

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

**Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA**

UMI[®]
800-521-0600

A

**The Epistolary Art of La Rochefoucauld and Mme de La Fayette:
A Thematic Analysis**

by

JULIE MAXIM ANDREI

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York**

1999

UMI Number: 9946197

**Copyright 1999 by
Andrei, Julie Maxim**

All rights reserved.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 9946197

Copyright 1999 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.

**All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

**Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346**

©1999

JULIE MAXIM ANDREI

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

9-24-91

Date

Alex Sgogji

Chair of Examining Committee

9-26-91

Date

E. L. ...

Executive Officer

JEANINE P. PLOTTEL

EVE SOURIAN

The City University of New York

ABSTRACT**The Epistolary Art of La Rochefoucauld and Mme de La Fayette:
A Thematic Analysis****by****JULIE MAXIM ANDREI****Adviser: Professor Alex Szogyi**

The present essay is a thematic analysis of La Rochefoucauld's and Mme de La Fayette's correspondence. Their letters provide information about their intentions thereby contributing to a better understanding of their literary works. The panorama of the seventeenth century is also vividly depicted through their elegant style.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Professor Alex Szogyi for his support and careful guidance. I would also like to thank Professor Francesca Sautman, Professor Eve Sourian, and Professor Jeanine Plottel for their help.

Contents

Introduction	2
1. The Importance of La Rochefoucauld's Correspondence	10
2. La Rochefoucauld and the Fronde	23
3. The Lucidity of La Rochefoucauld	56
4. The Ideal of the <i>Honnête-Homme</i>	70
5. Virtue, Vanity, Charity & <i>Amour-Propre</i> in La Rochefoucauld's Correspondence and Other Literary Works	82
6. The Literary Style of La Rochefoucauld	116
7. Friendship as Portrayed by La Rochefoucauld	130
8. The Collaboration between Mme de La Fayette & La Rochefoucauld ...	147
9. The Personality of Mme de La Fayette	164
10. Mme de La Fayette's Friendships	177
11. Mme de La Fayette's Diplomatic Letters	193
12. Reason in Mme de La Fayette	207
13. Passion / Virtue in Mme de La Fayette's writings	222
14. The Style of Mme de La Fayette's writings	240
Conclusion	262
Bibliography	268

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Writing letters was an important occupation in the seventeenth century. Encouraged by King Louis XIV, high society enjoyed writing letters as a way of obtaining information, exchanging ideas and expressing feelings. Letters contained all kinds of stories, either credible or incredible, and both interesting or ordinary. *Honnêtes gens* wrote about their good taste and their art of *savoir-vivre*. In some of her letters, Mme de Sévigné expressed nostalgia after her daughter's departure. She also gave her a practice course about style through correspondence. Mme de Sablé and La Rochefoucauld exchanged cooking recipes, while at the same time, perfecting their collections of maxims. Bussy-Rabutin became an advisor in matters of refinement. Mme de La Fayette alternated official news with private letters.

Important subjects such as language, refinement, spelling rules, etymology and the development of art add to a daily *coquetterie* and *galanterie*. Perfected through a customary practice, correspondence becomes an art of writing. These letters illustrate their authors and about society at the same time.

The present essay offers an analysis of La Rochefoucauld's and Mme de La Fayette's letters because they are among the most interesting of the epoch. They depicted the Court and high society as it was in everyday situations, the refinement of it as projected by the King himself, continued in salons, academies and other socio-cultural activities.

Mme de La Fayette's and La Rochefoucauld's elegant writing could be compared. Their letters provide a direct source of information about their collaboration. La Rochefoucauld and Mme de La Fayette are equally talented and educated. Their collaboration and friendship indirectly result from the

letters they addressed to mutual friends. La Rochefoucauld appears less pessimistic and Mme de La Fayette less severe.

When analyzing Mme de La Fayette's novels and La Rochefoucauld's Maxims and Refléxions diverses, critics reviewed parts of their correspondence to illustrate their viewpoint. However, a complete analysis of La Rochefoucauld's and Mme de La Fayette's correspondence, as in the present essay, has never been done before. This analysis was realized after examining each one of their letters paragraph by paragraph. Then, their ideas were grouped according to the topics discussed.

Only the letters that refer to their friendship and literary collaboration appear in the same chapter, alongside a few letters directly exchanged between the two. Their friends' responses shed more light on Mme de La Fayette's and La Rochefoucauld's personalities, and facilitate our understanding of them.

The main source used for the analysis of La Rochefoucauld's correspondence was the collection of letters published by L. Martin-Chauffier, and improved upon by Jean Marchand who added some previously unpublished texts to his volume of Oeuvres complètes. Jean Marchand provides additional information on how these editions were put together in the index.

This complete collection combines La Rochefoucauld's letters with those of his friends and also, letters regarding him directly. For instance, a letter of October 1637, n.d., addressed to M. de Chavigny can be found in the Museum Dobrée in Nantes. It was first published by Victor Cousin in 1900 in La Jeunesse de Mme de Longueville. The letter addressed to Tulin, (working for La Rochefoucauld) on September 28, 1643, from Paris, which was available only through a copy kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale (B.N. n. acq. fr. ms.

22,126, foL. 327), belonged to the Duke of Montebello, a great collector of autographs.

Many of La Rochefoucauld's letters, such as the letter addressed to the Count of Brienne (de Verteuil, le 29 octobre, 1648), are found among other manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale (B.N., m.s. fr. 4,178 foL. 136 V^o). Other letters are found in the same source (B.N., m.s. fr. 22,126 foL. 329).

Many other details related to La Rochefoucauld's letters can be found in the Notes and Variantes (pp. 852-875) to La Rochefoucauld's Correspondance (pp. 553-689), written by Jean Marchand who provides a rich documentation. He also refers to the direct and indirect sources. However, Jean Marchand does not claim that his collection is exhaustive because, as he himself says, anyone could find more letters hidden in private archives or in other private and public libraries. Unfortunately, some letters are unavailable because the existing collections did not publish all of La Rochefoucauld's diplomatic letters. Jean Marchand found some originals signed by La Rochefoucauld which were addressed to Princes concerning treaties and other conventions.

Some of La Rochefoucauld's letters have been published before in other editions by scholars and editors in the twentieth century. Jean Marchand has published the entire collection of La Rochefoucauld's letters and updated their spelling. The present essay analyzes La Rochefoucauld's correspondence as published in Jean Marchand's collection in the Gallimard edition (see the Bibliography of the present essay).

Mme de La Fayette's Correspondance presented by the editor, André Beaunier, in two volumes. This direct source of Mme de La Fayette's letters is the *portefeuille* of Doctor Valant (Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. fr. 17,044). Victor Cousin provides direct sources from his own library (L. 181, p. 219); the Feuillet's collection of Conches (L. 116, p. 164 and L. 155, p. 192); the

Morrison's collection in London (L. 190, vol. II p. 16); a Florence collection in the Bibliothèque Laurentienne (collection Ashburnam-Libri cassetta, 26, carteggio Huet, inserte 936-955, containing twenty letters addressed to Huet from October 15, 1662 and November 1664); a collection of letters from the Bibliothèque Nationale exchanged between Huet and Ménage (ms. fr. 15, 188-15, 190); the Chevalier's de Lescheraine's letters in the State Archives (Archivio di Stato) of Turin, Piemont-Italy; Louvois' letters in the Archives of the *Ministère de la Guerre* in Paris.

André Beaunier also used other printed sources (see pp. 15-17 in Correspondence LF), published in Paris, Gallimard (see the Bibliography of the present essay). Other letters cited in this essay such as Mme de Sablé's or Mme de Sévigné's have been carefully documented in the footnotes and in the Bibliography of the present essay.

La Rochefoucauld, as he appears in his correspondence, is highly humane and sensitive. He follows the code of loyalty with much fidelity. Contrary to the negative view of some critics who analyze La Rochefoucauld through his Maximes, the perspective offered by his correspondence is quite different. His values contradict the somber portrait of him created by some of his contemporaries. In his letters, La Rochefoucauld views himself indirectly as a distinguished nobleman who defends the Queen and the King. Due to his unconditional gratitude toward certain court members, he retains a place of honor in the court. The King forgets all the frictions during the Fronde and allows him to belong to his innermost circle.

La Rochefoucauld's friendships illustrate his character. He is the person who gladly adopts Montaigne's concept of friendship. La Rochefoucauld uses writing as a way of acquiring friendships. Therefore, the tone of his letters is always polite, open and sincere. His friends equally appreciate his letters and

his conversation because he follows the strict etiquette and the *bienséance* upheld by the elite.

La Rochefoucauld's reasoning provides him with the means of knowing himself and others. His inclination toward meditation, along with his varied philosophical ideas, gives him a great perspective on understanding life and human nature. In his letters, he depicts himself as having a confident attitude toward his writing. His letters, his Réflexions diverses and his Maximes show that he is in search of an absolute truth. With admirable self-control, he tries, whenever possible, to maintain good relationships.

La Rochefoucauld's philosophical ideal of the *honnête homme* becomes the prototype he defines for his contemporaries. His psychological observations express this ideal clearly. Later, he cultivates the ideal of the *honnête homme* in himself. He then offers it to his contemporaries as well. He advises them to follow it because he understands that it combines ethics with other noble values. Through his views, we may better comprehend the varied fresco of his epoch. Many of his most controversial maxims are clearer to us, because his correspondence sheds a different light on them. In his letters, La Rochefoucauld is willing to improve human virtue instead of chasing vices.

La Rochefoucauld's correspondence defines his views on humanity. They are influenced by his education, his life experience and his philosophical ideas. His own spirituality is influenced by ancient and modern philosophers, thinkers and religious men. The ancient ideal of the *virtuoso*, cultivated in Louis XIV's court, is defined by La Rochefoucauld in artistic ways. The basic virtues in a modern perspective are moderation and gratitude. In La Rochefoucauld, *Good* becomes an ideal that should oppose vanity or *amour-propre* when it does not involve sound purposes. According to him, anyone can improve his/her character by following reason's advice to become a better person.

La Rochefoucauld's unanimously admired style appears in his correspondence as well. His art seems natural even though it is highly refined according to the standards of his time. His tone is always elegant regardless of the feelings that inspire him. La Rochefoucauld's most distinguished interlocutors find many reasons to praise him. His letters excel in their content and in their form. La Rochefoucauld follows the etiquette of Louis XIV's court. His correspondence portrays him as a kind gentleman. It becomes obvious that he follows the trends of high society in his literary works. Reading his letters, we can comprehend the legendary rivalries related to his name which throw shadows on his literary writings. Therefore, La Rochefoucauld's thoughts appear in a new light. He appears as an author who refines his ideas and his art according to contemporary demands. Due to his letters, the Maximes' metamorphosis can also be retraced.

A close reading of Mme de La Fayette's correspondence provides answers regarding the so-called contradictory traits of her personality. Like her fictional writings, her letters allow readers to better understand this prominent writer. While her masterpiece, La Princesse de Clèves, has intrigued and continues to intrigue many readers due to the original way she presents some of the ethical issues of her time, her correspondence completes her portrait and casts a new light on her fictional works. Many critics have found the right answers by analyzing her literary works. When Bernard Pingaud states: "La personnalité de Mme de La Fayette est à l'image de son oeuvre: limpide en apparence, mystérieuse dès que l'on essaie d'en toucher le fond", he seizes the complex personality of Mme de La Fayette. La Princesse de Clèves is a beautiful love story which proposes irreconcilable ethical issues.

The analysis of Mme de La Fayette's correspondence facilitates the understanding of her fictional writings. Intriguing issues in her novels become

clearer after reading her private letters. Whenever she does not completely express herself in some of her letters due to their diplomatic content, she finds original ways to express herself artistically in her novels. Thus, readers can establish connections between her fictional works and her correspondence. These connections allow readers to discern her true literary intentions. The unanswered questions in her novels are indirectly answered in her letters. Even though some critics of her time, especially the *précieux*, have criticized her letters due to their direct tone, many of her contemporaries and modern readers admire them for their elegance. Mme de La Fayette's correspondence shows that she is a distinguished woman who knows how to dominate her feelings through her *divine raison*. In other letters her *divine raison* helps her solve problems related to her challenging diplomatic career.

It is remarkable that everyone in her epoch admired Mme de La Fayette, especially in a society where other people were equally bright and cultivated. This fact was elaborated in the Mémoires of her time. They prove that this educated and intelligent woman was passionately interested in the socio-cultural life of her time. Boileau wrote about her: "C'est la femme du monde qui a le plus d'esprit et qui écrit le mieux."

Mme de La Fayette's correspondence shows that her success in high society is attained through her good judgment. Her reason allows her to find practical solutions which are unanimously applauded. The Queen recognizes her merit and appoints Mme de La Fayette as a diplomat. She soon becomes a dominant figure because, as Mme de Sévigné writes in her own correspondence, Mme de La Fayette imposes respect for herself.

Mme de La Fayette's correspondence also reveals her integrity. She believes that everything has to be expressed directly. When the Duchess of Savoie confesses her tumultuous love affair, she gives her honest opinion

openly without trying to soften the tone of her voice. On the other hand, Mme de La Fayette's correspondence also shows that she is a sensitive person. Many of her interlocutors notice this quality especially when they feel the effect of her caring friendship.

Mme de La Fayette characterizes herself objectively. When she analyzes state affairs, she realizes their importance and concentrates her reason on them. However, in her fictional writings she allows passion to dominate her main characters. She relates passions to moral issues but never surrenders her ethical beliefs. In a letter of 1675, Mme de La Fayette writes that true passions are based on *la plus belle vertu*.

Due to their fascinating content, Mme de La Fayette's letters become a rich source of information in her epoch. Also, their aesthetic qualities offer delectable hours of reading. It is clear that her ideas have power over her contemporaries because they are further developed by her interlocutors in their responses. Surprisingly, they also inspire modern readers because of their moral and philosophical content.

The delicate tone of her novels can be compared to her correspondence. The latter is equally captivating. Its elaborate form and content can compete with the most illustrious correspondences of the epoch. Her moral preoccupations can also serve as ethical lessons for many generations to come.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF LA ROCHEFOUCAULD'S AND MME DE LA FAYETTE'S CORRESPONDENCE

La Rochefoucauld's and Mme de La Fayette's letters are more than a fashionable pastime. Some of their letters become *first source* documents for historians. For instance, one of La Rochefoucauld's letters indirectly informs that to circulate from one province to another requires a passport and that its issue becomes political: "Les corps des marchands de cette ville ayant été demander des passeports à Son Altesse Royale pour aller trouver le Roi, Elle les a accordés, et leur a témoigné être bien aise qu'ils fissent la paix." (L.38.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 25 sept., 1652, p. 591).¹ His great argumentative ideas help us decipher the facts. Historians can either confirm or deny them. Nevertheless, he usually speaks in an objective manner.² La Rochefoucauld's and Mme de La Fayette's correspondence are a varied fresco of their epoch depicting the events of the time and their outcome. This lively panorama allows us to view the authors and their contemporaries as La Rochefoucauld and Mme de La Fayette themselves envisaged them. This world continues to be revived through their writing.

In La Rochefoucauld's correspondence, both ordinary and great events are treated carefully with much concern for detail. Critics consider these details important due to the light a thinker such as La Rochefoucauld sheds on them. When he describes a historic event in his memoirs, it becomes alive through the accuracy of his impressions. His observations are further enhanced by his philosophical reflections and psychological remarks. Analyzing his Memoirs, his Reflections, and his Maxims, Edith Mora discovers:

¹ François duc de La Rochefoucauld, Oeuvres complètes. Ed. Louis Martin-Chauffier. Révisée et augmentée par Jean Marchand (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1964).

² Even when he writes about the Fronde's events, he maintains a rather objective viewpoint.

[...] une irremplaçable expérience humaine, un véritable champ d'observations psychologiques. Il a là, en particulier, trouvé la matière de ses analyses, fouillées jusqu'au subconscient, de la peur et du courage, de la valeur militaire et des mérites, faux ou réels, des chefs vainqueurs.³

In the seventeenth century, it is a great honor to receive letters from a renowned person. These letters are kept because the receiver feels proud of owning them. La Rochefoucauld expresses his joy for having received a letter from Mlle de Scudéry, "la plus agréable et la plus obligeante du monde" (L.117.-A Mlle de Scudéry. du 12 novembre, p. 647).

Many of La Rochefoucauld's letters deserve particular attention due to their rich content. His letters could be classified into several types according to their main subject: his correspondence with Mme de Sablé and Jacques Esprit contains critical literary analysis while his correspondence with Mme de Longueville reminds us about her infatuation for him.⁴ The significance of La Rochefoucauld's correspondence is further grasped through the responses of his interlocutors, important individuals in seventeenth century France.

Exiled, La Rochefoucauld enjoyed receiving letters because they were his source of news. He insisted that the Countess of Clermont write him as soon as possible. Since she forgot to write, he put his reproach into rhyme: "Forcez un peu votre paresse, Madame la Comtesse, je vous supplie, et donnez-moi de vos nouvelles; j'ai fort envie d'en savoir; je vous en demande de tout mon coeur [...]" (L.106.-A la Comtesse de Clermont, de Chambord, le 24 sept., 1669, p. 640). He hoped the musical sentence could articulate his reproach in a more pleasant manner and besides, a courteous tone was

³ Edith Mora, François de La Rochefoucauld (Paris: Pierre Seghers, 1965) 42.

⁴ "Elle me le pardonnera, s'il lui plaît, et excusera si ma tendresse pour cette malheureuse princesse, réduite à la dernière extrémité, l'emporte sur l'amour que je dois avoir pour mon pays" L.10.-La Duchesse de Longueville à La Rochefoucauld, de Stenay, le 16 décembre, 1650, p. 672.

mandatory. Among other news, La Rochefoucauld tells the Countess of Clermont that he saw Molière's play, L'Ecole des Maris. La Rochefoucauld is also influenced by Molière's humorous style when he writes: "Que fera-t-il, le pauvre homme?" (same L., 106).⁵ He borrows one of his comical effects when he paints M. de Créqui's portrait. He compares M. de Créqui to Tartuffe, *le pauvre homme*. The same rhetoric created by Molière inspires La Rochefoucauld to be satisfied with a situation in which Tartuffe himself would be fit. He could not find a better way to express his irony toward M. de Créqui. Besides Molière's viewpoint on hypocrisy, La Rochefoucauld finds another kind of hypocrisy: "Il y a une autre hypocrisie, qui n'est pas si innocente, parce qu'elle impose à tout le monde: c'est l'affliction de certaines personnes qui aspirent à la gloire d'une belle et immortelle douleur." (M.233). He alludes to the fact that common sense should be the guide in every situation, instead of hypocrisy.

La Rochefoucauld's correspondence also seizes his personality and, at the same time, follows his literary intentions. The maxim which is half-literary, half-philosophical, causes much interpretational controversy. La Fontaine is inspired by La Rochefoucauld's Maxims and by his image when he writes his fable L'homme et son image. La Fontaine feels that La Rochefoucauld loves his image too much: "Miroirs aux poches des galants, / Miroirs aux ceintures des femmes."⁶ The end of the fable gives us the key to these stanzas; as soon as Narcisse sees his image in a "canal, formé par une source pure", "Il s'y voit; il se fâche; et ses yeux irrités / Pensent apercevoir une chimère vaine."⁷ La

⁵ La Rochefoucauld uses Molière's expression "La pauvre homme!" in the same ironical manner. Repeating it in Molière's play, Tartuffe, causes amusement. It also exempts Orgon of other comments; saying something else would not cause the same effect: "(Dorine:) Tartuffe? Il se porte à merveille, / Gros et gras, le teint frais, et la bouche vermeille / (Orgon:) Le Pauvre homme! [...]" "Le pauvre homme!" even though he lives a cozy life. Molière, Oeuvres complètes 2 (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965) 276.

⁶ La Fontaine, Oeuvres complètes. Fables (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965) Livre Premier, 78.

⁷ La Fontaine 78.

Fontaine, as a fine connoisseur of human nature, feels obliged to recognize that La Rochefoucauld is not unique in his narcissistic adoration. He could say the very same thing about anyone:

Je parle à tous; et cette erreur extrême / Est un mal que chacun se
plaît d'entretenir. / Notre âme, c'est cet homme amoureux de lui-
même; / Tant de miroirs, ce sont les sottises d'autrui, / Miroirs, de
nos défauts les peintres légitimes; / Et quant au canal, c'est celui /
Que chacun sait, le livre des Maximes.⁸

These final stanzas praise La Rochefoucauld's Maxims by underlying their universal function. The key to solving their meaning lies in some of his letters which express his own opinions toward his literary writing.

Official scenes alternate with those of his private life in La Rochefoucauld's correspondence. By reading his opinions related to them, the reader gains insight into his world. The philosophical thoughts in his maxims which seem unintelligible or hard to grasp become accessible because, in his letters, he directly states what he thinks along with what he does. All the details he refers to contribute to understanding him better.

One of the most important ideas of La Rochefoucauld's is that actions define a person. He categorizes people that he encounters through their actions. Consequently, La Rochefoucauld's own actions become the means toward understanding him as a thinker and as a writer. The small details he uses to depict his interlocutors also complete his own image. And, without it being his main focus, certain things which he writes about, such as physical traits, customs, gestures, ceremonies, constitute a social fresco of his epoch. On the other hand, abstract elements, his most inner thoughts and his feelings complete the picture of his time. There is no scientific method that he constantly

⁸ La Fontaine 78.

follows; it is his own sensitivity that inspires him. Psychological observations appear simultaneously among other details. While observing others, he also watches himself. However, some critics believe there is a discrepancy between his writing and his personality; Edith Mora writes: "Cette dureté de coeur nous déçoit d'autant plus, chez La Rochefoucauld, qu'il étonnait ses amis par une sensibilité surprenante, en ce temps, et en son milieu [...]"⁹ He tries to define his feelings accurately, comparing the moods of his soul with the ebb and flow of the sea. He himself staggers from its waves and, because he lives in the middle of it, he is involuntarily compelled to do so. He realizes that opposing feelings are predictable in human nature. One of his contemporaries, La Bruyère, also has the same opinion on the relativity of human nature even though he expresses it differently: "Avec de la vertu, de la capacité, et une bonne conduite, l'on peut être insupportable [...] Il ne faut presque rien pour être cru fier, incivil, méprisant, désobligeant: il faut encore moins pour être estimé tout le contraire."¹⁰

Maxim 504, one of his longest reflections on death, is illustrated with an anecdote.¹¹ In his correspondence he alludes to it as the affair of the *tricotets*: "[...] je vous envoie le papier tout déchiré que j'ai écrit d'autrefois à M. Esprit, sur ce qu'il m'avait mandé qu'un laquais avait voulu danser les tricotets sur le même échafaud où il devait être roué [...]" (L.75.-Au Duc de Liancourt, n. d., p. 619). The Duke of Liancourt would probably read between the lines if he knew La Rochefoucauld's entire maxim where he also writes:

Après avoir parlé de la fausseté de tant de vertus apparentes, il est raisonnable de dire quelque chose de la fausseté du mépris de la mort [...] Il y a différence entre souffrir la mort constamment et la

⁹ Edith Mora 48.

¹⁰ La Bruyère, *Les caractères* (Paris : Librairie Générale Française, 1985) 125.

¹¹ M.504: "[...] Un laquais se contenta, il y a quelque temps, de danser sur l'échafaud où il allait être roué [...]"

mépriser: le premier est assez ordinaire, mais je crois que l'autre n'est jamais sincère [...] (same M., 504).

In his Maximes, La Rochefoucauld refers to life situations and expects others to do likewise.¹² He therefore adopts an ironical tone about the Countess of Maure who apparently does not react according to his expectations: "J'avais toujours bien cru que Mme la comtesse de Maure condamnerait l'intention des sentences et qu'elle se déclarerait pour la vérité des vertus."¹³ (L. 62.- A la Marquise de Sablé, de Verteuil, le 5 déc, p. 609).

He realizes that one of the reasons his maxims were not always understood is that the editor presented them in a different order than he had anticipated. A different order would have given readers a different perspective. He clearly expresses this opinion in one of his letters: " [...] c'est un malheur qu'elles aient paru sans être achevées et sans l'ordre qu'elles devaient avoir." (L.93.-Au Père Thomas Esprit, le 6 février, 1665, p. 630). Somewhat deceived after their publication, La Rochefoucauld writes: "Encore une fois, mon Très Révérend Père, comptez s'il vous plaît les Maximes pour rien et croyez que j'aime mille fois mieux qu'elles ne parussent jamais, que de faire la moindre peine à ceux qui en ont pris la protection." (L.98.-Au Père Rapin, de Paris, le 12 juillet, 1664, p. 635).

La Rochefoucauld's letters also help us to understand some of his contemporaries better: La Bruyère, Racine, Molière, and La Fontaine because he either directly or indirectly points to the same ideas and to the same ethical issues as they did. His letters are analyzed less by critics because they prefer his Maximes, his Réflexions diverses, or his Mémoires. However, La

¹² P. Lewis believes that the maxims are intended to influence readers because there is "nothing innocent or impartial about the structural notion of the maxim, which influences the reading of the text quite as decisively as a preconception of its message." Philip Lewis, La Rochefoucauld. The Art of Abstraction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 29.

¹³ She was a jansenist like Mme de Longueville. Acc. to note 2 on p. 861, and p. 612.

Rochefoucauld's letters are equally important because he directly expresses his opinions regarding events and ideas in them. Their non-fictional presence offers the key to interpreting some of his controversial Maximes. Some of his letters discuss ideas related to the maxims, their genesis and their metamorphosis from their initial form to their final one. His remarks and opinions contained in his letters help us read his abstract work in illustrated forms.

As a modern thinker, La Rochefoucauld understands that one's individual existence and realizations result from the contributions of society. It nourishes one's intellectual and moral growth. La Rochefoucauld presents this idea as an axiom even though he feels that not everyone would be willing to agree with him. La Rochefoucauld refers to his own values as a contribution from an entire society: "Quand je dis nous j'entends parler de l'homme qui croit ne devoir qu' à lui seul ce qu'il a de bon, comme faisaient les grands de l'antiquité [...]" (L.93.-Au Père Thomas Esprit, le 6 février, 1665, ?, p. 631). Enlightened by this idea, La Rochefoucauld analyzes some of the 'illustrious' events of antiquity with a certain degree of reserve. He sees their limitations or, at other times, their exaggerations. With his lucidity, La Rochefoucauld tries to find valuable arguments to support his objections. His examples are well chosen: "[...] et comme cela je crois qu'il y avait de l'orgueil, de l'injustice et mille autres ingrédients dans la magnanimité et la libéralité d'Alexandre et de beaucoup d'autres; que dans la vertu de Caton il y avait de la rudesse, et beaucoup d'envie et de la haine contre César [...]" (same L., 93). Because of the possible misinterpretation of some external facts, La Rochefoucauld believes that it is always necessary to analyze one's own psychology. He therefore illustrates this *analyse du cœur* by questioning Augustus' clemency for Cinna. Instead of virtue, he is tempted to distinguish "une lassitude de

répandre inutilement tant de sang” there (same L., 93). Because of this possible wrong interpretation, La Rochefoucauld reinforces his idea that one should study “l’anatomie de tous les replis du coeur” better (same L., 93). La Rochefoucauld chooses examples from antiquity to illustrate and reinforce his opinions on modern events. He feels that besides the superficial events, individual intentions are just as important and have to be taken into consideration. Speaking about his own Maximes, La Rochefoucauld suggests that, when reading them, one should analyze “tous les replis” of his own heart (same L., 93). This entire source is authentic and rich in detail. His enthusiasm is genuinely felt. He speaks about it whenever he feels overwhelmed. It becomes obvious in reading his correspondence that La Rochefoucauld is rather objective when relating some events. His interlocutors do not contradict him. Writing some memoirs, he realizes that objectivity is one of the most necessary qualities. And, because he is also a moralist, he passionately loves truth. This feeling is constantly expressed throughout his correspondence and his maxims. Despite the fact that he is an important figure, he never gives himself credit for it. He modestly accepts the privilege of being in the Queen’s or the King’s entourage, as events place him, sometimes independently from his intentions. Time acts on him and inevitably changes him. The passionate writing of his youth becomes more moderate. With time, the logic of his writing also changes.¹⁴ His referential system and manner of interpreting events go through an unavoidable progression:

[...] Ce qu’il faut mettre en lumière, c’est le caractère tout a fait
insolite en ce grand siècle du classicisme soumis à l’empire des

¹⁴ A writing intended for “*searching himself*” invites readers to interpret it “dans sa totalité, tout au moins pour que soient véritablement lues les Réflexions [...] morales qui en sont la quintessence et le sommet, fait très étroitement corps avec la vie et la personnalité intégrale - jusqu’au moi subconscient - de son auteur.” La Rochefoucauld’s maxims demonstrate a metamorphosis toward perfection. Edith Mora 57,58,61.

genres littéraires, de cette perpétuelle recherche [...] d'une forme non seulement toujours plus concise [...] mais encore et surtout adhérent de plus en plus intimement aux mouvements profonds de son être, qui de plus en plus aussi, s'identifiant à l'oeuvre [...]¹⁵

Edith Mora perceives an attenuation of La Rochefoucauld's tone. When he improves his first edition of the Maximes, La Rochefoucauld erases M.614, which alluded to the events of the Fronde: "Quelques autres sont, vues sous cet angle, très intéressantes à suivre à travers l'évolution du texte."¹⁶ In other circumstances, La Rochefoucauld alters his letters as well. His correspondence clearly shows that his style is modified when he has to comply with certain diplomatic rules. When he writes: "[...] Si son dessein [de Son Altesse] change devant ce soir, je corrigerai mon plaidoyer." (L.35.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 8 septembre, 1652, p. 588), it is apparent that the purpose he writes for counts the most here, and he becomes very flexible. Because letters are read, La Rochefoucauld is sometimes obliged to write in a codified manner: "[...] Bérénice (Mme de Châtillon) est toujours fort bien avec Astropol (Monsieur le Prince) [...]" (L.26.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 4 août, 1652, p. 576). This type of letter is not unique. La Rochefoucauld uses the same ciphered writing when secrecy has to be maintained. A letter to Mme de Sablé cannot be completely understood by the modern reader because the key to it belongs only in the Marquise's hands: "[...] je vous envoie donc ce que vous m'avez ordonné de vous faire voir, et je vous supplie très humblement que personne ne le voie que vous." (L.80.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n.d., p. 622-23).

As he matures, the fidgety character of his youth and imprudent actions¹⁷ are replaced by more poised thoughts. La Rochefoucauld remarks upon this

¹⁵ Edith Mora 57-58.

¹⁶ Edith Mora 61.

¹⁷ Some contemporaries and critics later continue to point to the Fronde, an event of his youth, without taking into consideration the fact that people change. La Rochefoucauld changed much during his lifetime.

with satisfaction and pride: “Moi qui connais tout ce qu’il y a de délicat et de fort dans les grands sentiments de l’amour, si jamais je viens à aimer, ce sera assurément de cette sorte; mais de la façon dont je suis, je ne crois pas que cette connaissance que j’ai me passe jamais de l’esprit au cœur.”¹⁸ This analysis of himself reveals that La Rochefoucauld contemplates his own feelings carefully. His lucidity gives him the strength to not react wrongly. His reason allows him to distinguish his own feelings from objective facts. In one of his maxims he feels that passion is not to be ignored, *au contraire*: “Les passions sont les seuls orateurs qui persuadent toujours. Elles sont comme un art de la nature dont les règles sont infaillibles [...] ” (M.8). As an expert on human nature, La Rochefoucauld feels compelled to recognize its weaknesses without pointing to anyone in particular and, also excluding himself. Human nature is a stronger power that can subdue any individual.

Mme de La Fayette uses her correspondence to voice her thoughts. When she is angry, she writes letters of thanks out of politeness, only making use of a different tone, that is no longer warm nor familiar. It becomes neutral because her writing then adopts the standard forms traditionally required by letters. In 1657, when she is anxious about one of her husband’s trials¹⁹ and also hurt that Ménage did not answer her letter, she writes him: “[...] si je voulois vous remercier de tout ce que vous feréz pour nous, je ne vous escrirois dorsenavant que des lettres de remerciement.” (L.65.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 12 juin, 1657, vol. 1, p. 106). Her state of mind clearly transpires and reflects an objective situation: “cette affaire me touche et m’inquiète [...] ” (same L., 65). And, a month later, she adds: “[...] je n’ay plus dans la teste que les sentences,

His correspondence has shown that he reconciled completely with all the members of the Court de France, and afterwards, he continued to live there as one of its most distinguished individuals.

¹⁸ La Rochefoucauld, “Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même”, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964) 6.

¹⁹ A trial about the La Fayette’s family domains. Acc. to the introductory paragraph to L.65, *Correspondance L.F.*, vol. 1, p. 105.

les exploits, les arrests, les productions [...] je ne songe non plus ny aux vers, ny à l'italien, ny à l'espagnol, que si je n'en avois jamais ouÿ parler." (L.67.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 3 juillet, 1657, vol. 1, p. 109). She realizes the trial in question causes a transformation in herself. At that point, she feels there is no room for affection, *un bel esprit* becomes *un esprit d'affaires* forced to read *des papiers de chicane* (same L., 67). And in 1662, when she understands that something has changed in her friendship with Ménage, she writes a concise but very emotional letter: "Je ne sçaurois m'accoutumer à l'injustice que vous me faites d'estre si mal persuadé de l'amitié que j'ay pour vous. Puisque mes paroles sont inutiles, il faut pourtant que je me donne patience que le temps vous persuade mieux." (L.142.-A Ménage, de Paris, ? 1662, vol. 1, p. 181).

In other situations, Madame de La Fayette resorts to a more direct form of communication. She breaks the traditional 'order' of a letter, where a polite formula ends, by placing it before the last sentence. She imposes her will in business affairs by placing it in the unusual position to remind the destinator about her dispositions. When she writes: "L'amitié et l'estime que j'ay pour vous dureront éternellement. Mandéz-moy, je vous prie, où logera Mademoiselle." (L.72.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 11 août, 1657, vol. 1, p. 118), the last sentence is an *aide mémoire* without being a *post scriptum*. This change in the micro-structure of the paragraph proves her originality in writing and the freedom that she wisely allows herself.

Her correspondence demonstrates that she writes because she is motivated by two reasons: first, by pleasure because she loves writing as a creative art, and second, because it is indispensable to her diplomatic career. Referring to Mlle de Coligny, she writes: "Je m'imagine que la mort du petit de Châtillon apportera du bien à la comtesse de la Suze; et, assurément, si elle

devient riche, elle ne fera plus de vers.” (L.79.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 9 novembre, 1657, vol. 1, p. 124). Mme de La Fayette knows that this young person writes to earn a living. She understands that once Mlle de Coligny co-inherits a great fortune, she will gladly give up her profession of stanza writing. Mme de La Fayette’s penetrating intuition distinguishes between writing out of obligation and writing for pleasure; therefore, she anticipates that the first step of a professional writer such as Mlle de Coligny will be to renounce her writing career. The neutral tone of her remark is equivocal and purposefully does not allow one to distinguish whether she is glad for this young person who will inherit a fortune or if she is ironically thinking that, in this way, literary art will rid itself of a mediocre writer who writes only to earn money.

Mme de La Fayette writes her correspondence in a frank tone. Therefore, she retains favorable relations with friends. She subtly imposes her will by giving them credit before-hand : “Je vous promets de croire ce que vous m’en diréz.” (same L., 31). Her tact is illustrated in the following letter: “J’auray au moins le plaisir de vous mettre dans vostre tort [...] ” (L.32.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse. le 16 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 65).

Mme de La Fayette shows sensitivity in her private letters. She accords more importance to them because she thinks that, unlike fictional writings where emotions relate to everyone, private letters directly express the feelings of the sender and receiver. In private letters, silence also becomes meaningful to Mme de La Fayette because her sensitivity allows her to interpret it accurately: “Je suis fort aise que la petitesse de vos lettres vienne du défaut de matière, et non pas du manque d’amitié.” (same L., 42). Being a connoisseur in matters of letters, she knows that the length of letters is an indirect sign of friendship. Therefore, she thinks that the longer the letter, the better it shows friendship. This idea is developed in one of her sensitive reflections: “ [...] je suis persuadée

qu'elle est toujours très grande; [...] cette sorte d'amitié-là est bonne en absence parce qu'elle est aussi vive qu'il faut pour que la séparation ne la fasse pas devenir languissante comme l'amitié simple a accoutumé de devenir quand on ne se voit point." (same L., 42).

II. LA ROCHEFOUCAULD AND THE FRONDE

La Rochefoucauld belongs to one of the most important noble families. In a letter addressed to Mazarin, he reminds him that he has reasons to be proud of this because, in its origins, his family is directly related to the French monarchy:

[...] il y a trois cent ans que les Rois n'ont point dédaigné de nous traiter de parents, bien que les prétendants à qui cet honneur peut être commun avec nous n'aient pas comme nous celui de la duché [sic], bien que la rencontre de ces deux avantages dans notre maison dût empêcher celles qui ont seulement l'un ou l'autre de tirer à conséquence [...] (L.9.-Au Cardinal Mazarin, à Verteuil, le 2 oct., 1648, p. 563).

Loyalty is greatly appreciated among members of the noble class. La Rochefoucauld's loyalty compels him to interfere whenever he feels it is reasonable to do so. In 1648, he defends the clerks of the *Traité de Charente*. He writes a letter to Cardinal Mazarin informing him that everyone respects fidelity: " [...] j'ai cru qu'il suffisait de les [les commis] y faire retourner, et de les mettre en la protection des habitants, et de les rendre responsables de leur sûreté." (L.8.-Au Cardinal Mazarin, de Fontenay, le 1-er sept., 1648, p. 561). La Rochefoucauld writes this letter to the Cardinal to assure him of his loyalty, reminding him that he will always honor his word. According to the noble tradition he alludes to, he also promises that the province of Poitou, for which he is accountable, will do likewise.¹

¹ This event is important because it shows La Rochefoucauld's reaction in a similar situation. Human dignity is a subject that appears constantly in his letters.

La Rochefoucauld carries out all obligations expected from a nobleman. Due to the fact that he belongs to a noble family, he understands that defending the interests of his class is an implied task as it appears in a letter to Lenet:

[...] si je ne rends pas ce devoir-là à Madame la Princesse, c'est seulement par respect, et pour être persuadé qu'il est inutile de lui renouveler les assurances de mon très humble service, puisque je ne m'imagine pas que rien lui pût faire douter du zèle avec lequel j'essaierai toute ma vie de lui en rendre. (L.17.-A Lenet, le 8 déc., 1650, p. 569).

However, in another letter, he asks Monsieur to establish justice in an affair that is not of his competence.² La Rochefoucauld is aware that his name imposes honor and that people like himself, belonging to the nobility, must respond with dignity. When La Rochefoucauld calls himself the *servant* of Lenet, he means that he is ready to serve his friend at any time. He thinks traditional rules compel both sides to the same order. La Rochefoucauld's letter reinforces this traditional respect of nobility: "Je vous donne le bonsoir, et vous assure, Monsieur, que vous n'avez pas un serviteur plus acquis que moi, ni qui vous honore avec taut de passion." (L.29.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 21 août, 1652, p. 581). Here, La Rochefoucauld wants to reassure his friend about his fidelity and make him understand that the outcome of that situation does not solely depend on him.³ This polite formula may seem exaggerated but, by reading his entire letter, one could really see that this form is often practiced in his time. Its content

² In April, ***, a clerk was murdered in Cahusac, but his relatives believed that the officers working with the victim were not competent. La Rochefoucauld asks Monsieur to judge this matter because he feels that more authority is needed in this case.

³ References included in his letter defend his position in an indirect manner because he writes: "Mgrs les Princes demanderont, conjointement avec le Parlement et Paris, que les choses soient rétablies en l'état ou elles étaient avant la guerre; et puis il ne dépendra que de la cour de nous donner la paix [...] Le Cardinal sera toujours hors du Royaume, il voudra revenir, et il faudra toujours parler à Monsieur le Prince." same L., 29. La Rochefoucauld's correspondence shows that his participation in the Fronde's events was not decisive.

is equally imposed upon by ancient tradition. La Rochefoucauld inherits the traditional etiquette through his family whose roots go back to medieval royalty.⁴

La Rochefoucauld's gratitude, expressed in a sincere tone, proves not only that he has authentic feelings for the Count of Chavigny, but also that he is capable of formulating them in a graceful manner: "[...] qu'en quelque lieu et en quelque état que je sois, rien n'empêchera jamais les sentiments de reconnaissance et d'estime que j'aurai toute ma vie pour vous [...]" (L.11.-Au Comte de Chavigny, de Poitiers, le 7 déc., 1648, p. 565). The family name should be proof of his dignity. He is sincere because *noblesse oblige* and also writes: "Je me persuade que j'ai assez d'honneur d'être connu de vous pour croire que vous ne pouvez douter de cette vérité [...]" (same L., 11). His letters addressed to M. de Liancourt reassure him that he is ready to render his services out of gratitude: "[...] je n'ai jamais cru me pouvoir empêcher de rendre un bien qu'on m'avoit confié." (L.3.-A M. de Liancourt, sept., 1638, p. 557).

Writing to Lenet, he confesses that he and his wife never forget their *obligations*, considering them before anything else. He also declares that he appreciates Lenet's friendship which is very meaningful to him: "[...] je ne fais de fondement sur l'amitié de personne du monde plus entièrement que sur le vôtre." (L.25.-A Lenet, le 21 juin, 1652, p. 574). He expresses his faithfulness sincerely: "[...] je ne manquerai jamais à ce que je vous ai promis [...]" (same L., 25). His word of honor is a matter of prestige for him and for those who respect it. La Rochefoucauld believes that noble duties are reciprocal: "[...] je vous laisse cette importante négociation à ménager." (same L., 25). Therefore, he expects his friend to be equally loyal.

In 1643, when the Duke d'Enghien succeeds in a battle, La Rochefoucauld is so happy for him that he expresses his enthusiasm in a

⁴ See L.9. cited on p. 6. La Rochefoucauld is the Prince of Marcillac and Duke of La Rochefoucauld.

hyperbolic manner: “ [...] Lui témoigner autrement que par des paroles de zèle [...] et avec quelle passion [...] ” (L.5.-Au Duc d’Enghien, de Paris, le 23 mai, 1643, p. 558). He reminds the Duke d’Enghien that he respects his noble obligations: “ [...] de croire que comme Votre Altesse n’a point de serviteur qui souhaite l’augmentation de sa gloire si passionnément que moi [...] ” (L.6.-Au Duc d’Enghien, de Paris, le 4 sept., 1643, p. 559). La Rochefoucauld expresses his loyalty because the Duc d’Enghien is a Prince of the Blood. The Duke d’Enghien is pleased to have La Rochefoucauld’s fidelity. La Rochefoucauld refers to it directly and considers his actions: “ [...] si proportionnées à sa naissance [...] ” (same L., 6).

Beyond the noble tradition for which La Rochefoucauld shows unconditional respect, one can perceive his opinions on human existence. His beliefs not only stem from his noble upbringing, but also from his own philosophy. La Rochefoucauld relates human actions to inherited conditions.⁵ He also connects feelings with abstract ideas through a system of logic. Writing to the Duke of Enghien, La Rochefoucauld points to his own feelings in an obvious manner: “C’est un sentiment que je suis obligé d’avoir par tant de raisons, que je me persuade [...] ” (same L., 6). The two adverbs *respectueusement* and *éternellement*⁶ underline La Rochefoucauld’s sentiments. Placed in his letter, they create a special effect by slowing the rhythm of his sentence. They also stress the idea of the duration of his feelings which coexist with his reason in perfect harmony.

La Rochefoucauld describes some of the Fronde’s events, offering *les meilleurs guides* to their understanding. The details contained in his

⁵ See page 109.

⁶ La Rochefoucauld writes: “C’est un sentiment que je suis obligé d’avoir par tant de raisons, que je me persuade que Votre Altesse me fera l’honneur de croire que je le conserverai éternellement et que je serai toujours plus respectueusement que personne du monde, Monseigneur, de Votre Altesse/Le très humble et très obéissant serviteur, / Marcillac.” L.6.-Au Duc D’Enghien, de Paris, le 4 septembre, 1643, Correspondence L R., p. 559.

correspondence provide a clearer picture of this historic period. He speaks about them in an objective manner, thereby gaining credibility because he generally addresses friends in private letters. And, as a participant in one of the opposing groups of the Fronde, he could have 'embellished' some details to speak in his favor. However, he remains generally impartial in his letters and in his Mémoires.

Historians have completely analyzed the events which caused the Fronde.⁷ However, here it is necessary to sketch out the historical period in order to understand La Rochefoucauld's position and participation in these events because his correspondence contains details referring to it.

The first years of Louis XIV's reign are determined by some pre-existent conditions. Before his arrival to power, peace among the French provinces was not possible due to the nobles' frequent disputes. The last General Estates, the nobles' meeting of 1614, was fruitless because their views were not in agreement. Richelieu, Louis XIV's prime-minister, understood that the nobles had to be called to order. He decided to destroy their private fortresses and impose laws to unify them. On the other hand, Parlement, made up of lawyers and officers, had no political responsibilities. Its sole duty was to register edicts. After Louis XIII's death, France was governed by a council, called the Regency, because the King was only five years old. Due to this situation, nobles, Parlement and the Estates wanted to regain their power. At the same time, the King's mother, Anne d'Autriche also wanted power for herself. She opposed Richelieu because she considered him as an enemy, and persuaded the Paris Parlement to appoint her as Regent during the King's minority. To reinforce her power, she decided to secretly marry Mazarin, the future prime-minister. Mazarin had many enemies among the bourgeois and other nobles not only

⁷ The main source of information regarding the Fronde was Paul Rice Doolin's The Fronde and other books cited in the Bibliography.

because of his Italian origins, but also because of his fiscal plan. Among the opposition, the Prince of Condé wanted to control the Queen along with his brother, the Prince of Conti, and his sister, Mme de Longueville. He was encouraged by his victories which had been obtained under his title of Duke d'Enghien and through his allies: Turenne and La Rochefoucauld, among other supporters. The Cardinal of Retz was an ambitious clergyman who defended Mazarin in order to reinforce his own power. Mazarin's counter-intrigues have played an important role during the Fronde.

The tragi-comic events of the Fronde occurred in two distinct periods while Louis XIV was a minor and France was ruled by the Regent Anne d'Autriche, the Queen Mother. The first movement of the Fronde was triggered in 1648 when the Sovereign Courts affirmed their right to independent jurisdiction. This main issue concerning authority was stated in the seventeenth of the twenty-seven articles drawn up by the Assembly of the Chambre St. Louis. The Courts claimed the right to verify all royal acts affecting their jurisdiction even though an article of the constitution guaranteed it. On January 15th, 1648, the Advocate General, Omer Talon, presented seven fiscal edicts asking for the increase of the system of taxation, the creation of new offices and the regulation of the *franc-fiefs* including the payment of revenues on all property. In Article 1, Sovereign Courts affirmed their right to sanction all extraordinary commissions. The King was thus deprived of one of the two agencies through which he had exercised direct jurisdiction. Omer Talon also believed that edicts did not need to be registered at the King's *lit de justice* because this was a recent practice in effect only for the past twenty-five years. Omer Talon added that edicts would be valid only when examined and approved by the Sovereign Courts. The Regent and ministers of government opposed these changes because the King was a minor. They replied that this

was a serious limitation upon the power of the King. Due to this fact, no new offices could be opened during the King's minority. At this point, friction between the Regent and Parlement seemed inevitable. It took approximately three months to clarify the matter.

On January 18th, 1648, Parlement and its chambers met to examine the edicts registered at the *lit de justice*. The first edict examined by Parlement was related to revenues on domains. It was approved by judges, but provisions were made to preserve domains. On February 15th, Parlement asked that the edict of the *franc-fiefs* be modified. Thus, payment of past dues would be reduced from twenty-five to fourteen years. The Regent opposed modification of this edict which was already registered at the King's *lit de justice*. She threatened to repress any changes but promised to consider remonstrances.

The Sovereign Court, the Grand Conseil and the Chambre des Comptes were attacked by government's decision about the *droit annuel*. This *droit annuel* consisted of annual payments to the crown. Only when these payments were thoroughly paid would offices become hereditary. However, Parlement accorded the right of heredity to any offices disregarding the *droit annuel*. Some government ministers viewed this decision reluctantly, fearing that the assembly might question Mazarin, the Prime Minister's right to his position, being that he was a foreigner. On May 18th, a Decree of the Council revoked the *droit annuel*. The King's attorneys forbade the chambers to assemble and declared the union of the Courts unconstitutional because they met without legitimate authority from the King. He also said that the Regent would never allow the Union of Chambers and, therefore, Parlement should cease further debates on this matter. The fact that they met even though they were not allowed to do so, resulted in the arrest of deputies and judges from the three courts. In response to the Decree of Union issued by Parlement, government

issued a counter decree denouncing the former as an act of disobedience. Then, the Duke of Orleans met with a delegation of Parlement and the imprisoned were released. The Regent ordered the Assembly to solve all matters within a week.

One month later, on June 30th, the four Sovereign Courts assembled with the Chamber of St. Louis with the Regent's approval. Their meetings involved radical reforms on the twenty-seven articles regarding the institution of the monarchy. One of the decrees revoked the government intendants and asked the Procureur Général to inform it about the administration of finances. This act of legislative authority of the Parlement attacked the government for less severe demands. The Duke of Orleans asked for the suspension of the Decree in a meeting with Mazarin and the Chancellor. Since Parlement did not want to make any concessions, government was forced to yield on the issue of the intendants under the condition that the King give his consent on reform. Government asked that the matter be solved by the Chamber of Justice, composed of members of the Sovereign Courts.

Another issue considered as fundamental by Parlement was the authority of taxation. The Assembly of Parlement wanted the reduction of the *taille* to one-fourth and remittance of all arrears starting with 1646. On July 18th, 1648, government met with Parlement and decided that arrears be remitted to one-eighth for 1648 and 1649. The Court endorsed this decision and petitioned the Regent.

The issue concerning the abolishment of the *taille* and the taxes from farmers caused frictions because it meant that the state's revenues would be ruined. The King admitted to some abuses of government but protested that this constitutional reform would weaken his authority. The Assembly of the

Chamber of St. Louis had to cease its activity and, starting from 1649, the *taille* would be reduced by one-fourth.

The offices of *maître de Requêtes* and *toisé des maisons* were abolished by 1648 by a declaration of the King. This interfered with some of the decrees of Parlement and created a new controversy. After three months, Parlement had to examine the royal declaration and other articles. Parlement ordered the prosecution of financiers who had advanced money to the King by reducing the officers' salaries. On August 22nd, the Prince of Condé, who opposed government, was victorious; therefore, government had to use force. The city took arms defending Parlement. The Court had to agree with the decrees of Parlement, thus undermining the Queen's, government's and Mazarin's authority. On September 6th, Parlement was forced into recess by the Regent's decision and, one week later, the court moved to Rueil. Government proposed negotiations with Parlement, the Lieutenant General and the Princes on September 24th. It expressed the will to end all conflicts with Parlement including the Paris tariff, the King's declaration on July 31st, and other articles issued by the chamber of St. Louis. The *taille* of 1648 was reduced by a fifth. Other taxes were also decreased including farm taxes. The wages of royal officers were returned. During the next four years, no new judicial or financial offices were allowed. Trading privileges in the Kingdom were abolished. All these negotiations were drawn into a declaration by Parlement on October 20th.

Unsatisfied, government decided to retaliate by besieging Paris. In January 1649, it ordered the Court out of Paris and laid siege to Paris to reinforce its command. Parlement gathered an army to defend itself. On January 5th, 1649, the royal family and government ministers left Paris for St. Germain. Parlement took measures to protect Paris and ordered that Mazarin resign because he was considered the main source of misunderstandings.

Several regiments were prepared to fight against government under the leadership of the Princes of royal blood: the Prince of Conti, the Duke of Longueville and the Duke of Beaufort. The blockade of Paris caused skirmishes between Condé's men and royal troops. On March 1st, Parlement agreed to meet with government. Government advised it to go to St. Germain where the King would hold a *lit de justice*. Amendments to the Declaration of October 22nd would be revoked and no assembly allowed. The treaty was signed by Mazarin which upset the people. The Palace of Justice was invaded by a crowd asking for Mazarin's expulsion. The Parlement of Paris had to intervene and, in September, the Regent summoned a delegation of Parlement. They were forbidden to assemble until 1649.

The next conflict was caused by the Prince of Condé, the First Prince of the Blood⁸, who opposed the Prime Minister Mazarin's intention to marry his niece to the Duke of Mercoeur. Condé refused to give his consent because he considered the marriage a *mesalliance*. Condé also offended Mazarin by asking for a fortress in Normandy for his brother-in-law, the Duke of Longueville. He was supported by all the nobles, but he also wanted Parlement on his side. Therefore, he asked Parlement to reenact the Decree of 1617 which obliged Mazarin to leave. After Mazarin's dismissal, Condé gained control of Government which promised to reestablish the King's authority. Condé awarded the Princess of Marcillac and the Marquise of Pons a *tabouret*.⁹ The Duke of Longueville was also satisfied because he received the fortress in Normandy. These awards caused feelings of animosity against the Princes. The Nobles felt that the *tabourets* were traditionally reserved only for Duchesses. In October of 1649, they formed a league in Paris to revoke the

⁸ The immediate members of the King were known as Children of the King or Sons of France. They were distinguished from more distant relatives who were called Princes of the Blood.

⁹ The *tabouret* allowed a person to sit in the presence of the Queen.

awards. Their petition was accepted by the Queen who, in exchange, wanted the support of the nobles.

On January 18th, 1650, Condé was arrested with the Prince of Conti, his brother, and the Duke of Longueville because they were accused of supporting the rebels of Guyenne and the Count of Jarzé. Their arrest triggered the first war. Government tried to explain its action in a Council on January 19th, 1650. Parlement was also present at this Council. The King did not accuse Condé so he, along with his collaborators, were released. However, the Fronde League continued to arrest other people. It supported Châteauneuf as the *garde des sceaux* and De Maisons as Surrintendant of Finances. This *coup d'état* caused several provinces to rebel. Among the rebels were Mme de Longueville in Normandy, the Duke of La Rochefoucauld in Poitou, the Duke of Bouillon in Turenne, and the Maréchal of Turenne in Stenay. In response, the King and the Regent sent armies to these provinces and, one by one, they were defeated. On September 16th, 1650, the Regent ordered an armistice and peace negotiations began. Declarations of treason were formulated against Mme de Longueville, Bouillon, Turenne and La Rochefoucauld. Frictions in the provinces continued for a while because Government, Parlement and the Regent equally fought for supremacy.

The conflict which started in March, 1651 was caused by the alliance of the nobles with the Duke of Orleans. Their objectives were to deliver the princes from prison, ask for Mazarin's official dismissal, and propose the assembly of the Estates General. Parlement had to intervene again when the Assembly of Nobility protested against the First President of Parlement. The Duke of Orleans was ordered to take his place in the court. An act signed by the King, the Regent, and the Secretaries of State allowed the Duke of Orleans and

the Prince of Condé to assemble the nobility when the Estates were not convoked.

The Regent, weakened politically by Mazarin's departure, planned to escape Paris and take the King with her. But, they were kept as prisoners in the Palais Royal for several weeks and were not allowed to escape or contact Mazarin. The Duke of Orleans and the Frondeurs became the leaders of government. On April 3rd, 1651, the Regent started a *coup d'état* by dismissing Châteauneuf without informing the Duke of Orleans. A council that met at Luxembourg, attended by Condé and the frondeurs, dismissed Molé on April 14th, 1651. Condé's family accused the Duchess of Longueville for being the cause of the dislike between the Frondeurs and the Queen. The Frondeurs took up negotiations with Mazarin once again but, Condé remained in power until July, 1651. He obtained the government of Guyenne and demanded Provence for his brother, Conti. The Regent refused this demand. She planned to arrest Condé but Orleans opposed it, so Condé was able to escape to Saint-Maur.

A new civil war seemed inevitable. Condé appealed to Parlement saying that his escape was justified because he was going to be arrested. He also stated that he could not feel secure while Mazarin and his Council were influencing the Regent. Parlement asked the Regent to promise that she would never ask for Mazarin's return. Due to this, Condé returned to Paris.

The second war started immediately after the King's majority. The Regent wanted the support of Condé's enemies: La Vieuville, Molé and Châteauneuf. Meanwhile, Condé went to Bourbonnais where he met with the Duchess of Longueville, Conti, Nemours and La Rochefoucauld. They decided to go to war. On September 22nd, 1651, Condé was received at Bordeaux as a sovereign. He wanted the support of Tavanne's army, Bourgogne, Bourbonnais and Berry, and eventually, from England too. However, he was defeated in only

a few days. Then, a new declaration against Condé arrived in Parlement. The Duke of Orleans informed the court that Mazarin had received a passport from government to re-enter France on Nov. 23, 1651. The Prince of Condé and the Duke of Orleans signed a treaty on January 24, 1652, to maintain arms until Mazarin's departure. The Duke of Orleans asked Parlement to maintain order while government tried to separate Parlement from the Princes (1652). After open fights, Condé left. The princes had been defeated in Estampes by the royal army under Turenne's command.

The Prince of Condé gained control of Paris after several confrontations. He then established a new government. On July 4th, 1652, an assembly of the city government, the Court, Condé and the clergy was held. Condé and the Duke of Orleans thanked the city for their assistance and promised to give up their arms as soon as Mazarin would be dismissed by the King. Then, on July 26, 1652, Parlement named the Duke of Orleans Lieutenant General of the Kingdom while Condé and his armies fought to free the King from Mazarin's captivity. However, the Prince's control had weakened because many members of the Parlement, who had defended him, left Paris. Government had to accord some concessions to save the peace.

The Prince of Condé joined his army on October 13th, 1652, but immediately lost control of Paris when Louis XIV came back on October 21st. Then, the Duke of Orleans was also forced to leave the city. Parlement lost many of the initial decrees it had obtained between 1648 and 1649.

At the beginning of the Fronde, La Rochefoucauld wanted to defend the Queen Mother and the King against all those who tried to undermine royal authority. However, he opposed Mazarin's political and administrative measures together with Condé. Victor Cousin believes that La Rochefoucauld seduced Mme de Longueville because he wanted the Prince of Condé on his

side: "Il réussit à tourner contre Mazarin Mme de Longueville en lui faisant croire qu'on ne rendait pas à Condé ce qu'on lui devait."¹⁰ Mazarin became their enemy. The misunderstandings between Mazarin and Condé started in 1649 and intensified in March of 1650. At this moment Condé, and Conti, his brother, were arrested. Mme de Longueville, his sister, was obliged to escape to Holland because she had unsuccessfully tried to create an upheaval in Normandy. At that point, the Queen Mother was on Mazarin's side, and Condé and his allies, such as La Rochefoucauld and Mme de Longueville, automatically found themselves among the opposition:" [...] Mazarin qui redoutait Mme de Longueville presque à l'égal de son frère, et ne voulut pas même lui permettre pendant cinq ou six années de passer par Paris et encore moins d'y séjourner [...] "¹¹ Condé and Mme de Longueville were among those arrested along with their supporters. Later, La Rochefoucauld belonged to the Princes' coalition whose purpose was to re-empower the nobles. The Princess of Condé, the Prince of Condé, the Duke of Bourbon and La Rochefoucauld were obliged to reconcile with Mazarin and recognize the Queen's authority.¹²

After the Fronde, everyone wanted peace. Louis XIV's declaration at his majority allowed nobles who had fought during the Regency to submit to the King. All the nobles surrendered except for Condé who retired to Spain for eight years. As for Mazarin, he remained in power for the rest of his life. His plan of restoring royal power, initiated by Richelieu, was successfully realized.

Louis XIV expressed his desire for magnificence by rebuilding Versailles, the Palais Royal, the Louvre and other royal residences. Philibert de Roy was

¹⁰ Victor Cousin, *La Jeunesse de Mme de Longueville* (Paris: Didier, 1876) 40.

¹¹ Victor Cousin, *La Jeunesse de Mme de Longueville* 26.

¹² Victor Cousin describes Mme de Longueville at the end of the Fronde: "[...] prête à rentrer pour toujours sous le gouvernement de son vieux mari et à disparaître à trente-quatre ans de la scène du monde, troublée et déjà pénitente devant Dieu, mais fière et dédaigneuse à l'égard des hommes, affichant bien haut son inviolable fidélité à son frère, et ne voulant faire du côté de la cour que ce qu'exigeait M. de Longueville dans l'intérêt de leurs enfants." Victor Cousin, *La Jeunesse de Mme de Longueville* 23.

asked to extend the south-west corner of the Louvre, known as the Square-Court. Vouet and Philippe de Champagne were asked to paint Louis' victories. The King also restored churches and abbeys. St. Eustache of Paris was decorated with an imposing sculpture of Louis XIV.

When he was 22 years old, Louis XIV decided to control state affairs directly. He became the most powerful sovereign in Europe because he wanted glory more than anything else. He controlled his government and its administration in every aspect. He denied the nobles opportunities for political involvement but allowed them at the court. To ensure their loyalty, he offered them titles and economic rewards as well as cultural distractions. Colbert, his other prime minister, improved the system of taxation. This measure contributed to the development of industry, agriculture, and commerce. The centralization measures established by Richelieu were followed by Mazarin and Colbert. Thus, political and social order was attained. Feudal landowners and municipal enterprises had to recognize royal authority. Nevertheless, French people were governed better by the reinforcement of royal power. Any provincial matter was settled in Versailles. Therefore, Paris became everyone's referential point. The King's efforts to develop culture and art set the tone for the entire society. The refinement of it was made possible by civility and discipline. The French Academy, established by Richelieu, preserved the French language by issuing strict rules. The best writers and artists had to glorify the monarchy. Richelieu directly influenced them by establishing a policy that promoted good taste and moderation in all its manifestations. Colbert also directed the arts by prohibiting private and informal interference.

The main goal of every noble was to attain celebrity in the Louis XIV's court. In the provinces, the same trends and goals influenced all the domains of socio-cultural life. Provincial nobles were also interested in architecture,

painting and books. They met in salons and educated their children according to the same principles. They rebuilt chateaux, fountains, gardens and parks. They also asked artists to paint their chateaux and their portraits. Concerts and other celebrations took place in Versailles's fashion. In addition, town halls and civic buildings hosted many similar cultural activities. Courtly standards were also adopted in the provinces because nobles, such as the Prince of Condé, Mme de La Fayette, Mme de Sévigné, La Rochefoucauld and Bussy-Rabutin, resided in both Paris and the provinces and were willing to enjoy the same cultural activities. In all provinces, education included Latin, rhetoric and the arts. Wealthy people educated their children at home to ensure a better quality of learning.

The most talented artists received royal pensions and other commissions from the King, the court, the nobility and other wealthy bourgeois who encouraged the development of arts. Writers hoped to gain a good reputation for themselves. To attain it, they were willing to comply with the demands of the court and the salons and were generously rewarded. Corneille became a lawyer in Rouen, Malherbe a governor's secretary and Conrart a rent collector and a landlord.

Louis XIV disliked poets but admired playwrights and actors whom he encouraged. He gladly sponsored them and attended many of their performances. Writers continued to write for their noble and wealthy sponsors. Voiture was sponsored by Mme de Rambouillet and Gaston d'Orleans, La Bruyère by Condé, Saint-Amant by the Cardinal of Retz, and Chapelain by the Duke of Longueville. Other rich bourgeois, following the nobles' example, sponsored additional writers. Furetière's Roman bourgeois was inspired by the struggle of the bourgeois to attain a noble status.

Richelieu was so fond of theatre that he had his own company, and writers, such as Corneille, were asked to write plays for him. Corneille's characters resembled the rich people who sponsored him. His plays were well remunerated. Mairet criticized him for this, insisting that he wrote only for pecuniary rewards. However, Corneille continued to write for Richelieu's plays like La Comédie des Tuileries and La Grande Pastorale. Corneille's art brought him success because he managed to create tension in a rather common drama. However, Richelieu objected that the *Cid* did not echo his ideal of order nor did it respect classical rules such as the *bienséance* and elegant language. Some members of the French Academy also criticized him. Mlle de Scudéry wrote the Sentiment de l'Académie sur le Cid (1637) in which she criticized the lack of unity, *vraisemblance* and *bienséance*. Corneille was not given an official opportunity to express his viewpoint. In Rouen, he continued to write plays such as: Horace, Cinna, Polyeucte, La Mort de Pompée and Rodogune, between 1640-1645. In 1660, he wrote Discours and Examens expressing his views on theatre. According to him, a play should be serious, illustrious and impressive. To him, only tragic heroes and extraordinary actions are convincing. He attacked the *vraisemblance* rule stating that History itself offers incredible examples such as: Clytemnestre who kills her husband and Oreste who kills his mother. Choosing Rome as a background for his plays, he depicted the mythological atmosphere in his dramas. His heroes overcome love and passion through reason. This view was also defended by the philosopher Descartes in his Traité des Passions. He set a new perspective on ethical issues even though his ideas were not new ones, being inspired by stoic thinkers. According to Descartes, reason has to dominate the senses and not vice-versa.

After a few years, Paris became a cultural place renowned for its buildings, paintings, theatre and academies: of letters, of science, and of painting. Le Vau and Mansart, two rival architects, were asked to build and rebuild old castles giving them the splendid shape ordered by Louis XIV and Mazarin. The Hôtel de Bouillon which belonged to the Duke of Liancourt was built by Solomon de Brosse in a new style. He managed space by combining the interior with the exterior. Projected pavilions added perspective to a large garden. Mansart was another great architect whose works embellished many French sites. He worked at the Château de Berny, and in 1635, he built the imposing Hôtel de Vrillière adding a beautiful garden to it. Besides them, other skillful craftsmen and artists were also called on: Le Nain brothers, Antoine, Louis and Mathieu and François Perrier.

The *Académie de Peinture et de Sculpture* (1648) was established with twenty renowned artists in the Saint-Germain neighborhood. Le Brun, Le Nain, and François Perrier were among the twenty. They idealized the noble hero and the *honnête homme* in their art. Charles Le Brun, apprentice to François Perrier, became very skilled in painting on a grand scale. He then became *peintre du roi* and was released from the *maîtrise*. Painting was one of the arts encouraged by Louis XIV and Mazarin. Mazarin had over 500 paintings in his private collection and added galleries in his Hôtel Duret, known as the Palais Mazarin. He also had about 40,000 books in his collection. Unlike Richelieu, Mazarin also wanted to rebuild some medieval castles for him, like Vincennes. He also helped rebuild a college, later known as the Mazarin Collège.

Later, Louis XIV replaced the pastime of hunting with music. The polyphony was replaced by melodic inventions accompanying verses. Pierre Guéridon was one of the most appreciated composers during Louis XIV's reign. He developed *le style brisé* preferred in the English court. Operas such as the

Fêtes de l'Amour et de Bacchus (1672) or the *tragédie lyrique*, Cadmus and Hermione, revived pastoral scenes from previous ballets. Louis XIV loved opera and decided that Port-Royal should become its permanent home. Encouraged artists performed Alceste (1674), Thésée (1675) and Isis (1677) there. Lully and Corneille produced a new opera almost every year. Lully became a *surintendant de la musique*. His recitals were his great achievements.

In the seventeenth century, official newspapers were rare. Of the few circulating in Paris was the Gazette de France, founded by Théophraste Renaudot. It was by Richelieu who offered his direct support. The Gazette de France appeared weekly and recorded internal and external official news. In 1672, Colleret was authorized to publish a Journal des avis et des affaires de Paris but he was not successful. The Muse historique was a special publication relating court and Paris' events in verses. The Mercure galant's first issue, dated from 1672, was edited by Donneau de Visé, and later by Thomas Corneille (1682). It contained news of politics, fashion, cultural events, poems, songs and publicity. The Journal des Savants was exclusively for literary writings. Denis de Sallo, its editor, encouraged all new creations. In January, 1665, Mme de Sablé published a magazine about La Rochefoucauld's Maximes. Besides newspapers, letters were another source of information. Mme de Sévigné informed her daughter, Mme de Grignan, about the most important events of the court. Nicolas Claude Fabri of Peiresc entertained one of the widest ranges of correspondence with Pascal Gassendi, and Descartes. He exchanged letters with Malherbe, Balzac, Chapelain and Corneille.

The sophisticated salons of the seventeenth century added to the court's efforts for progress and set the tone for other French provinces. The first salon was founded by Catherine Vivonne, the Marquis of Rambouillet's wife. She

became one of the most illustrious personalities at the time because she was intelligent and well educated. She reunited French society weekly from 1617 until 1665. Her salon became one of the most educative places where aristocratic nobles met with the most talented writers and scholars. Among the regular noble guests were: Richelieu, the great Condé, the Duke of La Rochefoucauld and the Count of Guiche. Writers such as Malherbe, Conrart, Chapelain, Corneille, Voiture and Vaugelas were also welcome because of their talent and academic preoccupations. Among the women, Charlotte de Montmorency, the Princess of Condé, the Duchess of Longueville, Mme de Combalet, one of Richelieu's nieces, were equally admired there for their good taste. The Rambouillet's educative goals and refining influence had a good impact on the social life of the century. Writers, preoccupied by salons reactions to their writings, adapted to the new trends. They had to comply with the new ideal of the *honnête homme* because the salon's guests were their sponsors and readers.

Mme de Rambouillet encouraged good conversation in her salons. Her guests talked with wit and charm about the most diversified subjects, except political matters. In this salon and in the most distinguished salons, conversation had to be bright in content and beautiful in form. This soon became the ideal for all French society. Vaugelas formulated certain rules pertaining to good conversation in his book, Remarques sur la langue française. He insisted on cultivating education in all members of noble society. In the Hôtel de Rambouillet, guests also used to speak about the nature of love. This subject was inspired by Honoré d'Urfé's L'Astrée which developed the mythological love between Céladon and the shepherdess Astrée. This pastoral tranquility inspired the noble society of the seventeenth century to formulate a new courtly gallantry. Voiture was one of the brightest masters of conversation.

His Sonnet d'Uranie became one of the most popular even though it was superficial. Instead of authentic feelings, he insisted on compliments which pleased men and women equally.

Amid the classical period literary works dedicated to the King praised his glory. To please the King, La Rochefoucauld sent Monsieur latin verses written by one of his friends who intended them "pour le Louvre et à la louange du Roi." (L.126.-A Monsieur *** n. d. , p. 652). La Rochefoucauld does not know Latin, as he states in his letter, but he knows that Monsieur does and would definitely enjoy these verses because he adds: "Je prends, Monsieur, la liberté de vous les envoyer, comme à la personne du monde que je crois la plus capable d'en juger." (same L., 126). La Rochefoucauld also knows that all artistic endeavors are highly appreciated in Louis XIV's court. By sending Monsieur the latin verses, La Rochefoucauld introduces an artist, his friend, to the court. Most inspired, Pierre Mignard paints the King catching his characteristic energy as the confident chief of his army.

The great monarch insisted on retaining only one official religion because he wanted the spirit of unity to dominate everywhere.¹³ However, political reasons come first in his mind. The slogan, *Un roi, une loi, une croyance* represents his dream of power concisely formulated in three words.

Despite the rivalry created by struggles for power and the Fronde, La Rochefoucauld is proud of having been faithful to the Queen, knowing that he defended her majesty's interests: " [...] et bien que je croie encore avoir témoigné à la Reine ma fidélité et mon zèle par des preuves aussi longues ou aussi certaines qu'Elle en ait pu recevoir de qui que se soit [...] Je n'y ai pas moins hasardé ma vie que ma liberté [...]" (same L., 9). La Rochefoucauld considers this the highest obligation; it is "l'accomplissement de la chose du

¹³ L'Edit de Nantes of 1685 abolishes the religious freedom of Protestants. Catholicism becomes the official religion of France.

monde qui me touche le plus” (same L., 9). It represents a gesture of prowess which is for him an atavism from medieval times. Noble people such as him believe that respecting one’s word is of utmost importance; therefore, La Rochefoucauld never violates this principle. Otherwise, he would condemn himself: “ [...] je serais un ingrat et un lâche, si je manquais d’être, à toutes occasions et à toutes épreuves [...]” (same L., 9). A letter addressed to A ***, signed by La Rochefoucauld, Arnauld, and Viole could justify the presence of La Rochefoucauld in the Queen’s entourage. He is there at the will of her Royal Majesty, which is an act of loyalty on his part: “La Reine a trouvé bon que Mr. de La Rochefoucauld, Arnauld et Viole lui fassent compagnie.” (L. 21.- A ****, le 10 février, 1651, p. 573).¹⁴

In 1652, “Monsieur a témoigné à Monsieur le Prince de vouloir demeurer plus que jamais uni avec lui [...]” (L.41.-A Lenet, le 13 oct., 1652, p. 594), and only because the Queen requested it, La Rochefoucauld did not follow her. While in Paris, he continued to defend the Queen and the Royal family. Some of his actions were imposed on him by the Queen. He comments on one of his missions to the Marquis of Sillery: “Je pars présentement pour faire le voyage dont nous parlâmes ici dernièrement; je ne sais quel en sera le succès, mais on me presse fort de le faire, sans m’avoir mandé néanmoins aucune autre particularité que la bonne disposition du Parlement [...]” (L.20.- Au Marquis de Sillery, le 14 janvier, 1651, p. 571). This paragraph illustrates the fact that La Rochefoucauld feels compelled to obey certain dispositions even though he was not consulted about them. It is impressive that La Rochefoucauld objectively describes the events of the Fronde in his Mémoires without trying to exonerate himself. Writing them, he does not intend to influence the outcome of the events that followed the Fronde knowing that his ideas circulate from his

¹⁴ During the Fronde, La Rochefoucauld defended the Queen and the King who was a child at that time.

Mémoires to society. He only feels obliged to deny Condé's threats and Saint-Simon's accusations of lying.¹⁵ La Rochefoucauld insists that he is not the key factor in all these events nor does their outcome depend on him. The news that he gives his friend Lenet proves this fact: "Son Altesse Royale doit encore écrire demain au Roi pour le supplier de vouloir donner la paix à son royaume, protestant toujours qu'on ne demande rien que le rétablissement." (L.30.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 25 août, 1652, p. 582). All signs point to a peaceful aftermath; however, he cannot allow himself to comment on it : "Si je vous pouvais entretenir, je vous dirais bien des choses que je ne puis mander. Il y avait eu quelque apparence de sédition aujourd'hui et hier pour faire de la paix; mais cela n'a pas eu de suite [...] je ne puis écrire davantage [...]"¹⁶ (L.39.-A Lenet, le 28 sept., 1652, p. 592).

La Rochefoucauld's contemporaries had a taste for intrigues. Anyone who wants to understand his century and La Rochefoucauld's position cannot disregard this fact. However, surrounded by intrigues, he is not interested in further enhancing them:

Il n'était pas non plus un véritable homme de parti, n'ayant ni la fermeté de l'esprit ni la constance nécessaires, entrant aisément dans une affaire et en sortant de même, s'étant mêlé d'intrigues dès son enfance [...] et cherchant toujours son intérêt au milieu de tous les mouvements contraires.¹⁷

La Rochefoucauld tries to exonerate himself by writing to M. de Liancourt, his uncle: "[...] je veux aussi, en vous rendant compte de mes actions, vous faire

¹⁵ Victor Cousin admits that part of La Rochefoucauld's disavowal could have been written by someone else (his private secretary Cérizay or other unknown editors) but, he insists that the paragraphs that irritate the most were undoubtedly written by La Rochefoucauld. Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 204.

¹⁶ This last sentence also proves the fact that letters are not as *private* as they seem. He therefore cannot write freely.

¹⁷ Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 104.

voir que je n'en ai jamais fait aucune qui nous puisse empêcher de me les [les bonnes grâces] continuer [...] ” (L.3.-A M. de Liancourt, sept., 1638, p. 554). There are reasons to believe that what he writes here to his uncle, the Duke of Liancourt, is true. He knows that his uncle would give his letter of justification directly to the Cardinal who would then understand his viewpoint. La Rochefoucauld adds:

Je prétends donc ici vous faire voir le sujet que mes ennemis ont pris de me nuire, et vous supplier, si vous trouvez que je ne sois pas en effet si coupable qu'ils ont publié, d'essayer de me justifier auprès de Son Eminence, et de lui protester que je n'ai jamais eu de pensée de m'éloigner du service que je suis obligé de lui rendre [...] (same L., 3).

Here, La Rochefoucauld affirms his loyalty toward Son Eminence.¹⁸ His following letters also try to convince the Cardinal about his sincere intentions. La Rochefoucauld tries to justify himself when addressing the Cardinal: “ [...] pour ce qu'il m'engageait sa foi et son honneur qu'il n'y avait rien dedans qui fût, directement ni indirectement, contre les intérêts de Son Eminence [...] ” (same L., 3). This passionate tone compels us to believe him.¹⁹ Here, La Rochefoucauld defends his prestige and, in the most sincere tone, he also adds his feelings: “Si je suis toutefois si malheureux que cela ait déplu à Son Eminence, j'en suis au désespoir [...] ” (same L., 3) because he fears that despite his honest testimony, the Cardinal would continue to have adverse feelings toward him. He therefore insists on his honor because he knows his uncle will accord him *l'honneur* of believing him (same L., 3).

¹⁸ M. le Cardinal.

¹⁹ La Rochefoucauld writes about M. Tartereau whose task is to bring precious stones to a certain destination. La Rochefoucauld questions M. Tartereau's honesty when he writes: “Je vous avoue que, voyant qu'il me parlait ainsi, je crus être obligé de prendre sa lettre, où, après avoir lu qu'elle me priait de remettre les pierreries entre les mains de ce Tartereau, je vis aussi qu'il m'en devait donner une pour une personne qu'elle ne me nommait point.” same L., 3.

La Rochefoucauld feels that peace is menaced by these intrigues. They influence the outcome negatively as he writes : “L'on ne souffle pas le mot approchant de la paix [...]” (L.27.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 7 août, 1652, p. 577). La Rochefoucauld thinks that these intrigues cause changes in the power of the court : “Le Cardinal est plus le maître de la cour que jamais.” (same L., 27). He also believes that, despite appearances, the Cardinal does not want to leave the court: “ [...] il disputerait le reste plutôt que de quitter la partie. Il craint trop qu'il ne paraisse au Roi que son éloignement met la paix dans son royaume, et que l'on ne s'oppose à son retour.” (same L., 27).²⁰ La Rochefoucauld believes in what he writes and persists “nonobstant tout cela, à croire” (L.28.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 14 août, 1652, p. 578) on it. He continues to defend the Queen's interests with the same faithfulness. And, if modern readers want to understand La Rochefoucauld, they have to accept his point of view; if not, appearances and intrigues offer a different perspective. La Rochefoucauld's position is also approved by some of his contemporaries. When La Rochefoucauld writes to the Princess of Condé: “[...] j'ai reçu avec le respect que je dois les marques de confiance qu'elle a la bonté de me donner.” (L.18.-A la Princesse de Condé, de la Terne, le 20 décembre, 1650, P. 570), he feels that she is a friendly ally during the Fronde. Because of this fact, he asks for her moral support, continuing in a confident tone: “[...] j'ai toute la joie imaginable de ce qu'on a très grand sujet d'espérer que la conduite de Votre Altesse contribuera beaucoup à la liberté de Monseigneur le Prince.” (same L., 18). Although he finds himself in a difficult situation, being isolated by adverse circumstances, the proof of friendship from the Count of Chavigny becomes valuable to La Rochefoucauld. The Duke of La Rochefoucauld is grateful to him for giving him

²⁰ The details furnished by one of the implicated parties are of great value for historians. They can understand the situation better through the details contained in La Rochefoucauld's letter(s) and through the answers of his interlocutors. These letters become valuable documents even though they are subjective.

credit: “ [...] en quelque état que je puisse être, elles [les preuves le l’amitié] me seront toujours le plus véritable sujet de consolation [...] ” (L.13.-Au Comte de Chavigny, de Verteuil, le 15 févr., 1650, p. 566). After the events of the Fronde, friendship becomes more meaningful to him. Despite the prohibition against writing letters, he sends a letter to Lenet informing him : “Je voudrais bien avoir l’honneur de vous voir; mais, comme ce n’est que pour le plaisir de vous entretenir, et qu’il n’y a rien de pressé, il faut se mortifier là-dessus.” (L.19.-A Lenet, le 27 déc., 1650, p. 571).

If details concerning a certain situation are not as he had anticipated, La Rochefoucauld insists that:

Je suis au désespoir, Monseigneur, qu’une chose aussi peu considérable que celle qui est arrivée nous ait pu faire douter de la fidélité d’une province qui certainement est aussi soumise qu’aucune autre du Royaume, et dont je puis répondre à Votre Eminence que la noblesse n’a eu aucune part à ce qui s’y est passé [...] (same L., 8).

He writes this letter about fidelity to regain trust and promise that things will follow the expected order: “ [...] l’accompagnant des assurances que je puis donner à Votre Eminence de l’entière obeissance où j’ai trouvé la province de Poitou.” (same L., 8). His noble word is the best guarantee.

Wearied by the intrigues, La Rochefoucauld writes to the Count of Marchin to formulate his “quasi envie de les [mes gardes] prier, une fois pour toutes, de se mettre l’esprit en repos sur mon sujet et de les assurer que quand je ne ferais pas mon devoir par principe d’honneur, je le ferai toujours assurément pour ne leur donner pas le plaisir de m’y voir manquer.” (L.45.-Au Comte de Marchin, 1652, p. 598). This letter also illustrates La Rochefoucauld’s efforts to rehabilitate his position. He is sincerely convinced that he acted the

way he did only to defend others' honor and prestige, always with the best intentions in mind. In 1653, the Duke of La Rochefoucauld writes to the Count of Guitaut : “Je vous parle comme à mon ami, et vous dis sincèrement que je ne mêle à cela nul chagrin ni nulles plaintes.” (L.51.-Au Comte de Guitaut, de Damvilliers, le 2 mai, 1653, p. 602). The dignity of his tone expresses his conviction that he participated in all the events out of loyalty: “Je crois avoir fait exactement ce que j'ai dû dans tout le cours de cette affaire, et, quoi qu'il m'en coûte, je ne m'en repentirai jamais, puisque mon procédé a fait connaître à Monsieur le Prince les sentiments que j'ai toujours eus pour sa personne et pour ses intérêts.” (same L., 51).

All the intrigues weaved around him induce a certain irony in him which can be seen in the letter he writes to Lenet : “Demain nous protesterons de ne plus rien faire contre le service du Roi. Je vous avoue que je me trouve bien embarrassé, car je vous assure que je ne saurai plus que faire quand je ne ferai plus de mal.” (L.43.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 23 oct., 1652, p. 596). If his interlocutor were not a friend understanding exactly what he alludes to, then one could be tempted to think that he indeed had a taste for intrigue. He sincerely reminds his friend about his best intentions toward the King; however, his enemies would be more satisfied to read his last sentence *ad litteram*.

Despite the intrigues, there are places where La Rochefoucauld's prestige remains intact. He feels proud about this because he writes : “Je vous engage mon honneur que Monseigneur le Prince n'a pas eu la pensée de se plaindre de M. de La Rochefoucauld en aucune façon [...] ” (L.40.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 13 octobre, 1652, p. 593). When his name does not appear anywhere, La Rochefoucauld blames intrigues and not himself. Following the Prince's example, Lenet praises him: “Monsieur le Prince dit cent choses très obligeantes [...] louant le procédé de M. de La Rochefoucauld [...] ” (same L.,

40). It is easy to imagine La Rochefoucauld's satisfaction upon hearing this good news. He feels proud to see his prestige re-instated during his lifetime by the Prince himself. However, due to the same intrigues, Lenet advises his friend to keep silent about it during the winter of 1652 : "en cas que la cour vous veuille bailler un passeport pour passer l'hiver chez vous comme un malade, promettant de ne rien entreprendre ce temps-là [...]" (same L., 40).

From all his letters, it clearly stems that La Rochefoucauld's activities aimed at *le bien de l'Etat et la conservation de l'autorité royale* (L.32.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 28 août, 1652, p. 584) and, whenever he indirectly cited Son Altesse Royale, it was to better express his total adherence to these noble principles. Paradoxically, he views himself as a participant to the Fronde but he denies being a *Frondeur*. He believes himself to be in a delicate situation because he writes : "L'état où je suis est assez embarrassant : je cours fortune d'être mis à la Bastille [...] Avec tout cela, je fais mon devoir jusqu'au bout [...]" (L.46.-A Lenet, de Baigneux, le 11 novembre, 1652, p. 598-99). He understands it is his duty to be on the Queen's side and to defend the interest of the state. He is amazed that some people could misinterpret his actions : "qu'on prend tant de peine à dire des choses fausses de moi, je pourrais bien en dire ici de véritables [...]" (same L., 46). Despite their wrong interpretations, he knows that his intentions are the most sincere and he hopes that perhaps one day, he could be understood: "[...] je voudrais bien que tout ceci fût fini, et qu'on ne se persuadât pas si aisément que le salut de l'Etat dépend que je sois brouillé avec Monsieur le Prince [...]" (same L., 46). Readers should look beyond this adverse situation and retain his thoughts and best intentions as La Rochefoucauld urged in his time: "[...] exhortez seulement le monde à attendre les événements avec plus de patience, s'il se peut." (same L., 46).

A few years later, alluding to old rancors, he appeals to religious miracles: "Je connais des gens qui ne m'en ont pas tant pardonné, mais Dieu leur pardonne." (L.105.-A la Marquise de Sablé, le 26 oct., 1667, p. 639). His good judgment gives him reasons to believe that intrigues are only a temporary hobby like any other game practiced in society.

La Rochefoucauld feels deeply gratified when he is allowed to have a *tabouret* next to his Eminence because this is one of the greatest signs of honor in his time. Whenever his royal majesty allows a person into his intimate entourage, it means this honor is deserved and that his/her merits are probably recognized. La Rochefoucauld feels satisfied by this because he writes to the Cardinal Mazarin reminding him about his inherited rights and about his faithfulness to the Queen. (L.9.-Au Cardinal Mazarin, de Verteuil, le 2 oct., 1648, p. 563). La Rochefoucauld participates loyally in all the events of the court. In 1666, he writes Lenet: "J'ai appris les nouvelles d'Angleterre, et j'admire la bonne fortune du Roi [...]" (L.101.-A Lenet, le 4 octobre, 1666, p. 636). His letter testifies about his good feelings and constant enthusiasm toward the King. It is a solid proof because he writes it in a private letter addressed to his friend Lenet where he could have stated any other remarks he had in mind.

When La Rochefoucauld returned to the court, he showed his sincere gratitude to the King who pardoned him for having participated in the Fronde. He also regained his previous privileges alongside other marks of *bonté*.

King Louis XIV pardoned La Rochefoucauld for many reasons. The King wanted to rule justly and refrain from oppression. He pardoned not only La Rochefoucauld but also all the other nobles who had participated in the Fronde. Louis XIV's conception of ruling over his subjects originated from the idea that he had inherited France like any other French gentleman would have inherited an estate. Therefore, he decided to oversee it in the same manner. As King, he

was determined to get to the root of matters by personal examination and make his own decisions without management. In the beginning, he tried to continue Louis XIII and Richelieu's policy of centralizing power by depriving the nobles of all shares in government. He resented the idea of a graduated hierarchy and did everything, if not to abolish, at least to diminish it. Louis XIV preferred to ignore this hierarchy. His policy was to turn the seigneur into a courtier and make an anachronism out of him in the countryside. The King wanted to deprive him of all his power yet, allowed him to retain his privileges and other emoluments. However, the retention of the nobles as a privileged class became a necessity because the King's revenues were insufficient. The King could not rule without their economic contribution so he felt compelled to give them their rights back. According to the Versailles hierarchy, the highest in rank was the King immediately followed by Le Dauphin known as Monsieur, the children of France, the grandchildren of France (the King's first cousin and the Duchess of Montpensier known as Mademoiselle), Monsieur's children, the Bourbons as collateral branches (the Prince of Condé, the Duke de Bourbon his son, and the King's legitimate children), a Cardinal ranked as a Prince of the Blood, and Princes of the Blood. The next in rank were the dukes, their wives, counts, marquises, and barons. This hierarchy shows that the Duke of La Rochefoucauld also belonged to this noble hierarchy of France. King Louis XIV pardoned La Rochefoucauld because he recognized that he deserved the dignity of Versailles shared by all the old legal families. When Colbert allows La Rochefoucauld to enjoy all the benefits of his high position, because he is asked to do so by the King himself, La Rochefoucauld feels that words cannot entirely describe his satisfaction. Therefore, he generously promises : "Je suis bien honteux, Monsieur, de ne pouvoir vous témoigner ma reconnaissance que par un compliment inutile; j'essayerai, avec tout le soin possible, de vous en

donner d'autres preuves [...] " (same L., 70). This polite formula allows him to express his sincere feelings better than anyone else would. Confidently, he foresees a future where he will be more able to prove his friendship and loyalty.

The court's glamour dazzles everyone including La Rochefoucauld who is amazed by its splendor because he writes to Mme de Sablé : "On ne parle que de la magnificence des habits de notre cour [...]" (L.58.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d. , p. 606). However, his subtle irony aims at certain individuals, *bourgeois*, who are only there by chance after becoming rich and being able to buy their noble titles: " [...] il me semble que c'est mauvais signe pour ceux qui les portent et qu'ils devraient souhaiter qu'on parlât d'eux aussi." (same L., 58). He adds no other comments knowing that his friend, Mme de Sablé, will be able to grasp the meaning of his allusions which are articulated with an ostensible malice.

The court offers models of behavior. La Rochefoucauld feels that the court is the source for the best examples because : "la conduite de la cour est si bonne." (L.34.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 4 sept., 1652, p. 587). Here, La Rochefoucauld satisfactorily describes a peaceful period in French history.²¹ La Rochefoucauld does not look for any advantages. He does however search for friendship: " [...] qu'en quelque état que je puisse être, elles me seront toujours le plus véritable sujet de consolation [...]" (L.13.-Au Comte de Chavigny, de Verteuil, le 15 février, 1650, p. 566).

La Rochefoucauld connects the two notions of honor and friendship so tightly that for him, they become almost synonymous. He could not conceive of one without the other. Because of this perception, he writes to the Count of Chavigny: " [...] qu'ayant toujours considéré l'honneur de votre amitié comme le plus grand avantage que je pouvais désirer, je serai toujours infiniment

²¹ The peaceful period he refers to is caused by the Prince signing a treaty with the Duke of Lorraine. Historians could use this letter as a first source to describe the period in question.

sensible aux preuves qu'il vous plaira de m'en donner [...] ” (L.14.-Au Comte de Chavigny, le 5 mars, 1650, p. 567). His sincere tone shows that he does not write this only out of politeness.

According to the strict etiquette of the time, one must address oneself in an elegant manner. When La Rochefoucauld wants to reproach Mme de Sablé for having forgotten him, he has to use his most affable tone and be as polite as possible. He therefore has to write : “Je sais qu'on dîne chez vous sans moi, et que vous faites voir des sentences que je n'ai pas faites [...] tout cela est assez désobligeant pour vous demander permission de vous en aller faire mes plaintes demain.” (L.78.-A la Marquise de Sablé, ce lundi soir ..., p. 620). He must restrain his discontent. His will is to maintain good relationships despite anything. He therefore declares to Mme de Sablé: “ [...] je suis fort disposé à oublier le passé, pour peu que vous vouliez le réparer.” (same L., 78).

La Rochefoucauld knows the real role of polite formulas. The way he uses them reflects his feelings towards his interlocutors. In a letter to the Count of Guitaut, he is angry because he starts the letter with a strong reproach : “Il faut être bien effronté pour oser me demander d'écrire, après tout ce que vous avez fait pendant que j'ai été à Poitou [...] ” (L.90.- Au Comte de Guitaut, de Paris, le 22 septembre, 1664, p. 626-27). Because of his anger, La Rochefoucauld addresses him coldly and, perhaps only because this is imposed by life in high society : “Adieu : je suis plus à vous que personne du monde” (same L., 90). After the reproach stated in the beginning of the letter, the meaning of his polite formula becomes deviated. Perhaps, common interests remain the only tie between them.

In La Rochefoucauld's time, conversations were a source of entertainment. However, etiquette dictated certain rules that had to be followed if one wanted to remain highly placed in society. La Rochefoucauld views

conversing with others as a social obligation: “ [...]j’ai tant de gens à entretenir ce soir, que je ne vous dirai pas davantage.” (L.100.-Au Comte de Guitaut, de la Tierce, le 24 sept., p. 636). But, sometimes it seems that conversations become burdensome. Despite the fact that he complains about them, he likes to meet his contemporaries and hold conversations with them. In a letter to the Marquise de Sablé, he complains about not having the opportunity of meeting her. Her letters give him the chance to stay in touch with her: “[...] quelque agréables qu’elles puissent être d’elles-mêmes, elles me le sont encore davantage par le plaisir que j’ai de vous en entretenir.” (L.84.-A la Marquise de Sablé, un mercredi soir, n. d., p. 624).

III. THE LUCIDY OF LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

La Rochefoucauld's Machiavellian lectures which transpire in some of his maxims and his sad experiences related to the Fronde add to his natural melancholy.¹ La Rochefoucauld himself recognizes this trait of his personality: "Premièrement, pour parler de mon humeur, je suis mélancolique, et je le suis à un point que depuis trois ou quatre ans, à peine m'a-t-on vu rire trois ou quatre fois."² However, reading his correspondence, one realizes that his tone is usually not pessimistic. His pessimism is superficial when he writes: "Il faudrait en conclure que sous le pessimisme de La Rochefoucauld se cache un optimisme foncier, car il y a chez lui un parti pris invincible de tirer le bien du mal, la vertu du vice et la consolation de l'illusoire espérance."³ Others believe that La Rochefoucauld's pessimism is due to a contemporary trend: "Si La Rochefoucauld tend à se singulariser affichant un sentiment comme celui de la mélancolie, il le fait tout comme d'autres personnages de la galerie, la mélancolie étant à l'époque l'apanage des natures nobles."⁴ His profound analysis of himself reveals his lucidity: "Je me suis assez étudié pour me bien connaître et je ne manque ni d'assurance pour dire librement ce que je puis avoir de bonnes qualités, ni de sincérité pour avouer franchement ce que j'ai de défauts."⁵ La Rochefoucauld openly recognizes that he has both qualities and weaknesses. Knowing his weaknesses, he thinks he can control his passion in

¹ His 43 maxims on passion and over 30 on love deny the pessimism expressed in his maxims about *amour-propre*.. Life and death from La Rochefoucauld's perspective are inseparable from love. He feels it even though he deals with some difficulties when he tries to define it: "Il est difficile de définir l'amou: ce qu'on en peut dire est que dans l'âme, c'est une passion de régner; dans les esprits, c'est une sympathie; et dans le corps, ce n'est qu'une envie cachée et délicate de posséder ce que l'on aime après beaucoup de mystères." (M.68). La Rochefoucauld combines epicureanism with modern libertinist ideas and with other modern aspirations in this original manner.

² La Rochefoucauld, "Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même", Oeuvres Complètes 4.

³ Louis Hippeau, Essais sur la morale de La Rochefoucauld (Paris : Nizet, 1967) 95.

⁴ Corado Rosso 70.

⁵ Corado Rosso 3.

his writing and his social relationships with his contemporaries. La Rochefoucauld knows that human nature is dominated by passion: "Il y a dans le coeur humain une génération perpétuelle de passions, en sorte que la ruine de l'une est presque toujours l'établissement d'une autre." (M.10). He wants his contemporaries⁶ to be aware of the harmful effects of passion: "Les passions ont une injustice et un propre intérêt qui fait qu'il est dangereux de les suivre, et qu'on s'en doit défier, lors même qu'elles paraissent les plus raisonnables." (M.9). As a connoisseur of the human soul, La Rochefoucauld analyzes passion and notices that it has a direct effect on our equilibrium; to be aware of its influence becomes an important issue: "La santé de l'âme n'est pas plus assurée que celle du corps; et quoique l'on paraisse éloigné des passions, on n'est pas moins en danger de s'y laisser emporter que de tomber malade quand on se porte bien." (M.188).

His correspondence, a spontaneous type of writing, offers good examples of his innermost motivations and of his beliefs and feelings. They appear indirectly beside his thoughts which are directly transmitted. Reading his correspondence, one also realizes the uniqueness of his thinking. For instance, he dominates his feelings with reason, thereby dominating himself.

He tries to persuade himself that he owes the Duke of Enghien a feeling of gratitude and, at the same time, he wants to persuade his interlocutor that he truly has this feeling.⁷ Some of his contemporaries would interpret this self-control as indifference. However, knowing that he is able to control his feelings helps us understand his Maximes better. For instance, he writes: "Nous avons plus de force que de volonté, et c'est souvent pour nous excuser à nous-mêmes que nous nous imaginons que les choses sont impossibles." (M.30). La

⁶ His subtle observations refer not only to his contemporaries, but also to any other readers of his Maxims.

⁷ See L.6., p. 559.

Rochefoucauld alludes to the fact that one's strength is not at fault when something seems impossible, it is his/her own will. If one knew how to control his/her will-power, then many things would become possible. Some critics think that it is convenient for him to be a moralist and offer recipes of life to other people. But, his correspondence shows he is able to control himself with the same morality he applies to others.

La Rochefoucauld is constantly in search of truth.⁸ To find it, he analyzes all aspects of a situation. When he promises: "Je vous supplie très humblement de croire que je vous avertirai de tout ce qui viendra à ma connaissance [...]" (L.10.-Au Comte de Brienne, de Verteuil, le 29 oct., 1648, p. 564), the tone of his promise invites us to believe he is sincere. It is also implied that he will analyze even the smallest details until he discovers the essence of a situation which he calls the *truth*.⁹ In a letter to Lenet, he declares he is ready to sacrifice polite formulas for the sake of the *truth*, which in this case is a more detailed account: "Je vous écris sans cérémonie pour vous obliger de faire de même [...] afin de savoir particulièrement le succès de votre voyage." (L.16.-A Lenet, le 16 nov., 1650, p. 568). Here, La Rochefoucauld gives up the elaborated and ceremonious greetings used in his epoch for an open communication. His reason tells him that polite formulas express only a formal beauty. He phrases them elegantly; however, for clarity of content, he is ready to renounce these ornate words in some of his letters. When he writes to his friend Lenet, for instance, he is impatient to find out the outcome of an event. He then realizes that directly relating the facts would be preferable. In this case, etiquette would

⁸ Philip Lewis believes that La Rochefoucauld envisages truth through a philosophical perspective: "[...] reading the maxims involves a kind of confrontation between the absolute and the relative in which each threatens the other, in which each version of the truth appears in its problematical aspect." Philip Lewis, 21.

⁹ However, he does not always do so: "Lui-même qui est-il? Nous l'avons vu tracer son portrait. Il est bien certain que, si épris fut-il de vérité, il n'a montré et dit de lui que ce qu'il acceptait qu'on en sût." Edith Mora 50.

be an obstacle. Therefore, he decides to do away with it, avoiding any ambiguity: “ [...] je vous conjure de me vouloir apprendre ce que vous saurez de toutes les choses [...]” (same L., 16).

La Rochefoucauld also uses his reasoning powers whenever he gives advice to all those who ask him for it. Thus, Mme d’Aiguillon declares herself ready to follow his counsel in a certain situation. His lucid advice is displayed when he believes that she should act with more tact in a moment when peace and friendship count; he sincerely offers his advice to her “de se radoucir pour Madame de Richelieu” and he also adds: “Je suis assuré qu’elle est disposée à relâcher ses intérêts tout autant qu’on le peut désirer pour la paix et l’amitié de Mme d’Aiguillon.” (L.20.-Au Marquis de Sillery, le 14 janv., 1651, p. 571).

La Rochefoucauld weighs all aspects of a situation with lucidity first, and only later does he envision a good outcome to the situations. He also realizes that his advice is not a law and knows that one is not obliged to follow it. Mme d’Aiguillon is free to adopt or reject this pacific solution; she is free to do what she wants, and he adds: “Je vous mande tout ceci avec la hâte d’un homme qui est fort pressé; vous en userez comme il vous plaira, et me ferez l’honneur de croire que personne n’est plus entièrement à vous que moi.” (same L., 20).

La Rochefoucauld knows that writing has influence over others and therefore, he takes responsibility for it. In consequence, he writes to his friend Mme de Sablé about Mlle de Liancourt: “ [...] on pourrait lui écrire des choses qui fortifieraient les sentiments contraires à ceux que je lui souhaite.” (L.56.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n.d., p. 605). La Rochefoucauld realizes that words have power. Because of this, he carefully chooses his words to not cause contrary results. It is a matter of integrity on his part which contradicts some resentful affirmations made by his enemies. For instance, the Cardinal of Retz paints a

somber portrait of La Rochefoucauld.¹⁰ La Rochefoucauld's own judgment gives him enough reasons to be confident in himself. He is aware of his own value when he remarks: "J'ai tous les sujets imaginables d'être content de la manière qu'on vit avec moi, et il ne s'y peut rien ajouter." (L.22.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 20 avril, 1652, p. 573). It is important to note that he writes this in a moment where things do not plead in his favor.¹¹ Painting himself, he remarks: "J'ai de l'esprit et je ne fais point de difficulté de le dire."¹² He cherishes this idea because he repeats it: "J'ai donc de l'esprit [...]"¹³.

In his portrait, La Rochefoucauld also notices the good opinion he has about himself: "Pour moi, je suis content qu'on ne me croie ni plus beau que je me fais, ni de meilleure humeur que je me dépeins, ni plus spirituel et plus raisonnable que je dirai que je le suis."¹⁴ In fact, La Rochefoucauld, who knows human nature well after having analyzed it deeply in all its aspects, should know himself rather well. Edith Mora thinks that La Rochefoucauld is so preoccupied by his portrait that he extends this pursuit to his maxims: "Les contemporains de La Rochefoucauld pensaient qu'il avait fait dans ses Maximes, son portrait; il s'en défendait, navré, assurant que bien au contraire, c'était justement celui de tous ces gens-là."¹⁵ Some of his contemporaries such as the Cardinal of Retz disagree, reproaching La Rochefoucauld for not knowing himself. This appears indirectly when he writes: "[...] il eût beaucoup mieux fait de se connaître."¹⁶ However, like other contemporaries who criticize

¹⁰ Le Cardinal de Retz, "Portrait du Duc de La Rochefoucauld", Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964).

¹¹ During the Fronde when the other half of nobility considers him an enemy.

¹² La Rochefoucauld, "Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même", Oeuvres Complètes 4.

¹³ La Rochefoucauld, "Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même", Oeuvres Complètes 4.

¹⁴ La Rochefoucauld, "Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même", Oeuvres Complètes 4.

¹⁵ Edith Mora 38.

¹⁶ Le Cardinal de Retz 7.

La Rochefoucauld, the Cardinal de Retz feels compelled to remark the fundamental quality of La Rochefoucauld : “il a un bon fond de raison.”¹⁷

La Rochefoucauld’s inclination toward philosophical meditation offers him a deeper understanding in any situation. Whenever he contemplates an event from a philosophical viewpoint, he benefits from a greater perspective. In 1652, he writes: “Cela me donne quelque espérance de la paix, car vous savez que les choses de ce monde ne demeurent pas longtemps en même état.” (L.24.-A Lenet, le 2 juin, 1652, p. 574). This philosophical reflection about the future helps him in finding the patience to let time act in his favor. In fact, the immediate future has proven his reflection accurate. He once again gained his place among the favorites of the court. The idea which he had caught a glimpse of in his philosophical meditation was at the same time his best moral support while in exile.

La Rochefoucauld’s letters are sprinkled with reasonings, reflections, and maxims concerning all kinds of subjects. He notices this when he writes to Lenet: “Je m’aperçois que ma lettre est plus pleine de raisonnements que de nouvelles “ (L.30.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 25 août, 1652, p. 582). Some of La Rochefoucauld’s maxims are embellished by other collaborators of his. In one of his letters, he writes to Mlle de Scudéry: “ [...] vous avez tellement embelli quelqu ’unes de mes dernières maximes qu’elles vous appartiennent bien plus qu’à moi. Je souhaiterais passionnément que vous voulussiez bien faire la même grâce aux autres.” (L.132.- A Mademoiselle de Scudéry, le 3 décembre, ?, p. 655).

La Rochefoucauld’s thinking is strongly influenced by ancient philosophers. The Stoic pantheism, having its central theme in morality, praises human beings who obey their reason. Stoics see this as the sovereign quality.

¹⁷ Le Cardinal de Retz 7.

Guided by their reason, Stoics hold on to their courage firmly despite any external circumstances such as fortune, fame, or pain. When he insists on the power of reason, La Rochefoucauld is directly influenced by this Stoic philosophy in his maxim:

L'intrépidité est une force extraordinaire de l'âme, qui l'élève au-dessus des troubles, des désordres et des émotions que la vue des grands périls pourrait exciter en elle, et c'est par cette force que les héros se maintiennent en un état paisible, et conservent l'usage libre de leur raison dans les accidents les plus surprenants et les plus terribles. (M.217).

Odette de Mourgues believes that La Rochefoucauld finds an honorable place in society due to the influence of stoical thinking on his behavior:

If La Rochefoucauld in a way belongs to a moral elite, it is because of this kind of intellectual stoicism, somewhat similar to Montaigne's final position, which is implied by his acceptance of the humiliating reality to be found in the make-up of any man, and first and foremost in himself.¹⁸

La Rochefoucauld's philosophical meditations offer lessons of a more general character that can be applied to other situations too. He is a thinker who chooses maxims to express wise thoughts better. And, in so doing, there is no doubt that he obeys his own nature. His natural talent for meditation seems to be in complete agreement with his reasoning. This thought is concisely reflected in one of his maxims: "Celui-là n'est pas raisonnable à qui le hasard fait trouver la raison, mais celui qui la connaît, qui la discerne et qui la goûte." (M.105). Thinking about one of the Prince's actions,¹⁹ La Rochefoucauld directs

¹⁸ Odette de Mourgues, Two French Moralists : La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978) 66.

¹⁹ La Rochefoucauld thinks that the Prince should direct his army to another point instead of keeping it near the doors of Paris. L.33.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 4 septembre, 1652, p. 585.

his own thoughts much further to peace. One could use his concluding thought as an independent maxim by detaching it from its immediate context and reading only: “qui veut absolument la paix [...] ne se soucie pas de qui la reçoive.” (L.33.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 4 sept., 1652, p. 585). A few days later, La Rochefoucauld formulates the same thought in a reflection: “Tout le monde veut la paix et pourvu qu’on l’ait, on ne se soucie pas lequel des deux partis ait l’avantage.” (L.35.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 8 sept., 1652, p. 588). When he writes this letter, he has a feeling that everyone is *tired of war and disorders*.²⁰ He himself is ready to apply the teaching of this pacific lesson which he has meditated on for a long time. With diplomacy, he also realizes that he needs a change of tone: “Si son dessein change devant ce soir, je corrigerai mon plaidoyer.” (same L., 35). In a previous letter (L.33) he added an Epicurean reflection to it: “[...] tous les moments sont précieux et importants.” (same L., 33). The optimism expressed here also contradicts all the generalizations about La Rochefoucauld’s pessimistic inclinations and gives us another reason for looking at some of his maxims and reflections from another angle.

All things have a superficial appearance, but beyond it lies a deeper meaning. However, even these appearances are important for a meditating person such as La Rochefoucauld. They help him come to conclusions with which he feels confident. He is aware of his good judgment when he writes: “Le duc de Lorraine est venu aujourd’hui ici pour y coucher, et Son Altesse Royale va demain à l’armée. Vous voyez bien par tout cela qu’il n’y a pas grande apparence de bataille.” (L.36.-A Lenet, le 11 sept., 1652, p. 589). The appearance of the small details he refers to helps him understand a more important situation and anticipate its outcome. He thinks that lucidity is the utmost quality to have in a human being: “ [...] il juge comme la plus haute des

²⁰ He alludes to the Fronde but also to other frictions between provinces and with outside enemies.

qualités humaines: la lucidité; par elle en effet, le héros atteint à la maîtrise de soi qui fait de lui un véritable sage [...] ”.²¹

Some of La Rochefoucauld's maxims have an extremely elegant form: “The Maximes (1665), his principal literary achievement [...] are a collection of 500 highly polished reflections on human behaviour, expressed in the most universal terms [...] ”²² Some of his maxims are perfect and, undoubtedly their merit is mainly attributed to him. His correspondence proves the fact that he has perfected them in different ways: by meditating on his own for the majority of them, and, by asking advice from those who also write other literary creations. La Rochefoucauld does not try to hide this fact which clearly results from his correspondence. To enlighten his own thoughts about certain maxims, he writes to M. Esprit frankly: “Je vous confesse à ma honte que je n’entends pas ce que veut dire: *La vérité est le fondement et la raison de la beauté* “ (L.61.-A M. Esprit, de Verteuil, le 24 oct., 1660, p. 608-609). Knowing that M. Esprit might be in a delicate situation,²³ La Rochefoucauld anticipates a certain delay to his request and promises to have the patience to wait until his friend is in better circumstances: “Vous me ferez un extrême plaisir de me l’expliquer, quand vos rentes vous le permettront [...] ” (same L., 61). Due to his friend’s problems, La Rochefoucauld feels obliged to recognize that “la philosophie ne fait des merveilles que contre les maux passés ou contre ceux qui ne sont pas prêts d’arriver, mais qu’elle n’a pas grande vertu contre les maux présents.” (same L., 61). He knows that due to the situation, his friend would not have the right disposition for reading his reflections; therefore, he writes: “La honte me

²¹ Edith Mora 43.

²² W.D. Howarth, “Classicism: the Creative Years 1660-1680” in France. A Companion to French Studies Ed. D.G. Charlton (London: Methuen & Co LTD, 1972) 308.

²³ La Rochefoucauld notices: “quelque mérite qu’aient les sentences, je crois qu’elles perdent bien de leur lustre dans un retranchement de l’Hôtel de Ville.” L.61.-A M. Esprit, de Verteuil, le 24 octobre, 1660. p. 608-609.

prend de vous envoyer des ouvrages.”²⁴ (L.62.-A la Marquise de Sablé, de Verteuil, le 5 décembre, p. 609). La Rochefoucauld has much appreciation for his friend, M. Esprit, because he praises him in a letter to Mme de Sablé. He writes to her about the same maxim while also complimenting M. Esprit’s art of writing: “Je trouve la sentence de M. Esprit la plus belle du monde.” (L.62.-A la marquise de Sablé, de Verteuil, le 5 décembre, p. 609).

La Rochefoucauld’s thinking insists on one’s personal value, including his own. He always asks himself what the meaning of his existence is. He also wonders if his friends have the same impression he would like to have about himself. There are times when he is quite sensitive to how others feel about him. When he reproaches M. de Pomponne that his appreciation is geared more to Turenne than to him, he bitterly writes: “Je voudrais bien pouvoir mieux faire et vous êtes cause que je ressens plus que je n’ai jamais fait le déplaisir d’être inutile en ce pays - ci; mais vous savez que c’est un défaut dont on ne se corrige pas quand on veut.” (L.65.- A Arnauld de Pomponne, de Paris, le 24 mars, p. 611). His irony directed to one of the two is obvious in this last sentence. He replaces the personal pronoun with the indefinite pronoun *on* in order to exclude himself for the sake of politeness.

At the end of his liaison with Mme de Longueville, La Rochefoucauld wonders if she still has feelings for him²⁵ because this question directly appears in a letter to Mme de Sablé, a mutual friend: “quels sont ses véritables sentiments pour moi.” (L.66.-A la Marquise de Sablé, de la Terne, le 21 juin, 1662, p. 612). And, knowing that Mme de Sablé has the same comprehension about human nature that he does and that she understands him, he adds : “Je

²⁴ It is true that here he is also talking about his style too. Therefore, one could not say exactly which of the two aspects is more important to him when he writes this. See comments on p. 609.

²⁵ Indignantly, Mme de Sévigné exclaims: “Etre dans les mains de tout le monde, être le livre de divertissement de toutes les provinces, se rencontrer dans toutes les bibliothèques, et recevoir cette douleur, par qui!” because she understands the sorrow in Mme de Longueville’s heart. Mme de Sévigné, Correspondance vol. I (Paris : Monmerqué) 130.

veux dire si elle a cessé de me haïr par dévotion,²⁶ ou par lassitude, ou pour avoir connu que je n'ai pas eu tout le tort qu'elle avait cru [...] ” (same L., 66). Perhaps, he also feels the need to exonerate himself when writing to Mme de Sablé about Mme de Longueville :

On m'en a dit des choses si différentes sur les sentiments qu'elle a pour moi [...] à vous parler franchement, je ne puis comprendre qu'une personne qui donne tous les jours des marques d'une piété si extraordinaire ait mieux aimé prendre le parti de se plaindre de moi avec aigreur et de m'accuser d'avoir fait un ouvrage qu'elle connaît bien que je n'ai pas fait [...] (same L., 66).

Without trying to totally exonerate himself in Mme de Sablé's eyes, La Rochefoucauld wants her to know that a part of blame should also be attributed to Mme de Longueville.²⁷ He writes this especially because he knows that letters circulate in his epoch. Anyone who wants to read them can do so freely without feeling guilty for having read a private letter. Knowing this, La Rochefoucauld wants to make it clear that he recognizes his share of the blame but, he feels that Mme de Longueville should also assume hers.²⁸ Friends of Mme de Longueville such as Mme de Sablé know that she has taken on her share of the blame by retiring to Port-Royal. Victor Cousin illustrates this fact by writing:

De toutes parts il n'était question que de cette illustre pénitence. Mme de Sablé, qui connaissait si bien le coeur de son ancienne amie, ce coeur qui avait été la source de ses fautes, ce besoin de plaire et d'être aimée, cette passion de paraître et de briller,

²⁶ He is referring to the fact that she retired to the convent Port Royal.

²⁷ See page 147.

²⁸ It is easy to understand why this story adds to the rancor some of his enemies felt against him, especially since this love affair concerns the Cardinal of Retz. One could easily imagine the negative influence that the Cardinal exerted on those who knew La Rochefoucauld.

comprit plus que personne tout ce qu'il y avait de douloureux et de magnanime dans un pareil sacrifice.²⁹

La Rochefoucauld believes that knowing himself is the first step toward knowing others which is rare. He is thus surprised to find it in a young lady like Mlle d'Aumale, the daughter of the Chambellan du Grand - Condé.³⁰ He writes her, showing his appreciation: "Il paraît bien que vous connaissez vos forces; vous m'écrivez hardiment comme si vous aviez songé à moi depuis que je suis parti." (L.96.-A Mlle d'Aumale, le 7 oct., p. 633). He praises her for her audacity; however, he does not excuse her for taking too long to answer back. He is not pretending when he claims to be impressed by her. However, he recommends that she find the truth in her own heart and be sincere: " [...] vous savez pourtant bien en votre conscience que ce n'est pas de celles - là [des nouvelles] que je vous demande [...]" (same L., 96). The superimposed metaphors which follow are somewhat obscure because we do not know what he is alluding to. However, he knows he sends a precise message to Mlle d'Aumale when he writes: " [...] il me semble que cela veut dire jeter le froc aux autres." (same L., 96). A skillful game of shadows on La Rochefoucauld's part ensues but does not omit the most respectful greeting to the Duchess of Montausier: "Je crois que ce ne serait pas être si respectueux que je dis si j'osais rendre grâces ici à Mme la duchesse de Montausier de l'honneur qu'elle me fait de se souvenir de moi [...]" (same L., 96). This is a reminder that his salute is always full of reverence toward Julie d'Angennes, the Duchess of Montausier, one of the Queen's ladies of honor.³¹ To underline this fact, he adds: "Je voudrais pourtant bien qu'elle sût combien je lui en suis obligé." (same L., 96).

²⁹ Victor Cousin, *Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle* 55-56.

³⁰ See footnote 1 on p. 633 in LR *Correspondance*.

³¹ According to footnote 4 on p. 633 in LR *Correspondance*: "Julie D'Angennes, Duchesse de Montausier, et Dame D'Honneur de La Reine (1607-1671)."

La Rochefoucauld deduces that even writing has its own fashion and what is pleasing at one age may not be pleasing at another. He also understands that taste does not come from one's reason, nor does it come from common sense. Sometimes, it even opposes common sense or reason. Taste changes with fashion; therefore, he writes to Mme de Sablé: "Je sais bien que le bon sens et le bon esprit conviennent à tous les âges; mais les goûts n'y conviennent pas toujours, et ce qui sied bien en un temps ne sied pas bien en un autre." (L.114.-A la Marquise de Sablé, le 2 août, 1675, p. 644). He does not comment on his reflection further because he knows that Mme de Sablé understands him since she too writes similar reflections. As in many other letters, La Rochefoucauld includes some of his maxims asking for Mme de Sablé's advice. Victor Cousin recognizes Mme de Sablé's contribution to the maxims because of her genuine talent:

Tout son génie était le goût et la politesse; elle aimait à réfléchir; [...] elle connaissait parfaitement le monde, et ses observations lui suggéraient des pensées qu'elle se plaisait à communiquer à ses amis comme une sorte de retour innocent sur le passé de leur vie, et comme une matière à des entretiens à la fois sérieux et agréables [...].³²

This exchange of ideas between the two maintains their friendship. It becomes obvious that both of them benefit from this collaboration: "Mêmes maximes circulaient parfois entre La Rochefoucauld et Mme de Sablé pourtant personne ne l'accuse de malice, ni ne met en cause leur sens. La critique contre La Rochefoucauld est assurément due à son implication à la Fronde."³³ Victor Cousin believes that La Rochefoucauld is the first to benefit because his

³² Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 75.

³³ Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 75.

maxims are preferred among the French society of the seventeenth century to those of Mme de Sablé.³⁴ It is probably another matter of taste, but, as many critics remark, it is also because La Rochefoucauld refines their form with much skill. An indirect proof about his meticulous work results from a letter to M. Esprit where he writes: “Je vous prie de montrer à Mme de Sablé nos dernières sentences: cela lui donnera peut-être envie d’en faire [...]” (L.60.-A M. Esprit, n. d., p. 608).

³⁴ About Mme de Sablé’s maxims, V. Cousin writes: “[...] parmi les quatre vingt et une maximes imprimées à peine s’il y en a huit ou dix qui soient un peu remarquables.” Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 81.

IV. THE IDEAL OF THE HONNÊTE-HOMME

La Rochefoucauld's correspondence from 1663 shows that he is one of the admired guests of the salons. The conversations he has with Mlle de Scudéry, Mlle de Montpensier, and Mme de Sablé in the salons inspire him. He also encounters other educated people there such as Henri d'Escoubleau de Sourdis, Arnauld d'Andilly, Antoine Arnauld, Jacques Esprit, the Countess of La Fayette, the Countess of Maure, Mme de Sévigné and many other people who play an important role in the cultural life of the seventeenth century. They talk about science, ethics and religion.

In these salons, the concept of the *honnête-homme* becomes the ideal of life in the seventeenth century. It reflects individuals' aspirations of a higher intellectual life. The concept of the *honnête-homme* can be traced back to the Renaissance. Later in 1632, Nicolas Faret writes *l'honnête homme ou l'art de plaire à la cour*, also influenced by many previous contributions to this concept. However, he redefines the ideal of an *honnête-homme* as frequenting the salons of the epoch. Salons and academies set the tone to be followed. The main quality of the *honnête-homme* is to be able to converse knowledgeably about all the subjects in fashion. According to Faret, the important attributes of the *honnête-homme* are to please and uphold moral values.

La Rochefoucauld's personality and education comply with the ideal of the *honnête-homme*. He cultivates this ideal after a careful examination of himself: "Je me suis assez étudié pour me bien connaître, et je ne manque ni d'assurance pour dire librement ce que je puis avoir de bonnes qualités, ni de sincérité pour avouer franchement que j'ai des défauts."¹ This preoccupation appears everywhere in his writings and in his correspondence. He honors it

¹ La Rochefoucauld, "Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même", *Oeuvres complètes* 3.

passionately, as he writes, because he is an honest and passionate man. He uses the word *passion* almost redundantly but, always sincerely: “Je [...] vous assure, Monsieur, que vous n’avez pas un serviteur plus acquis que moi, ni qui vous honore avec tant de passion.” (L.29.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 21 août, 1652 p. 581). The ideal of *l’honnête homme* becomes the main purpose of his life. He defines the ideal of the *honnête-homme* in his own words.

Un bel esprit pense toujours noblement; il produit avec facilité des choses claires, agréables et naturelles; il les fait voir dans leur plus beau jour, et il les pare de tous les ornements qui leur conviennent; il entre dans le goût des autres, et retranche de ses pensées ce qui est inutile, ou ce qui peut déplaire. (L.16.-De La Différence Des Esprits).²

Describing himself, he writes: “J’ai [...] une si forte envie d’être tout à fait honnête homme que mes amis ne me sauraient faire un plus grand plaisir que de m’avertir sincèrement de mes défauts.”³

La Rochefoucauld views *honnêtes gens* as people who have certain attributes such as confidence, honesty, integrity, and determination: “Le commerce des honnêtes gens ne peut subsister sans une certaine sorte de confiance; elle doit être commune entre eux; il faut que chacun ait un air de sûreté et de discrétion qui ne donne jamais lieu de craindre qu’on puisse rien dire par imprudence.” (2. De La Société)⁴ He thinks that the prestige of an *honnête homme* comes from honoring one’s word and behaving upright. As a disciple of Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld is once again influenced by his thoughts: “C’est une rare fortune, mais de soulagement inestimable, d’avoir un

² La Rochefoucauld, Réflexions Diverses in Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964) 527.

³ La Rochefoucauld, “Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même”, Oeuvres complètes 5.

⁴ La Rochefoucauld, Réflexions Diverses in Oeuvres complètes 506.

honneste homme, d'entendement ferme et de meurs conformes [...] ”⁵ La Rochefoucauld relates this ideal to many aspects:

Les honnêtes gens doivent approuver sans prévention ce qui mérite d'être approuvé, suivre ce qui mérite d'être suivi, et ne se piquer de rien; mais il y faut une grande proportion et une grande justesse: il faut savoir discerner ce qui est bon en général, et ce qui nous est propre, et suivre alors avec la raison la pente naturelle qui nous porte vers les choses qui nous plaisent.” (13.-Du Faux).⁶

In another reflection, honesty appears as a law: “Le noeud qui me tient par la loy d'honesteté me semble bien plus pressant et plus poissant que n'est celui de la contrainte civile. On me garote plus doucement par un notaire que par moy.” (De la vanité, p. 1082). La Rochefoucauld cares about his integrity at every moment.

La Rochefoucauld believes that he is an *honnête homme* as conceived by his epoch. La Bruyère concisely defines an *honnête homme* as: “Un honnête homme se paye par ses mains de l'application qu'il a à son devoir par le plaisir qu'il sent à le faire, et se désintéresse sur les éloges, l'estime et la reconnoissance qui lui manquent quelquefois.”⁷ Using the superlative: “ [...] Il me rendit une de vos lettres, et une de Monsieur le Prince; je ne lui ai, comme vous savez, point fait réponse, tant je suis honnête homme [...] ” (L.125.-A Lenet, de Verteuil, le 17 décembre, p. 651), La Rochefoucauld projects this ideal onto himself. Corrado Rosso believes that by painting his portrait, La Rochefoucauld paints *The portrait of the honnête homme*: “Il faut donc lire ce portrait non comme un aveu ni comme un document psychologique, mais comme la

⁵ Montaigne 1105.

⁶ La Rochefoucauld, Réflexions Diverses 520.

⁷ La Bruyère 61.

fomulation d'un type sociologique, à inscrire dans la doctrine de l'honnête homme."⁸

Keeping promises and doing one's duty are a matter of honor for an *honnête homme*. La Rochefoucauld 'reassures' his enemies, "*de se mettre l'esprit en repos*." (L.45.-Au Comte de Marchin, 1652, p. 598). Even when he finds himself in a difficult situation, his tone remains dignified. His assertions show indirectly that La Rochefoucauld's character is strong. When he writes: "[...] dans tous les temps, je serai toujours le même pour tout ce qui vous arrivera jamais." (L.51.-Au Comte de Guitaut, de Damvilliers, le 2 mai, 1653, p. 602), his affirmation sounds like an oath.

As an *honnête homme*, he assures his friends that he respects his word. La Rochefoucauld reminds his friends that he and his wife are loyal toward their friends. In a sincere tone, he writes: "[...] je ne manquerai jamais à ce que je vous ai promis, et que je ne fais de fondement sur l'amitié de personne du monde plus entièrement que sur la vôtre." (L.25.-A Lenet, le 21 juin, 1652, p. 574). He insists on it adding:

[...] je ne vous en mens point, j'en voudrais bien une qui nous donnât la paix. Je ne daigne pas vous assurer que Diane [La Rochefoucauld] fera son devoir; je pense que vous en êtes bien persuadé; mais vous le devez être, plus que de toute chose, que personne ne vous honore si parfaitement que moi. (L.34.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 4 septembre, 1652, p. 587).

La Rochefoucauld admires all his contemporaries who have the same ideal even though they express it in different ways. Speaking about the ideal of the *honnête homme*, many of his contemporaries relate it to honor directly because, in the seventeenth century, the etymology of this word was closer to

⁸ Corrado Rosso 69-70.

the Latin *honestus*. Analyzing this concept, Gonzague de Reynold writes: “ce qu’on retrouve dans cet adjectif ‘honnête’ et dans ce substantif ‘honnêteté’, c’est l’idée d’honneur.”⁹ Since these two qualities refer to the same concept, using one for the other as synonyms became common. Authors such as La Rochefoucauld and Molière also referred to both without discriminating between them. In Molière’s drama, *Le misanthrope*, his character Alceste also defines the ideal of the *honnête homme*: “Je veux qu’on soit sincère, et qu’en homme d’honneur/On ne lâche aucun mot qui ne parte du coeur.”¹⁰ Molière insists on this concept but uses the other meaning associated with it, *honneur*. He refers to “l’art de vivre en société”¹¹ as another *sine qua non* condition of being an *honnête homme*. *L’art de vivre en société* consists of never saying anything that could hurt someone. This ideal becomes clearer when Philinte retorts to Alceste: “Et, parfois, n’en déplaie à votre austère honneur,/Il est bon de cacher ce qu’on a dans le coeur.”¹² Molière believes that hiding some feelings in one’s heart is respecting others. This should not be considered as hypocrisy. Instead, it should be looked at as caring for other’s sentiments. At the end, Alceste is willing to live this ideal: “Je vais sortir d’un gouffre où triomphent les vices,/Et chercher sur la terre un endroit écarté/Où d’être homme d’honneur on ait la liberté.”¹³

La Rochefoucauld discovers the ideal of the *honnête homme* in his contemporaries’ conversations, in their actions, and in the relationships they cultivate in society. When speaking about their conversation, he describes it as either *sérieuse* or *enjouée*. He always enjoys talking with *honnêtes gens*: “La

⁹ Gonzague de Reynold, *Le XVIIe Siècle*. (Montreal: Editions de L’Arbre, 1944) 191.

¹⁰ Molière, *Le Misanthrope* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1988) 27.

¹¹ Gonzague de Reynold 192.

¹² Molière 28.

¹³ Molière 116.

conversation des honnêtes gens est un des plaisirs qui me touchent le plus. J'aime qu'elle soit sérieuse et que la morale en fasse la plus grande partie; cependant je sais la goûter aussi quand elle est enjouée [...]”¹⁴

La Rochefoucauld's belief in this ideal is unwavering. However, defining it too categorically and in contrast with other people who do not necessarily see it as the main purpose, he creates conflictual situations. Antoine Adam notices this in a concise manner: “Lorsqu'un caractère naturellement chimérique et généreux découvre sur le tard que le monde est livré à l'ambition, à l'ingratitude, à la ruse, la tentation est grande, pour lui, d'entrer dans le jeu à son tour, et de le jouer avec une lucide frénésie.”¹⁵ La Rochefoucauld notices that this ideal appears in conflictual situations among his contemporaries. He clearly distinguishes the *faux honnêtes gens* from the *vrais honnêtes gens*. He ironically claims that the former prefer to hide themselves while the latter have the strength to accept their weaknesses: “Les faux honnêtes gens sont ceux qui déguisent leurs défauts aux autres et à eux-mêmes; les vrais honnêtes gens sont ceux qui les connaissent parfaitement, et les confessent.” (M.202). In a letter addressed to Mme de Sablé, he realizes that such a maxim would not please the former group. Certainly, maxims of this kind can cause disputes; therefore, he would like to know her opinion about them. He makes his request in a maxim trying to illustrate his idea better and to obtain a direct reaction from his friend: “Ce qui fait tant disputer contre les maximes qui découvrent le coeur de l'homme, c'est que l'on craint d'y être découvert.” (L.77.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 620). In another letter, he attributes the tendency to criticize to a custom in fashion: “On loue et on blâme la plupart des choses parce que c'est la mode de les louer ou de les blâmer.” (L.111.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p.

¹⁴ La Rochefoucauld, “Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui-même”, *Oeuvres complètes* 4.

¹⁵ Adam Antoine, *Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, collection de la Pléiade) Ed. soignée par J. Martin Chauffier, Vol. IV, 88-89.

643). However, he believes that “le bon sens et le bon esprit conviennent à tous les âges.” (L.114.-A la Marquise de Sablé, le 2 août, 1675, p. 644). He has hope for a better future where other qualities will prevail : “j’espère que la clémence viendra à la mode [...]” (L.117.-A Mlle de Scudéry, le 12 novembre, 1677 ?, p. 647).

La Rochefoucauld believes that a true *honnête homme* has to accept criticism without resentment : “Le vrai honnête homme est celui que ne se pique de rien.” (M.203). The same idea appeared formulated by Montaigne when he wrote the essay “De l’institution des enfants.”¹⁶ La Rochefoucauld, Mme de La Fayette and M. de Méré, one of La Rochefoucauld’s friends, relate the ideal of the *honnête homme* to the concept of *bienséance*.¹⁷ This becomes an ideal for cultural life and for the literary art of the classical era.¹⁸ La Rochefoucauld believes that an *honnête homme* is not embarrassed when scrutinized by other *honnêtes gens*: “C’est être véritablement honnête homme que de vouloir être toujours exposé à la vue des honnêtes gens” (M.206). If other *honnêtes gens* find reasons to accept someone in their circle, it means that they comply with these norms even though later, La Rochefoucauld seems to be slightly sarcastic when formulating his opinion : “Ce que le monde nomme vertu n’est d’ordinaire qu’un fantôme formé par nos passions, à qui on donne un nom honnête, pour faire impunément ce qu’on veut” (M.606).

¹⁶ Montaigne, *Essais* De l’institution des enfants 25.

¹⁷ As defined by La Rochefoucauld, “Le vrai honnête homme est celui qui ne se pique de rien” (M.203). Inspired by Pascal’s *Pensées* and Montaigne’s *Essais*, this aristocratic conception of ethics unites moral criteria with aesthetic ones as conceived by *bienséance*. The same concept is artistically illustrated by Mme de La Fayette in the *Princesse de Clèves* and M. de Méré’s *Discours*, a moralist who tries to define the *honnête homme* through the same perspective. His letters also illustrate this moral preoccupation. The last verb *confesser* relates the *bienséance* to the quality of an *honnête-homme*. He will not reproduce in any way what he has heard. He does so out of noble beliefs.

¹⁸ Victor Cousin defines the classical ideal of the *bienséances* while depicting Mme de Sablé’s portrait: “[...] c’était la sûreté et l’agrément de son commerce, une obligeance inépuisable, toujours prête à prodiguer les services ou les conseils, une raison aimable, le goût très vif des choses de l’esprit, l’art heureux de faire valoir celui des autres, l’habitude et le talent des belles conversations et des occupations élégantes.” Victor Cousin, *Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe* 70-1.

An *honnête homme* also has other values in addition to those insisted upon in his epoch: “Un homme habile doit savoir régler le rang de ses intérêts et les conduire chacun dans son ordre [...]” (L.60.-A M. Esprit, p. 607). The qualities of *l'honnête homme* coincide with the characteristics of the noble society in the seventeenth century.

By using conventional salutations, La Rochefoucauld complies with the rules of etiquette: “Comme vous êtes un des hommes du monde de qui j’ai toujours le plus passionnément souhaité les bonnes grâces, je veux aussi, en vous rendant compte de mes actions, vous faire voir que je n’en ai jamais fait aucune qui vous puisse empêcher de me les continuer [...]” (L.3.-A M. de Liancourt, septembre 1638, p. 554). La Rochefoucauld shows respect not only to M. de Liancourt, his uncle, but also to any other noble of his entourage. In the same letter, he also writes about M. le Cardinal:

Je lui dis que, bien que je fusse son très humble serviteur, néanmoins je pensais qu’elle ne dût pas trouver étrange si, après les obligations que j’ai à Monsieur le Cardinal, je refusais de recevoir de ses lettres, de peur qu’il ne trouvât mauvais, et que je ne voulais me mettre en ce hasard là pour quoi que ce soit au monde (same L., 3).

He shows reverence toward the Cardinal because he is aware of the fact that the latter has more political power and more influence at the court due to his position as a high clergyman.

Kindness is reciprocal in the court. The King ought to be good and reasonable with his subjects, including members of the royal family. This is illustrated in a letter where he writes about the King’s grace toward him: “Outre l’avantage que je reçois de la grâce qu’il a plu au Roi de me faire [...]” (L.70.-A Colbert, le 21 décembre, 1665, p. 624). He believes that the King’s closest

servants like Colbert are willing to follow his Majesty's good example and feels inspired to express his gratitude: " [...] je souhaite de mériter l'honneur de votre amitié [...]" (same L., 70).

La Rochefoucauld is also willing to respect the traditional loyalty toward one's superiors. It is imposed on him by his noble status even though sometimes it might be contrary to his personal interests:

[...] si je ne rends pas ce devoir-là à Madame la Princesse, c'est seulement par respect, et pour être persuadé qu'il est inutile de lui renouveler les assurances de mon très humble service, puisque je ne m'imagine pas que rien lui pût faire douter du zèle avec lequel j'essaierai toute ma vie de lui en rendre. (L.17.-A Lenet, le 8 décembre, 1650, p. 569).

La Rochefoucauld is aware of his position in noble society because he bears one of the great titles of the realm. In many of his letters, he refers to it either directly or indirectly since it becomes both an asset and a guarantee to him. Writing to the Prince of Condé, he clearly refers to it in both ways: "Je ne pense pas avoir besoin de beaucoup de paroles pour persuader à Votre Altesse Sérénissime la joie que j'ai de son retour en France, accompagné de tant de gloire et de tant d'avantages." (L.57.-Au Prince de Condé, de Paris, le 23 déc., 1659, p. 605). Flattering his interlocutor while at the same time expressing his joy, La Rochefoucauld starts off his sentence in such a way as to allude to his noble position. He also suggests to the Prince of Condé that honor is due to him too because he adds: "Car je m'imagine, Monseigneur, que vous me faites toujours l'honneur de croire que j'ai pour tout ce qui touche Votre Altesse Sérénissime les mêmes sentiments que ses serviteurs particuliers doivent avoir [...]" (same L., 57).

La Rochefoucauld has a feeling that despite everything, his prestige will never be jeopardized because he writes: “Je vous engage mon honneur que Monseigneur le Prince n’a pas eu la pensée de se plaindre de M. de La Rochefoucauld en aucune façon [...]” (L.40.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 13 octobre, 1652, p. 593). Other remarks regarding his honor indirectly remind us that he benefits from the same prestige: “Monsieur le Prince dit cent choses très obligeantes dans tout cela [...]” (same L., 40).

As a Duke, La Rochefoucauld actively participates in all the events of his time. He understands the privileges and obligations that great lords such as himself have toward the King or toward the Queen.¹⁹ He also realizes the significance of all economic events, the role of institutions, and the contributions of writers. La Rochefoucauld discusses them directly and indirectly in his correspondence. His letters become a valuable source of information regarding the customs, traditions and etiquettes of the court along with other protocols. The court’s magnificence is unchanged even when the power of some of its inhabitants is questionable. La Rochefoucauld touches on these two aspects with some subtle irony when he writes to the Marquise de Sablé about the magnificence of the court’s habits. These details could not appear in historical documents where only the most important facts are written down; however, they become meaningful in La Rochefoucauld’s correspondence because he is part of these events and writes about them. La Rochefoucauld’s correspondence indirectly shows his interest in all contemporary events. He writes to M. Esprit asking him ; “Je ne sais plus aucune de vos nouvelles, ni domestiques, ni chrétiennes, ni politiques.” (L.60.-A M. Esprit, n. d., p. 607). Due to his social

¹⁹ La Rochefoucauld defends the Queen when enemies of Her Majesty put her in a difficult political situation. La Rochefoucauld is sincere because he writes it in a private letter addressed to his friend Lenet : “ [...] je craindrais même qu’on n’attaquât la Reine en sa personne, tant le monde est enragé contre elle de voir que l’on ne demande qu’une amnistie, et qu’elle la refuse.” L.34.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 4 septembre, 1652, p. 587.

position, he has the privilege of understanding the spirituality of these events and, even when his position is subjective, it is interesting to consider his point of view. His correspondence becomes a lively scenario where people act and react according to their position in these events. La Rochefoucauld's testimony about some of these events along with the ideas and feelings which appear in his correspondence also clarify his Maxims, the main source of his writing. For instance, in a letter addressed to M. Esprit, La Rochefoucauld tries to clarify a maxim²⁰ by explaining in detail what he meant by it:

Je ne sais si vous l'entendiez mieux ainsi; mais je veux dire qu'il est assez ordinaire de hasarder sa vie pour s'empêcher d'être déshonoré; mais, quand cela est fait, on est assez content pour ne se mettre pas d'ordinaire fort en peine du succès de la chose que l'on veut faire réussir, et il est certain que ceux qui s'exposent tout autant qu'il est nécessaire pour prendre une place que l'on attaque, ou pour conquérir une province, ont plus de mérite, sont meilleurs officiers, et ont de plus grandes et de plus utiles vues que ceux qui s'exposent seulement pour mettre leur honneur à couvert [...] (same L., 74).

To conclude, La Rochefoucauld uses another sentence written in the same style as a maxim: “[...] il est fort commun de trouver des gens de la dernière espèce que je viens de dire, et fort rare d'en trouver de l'autre.” (same L., 74). As seen in this paragraph, La Rochefoucauld tries to help his reader(s) understand him by offering a key. However, he expresses himself in the same philosophical manner using generalities and ends up with another maxim. It illustrates his thinking, inclined toward meditation and analysis. He also chooses to cite a few

²⁰ “La plupart des hommes s'exposent assez à la guerre pour sauver leur honneur, mais peu se veulent toujours exposer autant qu'il est nécessaire pour faire réussir le dessein pour lequel on s'expose.” L.74.-A M. Esprit, le 9 sept., ?, p. 617.

of his maxims instead of talking about daily events because he knows that M. Esprit²¹ would advise him on them. It becomes more apparent when he insists on it, writing: “[...] je vous prie de mettre sur le ton de sentences ce que je vous ai mandé [...]”.²² (same L., 74). By knowing his intentions, readers can understand his maxims with much more precision. They are likely to give him more credit after such a statement: “[...] Je n’ai jamais fait le déplaisir d’être inutile en ce pays-ci; mais vous savez que c’est un défaut dont on ne se corrige pas quand on veut.” (L.65.-A Arnauld de Pomponne, de Paris, le 24 mars, p. 611). He reminds his interlocutor, and us indirectly, that being proud of his own values cannot be a fault. When he ironically twists his sentence, it is to make it more obvious to his enemies who continue to question his sincere intentions.

²¹ Jacques Esprit was a renowned author from the French Academy. He is the author of the essay La Fausseté des Vertus Humaines that were partially written in the maxim form. V. Cousin describes him as an author preoccupied by spiritual subjects: “Dans sa jeunesse, il s’était fait à l’hôtel de Rambouillet une certaine réputation de bel esprit, et la protection du chancelier Séguier lui avait ouvert l’Académie [...] vers 1660, Esprit était dans l’intimité de Mme de Sablé et très janséniste. Personne plus que lui ne s’occupa des maximes et des pensées.” Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 86.

²² La Rochefoucauld alludes to a previous letter. The affair of *tricotets* illustrates La Rochefoucauld’s defiance of death. Later, he writes to the Duke of Liancourt asking his honest opinion about this subject: “Vous savez ce que vous m’avez verso promis sur ces sortes de choses - là et la sincérité que vous me devez.” L.75.-Au Duc de Liancourt, n. d., p. 619.

V. VIRTUE, VANITY, CHARITY & AMOUR-PROPRE IN LA ROCHEFOUCAULD'S CORRESPONDENCE

The seventeenth century represents a significant period for cultural life in France. The panorama of this epoch is of great interest to the individuals and artists defining it either directly or indirectly but, always with admiration. In perspective, this epoch, centered around Louis XIV's court and nobility, becomes a bridge between ancient and modern times. It is important to view it through La Rochefoucauld's correspondence because it is a direct source.

La Rochefoucauld's view of humanity as a whole is one of the most interesting subjects that appear in his correspondence. Besides being influenced by his reading and his own life experiences, he also has a natural tendency to penetrate deeper into things with characteristic lucidity. The letters that discuss human nature are, like his Maxims, not always intended to flatter because they remind readers about: selfishness, hidden interests, and unavowable passions that are wrapped under virtuous appearances. His belief is concisely expressed in one of his maxims when he writes: "Les vices entrent dans la composition des vertus comme les poisons entrent dans la composition des remèdes : la prudence les assemble et les tempère, elle s'en sert utilement contre les maux de la vie." (M.182).

Following the ideas of some ancient thinkers and those from more modern times,¹ La Rochefoucauld notices the fact that among all the vices, there are some such as jealousy or vengeance that we accept or tolerate. We even build our own passions around these vices because we are used to them

¹ Analyzing La Rochefoucauld, Edith Mora attributes several influences to his writings: "Une autre critique lui a été adressée, et déjà par certains de ses contemporains [...] celle de n'être point original et d'avoir pris à d'autres, Latins, Anglais, Italiens, Espagnols [...] chez tous les moralistes, à peu près les mêmes thèmes et souvent les mêmes idées. On a pu, depuis, rajouter à la liste des auteurs probablement utilisés par La Rochefoucauld, Machiavel, Montaigne, Charron [...]". Edith Mora 72.

and, at times, we also need them even though we might be tempted to criticize them in others.

La Rochefoucauld is a disciple of Plato, who summarizes Socrates' ideas in a more organized environment.² Plato tries to persuade Athenians to meditate on ethical subjects in order to strengthen their character. He re-writes Socrates' ideas in a literary form, Le Dialogue. Being expressed in a more elegant form, it allows us to comprehend the essence of his metaphysical thoughts. He continues the Socratic method of the conversation. He tries to demonstrate that contradictions are never excluded and therefore, a definite solution is not possible. La Rochefoucauld also invites us to do the same thing. Like Plato in antiquity, he also thinks that there are some matters in life that are more important than life itself. One has to discover truth without using others' opinions. One also has to avoid his/her own opinions on truth in order to avoid becoming fixed on them.³ La Rochefoucauld also agrees with the fact that if one views a subject from different angles, he/she arrives at the very essence of a thing. This relativist position helps one find the truth. Influenced by Plato and Socrates, La Rochefoucauld tries to validate this idea in his Réflexions Diverses: "Un sujet peut avoir plusieurs vérités, et un autre sujet peut n'en avoir qu'une: le sujet qui a plusieurs vérités est d'un plus grand prix, et peut briller par des endroits où l'autre ne brille pas; mais dans l'endroit où l'un et l'autre est vrai, ils brillent également." (1. Du Vrai).⁴ According to Plato's philosophy, one lives a good life when he/she is guided by his/her reason and by his/her own opinions (*doxa*) without feeling compelled to ask somebody else's advice (*epistémê*). In his opinion, a rich life is not necessarily synonymous with a happy life. Philosophically speaking, an accomplished life is one spent in

² Plato's Académie.

³ A person's opinions are their *doxa*.

⁴ La Rochefoucauld, Réflexions Diverses 503.

search of **the truth**. Having a good time results from one's own efforts in finding it. One can **then** perceive several aspects of truth because there are different angles that **each** throw a different light. By contemplating all of them, one arrives at **the Truth**. He/she then knows the real human nature along with the essence of **all other things**. La Rochefoucauld relates this philosophy to events and feelings in his own life: "Il créa l'expression *être vrai* ou plutôt *vraie* [...]"⁵

A virtuous person is any person who gains equilibrium. One can find happiness in measure. An unbalanced person is unhappy because he/she allows the **desire** for power, money, sex, food, and other desires to rule. Plato advises us to **dominate** our desires in order to live a good life. He believes that our appetites are not always the best thing for us. Only reason can give us the right answer and indicate the right measure in all things. Following his philosophy, La Rochefoucauld writes: "Quelque éclatante que soit une action, elle ne doit pas passer pour grande, lorsqu'elle n'est pas l'effet d'un grand dessein." (M.160). If our reason is clear, we can control our desires. At this point, our bodies become healthy and our spirit gains equilibrium. Plato believes that there are ideal forms in each one of us. However, it is hard to always see them because of our desires. He also believes that we have limitations because of our perceptions. They allow us to contemplate things only from two dimensions but, in reality, there are multiple dimensions. Plato believes that we cannot see the ideal forms because we only see their projected shadows. He offers the metaphor of the cave to explain our perceptions. Behind us, there is the flame and the ideal form. Guided by philosophy, anyone can grasp its image.

The Socratic method does not exclude contradictions concerning moral subjects. It can be inferred from this philosophy that virtue is perhaps a matter

⁵ Edith Mora 66.

of preference. One relates it to his/her own essence, culture and epoch. La Rochefoucauld does not exclude contradictions either: “Rien n’est si contagieux que l’exemple, et nous ne faisons jamais de grands biens ni de grands maux qui n’en produisent de semblables [...]” (M. 230). A wise person is anyone who knows how to dominate himself/herself even if reason foresees pain instead of pleasure.⁶ Any moderate person would consider it an attribute to normal behavior. Socrates believes that reason shows a person that there are multiple possibilities to be considered.⁷ Therefore, a virtuous person questions the direction of life itself and maintains integrity no matter what. Reason itself shows one that life is spent in a good way when one looks for the truth and knows how to dominate oneself. Finally, a virtuous person finds strict rules to govern himself/herself with the understanding that a good life is not always synonymous with a life full of satisfaction. In La Rochefoucauld’s writings, these rules appear synonymous with *économie*, which, for his contemporaries, is also synonymous with *bon usage*: “Ce n’est pas assez d’avoir de grandes qualités; il en faut avoir l’économie.” (M.159).

Aristotle rejects any excess of virtue:

[...] excess, deficiency, and the median can also be found in actions. Now virtue is concerned with emotions and actions; and in emotions and actions excess and deficiency miss the mark, whereas the median is virtue or excellence. Consequently, virtue is a mean in the sense that it aims at the median.⁸

He believes that any excess is harmful. He also believes that because of one’s pride, truth could be related to: falsehood, irony, false modesty. Because of all

⁶ La Rochefoucauld goes even further, with this idea adopting the Stoics’ endurance of pain. Serge Dubrovsky thinks that La Rochefoucauld is a sadist because he pushes his readers to receive truth *comme un stigmaté*.

⁷ Enlightened by Socrates’ observations, La Rochefoucauld extends them to his contemporaries: “On ne méprise pas tous ceux qui ont des vices, mais on méprise tous ceux qui n’ont aucune vertu.” (M.186).

⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962) 132.

these possible negative associations with truth, he advises adaptation to a certain condition that becomes true virtue. He advises young people to dominate their pride or other feelings and try to use humor and intelligence to find the right measure in everything while showing that they care for others' happiness too. One finds the right measure in everything while trying different possibilities. Then, one will be able to choose between virtues and vices, even between two virtues. Aristotle believes that not only the vices are harmful, but the pleasures also are when one forgets the right measure in them. It is equally harmful if a person is virtuous only in one aspect because he/she feels unhappy about other aspects in his/her life.

La Rochefoucauld is not the only thinker that treats virtue from a mainly pessimistic perspective: "Les vertus se perdent dans l'intérêt, comme les fleuves se perdent dans la mer." (M.171). This aspect of his writings is more noticeable because his maxims lack a fictitious context. His contemporaries write about the same matters, developing the same ideas, but, in their writings, virtue is hidden in the context and appears in a less striking manner. Racine also creates his characters following ancient theatrical patterns. He thinks it is "une école où la vertu n'était pas moins bien enseignée que dans les écoles des philosophes."⁹ When he creates Phèdre from ancient models, he wants to teach virtue: "je n'en ai point fait où la vertu soit plus mise en jour que celle-ci."¹⁰ This theme is easily accepted by his contemporaries because it becomes fashionable to speak about moral subjects. As a character, Phèdre becomes a model for Louis XIV's society. Unlike Sénèque or Euripide's Phèdre, Racine's Phèdre manifests "les sentiments si nobles et si vertueux."¹¹ In Louis XIV's court, cultivating virtuous feelings becomes a permanent ethical preoccupation.

⁹ Racine, *Préface* in *Théâtre Complet* (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1960) 542.

¹⁰ Racine 541.

¹¹ Racine 540.

It is viewed as a sign of distinction in the classical century. Racine, "très scrupuleusement attaché à suivre la fable",¹² rebuilds the tragedy of antiquity in a modern context. Phèdre lives hate and love simultaneously with being heartbroken not only by this drama, but also by the drama created by virtue while facing this conflict. There are critics who find another drama too, - that of a Christian lacking grace "son crime est plutôt une punition des Dieux qu'un mouvement de volonté."¹³ Racine also wants to respond to the trends of his century following its moral opinions and preferences. The internal drama of silence also inspires other writers of the seventeenth century. Mme de La Fayette's *Princesse de Clèves* lives the same drama intensified by her cultivated conscience. She is torn apart by an interior conflict, "dire ou ne pas dire", cover or uncover the truth. She is burning inside from the same *deadly flame* where passions are in an irreconcilable conflict with virtue.

Moderation is also another quality that helps a person impose his/her own reason. It gives a person the equilibrium necessary toward himself/herself and others.¹⁴ La Rochefoucauld's thinking follows the same trend. However, he seems to be more bitter: "On a fait une vertu de la modération, pour borner l'ambition des grands hommes, et pour consoler les gens médiocres de leur peu de fortune et leur peu de mérite." (M.308). The ancient concept of moderation becomes the number one rule for Montaigne in the sixteenth century and also for La Rochefoucauld¹⁵ a century later. Analyzing his maxims on moderation (M.17 and M.18)¹⁶, W. G. Moore writes notices that: "They

¹² Racine 541.

¹³ Racine 540.

¹⁴ The majority of the thinkers from ancient times adopt this viewpoint except Glaucon who defends the extreme idea that an unjust person could also be happy even if his/her own balance is missing.

¹⁵ Different from ancient thinkers, La Rochefoucauld has a more lenient view when he writes: "Il y a des gens dont tout le mérite consiste à dire et à faire des sottises utilement, et qui gâteraient tout s'ils changeaient de conduite." (M.156).

¹⁶ La Rochefoucauld: "La modération des personnes heureuses vient du calme que la bonne fortune donne à leur humeur." (M.17) and "La modération est une crainte de tomber dans l'envie et dans le mépris que méritent ceux qui s'envirent de leur bonheur; c'est une vaine ostentation de la force de notre esprit; et enfin

concern the quality of moderation, an aristocratic and indeed a military virtue, the quality of a man in possession of power yet strong enough to refrain from the full exercise of that power."¹⁷ Ancient philosophers consider moderation the *moyenne d'or*.¹⁸ Aristotle thinks¹⁹ that it is a *sine qua non* condition for the happiness of humanity as a whole because it agrees with human nature. Any virtuous person is moderate. Any moderate person knows how to dominate his/her own feelings and how to act in all situations without exaggeration. Reason will always indicate what the right point between two extremes is. Thus, one can distinguish a good action from a bad one and thereby make the right choice. One could say that the right choice was made when one has used his/her own reason. Aristotle thinks that the most important moment comes when one understands what a good deed is.²⁰ He can then repeat it on a regular basis in order for it to become a good habit as in a virtuous person. Good deeds prevail in a good person because his/her reason always shows him/her the Good and the Bad, and, he/she then chooses the good things which bring about his/her own happiness. Moderate actions are always correct because of the fact that one clearly understands the meaning of other things such as pleasure, pride, humility, and courage.

la modération des hommes dans leur plus haute élévation est un désir de paraître plus grands que leur fortune." (M.18).

¹⁷ W. G. Moore, *La Rochefoucauld. His Mind and His Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 8.

¹⁸ Plato summarizes the Golden Rule in this way: "May I do to others as I would that they should do to me." Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971) 1225.

¹⁹ Aristotle's ideas on biology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, theater and politics, analyzed in his school Lyceum, impose until the advent of Christianity. Aristotle continues the theory of the Forms formulated by Plato.

²⁰ Contrary to Plato, Aristotle believes that everything has its own cause and its own purpose. Plato's *Forms* cannot be separated from the things perceived by our senses; therefore, they do not exist independently from them. Because of this, any action is always significant. Every action or every part of the human body has its own purpose. Besides this, Aristotle also believes that humans are born for a certain purpose. Destiny with a purpose all its own influences our own purpose in life and our perceptions. Humans' main purpose is to reason. The existence of the soul depends on this same principle of reasoning: "There remains then an active life of the rational element. The rational element has two parts: one is rational in that it obeys the rule of reason, the other in that it possesses and conceives rational rules [...]. The proper function of man, then, consists in an activity of the soul in conformity with a rational principle [...]" Aristotle, 77.

A virtuous person is also happy because, as Aristotle believes, happiness is synonymous with *what is good for human nature*. Aristotle thinks that happiness is not always the equivalent of pleasure because there are pleasures that can be harmful, this is *vices*. While people are tempted to believe that a happy person is one that enjoys pleasure, Aristotle demonstrates the contrary. Any excess of pleasure, glory, fortune and other benefits can render one bored after a while because they are ephemeral matters. We are really happy when we are good and when our reason becomes the source of our happiness. According to Aristotle, any thinker can attain this ideal of happiness and maintain it as a lasting thing since his/her reason offers him/her the motive to keep it. One could feel even more happiness when fortune and friendship are added to reason. Furthermore, Aristotle distinguished two kinds of virtue: intellectual and moral. Guided by our intellectual virtues, we tend to attain perfection and distinguish among our momentary needs. Inspired by Aristotle's ideas, La Rochefoucauld adds his contemporary view on it: "Le rapport qui se rencontre entre les esprits ne maintiendrait pas longtemps la société, si elle n'était réglée et soutenue par le bon sens, par l'humeur, et par les égards qui doivent être entre les personnes qui veulent vivre ensemble."²¹ Also, according to Aristotle, a virtuous person knows how to dominate his talents and how to cultivate them for his/her own advantage. Modern thinkers are more reserved when naming a person virtuous, and La Rochefoucauld is also very hesitant in defining virtue, for he believes virtues are relative:

Ce que nous prenons pour des vertus n'est souvent qu'un
assemblage de diverses actions et de divers intérêts que la
fortune ou notre industrie savent arranger, et ce n'est pas toujours

²¹ La Rochefoucauld, Réflexions Diverses 505.

par valeur et par chasteté que les hommes sont vaillants et que les femmes sont chastes. (M.1).

The complex subject of virtue was first discussed by ancient thinkers and then, by classical thinkers. In antiquity, virtue represents a concept that envisages all the aspects related to human behavior. Greeks believed that any person could attain success through his/her own virtue. A virtuous person cultivates his/her virtue by dominating his/her own will. One shapes his/her behavior around virtue, thereby succeeding in overcoming the limits of one's innate character. One is entitled to feel confident in oneself only when one makes reasonable decisions. To Athenians, Socrates is known as a virtuous person because he succeeded in gaining control over himself and distinguishing himself through his good actions. His good conduct proves the fact that he has a good character and, because of it, he soon becomes a role model for others. Socrates teaches philosophy, rhetoric, and science; however, he never imposes his philosophical viewpoint on others because he thinks that a good teacher should communicate with his students and followers in a logical way without compelling them to adopt his own beliefs. He therefore teaches the beauties of nature and those of virtue. Virtue should take on nature's model.

Roman philosophers also meditated on the subject of virtue. Seneca wrote twelve essays on moral philosophy examining happiness, leisure, mercy and anger. He continued the stoic tradition whose central ethical doctrine was that humans should imitate the cosmos by following nature. Seneca's doctrine refers to happiness. He believes that one has to find it in nature because nature is the best guide from a twofold sense: the divine power, that rules the universe, and the rational nature in each person, as a portion of the divine power. Beyond all else, one is still happy when one follows nature. He/she also lives the life of virtue because a virtuous life is one of tranquillity and harmony of the

soul. Seneca seeks virtue in itself because “she herself is her own reward.”²² According to Seneca, happiness cannot be confused with pleasure. However, a virtuous life does not exclude a certain type of pleasure but, it should not become one’s life goal: “[...] he who pursues pleasures makes everything else secondary, and first of all gives up liberty.”²³ Seneca believes that a person searching for pleasure sells himself/herself to it. Some individuals relate wealth to happiness, being a *sine qua non* factor. In Seneca’s opinion, wealth does not oppose happiness. However, it is not an absolute necessity for a virtuous life. He agrees that material riches enable us to engage ourselves in virtuous activities and add a certain joy to life. Nevertheless, wealthy individuals are not more empowered than others to attain happiness and live a virtuous life.

Seneca believes that virtue is not an obstacle to a happy life. He defines virtue by opposites: “Virtue is something lofty, exalted, and regal [...] pleasure is something lowly, servile, weak and perishable [...].”²⁴ He claims that virtue can be found in the temple, in the forum, or in the senate-house. It stands firm in the daylight while pleasure hides in the darkness. Virtue touches the divine because the highest good is also immortal. It allows no excess or regret. The right thinking never confuses good with evil. It is nature that indicates what is virtuous to us. Any person who does not allow himself/herself to be corrupted by external things will be poised and well ordered. He/she will then be courageous in spirit, shaping one’s life according to nature’s laws and one’s own reason. In Seneca’s opinion, no man can live pleasantly without living virtuously as well. Virtue reduces our pleasures, while temperance gives us true joy. A wise person will allow nothing to dominate himself/herself, not even pleasure.

²² Seneca, Letters From a Stoic: Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium, trans. Robin Campbell (England: Penguin, 1969) 114.

²³ Seneca 147.

²⁴ Seneca 165.

In the seventeenth century, virtue as a notion also acquires negative connotations. Some falsely virtuous people become ridiculous, and their hypocrisy is condemned. They impose themselves forcefully, rejecting logic out of pure ignorance or malevolence. Writing his Précieuses Ridicules, Molière interpreted the common public opinion of them. He was the first to criticize the *précieuses ridicules*. In his Préface of 1660, Molière writes: “Les véritables auraient tort de se piquer lorsqu’on joue les ridicules, qui les imitent mal [...]”.²⁵ Molière wanted to attack the new *précieuses* who retained only exaggerations and false virtues, wrongly imitating the first *précieuses* whose efforts for refinement were genuine. Georges Mongrédien notices:

Molière donne une nouvelle preuve de sa soumission au sens commun en déclarant que les fameuses règles formulées par les théoriciens depuis Aristote jusqu’ à ses contemporains se réduisent en définitive à des conseils de bons sens et que la grande règle, formulée aussi par Racine et par La Fontaine, est tout simplement de plaire aux honnête gens [...] .²⁶

A thinker such as La Rochefoucauld stays far from this debate. He adopts the universal thinking based on reason. Because of it, he gains enemies among the clergy. It is easy for them to belittle him since even among themselves, there are irreconcilable differences between Jansenists and Jesuits. For instance, Victor Cousin clearly notices them:

Comme en philosophie la pensée avait été glorifiée aux dépens de la volonté mal définie [...] de même en théologie la liberté humaine courait grand risque d’être sacrifiée à la grâce. Ajoutez à cela l’autorité de la vertu et de la science, l’empire d’une morale

²⁵ Molière, Oeuvres complètes I (Paris : Flammarion, 1964) 225.

²⁶ Georges Mongrédien, introduction, Oeuvres complètes I by Molière (Paris: Flammarion, 1964) 14.

austère comparée à la morale relâchée du probabilisme et des Jésuites, les séductions de la disgrâce et bientôt de la persécution auprès des âmes généreuses, et vous aurez le secret de l'attrait et des conquêtes rapides du jansénisme.²⁷

Writing his maxims and reflections, La Rochefoucauld's life becomes somewhat similar to the lives of ancient thinkers. Trying to sustain an aristocratic government in Athens, Socrates also 'gained' enemies among the democratic leaders of the city. In his conversational classes with different politicians, Socrates demonstrates that they are all blinded by their own prejudice. Questioning their own reasoning, he indirectly questions their authority. To punish him, they accuse him of having offended the gods and of corrupting youth. Like Socrates, La Rochefoucauld 'acquires' enemies among the *Jesuits*. The Cardinal weaves intrigues around him whenever he talks to the King. Because of it, he is forced to live in exile during several periods of his life. His correspondence attests this fact.²⁸ Fortunately for him, he benefits from some hereditary rights that are still recognized in his time. He also has friends who defend him by using their position in society. La Rochefoucauld's correspondence shows that he has to rebuild his own power with much diplomacy in order to regain one of the most honored places in society.

La Rochefoucauld's thinking cannot be included in a system²⁹ because he is equally influenced by both ancient and modern thinkers. Some critics see in him: a *stoïcien*, an *épicurien*, a *platonicien*, a *janséniste*, a *moliniste*, an *augustiniste* or a *pascalien* philosophical influence. La Rochefoucauld's writing

²⁷ Victor Cousin, *Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle* 57.

²⁸ "On me chassa hier de Paris, et je ne sais pour combien de temps j'aurai sûreté ici." L. 46.- A Lenet, à Baigneux, le 11 novembre, 1652.

²⁹ Jean Lafond thinks that instead of seeing La Rochefoucauld's maxims in a system, it is better to view them as a cultural production: "[...] nous ne sommes pas ici au niveau d'une philosophie réfléchie, mais d'une simple *culture*, dont les notions sont, en littérature, mises à la contribution par tous, y compris les plus chrétiens, sans scrupules excessifs." Jean Lafond, *La Rochefoucauld : Augustinisme et Littérature* (Paris : Éditions Klincksieck, 1986) 10.

combines all these ideas to arrive at a very original concept. Because of all these controversial ideas, he is admired and criticized at the same time. He can be a stoïcien in some of his maxims.³⁰ The maxim M.217 seems to be inspired by his own “life experience”. His correspondence also proves his stoicism. In difficult situations, he is always *obligeant* and *aimable*.³¹

As any other thinker, La Rochefoucauld also meditates on virtue. Undoubtedly, he has his own viewpoint on it, treating it among several other philosophical notions as: just/unjust, good/bad, and other ethical questions related to reason and human nature because he is reluctant to adopt ideas of antiquity entirely.³² He finds limitations to their concept of virtue:

[...] la vertu des anciens philosophes païens, dont ils ont fait tant de bruit, a été établie sur de faux fondements, et que l'homme, tout persuadé qu'il est de son mérite n'a en soi que des apparences trompeuses de vertu, dont il éblouit les autres et dont souvent il se trompe lui-même lorsque la foi ne s'en mêle point. (L.93.-Au Père Thomas Esprit, 6 février, 1665?, p. 630).

La Rochefoucauld also associates the concept of virtue with religious beliefs. This fact causes him to view it from a more pessimistic perspective. La Rochefoucauld questions himself for viewing certain things perhaps with too much sensitivity; “[...] j’ai souvent peur de m’y méprendre moi - même, et de me trouver trop sensible au bien et au mal [...]” (L.111.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 642).

³⁰ “L'intrépidité est une force extraordinaire de l'âme, qui l'élève au-dessus des troubles, des désordres et des émotions que la vue des grands périls pourrait exciter en elle, et c'est par cette force que les héros se maintiennent en état paisible, et conservent l'usage libre de leur raison dans les accidents les plus surprenants et les plus terribles.” (M.217).

³¹ In one of her letters, Mme de Grignan describes La Rochefoucauld as an *honnête homme*. The words in italics are her own words.

³² The fact that he does not know Latin very well could also be an impediment to him: “Je n'entends pas assez le latin pour oser m'en mêler.” L.126.-A Monsieur xxx, n. d., p. 652.

One of the literary critics who analyzed La Rochefoucauld's Maxims and Reflexions diverses, Jean Lafond invites us to read La Rochefoucauld's moral writings in conjunction with the historical situation. The readers' attention should be imparted to the past way of thinking and the ideas he stresses about the contemporaries he refers to. La Rochefoucauld could be better understood if influences of the *augustinisme* of the epoch could be taken into consideration against *l'esprit libertin*, two opposite trends which circulated throughout the seventeenth century. Influenced by the two opposite currents that have this concept of *Evil* in common, La Rochefoucauld writes: "Il y a des héros en mal comme en bien." (M.185). One could then see that some of La Rochefoucauld's maxims are a version of an *augustinisme laïque* even though this seems paradoxical to some strict religious thinkers or laïque philosophers. According to Saint Augustine, *Evil* is the cause of man's falling from paradise. God did not create this *Evil*; man caused it through original sin. But, by doing it, man gained his freedom at the same time. Karl Jaspers recognizes Saint Augustine's dualism:

Saint Augustine se met en pleine contradiction. Le monde est création de Dieu, il est bon, beau, comme un chef d'oeuvre, les dissonances ne font qu'en rehausser la beauté. Dans cet ensemble, le mal lui-même est un élément du bien. Sans la chute d'Adam, nous ne connaîtrions pas la majesté du Rédempteur, de l'homme qui se fait Dieu.³³

By grasping some of Saint Augustine's ideas about *Evil*, and admitting it as a part of human nature, La Rochefoucauld approaches libertine beliefs with *Evil* being unrelated to morality. Odette de Mourgues notices a tendency toward the laïcisation of the maxims: "La Rochefoucauld refers specifically to God, but all

³³ Karl Jaspers, Les grands philosophes. 2/ Platon-Saint Augustin (Paris: Plon, 1957) 283.

the critics who have commented on the changes made from one edition to another have noted that he removed those maxims as if he were aiming at a laïcisation of his picture of man.³⁴ La Rochefoucauld's thinking appears different from Pascal's or Bossuet's, his contemporaries. La Rochefoucauld is a believer, in his manner, who never mixes religion and philosophy. However, he is no less sincere or less profound.

Human thought changes with time. Modern readers, including La Rochefoucauld, look at virtue with skepticism. He relates it to our moods. Love for women or false virtues have other meanings when confronted in his entire literary work. Matters related to one's conscience are also interpreted differently when one thinks that human nature cannot escape the power of its own ego. Values *per se* become distinct in the psychological reality in which we live.

Who could define the concept of a *correct behavior*? Philosophers from antiquity have meditated on virtue and other moral values. They have influenced the philosophical ideas circulating throughout the seventeenth century, without defining the concept of a *correct behavior* in the same way. Wisely conceived by human experience, these rules offer practical solutions. These basic rules of life teach us how to protect innocence, authority, and how to choose the right path. Moderation seems to be the standard key for everything including virtue. Aristotle insists on the fact that a good character results from practicing good habits.³⁵ Aristotle's ethical code seemed to be : "Ne fais pas aux autres ce que tu n'aimerais pas qu'ils te fassent", which became the golden rule of behavior. However, the idea of doing the *right thing* is more modern. How to form a good character remains the preoccupation of any moral theory. Humans feel that it is easier to comply with existent rules rather than defining other principles and trying to convince others to follow them.

³⁴ Odette de Morgues 4.

³⁵ In La Rochefoucauld, a person with a good character has the qualities of an *honnête homme*.

The teachings about virtue try to establish methods on modeling character. According to some moralists, one has to question himself/herself on personal preferences first and then, find reasons or arguments to prove or disprove them. There is no definite rule concerning virtue which is the most important. Modern thinkers envisage *family values* and *responsibility* first. Each family member becomes responsible for his/her own behavior. A conflict seems to arise when one does not know how to act in a responsible manner, facing his/her own natural predispositions. Specialists in ethics find an affirmative answer. It is true that there are people who love virtue and follow its rules effortlessly because they have natural predispositions, but there are people who do not have the same predispositions. Those of the latter category have no excuses; they have to make an effort to improve their own nature, to dominate it first and then change it according to models.

Paradoxically, one learns much from others' mistakes. Fictional characters teach us true moral lessons. The conclusion of their wrong deeds teaches us the right answer; if we follow their 'example' we shall face the same metamorphosis. In Antiquity, Socrates used to say "the unexamined life is not worth living."³⁶ Moral Judaism also teaches us that virtue *per se* has no value if it does not help a person understand truth in religion. Wisdom³⁷ is another aspect of morality; with wisdom we realize that laws make sense and consequently, we have to follow them. Reason facilitates the relationship between temperament and health. It helps one to cultivate good habits. Modern critics like Jean Lafond views ancient wisdom in a more modern perspective relating humans to their values. He says: "le Bien trop naïvement

³⁶ Plato 3-38.

³⁷ Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) believed that wisdom is part of virtue. Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1956).

fait ou dit n'est qu'un Mal, cependant que le Mal pleinement assumé peut-être un bien."³⁸

Modern thinkers like Bernard Mayo³⁹ believe that after accepting certain virtues, our behavior becomes correct. However, he believes that this is not enough: "faire son devoir ne suffit pas pour qu'on considère une bonne personne."⁴⁰ It is useful to follow the example of a hero, real or fictional, not only for what he did, but also for his personality. Then, one does not have to repeat his actions identically but act in such a way that his own actions correspond with the model given by the chosen hero. One could not copy a model *ad-literam*; it would mean acting unreasonably. Imitating someone risks copying the model *per se* instead of trying to become a model himself/herself. For ordinary people, the research of an ideal *per-se* could seem too abstract. Therefore, it is incorrect to point to a certain model because this might create adverse feelings like jealousy, rejection and the like.

Virtue is sometimes an illusion: "La vertu est un fantôme produit par nos passions, du nom duquel on se sert pour faire impunément tout ce qu'on veut." (L.77.-A La Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 620). La Rochefoucauld comes to the conclusion that antipodes touch each other when excess plays a role instead of measure; virtues can be detrimental to others if they inspire one to behave disdainfully or judgmental toward others. Human nature has its own rules. It is hard to oppose these rules: "Le caprice de l'humeur est encore plus bizarre que celui de la fortune." (L.60.-A M. Esprit, n. d., p. 607). Acting according to nature's rules is a luxury that only some people can afford: "Il n'appartient qu'aux grands hommes d'avoir de grands défauts." (L.68.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 614).

³⁸ Jean Lafond 12.

³⁹ American thinker who published his ideas in 1958.

⁴⁰ Bernard Mayo, "Virtue or Duty?" in *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life*. Ed. Christina Hoff and Fred Sommers (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989).

Anticipating the thoughts of many modern thinkers, La Rochefoucauld also viewed this matter from a general perspective. It helped him to analyze himself objectively: "J'ai toutes les passions assez douces et assez réglées, et on ne m'a presque jamais vu en colère, et je n'ai jamais eu de haine pour personne."⁴¹ His correspondence attests the fact that he knows how to dominate himself. He dominates his feelings by trying to react to everything equally. Consequently, he rarely becomes angry and then, only because of others.

La Rochefoucauld's adverse feelings vanish as quickly as a storm in the summer. He does not hold on to hate. He analyzes himself and perhaps he notices subconsciously that his feelings have to follow his beliefs. Therefore, his feelings seem to be a natural consequence of his opinions because he writes:

J'approuve extrêmement les belles passions; elles marquent la grandeur de l'âme, et, quoique, dans l'inquiétude qu'elles donnent, il y ait quelque chose de contraire à la sévère sagesse, elles s'accomodent si bien d'ailleurs avec la plus austère vertu, que je crois qu'on ne les saurait condamner avec justice.⁴²

La Rochefoucauld therefore thinks that passions could always be dominated by reason. He refers only to those passions compatible with the most austere virtue. Analyzing it in others, he thinks with candor that his own reason taught him how to distinguish nuances among the passions. He believes that he could dominate his own passions with much lucidity. His own life proves that he does not always do that⁴³ but his efforts to attain his own perfection cannot be ignored. In fact, can anyone totally dominate all his/her passions and feelings?

⁴¹ La Rochefoucauld, "Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même" in Oeuvres complètes 5.

⁴² La Rochefoucauld, "Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même" in Oeuvres complètes 6.

⁴³ His passion for Mme de Longueville proves that he does not always dominate himself.

Human experience shows that there are many instances where passions become blinding.

Passion and love are feelings that can subdue us at certain times. Perhaps La Rochefoucauld knows this from personal experience because he uses the pronoun *nous* thereby including himself: “Le pouvoir que les personnes que nous aimons ont sur nous est presque toujours plus grand que celui que nous y avons nous-même.” (L.82.-A la Marquise de Sablé, de Vincennes, n. d., p. 623).

La Rochefoucauld views love as one of the most innocent feelings because it comes from the heart and is hidden in our subconscious. True love is “ [...] exempt du mélange de nos autres passions, c’est celui qui est caché au fond du coeur, et que nous ignorons nous-mêmes.” (M.69). However, expressing it entails selfish manifestations: “Le plaisir de l’amour est d’aimer, et l’on est plus heureux par la passion que l’on a que par celle que l’on donne.” (M.259). In fact, selfishness, in humans seems to be more powerful than love: “Il n’y a point de passion où l’amour de soi-même règne si puissamment que dans l’amour, et on est toujours plus disposé à sacrifier le repos de ce qu’on aime qu’à perdre le sien.” (M.262).⁴⁴

La Rochefoucauld understands that his writing in itself affects certain people even though he treats subjects from a general perspective: “On se mécompte toujours quand les actions sont plus grandes que les desseins.” (L.77.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 620). His philosophical writing addresses not only the mind, but also one’s soul. He ironically recognizes that it is easy to understand human nature but more difficult to understand an individual: “Il est plus aisé de connaître tous les hommes en général que de

⁴⁴ If La Rochefoucauld had not chosen to write in the concise form of the maxims, all these observations would have successfully belonged to an essay on *passion* because there are approximately 43 maxims related to it.

connaître un homme en particulier.” (L.114.-A la Marquise de Sablé, le 2 août, 1675, p. 645).⁴⁵

La Rochefoucauld applied the ideas of ancient roman philosophers to a good purpose: “ [...] il a recours a Cicéron pour ajouter qu’il est bon que nos passions nous poussent à faire notre devoir [...]”⁴⁶ In his maxim, he views *orgueil* as an obstacle to accomplishing one’s duty: “La promptitude à croire le mal, sans l’avoir assez examiné, est un effet de l’orgueil et de la paresse: on veut trouver des coupables, et on ne veut pas se donner la peine d’examiner les crimes.” (M. 267). Analyzing this maxim, Corrado Rosso also notices the influence of Cicero: “ [...] un point conflictuel privilégié où s’affrontaient cicéronianisme, et tacitisme [...]”⁴⁷

Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106-43 BC) was well acquainted with the ideas of Greek philosophers. He introduced their philosophy into Latin literature. Cicero’s primary purpose was to provide his contemporaries with a wide range of philosophical opinions. He examined alternative views to all three commonly accepted branches of philosophy: logic, physics and ethics. His ideas were influenced by Plato, Carneades, Isocrates and Epicurus.⁴⁸ From Plato, he adopted the search for truth. Cicero’s humanistic ideal resulted from the combination of rhetoric and philosophy. Philosophy, alongside other specialized disciplines, provided the knowledge, while rhetoric made it effective. In his opinion, the use of knowledge for the guidance of human affairs represented the highest human achievement. Among Cicero’s major ethical writings is: De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum (45 BC) in which Epicurean, Stoic

⁴⁵ This maxim becomes a variant of the maxims 444 and 436.

⁴⁶ Edith Mora 99-100.

⁴⁷ Corrado Rosso 14.

⁴⁸ Epicurus (341-270), the Greek philosopher, was the disciple of Xenocrate and Democrite. He taught that pleasure is the most important thing, and people should do anything to obtain it. He searches for pleasure by cultivating virtue. Later, people vulgarize his philosophy by misinterpreting it to mean finding pleasure through the senses.

and Peripatetic ethical views were examined. Cicero reproved another philosopher, Piso, for having a superficial understanding of Epicureanism: “And so that stallion of a man, as soon as he heard the philosopher praise pleasure so highly, didn’t find out any more about the philosophy. He spurred on all his sensual faculties to such a degree, and so whinnied after the philosopher’s doctrine, that he thought he had found the originator of passion, not the teacher of virtue.”⁴⁹

La Rochefoucauld believes that vanity creates an illusion of happiness for humans. His analogy on the arrangement of organs in our body is not a new one: “La nature, qui a pourvu à la vie de l’homme par la disposition des organes du corps, lui a sans doute encore donné l’orgueil pour lui épargner la douleur de connaître ses imperfections et ses misères.”⁵⁰ (L.79.-A la Marquise de Sablé, le 10 décembre, ?, p. 622). Here, vanity is seen as a negative characteristic.

When writing to Mme de Sablé, La Rochefoucauld reflects on vanity jokingly: “La vanité et la honte et surtout le tempérament font la valeur des hommes et la chasteté des femmes, dont on mène tant de bruit.” (L.73.-A La Marquise de Sablé, un vendredi soir, n. d., p. 616). Vanity seems to be synonymous with pride here; pride is a constructive feeling while vanity is a destructive one. La Rochefoucauld believes that vanity is also associated with other qualities or faults but it is never genuine:

Il faut avouer que la vertu, par qui nous nous vantons de faire tout ce que nous faisons de bien, n’aurait pas toujours la force de nous retenir dans les règles de notre devoir, si la paresse, la timidité ou

⁴⁹ Qtd. in Catherine J. Castner, Prosopography of Roman Epicureans from the Second Century B.C. to the Second Century A.D. (New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988) 17.

⁵⁰ This is a version of M. 36.

la honte ne nous faisaient voir les inconvénients qu'il y a d'en sortir. (L.74.-A M. Esprit, le 9 septembre, ?, p. 617).

In the seventeenth century, *l'amour-propre* is a strong feeling that inspires one to acquire self-esteem. It is interpreted positively as an individual value and felt by any person who respects human dignity. Being associated with dignity and honor, it represents a meaningful quality. *L'amour-propre* becomes a feeling which influences people to acquire more personal values and contributes to one's spiritual growth. La Rochefoucauld's contemporaries are proud to cultivate it. In Mme de Sablé's letter, this concept appears in a positive acceptation. In one of her letters addressed to Mlle de Montemart,⁵¹ Mme de Sablé writes : "A la vérité, je n'y dois pas trouver à redire, moi, qui suis si humaine et ne vis que par l'amour-propre."⁵² In the cited paragraph she relates it to the concept of humanism. However, she subconsciously uses *amour-propre* as a synonym of vanity. The correspondence written in the seventeenth century shows many people who use both concepts, - *amour-propre* and *vanity* as synonymous without realizing that there is a distinct difference between them.

Even La Rochefoucauld himself does not always realize the distinction between the two when he allows his vanity to be satisfied by the King's compliment: "J'ai reçu la lettre que vous m'avez fait l'honneur de m'écrire le 7e de ce mois sur la grâce que le Roy me vient de faire." (L.278.-A Louvois, de Fontainebleau, le 16 septembre, 1683, vol. II, p. 113).⁵³ It is partly because La Rochefoucauld's contemporaries relate *l'amour-propre* to religion, ethics, psychology and philosophy. "Je voudrais bien savoir si ces peines, qui viennent de mon amour-propre, peuvent entrer dans ma pénitence" asks Mme

⁵¹ Mlle de Montemart, a clergy woman from the Abbaye-aux-Bois. Addressing this letter, Mlle de Sablé speaks about this matter in a confessional manner.

⁵² *Portfeuilles de Valant*, Tome VII, p. 434. Bibliothèque nationale, l. de 1670.

⁵³ La Fayette. *Correspondance*. (Copied with the spelling of the original letter).

de Sablé.⁵⁴ (same L.). Inspired by religious feelings, Mme de Sablé associates this concept to the fear of God. She declares herself ready to give up reason for the sake of religion.⁵⁵ She asks herself if she should also renounce *amour-propre* to please God.

Deceived by some events in his life, the Abbot of Rancé advises against vanity when one attributes too much value to external influences. He expresses his disbelief in a cynical tone: “ [...] il n’y a nul bien dans ce monde qui soit solide et qui mérite que l’on s’y attache.” (L.308.-De l’Abbé de Rancé, le 20 décembre, 1686, vol. II, p. 145).⁵⁶ His philosophical meditation⁵⁷ is clearly influenced by some religious creeds when he adds perhaps a little too bitterly: “les gens ne sont jamais sincères dans leurs relations.” (same L., 308). It is also true that the Abbot of Rancé admits the fact that his own views might be of less value being: “les vues et les lumières d’un homme retiré, comme je suis, sont bornées et de peu d’étendue.” (same L., 308).

Another clergyman, J. -J. du Guet⁵⁸ writes a letter to Mme de La Fayette that, in fact, is a philosophical meditation. He advises anyone to become aware of the vanity caused by dangerous factors. One will be able to recognize them if the first goal of knowing oneself has been achieved:

Il faut donc commencer par le désir sincère de se voir soi-même
comme on est vu par son juge. Cette vue est accablante, même
pour les personnes les plus déclarées contre le déguisement.
Elle nous oste toutes nos vertus, même nos bonnes qualités et
l’estime que tout cela nous auroit acquise. On sent qu’on a vécu

⁵⁴ Mme de Sablé has then retired to Port-Royal fighting against her illness.

⁵⁵ “Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point [...]”. Pascal 127.

⁵⁶ LF. Correspondance.

⁵⁷ Subjects like vanity, true values and wearing a mask are mixed up in Rancé’s meditation. It is clear that La Rochefoucauld’s contemporaries do not distinguish each one of these concepts, confusing them at certain moments.

⁵⁸ Author of Lettres de M*** [Du Guet] à diverses personnes sur plusieurs sujets de morale et de piété. Paris 10 vol. (1708-1753) Bib. Nat and Arch. Nat.

jusque là dans l'illusion et le mensonge, qu'on s'est nourry de viandes en peinture, qu'on n'a pris de la vertu que l'ajustement et la parure et qu'on en a négligé le fonds [...] (L.331.-De J. -J. du Guet, le 13 nov. 1690, p. 169) ⁵⁹

However, amour-propre seems to prevail over vanity when Mme de La Fayette writes in a letter of Nov. 1st, a few days earlier than J.-J. du Guet's:

Je m'admire quelquefois toute seule; je ne crois pas aussi avoir bien des camarades en cette occupation; cependant je trouve que je dois estre admirée. Trouvéz - m'en une autre qui eust une figure comme la mienne, et tournée au bel esprit comme vous m'avez tournée, et quy ayt aussi bien fait pour sa maison. Ce sont des choses assez rares rassemblées. Il résulte de tout cela que je n'ay plus le sens commun. Je vous assure que c'est un bel exemple à quy en voudroit faire un bon usage. (L.360.-A Ménage, de Paris, le 1er novembre 1691, p. 207, signed La C. de La

Fayette).⁶⁰

After scrutinizing herself, Mme de La Fayette finds many reasons to be satisfied with herself. This is not vanity but self-esteem and the feeling of dignity that inspired her to become the person that she feels proud to be.

Many of La Rochefoucauld's contemporaries also analyze the different aspects of morality. La Bruyère believes that any philosopher should meditate on it. According to La Bruyère:

Le philosophe consume sa vie à observer les hommes, et il use ses esprits à en démêler les vices et le ridicule; s'il donne quelque tour à ses pensées, c'est moins par une vanité d'auteur, que pour

⁵⁹ LF. Correspondance.

⁶⁰ LF. Correspondance.

mettre une vérité qu'il a trouvée dans tout le jour nécessaire pour faire l'impression qui doit servir à son dessein.⁶¹.

La Bruyère believes that a philosopher's duties are: to observe people, to discern vices from virtue, to distinguish ridicule from common sense and finally, to bring the truth to light. No one can ignore vanity because its positive and negative roles are manifested obviously. Everyone has a certain degree of vanity in himself/herself. Loving oneself is useful for one's self preservation and progress, and should not be considered an obstacle for loving others. Analyzing vanity, La Rochefoucauld notices that there are hidden passions and vices related to it which are wrongly interpreted as positive qualities. Nevertheless, he also admits that everyone's intentions are genuine. Why then criticize his maxims for having insisted on it?

One century earlier, Montaigne wrote on this matter in the same way. He simultaneously treated *amour-propre* and vanity in his essay, De la Vanité. However, he named both *vanity* and tried to define its aspects: of nature, of humans, of oneself and of speech. The Renaissance thinker agreed that this subject "devrait estre soigneusement et continuellement médité par les gens de l'entendement."⁶² Montaigne also related vanity to the idea of *meschamment faire*: "La corruption du siècle se faict par la contribution particulière de chacun de nous: les uns y confèrent la trahison, les autres l'injustice, l'irréligion, la tyrannie, l'avarice, la cruauté [...] les plus foibles y apportent la sottise, la vanité, l'oisiveté, desquels je suis."⁶³ Montaigne implied that vanity has its role in corruption. Montaigne believes that, because of it, everyone should be aware of his own limitations, since there are "mille choses [...] à désirer et à craindre."⁶⁴ Montaigne also thinks that there are people who do not analyze

⁶¹ La Bruyère 39.

⁶² Montaigne, Essais. (Paris: Gallimard, 1950) 1057.

⁶³ Montaigne 1058.

⁶⁴ Montaigne 1059.

themselves with the same scrutiny: "Ceux qui suivent l'autre extrémité de s'agrèer en eux-mêmes, d'estimer ce qu'ils tiennent au dessus du reste et de ne reconnoistre aucune forme plus belle que celle qu'ils voyent, s'ils ne sont plus advisez que nous, ils sont à la vérité plus heureux."⁶⁵ Recognizing his own limits, Montaigne advises that one should not let oneself be blinded by vanity. One should look at the broader perspective instead of confining himself/herself to a single way of thinking."⁶⁶ *Vanitas vanitorum!* Following this idea, he analyzes himself and discovers that human nature is not always the best advisor: "Les paroles que j'exprime au malheur sont des paroles de despit; mon courage se hérissé au lieu de s'applatir."⁶⁷

Montaigne believes that some of our qualities which we should feel proud of do not have the same value if they are not acknowledged by others. Because of it, he adds ironically: "l'esprit et la sagesse nous semblent sans fruit si elle n'est jouée que de nous, si elle ne se produit à la veue et approbation estrangère."⁶⁸ Vanity cultivates other vices like inhumanity and dishonesty that are added to our *alteration* and *natural corruption*. To illustrate his thoughts, Montaigne adds his own maxims like: "La louange est toujours plaisante, de qui et pourquoi elle vienne"⁶⁹ or: "Les imperfections mesme ont leur moyen de se recommander."⁷⁰ And, it is obvious that other people play a key role in one's vanity: "Peu de vaisseaux fondent de leur propre poix et sans violence estrangère."⁷¹

Montaigne believes that vanity should be *carefully* and *continuously* contemplated.⁷² He compares his epoch to antiquity when "chacun devoit

⁶⁵ Montaigne 1060.

⁶⁶ See page 115, line 17.

⁶⁷ Montaigne 1060.

⁶⁸ Montaigne 1069.

⁶⁹ Montaigne 1079.

⁷⁰ Montaigne 1080.

⁷¹ Montaigne 1075.

⁷² Montaigne 1057.

rendre raison de ses actions”⁷³ by saying that *other times*, like his, compel one to think differently: “Je ne puis tenir registre de ma vie par mes actions: fortune les met trop bas; je le tiens par mes fantaisies.”⁷⁴ Montaigne says it is also a matter of personal interpretation: “Quand je suis en mauvais estat, je m’acharne au mal; je m’abandonne par desespoir et me laisse aller vers la chute [...]”⁷⁵ Who can accuse La Rochefoucauld of being pessimistic after reading Montaigne’s reflection?

Montaigne notices that it is also vanity when we think that we are the center of everything: “Nous empeschons nos pensées du general et des causes et conduittes universelles, qui se conduisent très bien sans nous [...]”⁷⁶ Because of this generalized erroneous view, Montaigne suggests a more modest attitude offering his own example: “Je me contente de jouir le monde sans m’en empresser, de vivre une vie seulement excusable, et qui seulement ne poise ny à moy ni à autrui.”⁷⁷ He thinks it is more convenient to do so. Montaigne concludes that vanity in itself causes harm: “Qui que ce soit, ou art ou nature, qui nous imprime cette condition de vivre par la relation à autrui, nous faict beaucoup plus de mal que de bien.”⁷⁸ Persuasively, he adds: “Nous nous défraudons de nos propres utilitez pour former les apparences à l’opinion commune.”⁷⁹ Vanity is such a compelling feeling that: “l’esprit et la sagesse nous semble sans fruct, si elle n’est jouie que de nous [...]”⁸⁰ Montaigne compares one’s sinking to that of sinking boats and notices what any person with common sense should keep in mind : “Peu de vaisseaux fondent de leur

⁷³ Montaigne 1057.

⁷⁴ Montaigne 1057.

⁷⁵ Montaigne 1059.

⁷⁶ Montaigne 1065.

⁷⁷ Montaigne 1065.

⁷⁸ Montaigne 1068.

⁷⁹ Montaigne 1068.

⁸⁰ Montaigne 1069.

propre poix et sans violence estrangere.”⁸¹ Mme de La Fayette also believes that vanity is sometimes the driving force behind others’ happiness. In a letter addressed to Mme de Sévigné, she writes: “Tout le monde me paroist si attaché à ses plaisirs, et à des plaisirs quy despendent entièrement des autres, que je me trouve avoir un don des fées d’estre de l’humeur dont je suis” (L.213.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Saint-Mour, le 4 sept. 1673, vol II, p. 45).⁸²

Unlike Montaigne who included in the same concept of vanity amour-propre and vanity itself, La Rochefoucauld differentiated between the two. In La Rochefoucauld, l’amour-propre is synonymous with honor and prowess.

La Rochefoucauld felt preoccupied by *l’amour-propre* since his youth. Louis Hippeau believes that the concept of amour-propre in La Rochefoucauld cannot be separated from the concept of virtue: “Ce qu’on appelle ordinairement le système de La Rochefoucauld, c’est simplement son parti pris d’expliquer la vertu de l’amour-propre.”⁸³ Even though La Rochefoucauld does not say it exactly, he points to the same requirement when he writes: “ [...] je serais un ingrat et un lâche, si je manquais d’être à toutes epreuves [...] ” (L.9.-Au Cardinal Mazarin, de Verteuil, le 2 octobre, 1648, p. 563).

La Rochefoucauld writes many maxims on *vanity*. This subject is analyzed from different angles. Vanity inspires other positive feelings like mercy, but it also inspires vices: “Cette clémence, dont on fait une vertu, se pratique tantôt par vanité, quelquefois par paresse, souvent par crainte, et presque toujours par tous les trois ensemble.” (M.16). Montaigne’s influence on La Rochefoucauld is obvious when he speaks about vices’ ‘contribution’. However, its association with a positive feeling like mercy belongs to his century. La Rochefoucauld believes that vanity is stronger than passion : “Les

⁸¹ Montaigne 1075.

⁸² La Fayette, Correspondance.

⁸³ Louis Hippeau 75.

passions les plus violentes nous laissent quelquefois du relâche, mais la vanité nous agite toujours.” (M.443). He believes that vanity overcomes passion. He also believes that our virtues are strongly influenced by vanity : “Si la vanité ne renverse pas entièrement les vertus, du moins elle les ébranle toutes.” (M.388). Our resentments are also partly caused by vanity: “Quelque prétexte que nous donnions à nos afflictions, ce n’est souvent que l’intérêt et la vanité qui les causent.” (M.232).

According to La Rochefoucauld, *vanité* and *amour-propre* are acquired attributes manufactured by society. They are artificial because they are absent in nature. He gives children as an example; they are not born with these attributes and follow only nature’s rules: “Ce qui fait que la plupart des petits enfants plaisent, c’est qu’ils sont encore renfermés dans cet air et dans ces manières que la nature leur a donnés, et qu’ils n’en connaissent point d’autres [...]” (De l’air et des manières, p. 507). Later in life, these attributes become noticeable because everyone tries to imitate his/her peers: “on aime à imiter, on imite souvent, même sans s’en apercevoir, et on néglige ses propres biens pour des biens étrangers, qui d’ordinaire ne nous conviennent pas. (De l’air et des manières, p. 507). La Rochefoucauld believes that this artificial acquisition does not agree with our true nature: “ [...] personne ne sait accorder son air et ses manières avec sa figure, ni ses tons et ses paroles avec ses pensées et ses sentiments; on trouble leur harmonie par quelque chose de faux et d’étranger [...]” (p. 508). Another contemporary author, La Bruyère, also underlines the negative aspects of *l’amour-propre*.

observant que l’amour-propre est dans l’homme la cause de tous ses faibles, [il] l’attaque sans relâche, quelque part où il se trouve; et cette unique pensée, comme multipliée en mille manières

différentes, a toujours, par le choix des mots et par la variété de l'expression, la grâce de la nouveauté.⁸⁴

After having read his predecessors' reflections, one is inclined to criticize La Rochefoucauld's maxims on vanity less than before, even though some of them have a pessimistic tone.

"L'orgueil [...] est inséparable de l'amour-propre" writes La Rochefoucauld in one of his reflections (De la Retraite, p. 540). Here, vanity becomes the synonym of pride. La Rochefoucauld finds some benefits to vanity when he writes: "La complaisance est nécessaire dans la société, mais elle doit avoir des bornes: elle devient une servitude quand elle est excessive; il faut du moins qu'elle paraisse libre, et qu'en suivant le sentiment de nos amis, ils soient persuadés que c'est la nôtre aussi que nous suivons." (De la société, p. 505).

Many of La Rochefoucauld's maxims on amour-propre and vanity are acknowledged by his contemporaries. In a letter addressed to Bussy-Rabutin, Mme de Sévigné writes:

C'est une jolie chose à mon gré que d'entendre vite; cela fait voir une vivacité qui plaît, et dont l'amour-propre sait un gré nonpareil. M. de La Rochefoucauld dit vrai dans ses Maximes : *Nous aimons mieux ceux qui entendent bien que ceux qui se font écouter.* Nous devons nous aimer à la pareille, pour nous être toujours si bien entendus.⁸⁵

Montaigne and La Rochefoucauld view amour-propre somewhat differently. However, La Rochefoucauld agrees with his mentor Montaigne on other subjects like charity. Montaigne and La Rochefoucauld detach themselves from religious people because they have different opinions on

⁸⁴ La Bruyère 42.

⁸⁵ Mme de Sévigné 508.

charity. From a religious perspective, charity is viewed as a *sine qua non* quality of any person whereas Montaigne views it in his essay, De la Charité, as: “une qualité ambitieuse et de prérogative.”⁸⁶ He believes that it is equally difficult to accept charity because it infers the *quality of submission*. Montaigne himself feels that he could not accept it because of some other traits of his character which oppose it like: “un peu de fierté naturelle, l’impatience du refus, contraction de mes désirs et desseins, l’inhabileté à toute sorte d’affaire, et mes qualites plus favories: l’oisiveté, la franchise.”⁸⁷ Because of these ‘qualities’, as he calls them ironically, Montaigne would have adverse feelings: “Par tout cela j’ay prins à haine mortelle d’estre tenu ny à autre ni par autre que moi.”⁸⁸ Montaigne expresses reluctance towards the idea of charity. He thinks that charity is harmful because the receiver may feel humiliated or act rudely to his benefactor: “[...] non seulement il les refuse rudement disant que ny luy ny ses prédecesseurs n’avaient à coustume de prendre [...]”.⁸⁹ Montaigne thinks that he himself should be thankful because he does not owe anything to anyone, not even *thanks*: “Combien je supplie instamment sa sainteté miséricorde que jamais je ne doive un essential grammercy à personne!”.⁹⁰ He feels free because he does not have debts toward anyone: “Ce que je doibts, je le doibts aux obligations communes et naturelles”.⁹¹

Montaigne understands the idea of benevolence and gratitude as a *subtle* matter. He detaches himself from many of his contemporaries because he views the subject of charity from a personal perspective rather than a general one. He thinks it is related to one’s personality: “[...] s’il faut ainsi devoir quelque chose, ce doibt estre à plus legitime titre que celui de quoy je parle

⁸⁶ Montaigne 1085.

⁸⁷ Montaigne 1058.

⁸⁸ Montaigne 1085.

⁸⁹ Montaigne 1085.

⁹⁰ Montaigne 1084.

⁹¹ Montaigne 1083.

[...],⁹² adds Montaigne. He also thinks that other human qualities such as kindness or evil are inter-converted with charity and, are therefore viewed in another light: “[...] la bonté est plus belle et plus attrayante quand elle est rare, et [que] la contrariété et diversité roidit et resserre en soy le bien faire, et l’enflamme par la jalousie de l’opposition et par la gloire.”⁹³ When Montaigne states: “[...] que les maux d’autrui ne nous doivent pas poindre comme les nostres”,⁹⁴ he seems to be more practical than selfish because he is logical in what he adds: “Vous souffrez pour autrui, ou autrui pour vous; l’un et l’autre inconvenient est poissant, mais le dernier me semble encore plus rude.”⁹⁵

He feels satisfied for being able to provide for his needs by his own efforts: “Ce que je doibts, je doibts aux obligations communes et naturelles.”⁹⁶ Inspired by Aristotle’s ideas, Montaigne concludes: “Après tout, selon que je m’entends en la science du bienfaict et de reconnaissance qui est une subtile science et un grand usage [...]”.⁹⁷

La Rochefoucauld believes that helping others too much is harmful: “Il n’est pas si dangereux de faire du mal à la plupart des hommes que de leur faire trop de bien.” (M.238). Doing too much good to others compels them to show false gratitude: “Il est de la reconnaissance comme de la bonne foi des marchands: elle entretient le commerce, et nous ne payons pas parce qu’il est juste de nous acquitter, mais pour trouver plus facilement des gens qui nous prêtent.” (M.223).

The feeling of *gratitude* is viewed differently at different times. Religious people are inclined to think that one should feel gratitude only toward God; we should be grateful for the life he gave us and for other blessings. The non-

⁹² Montaigne 1086.

⁹³ Montaigne 1088.

⁹⁴ Montaigne 1089.

⁹⁵ Montaigne 1105.

⁹⁶ Montaigne 1083.

⁹⁷ Montaigne 1083.

religious people think that government deserves gratitude for the conditions of our lives. Parents and friends think that we should show them recognition for all the favors they have done for us.⁹⁸ When we do not necessarily agree, it is because we are not inspired by the same feeling. Gratitude is a feeling like any other. Therefore, it can not be imposed on us by family and friends. However, traditional rules can inspire us. We feel compelled to accept traditional practices even when our reason indicates the contrary to us. Pre-established rules impose on us.

When he analyzes himself, La Rochefoucauld feels grateful to society for everything it did for him. Analyzing the life of each individual, he realizes that society has contributed to his/her success even though one might not necessarily feel the same way. He includes himself writing: “quand je dis nous j’entends parler de l’homme [...] ” (L.93.-Au Père Thomas Esprit, du 6 février, 1665, p. 631). As a modern thinker, he analyzes facts objectively. He looks at the ancient teachings with reserve because he recognizes the limitations and exaggerations of some statements. With much lucidity, he tries to find solid arguments to prove that his affirmation is valid. He illustrates them with some examples and writes about it: “ [...] et comme cela je crois qu’il y avait de l’orqueil [...] magnanimité et la libéralité [...] il y avait de la rudesse et beaucoup d’envie et de la haine [...] ” (same L., 93). La Rochefoucauld also takes into consideration some external references that could lead to a false interpretation. Because of this, he believes that the analysis of one’s soul is necessary. When he analyzes Augustus’ clemency toward Cinna, instead of seeing virtue in it, he sees “une lassitude de réprandre inutilement tant de sang.” (same L., 93).

⁹⁸ La Rochefoucauld believes that in friendship, one should not feel gratitude. All favors and duties should be contemplated from another perspective because friendship follows other rules. A friend is there when he/she is needed. Modern thinkers such as Montaigne, who inspires La Rochefoucauld, believe that one should not have debts toward a friend and act with gratitude because of them. One should be compelled by reciprocal obligations that are imposed by friendship itself.

Therefore, one should analyze all the *replis* of one's soul. These examples of ancient times help him understand modern feelings. When he relates it to his Maxims, La Rochefoucauld suggests the fact that, when reading his maxims, one should also analyze:

tous les replis de son propre coeur; à part les événements extérieurs les intentions d'un individu comptent aussi: Il me semble, dis-je, que l'on n'a pu trop exagérer les misères et les contrariétés du coeur humain pour humilier l'orgueil ridicule dont [il] est rempli; et lui faire voir le besoin qu'il a en toutes choses d'être soutenu et redressé par le christianisme. (same L., 93).

La Rochefoucauld tries to define the purpose of his Maxims: "Il me semble que les maximes dont [il] est question tendent assez à cela et qu'elles ne sont pas criminelles, puisque leur but est d'attaquer l'orgueil, qui, à ce que j'ai ouï dire, n'est pas nécessaire à salut." (same L., 93).

VI. THE LITERARY STYLE OF LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

La Rochefoucauld's letters are genuine literary achievements. The manner in which he describes each and every detail is always elegant and almost always artful. The talent displayed in his maxims and in his reflections is equally found in his correspondence. Using his words skillfully, he expresses the most subtle ideas with extreme sensitivity. Little by little, he indirectly paints the panorama of his century. Once again, one can imagine the King's court, his entourage, the courtiers, the Dukes, Counts, his friends, his enemies, and the talented writers of the epoch. La Rochefoucauld paints the entire society from the perspective of a *grand seigneur* and, despite rivalries, he defends the position of his peers in society.

La Rochefoucauld's maxims are exceptionally refined, distinct from all the other maxims written in that epoch. Their distinction results from the fact that he perfects them constantly. He also wishes to avoid ridicule in them. Thus, he writes to M. Esprit, one of his collaborators:¹

Je vous déclare donc que j'attendrai votre réponse tant que vous voudrez; mais je vous la demande aussi sur l'état de vos affaires. La honte me prend de vous envoyer des ouvrages. Tout de bon, si vous les trouvez ridicules, renvoyez-les-moi, sans les montrer à Mme de Sablé. (L.61.-A M. Esprit, de Verteuil, le 24 oct., 1660, p. 609).

And in a letter addressed to Mme de Sablé, La Rochefoucauld declares that he is always willing to accept M. Esprit's good counsel: "J'espère suivre bientôt son conseil [...]" (L.62.-A la Marquise de Sablé, de Verteuil, le 5 déc., p. 609).

¹ The letter 61 represents his own testimony about his collaboration with Jacques Esprit. He clearly writes: "Vous n'aurez que cela [trois maximes] pour cette heure. Mandez ce qu'il faut en changer [...]" L.61.-A M. Esprit, n. d., p. 607. He also reminds him about their terms of friendship: "Je crois que j'irai cet hiver à Paris, et que nous recommencerons de belles moralités au coin du feu." same L., 61.

It is well known from his Maximes and Réflexions diverses that La Rochefoucauld thinks and writes well; however, he could not write without other connoisseur's advice. In his epoch, it is customary to ask this advice from other people who also write well, and La Rochefoucauld asks M. Esprit and Mme de Sablé's advice. For instance, in one of his letters, he informs the latter: "J'ai écrit à M. Esprit pour venir demain voir l'ouvrage tout entier." (L.56.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 605). La Rochefoucauld gives up pride for the sake of his writing. He wants to express himself both clearly and beautifully. His letters also show that his contemporaries are preoccupied by the same ethical subjects, - *les moralités*. These reflections are well thought out, maturing *au coin du feu* in an amiable atmosphere.

La Rochefoucauld's correspondence clearly shows a *fond commun*² between Mme de Sablé's maxims and his own without diminishing either La Rochefoucauld's merit or Mme de Sablé's art of refinement: "Voilà encore une maxime que je vous envoie pour joindre aux autres. Je vous supplie de me mander votre sentiment des dernières que je vous ai envoyées. Vous ne les pouvez désapprouver toutes, car il y en a beaucoup de vous" (L.81.-A Mme de Sablé, n. d., p. 623). La Rochefoucauld feels grateful toward the Marquise; he expresses his feelings warmly: "Après tout ce que vous avez fait pour moi, il me semble qu'il serait plus juste de vous en rendre de très humbles grâces, que de vous donner de nouvelles peines." (L.89.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 626).

La Rochefoucauld carefully scrutinized his writing so, it is no wonder that he became upset when his Mémoires were 'altered' during their circulation.³ When he writes:

² Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe 100.

³ See note 3 on p. 861 in La Rochefoucauld's Correspondance.

Les deux tiers de l'écrit qu'on m'a montré, et que l'on dit qui court sous mon nom, ne sont point de moi, et je n'y ai nulle part. L'autre tiers, qui est vers la fin, est tellement changé et falsifié dans toutes ses parties et dans le sens, l'ordre et les termes, qu'il n'y a presque rien qui soit conforme à ce que j'ai écrit sur ce-sujet-là [...] (L.67.-A Monsieur ***, de 1662, p. 613),

he intends to remind Monsieur about the “friponnerie de ceux qui vendent toute sorte de manuscrits sous quelque nom qui ce ⁴ puisse être.” (same L., 67). As a guarantee of his affirmation, he offers the testimony of three respected witnesses: “Mme la Marquise de Sablé, M. de Liancourt et M. Esprit ont vu ce que j'ai écrit pour moi seul.” (same L., 67).

Polite forms are in fashion more than ever in the so called classical era. No one is allowed to ignore them or even forget them. It would be an unforgivable error, but it is also a sign of nobility; the more one uses them, the more one is admired. The way that La Rochefoucauld uses a variety of polite formulas in his letters with much elegance is remarkable. He alternates them according to his interlocutors and according to the message he wants to convey. In one of his letters, he exclaims: “Grands Dieux! qu'ai-je pensé faire? J'allais finir ma lettre sans mettre votre très humble, très obéissant et très fidèle serviteur.” (L.124.-A Mlle d'Aumale, de Verteuil, le 4 décembre, p. 651). Writing in this way, one could question if La Rochefoucauld does so because he indeed has almost forgotten to include these polite forms or rather, because he wants to attract attention to the fact that he uses such polite forms meaningfully.⁵

⁴ It appears to be spelled like that in the letter because, at the beginning of the classical era, spelling rules were not yet forged; therefore, a word can appear spelled in different ways. This is even more obvious in the second part where Mme de La Fayette's correspondence is analyzed.

⁵ However, some of La Rochefoucauld's letters must be altered due to certain conditions because he writes: “Je me servirai d'une autre main pour vous dire le reste.” One could ask himself, how many of these letters appear in the collection of his correspondence. L.31.-Au Prince de Conti, de Paris, le 27 août, 1652, p. 584. In another letter, he writes: “Si je vous pouvais entretenir, je vous dirais bien des choses que je ne puis mander.” L.39.-A Lenet, le 28 septembre, 1652, p. 592. Other letters are unfortunately lost.

La Rochefoucauld also recognizes the skill of others who equally use these polite forms. At the same time, he realizes that ridiculous situations arise when one uses these polite forms without knowing the right measure; because of it, he remarks in one of his letters: “[...] vous m’écrivez avec des façons que, si vous continuez, nous ferons comme les évêques.” (L.91.-Au Comte de Guitant, le 15 novembre, 1664, p. 628). Does he want to give advice to his friend here or, perhaps, does he want to give himself more room to write in a more direct tone, renouncing these polite forms which, from time to time, take one off the subject?

Writing letters is more than a sign of politeness for La Rochefoucauld. It shows his determination to continue his correspondence: “Encore qu’il n’y ait quasi point de nouvelles à vous mander, je ne laisse pas de vous écrire [...]” (L.37.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 11 septembre, 1652, p. 589). And when there are no news, there are ideas that La Rochefoucauld expertly develops to defend his own opinions regarding a certain event. La Rochefoucauld realizes that the first function of a letter is to inform others because he writes: “[...] Il n’est rien arrivé depuis qui mérite d’être écrit.” (L.90.-Au Comte de Guitant, de Paris, le 22 septembre, 1664, p. 627). However, the letter sent on this occasion abounds in interesting opinions and comments on contemporary events.

La Rochefoucauld’s letters also present a variety of styles. One of the letters addressed to Lenet is written like press coverage in which he reviews the most important news. The details contained within describe contemporary customs and the life of his time. His commentaries concerning noble obligations and recompenses also have historical value for us, the modern readers. When La Rochefoucauld writes about Mademoiselle: “[...] Elle est

This fact bothers La Rochefoucauld when he writes: “Je vous conjure de me mander quand vous aurez reçu cette lettre et celle que je vous ai écrite de Damvilliers, car je serais bien fâché qu’elle fût perdue.” L.49.-A Lenet, de Stenay, le 11 février, 1653, p. 601.

partie avec fort peu de train et d'équipage [...] le Roi lui a envoyé quatre gardes, qui demeureront en son logis." (L.44.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 27 octobre, 1652, p. 597), the news he refers to, many times unintentionally, remake the scenery of court life some three hundred years ago.

La Rochefoucauld makes his style work in his favor. To ask the Duke d'Eperon's favor, he writes a special letter where the introduction dominates the content in order to evoke his friendship. La Rochefoucauld expresses his confidence about the Duke's good feelings. The ample tone he uses cannot be left unnoticed by his interlocutor. We also feel it when we read his past letter:

Monsieur, c'est avec la plus grande confusion du monde que je prends la liberté de vous rompre la tête de mes intérêts, mais la confiance que j'ai en l'amitié que vous m'avez fait l'honneur de me permettre, me fait faire une faute dont je vous demande pardon devant que de l'avoir commencée, et pour ne vous lasser pas par la longueur de mes excuses [...] (L.52.-Au Duc d'Eperon, le 7 juillet, 1656, p. 603).

La Rochefoucauld realizes the power of words; therefore, he chooses them carefully. He suggests that his interlocutor do likewise: "Je ne pense pas avoir besoin de beaucoup de paroles [...]" (L.57.-Au Prince de Condé, de Paris, le 23 décembre, 1659, p. 605). The rhythm of his sentence also changes to express the joy he feels when writing and being persuasive at the same time. The concluding sentence becomes an elegant superlative which mirrors his most sincere feelings: "[...] Elle voudra bien me faire assez de justice pour croire que personne ne peut prendre plus de part que moi à sa satisfaction, ni être si véritablement que je suis [...]" (same L., 57). He strongly believes in the strength of words because this also appears in one of his maxims: "Il n'y a pas moins d'éloquence dans le ton de la voix que dans le choix des paroles."

(Posthumous M. 530). When spoken, words need to be articulated in a certain manner, believes La Rochefoucauld. He distinguishes between the art of writing and the art of speaking but never denies their intersecting point as an asset to all elegantly formulated thoughts. Philip Lewis believes that maxims are open thoughts allowing for dialogue between the author and readers: “The Maxims were clearly viewed from the outset as an occasion for dialogue (in some cases direct dialogue with the author); they offered their readers a kind of stimulus or reference point for reflection and discussion.”⁶ He is aware that mediocrity could have the nicest form when he writes in one of his maxims: “On admire tout ce qui éblouit, et l’art de savoir bien mettre en oeuvre de médiocres qualités dérobe l’estime, et donne souvent plus de réputation que le véritable mérite.” (M. 162). He also warns those who imitate: “L’imitation est toujours malheureuse, et tout ce qui est contrefait déplaît avec les mêmes choses qui charment lorsqu’elles sont naturelles.” (M. 618). This is one of the most concise pleas for originality, but also one of the most convincing at the same time.

La Rochefoucauld uses words with great wisdom. He distinguishes their most subtle nuances. He chooses words with extreme care to express his most shaded thoughts (shade of meanings). His own thoughts have a naturally artistic form which is connected to his distinguished manners echoing a *modus vivendi* of the high class of his time.

La Rochefoucauld’s writings have a poetic form. There is an equilibrium between his philosophical thoughts and these imaginative, concise sentences in his creations. Critics notice that he chooses words that express his ideas in an artistic manner. Some critics such as Edith Mora find a connection between La Rochefoucauld’s poetic forms and his psychological observations: “ [...] La

⁶ Philip E. Lewis 43.

Rochefoucauld a fait un labyrinthe psychologique et dialectique, que peuvent nous ouvrir, seules les ailes de la poésie.”⁷

When he writes: “Je suis extrêmement fâché du mal de M. de Guitaut” (L.55.-A Lenet, n. d., p. 605), his pathetic tone results from the skillful manner in which he chooses his words. The adverb *extrêmement* completes the meaning of the adjective *fâché* in such a way that from this combination results a relative superlative which helps La Rochefoucauld to precisely define his feelings. In the circumstance when one of his friends is ill, La Rochefoucauld feels much pain; however, he expresses himself reservedly, without effusion. One sentence, he believes, is enough to say whatever he feels is related to this subject.

It is unanimously recognized that La Rochefoucauld is a master of conciseness. However, he sometimes compromises with the new literary fashion and the new non-classical tendencies. Influenced by the current of the *préciosité*, he sends kind words to his friend M. Esprit in these new forms : “Il n’y a personne ici qui ne se plaigne de vous, et qui ne s’attendît à quelque marque de votre souvenir. Pour moi qui connaît son étendue, je n’ai pas cru qu’il vous obligeât à de grands soins [...]” (L.60.-A M. Esprit, n. d., p. 608). Nevertheless, his courteous sentences, written in the *precious* style, maintain the elegant tone of ancient nobility.

There are times when La Rochefoucauld is so busy that he omits the polite forms requested at the end of each letter. In a letter of 1658, he is obviously vexed against M. de Pomponne and against many of his friends who have forgotten him. He then feigns his haste to renounce polite forms but, ostensibly and without hesitation, he comments about this fact in a tone which may seem too direct: “[...] je ne puis toutefois me résoudre à vous en faire bien

⁷ Edith Mora 50.

régulièrement des excuses ni à finir ma lettre avec toute la cérémonie que je dois.” (L.54.-A Arnauld de Pomponne, de Verteuil, le 24 juin, 1658, p. 604). This silence is expressive in itself.

All of La Rochefoucauld’s critics recognize the elegance of his style. However, describing himself, La Rochefoucauld writes: “ [...] Souvent j’exprime assez mal ce que je veux dire.”⁸ His own opinion on his writing seems to contradict all those who highly appreciate him. It shows not only his modesty, but also, it relates to his efforts. Perhaps his elegant writing comes only after a great deal of struggle. His correspondence shows this fact as well. La Rochefoucauld never hesitates to ask the advice of the connoisseurs in the art of writing. It is customary among La Rochefoucauld’s contemporaries to ask for advice when one writes literary works. For instance, La Rochefoucauld often asks for M. Esprit’s opinion. He informs his friend, Mme de Sablé, about this fact: “ [...] j’ai écrit à M. Esprit pour venir demain voir l’ouvrage entier.” (L.56.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 605). Here, he refers to his maxims and the benefit of others’ wise advice on them. La Rochefoucauld recognized that he could not have done everything alone: “Mandez ce qu’il faut en changer.” (L.60.-A M. Esprit, n. d., p. 607). He writes insisting on the fact that he is willing to accept criticism. He humbly accepts this criticism for the sake of his writing. He realizes that the beauty and clearness of his expressions also become refined in the process.

The anonymous author of the Discours⁹ underlines the value of the Réflexions in a sentence that inspires one’s meditation. He suggests that there are many people who talk about these reflections but only a few of them could understand the true value of these philosophical thoughts. To understand their

⁸ La Rochefoucauld, “Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui-même”, Oeuvres 4.

⁹ The Discours appeared in the first edition of the Réflexions in 1665.

profound meaning, one should analyze them with “much penetration” (M.388). This remark can be looked at as advice for any cultivated reader; however, it discourages any non-purposeful amateur. The author of the same Discours also expresses his opinion about “ces pensées élevées et hardies”¹⁰ and about their author. According to him, La Rochefoucauld writes to release “son esprit” without searching for glory in his writing.¹¹ He does not have this ambition, because his reputation is already assured by his noble title and by his social position. Therefore, he does not write to acquire glory as other writers do. On the contrary, La Rochefoucauld would not like to be published; he already showed his reluctance when publishers wanted to publish his *Mémoires*. He opposed them rather energetically.

The author of the Discours also invites us to notice the noble air which appears in La Rochefoucauld’s writings in a natural manner: “Cet air de qualité qui en ressort serait inimitable par un écrivain qui écrirait selon des règles car, nulle règle ne saurait rendre cette écriture non-affectée.”¹²

La Rochefoucauld’s friends and enemies alike acknowledge the talent of his writing. He is known for using a tone that brings with it poetic inflections and varied modulations. Everyone admires his seemingly natural tone even when he is being ironical or profoundly humane. Despite the impression of ease, he arrives at a perfection of style only after tedious work.

La Rochefoucauld’s tone creates the right atmosphere. When he wants to amuse his interlocutor, he manages to do so skillfully:

[...] au lieu des prospérités je vous souhaite, je vous souhaiterais les impossibilités, les jalousies réciproques, l’incompatibilité d’humeur, un beau-père amoureux de vous, une belle-mère

¹⁰ Discours (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964) 387.

¹¹ Discours 387.

¹² Discours 387.

acariâtre, des beau-frères querelleurs, des belles-soeurs ennuyeuses [...] de la fumée en hiver, des punaises en été [...] des procès en défendant, des valets qui vous volent, un méchant cuisinier, un confesseur moliniste, une femme de chambre qui ne sait pas bien peigner, un carrosse mal attelé, un cocher ivrogne, du linge sale, de l'eau trouble, du vin vert [...] (L.92.-A Mademoiselle de Sillery, de novembre, 1664, p. 629).

Enumerating all these items, he creates a humorous effect. He writes in this way knowing that the future bride, his niece, would rather read about amusing things instead of wise ones. However, he offers her his good advice for the near future. He knows that she would need it in order to avoid many unpleasant problems and misfortunes which inherently enter one's life. In this understanding tone, he psychologically prepares the future wife for the life that awaits her: "Venez donc me voir quand ce sera fait, pour éviter tous ces malheurs, et pour vous rendre digne des biens que vous méritez, si vous faites votre devoir." (same L., 92).

La Rochefoucauld's writing mirrors his feelings. In a letter to Monsieur *** he writes: "J'aime mieux vous écrire à tâtons [...]" (L.48.-A Monsieur ***, de 1652, p. 600). Due to this fact, his letter is extremely short. He expresses his fidelity in a concise manner expecting no answer to it. The mere reading of his letter by his interlocutor¹³ would be an act of grace and honor for La Rochefoucauld. His sensitivity is also displayed when he writes: "C'est avec un des plus sensibles déplaisirs du monde que je suis contraint de partir de ce pays ici [...]" (L.11.-Au Comte de Chavigny, de Poitiers, le 7 décembre, 1648, p. 565). La Rochefoucauld chooses words that describe his exact feelings. At this time, he was the Prince of Marcillac and the governor of Poitou. He expected

¹³ In Paris in October 1652, the King accords an amnesty which includes La Rochefoucauld.

one of the *tabourets* for his wife as a sign of a recognition for his own merits. Despite his grief, he reassures the Count of Chavigny, governor of Vincennes, of his gratitude: “Je ne vous dis point qu’en quelque lieu et en quelque état que je sois, rien n’empêchera jamais les sentiments de reconnaissance et d’estime que j’aurai toute ma vie pour vous [...]” (same L., 11). In a passionate tone, he reassures his interlocutor about his position: “[...] j’ai assez l’honneur d’être connu de vous pour croire que vous ne pouvez douter de cette vérité [...]” (same L., 11).

La Rochefoucauld expresses his feelings in a variety of sentences. he reproaches his friend in a rhetorical way for not having written him while he was ill: “Que serait-ce, si vous vous étiez souvenue de moi!” (L.105.-A la Marquise de Sablé, le 26 octobre, 1667, p. 639). The half-exclamatory, half-interrogative sentence compels his friend to search for the right answer in her heart. La Rochefoucauld fears his own nature: “notre avidité [...] nous faisant courir à tant de choses à la fois.” (same L., 60). Was it also echoing feelings of his own? Critics feel that he was when they affirm that his book on maxims is a *livre vécu*. Victor Cousin insists on the value of the maxims because they contribute to a deeper understanding of human nature:

La Rochefoucauld a donné à la France un genre de littérature agréable et sérieux, délicat et élevé, une école d’observateurs ingénieux de la nature humaine, dont le premier père est sans doute Montaigne, mais dont La Rochefoucauld est plus particulièrement le fondateur et le promoteur.¹⁴

Whenever La Rochefoucauld addresses his adversaries, he maintains an elegant tone. One sentence is sufficient for La Rochefoucauld to explain himself and relate his view to his enemies: “[...] qu’on ne continue à faire de

¹⁴ Victor Cousin, *Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Didier, 1854) 147.

belles histoires: c'est pourquoi je veux dire toutes choses mot à mot." (L.40.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 13 oct., 1652, p. 593). His rhetoric is concise but prompt when he defends his good name advising others to respect him.

La Rochefoucauld also pays attention to the style of his interlocutors. He does not hesitate to notice this fact: "[...] la lettre que vous m'avez fait l'honneur de m'écrire passe encore tout ce que vous m'avez envoyé." (L.132.-A Mademoiselle de Scudéry, le 3 décembre, ?, p. 655). It is a well-known fact that writing letters becomes an art in La Rochefoucauld's time. The fact that he repeats it in the same letter, underlines his conviction that he admires Mlle de Scudéry's art of writing. His comments reinforce his belief: "[...] écrire de belles lettres: c'est un grand art [...]" (same L., 132). He constantly pays attention to the content stating: "[...] je suis d'avis non seulement qu'on ne dise plus rien là-dessus, mais qu'on ne réponde même autre chose que ce que je viens de dire, à quelque objection que l'on puisse faire." (L.67.- A Monsieur ***, de 1662, p. 613). This detail on style mirrors La Rochefoucauld's personality.

La Rochefoucauld masters antitheses in his maxims, rendering them easier to comprehend: "Plusieurs des Réflexions Morales qui sont si estimées, tirent leur beauté de l'opposition ou du jeu des termes."¹⁵ From his Maxims, one could infer that La Rochefoucauld's preferred style of writing is a concise one.¹⁶ However, there are times when his sentences seem endless. Even then, his ample sentences do not cede their logic or elegance.¹⁷ Whether short or long, they never fail to express his deepest thoughts. Philip Lewis writes :

¹⁵ Bouhours gives a maxim from La Rochefoucauld as an example of this kind: "La passion fait souvent du plus habile homme un fou, et rend presque toujours les plus forts habiles." (M.6). Dominique Bouhours, Pensées Ingénieuses des Anciens et des Modernes (Paris : La Veuve Delaulne, 1971) 301-302.

¹⁶ La Rochefoucauld understands that one's thought cannot be entirely expressed: "Il est impossible d'écrire tout ce qu'on pense là-dessus." L.102.-Au Comte de Guitant, le 19 novembre, p. 637. He also realizes that it is much easier to give advice than to follow it: "Ces conseils-là sont bien plus aisés à donner qu'ils ne le sont à suivre." same L., 102.

¹⁷ L.3.-A M. de Liancourt: "Lorsque je fus la dernière fois à Paris, pour donner quelque ordre aux affaires que Mme de Mirabeau nous avait laissées en mourant, un gentilhomme, que je ne connaissais point, me vint trouver, et, après quelques civilités, me dit [...]" L.3.-A M. de Liancourt, septembre, 1638, p. 554.

“the form of the maxim by no means excludes the dimension of expression”¹⁸ , noticing that the maxim as a literary form does not create any opposition between the two.

La Rochefoucauld's letters are among the most admired and it is meaningful in a century where the art of writing letters becomes a hobby among all his contemporaries. La Rochefoucauld is admired because he knows how to maintain a *pleasant tone* constantly. It is a rare quality because, according to some critics, there is an obvious conflict between form and content in some of his writings. In his letters too, one could remark this original style. He knows how to approach the most objectionable remarks in the kindest tone.¹⁹ Because of it, he manages to satisfy all his interlocutors.

Not only his letters, but also his entire writing has this discontinuous form. Odette de Morgue notices this discontinuity at the level of La Rochefoucauld's maxims: “These variations in the level of experience chosen for each maxim may to a certain extent account for the impression of fragmentation or the apparent contradictions to be found in the work.”²⁰ The reader of the seventeenth century was accustomed to a *bound style (style lié)* reinforced by classic rules. Until his writing, texts used to have a certain traditional construction where the action developed in an anticipated order. Different from it, La Rochefoucauld detaches himself from this traditional rhetoric according the prevailing place to thinking itself. His ‘jeux de miroirs de la psyché’ allow him to express himself through aphorisms.

¹⁸ Philip E. Lewis 29.

¹⁹ In a letter to Lenet, he writes: “Tout cela ne fera que chipotage (le mot n'est peut-être pas bon, mais il n'importe), jusqu'à ce que Monsieur le Prince et le Cardinal soient d'accord.” L.30.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 25 août, 1652, p. 581. The parenthesis belongs to La Rochefoucauld and it is meaningful to see the ease with which he overcomes obstacles of this kind.

²⁰ Odette de Mourgues 7.

La Rochefoucauld's style in his correspondence surprises readers by its varied techniques. In one of his letters, he uses a metaphor that no one but his interlocutor could interpret because only he has the key to unraveling it²¹:

La même faim qui chasse le loup du bois oblige un aveugle de vous écrire pour vous conjurer bien sérieusement de juger de l'état de mes affaires par ce qui a commencé de vous en paraître il y a deux ans; vous savez assez ce que cela signifie, et ce que j'attends de l'amitié que vous m'avez promise. (L.36.- A Lenet, le 11 septembre, 1652, p. 589).

The cited paragraph seems to be the entire letter; nothing else is added, not even a polite formula. It is perhaps because his friendly tone successfully replaces it or, perhaps because he wants to write as directly as possible. The metaphor he uses conceals a secret.

²¹ Analyzing La Rochefoucauld, Jean Starobinski does not exclude ambiguity from any writing because: "Litterature is the language that becomes ambiguity [...] for one does not know if it expresses or represents [...]". Jean Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld & les morales substitutives," *NRF* 163-164 (July/August 1966) : 20.

VII. FRIENDSHIP AS PORTRAYED BY LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

La Rochefoucauld showed himself to be a good friend who understood that true friends are always faithful even when bad luck puts them to the test. He himself successfully passes one of these tests. In one of his letters, he encourages the abbot of Thou, by offering his support in quite sensitive words. When the abbot mourns one of his brothers, La Rochefoucauld writes:

J'ai une extrême honte de vous donner de si faibles marques de la part que je prends en votre déplaisir, et de ce qu'étant obligé en tant de façons à Monsieur votre frère, je ne peux vous témoigner que par des paroles la douleur que j'ai de sa perte, et la passion que je conserverai toute ma vie de servir ce qu'il a aimé. (L.4.-A l'abbé de Thou, 1642, p. 558).

These touching words somehow appease the painful loss experienced by the abbot. In addition, La Rochefoucauld expresses his sympathy to the abbot. He offers the abbot his friendship because he realizes that a true attachment can compensate for one's suffering. He is inspired by the great friendships of antiquity¹ which remained illustrious for posterity. La Rochefoucauld believes them to be the strongest of relationships. To him, having a friend is like having an identical *alter ego*. Here, La Rochefoucauld is inspired by Montaigne whom he has admired since his youth.² Montaigne's ideas enlighten La Rochefoucauld.

¹ La Rochefoucauld is inspired by such legendary friendships as: that between Achilles and Patrocles, his most admired companion; Castor and Pollux, the so-called *celestial twins*; Eneas and Achate, his faithful companion; Timagoras and Meles, -Timagoras threw himself from the Acropolis to prove his love for Meles.

² Louis Hippeau thinks that La Rochefoucauld was mainly influenced by two main sources: "Il semble que La Rochefoucauld ait été formé par deux livres: d'abord par l' *Astrée* qu'il avait beaucoup lu dès sa jeunesse et qui a nourri en lui la tendance néo-stoïcienne; puis les *Essais* de Montaigne le tirèrent dans un sens opposé et finirent par l'emporter. A l' *Astrée* il dut le goût du romanesque, à Montaigne celui de la sagesse et de la modération." Louis Hippeau, *Essai sur la morale de La Rochefoucauld* (Paris: Nizet, 1967) 73.

Montaigne grasps the true essence of friendship in his essay, De l'Amitié³. It is one of the most admired because in it, he expresses his own feelings for Etienne de la Boétie. He nostalgically remembers “cette amitié” [...] si entière et si parfaite que certainement il ne s'en lit guiere de pareilles et entre nos hommes, il ne s'en voit aucune trace en usage.”⁴ To attain such a perfect relationship, Montaigne thinks people have to meet certain conditions: “il faut tant de rencontres à la bastir, que c'est beaucoup si la fortune y arrive une fois en trois siècles.”⁵ He believes no other tie could be compared with friendship: not between a father and a son, not between brothers, nor between a man and a woman, and even less between acquaintances.

There cannot be a true friendship between a father and son because their relationship is mainly based on respect. Communication between the two cannot be complete because fathers keep their *secret thoughts* aside, and also because they impose responsibilities and discipline on their sons. Montaigne believes true friendship follows other rules without totally excluding these. The essential rules are prudence and caution. This is so because one has to accept both qualities and defects alike.

Inspired by Aristotle, Montaigne thinks friends must avoid differences: “chasser d'entre eux ces mots de division et de différence : bien fait, obligation, reconnoissance, prière, remerciement, et leurs pareils.”⁶ He conceives friendship as a *jouissance spirituelle* which results from the perfect union which consolidates friends: “Tout estant par effet commun entre eux, volontez, pensemens, jugemens, biens, femmes, enfans, honneurs et vie, et leur convenance n'estant qu'un âme en deux corps [...]”.⁷ This unity could not be

³ Michel de Montaigne, Essais (Paris: Gallimard, 1950) 219. (Montaigne's citations are copied with the spelling of the sixteenth century).

⁴ Montaigne, 219.

⁵ Montaigne, 219-20.

⁶ Montaigne 227.

⁷ Montaigne 227.

possible between a father and his son because the two are of “complexion entièrement eslognée.”⁸ The same *complexion* exists between brothers. Montaigne believes brothers cannot be perfect friends because they have to share inheritance and other benefits. This creates animosity between them especially because the first-born becomes richer by tradition. *Natural obligations* hinder true friendship between brothers; “il y a d'autant moins de nostre choix et liberté volontaire.”⁹

The love of a woman cannot inspire but *affections volages*. The *passions du corps* only cause *douce amertume*. Therefore, Montaigne thinks that friendship with women is not possible although he does not totally exclude it. However, he believes there are *insurmountable differences* to reconcile because their soul is not strong enough to withstand such a lasting tie.¹⁰

Montaigne also rejects what only looks like true friendship: “Au demeurant, ce que nous appelons ordinairement amis et amitiéz, ce ne sont qu'accointance, et familiaritez nouées par quelque occasion ou commodité, par le moyen de laquelle nos âmes s'entretiennent.”¹¹

A famous friendship like that of Achilles and Patroclus or that of Laelius, Tiberius Gracchus, and Caius Blossius in antiquity is born through the *convenance des volontés*¹² which makes *plus amis qu'amis*.¹³ A friendship is *indivisible* when “chacun se donne si entier à son amy, qu'il ne luy reste rien à départir ailleurs.”¹⁴

The friendship between Montaigne and La Boétie is unique and he describes it in impressive words : “Nos âmes ont charrié si uniement ensemble,

⁸ Montaigne 221.

⁹ Montaigne 221.

¹⁰ Montaigne 222.

¹¹ Montaigne 224.

¹² Montaigne 222.

¹³ Montaigne 226.

¹⁴ Montaigne 228.

[...] que, non seulement je connoissoy la sienne comme la mienne, mais je me fusse certainement plus volontiers fié à luy de moy qu'à moy."¹⁵ La Boétie's death left an irreplaceable emptiness in Montaigne's heart. Since then, he felt nothing but an *obscure and annoying night*. : "Depuis le jour que je le perdy [...] je ne fay que trainer languissant; et les plaisirs mesmes qui s'offrent à moy, au lieu de me consoler, me redoublent le regret de sa perte. Nous estions à moitié de tout; il me semble que je luy desrobe sa part [...]"¹⁶ Could anyone express more sorrow than Montaigne himself? Here, the superlative attains a syntactic level that expresses the essence of friendship itself.

Some of La Rochefoucauld's maxims on friendship are directly inspired by Montaigne's reflections. When La Rochefoucauld writes: "Ce que les hommes ont nommé amitié n'est [...] qu'un ménagement réciproque d'intérêts. et qu'un échange de bons offices; ce n'est enfin qu'un commerce ou l'amour propre se propose toujours quelque chose à gagner." (M.83), he defines what Montaigne refers to as *acquaintances*. This kind of relationship is obviously far from being true friendship. Even though La Rochefoucauld attributes its failure to *amour-propre*, it is not pessimism on his part. When La Rochefoucauld writes: "Nous nous consolons aisément des disgrâces de nos amis, lorsqu'elles servent à signaler notre tendresse pour eux." (M.235), his idea on friendship is more complex than Montaigne's because, while Montaigne believes that the essence of friendship lies in disregarding mistakes and defects, La Rochefoucauld claims that our own feelings and interests count the most. However, like Montaigne, he does not deny the fact that it is also important to overlook mistakes and defects. He also writes: "On ne saurait conserver longtemps les sentiments qu'on doit avoir pour ses amis et pour ses bienfaiteurs, si on se laisse la liberté de parler souvent de leur défauts." (M.

¹⁵ Montaigne 226.

¹⁶ Montaigne 230.

319). Friends seem to pay less attention to each other's mistakes or defects because their own *amour-propre* inspires them. La Rochefoucauld's maxim develops this idea completely: "L'amour-propre nous augmente ou nous diminue les bonnes qualités de nos amis à proportion de la satisfaction que nous avons d'eux; et nous jugeons de leur mérite par la manière dont ils vivent avec nous." (M. 88). Friends' qualities or defects become relative not only due to *l'amour-propre*, but also due to the satisfaction they bring us. Feelings are not objective, as La Rochefoucauld develops in another maxim: "Rien n'est moins sincère que la manière de demander et de donner des conseils: celui qui en demande paraît avoir une déférence respectueuse pour les sentiments de son ami, bien qu'il ne pense qu'à lui faire approuver les siens, [...] " (M. 116). One could offer contrary opinions to this maxim, but the way La Rochefoucauld formulates it seems to exclude any other possibilities. He gives the impression that his observation cannot be contradicted. However, this maxim, like any other, allows readers to choose to either support or contradict La Rochefoucauld's views.

When La Rochefoucauld distinguishes between true and false friendships, interest is identified as an obstacle to genuine friendships:

Nous nous persuadons souvent d'aimer les gens plus puissants que nous, et néanmoins c'est l'intérêt seul qui produit notre amitié. Nous ne nous donnons pas à eux pour le bien que nous leur voulons faire, mais pour celui que nous en voulons recevoir. (M. 85).

La Rochefoucauld notices that a false friendship sometimes resembles a true one. However, this idea is only inferred in his maxim. A maxim is so concise that it is not possible to develop opposite ideas in. Interest also plays the primary role in some situations where friendship should matter instead : "Ce qui

fait que l'on est souvent mécontent de ceux qui négocient, et qu'ils abandonnent presque toujours l'intérêt de leurs amis pour l'intérêt du succès de la négociation, qui devient le leur par l'honneur d'avoir réussi à ce qu'ils avaient entrepris." (M. 278). La Rochefoucauld relates interest to friendship in some of his maxims.

La Rochefoucauld believes human nature is responsible when feelings of friendship change. Subjective perceptions are at the root of this: "Nous nous plaignons quelquefois légèrement de nos amis pour justifier par avance notre légèreté?" (M. 179). According to La Rochefoucauld, true friendship is directly influenced by our feelings.¹⁷ Most often, La Rochefoucauld stresses the importance of the ego: "Quand nous exagérons la tendresse que nos amis ont pour nous, c'est souvent moins par reconnaissance que par le désir de faire juger de notre mérite." (M. 279). He sees our weaknesses are hindering us from completely expressing our feelings, and he develops this idea in another maxim: "Ce qui nous empêche d'ordinaire de faire voir le fond de notre coeur à nos amis, n'est pas tant la défiance que nous avons d'eux, que celle que nous avons de nous-mêmes." (M. 315).

La Rochefoucauld seems to agree with Montaigne who believes that true friendship with women is almost impossible. However, La Rochefoucauld expresses it differently: "Ce qui fait que la plupart des femmes sont peu touchées de l'amitié, c'est qu'elle est fade quand on a senti de l'amour." (M. 440). It seems that La Rochefoucauld considers the two feelings of friendship and love equally strong. If love appears more intense, it can be attributed to women. It is also true that La Rochefoucauld finds true love very rare: "Quelque rare que soit le véritable amour, il l'est encore moins que la véritable amitié." (M. 473).

¹⁷ See M.235, cited here p. 140.

Ten years later, his opinions on friendship have not changed. His correspondence attests this fact indirectly because he has no intention of demonstrating it. He is sincerely touched when he writes to his friend Lenet: "Votre mal m'a tout à fait donné de l'inquiétude, et vous me feriez la plus grande injustice du monde, si vous croyiez qu'il y eût quelqu'un qui prît plus de part que moi à tout ce qui vous touche." (L.43.-A Lenet, de Paris, le 23 oct., 1652, p. 596). During the illness of his friend, La Rochefoucauld never stopped writing him. In his letters, he always inquired about his health because he was impatient to see Lenet's recovery : "Je n'ai pas laissé passer un seul courrier sans vous écrire; et tout de bon, vous devez être satisfait de moi [...]" (same L., 43).

La Rochefoucauld's letters impressed many of his contemporaries because they were elegantly written. The courtesy which constantly appears in them helps him entertain correspondence with a great number of people, and this correspondence proves that many of La Rochefoucauld's interlocutors admired him. For instance, in one of her letters, Mme de La Fayette notices M. Huet's preference for having La Rochefoucauld in his company: "M. de La Rochefoucauld vous est sensiblement obligé de l'envie que vous avez de l'avoir dans votre Compagnie [...]"¹⁸ He is appreciated for his affability and wit, his thoughts and reflections are admired and his advice is always valued. His friends and acquaintances feel that his opinions are poised, his writing reflects his intention never to be unpleasant in any way.¹⁹ La Rochefoucauld has innate consideration for others so the *argoteries*, the small intrigues common among his contemporaries, never attract him. Even when there are misunderstandings between himself and others, he gently reconciles with them.

¹⁸ L. 216.- A Huet, ? 1676, LF *Correspondance*, vol. 2, p. 50.

¹⁹ When La Rochefoucauld feels sick, he prefers postponing his correspondence to avoid writing about unpleasant things or answering in an unkind manner which he would regret later.

And, La Rochefoucauld's enemies were not happy at seeing he had many friends with whom he was always affable. Indeed, La Rochefoucauld knows how to express his friendship in the most elegant manner. For instance, in 1643, he writes to the Duke of Enghien : "Si quelque chose pouvait diminuer la joie que j'ai de la gloire que Votre Altesse vient d'acquérir dans une des plus célèbres actions du monde, ce serait, Monseigneur, de ce qu'étant plus obligé que personne d'en ressentir une extraordinaire [...]" (L.5.-Au Duc d'Enghien, de Paris, le 23 mai, 1643, p. 558). La Rochefoucauld flatters his friend not only by using polite formulas but also, by adopting a humble tone despite the fact that he has the same noble title.

Far from the court, La Rochefoucauld misses society and the benefits of friendship even though he tries to convince himself otherwise : "J'ai, tout de bon, ici des occupations plus agréables que vous n'aviez cru, et ma belle-fille est la plus aimable petite créature qui se puisse voir." (L.60.-A Mr. Esprit, n. d. , p. 608). However, in his following letter, he recognizes bitterly: "[...] la philosophie ne fait des merveilles que contre les maux passés ou contre ceux qui ne sont pas prêts d'arriver, mais qu'elle n'a pas grande vertu contre les maux présents." (L.61.-A M. Esprit, le 24 octobre, 1660, de Verteuil, p. 609). One century earlier, the great philosopher Montaigne, who influenced La Rochefoucauld's thinking, also believed that one's feelings can influence one's writing : "Les paroles que j'exprime au malheur sont des paroles de despit; mon courage se hérissé au lieu de s'applatir."²⁰ He is grateful and enthusiastic when he is allowed to return to the court. This gratitude is not only influenced by personal feelings, but also by the fact that it is difficult in his time to acquire a place in the court as La Bruyère notices: "Quelques grandes difficultés qu'il y ait à se placer à la cour, il est encore plus âpre et plus difficile de se rendre digne

²⁰ Montaigne, Essais. De la Vanité. Livre III, chap. IX, p. 1059.

d'être placé."²¹ However, writing to Colbert, he restrains himself in a dignified manner: "Outre l'avantage que je reçois de la grâce qu'il a plu au Roi de me faire, ce m'en est un si grand d'avoir eu en cette rencontre des marques particulières de votre bonté, que je ne puis m'empêcher de vous protester que personne ne les peut jamais ressentir plus véritablement que moi." (L.70.-A Colbert, le 21 décembre, 1663, p. 615).

When speaking about leisure time, he refers to the art of conversation as being one of the most enjoyable activities. Thus, he writes to the Count of Guitaut: "Pour moi, je vous y souhaite de tout mon coeur, pour mon seul divertissement, qui est fort grand d'être avec vous. (L.91.-Au Comte de Guitaut, le 15 nov., 1664, p. 628). La Rochefoucauld enjoys conversing with the Count because the two have many things in common : art, policy and the like. He therefore writes to the Count : "Nous nous entendons bien sur mille choses. Je voudrais pourtant bien que nous en puissions parler à loisir." (same L., 91). La Rochefoucauld insists on paying him a visit: "[...] mais, quelque hâte que je puisse avoir, je ne partirai point que je ne vous aie vu [...]" (same L., 91). This is just one instance where his correspondence indirectly shows his delicate and passionate nature. When he expresses his feelings toward his friends, he indirectly reveals his own personality.

La Rochefoucauld generously compliments his friends. He elegantly expresses his approbation, especially when he admires the people to whom he writes. Thus, he addresses Mme de Sablé with respect because he is grateful to her for having recommended him as a private tutor for Monsieur le Dauphin, Louis XIV's son: "C'est ce que vous m'avez envoyé qui me rend capable d'être gouverneur de Monsieur le Dauphin depuis l'avoir lu, et non pas ces sentences que j'ai faites." (L.97.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 634). The same event

²¹ La Bruyère 196.

also compels La Rochefoucauld to be courteous toward the Dauphin by praising some of his essays: “Je n’ai en ma vie rien vu de si beau ni de si judicieusement écrit. Si cet ouvrage-là était publié, je crois que chacun serait obligé en conscience de le lire, car rien au monde ne serait si utile [...]” (same L., 97). Due to the strict etiquette, the Dauphin cannot publish what he wrote.²² So, it is not simply a courtier speaking when La Rochefoucauld compliments him.

Among La Rochefoucauld’s most admired letters are those addressed to women who belong to high society and religious orders. These letters have an intimate tone imposed by the confidential nature of the contents. They illustrate the taste of the epoch for spiritual and elevated matters. When addressing women, his tone seems to be more natural, more humane, and by far more delicate. Despite the subjects discussed in other circumstances, the general tone of these letters is more intimate. The pleasant relationships between these women and himself give him the chance to enhance his warm nature. The correspondence with Mademoiselle, Mme de Sablé, and Mme de La Fayette illustrate this high-minded friendship. Victor Cousin attributes it not only to La Rochefoucauld’s qualities of being open and sincere toward these women, but also to them in the first place: “C’est tout à fait la manière de Mme de Sablé; tout y est marqué au coin de la raison, et respire une simplicité de meilleur goût.”²³ Victor Cousin also believes that Mme de Sablé’s personality imposes upon La Rochefoucauld’s friendship and upon society in general. He views Mme de Sablé as the model of her century: “La marquise de Sablé est le modèle de la femme aimable et distinguée de la première moitié du XVIIe siècle.”²⁴ As it results from the letters exchanged with some of her contemporaries: Pascal, La

²² At the time, only professional writers publish their writings in order to earn a living.

²³ Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 162.

²⁴ Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 1.

Rochefoucauld, and Mme de La Fayette, it is obvious that she has many qualities. While her contemporaries admire Mme de Rambouillet's virtue, Mme de Longueville's charm and Mme de Sévigné's genius, they find Mme de Sablé superior because she is " [...] un heureux mélange de raison, d'esprit, d'agrément et de bonté" ²⁵ highly regarded in the Louvre and at the Palais Royal.

The bright society of the seventeenth century has a predilection for beauty in every domain: art, philosophy, policy. This love of beauty, known as *galanterie française*, is related not only to one's appearance, but also to one's intellect and one's soul. The names of Mme de La Fayette and Mme de Sévigné appear frequently in the most distinguished salons. Other names, such as that of the beautiful Princess, Mme de Longueville, appear much less. In the Carmélites, the Hôte! de Rambouillet and even in the Royal Palace, Mme de Longueville, Condé's sister, is admired for her beauty and her elegant presence. One day, the chivalric appearance of the Prince of Marcillac, later known as the Duke of La Rochefoucauld, fascinates her and defines her life until 1648. To defend her love, she risked her own situation. She engaged in the Fronde because she dearly loved La Rochefoucauld. She had no real reason to complain about court issues because the Prince of Condé, her brother, loved her tenderly and could defend her interests at any time. This man had much charm but loved evil²⁶ in this liaison. He inspired her to have false resentments during the Fronde. He dominated her completely and maneuvered her at his will until the end of 1647 which was also the end of their liaison. He not only saw a beautiful, but also an influential person whose political movements could serve his interests. She spent the last twenty-five years of her

²⁵ Victor Cousin, *Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle* 1.

²⁶ Victor Cousin, *La Jeunesse de Mme de Longueville. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle* 49.

life in total solitude enduring self-administered penitence for having chosen to love the Duke of La Rochefoucauld. After the Fronde, La Rochefoucauld managed to renew his connections and his affairs with the court. In his Mémoires he praises her: “ [...] Cette princesse avait tous les avantages de l'esprit et de la beauté en si haut point [...] qu'il semblait que la nature avoit pris plaisir de former un ouvrage parfait et achevé.”²⁷ The Cardinal de Retz would have liked to be in La Rochefoucauld's place because he also admired the beautiful princess. He felt much jealousy against La Rochefoucauld²⁸ and he never missed any occasion for weaving intrigues about his rival.

La Rochefoucauld's correspondence with Mme de Longueville does not furnish details about their *liaison amoureuse*. Did their relationship continue after her seclusion from society? What were their feelings about the breakup? Did they continue to see each other when they visited common friends? There are friends like Mme de Sablé whom they visit on a regular basis; do they meet by chance or because they want to do so? Mme de Longueville's correspondence is no longer available because she destroyed almost all the letters she received. For the sake of privacy, she preferred to burn the most compromising letters. The short memos that remain do not give any information about her relationship with La Rochefoucauld. It is understandable that a young woman like her would want some privacy because at age 35 (in 1656), she was obliged to retire to Port-Royal to avoid all kinds of misfortune. In 1660, she was far away from everyone, after having completely severed all social ties with high society, and no longer loved La Rochefoucauld. Rancor replaced her feelings of love because, after 1662, their private relationship was publicly unveiled by

²⁷ La Rochefoucauld, Mémoires in Collection Petitot, t. LI, p. 455.

²⁸ Victor Cousin, La Jeunesse de Mme de Longueville. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 7.

the Mémoires of La Rochefoucauld.²⁹ In Victor Cousin, it was selfish on his part to do so: “[...] il ne s’est occupé que de lui-même et du soin de composer un personnage intéressant.”³⁰ However, La Rochefoucauld felt it was honest to reveal this relationship even though it was detrimental to him as well. He finds Mme de Longueville *désintéressée* and *désavouée*.³¹ Readers would also like to know how La Rochefoucauld views these *choses galantes* which appear in some of his Maxims. Indeed, all high society women had an opinion about his relationship with Mme de Longueville. Mme de La Fayette, Mme de Guéméné, Mme de Liancourt and Mme de Schomberg expressed their thoughts in their letters and in their daily conversations.

La Rochefoucauld knows that his literary work on maxims inspires Mme de Sablé because he writes to M. Esprit: “Je vous prie de montrer à Mme de Sablé nos dernières sentences : cela lui redonnera peut-être envie d’en faire.” (L.60.-A M. Esprit, n.d., p. 608). The possessive adjective *nos* placed before *sentences* indirectly refers to the collaboration between La Rochefoucauld and M. Esprit.

Si même entre eux il y a un disciple et un maître, le disciple serait La Rochefoucauld. Celui-ci ne parle jamais d’Esprit dans ses lettres qu’avec une déférence marquée; il loue ses maximes, qui déjà circulaient; il le consulte sur les siennes, il lui adresse des sujets et des ébauches de maximes pour qu’il y mette la dernière main.³²

²⁹ Les Mémoires de M. de La Rochefoucauld tels qu’il les avoue from the National Library is one of the most compromising copies from XVII th century. La Rochefoucauld unveils his liaison with Mme de Longueville in a manner *fort peu chevaleresque*. Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle 208.

³⁰ Victor Cousin 203.

³¹ Victor Cousin 208.

³² Victor Cousin, Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe 87.

The Duke's correspondence also attests his collaboration with Mme de Sablé. It could be used as an outstanding argument in defense of La Rochefoucauld. If the three, and they are not the only ones, write maxims using an ironical or sharp tone, why then reproach this fact only to La Rochefoucauld? It appears more as a trend of his epoch than as a peculiar trait of his. Some of his maxims follow the spirit of his time while others apply to all times. La Rochefoucauld is grateful for Mme de Sablé's collaboration, and in the following letter, he clearly states that he could not write without her: "Je vous envoie l'opéra dont je vous ai parlé; je vous supplie que Mme la Marquise de Sablé le voie, car j'espère au moins qu'elle approuvera mon sentiment et qu'elle sera de mon côté." (L.61.-A M. Esprit, le 24 oct., de Verteuil, 1660, p. 608). Once again, he is convinced she could read him without '*interpreting*' his ideas.

Another letter of La Rochefoucauld's indirectly proves his collaboration with Mme de Sablé: "Souvenez-vous, s'il, vous plaît, de faire copier vos maximes, et de me les donner à mon retour." (L.76.-A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 619). He wants his friend to do the same: " [...] je vous demande en conscience s'il est juste que vous écriviez de ces choses-là sans me les montrer; vous savez avec combien de bonne foi j'en ai usé avec vous, et que les sentences ne sont sentences qu'après que vous les avez approuvées." (L. 69.-A la Marquise de Sablé, de Verteuil, le 17 août, 1663, p. 614). La Rochefoucauld is glad to share the pleasure of reading and meditating on maxims with his friend Mme de Sablé. In a humorous tone, he suggests a friendly atmosphere too:

Voilà tout ce que j'ai de maximes que vous n'avez point. Mais, comme on ne fait rien pour rien, je vous demande un potage aux carottes, un ragoût de mouton et un boeuf [...] de la sauce verte et un autre plat, soit un chapon aux pruneaux, ou telle chose que

vous jugerez digne de votre choix [...] (L. 73.- A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 617).

He knows how to kindly compensate the Marquise de Sablé, to show gratitude, and how to regulate his affairs frankly because he adds: "J'envoie donc savoir ce que je puis espérer pour lundi à midi; on apportera tout cela ici dans mon carrosse, et je vous rendrai compte du succès de vos bienfaits" (same L., 73). La Rochefoucauld openly asks for the connoisseurs' advice when he writes his Maximes and his Réflexions diverses: "Je vous envoie vos sentences d'aujourd'hui, et j'ai écrit à M. Esprit pour venir demain voir l'ouvrage tout entier." (L. 56.- A la Marquise de Sablé, n. d., p. 605). Later, he writes: "Vous m'avez fait un très grand plaisir d'avoir rectifié des sentences." (L. 61.- A M. Esprit, de Verteuil, le 24 octobre, 1660, p. 608). This sentence shows that La Rochefoucauld adopts a correct attitude toward critics regarding his style. "*Ecrire en vrai auteur*" (same L., 61), he accepts to openly talk about the weaker aspects of his writing which helps him to perfect his style. The ancient thinkers used to say *per aspera ad astram*, and with the same struggle, La Rochefoucauld arrives at his admired style, but he is not only a writer, but also a collector of maxims.

It is obvious that the Marquise's influence is well appreciated by La Rochefoucauld. He is aware of it because when he writes to her, he expresses his gratitude about it: "Je me suis tellement paré devant elle [Mme de Fontevraux] de l'honneur que vous me faites de m'aimer, qu'elle en a bonne opinion de moi. Ne détruisez pas votre ouvrage et laissez-lui croire là-dessus tout ce qui flatte le plus ma vanité." (L. 114.- A la Marquise de Sablé, le 2 août, 1675, p.645). La Rochefoucauld understands that this distinguished woman opens many doors for him and, not only those of his contemporaries, but also those of many generations to come. His *vanity* would be even more satiated if

he knew this and he would have even more reasons to be grateful to her about it.³³

In his own portrait, La Rochefoucauld recognizes that his lucidity is not always his best counselor as he notes:

Tant biaiser et tant apporter d'adoucissement pour dire les avantages que l'on a, c'est, ce me semble, cacher un peu de vanité sous une modestie apparente et se servir d'une manière bien adroite pour faire croire de soi beaucoup plus de bien que l'on n'en dit.³⁴

La Rochefoucauld struggles to be sincere toward himself in the first place. He believes that anyone should disregard the false impressions created by vanity.

Despite his lucidity and sincere efforts, La Rochefoucauld was not always understood by his contemporaries. Due to this fact, he tries to express himself with much precision not only in his maxims, but also in his letters to avoid any misunderstanding. His efforts in this sense are genuine. He writes to the Count of Guitaut expressing his regrets that M. La Barre did not understand his letter: "Je suis bien fâché que le bonhomme La Barre n'ait pas entendu ma lettre [...]" (L.51.-Au Comte de Guitaut, le 2 mai, à Damvilliers, p. 602). He is intrigued by the fact that even though M. La Barre did not understand him, he acted as if he had. However, it could be out of mere diplomacy that M. La Barre pretended to have understood the Duke.³⁵

Aside from La Rochefoucauld's customary elegance, one could reproach him that from time to time, he tells people exactly what he thinks without using

³³ This letter contradicts the opinion of those who were tempted to believe that La Rochefoucauld had more influence on Mme de Sablé's and Mme de La Fayette's writings. Reading his correspondence, it is astonishing that he himself asks for his friends' advice, including Mme de Sablé's who also likes to write maxims.

³⁴ La Rochefoucauld, "Portrait de La Rochefoucauld fait par lui - même", Oeuvres Complètes 4.

³⁵ There is no precise answer because the collection of letters dating from 1653 does not include any of M. La Barre's letters. And, La Rochefoucauld does not add anything else. It seems that he expressly changes the subject to avoid writing too much about the affair in question.

any diplomacy. When he writes in that tone, it is sometimes due to others who force him to do so. La Rochefoucauld begins a letter from 1658 with a *nom de plaisanterie*, *quy quoy*³⁶ but, instead of joking about it, he expresses his bitterness toward those who have forgotten him. He feels annoyed at the friends who have left him in his solitude which he describes further: “ [...] j’ai changé de folie et [...] l’agriculture tient aujourd’hui la place de toutes les autres [...] ” (L.54.-A Arnauld de Pomponne, de Verteuil, le 24 juin, 1658, p. 604). La Rochefoucauld seems to be inspired by the same idea as Voltaire, one century later, when he feels the need to *cultivate his garden*.³⁷ It seems that he is relating the fact that everyone has to cultivate his/her garden in order to save his/her own soul. Or, La Rochefoucauld could be referring to his own hobby because he inquires about a good gardener³⁸ who knows how to care for trees on his domain. This is philosophical ambiguity on La Rochefoucauld’s part which is found in many instances throughout his attractive correspondence.

³⁶ L.54.-A Arnauld de Pomponne, de Verteuil, le 24 juin, 1658, p. 604.

³⁷ Voltaire’s philosophical story, *Candide ou l’optimisme*, ends with the same idea: “Tous les événements sont enchaînés dans le meilleur des mondes possibles : car enfin si vous n’aviez pas été chassé d’un beau château [...] vous ne mangeriez pas ici des cédrats confits et des pistaches. - Cela est bien dit, répondit Candide, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin.” Voltaire, *Romans et Contes* (Paris : Garnier-Flammarion, 1966) 259.

³⁸ In the same letter addressed to M. de Pomponne on p. 604.

VIII. THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN MME DE LA FAYETTE & THE DUKE OF LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

La belle sympathie unites the Countess of La Fayette with the Duke of La Rochefoucauld in one of the most fruitful friendships in French literature during the seventeenth century. She confirms her friendship with La Rochefoucauld writing: "Je suis infiniment obligée à Mr de La Rochefoucauld de son compliment; c'est un effet de la belle sympathie qui est entre nous." (L.37.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 5 septembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 74). She had known La Rochefoucauld since her youth. Mme de La Fayette remembers this youth with medieval nostalgia: "J'estois assez jolie, en ce tems-là; et cela suffit, de l'avoir esté, pour estre traitée de belle [...]" (L.80.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 15 novembre, 1657, vol. 1, p. 125). Bernard Pingaud compares Mme de La Fayette's novel with the beautiful medieval love story between Tristan and Yseut: "S'il en est ainsi, loin d'apparaître comme la *dernière flamme mince et pure* d'une *féerie romanesque* dont Tristan et Yseut resteraient l'inégalable modèle [...]"¹ One can also find medieval nostalgia in her novel. However, melancholy is not a *status quo* in Mme de La Fayette. She uses her reason to meditate on ideas about the durable values of human existence. A moment of philosophical meditation replaces the feeling of sorrow about her passing beauty with a more practical and clear thinking. The maxim that she adds illustrates her philosophical meditation: "[...] les beautés ne sont pas immortelles comme les louanges que l'on leur donne." (same L., 80). The philosophical reflection contained in this maxim has its own logic, -it is better to

¹ Bernard Pingaud, L'absence et l'éloignement. Mme de La Fayette par elle-même (Paris: Seuil, 1959) 101-106.

submit beauty for wisdom. The reasoning behind this maxim is stronger than the feeling which inspired it.

Details regarding the friendship between Mme de La Fayette and M. de La Rochefoucauld indirectly appear in the correspondence they addressed to other friends and in their replies to them. The indirect information from this network is very valuable because it allows modern readers to better interpret their literary cooperation since there are very few letters left which were directly exchanged between the two.² It would be interesting to read their direct letters for the spirituality contained within them which clearly appears in their literary works. This spirituality appears in Mme de La Fayette's main character, *La Princesse de Clèves*: "M. de Clèves y vint comme à l'ordinaire; il était si rempli de *l'esprit* et de la beauté de Mlle de Chartres qu'il ne pouvait parler d'autre chose."³

Mme de La Fayette is renowned among her contemporaries for her reason which inspires them to cultivate good relationships. Following her example, the Duke of La Rochefoucauld renews his correspondence with an old friend, the Marquis of Pomponne. He restores not only his correspondence, but also their previous good relationship when Mme de La Fayette personally addresses a letter to M. de Pomponne. Mme de La Fayette feels proud for having interfered between La Rochefoucauld and his old friend and for having influenced him to recommence relations with other friends: "A mon bon exemple, voilà Mr de La Rochefoucauld qui vous escrit: c'est pour vous montrer que la nouvelle troupe donne l'exemple à la vieille et que ce n'est pas icy qu'il faut dire qu'il n'y a rien de tel que les vieux amis." (L.117.-Au Marquis de Pomponne, de Nevers, le 24 mars, 1662, vol. 1, p. 166). Paradoxically, this

² According to Mme de La Fayette's own will, some of her letters were burned: "[...] je voudrais bien qu'elles [mes lettres] fussent brûlées quand elles sont leues." L.222.-A Lescheraine, le 18 mai, 1678, *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 2, p. 64.

³ Mme de La Fayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 139.

spiritual woman has to remind La Rochefoucauld who writes philosophical reflections on wisdom that friendship should be maintained through reason.

The passion for truth joins together Mme de La Fayette and La Rochefoucauld. Both search for this quality in everything, especially Mme de La Fayette who always speaks her mind despite the fact that some might not like what she has to say. She searches for the truth when warning Ménage about his ninth madrigal: "Puisque des maistres du métier ne se sont pas aperceus de vostre tromperie, il m'est gloireux d'avoir esté trompée aussi bien qu'eux." (L.37.-A Ménage, d'Espinase, le 5 septembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 73). La Rochefoucauld's first article of Reflexions diverses is about truth. He is so preoccupied by this subject that he searches its very essence in abstract and concrete thinking: "Le vrai, dans quelque sujet qu'il se trouve, ne peut être effacé par aucune comparaison d'un autre vrai, et quelque différence qui puisse être entre deux sujets, ce qui est vrai dans l'un n'efface point ce qui est vrai dans l'autre [...]"⁴ Mme de La Fayette passionately searches for the truth without sparing anyone. She openly expresses her opinion about the memoir of Le Gendre: "Je ne vous dis rien sur le mémoire du nommé Le Gendre, parce qu'il n'y a pas un mot de vérité dans tout ce qu'il contient." (L.267.-De Louvois, à Fontainebleau, le 26 août, 1681, vol. 2, p. 105.) This probably adds to her exacting image which in reality is contradicted by her correspondence where she comes off as passionate and sensitive. Bernard Pingaud also notices Mme de La Fayette's sensitivity:

La nuance est essentielle: elle exprime tout ce qu'au fond d'elle-même, Mme de La Fayette n'a jamais cessé de désirer, le voeu secret que dissimulent ses entreprises mondaines et son apparente insensibilité, que sa vie contredit et que son oeuvre

⁴ La Rochefoucauld, Reflexions diverses (Paris: Les Grands classiques illustres, n.d.).

révèle, non pas par hasard, mais parce que cette fin, c'est aussi celle de l'écriture elle - même [...].⁵

The passion for truth will dominate her entire life, becoming a constant trait of her personality. It contributes to her fame even though some regard her frankness as a defect. When expressed directly, her irony intentionally points to others:

Je suis ravie que Mme la maréchale de Clairambault soit accouchée heureusement. Je vous prie, quand vous la verréz, de luy dire que je m'en resjouis avec elle et que je m'en resjouis plus que pas une de ses servantes, parce qu'outre l'intérest que j'y prends pour l'amour d'elle, j'y prends un peu [pour] moy. (L.43.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 21 octobre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 81).

This irony is a common trait in both Mme de La Fayette and M. de La Rochefoucauld. La Rochefoucauld is ironical even when he includes himself in a maxim: "Si nous n'avions point de défauts, nous ne prendrions pas tant de plaisir à en remarquer dans les autres." (M. 31).

October 27, 1664 is an important date for La Rochefoucauld. The editor, Claude Barbin, has just finished printing his reflections, Sentences et Maximes de Morale. Mme de La Fayette is in Fresne at that time. Her reaction to Sentences et Maximes de Morale is not different from the reaction of the majority of her contemporaries who criticize La Rochefoucauld: "Nous y avons leu les maximes de Mr de la Rochefoucauld. Ha, Madame, quelle corruption il faut avoir dans l'esprit et dans le coeur pour estre capable d'imaginer tout cela!" (L.181.-A Madame de Sablé, ? novembre, 1664, vol. 1, p. 219). The criticism prevailing over La Rochefoucauld's maxims is common throughout the most distinguished circles. However, Mme de La Fayette is not swayed by it. She

⁵ Bernard Pingaud 27.

gives her own opinion about this collection and one could trust her sincerity because, in the same letter, she criticizes the writing without blaming the author: “ [...] l’homme quy l’escrit est un des hommes du monde que j’aime autant et qu’ainsi c’est une des plus grandes obligations que je vous puisse avoir que de luy accorder ce qu’il souhaite pour son amy.” (same L., 181).

In the beginning, Mme de La Fayette rejects La Rochefoucauld’s maxims because she compares them to Mme de Sablé’s. She prefers Mme de Sablé’s maxims because she thinks La Rochefoucauld’s maxims excessively insist on corruption. In contrast, Mme de Sablé’s maxims persuade her that “toutes les personnes de bon sens ne sont pas si persuadées de la corruption générale que l’est Mr de La Rochefoucauld.” (L.184.-A Mme de Sablé, ? 1664, vol. 1, p. 221). It is questionable whether Mme de La Fayette is completely convinced when attacking La Rochefoucauld’s maxims. She criticizes him here out of diplomacy⁶ knowing that her letter can be read by others. She does this to please them but, in private, she does the contrary when she thanks Mme de Sablé for having been kind to La Rochefoucauld. With gratitude, she writes her: “Je vous rends mille et mille grâces de ce que vous avez fait pour ce gentilhomme. Je vous en iray encore remercier moy mesme [...] ” (same L., 184).

Mme de La Fayette prefers Mme de Sablé’s maxims for their ethics and logic. She insists that Mme de Sablé send her the collection of maxims because she has already read some of them and admired them for their spirituality: “Vous me donneriez le plus grand chagrin du monde, si vous ne me montriez pas vos maximes [...] c’est justement parce qu’elles sont honnestes et raisonnables [...]” (L.184.-A Mme de Sablé, ? 1664, vol. 1, p. 221). Mme de la Fayette thinks that Mme de Sablé’s maxims are superior to those of other

⁶ Perhaps Mme de La Fayette attacks La Rochefoucauld only to agree with the majority position.

authors as she writes: “ [...] il faut s'en fier à votre habileté : elle est au-dessus des maximes ordinaires [...] ” (L.185.-A Mme de Sablé, fin de 1664 ou début de 1665, vol. 2, p. 10).

In fact, Mme de La Fayette does not criticize La Rochefoucauld because she understands that his Maxims represent his view on society. She knows that some members of society have a tendency for corruption and that the Maxims are a response to this tendency. Mme de La Fayette also attacks vices and other temptations in her novels but her tone seems more attenuated because she chooses fictional themes to depict them. The difference between La Rochefoucauld and Mme de La Fayette is that the former is more direct at criticizing corruption.

Mme de La Fayette sees something different in La Rochefoucauld's maxims. Their wit has attracted her from the start. His maxims have a concise form which compels others to reflect on them. This is precisely what captivates Mme de La Fayette because she herself likes to reflect on moral issues. Her novel La Princesse de Clèves, besides being romanesque, is mainly a moral debate.

On the contrary, she admires him as an old friend. A sincere friendship links Mme de La Fayette and La Rochefoucauld. Mme de Sablé can easily understand Mme de La Fayette's affection for La Rochefoucauld even though she disagrees with Mme de La Fayette's opinion about his maxims. La Rochefoucauld refines the form of the maxims only after analyzing them in detail with Mme de Sablé: “La Rochefoucauld avait composé quelques sentences, il les mettait sur le tapis avant où après dîner, ou il les envoyait au bout d'une lettre. On en causait, on les examinait; on lui faisait des observations dont il profitait; on a pu lui ôter des fautes, mais on ne lui a prêté aucune beauté [...] ”.⁷

⁷ Victor Cousin, La Société française au XVII-es 100.

Mme de La Fayette did not collaborate with la Rochefoucauld on this edition nor did she read them until November 1664.⁸

Are there moral issues in La Princesse de Clèves? Critics such as Helen Karen Kaps interpret Mme de La Fayette's novel as a complex novel illustrating pre-existential philosophy, a Freudian psychology, and a Bergsonian perspective of time⁹: "Intentionally or unintentionally, however, Mme de La Fayette has created a work of art which poses moral questions [...]".¹⁰ These moral issues can be related to "the heroine's actions, feelings and motivations."¹¹ Morality is also a matter of personal perspective in Mme de La Fayette's novel: "Whether the reader views Mme de Clèves' final decision as meaningless self-deprivation or positive self-fulfillment through sacrifice depends in large part on the moral viewpoint implicit in the total design of the novel."¹² Mme de La Fayette's role as a narrator is that of a moralist at the same time: "[...] the role of the narrator, however serves largely to modify the reader's view of the heroine's relationship with her surroundings, with other people and with herself [...]".¹³ B. Woshinsky feels that Mme de La Fayette subjectively stresses the moral issues of her novel by comparing them with those of the court life: "[...] To a certain extent, Mme de La Fayette must show the court's amorality in order to highlight the superior moral position of Mme de Clèves."¹⁴ She seizes them at their intersecting point in the novel: "[...] The first-person monologues reveal the court's corruption, but they also display its scintillating attractiveness in a way the dignified official narration cannot match."¹⁵

⁸ According to the introductory paragraph to 1665, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 9, A. Beaunier writes: "Il est assuré que Mme de La Fayette ne fut point dans la confidence de ce travail ni dans la publication des Maximes."

⁹ Helen Karen Kaps IX - X.

¹⁰ H.K. Kaps XIII.

¹¹ H.K. Kaps XII.

¹² Helen Karen Kaps XIII.

¹³ H.K. Kaps XIII.

¹⁴ Barbara Woshinsky 66.

¹⁵ Barbara Woshinsky 66-67.

Mme de La Fayette has always been drawn to reflection even before her friendship with La Rochefoucauld. Contrary to the opinion that Mme de La Fayette was influenced by him¹⁶, her correspondence confirms the fact that she has been interested in spiritual matters since the beginning. She understands that meditating is an important part of this spiritual exercise: "Il est vray que la pensée est la plus extraordinaire du monde [...] " (L.120.-A Ménage, ?avril, 1662, vol. 1, p. 167). Despite the fact that she rejects La Rochefoucauld's maxims in the beginning because they stress corruption, she later is attracted by the reflections contained within.

Her correspondence proves that she is also capable of condensing a philosophical reflection into only one sentence. She includes a maxim in a letter from 1665 which shows her ability for deep meditation: "Il n'y a rien qui ne finisse avec le temps." (L.20.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 15 août, ? 1655, vol. 1, p. 52). Mme de La Fayette's correspondence is abundant with profound reflections of this kind. She writes many reflections because she has the talent to clearly express her thoughts in the concise form required by maxims. She advises Ménage to take advantage of the happy instances in life in the same succinct manner: "Il faut prendre ces bons moments-là sans s'inquiéter de ceux qui les suivront." (L.47.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 19 décembre, 1656, vol.1 , p. 84). She condenses the whole Epicurean philosophy¹⁷ in this maxim. Its concise form is more persuasive than an entire discourse which she could have offered on this subject.

Maxims and reflections are in style at the time so everyone wants to read and write them. M. du Guet, author of a collection of letters,¹⁸ prefers Mme de

¹⁶ This opinion originates from Mme de Scudéry's letter of December 1677 to Bussy-Rabutin informing him that : "Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld et madame de la Fayette ont fait un roman des galanteries de la cour de Henry second." Bussy-Rabutin, Correspondance vol. 3, (Paris: Charpentier, 1858) 431-432.

¹⁷ See page 108.

¹⁸ Lettres de M**** à diverses personnes sur plusieurs sujets de morale et de Piété, Paris, Bibl. nat., ms. fr. 19,429, en 10 vol.

La Fayette's maxims¹⁹ because they deal with moral and religious subjects. He himself is preoccupied by these subjects and, knowing that Mme de La Fayette is also an ardent supporter of morality, he expresses his desire to read her maxims.

Maxims impose upon readers because it seems like they are personally meant for them. Mme de La Fayette writes Ménage to console him during her absence: " [...] je m'en vais demain à Fresnes, et je croy qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de grands discours pour vous obliger à supporter patiemment mon absence: *Altri tempi, altre cure.*" (L.145.-A Ménage, ? janvier, 1663, vol. 1, p. 186). This maxim where she cites a stanza from Guarini²⁰ is a solid argument for her friend because of the evident truth contained in itself. She perceives it as a law which everyone must submit to without reserve. Therefore, Ménage should submit not only his thoughts, but also his feelings of sorrow caused by her departure. A sentence, very similar to a maxim, encourages Ménage to reflect on matters related to his own life: "J'admire tous les reproches que vous faites à vostre mémoire." (L.153.-A Ménage, ? Livry, ? avril, 1663, vol. 1, p. 191). She subtly adds a certain irony to the sentence.

Mme de La Fayette inspires her friends to use maxims whenever they need to illustrate their thoughts. Therefore, Ménage uses an ancient proverb to display the wisdom of antiquity when he replies : "Vale et vive, si me valere et vivere cupis." ²¹ (L.159.-De Ménage, le 26 juillet, 1663, vol. 1, p. 199).

Mme de La Fayette writes a letter to Mme de Sablé in 1664 or 1665 defining her friendship with the Duke of La Rochefoucauld. Despite others' opinions, she envisages it differently: "Je hay comme la mort que les gens de

¹⁹ "J'aurois mieux aimé vos pensées que les miennes, Madame [...]" writes M. du Guet about Mme de La Fayette's reflections in L.331.-De J.-J. Du Guet, le 13 novembre, 1690, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 169.

²⁰ Acc. to footnote 2 in L.145, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 186.

²¹ "Be strong and live if you wish to influence me to have the desire to live." Translated from Latin.

son âge puissent croire que j'ay des galanteries.” (L.185.-A Mme de Sablé, fin de 1664 ou début de 1665, vol. 2, p. 10). The idea of a possible liaison between the two seems ridiculous to Mme de La Fayette who is thirty-two at the time and the Duke of La Rochefoucauld fifty-two. However, people might have this idea because Mme de La Fayette and La Rochefoucauld make appearances together at certain events. In 1669, the Countess of La Fayette and the Duke of La Rochefoucauld, Sire of France and Prince of Marcillac, are witnesses to the wedding between Françoise Marguerite de Sévigné and the Count of Grignan.²² In 1667, the Marquis of Saint-Maurice, prime minister of Madame Royale, visits Mme de La Fayette when coming to Paris for diplomatic affairs. He writes about his encounter with Mme de La Fayette and La Rochefoucauld: “Je me promenai longtemps en carrosse avec elle et M. de La Rochefoucauld [...] Je n'ai jamais ouï de conversation si douce et tant d'esprit.”²³ In her opinion, people are free to fantasize about their relationship. However, she writes to Mme de Sablé indirectly letting everyone, including La Rochefoucauld, know that her friendship is purely spiritual: “[...] je ne veux pas qu'il en pense rien, sinon qu'il est de mes amis; et je vous supplie de n'oublier non plus de luy oster cela de la teste, si tant est qu'il l'ait [...]” (same L., 185). André Beaunier remarks on the essence of the spiritual relationship between Mme de La Fayette and La Rochefoucauld with a deep understanding:

[...] Il est bien difficile d'admettre que la liaison qui remplit la seconde moitié de sa vie, n'ait pas eu, à la longue, une action profonde sur Mme de La Fayette, et ne lui ait pas fait subir, dans une certaine mesure l'influence de M. de La Rochefoucauld.²⁴

²² Acc. to the introductory paragraph in 1669, *Correspondance L.F.*, vol. 2, p. 22.

²³ Acc. to the introductory paragraph in 1677, *Correspondance L.F.*, vol. 2, p. 56.

²⁴ Jugements in *Correspondance L.F.*, vol. 1, p. 21.

He views the relationship between the two as a reciprocal spiritual exchange: “Elle réforma son coeur sans doute, comme elle s’en vantait; mais, en retour, il lui donna (elle en convenait) quelque chose de son esprit.”²⁵

The Duke of La Rochefoucauld is a loyal friend to Mme de Sablé. Mme de La Fayette compares her own friendship with the Duke to that of Mme de Sablé’s admiring the spirituality of it. Her encounter with M. the Count of Saint-Paul²⁶ inspires her to write to Mme de Sablé: “Nous avons aussi parlé d’un homme que je prends toujours la liberté de mettre en comparaison avec vous pour l’agrément de l’esprit.” (same L., 185). Mme de La Fayette reinforces her compliment to Mme de Sablé with courtesy: “Je ne sçay si la comparaison vous offense; mais, quand elle vous offenseroit dans la bouche d’un autre, elle est une grande louange dans la mienne, si tout ce qu’on dit est vray.” (same L., 185).

Mme de La Fayette is welcomed not only in feminine entourages, but also in male entourages. Her correspondence shows that men treat her as their peer in business affairs: “Nous allons disner à Livry, Mr de La Rochefoucauld, Morangis,²⁷ Coulanges et moy. C’est une chose quy me paroist bien estrange, d’aller disner à Livry [...]” (L.210.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Paris, le 26 mai, 1673, vol. 2, p. 40). This event should not surprise her because they appreciate her for her intelligence and her good taste. A few months later, she writes a letter to Mme de Sévigné relating a conversation that took place at Gourville, *un après disner*, where Mme Scarron and the Abbot Testu were also present. This conversation was about people that “*ont le goust au-dessus ou au-dessous de*

²⁵ Jugements 21.

²⁶ The Duke de La Rochefoucauld is the biological father of the Count of Saint-Paul, Charles Paris d’Orléans, and not the Duke Henri d’Orléans, the official husband of the Duchess of Longueville. After a short liaison with the Duchess, La Rochefoucauld publicly recognized the Count of Saint-Paul as his son. Victor Cousin, *La Société française au XVII-e siècle*.

²⁷ Antoine de Barillon de Morangis is the head of claims in Parlement starting from 1672. Acc. to footnote 9 in L.210, *Correspondance L.F.*, vol. 2, p. 40.

leur esprit." (L.213.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Saint-Maur, le 4 septembre, 1673, vol. 2, p. 46). Mme de La Fayette is glad to be considered among those in the first category although she affirms it modestly: "Vous avez le goust au-dessus de vostre esprit, et Mr de Rochefoucauld aussi, et moy encore, mais pas tant que vous deux." (same L., 213).

Mme de La Fayette enjoys Mme de Sévigné's and La Rochefoucauld's company because of the refined conversations she has with them. She compares herself to them thinking that both are more talented than she in the art of conversation. She believes that a certain degree of spirituality should be a *sine qua non* condition for a worthy conversation. The compliment she addresses to them indirectly alludes to her own spirituality. Mme de La Fayette comes to Gourville a few days later with La Rochefoucauld to listen to the reading of Boileau's²⁸ L'Art poétique. They are both interested in Boileau's proposals for a new literary art.

Another letter of Mme de La Fayette invites Mme de Sévigné to compare two maxims: "On pardonne les infidélités, mais on ne les oublie point", and "On oublie les infidélités, mais on ne les pardonne point." (L.212.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Paris, le 14 juillet, 1673, vol. 2, p. 45). The inversion of words leading to an inversion of meanings illustrates Mme de La Fayette's subtle reasoning. La Rochefoucauld's influence is excluded from these maxims. La Rochefoucauld prefers not to discuss this subject because of his own infidelities. His maxim²⁹ is completely different: "On pardonne tant que l'on aime" (M.337). The implied compromise of this maxim seems less conflictual to him. In the same letter, Mme de la Fayette invites her friend to meditate on another subtle question: "Aiméz-vous mieux avoir fait une infidélité à vostre

²⁸ Boileau-Despréaux, Nicolas (1636-1711) is against l'art Burlesque or any other kind of affectation.

²⁹ This maxim appeared in the third edition of the Maximes. See footnote 4, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 45.

amant que vous aiméz pourtant toujours; ou qu'il vous en ait fait une et qu'il vous aime aussi toujours?" (same L., 212). This play on words, almost allusive to ordinary people, contains ethical connotations. Words in her vocabulary are surcharged by personal connotations which contain even more meanings. The word *infidélité* is overloaded with special meanings as illustrated in the following maxim: "On n'entend pas par infidélité avoir quitté pour un autre, mais avoir fait une faute considérable." (same L., 212). She catches a glimpse of the miniscule difference in words only because her mind is exercised by continuous meditation. The observation related to the word infidélité in this letter enlightens the psychology contained in La Princesse de Clèves as viewed by Mme de La Fayette. La Princesse de Clèves' infidelity is originally conceived by Mme de La Fayette. The Princess is not unfaithful for having abandoned her husband for Nemours; however, she has committed *une faute considérable*. She asks herself: " [...] pourquoi elle avait fait une chose si hasardeuse, et elle trouvait qu'elle, s'y était engagée sans en avoir presque eu le dessein."³⁰ Her fault lies in her repressed thoughts when she allows strange feelings to enter her heart. She should not have such feelings because she is a married woman who should refrain from infidelities of this kind. Unfortunately, the Princess does not understand her own psychology nor its ethical implications until it is too late; she hurt her husband and destroyed their marriage.

The friendship between La Rochefoucauld and Mme de La Fayette becomes familiar to their other friends. Louvois writes a letter to La Rochefoucauld in 1679 encouraging him to get well³¹ and, anticipating that Mme de La Fayette is close by, he declares his sincere friendship for her. He is grateful to count her among his friends: "Je reçois comme une marque de vostre

³⁰ Madame de La Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves 244.

³¹ La Rochefoucauld is ill at this time.

amitié que vous ne doutez pas que ne me soit fort cher l'avis qu'il vous plaist de me donner de l'estat de santé de Mr de La Rochefoucauld." (L.238.-De Louvois, à Saint-Germain, le 3 décembre, 1679, vol. 2, p. 78). This intelligent woman is inspired by and inspires La Rochefoucauld in turn.

The novel La Princesse de Clèves generates a plethora of controversy around it. Mme de La Fayette realizes this fact because she writes: "On est partagé sur ce livre-là, à se manger; les uns en condamnent ce que les autres en admirent." (L.221.-Au Chevalier de Lescheraine, le 13 avril, 1678, vol. 2, p. 63). This is perhaps one of the reasons why Mme de La Fayette disclaims the paternity of the novel in the beginning. Micheline Cuénin believes that Mme de La Fayette refuses to recognize the paternity of her fictional writings because she cares about what her contemporaries might say: "[...] voici une grande dame qui par coquetterie aristocratique et par humilité féminine [...] une des femmes les plus instruites de son temps, refuse d'être *auteur de profession*[...]"³² Speaking for herself and La Rochefoucauld, she denies having written it to give an answer to those who are interested in it: "[...] je vous assure que je n'y en ay aucune [part] et que Mr de la Rochefoucauld, à qui on l'a voulu donner aussi, y en a aussi peu que moy, il en fait tant de serments qu'il est impossible de ne le pas croire, surtout pour une chose qui peut estre avouée sans honte." (same L., 221). The same reasons for which she rejected La Princesse de Montpensier³³ fifteen years earlier drive her to reject La Princesse de Clèves once again. Micheline Cuénin remarks semantic similarities between the two stories: "Enfin la consistance psychologique des héros est fort inégalable, et l'aventure divertissante; les plaisirs de la vie en

³² Micheline Cuénin 8.

³³ In the same letter, she writes about it: "Un petit livre qui a couru il y a quinze ans et où il plut au public de me donner part, a fait qu'on m'en donne encore à la *P. de Clèves*." (same L., 221). La Princesse de Montpensier was published in 1662.

société occupent plus de place, dans l'ensemble, que le jeu des passions."³⁴ Due to this fact, she supports Mme de La Fayette's paternity. In her later correspondence, Mme de La Fayette recognizes that she is the author of Histoire de la Princesse de Montpensier and La Princesse de Clèves. Her letter clearly shows that her denial is not caused by pride because she in fact admires the novel: "Je le trouve très agréable, bien escrit sans estre extrêmement châtié, plein de choses d'une délicatesse admirable et qu'il faut mesme relire plus d'une fois." (same L., 221). Mme de Sévigné also admires this novel, La Princesse de Clèves, because she writes to Bussy-Rabutin about the first edition: "[...] C'est un petit livre que Barbin nous a donné depuis deux jours, qui me paraît une des plus charmantes choses que j'aie jamais lues[...]."³⁵ A few months earlier, Bussy-Rabutin had informed Mme de Sévigné: "Cet hiver, un de mes amis me manda que M. de La Rochefoucauld et Mme de La Fayette nous allaient donner quelque chose de fort joli; et je vois bien que c'est de *La Princesse de Clèves* dont il voulait parler."³⁶ *Ce petit livre*³⁷ is praised not only in Mme de La Fayette's entourage, but also by all those who read it. However, the ethical problems implied within cause the most unexpected reactions. Illicit morality in La Princesse de Clèves serves as an ethical lesson by producing the opposite reaction. B. Woshinsky writes: "The models of illicit behavior, like the patterns for public behavior, aim at maintaining order and an esthetic decorum at court. By following the rules for clandestine activities, the individual can indulge his private passions without disturbing appearances."³⁸

Mme de La Fayette's contemporaries and other literary critics believe that La Rochefoucauld helped her refine the style of the novel, La Princesse de

³⁴ Micheline Cuélin 11.

³⁵ Mme de Sévigné 429.

³⁶ Bussy - Rabutin, Correspondance (Paris: Librairie A.G. Nizet, 1983).

³⁷ *Ce petit livre* is printed by the editor Barbin on March 8, 1678.

³⁸ Barbara Woshinsky 81.

Clèves, by giving it a more elegant and concise form. Mme Georges de Scudéry writes to Bussy-Rabutin in 1677: "M. de La Rochefoucauld et Mme de La Fayette ont fait un roman des galanteries de la cour de Henri second, qu'on dit être admirablement bien écrit."³⁹ However, Mme de La Fayette's correspondence certifies that La Rochefoucauld did not directly contribute to the writing of the novel. Ménage consults Mme de La Fayette in 1691 about the *Duchess of Clèves*: "Je vous demande premièrement, Madame, si vous voulez bien qu'on dise que vous avez fait des livres, et je vous demande en second lieu si vous avez fait cette histoire de la Duchesse de Clèves [...]" (L.341.-De Ménage, ? septembre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 181). He knows that she is the author of this novel and wants her to decide whether or not she will acknowledge herself as the sole author. He is concerned by the opinion of some contemporaries who "disent que c'est Mr de La Rochefoucauld qui l'a faite, et d'autres que c'est Mr de Segrais." (same L., 341). Ménage reminds Mme de la Fayette that La Princesse de Montpensier was a great success and that La Princesse de Clèves will be an even greater one: "[...] j'ay dit que c'estoit cette Princesse de Montpensier dont vous aviez écrit l'histoire avec toute sorte d'élégance et d'agrément, et que cette histoire seroit incomparable, si vous n'aviez point écrit celle de la Duchesse de Clèves, qui lui est comparable." (same L., 341). He will accept any of her decisions because he trusts her: "Aiant l'honneur de vous connoistre depuis que vous estes née et aiant eu l'honneur de vous voir aussi longtems et aussi particulièrement que j'ay fait, il me seroit honteux d'avoir été mal informé de cette particularité et d'en avoir mal informé le public." (same L., 341).

³⁹ Bussy - Rabutin, Correspondance (Paris: Librairie A.G. Nizet, 1983).

The editor, André Beaunier, believes that the memo that follows is very important to literary critics.⁴⁰ It shows that the contribution of La Rochefoucauld and Segrais to La Princesse de Clèves was limited to only a few corrections because Mme de La Fayette writes⁴¹:

Vous pouvez parler, dans votre *Histoire de Sablé*⁴² des deux petites histoires dont vous me parlastes hier; mais je vous demande en grâce de ne nommer personne, ny pour l'une ny pour l'autre. Je ne croy pas que les deux personnes⁴³ que vous me nommés y ayent nulle part, qu'un peu de correction. (L.342.-A Ménage, ? septembre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 182).

Mme de La Fayette admits that La Rochefoucauld has helped her with a few corrections. In exchange, he also benefited from her spiritual contribution to his maxims. B. Roussel notices the reciprocal influence they have on each other: "Il donne de l'esprit à Mme de La Fayette, il l'aide à polir son style; mais des observations qu'elle a écrites en marge d'un exemplaire des Maximes nous montrent qu'elle n'acceptait pas ce que le pessimisme exprimé dans cet ouvrage avait de paradoxal et d'excessif."⁴⁴ When the Count of Saint-Maurice advises Mme de La Fayette *de ne pas faire des folies*⁴⁵, she replies, not without a certain disdain, in a maxim that she adds to La Rochefoucauld's maxims. This indirectly appears in a letter to Lescheraine: "L'on donne des conseils, mon cher monsieur, mais l'on n'imprime point de conduite. C'est une maxime que j'ay prié Mr. de La Rochefoucauld de mettre dans les siennes." (L.231.-A Lescheraine, le 14 juin, 1679, vol. 2, p. 72).

⁴⁰ Acc. to the introductory paragraph to L.342, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 181-182.

⁴¹ She writes this letter indirectly through her secretary because she is sick.

⁴² In Ménage's Histoire de Sablé (1683), he had named Mme de La Fayette as the author of the two novels. His death prevented him from changing the information that she requested in her memo.

⁴³ La Rochefoucauld and Segrais.

⁴⁴ Bernard Roussel 17.

⁴⁵ Acc. to the introductory paragraph to L.231, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 72.

IX. THE PERSONALITY OF MME DE LA FAYETTE

Mme de La Fayette begins writing in 1653 at the age of nineteen, signing her letters with her maiden name, *Marie-Madeleine de La Vergne*. From the beginning, her friends admire her gifted writing skills and she easily asserts herself among them. For this reason, Gilles Ménage¹ and Pierre Costar² encourage her to write her first letters. Later, in 1652 or in the beginning of 1653, Costar writes in one of his letters: “ [...] j’ay découvert que ce beau titre dont il vous avoit plu me relever, vous estoit demeuré à vous seule [...] ” (L.1.-De Costar, Le Mans, 1652, ou début de 1653, vol. 1, p. 27)³ noticing *the reputation and the esteem* (same L., 1) she gained from the beginning.⁴

In fact, Costar admires Mme de La Fayette so much that he compares her to a deity: “ [...] c’est, Mademoiselle, de m’ériger en Incomparable parmy ceux qui vous adorent de loin et qui vous sacrifient en esprit comme à une divinité inconnue.” (same L., 1). This praise, expressed in superlative terms, is somehow surprising because Costar is a curate well-known for his vanity in the hôtel de Rambouillet and among his friends Voiture, Ménage, and Scarron. Costar⁵ appreciates Mme de La Fayette not only for her beauty and good manners, but also for her virtue and *bel esprit* (L.4.-De Costar, Le Mans, fin de juin, 1653, vol. 1, p. 31). In the same letter, he commends her *bonnes actions*

¹ Gilles Ménage (1603-1692), lawyer in Poitiers and Paris, is a clergyman. He is a highly educated scholar who is renowned for his polemic with Boileau (phonetic), Bouhours, and Cotin. He is also the author of a Dictionnaire étymologique in 1650. Balzac, Pelisson, Benserade, and Chapelin are among his friends. When frequenting reunions at Rambouillet, he also encounters Conrart, Furetière, Perrault and other members of high society.

² Costar (Pierre Coustard, 1603-1660, calling himself Costar) is a scholar and priest. He corresponds with Balzac (J.L. Guez de 1597-1654) and sends other letters “farcies de littérature” in Latin addressed to his friends and penpals. His own collection of Letters dates from 1658.

³ All citations from Mme de La Fayette’s correspondence are copied exactly with the spelling she used in the seventeenth century, even though at times, they may seem bizarre to the modern reader.

⁴ It would be very interesting to read Mme de La Fayette’s reaction to this compliment but unfortunately we have no response to it. Acc. to footnote 1, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 27.

⁵ He himself was eager to be admired by gallants and women. Acc. to the bibliographical note in Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 229.

and *bonnes fortunes* (L.2.-De Costar, Le Mans, 1652, ou début de 1653, vol. 1, p. 29) At the same time, he is willing to moderate his infatuation with himself. Despite his vanity, Costar recognizes Mme de La Fayette's good influence on himself and on others as he writes: "[...] vous qui vous meslez de charmer tout le monde et qui vous en démeslez si heureusement." (L.3.-De Costar, Le Mans, ? mars, 1653, vol. 1, p. 30). The image that Costar formed about Mme de La Fayette is one that never changes for him: "[...] si semblable à l'excellent portrait que l'on m'avoit fait de vos Grâces à ma mémoire et à mon imagination. Ce mesme plaisir me dure encore [...]" (same L., 3). He preserves the same perfect impression about this bright woman always. He writes in the same complimentary manner congratulating her for her happy marriage in 1655. Her qualities: beauty, spirituality, education, virtue, reason, delicacy and moderation charm everyone including the most distinguished people. The Cardinal de Retz remarks the same qualities in his *Mémoires*: "Mme de la Vergne [...] m'y vint voir et y amena Mlle de la Vergne, sa fille qui est présentement Mme de La Fayette. Elle était fort jolie en fort aimable. [...] Elle me plut beaucoup [...]"⁶ Ménage also admires Mlle de la Vergne for her beauty, kindness, good-nature, and pleasant manners. The list of qualities that Ménage draws for Mme de la Fayette seems endless. He stresses these qualities further using epithets in the superlative: "There is no other lady among us more beautiful and more virtuous." (L.7.-De Ménage, Paris, le 17 janvier, 1654, vol. 1, p. 35).⁷ Soon these feelings of admiration toward his disciple turn into deep feelings of love.⁸

⁶ Retz. *Mémoires*. IIe partie, chap. XLII.

⁷ Non c'è Donna frà noi, bellissima, e virtuosissima signora, ch'abbia più ammiratori di V.S. Illma, non trovandosi alcuno, che conoscendola non l'ammiri [...] beltà, leggiandria, gentilezza, bontà, virtù, onestà, piacevole maniera, dolcezza de' costumi, spirito vivace, ingegno perspicace, purgato giudizio, e sopra ogni cosa in così teneri anni un saper vario, e pellegrino. (same L., 7 written in Italian).

⁸ A. Beaunier: "Ménage avait alors trente-huit ans, la jeune fille avait quinze. Elle devint son élève, et il tomba amoureux d'elle." *Correspondance L.F.*, vol. 2, p. 239, Notices Bibliographiques.

Mlle de la Vergne expresses satisfaction in becoming an inspiring muse to her mentor who, enlightened by all her qualities, writes madrigals and other short poems.⁹ She realizes this fact with her sharp wit and answers with an equally kind wish for him: “Je suis bien aise que vous remontiez sur le Parnasse [...]” especially in a moment when she thinks that “les Muses ont si peu de gens à donner leurs grâces.” (L.6.-A Ménage, de Champiré, le 18 Septembre, ? 1653, vol. 1, p. 33). Ménage is very satisfied to be appreciated by a young person who is so cherished by society. Therefore, he reassures her that he will save her valued testimony on his writings. Ménage is also eager to find out if she has any feelings for him so he inquires about this in a letter: “[...] dites-moy sincèrement quelle place je tiens présentement dans votre coeur.” (L.31.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 8 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 65). This question with romantic echoes makes one think about Mme de La Fayette’s masterpiece, La Princesse de Clèves.¹⁰ The letter of Mme de La Fayette that follows could be a response to Ménage’s question when she complains about not having heard from him. However, when she writes about having feelings of friendship for him, she uses a passionate tone which fascinates readers, suggesting more than friendship:

[...] je ne suis pas résolue de vous laisser le plaisir de m’oublier si tranquillement: je veux vous faire souvenir de moy malgré que vous en ayéz et avoir de l’amitié pour vous quoy que vous n’en

⁹ Acc. to the introductory note to L.6 of September 18, 1653, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 33.

¹⁰ La Princesse de Clèves subject: Mlle de Chartres and her mother are introduced to Henry II’s court. She is wealthy, rich, and beautiful. She also has strong opinions on moral issues that were cultivated by her mother since her youngest years. She meets Mr. de Clèves, a distinguished man, whom she marries because she admires him. However, she has no feelings of love for him. She feels no *peculiar inclination for him*. She soon falls deeply in love with M. de Nemours. When her husband finds out, he succumbs to a physical illness which is the normal reaction to feeling betrayed in this novel. After her husband’s death, however, she decides not to marry M. de Nemours, perhaps to punish herself. She then retreats to a provincial seclusion. Mme de La Fayette was perhaps inspired by Mme de Longueville’s love story for the Duke of La Rochefoucauld. The resemblance of its subject with that depicted in the novel is striking. V. Cousin reminds us of it in his essay on Mme de Sablé. Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVII^e siècle (Paris: Didier, 1854).

ayéz plus pour moy. (L.32.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 16 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 65).

This is not the only letter that arouses interest in readers because she not only dominates her own tone, but also prevails over that of her friends. She easily makes the transition from a serious matter to a pleasantry which allows one to see the humor in a situation. Mme de La Fayette knows how to captivate and persuade her interlocutor with all the power of her mind, when she writes:

L'on m'a escrit que vous estiéz amoureux de Mme de Môngbazon. Mandéz-moy un peu ce quy en est; car je suis bien aise d'estre informée de ce quy se passe dans vostre coeur et je croy mesme que j'ay intérêt qu'une personne comme celle-là n'y soit pas bien avant; car, bien que je ne sois que vostre amie, je suis persuadée qu'une maistresse me feroit tort et je croy que toutes les maistresses en font aux amies et qu'il est impossible d'aimer autant une amie, ayant une maistresse, que si l'on n'en avoit point. Dites-moy un peu vostre sentiment là-dessus [...] (L.38.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 12 sept., 1656, vol. 1, p. 75).

Mme de La Fayette is such a captivating presence that artists are inspired by her and take her as a model. Ménage writes an elegy in 1655 about all her qualities, to which she answers, very satisfied: "Je ne perds pas ainsi ce que vous faites à ma louange. Voilà vostre Élegie que je vous envoye." (L.16.-A Ménage, Paris, ? dec. 1654 ou janv. 1655, vol. 1, p. 46). Although Mme de La Fayette is not always concerned with other people's praise of her, those who are inspired by her realize that this elegy emanates from her true personality.

At that time, Mme de La Fayette is so revered that she is accepted among the ladies of honor in Anne D'Autriche's¹¹ court. She can also be found among

¹¹ Acc. to the information given in Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 46.

the Queen's ladies until her marriage on February 15, 1655, to the Count de La Fayette which reinforces her position in high society and gains her a noble title. After this, she will be a prestigious member of the court seen among the King and Queen's entourage as a diplomat, counselor, and friend for a long time to come. She is always welcomed with much warmth. When Mme de Sévigné¹² pays a visit to the Mademoiselle at the Château de Saint-Cloud in 1657, she presents the compliments of Mme de La Fayette who is then living in the province. Mademoiselle is pleased to receive these compliments, sending Mme de La Fayette back "les plus grandes caresses du monde." (L.70.-De Mme de Sévigné, Paris, le 24 juillet, 1657, vol. 1, p. 113). At the time, Mme de Sévigné is accompanied by Mlle de Rambouillet, Mme de Valençay, and Mme de Lavardin.

Mme de La Fayette manages to maintain her place of honor in the court despite the fact that it is not always easy to do so because of court intrigues.¹³ Ralph Albanese describes these court intrigues as follows:

The court is, in short, a deleterious presence, just as much a focus of vulnerability as one of sociability: its ordered or controlled agitation- "une sorte d'agitation sans désordre"- encompasses the intrigues inherent in the courting ritual [...] The perpetual watchfulness of society assumes the dimensions of a spy system at court [...] one witnesses the systematic crushing of intimacy, the virtual impossibility of private relationships.¹⁴

¹² Mme de La Fayette and Mme de Sévigné, two brilliant women whom critics compare all the time, who are also very good friends, are always welcome in the most distinguished circles of high society because of their agreeable presence.

¹³ La Bruyère compares the intrigues at the court with a chess game: "La vie de la cour est un jeu sérieux [...] on est échec, quelque fois mat, souvent avec des pions qu'on Ménage bien, on va à dame, et l'on gagne la partie : le plus habile l'emporte, ou le plus heureux" 205.

¹⁴ Ralph Albanese, "Aristocratic Ethos and Ideological Codes in *La Princesse de Clèves*", An Inimitable Example. The Case for the Princesse de Clèves (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992) 91).

In Mme de La Fayette's opinion, an affair like *l'affaire de Vaux*¹⁵ is interpreted differently even though the Queen makes it apparent that she disregarded the rumors related to it. While others find their own reasons to build up this intrigue, Mme de La Fayette tries to explain her exact role in the matter by relating how the Queen continued to view her later on: "Le lendemain, il vint à de certaines gens de dire que c'estoit par ordre de la Reine que je ne m'y estois point mise, et que la Reine l'avoit dit." (L.109.-A Ménage, de Fontainebleau, le 2 sept., 1661, vol. 1, p. 159). Immediately after this, the Queen and the King welcome her in the same cordial manner. Monsieur encourages her to come to court as usual "[...] pour faire taire ceux quy avoient dit cela [...]" (same L., 109).

All who know Mme de La Fayette acknowledge the fact that she is a good counselor. The King himself often asks for her advice. For instance, he asks her opinion when he wants to choose a private tutor for his son.¹⁶ She proposes her friend, Huet¹⁷, as proof of her great esteem for him, and gives him a good recommendation: "[...] j'ay eu la joye de dire du bien de vous à tous ceux quy ne vous cognoissoient pas [...]" (L.203.-A Huet, de Saint-Germain, le 5 sept., 1670, vol. 2, p. 29). The King chooses L'Evêque de Condom as a private tutor for Monseigneur le Dauphin but he also retains Huet as an assistant tutor only because Mme de La Fayette insists on it.

As a sign of his high appreciation for Mme de La Fayette's services, the King orders a *pension* for her in the sum of five-hundred *écus*. He also adds to

¹⁵ Mme de La Fayette manifests an excessive kindness towards the Chancellor of Finances without anticipating that he will soon be in complete disgrace. Acc. to the introductory note to L.109, *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 1, p. 158.

¹⁶ Mme de La Fayette is also carefully looking for a private tutor for her own children. She chooses Monsieur Fournier, probably Antoine Fournier, master of the arts at the University of Paris. Finding a private tutor at that time was an important matter, so her careful scrutiny shows that she was a good mother. L.189.-A Ménage, de Livry, ? sept. 1655, *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 2, p. 15.

¹⁷ Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721), prelate and French scholar, is well-known among the educated people of his century for his ideas and writings. He is accepted into the French Academy in 1674. Mme de La Fayette, Ménage, Segrais, Chapelain, Pelisson, Conrart, and the Duke of Montausier are among his friends. La Fontaine will dedicate an *Épître* to him.

this grant “tants de paroles agréables”¹⁸ which impress her friends, M. de La Rochefoucauld, Mme de Sévigné, and Mme de Grignan. La Rochefoucauld’s letter to Mme de Sévigné in which he inquires about Mme de La Fayette arrives exactly when she leaves for Saint-Germain to thank the King for the grant. Mme de La Fayette is grateful for this remuneration, especially for the significance of this high commendation.

Mme de La Fayette’s reasoning and inclination toward business affairs are noticed everywhere. She imposes herself easily because she herself struggles for personal perfection. Bernard Roussel views Mme de La Fayette as: “une femme qui essaie de donner du prix, de la beauté à ce qui n’est que commun et vulgaire; elle fait un effort constant vers la distinction, d’abord au niveau du langage, mais bientôt dans tous les domaines de la vie.”¹⁹ She knows how to respect protocol among friends, especially in diplomatic affairs. M. Bougeault quickly remarks her etiquette when she pays him a visit to give him a letter from M. de Limoges and to read him a memoir.²⁰ Due to the rules of etiquette, she would like to go there accompanied by Ménage who would act as her mediator: “ [...] comme il faut un peu de temps, je voudrais bien, si vous croyez que cela se puisse sans incivilité, que vous envoyassiez luy demander à quelle heure nous le pourrions voir sans l’incommoder [...] ” (L.96.-A Ménage, ? 1661, vol. 1, p. 152). However, if Ménage could not mediate for them, she feels she should go there anyway because she always respects her promises. In the same letter, she adds : “Si vous aviez affaire et que vous ne pussiez venir avec moy, je ne laisserois pas d’y aller, car c’est une affaire dont il faut que je rende compte à M. de Limoges [...] ” (same L., 96). Mme de La Fayette is vigilant

¹⁸ Acc. to the introductory note to L.206, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 36.

¹⁹ Bernard Roussel, analyse méthodique, La Princesse de Clèves, by Mme de La Fayette (Paris: Ed. Bordas, 1968) 17.

²⁰ L.96.-A Ménage, ? 1661, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 152.

toward all the events around her, treating each one seriously, especially when dealing with official affairs.

Her contemporaries also admire Mme de La Fayette for her physical beauty which adds to her bright wit. Do modern readers see her true image? Probably not, because in 1661, she writes : “Je me fais peindre par un très meschant peintre que M. de Brosses m’a enseigné.” (L.110.-A Ménage, de Paris, sept., 1661, vol. 1, p. 160). She modestly does not add any other comment regarding her true portrait.

There are many people at the court directly related to the royal family who admire Mme de La Fayette and would like to partake in her friendship. Mme de Montmorency writes a letter to Bussy-Rabutin relating the fact that Mme de La Fayette is constantly seen next to Madame²¹: “Madame de La Fayette, favorite de Madame [...] une tête si brillante de la gloire que lui donnent les faveurs d’une si grande princesse.” (Lettre de Mme de Montmorency à Bussy-Rabutin, du 1er mai, 1670, insérée dans le vol. 2, p. 26). When Henriette Anne Stuart arrives at the court²² in 1654, she is as beautiful and witty as Mme de La Fayette. A good friendship builds between the Princess Henriette Anne Stuart and the Countess of La Fayette because the two have the same taste and the same interest in art. Their financial and moral support help Molière and Racine become illustrious authors. Unfortunately, in 1670, Madame dies instantaneously after a short diplomatic career in the service of Louis XIV. This event has a painful impact on the Countess of La Fayette because she witnessed it. It inspires her to write the Histoire de la Princesse d’Henriette d’Angleterre, and she immortalized the Princess’ death in the chapter entitled

²¹ Henriette-Anne Stuart, last child of Charles I, King of England and of Henriette-Marie, daughter of Henri IV, King of France, becomes the spouse of Philippe, Duke of Orléans, called Monsieur. Acc. to *Notices Biographiques* in *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 2, p. 235.

²² In 1654, the Prince of Conti marries Anne Martinozzi, the niece of Cardinal Mazarin. Acc. to the bibliographical note in *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 2, p. 235.

“Relation de la mort de Madame”. This chapter remains unfinished although the pages written about it preserve her feelings of sorrow through the authenticity of her writing.²³ Later on, she will keep the same feelings in her heart because her best friend is no longer there; in 1672, she writes: “J’allay hier au Palais-Royal avec Mme de Monaco [...] J’y pleuray MADAME de tout mon coeur [...]” (L.205.- A Mme de Sévigné, Paris, le 30 decembre, 1672, vol. 2, p. 34). The remembrance of such a remarkable person remains with her forever.

Interested in keeping the important place that she gained next to Madame at the court, Mme de La Fayette has to let her husband go to the Bourbons alone. She must also remain in Paris to deal with trials related to her family’s domain and take care of the education of her children: “[...] et vous jugéz bien qu’il faut quelque bonne raison pour obliger une mère de famille comme moy à quitter ses enfans.” (L.117.-Au Marquis de Pomponne, de l’hôtel de Nevers, le 24 mars, 1662, vol. 1, p. 165). This fact attests that she is a good mother despite the turmoil created by the separation with her husband. Analyzing Mme de La Fayette, André Beaunier thinks that his separation is inevitable due to the fact that Mme de La Fayette is so different from her husband:

[...] Mme de La Fayette et son mari s’aperçurent qu’ils n’avaient pas les mêmes goûts: lui, qui était sauvage et qui préférait la vie calme des champs, elle qui se souvenait de Paris avec l’envie d’en goûter encore le remuement et les délices. Et ils s’aperçurent aussi que les raisons qu’ils auraient de sacrifier l’un à

²³ Inspired by the memories of this beautiful Princesse, Bossuet writes a eulogy at her death in 1670 to appease the pain of her husband Philip, Duke of Orléans, only brother of Louis XIV: “[...] O nuit désastreuse! ô nuit effroyable où retentit tout à coup comme un éclat de tonnerre cette étonnante nouvelle: Madame se meurt! Madame est morte! [...]” Les Oraisons Funèbres. (Paris: Gallimard, 1935).

l'autre leurs préférences n' étaient pas si impérieuses que leur désir de n'y point renoncer.²⁴

Despite the fact that she is generally viewed as a stern woman,²⁵ this event showed her sensitivity and inspired her to write La Princesse de Clèves. Perhaps her pain is illustrated in La Princesse de Clèves when the Princess' husband is on the verge of dying:

La douleur de cette princesse passait les bornes de la raison. Ce mari mourant, et mourant à cause d'elle et avec tant de tendresse pour elle, ne lui sortait point de l'esprit. Elle repassait incessamment tout ce qu'elle lui devait, et 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. Elle ne trouvait de consolation qu'à penser qu'elle le regrettait autant qu'il méritait d'être regretté et qu'elle ne ferait dans le reste de sa vie que ce qu'il aurait été bien aise qu'elle eût fait s'il avait vécu.²⁶

Her soul is somehow transparent in her novel when she understands the Princesse de Clèves' feelings of love, but in her correspondence, she allows reason to dominate herself and others. Her classical correspondence relates to her diplomatic and intellectual nature while her novel *plein de choses d'une délicatesse admirable* connects with her passionate self.

Belonging to one of the most important families in the kingdom, Mme de La Fayette believes that she should have its genealogy traced by a specialist. This would be profitable, for her children. Therefore, she hires M. Charles-René d'Hozier to do the pedigree of the La Fayette family. He refuses to be paid for this research because he thinks of this job as an honor for him due to Mme de

²⁴ Andre Beaunier, La jeunesse de Mme de La Fayette 275.

²⁵ A. Beaunier adds to this: "Nulle rupture, nulle dispute entre l'époux et l'épouse, nul drame énigmatique. La raison domine leur foyer." Andre Beaunier, La jeunesse de Mme de La Fayette 275.

²⁶ Madame de La Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1972) 294-295.

La Fayette's high position in society. However, Mme de La Fayette feels embarrassed because she does not know how to thank him for his services. She writes him impatiently:

[...] Il me semble que c'est ma faute. Ce n'est pas que je ne cognoisse à quel point vous estes honneste, et que je ne sache aussi que nostre ancienne cognoissance vous donne quelque considération particulière pour moy. Mais vous poussez cela si oing que je ne sçay comment vous en tesmoigner ma recognoissance. Je vous conjure de croire que je sçay congoistre tout vostre mérite et que je souhaite très véritablement continuation de vostre amitié. (L.305.-A M. d'Hozier, du 8 septembre, 1686, vol. 2, p. 140).

She signs this letter with her name and with her title, LA C. DE LA FAYETTE, to reassure him that having a friend in her position could be a valuable asset. Ménage curiously inquires about this issue three years later. He would like to know if "la généalogie de la maison de La Fayette"²⁷ is finished so that he might read it. He does not want to insist on it too much and so he cites the comical opinion of Abbot Gaudin on genealogies: "J'ay[me] extrêmement les généalogies. Et j'en ay été fou autrefois [...] M. l'abbé Gaudin, pour me détourner de l'étude de cette sorte de livres, qu'il ne croyoit dignes de moy, me disoit qu'Adam, qui étoit le premier des hommes ne savoit point de généalogies." (L.359.-De Ménage, oct., 1691, vol. 2, p. 205). Mme de La Fayette's response to this letter becomes a written testimony proving not only that she belongs to an important family, but also that her husband and children are of noble descent:

²⁷ L.359.-De Ménage, oct., 1691, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 205.

La généalogie de mes enfans n'est point avancée du tout. J'en suis demeurée au grand-père du mareschal, que j'ay trouvé chez les comtes de St Jean de Lyon dans le siècle 1000 et 1100, ils sont qualifiés *miles*.²⁸ J'ay encore trouvé de leurs ancestres entre ce cartulaire de Souscilange et les preuves de St. Jean de Lyon [...] (L.360.-A Ménage, de Paris, le 1er nov., 1691, vol. 2, p. 208).

She regrets that the state of her health does not allow her to continue her own research : "En l'estat où est ma pauvre teste, je ne travaillerois pas à leur généalogie, quand ils seroient princes du sang. (same L., 360).

Among Mme de La Fayette's most illustrious family members were: the Count of La Fayette, François Mottier (1616-1683), the Abbot of Limoges, François de La Fayette (1590-1676), Louise Angélique de La Fayette (1618-1669) and Mme de La Fayette herself.

François Mottier the Count of La Fayette was born in the Château d'Espinasse on September 18, 1616. His parents were Jean II of La Fayette, Seigneur of Hauteville (born in 1585) and Marguerite de Bourbon Busset. The Count of La Fayette was a *lieutenant aux gardes* who participated in the campaign of the Pays-Bas in 1637. He married the *fille d'honneur de la Reine*, Sibylle d'Amalvy. After her death, he retired from the Court and went to his domain in the Bourbonnais. Eleven years later, when he was 39 years old, he married Marie-Madeleine de la Vergne on February 15, 1655.

François de La Fayette, Abbot of Limoges, was the uncle of Mme de La Fayette's husband. He was also born at the Château d'Espinasse (1590). He was the son of the Count of La Fayette, Claude du Mottier and Seigneur of Hauteville and of Marie de Toursel d'Alègre, Count of Riverol's daughter. He was *chanoine* of Lyon's church. Louis XIII named him abbot of Limoges. And,

²⁸ Mme de La Fayette uses the Latin word *miles* which means soldier, officer, or court official for the imperial palace.

as a sign of high appreciation, the Queen gave him a beautiful ring. For his merits, he also became Anne d'Autriche's first chapelain. He belonged to the Queen's entourage and declared himself against Richelieu. Later, he was affiliated with the campaign of Saint-Sacrement and worked as an active agent in Limoges. He also had administrative duties there.

Louise Angélique de La Fayette was the Count's sister and the abbot's niece. In 1632-1633, she was among the *filles d'honneur* of the Queen. Louis XIII noticed her in 1635 arousing jealousy in Mlle de Hautefort, one of his favorites, despite the fact that their love remained innocent. Their long love lasted for more than ten years, and was depicted in Mme de La Fayette's Histoire de Madame Henriette d'Angleterre. In 1637, Mlle de La Fayette retired to the convent des *Filles Sainte Marie*, in Paris. In 1642, she became *maîtresse des novices* and was empowered with reforming a religious settlement in the rue Saint-Honoré. She moved to the convent of Chaillot in 1651 at the demand of Henriette de France, the exiled Queen, the future Madame's mother. Together with her uncle the abbot of Limoges, she negotiated the Mme de La Fayette's marriage with the Count François de La Fayette.

La Fayette's illustrious name continued later on in Mme de La Fayette's two sons: the abbot Louis de La Fayette (1658-1729) and the Marquis René Armand de La Fayette (1659-1694). In his Mémoires, Saint-Simon portrays the abbot Louis de La Fayette as a man who enjoyed honor and friends. Undoubtedly, he inherited two of Mme de la Fayette's qualities. Her other son, René Armand, Marquis of La Fayette gained a renowned name through his military success. Some of Mme de La Fayette's letters offer details about her son's military campaigns and about her struggle to help her sons succeed in French society.

X. MME DE LA FAYETTE'S FRIENDSHIPS

Mme de La Fayette has friends among some of the most distinguished people. They appreciate her friendship because she is always honest in giving advice. She expresses her opinion directly without sparing one's feelings. When Ménage concludes a bad affair,¹ her tone is severe because she wants to have a precise impact on him: "Je vous dis qu'il n'y a rien d'esgal à ce que vous faites, et qu'en bonne justice il vous faudroit mettre en tutelle." (L.9.-A Ménage, de Champiré, ? avril, 1654, vol. 1, p. 38). In her reflection, "Si vous n'aviez point d'intérêt à cette opinion-là, assurément vous la suivriez point et vous seriez, selon vostre ordinaire, du party de la raison." (L.13.-A Ménage, de Champiré, le 6 novembre, ? 1654, vol. 1, p. 43). She seems to be more persuasive than *reason* itself. Mme de La Fayette has the rare attribute of being either lenient or intolerant in friendships, according to the situation. The tonality of her letters addressed to friends varies from inflexible to sublime. When she reaches the sublime, she indirectly expresses friendship in a sensitive tone: "[...] je serois au désespoir de ne vous avoir point vu;" (L.15.-A Ménage, de Paris, ? décembre 1654, ou janvier 1655, vol. 1, p. 46). Her feelings, which are expressed in a simple manner, surely touches her friend.

The correspondence Mme de La Fayette exchanges with her friends becomes almost a ritual to her. She views writing letters as a religious practice and tries to persuade her friends to do likewise: "L'on ne va point en paradis sans payer ses debtes²: si cela [est], il faut, pour aller au ciel, que vous ayéz bien de l'amitié pour moy, afin de vous acquitter de ce que vous devéz." (L.20.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 15 août, ? 1655, vol. 1, p. 52). While others believe they could go to paradise by other means, she sincerely believes that friendship

¹ See page 199.

² She asks Ménage to 'pay' for his letters which means she wants a reply for each.

is the way to attain it. Therefore, she insists on Ménage's friendship. This original idea connects friendship to spirituality. Mme de La Fayette alone can make this connection so flawlessly.

Mme de La Fayette wants to write and persuade her interlocutors at the same time. She does this not only by being very sensitive to the tone she uses, but also by analyzing the tone in others. Therefore, she complains to Ménage: "Je pense que je suis comme brouillée avec vous, car je trouve vos lettres furieusement sèches. Les miennes ne suivent pas mon intention, si elles ne vous persuadent [...]" (L.22.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 27 août, 1655, vol. 1, p. 54). She then measures the effect of her writing against the reaction of her interlocutors.

Mme de La Fayette's sojourn to the province causes a painful void in her friends' hearts. When she is far from Paris, Costar continues to appreciate her *rare qualities*. He courteously expresses this admiration in one of his letters: "Et certes il seroit fort estrange qu'une personne que l'on appelle Incomparable, qui, dans la première fleur d'une excellente beauté se passe si aisément de Paris et n'est point enchantée de la cour [...]" (L.4.-De Costar, Le Mans, ? juin, 1653, vol. 1, p. 32). Costar always renders her the respect she so well deserves: "[...] j'honore vos excellents qualitez [...]" (L.5.-De Costar, ? 1653, vol. 1, p. 33). This is not just a simple compliment from Costar because he is already an important person in the court and is working on two memoirs, Gens de lettres célèbres en France.³ Mme de La Fayette is not left unaffected by these compliments because the good opinion of others encourages her. M. de Limoges, her husband's uncle, is impressed by his talented niece whom he met in 1655. Mme de La Fayette is delighted by his gentle remarks; therefore, she asks Ménage to maintain the same opinion stated by Mr de Limoges: "Il n'y a

³ In collaboration with Ménage who also reveres Mme de La Fayette for her amiable personality.

rien de plus obligeant que tout ce que Mr de Limoges dit de moy; j'espère que vous ne diminuerez pas la bonne opinion qu'il en a." (L.25.-A Ménage, de Nades, le 26 octobre, 1655, vol. 1, p. 56). When necessary, she pleads in her favor and insists upon *la bonne opinion*, repeating it specifically to attract his attention to it. The redundancy contained in this letter conveys her subconscious will of always being revered by others.

Mme de La Fayette knows how to keep her friendships alive. This fact indirectly results from Ménage's reply: "Mon amitié pour vous ne fut jamais plus vive." (L.28.-De Ménage, février, 1656, vol. 1, p. 61). He feels remorseful when he cannot respond to her letter sooner but it is due to his failing health: "Pour ma santé, elle est toujours languissante et il semble que mon mal s'irrite contre les remèdes." (same L., 28).

Respect is the most important attribute ascribed to friendship in Mme de La Fayette's opinion. She is the first person to act properly, imposing herself as an example for others. This is implied in her letter: "Je vous prie, mais je vous prie de tout mon coeur, de faire mille compliments de ma part à Mlle de Scudéry et de l'asseurer que j'ay pour elle toute l'estime imaginable [...]" (L.34.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 22 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 68).

Mme de La Fayette understands her own psychology as well as that of others. She believes that she has mastered friendship in all its aspects as clearly stated: " [...] je me cognois mieux que vous en amitié [...]" (L.31.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 8 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 64). She uses a confident tone when she refers to the power of her psychological penetration. This psychology comes from her intuitive nature which never betrays her. In Mme de La Fayette, this quality can be found in combination with intelligence, sensitivity, and wisdom. Her intuitive nature is implied when she anticipates her friend's reaction: "Nous verrons si vous aurez la dureté de recevoir toujours de mes

lettres sans me faire de responce. Je ne crois pas que vous le poussiez [...] ” (L.31.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 8 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 64). The same psychological insight is observed in her fictional writings. La Princesse de Clèves tries to analyze herself after having seen M. de Nemours the previous evening: “Elle regarda avec étonnement la prodigieuse différence de l’état où elle était le soir, d’avec celui où elle se trouvait alors [...] Elle ne se reconnaissait plus elle-même.”⁴ In this paragraph, Mme de La Fayette intuitively analyzes La Princesse de Clèves’ psychology.

Mme de La Fayette is determined to hold on to friendship by counting more on her effort than on that of others: “Vous me quittâtes avec si peu de chagrin, lorsque vous me dîtes adieu, que je pense que, si je ne vous escrivois, vous ne songeriez de lomtemps à m’crire pour vous consoler de mon absence.” (same L., 32). Unanswered letters never discourage Mme de La Fayette; even then, she finds the energy within herself to fight for a vanishing friendship: “[...] je vous assure que vous avéz tort de ne me plus aimer, car il est fort véritable que j’ay pour vous beaucoup d’amitié et que vous avez si fort esté de mes amis que vous le serez toujours quoy que vous ne le vouléz pas.” (same L., 32). Mme de La Fayette’s correspondence clearly shows that she is unable to live without being in permanent contact with her friends.

How does Mme de La Fayette see herself? She views herself as a reserved person who would rather not display her feelings: “[...] je ne suis pas tendre parce que je ne saute pas au cou de tout le monde.” (L.34.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 22 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 67). She knows that she is restrained in society but passionate in her heart because she writes: “[...] quelque peu tendre que l’on me croye, je n’ay guère de négligence pour mes amis [...] ” (L.43.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 21 octobre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 80). Her correspondence

⁴ Madame de La Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves 235.

illustrates Mme de La Fayette's constant trait of being considerate in her friendships. Exchanging letters with her friends is not a mere act of politeness in fashion at the time. It is for her a necessity to express the noble feelings of her heart. She is sometimes forced to be reserved and hide her feelings for the sake of the strict etiquette adopted by high society. The strict etiquette which forces Mme de La Fayette to be reserved in public also influences her main characters' decisions to also hide their feelings:

[...] Mme de Clèves et M. de Nemours cachèrent aisément au public leur tristesse et leur trouble. Mme la dauphine ne parla même qu'en passant à Mme de Clèves de la conversation qu'elles avaient eue avec M. de Nemours, et M. de Clèves affecta de ne plus parler à sa femme de tout ce qui s'était passé, de sorte qu'elle ne se trouva pas dans un aussi grand embarras qu'elle l'avait imaginé.⁵

Barbara Woshinsky believes that hiding one's feelings has negative effects in the seventeenth century: "Unfortunately, the camouflage offered by the social forms in its turn becomes a dangerous constraint on the individual."⁶ Costar advises Mme de La Fayette to conceal her enthusiasm behind *apparences sensibles* because it is customary to do so: "[...] si vous aviez ces sentimens, je vous conseillerois, pour l'intérêt que j'ay à vostre belle réputation,⁷ de les cacher soigneusement au fond de votre esprit et de ne souffrir pas qu'ils en sortissent que bien à propos." (L.4.-De Costar, Le Mans, ? juin, 1653, vol. 1, p. 31).

⁵ Mme de La Fayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 264.

⁶ Barbara Woshinsky 79.

⁷ He is referring to a minor dispute in grammar about the conjunction *car*. Inspired by this dispute, Voiture writes a madrigal and a plea against the supporters of the Academy. Costar believes that due to Mme de La Fayette's high position in society, she should not interfere in this argument even if she has read the *Défense des Ouvrages* by Voiture.

The state of Mme de La Fayette's health sometimes causes her to refrain from going about her daily activities; however, it does not hinder her from cultivating friendship. She is grateful for those moments when she can savor friendship as she writes: " [...] il faut prendre ces bons moments-là sans s'inquiéter de ceux qui les suivront." (L.47.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 19 décembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 84). When her health seems to improve from time to time, she feels her friendship blossom again and her thoughts reflect her new hopes: "Il me semble que nostre amitié reverdit; et j'en suis ravie, car en vérité j'ay pour vous tous les sentiments d'amitié et d'estime que vous pouvez attendre de la meilleure amie du monde." (same L., 47). The affirmation that she is the *best friend in the world* supports the real fact that she indeed knows how to be the best friend in the world. Her correspondence proves that most of her friends remain her friends for life. Mme de La Fayette's friendships are based on her own feelings and qualities. In her opinion, friendship depends on feelings of gratitude and obligation. Her thoughts about M. de Raincy reflect this opinion: "Je suis tout à fait persuadée que l'obligation que j'ay à Mr du Raincy est très grande et je vous assure aussi que ma reconnaissance est infinie. Je me fie à vous pour l'en persuader." (same L., 47). Mme de La Fayette preserves friendship more than anybody else because she enriches it with other equally noble qualities. The Duchess of Brissac whom she had met in 1654 brings to mind a souvenir full of reverence. She feels for this Duchess *une amitié fort obligeante* because it is associated with a feeling of gratitude: "Effectivement, je suis obligée de vivre avec elle avec reconnaissance; car on ne peut pas prendre plus de soing de tesmoigner de l'amitié à une personne, qu'elle a pris de m'en tesmoigner." (L.80.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 15 novembre, 1657, vol. 1, p. 125). She insists upon her gratitude when expressing her feelings for the Duchess.

Far from Paris, Mme de La Fayette never ceases to keep her friends in her thoughts. The time that she spends in her castle of Espinasse in Bourbonnais from October 1656 until the end of 1657 does not isolate her from them. During her trips throughout the region, she recollects moments from her friendships and then passes long periods of time writing letters to her friends. In a semi-amused tone, Mme de La Fayette writes to Ménage who then has to meet Mme de Sévigné arriving from Rochers: “Quand Mme de Sévigné sera arrivée, mandéz-moy comment vous seréz ensemble et si le feu ne se remettra point à vostre amitié. Je suis toujours persuadée que cela n'est pas difficile et que vous luy pourriéz dire *Ardó si, ma non t'amo.*” (L.48.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 26 décembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 86). Reading between the lines, it becomes obvious that Mme de La Fayette is able to artfully express the inexpressible. Her silence subtly suggests her hope to remain his best friend.

Mme de La Fayette addresses friends with modesty. She reassures the Marquis of Pomponne that she is his *véritable amie* revealing her feelings accordingly: “Je vous supplie donc d'estre persuadé que personne du monde ne vous estime plus que je fais, et que personne du monde ne peut souhaiter davantage que je fais que vous la croyiéz au nombre de vos véritables amies [...]” (L.114.-Au Marquis de Pomponne, le 13 février, 1662, vol. 1, p. 163). Here, she indirectly compares herself to the rest of the world. This hyperbolic statement convinces the Marquis of Pomponne because it is followed by plausible arguments. He feels compelled to believe her because she freely expresses in private letters what she must refrain from in society.

Mme de La Fayette rejoices from reading Ménage's collection of poems L'Oiseleur⁸ especially because he dedicates the first poem Idylle to her. She could not find better words to voice her emotions: “ [...] je ne pourrois vous faire

⁸ This collection was published by Antoine Vitré in 1657. Ménage, the author of this small collection of thirty pages, dedicates his poems to his closest friends who have inspired him.

comprendre à quel point je suis touchée de reconnaissance pour l'obligation que [je] vous ay des continuelles marques publiques que vous me donnéz de votre estime et de vostre amitié." (L.81.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 27 novembre, 1657, vol. 1, p. 127). She is touched by his poem because it is a mark of his esteem and friendship and not out of feminine vanity which would satisfy any other woman.⁹ She insists that friendship and esteem are very valuable to her. Here, she reinforces what she had said in a previous letter: "Quand je relis vos oeuvres et que j'y trouve mon nom en mille et mille endroits, je suis bien persuadée que vous avéz de l'amitié pour moy [...]" (L.61.-A Ménage, de Vichy, le 20 avril, 1657, vol. 1, p. 102). Instead of being flattered for having inspired him, she feels honored by his dedication because it is a guarantee of his friendship. Mme de La Fayette is aware that she will always be Ménage's best friend and that no love could replace her in his heart: "[...] malgré Chloé,¹⁰ j'ai encore assez de pouvoir sur lui pour lui faire faire des choses qui lui plairoient moins que de vous écrire." (L.130.-A Huet, de Paris, le 15 octobre, 1662, vol. 1, p. 174). She is confident in herself and in the spiritual influence she has upon others. Obeying her instincts, she finds means to impose her will on others especially on an old friend whom she knows has admired her from the beginning. In other situations, her common sense becomes her best friend. Mme de La Fayette recognizes an adverse situation at first sight. She admits her feebleness compared with a strong rival like Mme de Brissac because she writes to Huet:

Vous jugéz bien qu'avec ces belles dispositions nous ne sommes guère propres à Mr Ménage. Aussi ne m'aime-t-il plus du tout et, quy pis est, il en aime une autre à quy je ne dois pas mesme

⁹ Any other woman, except for Mme de La Fayette, would be flattered by this dedication because this collection of verses circulates throughout high society and generates many comments on it.

¹⁰ Chloé, Mademoiselle de Belesbat, is the daughter of Henri Hurault, councillor of Parliament. Her friendship with Ménage is as Mme de La Fayette had predicated, -very short.

penser de le disputer. C'est Mme de Brissac, qui n'a véritablement que dix-huit ans et toutes les grâces de l'esprit et du corps en partage. (L.186.-A Huet, le 25 mai, 1665, vol. 2, p. 12).

Perhaps due to this, Mme de La Fayette ceases her correspondence with Ménage a few months later. This silence will last around twenty years.¹¹ However, their friendship of a lifetime remains unaltered because even after many years, she still writes with the same enthusiasm: "Je suis en vérité bien sensible à l'amitié que vous me tesmoignéz." (L.353.-A Ménage, le 2 octobre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 198). This woman who seems so tough is in fact sensitive to all those around her. In 1690, after the renewal of their correspondence, she still writes in the same manner: "Je vous prie de croire que j'y prends un intérêt sensible et que la reconnaissance que je dois à vostre longue et fidèle amitié ne s'effacera jamais de mon coeur." (L.323.-A Ménage, ? avril, 1690, vol. 2, p. 163). She advises Ménage not to spoil the friendship of a lifetime. Therefore, she insists on it passionately: "[...] que nostre amitié ne meure pas devant nous. Je conserve un souvenir qui m'est cher de celle que vous avéz eue pour moy." (L.324.-A Ménage, ? juillet, 1690, vol. 2, p. 164). She feels that she is doing him a favor by writing to him because her health problems impede her from writing to anyone else: "[...] moy qui n'escris plus à personne et dont le caractère est aussi changé que la figure." (L.325.-A Ménage, 1690, vol. 2, p. 165). Ménage understands the new circumstances and appreciates Mme de La Fayette's effort because he sorrowfully replies: "[...] vous êtes toujours très-mal. J'en suis pénétré de douleur, j'en suis comblé de tristesse et accablé d'affliction." (L.326.-De Ménage, 1690, vol. 2, p. 165). He understands the *special grace* that Mme de La Fayette offers him when she writes him personally without appealing to

¹¹ The letters that followed (L.341 and L.342 of September 1691) show that this correspondence was not renewed in the meantime because Ménage is not informed about her literary writings. He knows nothing about Zayde and very little about La Princesse de Clèves.

the services of a secretary. He enjoys Mme de La Fayette's letters so much that he feels compelled to unveil his feelings: " [...] je l'ay leue mille fois, je l'ay baisée mille fois, je l'ay souvent arrosée de mes larmes." (same L., 326). " [...] Les marques de vostre souvenir me sont toujours chères." (L.336.-A Ménage, ? août, 1691, vol. 2, p. 176) replies Mme de La Fayette in exchange. Her plea echoes her previous letters : "Conservez-moy, je vous en prie, la véritable et fidèle amitié que vous avez toujours eue pour moy et dont je conserve une reconnoissance parfaite." (same L., 336). As an answer to it, Ménage writes her a *belle lettre* in 1691 which reflects Mme de La Fayette's wishes. He describes himself as

[...] une personne qui songe en vous continuellement et qui vous a tant donné de marques publiques de son estime, de sa vénération, de son admiration et à qui de votre côté vous avez donné tant de témoignages de votre souvenir et de votre bienveillance. (L.361.-De Ménage, le 2 novembre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 209).

Here, Ménage paints an indirect portrait of himself synthesizing himself as he appears in their rich correspondence. He jokingly describes the impatience with which he waits for Mme de La Fayette's letters:

Il y a onze jours, deux heures et deux minutes, que vous me mandastes par Simon, le jour qu'il vous rendit ma dernière lettre, que vous m'écririez le lendemain. J'attendis votre lettre tout le lendemain de moment en moment, avec une très grande impatience. (L.361.-De Ménage, le 2 novembre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 209).

This old friend surely knows how to enjoy her letters because he writes:

Jugez, Madame, ce que peut une lettre si obligeante sur un coeur aussi tendre et aussi reconnoissant que le mien. Il est très vray, Madame, qu'elle a encore augmenté considérablement l'amitié que j'avois pour vous.¹² Et, pour peu que cette amitié augmente, je pourray me vanter auprès de vous d'avoir presque autant d'amitié pour vous que vous en méritez. (same L., 361).

Mme de La Fayette recognizes that Ménage also strives to maintain their friendship:

[...] j'y avois marqué tout ce que je dois à vostre amitié depuis tant d'années et l'intérest sensible que je prends à ce quy vous regarde. Je parlois de la justice de vostre cause; enfin j'y avois mis tout ce que j'avois cru de meilleur. Hélas, que ne fairois-je point pour vostre service; que n'avez-vous point fait pour le mien? Combien de pas vous ay-je coustés, sans compter les larmes que je vous ay coustées aussi (L.372.-A Ménage, ? 1692, vol. 2, p. 220).

Mme de La Fayette is receptive to human contact. She is sensitive about how others feel in her presence. Therefore, she writes to Mme de Sablé¹³: “ [...] j'aime que vous ayéz bonne opinion de moy et je ne veux vous rien dire de contraire à ce que vous en penséz.” (L.185.-A Mme de Sablé, fin de 1664 ou début de 1665, vol. 2, p. 10). Mme de La Fayette receives Mme de Sablé's

¹² He is referring to the period where the two have ceased writing to each other. He is evidently pleased by the renewal of their correspondance.

¹³ Mme de Sablé (1598-1678), Madeleine de Souvré, is one of the most educated women of the seventeenth century. Born to a distinguished family, she becomes renowned in the hôtel de Rambouillet, the tea-room of Luxembourg presided over by la Grande Mademoiselle, and the famous meetings of *Saturday* at Mlle de Scudéry's residence. Mme de Sablé also had her own *salon* at the Royal Palace where she entertained the most distinguished people: the Duke of Enghien, the Grand Condé's son, Mme de Longueville, princes and other members of high nobility. In 1659, she continues these famous encounters at her new residence in Port-Royal. Mme de Sablé launched the writing and commentaries of maxims. She is the author of a collection of them and the author of many famous letters. Victor Cousin has revived Mme de Sablé in La Société française au XVII-es.

generous compliments enthusiastically. With reverence, she offers Mme de Sablé her friendship not only in fortunate situations, but also in those less fortunate. She firmly promises Mme de Sablé to maintain their friendship at all costs. Therefore, in a delicate moment, she writes: “Je suis résolue à avoir l’honneur de vous voir, quand vous seriez ensevelie dans le plus noir des chagrins.” (L.190.-A Mme de Sablé, ? 1666, vol. 2, p. 16).

Analyzing herself deeply, Mme de La Fayette discovers unknown feelings in her own heart. Surprised by these sentiments, she writes to Mme de Sablé: “[...] j’étois encore plus attachée à vous que je ne pensais [...]” (L.192.-A Mme de Sablé, ? 1665-1666, vol. 2, p. 17). Mme de La Fayette realizes that their strong friendship can withstand all obstacles as written : “Il est vray qu’il faut que vous ayéz de grands charmes ou que je ne sois guère sujette à m’offenser [...]” (L.193.-A Mme de Sablé, ? 1665-1666, vol. 2, p. 17).

The enduring friendship with Mme de Sévigné is another one which Mme de La Fayette fosters over a lifetime. A letter from Ménage to Huet attests the friendship between Mme de La Fayette and Mme de Sévigné. Mme de La Fayette is in Livry, a countryside, with Mme de Sévigné in October 1662¹⁴ Mme de Sévigné’s correspondence indicates that Mme de La Fayette is always surrounded by friends and that her presence is always noticed among them. Letters of 1674 prove that the two friends visit each other often and also frequent the same places. Together, they participate in the cultural events of the epoch such as assisting in the opera of Lully, *Alceste*. They also visit Turenne, who is ill at the time, together. This event is related in Mme de Sévigné’s correspondence: “Nous fûmes voir M. de Turenne, il a un peu la goutte. Nous fûmes reçues, Mme de La Fayette et moi, avec un excès de civilité.” (L.359.-A Mme de Grignan, de Paris, le 5 janvier, 1674, Correspondance de Mme de

¹⁴ Acc. to the introductory paragraph to L.128, in Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 172.

Sévigné, p. 655). Mme de Sévigné comes to visit Mme de La Fayette in 1677 at Saint-Maur where Mme de La Fayette is caring for her failing health. She is there alone because her husband had to leave for the Bourbonnais¹⁵ to manage the family's domain. Therefore, Mme de La Fayette appreciates Mme de Sévigné's visit even more.

These two distinguished women are pleased to share common friends. Mme de Sévigné expresses her enthusiasm about this writing to M. de Pomponne:

[...] J'ai Madame de La Fayette à ma droite; Madame du Plessis devant moi, qui s'amuse à barbouiller de petites images, Madame de Motteville un peu plus loin, qui rêve profondément, notre oncle de Cessac [...] et Mademoiselle de Sévigné sur le tout, allant et venant par le cabinet comme de petits frelons [...] (L. de Mme de Sévigné à M. de Pomponne, de Fresnes, le 1er août, 1667, vol.. 2, p. 21).

The scene just described by Mme de Sévigné is a typical one for life in the society of the seventeenth century. The French society during the reign of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, depicted in the Histoire de la Princesse de Montpensier and in the Histoire de la Comtesse de Tende, contain the characteristic traits of the seventeenth century as described by M. Cuénin: " [...] On sait quelle fascination le XVIe siècle des Valois exerça sur les esprits dans les vingt premières années du règne personnel : *éclat et magnificence* de la vie de cour certes, mais aussi libre jeu des passions amoureuses et politiques, âge d'or, presque légendaire [...] ".¹⁶ People enjoy being together and their friendship inspires the writing of letters like the one written by Mme de Sévigné where she describes *de petites*

¹⁵ Acc. to the introductory notes about the correspondence of 1677 in Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 56.

¹⁶ Micheline Cuénin 13-14.

images.¹⁷ It is not by mere coincidence that Mme de La Fayette is described as the central figure in the scene. It corresponds with the fact that she is seen as the center of society. The well-refined habits of this society, expressing the desire to maintain harmony and a high spirituality, characterize the tendencies of the epoch. In Mme de La Fayette's novel, spirituality can be seen from two levels: one, in its background where courtly life is depicted through its main cultural events: banquets, visits, hunting, music, theatre, painting, and second, resulting from the psychological analysis of its fictional characters. Its spirituality is not viewed in a religious sense. Georges Poulet notices spiritual trends that have no religious character nor do they originate in any religious beliefs: "A chaque fois l'esprit est comme assailli par des lueurs inattendues: prises de conscience quasi instantanées, sous la pousée immédiate, extraordinairement urgente d'une émotion."¹⁸ The historical setting of the novel is life in the seventeenth century. The role of education in this epoch is to cultivate virtue and kindness. "Cultiver son esprit et sa beauté" become the primary goals.¹⁹ Bernard Roussel finds the explanation in the author's intentions: "Toute sa vie, Mme de La Fayette a apprécié les intelligences lucides et les caractères fermes; elle recherchait la grandeur des sentiments et la noblesse de l'âme[...]"²⁰

Mme de La Fayette exerts a positive influence on her friends either willingly or unintentionally. In their letters, her friends express their gratitude about it. Louvois appreciates the *marques d'amitié* that he receives from her:

¹⁷ At that time, Mme de Sévigné paints *de petites images* like Mme de Plessis who studies painting with the painter Nicolas Loir.

¹⁸ Georges Poulet 122-132.

¹⁹ H. K. Kaps also notices spirituality has no religious perspective when she writes: "The absence of overt references to a Christian God or to Christian doctrine indicates not so much that Mme de La Fayette has dispensed with the sanctions of formal religion to bolster the moral principles in the *Princesse de Clèves* as they do her compliance with a code of propriety which excluded from fiction matters unsuitable by their extreme dignity as well as those unsuitable by their lack of it". Helen Karen Kaps 25.

²⁰ Bernard Roussel 14.

[...] je ne puis la recevoir sans vous remercier de la continuation des marques d'amitié qu'il vous plaist me donner, et vous assurer que je profiteray toujours avec le plus grand plaisir des moindres occasions qu'il vous plaira me donner de vous tesmoigner la passion avec laquelle je suis vostre très-humble [...] (L.289.-De Louvois, à Chambord, le 29 septembre, 1684, vol. 2, p. 121).

He is thankful for Mme de La Fayette's good counsel and also for the fact that she cares for his son because later, he writes: "Je regarde ce que vous me dites sur le sujet de mon filz comme une marque de l'honneur de vostre amitié, à laquelle je suis fort sensible." (L.291.-De Louvois, à Versailles, le 4 décembre, 1684, vol. 2, p. 123). Louvois extends the same friendship to Mme de La Fayette. In 1680, he also assists with the progress of one of Mme de Lafayette's sons who has chosen a military career. Like any good mother, Mme de La Fayette impatiently inquires about her son because she knows that Louvois is closely monitoring his progress. Louvois writes to reassure her: "Lorsqu'il sera dû trois mois d'appointements à Mr de La Fayette, je pourvray à son payement. L'on ne peut estre plus véritablement que je suis / Vostre très-humble & très-obéissant serviteur." (L.241.-De Louvois, à Saint-Germain, le 29 janvier, 1680, vol. 2, p. 80).

Mme de La Fayette's friends are more considerate when she is sick. She is receptive to this because she writes to Mme de Sévigné: "Mr le chevalier de Grignan a soing de moy, j'en ay une recognoissance parfaite et je l'aime de tout mon coeur. Mme la duchesse de Chaulnes me vint voir hier; elle a mille bontés pour moy: mon estat luy fait pitié." (L.345.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Paris, le 19 septembre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 186). Mme de La Fayette sees her reflection mirrored in the eyes of others. When her friends show sympathy toward her worsening condition, she does not pity herself. Instead, she kindly warns Mme

de Sévigné: "Ainsi, ma belle, soyez en repos sur la vie de vostre pauvre amye. Vous aurez le loisir d'estre préparée à tout ce qui arrivera [...]" (same L., 345). Although she is hardhearted toward her own condition, she is compassionate toward her friends'. In 1674, when Ménage who is in his seventies, breaks his hip, Mme de La Fayette reacts sorrowfully to the news. Then, "Sa tendresse, qu'elle croyait à jamais évanouie, remonte en elle, elle lui écrit un billet de retour qu'elle signe de son nom de jeune fille."²¹ Mme de La Fayette promises to support Ménage. Her words encourage him because he sees that she is grateful to him: "Je tiens de vous tout ce que je sçay." (L.286.-A Ménage, juin ou juillet, 1684, vol. 2, p. 120).

²¹ André Beaunier's remark in the introductory paragraph to Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 119.

XI. MME DE LA FAYETTE'S DIPLOMATIC LETTERS

Mme de La Fayette was interested in politics since her youth. One of Mme de La Fayette's letters to Ménage in 1654, the year of the Archbishop of Paris Jean François de Gondi's death, inquires with anticipation about the Cardinal of Retz, the nephew of the deceased. She also wonders about Denise de Bordeaux, the Cardinal de Retz's mistress, in an ironical manner: "Mandéz-nous un peu comment vont celles [les affaires] de Denise et s'il lui reste encore de la beauté et des Amants." (L.8.-A Ménage, de Champiré, le 31 mars, 1654, vol. 1, p. 37).

Mme de La Fayette's reasoning allows her to carefully scrutinize all the aspects of political, social, financial and business affairs. Her friends benefit from her good counsel and, despite the fact that Ménage is her mentor, he also accepts her advice. For instance, Mme de La Fayette admonishes Ménage when he thoughtlessly lends four-hundred *pistoles*¹ to a Swedish man whom he barely knew. Mme de La Fayette advises him to think better in future financial situations because she writes: "[...] mais, pour vous, qui n'avez point de richesse que celle des beaux esprits, on ne peut pas vous en faire assez de réprimande." (L.9.-A Ménage, de Champiré, Avril, 1654, vol. 1, p. 38).

Mme de La Fayette is also a skillful diplomat² who knows how to handle political affairs with both reason and sensitivity. She responds compassionately to a situation where the Marquis of Pomponne, Chancellor of Foreign Affairs, is forced to resign due to a possible intrigue between Colbert and Louvois³: "Je fus frappée hier de la nouvelle peu différemment de ce que je l'aurois esté pour

¹ Ancient gold coin varying in value. At that time it had the value of ten francs.

² "The spokesmen Mme de La Fayette chooses- Mme de Chartres, Mary Stuart, the vidame de Chartres- all know society intimately and speaks of it with gusto and good humor. They convey a feeling for court life which the historical narrator cannot communicate [...]" Barbara R. Woshinsky, La Princesse de Clèves. The Tension of Elegance (Paris : Mouton, 1973) 67.

³ Acc. to the introductory note to L.237, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 77.

moy-mesme.” (L.237.-Au Marquis de Pomponne, le 20 ou 27 novembre, 1679, vol. 2, p. 77).

The Duchess of Orléans writes letters to Mme de La Fayette about private matters and official events. These letters from 1666 have a more friendly rather than an official tone: “Ne croyez pas cependant que ce soit par paresse que je manque au rendez-vous, mais seulement la peur⁴ que j’ay qu’elle n’en ait de moy.” (L.196.-De Madame La Duchesse d’Orléans, ? 1666, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 20). This letter is meaningful because the Duchess, using an intimate tone, treats Mme de La Fayette as her peer. It proves that she considers Mme de La Fayette a friend.

Mme de La Fayette knows how to respond with the proper tone in any diplomatic affair in order to reinforce her position or insist on certain facts. When she writes to the Marquis of Pomponne: “Je vous supplie donc d’estre persuadé que personne du monde ne vous estime plus que je fais, et que personne du monde ne peut souhaiter davantage que je fais [...]” (L.114.-Au Marquis de Pomponne, le 13 février, 1662, vol. 1, p. 163) she is so congenial that the Marquis of Pomponne would probably have felt very important, especially when she adds: “[...] je m’intéresse à tout ce qui vous touche.” (same L., 114). M. de Pomponne, who is then consigned to Verdun by the order of Colbert, receives a letter from Mme de La Fayette in which she reassures him about her loyalty : “Il n’y a jour que l’on ne parle icy de vous escrire [...]” (L.117.-Au Marquis de Pomponne, de Nevers, le 24 mars, 1662, vol. 1, p. 165). She excuses herself for answering late because she feels the need for more time to reflect and because of other social obligations. Being in the castle of Nevers,⁵

⁴ At that time, the Duchess of Orléans had a bad flu and thought it might be contagious. Because of it, she was afraid to pay Mme de Sablé a visit.

⁵ At that time, the castle was the center of social, political and literary reunions. In his *Mémoires*, Rapin comments: “Cette maison était aussi le grand théâtre où se débattait avec plus de bruit, et même plus d’applaudissements le nouvel évangile de Port-Royal.” *Mémoires I*, p. 403, cited in Correspondance L.F., p. 240, Notices Bibliographiques.

she has to socialize with common friends. Otherwise, she informs him that his presence is sorely missed. She is impatiently waiting along with many of her other friends to see him again. She also mentions that this letter is dedicated to him in exclusivity⁶: “je [...] vous écris en mon particulier. Et, quoy que ce soit de l'hostel de Nevers, ne croyéz pas que personne ait part à ma lettre [...] ” (same L., 117).

Mme de La Fayette actively participates in the events of the court and in different diplomatic affairs with much passion. She always struggles to fulfill the tasks entrusted to her in the highest capacity. Therefore, her services are always well appreciated. For instance, a letter from 1657 shows Mme de La Fayette's preoccupation with finding a suitable residence in the Petit Luxembourg ⁷ for Mademoiselle upon her return from Sedan. On her way there, Mademoiselle has to stop somewhere to rest for a short time. Mme de La Fayette is concerned about the randomly chosen house of M. de Fenestraux because she does not know all the details related to this residence. That is why she writes reluctantly:

Quand vous me parleréz doresnavant de quelque maison, je vous prie de me dire un peu exactement le logement qu'il y a, parce qu'autrement je ne pourrois vous donner de responce qu'après vous avoir demandé ce que ce seroit que cette maison: et cela iroit à de grandes longueurs. (L.73.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse. le 24 août, 1657, vol. 1, p. 18).

The Countess of La Fayette goes to Fontainebleau in April to prepare Madame's arrival in July. Her business letters dating from that time attest that the orders given by her are just. She is determined to see them concluded

⁶ In the seventeenth century, letters are read for amusement. They are also read as literary works when they are as well-written as those of Mme de La Fayette's.

⁷ Acc. to footnote 1, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 118.

according to her will: “ [...] voilà deux placets que je vous prie de donner et de recommander d'un bon ton [...] ” (L.107.-A Ménage, de Fontainebleau, juillet, 1661, vol. 1, p. 157). Even when she is far from the court, she writes: “Mandéz-moy, je vous prie, si Mr. de Tréville n'a point donné sa démission de la charge des mousquetaires⁸ et si l'on ne le récompense point.” (L.52.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 23 janvier, 1657, vol. 1, p. 90-91).

There is no doubt that Mme de La Fayette's ideas are highly valued in the court. She is well aware of this fact because she writes:

J'ay esté tout le jour chez Madame, à faire ma cour [...] je viens de trouver céans un billet quy m'advertit qu'il faut que je sollicite demain pour les débats que f[ont] mes parties sur le compte que nous rendons, et croy que la teste me tournera de tout cela. (L.138.-A Ménage, ? oct. ou nov., 1662, vol. 1, p. 179).

Mme de La Fayette is also involved in marriage projects,⁹ giving her advice about Mlle de Valois' marriage concluded for Denmark: “Elle [Mademoiselle] trouvera le mariage de Mlle de Valois conclu pour la Savoye et celuy de Mlle d'Alençon fort avancé pour le Danemarck. J'en vis l'autre jour l'ambassadeur chez Madame.” (L.130. -A Huet, de Paris, le 15 octobre, 1662, vol. 1, p. 174-175). Due to the position that Mme de La Fayette gained for herself in the court, she has her place in the history of her century. She realizes this, yet she modestly does not remind Huet about it, treating it as a secondary issue by diverting his attention to other people's qualities: “Je fus surprise de trouver tous ceux de sa suite parler aussi bon français que moy et n'avoir pas d'accent

⁸ Musketeers- gentlemen of the cavalry who were hired to defend the King and his court. They fought with muskets and, because they were carefully chosen, Mme de La Fayette takes great concern in their appointment.

⁹ Marriage affairs were very important at that time because their financial aspect was taken into consideration, often having precedence over matters of love.

étranger.” (L., 130). Her diplomatic qualities are greatly appreciated, especially by the Queen, who constantly requests her services.¹⁰

Mme de La Fayette’s diplomacy is an asset in any situation. When Mme de Sévigné introduces Fouquet at Vaux, she relates:

Quoyque mon affaire ne se soit pas faite, je n’en désespère pas.
L’accablement d’affaires de Mr. le Surintendant a esté cause qu’il
n’a pas donné mes papiers et je suis persuadée qu’il vouloit peut-
estre me faire dire quelque chose en me les rendant. (L.108.-A
Ménage, de Fontainebleau, le 30 août, 1661, vol. 1, p. 158).

Mme de La Fayette, who carefully weighs her words, does not use the expression “*accablement d’affaires*” randomly. Does she use it to allude to the events that follow the reception of Vaux on August 17, which was fatal for Fouquet? The hyperbolic expression indirectly conveys this idea even though it is not clearly stated and one can easily guess why. Perhaps it is because Mme de La Fayette belongs to the court of the dowager Queen of England¹¹ and must remain silent about it because of diplomatic reasons. The court does not allow private manifestations because it has a strict etiquette with which one must comply: “In return for the really noble rewards it brings, social life at court places enormous constraints on both public and private acts.”¹² Mme de La Fayette also knows how to wisely interpret the chancellor’s silence when he renders her papers before the reception. Her absence from the reception of Vaux, when she claims to be ill, indirectly shows she understood that she defended Fouquet with too much enthusiasm. Fortunately, her position is not hampered with because the King: “ [...] donneroit exprès une collation le jour de la naissance du Roy [...] ” (L.109.-A Ménage, de

¹⁰ A good example is L.138 of October or November 1662, *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 1, p. 179.

¹¹ Acc. to the introductory note to L.108, *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 1, p. 157.

¹² Barbara R. Woshinsky 73.

Fontainebleau, le 2 septembre, 1661, vol. 1, p. 159) and he wants her to be among the honored guests. The party that followed obliged her to act tactfully.

Although Mme de La Fayette is not a specialist in business affairs, Huet needs her thoughtful advice because he knows the value of her reasoning. She tries to help him find a house for a good price when he decides to move to Paris in 1670 due to his new position as an assistant tutor to M. le Dauphin. She is obviously right when she advises him that:

Vous pouvez vous en enquérir de tous ces architectes de Versailles et c'est sur quoy vous vous devéz régler pour le prix de cette maison; car, encore une fois, sans cette risque, [sic] ce seroit un marché donné, et d'autant plus qu'on la rehaussera assurément, de l'adveu mesme de celle qui la tient. (L.204.-A Huet, de Paris, fin de 1670, voi. 2, p. 31).

She is closer to estimating its value than Mansar, the famous architect, because she remarks: "Mansar ne sçait point sur quel pied on fait les estimations de ce que le Roy prend." (same L., 204).

Despite the high pedestal that people place her on, Mme de La Fayette modestly recognizes that she often struggles beyond her capacity. She knows her knowledge has its limits: "[...] Paris me tue. Si vous sçaviez comme je ferois ma cour à des gens à quoy il est très bon de la faire, d'escire souvent toutes sortes de folies, et combien je leur en escris peu, vous jugeréz aisément que je ne fais pas ce que je veux là-dessus." (L.211.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Paris, le 30 juin, 1673, vol. 2, p. 41). These lines, addressed to her friend Mme de Sévigné, represent a direct testimony of the effort put forth by Mme de La Fayette to maintain her high position.

Court life is complicated because of the competition between so many famous people. It is even harder for Mme de La Fayette because she must

maintain her special place in the court. Sometimes she would like to be far from this glamorous life. There are moments when she would rather be in the provinces like Mme de Sévigné. A life similar to that of her friend occasionally tempts her, so she enviously writes: "Vous estes en Provence, ma belle, vos heures sont libres, vostre teste encore plus. Le goust d'escrire vous dure encore pour tout le monde [...]" (same L., 211). However, she amusingly finds an advantage to her own life - not having a lover she would have to write to daily, because in that case, her life would really become impossible: "[...] si j'avois un amant quy voulust de mes lettres tous les matins je romprois avec luy." (same L., 211). Therefore, she decides to content herself with her life as it is instead of trying to change it. She prefers to take small vacations from time to time which bring her the rewarding tranquillity that she longs for: "Je suis à Saint-Maur; j'ay quitté toutes mes affaires et tous mes amis. J'ay mes enfans et le beau temps: cela me suffit." (L.213.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Saint-Maur, le 4 septembre, 1673, vol. 2, p. 45).

Between 1678 and 1689, Mme de La Fayette fulfills the task of "diplomate et solliciteuse"¹³ for the court. It is well-known that a person in this function must have many qualities and much prestige. All those who know Mme de La Fayette believe that she is the right person for this position precisely because of her qualities.

The Marquis of Saint-Maurice, former ambassador of Savoie, pays Mme de La Fayette an official visit to bring her a message from Madame Royale who is in England. This message is a sad one relating the death of Madame's husband, the Duke Charles Emmanuel of Savoie. The Marquis of Saint-Maurice is a prestigious person in Louis XIV's entourage. The King allows him to possess domains in Dauphiné and in any other place he chooses because

¹³ Acc. to the title given to her by André Beaunier in the sixth part of Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 45.

he continues to accomplish diplomatic missions. This permission is an indication of high distinction for a foreigner. At the same time, it is also a sign of honor for Mme de La Fayette to receive news from Madame Royale through a diplomat, since the Marquis of Saint-Maurice is well-known in both the court of France and the court of England. The Marquis of Saint-Maurice is then impressed by the interesting conversation that he has with Mme de La Fayette and the Duke of La Rochefoucauld.

The letters of Mme de La Fayette to other friends attest her long friendship with Madame Royale, regent Duchess of Savoie. The two share many memories in common like their childhood years which were spent in the convent of Chaillot. The young duchess was then known by her maiden name, *Jeanne de Nemours*. They are such good friends that they write each other *des bagatelles*¹⁴ yet, sometimes the subject decides the tone. There are probably other letters concerning private matters which Mme de La Fayette thinks would be better off destroyed because she writes: “ [...] je voudrais bien qu’elles fussent brulées quand elles sont leues.” (L.222.-A Lescheraine, le 18 mai, 1678, vol. 2, p. 64). It is regretful that many of these letters were in fact destroyed because they are irreplaceable. However, the letters which were saved reveal Madame Royale’s esteem for Mme de La Fayette. In 1680, the Countess writes: “Je suis honteuse que vous ayéz parlé à Mme Royale, elle me comble de biens.” (L.253.-A Lescheraine, le 18 septembre, 1680, vol. 2, p. 92). Mme de La Fayette finds much pleasure in working for Madame Royale as she expresses in a letter to the Count of Saint-Maurice: “ [...] faites ma cour à S.A.R. de la joye que j’ay d’estre employée pour son service.” (L.265.-A Lescheraine, le 10 janvier, 1681, vol. 2, p. 104). She is then employed by Madame Royale to choose Madame’s wardrobe and accessories because she is well-known for

¹⁴ Acc. to Mme de La Fayette’s own words in L.222, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 64.

her good taste. Madame Royale also appreciates her fidelity and clear thinking. She even believes that Mme de La Fayette would be able to replace her and be her spokesperson. Madame Royale writes to the Duke D'Enghien in 1678: "[...] De peur de vous importuner par une longue lettre, j'ai chargé Madame de La Fayette de vous dire toutes les nouvelles de ce pays icy et de vous parler aussi d'une affaire qui y est arrivée et qui est finie de la manière dont je le pouvois souhaiter [...]" (L. de Madame Royale au Duc D'Enghien, le 20 juin, 1678, vol. 2, p. 65). She is convinced that only a reasonable person such as Mme de La Fayette could make peace between the Knight of Savoie and the two sons of the Marquis of Saint-Maurice. Mme de La Fayette wisely interferes in conflictual situations by bringing reconciliation to the two parties involved. She indirectly expresses her opinion about this when she advises Ménage: "Exhortéz les parties à la patience et à la douceur." (L.351.-A Ménage, fin de septembre ou début d'octobre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 194). Besides being practical in this situation, her advice is extremely important for all diplomatic relations. She believes that it is better to think first before giving a decision.

Mme de La Fayette is able to distinguish political reasons from individual interests. Therefore, she defends Madame Royale when she writes to Lescheraine: "[...] je ne croye que Mme Royale a de très bonnes raisons. Je cognois trop sa bonté et sa justice pour en douter. Je croy mesme qu'elle en peut avoir qui ne sont pas propres à estre données au public." (L.245.-A Lescheraine, le 12 mai, 1680, vol. 2, p. 84).¹⁵ Lescheraine is forced to acknowledge his mistake for having failed to inform Mme de La Fayette about it. Her bitterness is evident in this letter written mainly to admonish him: "Je ne sçay quelle bonne maxime vous avéz de n'instruire jamais les personnes bien

¹⁵ Mme de La Fayette probably knew that Louis XIV had advised the Abbot of Estrades, his ambassador in Turin, to cease all relations with the court. She also knew that, consequently, Madame Royale is forced to disavow him. Acc. to the introductory note L.245, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 83.

intentionnées des changements qui arrivent, afin qu'ils puissent en rendre compte au public et les donner par le costé qui convient qu'on les voye." (same L., 245). Mme de La Fayette's diplomatic ability is once again incontestable.

The smallest gesture of politeness touches Mme de La Fayette; hence, she promptly answers all her letters. B. Woshinsky notices that politeness becomes a code which supports and reinforces other social requirements in the seventeenth century: "The code of politeness becomes necessary to the continued existence of society [...] By cultivating an impeccable surface, the courtiers weather difficult situations while retaining some inner freedom of thought and feeling."¹⁶ If Mme de La Fayette cannot answer in person due to independent circumstances, she then responds through a mediator. She writes to Lescheraine¹⁷ in 1681 asking him to be her messenger and reply to the count of Masin's letter. She thinks it would be a pity not to respond to such a letter, "très agréable et très obligeante" (L.265.-A Lescheraine, le 10 janvier, 1681, vol. 2, p. 104). Mme de La Fayette also thanks Lescheraine for the good services that he rendered as a mediator. Louvois likewise performs diplomatic services for Mme de La Fayette in other affairs. He is Mme de La Fayette's messenger to the King, because in 1682, he writes: "J'ay rendu au Roy la lettre que vous m'avez adressée pour Sa Majesté, qui l'a leue toute entière et m'a commandé de vous assurer que c'estoit tousjours avec plaisir qu'Elle en recevoit de vostre part, [...]" (L.273.-De Louvois, à Versailles, le 11 août, 1682, vol. 2, p. 109).

Mme de La Fayette's letters are among the most widely read letters of her time. This fact is clearly stated in the responses she receives. She cannot help

¹⁶ Barbara Woshinsky 73.

¹⁷ Lescheraine, Joseph-Marie, belongs to a renowned family in Savoie. He becomes the first secretary of Madame Royale. Later, he also performs other important duties because of his numerous skills and education. Acc. to the bibliographical note in Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 234.

but notice eventual oversights in others when she compares her letters to those of other diplomats. She expresses her opinion about this to Lescheraine:

Pouvéz-vous croire qu'un ambassadeur et tant de gens qui ont des relations en France n'escrivent pas ce qui se passe? Je vous estonnerois, si je vous disois jusques où l'on sçait des choses qui se projettent présentement dans vostre cour et de la fin à quoy aboutissent les projets. (L.252.-A Lescheraine, le 9 septembre, 1680, vol. 2, p. 89).

Her remarks indirectly reflect the conception she has about the content and purpose of diplomatic letters without mentioning the details ¹⁸ contained within. Mme de La Fayette believes that each detail has its own importance and therefore, one has the responsibility to treat it accordingly. Thus, she advises Lescheraine to carefully weigh these details in order to better serve Madame Royale:

Vous avez beaucoup de part aux affaires et l'on vous regarde comme un homme qui pourra y en avoir encore davantage à l'avenir; il est de vostre intérêt comme de la gloire de Mme Royale de contribuer que ce qui doit paroistre icy ne se fasse qu'après avoir esté pesé et considéré lomtemps et plusieurs fois. (same L., 252).

Could Lescheraine disregard Mme de La Fayette's logical advice? The persuasive tone she uses should also convince him but to insist on it, she adds: "Rien ne vous manque pour bien remplir cette place, que l'expérience, et le temps ne vous la donnera que trop: ce n'est pas un malheur, de n'en manquer que parce que l'on est jeune." (same L., 252). This reflection is once again too

¹⁸ The details are probably contained in a memoir that Mme de La Fayette sends separately to Lescheraine because she informs him about it: "[...] je vous envoyois un mémoire de ce qui est dans la boîte pour le Portugal." L.252.-A Lescheraine, le 9 septembre, 1680, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 91.

logical for her friend to not consider. The counsel that Mme de La Fayette gives Lescheraine is useful not only for him, but also to those who prepare for diplomatic careers.

Always prudent, Mme de La Fayette cannot help but wonder what the right measure in everything is. Her intuition tells her that discretion is the best solution in certain situations: “ [...] et, sur les choses qui ne viennent point icy, je ne me mesle pas mesme d’en parler : mais j’avoue que, sur celles qui s’y passent, j’ay de la peine à m’empescher d’en parler [...] ” (same L., 252).

Mme de La Fayette is determined to understand all the aspects of a situation beyond rhetoric. She again writes Lescheraine reassuring M.G. Ferrari, the care-taker of Madame Royale’s estate, about her careful scrutiny: “Dites au controleur de sa maison qu’il doit estre assureé de ma diligence et de mon exactitude, et que, sans qu’il prenne la peine de m’escire, [...] je l’en croiray et feray de mon mieux [...] ” (L.265.-A Lescheraine, le 10 janvier, 1681, vol. 2, p. 103).

Mme de La Fayette’s diplomatic duties sometimes bring her in contact with the King. His Majesty finds her services irreplaceable as illustrated in a letter from Louvois in 1682: “J’ay rendu au Roy la lettre que vous m’avez adressée pour Sa Majesté, qui l’a leue toute entière et m’a commandé de vous assurer que c’estoit tousjours avec plaisir qu’Elle en recevoit de vostre part [...] ” (L.273.-De Louvois, à Versailles, le 11 août, 1682, vol. 2, p. 109). Louvois also appeals to her services when she works for the King. He is grateful for Mme de La Fayette’s assistance and expresses this gratitude in the following words:

J’ay receu la lettre que vous m’avez fait l’honneur de m’escire le 7-e de ce mois sur la grâce que le Roy me vient de faire. Je suis fort sensible aux marques d’amitié qu’il vous plaist de me donner à cette occasion, et je vous supplie de croire que j’en ay toute la

reconnaissance que je dois, et que l'on ne peut estre plus véritablement que je suis/Vostre très-humble et très-obéissant serviteur. (L.278.-De Louvois, à Fontainebleau, le 16 septembre, 1683, vol. 2, p. 113).

Reading her correspondence, one could be inclined to believe what Charles Dédéyan states: "Ce fut à ce moment que Louis XIV, à son tour, s'attachait fort à elle et lui témoignait une complaisance extrême."¹⁹

The King's friendship for Mme de La Fayette and Louvois comes naturally because their diplomatic relations create an amiable atmosphere. The King also treats them like friends because he is always concerned with his people. For example, His Majesty inquires about the Duchess of Savoie's family problems: "J'ay leu au Roy la lettre que vous m'avez fait l'honneur de m'crire le XI-e de ce mois, par laquelle Sa Majesté a pris avec déplaisir la mauvaise satisfaction que madame la duchesse de Savoye a de la manière dont Mr son filz la traite."²⁰ (L.287.-De Louvois, à Versailles, le 13 août, 1684, vol. 2, p. 120).

Mme de La Fayette will continue her diplomatic career for a long time because her style and diplomacy are acknowledged by the court. In 1686, Madame Royale asks Mme de La Fayette to write her in a detailed manner about Madame Son Altesse Royale: "Je vous conjure de m'crire tous les ordinaires des nouvelles de Sa Majesté, auxquelles je m'intéresse comme je doibz." (L.302.-De Madame Royale, de Turin, le 4 mai, 1686, vol. 2, p. 136). Mme de La Fayette's task is not an easy one because she has to decide impartially at all times. Feeling inspired, her interlocutors are compelled to follow her example. Madame Royale is among those inspired when she writes

¹⁹ Charles Dédéyan, *Madame de La Fayette* (Paris: Soc. D'Ed. D'Enseignement Supérieur, 1965) 167.

²⁰ Being too young and because of his depression, Victor Amédée entrusts his power to his mother, Madame Royale. However, as soon as he reaches his majority in 1680, he decides to renounce her support and become master of his estates.

about herself and about S.A.R.: "Madame Son Altesse Royale est dans une retraite toute extraordinaire ce voyage-cy [...] On luy a fait sa leçon avant de partir [...] quoyqu'elle meure d'ennuy, elle ne m'en dit rien et je ne fais pas semblant de m'en apercevoir." (same L., 302). Mme de La Fayette forces others to remain silent in some circumstances and, even if they do decide to use confidential information, they must do so with the greatest discretion. For instance, Louvois promises to follow her request when writing her: "J'ay receu la lettre que vous m'avez fait l'honneur de m'escire hyer. Je me serviray de ce qu'elle contient [...] je n'en diray pas une parolle." (L.301.-De Louvois, à Versailles, le 4 avril, 1686, vol. 2, p. 135).

XII. REASON IN MME DE LA FAYETTE

Since the early days of her youth, Mme de La Fayette is gifted with a rational mind. At the age of nineteen, some girls have romantic dreams, Mme de La Fayette allows reason to dominate her life. She gladly realizes it, writing: "[...] Je suis si persuadée que l'amour est une chose incommode, que j'ay de la joye que mes amis et moy en soyons exempts." (L.6.-A Ménage, de Champiré, le 18 septembre, 1653, vol. 1, p. 34). Costar admires and praises her for this choice. However, he cannot decide which quality is stronger in her at that age, her grace or her reason, because he writes: "[...] j'ay tâché seulement, Mademoiselle, de vous faire bien remarquer sur mon visage et dans toutes mes actions l'extrême joye que je recevois de vous voir si belle, si spirituelle, si raisonnable [...]" (L.3.-De Costar, Le Mans, ? mars, 1653, vol. 1, p. 30).

The majority of Mme de La Fayette's friendships are based on reason which allows her to maintain them. She has the wisdom to differentiate between honor, love, and friendship beyond treacherous appearances. Sweet words alone would never have the power to influence her. Therefore, she writes to Ménage in a direct tone: "Et ainsi, par honneur, vous dites que vous m'aiméz toujours, mais, malgré que vous en ayéz, il vous eschappe mille choses qui font voir le contraire." (L.13.-A Ménage, de ? Champiré, le 6 novembre, ? 1654, vol. 1, p. 44).

Costar is one of the first to notice that reason surpasses all of Mme de La Fayette's other qualities: "[...] vous ne cesserez jamais d'estre une des meilleures, des plus vertueuses et des plus raisonnables personnes qui vivent." (L.17.-De Costar, Le Mans, fin février, 1655, vol. 1, p. 51). Her reason also indicates the right means to obtain whatever she wants in any situation. In her opinion, a friend like Ménage should be touched by her insistence and cede to

her will, maintaining their friendship at any expense: “ [...] je m’en vais vous escrire toutes les sepmaines avec la mesme régularité que j’aurois pu faire du temps de cette belle amitié que vous m’aviéz juré quy devoit surpasser les siècles en durée.” (L.32.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 16 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 65). Here, Mme de La Fayette uses his own arguments to persuade him.

At the time, Costar would gladly give up his acquired fame to deserve Mme de La Fayette’s attention: “Quels efforts ne ferois-je point pour mériter une des premières places dans un si bel esprit que le vostre [...]” (L.4.-De Costar, Le Mans, fin de juin, 1653, vol. 1, p. 32). It is a privilege for Mme de La Fayette to be esteemed for her wisdom by an educated scholar such as him. He therefore encourages her to write to the *Beaux-Esprits*¹ for the spiritual exchange from which she would benefit.

Mme de La Fayette appears to have a natural talent for writing because her first letters seem to be written effortlessly but, upon analyzing them further, one realizes that she in fact works hard to educate herself and improve her own thinking.

Mme de La Fayette’s sojourn to the provinces turns into a rather annoying experience. The neighbors she meets there have nothing in common with the refined society left in Paris. She describes them as: “ [...] ce sont gens que vous avéz le bonheur de ne pas cognoistre, et que j’ay le malheur d’avoir pour voisins.” (L.35.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 1-er septembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 68). However, her reasoning helps her find ways to cope with them: “ [...] j’ay pris un certain chemin de leur parler des choses qu’ils sçavent, qui m’empesche de m’ennuyer.” (same L., 35). When she is too tired to deal with them, she prefers solitude to their company as she confesses: “ [...] j’aime bien mieux ne voir guère de gens que d’en voir de fâcheux, et la solitude que je

¹ L.4.-De Costar, Le Mans, fin de juin, 1653, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 32.

trouve icy m'est plutost agréable qu'ennuyeuse." (same L., 35). She then diverts all her attention to her household and her children.

Mme de La Fayette allows reason to dominate her feelings. This conviction has its roots in ancient philosophers which she studied in her youth. Plato's concept of happiness which consists of overcoming passions by reason² probably influences her thinking. Mme de La Fayette chooses logic over passion even in her fictional writing, La Princesse de Clèves. M. de Nemours prefers restraining himself out of respect for the Princess in spite of his *violent* passion: "Mme de Clèves lui paraissait d'un si grand prix qu'il se résolut de manquer plutôt à lui donner des marques de sa passion que de hasarder de la faire connaître au public."³ When she finds out that Ménage is in love with Mme de Monbazon, Mme de La Fayette writes him with the understanding that he cannot have the same feelings for a friend.⁴ Ménage does not deny his affair⁵ nor does he deny the fact that Mme de Monbazon has inspired him to write a sonnet in Italian, "La bella attempata". It is clear that he anticipates Mme de La Fayette's reaction because he ventures to send her this sonnet asking her advice on its literary value. He also knows that she would enjoy reading it.

Guided by reason, Mme de La Fayette estimates the advantages to a situation. She feels it would be regrettable for Mlle de Rambouillet's marriage not to take place because she writes: "Je serois fâchée que le mariage de Mlle de Rambouillet se rompît, car il me semble qu'il luy est avantageux." (L.47.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 19 décembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 84). Perhaps she has the Count of Grignan in mind when she writes this because she believes that

² Anthony Levi, French Moralists (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) 9.

³ Madame de La Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves 163.

⁴ See L. 38. in Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 75.

⁵ Acc. to L.40-A Ménage, de Vichy, le 19 septembre, 1656, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 76.

Mr. Grignan's high noble title would associate perfectly with that of the Rambouillet family through his marriage with Angélique Clarisse d'Angennes.⁶

Besides reason, Mme de La Fayette's best counselor is her own intuition. This intuition helps her choose the right path to take in official business whenever she does not see any immediate solutions. She is then guided by instinct alone because she feels that she is not an expert in some duties she is asked to perform. A person in her high position as Chancellor of Royal Affairs should keep this fact a secret by a concern for her vanity; however, she sincerely admits that she is sometimes guided only by intuition.

Now and then, she is also enticed by certain advantages which would come about by concluding an affair. She humorously confesses this to Ménage:

C'est une chose admirable que ce qui fait l'intérêt que [l'on] prend aux affaires: si celles-cy n'estoient point les miennes, je n'y comprendrois que le haut allemand, et je les sçay dans ma teste comme mon *Pater* dispute tous les jours contre nos gens d'affaires des choses dont je n'ay nulle cognoissance et où mon intérêt seul me donne de la lumière. (L.67.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 3 juillet, vol. 1, p. 110).

Mme de La Fayette's reason helps her distinguish the strong points from the weak. This fact is obvious when she writes about the complaint of Charbonier to the Parquet which could turn in their favor: "[...] Cependant, c'est une chose extrêmement importante, dont nous pouvons tirer grand avantage [...]" (L.71.-A Ménage, le 3 août, 1657, vol. 1, p. 115). Even though she does not provide all the details concerning this situation, one cannot help but realize Mme de La Fayette's strong judgment.

⁶ However, this thought is not clearly expressed in Mme de La Fayette's correspondence. Also see footnote 1, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 84.

Mme de La Fayette's wisdom is occasionally inspired by events in her own life. When her health starts to diminish in 1658, she goes for treatment to take waters at Vichy. She complains about her health to M. de Saint-Pons but only because it prevents her from writing: "J'ay des maux de teste insupportables, qui m'ostent tout à fait le pouvoir d'escrire." (L.88.-A M. de Saint-Pons, de Vichy, le 16 septembre, 1658, vol. 1, p. 135). She reflects about this in an insightful maxim: "Le manque de santé est le seul véritable malheur de la vie" (same L., 88), giving her interlocutor reasons to be happy whenever he benefits from good health. Otherwise, she never pities herself for her sickness nor for her physical suffering. There are even moments when she considers her sickness humorously and finds pretexts to joke about her headaches: "Il me prend très souvent et je ne prétends pas qu'il m'a [ban] donne jamais tout à fait. Vous sçavez que c'est la maladie des beaux esprits, et ainsi il faut que j'y sois sujette, tant que je seray bel esprit [...]" (L.67.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 3 juillet, 1657, vol. 1, p. 109). In those moments, the people around her believe that Mme de La Fayette's greatest quality is her capacity for thinking.

L'esprit is indeed one of the most appreciated attributes in the seventeenth century. Mme de La Fayette holds the Queen of Sweden in high esteem for having this quality. Mme de Sévigné has also noticed the Queen's spirituality when she paid Her Majesty a visit in Fontainebleau. Mme de La Fayette relates Mme de Sévigné's impression to Ménage: "Mme de Sévigné a esté voir la reine de Suède à Fontainebleau. Elle est charmée de son esprit et de sa civilité." (L.79.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 9 novembre, 1657, vol. 1, p. 124). Mme de La Fayette is well aware that she too possesses a *bel esprit*. She feels it is a pity that Huet did not receive the letter in which she spoke about it: "Je suis très fâchée que vous n'ayez point reçu ma lettre. Je vous parlois de

ma science, de mon bel esprit, enfin c'est très grand dommage pour ma vanité que cette lettre soit perdue." (L.174.-A Huet, le 12 février, 1664, vol. 1, p. 212), because her letters are unique and cannot be rewritten. The letters of Mme de La Fayette cannot be reproduced once lost because, besides the information included within, they also contain valuable reflections, the fruit of her *bel esprit*.

"On profite toujours de quelque chose, avec nous autres beaux esprits." (L.158.-A Huet et Segrais, le 8 juillet, 1663, vol. 1, p. 197). In this sentence, Mme de La Fayette conveys more information to her contemporaries than to modern readers.⁷ Modern readers have to take into account only the general reflection that can be deduced from it because the facts she alludes to do not appear here. There are many times when her letters are too subtle for readers nowadays; she may be referring to a conversation that she already had and therefore does not feel the need to develop it further since her interlocutor already knows what she is talking about.

"[...] Le plaisir de la conversation ou le raisonnement sur les nouvelles [...]" (L.117.-Au Marquis de Pomponne, de Nevers, le 24 mars, 1662, vol. 1, p. 165) is a daily spiritual exercise at that time⁸ and, for a *bel esprit* like that of Mme de La Fayette, it is also a pretext for reasoning. She not only discusses daily events in her conversations, but also expresses ideas on universal questions. Micheline Cuénin notices that Mme de La Fayette's novels are constructed from an *extra-temporal perspective*: "Ainsi se plaçant dans une perspective extratemporelle, la romancière peut-elle se livrer à un savant jeu de surimpression historique dont elle va donner le goût au public aristocratique

⁷ She plays upon two grammatical entities not only in French, but also in Polish to which she is referring. In this letter, she wants to relate the visit that she paid to Mme de Choisy where she met a young lady from Poland.

⁸ However, there are critics who feel differently about this subject: "The eagerness with which the courtiers snatch and exploit a new topic of conversation points up the dullness and the emptiness of their lives." Barbara Woshinsky 74.

pour une vingtaine d'années au moins."⁹ A *raisonneuse* like Mme de La Fayette profoundly meditates on the matters being discussed, extracting from them the best lessons of philosophy, psychology and ethics. Her correspondence and her fictional writings reflect this profound meditation. H. K. Kaps notices this psychological meditation on different levels; in the novel :

The difference in these scenes illustrates the continuation of the novel's overall structural pattern on the psychological plane. As the main plot advances, the heroine becomes progressively more aware of her own thoughts and feelings, and, at the same time, the reader is allowed an increasingly direct view of her psychological processes.¹⁰

The pleasure of conversing is greatly sought after in Mme de La Fayette's entourage. She is aware that her conversation is especially interesting but she is not disposed to accord it easily because of her busy schedule. One can deduce this fact from a letter addressed to Ménage: "Je ne vous promets qu'une heure de conversation, car il faut retrancher ses divertissements ces jours icy." (L.118.-A Ménage, mars ou avril, 1662, vol. 1, p. 166). It appears that the encounter in question will be a special one where a very important matter is to be discussed because she grants him this privilege only after a great deal of soul-searching. She recommends the same spiritual examination on his part: "Si la pensée de faire votre examen de conscience vous inspire de telles choses, je doute que la contrition soit forte. Je vous assure que je fais tout le cas de votre amitié qu'elle mérite que l'on en fasse, et je croy tout dire en disant cela." (same L., 118). Mme de La Fayette has the rare quality of inspiring elevated feelings in the people around her by appealing to their reason. She

⁹ Micheline Cuénin, introduction, Histoire de la Princesse de Montpensier & Histoire de la Comtesse de Tende, by Mme de La Fayette (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1979) 23.

¹⁰ Helen Karen Kaps, Moral Perspective in La Princesse de Clèves (Oregon: University of Oregon Press, 1968) 61-62.

advises people to explore their consciences. The same insight is noticed in her novel, *La Princesse de Clèves*: “In the beginning, the narrator remains largely on the surface of things [...] but as the work progresses, the historian becomes a biographer and penetrates more and more deeply into private thoughts of the characters.”¹¹ All those who know Mme de La Fayette think she is *un bon juge* because she weighs statements objectively, even ones which are favorable to her: “Je voudrois bien sçavoir quy sont les gens de l’autre monde quy me prennent pour un bon juge.” (L.353.-A Ménage, le 2 octobre, 1691. vol. 2, p. 198). In the same letter, she asks Ménage’s opinion about the difference between *plein d’erreur* and *plein d’erreurs* which shows that even the smallest detail is important to her. She always analyzes the meaning and form deeply.¹²

Each age has its own advantages and, according to Mme de La Fayette, old age is synonymous with wisdom. When she is fifty-nine years old, she wonders about the carelessness of youth and already believes she has attained the age of reason because she writes: “Que l’on est sotté quand on est jeune; on n’est obligée de rien, & l’on ne connoist pas le prix d’un ami comme vous. Il couste cher pour devenir raisonnable, il en couste la jeunesse.” (L.349.-A Ménage, automne, 1691, vol. 2, p. 192). She now knows the true value of everything, including friendship. This sounds paradoxical because she was cultivating this feeling throughout her life. All her friends have felt the warmth in her heart. However, her feelings for Ménage are different because she interrupted their friendship for a while. There is no one to blame here but the unaccountable frailties of youth. She later tries to persuade him of her authentic feelings toward him: “Je suis en vérité bien sensible à l’amitié que vous me tesmoignéz.” (L.353.-A Ménage, le 2 octobre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 198). Ménage is

¹¹ Helen Karen Kaps 47.

¹² Mme de La Fayette may be influenced by the *précieuses*’ preoccupation for choosing rare words; however, she was never a *précieuse*.

grateful in his reply and stresses that this feeling of friendship never ceased to inspire him¹³:

Madame, vous y faites trop valoir la longue durée de l'amitié, de l'estime et [de] l'admiration que j'ay pour vous. C'est à vous, Madame, à qui est dû le mérite de cette longue durée. Il n'est rien si aisé que d'aimer, d'estonner et d'admirer toujours la plus aimable, la plus estimable et la plus admirable personne du monde. Je le dis, Madame, comme je le pense, de quelque côté que je tourne les yeux, je ne voy personne de votre sexe qui vous soit comparable. (L.354.-De Ménage, n.d., vol. 2, p. 199).

Mme de La Fayette modestly recognizes that Ménage has contributed most to her fame but in 1691, she prefers not to comment on it anymore, advising him to do likewise: "Laissons le monde sur ce que vous luy en avéz dit. Vous avéz asséz surfait." (L.355.-A Ménage, du 8 octobre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 200). In fact, the rhetorical questions that follow are more for herself than for Ménage: "N'avéz-vous point asséz fait pour moy, de m'avoir tant louée, au delà de ce que je méritois; et n'avéz-vous asséz fait aussi, de m'avoir donné une amitié du prix dont est la vostre?" (same L., 355).

Mme de La Fayette's reason inspires her to write short reflections which are almost as concise as maxims. Her original thoughts impose themselves directly upon her interlocutors. An example of this can be seen when she congratulates M. Huet for his new position as assistant tutor. Here, she makes an original connection between wealth and the spiritual advantages that result from it: "Voilà le seul service que la fortune laisse en partage à ceux quy n'en peuvent rendre d'ailleurs à leurs amis." (L.203.-A Huet, de Livry, le 19 septembre, 1670, vol. 2, p. 30). This reflection, inviting Huet not to change and

¹³ After four years of friendship, his best feelings for Mme de La Fayette remain the same.

to keep their friendship intact, is formulated in the same style as maxims: "J'espère que les honneurs ne changeront pas les mœurs [...]" (same L., 203). Thus formulated, this advice had the intended effect on him.

Mme de La Fayette believes that maxims illustrate one's viewpoint better. She uses one when she reproaches Lescheraine for having forgotten to lean on a well-intentioned person such as herself.¹⁴ This maxim is widely used at the time but she adapts it to fit the circumstances at hand and to illustrate her argument. The following letter contains a maxim which could also be admired for its form: "Il ne faut point de fleurs ny d'air esgayé dans ces natures de choses, il faut que tout soit noble et simple : au moins, c'est le goust présent de ce pays-icy." (L.246.-A Lescheraine, le 27 mai, 1680, vol. 2, p. 85). Here, her thoughts point to a specific situation that she refuses to comment on.¹⁵ She instead directs her attention to the main tendencies of her century: the preference for noble things and the taste for simplicity. Mme de La Fayette reasonably foresees these two tendencies which will become the dominant traits of the classical era. Critics have proven that these two tendencies are common in the seventeenth century as Mme de La Fayette expected beforehand. Analyzing Mme de La Fayette's novel, Bernard Roussel notices that she has a natural tendency toward noble things: "Toute sa vie, Mme de La Fayette a apprécié les intelligences lucides et les caractères fermes; elle recherchait la grandeur des sentiments et la *noblesse* de l'âme, même si elle laissait voir assez souvent chez elle un esprit pratique et intéressé."¹⁶

Mme de La Fayette anticipates other people's reactions with precision. Her intuition is right on target when she predicts the Count of Saint-Maurice's thoughts: "J'ay escrit au comte, mais j'ay si bonne opinion de sa teste, que je ne

¹⁴ See L. 245.-A Lescheraine, le 12 mai, 1680, *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 2, p. 84.

¹⁵ In Mme de La Fayette's letter, she refuses to criticize M.l'abbé de Saint-Réal's harangue. See same letter, *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 2, p. 85.

¹⁶ Bernard Roussel 14.

croy pas qu'il me fasse response." (L.251.-A Lescheraine, le 4 septembre, 1680, vol. 2, p. 89). Her common sense is displayed when she refuses to advise Lescheraine who asks for her opinion: "Je ne vous dis rien sur vostre résolution de vous taire, je ne la sçaurois blasmer." (same L., 251). The Countess fully understands his frame of mind even when he remains silent because she writes: " [...] j'entends mieux un silence que je n'entendrois vos paroles." (same L., 251). This remark is not randomly mentioned. She suggests him to be discreet in that situation. Mme de La Fayette takes into account not only her own reasons, but also those of others. Therefore, she advises Lescheraine not to forget others' reasons and, eventually hers also: " [...] au lieu d'avertir des choses et d'en instruire par avance, il semble que, pourveu que vous n'en escriviéz point, vous croyéz que personne n'en escriira, et que, pourveu que vous ne raisoniéz point sur les causes, personne ne raisonnera." (L.252.-A Lescheraine, le 9 septembre, 1680, vol. 2, p. 89). She attributes Lescheraine's errors to his lack of experience. However, his youth should not be used as an excuse. She barely refrains herself from reproaching him further. Lescheraine should take her advice into consideration because the event she is referring to is directly related to Madame Royale: " [...] je vous les [des reproches] fis, non seulement par rapport à moy, mais par rapport à Mme Royale. Il est de son service que l'on sçache icy ce qui doit estre public, afin de donner des couleurs et des raisons [...] " (same L., 252). Here, she reminds him metaphorically that colors count more when they are related to a prominent person. Lescheraine should also remember that Mme de La Fayette is sincerely on Madame Royale's side: " [...] sçachant comme je suis pour Mme Royale [...]" (same L., 252). Two weeks later, she rebukes Lescheraine frankly: " [...] vous me mentéz, vous me contéz des contes borgnes et je ne veux pas vous laisser croire que je vous croye." (L.254.-A Lescheraine, le 23 septembre,

1680, vol. 2, p. 92) because she does not want him to believe she is naïve. This warning, and others formulated in the same severe tone, contribute to her exacting image. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore her sensitivity and intuition which lead her to the heart of matters. Even though she is indignant with Lescheraine, she does not forget that he also contributed to the success of the affair in question. Therefore, she does not hesitate to thank him: “Il faut pourtant que [je vous] remercie de l'extremé soing que vous avéz eu pour ma commission.” (same L., 254).

Some people see Mme de La Fayette as a direct person¹⁷ because of her frank tone. She uses the same firm tone with anyone, no matter what his or her position is. She is equally firm with her friends. When Ménage writes a madrigal, too ‘inspired by Tasso’¹⁸, she tells him directly that she is not fooled by it: “[...] des maistres du métier ne se sont pas aperceus de vostre tromperie [...]” (L.37.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 5 septembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 73). Her irony is probably not accepted without reserve when she adds: “Mais j'aurois une curiosité extremesme de sçavoir ce quy vous a donné la pensée d'enrichir le Tasse de vostre bien.” (same L., 37). She teaches him a lesson about correctness because she cannot refrain from being just: “Je vous prie que cette obligation-là soit cause que vous ne me trompiez plus [...]” (same L., 37). She sounds exacting even when she tries to soften her tone by polite formulae.

Many of Mme de La Fayette's diplomatic affairs are completed more successfully because of the good use of her intellect. Her reason, a natural gift, allows her to make the most unexpected connections. She understands that some customs of her epoch are the key to interpreting diplomatic relations. For

¹⁷ Bernard Pingaud writes about Mme de La Fayette: “Spécialiste des tourments du coeur et des égarements de la passion, Mme de La Fayette est aussi une tête froide [...]”. Bernard Pingaud, introduction, La Princesse de Clèves, by Mme de La Fayette (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1972) 11.

¹⁸ Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), Italian poet, is the author of a collection of poems entitled Poemata (1558) and the great poem Jérusalem délivrée (1575).

example, she says: “Mr Foucher est party avec un beau carrosse, des livrées admirables, en fin dans un équipage qui soutient fort bien sa dignité et il ne fera point de honte à son maître. Il faut avouer aussi qu’il n’a pas épargné son argent.” (L.252.-A Lescheraine, le 9 septembre, 1680, vol. 2, p. 91). Then, she unexpectedly comments suggesting that M. Foucher is spending too much money. This also shows her excellent managerial ability. She pays attention to unnecessary spending especially when it comes from her own pocket: “Souvenéz-vous surtout de mesnager ma bourse [...]” (L.248.-A Lescheraine, le 12 août, 1680, vol. 2, p. 87). Mme de La Fayette asks herself if she is prudent when advising Lescheraine to avoid any excess by appealing to his sensitivity: “[...] les personnes en malheur doivent estre choyées dans les moindres choses [...]” (same L., 248). Lescheraine cannot contradict Mme de La Fayette’s strong reasoning because the arguments she provides are too sound to be ignored. It is logical to follow her judgment because she is able to present things from the best angle. However, she modestly rejects this ability: “Vous pouvéz croire que je suis bien esloignée de me croire une teste à donner des conseils [...]” (L.252.-A Lescheraine, le 9 septembre, 1680, vol. 2, p. 91).

Solitude is not a burden for the Countess of La Fayette. In 1673, when she decides to retire to Saint-Maur, she finds happiness in being alone with her children. While other people’s happiness depends on others, Mme de La Fayette discovers it within herself. She congratulates herself for being content in nature: “[...] je ne vois personne, je ne m’en soucie point du tout. Tout le monde me paroist si attaché à ses plaisirs, et à des plaisirs quy despendent entièrement des autres, que je me trouve avoir un don des fées d’estre de l’humeur dont je suis.” (L.213.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Saint-Maur, le 4 septembre, 1673, vol. 2, p. 45). This *don des fées* is none other than reason which shows her how to look for interior happiness.

Later on, Mme de La Fayette feels obliged to admit her own weakness, not without some melancholy, knowing that usually she is not feeble at all: “Je n’ay plus du tout d’esprit et il ne me reste de bon sens que pour cognoistre le tort que j’ay d’estre accablée de mélancolie sans en avoir aucun sujet.” (L.333.-A Ménage, ? 1691, vol. 2, p. 175). She now understands that because of her sickness, this situation no longer depends on her will-power. Therefore, she decides to accept her suffering with resignation, “tant qu’il plaira à Dieu” (same L., 333). She attributes her *entire incapacity* and *exhaustion* to the limits of medicine “[qui] ne fait que blanchir ces sortes de maux” (same L., 333). Once again, her reason gives her the pretext to accept her sickness stoically. The time that passes, however, does not work in her favor. She realizes that she becomes more and more sensitive, as she confesses to Ménage: “La plus petite chose du monde m’afflige, une mouche me paroît un éléphant.” (L.339.-A Ménage, de septembre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 178). With some resentment, she adds: “[...] voilà ce que le temps sçait faire.” (same L., 339) and, because Ménage is working on her literary portrait, she writes: “Vous ne pourriéz me peindre que telle que j’ay esté [...]” (L.353.-A Ménage, le 2 octobre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 197). She feels that Ménage becomes sensitive when she talks about her impending mortality; therefore, she decides not to remind him about it anymore : “Je ne vous parleray plus de ma mort, puisque vous ne le vouléz pas, mais ma santé, quy est très mauvaise [...]” (L.357.-A Ménage, le 12 octobre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 203). She lightens the mood by humorously adding: “Ainsi, je n’ay pas grand tort de vous en parler comme d’une chose que vous pouvéz voir; on ne meurt de la mort de personne.” (L.357.-A Ménage, le 12 octobre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 203). There is no contradiction to this reasoning. Unfortunately, her health does not improve. She compares herself to Ménage despite the fact that he is much older than her. She has the impression that the burden of her own years is

heavier than his: “J’ay cent ans au prix de vous, par mille maux que j’ay, qui attaquent le corps, et par l’accablement des vapeurs, qui accablent non seulement l’esprit, mais qui l’ostent entièrement.” (L.364.-A Ménage, le 19 novembre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 212). A year later, she informs Mme de Sévigné about her noticeably deteriorating health: “ [...] tout ce que j’ay à vous dire de ma santé est bien mauvais. En un mot, je n’ay repos ny nuit ny jour, ny dans le corps ny dans l’esprit.” (L.369.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Paris, le 24 janvier, 1692, vol. 2, p. 218). She realizes with lucidity that she cannot *subsist* like this because she can no longer control her mood nor her will-power: “Je suis toujours triste, chagrine, inquiète; sçachant très bien que je n’ay aucun sujet de tristesse, de chagrin ny d’inquiétude; je me désapprouve continuellement: c’est un estat assez rude. Aussi ne croy-je pas y pouvoir subsister [...] ” (L.370.-A Ménage, le Printemps, 1692, vol. 2, p. 219).

Her reflections on diplomatic and business affairs are valuable beyond the moment in which they were conceived. They are just as valid for her contemporaries as for us. Her lucidity and reason transgress time by becoming lessons of wisdom. For instance, the following reflection could also be useful to us, even though at the time it was written for a friend: “ [...] vous êtes partie intéressée et qu’ainsi vous ne pouvés pas estre juge.” (same L., 13).

XIII. PASSION / VIRTUE IN MME DE LA FAYETTE'S WRITINGS

Inspired by Mme de La Fayette, La Fontaine writes an epistle in 1670. The verses of his letter remind Mme de La Fayette about their first encounter made possible by Mme de Sablé and La Rochefoucauld, their common friends. La Fontaine is evidently impressed by Mme de La Fayette's genius. His verses state it in a declamatory manner. La Fontaine believes that no one could compare with Mme de La Fayette because her qualities make her unique: "Toute comparaison cloche, à ce que l'on dit : "Celle-ci n'est qu'un jeu d'esprit / Au-dessous de votre génie."¹ This epistle also eulogizes the morality of this distinguished woman. La Fontaine uses mythological metaphors to better express his praise. He personifies *Magnificence* and *Friendship* to compliment Mme de La Fayette's mature mind and preference for virtue: "Le Faste et l'Amitié sont deux divinités / Enclines, comme on sait, aux libéralités./ Discerner leurs présents n'est pas petite affaire [...] / Vous jugez autrement de ces dons superflus [...]"² Mme de La Fayette is able to discern superficiality from virtue. Her contemporaries have the same opinion about Mme de La Fayette which La Fontaine is only echoing here. His straightforward verses clearly underline the attributes of Mme de La Fayette which have impressed him so much that he ends the epistle by offering his heart. These verses that praise Mme de La Fayette become more meaningful because they are written by an illustrious poet, known among his contemporaries, and admired by countless generations later on.

Mme de La Fayette has a natural tendency to be virtuous³ which is attested to by her correspondence, her fictional writings, and her

¹ La Fontaine, Jean de. *Oeuvres posthumes*. Ed. A. Régnier. t. IX, p. 136.

² La Fontaine 136.

³ B. Woshinsky believes that virtue plays a role in the dynamics of a society: "Once society fails to keep individual passions within bonds, the whole system inevitably collapses." Barbara R. Woshinsky 69.

contemporaries. Writing a letter to her in 1655, Costar foresees a happy future for Mme de La Fayette because of her moral excellence:

Mais, Madame, vostre douceur, vostre modération, vostre sage et judicieuse conduite produiront infailliblement dans vostre âme des plaisirs tranquilles et des contentements tout purs qui ne vous cousteront que ce qu'ils valent et qui n'auront point de fâcheuses suites. (L.17.-De Costar, Le Mans, fin de février, 1655, vol. 1, p. 51).

This letter is written with the intention to congratulate this young lady for her talents rather than to advise her on how to lead her life. Costar is convinced that, offering herself as an example, Mme de La Fayette is fully capable of accomplishing the mission of correcting *l'amertume et le mauvais goût* (same L., 17).

Mme de La Fayette always finds the right arguments to touch the heart of others reminding them that moral obligations should come from one's conscience: "[...] la bonne feste d'aujourd'uy ne se passera point sans qu'en songeant à vostre conscience vous ne fassiez résolution de me payer toutes les lettres que vous me devéz." (L.20.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 15 août, 1655, vol. 1, p. 52). Moral issues are so controversial in Mme de La Fayette's epoch that later, in the eighteenth century, some writers like the Marquis of Sade oppose them intentionally. In Sade's novels, the main purpose of his characters is to seek pleasures. Their search of self-indulgence is evil because they have a perverse taste of causing suffering in the object of their desires. Contrary to Mme de La Fayette, Sade believes that a writer's goal is to entertain readers. He opposes somber stories that debate moral issues: "L'obligation dans laquelle est tout écrivain de se conformer au ton de son siècle a pour ainsi dire obligé à rendre les contes sérieux de ce recueil extraordinairement

sombres, et peut-etre un peu trop libres [...] avec l'intention de leur servir de repos, et de dérider le front du lecteur.”⁴

When speaking about moral duties and conscience, Mme de La Fayette is influenced by religion to some extent. She accepts religion because she believes that having one and being right is better than not having one and being wrong. She practices religion when she is away from other events and when she is on those vacations so necessary for her health as she writes: “Je fais une vie fort inutile. Elle n'en est pas moins agréable. Hors de travailler pour le ciel, je commence à trouver qu'il n'y a rien de meilleur à faire que de ne rien faire.” (L.143.-A Huet, de Paris, le 14 novembre, 1662, vol. 1, p. 183). Mme de La Fayette associates religious thinking with certain patterns of behavior: “L'on ne va point en paradis sans payer ses debtes : si cela [est], il faut, pour aller au ciel, que vous ayéz bien de l'amitié pour moy, afin de vous acquitter de ce que vous devéz.” (same L., 20). It is obvious here that her reflection points more toward friendship than toward religious beliefs.

Mme de La Fayette feels that everyone including herself should follow virtuous rules as she states: “J'ay besoing d'une devise jolie, pour une femme qui aime passionnément son mary et qui ne vit que pour luy [...] ” (L.103.-A Ménage, ? 1661, vol. 1, p. 155). Her conscience tells her that she is one of those rare women who like virtue: “[...] il s'en trouve peu de cette espèce.” (same L., 103). She formulates this thought in a concise sentence similar to the style of maxims yet, surprisingly, preceding them.

The philosophy of Mme de La Fayette, concentrated on virtue, helps her uncover subtle nuances in human behavior. Her clear-sightedness also allows her to analyze these nuances in her friends. Mme de La Fayette understands Ménage's intentions when she writes: “Vos lettres sont bien galantes. Sçavéz-

⁴ Sade, “Ce Sexe délicat”, *Projet*, tome X (Paris : Cercle du livre précieux, 1967) 497.

vous bien que vous y parlez d'adorateur et de victime [...]” (L.120.-A Ménage, ? avril, 1662, vol. 1, p. 168). The respect for tradition indicates to her what things are allowed or forbidden. She invites Ménage to respect holy week more from a traditional point of view than from a religious one. He is then forty-nine years old: “Voici qu’il cède à une impulsion plus vive, et qu’il sort de la réserve où il aurait dû se tenir. Mme de La Fayette le remet à sa place”⁵. Mme de La Fayette reminds Ménage about the norms of true virtue. She has established them from the beginning as codes of behavior in their friendship: “ [...] vous ne me verrez plus, si vostre amitié augmente si fort. Vous sçavez bien quelles bornes j’y ay mises.” (L.127.-A Ménage, ? 1662, vol. 1, p. 172). She never allows Cupid to pierce her heart with his arrows because, unlike other women, she does not accept any compromises. She reinforces her will-power within her own reasoning; therefore, she sends a warning message to Ménage: “Prenéz bien garde que nous ne nous brouillions en vérité. Je ne croy pas aux enchantements, mais je croy aux tourments de cervelle.” (same L., 127). However, he is unable to resist Mme de La Fayette’s charm because she is the most enchanting woman in the world to him, without mentioning that he is still rather young. It is a big temptation for him to be near a beautiful and intelligent woman. One can easily see why he feels seduced by her. However, he expresses his feelings by sincere admiration and not by irreverence. Nonetheless, Mme de La Fayette never turns from the right path she has chosen for her life. The fact that she is a model of virtue indirectly results from her correspondence and from her fictional writings where she constantly maintains the same position. Social requirements impose even upon the characters in her fictional works. They can be seen in the way characters behave: “ [...] Instead of claiming the freedom to behave as they please, the

⁵ André Beaunier’s comments in the introductory paragraph to L.127, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 172.

characters in the novel make a virtue out of their own graceful conformity: they are proud to be the model of decorous and decorative behavior.”⁶

Mme de La Fayette's virtue should not be mistaken for a lack of sensitivity. Contrary to this, she is an extremely sensitive woman receptive to feelings of tenderness. Whenever she reads Latin verses sent by Huet, she is touched by the affection contained within. She reassures him that she understood them and that she is really impressed: “ [...] je les trouve bien tendres, pour pouvoir croire que tous les sentiments portent à faux.” (L.144.-A Huet, le 18 décembre, 1662, vol. 1, p. 184). While some of Mme de La Fayette's contemporaries and critics⁷ believe that she is a cold and exacting woman, her correspondence proves the contrary. It shows she is a very sensitive person.

A *Raisonnement contre l'amour* written by Mme de La Fayette further added to the impression that she was a cold woman. This *raisonnement* was induced by a question of gallant casuistry which surveyed during a conversation with Corbinelli. The two did not share the same opinion about this matter so they decided to formulate their arguments in writing. Corbinelli was so interested in Mme de La Fayette's arguments that he wanted to hold on to them for a long time to read them over and over again.⁸ But instead of keeping them for himself, he circulated them among friends and acquaintances and, because the *raisonnement* was against love,⁹ it caused many polemical debates. Others were even scandalized by it. Mme de La Fayette reacted calmly and philosophically, concluding: “Les beaux esprits vont quelquefois

⁶ Barbara R. Woshinsky 73.

⁷ H. Kaps views Mme de La Fayette as being an emotionless person : “Since she herself is free of emotional attachment, she is also free of anxiety and lack of control which accompany it; and is able to observe objectively and with great insight the actions of those around her.” Helen Karen Kaps 3.

⁸ Acc. to the introductory paragraph to L. 156, *Correspondance* L.F., vol. 1, p. 192.

⁹ Barbara Woshinsky believes that love becomes an important feeling in the social life of the seventeenth century because she writes: “Once the court civilized love by incorporating it into its social system, love serves in turn to control ambition. Instead of causing havoc with their frustrated political aspirations, the courtiers are induced to substitute *amour* for *gloire*.” Barbara R. Woshinsky 84.

aussi vite en besogne que les autres et le mesme feu quy les rend beaux esprits les rend aussi esprits de feu, c'est à dire estourdis, en pa[role]s ouvertes." (L.156.-A Huet, le 15 mai, 1663, vol. 1, p. 193).

Mme de La Fayette is immutable on moral issues. She does not accept any compromises when it comes to morality. She believes that moral rules should be identical everywhere and everyone should follow them to the letter. She also thinks that tradition has made them right. The moral issues proposed by Mme de La Fayette are strongly influenced by the ethical opinions accepted by her society : "Refusant de prendre ses distances avec la société, Mme de La Fayette montre par ses récits que l'existence d'une grande dame ne peut s'engager que sur deux voies: l'adhésion aux valeurs respectées par tous, ou la mort."¹⁰ Mme de La Fayette's adhesion to this morality is revealed by her tone: "L'auteur constate, et même approuve ce dénouement qu'elle a voulu instructif: le ton glacé de la nouvelle le montre assez."¹¹ The Countess does not make any exceptions, not even for people residing at the court. Therefore, she expresses this opinion writing: "J'ay esté trois jours sur les dents, de cet honorable voyage de Versailles et j'ay trouvé que, si les honneurs changent les moeurs, du moins ils ne changent pas la santé et qu'ils n'en donnent point à qui n'en a pas." (L.158.-A Huet et Segrais, le 8 juillet, 1663, vol. 1, p. 196). It is true that here she is talking about health but it is doubtful that she is referring only to it because she associates it to the idea of honor in a very elaborate reflection. She does this because she knows that private letters are read in society and wants to influence all eventual readers.

Mme de La Fayette's sensitivity complements her morality. This is exemplified in a letter to Mme de Sévigné in which she expresses her disbelief about demoiselle de Poussai's unfit behavior. Mme de La Fayette is unable to

¹⁰ Michelin Cuénin 25.

¹¹ Michelin Cuénin 26.

understand how this young person can act so indifferently knowing that her lover, Mme de Sévigné's son, is leaving that very evening for the army. This fact intrigues Mme de La Fayette and therefore, she writes: "Elle soupa chez Longueil, à une musique, le soir mesme qu'il partit. Souper en compagnie, quand son amant part et qu'il part pour l'armée, me paroist un crime capital; je ne sçais pas si je m'y cognois." (L.209.-A Mme de Sévigné, de Paris, le 19 mai, 1673, vol. 2, p. 38). Mme de La Fayette believes that a certain code of conduct must be followed in all relations.

M. J.-J. du Guet believes that any virtuous person is under the influence of both good and bad. Therefore, he writes to Mme de La Fayette: "Il est juste cependant que la vertu coûte quelque chose. Car elle seroit indigne des récompenses promises, si elle n'étoit aimée qu'à cause du plaisir [...]" (L.331.-De J.-J. du Guet, le 13 novembre, 1690, vol. 2, p. 172). M. du Guet thinks that a person *accoutumée aux douceurs* should repent and renounce all forms of "mal" because the joy that one feels by renouncing it is much more rewarding even if it is preceded by a long period of "chagrin". Mme de La Fayette's opinion concords with M. du Guet's view because she feels that the benefits of virtue outweigh those of the *douceurs*. She artistically illustrates these beliefs in her novel La Princesse de Clèves. Here, she analyzes virtue and its origins illustrating the convictions which have inspired her. These convictions are apparent in the heroine of the novel: "Mlle de Chartres inherits her mother's interest in personal moral values, but she carries it to even greater lengths. Her upbringing outside of court instilled in her a form of moral extremism alien to the court mentality."¹² Mme de La Fayette believes that one should be virtuous even in one's innermost thoughts. Her subtle thinking discerns deeper nuances to the idea of virtue. For example, it is not enough to try not to make any

¹² Barbara R. Woshinsky 105.

mistakes. One should mentally try to avoid them before getting to the point of committing them.

The contemporaries of Mme de La Fayette appreciate her for her moral excellence. M. Perrault from the French Academy pays her a well-deserved homage. This homage is indirectly reflected in Ménage's letter: "Il [Mr Perrault] me dit des merveilles de votre bonté, de votre savoir et de votre réputation." (L.350.-De Ménage, septembre/octobre, 1691, vol.2, p. 193).

Honesty is one of the moral values which constantly guides Mme de La Fayette's life. This subject comes up in her letters and fictional writings influencing others also. Knowing how honest she is, Louvois realizes the grief that she must feel in adverse situations because he writes: "[...] je vous remercie de la manière honneste dont vous vous en plaignez, & je m'assure que vous ne doutez pas que je ne prenne part à la peine que cela vous fait [...]" (L.284.-De Louvois, de Versailles, le 8 avril, 1684, vol. 2, p. 117). Her friendship inspires Louvois to partake in her sorrow and try to alleviate it. Mme de La Fayette respects those who are as honest as she. She is intrigued when M. Charles-René d'Hozier¹³ refuses her payment because she knows that his research is worth more than he wants to admit. In her letter, she recognizes his honesty: "Ce n'est pas que je ne cognoisse à quel point vous estes honneste [...]" (L.305.-A M. D'Hozier, le 8 septembre, 1686, vol. 2, p. 139).

Mme de La Fayette receives one of the two volumes of Conversations¹⁴ written by Mlle de Scudéry. She then writes a letter to Mlle de Scudéry in which she informs her that reading it caused her *un véritable plaisir* because of her fondness for moral subjects. Mme de La Fayette found this reading entertaining and useful at the same time: "Il ne se peut rien de plus divertissant et de plus

¹³ See page 180.

¹⁴ Conversations sur divers sujets, published in 1680, and Conversations nouvelles of 1684, published in 1688, the same year that Mme de La Fayette writes her. This second volume is also known under the title Nouvelles Conversations de Morale.

utile [...]” (L.318.- A Mlle de Scudéry, ? juillet, 1688, vol. 2, p. 153). She adds in the same letter : “Vous estes toujours admirable et inimitable”, praising Mlle de Scudéry in the superlative. This honor is more than rewarding for Mlle de Scudéry because it comes from Mme de La Fayette.

Many of her contemporaries ask the opinion of Mme de La Fayette on questions of morality. When Pierre Nicole modifies his volume Essais de Morale in 1675, he wants to know Mme de La Fayette's views on some moral issues. In that époque there is a diversity of beliefs in matters related to morality. This diversity of ideas appears in Nicole's Essays in a questionably critical manner ¹⁵ One of Mme de La Fayette's first remarks regards the question of pride as approached in the Cid : “La première [remarque] est qu'il y a bien de la différence entre l'orgueil tel qu'il est quand il se produit au dehors par les paroles et le même orgueil caché dans le fond du coeur. Il se cache ordinairement en paroissant au dehors, de peur de choquer le monde.” (L.217.- De Nicole, 1676, vol. 2, p. 52). Nicole reflects on Mme de La Fayette's opinion *de peser les choses de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur* and invites others to do likewise. He sees the real difference between appearances and the essence of a soul. He suggests that these appearances are a mask without naming it directly. He instead speaks about *disguises* which one first sees when looking from the exterior: “Mais ces déguisements n'ont point de lien dans le coeur, où les mouvements sont tout purs et sans mélange et où ils ne sont point revêtus de ces voiles qu'ils empreuntent lorsqu'ils deviennent extérieurs.” (same L., 217). Nicole completes his thought only because he knows that Mme de La Fayette's able thinking is capable of understanding him. He adds that the mask is a common practice among his contemporaries who: “seroient ridicules s'ils

¹⁵ In his Essais, the author criticizes Corneille's play the Cid finding it *un ouvrage si plein de défauts*. Acc. to the introductory paragraph to L.217, Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 51.

s'en servoient effectivement." (same L., 217). In his opinion, people are so accustomed to the mask that: " [...] on est piqué de jalousie [...] quand on nous préfère quelqu'un à cause de son mérite." (same L., 217). He cites a paragraph from his preceding work *l'Écriture*, written in *la plus parfaite éloquence*, to be more persuasive: "Trompons le juste, parce qu'il nous nuit, qu'il est contraire à nos oeuvres et qu'il nous reproche nos péchés, nous avons même de la peine à le voir parce que sa vie est différente de la nôtre." (same L., 217). It is clear that here his religious views are the source of his indignation and resentment toward people who hide their heart behind appearances. Fortunately, there are people like Mme de La Fayette who have the *intelligence* and *patience* to see truth beyond appearances.¹⁶ Whether or not Nicole benefited from Mme de La Fayette's advice is a minor issue here; nonetheless, his letter becomes one of the most important documents for modern readers because it testifies to Mme de La Fayette's preference for moral reflections.

Mme de La Fayette's entire novel *La Princesse de Clèves* originally illustrates the theory of a pure heart. After analyzing this novel, Jean Rousset finds that passion is conflictual in *La Princesse* because of her pure heart:

Au moment où son coeur vibre, un voile l'enveloppe qui le dérobe à ses yeux et ne le laisse voir qu'aux tiers intéressés par leur passion pour elle [...] Et pourtant, nous lisons dans ce coeur comme s'il était de verre. C'est que nous avons en l'auteur un intermédiaire plus savant que le plus intime des amoureux; c'est lui qui soulève ce voile et nous fait connaître ce que l'héroïne ne sait pas encore et tout ce qu'elle s'efforce de cacher à autrui [...].¹⁷

¹⁶ In this edition, A. Beaunier thinks that Nicole did not use Mme de La Fayette's advice: "Nicole n'a jamais tenu compte des observations de Mme de La Fayette." Acc. to footnote 5, L. 217 in *Correspondance L.F.*, vol. 2, p. 51.

¹⁷ Jean Rousset, *L'occultation de l'auteur dans La Princesse de Clèves. Forme et signification* (Paris: Corti, 1962) 36-44.

La Princesse de Clèves finds satisfaction in innocent pleasures: “Elle ne sentait que le plaisir de voir M. de Nemours, elle en avait une joie pure et sans mélange qu’elle n’avait jamais sentie [...]”.¹⁸

A letter of 1690 from M. du Guet addressed to Mme de La Fayette contains numerous moral reflections. He pleads in favor of the *naturel* when he writes: “ [...] il est difficile de ne pas dépendre de son naturel quand on veut bien qu’il soit le maistre [...] ” (L.331.-De J.-J. du Guet, le 13 novembre, 1690, vol. 2, p. 170). He exaggeratedly depicts the panorama of his century in a pessimistic way: “Cette vue est accablante, même pour les personnes les plus déclarées contre le déguisement.” (same L., 331). He believes that the majority of people are too accustomed to the convenience brought on by the mask. His reflection also points to spiritual emptiness. He believes that once one scrutinizes the spirituality within oneself, one realizes that the virtue one believed to have had out of self-esteem is missing. The image appears equally deceiving to those who are against the mask but are subconsciously affected by it. He insists on his idea by adding that a person who has the courage to deeply analyze his/her spirituality realizes that he/she has neglected the core of it. The role of *illusion* and *lies* dominates a person’s life before this spiritual examination. However, one’s purpose in life changes after examining oneself. M. du Guet tries to find this purpose in a future celestial life while Mme de La Fayette looks for it in this terrestrial life. He alludes to it when he writes: “ [...] j’ai déjà eu l’honneur de vous dire que les choses ne vous seront utiles qu’autant que vous y aurez de part et qu’on ne peut vous ôter toute la peine qu’en vous mettant en danger d’en perdre tout le fruit.” (same L., 331). Even though Mme de La Fayette has asked for his advice hoping to find spiritual consolation, he still remains convinced that her views would probably be more valuable because he writes:

¹⁸ Madame de La Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves 234.

“J’aurois mieux aimé vos pensées que les miennes, Madame [...]” (same L. 331). Mme de La Fayette surprisingly understands others with ease even if they remain silent. This is more than just feminine intuition on her part; she has a deep psychological comprehension which allows her to impressively unveil Lescheraine’s thoughts. In a letter from 1679, she writes: “Je comprends que vous ne pourriez pas m’écrire toutes les vérités, mais ne me mandez jamais rien de faux ny de contraire à ce que vous penséz.” (L.225.-A Lescheraine, février ou mars, 1679, vol. 2, p. 68).

Mme de La Fayette recognizes the passionate side of her personality which is a complementary trait to her reasoning. “La passion est une expression plus libre de nous-même que notre volonté”, thinks Serge Dubrovsky.¹⁹ He notices that in Mme de La Fayette’s novel, La Princesse de Clèves, this passion is *spontaneous*: “C’est un coup de Dubrovsky qui tombe soudainement sur l’individu de nulle part.”²⁰ The Princess’ love for M. de Nemours is a *coup de foudre* and the way she views it creates a unique moral debate. Their love starts while dancing together. They are so charming that everyone notices: “Quand ils commencèrent à danser, il s’éleva dans la salle un murmure de louanges.”²¹ Serge Dubrovsky calls it a *drama of freedom*: “Ainsi, le drame que les critiques ont jusqu’ici compris en termes de fatalité et de déterminisme, selon le schéma racinien, est, en réalité, un *drame de la liberté* mais une liberté farouche qui ne saurait être confondue avec l’exercice du jugement et de la volonté.”²² This drama relates to a Mme de La Fayette different from her correspondence. While the novel voices an *absolute choice*, the Mme de La Fayette of her correspondence does not allow herself such

¹⁹ Serge Dubrovsky, “La Princesse de Clèves, une interprétation existentielle”, La Table Ronde, 1959, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1946) 44-9.

²⁰ Serge Dubrovsky 44-9.

²¹ Mme de La Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves 153.

²² Serge Dubrovsky 44-9.

freedom of choice. All her decisions depend upon duty and lead to a practical outcome. As she appears in her correspondence, Mme de La Fayette is more inclined to think as M. de Nemours does in one of his replicas. He condemns La Princesse's decision as being too extreme: " [...] vous seule vous vous imposez une loi, que la vertu et la raison ne sauraient imposer."²³ Serge Dubrovsky views the Princess's values as *purement personnelles*.²⁴ He remarks that the novel's drama results from the conflict between aristocratic values and spontaneous passion. La Princesse is ready to sacrifice her own passion, and finally her life, to these aristocratic values.

Mme de La Fayette's passionate gesture is almost theatrical when pleading in her favor: "J'ay rouvert ma lettre exprès pour vous dire que vous l'avéz deviné: j'ay quasi jeté le portefeuille dans le feu. Sérieusement, bien loing de profiter, j'oublie tout ce que j'avois appris." (L.167.-A Huet, le 10 janvier, 1664, vol. 1, p. 208). Here, she mimics her passionate gestures to express herself better. Georges Poulet believes that passion is a complex feeling which often involves other unexpected feelings: "A chaque fois l'esprit est comme assailli par des lueurs inattendues: prises de conscience quasi instantanées, sous la poussée immediate, extraordinairement urgente, d'une émotion qui semble pourtant le produit d'un très long travail souterrain."²⁵ He also remarks that passion is never detached from reason. It is a characteristic trait of Mme de La Fayette which constantly appears in her correspondence and which is artistically depicted in her novel: "Une raison droite et bien dressée, un coeur qui n'a *ni impatience, ni inquiétude, ni chagrin* mais qui se tient dans ce repos foncier qui est celui de l'innocence. Et tout d'un coup la rupture, l'évanouissement total de cette tranquillité parfaite sous le choc de la passion."²⁶

²³ Mme de La Fayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 309.

²⁴ Serge Dubrovsky 44-9.

²⁵ G. Poulet, *Etudes sur le temps humain* (Paris: Plon, 1950) 122-132.

²⁶ G. Poulet 122-132.

However, it seems that passion and wisdom are not an ideal combination in Mme de La Fayette. She realizes it is mere weakness on her part to be influenced by both simultaneously. Therefore, she thanks Mme de Grignan for intervening in one of these moments: “ [...] quoyque je sois assurément une femme asséz sage. Je veux remercier Mme de Grignan, pour me calmer l’esprit.” (L.356.-A Mmes de Sévigné et de Grignan, de Paris, le 10 octobre, 1691, vol. 2, p. 202). Mme de La Fayette is grateful to Mme de Grignan for having reminded her about the wisdom she had almost forgotten over passion.

A sage person like Mme de La Fayette should not be misled by anything, not even by love. She does not allow herself any feminine weakness; therefore, she foresees any movements which could trigger this feeling. She wonders whether there is ever an age when one could escape the enchantment of love: “ [...] à quel âge et dans que temps est-on à couvert de l’amour, surtout quand on a senty le charme d’en estre occupé?” (L.225.-A Lescheraine, février ou mars, 1679, vol. 2, p. 69). However, she is forced to acknowledge that love is an invincible power.²⁷ Because of love, “On oublie les maux qui le suivent, on ne se souvient que des plaisirs, et les résolutions s’esvanouissent.” (same L., 225). An eternal truth is present in this observation where philosophy is forced to surrender to love. Sooner or later, everybody becomes fascinated by it. Analyzing La Princesse de Clèves, Victor Fournel notices that its entire theme is based on *galanterie et amour* :

Mais quels que soient la noblesse, le charme adorable, la fraîche et suave poésie du sentiment dans La Princesse de Clèves, quelles que soient la réserve et la retenue de la narration, il n’en

²⁷ In this letter, Mme de La Fayette shows her sensitive side quite differently than in her novel. She is more willing to concede to love when writing to her friends.

est pas moins vrai qu'il n'est question, d'un bout à l'autre de ce livre que de galanterie et d'amour.²⁸

The Vidame de Chartres is also passionately in love with Mme de Thémines and the entire scene seems to be un *commerce de galanterie*.²⁹ Therefore, Victor Fournel does not see Mme de La Fayette as a moralist; he sees her as: "une femme du monde dont le regard indulgent s'est habitué au désordre moral qui l'entoure; mais elle porte dans son style la bienséance naturelle de son âme et le respect de la décence [...]".³⁰ However, Victor Fournel infers a certain moralist lesson:

La leçon qui résulte du roman, c'est que tout amour qui attaque le devoir ne peut être heureux; cependant l'amour de la princesse n'est vaincu par le devoir qu'après tant de concessions, de résistances et de larmes, il est encore si beau et si touchant dans sa défaite, il en sort enfin une émotion si douce et si communicative.³¹

Duty is more important than love but, Mme de La Fayette does not sacrifice it without tears. In her correspondence, as in her novel, duty always prevails.

Mme de la Fayette describes jealousy as a detrimental feeling and those under its influence can only be pitied. She has this thought in mind when writing to Lescheraine about the Count de Saint-Maurice's jealous wife:

Le comte de Saint-Maurice est achevé, de prendre une femme jalouse. Je n'envisage qu'avec pitié la suite de la vie de cet homme, dont les commencements estoient si délicieux; je ne

²⁸ Victor Fournel, "Ce n'est point une moraliste", La Littérature indépendante et les écrivains oubliés au XVII^e siècle, 1862, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1946) 207-8.

²⁹ Victor Fournel 207-8.

³⁰ Victor Fournel 207-8.

³¹ Victor Fournel 208.

comprends point ce qu'il peut faire, ny devenir. (L.265.-A
Lescheraine, le 10 janvier, 1681, vol. 2, p. 103).

This touching epithet *achevé* defines the devastating effect of jealousy and anticipates the unhappy future of a man who will break down under such an adverse feeling. Bernard Pingaud compares the jealousy depicted in Mme de La Fayette's novel, La Princesse de Clèves, with that of Proust:

L'analyse de Mme de La Fayette annonce ici celle de Proust par la place considérable qu'elle accorde à la jalousie, qui n'est pas un accident de l'amour, mais qui surgit avec lui, qui est en quelque sorte son premier visage: on est déjà jaloux de celui que l'on aime avant de savoir s'il vous aime, et c'est bien souvent la jalousie qui révèle l'amour.³²

In La Princesse de Clèves, almost all the characters feel jealous at one point or another: "La jalousie du roi augmenta néanmoins d'une telle sorte qu'il ne put souffrir que ce maréchal demeurât à la cour; mais la jalousie, qui est aigre et violente en tous les autres, est douce et modérée en lui par l'extrême respect qu'il a pour sa maîtresse [...]"³³ Jealousy reappears as often as love or passion does in her novel.

The feeling of love remains however, the strongest. Its irresistible attraction is equally felt even among those who dedicated their lives to religion like Abbot Jean-François d'Estrades. Mme de La Fayette thinks that: "On le croit icy un peu plus attaché que de raison [...]" (L.232.-A Lescheraine, le 26 juin, 1679, vol. 2, p. 73) which results from his long and frequent conversations with Madame Royale.³⁴ Mme de La Fayette believes love is at fault here but

³² Bernard Pingaud 25.

³³ Mme de La Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves 161.

³⁴ Abbot Jean-François d'Estrades was then Madame Royale's attaché. According to footnote 2 in Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 73.

indirectly³⁵ advises him against doing anything about it when she states: “l’amour ne convient pas dans de telles places, ny pour les uns ny pour les autres.” (same L., 232). Who could contradict Mme de La Fayette’s reasoning when she alludes to such circumstances?

Barbara Woshinsky believes that passion is the driving force in Mme de la Fayette’s novel, La Princesse de Clèves:

Mme de La Fayette uses the destructive effect of passion to explain the breakdown of the court structure after Henri II’s death. Without his controlling influence, the court order gradually disintegrates until individual ambitions and passions reign supreme amid the chaos of civil war.³⁶

B. Woshinsky feels passions are a *motivating force*: “The secret passions of the courtiers, which never appear in official histories, actually furnish history’s motivating force.”³⁷ M. Cuénin also believes that passion is an absolute power in the seventeenth century: “[...] Mme de La Fayette, avec tout son siècle, est convaincue du pouvoir absolu de la passion amoureuse sur le coeur des monarques: les faits l’ont montré et continuent à le prouver.”³⁸ M. Cuénin refers to all illegitimate affairs and children born under those circumstances. Some of these anecdotal stories appear in the Mémoires of the Duchess of Nemours. Mme de La Fayette’s correspondence also alludes to these situations. M. Cuénin notices that they also inspire her fictional writings:

Convaincue comme tout son siècle, de l’identité de la nature humaine à travers les âges, particulièrement en ce qui touche l’amour, elle n’hésite pas à remployer, sous le nom d’autres figures un fait divers contemporain, qui s’inscrira sans inexactitude

³⁵ Because the letter is addressed to Leschraîne and not to the Abbot of Estrades.

³⁶ Barbara Woshinsky 68-69.

³⁷ Barbara Woshinsky 66.

³⁸ Micheline Cuénin 19.

choquante et même avec une certaine probabilité, dans le cadre des données historiques générales.³⁹

³⁹ **Micheline Cuélin 22.**

XIV. THE STYLE OF MME DE LA FAYETTE'S WRITINGS

Mme de La Fayette knows what it takes to write well. It is a craft she learns little by little, practicing it daily when she writes her correspondence. She thinks that time and space are the key factors of a masterful writing. She believes that she writes well because she schedules her time properly according as much as necessary to her writing. She advises her friend to do likewise: "[...] quand on a envie d'écrire aux gens, l'on sait prendre son temps en sorte que l'on ne soit pas pressé de finir sa lettre." (L.38.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 12 septembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 74). In her opinion, the first condition of writing well is to freely express feelings. This leads to a successful writing style. Therefore, she writes first to those she likes and, only after this does she start writing her business or courtesy letters. Her own words prove this fact: "[...] je commence toujours mes lettres par celles des personnes que j'aime le mieux: en sorte que qu'y verroit l'ordre que je tiens à écrire mes lettres verroit le rang que mes amis tiennent dans mon coeur." (same L., 38). Her correspondence indirectly contains degrees of affection because she first writes what she enjoys most. One could feel the different degrees of warmth according to whom she first writes and what she enjoys most. Not only her friends, but also all those who read her correspondence can perceive the difference and feel her passion. Critics notice the changes in the form of her letters which can be explained by these preferences. André Beaunier notices the fact that:

Sa correspondance pourrait être classée en deux parties, dont l'une comprendrait des lettres écrites avec soin et formerait un recueil à comparer avec celui de Mme de Sévigné; l'autre serait d'un grand intérêt documentaire sans être dépourvue de qualités

littéraires et renfermerait des billets d'affaires et d'autres billets également courts [...] .¹

Mme de La Fayette is a master of style. Her contemporaries ask for her advice on matters of style. They want her opinion on the *affaire des madrigaux*² which preoccupies educated society around 1656 because they feel she is an expert. She promises Ménage that she will give her honest opinion on this matter: "Vous sçauréz mon sentiment sur les madrigaux au premier ordinaire [...] " (L.33.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 18 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 66). She compares the madrigals written by her contemporaries to those written by Pétrarque a century earlier: " [...] je donne ma voix au madrigal de Pétrarque [...] celui du Pétrarque a quelque chose de naturel et de passionné quy me plaît plus que les autres." (L.34.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 22 août, 1656, vol. 1, p. 67). These remarks appear competent to her contemporaries because they are based on an attentive reading and are the result of her habitual reasoning. She prefers Pétrarque's madrigal for his *natural* and *passionate* tone because they are characteristic of her writing as well. These qualities constantly reappear in a spontaneous manner in her correspondence and in her fictional works. G. Poulet remarks the same qualities in Mme de La Fayette:

Une raison droite et bien dressée, un coeur qui n'a *ni impatience, ni inquiétude. ni chagrin*, mais qui se tient dans ce repos foncier qui est celui de l'innocence. Et tout d'un coup la rupture, l'évanouissement total de cette tranquillité parfaite, sous le choc de la passion.³

¹ André Beaunier. Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 22. He also adds that unfortunately letters of the first category were not saved; example: L. of 14 May, 1657, vol. 1, p. 103.

² Chapelain had the impression that his Italian was the best. To contest his opinion, Ménage decided to translate a madrigal of Jacques Bordier du Raincy that he attributed to Tasso. A third madrigal of Guarini increased the polemic to the point that everyone was on one side or the other. Acc. to Victor Cousin. La société française au XVII-s 198-205.

³ George Poulet 122-132.

Mme de La Fayette analyzes texts which appear in her time with the competence of a literary critic. In 1656, she defends the Italian sonnets for aesthetic reasons: "J'ay pris toute la part que je devois à la chanson italienne,⁴ car je l'ay prise pour moy, et je l'ay prise d'autant plus volontiers que je l'ay trouvée fort jolie et fort galante." (L.35.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 1-er septembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 69). However, in the following letter Ménage continues to defend the madrigals when he states *tous éclaircissements sur la farce des madrigaux*. (L.36.-De Ménage, fin août ou début septembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 70). He ostensibly defends the madrigals because Mme de La Fayette forgot to praise his madrigal. She once again finds a way to prevail over her friend when she kindly reminds him that she was the inspirational source of his madrigal: "Souvenéz-vous, s'il vous plaît, que c'est à moy à quy vous devéz toute la gloire qu'il vous revient de cette langue et que ce fust pour me plaire que vous vous mîtes à l'estudier, du temps que vous m'aimiez [...]" (L.37.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 5 septembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 73).

It is customary in that epoch to insert classical verses or new verses which are in style in letters. Mme de La Fayette is also sensitive to the beauty found in these verses: "Je trouve les deux vers qui sont au commencement de vostre lettre si beaux et si touchants que je ne puis m'empescher de vous demander d'où ils sont et qui est leur père." (L.23.-A Ménage, le 18 septembre, 1655, vol. 1, p. 54).

The natural tone of Mme de La Fayette's letters lead us to believe that she writes effortlessly. Even though her tone appears natural, she believes that she still has to work on the style of her letters. She constantly has the impression that she does not write to the best of her ability. Therefore, she is unsatisfied with the idea that someone might read a letter of hers which is not

⁴ Mme de Sévigné also defended the Italian sonnet, the *canzonetta pastorale*, which was very popular at the time. Acc. to L. of september 12, 1656, 416.

written according to her exigencies: “Je ne sçay si je suis bien aise que vous ayéz donné ma lettre au cadet Barillon, car il me semble qu’elle estoit si mal bastie [...]” (L.26.-A Ménage, ? Nades, le 2 novembre, 1655, vol. 1, p. 58). The objectivity with which she views her writing and the permanent intransigence toward herself lead to her elegant writing.

Mme de La Fayette renders an interesting literary criticism in her letter of 1657 about Ménage’s L’Oiseleur. However, she is not an expert literary critic because her criticism is more intuitive than “*stricto-senso*” technical. She modestly recognizes this fact: “A Dieu ne plaise que je croye pour cela qu’elles ne soient pas bien; car, sans vanité, je n’ay pas celle de me croire capable de juger de tels ouvrages.” (L.82.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 4 decembre, 1657, vol. 1, p. 128). However, her reason allows her to create an analysis of quality because her observations are clearly promulgated. Her comments also refer to the content of what is written when she considers moral issues. She praises the ethical beauty implied in the L’Oiseleur.⁵ Then she also comments on the artistic form of the poem.

Evidently, Mme de La Fayette’s reason and sensitivity are a good combination resulting in valuable observations for which the author is grateful. It seems that Ménage appreciates Mme de La Fayette’s remarks and finds her literary cooperation indispensable. This fact indirectly results from her reply: “Nous relirons cela [une ballade] ensemble à la première veue.” (L.84.-A Ménage, de Paris, hiver, 1658, vol. 1, p. 131). She likes this ballad⁶ for its

⁵ In her letter, she states: “J’ay releu vingt fois *L’Oiseleur*, mais plus je l’ay leu et plus je me suis fortifiée à estre de son party. Je trouve que ce que vous y avéz adjousté, lorsque la belle est touchée de l’amour d’Eurilas, y fait fort bien et j’aime fort qu’elle se souviene de ce que luy a dit le Perroquet comme d’une chose quy vient peut-estre des dieux [...] Il me semble qu’il faudroit: *s’esloignoit de ces lieux*; car Eurilas peut bien s’éloigner de Chypre, mais il ne peut pas éloigner Chypre de luy, et il y a grande différence [...] (je ne sçay pas si c’est la mesme chose dans le langage des dieux) à s’éloigner d’une personne, ou à esloigner une personne de soy.” L.82.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 4 decembre, 1657, vol. 1, p. 127.

⁶ Their correspondence does not indicate exactly which ballad they are talking about.

musical rhymes “quy sont douces et agréables” and for the “envoy aux blondins”⁷ (same L., 84).

When Mme de La Fayette reads L'Histoire d'Alcidalis et de Zélide, imagined by Julie d'Angennes around 1630 and written by Voiture, she finds it *very pleasant*. Mme de La Fayette thinks the subject is a very attractive one; however, its style is “trop fleury et trop orné pour un style narratif.” (L.89.-A Ménage, de Vichy, le 24 septembre, 1658, vol. 1, p. 135). In her opinion, the form of writing should be directly influenced by the content. Her own writing not only depends on the subject, but also reflects her state of mind. Consequently, the variety of tones she adopts concords with her frame of mind. She uses a direct tone to say exactly what she thinks. When she is upset, she writes a memo instead of a letter renouncing the polite formulas established by etiquette: “[...] cela ne me fera pourtant pas oublier que je suis en colère contre vous de la gaieté que vous aviez en me disant adieu [...] Adieu.” (billet à Ménage, été de 1656, vol. 1, p. 64).

In that epoch, people wrote of love and friendship. It sometimes caused them to switch from an objective criticism to a more subjective one, reflecting the feelings of those concerned. Mme de La Fayette's criticism also becomes subjective when Ménage dedicates a sonnet to Mme de Montbazon in 1656. When she reads the sonnet, she finds it well written; yet, she believes that a change is advisable: “Je trouve le sonnet que vous avéz fait pour elle très beau et je n'en voudrois retrancher que le titre [...]” (L.40.-A Ménage, de Vichy, le 26 septembre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 77). She would like to change the title of the sonnet⁸ because she relates it to herself. This is a delicate allusion to her jealousy

⁷ In L. 84, she partially cites verses from Ménage's Poemata, the edition of Amsterdam of 1663 dedicated to Mlle de La Vergne.

⁸ Ménage wrote the sonnet, La Bella attempata, being inspired by Mme de Montbazon. In the first edition of 1658, it was published without a title. He then dedicated it out of politeness to the Marquis of Rambouillet in 1663, edition of Amsterdam.

which could be perceived in her subjective reflection: “ [...] il est certain que le premier [le nom de *bella*] ne sçauroit empescher qu’on ne sente le dégoût de l’autre [...] ” (same L., 40). This remark proves once again that Mme de La Fayette reads with both intelligence and sensitivity, distinguishing the most subtle nuances. In her following letter, she promises to discuss this subject further in a conversation with her friends: “Au premier ordinaire, nous parlerons de *L’Oiseuse* et du titre du sonnet.” (L.42.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 12 octobre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 80). However, it is more than likely that she will refrain from talking about the title of sonnet with the same jealousy which is transparent in her letter.

While Mme de La Fayette’s critical observations on letters are sometimes subjective, her literary criticism is based on an objective reasoning. She objectively defends national literature affirming that one could be inspired by ethnic subjects without appealing to foreign ones. Therefore, she pleads in favor of French literature⁹: “Je ne sçaurois asséz vous dire l’estonnement que j’ay qu’un François fasse des vers italiens aussi italiens que sont [ceux-]là. Il y a une chose dedans qui ne me plaît pas [...] ” (L.43.-A Ménage, d’Espinasse, le 21 octobre, 1656, vol. 1, p. 80). She declares herself in favor of a national creation because she is convinced that any ethnical work of art, originally expressed, is superior to a borrowed one. She clearly foresees a national creation of value in the near future: “ [...] c’est une délicatesse bien fondée que nous avons au-dessus des autres poètes; je croy mesme qu’ils y viendront quelque jour.” (same L., 43).

Mme de La Fayette analyzes the letters she receives as a literary critic would. The following remarks illustrate this: “Il y avoit longtemps que vous ne

⁹ Mme de La Fayette is undoubtedly influenced by Segrais who defends French as a language: “Nous avons des noms de terminaison française aussi agréable que les Grecs ou les Romains, et qui pourrait venir à bout de trouver des aventures extrêmement naturelles, tendres et suprenantes [...]” Segrais, Nouvelles françaises, tome I, 32-33.

m'aviéz escrit une lettre si lettre que la dernière que j'ay receue de vous." (L.56.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 27 février, 1657, vol. 1, p. 94). *Une lettre si lettre* is, for Mme de La Fayette, synonymous with a well written letter. She implicitly compares this letter from Ménage to all his other letters: "Toutes les autres ne sont quasi que des mémoires, des nouvelles du monde; mais, dans celle-cy, vous me parlez de vous et de vos oeuvres." (same L., 56). In her opinion, an ideal letter is one which displays the writer's soul and establishes spiritual contact with the interlocutor. She defends this opinion because she practices it in her correspondence. She is confident in her own abilities and those to whom she addresses her critical remarks also recognize her authority in these matters. Ménage, a professional literary critic whose opinion counts among his contemporaries, is compelled to accept Mme de La Fayette's critical advice. In exchange, she also needs his counsel when reviewing a literary work. In 1657, her impatient desire to read *Clélie* is explained by the fact that Ménage has praised it. She admits that his criticism is well-founded when she writes : "Quand vous louéz quelque chose pour estre bien escrit, il faut s'en fier à vous; car, pour l'ordinaire, vous ne louéz guère que ce qui mérite d'estre loué." (L.57.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 6 mars, 1657, vol. 1, p. 95).

It becomes more significant when a knowledgeable literary critic such as Ménage praises Mme de La Fayette's style. However, she accepts his laudatory comments with reserve because she distinguishes true merit from courteous compliments: " [...] vous m'avéz tant louée en françois et en italien que je serois en droit de croire que j'aurois quelque sorte de mérite. Mais ma vanité ne me mène pas si loin et j'attribue les louanges que vous m'avéz données à l'amitié que vous avéz pour moy, sans y chercher d'autre cause." (same L., 57).

Mme de La Fayette's original writing is seen not only in her fictional works, but also in her correspondence. Jean Fabre remarks that Mme de La Fayette's syntax in her fictional work creates a certain *poetical rhythm*:

[...] de phrase en phrase le temps se dilate ou se contracte, les événements s'accélèrent ou ralentissent, les heures comptent plus que les années et le détail du style, l'enchaînement des paragraphes, les blancs même [...] Mme de La Fayette excelle dans cette transcription du temps. C'est pourquoi elle ménage si soigneusement les perspectives.¹⁰

While originality is a *sine qua non* for fictional works, it is not a requirement for letters. Being a fixed form of writing, letters are only destined to convey a message; however, those of Mme de La Fayette are a field where literary creation blossoms. Some of her letters become genuine literary creations due to their rich content and elegant form. She often writes in a poetical manner: "Adieu. Souvenéz-vous de moy dans votre solitude et je vous promets de me souvenir de vous en voyant esclore les fleurs de mon jardin." (L.58.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 13 mars, 1657, vol. 1, p. 97). Here, an original poetic form replaces a plain formula of politeness. She also produces a lyrical prose which reflects her affection.

Whenever Mme de La Fayette needs to write artistic letters, she rejects the fixed or standardized forms used by her contemporaries in their habitual letters. She transforms everything, including polite greetings, creating new ones which better reflect her feelings. It is one of her literary innovations. Instead of using fixed formulas of politeness to express customs imposed by sovereign relationships, Mme de La Fayette finds new ways to reflect the same relations in an embellished manner. She uses highly sensitive forms to show

¹⁰ Jean Fabre, "Le Monopole du discours indirect", *L'Art de l'analyse dans La Princesse de Clèves* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1946) 261-306.

the passion in her heart. These new delicate forms become literary jewels which impress her interlocutors. When Mme de La Fayette promises in her letter to remember Ménage while looking at flowers in her garden¹¹, he cannot help but be touched knowing that he is the source of her inspiration. Three centuries later we also feel the effect of these original salutations echoing her heart. We too are touched by their beauty.

The syntax of Mme de La Fayette's sentences also reflects her feelings in a more subtle manner. There are instances when she surprises others by the subtlety of her tone. She is able to voice her passion in an allusive manner, transgressing a common polite formula when she writes: "[...] moy je suis bien plus vostre servante que vous ne le sçauriez penser." (L.25.-A Ménage, de Nades, le 26 octobre, 1655, vol. 1, p. 57) anticipating an eventual contradiction in her friend's mind. Even though she foresees *changements*/changes in Ménage's heart¹², she wants to maintain her friendship with him in spite of any obstacles. These changes can also be noticed in the way she constructs her sentences. Her syntax subconsciously reflects these changes appearing in consensus with her will.

Mme de La Fayette writes her letters in a simple way which gives the impression that style is not her main concern.¹³ However, after analyzing her letters, it becomes clear that she tightly monitors her writing. She is pleased to be admired for her letters. They are well written and elegant because she struggles to achieve a more perfected writing. Later, she realizes the value of her letters because she decides to publish them in a collection.¹⁴

¹¹ See L.58-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 13 mars, 1657, Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 97.

¹² She writes then: "[...] quelque changement qu'il y ait dans vostre amitié pour moy, j'en ay toujours beaucoup pour vous." L.169.-A Ménage, ? 1664, vol. 1, p. 209.

¹³ "Elle ne *donne pas dans l'éloquence*, et c'est là un des grands charmes de sa correspondance." remarks A. Beaunier in Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 22.

¹⁴ In her epoch, it is fashionable to write letters. However, only artistic letters like those of Mme de La Fayette, Mme de Sévigné, Bussy-Rabutin, and Mme de Sablé are published due to their literary value.

Mme de La Fayette's writing style is unsophisticated. She writes without adding literary embellishments. She only appeals to metaphors when she wants to emphasize a fact. In a letter of 1657, she writes: " [...] vous n'avez veu Mme de Sévigné qu'une seule fois depuis son retour. Il faut avouer qu'il y a de grandes révolutions dans l'empire amoureux." (L.55.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 20 février, 1657, vol. 1, p. 93). Here, she uses this metaphor to subtly express her irony and reproach him at the same time. However, when she writes diplomatic or business letters, she writes clearly to convey her message without any *qui pro quo*, avoiding misunderstandings. Her sentences are clearly formulated because she wants to inform her interlocutors about a situation as it is without trying to impose her own opinions on them.

Mme de La Fayette prefers new forms of writing which complement *classical* ones that are unanimously recognized.¹⁵ She successfully pleads in favor of the new forms which are illustrated in her own writing. She thinks that these forms attract by their novelty and allow the author to be original. The author can elaborate the new artistic forms according to his/her own intentions. Regarding the two idylls, Le Jardinier and L'Oiseleur, she asks herself if one could compare them considering their newness: " [...] comme de la plupart des choses qui sont également belles, dont la plus nouvelle plaît davantage; mais enfin, soit par la nouveauté ou par le mérite effectif, je suis pour *L'Oiseleur*." (L.61-A Ménage, de Vichy, le 20 avril, 1657, vol. 1, p. 101). It is not for pure aesthetic reasons that she chooses L'Oiseleur. She shows her preference by adding other arguments when she analyzes it in a competent manner¹⁶:

¹⁵ The classical form of writing is defined in Mme de La Fayette's own words: "Il ne faut point de fleurs ny d'air esgayé dans ces natures de choses; il faut que tout soit noble et simple: au moins, c'est le goust présent de ce pays-icy." L.246.-A Lescheraine, le 27 mai, 1680, vol. 2, p. 85.

¹⁶ Verses from L'Oiseleur: "Quel plaisir Eurylas trouve-t-il dans la peine ?/ Sur les âpres rochers, dans la brûlante plaine./ Par les bois épineux, sur les rapides eaux,/ Sans cesse il va suivant de farouches oiseaux./ Sans travail, sans ennuy, comblé d'heur et de joye./ Il peut prendre en ses rets une plus belle proye./ Et qui d'un vol léger, sauvage ne fuit pas./ Ses aimables accens, ni ses charmans appas [...]" Cited in Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 101.

Il y a, à mon sens, quelque chose de plus riche et de plus nouveau qu'à l'autre. La description de cet Amour déguisé en oiseau me paroist admirable et ces traits de lumière qu'il laisse où ses ailes passent me donnent une idée quy me ravit. J'aime encore fort ce que cette Amarante luy dit sur la peine qu'il se donne pour attrapèr des proyes qui le fuyent, en pouvant avoir de plus belles quy ne le fuyent pas. (same L., 61).

She admires the personification of the parrot because its author appeals to new formulas:

L'invention d'apprendre à parler à ce perroquet est tout à fait jolie et si propre à un jeune garçon quy n'a jamais eu d'habitude qu'avec les oiseaux. La fin de l'idylle est encore, à mon gré, tout à fait belle, et je ne m'estonne pas qu'Amarante ait le coeur si promptement attendry de ce qu'Eurylas luy dit, car il luy dit les plus belles et les plus touchantes choses du monde. (same L., 61).

This last remark also proves the fact that Mme de La Fayette pays attention to the content which can convey *les plus belles et les plus touchantes choses*. This letter becomes a page of literary criticism in which Mme de La Fayette proves her competence. She also deserves the reader's admiration because her thoughts are educated and passionate. Ménage praises her whenever he can for her true merit. However, Mme de La Fayette modestly interprets his compliments, attributing them to his friendly feelings: "Je vous prie de bien remercier Mr du Raincy du compliment que vous m'avez fait de sa part et de croire que je ne vous en fais point de vous dire que vous estes l'homme du monde que j'estime et que j'ayme autant." (L.55.-A Ménage, d'Espinasse, le 20 février, 1657, vol. 1, p. 94).

Mme de La Fayette uses her knowledge as a literary critic to promote other rising talents and encourage amateurs of literary art. In 1657, she writes *Ménage* to present Mr. Gâtelier's wife who writes stanzas and a specific speech "avec un ton et une autorité incomparables." (L.64.-A *Ménage*, d'Espinasse, le 5 juin, 1657, vol. 1, p. 105). Mme de La Fayette wants to help this woman not only because she and her husband are friends, but also because she knows that writing is the most common hobby in her time. Mme Gâtelier has the chance to please the public especially since she writes well. Later, when her own criticism becomes more expert, she will support real talents like Racine and Molière who became renowned for their writing, proving that Mme de La Fayette was right when she confidently pointed out their artistic ability.

Mme de La Fayette knowledgeably distinguishes between styles anticipating the effect they can engender. She knows that styles can be adapted to the situation. For instance, she realizes that business letters are serious matters and that therefore, details included within them are of utmost importance. To obtain the best results and conclude a transaction in its best terms, she denudes them of all linguistic embellishments. Her remarks clearly state her intentions concerning this matter:

Je luy viens d'crire une grande lettre et je luy mande que vous ay prié de le voir pour conférer s'il n'y a point moyen de former cette contestation au Parquet. En cas que cela se puisse, il faudra que vous ayez la bonté de chercher une cognoissance bien forte auprès de Mr. Brodeau, quy est le rapporteur des enquestes, afin de l'obliger à contester assez fortement au Parquet [...] Je vous conjure de vouloir bien voir à fond ce quy se peut faire à cela [...]”¹⁷ (L.71.-A *Ménage*, le 3 août, 1657, vol. 1, p. 116).

¹⁷ This paragraph is cited to illustrate her writing of business letters and not for references to the affair at hand.

This letter clearly shows that her tone is direct. It also shows that her sentences contain no literary figures of speech except for the polite formula required by a superior communication.

Even when Mme de La Fayette formulates directions, “je vous conjure de vouloir bien voir à fond”, (same L., 71) she only changes her sentence at the syntactic level. She places the reiterated verb “*conjure*” and the adverbial expression “à fond “ in context with the polite expression “*vouloir bien*” to politely attract her interlocutor’s attention. Her message is suggested by the mere but wise arrangement of words.

Metaphors are rare in Madame de La Fayette's correspondence. She uses them only when she finds comments that are superfluous. When metaphors do appear, they produce a pre-calculated effect. A metaphor of fire helps her manifest the indifference she feels toward Segrais who is in exile at the time: “Ce pauvre Segrais aura tout loisir de brusler à Saint-Fargeau. Il ne luy manquera que du feu, mais je ne croy pas qu’il en puisse trouver !à pour allumer une allumette. Toutes les lettres que je luy ai escrites en Normandie ont esté perdues.” (L.143.-A Huet, de Paris, le 14 novembre, 1662, vol. 1, p. 182). She is then satisfied with burning everything except his inexistent letters.

Metonymies and personifications are also very rare in her writing. When Mme de La Fayette admires Mme de Plenneville’s nymph, she writes:

[...] je voy devant mes yeux la nymphe que m’a envoyée Mme de Plenneville. C’est la plus jolie nymphe que j’aye jamais veue, et je l’aime mieux aussi que toutes les nymphes que je vis jamais. Vous m’avez tirée d’un grand embarras en m’apprenant qu’elle représente la Constance. Mr de Coulanges m’avoit troublé l’esprit en me disant que c’estoit l’Innocence. (L.157.-A Huet, le 11 juin, 1663, vol. 1, p. 194).

Her ambiguity refers to the suggested context and not to the literal context. Does this woman paint *Constancy* or *Innocence*? We could be tempted to think that this is unimportant; however, we know that Mme de La Fayette does not write about this haphazardly. Perhaps she wants to be condescending toward a mediocre painting that she is forced to contemplate out of politeness or perhaps she admires it only to encourage the painter to practice more thereby improving his art. Mme de La Fayette's correspondence abounds in such connotations. Their interpretation sometimes becomes obscure to the modern reader who feels that some details which are left out cannot be inferred from the existing ones.

Epithets are also found infrequently in Mme de La Fayette's writing. She uses them only when she wants to address specific issues. Three adjectival epithets are added to a nominal one when she paints Ménage's portrait as she sees him in 1664: "Vous me l'avez renvoyé bourru, chagrin, desgoûté du monde au point qu'il l'a abandonné, et moy avec luy : voyéz que vous avez fait un beau chef-d'oeuvre!" (L.167.-A Huet, le 10 janvier, 1664, vol. 1, p. 207). She shares her impressions about Ménage with Huet because she is moved by his spirituality. Mme de La Fayette would sincerely like to see Ménage in a better mood because his appearance saddens all those who know him, including herself. She does not show it in an ostensible manner but this fact is perceived through her words in which her sorrow speaks for itself:

A vous parler sérieusement, je suis sensiblement touchée de l'avoir perdu. Je suis mesme fâchée pour l'amour de luy qu'il se soit jeté dans une si grande retraite et avec si peu de nécessité. J'ay fait tout ce que j'ay pu pour l'en dissuader; mais mes efforts et mon éloquence ont esté inutiles. (same L., 167).

Her friend's grief touches her but she does not allow herself to submit to it. She reasonably tries to understand him and optimistically finds ways to encourage him.

Mme de La Fayette subtly expresses her irony by playing with words especially when she feels that the writing does not accomplish its anticipated purpose. She passionately criticizes Segrais' bad translation¹⁸ or any other translations where the translator allows himself/herself too much freedom. However, her tone remains objective and polite. Her remark about Segrais' Aeneas illustrates this: “[...] mais si vous, Mr son traducteur, vous rendez Enée aussi peureux et aussi dévot qu’il est, je crois qu’il faut l’envoyer coucher plutost que de le mener faire la guerre en Italie, et l’envoyer à vespres au lieu de le conduire dans la grotte avec Didon.” (L.158.-A Huet et Segrais, le 8 juillet, 1663, vol. 1, p. 197).

The hyperbole, a figure of speech destined to exaggeratedly express an idea in order to emphasize it, is rarely used by Mme de La Fayette. A reasonable person like her, living in a century in which people prefer a *classical*¹⁹ style²⁰, uses it only when she wants to liberate her feelings. She also uses a hyperbole when she wants to impress her friends with a special compliment. She starts a letter of 1663 with a hyperbole: “Il y a, je crois, deux mille trois ou quatre cents ans que je ne vous ay escrit, à compter sur l’envie que j’en ay eue et sur le tort que je me trouve de ne l’avoir pas fait [...]” (L.165.-A Huet, le 16 décembre, 1663, vol. 1, p. 204). This hyperbole, abruptly placed in her letter, helps Mme de La Fayette express her feelings more easily. She

¹⁸ Acc. to footnote 1, L.158 in Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 197.

¹⁹ Analyzing stylistic traits, Helmut Hatzfeld finds a mixture of both classical and baroque elements which allow one: “[...] to incorporate the traditional elements of classicism into a broader system of stylistic traits corresponding to those which characterize the baroque style of the mainstream of European literature.” Helmut Hatzfeld, A Clarification of the Baroque Problem in *Comparative Literature I*, 1949, p. 113-139.

²⁰ The *classical* style is parsimonious in using figures of speech of this kind which tend to imbue ideas with expressions that go beyond them.

also wants to reassure Huet that their great friendship will become stronger and more durable. It too is a source that invades her writing in an original way. This rhetorical figure of speech emphasizes the fact that he is always present in her mind even though she does not write him over long periods of time. He understands that besides the joy of receiving letters, writing them becomes an additional task which Mme de La Fayette added to her other social obligations. She has to answer many letters by mere politeness; therefore, there are times when it becomes tedious for her because she prefers to concentrate on her literary works, her diplomatic career, and her family obligations. She complains that it sometimes becomes a burden to write letters:

Voicy la dixiesme lettre que j'escris depuis deux heures : cela veut dire que je suis si lasse d'escire que je ne sçay tantost plus ce que j'escris. Vous perdéz beaucoup que je n'aye pas commencé par vous; car je vous assure que mes premières lettres sont très éloquentes. (L.161.-A Huet, le 29 août, 1663, vol. 1, p. 200).

Mme de La Fayette embellishes her letters with mythological motives when she is enthusiastic about a special event. An encounter between Mlle de Scudéry and Pelisson inspires her day-dreaming. Mythological analogies become a poetical means to fantasize: “Je me resjouis de la joye qu’auront nos amants de se voir. Il faudra sonner double carillon par tous les clochers de Cithère; ce sera une des plus grandes festes de l’empire amoureux.” (L.166.-A Ménage, le 19 décembre, 1663, vol. 1, p. 205).

Even though this dream seems to be less original²¹, its poetic echoes impress the reader’s imagination. Her original contribution results from the assimilation of mythological motifs into a new poetic prose. She artistically adapts the mythological story in her own words. This poetic prose inspires

²¹ Huet believes that her source of inspiration can be traced back to Voiture’s verses. Acc. to footnote 1, L.166 in Correspondance L.F., vol. 1, p. 206.

Ménage who paraphrases her in his reply in a similar poetic manner: “Vous ne doutez pas que le jour de sa sortie ne soit une grande fête dans l’empire du Tendre et qu’on ne sonne partout, ce jour-là, les cloches de Cythère à double carillon [...]” (Billet de Ménage à Huet, de Paris, le 19 décembre, 1663, vol. 1, p. 206).

Mme de La Fayette masters her style so well that she creates distinct effects with it. In a letter of 1664, she replaces a negation by an exclamation to politely reproach Huet who forgot to send her some stanzas: “Comme vous m’avez renvoyé mes vers sur les saints! Vous estes un très honneste homme, de l’avoir si bien oublié.” (L.183.-A Huet, le 22 novembre, ? 1664, vol. 1, p. 220). She quickly understands that he may be too distracted by other places because she adds: “Mais je croy que, quand vous alléz à Malnoue, vous oubliez toutes choses. Ce n’est que par cette raison que je vous pardonne de ne m’avoir pas rendu mes vers.” (same L., 183). Her reason allows her to understand him but she does not excuse her friend’s fault. However, the tone she uses is delicate and her reproach is not too strong.

Mme de La Fayette always grasps the right measures in everything. Due to this fact, her contemporaries and modern readers admire her correspondence, although time attenuates her tone somewhat because many details are no longer understood exactly.

The well-balanced construction of her sentences proves that she continuously works on improving her style. However, she denies this in one of her letters: “J’aime mieux laisser détruire toute ma science que de construire des phrases.” (L.173.-A Huet, le 12 février, 1664, vol. 1, p. 211). Here, she speaks about style in general and it is her indirect testimony about her writing. It shows that her writing is spontaneous. She seems to have acquired her talent

for writing naturally alongside her education. Her sentences follow her thinking without any formal effort on her part.

Mme de La Fayette's friends recognize her expertise in writing and because of this, they ask her advice whenever they write publishable books. When Pierre Nicole modifies his volume Essais de Morale in 1675, he realizes that he needs Mme de La Fayette's opinion. He declares himself ready to accept her counseling in the letter he addresses to her: "Je prendrai, Madame, la liberté d'appeler de votre critique, quelque respect que j'aye d'ailleurs pour vos sentiments [...]" (L.217.-De Nicole, 1676, vol. 2, p. 51). Nicole is then eager to know Mme de La Fayette's opinion regarding his ideas and style. He understands that his essays show some *negligence* but, he tries to excuse himself by saying that these essays *were never written to be printed* (same L., 217). He feels obliged to read them in *another* way as he states: " [...] je me contentai à les relire fort légèrement en m'appliquant particulièrement aux choses." (same L., 217). However, he feels that Mme de La Fayette can accomplish more than he by giving him constructive ideas regarding the content and the form of his essays.

It is true that Mme de La Fayette gives advice to her friends but she never forgets that she also needs advice concerning her own writing. In 1668, Huet edits her fictional writing Zaïde. She is then more concerned with other aspects of the story than with its form. Therefore, she tells him to disregard matters of style: " [...] ne vous amusez guère aux expressions et prenez seulement garde aux choses; car, quând nous l'aurons corrigé, vous y repasserez encore." (L.198.-A Huet, début 1669, vol. 2, p. 22). She refines the style of her story after building up the content and sequence of the described events. Maurice Laugaa compares Zaïde with La Princesse de Clèves and finds striking similarities: "Par le croisement de trois réseaux : l'énoncé des lieux communs de l'époque, la

position du fragment dans une chaîne généalogique et quasi juridique, les marques d'un sujet de l'écriture [...] ".²² Huet confirms Mme de La Fayette's paternity of Zaïde. He followed it *piece by piece* and monitored its progress step by step²³. Another proof of Mme de La Fayette's paternity of this story is offered by her letters dating from the same period. She asks for Huet's "*sentiment*" and allows him to make corrections in pencil.

The reciprocal collaboration between Mme de La Fayette and Huet lasts for many years. Huet expresses it through a nice metaphor: "[...] nous avons marié nos enfants ensemble." (L.-De Huet, à un aïeul, du 27 août, 1705, vol. 2, p. 23). Segrais, their mutual friend, can confirm this fact. He was always informed about it through their conversations and correspondence²⁴. One of Mme de La Fayette's letters to Ménage also proves the paternity of one of her novels²⁵: "Je ne vous envoie point cette petite histoire, qui ne vaut pas la peine que vous la rescriviez." (L.153.-A Ménage, ? Livry, ? avril, 1663, vol. 1, p. 191). This information sheds light on the controversial paternity of Mme de La Fayette's fictional writing. The letter also reinforces the fact that her friends give their ideas concerning her style, occasionally suggesting corrections. However, the main structure belongs to Mme de La Fayette in exclusivity. She always has the final decision on any changes.

Some coincidences may occur when two people write on the same subject. However, Mme de La Fayette rejects this idea because she knows that she is never 'inspired' by others. She indignantly writes to Corbinelli because she feels that he should know this fact:

²² Maurice Laugaa, Lectures de Mme de La Fayette (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971) 153.

²³ Huet affirms this fact in a letter to one of his relatives which was copied by Léchaudé d'Anisy. Acc. to footnote 1, L.198 in Correspondance L.F., vol. 2, p. 22.

²⁴ It also confirms that Mme de La Fayette is the author even though this fact was kept confidential due to her position in the court.

²⁵ It is not clear to which one she refers .

[...] j'ay trouvé mauvais, et très mauvais, que Corbinelli en quy j'ay une confiance si entière que je ne luy recommande pas mesme le secret, parce qu'il est luy-mesme le secret en personne, ait monstré à Mlle de la Trousse une chose que j'escris à luy seul, à la campagne, sur le bout d'une table, pendant qu'il escrit de l'autre costé sur le mesme sujet [...] (L.156.-A Huet, le 15 mai, 1663, vol. 1, p. 193).

She encourages her friends whenever they write well. Praising Huet, she invites him to write according to his style, with his own literary tools: "J'ay veu de vos oeuvres entre les mains de Mlle de Méry, *Coeur de Paris est mon affaire* m'a semblé très joly. Vous devenéz poète françois; il me semble que vous vous en deviez tenir à la muse latine ; c'est trop, d'estre à la fois et latin et françois." (L.151.-A Huet, le 25 février, ? 1663, vol. 1, p. 189). It seems that she is also influenced by others such as Ménage, because she adds: "Le sonnet du *piéd démis* m'a paru aussi fort agréable. Comment voudriéz-vous que j'y trouvasse des fautes? Mr Ménage n'y en trouve point." (same L., 151). It is obvious that his opinion is meaningful and she appreciates its value. However, she refines her writing by herself. She judges her writing with the same objectivity and never avoids criticism on it. Before anything else, she insists on the quality of writing. Therefore, whenever she feels the need for expert advice, she does not hesitate to ask for it.

Mme de La Fayette rejects artificial forms of writing because she is adept in an unsophisticated style. In her Lettre "Du Jaloux", she sneers at the *précieuses* of her time by imitating the dialogue between a lover and his mistress. She reproduces the style of the *précieuses* in this letter to mock them: "Madame de La Fayette, favorite de Madame [...] pour se moquer de ce qu'on appelle les mots à la mode et dont l'usage ne vaut rien." (L.-De Madame de

Montmorency à Bussy-Rabutin, le 1er mai, 1670, vol. 2, p. 26). This very convincing dramatization indirectly reflects her opinion on writing. Mme de La Fayette rejects epithets, comparisons, and other rare figures of speech which are misplaced. She believes that there is no reason to use them only for the sake of fashion. Her writing pleads for the natural usage of all resources of a language. She thinks that one should write carefully, avoiding any excess and fearing ridicule. Despite the fact that the *précieuses* are well-intentioned in the beginning²⁶, they end up being ridiculous because they disregard moderation in their writing.

Being aware of this, Mme de La Fayette's purpose in writing is completely different: "J'entends le françois à la vérité. Je ne feray point de fracas; j'en useray fort honnestement [...]" (L.200.-Lettre, dite "Du Jaloux", avril, 1670, vol. 2, p. 26). And, in fact, this *honest writing* becomes a constant quality in everything she writes. Mme de La Fayette carefully avoids any linguistic exaggerations. She writes clearly without embellishments, focusing her attention on the content. Her attention is also directed to what other people want to say or to write. Another letter of the *étourneau* that she writes in 1670 derides all those who formulated senseless sentences without saying anything. From time to time, she hears pointless discourses even in the court. Amused, she compares them with a "grand repas, où l'on a mangé une bonne soupe [...]" (L.201.-Lettre, dite de "L'Étourneau", le 2 mai, 1670, vol. 2, p. 27). Distinguished people such as Mme de La Fayette mock these discourses: "L'on y fit mille plaisanteries." (same L., 201). In this letter, she talks about many important things without communicating anything meaningful to imitate and ridicule their artificial speech. She ridicules them in a very subtle manner

²⁶ *Précieuse* - (at the beginning) a woman belonging to the Rambouillet's entourage, distinguished by her dignity and by her elevated language; (later) a woman exaggerated in her manners and in her language. In 1659, Molière ridicules the *précieuses* in his play entitled Les Précieuses Ridicules.

through her imitation. If her allusion is not apprehended, she warns: “[...] vous estes aujourduy la coqueluche de tout le monde. Il est vray que votre mérite n’est pas postiche. Les damoiselles me rendront seurement de bons tesmoignages.” (same L., 201). This letter is aimed once again at those *demoiselles*, the *précieuses*, who speak like that in their daily activities without realizing how ludicrous their speech sounds.

Ménage finds that Mme de La Fayette’s letters are praiseworthy because they are “belles et éloquantes” (L.354.-De Ménage, 1691, vol. 2, p. 199). He feels their warmth without any ostentation. Her qualities expressed in the superlative are unique.

CONCLUSION

To understand La Rochefoucauld, one has to take into account the many influences that have shaped his life. His noble upbringing is one of the most important factors that contributed to his personality. In La Rochefoucauld's time, there were certain rules that had to be followed when one belonged to nobility. Loyalty to the royal family was important. La Rochefoucauld believed in this ideal firmly even if it meant being exiled. Honor meant everything to him. He considered it his obligation to defend the Queen and, he always respected obligations. He also defended public interest that, in the end, granted him a place of honor in the court.

La Rochefoucauld takes the concept of friendship to an even deeper level by stating that it is the most important relationship. To him, friendship is stronger than family. He tries to explain this view by offering the theory of an *alter ego*, in which friendship involves a great deal of trust. This idea is inspired by Montaigne's concept of friendship. La Rochefoucauld believed that Montaigne found the true essence of friendship. True friendship cannot come about if there are any obligations. La Rochefoucauld is heavily influenced by Montaigne when he writes his maxims on friendship. In them, he distinguishes between friends and acquaintances. Real friends disregard the defects in each other. And, when feelings of friendship become imperfect, it is due to human nature. People often see things subjectively rather than objectively. La Rochefoucauld believes respect is the key to maintaining friendship. Therefore, he often uses warm words to declare his friendship. He also generously compliments his friends. Because of his view on friendship, La Rochefoucauld

gathers many friends around him and keeps in touch with them through his correspondence.

The characteristic that constantly shows up in La Rochefoucauld's correspondence is his lucidity. This counteracts the view that some critics have when they depict him as an introverted person. La Rochefoucauld's correspondence offers good examples on how his mind works and, on his innermost thoughts and feelings. He openly admits that he has both strengths and weaknesses but, he feels he can control his weaknesses by appealing to reason. He is constantly in search of the truth. Therefore, he quickly gives up using polite formulas if it means he will find the truth faster. La Rochefoucauld's power of reason is very well-developed. Many people realize that he offers sound advice so they always ask him for it. He knows that he has influence over others; yet, he also recognizes that no one is obliged to follow his counsel. La Rochefoucauld is confident in his own judgment. This fact is illustrated in the portrait he makes of himself. He also notices his inclination toward philosophic meditation. His letters contain maxims and reflections on numerous subjects. La Rochefoucauld seems to have a natural talent for meditation which compliments his reason. He believes that knowing oneself is the first step to knowing others. Therefore, he tries to understand himself through meditation.

To reach the ideal of the *honnête homme* is one of La Rochefoucauld's greatest aims in life. He constantly strives to better himself spiritually. He also gives much importance to the value of integrity. La Rochefoucauld admires those contemporaries that live by the same ideals. Some of these ideals are: respect for one's word, honesty, and loyalty toward friends. La Rochefoucauld believes that keeping promises is a matter of honor for an *honnête homme* because, being an *honnête homme* imposes a certain behavior on an

individual. La Rochefoucauld tries to define this behavior and live by his description.

One of the most interesting views on humanity prevails in La Rochefoucauld's correspondence. Readers often distinguish his unique ability to understand human nature. Many of his philosophical reflections are influenced by the ancient philosophies of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Saint Augustine, and by the Stoics. His ideas are also inspired by Montaigne. La Rochefoucauld draws upon all these influences to come up with his own theories on virtue, moderation, morality, vanity and *amour-propre*. La Rochefoucauld analyzes vanity, one of the imperfections of human nature. However, he does not fail to notice that vanity can sometimes be a positive factor in someone's life if it relates to one's pride. La Rochefoucauld's lucidity shows him that human nature has its own rules. Certain feelings such as passion and love can often control people. The concept of *amour-propre* represents a meaningful aspect for spirituality in the seventeenth century. La Rochefoucauld's contemporaries relate it to morality, philosophy and psychology.

La Rochefoucauld's talent resides in writing elegantly. His well-written letters allow for the revival of his epoch. In them, as in all his other writings, La Rochefoucauld strives to attain perfection. He knows that writing can have influence over others. Therefore, he carefully chooses the content and form of his letters depending on his interlocutors and other amateurs desiring to read them. To render his writing more attractive, he appeals to some of his educated friends such as M. Esprit and Mme de Sablé for help. Thus, he follows their advice in order to attain perfection and refine his art. Writing letters becomes an important task for him. He views it as an apprenticeship to his other literary works. His letters show the Maximes in their initial phase of writing. They

exhibit a writer continuously preoccupied with improving himself and his art. Soon, La Rochefoucauld becomes a master of the maxims. The concise form that he perfects allows him to express his ideas precisely. As a result of his inclination toward meditation, he achieves interesting reflections. Like his Maximes and his Réflexions diverses, his letters show a writer interested in improving human nature through what has come to be known as the most humane, ethical preoccupation among other spiritual aspirations. In his correspondence, La Rochefoucauld expresses the highest respect for noble tradition in consensus with the trends of his epoch. He chooses the maxims and philosophical reflections not only because he seems willing to comply with literary fashion, but also because his mind likes to twist and untangle thoughts until he attains the most perfect form.

The present essay has attempted to analyze the correspondence of one of the most distinguished women of the seventeenth century, - Mme de La Fayette. This prominent personality is intuited by reading her correspondence. Modern readers can remark the same captivating personality that made her famous among her contemporaries. Her interlocutors provide the best description of Mme de La Fayette. She is portrayed as not only *fort jolie et fort aimable*, but also possessing *une tête si brillante*. Her reputation allows her to gain a place of honor in the court. Everyone there shows esteem for her: the King, the Queen, and the high nobility frequenting the court.

Mme de La Fayette's role as a diplomat to the court allows her to influence many decisions relating to social, political and financial affairs. She also influences her friends who benefit from the good advice she never hesitates to give. Mme de La Fayette always struggles to perform to the best of her ability. Therefore, she is appreciated for her continuous effort.

Mme de La Fayette sees herself as a *bel esprit* who deepens her spirituality by conversing with friends and meditating on philosophical ideas. Friends such as Costar admire her for being *si spirituelle, si raisonnable*. Her reason inspires her to write short reflections which directly convey her thoughts. Aside from reason, Mme de La Fayette's best guide is her intuition. One notices this not only in her correspondence, but also in her novel, La Princesse de Clèves.

Mme de La Fayette's natural tendency toward virtue appears in both her correspondence and in her novel, La Princesse de Clèves. The main character of her novel is just as preoccupied with moral excellence as she is. Mme de La Fayette's belief that everyone should be virtuous is voiced in many instances throughout her correspondence. However, she is also an extremely sensitive woman who understands human nature. There is a passionate side to her personality but, it never takes the place of virtue.

The *belle sympathie* which unites the Countess of La Fayette with the Duke of La Rochefoucauld is strengthened by their similar passion for truth. Even though Mme de La Fayette criticizes La Rochefoucauld's maxims at first, she is later drawn to them. She enjoys them because they compel her to reflect on moral issues. She is inspired by and inspires La Rochefoucauld in turn. However, she is the sole author of La Princesse de Clèves. La Rochefoucauld is not the main source of influence as others had believed. The elegant style of her letters and the maturity of her thinking prove that she was capable of writing the novel herself.

Mme de La Fayette's success in writing may be attributed to two main reasons. First, she always allows enough time for her writing and second, she always writes what she enjoys before writing anything else. The form of her correspondence changes based on her preferences but never fails to attain the

form required by the etiquette of her time. Mme de La Fayette's contemporaries feel that she has mastered her style of writing and often ask for her literary advice. Due to the valuable content and highly aesthetic form of her correspondence, Mme de La Fayette continues to be one of the most admired authors of her time, one of the most important writers France has given the world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AUTHORS

Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics. trans. Martin Ostwald. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962.

La Bruyère, Jean de. Les caractères. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1985.

Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne. Les Oraisons Funèbres. Paris: Gallimard, 1961.

Bussy-Rabutin, Roger de. Correspondance. Paris: Librairie A.G. Nizet, 1983.

Choix de lettres du XVII-e siècle. Paris: n.d.

Discours. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964.

Epistoliers du XVII-e siècle. Paris: Larousse, 1952.

Esprit, Jacques. La Fausseté des vertus humaines. Paris : G. Desprez, 1678.

La Fayette, Mme de. Correspondance. Edition complète par André Beaunier. Paris: Flammarion, 1927.

---, Histoire de Mme Henriette d'Angleterre. Intro. Emile Henriot. Paris: 1925.

---, La Princesse de Clèves. Préface d'Armand Hoog. Paris: 1949.

---, Mémoires. Paris: 1925.

La Fontaine. Oeuvres complètes. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965.

Maimonides, Moses. The Guide of the Perplexed. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1956.

Maison, André. Ed. Anthologie de la correspondance. vol. I et vol. III. Paris: Rencontre, 1969.

Molière. Oeuvres complètes 1. Paris: Flammarion, 1964.

—, Oeuvres complètes 2. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965.

Montaigne, Michel de. Essai. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1950.

Pascal. Pensées. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1976.

Plato. The Collected Dialogues of Plato. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971.

Racine. "Préface". Théâtre Complet. Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1960.

La Rochefoucauld, François duc de. Oeuvres complètes. Ed. Louis Martin-Chauffier. Revisée et augmentée par Jean Marchand. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1964.

La Rochefoucauld, François, prince de Marsillac, duc de. Réflexions diverses. Paris: Les Grands classiques illustres, n.d.

—, Un tableau synoptique de la vie et des oeuvres de La Rochefoucauld. Paris: Seghers, 1965.

Sablé, Madeleine de Souvre, Marquise de. Maximes et pensées diverses. Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1678.

Sade, Donatien, Comte de. "Ce Sexe délicat." Projet. Vol. 10. Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1967.

Seneca. Letters From a Stoic: Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium. trans. Robin Campbell. England: Penguin, 1969.

Sévigné, Mme de. Correspondance. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1972.

Voltaire. Romans et Contes. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Adam, Antoine. Histoire de la littérature française au XVII-e siècle. 5 vols. Paris: Del Duca, 1958.

Albanese, Ralph, Jr. "Aristocratic Ethos and Ideological Codes in *La Princesse de Clèves*." An Inimitable Example. The Case for the Princesse de Clèves. Ed. Patrick Henry. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992.

Allison, C.F. The Rise of Moralism. New York: Scabury Press, 1968.

---, "Mme de La Fayette et la Princesse de Clèves" Les Echanges. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

Beunier, André. Jugements, Introductory Notes, and Notices Bibliographiques. Correspondance. By Mme de La Fayette. Paris: Flammarion, 1927.

---, L'amie de La Rochefoucauld. Paris: Flammarion, 1927.

Bénichou, Paul. Morales du grand siècle. VI-e éd. Paris: Gallimard, Coll. Idées, 1948.

Bishop, Maurice. The Life and Adventures of La Rochefoucauld. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951.

Booth, Wayne C. A Rhetoric of Irony. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

Bouhours, Dominique. Pensées Ingénieuses des Anciens et des Modernes. Paris: La Veuve Delaulne, 1971.

---, "L'Intention des Maximes." L'Ecrivain et ses travaux. Paris, 1967.

Bray, René. La Formation de la doctrine classique. Paris, 1966.

- , La Préciosité et les précieux de Thibaut de Champagne à Jean Giraudoux. Paris: Michel Albin, 1948.
- Brody, Jules. "La Princesse de Clèves and the Myth of Courtly Love" Univ. of Toronto Quarterly, 1968.
- Buffum, Imbrie. Studies in the Baroque from Montaigne to Rotrou. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.
- Burke, Peter. The Fabrication of Louis XIV. London: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Castner, Catherine J. Prospograph of Roman Epicureans From the Second Century B.C. to the Second Century A.D. New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988.
- Chamard, H. and G. Rudler. "Les Sources historiques de la Princesse de Clèves" Revue du Seizième Siècle, II, (1914). 92-131, 289-321.
- Church, William F. The Impact of Absolutism in France Under Richelieu, Mazarin, and Louis XIV. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969.
- Clarac, Pierre. L'âge classique. 1660-1680. Vol. II en Littérature Française. Dirigée par Claude Pichois. Paris: Arthoud, 1969.
- Cousin, Victor. La Jeunesse de Mme de Longueville. Paris: Didier et Cie, 1876.
- , Madame de Longueville Pendant La Fronde. Paris: Didier et Cie, 1872.
- , Mme de Sablé. Etudes sur les femmes illustres et de la société du XVIIe siècle. Paris: Didier, 1854.
- , La Société française au XVII-es. Vol.2. Paris: Didier et cie, 1876.

- Cuénin, Micheline. Introduction. Histoire de la Princesse de Montpensier & Histoire de la Comtesse de Tende. By Mme de La Fayette. Genève: Librairie Droz, 1979. 8-26.
- Davidson, Hugh. Audience, Words in Art. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1965.
- Dédéyan, Charles. Madame de La Fayette. Paris: Soc. D'Ed D'Enseignement Supérieur, 1965.
- Deloffre, Frédéric. La nouvelle en France à l'âge classique. Paris: Didier, 1967.
- Doolin, Paul Rice. The Fronde. London: Oxford University Press, 1935.
- Dubrovsky, Serge. Corneille et la dialectique du héros. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque des Idées, 1963.
- , "La Princesse de Clèves: une interprétation essentielle." La Table Ronde, no. 138 (juin, 1959), 36-51.
- Durry, Marie-Jeanne. Madame de La Fayette. Paris: 1962.
- , "Le Monologue Intérieur dans la Princesse de Clèves" in Strasbourg Université, Centre de philologie romane. La Littérature narrative d'imagination. (Paris, 1961) 87-96.
- Fabre, Jean. "L'art de l'analyse dans *La Princesse de Clèves*". Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, Mélanges, II, fasc. 105 (1945) 261-306.
- , "Bienséance et sentiment chez Mme de La Fayette." Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Française, XI (mai, 1959), 33-66.
- , "Le Monopole du discours indirect." L'Art de l'analyse dans La Princesse de Clèves. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1946.

Foumel, Victor. "Ce n'est point une moraliste." La Littérature indépendante et les écrivains oubliés au XVIIe siècle, 1862. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1946.

Fraisse, Simone. "Le repos de Madame de Clèves." Esprit, no. 363.

Gaxotte, Pierre. The Age of Louis XIV. trans. Michael Shaw. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970.

Gransaignes d'Hauterive. Le Pessimisme de La Rochefoucauld. Paris: Armand Collin, 1914.

Grubbs, Henri A., Jr. "La Genèse des Maximes de La Rochefoucauld." Revue d'Histoire Littérature de la France, 39 (1932) 481-99; et, 40 (1933) 17-37.

Harth, Erica. Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Hippeau, Louis. Essai sur la morale de La Rochefoucauld. Paris: Nizet, 1967.

Hodgson, Richard, G. Falsehood Disguised. Unmasking the Truth in La Rochefoucauld. Indiana: Purdue University Press, vol. 7.

Horowitz, Louise Kahan. Love and Language : A Study of the Classical French Moralists Writers. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986.

Howarth, W.D. "Classicism: the Creative Years 1660-1680." France: A Companion to French Studies. Ed. D.G. Charlton. London: Methuen & CO LTD, 1972.

Jaspers, Karl. Les Grandes Philosophes. 2/Platon-Saint Augustin. Paris: Plon, 1957.

Kaps, Helen Karen. Moral Perspective in La Princesse de Clèves. Oregon: University of Oregon Press, 1968.

Kauffman, Linda. Discourses of Desire : Gender, Genre and Epistolary Fictions. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

---, "La Rochefoucauld's Masterpiece." Linguistic and Literary Studies in Honor of Halmut A. Hatzfeld. Ed. Alessandro S. Crisafulli. Washington, D.C., 1964.

---, La Rochefoucauld. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.

Lafond, Jean. La Rochefoucauld : Augustinisme et littérature. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1986.

Laugaa, Maurice. Lectures de Mme de La Fayette. Paris: Armand Colin, 1971.

Leov, Nola N. "Sincerity and Order in the Princesse de Clèves" AUMLA, XXX (Nov. 1968), 133-150.

Levi, Anthony, S.J. French Moralists : The Theory of the Passions. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.

Lewis, Philip E. La Rochefoucauld. The Art of Abstraction. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Lewis, W.H. The Splendid Century. New York: Garden City, 1953.

Lough, John. An Introduction to Seventeenth Century France. New York: Longmans, Green and CO, 1954.

Maland, David. Culture and Society in Seventeenth-Century France. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.

Mayo, Bernard. "Virtue or Duty?". Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life. Ed. Christina Hoff and Fred Sommers. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1989.

Mongrédien, Georges. Introduction. Oeuvres complètes 1. By Molière. Paris: Flammarion, 1964.

- Mora, Edith. François de La Rochefoucauld. Paris: Éditions Pierre Seghers, 1965.
- Moore, W.G. "La Rochefoucauld : Une Nouvelle Anthropologie." Revue des Sciences Humaines, n.s. 1953, (301-310).
- , La Rochefoucauld. His Mind and His Art. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
- Mourgues, Odette de. Metaphysical Baroque and Précieux Poetry. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.
- , Two French Moralists : La Rochefoucauld & La Bruyère. London: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Peyre, Henri. Qu'est-ce que le classicisme? Edition revue et augmentée. Paris: Nizet, 1965.
- , L'absence et l'éloignement. Mme de La Fayette par elle-même. Paris: Seuil, 1959.
- , Préface. La Princesse de Clèves. By Mme de la Fayette. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1972.
- Poulet, Georges. Etudes sur le temps humain. Paris: Plon, 1950.
- Reynold, Gonzague de. Le XVIIe siècle. Montréal: Editions de L'arbre, 1944.
- Rosso, Corado. Procès à La Rochefoucauld et à la maxime. Paris: Nizet, 1986.
- Roussel, Bernard. Analyse Méthodique. La Princesse de Clèves. By Mme de La Fayette. Paris: Éditions Bordas, 1968.
- Rousset, Jean. La Littérature et l'âge baroque en France: Circé et le paon. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1953.

---, L'occultation de l'auteur dans La Princesse de Clèves. Forme et signification. Paris: Corti, 1962.

Sivasrianada, W. L'Epicurisme de La Rochefoucauld. Paris: L. Rodstein, 1939.

Starobinski, Jean. "Complexité de La Rochefoucauld." Preuves. (May, 1962).

---, "La Rochefoucauld & les morales substitutives." NRF. 163-164 (July/August 1966).

Woshinsky, Barbara R. La Princesse de Clèves. The Tension of Elegance. Paris: Mouton, 1973.

Zuber, Roger and Cuenin, Micheline. Eds. Le Classicisme. Paris: Collection Littérature Française, 1984.