic hero: 'Est-ce une illusion ou une vérité?⁹³...éclaircissez-moi d'une aventure que je ne puis croire telle qu'elle me paraît.'⁹⁴ Chabanes replies 'avec un air qui marquait son innocence.'⁹⁵ He declares that, if he be guilty, 'ce n'est pas de la manière que vous pouvez vous l'imaginer.'⁹⁶ The appearances are conflicting and confusing, the more so since Chabanes, though innocent of adultery, does in reality love Mme de Montpensier. When Montpensier once more appeals for an éclaircissement⁹⁷, all the trapped Chabanes can do is to state, pathetically, that 'les apparences sont bien fausses.'⁹⁸ The truism, never so true, is not believed. The murder of Chabanes during the St. Bartholemew's Day massacre is accepted joyfully by Montpensier as revenge 'de l'offense qu'il croyait avoir reçue.'⁹⁹ Croire signifies here an illusion the more potent for being the illusion of a discovered truth.

'Les apparences sont bien fausses.' No single statement more neatly sums up the theme of appearances in PM. The truth is stifled by image, mask, deception, illusion. It is only glimpsed fitfully, and partially. Does the author not suggest that the reality behind the appearance is that we are condemned to live in a world of appearance?

La Comtesse de Tende

Is what seems to be what really is? If not, can the truth then ever be found? And if so, is it more damaging than the false impression held previously? Such are the questions which arise from this short nouvelle. The image furnished is throughout of great importance:¹⁰⁰ 'elle fit paraître beaucoup d'esprit; le monde la regarda avec admiration.'¹⁰¹ The use of a term like air is a clear indication of this focus on the image given.¹⁰² What seems to be is what is often unthinkingly accepted, as Tende ruefully ponders in the case of his wife: 'elle lui avait toujours paru la plus estimable femme qu'il eût jamais vue.'¹⁰³

In this light, the question of public image becomes crucial, especially for Tende. He must appear to love his wife, since 'il avait toujours conservé des mesures d'honnêteté aux yeux du public et de son domestique.'¹⁰⁴ In her confession of adultery Mme de Tende takes care to assure him that, concerning her liaison with Navarre, 'le public ne l'a jamais soupçonné'¹⁰⁵, and that she has not committed suicide because 'je n'ai pas voulu me déshonorer aux yeux du monde parce que ma réputation vous regarde.'¹⁰⁶ Public, aux yeux du monde, réputation, proclaim a world where ~~image has primacy over~~ reality. Mme de Tende hopes that her husband will kill her, because, as she admits, 'je vais faire paraître l'état où je suis'¹⁰⁷, that is, her pregnancy. On the contrary, Tende feels that if he were to kill her, 'l'on soupçonnerait aisément la vérité.'¹⁰⁸ So he 'résolue de ne rien laisser voir au public'¹⁰⁹, and informs his wife coldly that 'le désir d'empêcher l'éclat de ma honte l'emporte présentement sur ma vengeance.'¹¹⁰

Thus Tende's avenging hand is stayed only by the thought of what the outside world would think. His final warning to his wife is almost a parody of his obsession with public image: 'Conduisez-vous comme si vous aviez toujours été ce que vous deviez être.'¹¹¹ Life is lived on the level of appearances, with a standard of ideal behaviour to which no-one might keep, but to which everyone must ascribe. In his blind jealousy Tende has one comfort: 'cette ignorance entière du public pour son malheur lui fut un adoucissement.'¹¹² And his wife can die calmed 'de voir sa réputation en sûreté.'¹¹³

With the image furnished invariably false, those interpreting the image invariably live in a state of illusion. False image without, false belief within: croire usually indicates this world of illusion.¹¹⁴ Appearances are accepted, the vraisemblable believed.¹¹⁵ Mme de Tende thinks that no harm can come from her liaison with Navarre: 'elle s'était senti tant de vertu qu'elle s'était défiée ni de lui, ni d'elle-même.'¹¹⁶ The result is an unwanted pregnancy.

In this world of false image, everyone has something to hide, or someone to deceive. Navarre pretends to love in order to marry well, a 'dessein ignoré de tout le monde.'¹¹⁷ Even Mme de Tende is worried by this deception of Mme de Neufchâtel and 'du soin qu'il prenait de la tromper.'¹¹⁸ So for a short time Navarre 'se contraignit par ses ordres'¹¹⁹, and reassures Mme de Neufchâtel so well that she is ready to sacrifice her name and fortune in return for a love which is entirely counterfeit, which is even an effort, a 'supplice'.¹²⁰ Ironically, with no idea of the secret her fiancé is withholding from her, she is busily preparing to marry 'secrètement et de ne le déclarer que quand il serait fait.'¹²¹

Two incidents in particular sum up the nature of a society riddled with deceit. On his wedding-night Navarre enters Mme de Tende's bedroom, through 'une porte dérobée'¹²², and has to calm her worries about her réputation.¹²³ His reply speaks eloquently of the world of appearances: 'Personne ne le peut savoir.'¹²⁴ When Tende discovers them both together in the bedroom, an explanation (that Navarre has come to seek advice about a love-affair) comes so naturally to Navarre that Tende believes him. Ironically, Navarre's lie contains several truthful elements. What he does not say is the essential fact, that the mistress in question is also the honourable wife of the person to whom this plausible explanation is being given.

Navarre excuses his presence here by saying that he was only begging Mme de Tende to intercede in his favour with a jealous wife, and then adds: 'Elle me refuse de mentir en ma faveur...; elle ne veut pas trahir son amie.'¹²⁵ This last is perhaps the grossest lie conceivable. Mme de Tende deceives both her best friend and her husband all the time. She even attempts to hide her true feelings from Navarre¹²⁶, but love will out.¹²⁷ This love between Navarre and Mme de Tende, involving a double treachery, is the only spontaneous sincerity in the story. Since love must be satisfied, imperatively, there is no other way out than to lie, deceive and betray. When Mme de Tende's lover goes away to the army, she is naturally 'contrainte de cacher son affliction'¹²⁸, and when he dies, she has to invent a pretext for her grief.¹²⁹ Sooner or later the truth must be told, however, if only because of the child she is ready to be delivered of. For once, the appearances will speak for themselves.

Can the truth then ever be found? Nothing is less

certain. Mme de Neufchâtel almost discovers the truth about her husband's adultery.¹³⁰ But in this case the truth is so destructive of any shred of self-esteem that she investigates no further. She is alternately jealous¹³¹ and happy with Navarre¹³², and when he dies she mourns a love which never existed.¹³³ Love, in any case, can never be shown to be 'true', and no-one is prepared completely to believe professions of love. Mme de Tende wonders whether, after all, 'son amant n'aimât véritablement la princesse.'¹³⁴ Navarre wants to prove his passion¹³⁵ by withdrawing from his imminent wedding. But if he is deceiving so successfully his wife and his good friend Tende, why should he not, now or later, deceive his mistress? Ironically, only Navarre, the arch-deceiver, believes he has attained true love.¹³⁶

Tende finally discovers the true facts about his wife's adultery. When he sees how unhappy she is after the death of Navarre, he is 'presque éclairé'.¹³⁷ Thinking over all that has happened, 'enfin il crut voir la vérité.'¹³⁸ But on the very threshold of discovery, he refuses to go any further: 'il lui restait néanmoins ce doute que l'amour nous laisse toujours pour les choses qui coûtent trop cher à croire.'¹³⁹ In the depths of his mind he resists the invasion of an objective certainty which would shatter his world. Finally he postpones any conclusion, 'remettant au temps à lui donner plus de certitude.'¹⁴⁰ But time cannot wait. A pregnant Mme de Tende knows better than anyone that the truth will one day be known, and that her husband already suspects it.¹⁴¹ Her confession is thus forced on her by events, and is also a tactical move, designed so to inflame her husband that he will kill her.¹⁴² She is not moved by any final, repenting love of the truth.

In such a situation we see the pain such an illumination

can cause, despite all Tende's previous suspicions. 'La jalousie et les soupçons bien fondés préparent d'ordinaire les maris à leurs malheurs; ils ont même toujours quelques doutes, mais ils n'ont pas cette certitude que donne l'aveu, qui est au-dessus de nos lumières.'¹⁴³ Nos lumières: this story shows them to be feeble indeed, and bounded on all sides by false images. Suddenly in one blinding flash the hapless Tende is enabled to see all that has happened between his wife and Navarre, and the latter's deception of both Mme de Neufchâtel and himself: 'les circonstances, qui lui faisaient voir à quel point et de quel manière il avait été trompé, lui perçaient le coeur, et il ne respirait que la vengeance.'¹⁴⁴ To know the truth is to stumble on a whole, unknown world of falsity.

As for Mme de Tende, she is finally brought to a kind of serenity: 'son âme était, d'ailleurs, détrompée'¹⁴⁵ et noyée dans l'affliction.'¹⁴⁶ This is another sort of illumination, but bought at such a price that death seems more bearable than life: 'elle ne pouvait arrêter les yeux sur aucune chose de cette vie qui ne lui fût plus rude que la mort même.'¹⁴⁷ Mme de Tende casts her eyes round a darkened world for the last time, and sees nothing. Appearance and reality are joined only in death.

Zafde

In this novel the terms which have been grouped under paraître are often used for purely descriptive reasons, e.g. 'Elle paraissait triste et embarrassée.'¹⁴⁸ This may be taken as a sign of an authorial reluctance to intervene directly, especially if taken in conjunction with the narrative structure: most of the novel comes in the form of stories

told by different characters.

Usually, however, such words focus our attention on reality as it appears to each character, on his own inner world: 'il me parut qu'elle ne s'était pas souciée que je visse qu'elle lui parlait.'¹⁴⁹ Terms like marque, air, manière, physionomie¹⁵⁰, are evidence of the same procedure.¹⁵¹ Don Garcie has no hesitation in declaring the basis of his judgement of women: 'Nous jugeons de leur esprit par leur physionomie.'¹⁵² Elsibery looks at Alamir for 'des marques d'une passion très sincère et très délicate'¹⁵³, while Zafde feels that Consalve has some love for her, on noticing that 'il y avait un air dans ses actions qui le lui faisait soupçonner.'¹⁵⁴ And Naria, suspecting infidelity on the part of Alamir, lets herself be deceived by his very tone of voice: 'il lui parla d'une manière qui la persuada quasi qu'elle lui faisait injustice de le soupçonner.'¹⁵⁵ There are so many instances of the paraître group of terms that a pattern of description is formed which makes us concentrate more and more on the reactions of the different characters to events. Reality is multi-sided, conveyed and distorted in the mirror of each man's mind. It is no longer the fact that matters, but rather the character's reaction to what appears to be.

The use of the single term paraître especially underlines this central point. Consalve is attracted, for example, by 'une personne qui lui paraissait si extraordinaire.'¹⁵⁶ He recalls how Nugna Bella 'ne négligea pas de me paraître aimable.'¹⁵⁷ Félimé's whole attitude to Alamir is influenced by how he had appeared on their first meeting.¹⁵⁸ She is then deceived into believing that Alamir might have some regard for her by the looks he gave, 'd'une manière qui m'avait paru

si naturelle.¹⁵⁹ Naria confesses to Alamir that 'Vous m'avez paru aimable dans le premier moment que je vous ai vu'¹⁶⁰, while Alamir himself has no scruples in admitting that what matters is not the fact of love, but the appearance of it: 'le plaisir d'être aimé et l'envie de surmonter des difficultés fait en moi ce qui leur paraît de la passion.'¹⁶¹ These few examples, from a great many more, serve to indicate the importance of what appears to be.

This becomes crucial in the case of Alphonse, whose sensitivity to the slightest change in outward appearances borders on the neurotic. He reaches a whole set of (totally wrong) conclusions about his 'rival' on the basis of what seems to him to be: 'il me parut qu'(e)... il fallait qu'il fût prévenu pour Bélasire'¹⁶²; 'il me semblait qu'elle cherchait à s'en consoler avec lui'¹⁶³; 'il me parut que je n'avais pas sujet de me plaindre.'¹⁶⁴ Paraître and sembler constantly recur in Alphonse's conclusions from the 'evidence'.¹⁶⁵ This leads to Bélasire's anguished cry, 'où pouvez-vous prendre des choses si peu vraisemblables?'¹⁶⁶ But Alphonse has only believed what seems to him to be true. He has received this 'reality' through the deforming prism of his passion.¹⁶⁷

Thence the importance of all those terms grouped with croire.¹⁶⁸ This normally indicates a state of illusion which passion has induced: 'il n'y avait qu'une passion qui pût assez aveugler...'¹⁶⁹ Every character in the text lives through these states of unreality in which the falsest things are to them the only true ones. Consalve falls from one pit of ignorance to the next. He realizes suddenly that he is passionately attached to Zaïde, though before he has imagined the opposite.¹⁷⁰ Now he realizes that all his previous ideas have been false.¹⁷¹

Similarly, at the court of Léon, Consalve lives as in an unreal world, believing only what appears to be, and surrounded by those he holds to be his friends¹⁷²: 'Je me crus mieux avec lui que je n'avais jamais été'¹⁷³; 'la consolation de me croire véritablement aimé'¹⁷⁴; 'je me croyais aimé des personnes qui m'étaient les plus chères.'¹⁷⁵ The realization of his errors leads him to diagnose the same self-delusion in others: 'Nugna Bella a cru m'aimer; elle n'aimait que ma fortune.'¹⁷⁶ Yet Consalve is never at any time enlightened; his love with Zaïde is played out against a background of illusion, fear and uncertainty¹⁷⁷; the term croire is at the centre of Alphonse's debate with him.¹⁷⁸ Small comfort for Consalve to be told that 'les apparences sont trompeuses si vous n'êtes véritablement aimé de Zaïde.'¹⁷⁹ He has just been deceived by the most faithful of his friends. How can one ever tell?¹⁸⁰ Passion inevitably deforms the meaning of things: 'Je me flattai, comme toutes les personnes qui aiment.'¹⁸¹

The use of croire in conjunction with s'imaginer and se flatter is widespread in the case of Alphonse¹⁸², and is an apt enough commentary on his inward state: 'j'étais jaloux de mon ami, et...je le croyais mon rival sans croire avoir sujet de le haïr.'¹⁸³ Soon Alphonse is reduced to despair. If he refuses to believe what appears to be, life is hardly worth living. But if he believes, he knows that he is open to treachery. 'Je ne pouvais donc démêler quels sentiments il avait pour elle, ni quels étaient ceux qu'elle avait pour lui. Je ne savais même très souvent quels étaient les miens.'¹⁸⁴ The whole debate with Bélasire turns on the value of the word croire, contrasted in Bélasire's mind with a futile s'imaginer. For her croire is directed to what is true, s'imaginer to what is illusory.¹⁸⁵ But Alphonse cannot, in his heart, make this distinction: 'Je veux croire... que tout ce que vous me dites est véritable, et que vous ne croyez point

que Don Henrique vous aime; mais je le crois, Madame, et c'est assez.'¹⁸⁶

This last phrase falls like a hammer-blow. It aptly summarizes a recurring theme in the novel. Thus Féline prefers, to the truth that Alamir loves Zaïde and not herself, 'ces moments précieux où il voulait bien me laisser croire qu'il m'aimait.'¹⁸⁷ And despite Alamir's apparent guilt ('toutes les apparences étaient que son amant l'avait trahie'¹⁸⁸), Elsbery wants with all her heart to believe in his innocence. But she cannot¹⁸⁹; and ironically, for once Alamir is innocent of infidelity. On every side there is illusion.¹⁹⁰ Croire here inevitably points to a state of false belief.

But the appearances are falsified not only in the distorting mirror of the passion-troubled mind. Reality is also hidden or falsified.¹⁹¹ Féline, for example, assures Alamir that the 'apparences sont trompeuses'¹⁹², just at the very moment when the appearances point to the truth. She feels that she cannot afford to be truthful.¹⁹³ The whole history of her dealings with Alamir and Zaïde is one of subterfuge.¹⁹⁴ In this situation there are many folds of irony. Alamir, little realizing that he is the object of Féline's secret passion, comes to suspect that she is suffering from some unrequited love for someone. Féline is offended: 'Je ne pouvais supporter qu'il crût que j'aimais sans être aimée; et il me semblait que j'en paraissais moins digne que lui.'¹⁹⁵ Once again we see, in the croire...sembler...paraître of her words, the obsession with fixing an image of oneself. Feelings must be suppressed, or hidden, if they do not answer to the idea which people have of themselves, or that which they wish others to have of them.¹⁹⁶

With the Histoire de Consalve the author brings a new intensity to the use of words like cache, feindre, tromper, prétexte.¹⁹⁷ The whole Court is a hotbed of treacheries.¹⁹⁸ Consalve, forbidden by the king to pay court to Nugna Bella, conducts his sentimental life with the help of prétextes.¹⁹⁹ Ironically, this calculated deception turns against him. If he may deceive in order to further his love, why might others not do the same? Consalve's friendship with Don Garcie founders on the very rock that supported it, the fact that they hid nothing from each other.²⁰⁰ Don Garcie uses this past sincerity to hide from Consalve everything that really concerns him. Cacher and secret become the dominant themes of the new set of relationships between Consalve and all those who surround him.²⁰¹

The rule here is to keep up the appearances: Don Ramire 'voyait bien qu'il ne fallait pas changer de conduite, ni cesser de vivre avec moi comme il avait accoutumé.'²⁰² Don Garcie hides his love for Consalve's sister with equal skill: 'La passion que le prince avait pour elle était conduite avec tant d'adresse que... personne ne soupçonna seulement qu'il en fût amoureux.'²⁰³ Don Ramire deceives almost as a matter of course: 'Il était accoutumé à me tromper et à me cacher ce qu'il disait à Nugna Bella.'²⁰⁴ At the court of Léon hypocrisy reigns supreme. On the surface Don Ramire and Don Garcie are both friends of Consalve, while Nugna Bella is supposed to be the latter's faithful beloved, and Hermenesilde a loyal sister. At one level below, Don Garcie and Don Ramire are in collusion against Consalve, Nugna Bella being Don Ramire's mistress and Hermenesilde that of Don Garcie. At another level still, Don Ramire and Nugna Bella are working secretly for the banishment of Consalve²⁰⁵, while within himself Don Ramire is boiling over with spite and jealousy because Nugna Bella is expected to keep up the appearance of her love for Consalve.²⁰⁶

Not surprisingly, when Don Garcie finally agrees to have Consalve exiled, it is on one condition: 'pourvu qu'il parût à tout le monde que c'était contre son consentement.'²⁰⁷

Consalve's later plea is that 'j'ignorais les trahisons de la Cour.'²⁰⁸ The lesson he draws from his experience, défiante²⁰⁹, is the realization that nothing is ever as it seems. How then can one hope to have serious relationships with others, unless, as Alphonse says, one sets out to be 'naturellement soupçonneux'?²¹⁰ But can one live with oneself in this frame of mind? As Alphonse adds of Consalve's case, 'vos soupçons vous auraient paru injustes.'²¹¹ The options seem bleak: trust, and be deceived, or distrust methodically, and become neurotic, like Alphonse.

It is then easy to judge the importance of Consalve's anguished question to Alphonse: 'que voulez-vous que je pense de ce que je viens de voir?'²¹² The Histoire d'Alphonse et de Bélasure is the clearest illustration of this dilemma. It seems at first that Bélasure has chosen her camp: 'elle avait une défiance naturelle de tous les hommes.'²¹³ But very soon, in love with Alphonse, she falls into the trap of sincerity: 'elle ne me cachait point ses sentiments non plus que je ne lui cachais pas les miens.'²¹⁴ As usual, this sincérité²¹⁵ becomes a one-sided affair. Alphonse uses Bélasure's honesty to torture her into confessing her feelings past and present, while at the same time refusing to believe anything that she says, and doing his best to hide his own neurotic feelings from her.²¹⁶ It is, again, a question of image. For Alphonse, ridden by doubt, 'Bélasure ne me paraissait plus la même personne'²¹⁷, and even her past life, as he has imagined it, seems completely different: 'vous n'étiez point telle que je vous ai crue.'²¹⁸ He himself sees the danger of being too

inquisitive, and inquisitorial, and makes an effort 'de ne lui plus paraître déraisonnable.'²¹⁹ The paraître is all. Now Bélasire in turn realizes the dangers of sincerity, and hides as much as she can from Alphonse, in order not to trouble him.²²⁰

The irony of the situation could hardly be more bitter or more bitterly complete. This suppression becomes an almost legitimate motive for Alphonse's suspicions. When Bélasire withdraws to a convent, it is thus to 'un lieu où je n'aurais point la honte de voir les divers jugements qu'on fait de moi.'²²¹ Judgements, by definition unfair here, point to the ever-present gap between the reality of things and the different forms this reality takes within each person's mind. As Alamir says, in another context, 'cette physionomie agréable peut cacher un esprit si fâcheux.'²²²

Where then is this elusive 'truth'?²²³ Can it ever be found? Is there any sure ground on which to base judgements? The treatment of this theme could hardly paint a bleaker picture. To know the truth, Alphonse has to wait for the dying words of Don Manrique, whom he has stabbed in a fit of jealousy: 'Je me meurs...et l'état où je suis vous doit persuader de la vérité de mes paroles.'²²⁴ Equally, the true state of Félimé's feelings only comes to light on Alamir's death-bed.²²⁵ At one point Consalve believes that he is on the path to light: 'Eclairé par la pénétration que donne un amour naissant...'²²⁶ Ironically again, he is on the road to illusion. Passion in Z is never a herald of truth. From the moment love comes into his life, Consalve no longer knows what is véritable.²²⁷ Is what he sees, or what he thinks, or what is said to him, the truth?²²⁸ Alphonse may well develop into a neurotic, with his refusal to believe even 'toutes les raisons qui pouvaient me persuader que ce qu'elle me disait

était véritable.'²²⁹ But the causes of his neuroses are within each of the novel's characters. Alphonse needs the truth, like an addict in a state of advanced deprivation. Just one more detail, and one more, and he will know...:'il me semblait...que je m'éclaircirais avec elle d'une manière qui ne me laisserait plus de soupçon.'²³⁰ Nothing is ever sure.

Vérité? When Consalve finds out the truth about all those who surround him at the court of Léon²³¹, it is too late. He can then only take the same course as Bélasire, and flee society in order to avoid deceits. But when he meets Zaïde, the whole process starts again: 'Que d'un mot, belle Zaïde, vous m'éclairciriez de doutes!'²³² The terms démêler...découvrir...véritable...s'éclaircir punctuate his quest to know Zaïde's real feelings.²³³ Until the very end Consalve is flung from one doubt to the next.²³⁴ Only then can he tell Zaïde 'le véritable état où était son coeur quand il l'avait connue.'²³⁵ There is no difficulty with the past. But in the present it seems impossible to know the true state of one's own heart, let alone that of others. Elsibery is tormented by 'l'envie de s'en éclaircir'²³⁶ concerning Alamir's real motives. The only illumination possible, on the evidence of this novel, is to come to know how little truth and sincerity there are in others, as when Naria, suspicious of Alamir, 'résolue de s'éclaircir de l'infidélité de ce prince.'²³⁷ At best, masks can be scrutinized, and an intelligent guess made: 'J'essayai de démêler si elle avait remarqué l'attachement qu'il m'avait témoigné; mais il me sembla...'²³⁸ But one fact is certain: the mask is an essential part of the personality.²³⁹

In these circumstances the author is by implication, throughout the novel, suitably ironic about words like vrai and véritable when they are used of passion, amour or sentiments.²⁴⁰ In Z truth and love are at opposite poles of a disordered universe.

La Princesse de Clèves

The development of the theme of the falsity of appearances reaches a climax in this novel. From the beginning, the stress laid on the ostentation of the Court hides a deeper reality. On both a social and personal level, the appearance is what counts.²⁴¹ And when even factual reality is obscured or ambiguous, it seems impossible for the characters to attain any deeper truth, whether about themselves or about the nature of the world in which they are placed.

The paraître of the novel's first sentence sets a tone which is maintained throughout.²⁴² Depicted is a Court where parade is king²⁴³, a society whose members are seen as 'l'ornement et l'admiration de leur siècle.'²⁴⁴ The kings of France and England each receive the other 'avec une magnificence extraordinaire'²⁴⁵, while at the (forced) marriage of his daughter to the Spanish king, 'le roi ne songeait qu'à rendre ces noces célèbres par des divertissements où il pût faire paraître l'adresse et la magnificence de la cour.'²⁴⁶ The general aim is clear: 'Tous les princes et seigneurs ne furent plus occupés que du soin d'ordonner ce qui leur était nécessaire pour paraître avec éclat.'²⁴⁷ Mme de Clèves is reminded by her husband that at the coming celebrations she must 'y paraître avec la même magnificence que les autres femmes.'²⁴⁸ The paraître is overwhelmingly important.

To be present at Court is always to paraître.²⁴⁹ The ambiguity of the term is rich in hidden associations.²⁵⁰ The 'soin de se parer'²⁵¹ is not always limited to visible ornament: 'les couleurs et les chiffres de Mme de Valentinois paraissaient partout, et elle paraissait

elle-même.²⁵² It is not long before we realize how much this appearance hides in terms of social rivalry and poisonous jealousy. By its very nature the word paraître suggests that below the surface is a reality which belies what appears. Thus the description, in the opening pages, of a glittering Court, is subverted almost immediately afterwards by an account of the passions and ambitions which divide the courtiers into several factions.²⁵³ Mme de Chartres crowns this movement with her grim warning to her daughter: 'Si vous jugez sur les apparences en ce lieu-ci...vous serez souvent trompée: ce qui paraît n'est presque jamais la vérité.'²⁵⁴ What is 'selon les apparences' is as often as not wrong.²⁵⁵ The description of Nemours is a perfect example of this kind of ambiguity. He has 'un air dans toute sa personne qui faisait qu'on ne pouvait regarder que lui dans tous les lieux où il paraissait.'²⁵⁶ What matters is what is seen²⁵⁷, the image provided.²⁵⁸ It is impossible to be sure what the image hides. Nemours has 'une mine et une grâce...admirables'²⁵⁹; what is his real character? Mme de Clèves wonders how someone 'qui avait toujours fait paraître tant de légèreté parmi les femmes, fût capable d'un attachement sincère et durable.'²⁶⁰ She is never to know what lies behind this paraître.

Another example of the distance which can separate appearance and reality in society is the case of Mme de Tournon²⁶¹, who had 'l'artifice de soutenir, aux yeux du public, un personnage si éloigné de la vérité.'²⁶² She has played the role of the chaste widow, with an 'affectation à paraître encore affligée'²⁶³, and this despite an affair with Sancerre, 'qu'elle n'avait pu laisser paraître.'²⁶⁴ Despite the ease with which Mme de Tournon has projected a totally false image of herself to society, Sancerre never realizes that she might deceive him just as easily. When he mentions that her love might be in decline, 'elle parut si offensée

de ses soupçons qu'elle les lui ôta entièrement.²⁶⁵ And Sancerre's friend Clèves tells him that there is 'aucun fondement sur ses plaintes.'²⁶⁶ Both believe totally the image Mme de Tournon projects, of a perfectly faithful mistress.²⁶⁷

In fact, Mme de Tournon has been perfectly unfaithful, and with one of Sancerre's best friends, Estouteville. Only after her death can her persona be brought crashing to the ground.²⁶⁸ Estouteville reveals that they 'avaient caché leur passion à tout le monde, qu'il n'avait jamais été chez elle publiquement.'²⁶⁹ During all this time Mme de Tournon had managed to safeguard her public image as a chaste and sorrowing widow²⁷⁰, and her private image as a faithful mistress to each of two friends separately.²⁷¹ No-one, except her, knew anything approaching the truth.²⁷² Clèves's summary of the affair insists especially on her total credibility and absolute treachery.²⁷³ (Only his wife, he adds with unknowing irony, is beyond this kind of deception.²⁷⁴) And so Mme de Tournon becomes, within the novel, the living symbol of how false appearances can be. Tantalizingly, however, there is no way of knowing when an image is true or false. Later in the novel both Mme de Clèves and her husband believe that the other has leaked out the aveu, and both believe on the basis of vraisemblance.²⁷⁵ Indeed, Nemours does his best to confirm Mme de Clèves's suspicions of her husband, though knowing that he himself is the source of the leak.²⁷⁶ There is no evidence but the paraître.

Appearances count for a great deal for and between the principal characters. Mme de Clèves has a certain image, 'un air qui inspirait un si grand respect et qui paraissait si éloigné de la galanterie'²⁷⁷, that she is protected from the attentions of Court gallants. Her mother

has an important role to play in this image-making: Mme de Chartres had 'une conduite si exacte pour toutes les bienséances qu'elle achevait de la faire paraître une personne où l'on ne pouvait atteindre.'²⁷⁸ Terms such as conduite, bienséance and paraître focus the attention on the importance of the image provided.²⁷⁹ There is no suggestion that this image is false. But even if the reality beneath changes, as is the case with Mme de Tournon, the image is a prize not to be tossed away lightly: 'pensez que vous allez perdre cette réputation que vous vous êtes acquise et que je vous ai tant souhaitée.'²⁸⁰ Mme de Chartres sees réputation as a bulwark of the personality, not as a false cover.²⁸¹ But in her daughter these two elements come to be inseparable: 'elle était honteuse de paraître si peu digne d'estime aux yeux même de son amant'²⁸²; 'je serai bientôt regardée de tout le monde comme une personne qui a une folle et violente passion.'²⁸³ The outside world must not get to know what she is like, or she will crumble like a house of cards. A certain self-respect cannot go without the respect of others. Appearances must be sustained, she feels, even though they be false.²⁸⁴

For a long time Mme de Clèves gains her husband's respect by an appearance of tranquillity and faithfulness which is not an exact picture of the self tormented and almost dominated by passion. But there comes a moment when she can sustain the effort no longer. She knows that her desire to leave the Court may arouse Clèves's suspicions. Indeed, this leads to the aveu, when her image of tranquil fidelity is irreparably shattered. No matter how chaste and faithful she seems, Clèves can now no longer trust what merely seems: 'vous ne me paraissez plus digne de moi.'²⁸⁵

This crisis of image comes to a head when Clèves is

on his death-bed. His wife's sorrow 'lui paraissait quelquefois véritable'²⁸⁶, but seems also to be 'des marques de dissimulation et de perfidie.'²⁸⁷ His natural instinct, now that he knows his wife's feelings for Nemours, is to regard this sorrow as show: 'la douleur que vous faites paraître.'²⁸⁸ There is no reason why this image should not be as deceptive as the last. The truism, of appearances, is that they must be kept up: one slip, and they will never again be believed. Only at the very end will reality and appearance come together for Mme de Clèves, who 'vécut d'une sorte qui ne laissa pas d'apparence qu'elle pût jamais revenir.'²⁸⁹ She has already left the normal life of men and women, for good.

The falsity of appearances makes it inevitable that beliefs and opinions are rarely accurate. As can be observed from the very number of the examples listed, croire (or penser, in this sense) very often implies an error of judgement.²⁹⁰ What seems true is what is believed. 'Elle croira, et avec apparence, que cette lettre me regarde'²⁹¹, says the Dauphine, of the Queen's potential reaction to the lost letter. And indeed the Queen does believe what is totally false.²⁹² A belief which turns out to be true is therefore often formed by curious mixtures of suspicion, fear and guess, as though only a total mistrust of what appears to be true will be a guide to the truth. The Dauphine's intimation of her fate seems unfounded: 'quelque bonheur qui semble se préparer pour moi, je ne saurais croire que j'en jouisse.'²⁹³ A shocked Mme de Clèves urges her not to doubt 'que son bonheur ne répondit aux apparences.'²⁹⁴ But the Dauphine was to become Mary Queen of Scots... Similarly, the astrologer's prediction of the king's fate seems ridiculous: 'il n'y a guère d'apparence que je sois tué en duel. Nous venons de faire la paix.'²⁹⁵ But what is disbelieved, even by those of the courtiers who believe in astrology²⁹⁶,

turns out to be true.²⁹⁷ The question implicitly asked is simple: is there a rational basis for any belief?

For example, sometimes true opinions are formed, not from a keen appraisal of facts, but for uncertain or unknown reasons, such as when Guise²⁹⁸ and Clèves²⁹⁹ come to realize that Nemours is paying court to Mme de Clèves. They both believe, and are right. But there is no reason why they should not be wrong. To believe anything is to buy a lottery ticket for the truth. This central theme is well illustrated in the case of the three main protagonists. Though warned by her mother to have 'une extrême défiance de soi-même'³⁰⁰, Mme de Clèves finds it difficult to put this rule into practice. An example is the number of occasions on which she feels that she can no longer possibly love Nemours, such as after her mother's death.³⁰¹ Then she realizes that 'elle s'était trompée'³⁰², and 'elle ne se flatta plus de l'espérance de ne le pas aimer.'³⁰³ This renunciation of self-flattery does not persist. On other occasions the same illusion returns³⁰⁴, and is again destroyed.³⁰⁵ Her mother's advice of défiance has been justified, if painfully. Thus Mme de Clèves misinterprets her own chagrin: 'Mais elle se trompait elle-même; et ce mal, qu'elle trouvait si insupportable, était la jalousie.'³⁰⁶ Défiance suggests that self-delusion can be avoided only by a systematic effort to mistrust all natural feelings and ideas.³⁰⁷

Haunted by this possibility of self-delusion, Mme de Clèves finds it impossible to escape illusions about Nemours, even about whether he really loves her. It only takes the thought, planted by her mother, that he might be in love with the Dauphine, and 'elle crut si bien voir combien elle s'était trompée dans tout ce qu'elle avait pensé

des sentiments de ce prince.'³⁰⁸ She thinks how 'elle aurait pris tout ce que l'on disait du changement de ce prince pour des marques de sa passion si elle n'avait point été détrompée.'³⁰⁹ But she only has to talk with Nemours for this whole idea to be overturned.³¹⁰ Croire...se tromper...penser...prendre...marque...détromper; such constantly recurring terms show how Mme de Clèves is lost in that world of illusion, prejudice and distortion which is the ordinary world of each character. She is only finally convinced when all the different pieces of evidence point in the same direction.³¹¹

Yet this conviction of Nemours's love only plunges Mme de Clèves into greater whirlpools of uncertainty. She has no idea how to respond to him: 'Elle croyait devoir parler et croyait ne devoir rien dire.'³¹² She cannot reach an acceptable or stable image of the man she loves. Her opinion of him one moment is destroyed the next. The letter episode is a clear example. Nemours works hard to persuade her that the letter had nothing to do with him: 'je vous ferai bientôt voir la vérité.'³¹³ But this vérité does not seem vraisemblable.³¹⁴ As for Nemours's arguments, Mme de Clèves 'ne les crût pas véritables'³¹⁵, till he attempts to prove his case with a document. Then 'elle trouva une apparence de vérité à ce que lui disait M. de Nemours.'³¹⁶ However Mme de Clèves finally believes, because in her heart of hearts she wants to believe: 'comme on persuade aisément une vérité agréable, il convainquit Mme de Clèves.'³¹⁷

There are echoes of Port-Royal in that deadly phrase, 'une vérité agréable.'³¹⁸ Thus the Queen can declare: 'Je le veux croire... parce que je le souhaite; et je le souhaite, parce que je désire que vous soyez entièrement attaché à moi.'³¹⁹ It is never sure how much what is

believed comes merely from the desire to believe. 'Cet homme, que j'ai cru si différent du reste des hommes',³²⁰ is Mme de Clèves's bitter comment when she realizes that Nemours has betrayed the aveu to the Court. Illusion follows hard on disillusion. Can she ever be sure which is which?

This pervasive uncertainty confers a certain symbolism on the scene where Mme de Clèves thinks that she has seen Nemours in her country garden. The terms used here are those which we have seen recurring throughout the novel: 'Quand elle eut fait quelque réflexion, elle pensa qu'elle s'était trompée et que c'était un effet de son imagination d'avoir cru voir M. de Nemours...; elle ne trouvait nulle apparence qu'il eût entrepris une chose si hasardeuse.'³²¹ She makes a considered judgement, and is wrong, though all the appearances are against Nemours's presence in the garden. There seems no sure foundation for any belief or idea, no difference between penser and se tromper, voir and croire voir, réflexion and imagination. It is this very uncertainty which breeds jealousy, and fear, and suspicion, and which is one of the main reasons given by Mme de Clèves for not marrying Nemours: 'Je vous croirais toujours amoureux et aimé et je ne me tromperais pas souvent.'³²²

Even Nemours, who seems so ebulliently singleminded in his quest for Mme de Clèves's affections, is not always sure whether she loves him or not. She has a husband 'qu'il croyait tendrement aimé',³²³ and she herself can be so cold that 'elle lui ôta quasi toute la joie qu'il avait de se croire aimé d'elle.'³²⁴ He comes almost to doubt what she has said in her confession to her husband: 'Il ne savait quasi si ce qu'il avait entendu n'était point un songe, tant il y trouvait peu de vraisemblance.'³²⁵ There seems no way of knowing. 'Il était si éperdument

amoureux d'elle qu'il croyait que tout le monde avait les mêmes sentiments.'³²⁶

To believe or not to believe? This is the core of Clèves's dilemma, from the aveu to his death. Mme de Clèves must plead with him to believe her words rather than his own suspicions: 'Croyez, je vous en conjure...'³²⁷ The idea that Nemours has gone to see his wife sets Clèves's imagination on fire.³²⁸ he cannot believe that she has refused to see the man she loves: his ~~reproaches~~ to her are 'bien fondés.'³²⁹ Her own assurances, 'fondées sur la vérité'³³⁰, calm him³³¹, but do not take away his belief in her unfaithfulness. Only her tears and supplications, on his death-bed, can change his mind: 'Je ne sais...si je me dois me laisser aller à vous croire.'³³² There seems no reason why he should believe her, and he does not seem totally convinced. Such belief requires an act of faith in the other person's sincerity: once this faith is destroyed, no such belief is possible.

By a complete abstention from comment, the author naturally increases the uncertainty which envelopes each character's judgement of the truth. No-one is privileged, not even the heroine at the end of her long struggle: 'elle appela à son secours...toutes les raisons qu'elle croyait avoir pour ne l'épouser jamais.'³³³ And, 'les raisons qu'elle avait de ne point épouser M. de Nemours lui paraissaient fortes...'³³⁴ Mme de Clèves's voyage of discovery only ends when she has left the world of appearances for good.

The kaleidoscope of appearances, with the subsequent potential for illusion, has a major source in the masks men wear.³³⁵ Cacher and similar terms are key-words in a society where nothing is as it appears.³³⁶

Mme de Chartres, in educating her daughter, once again makes a comment which sets the tone for the novel as a whole: 'elle lui conta le peu de sincérité des hommes, leurs tromperies et leur infidélité.'³³⁷ If the reference to les hommes can be extended to include man in general, then no statement more accurately reflects the condition of the society into which the young princess is introduced.³³⁸ In a Court split into different cliques³³⁹, there reigns a permanent atmosphere of intrigue. Secrecy is the watchword.³⁴⁰ Even with the king on his death-bed, the surface is calm: 'tous les mouvements étaient cachés et l'on ne paraissait occupé que de l'unique inquiétude de la santé du roi.'³⁴¹ Nothing is said openly and freely.³⁴² Ironically, the Queen tells the Vidame 'qu'elle n'avait trouvé personne en France qui eût du secret.'³⁴³ This is a prelude to her entering a secret pact with him.³⁴⁴

Animosities and rivalries are expressed in the same underground manner.³⁴⁵ Typical is the Queen's attitude to the king's mistress. She seems not to mind this relationship, 'mais elle avait une si profonde dissimulation qu'il était difficile de juger de ses sentiments.'³⁴⁶ Later she confesses, to a Vidame sworn to secrecy, how wrong this apparence is.³⁴⁷ The rare exceptions to this obsession with secrecy are couched in a language which makes secrecy seem the norm: 'il...cacha si peu son emportement que...'³⁴⁸; 'il y fut si peu maître de sa tristesse que...'³⁴⁹ The same could be said of the expression ne put s'empêcher de, which implies not so much openness as secrecy and constraint.³⁵⁰ In this Court, love and secrecy are inseparable. Friend hides from best friend this or that liaison.³⁵¹ The Dauphine might declare to Mme de Clèves that 'je n'ai rien de caché pour vous.'³⁵² But even if this be true, Mme de Clèves hides from her friend both her love for Nemours and even peripheral details such as the

truth about the Vidame's lost letter.³⁵³ Ironically in this affair, the Dauphine, thinking herself in the know, tells Mme de Clèves how she has to 'déguiser la vérité'³⁵⁴ to keep others from learning the secret. Love leads inevitably to deception. The letter itself, with its tortuous hide-and-seek of passion, would alone verify this central theme: cacher and tromper are its refrain.³⁵⁵

A clear example of this constant hide-and-seek is the Queen's liaison with the Vidame. He has promised to hide nothing from her, and hides everything.³⁵⁶ When the Queen suspects this, he reassures her 'à force de soins, de soumissions et de faux serments.'³⁵⁷ The lost letter is a great risk: 'Si la reine voit cette lettre, elle connaîtra que je l'ai trompée et que presque dans le temps que je la trompais pour Mme de Thémînes, je trompais Mme de Thémînes pour une autre.'³⁵⁸ The mask cannot be dropped: 'jugez quelle idée cela lui peut donner de moi.'³⁵⁹ It is unthinkable to reveal the truth. Every small brushstroke by the author, such as the number of times the term prétexte is used³⁶⁰, or sickness is feigned³⁶¹, tends to increase this atmosphere of secrecy, intrigue and treachery.³⁶²

This is the climate in which the major relationships of the novel evolve. The three main characters have their masks too. Clèves's reaction on the one occasion, the aveu, when the norm of secrecy is disregarded, is an indication that his preference for marital sincerity³⁶³ is purely theoretical. Indeed, he himself has never dared show his wife the extent of his passion for her: 'je vous en ai caché la plus grande partie.'³⁶⁴ After the aveu, his one thought is to hide from everyone any expression of his wife's feelings, however innocent. If she is to leave the Court,

it must be 'sans qu'il parût qu'il eût dessein de l'en éloigner',³⁶⁵ or 'sans qu'il parût de changement dans sa conduite.'³⁶⁶ The mask must be complete. Ironically, when the secret of the aveu has been let out, Clèves charges his wife with the task of persuading Nemours and the rest of the Court that the whole business was 'une fable où elle n'avait aucune part.'³⁶⁷ Nemours might have some suspicions, Clèves adds, but if she 'ne faisait paraître aucune faiblesse', then in Nemours's mind 'toutes ses pensées se détruiraient aisément.'³⁶⁸ Clèves's ignorance of Nemours's eavesdropping gives a grim humour to this attempt at concealment. We are reminded of the Emperor and his clothes. Inevitably, Clèves's first major accusation against his wife is that 'vous n'avez pu cacher vos sentiments.'³⁶⁹

Nemours's mask is as complete as any other: 'il avait plusieurs maîtresses, mais il était difficile de deviner celle qu'il aimait véritablement.'³⁷⁰ His secrecy over his new love³⁷¹, however, comes from the simple realization that publicity will destroy it.³⁷² His attempts to gain access to Mme de Clèves necessitate one artifice after another.³⁷³ The escalier dérobé³⁷⁴, by which he comes to see her for the last time, is a fitting symbol of this important aspect of their relationship. It is true that Nemours has no wish to hide his love from Mme de Clèves, but even here, he cannot be spontaneous: 'Commencerai-je à lui parler ouvertement... afin de lui paraître un homme devenu hardi par des espérances?'³⁷⁵ Within his apparent openness, what counts for him is his image in Mme de Clèves's eyes. There is no escaping the tyranny of the paraître.

The focus of the cacher group of words is naturally Mme de Clèves, struggling throughout to appear other than she is, in a Court full of questing eyes and listening ears.³⁷⁶ She tries, though not without

some effort, to hide her feelings from her husband.³⁷⁷ She is ashamed at having to find pretexts, 'de se vouloir servir d'une fausse raison et de déguiser la vérité.'³⁷⁸ Even the aveu is neither spontaneous nor complete³⁷⁹, and this half-frankness has disastrous consequences. Thus Mme de Clèves's question to her husband is not as rhetorical as might seem: 'Est-il possible... que vous puissiez penser qu'il y ait quelque déguisement dans un aveu comme le mien?'³⁸⁰ But why should he believe? The suggestion is that it is better to hide everything, rather than cover up only in part.³⁸¹

Even with her mother, Mme de Clèves hides her feelings for Nemours.³⁸² And Mme de Chartres, noticing this, hides this knowledge from her daughter³⁸³, so that she can speak of Nemours with seeming impartiality ('louanges empoisonnées'³⁸⁴). All of this adds a certain irony to her scepticism as to her daughter's sincerity.³⁸⁵ Both now begin an elaborate game of hide-and-seek with each other and with everyone else. Thus Mme de Clèves first feigns not to have heard of Nemours's preference that his mistress should keep away from a ball³⁸⁶, and finds within herself a convenient 'raison de sévérité' for wishing to absent herself from the next Court ball.³⁸⁷ This necessitates a public pretext, one of sickness, and this pretext is suggested by her mother, who sees very well the true reason.³⁸⁸ When doubt is cast on this pretext, therefore, it is Mme de Chartres who steps into the breach and lies to save face.³⁸⁹ Nemours is left to ponder this apparence.³⁹⁰ The appearances have been saved.

With her mother dead, hiding her love for and from Nemours becomes for Mme de Clèves her major defence against total capitulation to passion.³⁹¹ 'Jamais aucune marque', is her resolve.³⁹²

She can manage this before the Court.³⁹³ But she cannot sustain this delicate position indefinitely against the searching, pleading gaze of Nemours.³⁹⁴ Whatever mask she wears, the mask must slip. An attitude either of warmth, or of coldness, will defeat her aim. On the one hand are 'marques de sensibilité',³⁹⁵ and on the other, a bitterness which 'avait fait paraître des sentiments de jalousie qui étaient des preuves certaines de passion.'³⁹⁶ Thus the claim she makes to her husband never to have given the least mark of her feelings to Nemours is self-evidently false, and contradicted by herself.³⁹⁷ Nor can her husband believe this claim.³⁹⁸ Some of Mme de Clèves's attempts to keep up appearances verge on the hypocritical. When she allows Nemours to steal her portrait rather than alert anyone to his love for her, 'elle fut bien aise de lui accorder une faveur qu'elle lui pouvait faire sans qu'il sût même qu'elle la lui faisait.'³⁹⁹ Equally, her affliction at having shown Nemours her concern for him⁴⁰⁰, and her pain that 'elle n'était plus maîtresse de cacher ses sentiments',⁴⁰¹ are not unmixed with other feelings: 'cette dernière douleur n'était pas si entière et elle était mêlée de quelque sorte de douceur.'⁴⁰² The hide-and-seek is also with herself.⁴⁰³ Only at the end, in a single interview with Nemours⁴⁰⁴, does Mme de Clèves voluntarily drop her mask, and allow the light to play on the tensions and contradictions of her whole self.

But this is a unique case, a single point of light. Otherwise the element of 'discovery' in the novel is minimal, and superficial. If the appearances rarely reflect reality, if each person is inevitably wrong in his ideas of what that reality is, if moreover there is a universal urge on each person's part to mask his own reality for others, how in these

circumstances can the term vérité have much meaning? There is a certain irony in the association of the terms passion and véritable.⁴⁰⁵

Even more ironically this situation, where discovery is rare, occurs in a Court where all are constantly striving to tear down each other's masks.⁴⁰⁶ Such attempts can be dangerous when they concern important matters of state. Thus only a few courtiers, disturbed by Mme de Valentinois's hold on the king and on state affairs, 'ont voulu éclairer le roi sur sa conduite'⁴⁰⁷, but 'ont péri dans cette entreprise.'⁴⁰⁸ Given these unpalatable facts, the curiosity of all is channelled into discovering as much as possible about the secret relationships of love which proliferate in the Court atmosphere.⁴⁰⁹ The whole series of attempts by the Dauphine and others to discover the identity of Nemours's new mistress is an obvious example.⁴¹⁰ Ironically, the Dauphine makes all these 'revelations' known to Mme de Clèves. She has 'aucun soupçon de la vérité'⁴¹¹ at the very moment she feels she has discovered the truth.

Even this kind of discovery is not always fruitful. The Queen triumphantly tells the Vidame that his love-life 'est connu'⁴¹², while all the time he is hiding something from her, and is able to discover exactly all that she knows about him.⁴¹³ With all her investigating, the Queen only finds out about the Vidame's real character when many others already know.⁴¹⁴ If Mme de Chartres sees behind her daughter's mask, this is due as much to the exceptional nature of their relationship as to an eagle eye which never misses the slightest change of expression.⁴¹⁵ Few others, in their obsessive curiosity, can detach themselves from the very appearances which they seek to break through.

This is certainly the case with Nemours. He strives throughout to discover the true state of Mme de Clèves's feelings. After his eavesdropping during the aveu, he at first seems to have no doubts.⁴¹⁶ Mme de Clèves loves: it is a matter of certitudes.⁴¹⁷ But no sooner is this said, than he is begging Mme de Clèves to prove that she loves him: 'Laissez-moi voir que vous m'aimez...; laissez-moi voir vos sentiments; pourvu que je les connaisse par vous une fois dans ma vie.'⁴¹⁸ Despite his certitudes, he wants to know for certain. If he is loved, why should Mme de Clèves refuse him, especially after her husband's death? This uncertainty will push him to 'tenter quelque voie d'éclaircir ma destinée.'⁴¹⁹ The final act of the novel, as in a tragedy, becomes one of discovery.

Like his rival, Clèves has from the beginning desired to know if Mme de Clèves really loves him.⁴²⁰ He complains that she only gives 'de certaines apparences dont je serais content s'il y avait quelque chose au delà.'⁴²¹ In one sense, like Mme de Chartres, he has an exceptional relationship with Mme de Clèves: he is not easily fooled.⁴²² Indeed, the very tide of his rising suspicion provokes the aveu.⁴²³ But this very perspicacity makes him embark, like Alphonse in Z, on a futile quest for total discovery. From first trying to find out the name of his wife's lover he is driven to investigating whether she is being unfaithful to him.⁴²⁴ Alternatively, he closes his eyes, with the desire not to know anything.⁴²⁵ His 'discovery' of his wife's unfaithfulness is then perfectly unfounded and totally accepted.

Clèves tries to discover 'la vérité tout entière.'⁴²⁶ Yet he seeks the truth only on one level, accounts of when and how Nemours and his wife have met. Even on this level, what he knows is a

caricature of reality. His quest for enlightenment is so evidently self-destructive, that it is easy to understand his death-bed lament for blindness: 'Que ne me laissez-vous dans cet aveuglement tranquille dont jouissent tant de maris?'⁴²⁷ He has to struggle between the vérité of his wife's sorrow and affection⁴²⁸, and the vraisemblance of her infidelity.⁴²⁹ Like some Thésée, struggling through other labyrinths, Clèves's final words have a tragic pathos: 'Vous m'avez éclairci trop tard.'⁴³⁰ The tragedy is that in pursuing only one superficial level of truth, Clèves has been unable to discover the reality of his wife's lonely vigil. It will be left to Mme de Clèves to come to a discovery.

This discovery is bound up with a knowledge of the truth about herself. The first step towards self-discovery is the realization that passion is a mystery to her, and that she is a mystery to herself⁴³¹: 'Elle avait ignoré jusqu'alors les inquiétudes mortelles de la défiance et de la jalousie.'⁴³² But this journey towards the light is not a simple linear one. The garden scene, with the possibility of Nemours's presence, is again symbolic: 'il valait mieux demeurer dans le doute où elle était que de prendre le hasard de s'en éclaircir.'⁴³³ Fear, prudence and unadmitted complicity continually suppress her desire to know.

Only in the last, long interview with Nemours does Mme de Clèves face up to the truth. She moves into a new perspective, in which, for the first time, passion is openly admitted⁴³⁴, openly examined and openly refused. Her reasons for not marrying may just be a figment of her imagination.⁴³⁵ How can she, a passion-bound subject⁴³⁶, differentiate clearly between imagination and objective truth? She expresses the need for 'des vues claires et distinctes.'⁴³⁷ The Cartesian

ring of the phrase (by) itself convinces of her struggle for truth. After this long interview with Nemours, she has a moment of panic, to have spoken so frankly⁴³⁸, so that 'elle ne se connaissait plus.'⁴³⁹ But this is momentary. No matter how much passion still unsettles her, she has now arrived at an unshakeable truth (which we as readers can verify throughout the novel), the malheur certain⁴⁴⁰ of yielding to passion.

This movement towards a new perspective is crowned for Mme de Clèves by a long and serious illness: 'Cette vue si longue et si prochaine de la mort fit paraître à Mme de Clèves les choses de cette vie de cet oeil si différent dont on les voit dans la santé.'⁴⁴¹ The cold light of death has played on all the world's appearances and deceits, and they now seem to stand out clearly for the first time: 'Les passions et les engagements du monde lui parurent tels qu'ils paraissent aux personnes qui ont des vues plus grandes et plus éloignées.'⁴⁴² The hint of authorial comment here gives this paraître a firmer validity than previously. The final point is reached in Mme de Clèves's last message to Nemours: having renounced him, 'les autres choses du monde lui avaient paru si indifférentes qu'elle y avait renoncé pour jamais.'⁴⁴³ The paraître of the world is dead. No discovery could be more final, or more pessimistic. The choice is between the falseness of the world and the truth of death.

Chapter Five

APPEARANCES AND REALITY

- trouble

- surprise

- voir

- avouer

TROUBLE

a)

The Trouble group is closely related to the themes both of passion and appearances. These terms suggest the power of passionate love, and thus of the irrational, on the personality. They indicate, too, the gap between the appearance which is each character's mask to the world, and the reality of emotional disorder which cannot completely be hidden.¹ These terms therefore represent phenomena of unease and confusion which constitute a kind of language. From beneath the simple appearance come symptoms of a complex and disturbing reality. The use of such terms reveals an author bent not on performing some cold analysis of passion but on evoking fleeting and opaque emotional states.

b)

This small cluster is grouped around the figurative use of the terms trouble² and embarras³, terms which recur with a certain frequency.⁴ There are few associated words: troubler⁵, embarrasser⁶, agitation⁷, confusion⁸, rougir⁹, émotion.¹⁰ The confusion which these terms all connote significantly relates to the dominant themes of passion and appearances. No examination has been made of other meanings of the terms, much less common in the texts and unrelated to their main themes (e.g. embarras meaning 'Difficulté, obstacle...'¹¹).

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

An appropriate introduction to the use of these terms is perhaps the following extract from the text. Guise has just declared his love to Mme de Montpensier:

'La princesse fut d'abord si surprise et si troublée de ce discours qu'elle ne songea pas à l'interrompre; mais ensuite, étant revenue à elle et commençant à lui répondre, le prince de Montpensier entra. Le trouble et l'agitation étaient peints sur le visage de la princesse; la vue de son mari acheva de l'embarrasser, de sorte qu'elle lui en laissa plus entendre que le duc de Guise ne lui en venait de dire.'¹²

Strikingly here, we are not told what Mme de Montpensier begins to say to Guise, nor do we know in what manner the jealous husband approached them or Guise left. The language of the passage translates essentially the tension which exists between the inner reality of Mme de Montpensier's emotions, and the mask worn for Guise and for her husband. Our attention is here clearly being directed from the outset towards her reactions to Guise's declaration: 'si surprise et si troublée...qu'elle ne songea pas à...'. Her emotional confusion, an uneasy mixture of the half-spontaneous and the half-repressed, precedes any rational consideration. Troublée here implies all the désordre and confusion of Richelet's definition: passion struggles with the refusal to acknowledge its existence and the desire to suppress all evidence of it. This suppression becomes even more difficult for Mme de Montpensier when her husband enters, to find her alone with Guise. 'Le trouble et l'agitation étaient peints sur le visage de la princesse; la vue de son mari acheva de l'embarrasser.' Trouble...agitation...

embarrasser: the terms again stress the gap between appearance and reality, and bring us to the heart of Mme de Montpensier's double conflict. She has earlier declared that she scorns the very idea of a love affair, and she knows that her husband is jealous. Yet rational considerations cannot suppress evidence of passionate love. Trouble and embarras speak despite herself, 'de sorte qu'elle lui en laissa plus entendre que le duc de Guise en venait de dire.' For a moment the surface shows cracks, and her husband glimpses the reality beneath.

Troubler is employed elsewhere in similar situations, to indicate the confusion of Mme de Montpensier¹³, Chabanes¹⁴ and Guise.¹⁵ Each use of the terms demonstrates the violent force of passionate love, as when Mme de Montpensier unexpectedly meets Guise for the first time in three years: 'Sa vue lui apporta un trouble qui la fit un peu rougir.'¹⁶ The mask can never be perfect, since love escapes complete rational control. Mme de Montpensier's trouble is doubly revealing. It reveals love to herself, and reveals love in its reality as an emotional disorder: 'elle en avait été troublée par la honte du souvenir de l'inclination qu'elle lui avait autrefois témoignée.'¹⁷ Trouble is thus an important symptom of the power of the irrational within.

La Comtesse de Tende

Trouble expresses a moment of truth. Such a moment comes when Navarre unexpectedly suggests his love for Mme de Tende: 'il y eut un trouble et un silence entre eux, plus parlant que les paroles.'¹⁸

The eloquent language of their unease signifies to each of them a passion which reason refuses, but which neither can control. Trouble and embarras are an infallible sign of passion¹⁹, of appearances which, under the pressure of emotion, cannot be kept up, as when Tende finds Navarre in his wife's bedroom.²⁰ In this situation Navarre can keep wearing his mask of innocence 'sans se troubler'²¹, but Mme de Tende only 'cacha son trouble par l'obscurité du lieu où elle était.'²² Despite the signs of confusion, the appearances of unconcern are saved.

Tende comes to understand the language of trouble later in the story. Mme de Tende, having simultaneously discovered her pregnancy and her lover's death, cannot hide her grief and bewilderment from her husband, who 'lui donna encore un trouble et une confusion qui lui fut nouvelle.'²³ As for Tende, 'il sortit de la chambre plein de trouble et d'agitation.'²⁴ Trouble marks the distance between the appearance of calm and the reality of depths discovered within, unknown and feared.²⁵

Zafde

Trouble here constitutes a kind of involuntary language. The sight of someone²⁶, or what he says or writes²⁷, can unleash hidden emotional forces. These terms are a constant reminder of the power of passion and of the falsity of appearances. Thus Alamir realizes Naria's fascination for him by the confusion she manifests on seeing him.²⁸ And when Félimé has to explain the effect of Alamir's sudden presence, she does it in terms such as 'A quel point fus-je surprise et troublée!', 'mon

trouble', 'l'embarras où il me voyait.'²⁹ This makes Alphonse's question to Bélasure significant for the neurosis that will destroy him: 'Votre coeur... n'a jamais été troublé au nom et à la vue de ceux qui vous adoraient?'³⁰ He even desires to investigate, and perhaps see her control, the involuntary movements of the soul.

These terms often translate the painfully opaque nature of love, difficult either to comprehend or to articulate.³¹ When Don Ramire, supposedly Consalve's friend, speaks to Nugna Bella, supposedly Consalve's beloved, of a passion he feels for...someone, 'elle en parut embarrassée et il en fut embarrassé lui-même.'³² Each half-suspects what the other feels, but the trouble³³ experienced is the only language possible. A similar situation is when Félimé, very much in love with Alamir, is asked by him to talk confidentially about the man she loves. The only language she can use is that of confusion, 'embarras...trouble...agitation...embarras.'³⁴

Consalve's relationship with Zafde is symbolic of many another; they literally do not speak the same language. Emotion is not explained, it is ambiguously revealed, by embarras and trouble.³⁵ There is no way of knowing exactly what the language signifies. These terms are symptomatic of the whole world of the irrational and violent which passion creates, or represents³⁶: 'un trouble qui m'ôtait la connaissance de moi-même.'³⁷ Pretensions to rational control are swept away. Troubler is the term chosen to describe the effect of neurotic jealousy on Alphonse's mind.³⁸ The Trouble group of words is therefore here an eloquent witness of passion's force and reason's weakness.

La Princesse de Clèves

The terms in the Trouble group are a sign of love, pointing to the power of the irrational to disrupt appearances. This much is evident from an early dialogue between Clèves and his new fiancée, whom he reproaches with not really loving him: 'ma présence ne vous donne ni de plaisir, ni de trouble.'³⁹ For both of them, trouble is an obvious sign of love. Mlle de Chartres protests that he makes her blush⁴⁰, but Clèves retorts that this is natural modesty, not the emotional confusion of passion.⁴¹ He senses rightly that true passion confuses the mind and troubles the heart. 'Les paroles les plus obscures d'un homme qui plaît donnent plus d'agitation que les déclarations ouvertes d'un homme qui ne plaît pas.'⁴²

And indeed confusion and unease are only caused to Mme de Clèves by Nemours.⁴³ Desire, fear of desire, and fear of showing either emotion, produce in Mme de Clèves a visible apprehension. It only takes Nemours's name to be mentioned for her to blush.⁴⁴ On seeing him she feels a confused mixture of fear, pleasure and desire.⁴⁵ Nemours himself, whatever his Court reputation as a ladies' man, is at critical moments just as susceptible to this disorientation.⁴⁶ Their reaction to each other shows how distant is their self-control: 'Il monta avec une agitation et un trouble qui ne se peut comparer qu'à celui qu'eut Mme de Clèves, quand on lui dit que M. de Nemours venait pour la voir.'⁴⁷

It does not even require the presence of Nemours for Mme de Clèves to be plunged into 'un trouble dont elle n'était pas maîtresse.'⁴⁸ She suppresses evidence of her passion with such difficulty that even more

evidence is generated.⁴⁹ It is such a state which has caused Clèves to suspect Mme de Tournon's image in society: 'elle me parut embarrassée. Son embarras me donna du soupçon.'⁵⁰ Later, an incident when his wife shows similar confusion⁵¹ gives him similar suspicions.⁵² Embarras becomes a clear sign of her passion.⁵³ She can even use this fact to persuade Clèves not to scrutinize her reactions too closely in public: 'Vous me donnerez un embarras qui paraîtra aux yeux de tout le monde.'⁵⁴ Ironically, the very pressure to conceal feelings makes it impossible for the concealment to be complete.

This word-group also expresses the complexity of those emotional states which passion creates. Mme de Chartres promised to help her daughter 'à se conduire dans des choses où l'on était souvent embarrassée quand on était jeune.'⁵⁵ Little did she realize that this embarras was to be no momentary difficulty, but confusion of Mme de Clèves's personality, 'un trouble dont elle fut longtemps à se remettre.'⁵⁶ Thus Mme de Clèves cannot understand the nature or effect of passion, nor why 'le trouble qui s'éleva dans son âme'⁵⁷ at the thought of Nemours's sacrifices for her, should so suddenly become 'une autre sorte de trouble'⁵⁸ when she realizes that the sacrifices might not be for her. Then 'l'impatience et le trouble où elle était'⁵⁹, and the trouble⁶⁰ with which she awaits a Nemours now presumed to be unfaithful, give her a startling insight into what passion means.

Trouble and embarras thus mark Mme de Clèves's growing consciousness of how passion makes a mockery of lucidity and self-control.⁶¹ She is 'pleine d'incertitude, de trouble et de crainte'⁶²,

she has 'un trouble confus, dont elle ne savait pas même la cause.'⁶³

She has an uncomfortable awareness both of unknown limits and of unrealized depths. Until the very end passion is seen as a complex and violent force⁶⁴, erupting as and when it pleases: 'tous ses sentiments étaient pleins de trouble et de passion.'⁶⁵ Her state is never a simple one. The Trouble group of terms is one symptom of this dark complexity.

SURPRISE

a)

This group of terms is closely linked with the previous group. As with Trouble, the idea of surprise is associated with passionate love.⁶⁶ Equally, the Surprise group underlines the difference between what is and what had seemed to be. Words expressing surprise often accompany visual terms. Passion erupts, and the mask falls. Surprise here points invariably to a world of hidden complexities.⁶⁷

b)

The terms retained in this word-group are simply those which signify surprise, and thus surprise⁶⁸, étonnement⁶⁹, surprendre⁷⁰, étonner⁷¹. Joined to these is admiration⁷², used mostly in PC. As can be judged from contemporary definitions of the terms used in this sense, this word-group is placed, with Trouble, in a perspective of emotional shock and confusion.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

Terms of surprise here reflect the emotional turmoil associated with passion⁷³, and naturally occur with verbs of seeing. Thus Montpensier, returning from the wars, 'fut surpris de voir la beauté de la princesse sa femme.'⁷⁴ This is not his memory of her, and the surprise is a manifestation of jealousy.⁷⁵ The reaction ('étonnement'⁷⁶) is identical when he finds his wife with Anjou and Guise. The bitterness of discovery is inseparable from the surprise⁷⁷, as later with an equally jealous Chabanes, filled with étonnement and douleur⁷⁸, both surpris and affligé.⁷⁹ Surprise marks here a sudden eruption of jealous passion: 'la surprise de trouver, et seul, et la nuit, dans la chambre de sa femme l'homme du monde qu'il aimait le mieux le mit hors d'état de pouvoir parler.'⁸⁰ The reality is discovered to be different from the appearance: surprise is a measure of the gap between them.

La Comtesse de Tende

In this story two examples of surprise are especially significant. They mark Tende's painful awareness of the mask which his wife has worn. In the first case, when Mme de Tende hears of Navarre's death, 'ses larmes redoublèrent d'une telle sorte que le comte de Tende en fut surpris et presque éclairé.'⁸¹ The surprise is here a factor of enlightenment. When Tende finally hears the whole truth, of his wife's adultery and pregnancy, 'il n'avait pas moins d'étonnement que de fureur, et au travers de l'un et de l'autre, il sentait encore, malgré lui, une douleur où la tendresse

avait quelque part.'⁸² Self-discovery follows on discovery: in his hate Tende finds love. Surprise gives him a sudden insight into his tormented inner world. It is an avowal of the dark and complex nature of what seemed to be a simple emotional state.

Zaïde

The many examples of surprise in this novel stress both the falsity of appearances and the force of passion: surprise is an avowal of both.⁸³ Very often, surprise results from a sudden contact with beauty, physical or moral, as when Consalve meets Zaïde ('Il fut surpris...; il regarda avec étonnement.'⁸⁴) and rushes back to tell Alphonse 'avec cet empressement que l'on a pour les choses qui nous surprennent et qui nous charment.'⁸⁵ Similar examples are too numerous to quote⁸⁶, but all imply a kind of enlightenment. When Consalve meets his betrayers after a period of absence, they greet him as a friend: 'surprise...étonnement...surprise extraordinaire' are his unconsciously ironic reaction to this sudden change.⁸⁷ In the endless game of appearances and reality, surprise may be a step towards discovery or self-discovery.⁸⁸ For Consalve, at the court of Léon, love is a series of unhappy surprises.⁸⁹

Passion and surprise are explicitly associated by Don Garcie: 'la surprise augmente et réveille l'amour'⁹⁰; si je ne suis surpris d'abord, je ne puis être touché.'⁹¹ Ironically, those who deny this theory, Don Ramire and Consalve, come to experience its truth.⁹²

Ironically again, when Don Garcie is asked to justify his surprised reaction to Consalve's sister⁹³, supposedly out of bounds as a love-match for him, he is clearly embarrassed: 'J'ai été surpris de sa beauté...mais, encore que je croie qu'on ne puisse être touché sans être surpris, je ne crois pas qu'on ne puisse être surpris sans être touché.'⁹⁴ The cumbersome syntax enacts the confusion of his own surprise at Consalve's question.⁹⁵ Surprise eloquently points out the gap between the phrases *proffered* and the reality within.

Surprise is yet another indication of the power of passion. It is the herald of that confusion into which passion throws the whole personality⁹⁶, accompanying the first stirrings of jealousy and wounded love.⁹⁷ Félimé's reaction to Alamir is a good example of how passion's hold is demonstrated: 'j'étais surprise à tous les moments de l'agrément de son esprit et de sa personne; et cet étonnement m'occupait si fort, que je devais bien soupçonner dès lors qu'il y avait quelque chose de plus que de la surprise.'⁹⁸ The language of surprise describes first the shock effect of love, and then, gradually seeping into the mind, the realization of what this means.

The author then uses these terms of surprise in this novel above all to underline the separation between apparent feelings and the deep-rooted forces which in reality control the soul.

La Princesse de Clèves

Terms of surprise are used here in the first place to single out, in an already superlative Court, the beauty and charm of the story's heroine, who evokes universal admiration⁹⁹ and étonnement.¹⁰⁰ Clèves's reaction is dwelt on at some length: 'Il fut tellement surpris... qu'il ne put cacher sa surprise...'¹⁰¹; '(il) la regardait avec admiration...'¹⁰² 'il la regardait toujours avec étonnement.'¹⁰³ The insistent return of these terms points decisively to the fact that things will never again be the same for Clèves. Etonnement marks the sudden, irrational onslaught of that passion which will hound him to his death. Nemours has a similar reaction of surprise and admiration.¹⁰⁴ In this way the author clearly sets apart the two central love-relationships of the novel, and also stresses the gratuitous, irrational nature of passion. From this last point of view, it is significant that Mme de Clèves has felt this initial shock with Nemours¹⁰⁵, but not with her future husband. Surprise is here as much a proof of love as Don Garcie would ever have wished.¹⁰⁶

Surprise indicates, too, the complex nature of passion. Mme de Clèves in particular is continually taken aback by the areas of darkness within her which love reveals: 'Vous m'avez inspiré des sentiments... dont j'avais même si peu idée qu'ils me donnèrent d'abord une surprise...'¹⁰⁷ This is a late avowal of what has been a continuing state. She cannot control her own emotions or thoughts¹⁰⁸: 'Cette pensée l'occupa longtemps; ensuite elle fut étonnée de l'avoir eue.'¹⁰⁹ There are many similar moments of enlightenment for Mme de Clèves, as when she first has to come to terms with jealousy¹¹⁰, realizes the effect which Nemours has on her¹¹¹, senses

how illusory might be her own innocent assumption of his love¹¹², is dumbfounded at her own aveu ('elle en fut si épouvantée¹¹³ qu'à peine put-elle s'imaginer que ce fût une vérité.'¹¹⁴), or is astonished by her long final dialogue with Nemours ('Elle fut étonnée de ce qu'elle avait fait.'¹¹⁵) Each moment of shock inexorably heightens her awareness of all that is irrational within her. Despite all her resolutions, Mme de Clèves cannot be indifferent to Nemours, even at the very end, when surprise creates a new awareness of a passion believed vanquished.¹¹⁶

The central themes of passion and appearances are therefore inseparable from the idea of surprise.¹¹⁷ Very revealing, thus, is Nemours's astonishment at the aveu¹¹⁸: he cannot accept that passion should have compelled Mme de Clèves to take such an unthinkable step. His surprise gives all the measure of her despair, and of all that separates her from Nemours.

VOIR

a)

For the author, society is a world of watching eyes. What is important is the appearance. But the appearance is scrutinized with minute attention, simply because it is only an appearance. The eye imprisons those it contemplates.¹¹⁹ The eye is also a servant of passionate love, which creates its own imprisoning structure.¹²⁰ Love at first sight is common, the manifestation of all that is spontaneous and irrational in passion. Thus both main themes of these works, passion and appearances, are often expressed in terms of seeing.

b)

This word-group is simply composed of terms connected with the sense of sight. The terms voir and vue recur with great frequency in PM and Z, but especially so in PC.¹²¹ Associated with these words are many other visual terms, e.g. regarder¹²², regard, oeil, observer¹²³, (s')apercevoir (de)¹²⁴, remarquer¹²⁵, distinguer¹²⁶, entrevoir¹²⁷, image¹²⁸. Présence¹²⁹ is an obviously related term, with admiration¹³⁰ and charme / charmer¹³¹ sometimes showing the effect of a particular presence. In PC the use of the verb exposer is revealing of one aspect of the world of watching eyes.¹³²

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

Visual terms in this work express two main ideas: the links between passion and sight, and the eye as a prison-warder in a society where what matters is what appears, and where what appears is constantly scrutinized.

In the first few pages of the story two characters fall in love with Mme de Montpensier. In both cases sight and attraction are almost one and the same thing. Guise 'la voyait souvent, et...voyant en elle les commencements d'une grande beauté, en devint amoureux et en fut aimé.'¹³³ And Chabanes, who 'regardait avec admiration'¹³⁴ the beautiful Princess, 'ne put se défendre de tant de charmes qu'il voyait tous les jours de si près.'¹³⁵ Admiration and charmes express here the way in which sight is related to passionate love. Chabanes makes himself the prisoner of his own gaze. In the case of Anjou voir and souhaiter ardemment are inseparable.¹³⁶ The sight of Mme de Montpensier exerts on him an almost magnetic power: 'il sentait bien que sa vue lui pourrait être dangereuse.'¹³⁷ As for Mme de Montpensier, despite her resolve to forget about love, she only has to see Guise to be troubled.¹³⁸ Further resolutions 'se dissipèrent dès le lendemain par la vue du duc de Guise.'¹³⁹

Each member of this society is trapped by the constant scrutiny of the others. Montpensier watches Guise looking at his wife, and is jealous: 'ce qui lui déplaisait le plus, était d'avoir remarqué que le duc de Guise l'avait regardée attentivement.'¹⁴⁰ Here lies the drama for Mme de Montpensier. She can never escape the watching eyes.

Eyes, interested eyes, are always fixed upon her. She is continually seen and scrutinized by Guise and his rival Anjou.¹⁴¹ She is as a prisoner.

In their emphasis on the role of the watching eye, the Court scenes in this story prefigure more intense moments in PC. Guise desperately tries to express his love 'lorsqu'il ne pouvait être vu de personne.'¹⁴² Mme de Montpensier angrily rebuffs him partly because any love-relationship must be 'à la vue de toute la cour.'¹⁴³ The spontaneous expression of feelings is impossible in this place: 'on m'observe, ne m'approchez plus.'¹⁴⁴ Thus the very slightest difference in expected behaviour or expression becomes a sign for the ever-present observers: 'Le duc d'Anjou les observait soigneusement l'un et l'autre. Les yeux de cette princesse laissaient voir malgré elle...'¹⁴⁵ Jealousy feeds on this constant, obsessive scrutinizing.¹⁴⁶

Ironically, when the jealous and vigilant Montpensier enters his wife's bedchamber and there sees Chabanes, simple sight becomes more like hallucination: 'il ne croyait pas ce qu'il voyait...'¹⁴⁷; 'Que vois-je?... Est-ce une illusion ou une vérité?'¹⁴⁸ Finally he turns away, 'ne pouvant plus soutenir la vue de deux personnes qui lui donnaient des mouvements si tristes.'¹⁴⁹ A second irony is that he actually believes what he sees. The eye which gives light to the body can here only spread the darkness of passion.

La Comtesse de Tende

There are relatively few visual terms in CT¹⁵⁰, and these concern especially the relationship between Navarre and Mme de Tende:

'en la voyant il prit aussi pour elle une passion violente.'¹⁵¹

Voir and aimer are equated, suggesting once more the gratuitous,

spontaneous nature of love: 'pour résister, il ne fallait pas voir

souvent la comtesse de Tende et il la voyait tous les jours...; ainsi il

devint éperdument amoureux de la comtesse.'¹⁵² Mme de Tende comes under

the same law. She is 'frappée des regards et des paroles du chevalier;

elle le regarda des mêmes yeux dont il la regardait.'¹⁵³ Regards..regarda...

yeux...regardait: love is associated with a kind of mutual hypnosis.

These visual terms express the immediacy and intensity of the force which is passionate love.

Zafde

Consalve's love at first sight for Zafde, narrated in some detail, is a clear example of how visual terms are used to convey the immediate, irrational impact of love. He 'regarda cette inconnue avec plus d'attention qu'il n'avait encore fait', 'regarda avec étonnement', was 'charmé de tout ce qu'il voyait dans cette étrangère.'¹⁵⁴ Zafde's eyes seem to be a source of power: 'Quels yeux! quels regards! que je plains ceux qui peuvent en être touchés!'¹⁵⁵ The sense of sight conveys perfectly the spontaneous and obsessive nature of Consalve's feelings. His lament to Alphonse is a parody of the gospel text: 'Que vous êtes sage d'avoir vu Zafde et de ne l'avoir pas aimée.'¹⁵⁶

Thus the eye is both the instrument and the sign of love's power. The intense curiosity with which Consalve scrutinizes Zafde¹⁵⁷,

'le plaisir de la voir et d'être regardé par ses beaux yeux'¹⁵⁸, is a more powerful language than words: 'il ne pouvait s'empêcher de laisser parler ses yeux.'¹⁵⁹ Her gaze seems to cast a spell: 'Vous tournez les yeux sur moi... d'une manière à charmer et à embraser tout le monde...'¹⁶⁰ The eye is the direct instrument of a passion which enslaves all that it possesses.

Love at first sight is the norm, with Alamir as with Don Garcie: 'enfin, plus il la regardait, et plus il lui donnait des louanges.'¹⁶¹ Don Ramire falls in similar fashion¹⁶²: 'la beauté de Nugna Bella était de celles dont la vue ordinaire n'est pas sans danger.'¹⁶³ Then, logically, to be certain that his mistress will not fall in love with Consalve, Don Ramire forbids her to look at him: 'Je ne saurais plus souffrir... que vous regardiez Consalve.'¹⁶⁴ To look may mean to love.¹⁶⁵ This is the dread of Alphonse¹⁶⁶, the fact that Bélasire can see her friend Don Manrique freely sets his jealousy alight.¹⁶⁷ Finally, to calm Alphonse, she urges her friend 'de ne me voir jamais.'¹⁶⁸ It is absurd, but yet strangely reasonable in the author's treatment of love: voir and aimer are closely associated.

The interpretation of what is seen poses once more the problem of appearances. Consalve does not know whether he can, with Zaïde, 'juger de ses sentiments par ses regards.'¹⁶⁹ Féline scrutinizes every glance of Alamir's, to see whether he loves Zaïde or herself.¹⁷⁰ 'Le langage de ses yeux'¹⁷¹ is ambiguous: 'J'avais... remarqué que ses regards avaient souvent été attachés sur Zaïde; mais souvent aussi je les avais vu attachés sur moi...'¹⁷² In the end she misinterprets the way he looks at her.¹⁷³ The eyes are directed by the heart.

Especially at the Court of Léon, watching eyes are everywhere. Each person scans the other, to surprise the secrets of his heart¹⁷⁴: 'Je l'observai avec beaucoup de soin'¹⁷⁵; 'je remarquai qu'il m'observait avec beaucoup de soin, afin d'apprendre...'¹⁷⁶; 'il croyait même avoir remarqué dans ses yeux...'¹⁷⁷ Seeing can easily become synonymous with spying: visual terms take us to the heart of the world of appearances.

La Princesse de Clèves

The Court is a glass prison.¹⁷⁸ Masks are worn to avoid searching eyes, and the searching eyes seek to penetrate the masks. Everyone spies and is spied on. In this hothouse world it is not surprising that the word-group voir should figure prominently.¹⁷⁹ The author stresses, too, the links between voir and amour. The physical presence of Nemours weighs heavily on Mme de Clèves until the end. Where there is no escape from the all-powerful eye, a mere look is a weapon, and a language of its own.

The presentation of the two main characters makes clear to what extent they are both subjected to the searching gaze of the Court.¹⁸⁰ Nemours has 'un air dans toute sa personne qui faisait qu'on ne pouvait regarder que lui dans tous les lieux où il paraissait.'¹⁸¹ The contrast between the air, personne and paraître of Nemours, and the regarder of the Court, gives a good idea of the forces at work. Mme de Clèves, on her first appearance at Court, 'attira les yeux de tout le monde.'¹⁸² Such phrases are not as innocent as they might appear: neither Mme de Clèves nor Nemours is henceforth able completely to escape the inquisitorial eye of

Court society. The Vidame keeps a close watch on Nemours, to try and find out for the Court in general the reason for his apparent change of behaviour.¹⁸³ He even asks his mistress 'de lui aider à observer ce prince.'¹⁸⁴ At the same time the Vidame is spied upon by the Queen, and the Queen's informers: 'On vous observe, on sait les lieux où vous voyez votre maîtresse...'¹⁸⁵

This constant scrutiny means that at Court an appearance of tranquillity must be given. It is dangerous to reveal even the slightest emotion, as Nemours discovers with the Dauphine: 'Regardez-le, regardez-le...et jugez.'¹⁸⁶ Only a quick-witted piece of deception covers up in time. Feelings must be expressed secretly, 'pour n'être vu ni entendu de personne.'¹⁸⁷ For the final interview with Mme de Clèves, Nemours uses a hidden staircase to gain access to her room, 'afin de n'être vu de personne.'¹⁸⁸ The marauding eyes of the Court are everywhere.¹⁸⁹

A second strand to this Voir group is the connection with passion.¹⁹⁰ The many cases of love at first sight translate its totally irrational, spontaneous nature.¹⁹¹ Voir very often, too, suggests the kind of overpowering physical presence which makes love inevitable: 'ce fut en la voyant souvent qu'il prit le commencement de cette malheureuse passion qui lui ôta la raison...'¹⁹² Conversely Clèves can see that his presence has no effect on his fiancée, despite her protests.¹⁹³ It is the acid test of her love, as it is later with her reaction to Nemours: 'Pourquoi faut-il que vous craigniez sa vue?'¹⁹⁴ To be kept safe she must be kept out of sight: 'la prudence ne voulait pas qu'il l'exposât plus longtemps à la vue d'un homme qu'elle aimait.'¹⁹⁵

These two strands of the Voir group come together in the case of Mme de Clèves. She is in the middle of a Court where every eye scrutinizes the slightest movement. She is subject to the stern gaze of a jealous husband and a lover desperate to know if he is loved. And the physical presence of Nemours is enough to destroy all her resolutions to refuse the call of passion. She is totally imprisoned by the watching eyes. Before the aveu, Clèves has looked at his wife for 'le plaisir de la voir.'¹⁹⁶ Afterwards, the eye of love becomes the searching eye of jealousy¹⁹⁷: 'M. de Clèves avait les yeux sur sa femme...Il remarqua...Cela lui fit croire..'198; 'Son mari s'aperçut aisément de son embarras. Il vit qu'elle craignit...'199 The climax comes when Clèves sends a spy to report on Nemours's activities at Coulommiers, 'de l'observer exactement.'²⁰⁰ It only needs the spy to observe Nemours going in and out of the garden of their house for Clèves to suspect the worst, a worst which is utterly false.²⁰¹

Such relentless observation on the part of the Court and of her husband is only a small part of the pressure building up on Mme de Clèves. The gaze of Nemours is the most feared of all, feared and desired with almost the same intensity, just as she fears and desires to look at him. Ironically, when she does not know Nemours, she has 'de la curiosité, et même de l'impatience de le voir.'²⁰² It is love at first sight.²⁰³ After this first contact, her fascination with Nemours, and at the same time the near-impossibility of avoiding him, is conveyed in the breathless succession of occasions on which she sees him: 'Mme de Clèves y vit le duc de Nemours avec une mine et une grâce si admirables...Les jours suivants elle le vit chez la reine dauphine, elle le vit jouer à la paume avec le roi, elle le vit courre la bague...elle le vit toujours surpasser de si loin

tous les autres...'²⁰⁴ The repetition of voir here creates almost an effect of dizziness, suggesting Mme de Clèves's state of total fascination with Nemours. She cannot look at him without her passion taking a complete hold of her.²⁰⁵ For Nemours the same process occurs, 'de sorte que, en se voyant souvent, et se voyant l'un et l'autre ce qu'il y avait de plus parfait à la cour, il était difficile qu'ils ne se plussent infiniment.'²⁰⁶

Mme de Clèves soon realizes, however, that this mutual fascination is the primrose path to all that her mother has charged her to avoid.²⁰⁷ Nemours seeks her, and sees her, almost everywhere. He cannot be avoided.²⁰⁸ 'Elle ne pouvait s'empêcher d'être troublée de sa vue, et d'avoir pourtant du plaisir à le voir; mais quand elle ne le voyait plus et qu'elle pensait que ce charme qu'elle trouvait dans sa vue était le commencement des passions, il s'en fallait peu qu'elle ne crût le haïr...'²⁰⁹ Again, the repetition of voir here creates an effect of hallucination, suggesting powerfully the pull of passion. Mme de Clèves resolves to 's'empêcher de le voir'²¹⁰, to 'éviter la présence de ce prince.'²¹¹ But 'il y avait trop longtemps qu'elle ne l'avait vu, pour se résoudre à ne le voir pas.'²¹² Voir expresses the physical need she has of his presence, as well as the physical fear she has of what this presence will do to her prudent resolutions.

Parallel to this inner need is pressure from without, from a Nemours who follows Mme de Clèves, and scrutinizes her, as a hunter stalks his prey.²¹³ 'Elle voyait M. de Nemours chez Mme la Dauphine; elle le voyait chez M. de Clèves...mais elle ne le voyait plus qu'avec un trouble dont il s'apercevait aisément.'²¹⁴ She cannot escape Nemours's searching eyes:

'Quelque application qu'elle eût à éviter ses regards et à lui parler moins qu'à un autre, il lui échappait de certaines choses qui partaient d'un premier mouvement.'²¹⁵ Under the pressure of scrutiny Mme de Clèves is unable to keep up a completely false appearance, especially as she cannot always prevent herself from looking at Nemours.

Thus Mme de Clèves's love is almost discovered when she is looking at Nemours surreptitiously taking her portrait: 'Mme la Dauphine remarqua qu'elle ne l'écoutait pas et lui demanda tout haut ce qu'elle regardait. M. de Nemours se tourna à ces paroles; il rencontra les yeux de Mme de Clèves, qui étaient encore attachés sur lui...'²¹⁶ A succession of visual terms here renders the impression of a closed, intense world from which no escape is possible. Mme de Clèves does lapse and allow herself 'le plaisir de voir M. de Nemours'²¹⁷, but it only needs the withdrawal of 'cette joie que donne la présence de ce que l'on aime'²¹⁸ for a bitterness as of self-betrayal to sweep through her. Seeing Nemours is for her a surrender to passion.

But at the very moment that Mme de Clèves withdraws, and begs her husband to let no-one see her²¹⁹, Nemours begins to track his quarry 'in desperate earnest.'²²⁰ When she goes to Coulommiers to avoid him, he goes too, and spies on her in the garden: 'il ne put se refuser le plaisir de voir cette princesse.'²²¹ Thus he eavesdrops on the whole of the aveu scene, watching Mme de Clèves when she thinks she can be alone with her husband.²²² Ironically, he sees her less at Court, where 'elle évitait la présence et les yeux de M. de Nemours.'²²³ She knows that one look exchanged with him, and her husband would know the truth.²²⁴ So that

when Nemours tries to speak with Mme de Clèves, 'elle le quitta sans le regarder.'²²⁵ We are given the impression of someone desperately trying to close her eyes to the outside world.²²⁶

The climax of Nemours's voyeurism is when, at Coulommiers, he gazes in at Mme de Clèves's private cabinet, watching her every move: 'Il se rangea derrière une des fenêtres...pour voir ce que faisait Mme de Clèves. Il vit qu'elle était seule; mais il la vit d'une si admirable beauté qu'à peine fut-il maître du transport que lui donna cette vue.'²²⁷ Ironically what he sees is a woman who, deprived of the sight of the man she loves, gazes fixedly at his portrait.²²⁸ At the same time Nemours has been under surveillance from Clèves's spy.²²⁹ Nowhere are we given a more luminous idea of this closed yet transparent world in which Mme de Clèves must struggle to be other than she is.

After her husband's death she shuts herself away completely. But Nemours cannot 'vivre si absolument privé de la vue de Mme de Clèves'²³⁰; he even rents a room overlooking her town house, so as not to lose sight of her.²³¹ But he cannot live indefinitely without seeing her gaze meet his: 'Pourquoi me réduire à la voir sans en être vu?'²³² And Mme de Clèves has only to see him for a second for the full force of her passion to come alive again: 'Quel effet produisit cette vue d'un moment dans le coeur de Mme de Clèves!'²³³ The spying, the voyeurism and the determined closing of eyes come to an end only when the two protagonists come together to exchange in words what has up to now been said in looks and glances.

One more step remains to be taken, however, before Mme de Clèves can renounce her passion for Nemours. She must put herself out of reach of that searching eye, and that desired presence: 'je me priverai de votre vue, quelque violence qu'il m'en coûte. Je vous conjure...de ne chercher aucune occasion de me voir.'²³⁴ She sees that it is impossible to resist love in the presence of Nemours²³⁵, and that only distance will keep her safe from the desire to see him.²³⁶ And when Nemours seeks her out in desperation²³⁷, she opposes the 'péril de le voir'²³⁸ to any visit. The wheel has turned full circle, from the young girl impatient to see the dashing young prince. In her final state, with 'des vues plus grandes et plus éloignées'²³⁹, it is as if the sense of sight itself has been transformed: 'Cette vue si longue et si prochaine de la mort fit paraître à Mme de Clèves les choses de cette vie de cet oeil si différent dont on les voit dans la santé.'²⁴⁰

Through this Voir group the author then emphasizes the intense power of passion. It is as though the eye expresses all the desires of the heart. The recurrent visual terms remind us of the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Court, and of the importance of all those appearances which passion creates and which the roving eye seeks to break down.

Avouer

a)

The world of confidential relationships, the world of avowals and declarations, the world of the half-said and the half-meant: this is the world of the terms placed under the convenient label of Avouer.²⁴¹ Among people in whom appearances and truth rarely coincide, trust seems impossible, yet confidences abound.²⁴² Mme de Clèves's aveu to her husband, though the most immediately striking case, is by no means the only one.²⁴³ The treatment of this area of human relations demonstrates once more the author's concern with the abiding tensions between the social face of man and his inner self, between a formal social order and a feverish underground activity, between social relationships and those generated by passionate love. In such a society, can confidential relationships ever be fully confidential?

Passion and appearances: these two elements combine to create the world of confidences.

b) This group is composed of three main clusters of words: terms descriptive of the act of telling, such as avouer²⁴⁴, aveu²⁴⁵, dire, raconter, parler, conter, apprendre, déclarer, rendre compte, éclaircir; terms connected with the idea of confidence, confiance²⁴⁶, confidence, confidant, confier, se fier, sincérité²⁴⁷, liaison²⁴⁸, intelligence²⁴⁹, secret²⁵⁰, cachier, souçon, incertitude; and terms which in various ways relate to these first two sets of words, e.g. nécessaire, poison²⁵¹, douceur, envie, plaisir, soulagement²⁵², remède, besoin, secours, s'abandonner. This last group of terms is most numerous in PC, partly because of the importance of Mme de Clèves's aveu to her husband. The variety of words which qualify the act (e.g. courage²⁵³, folie, extraordinaire, guère vraisemblable) already anticipates the wide range of critical response to it.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

In this story everyone wears a mask. Yet passion must be expressed: 'L'amour fit en lui ce qu'il fait en tous les autres; il lui donna l'envie de parler.'²⁵⁴ The tension between social face and inner self generates confidential relationships. An inner need prompts avowals, as the author's direct comment implies.

The very structure of these relationships is an ironic comment on the confidential. Chabanes comes to be the confidant of husband²⁵⁵, wife²⁵⁶ and lover²⁵⁷, while at the same time loving the wife and feeling the lover to be his rival. The plot is thus fraught with bitter ironies. Chabanes has with Montpensier 'une sincérité aussi exacte que s'il n'eût point été amoureux.'²⁵⁸ This sincérité does not stretch to telling Montpensier his real feelings, nor those of Mme de Montpensier. It is a limited, if not meaningless quality. When Montpensier, devoured by jealousy, begs to know the truth²⁵⁹, Chabanes cannot speak. The confidant of all, he can be confidential with none.

Confidences are here shared from self-interest, from a need to speak rather than a desire to tell the truth. Guise and Anjou both confide in someone else of their love²⁶⁰, while Mme de Montpensier does not hesitate to tell Chabanes of her feelings for Guise.²⁶¹ It is clear that her motive is not friendship: 'la princesse, qui était pleine de sa passion et qui trouvait un soulagement extrême à lui en parler....'²⁶² Soulagement indicates to what extent the confidential relationship is one-sided. When Mme de Montpensier does express an 'impatience extraordinaire

de s'entretenir en particulier'²⁶³ with Chabanes, this is to ask him to carry her love-letters to his rival Guise. She pushes the 'confidential' relationship to the point of torture by showing Guise's love-letters to Chabanes: 'elle...lui fit avaler à longs traits tout le poison imaginable en lui lisant ces lettres et la réponse tendre et galante qu'elle y faisait.'²⁶⁴

Similarly Guise tortures the hapless Chabanes into a mood of jealous fury by confidentially describing the progress of his love.²⁶⁵ For Anjou, indeed, the confidential relationship is a weapon of vengeance against Guise, the expression of dépit, rage, haine²⁶⁶: 'il ne put toutefois se refuser le plaisir de lui apprendre qu'il savait le secret de son amour.'²⁶⁷ Soulagement, poison, dépit...The terms associated with confidential relationships show clearly that the avowal of feelings is more an expression of passion than a wish to break through the surface of appearances which repressed passion creates.

La Comtesse de Tende

Here the confidential relationship is a tool used cynically for a certain end. This is seen at the very beginning with Navarre's exploitation of such a confidence in order to win the hand of the rich Mme de Neufchâtel.²⁶⁸ Essentially, however, it is Mme de Tende's relationships, with Mme de Neufchâtel and with Navarre²⁶⁹, which demonstrate the treacheries of seeming trust. What Mme de Neufchâtel tells Mme de Tende in confidence, about her love for Navarre, is relayed directly to him.²⁷⁰

This casual breach of trust becomes organized deception when Mme de Tende falls in love with Navarre, and yet hears out Mme de Neufchâtel's confidences about the infidelity of her new husband.²⁷¹ Mme de Tende pretends to be moved, but 'écrivit dès le soir au Prince de Navarre pour lui donner avis des soupçons de sa femme.'²⁷² Her love for one precludes any possible sincerity to the other.

Mme de Tende's confession to her husband is no spontaneous desire to tell the truth.²⁷³ With the death of her lover and of the valet used as go-between, 'elle se trouvait dénuée de tout secours, dans un temps où elle en avait tant de besoin.'²⁷⁴ She is pregnant, yet has no-one to help her. Secours and besoin are terms which throw light on the motives for her complete avowal of a truth which, in any case, would soon be obvious.²⁷⁵ Ironically, the very completeness of this confession²⁷⁶ is too much of a shock for Tende. 'Cette certitude que donne l'aveu'²⁷⁷ is more unbearable than the uncertainties of jealousy. It is as if breach of trust is accepted as natural human behaviour. Confession of the truth seems a perverse and bizarre expedient.

Zaide

The element of 'confession' in this novel comes mainly in the form of love-declarations.²⁷⁸ There is an imperious need for characters to free themselves from the pressures that passion brings to bear.²⁷⁹ Someone in love, Alphonse declares, 'trouve toujours de la douceur à parler de son amour.'²⁸⁰ This douceur is often seen as a failure:

passion has broken through the appearances.²⁸¹ Thus Zaïde consoles herself that her absence from Consalve 'm'empêche d'avoir la faiblesse de lui dire que je l'aime.'²⁸² Douceur and s'abandonner are closely linked.²⁸³ Zaïde cannot help confiding in Félimé of her love for Consalve.²⁸⁴ Passion must be expressed²⁸⁵, yet its expression is resisted.²⁸⁶ A need to confide is challenged by shame at an avowal of weakness.²⁸⁷ Félimé fights valiantly not to let her love be known, at first even by her friend Zaïde.²⁸⁸ When finally she resolves, despite her shame and embarrassment²⁸⁹, to tell her friend all²⁹⁰, she is scared lest Alamir should find out.²⁹¹ Yet when Alamir is dead, she is grief-stricken at not having told him of her love: 'Que craignais-je? Pourquoi ne voulais-je pas qu'il sût que je l'adorais?'²⁹² To confide or not to confide? Ironically, both solutions bring unhappiness.

Added to these recurring crises are the material difficulties of speaking confidentially in a society where privacy has little meaning.²⁹³ Even when these barriers, and those of language and absence, come down, it is still difficult to speak the truth to another of one's deepest feelings: 'ce n'était pas toujours assez de pouvoir être entendu pour se déterminer à se vouloir faire entendre.'²⁹⁴ This tension between desire and shame produces conditions ideal for a confidant.

Even here, however, such relationships cannot survive for long. When the demands of confidence conflict with those of passion, the confidant's trust inevitably becomes a mask for treachery. Nowhere is this basic fact more evident than in the perilous series of relationships set up between Don Garcie, Don Ramire, Mugna Bella, Hermenesilde and Consalve. Short-circuits abound. Consalve appears to be the confidant

of all the others.²⁹⁵ In reality, he is betrayed by them²⁹⁶: Nugna Bella and Don Ramire are persuaded by vanity to confide in Don Garcie and to inform on Consalve.²⁹⁷ The term confidence can now only be used with irony.²⁹⁸ The confidant has become a sort of banker, buying and selling his information either to gain power and prestige or to favour the course of his own love.²⁹⁹ Consalve's trust is opposed to the intelligence³⁰⁰ of the others.

A climax of perfidie³⁰¹ comes when Nugna Bella switches her love to Don Ramire, yet without telling Consalve, who confides in him 'jusques à mes moindres soupçons.'³⁰² At the same time Don Ramire brings Don Garcie fully into the network of deceit³⁰³; 'ce nouveau favori eut son maître pour confident, comme il était le confident de son maître.'³⁰⁴ In the feverish spate of hidden contacts - 'redoublement de liaison...intelligence... conversations particulières'³⁰⁵ - Don Ramire begins to feel the strain of being at the same time, with different people, favourite, friend, lover and confidant. He suggests to Don Garcie that Consalve be banished from the Court. Consalve, having by chance heard of this plan, turns to Don Ramire 'pour avoir le soulagement de me plaindre avec lui.'³⁰⁶ This is the dizzy apex of duplicity in the novel, the clearest comment on a world where trust is traded for treachery at the slightest breath of passion. Suddenly the whole system breaks down. Consalve learns of the collective deceit of his friends and confidants. Nothing can here be kept completely secret³⁰⁷: someone who may or may not be trustworthy is always in the trust of someone else.³⁰⁸ And so Consalve's eyes are opened to the ways of the world.

A second main strand in the author's handling of

of these ideas is the link between avouer and wounding, a link demonstrated in the Histoire d'Alphonse. At first both Alphonse and Bélasire are perfectly frank with one another.³⁰⁹ Then Alphonse, naturally jealous, takes advantage of Bélasire's openness to torture her remorselessly about her past: 'Je la priai de me dire tout ce que ses amants avaient fait pour elle...; je la priai de me redire encore tout ce qui s'était passé entre eux...; je n'eus point de repos que...je ne lui fisse encore raconter tout ce qu'elle m'avait dit le jour précédent...; je lui fis mille questions.'³¹⁰

The relentless repetition of avouer-type words suggests some of the torture involved: Bélasire must tell, tell, tell. Though in his heart Alphonse feels he will never attain the truth³¹¹, he keeps demanding that Bélasire should confess it.³¹² The aveu thus becomes in his hands an instrument of torture and of self-torture: 'Par pitié, ne me laissez plus dans l'incertitude où je suis; si vous m'avez caché quelque chose sur le comte de Lare, avouez-le-moi; le mérite de l'aveu et votre sincérité me consoleront peut-être de ce que vous m'avouerez; éclaircissez mes soupçons...'³¹³

Here the very idea of an aveu is being devalued. Terms like incertitude, cacher, soupçon, surround and contaminate the values implicit in sincérité, avouer, éclaircir. The irony is bitter. Where trust is accepted (the elusive confiance), as is the case with Consalve, the seeds of disillusion are sown. But where, as here, trust is refused, all is wounding suspicion and self-doubt.³¹⁴ There seems to be no possible middle ground. Ironically again, Alphonse begins to suspect the honesty of the relationship between his friend Don Manrique and Bélasire³¹⁵, which for once is based on the sincere desire to help Alphonse. There is no way of knowing when trust is genuine or not.

Alphonse has by now reached such a pitch of self-torture that he imagines Bélasire's inability to confess to be a subtle form of

torture on her part.³¹⁶ Each poisoned question is put in the blind hope that one day some final, uncompromising aveu may be extracted from her:

'Don Manrique est mon rival, repartis-je, et je ne crois pas que vous puissiez vous défendre de l'avouer.'³¹⁷ The final twist to this series of ironies

is that a complete aveu comes only when Bélasire has decided to refuse the world in which such an act is necessary. Rather than be torn apart by

Alphonse's quest for the 'truth', Bélasire prefers never to see him again.³¹⁸

This is the final 'truth'. Bélasire's aveu is the most pondered and selfless in the text. It comes neither from a desire to wound nor from a mere need for emotional relief. Yet it is the ultimate confession, that one in which every sort of human relationship is renounced. This is the dark logic of the novel's action throughout.

La Princesse de Clèves

The Court atmosphere in this novel breeds confidences and secret liaisons.³¹⁹ Almost everyone has his confidant, even the

suspicious Mme de Valentinois.³²⁰ The confidant not only shares the person's problems, but often acts as go-between where direct contact would be

frowned upon. Thus Chastelart's master 'le fit confident de l'amour qu'il avait pour la reine dauphine.'³²¹ But Chastelart cannot remain a neutral

messenger: he falls in love with the Dauphine, and comes to grief.³²²

This is a first indication, at the very beginning of the novel, of how difficult any relationship of trust will be. For the person to whom a confidence is given has the same kind of needs and feelings as he who gives it.

Not only is it difficult, in addition, 'd'avoir une conversation particulière'³²³; the partner in one confidential relationship can also be party to another.³²⁴ Trust is a currency which is quickly devalued.

Typical in this respect is Clèves's experience with Sancerre, to whom he relates a Court incident 'comme un secret que l'on venait de me confier et dont je lui défendais d'en parler.'³²⁵ His surprise is great when, the next day, his sister-in-law recounts the story to him word for word.³²⁶ This leads him to realize that there must be a liaison between Sancerre and his sister-in-law's confidant, Mme de Tournon, and he is then able to pressurize Sancerre 'de me l'avouer'³²⁷, thus entering 'très avant dans leur confidence.'³²⁸ Or so he believes, till Estouteville's revelation that he has had a secret liaison with Mme de Tournon.³²⁹ A whole series of relationships of trust has been founded on deception: no-one's confidences in fact reflected the truth of the situation. Nemours's eavesdropping on Mme de Clèves's aveu³³⁰ is then symbolic of the state of relationships in the novel as a whole. Normally the break in confidence is from the inside. One trusted friend has inevitably another confidant, in whom he in turn trusts utterly, and so it continues: 'Mme la Dauphine vient de me conter toute cette aventure; elle l'a sue par le vidame de Chartres qui la sait de M. de Nemours.'³³¹ There is a pressing need for trust and an obvious lack of it.

The Queen and the Vidame have a revealing discussion on this whole question of confiance. The Vidame admits his reluctance to place his trust in anyone³³², and the Queen is equally sceptical: 'elle n'avait trouvé personne en France qui eût du secret...; cela lui

avait ôté le plaisir de donner sa confiance.³³³ But she cannot deny the need for trust: 'c'était une chose nécessaire, dans la vie, que d'avoir quelqu'un à qui on pût parler.'³³⁴ Nothing could provide a more accurate commentary on one of the main themes of the novel.

Ironically, this conversation brings the Queen and the Vidame together. The Queen demands total frankness and trust, in return for the prestigious place of confidant.³³⁵ This would not be possible, if the Vidame was in love with someone: 'On ne peut se fier à ceux qui le sont; on ne peut s'assurer de leur secret.'³³⁶ Their confidence is essentially a self-seeking arrangement, the Vidame being led on by vanité³³⁷ and fortune³³⁸, the Queen 'pour vous confier tous mes chagrins.'³³⁹ Even for these motives, however, there is no trust on the Vidame's side³⁴⁰, despite the Queen's 'entière confiance'³⁴¹ in him. The history of this relationship shows the impossibility, in such a society, for two of its members to have a mutual trust and sincerity, even for the most selfish of reasons. The relationship between Nemours and the Vidame is no different, though they are old friends: trust is given only when it must be used.³⁴² Nowhere in the novel is there a complete and voluntary trust between two characters.

No trust. But confidences abound. They are the small change of Court society, relentlessly given and received³⁴³, especially through the network of love liaisons. A rare authorial aside prefaces the account of one such breach of secrecy: 'la disposition naturelle que l'on a de conter tout ce que l'on sait à ce que l'on aime, fit qu'il redit à Mme de Martigues...'³⁴⁴ In this case the Dauphine can assure

Mme de Clèves that the story is true because it has been passed down the line of confidants to her as a secret.³⁴⁵ By a strange metamorphosis the word confidence thus naturally comes to mean a betrayal of trust.³⁴⁶ Perhaps Mme de Chartres has this in mind when encouraging her daughter to avoid too close a contact with the Dauphine's circle: 'on dirait bientôt que vous êtes leur confidente, et vous savez combien cette réputation est désagréable.'³⁴⁷

This inevitable lack of trust in relationships seems at first to have one major exception, in the dealings of Mme de Clèves with her mother, who has asked her 'de lui faire confidence de toutes les galanteries qu'on lui dirait.'³⁴⁸ Mme de Clèves does this so well³⁴⁹ that her mother 'admirait la sincérité de sa fille.'³⁵⁰ All this changes, however, with her love for Nemours. She no longer finds it possible to speak naturally to her mother of feelings that she can hardly begin to accept in herself.³⁵¹ This relationship follows the law common to them all. Though Mme de Chartres perceives this deception³⁵², she herself keeps up a show of total frankness so that her 'louanges empoisonnées' of Nemours might not be mistrusted by an unsuspecting daughter.³⁵³ Only on her death-bed does Mme de Chartres unburden herself, at the same castigating her daughter's failure to confess her love for Nemours: 'je ne vous demande point de me l'avouer: je ne suis plus en état de me servir de votre sincérité pour vous conduire.'³⁵⁴ Her whole death-bed speech, with its frank condemnation of passion, has a lonely splendour in a world where little is said openly and even less is said frankly. By its very uniqueness it condemns the world to which it is a bitter adieu. Mme de Chartres's death, and the manner of its presentation, emphasize the degree of solitude to which members of this society are doomed.

Nowhere is such a solitude more apparent than with Mme de Clèves after her mother's death: 'elle eût tant souhaité d'avoir quelqu'un qui pût la plaindre...' ³⁵⁵ She does not mention anything which touches her deeply even to the Dauphine ³⁵⁶, 'la personne de la cour en qui elle avait le plus de confiance.' ³⁵⁷ This is fortunate, since the Dauphine does not escape the general rule of indiscretion. ³⁵⁸ Mme de Clèves is alone. The problem posed by a confession to her husband is that relations with him have always been on a superficial level. They are as much strangers to one another, in this respect, as to anyone else at Court. ³⁵⁹ We can savour the bitter irony of the Dauphine's retort to Mme de Clèves: 'il n'y a que vous de femme au monde qui fasse confiance à son mari de toutes les choses qu'elle sait.' ³⁶⁰ Nothing could be further from the truth. In these circumstances it is not difficult to see why the aveu strained the credulity of contemporaries such as Bussy ³⁶¹ and Valincour. ³⁶² What they fail to stress, however, is the way in which Mme de Clèves is inexorably brought to the position where such an aveu seems the only way in which she may protect herself from Nemours, and from her own self. ³⁶³ In her struggle against passion she realizes that complete isolation only increases her chances of succumbing. ³⁶⁴

The first step towards an aveu (and towards making such an act likely) comes with a casual remark by Clèves: 'la sincérité me touche d'une telle sorte que je crois que si ma maîtresse, et même ma femme, m'avouait que quelqu'un lui plût, j'en serais affligé sans en être aigri.' ³⁶⁵ His role would not be to blame but to counsel. ³⁶⁶ From this moment on Mme de Clèves is tempted by the thought of a confession to her husband, who alone, with his declared respect for sincérité, might be

a trusted confidant: 'Elle fut prête de lui dire que le bruit était dans le monde que M. de Nemours était amoureux d'elle; mais elle n'eut pas la force de le nommer.'³⁶⁷ Already are apparent the pressures on her both to speak, and yet to conceal as much of the truth as possible.

More pressure and more isolation take their toll, as Mme de Clèves gradually envisages an act always viewed as exceptional: 'Ce que M. de Clèves lui avait dit sur la sincérité...lui revint dans l'esprit; il lui sembla qu'elle lui devait avouer l'inclination qu'elle avait pour M. de Nemours.'³⁶⁸ The term sincérité dangles temptingly before her imagination, but again she steps back from the brink: 'Cette pensée l'occupa longtemps; ensuite elle fut étonnée de l'avoir eue, elle y trouva de la folie.'³⁶⁹ But it only takes a moment of jealous remorse for her to regret bitterly 'de n'avoir pas suivi la pensée qu'elle avait eue de lui avouer l'inclination qu'elle avait...'³⁷⁰ She is tempted by the image of a trusting, sympathetic husband.³⁷¹ At the same time she is under no illusions as to the extraordinary nature of such a confession, as the term folie indicates. But if her husband keeps on pressing her to know the reasons why she wants to leave the Court, 'peut-être lui ferai-je le mal, et à moi-même aussi, de les lui apprendre.'³⁷² Far from being unbelievable, the aveu, when it comes, may be seen as the inevitable climax of a long progression of events.

It should perhaps be added that the author consistently underlines the exceptional nature of the aveu³⁷³: 'la singularité d'un pareil aveu, dont elle ne trouvait point d'exemple...'³⁷⁴; 'un remède si extraordinaire...'³⁷⁵; 'l'action extraordinaire de cette personne.'³⁷⁶ The way in which the Dauphine relates this startling event to Mme de Clèves

shows just how incredible it seemed.³⁷⁷ There is a bitter irony in Mme de Clèves's reaction: 'Cette histoire ne me paraît guère vraisemblable.'³⁷⁸ It is doubly ironic that the charge of invraisemblance should have been made, in self-defence, by Mme de Clèves herself. She emphasizes how extraordinary the act is: 'Le hasard ne peut l'avoir fait inventer; on ne l'a jamais imaginée et cette pensée n'est jamais tombée dans un autre esprit que le mien.'³⁷⁹

Yet, as we have seen, the aveu is the natural outcome of a long development. It is both inevitable and exceptional: nowhere else in this whole society does anyone refuse the call of passion and confide in an unloved married partner. The extraordinary is within a society where such an act is seen as a desperate expedient.

Even given the long evolution which has led to this confession, indeed, it is still no spontaneous act.³⁸⁰ Only when her husband's suspicions are aroused³⁸¹, when Mme de Clèves has hardly any choice, does she beg him not to make her 'avouer une chose que je n'ai pas la force de vous avouer.'³⁸² The confession has begun. There is no question of courage, or lucidity, or the triumph of the will over passion.³⁸³ The confession itself is made in the most oblique way possible, and surrounded by assurances of her fidelity and resolve: 'Je vous demande mille pardons, si j'ai des sentiments qui vous déplaisent...'³⁸⁴ Few avowals could be more circumspect. It is so far from being a full confession as hardly to be a confession at all.³⁸⁵

It is at this point that the gap opens between

Mme de Clèves's aveu and the relationship of confiance which nowhere exists in this society. Clèves does declare that 'je n'abuserai pas de cet aveu'³⁸⁶, and praises the confiance and sincérité of his wife.³⁸⁷ But this leads him to believe that she will go beyond the oblique understatement she has just painfully made.³⁸⁸ Instead she retreats, invoking the courage³⁸⁹ and sincérité³⁹⁰ which she has already displayed, and stressing the spontaneous nature of 'un aveu comme le mien.'³⁹¹ In the circumstances such assertions are not totally believable.³⁹²

Ironically, therefore, the only concrete result of the aveu is to take away the appearance of trust which existed before. This one incomplete act of confidence has shattered any hope of establishing it, despite Mme de Clèves's pleas: 'Fiez-vous à mes paroles; c'est par un assez grand prix que j'achète la confiance que je vous demande.'³⁹³ Her refusal to go into 'des détails qui me font honte à moi-même'³⁹⁴, however understandable, can only fuel her husband's suspicions. He now has to trick her into finding out her lover's name.³⁹⁵ The aveu is the wound from which Clèves will die, tortured by an obsessive curiosity.³⁹⁶

In Mme de Clèves's long meditation which follows the aveu, she makes it obvious how little this confession was a planned, fully-conscious act of the will.³⁹⁷ She is as one who awakens from a dream: 'elle trouvait qu'elle s'y était engagée sans en avoir presque eu le dessein.'³⁹⁸ So much for courage or sincérité. Then, however, she returns to the reasons which made the act necessary, whatever its consequences: 'ce remède...était le seul qui la pouvait défendre contre M. de Nemours.'³⁹⁹ Simple egoism?⁴⁰⁰ Such a judgement seems to underestimate the violent,

irrational force of passion which Mme de Clèves feels will tear apart her whole personality. The aveu must be seen in context of the later choice of repos, as a first, desperate, radical attempt at self-preservation.

The failure of the aveu to create a relationship of trust is confirmed when Nemours inadvertently leaks news of it to the Court at large. Mme de Clèves assumes that this breach of trust was caused by her husband's seeking help to find the truth⁴⁰¹, while he supposes that she had sought 'le soulagement de vous plaindre avec quelque confidente qui vous a trahie.'⁴⁰² Given the society in which they live, both suppositions are only natural. Mme de Clèves regrets having been tempted by the idea that their relationship could be any different from those outside: 'quel usage avez-vous fait de la confiance extraordinaire, ou, pour mieux dire, folle que j'ai eue en vous?'⁴⁰³ We are firmly back in the world of suspicion, rumour and lack of trust. Clèves knows that he has not disclosed the secret of the aveu⁴⁰⁴, and Mme de Clèves just as naturally feels 'qué M. de Clèves avait abusé de la confiance qu'elle avait en lui.'⁴⁰⁵ Thus the exception of the aveu seems only to confirm the rule that no trust should ever be accorded to anyone. This one marriage has become a microcosm of the bitterness and distrust of normal human relations. Mme de Clèves is now more exposed, isolated and distant from her husband than ever.⁴⁰⁶

Mme de Clèves and her husband are then reduced to silence over the aveu, a silence which is a mockery of confidence.⁴⁰⁷ When Mme de Clèves refuses her husband's demand for a full avowal⁴⁰⁸, he then knocks a final nail into the coffin of the aveu by accusing her of having concealed more than she told: 'vous vous êtes repentie même du peu que vous m'avez

avoué et vous n'avez pas eu la force de continuer.'⁴⁰⁹ Few ironies could be more bitterly complete. Clèves had announced his respect for sincerity and trust; now he admits that the example of it he has known has wrecked his life.⁴¹⁰ Even on his death-bed he is at first in no mood to listen: 'de faux serments ou un aveu me feraient peut-être une égale peine.'⁴¹¹ The aveu is associated with perjury, and Clèves dies without knowing what to believe, or whom to trust.⁴¹² Thus Mme de Clèves's action, far from being totally set apart from the remainder of the novel, comes to symbolize all that avouer and confiance can mean in a society where neither trust nor sincerity can readily be found.

The novel's real aveu is elsewhere, in the long final conversation in which Mme de Clèves for the first time brings her love for Nemours into the open. Before this moment, their contact has been intermittent. Nemours finds it difficult to speak 'sans témoins'⁴¹³, and even his oblique declarations⁴¹⁴ are resisted by Mme de Clèves as a weakening of her resolve not to speak to him of her love.⁴¹⁵ Only once, when they meet to forge a letter for the Vidame, does she drop her guard, entering into 'tous les secrets que M. de Nemours lui confiait.'⁴¹⁶ Indeed, the very fact of having gone so far is one of the major factors determining the aveu to her husband: 'Cet air de mystère et de confidence n'était pas d'un médiocre charme pour ce prince et même pour Mme de Clèves.'⁴¹⁷ She trembles on the edge of a 'confidential' relationship, with all its dangers. Thereafter she refuses to have any dealings with Nemours⁴¹⁸ till the final conversation, strengthened by the knowledge of Nemours's indiscretions: 'J'ai eu tort de croire qu'il y eût un homme capable de cacher ce qui flatte sa gloire.'⁴¹⁹ Only with Clèves dead, and some time elapsed,

are they 'seuls et en état de se parler pour la première fois.'⁴²⁰

The moment of truth, of the real aveu, has come: 'Puisque vous voulez que je vous parle et que je m'y résous...'⁴²¹ Her sincérité is promised.⁴²²

But for Mme de Clèves this does not only mean an admission of her love to Nemours,⁴²³ even though she concedes that 'je trouve de la douceur à vous le dire.'⁴²⁴ It also means an avowal that this love cannot be fulfilled. Her admission of love is 'cet aveu...sans crime'⁴²⁵ not only because her husband is dead, but because, uniquely, the fact of admitting love will not alter in any way her resistance to it. 'Car enfin cet aveu n'aura point de suite...'⁴²⁶ For the only time in the novel, a frank admission of love and a complete trust will not lead inevitably to a love relationship.

This climactic moment of confession itself reaches a climax when Mme de Clèves promises total frankness, 'par-dessus toute la retenue et toutes les délicatesses'⁴²⁷ que je devrais avoir...'⁴²⁸ She has failed the first time in confessing to her husband, principally because what she had to tell was only a fraction of the truth within her. Now at the end of a long process which has been a growing consciousness of what passion is, Mme de Clèves sets before Nemours the whole truth about passion as she now sees it. Beside this affirmation of what is a view of life, Nemours's simple declaration of love seems shallow.⁴²⁹ Once this aveu has been made by her, there is no more contact between them. The inner distance between them makes this physical distance utterly fitting.⁴³⁰

Only in this final aveu does reality begin to break through the mists of appearances.⁴³¹ Elsewhere, leaving aside the death-bed

speech of Mme de Chartres, all is deceit, suspicion, indiscretion and half-truth. From all these worldly relationships Mme de Clèves now withdraws. As with the case of Bélasire, in Z, such a confession only underlines the bleak view of humankind which the novel as a whole presents.

Chapter Six

BEYOND PASSION AND APPEARANCES?

- Réflexion
- Résolution
- Raison
- Vertu
- Repos

REFLEXION

a)

It is clear that in the works studied one centre of interest is the way in which characters scrutinize their thoughts and behaviour.¹ Critics differ greatly, however, as to the significance of this self-scrutiny, especially in PC. Some feel that lucidity is attainable, and attained, by the characters², while others claim that the author demonstrates how self-knowledge is an illusory aim.³ These critical differences pose questions which are crucial to an understanding of the world of passion and appearances which these works portray. Can the characters in them be lucid? And if so, does this lucidity help them to stem the tide of passion?

b)

The term réflexion⁴ heads a group of similar expressions denoting the act of thinking, or words connected with this, e.g. penser, considérer⁵, rêver⁶, délibérer⁷, réfléchir, se dire, se représenter⁸, se rappeler, songer⁹, examiner¹⁰, voir¹¹, repasser¹², pensée.

These expressions do not occur frequently in either of the nouvelles, a fact possibly determined by the nature of the genre. In both works, however, moments do exist which prefigure larger-scale introspective passages in Z but especially in PC. This latter novel contains terms critical of the thinking process (e.g. se tromper, se flatter, s'abandonner), and other terms which point to the need to see clearly within the self (e.g. s'avouer, se reconnaître, clair, distinct), terms which are almost exclusively used in connection with Mme de Clèves.

Not every occurrence of these terms is significant. This is especially the case in Z. When we read that the love-lorn Consalve 'faisait souvent réflexion sur la cruauté de sa destinée'¹³, we are not brought nearer the inner life of this character. Similar examples (such as the many cases of 'je pense que...') have not been considered here.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

One particular scene in this story is a forerunner of similar episodes in PC. It occurs after Mme de Montpensier has had a long conversation with Guise in which her whole manner has been an implicit acceptance that she still loves him: 'Mais quand elle fut dans son cabinet, quelles réflexions ne fit-elle point sur la honte de s'être laissé fléchir si aisément aux excuses du duc de Guise...'¹⁴ After fléchir comes réfléchir. Mme de Montpensier here sees very clearly the mortal consequences of giving way to passion, and is able lucidly to analyse her own behaviour.¹⁵ But this does not prevent her from doing what she has just seen will prove disastrous. Lucidity only helps to increase her awareness of passion's force within her.¹⁶

This futile lucidity is, however, an optimum state. Chabanes, placed by Mme de Montpensier in an impossible situation, begs her 'de penser un peu à ce qu'elle lui faisait souffrir.'¹⁷ But she is blind to Chabanes's plight. Her fleeting lucidity is purely egocentric. She sees only the dire consequences of her own submission to adultery: 'Mais, quand elle pensa...elle se trouva dans une extrémité épouvantable.'¹⁸ Her reflections here only lead her to consider how best she might satisfy both her love and her fear of exposure. Chabanes's comment to her is a fitting obituary for the role of the mind in this story: 'Ah! Madame...c'en est fait, puisque vous ne délibérez plus que sur les moyens...'¹⁹ In PM therefore, such lucidity as there is appears partial, egoistic and soon blinded by passion.

La Comtesse de Tende

The examples of reflection in this story concern mainly Mme de Tende. Like Mme de Montpensier, she has a certain lucidity when faced with the sudden fact of love: 'La honte et les malheurs d'une galanterie se présentèrent à son esprit; elle vit l'abîme où elle se précipitait.'²⁰ When her husband talks unwittingly of the folly of adultery, she is able to examine her love in the light of its possible consequences.²¹ But like Mme de Montpensier, this temporary lucidity does not prevent Mme de Tende from falling into the trap she has foreseen. Only when her lover is dead and no action is required of her can she look into herself with a cold eye: 'Si mille adversités la firent retourner sur elle-même, elle vit qu'elle les avait méritées.'²² She can prepare a full confession to her husband 'après avoir examiné ce qu'elle allait faire.'²³ The role of reflection is not so much to light the way ahead as to see the extent of the damage behind.

Zafde

On the evidence of this novel, reflection does not always denote an active and positive thinking process. When Consalve, for example, is sitting pondering over all the ways in which he has been tricked, he is simply brooding rather than examining his own position.²⁴ When this is suddenly interrupted, 'je reviens comme d'un songe.'²⁵ It was a dream, a series of visions of deceit, and no more. The same passivity, which can be noted on many occasions²⁶, is evident on the

occasion when Alphonse stops to think of his love for Bélasire²⁷, and concludes not from cold analysis, but from what he has 'vu dans ses yeux.'²⁸ Neither need thought be either ordered or illuminating, as witness a phrase such as 'les pensées qui se présentaient en foule à son imagination.'²⁹ The thought of something can merely be a sort of trigger mechanism for every variety of emotional disorder: 'On ne peut exprimer ce que ces pensées produisirent dans l'âme de Consalve et le trouble qu'apporta la jalousie...'³⁰ 'Thoughts' are here something passively submitted to, like emotions.

Some effort towards self-analysis does exist, however, and on the part of Alphonse. He sets out to think over his whole position before he commits himself to loving Bélasire, in what is a rigorous examination of the values and dangers of passionate attachments: 'je rappelais... je trouvais...je pensais...je me disais...je me représentais...'³¹ This leads him to consider all the horrors of jealousy, and finally to conclude, most logically, that it is better to live without Bélasire than to live without her love.³² Ironically, then, after such a stern analysis, Alphonse cannot resist the charms of love, and falls into the very traps of jealousy he has so clearly foreseen. Thought is love's fool.³³

Introspection may of course provide an interesting post-mortem, as when Don Garcie begins to reflect on all his treacheries towards Consalve: 'Quand je fis réflexion..., quand je considérai..., je trouvais...: il me semblait...'³⁴ His realization is only a confirmation of passion's power. This is not the only case: 'Lorsqu'il se vit seul et qu'il fit réflexion sur le peu de joie que lui donnait un changement si avantageux, quels reproches ne se fit-il point de s'être si entièrement abandonné

à l'amour!' ³⁵ Thus at best, characters can see where passion is leading them: 'il fit réflexion sur ses sentiments; mais plus il en fit, et plus il trouva que son coeur était engagé...; enfin il connut son amour et qu'il avait commencé bien tard à le combattre.' ³⁶ It is as if the mind were divorced from the source of decisions and action. All Consalve's reflections only lead him to conclude that he can do nothing but follow his desires. ³⁷ Sometimes his reasoning is totally false ³⁸, and sometimes his conclusion is quite simply that he can know nothing certainly about anything. ³⁹ In his outburst against women Consalve is enunciating one of the main themes of the novel, the impossibility of knowledge and of self-knowledge. ⁴⁰ 'Mais je prétendais une chose impossible: on ne connaît point les femmes, elles ne se connaissent pas elles-mêmes...' ⁴¹

It is significant, then, that the only instance of lengthy and clear-sighted introspection leading to action is Consalve's consideration of why a retreat from the world might be desirable: 'Je me mis encore à considérer l'état où j'avais été et celui où je me trouvais...' ⁴² Only one conclusion seems possible: 'quand je fus seul et abandonné à la réflexion de mes malheurs, le reste de ma vie me parut une si longue souffrance...' ⁴³ The only example of lucid self-examination in the text leads to the conclusion that the life examined is really not worth living in the society of men. ⁴⁴ Where the mind does give light, this only points to the darkness of life.

La Princesse de Clèves

From the very number of terms used it is clear that reflection plays a greater part in this novel than in the previous works.⁴⁵ The reasoning-out of a situation, however, may only be yet another appearance. It does not always mean an effort towards lucidity.⁴⁶ A clear example is the one long meditation of the Vidame, when asked to choose between the Queen's favour and his other attachments: 'Je voyais qu'elle voulait savoir...Je voyais les suites et conséquences du parti que j'allais prendre...Je voyais aussi le péril où je m'exposais...'⁴⁷ Each step here is weighed up ('Je voyais...'), and a final conclusion is reached in the light of this reasoning. But the reasoning is only a calculation of where the greatest possibility for self-aggrandisement lies. At no point does the Vidame challenge the very basis of his behaviour.

The same process can be observed with Nemours. When he does meditate, and this is not often⁴⁸, it is to advance his love for Mme de Clèves.⁴⁹ Even at moments when we are given an insight into his inner world, there is no hint that he is coming to an awareness of the nature and limits of love.⁵⁰ Any regret that he feels is for tactical mistakes, in a general strategy of pursuit, not for the possibly painful consequences of passion.⁵¹ And when he pauses to 'repasser toutes les actions de Mme de Clèves depuis qu'il en était amoureux'⁵², her state of mind interests him more than his own. There is a certain irony in his calling Mme de Clèves's idea of duty 'une pensée vaine'⁵³ et sans fondement.⁵⁴ Nemours does not reach the stage of

considering any idea of duty.

From the beginning Mme de Clèves's way of meeting experience seems different from that of other characters. Her mother warns her daughter always to have 'une extrême défiance de soi-même'⁵⁵, and on her death-bed urges her to scrutinize her own feelings: 'Songez ce que vous vous devez... songez... pensez... souvenez-vous.'⁵⁶ Almost inevitably, then, Mme de Clèves from time to time does think over her actions and feelings. Indeed, one of the patterns of the novel is Mme de Clèves's repeated withdrawal into a lonely reflection on her life.⁵⁷ The long silence after her husband's death, the journey to the Pyrenees and then the entering of a convent only materialize a distance which is conveyed by the habit of thought instilled in her. This repeated distancing of self from direct experience, through reflection on its significance, makes Mme de Clèves a unique character. This inner questioning is an essential part of the novel's action, the distancing already a clue as to the novel's conclusion.

But self-questioning does not necessarily imply lucidity.⁵⁸ Mme de Clèves is often overwhelmed by thoughts as by a tide, as by passion itself. Nor is there any clear and logical progression towards the light. Such a movement is not quite as straightforward as some have suggested.⁵⁹ Mme de Clèves's recognition, therefore, of the nature and extent of her feelings for Nemours is presented not so much as a triumph for lucidity as the unwilling admission of something for a long time half-known and half-repressed: 'elle n'avait encore osé se l'avouer à elle-même.'⁶⁰ Her reaction, later, to Nemours's first veiled declaration of love, shows that she is still as though unwilling to go beyond certain limits in her knowledge of herself and of a relationship which she cannot

begin to visualize. Nemours's words, she feels, have 'quelque chose de galant et de respectueux, mais aussi quelque chose de hardi et de trop intelligible.'⁶¹ The repeated quelque chose emphasizes this unwillingness to scrutinize the situation, while 'quelque chose de...trop intelligible' suggests a deep desire not to understand. To self-knowledge is given a sense of danger. Only when left alone does Mme de Clèves begin to recognise past illusions: 'elle connut bien qu'elle s'était trompée...'⁶² Elle ne se flatta plus...'⁶³ It is a necessary first step towards the lucid recognition of her position.

A second step is when a playful remark from her husband sends her into a long meditation on the present state of her feelings.⁶⁴ There is no more luminous moment in the first half of the novel. The logical framework of this passage, the inevitable progression from admitted facts to inescapable conclusions⁶⁵, show a mind attempting desperately to see clear in a heart besieged by guilt and desire, in a world where no appearance necessarily reflects reality. Ironically the lucid, questioning mind is a beacon which seems merely to heighten the darkness.

The structure of the phrases in this meditation makes the mind's progress seem inexorable:

'elle fit réflexion à la violence de l'inclination qui l'entraînait vers M. de Nemours; elle trouva qu'elle n'était plus maîtresse de ses paroles et de son visage; elle pensa que Lignerolles était revenu'; qu'elle ne craignait plus l'affaire d'Angleterre; qu'elle n'avait plus de soupçons sur Madame la Dauphine; qu'enfin il n'y avait plus rien qui la pût défendre et qu'il n'y avait de sûreté pour elle qu'en s'éloignant.'⁶⁶

The use of fit réflexion, trouva, pensa, and the repeated, symmetrical que-clauses, give an idea of irresistible logical progression, of someone looking squarely at the evidence and building up a case piece by piece.

Mme de Clèves knocks away one by one the illusions of the past and sweeps to the inevitable conclusion that faces her: absence, distance. But such a solution is impossible. And now a hint of desperation creeps in.⁶⁷

Mme de Clèves can closely scrutinize past experience. When it comes to dealing with the present, the mind's light seems to go out.⁶⁸ In this passage we are given a privileged glimpse into the role of reflection in the novel, a reflection in which we as readers are caught up, following Mme de Clèves in her growing consciousness of imminent defeat. By 'taking thought' she cannot alter in any way her state of siege. But her awareness of this gives her a new stature. Her lucidity here has a kind of moral weight.

Mme de Clèves does not, however, always have this self-awareness.⁶⁹ Faced with the apparent fact of Nemours's love for another woman, she is incapable of seeing clearly in herself, to the point of imagining that she is indifferent to Nemours: 'mais elle se trompait elle-même.'⁷⁰ Seized by jealousy, she can only think of Nemours's imagined other love: 'Enfin elle pensait tout ce qui pouvait augmenter son affliction et son désespoir.'⁷¹ Her 'réflexions sur les conseils que sa mère lui avait donnés.'⁷² are neither calm nor lucid. She even thinks that 'elle n'avait plus rien à craindre d'elle-même.'⁷³ Raw feeling is clothed as lucid thought.⁷⁴ Mme de Clèves is again in the world of appearances.⁷⁵

This state of illusion only lasts until the moment when she sits down with Nemours to compose a letter. From these happy few hours 'elle revint comme d'un songe'⁷⁶, as though her life had been a waking

dream. Once again she begins to focus clearly on her own inner world: 'elle regarda avec étonnement...; elle se remit devant les yeux...Quand elle pensait...elle ne se reconnaissait plus elle-même...Quand elle pensait encore... elle trouvait qu'elle était d'intelligence avec M. de Nemours.'⁷⁷ Once again a scrupulous examination of the evidence is followed inexorably by the bitter realization of past illusion.

But once again, more importantly, it is made clear how futile is meditation on future conduct. When Mme de Clèves casts her mind to the problems confronting her and attempts to work out a reasoned, reasonable attitude and line of conduct, she is lost.⁷⁸ Can she be happy in yielding to passion? 'Mais quand je le pourrais être, disait-elle, qu'en veux-je faire? Veux-je la souffrir? Veux-je y répondre? Veux-je m'engager dans une galanterie? Veux-je manquer à M. de Clèves? Veux-je me manquer à moi-même?'⁷⁹ The series of short, repeated questions, the tone of breathless and despairing self-interrogation, are like a moth's obsessive fluttering against a lighted window-pane: Mme de Clèves cannot reach the light.⁸⁰ It is as if, at best, caught in the whirl of life, the mind's role were limited to recording the path it has taken. A realization of this is part of Mme de Clèves's growing consciousness of what passion is, of the power of the irrational within.

Again, this sombre realization is only a moment of light. When Mme de Clèves considers Nemours's indiscretion over the aveu, her thoughts are shot through with guilt and spite. Her 'tristes réflexions'⁸¹ are a mere reaction to a painful situation. There is no trace of the 'logique' and 'maîtrise de soi'⁸² claimed for her in this particular passage. One incident is enough to provoke a

complete denunciation of Nemours.⁸³ Chagrin and hurt pride fuel the fire in a very obvious way⁸⁴, while any 'logique' is confounded by the way in which the situation is reversed so easily.⁸⁵

Mme de Clèves's lack of lucidity is seen again, more forcibly, after her husband's death, when feelings of sorrow, anger and guilt infuse a long meditation. Horreur⁸⁶ and douleur⁸⁷ set the tone for a series of guilt-ridden memories: 'Elle repassait incessamment tout ce qu'elle lui devait.'⁸⁸ Once more, Mme de Clèves entertains the illusion that she is now indifferent to Nemours.⁸⁹ Quite evidently, the existence of terms of thinking does not necessarily imply an effort on a character's part to see clearly in himself. Later, more tender thoughts of Nemours suggest an equally passive acceptance: 'Toutes ces idées furent nouvelles à cette princesse...La présence de M. de Nemours les amena en foule dans son esprit.'⁹⁰ The language suggests a mind swamped by ideas as by a flood. Even when the flood subsides, and when her mind 'en eut été pleinement rempli'⁹¹, the language still points to her mind's passivity: 'Elle s'abandonna à ces réflexions si contraires à son bonheur.'⁹² Here all is darkness and confusion, with one set of ideas being suddenly replaced by their antithesis, without any reasoned distinction being made between them. S'abandonner is a term taken from the language of love, not logic.

This is not, however, the last word. Mme de Clèves ends her last, long interview with Nemours on the regret that she cannot have 'des vues claires et distinctes'⁹³, a phrase which fittingly sets the tone for the self-examination with which the novel concludes. Mme de Clèves recognises the fact that she 'ne se connaissait plus'⁹⁴, and postpones serious consideration of her situation 'pour se donner quelque

calme.⁹⁵ For the first time she gains a freedom from the mere reactions to stress which so many of her réflexions have been: 'Mme de Clèves demeura à elle-même.'⁹⁶ The passage following shows a calm lucidity, as she examines one by one the reasons which make fulfilment of her love impossible.⁹⁷ Here we touch on the dark paradox of the novel. Only the approach of death gives her 'des vues plus grandes et plus éloignées'⁹⁸: 'les pensées de la mort'⁹⁹ enlighten her attitude to life. Her final awareness of how passion and appearances rule the world is also an awareness that life in such a world is impossible. Mme de Clèves no longer thinks of the things of this world: 'elle ne pensait plus qu'à celles de l'autre vie.'¹⁰⁰ In this novel, a lucid awareness of life implies its rejection.

PC is therefore no Cartesian romance.¹⁰¹ If anything, it is the most anti-Cartesian of novels.¹⁰² Mme de Clèves's long reflections on her relationships, her continual self-analysis, are too often exercises in self-delusion, impassioned reactions to situations which she cannot control. Behind the appearance of reason is the passion which subverts it. Freedom from illusion is concomitant with death.

RESOLUTION

a) Recent critics are divided as to the extent to which ML believes in the power of the will to rule the passions. On the one hand it is asserted that the author has followed Descartes¹⁰³, and that for her the supreme arbiter of the passions is, if not free will, at least the will to become free.¹⁰⁴ Other critics conclude that the will is viewed as powerless.¹⁰⁵ Attention has understandably been focused on PC. But the questions posed by Mme de Clèves's struggle for self-control are raised by characters in all the fictional works. The fundamental question therefore is: can these characters ever will to act against the seemingly irresistible force of passion?

b)

With the term résolution¹⁰⁶ are grouped some obviously-related terms: résoudre¹⁰⁷, se résoudre, volonté, prendre un parti, se déterminer. Associated with these terms are words connected with the idea of the effort required to do something (e.g. force, résister, volonté¹⁰⁸, pouvoir, effort), or more usually, with the futility of efforts to carry out something resolved upon (e.g. se dissiper, céder, irrésolu¹⁰⁹, irrésolution¹¹⁰). No study has been made of terms such as se résoudre when these imply simple decisions on inconsequential matters.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

The character of Mme de Montpensier demonstrates the ephemeral nature of the will's hold. When she meets her former lover Guise for the first time since her arranged marriage, she feels able to say that 'rien ne pouvait ébranler la résolution qu'elle avait prise de ne s'engager jamais.'¹¹¹ But she cannot help desiring Guise, 'nonobstant toutes ses résolutions.'¹¹² And when she attempts to resist this desire, by thinking of the harm a love-affair could cause, 'ces pensées lui firent faire de nouvelles résolutions, mais qui se dissipèrent dès le lendemain par la vue du duc de Guise.'¹¹³ Can she then prevent him from coming to see her? She only has to keep the castle drawbridge up: 'Elle crut qu'elle continuerait dans cette résolution.'¹¹⁴ This is yet another illusion. To believe in the will's power over passion only confirms the capacity for self-delusion.¹¹⁵

La Comtesse de Tende

At no stage in this story are either Mme de Tende or Navarre able to resist passion. The ensuing tragedy is a problem of will. Navarre's resistance to an adulterous love is ~~a token one~~.¹¹⁶ The reason he gives for coming to see Mme de Tende, despite the risks involved, is comment enough: 'je n'ai pu y résister.'¹¹⁷ Mme de Tende's will to resist seems much more decided: 'elle vit l'abîme où elle se précipitait et elle résolut de l'éviter.'¹¹⁸ But 'elle tint mal ses résolutions.'¹¹⁹ And so she plunges into the affair which will wreck her life.

Significantly, the only trace of authorial intervention is a comment on this lack of will: 'l'on cède aisément à ce qui plaît.'¹²⁰ Mme de Tende knows that love brings misfortune, but 'elle n'eut pas la force de s'en dégager.'¹²¹ Résister...céder...force: the terms used imply the strength of passion and the weakness of the will. The will seems strong only when executing passion's demands: 'La passion de la princesse surmonta enfin toutes ses irrésolutions.'¹²² Mme de Tende's final judgement is conclusive: 'elle n'avait pas laissé de s'apercevoir du peu de pouvoir qu'elle avait eu sur elle-même.'¹²³ She has not been able to avoid doing what she really desires to do.

Zafde

In this novel no character has a will of his own. Passion overturns the most coldly-reasoned decision, such as that of Consalve to live in solitude 'avec la résolution de n'en sortir jamais.'¹²⁴ Ironically, at a later moment, when Consalve has come out of his solitude for Zafde, he declares that 'je ne veux pas même que Zafde puisse croire que je suis irrésolu.'¹²⁵ It is impossible to resist love. When Don Ramire 'résolut de ne plus rien dire de son amour à Nugna Bella'¹²⁶, this is only the preface to a capitulation: 'Il se résolut donc à suivre les mouvements de son coeur...'¹²⁷ It is comforting to disguise such capitulations as decisions.¹²⁸ Thus the surrender to passion is very often presented as the mind's own choice¹²⁹: 'Nugna Bella se détermina donc à s'engager avec don Ramire; mais elle était déjà engagée...quand elle crut s'y déterminer.'¹³⁰ Only when passion does not intervene can real choices be made.¹³¹ When Consalve has been crossed in love,

he makes choices which are exactly the opposite of previous ones.¹³²

The most striking case of the will's impotence is that of Alphonse. Past difficulties with women have made him 'prendre la résolution de n'en épouser jamais de belles.'¹³³ On meeting Bélasire, his only fear is lest his resolution might vanish.¹³⁴ It inevitably does, despite further resolutions to keep away from Bélasire.¹³⁵ Later resolutions not to torment her are no sooner made than broken.¹³⁶ Irrésolution well describes the state of flux into which the hapless mind is pitched.¹³⁷ Only Bélasire's renunciation of 'the world' to enter a convent may be regarded as a victory of will over passion.¹³⁸ Paradoxically, this victory only confirms the will's weakness within the society of men.

La Princesse de Clèves

With characters other than Mme de Clèves, there is little idea of a struggle of the will against passion.¹³⁹ The Vidame's indecision, for example, over a possible liaison with the Queen comes, not from an attempt to escape passion's hold, but from an inability to decide between two different women, both of whom he decides in the end to keep¹⁴⁰: 'On n'est pas amoureux par sa volonté.'¹⁴¹ Nemours is perhaps the most striking example of a character whose acts of will are in reality dictated by love.¹⁴² His only moments of indecision concern tactics, as in the garden at Coulommiers¹⁴³: 'Il résolut de trouver les moyens, quelque difficiles qu'ils pussent être...'¹⁴⁴ Nemours's resolve to overcome any difficulty in the way of his passion (ironically recalling Mme de Chartres's

advice to her daughter¹⁴⁵) hardly indicates strength of will. When he does hesitate, for a moment, to spy on Mme de Clèves, 'il ne put se refuser le plaisir de voir cette princesse.'¹⁴⁶ Passion is totally in control.¹⁴⁷ Only when love fades is it possible to 'decide' to forget it.¹⁴⁸

A phrase in the novel's lettre illustrates this central fact: 'Je m'arrêtai à cette résolution; mais qu'elle me fut difficile à prendre, et qu'en vous revoyant elle me parut impossible à exécuter.'¹⁴⁹ Thus Clèves resolves not to show his bitter jealousy and chagrin¹⁵⁰, but 'il ne les put renfermer en lui-même.'¹⁵¹ Apart from Mme de Clèves and her mother, only one character, Guise, decides not to follow the dictates of passion. His alternative is to run away, to embark on a suicidal expedition to capture Rhodes.¹⁵² The choice is between surrender and self-destruction.

In Mme de Clèves there is a struggle, between will and passion, which forms the central action of the novel. Her mother's death-bed speech prepares this long resistance: 'il faut de grands efforts... Ayez de la force...; ne craignez point de prendre des partis trop rudes ou trop difficiles...'¹⁵³ Mme de Chartres sees strength of will as the main shield against passion. What this means, for her daughter, is a cycle of resolutions and lapses, spiralling inexorably towards the final decision. Thus it is easy for Mme de Clèves to resolve, in the abstract, not to see Nemours.¹⁵⁴ But no sooner does he appear than this decision is overturned: 'Il y avait trop longtemps qu'elle ne l'avait vu, pour se résoudre à ne le voir pas.'¹⁵⁵ When finally 'elle exécuta...la résolution qu'elle avait prise', this is only 'en se faisant une extrême violence.'¹⁵⁶

This first victory shows not so much the power of the will as the strength of the passion which at every moment seems to overwhelm it.

While Mme de Clèves therefore admires the courage¹⁵⁷ and force¹⁵⁸ of the letter-writer, she herself can only regret her own lack of resolve.¹⁵⁹ 'Toutes mes résolutions sont inutiles; je pensai hier ce que je pense aujourd'hui et je fais aujourd'hui tout le contraire de ce que je résolus hier.'¹⁶⁰ Paradoxically, this gives rise to another set of resolutions: 'Il faut m'arracher à la présence de M. de Nemours; il faut m'en aller à la campagne... Elle demeura dans cette résolution.'¹⁶¹ The use of the impersonal il faut, and its repetition, shows a wild, urgent need to decide something, anything, which will remove the threat of surrender to Nemours.¹⁶² The fact that Mme de Clèves chooses flight shows her realization of how little she can control her life by conscious acts of the will.

In this spirit she continually begs her husband to take decisions for her: 'conduisez-moi...'¹⁶³, 'réglez ma conduite.'¹⁶⁴ Clèves refuses, in the belief that his trust will make her 'prendre des résolutions plus austères qu'aucune contrainte n'aurait pu faire.'¹⁶⁵ She is back at the beginning. Thus though she 'se résolut donc de faire un effort sur elle-même'¹⁶⁶, she knows that Nemours's very presence 'détruirait toutes ses résolutions.'¹⁶⁷ She simply must refuse to see him¹⁶⁸, to put her will to a test which she knows it would fail: 'elle prit la résolution d'éviter la chose du monde qu'elle souhaitait peut-être le plus.'¹⁶⁹ And so a strange kind of half-life is required of her: in order not to weaken her résolutions she has to refuse contact with almost every normal social situation.

It is thus fitting that the final section of the novel should crown this movement towards an awareness of the will's weakness in resisting desire. Mme de Clèves's resolve to resist¹⁷⁰ is understandably greeted by Nemours with scepticism: 'Pensez-vous que vos résolutions tiennent contre un homme qui vous adore et qui est assez heureux pour vous plaire?'¹⁷¹ The unmistakably ironic tone of vos résolutions is underlined by Mme de Clèves's plea: 'Je vous conjure, par tout le pouvoir que j'ai sur vous, de ne chercher aucune occasion de me voir.'¹⁷² There are few more ironical phrases in the novel. Never has a pouvoir seemed so frail. Nemours is convinced that 'il était impossible que Mme de Clèves demeurât dans les résolutions où elle était.'¹⁷³

If Nemours is here proved wrong, it is not because of any sudden demonstration of the will's power, which would contradict the way in which the language of resolve has been used from the beginning of the novel. Mme de Clèves's resolve not to marry is 'une résolution bien violente à établir dans un coeur aussi touché que le sien.'¹⁷⁴ Her final decision is postponed until she is able to take it¹⁷⁵, and all her resolutions¹⁷⁶ are accompanied by the hope of being able to carry them out: 'elle espérait d'en avoir la force.'¹⁷⁷ Finally she realizes that the force which her mother urged her to have can only be gained by a refusal of any possible trial of it: 'Elle jugea que l'absence seule et l'éloignement pouvaient lui donner quelque force.'¹⁷⁸ The will must not be exposed to any demonstration of its weakness: 'comme elle connaissait ce que peuvent les occasions sur les résolutions les plus sages, elle ne voulut pas s'exposer à détruire les siennes...'¹⁷⁹

The novel's conclusion, then, rather than affirming a triumph of the will over passion¹⁸⁰, only confirms its fragility. Mme de Clèves's strength is to realize her weakness. In this novel the one major act of the will not to be overturned by passion demands for its accomplishment that normal social life be renounced. It is tantamount to an admission that man is powerless to control his own behaviour in society. Such a control demands that such a society be refused totally and forever. Mme de Clèves's choice singularly resembles that of the Guise who went to his death in Rhodes.

RAISON

a)

Is Mme de Clèves's renunciation a victory of reason over passion? Can one accept Francillon's judgement that ML 'se fait l'avocat de la raison'?¹⁸¹ In her works as a whole, does reason inform the will?¹⁸² Is it an ethical norm, a necessary point of reference by which characters judge themselves, and are judged? In the wasteland of passion and appearances, is reason alone a beacon of light?

b) The term raison means firstly the faculty of the mind.¹⁸³ But it can also imply the right use of reason¹⁸⁴ and may have normative connotations.¹⁸⁵ Raison is thus inevitably seen as what gives light, as what is a touchstone of truth and justice. Of minor significance in the nouvelles, the term has a certain place in the novels, especially PC. In the novels, raison is referred to essentially as an ethical norm. It remains to be seen whether the fact that the term occurs means that characters necessarily attach significance to the norm which it represents.

These uses are central to basic questions in the texts: the ability of a person to see clearly in himself, and to regulate his own behaviour. Raison is not examined when it is used in a sense peripheral to this, in phrases of the type 'avoir raison' or 'les raisons de cette action'.¹⁸⁶ Thus when Mme de Clèves thinks alternately of 'les raisons de son devoir',¹⁸⁷ and 'la raison et son devoir',¹⁸⁸ only the second occurrence of the word is significant for the purposes of this study.

Associated with raison are terms such as raisonnable¹⁸⁹, déraisonnable¹⁹⁰, folie¹⁹¹, perdre. In PC raison is used alongside other normative terms, vertu¹⁹² and prudence.¹⁹³

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

There is only one example of the term raison here, used in a medical context of the recovery of the mind's faculties:

'La raison lui revint...'¹⁹⁴ Ironically here, Mme de Montpensier's mind is brought back to life only to be overwhelmed, mortally, by consciousness of what that life is.

La Comtesse de Tende

The few examples of the term raison here give no more than hints of its possible connotations. In the two instances where the term is used to describe a real loss of reason, the minds affected are dominated both by passionate love and its consequences.¹⁹⁵ We do glimpse the use of raison as the norm by which passion is judged. Mme de Tende asks Navarre 'Avez-vous perdu la raison?'¹⁹⁶ when he declares his love for her, and qualifies this passion as déraisonnable.¹⁹⁷ This does not stop either of them entering a love-relationship. The mistake is obviously to believe, with Mme de Tende, that 'ma faible raison me conseillera.'¹⁹⁸ She goes on to disaster, with the counsels of reason unseen and unheard.

Zafde

Raison in this novel is viewed as one of the traditional virtues, to be quoted along with others¹⁹⁹, even to justify treachery: 'elle s'imagina que la raison et la prudence autorisaient son changement.'²⁰⁰ In theory at least, reason is a norm to which appeal may be made, or from which guidance may be sought. Certain kinds of behaviour are labelled déraisonnable²⁰¹: Alphonse's remorse finds expression in his despair 'd'avoir été injuste et déraisonnable.'²⁰² The characters of the novel, however, pay only lip-service to this universal norm of reason. Confronted with the demands of passion, its weight is negligible and its light faint. Reason only returns to counsel Féline when, having been 'emportée par la passion'²⁰³, she has already been damaged by love.²⁰⁴ Reason may help her to keep up appearances, but no more: 'Il fallait que je me servisse de toute ma raison pour ne lui pas laisser voir les dispositions que j'avais pour lui.'²⁰⁵ As Zafde points out, reason is 'inutile' against passion.²⁰⁶ At best it can offer consolations for spurned love, not enlighten the mind or strengthen the will.²⁰⁷

One of the characteristics of passion in the novel is that it should extinguish the light of reason: 'une passion qui ôte la raison à ceux qui en sont possédés'²⁰⁸, 'un amour qui ne vous laisse plus de raison.'²⁰⁹ When Consalve meets Zafde, 'sa raison ne put demeurer libre.'²¹⁰ For him love is a loss of reason²¹¹, and respite from love only momentary.²¹² Raison and passion are clearly seen to be mutually exclusive. Since passion is everywhere triumphant, there is little room for reason.

This seeming acceptance of raison as a norm and the obvious inability to follow what is reasonable when passion intervenes provide a theme which is fully played out in the story of Alphonse's jealousy. It is made obvious to him that he has 'perdu la raison'²¹³, that he is being déraisonnable²¹⁴, and he himself, in a moment of calm, is astonished not yet to have surrendered 'le peu de raison qui me restait.'²¹⁵ His reason is the prisoner of his passion.²¹⁶ He can see quite clearly, but cannot begin to accomplish, what reason demands. His earlier advice to Consalve now seems bitterly ironical: 'il fallait se servir de sa raison pour supporter son malheur'²¹⁷, and (of possible treachery) 'la raison ne voulait pas qu'on la soupçonnât.'²¹⁸ More ironical still is his insistence, between two bouts of neurotic accusations, that 'la raison m'était entièrement revenue.'²¹⁹ Once more, passion has installed a world of appearances.

Raison is thus in this novel an accepted norm of behaviour. Since behaviour is controlled by passion, the norm is of essentially ornamental value: there is not even a conflict between the two.²²⁰

La Princesse de Clèves

As in Z, raison is here associated with passion in one very simple way: where passion is, reason is not.²²¹ No-one is more aware of this than Clèves, seized by jealousy after the aveu: 'Comment pouviez-vous espérer que je conservasse de la raison?'²²² Similarly Nemours is left in such a state that 'il n'avait pas l'usage de la raison.'²²³ Ironically therefore, when Clèves assures his wife that she must control

her own behaviour because 'la raison me le conseille'²²⁴, his later attempts to spy on her activities, by his own admission, are a form of madness.

Most of the examples of the term raison concern Mme de Clèves, and most of these occur in the final pages of the novel. One incident earlier in the novel shows her inability to follow this norm. When she sees Nemours steal her portrait, 'La raison voulait...'²²⁵ that she should ask for it back. But she cannot do it. Raison implies that she bring something into the light that is dangerous and hidden, the state of her feelings for Nemours. On one occasion only does raison triumph. When Mme de Clèves wants to verify whether she really has seen Nemours in the garden at Coulommiers, she hesitates, until 'la raison et la prudence l'emportèrent sur tous ses autres sentiments.'²²⁶ Elsewhere, until the very end, reason is a norm of behaviour to which Mme de Clèves gives assent outwardly, while inwardly in the grip of passion.²²⁷

This fact is clear when, after her husband's death, Mme de Clèves tries to persuade herself to flee Nemours's presence: 'Mais cette persuasion, qui était un effet de sa raison et de sa vertu, n'entraînait pas son coeur.'²²⁸ Reason, indeed, seems to take on the guise of a tyrant, imposing artificial norms from outside the self. It is certainly with this connotation that Nemours uses the word when he speaks of 'une loi que la vertu et la raison ne vous sauraient imposer.'²²⁹ Reason as a norm does not conflict with passion, for him.²³⁰ In the end, however, for Mme de Clèves, the demands of reason cannot be ignored. In the logic of her final consciousness of passion as an evil to be avoided, reason demands that Nemours be rejected, and with him the world.²³¹ In this final episode, where reason uniquely becomes the eye of the will, it is made clear that reason has no place in the world of passion and appearances.

VERTU

a)

It is not the purpose of this short study to duplicate the work already undertaken on the moral climate of ML's fiction.²³² The intention is simply to see more clearly the meaning and use of ethical terms such as vertu and devoir. This becomes important in the light of Mme de Clèves's refusal of Nemours. Is this based on 'noble idealism'²³³ or 'bourgeois hypocrisy'?²³⁴ Since terms such as vertu and devoir weigh heavily in this refusal, it seems reasonable to attempt to seize their meaning within the text.

b) The moral connotations of the term vertu²³⁵ are threefold in these works. A sense close to the Latin virtus, and signifying energy and strength of soul²³⁶, is present in Z but important only in PC. Here the term is linked with words such as force, résister, conserver.

Vertu is more often associated with terms, which are very numerous in PC, denoting sometimes ambiguous qualities (générosité²³⁷ is an exception). These are very often of an essentially social nature, e.g. élévation²³⁸, naissance²³⁹, beauté, honnêteté²⁴⁰, honnête.²⁴¹ Other terms straddle an ill-defined frontier between the social and the moral, between appearance and inner reality, e.g. esprit²⁴², mérite²⁴³, grandeur. The ambiguity of such terms points to the ambiguity of vertu in these contexts. The term vertu here seems to imply a quality of behaviour and personality which exists especially on the level of social appearances, a 'qualité louable.'²⁴⁴ All of these terms are most often found in PC.

Vertu in these texts is often also linked to the idea, for women, of avoiding the dangers of passion. In this connotation of chastity the term is associated with terms such as sagesse²⁴⁵, prudence²⁴⁶, and danger.

Inseparable from vertu, in PC, is the term devoir.²⁴⁷ It is associated by Nemours with fantôme²⁴⁸, and opposed by him to liberté, while for Mme de Clèves it is linked to terms implying a code of conduct, e.g. imposer, règle²⁴⁹, défendre.

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

The term vertu is here used only in connection with Mme de Montpensier. The word's possible connotations are reduced to one of two things: a vague quality conferring social distinction, and chastity or marital fidelity. In no case is there an idea of moral strength or an inner impulse towards what is right.

Vertu is primordially a social quality: 'Chabanes, de son côté, regardait avec admiration tant de beauté, d'esprit et de vertu qui paraissaient en cette jeune princesse.'²⁵⁰ The term is placed in the same context as beauté and esprit, and associated with paraître. What matters is what appears. This vertu is like a piece of jewellery worn for public display. Mme de Montpensier has 'une vertu' extraordinaire et digne de la grandeur de sa naissance.'²⁵¹ The greater the social position, the greater this quite exterior concept of moral worth: vertu and grandeur de sa naissance are here explicitly linked. This explains Mme de Montpensier's virtuous anger against Guise, who has had 'l'audace de faire l'amoureux d'une personne comme moi.'²⁵² Guise's behaviour is not what Mme de Montpensier's apparent social standing seems to deserve.

Vertu can also imply chastity.²⁵³ Implicit here too is the world of appearances, the desire to avoid what is socially unacceptable and dangerous for the reputation.²⁵⁴ Even when there is danger, however, this vertu provides no defence against passion. Thus when Guise wishes to enter Mme de Montpensier's bedchamber late at night, she thinks first how much 'cette action était contraire à sa vertu.'²⁵⁵ Inevitably this vertu is blown away, and with it the appearance of virtue as well.²⁵⁶

In a rare intervention, the author concludes that Mme de Montpensier would have been happy 'si la vertu et la prudence eussent conduit toutes ses actions.'²⁵⁷ Vertu denoting moral strength, or a sense of what is right, is absent from the characters' world-picture.²⁵⁸ The world painted by the author is a moral desert, in which passion struggles only with a desire to keep up appearances which bears the name of vertu.

La Comtesse de Tende

Tende's sense of ethics exists only for the public eye. He seems to respect quite a number of values, given his comment that Navarre's mistress must have 'ni esprit, ni courage, ni délicatesse.'²⁵⁹ But when he is faced with an unfaithful and pregnant wife, he is only prevented from murdering her by the thought of the damage this might do to his reputation.²⁶⁰ Public image is all that matters to him: 'Il avait toujours conservé des mesures d'honnêteté aux yeux du public et de son domestique.'²⁶¹

In the case of Mme de Tende the term vertu at first has a connotation of chastity: 'elle s'était senti tant de vertu qu'elle qu'elle ne s'était défiée ni de lui, ni d'elle-même.'²⁶² This is so frail a defence that she becomes pregnant: 'le temps et les occasions avaient triomphé de sa vertu.'²⁶³ It is then ironic that Mme de Tende should discover true virtue and embrace it as she had Navarre: 'Elle embrassa la vertu et la pénitence avec la même ardeur qu'elle avait suivi sa passion.'²⁶⁴

Her renunciation comes only when she has been found out. It is presented as a mere reflex action. Although 'la nature'²⁶⁵ et le christianisme'²⁶⁶ prevent Mme de Tende from committing suicide, her Christianity is little more than a repugnance for this life and fear for the next one: 'n'ayant plus que de l'horreur pour sa vie, elle se résolut de la perdre d'une manière qui ne lui ôtât pas l'espérance de l'autre.'²⁶⁷

Ethical terms other than vertu are thus firmly linked with the world of appearances. The word vertu itself, when it does not simply denote chastity, here translates at most an instinctive revulsion from past behaviour.

Zafde

In this novel vertu has in the first place the sense of some ill-defined moral worth which is as socially recognizable as beauté or esprit: 'Votre mérite, et votre vertu...'²⁶⁸ Thus Zafde is 'pas moins révérée par sa vertu que par sa naissance'²⁶⁹, while Alamir can be 'surpris de l'esprit et de la vertu de Zabelec.'²⁷⁰ Vertu is in such cases one of those stock words, like mérite, used by the author to describe behaviour and character, but in a deliberately non-committal way: 'S'il l'avait aimée par la seule vue de sa beauté, la connaissance de son esprit et de sa vertu lui donnait de l'adoration.'²⁷¹ This vertu is as distinctive and impersonal as wealth or social position: 'une jeune veuve...dont la beauté, la richesse et la vertu étaient extraordinaires.'²⁷² It is a means of social evaluation, with little

or no moral connotation: 'Ce qu'il apprit de la vertu et de l'esprit de Naria lui redoubla l'envie de s'en faire aimer.'²⁷³ Ironically, by the constant use of terms such as vertu in this sense, a climate of moral abstention is created by the author. We do not find here the moral judgements of a Comberville.²⁷⁴

There are only two fleeting suggestions of the use of the term vertu in the sense of strength of soul, strength of character. One example has no particular significance²⁷⁵, while the other only confirms the impression that passion is the only strength: 'ma vertu était trop faible pour y résister...'²⁷⁶ Finally, vertu is used, twice, to suggest the idea of chastity. Here again, weight is given to what is socially acceptable rather than to what is morally right.²⁷⁷ What matters is reputation.

There are three occurrences of the term générosité in the novel. Its use in these cases is far removed from Descartes's celebrated definition, which implies a deep and continuing moral commitment.²⁷⁸ In the first case générosité is felt as a harsh, alien duty: 'Quelle loi...me veux-je imposer et quelle générosité m'oblige à conserver Alamir?'²⁷⁹ Consalve here accedes to Zalde's plea for Alamir's life, and his motives are shrewdly named by Don Garcie as 'une générosité aveugle et un amour qui ne vous laisse plus de raison.'²⁸⁰ The qualification of aveugle, and the coupling with mad passion, hardly suggest the Cartesian definition. At best Consalve's desire to save Alamir is a piece of enlightened self-interest, an act destined to save Zalde's love first and foremost. There is some irony in the description of a Consalve physically and mentally exhausted by his sacrifice to 'une exacte générosité.'²⁸¹

Like the previous works, then, this novel depicts a moral desert, in which terms such as vertu and générosité do not for the characters imply a desire to do what is right.²⁸²

La Princesse de Clèves

In this novel vertu and its associated terms are used in the same way as in the three other works, the emphasis being on the world of appearances. But exceptionally, these terms may refer to values beyond the merely superficial. With Mme de Clèves's struggle against her passion for Nemours, we enter for the first time an inner world where vertu and devoir have a real force, or seem to have.²⁸³

The novel begins with an introduction to the main personalities at Court. They are mostly described in superlative terms, to the extent that words such as mérite, valeur, esprit and grandeur in no way single out the persons whom they characterize.²⁸⁴ The author's emphasis is on appearance, the persons described being 'l'ornement et l'admiration de leur siècle.'²⁸⁵ The use of mérite is a significant example of the way in which this vocabulary is used: 'ce qui rendait cette cour belle et majestueuse était le nombre infini de princes et de grands seigneurs d'un mérite extraordinaire.'²⁸⁶ Here mérite refers less to the inner worth of a person than to a synthesis of a number of evident qualities of body, mind and breeding. In this context of the presentation of the Court, the term connotes social graces more than ethical values. Its attribution to the epicurean Saint-André crowns the devaluation of mérite as a morally-significant term: 'Sa faveur lui

donnait un éclat qu'il soutenait par son mérite et par l'agrément de sa personne, par une grande délicatesse pour sa table et pour ses meubles.'²⁸⁷

Indeed, once the poisonous nature of the Court is seen, a return to this introductory vocabulary is inevitably tinged with irony. The terms mean so little as to mock the persons they characterize.²⁸⁸

Within this general introduction to the Court, therefore, the various qualities attributed to the main protagonists are not as informative as they might seem, taken in isolation.²⁸⁹ These characters are seen to possess certain outwardly admirable standards of behaviour, and certain standard qualities, which are part of that good breeding which characterizes the Court in general. When Clèves is seen as 'le plus honnête homme du monde'²⁹⁰, when he writes to his wife with 'honnêteté'²⁹¹, when he dies 'avec une constance admirable'²⁹², we do not advance much further beyond this introductory terminology. The general use of such abstractions at this early stage limits rather than extends their significance. In this way the author confers a sense of dignity on the setting of the novel while abstaining from comment on individual characters.²⁹³ In the body of the novel, likewise, the moral abstractions used are not imposed by the author, who continues to abstain from direct comment. The narrative action as a whole, and the particular context, give its significance to each term. Chief among these abstract terms are sagesse, vertu, prudence and devoir.

Sagesse is a quality which Mme de Chartres particularly admires in Clèves.²⁹⁴ It is not immediately obvious what precisely this means, but the author indicates that Mme de Clèves's sagesse at Court²⁹⁵ makes her 'une personne où l'on ne pouvait atteindre'²⁹⁶, and it seems

clear that the term implies the refusal to embark on the same galanteries which distinguish this particular society. This sagesse is seen to depend very much on reputation: 'elle a vécu depuis avec tant de sagesse...qu'elle a mérité que l'on conserve sa réputation.'²⁹⁷ The term represents less an ethical norm than an image of the self to be given to others. Thus the promiscuous Mme de Tournon is believed to have sagesse as a principal quality²⁹⁸, while Nemours 'prit une conduite si sage...que personne ne le soupçonna d'être amoureux de Mme de Clèves.'²⁹⁹ Sagesse here belongs totally to the world of appearances.

Similarly, vertu can imply the same publicly-recognized good conduct. Those who gather round the Queen at Court are those 'qui avaient passé la première jeunesse et qui faisaient profession d'une vertu plus austère.'³⁰⁰ Here 'virtue' depends on age, while 'faisaient profession' points to the importance of the image.³⁰¹ The same term vertu, suggesting this idea of chastity, characterizes Mme de Chartres alone of all the figures mentioned in the Court introduction.³⁰² Vertu is a quality which she attempts to inspire in her daughter, beyond the beauté and esprit which the Court milieu demanded: 'elle songea aussi à lui donner de la vertu et à la lui rendre aimable.'³⁰³ What this vertu means for Mme de Chartres is clear in what follows, when she depicts for her daughter the poisonous realities of love.³⁰⁴ The honnête femme³⁰⁵ she wishes her daughter to be is clearly one who must abstain from any love-affair beyond the bounds of matrimony.³⁰⁶ Since matrimony and love have no visible relationship in the novel, vertu for Mme de Chartres clearly implies a refusal of love itself.

This narrowing of the term vertu to a connotation of chastity, to a rejection of passionate love³⁰⁷, is appropriate in a novel where passion deprives characters of their ability to choose a proper line of conduct. On the other hand the fact that this refusal of passion is characterized by the term vertu perhaps gives an added moral dimension to Mme de Clèves's struggle. The term confers on this conflict a dignity and gravity which ceaselessly set the tone for the declarations of the embattled heroine: 'La vertu la plus austère ne peut inspirer d'autre conduite que celle que j'ai eue.'³⁰⁸

Another important aspect of the term vertu is its association, in Mme de Chartres's mind, with effort and strength of will.³⁰⁹ In order to 'conserver cette vertu'³¹⁰, struggle within oneself is always necessary.³¹¹ Vertu is presented in terms of conflict, with a Court full of 'des exemples si dangereux.'³¹² (Only if one ignores the nature of the world of passion and appearances which is that Court, can Mme de Chartres be taxed with matronly prudishness or 'bourgeois' morality.³¹³) In this connotation of vertu, the term is associated with force and résister³¹⁴, an idea perfectly expressed in the violently physical image of Mme de Clèves tearing herself away from Nemours.³¹⁵

In the novel, however, this vertu-force is of no great strength, and must at all costs be shielded from any occasion which might expose its weakness. It is here that the idea of prudence enters:

'la prudence ne veut pas qu'une femme de mon âge...demeure exposée au milieu de la cour.'³¹⁶ Prudence prevents the taking of risks.³¹⁷

Vertu without prudence stands defenceless: 'quelque bonne opinion qu'il eût de la vertu de sa femme, il voyait bien que la prudence ne voulait

pas qu'il l'exposât plus longtemps à la vue d'un homme qu'elle aimait.'³¹⁸
 The choice is between defeat or flight. Mme de Chartres's mistake was to think vertu possible in a Court where prudence is not. The values which she attaches to vertu (éclat...élévation...beauté...naissance³¹⁹) are too bound up with those of a Court whose dangers she stigmatizes.³²⁰

In the final act of the novel, an oscillating role is played by the term vertu, which for Mme de Clèves alone now denotes the refusal of passion and the strength to refuse it.³²¹ At one moment Mme de Clèves feels that, since her husband is dead, vertu no longer stands in the way of her heart's desire.³²² But she has no sooner allowed this thought to cross her mind than she recoils: 'son austère vertu était si blessée de cette imagination...'³²³ Her vertu makes a crime of such a marriage.³²⁴ Again, however, this moment of revulsion is not decisive: vertu does not affect her deep longing for Nemours.³²⁵ He indeed tries to persuade her that 'cette vertu ne s'oppose plus à vos sentiments.'³²⁶ The 'vertu austère, qui n'a presque point d'exemple'³²⁷ to which Nemours refers is Mme de Clèves's chaste refusal to be unfaithful to her husband. And, in a strict sense, he is right: 'vous seule vous imposez une loi que la vertu et la raison ne vous sauraient imposer.'³²⁸

Nemours's vous seule takes Mme de Clèves to the heart of her dilemma. For there is no doubt, as she admits, that to marry Nemours is 'une chose qui ne choquait ni la vertu ni la bienséance.'³²⁹ But deep within the vous seule is a vertu beyond a mere idea of social respectability or simple marital fidelity, a vertu which is a refusal of that world of passion and appearances of which Mme de Clèves is now

acutely conscious. Her mother's first counsels on vertu alluded to 'le peu de sincérité des hommes, leurs tromperies et leurs infidélités.'³³⁰ To avoid such deceit is to avoid any passionate love, however seemingly legal or respectable. In Mme de Clèves, therefore, the word vertu is given a necessarily unique resonance.³³¹ Taken together with prudence, this vertu implies a flight from life in society. Mme de Clèves's 'exemples de vertu inimitables'³³² are a performance of this living death.

Another absolute to which reference is often made by Mme de Clèves is devoir.³³³ The dying Mme de Chartres urges her daughter to be aware of her own dignity: 'songez ce que vous vous devez à vous-même.'³³⁴ But at the same moment she almost implies the weakness of any such idea by attempting to convince her daughter by 'd'autres raisons que celles de la vertu et de votre devoir'³³⁵, in other words by her preference for death rather than see her daughter 'tomber comme les autres femmes.'³³⁶ For Mme de Clèves, then, after her mother's death, the sense of duty to herself is mingled with filial guilt and obligation. Added to this ambiguity is her inability, in a concrete situation, to know what she ought to do: 'Elle croyait devoir parler et croyait ne devoir rien dire.'³³⁷ The whole idea of devoir, now linked to her duty to her husband³³⁸, seems clothed in unreality, as though it were just an idea, with little inner desire to make it live. She desires only to love, whence her bewildered self-questioning: 'Veux-je manquer à M. de Clèves? Veux-je manquer à moi-même?'³³⁹ Although as an abstract conception the idea of duty is never challenged, it is continually being eroded, and continually propped up again with an ever-greater sense of desperation.³⁴⁰

In the final part of the novel, however, Mme de Clèves is placed in a situation where a fundamental choice is necessary, and where the idea of devoir becomes central to her final decision. As is the case with vertu, she is swayed one way and the other by conflicting ideas of what devoir entails.³⁴¹ As with vertu, again, the uncertainty hinges on the true significance of devoir. Nemours only sees that part of it which implies marital fidelity: 'elle est libre, elle n'a plus de devoir à m'opposer.'³⁴² Thus when Mme de Clèves declares that 'je suivrai les règles austères que mon devoir m'impose'³⁴³, he can naturally respond that 'il n'y a plus de devoir qui vous lie, vous êtes en liberté.'³⁴⁴ His use of terms such as libre and liberté shows his understanding of the word devoir: Clèves being dead, is not the whole idea of duty in the grave too? It seems an unchallengeable argument.

But then Nemours goes slightly too far: 'je vous dirais même qu'il dépend de vous de faire en sorte que votre devoir vous oblige un jour à conserver les sentiments que vous avez pour moi.'³⁴⁵ Up till now devoir has been associated with that anti-passion theme underlying Mme de Chartres's understanding of vertu.³⁴⁶ Now Nemours is suggesting that Mme de Clèves should at last surrender to her love and marry him, and thus turn what has seemed to be merely the gratification of passion into marital fidelity, or devoir in his own sense of the word.

The about-turn seems gross and brutal. Instinctively Mme de Clèves rejects it: 'Mon devoir.....me défend de penser jamais à personne.'³⁴⁷ Another idea of duty resurfaces here, an idea of duty to oneself which has lain submerged, and which is now actively opposed to the acceptance

of passionate love. This refusal of love, implicit in her mother's understanding of vertu and devoir, is further strengthened by remorse at her husband's death. Devoir becomes, as vertu, a flight from passion and all that passion implies. Nemours is naturally unable to perceive that devoir might have any more significance for Mme de Clèves than for himself.³⁴⁸ He calls it a 'fantôme de devoir.'³⁴⁹ But it is precisely because Mme de Clèves loves Nemours that her sense of duty to herself is so acute. Therefore when Nemours asks her to remember that 'vous m'avez distingué du reste des hommes'³⁵⁰, she replies that 'les raisons de mon devoir ne me paraîtraient peut-être pas si fortes sans cette distinction.'³⁵¹ Her invocation of devoir seems final.³⁵²

But until now only passion has been final, and passion still has a word to say. Mme de Clèves's inner conviction, impossible to share, is set against the yearning of her whole being for Nemours, who is in front of her pleading for happiness.³⁵³ For a tremulous moment she seems to give in to the force of her desire: 'Il est vrai... que je sacrifie beaucoup à un devoir qui ne subsiste que dans mon imagination.'³⁵⁴ The 'raisons de devoir insurmontables'³⁵⁵ of a few moments before take on the appearance of something not real. It is important to see this, however, as an inevitable moment of weakness, as well as being a recognition that devoir might belong to the very uncertain world of appearances. It is not a considered and final statement. Absence and distance begin to lend a different perspective to what has been visualized, momentarily, as belonging to the imagination. An inner perspective of devoir is already suggested in Mme de Clèves's refusal to see her husband's death as the monde³⁵⁶ would.³⁵⁷ This points to a set of values which the world,

the world of passion and appearances, Nemours's world, cannot see or understand, and which she herself would so often like to dismiss.

'Elle examina encore les raisons de son devoir qui s'opposaient à son bonheur; elle sentit de la douleur de les trouver si fortes...'³⁵⁸ Right until

the end Mme de Clèves is tempted to give way, even when 'la raison et son devoir'³⁵⁹ convince her that surrender to passion would be folly.

It would be to betray one of the central themes of the novel to pretend

that love just fades before a sudden illumination of a sense of duty.³⁶⁰

Finally, however, when Mme de Clèves does renounce Nemours and with him the world, devoir weighs heavily in her mind.³⁶¹

Vertu and devoir are therefore real values for

Mme de Clèves, if not for the world they reject. The very fact that they do reject human life points not to their falsity but to the absolute nature of the pessimistic vision they imply.

REPOS

a)

Much critical attention has been given to the idea of repos in PC. Many conflicting statements have been made as to the real meaning of Mme de Clèves's withdrawal from the world.³⁶² Rather than seek a meaning of the term outside the texts, however tempting this might be³⁶³, this study will attempt to examine the meaning and use of repos in its various contexts. The terms associated with repos, such as agitation and éloignement, are especially valuable in this connection.

b) Repos is a term which has a limited but growing significance in Pm, CT and Z. In PC it is employed 21 times³⁶⁴ and, with its associated terms, forms a well-defined word-group. The basic sense of repos is the idea of rest, physical or mental.³⁶⁵ Here it is obviously a companion-word to se reposer. In this sense repos usually comes in a phrase of the type, chercher du repos. This sense is unambiguous, and unimportant here.³⁶⁶

The term becomes important in its extended meaning, denoting an inner state of repose³⁶⁷, associated with words such as tranquillité³⁶⁸ and calme.³⁶⁹ It is most often used in a context where the need for such a state is expressed. This context is invariably one of passion and often, in PC, in a Court situation. Many words already seen in these contexts recur here, e.g. agitation, inquiétude, impatience, tumulte, crainte, peine, douleur, chagrin, péril, trouble.³⁷⁰ Repos is also seen in a context of involvement and flight, engagements and le commerce du monde being opposed to related terms such as retraite³⁷¹, éloignement, se détacher, sûreté.³⁷²

c)

La Princesse de Montpensier

The term repos occurs only once in the text, and is used of Anjou returning from the wars: 'l'envie qu'il avait de revenir goûter le repos et les douceurs de Paris.'³⁷³ Here its meaning is limited to the idea of rest from the military life.

La Comtesse de Tende

Mme de Tende is the only character in this nouvelle of whom the term repos is used. In each case reference is to a state of mind, a mind tortured by passion, which can find no rest.³⁷⁴ Mme de Tende's love for Navarre is accompanied by 'une agitation qui ôte le repos.'³⁷⁵ Agitation and repos: the antithesis shows clearly that repos is equated with lack of passion. This is evident throughout the portrayal of Mme de Tende's love: 'leur passion ne se ralentit pas...; la comtesse de Tende n'avait point de repos.'³⁷⁶ It is no small irony that Mme de Tende is 'couchée sur un lit de repos et abandonnée à tout ce que le remords, l'amour et la jalousie peuvent faire sentir de plus cruel.'³⁷⁷ Love is inseparable from 'de continuelles craintes' and 'des mortelles horreurs dont elle était agitée.'³⁷⁸ Repos can therefore be seized as a concept, in a negative fashion, as the opposite of all that passion entails: agitation, remords, jalousie, craintes, horreurs.

The only repos therefore for Mme de Tende is the peace

of the grave, firstly when Mme de Tende's lover dies and nothing else in life seems to matter to her³⁷⁹, and then when she knows that death is at hand: 'Elle se trouva dans une sorte de calme de se croire assurée de mourir.'³⁸⁰ Repos is not then a positive value, something yearned for by a troubled mind. It is rather a state in which passion has no place.³⁸¹

Zaïde

In this novel 'l'esprit en repos' means a mind which passion does not trouble with fear, jealousy or anxiety.³⁸² Tranquillité is used with a similar connotation.³⁸³ Repos is therefore first and foremost all that love is not, its direct opposite: 'Comment avez-vous pu vivre en repos avec celles que vous avez aimées?'³⁸⁴

Repos and amour cannot co-exist.³⁸⁵ Love necessarily implies inquiétude.³⁸⁶ Consalve suffers from 'une inquiétude qui ne lui laissait point de repos.'³⁸⁷ And when Zoromade is abandoned by Alamir, her only thought is to try and regain that peace which passion has made her lose. On seeing Alamir beside her, then, she cries out: 'Il y a de l'inhumanité...à venir troubler mon repos par une action qui me devrait persuader que vous m'aimiez...'³⁸⁸ Consalve has a similar experience: 'La vue de Zaïde vient de m'ôter ce triste repos dont je jouissais...'³⁸⁹ For in his lonely exile 'j'y trouvai le repos et la tranquillité que j'avais perdu...Il ne me restait aucune passion.'³⁹⁰ Repos can only come when passion has gone.

The case of Bélasure hints very strongly at the later plight of Mme de Clèves. She finally realizes that the jealousy of Alphonse will tear her apart: 'je suis contrainte, pour votre repos et pour le mien, de vous apprendre que je suis absolument résolue de rompre avec vous.'³⁹¹ She loves Alphonse very much, but realizes that she cannot love and at the same time live. She retires to a convent, with final words which are a poignant reminder of her choice between passion and peace of mind: 'souhaitez, pour mon repos, que je ne me souvienne jamais de vous.'³⁹²

In this novel, then, the basic meaning of repos must still be determined negatively, as the absence of passion.³⁹³ What is new is, in the case of Bélasure, the implications of such a repos: the flight from life itself. This is a connotation which remains to be developed, in PC.

La Princesse de Clèves

'Mon repos.' If this were just a last-minute expedient it would doubtless be possible to dismiss Mme de Clèves's refusal of love as an egoistic charade.³⁹⁴ Repos is, however, a continual theme running through the novel, being closely linked with the disturbance of passion.

It is important not to overlook the feverish atmosphere in which the main narrative action takes place, at Court: '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.³⁹⁵ No-one is still. Everyone at Court is condemned to a remorseless agitation³⁹⁶, the more insidiously disturbing for being hidden.³⁹⁷ In such an atmosphere any idea of repos is out of the question.³⁹⁸

A second point to be established at the outset is the close connection of repos with passion. Repos is an evident antithesis to the inquiétude and agitation which love brings.³⁹⁹ Clèves's love is a clear example. At the very beginning it is 'une passion violente et inquiète qui troublait sa joie'⁴⁰⁰, and after the aveu he confesses that 'il n'y a plus en moi ni de calme, ni de raison.'⁴⁰¹ The only semblance of calm he knows comes from a short lull in his jealousy, only a lull.⁴⁰² When he declares that 'j'ai regretté ce faux repos dont vous m'avez tiré'⁴⁰³, speaking of his state before the aveu, it is a faux repos in a sense he does not mean. For his former repos has only been a semblance of peace of mind, yet another appearance: 'une passion violente et inquiète...' Passion necessarily brings uncertainty, desire, anxiety and feverish anticipation: Nemours knows this as well as Clèves.⁴⁰⁴

It is no surprise, then, to find Mme de Chartres urging her daughter to seek that peace of mind which no love-affair might trouble: 'elle lui faisait voir, d'un autre côté, quelle tranquillité suivait la vie d'une honnête femme...'⁴⁰⁵ As long as there is only Clèves in her life, this calm is natural, because Mme de Clèves has no passion: 'vous n'avez ni impatience, ni inquiétude, ni chagrin...'⁴⁰⁶ With Nemours comes the shattering of this passionless state. From this moment until the very end repos is an objective for Mme de Clèves, never

a reality. Love leaves her 'bien éloignée de la tranquillité.'⁴⁰⁷

If she loves there can be no question of peace of mind.

Twice Mme de Clèves imagines that she can be at peace with herself, once when she thinks her love for Nemours is no more⁴⁰⁸, once when she realizes that her jealousy is without foundation, and she can sit down with Nemours 'avec un esprit ouvert et tranquille.'⁴⁰⁹ This faux repos is an ephemeral illusion, quickly replaced by the bitterness and anxieties of passion. Mme de Clèves comes to see that to purchase calm by surrendering to love is to lose all peace of mind: 'Elle avait ignoré jusqu'alors les inquiétudes mortelles de la défiance et de la jalousie.'⁴¹⁰ This is a moment of illumination, when she realizes what love can do to her whole personality.⁴¹¹ For the first time the idea that passion is incompatible with peace of mind comes forcefully to her: 'veux-je enfin m'exposer aux cruels repentirs et aux mortelles douleurs que donne l'amour?'⁴¹²

Ironically, cruelly, it is just at the moment when the need for repos comes to the surface of Mme de Clèves's mind that she begins the dialogue with her husband which leads inexorably to the aveu and to his crisis of jealousy, which deprives them both of any possible peace of mind: 'c'est pour éviter ces malheurs que j'ai hasardé tout mon repos...'⁴¹³ Ironically again, the conversation which leads to the aveu is prompted by Mme de Clèves's desire to leave the tumulte, the monde of the Court: 'le tumulte de la cour est si grand et il y a toujours un si grand monde chez vous qu'il est impossible que le corps et l'esprit ne se lassent et que l'on ne cherche du repos.'⁴¹⁴ Clèves can see no reason for this: 'Le repos...n'est guère propre pour une personne de votre âge.'⁴¹⁵

He sees repos as merely a rest from the weary world. Not for the last time Mme de Clèves is unable to communicate a need for security from a seemingly all-powerful passion.

This need for security is formulated in terms of absence from the Court. Mme de Clèves desires 'une vie plus retirée'⁴¹⁶, and concludes that 'il n'y avait de sûreté pour elle qu'en s'éloignant.'⁴¹⁷ A fit of jealous remorse makes her repent 'de ne s'être pas opiniâtrée à se séparer du commerce du monde.'⁴¹⁸ Her mother's advice on this point was clear: 'retirez-vous de la cour, obligez votre mari de vous emmener.'⁴¹⁹ It is thus evident that the idea of repos is bound up with this instinctive need for sûreté⁴²⁰ and the corresponding desire to break away from le commerce du monde. The language used here has a religious resonance.⁴²¹ The world and its dealings, which find expression in the many pressures of the Court and are perfectly embodied by Nemours, are seen by Mme de Clèves as a threat to her very being: 'Il faut m'arracher de la présence de M. de Nemours; il faut m'en aller à la campagne...'⁴²² The explanation which she gives to her husband accurately reflects her pressing desire to escape from her own love for Nemours: 'je veux éviter les périls où se trouvent quelquefois les personnes de mon âge.'⁴²³ Repos is inconceivable without a withdrawal from the world. So much is clear well before the novel's conclusion.

For Mme de Clèves such a withdrawal is not easy, with a husband who insists that she should play her role at Court. The torture is refined. Her desperate cry to Nemours brings us very far from the banal sense of the phrase she employs: 'Au nom de Dieu...laissez-moi

en repos!' ⁴²⁴ At Court it is difficult even 'd'y paraître avec un visage tranquille' ⁴²⁵, and only when Nemours is absent does Mme de Clèves find 'quelque sorte de repos.' ⁴²⁶ The refusal of Nemours's visits only creates 'crainte...appréhension...inquiétude...peine.' ⁴²⁷ The vocabulary sharply evokes the kind of feverish agitation which the refusal was destined to avoid. Even at Coulommiers, where Mme de Clèves seeks 'le moyen d'être dans une solitude entière' ⁴²⁸, Nemours comes to spy on her, ironically when she is resting on a 'lit de repos.' ⁴²⁹ She cannot escape. Indeed, right beside her 'lit de repos' is a portrait of Nemours, at which she gazes intently. ⁴³⁰ There is no repos for her in flight alone. ⁴³¹ This is shown after her husband's death. Despite a withdrawal from society ⁴³², and an apparent calm, it only takes the thought of meeting Nemours for the storm to break again: 'elle ne se trouva plus dans un certain triste repos qu'elle commençait à goûter, elle se sentit inquiète et agitée.' ⁴³³ Her desire for Nemours 'la mettait dans un état digne de compassion et qui ne lui laissa plus de repos.' ⁴³⁴ The action moves inexorably to the long final dialogue with Nemours.

Only at this final moment is it possible to gather together the different elements which make up this idea of repos: the absence of passion; the idea of self-preservation, sûreté; the separation from le commerce du monde; and finally, in this last section, a totally new perspective of life which unifies these elements and gives a certain coherence to the renunciation of passion. An infinite distance separates this idea of repos from the aveuglement tranquille which a dying Clèves regrets not having enjoyed. ⁴³⁵

Crucially important, then, for an understanding of Mme de Clèves's self-awareness is her exposition to Nemours of the volatile and irrational nature of passion, with the seemingly inevitable jealousy and infidelity which it entails. Giving in to passion means douleur mortelle, souffrance, malheur.⁴³⁶ To surrender to her love for Nemours is therefore to risk the disintegration of her whole personality.⁴³⁷ In this context 'l'interêt de mon repos'⁴³⁸, far from being egoistical, can only stand for self-preservation in the deepest sense.⁴³⁹

The very fact of having had this confrontation with Nemours takes away any peace of mind which Mme de Clèves might have had:⁴⁴⁰ 'Elle fut étonnée de ce qu'elle avait fait; elle s'en repentit; elle en eut de la joie; tous ses sentiments étaient pleins de trouble et de passion.'⁴⁴¹ This breathless succession of different states, like the feverish activity of the Court, is an exact image of that disintegration by passion which Mme de Clèves seeks to avoid.⁴⁴² Passion must be refused, but refused from deep within: a temporary calme is not enough.⁴⁴³

When Mme de Clèves withdraws from Court again and makes her final disavowal of love, repos implies therefore not just absence and distance, but a vision of life for which absence and distance are necessary. 'Mme de Clèves demeura à elle-même et, à mesure qu'elle était éloignée de M. de Nemours et de tout ce qui l'en pouvait faire souvenir, elle rappelait la mémoire de M. de Clèves.'⁴⁴⁴ Absence from the Court as from Nemours, solitude and self-scrutiny lead to memories of her husband and thus, inevitably, to a heightened awareness of how passion and self-destruction are synonymous. Her reasons for not marrying

Nemours now appear to her 'insurmontables du côté de son repos.'⁴⁴⁵

Passion means 'un malheur certain'⁴⁴⁶, but the strength to resist Nemours, as experience has taught her, can be given by 'l'absence seule et l'éloignement.'⁴⁴⁷ Taking advantage of the mourning-period of retraite⁴⁴⁸, she makes a long journey to the Pyrenees, there to remain. She could not be any further from 'le commerce du monde.'⁴⁴⁹

The final stage in Mme de Clèves's long inner journey towards repos, and a final connotation of the term, comes with an illness which brings death into her consciousness of what life is: 'La nécessité de mourir, dont elle se voyait si proche, l'accoutuma à se détacher de toutes choses et la longueur de sa maladie lui en fit une habitude.'⁴⁵⁰ Se détacher: the idea of repos has its final meaning in this refusal of life as it is lived.⁴⁵¹ Attachment to the world's values can only mean loss of self.⁴⁵² And attachment to Nemours means attachment to the world of passion and appearances, that whirlpool of fears, doubts, treasons, jealousies and illusions which she knows so well⁴⁵³: 'les passions et les engagements du monde lui parurent tels qu'ils paraissent aux personnes qui ont des vues plus grandes et plus éloignées.'⁴⁵⁴ The engagements of passion contrast starkly with the détachement of repos.⁴⁵⁵

Given this choice between engagements and détachement, once a choice is possible, there is only one choice to be made: 'elle se retira...dans une maison religieuse.'⁴⁵⁶ Immediately Nemours 'sentit le poids de cette retraite.'⁴⁵⁷ Retraite here is clearly a withdrawal from life. Mme de Clèves's final message to Nemours is thus

final in every sense: 'ayant trouvé que son devoir et son repos s'opposaient au penchant qu'elle avait d'être à lui, les autres choses du monde lui avaient paru si indifférentes qu'elle y avait renoncé pour jamais; qu'elle ne pensait plus qu'à celles de l'autre vie.'⁴⁵⁸ Opposed to penchant and les autres choses du monde are terms such as devoir, repos, autre vie: the context gives to repos the resonance and weight of a deliberate moral choice. It is not just that having renounced love, the things of the world lack savour for Mme de Clèves. In refusing love and thus 'les autres choses du monde', she is refusing the world. Love and the world are inseparably linked. The autre vie of which Mme de Clèves here thinks is obviously the afterlife, but also suggests the other life which must be led in the renunciation of the world, 'dans une retraite et dans des occupations plus saintes que celles des couvents les plus austères.'⁴⁵⁹

Autre vie? Such is the author's pessimism that this phrase may only be read with a strong degree of irony. For repos is necessarily the choice of death rather than life.⁴⁶⁰ But given that such a life means self-destruction in the world of passion and appearances, Mme de Clèves's renunciation is inevitable, and almost as sad as the world which she renounces.⁴⁶¹

CONCLUSION

From ML's fictional works, so obviously related in theme, there emerges a bleak and disturbing world-picture. One theme runs through the different word-groups studied: that passion subverts a world where appearance and reality rarely coincide. The world created by the author, and every part of it, is a world which points to death.¹

Love is at the centre of this world of death. The term amour acts as a focus for a vast network of terms relating to love. The connotation of these terms, such as passion, inclination and galanterie, is usually restricted to that of passionate love², and to a clearly-defined idea of passionate love. For this love, which paradoxically promises happiness and self-fulfilment, is shown in reality to be a source of violent disorder. Amour and its associated terms are invariably coupled with the vocabulary of danger, fear and suffering, with words describing anger, bitterness, revenge and despair. In addition, a whole set of terms relating to physical and (especially) emotional violence suggests that love is akin to civil war. The opening lines of PM, which speak of civil war, thus set the tone for the description of love in all of the author's works. The so-called 'digressions' of PC reinforce this central vision: love is here a principle of anarchy, unpredictable and uncontrolled. Order and power in society are subordinate to the rule of love. In the Court described in PC, nouvoir absolu and love are explicitly associated in the person of Mme de Valentinois³, the 'maîtresse absolue de toutes choses.'⁴ Historical material is used in all the fictional works to teach a simple lesson: the world's masters are ruled by love.⁵

Another consistent lexical pattern is the interweaving of love-vocabulary with terms connoting human weakness, such as s'abandonner, céder and often the simple ne pouvoir. Mme de Clèves's plaintive cry, 'Je suis vaincue et surmontée par une inclination qui m'entraîne malgré moi'⁶, is one striking illustration of this association. 'Avons-nous du pouvoir sur le commencement ni sur la fin de nos passions?'⁷ Hugna Pella's poignant question evokes the reality of man's helplessness to control passion, a helplessness underlined by the author in three rare direct comments within the narrative.⁸ One remembers Mme de Sévigné's witty comparison of passions to vipers: '...que ne leur fait-on point? On dit des injures, des mépris, des rudesses, des cruautés, des querelles, des plaintes, des rages: et toujours elles reviennent, on n'en saurait voir la fin; on croit que quand on leur arrache le coeur, c'en est fait, qu'on n'en entendra plus parler: point du tout, elles sont encore en vie, elles reviennent encore.'⁹

Love is also consistently depicted as the irrational within. This image is clearly brought into focus in Clèves's complaint to his fiancée, that she has 'ni impatience, ni inquiétude, ni chagrin.'¹⁰ Love at first sight is thus the common rule: aimer and voir are closely linked throughout. Love is presented as a spontaneous combustion.¹¹ But this irrational element is also seen as a dark, poisoning force, 'l'envahissement des puissances de la nuit et de la forêt.'¹² Many of the terms inseparable from descriptions of passionate love show it to entail infidelity, deceit and hypocrisy. Mme de Chartres's association of love-relationships and tromperies¹³ finds an echo, in each of the works examined, in the vocabulary of deception surrounding love. Consalve's

bitterness at being 'trompé, trahi et abandonné'¹⁴ is an awareness that love cannot co-exist with any rational pattern of behaviour.

Indeed, love is indissolubly wedded to the darkest and most irrational passion of all, the torture and self-torture of jealousy. This 'folie et dérèglement'¹⁵ is seen as love's own shadow. Both love and jealousy move in a disquieting world bounded by terms such as persécution, soupçon, chagrin, inquiétude, caprices, bizarreries. Montpensier, Tende, Alphonse, Clèves and many other characters painfully enact the warping of soul and mind by love in this mocking guise of jealous madness. What is called love seems more akin to hate. The insight is close to that of Pascal: 'Tous les hommes se haïssent naturellement l'un l'autre. On s'est servi comme on a pu de la concupiscence pour la faire servir au bien public; mais ce n'est que feindre, et une fausse image de la charité; car au fond ce n'est que haine.'¹⁶ Love is alienation within: as the hapless Clèves laments, 'il n'y a plus en moi ni de calme ni de raison.'¹⁷

Equally, passionate love is shown to alienate men from each other. Human relationships are made and broken as love demands. Friendship, affection, esteem, these only seem to be. In none of the works studied may any substance be found in terms such as amitié and ami. Cnabanes, in PK, is one of many characters to discover that 'la qualité du meilleur ami du monde'¹⁸ is consistent with cold exploitation. Characters continually violate the most apparently secure relationships in order to meet love's demands. In this society, too, the marriage of true minds is a fiction. Marriage is presented either as a purely social and external institution, with adultery the norm, or else a relationship

torn by jealousy and breach of faith. Montpensier, Tende, Clèves discover to their cost the difference between the apparent rights of the mari and the real power of the amant. As for Court society, the terms which describe it, beneath a glittering surface evoked by words such as éclat and magnificence, all point to the treachery, intrigues and bitterness which passion creates and stimulates.

The world of passion, what Bourdaloue calls 'les ténèbres d'une aveugle concupiscence'¹⁹, is also a world of appearances. In all of ML's fictional works may be found a wealth of terms related to outward appearance. What is important is the image. Yet all the terms referring to image, such as air, marque, mine, only reinforce the crucial ambiguity of the single term paraître, which suggests in its use that below the surface is a reality which belies what appears.²⁰ No character can be certain what the image hides. The case of Mme de Tournon, in PC, is a concise illustration of the distance which can separate appearance and reality in society.²¹ The language of appearances in which this whole episode is couched makes it less a 'digression' than a microcosm of ML's fictional world. Reality is seen by characters through the deforming prism of passion, making illusion and self-deception almost unavoidable. A whole cluster of terms points to this parallel of appearance and illusion, and not only words such as s'imaginer, imagination, illusion, but also croire and penser, which in most cases imply an error of judgement. Characters believe what the heart urges them to believe, whether Alphonse's neurotic suspicions ('je le crois, Madame, et c'est assez'²²), or Mme de Clèves's vérité agréable.²³ The predictions concerning the Dauphine²⁴ and the king²⁵ in PC, and the reactions to them, show that

there is no reason for believing, or not believing, either the evidence of the senses or simple common sense.

The numerous terms suggesting secrecy reveal that the image is also the mask. All the love-relationships in the works studied have as their refrain terms such as catcher, tromper, secret and prétexte. A constant tension reigns between social face and inner self: one small indication is the set of terms indicating embarrassment, confusion or surprise, which continually focus our attention on the difference between the mask and the reality beneath. Such a tension leads to a continual scrutiny of all that appears. The frequency of visual terms suggests that in the society depicted by the author each person is condemned by all the others to a prison of watching eyes. This scrutiny by society leads to a redoubling of efforts to keep the image different from a dangerously compromising reality, and thus to an even greater intensity of scrutiny. The oppressive atmosphere rendered by this use of visual terms is most striking in PC: one scene which is a powerfully suggestive example is when Clèves sends a spy to watch Nemours, who is spying on Mme de Clèves, who ironically is gazing fixedly at a portrait of Nemours.²⁶

Inevitably, in these circumstances, trust is usually only an appearance of trust. Relationships of trust, involving confiding, confessing, revealing, abound in these works, and a whole series of terms expresses ML's interest in such relationships. The dealings between the Queen and the Vidame²⁷, however, provide one example among many that in the world created by the author, terms such as confiance and sincérité have very little meaning, while the term confidence implies a betrayal of

trust. Where trust is real, as is the case with Consalve, disillusionment is certain. Where it is refused, as with Alphonse, all is bitterness and suspicion. Never are avowals presented as springing from the desire to break through this recurring cycle of image, deception and illusion. Even Mme de Clèves's famous aveu²⁸ proves on examination to be neither spontaneous nor complete. The only real aveu, Mme de Clèves's final declaration to Nemours²⁹, precedes a withdrawal from the world. The logic of the breakdown of human relationships is to refuse relationships. The shadow of death is cast over all this society.

'Est-ce une illusion ou une vérité?'³⁰ Montpensier's despairing question haunts every page of LL's fiction. There is no way for characters to know when any image is true or false. If the paraître rarely reflects reality, if terms such as croire often translate a state of illusion, if each character hides innermost feelings and desires, a term such as vérité necessarily suggests the illusion or desire of certainty rather than the possibility of attaining it: 'il n'y a point de vérité, ou constante ou satisfaisante.'³¹ The choice is between suspicion and illusion. Terms like vérité, éclaircir, avouer, are constantly being placed in the perspective created by others such as incertitude, cacher and soupçon. When everyday factual reality is shown to be ambiguous, how is it possible to grasp any deeper reality?

Thus certain quests for 'the truth', such as that of Clèves, will evidently be self-destructive. For the first, deeper truth has been missed, that 'the truth' can never be had: 'Ne cherchons donc point d'assurance et de fermeté; notre raison est toujours déçue

par l'inconstance des apparences.'³² Mme de Clèves's enlightenment, and her uniqueness as a character in ML's fiction, is bound up with the slow and painful realization that passion makes the world, and her own self, a mystery to her. The other characters never seek a truth so radical that it might call into question their being and purpose in the world.³³

The bleakness of such a vision is intensified when it is realized that nowhere in these works does any character escape from passion and the maze of appearances, unless by total withdrawal from the society of men. For what seem to be human resources - lucidity, will, reason and ethical norms - are shown in most cases only to have the appearance of reality. The various terms denoting the act of thinking, and the moments of self-analysis in these texts, not only demonstrate that the gap between thought and imagination is small, but that in most cases the mind's role is limited to recording the progress of passion. No amount of reflection can prevent characters falling into the traps they have foreseen. Lucidity at best, at certain moments for Mme de Clèves, only increases awareness of what passion is, of its dark irrational power. The mind's light only points to the darkness of life.

Equally the will is here powerless in the face of passionate love: 'on n'est pas amoureux par sa volonté.'³⁴ Résolution is in the same semantic area as croire, that of illusion. The exceptions to this rule, Mme de Clèves and Bélisire, only confirm its validity, since both renounce life in society. The greatest strength of the will is to refuse any demonstration of its weakness. Given the spontaneous and irrational nature of passion, 'une passion qui ôte la raison à ceux

qui en sont possédés'³⁵, raison, too, is shown to be a value which all accept with their lips but deny in their actions. Reason cannot be reconciled with the world of passion and appearances. For Mme de Clèves, therefore, reason demands that Nemours and thus the world be rejected. 'La raison demeure toujours qui accuse la bassesse et l'injustice des passions et qui trouble le repos de ceux qui s'y abandonnent. Et les passions sont toujours vivantes dans ceux qui y veulent renoncer.'³⁶

Similar lip-service is paid by most characters to ethical norms. In most cases the term vertu belongs, with others such as esprit and beauté, to the world of appearances, or else has only the narrow connotation of an impossible chastity: 'l'on cède aisément à ce qui plaît.'³⁷ Characters are not swayed in their actions by any idea of right or wrong. Terms such as mal or faute do not form a general ethical frame of reference. There exists no objective moral code. What is right is usually, with the exemplary exceptions of Bélisire and Mme de Clèves, what will further the course of love. Even Mme de Clèves is shown to have no clear and fixed idea of right and wrong. She sways from declarations of innocence to feelings of remords, with no inner light to guide her behaviour in the world. This moral desert paradoxically arouses, if not a sense of evil, at least a sense of waste and sorrow, that men inevitably surrender to destructive passions. Where vertu and devoir are inner realities, as they gradually become for Mme de Clèves, these values are, again, shown to be incompatible with life in society. The fact that vertu and devoir finally encourage a rejection of human life points not to their falsity but to the absolute nature of the pessimistic vision which they imply.

All roads then lead to death. Mme de Clèves's final enlightenment, 'des vues plus grandes et plus éloignées'³⁸, which she owes at least in part to 'les pensées de la mort'³⁹, is a vision which puts into perspective the self-disintegration which is life in this society. The visual language of this last section of PC⁴⁰ suggests a vision eternally distant not just from the physically visual, but from the world of appearances, which is also the world of words which are only appearances: mariage, amitié, sincérité, vérité, raison, vertu.

In this perspective it is interesting to examine attempts to read a religious significance into Mme de Clèves's repos. Francillon⁴¹ and Niderst⁴² both speak of religious conversion, the former declaring that 'la dimension religieuse est bien réelle dans les dernières pages du livre.'⁴³ Such an interpretation ignores one important fact, emphasized by Sweetser: 'On ne peut parler de conversion religieuse dans le sens qu'aucune illumination de la grâce n'intervient dans sa décision.'⁴⁴

It may be argued, however, that the refusal of the world implied by repos reflects what is a traditional religious attitude. One thinks of Rancé's letter to ML: 'Vous demandez, Madame, les motifs qui m'ont déterminé à quitter le monde. Je vous dirai simplement que je le laissai parce que je n'y trouvai pas ce que j'y cherchais. J'y voulais un repos qu'il n'était pas capable de me donner.'⁴⁵ Whereas ML's fictional work, like Mme de Clèves, rejects the world, Rancé rejects the world with the avowed aim of seeking God. It is obvious that only the second course of action may truly be called religious. When Nicole declares that

'le bonheur consiste en effet dans le repos'⁴⁶, and that 'le monde n'est bon qu'à quitter et à sacrifier à Dieu'⁴⁷, renunciation of the world is here necessarily coupled with a yearning for union with God.⁴⁸ This aspiration is movingly symbolized for François de Sales in the halcyon birds, 'ces oiseaux qui sont environnés d'eaux et ne vivent que de l'air, qui se cachent en mer, et ne voyent que le ciel.'⁴⁹

No such yearning for God exists in ML's fictional works. Repos is seen to imply, initially, absence and distance, and then, a kind of living death: 'se détacher de toutes choses.'⁵⁰ This is preferable, for Bélasire and Mme de Clèves, to the torture and self-disintegration inherent in the world of passion and appearances. The only repos is the peace of the grave. Fraisse points out that 'vidé de sa dimension surnaturelle, le repos est une valeur appauvrie'⁵¹, while Hipp situates the term precisely: 'Cet idéal de repos peut recouvrir une morale de l'abstention, et le bonheur se définirait alors par le vide.'⁵² Francillon himself confirms this interpretation, paradoxically, if it is admitted that the religious element be found wanting: 'Seule la dimension religieuse donne ainsi tout son sens au concept de repos, qui, sur un plan purement psychologique et humain, paraît vide et proche du néant.'⁵³ Le vide, le néant: absence, distance, death. 'Le repos entier est la mort.'⁵⁴ The choice between death and self-disintegration in the world is clearly absurd. But then 'tout ce qui est incompréhensible ne laisse pas d'être.'⁵⁵ The very absurdity of the choice only confirms the intolerable nature of the world.

With Pascal, a similar dark vision heralds a crucial stage of the Apologie: 'En voyant l'aveuglement et la misère de l'homme,

en regardant tout l'univers muet et l'homme sans lumière abandonné à lui-même, et comme égaré dans ce recoin de l'univers sans savoir qui l'y a mis, ce qu'il y est venu faire, ce qu'il deviendra en mourant, incapable de toute connaissance, j'entre en effroi comme un homme qu'on aurait porté endormi dans une île déserte et effroyable, et qui s'éveillerait sans connaître et sans moyen d'en sortir. Et sur cela j'admire comment on n'entre point en désespoir d'un si misérable état.⁵⁶

Paradoxically, a depiction of the black completeness of the world's absurdity may be used to awaken in us a desire to seek the hidden God.

In her fictional works ML, unlike Pascal, never seeks to awaken this desire. The world and its works are rejected, but without a trace of the Christian hope proclaimed by Donne:

'To see God only, I goe out of sight;

And to scape stormy days, I chuse

An everlasting night.'⁵⁷

In ML's works the only escape from the world of passion and appearances is the everlasting night of death.