*Cahiers du dix-septieme : An Interdisciplinary Journal*
**ISSN: 1040-3647**

**Volume XII, 1 (2008)**

Editor: Faith Beasley

Outgoing Editor: Stephen H. Fleck

Associate Editor: Rose A. Pruiksma

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# *Nos Ancêtres les Américains* : Myth and Origins in Early New France

**by**
**Brian Brazeau**

> "Les plus curieux aussi et les moins dévots, qui n'ont d'autre sentiment que de se divertir et d'apprendre dans l'histoire l'humeur, le gouvernement et les diverses actions et cérémonies d'un peuple barbare, y trouveront aussi de quoi se contenter et satisfaire, et peut-être leur salut, *par la réflexion qu'ils feront sur eux-mêmes*."
>
> Gabriel Sagard, *Le Grand voyage du pays des Hurons*

In a recent article entitled "Etre français en Nouvelle-France," historian Saliha Belmessous poses one of the major issues of New France as that of identity. She centers her discussion on seventeenth-century campaigns of *francisation*: the population-building policy whereby natives were granted French citizenship through conversion and intermarriage. This policy, according to Belmessous, led to a reflection on what "français" implied. Her argument is that at a time when French identity itself was more local and malleable than unified and fixed, the French crown had to define that identity if it was to grant it to others. In short, if they were going to call the place "New France", they had to figure out what that meant. A form of this last point has been the basis for much of my thinking on New France for the last several years. It implies that America was a site for reflection, as the Recollect missionary Gabriel Sagard noted in the above citation long before modern scholars, on some of the most pressing issues in early-modern France. Such work is, as Alice L. Conklin elegantly states, a "recognition of reciprocal influences and multidirectional flows between France and its diverse colonial possessions" (500).

What Belmessous and others situating France's colonial policies in terms of identity have been focusing on, however, are the years during which the colony was heavily administratively bound. Essentially, they begin with the clear (if insufficient) royal involvement in the colony around 1632, and trace a forward movement to define policies of *francisation.*

In this paper, and in my larger book project, I argue that in fact the most fascinating struggle with identity came from the earlier 17th-century travelers, who had significantly less institutional backing. Without the comfort of official royal publications on the "requirements" that would make this place live up to its name, these authors, such as Samuel de Champlain, the Recollect Missionary Gabriel Sagard, and Marc Lescarbot, had to think a New France within their own individual frameworks. Theirs was a type of *francisation* before official policy, and it was a *francisation* not only of a people, but of a land, and of themselves. It was a process of *Writing a New France*, in all senses of the phrase.

We will focus on a writer who produced one of the most captivating reflections on identity and the New World: Marc Lescarbot, author of the *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*. [1] For Lescarbot: "Rien ne sert de qualifier une NOUVELLE-FRANCE, pour estre un nom en l'air & en peinture seulement" (I:214). His elaboration of that New France passed through a reflection on how this place was similar, and dissimilar, to its namesake. We will address these questions in relation to two major aspects of his text: the ways in which Lescarbot fills up the silence that was the incommensurability of America in order to make understandable what was, physically, anything *but* a New France, and the changes both sides –Amerindians and French- undergo in the process.

In reducing the otherness of the New World, Lescarbot deals heavily with myths of origins. He treats in subtle yet radical fashion the origins of the Amerindians and those of the French, linking the two in a mytho-poetic present. We find in the *Histoire*

---

[1] Roman numerals in citations to Lescarbot refer to volume numbers in the Champlain Society edition.

the following complex movement, all mediated by a discussion of origins, which we will try to elucidate: first, an enfranchisation of the natives (not a *francisation*, but preparing the terrain) through a novel theory of their origins; second, a refranchisation of the French (a recentering of the past in line with his vision of history and the present) by a new vision of their ancestors; third, a rejection, or *défrancisation* of certain modern French through their distance from the purity of their origins; and finally, a *refrancisation* of both French and Amerindian in the present. The *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*, then, is in many senses the story of a family reunion.

Who is the author of the *Histoire*? Born around 1570, Marc Lescarbot received a very thorough classical education, and graduated as a lawyer in 1598. He was called to the *Parlement de Paris* as an attorney in 1599. His works include several translations, various travel writings, some poetry, and the six hundred page *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*.

In 1606, Lescarbot embarked on the *Jonas* for New France, where he spent roughly a year between the territory of the Souriquois and the Almouchiquois of the Algonquian linguistic group, tribes referred to as Micmac today. The result was the *Histoire*, which bears the mark of a sensitive scholar and humanist, whose curiosity, culture, and quirks produced one of New France's most intriguing *oeuvres*. It was first published in 1609, then in 1611-12, and 1617-18.[2] The *Histoire* traces the history of French colonization of the Americas, implantation in Canada including a discussion of his time there, progress since his departure, and finally Amerindian mores. The sections we discuss are primarily

[2] For useful summaries of Lescarbot's life, see René Baudry's entry in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, and H.P. Biggar's introduction to the Champlain Society edition of the *Histoire*. There existed, according to Baudry, a biography of Lescarbot written by the poet Guillaume Colletet, but this has unfortunately been lost.

from the introductory Book I which treats general topics of history and colonization, and the final Book VI, the primary meditation on American customs.

Lescarbot's treatment of the New World moves through a exploration of origins, as we have said, and he begins with those of the natives. In so doing, he engages in a debate that had occupied European minds since the early 16th century: namely the implications of the discovery of the "new" people of America for a Christian worldview. A major question that arises is why he takes this issue further than most, well beyond the scope of French discussions of the day.

Despite common thinking, the controversy concerning the origins of American natives essentially began nearly thirty years after Columbus first landed in America. Columbus died unaware that he had discovered a "New World". This fact was only gradually realized, culminating in the dissemination of the reports of Magellan's 1519-1521 expedition. Subsequently Europe, beginning with Spain, began to ask numerous questions concerning these people, the first of which was "are they human?". From here arose the question of whether the natives were descendants of Adam, and therefore part of the humanity for which Jesus Christ was sacrificed. Despite certain divergent voices, such as Gomara in Spain, and, occasionally, André Thevet in France, most European authors agreed that the natives were human, and that they were susceptible to conversion. After all, does the Bible not report provocatively in John 10:16 Christ's affirmation, "*Alias oves habeo qui non sunt ex hoc ovili* [other sheep I have that are not of this fold]" (Dickason, 29; Baudet, 37)? Schematically, the range of explanations of Amerindian origins runs from indigenous and Oriental sources to Jewish, Carthaginian, Canaanite, Ophiric, Phoenician, Trojan and Egyptian transoceanic migrations. Some of these theories had advocates in France, and most were known to the élite interested in America in the seventeenth century.[3]

---

[3] On the popularity of travel literature in early modern Europe, including works treating America, see the very useful compilation

To enter into this subject in detail would take us on a complex tangent, but it is important to stress here that many theories of Amerindian origins had links to more European concerns. That is to say: most times an author advanced a theory, it was not simply the fruit of a theological or humanist wrestling with the origins of these poor people, but rather to prove a point that said author held dear. One famous example of the generally interested nature of the use of these theories, and there are many, is Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdez's claim that America was once inhabited by the twelfth king of Spain, Hespéro, and that therefore the Indians were his descendants. This in fact was a ploy to rescind on the promise made to Columbus by Queen Isabella that he and his descendants would be viceroys and in charge of bounty in all discovered lands. If the Spanish had been there since the 12th century, then Columbus had only re-discovered, and all of the gold could go to the Spanish crown.

One major tenet in many theories was to link the Amerindians to the migration of Noah's sons. The traditional story posits that the world was divided between Noah's sons after the Deluge, Asia going to Shem, Egypt and Africa to Ham and Europe to Japheth.[4] Who received America, though? Or rather, which of the descendants of Noah's sons migrated to America? Many theorists in Europe, for various reasons, wished to attribute American

---

by Geoffroy Atkinson, *Répertoire bibliographique de la littérature géographique de la Renaissance en langue française*. Paris: Picard, 1927; also see Sara E. Melzer, "The Relation de Voyage, A Forgotten Genre of Seventeenth-Century France". *Biblio-17*. 166 (2006): 33-52.

[4] In relation to the discussion that follows, Colin Kidd reminds us, in *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 9, that "the first five verses of Genesis 10" in which is described the division of the world among Noah's sons and their descendants, "constituted the fundamental text" by which Europeans sought their own origins as well.

origins to the cursed race of Ham beginning with the immensely influential *Omnium gentieum mores* of Johann Boem (1520), while others, such as the Huguenot Urbain de Chauveton, took exception to such Canaanite theories, claiming that they slandered the American Indians (Dickason, 33).

It is here that Lescarbot, one of a small number of French commentators of his time, enters the debate. He begins by noting the difficulty of the subject, in the first book of the *Histoire*:

> Je sçay que plusieurs, étonnez de la decouverte des terres de ce monde nouveau que l'on appelle Indes Occidentales, on exercé leur esprit à rechercher le moyen, par lequel elles on peu étre peuplées apres le Deluge: ce qui est d'autant plus difficile, que d'un pole à l'autre, ce monde là est separé de cetui-cy d'une mer si large. (I: 236)

In an attempt to address this troublesome problem, writes Lescarbot, many Europeans "se sont servi de quelques propheties & revelations de l'Ecriture sainte tirées par les cheveux" (I:236). He discusses, and appears to endorse as the most plausible circulating hypothesis, the Canaanite theory, according to which the Amerindians "étoit une race de Cham portée là par punition de Dieu, lors que Josué commença d'entrer en la terre de Chanaan" (I:236). For much of the chapter, it seems as if Lescarbot adheres to this popular theory of Amerindian origins. However, he makes a novel move at the end of this discussion. After a lengthy treatment of the possibilities of the Canaanite view, he rather discreetly advances the following,

> Mais quand je considere que les Sauvages ont de main en main par tradition de leurs peres, une obscure conoissance du Deluge, il me vient au devant une autre conjecture du peuplement des Indes Occidentales, qui n'a point encore esté mise en avant.

Developing his theory, Lescarbot continues,

> quel empéchement y a-il de croire que Noé ayant vécu trois cens cinquante ans aprés le Deluge, n'ait luy méme eu le soin & pris la peine de peupler, ou plustot repeupler ces pais là? (I :238)

The link between Noah's son Japheth and the New World had already been made by Guillaume Postel in 1556, but Lescarbot moves beyond his predecessor here (Gliozzi, 32). If, as we said, most theories of Amerindian origins had ulterior points to prove by choosing one theory or another, what were Lescarbot's? Why did he advance, circumventing most existing hypotheses, that Noah was the first face of the Amerindians? What does this have to do with his vision of French origins? This is the first step, I argue, understandable only after we have looked at his theories concerning French origins, in his *francisation* of America.

In order to grasp this, we must move on to the French. Lescarbot's discussion of Native roots is indivisible from his discussion of French origins. While the origins of the Amerindians were certainly a source of debate at this time, the foundations of the French were also the subject of much study. Again, as with the discussion of Amerindian roots, the choice of one or another version of French origins was linked to a political, religious, or philosophical agenda. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the wish to find European rather than antique sources for French ancestry led to a conflict between the most common previously-accepted version, that of the Trojan ancestors (which would return to favor in the 17th century), and the newer Gaulois model.[5] By the mid-sixteenth century, however, the Gaulois origin, in various forms, had become the most widely accepted version of French ancestry. The success of the Gaulois was such that even by the end of the fifteenth century, according to Colette Beaune, "un

[5] The Trojan legend, according to Beaune, remained unchanged from the seventh until the mid-sixteenth century. From here, the Gaulois legend took precedence, although it had begun competing with the Trojan legend as early as the fifteenth century.

Français a, à coup sûr, des ancetres gaulois qu'il ne possédait pas en 1400" (45). Whether used to show the beginnings of the French attachment to representative government such as in Hotman's *Franco-Gallia* (1574), or the pure origins of French institutions in Etienne Pasquier's *Les Recherches de France* (1560) the Gaulois were, we could say, "hot". Lescarbot adheres to the Gaulois origin theory, as we will see below, but the question is why? Is it simply that, trained as a humanist and a lawyer and a disciple of humanist *robe* culture of the sixteenth century, he is espousing the views of his masters? He seems to exceed expectations were this the case: In his letter "A la France", he notes French origins : "Lors qu'ilz portoient le nom de Gaullois", he notes,

> voz François n'étoient reputez legitimes si dés la naissance ilz ne sçavoient nager, & comme naturellement marcher sur les eaux. Ils ont avec grande puissance occupé l'Asie. Ils y ont planté leur nom, qui y est encore. (I :216)

He follows this by making the move with perhaps the most far-reaching implications, in light of the fact that he has established Noah as the direct father of the American Indians, and the Gaulois as the ancestors of the French. In chapter III, entitled "Noé Premier Gaullois". Lescarbot explains that

> pour le nom Gaullois, nous avons l'authorité de Xenophon, lequel en ses Aequivoques dict, que…Noé fut surnommé Le Gaullois, pource qu'au Deluge du monde s'étant garantit des eaux, il en garantit aussi la race des hommes, & repeupla la terre. (I :231)

Thus, "Noé repeuplant le monde amena une troupe de familles pardeça." (I :232).[6] To resume thus far, then: Noah is the direct

---

[6] The tradition of Noah as the first representative of the Gauls is developed by Jean Lemaire de Belges, whose fifteenth-century discussion Lescarbot borrows from. See Jean Lemaire de Belges,

and specific (rather than descended or distant, as with the rest of Christianity) father of the Gauls, the Amerindians, and the French. Lescarbot has thus enfranchised the Indians, and refranchised the French. From here, there remain two steps in his meditation on origins: a *défrancisation* of certain Frenchmen, and a *refrancisation* of the Indians and those French who are virtuous enough to mix with them.

Both of these final elements are most clear in the ultimate book of the *Histoire*, which deals with Indian mores and is generally read as the moment when Lescarbot's voice surfaces. He begins with a chapter "De la naissance", and ends with "Des Funérailles", discussing in between such varied topics as "ornemens du corps", "danses et chansons", "exericices des hommes", or "la civilité".

We can now read this section in light of what we have learned about Lescarbot and origins. Choosing an origin (for the French or for the Amerindians) is a decision which has its effects in the present; in it can be traced, as Michel de Certeau notes, "the *decision* to become different and no longer to be such as one had been up to that time" (Lyons, 3). This is the process of *défrancisation* of certain Frenchmen hinted at earlier. In one section, Lescarbot invokes the separation between modern France and the one he has created. He then follows with a chapter denouncing "La lacheté de nôtre siècle" (I: 233). The French of today are a people who "trouvent toutes choses grandes impossibles". Lamenting in his poem "Sur Le Voyage de Canada", he writes:

> Allons où le bon heur & le ciel nous appelle;
> Et provignons au loin une France plus belle.
> Quittons aux faineans, à ces masses sans coeur,
> A la peste, à la faim, aux ebats du vainqueur.
> Au vice, au desespoir, cette campagne usee,
> Haine des gens de bien, du monde la risee. (II:387)

---

*Les Illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troye* 1509 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), esp. p. 17-23.

Another poem, the "Adieu à la France", ends with a cry to the French: "Sommeillez vous, hélas!" (II: 533).

He has now *défrancisé* his fellow French, and we arrive at the final stage: the *refrancisation* of both through mixture. He details the Indian mores through comparison, which was in many ways a standard reaction by Europeans in the face of Amerindian otherness: a major current in explaining the origins of the Indians, was to link the natives to biblical tribes and to ancient European peoples. Among these people of "méme parallele et degré", in the *Histoire* we find a relatively standard group of cultures: the *Romains*, Hebreux, *Allemands*, and the *Aegyptiens*. However, in Lescarbot, by far the most common comparison made is with the *Gaulois*. The Romans, the second-most mentioned people, are seen eight times in the book, while the Gauls, the direct ancestors of the French, are treated on over fourteen occasions. It is thus more than a simple case of Foucaulian early-modern analogy here. This keen interest in relating the natives to the Gaulois can be explained by the genealogy he has created earlier in the text. By contact with each other, French and Amerindian will return to the purity, solidity, and fortitude of their ancestors.

First, this process will benefit the French: if contemporary France is closed to the world, accomplishing "aucune chose de vertu", this is not the case for their forbears and new brothers (I:218).

In a section entitled "Hospitalité des Sauvages, Gaullois, Allemans, & Turcs, à la honte des Chrétiens", he notes that,

> Ils ont aussi l'Hospitalité propre vertu des anciens Gaullois…lequels contraignoient les passans et étrangers d'entrer chés eux et y prendre refection: vertu qui semble s'estre conservée seulement en la Nobless: car pour le reste nous la voyons fort enervée. (III: 393)

The practice of a Homeric *xenia*, or welcoming of others, places the Amerindians atop the French, and closer to their common grandfathers and mothers.

He continues by comparing the French and the Indians on several other levels, in which, now that he has eliminated the undesirable element from participation, the true commerce of origins can commence. Lescarbot believes this to be a relationship of exchange.[7] Beyond the "parole de Dieu" which is the paramount gift the Europeans will bestow upon their brothers, the French will allow them to realize their potential as humans and through the marrying of the two peoples, to be fertile and numerous.

The rhetoric of potential is widespread in this text, a telling example of which comes in the chapter on "La Tabagie", or feasts. After a lengthy and positive discussion of native gatherings, Lescarbot moves to another, more Gallic subject: "c'est assez manger, parlons de boire" (III: 397). He laments, concerning the abundance of grapevines in the New World, "Je ne sçay si je doy mettre entre les plus graves aveuglemens des Indiens Occidentaux d'avoir abondament le fruit le plus excellent que Dieu nous ait donné, & de n'en sçavoir l'usage" (III:397). This fault, to be corrected by contact with the French, is lessened by the following sentence. Lescarbot's hesitation in reprimanding the Indians for lack of viniculture is justified, "Car je voy que nos anciens Gaullois en étoient de méme, & pensoient que le raisins fussent poison" (III: 397). Thus, the French have the mission of extracting their neo-Gaulois brothers from the state of blindness in which they find themselves, as with wine from a grape.

---

[7] We should not forget that it is also a case of cultural erasure, as the majority of descriptions of Amerindians by Europeans tended to be. I pursue this aspect of Lescarbot's vision further in *Writing a New France*, forthcoming Fall 2009.

Finally, he discusses fecundity. After all, is not the foundation of a discussion of lost family a desire to augment one's ranks? For "(comme dit le sage) *la gloire & dignité des Rois git en la multitude du peuple*" (I:234). In addition, if there are so many French who are unworthy of the glorious project of New France, then we must make more who are. In the section "du Mariage", Lescarbot notes that the natives are lacking in population. "Voire j'ay oui dire pluseurs fois que pour rendre le devoir au mari elles se font souvent contraindre: ce qui est rare pardeça" (III:391). In contrast, "Aussi les femes Gaulloises sont-elles celebrées par Strabon pour étre bonnes portieres (j'entend fecondes) & nourrissieres" (III:391). In this instance, it is the French who most resemble the Gaullois, as "je ne voy point que ce peuple là abonde comme entre nous" (III:391). However, Lescarbot attributes this not to Amerindian nature, but rather to material conditions, implying that it is only an isolated aberration that the natives do not resemble the French and their common ancestors in reproductive prowess. He explains,

> Vray est que noz Sauvages se tuent les uns les autres incessamment, & sont toujours en crainte de leurs ennemis, n'ayans ny villes murées, ni maisons fortes pour se garder de leurs embuches, qui est entre eux l'une des causes du defaut de multiplication. (III:391)

It is only through civilization, in the form of organized habitats, to be brought by the French (a chosen few of them, at that), that the Amerindians will overcome this defect. Thus, the commerce of customs, mediated by a commonality of origins, creates a New France of infinite possibilities in this early period.

The *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* is a closing of the rift opened up by the distance between two places, moments, cultures. It is an attempt to assimilate the difference of the other. What is fascinating about Lescarbot, however, is that he causes France, and by extension himself, at the same time as he closes that distance, openly to be transformed as he transforms the natives. His France

finds itself, if only temporarily and textually, mythically modified by his attempted *francisation* of America.

**The American University of Paris**

## Works Consulted

Asher, R.E. *National Myths in Renaissance France*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993.

Atkinson, Geoffroy. *Répertoire bibliographique de la littérature géographique de la Renaissance en langue française*. Paris: Picard, 1927.

Baudet, Henri. *Paradise on Earth, Some Thoughts on European Images of non-European man*. Trans. Elizabeth Wentholt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965.

Belmessous, Saliha. « Etre français en Nouvelle-France: Identité française et identité coloniale aux dix-septième et dix-huitième siècles » in *French Historical Studies. Special Issue : Writing French Colonial Histories* 27.3 (2004): 507–540

Brown, George W. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography I: 1000-1700*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966.

Colette Beaune, *Naissance de la nation France*. Paris: Gallimard, 1993.

Conklin, Alice L. "Introduction: Writing Colonial Histories" *French Historical Studies. Special Issue : Writing French Colonial Histories* 27.3 (2004): 497–505.

Dickason, Olive Patricia. *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984.

Gliozzi, Giuliano. *Adam et le nouveau monde: la naissance de l'anthropologie comme idéologie coloniale : des généalogies*

*bibliques aux théories raciales, 1500–1700*. Trans. Arlette Estève and Pascal Gabellone. Lecques : Théétète éd., 2000

Huddleston, Lee Eldridge. *Origins of the American Indians: European Concepts, 1492–1729*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967.

Huppert, George. *The Idea of Perfect History: Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970.

Kelley, Donald R. *Foundations of modern historical scholarship: Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

Kidd, Colin. *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Lemaire de Belges, Jean. *Les Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye*. Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969.

Lescarbot, Marc. *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*. 3 vols. Toronto: Champlain Society, 1907.

Lyons, John D. *The Tragedy of Origins : Pierre Corneille and Historical Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Melzer, Sara E. "The *Relation de Voyage*, A Forgotten Genre of Seventeenth-Century France". *Biblio-17*. 166 (2006): 33–52.

Pagden, Anthony. The *Fall of Natural Man: the American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Pomian, Krzysztof. « Francs et Gaulois. » *Les lieux de mémoire, les France: I* . Ed. Pierre Nora. Paris: Gallimard, 1992.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *La Conquête de l'Amérique. La question de l'autre*. Paris : Seuil, 1982.

Vivanti, Corrado. « *Les Recherches de la France* d'Etienne Pasquier: l'invention des Gaulois. » *Les Lieux de mémoire, la nation: I*. Ed. Pierre Nora. Paris: Gallimard, 1986.

**"Il faut parler pour estre entendu":**
**Talking about God in Wendat in 17th century New France**

**by**
**Micah True**

When French Jesuits began their work preaching Catholicism to the Amerindian inhabitants of modern-day Canada in the seventeenth century, they simultaneously embarked on another project, viewed as essential to the success of their religious mission. Because Jesuits, from the time of Ignatius Loyola, insisted on communicating their message in local languages,[1] a major effort was necessary to analyze, document, and, most importantly, learn to speak the languages of the peoples they hoped to convert in New France. As the Jesuit Superior Paul Le Jeune wrote in a 1636 report to his supervisors in France, "En effet, il faut parler pour estre entendu; c'est ce que nous ne pouvons encore faire qu'en enfans" (Campeau 3.236). In order to achieve the goal of introducing Catholicism to Iroquoian and Algonquian groups, European missionaries and their Amerindian interlocutors alike would have had to adapt to the difficulties of expression and comprehension posed by indigenous tongues that the missionaries found resistant to the task, whether due to their own lack of mastery or to the inherent nature of the unfamiliar languages

---

[1] "They will exercise themselves in preaching and in delivering sacred lectures in a manner suitable for the edification of the people, which is different from the scholastic manner, by endeavoring to learn the vernacular language well, to have, as matters previously studied and ready at hand, the means which are most useful for this ministry," instructed Ignatius Loyola in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus (201). "When a plan is being worked out in some college or university to prepare persons to go among the Moors or Turks, Arabic or Chaldaic would be expedient; and Indian would be proper for those about to go among the Indians; and the same holds true for similar reasons in regard to other languages which could have greater utility in other regions" (214).

(Blackburn 102–103, 163). As the Jesuit priest Jérome Lalemant put it in his 1640 *Relation* from the Huron mission, "Il semble que ny l'évangile ny l'escriture saincte n'ayent esté composez pour eux. Non seulement les mots leur manquent pour exprimer la saincteté de nos mystères, mais mesme les paraboles les plus familiers de Jésus Christ leurs sont inexplicables" (Campeau 4.736). As I will demonstrate in the coming pages, the Jesuits were inventive and flexible in attempting to meet these challenges, and so were their Wendat interlocutors, who would have struggled to understand concepts that were absent from their culture.

In light of the communicative challenges facing both parties, seventeenth century Jesuit reports of the enthusiastic embrace of Christianity by the Wendat, the five Iroquoian groups that are sometimes still called the Huron[2] and that inhabited the land between Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe in modern-day Ontario (Trigger 27–31), deserve a closer look. In a typical description of an Amerindian's reaction to missionary lessons, Lalemant reported in 1640 that a Wendat interlocutor was inspired to convert after being told about God. "Ayant entendu parler de Dieu, elle fut incontinent éprise de son amour et du désir de croire en luy et de le servir," he wrote (Campeau 4.694). Leaving aside for the present the question of whether Jesuit accounts of their missionary successes were accurate or exaggerated,[3] my aim in this article is

---

[2] Wendat is used here, as elsewhere, to designate the people who were once more commonly known as the Huron. Wendat is the name this group gives itself, and Huron was a name imposed by European colonizers (Trigger, preface to the Carleton Library Series reprint). The term "Huron" is used in this study only to refer to specific Jesuit documents or the missionary field.

[3] In fact the question of whether Jesuits faithfully recorded the fruits of their missionary efforts or freely embellished their record to boost material and spiritual support for the mission is a matter of debate. As Carole Blackburn noted in her book *Harvest of Souls,* scholars such as Lucien Campeau and Kenneth Morrison have argued for a literal reading of passages describing conversions in the *Jesuit Relations.* Blackburn herself adopted a more measured

to expose some of the linguistic inventions and compromises that are obscured by the facile declarations that Lalemant and his colleagues made in published texts about the Wendat reaction to their preaching. Specifically, I will examine the strategies that made it possible for Jesuits to preach about God in the unfamiliar tongue of potential converts and then report to their French readers that the Wendat were embracing the message, and also will examine the relatively sparse clues about a strategy that their interlocutors might have employed to understand the ideas about the Christian deity that the Jesuits were trying to express.[4] I will argue that the Jesuit strategy of introducing the terms *ha8endio* and *Di8* into the Wendat language, and the ways their interlocutors would have tried to make sense of them, would have worked together to create meaning that was later obscured when the terms were translated back into French for the purposes of informing French readers of mission progress. The symbol 8 in these terms was used by Jesuits to designate the phonemes [u] and [w] (Steckley, *Words,* vii).[5] Finally, I will reflect on what the Wendat-

---

approach, recognizing that Jesuit ideology likely took a toll on the accuracy of their accounts of conversions (Blackburn 6-7).

[4] For the purposes of the present discussion, I give the Jesuit missionaries the benefit of the doubt as to the receptivity of Amerindians to their message, although the Jesuits themselves admitted that at least some of their interlocutors actively resisted their message. For example, Le Jeune reported in 1636 the results of a colleague's effort to persuade the Montagnais to give a dead relative a Christian burial: "Un sauvage lui répart: 'va-t'en, on ne t'entend pas.' C'est une réponse qui nous font parfois les sauvages quand on les presse de faire une chose qui ne leur agrée pas" (Campeau 3.201). Although resistance by Amerindian listeners is fascinating and worthy of study, I have opted to focus the present article on language encounters in which both parties made a good-faith effort to understand and to be understood.

[5] The symbol "represents a sound like the *u* in 'lute' when it precedes a consonant and a *w* sounds when it precedes a vowel" (Steckley, *De Religione* 45). This solution to transcribing

French linguistic encounter means for the religious conversions reported in the *Jesuit Relations*, and for the interpretive possibilities of the texts more generally.

The particular problem of how to express *Dieu,* God, in the language of the Wendat is an intriguing one for study, since the Christian deity, as I will demonstrate shortly, proved challenging to discuss in that tongue. Although seventeenth century France's understandings of God were surely varied, complex, and nuanced in the wake of decades of religious strife, it is safe to generalize that an important and universally recognized feature was the deity's quality as an all-powerful, transcendent, and abstract entity. As Antoine Furetière put it in the entry for "Dieu" in his *Dictionnaire Universel* (1690), "Il ne peut avoir de vraye définition, à cause que c'est un Estre infini et incompréhensible. Les hommes le considèrent comme la première Cause, le premier Estre qui est de tout temps, qui a tout créé, et qui subsiste de luy-même," he wrote. Whatever doctrinal disputes may have been raging in France and the rest of Europe, God was understood to so far exceed man as to be practically indefinable in human terms. The ways French priests and their Wendat interlocutors attempted to communicate about this obviously essential topic are, I hope to show, revealing both of the colonial encounter in New France and of the texts produced by missionaries in that context.

The rich record of French-Amerindian linguistic encounters in New France has inspired a fair amount of work by students of language and culture. Some scholars, notably Victor Hanzeli and Pierrette Lagarde, have used texts produced by missionaries to uncover the methodology of missionary linguists and the grammatical characteristics of Amerindian languages. John Steckley has examined Jesuit texts written in Wendat to demonstrate how priests incorporated aspects of Iroquoian cultures into their message (see, for example, "The Warrior and the Lineage"), and has also used the work of missionary linguists as a source of clues about Wendat culture (*Words of the Huron)*.

---

unfamiliar sounds first appeared in print in the *Relation* for 1636, according to Campeau's preface to that text (Campeau 3.183).

Although Jesuit writings certainly have proved a useful tool for the study of Wendat language and culture, I am more interested here in the lessons they offer about how knowledge was produced in dialogue in New France, and how those lessons can in turn inform one's understanding of writings produced in the context of colonial encounter.[6] Complicating this line of inquiry is the fact that the only existing accounts of such encounters were written by Europeans, meaning that the Wendats' reaction to Jesuit efforts to tell them about *Dieu* are only available as perceived and described by missionary writers. It is nonetheless possible, I hope to show, to discern clues as to how the Wendat experienced and coped with the changes wrought in their language by missionaries using it to express novel ideas.

This article draws on the *Jesuit Relations*—annual New France mission reports that were published from 1632 until 1673 with the goal of rallying spiritual and material support for the mission (Pouliot, *Etude,* 7)— and on six unpublished bilingual dictionaries, of varying format and content, penned by Jesuit missionaries in the field. I am aware that my lack of attention to the individuals who authored the *Relations* and the dictionaries deprives them and their interlocutors of individual agency, and glosses over the theological, personal, and political differences that may have

---

[6] My approach here is informed by what Natalie Zemon-Davis has identified as a strategy for understanding Canada's history in less Eurocentric terms, privileging "both Amerindians and Europeans as actors and reactors" (24). Like Carole Blackburn, I read the Jesuits' Amerindian interlocutors and informants as "[…] active agents whose cultural logics had the power to decentre the authority of [the] Word and of the Jesuits" (102). Despite the authoritative tone of the *Jesuit Relations,* it is important to recognize and attempt to account for the fact that, in Blackburn's words, "The Jesuits were required to negotiate and struggle over meaning" (104) in the conversations that formed the basis of their written accounts.

existed among members of the Society of Jesus.[7] This shortcoming is a natural consequence of the nature of my sources. The dictionaries I draw on were not only a reference tool for priests in New France, but a pedagogical one as well. New missionaries were required to copy—and partially revise, if necessary—whichever dictionary was currently in use as part of their linguistic training, making the surviving manuscripts good indicators of general Jesuit knowledge, but also difficult to date precisely or attribute to any particular priest (Hanzeli 22–23). Five of the dictionaries I use here are housed at the Archives du Séminaire de Québec at the Musée de la Civilisation in Québec, and are designated here by the catalogue numbers assigned by that library: MS59, MS60, MS62, MS65, and MS67. The sixth is at the John Carter Brown Library, in Providence, Rhode Island, and will be referred to here, for the sake of simplicity, as JCBL. Like the dictionaries, the *Jesuit Relations* do not lend themselves, in my opinion, to studying the motives and philosophical orientation of individual priests. Although authorship of the *Relations* was always attributed to a single Jesuit, named on the frontispiece, in reality the texts were patchwork compositions made up of letters and journals of individual missionaries in the field and then edited together by the mission superior, and then edited again by order officials in France "with current European conditions in mind" (Wroth 117–119). Further complicating matters is the fact that the name that adorned the frontispiece of each *Relation* did not necessarily correspond to its principal compiler. Instead, the mission Superior was usually given credit, regardless of his actual role in the producing the text. The factors complicating authorship of both the dictionaries and the *Jesuit Relations* make it very difficult, in my opinion, to

---

[7] As Luca Codignola has pointed out, "[…] even within an order usually deemed monolithic in the extreme, there were differences and jealousies. Barthélemi Vimont, who had problems with fellow Jesuit Paul Ragueneau, was recalled [from the New France mission] in 1659. Ragueneau himself then returned to France, together with Joseph-Antoince Poncet de la Rivière, because they had been engaged in political controversy" (181).

account for the individual voice of particular authors.[8] In any case, my aim here is to illuminate the linguistic limits that confronted all speakers and listeners in seventeenth century conversations about God in the Wendat language, regardless of individual skill, doctrinal orientation, or intelligence.

Before considering the specific case of Jesuit translations of *Dieu* into Wendat, some background on the religious and linguistic confrontation in New France is revealing, since Wendat and French outlooks on those subjects determined what options were open to both groups as they tried to express and understand the Christian concept of God. The Jesuits' missionary efforts were informed by an "assumption of Christian universalism"—the notion that "Christian truth, as embodied by the Roman Catholic Church, could not share space with other beliefs […]" (Blackburn 127)—and by the idea that the Truth could be expressed in novel ways without losing its meaning. While earlier Franciscan Récollet missionaries in New France "based their approach on the assumption that Native people could only be made Christian after they had settled among French people and been taught their language, manners, and customs" (Blackburn 130–131), Jesuits "transformed Catholic practice and translated catholic faith into terms familiar to the people with whom they lived" (Dorsey 401). These transformations were licensed by the Jesuits' understanding of the nature of language itself. Until the eighteenth century, differences between languages were understood to be created deliberately by God, an enduring consequence of the biblical Tower of Babel incident (Gray 4–5). In that foundational Christian tale, contained in Genesis, early man is said to have shared a single

---

[8] Several scholars, such as Dominique Deffain, Yvon Le Bras, and Rémi Ferland, have nonetheless written studies that seek to isolate the voice of Paul Le Jeune. Although still complicated, such an endeavor is perhaps least fraught in the case of Le Jeune, who was clearly the most active writer among the New France Jesuits, even continuing to contribute to or entirely compose the *Relations* after his return to France in 1650 (Pouliot "La Contribution").

language, until God found it necessary to "confuse their language […] so that they will not understand one another's speech" because a project by humans to build a tower to reach heaven convinced God that as long as humans had a common language, "nothing that they propose will be impossible for them" (Gen 11.1–9). Accordingly, Lalemant wrote in his 1646 *Relation* that he saw in the Montagnais language proof of God's existence : "Leurs compositions sont admirables et je puis dire que quand il n'y auroit point d'autre argument pour nous montrer qu'il y un Dieu que l'oeconomie des langues sauvages, cela suffiroit pour nous convaincre" (Campeau 6.631). Since the Jesuits understood differences between languages to be divinely created, indigenous tongues were considered as suitable to conveying supposedly universal religious truths as Latin, French, or any other language, a notion common in seventeenth century language studies (Hanzeli 33). As Peter Dorsey put it, "As long as one accepted a single source for the multitude of languages and peoples, cultural difference was acceptable and communication could become effective. At the deepest level, cultural difference cannot prevent God's word from being heard" (412).

This understanding of the nature of language explains how Jesuits could have been satisfied with some of their more inventive solutions to the problem of rendering Catholic doctrine into Wendat. One oft-cited example is Brébeuf's 1636 request for approval of a translation of the Trinity, a concept that apparently was very difficult to express in Wendat.

> Un nom relative parmy eux envelope tousjours la signification d'une des trois personnes du pronom possessif, si bien qu'ils ne peuvent dire simplement: père, fils, maistre, valet, mais sont contraincts de dire l'un des trois: mon père, ton père, son père […] Suivant cela, nous nous trouvons empeschez de leur faire dire proprement en leur langue 'au nom du Père et du Fils et du Saincte-Esprit'. Jugeriez-vous à propos, en attendant mieux, de substituer au lieu: 'au nom de nostre Père et de son fils et de leur Sainct-Esprit'? Certes, il semble que les trois

> personnes de la très saincte Trinité seroient suffisamment exprimées en ceste façon […] Oserions-nous en user, jusqu'à ce que la langue Wendat ne soit enrichie ou l'esprit des Wendats ouverts à d'autres langues? Nous ne ferons rien sans conseil (3.344).

Catholic faith holds that the three entities of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are "one Being, three Persons" (Torrance 10). Changing the formula to "*Our* Father, *His* Son, and *Their* Holy Spirit" might adequately express the three persons of the Trinity, as Le Jeune claimed, but it also fails to capture their unity in a single being and suggests a hierarchical relationship between the three figures. Brébeuf himself acknowledged the inadequacy of the translation with the phrase "en attendant mieux," suggesting that he hoped the solution was only temporary. Indeed, it appears that Jesuits used a different translation later in the seventeenth century. In *De Religione,* a Jesuit document explaining the nature of Christianity that was composed in Wendat in the late 1660s or 1670s, a different rendering is suggested, as John Steckley pointed out in the introduction to his recent translation of the text. "The Father is *sa,[e]n,* he has them (indefinite) as children'; the Son is *honaen* 'they (masculine plural) have him as child'; and the Holy Ghost is *hoki data hoatato,eti* 'he is a spirit, the very, he is the true one'" (26). This alternate translation poses its own problems, similarly suggesting a hierarchical relationship between the three figures and failing to account for the relationship between them. As Carole Blackburn has noted, "It is doubtful that this accommodation would have been either acceptable to the Jesuits' supporters or defensible if subjected to the scrutiny of their critics" (7). In spite of the apparent shortcomings of their translations, the Jesuit belief in the divine origin of linguistic difference would have assured the missionaries that their point was getting across, regardless of what they perceived to be the limitations imposed by the Wendat language or the acknowledged imperfection of any particular translation of a Christian concept.

Unlike the Jesuits, the Wendat did not view religious truth as universal and exclusive, and therefore "[…] tended to incorporate the Jesuits' message into an existing spiritual repertoire," according to Blackburn (127). Potential converts listening to religious lessons were more likely to understand the new material as supplementary to their pre-existing knowledge, rather than a replacement. As Blackburn pointed out, examples abound in the *Relations*. I will content myself here with just two. In both 1637 and 1639, the Jesuits' reported their horror at the decision by Wendat healers to incorporate mimicry of baptism into their traditional rites (Blackburn 111). And when epidemic disease arrived among the Wendat, the Jesuits reportedly urged them to pray and have faith in God, calling this "[…] le vrai et unique moien de destourner ce fléau du ciel" (Campeau 3.733). As Blackburn notes, "While many people were initially prepared to adopt the Jesuits' terms, most did not realize the exclusive nature of the priests' demands, and they continued to seek other remedies, leaving the Jesuits to accuse them of hypocrisy" (106). In both of the above cases, the Jesuits' potential converts reportedly embraced priestly lessons without sharing the missionaries' assumption that doing so necessarily entailed a rejection of their old practices. Thus, for those preaching about God in New France, the subject was one whose universal and universally intelligible truth could not fail to penetrate the difficulties posed by the Wendat language, and for their listeners, the deity, like other Christian concepts introduced by the Jesuits, was likely regarded as a new figure to simply add to their traditional knowledge. I will now examine the results of the confrontation between these two viewpoints that occurred when the Jesuits attempted to introduce the Christian God to the Wendat.

As I have already mentioned, Jesuits had two common ways of saying *Dieu* in Wendat.[9] Jesuits employed a Wendat term—*ha8endio*, which literally means "he is great or large in voice" (Steckley, personal communication, 4/18/06)—to name God, and also introduced a French word—*Di8*—into the Wendat language. Both words were used often and, it seems, interchangeably in bilingual dictionaries from the period. But merely introducing a word would not, as I will discuss in more detail shortly, ensure that the concept it was meant to designate would be comprehensible to listeners. And before they could be used to convey anything, both invented terms would have to be invested with meaning. Whatever connotations *ha8endio* might have had in Wendat would have to be replaced with Christian religious significance, and *Di8,* as a French word, was a blank slate in Wendat that Jesuits would have had to fill with meaning before it could be used effectively. The ways Jesuits went about assigning meaning to the terms illustrates how the limits of the Wendat language—whether real or merely as perceived by priests struggling to communicate in an unfamiliar language—influenced the Jesuit message.

The obvious problem with borrowing a pre-existing term to express a foreign concept is, as Steckley noted, that the term's original meaning might be durable, potentially "causing cognitive dissonance between communicative intent and result" ("Brébeuf's presentation" 94). For *ha8endio* to be an adequate translation of *Dieu*, Jesuits would have had to erase whatever significance the term might already have had in Wendat and invest it with new meaning. Because there is no record of the Wendat language that predates European contact, it is not possible to know how, or if, *ha8endio* was used before Jesuits began using it to refer to God, nor, therefore, to determine how successful they were in replacing with Christian meaning whatever connotations the term had for the

---

[9] I am grateful to John Steckley for his gracious guidance on points of Wendat language. Responsibility for the argument made here remains mine.

Wendat. It is, however, possible to assess how Jesuits attempted to do so. Each of the dictionaries contains bilingual sentences that are useful in determining what kinds of things Jesuits were saying about God to their Wendat interlocutors, and in what contexts they used *ha8endio*. The missionaries used the word to say things like "Dieu a tout fait" (JCBL 'achever'), "Dieu a défendu cela" (MS60), "Nous ne nous cachons, ne sont point cachez à Dieu" (MS59 16), "Dieu ne nous force, ne fait pas faire les choses malgré nous" (MS65 31), "Peririons nous si Dieu cessoit de nous conserver" (MS67 "cesser" 208). Reflecting the limitations Jesuits saw in the Wendat language, these sentences insist on God's role in human affairs, and make no mention of the deity's abstract qualities.

The Jesuits' second strategy, transferring the French term *Dieu* to the Wendat language, seems to have yielded similar results. Simply borrowing a word from French does not guarantee, of course, that all the meaning of the French term would be transferred automatically along with it. Jesuits using *Di8* to refer to God in Wendat would have had to give the neologism meaning by explaining what it meant, in the same way they explained *ha8endio*. Again, contextual examples from bilingual dictionaries provide clues about how the missionaries did so. Sentences such as "rien n'est impossible à Dieu" (MS59 108), "Dieu a créé la terre" (MS67 "créer" 68), "Dieu a fait l'homme ou les hommes" (MS67 "homme" 67), "Garde les commandemens de Dieu" (MS65 10), "Rien n'empeche Dieu de voir" (MS60), and "Dieu est partout" (MS60) all serve to indirectly define the new term, *Di8*, by describing how the deity intervenes in human life. God, in these examples, only has meaning in relation to human affairs and to the visible characteristics of the world.

Comparing translations of Wendat sentences using *Di8* with those that describe *ha8endio* suggests that there was little difference in how the terms were used. Indeed, two of the six dictionaries I draw on here attempt direct definition of *Dieu*, and both entries include both *Di8* and *ha8endio*, testifying to the

interchangeable nature of the two terms.[10] Dictionary definitions using each of the words paint portraits of a God who created the visible world, who forbids or condones human behavior, and from whom it is impossible to hide. They insist on God's role in visible, familiar phenomena and leave out the abstract qualities that the Jesuits had trouble explaining in Wendat. That this was a general characteristic of Jesuit attempts to introduce God to the Wendat is confirmed by descriptions of the deity attributed to Amerindian Christians in the *Jesuit Relations.* A good example is furnished by Lalemant's 1640 *Relation,* in which he claims to report a dialog between a Wendat convert and an infidel. The faithful convert argues for the existence of God: "[…] Nous voyons toutes les choses de ce monde qu'il a créées et nous pouvions aussi peu douter qu'il est un Dieu qu'un homme sage pourroit douter que le soleil est dans le ciel, lorsqu'il est couvert de nuées et qu'il éclaire ce bas monde, quoyqu'on ne le voye pas " (Campeau 6.655). This profession of faith, purportedly uttered by an actual Wendat Christian,[11] focuses solely on the visible

---

[10] The definition for *Dieu* in JCBL reads "*Di8 ha8endio*." MS67's entry on *Dieu* is difficult to decipher, but appears to read "*Grand Esprit I Dïo ha8endio da,ionnhe*." According to Steckley, the entire phrase "ha8endio da,ionnhe" literally means "he is master of our lives" (personal communication 4/18/06). The inclusion of both terms in each of the entries demonstrates that both were used in situations where missionaries would have referred to *Dieu* if they had been speaking French, and suggests that neither term may have been deemed entirely adequate on its own.

[11] Modern scholars are often skeptical of the authenticity of such speeches, and with good reason. As the eminent ethnohistorian of the Wendat Bruce Trigger wrote, "Filtered through translators, the recorder's incomprehension, and the general tendency of European authors to embellish and fabricate whole addresses, it is not always certain that such sources are reliable" (17). It is, however, reasonable to draw conclusions about what Jesuits considered correct or acceptable from the contents of Amerindian speeches reported in the *Jesuit Relations,* since they were meant not only to

evidence of a higher being and defines it only in relation to human life. Absent is the abstract originator of all things of Furetière's definition.[12]

Gauging Wendat reaction to attempts to introduce them to the Christian deity is more difficult, since the Wendat themselves produced no written record of their encounter with Jesuit missionaries. Traces of their thoughts on the subject are only available through the filter of the Europeans who wrote about their encounters with Amerindians. This portion of my argument is therefore unavoidably more speculative than my preceding analysis of French strategies for expressing God in Wendat. Nontheless, one can be sure that comprehending Christian lessons in Wendat would have been as much of a challenge as expressing them because of the culture-bound nature of language. As I have argued elsewhere, drawing on the work of Edward Sapir and

---

inform the missionaries' superiors in France of their activities, but also to rally support among the reading public of France. Given the dual goals of pleasing company superiors and attracting financial backers, it is unlikely that the authors of the *Relations* would have attributed objectionable comments to new Christians without also remarking on how those who uttered them were corrected. Therefore, there is good reason to think that pious words in the *Relations* that are attributed to Amerindian Christians reflect the message the Jesuits were preaching and the ways they were preaching it.

[12] For another good example, see the prayer attributed to Wendat convert Joseph Chih8atenh8a, in Lalemant's 1641 Relation from the Huron mission. A French translation of the prayer was printed alongside the original Wendat, (Campeau 5.210–214). The text of the prayer includes both Di8 and Chie8enio, the second person singular form of ha8endio, which was used to address God directly (Steckley, personal communication 5/30/06). The prayer covers four pages in Campeau's edition, the entire first page of which is dedicated to describing what God is by detailing the deity's relationship to man, confirming that neither Di8 nor ha8endio was entirely adequate to name God.

Benjamin Whorf, thought and meaning are limited by language, since the ability to think about or discuss a concept depends on its presence in the language—and therefore culture—in question (True "What's in a name"). As Sapir put it, "It is the complete vocabulary of a language that most clearly reflects the physical and social environment of its speakers. The vocabulary of a language may indeed be looked upon as a complex inventory of all the ideas, interests, and occupations that take up the attention of the community […]" (228). It follows, therefore, that if the Wendat had no pre-existing term to express their understanding of God, they would have no concept of the Christian deity with which to associate the terms *ha8endio* and *Di8* when they were introduced. While Jesuits sought to give meaning to the terms they introduced by emphasizing the divine attributes that they found easy, or at least possible, to express in Wendat, their interlocutors, guided by a relativistic perspective on religion, would have sought means of understanding within their pre-existing language and culture.

Indications of how they might have done so are sparse, but tantalizing clues nonetheless can be found in the *Jesuit Relations* and elsewhere. Describing his efforts to teach the Montagnais, another Amerindian group, about God, the mission Superior Paul Le Jeune wrote in his 1633 *Relation:* "Parlant un jour de Dieu dans une cabane, ils me demandèrent que c'était que Dieu. Je leur dis que c'estoit celuy qui pouvait tout et qui avoit fait le ciel et la terre. Ils commencèrent à se dire les uns aux autres: 'Atahocan, Atahocan; c'est Atahocan'" (Campeau 2.434). Although, as I have argued elsewhere, the equation in the *Relations* of Christian concepts to traditional Amerindian figures is a rhetorical tool that the Jesuits wielded to simultaneously demonstrate the need for missionary activity and its likelihood for success (True "Retelling Genesis"), it also reflects the Amerindian strategy for trying to understand the unfamiliar concepts preached by their interlocutors that I discussed earlier, partially adopting news ideas introduced by the Jesuits, but adding them to old ones already familiar. There is evidence that the Wendat and their descendents employed the same strategy when attempting to make sense of the Christian God. The

Wyandot, present day descendents of the Wendat,[13] were found by twentieth century anthropologists to equate the Christian God with Iouskeha, a key figure in the Wendat origin myth (Chafe 257). And it seems that the Jesuits and other Europeans, guided by the flexibility afforded them by belief in the ability of all languages to express divine truth, even encouraged the conflation of Christian and Amerindian religious figures, perhaps recognizing that it aided in the communication of points of Christian doctrine (Chafe 257).

With Jesuits striving to be understood by tailoring their teachings to the perceived strengths and weaknesses of an unfamiliar language and the Wendat, in turn, seeking to understand by adapting the foreign concepts the Jesuits were expressing to their own culture, Jesuit reports of the Wendats' enthusiastic embrace of *Dieu*—like the one cited at the beginning of this article—must be regarded as the products of linguistic confrontation. Even if it is assumed that the author's account was based on the actual words of a Wendat convert, and that he translated the conversation as faithfully as could, the conversion in question must be understood as fundamentally different in nature from what the missionaries communicated to their readers. The convert who is quoted by Lalemant most likely would have used *Di8* or *ha8endio*—or perhaps both—to refer to the Christian God. As I have argued, both terms, as invested with meaning by the French, describe a deity directly engaged in human affairs, whose work is everywhere visible in the physical world, and who is devoid of the abstract qualities that the Jesuits found themselves unable to express in Wendat. And there can be no guarantee that Wendat listeners, attempting to understand by drawing on their own understanding of the nature of religious truth, would have arrived at precisely the understanding that the Jesuits were aiming for. A French reader, presented only with Lalemant's translation of

---

[13] When the Wendat confederacy was dispersed by Iroquois enemies around 1650, surviving members moved to Québec to live near the French, fled westward, or were absorbed by other groups. Those moving west came to be known as the Wyandot (Trigger 789).

his interlocutor's words, likely would have understood *Dieu* in its French sense, unaware of the unique characteristics of the deity as invented in dialogue in New France. The fact that conversations that occurred in Wendat, and the outcome of such exchanges, were translated into French for publication opens a dimension of meaning in the words of new converts in the *Relations* that is only clear when one reflects on the linguistic confrontation that produced them. The case of the introduction of God to the Wendat illuminates the challenges of cross-cultural communication in seventeenth century New France, and suggests that analysis of the linguistic encounter can be a potent tool for interpreting European accounts of interactions with Amerindian groups. Reading texts like the *Jesuit Relations* through this lens promises, if not to restore an Amerindian voice that is regrettably absent from the colonial record, then at least to reveal meanings that are present in the text, but obscured by the fact that the Jesuits translated the words of potential converts into French to make them comprehensible to their readers.

**Duke University**

## Works Cited

Blackburn, Carole. *Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missionaries and Colonialism in North America, 1632–1650.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004.

Campeau, Lucien, ed. *Monumenta Novae Franciae*. 9 vols. Rome: Monumenta Hist. Soc. Jesu, 1967–2003.

Chafe, Wallace. "The Earliest European Encounters with Iroquoian Languages," *Decentring the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective 1500–1700.* Eds. Warkentin, Germaine and Carolyn Podruchny. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. 252–261.

Codignola, Luca. "Few, Uncooperative and Ill Informed? The Roman Catholic Clergy in French and British North America,

1610–1658," *Decentring the Renaissance:Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective 1500–1700*, eds. Warkentin, Germaine and Carolyn Podruchny. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. 173–185.

Dorsey, Peter A. "Going to School with Savages: Authorship and Authority among the Jesuits of New France," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55.3 (1998): 399–420.

Furetière, Antoine. *Dictionnaire Universel, Contenant Generalement Tous les Mots François Tant Vieux Que Modernes, et les Termes de Toutes les Sciences et des Arts*. Rotterdam, 1690.

Gray, Edward G. *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Hanzeli, Victor Egon. *Missionary Linguistics in New France: a Study of 17th and 18th Century Descriptions of American Indian Languages*. The Hague: Mouton, 1969.

Lagarde, Pierrette. *Le Verbe Huron: Etude morphologique d'après une description grammaticale de la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 1980.

Pouliot, Léon. *Etude sur les Relations des Jésuites de la Nouvelle-France (1632–1672)*. Paris : Desclée le Brouwer, 1940.

———. " La Contribution de P. Paul Le Jeune aux Relations des Jésuites de 1650 à 1663, " *Bulletin des Recherches Historiques* 68(1966): 49–53, 77–85, 131–135.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola. *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. George E. Ganss. St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970.

Sapir, Edward. "Language and environment," *American Anthropologist* 14.2 (1912): 226–242.

Steckley, John. *Words of the Huron*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007.

———. *De Religione: Telling the 17th Century Jesuit Story in Huron to the Iroquois*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004.

———. "The Warrior and the Lineage: Jesuit Use of Iroquoian Images to Communicate Christianity." *Ethnohistory* 39.4 (1992): 478-509.

———. "Brébeuf's Presentation of Catholicism in the Huron Language: A Descriptive Overview." *University of Ottawa Quarterly* 48.1-2 (1978): 93-115.

Torrance, T.F. *The Trinitarian Faith*. London: T&T Clark, 1995.

Trigger, Bruce. *The Children of Aataentsic: a History of the Wendat People to 1660*. 1976. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.

True, Micah. "Retelling Genesis: The *Jesuit Relations* and the Wendat Creation Myth," *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* 34.67(2007): 465–484.

———. "What's in a Name? The Roots of Christian/Islamic Tension in 17th Century France," *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* 33.65 (2006): 533–550.

Wroth, Lawrence C. "The Jesuit Relations from New France," *The Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America* 30(1936): 110–139.

Zemon-Davis, Natalie. "Polarities and Hybridities: What Strategies for Decentring?" *Decentring the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective 1500-1700*, eds. Warkentin, Germaine and Carolyn Podruchny. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001, 19–32.

**Unpublished dictionaries:**

Musée de la Civilization, fonds d'archives du Séminaire de Québec. SME13/MS-59, MS-60, MS-62, MS-65, MS-67.

John Carter Brown Library, Brown University: Huron Dictionary.

# Magnanimous Women:
# Gender and Souls in Corneille's Tragic Theater

**by**
**Michael Taormina**

In Corneille's tragic theater, there are many examples or types of the "great soul," what Aristotle calls the *megalopsuchos* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: someone "who believes himself worthy of great things and is in fact worthy of them" (Aristotle, *Ethics* IV.iii.1123a34).[1] For example: Horace and Polyeucte—one classical and one Christian hero. But what about Corneille's heroines: Camille and Pauline? Do they not also display greatness of soul? While the category of gender in seventeenth-century France has been examined in terms of physical, social, or political bodies, this particular examination of gender in terms of soul—an explicitly metaphysical approach—is inspired by Corneille's own discussion of character in *Discours de l'Utilité et des Parties du Poème dramatique*. (Corneille, *Trois discours* 63–94). Out of many possible examples, Corneille privileges Cleopatra and explicitly appeals to her greatness of soul. This same kind of analysis may be usefully extended to other female characters, such as Camille and Pauline. Given the patriarchal system of values, as well as the restricted means of action available to female characters, the question is whether and how these tragic heroines of Corneille exhibit greatness of soul.

## Characterization and Cleopatra's Soul

Addressing the question of characterization in the *Discours*, Corneille is faced with a philological quandary: What does Aristotle mean when he prescribes that a dramatic character be

---

[1] Irwin notes (*Ethics*, 326): "'Magnanimity' is the traditional Latinized form of *megalopsuchia* (lit. 'having a great soul'), and captures some aspects of it fairly well. The *megalopsuchos* will not be calculating, suspicious, ungenerous, or prone to nurse petty grievances, 1125a3. *Megalopsuchia* is concerned with HONOUR in its different aspects."

good? "Je ne puis comprendre par ce mot de bonnes," writes Corneille, "qu'il faut qu'elles [les Mœurs] soient vertueuses" (Corneille, *Trois discours* 78). Corneille underscores this apparent contradiction with examples drawn from Horace: Medea, Ixion, and Achilles, each of whom by convention displays less than virtuous character traits. Corneille argues that if we faithfully portray these characters according to the conventional traits which Horace recommends, this does not leave much room for the expression of virtue as it is conventionally understood, in other words, moral goodness. Hence, reasons Corneille, Aristotle must mean something else by "good:" "je crois que c'est le caractère brillant et élevé d'une habitude vertueuse, ou criminelle, selon qu'elle est propre et convenable à la personne qu'on introduit" (Corneille, *Trois discours* 78).

Corneille supports his interpretation with citations from Aristotle and Robertello (an Italian commentator). According to Louvat and Escola (Corneille, *Trois Discours* 159, n. 41),[2] Corneille seems to have accurately intuited a possible conceptual link between what reads in Aristotle's original text as "good" (*khrèsta*) and "suitable" (*epieikeis*) (Aristotle, *Poetics* XV.1454a15–1454b10).[3] In their view, our French playwright rejects a moral and social interpretation in favor of an esthetic one: it is not the character but the characterization that must be good in

---

[2] Bénédicte Louvat and Marc Escola write in their notes (Corneille, *Trois Discours* 159, n. 41): "Comme le suggère Corneille, le terme de *khrèstos* ne semble pas renvoyer, dans la *Poétique*, à la grandeur comme qualité morale ou sociale des personnages eux-mêmes—ce qui exclurait par exemple les criminels de la tragédie—mais à la qualité du traitement des caractères." Louvat and Escola claim that textual misreadings in Corneille's Latin translation of Aristotle were responsible for the philological quandary in the first place (Corneille, *Trois Discours* 160, n. 43).

[3] For *epieikès*, the Liddell and Scott gives "fitting" and "suitable" as literal meanings; "reasonable," "fair" and "good" in the moral sense are figurative.

the sense of suitable. *Tradition* makes it suitable to portray the "bad" character traits of Medea, Ixion, or Achilles; and *decorum* makes it suitable to portray them with a certain elevation—the dignity and elevation of tragedy as a genre demand elevation of character.

However, when we take a closer look at how Corneille himself translates the crucial passage from Aristotle, we sense that the playwright may have something else in mind other than purely esthetic concerns: "ainsi les Poètes, représentants des hommes colères, ou fainéants, doivent tirer une haute idée de ces qualités"(Corneille, *Trois Discours* 79). Stephen Halliwell renders the original Greek: "Likewise the poet, while showing irascible and indolent people and those with other such character traits, should nonetheless make them decent [*epieikeis*]" (*Poetics* XV.1454b10). Although Corneille is working from a Latin translation, we might have expected "honnête" or "bienséant," if the playwright's concerns were merely esthetic. Instead, Corneille reads "une haute idée." Corneille's citation from Robortello[4] only serves to reinforce this reading which conceptually links "cette bonté nécessaire aux Moeurs" to "cette elevation de […] caractère" (Corneille, *Trois Discours* 79). The link between "bonté" and "caractère" is more than esthetic.

Although this whole passage from the *Discours* is dealing with how best to create a fictional character, it also treats fictional characters as moral agents who express character traits through their acts. The passage shows Corneille making of elevation a conceptual link that is ethical and, ultimately, metaphysical in its import. This is perfectly consistent with what Fumaroli has

---

[4] *Trois discours*, 79: "Unumquodque genus per se supremos quosdam habet decoris gradus, et absolutissimam recipit formam, non tamen degenerans a sua natura et effigie pristina." Louvat and Escola offer a very telling translation: "Chaque genre [de caractère] possède par lui-même son degré d'excellence, et admet une forme parfaite, sans dégénérer jamais de sa nature et de sa figure primitive."

repeatedly emphasized in his historical research on eloquence: there existed a close relationship among ethics, rhetoric, and poetics in the first half of the seventeenth century. To focus on the metaphysical dimension is merely to highlight the microcosm of social and political bodies. This metaphysical dimension would theoretically become unconcealed in action and speaking, would be represented by certain marks or traits, and, ultimately, would be played out in the social and political arenas. Hence there would exist a proportion of scale across the various dimensions or levels. The great actors on the historical stage would be great souls.

To shore up his reading of Aristotle, Corneille draws on his own work as well, citing Cleopatra as an example of a character that is "brilliant and elevated" and yet wicked:

> Cléopâtre dans *Rodogune* est très méchante, il n'y a point de parricide qui lui fasse horreur, pourvu qu'il la puisse conserver sur un trône qu'elle préfère à toutes choses, tant son attache à la domination est violent ; mais tous ces crimes sont accompagnés d'une grandeur d'âme qui a quelque chose de si haut, qu'en même temps qu'on déteste ses actions, on admire la source dont elles partent (Corneille, *Trois Discours* 79).

This distinction between Cleopatra's ambition and pride, on the one hand, and her actions and crimes, on the other, suggests that Corneille is working from an altogether different conception of virtue. As Paul Bénichou notes, Corneille's conception of virtue has less to do with moral goodness and more to do with "valeur, force ou grandeur" (Bénichou, *Morales* 12). This is in turn associated with height or elevation ("quelque chose de si haut"), as Robortello intimates: "supremos quosdam [...] decoris gradus" (Corneille, *Trois Discours* 79). Virtue is a kind of superlative degree. In other words, Cleopatra is the outstanding type of her class. This conception of virtue as superlative elevation is very close to an Aristotelian conception of virtue in the *Nicomachean*

*Ethics*, where virtue is seen as human activity raised to the highest degree.[5]

We know that Corneille was a reader of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Marc Fumaroli tells us that Corneille was probably also a reader of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, or had at least second-hand knowledge of it from Latin versions used in the Jesuit schools (Fumaroli 330–331). In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Corneille would have acquired the conceptual tools necessary to articulate the complex relationship of character, soul, and virtue. For Corneille, this complex relationship is articulated in dramatic language. Therefore, when Fumaroli examines the Aristotelian "great soul" as the moral archetype of the Cornelian hero, he looks to Corneille's eloquence: "Point de grande éloquence sans une grande âme qui soit la source" (Fumaroli 324). This formulation explicitly links the rhetorical sublime to the presence of a great soul. With his usual perspicacity, Fumaroli has linked the social and political to the metaphysical; the link is one of proportional elevation, height, greatness, across micro- and macrocosm. This correspondence between elevation of style and elevation of soul, I would assert, uncovers a metaphysical dimension to social and political bodies not only because such a correspondence presupposes a whole series of Aristotelian concepts (capacity, activity, movement, form, matter, etc.) that are part of the search for primary being in the *Metaphysics*, but also because it commits one to a view of the soul as a microcosmic source of power, inseparable from the human body, and perceptible in certain activities, like action or speaking.[6] The representation of this

---

[5] Cf. Book I, Chapter vii, 1098a5-15. Terence Irwin comments in the glossary (*Ethics* 431): "Aristotle's conception of virtue is much wider than moral virtue. In some cases, 'excellence' is the best rendering of *aretè*, and Aristotle develops his conception of a good person from excellence in a craft."

[6] Aristotle does not in fact separate the soul from the body but sees the soul as particular activities in virtue of which a human organism can do all the things it does: i.e. moving and growing,

microcosmic power in dramatic language may very well foreground the normally invisible operation of macrocosmic power in social and political bodies, such as the family and the State.

Precisely, then, this correspondence between soul and eloquence is so intriguing because, in that case, the eloquence of Corneille's tragic heroines can be read as a representation of their soul.[7] Corneille's choice of Cleopatra as an example of a great soul now looks all the more polemical. Corneille could have chosen a male character, even a wicked male character, to make his point, but instead he chose a female character. Cleopatra serves Corneille's purposes in the *Discours* not just because her greatness of soul challenges the usual equation of virtue with moral goodness, but also because she is an archetype of the female threat to the patriarchal State. A *femme forte*, a woman with a great soul, has the power to challenge prevailing dramatic theory as well as social and political expectations for women in seventeenth-century France.[8] In this sense, Cleopatra, despite her wickedness, is an

---

but also desiring, thinking, imagining, etc. Cf. Michael Frede, *'De Anima'* 97.

[7] Cf. Pascal, *Pensées*, 578 (26): "L'éloquence est une peinture de la pensée...." The logic of this correspondence deserves clarification, but I cannot fully develop it here. The line of argument is roughly as follows: The soul is the source of action; action involves voluntary decision, but so do speaking and writing; if voluntary decisions are indicative of character (because different kinds of people aim at different ends), then so are the stylistic choices one makes in speaking and writing. In this way, stylistic traits may be equated with character traits. Such traits represent the soul to the extent that they correspond to operations characteristic of the soul: judging, desiring, imagining, etc.

[8] Cf. Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies* 32: "The *femme forte* openly violated the standards for acceptable female behavior proposed by contemporary critics. Thus, in his *Poétique* (1640), Jules de la Mesnardière decrees that 'with regard to decency of conduct (*propriété de mœurs*), the poet must consider that one

archetype for Corneille's other magnanimous women, in this instance Camille and Pauline, whose actions and speeches often challenge dramatic, social, and political expectations. Analyzing some of Camille's and Pauline's speeches in terms of eloquence should allow us to determine in what sense and to what extent these Cornelian heroines possess great souls, and how this representation affects the social and political bodies of which they are part. It will become clear that Corneille's characterization of women as great souls entails not just a social and political revaluation, but a metaphysical one as well. This is the line of argument we will pursue just as soon as we review the Aristotelian conception of magnanimity.

**The Aristotelian "Ethos" of Magnanimity**

We should briefly examine the definition of magnanimity in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to see how Corneille's heroines compare. What makes this comparison feasible is, as Fumaroli notes in "L'Héroïsme cornélien et l'éthique de la magnanimité" (Fumaroli 336–338), the Christian reception of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in early seventeenth-century France but also, as Bénichou says in *Morales du grand siècle* (Bénichou 19), the transmission of "archaic" ideas of heroism to the early modern nobility. In principle, we do not want to exclude either the Christian or the archaic version of the *megalopsuchos*, albeit in female incarnations, Pauline and Camille. For our purposes, however, we will treat magnanimity, and the *megalopsuchos*, primarily as an "ethos," that is, a character or a kind of person. Indeed, Aristotle himself, when he sets out to define magnanimity, merely describes the kind of person the *megalopsuchos* is. He singles out certain typical character traits. After reviewing these character traits, we can see to what extent they show up in the speeches of Corneille's heroines.

---

should never introduce without absolute necessity either a valiant girl or a learned woman.' To avoid 'shocking normal plausibility' (*vraisemblance*), the poet should keep 'generosity' a male preserve and create only 'gentle and modest women.'" La Mesnardière, it should be noted, is merely echoing Aristotle.

Aristotle defines the magnanimous person in terms of worth and greatness: "one who thinks himself worthy of great things and is really worthy of them;" "magnanimity is found in greatness;" and "what he thinks he is worthy of reflects his real worth" (Aristotle, *Ethics* IV.iii.1123b1–15). Aristotle relates the idea of worth to external goods, such as wealth, power, or good fortune. However, honor, "the greatest of external goods," is reserved for the magnanimous person alone, because honor is what "we award the gods" and is also "the aim of people with a reputation for worth" (Aristotle, *Ethics* IV.iii.1123b20). As a result, the defining characteristic of the magnanimous person is "the right concern with honors and dishonors" (Aristotle, *Ethics* IV.iii.1123b20). This last trait is crucial. The magnanimous person aims at honor in the right way and for the right reasons. He is therefore "at the extreme," says Aristotle, "in so far as he makes great claims. But in so far as he makes them rightly, he is intermediate" (Aristotle, *Ethics* IV.iii.1123b14–15). He aims neither too high, which would make him foolish and vain, nor too low, which would make him merely small.

Magnanimity is the greatest of the Aristotelian virtues of character. Aristotle calls it "a sort of adornment of the virtues" (Aristotle, *Ethics* IV.iii.1124a1). On the one hand, magnanimity cannot arise without the other virtues. Aristotle argues that one could not be magnanimous, that is, worthy of great things, if one were cowardly, unjust, or base. On the other hand, magnanimity adds luster to the other virtues. If one is truly worthy of great things, then one is the best person, and the honor due to the best shows the other virtues also to be great. Magnanimity is the greatest of the Aristotelian virtues, and the most complete, because the magnanimous person raises to its highest degree what Aristotle calls "the human function," that is, "the soul's activity that expresses reason" (Aristotle, *Ethics* I.vii.1098a5–15). When the activity of the human soul expresses reason, and when it does this finely and well, Aristotle calls it virtue. It is a kind of excellence.

Other characteristics of the magnanimous person include a willingness to display greatness only to the great; an unwillingness

to face danger and take action except in the most extreme circumstances; frank expression of friendship and enmity; a tendency to do more good than he has received, and hence to remember only the good he has done, not what he has received; and, finally, a moderate display of pleasure from public honors and recognition of his worth (Aristotle, *Ethics* IV.iii.1124a1–1125a15). Aristotle underscores all these characteristics as a function of the magnanimous person's right concern with honor and dishonor.

This emphasis on honor and dishonor must have made Aristotelian magnanimity an attractive virtue to the nobility of early seventeenth-century France. At a time when noble treatises were struggling to define noble identity, the virtue of magnanimity, being "a virtue productive of great benefits [for others]" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.ix.11), would have held out to a nobility increasingly sidelined in the affairs of state the promise of relevance in the political arena. Furthermore, magnanimity's concern with honor dovetails with the definition of nobility found in some early seventeenth-century noble treatises. For instance, P. Boyssat states in *Recherches sur les duels* (Lyon, 1610): "Honor is by nature imprinted in the hearts of the Nobility, and it consists in never admitting defeat and considering only victory or death while fighting" (ctd. in Schalk 52). Thus, while Fumaroli is perfectly right to underscore the Christian appropriation and mediation of the Aristotelian "ethos" of magnanimity, one can very well imagine the nobility selectively choosing to ignore elements of that Christian accretion in favor of more "archaic" elements, what Bénichou calls "heroic morality," in which pride and passion are awaiting only a sufficient obstacle to be transformed into the glory of triumph.

**The Magnanimity of Two Cornelian Heroines**

We know that the scope of action in Corneille's tragedies is not the same for women as it is for men. In *Horace* (1640), it is Curiace and the younger Horace who must fight to the death to determine whether Alba or Rome will have supremacy. In *Polyeucte martyr* (1642), Polyeucte himself has the privilege of smashing the pagan idols and offering up his life to God. As

Noémi Hepp notes, these tragic protagonists are heroes precisely because they have taken action; because they have done so in the name of honor, the State, or God; and because they have been recognized as heroes by the community, which has benefited greatly by their actions (Hepp 14). Generally speaking, each can be called magnanimous because he is truly worthy of great things.

Noémi Hepp explains further how this same scope of action is not truly open to seventeenth-century women. There exist different social expectations for women, and Hepp explores these by comparing masculine and feminine ideals as embodied in the hero and the heroine. "Si être un héros et être un homme parfait," she writes, "sont une seule et même chose, faire des actions de héros et être une femme parfaite sont deux choses tout à fait différentes" (Hepp 19). According to Hepp, the characteristics of a perfect seventeenth-century French woman are defined not by her relation to action but by her relation to men. It is not just the case that she should be loyal to family and devoted to her husband; it is also that she is meant to mediate between men and heroic values, inspiring men to achieve great things. This can be done through love, through motherhood, or through prayer. In every case, moreover, she should be modest, hiding her feelings, her opinions, and her intellectual gifts. As Hepp shows, "les panégyristes les louent [les femmes] bien plus pour leurs vertus secrètes—prière, pénitence, humilité, fidélité à la volonté de Dieu," and one might add, loyalty to the will of father and husband, "que pour leurs exploits [eux-mêmes]" (Hepp 14).

However, we often observe women contending with men in Corneille's tragedies. In *Horace*, Camille directly impugns her brother's rigid heroic code for its inhumanity (II.v); in *Polyeucte*, Pauline is pitted against every male protagonist, the most challenging being her old flame Sévère (II.ii). Thus, I would argue, what we find at the heart of Cornelian tragedy is not just the heroic imperative which Serge Dubrovsky has aptly formulated "meurs ou tue" (Dubrovsky 95), but also a war of prestige, a potlatch, a struggle in the name of honor between men and women. This struggle cannot be explained merely by assigning supremacy

to men in the public sphere of action and supremacy to women in the personal sphere of love. Time and again, we see in Corneille just how entangled political rivalries and alliances are with love interests, such that it is difficult to separate the public from the personal and politics from love. Rather, what levels the playing field, so to speak, for the heroes and heroines in Corneille's tragedies is not the representation of action per se, but the representation of decision-making. What we are in fact witnessing are male and female protagonists who are constantly called on to deliberate and who, eventually, do make a decision.

This representation of decision-making occurs both on the level of plot and on the level of style, that is, in action and in speaking. Given the more restricted scope of action allotted to Corneille's women, however, our analysis will have to focus on the sublime eloquence of their speeches. To shore up the legitimacy of this focus on speaking, I want briefly to explain how, from an Aristotelian perspective, speaking involves voluntary decision just as action does. It should then be less of a leap to see how Corneille's women may be considered just as magnanimous as his men.

Aristotelian magnanimity is a virtue but also a character or a kind of person. For Aristotle, the conceptual link between virtue and character is voluntary decision. "Decision," he says, "seems to be most proper to virtue, and to distinguish characters from one another better than actions do" (Aristole, *Ethics* III.iii.1111b5). Broadly defined, virtue is the state that qualifies an activity as good. The activity characteristic of a human being is the activity of the soul, especially its rational parts. When the activity of the human soul expresses reason, and when it does this finely and well, Aristotle calls it virtue. It is a kind of excellence, a "high" actualization of a potential good. Decision is therefore proper to virtue, though only to the extent that decision involves reason and thought, in other words, the rational parts of the soul. The kinds of decisions a person makes, for what reasons, in what way, etc., not only characterize a person as virtuous but also distinguish one kind of person from another. Earlier we reviewed the traits characteristic of the *megalopsuchos*; these traits, therefore,

essentially amount to the decisions the *megalopsuchos* is in the habit of making. And because these decisions involve the rational parts of the soul, they can be seen as essential attributes of the soul.

It follows that the "ethos" or character traits of magnanimity are available to the orator and the playwright. In oratory, a speaker will attribute the character traits of magnanimity either to himself or to another. In drama, the playwright will have the fictional characters make decisions characteristic of a magnanimous person.[9] What is more, style or manner of speaking is a rhetorical resource also available to orator and playwright. Style is understood here to be invention, disposition, and elocution taken as a whole. If we consider the choice of topics, the choice of arrangement, and the choice of figures to constitute a series of voluntary decisions, then we can read style as a portrait of character and, ultimately, a portrait of the soul, provided that voluntary decision is indeed a defining characteristic of the soul. This is claiming more than the idea that queens and kings should speak in a dignified and elevated way. This is saying that, on an Aristotelian view, stylistic traits are tantamount to character traits, and that such traits ultimately refer back to operations characteristic of the soul. This would hold for fictional as well as real speakers.

We can now understand more fully the rationale behind the idea that a great soul is the source of great eloquence. As Longinus defines them (Longinus 8), the characteristics of the rhetorical sublime—grand conceptions, vehement emotion, nobility of diction, majestic syntax, and striking figures—involving both "congenital disposition" *and* the voluntary decision-making of art, point to a grand and noble character. That is, they ultimately derive from a great soul. The audience's

[9] In Corneille's *Cinna*, for example, Auguste's decision not to retaliate against Cinna, Emilie, and the other conspirators, demonstrates not just clemency but also superiority, since a magnanimous person disdains making a show of greatness to his inferiors.

elevation of soul, which results from the so-called flashes of sublimity in the speech, reveals the speaker's own elevation of soul. The superlative heights associated with magnanimity would correspond to the superlative heights of sublimity. Elevation of style = elevation of soul.

To sum up, then, voluntary decision is more indicative of character than action itself, and style or manner of speaking, being the result of such decision, may potentially portray the soul in language. So, while women do have a more limited scope of action in Corneille's tragedies, the decisions they make are no less momentous and crucial. Furthermore, if such decision, whether action or speaking, shows women to be as magnanimous as men, they are so in virtue of the same principle as men: the rational parts of the soul.

This is nowhere more evident than in *Polyeucte*. Pauline, the play's heroine, displays many of the characteristics of magnanimity, though she conforms to the more traditional role expected of women. She could indeed serve as an example in Pierre Le Moyne's highly Christianized poems "La femme forte" and "La Gallerie des femmes fortes" found in his *Oeuvres poétiques* of 1671. Her honor resides in her duty, expressed as obedience to her father, Félix, on the one hand, and as loyalty to her husband, Polyeucte, on the other. The obstacle to the fulfillment of this duty is the arrival of Sévère, Pauline's old flame. The presence of Sévère not only tests Pauline's loyalty to Polyeucte, but when Polyeucte boldly smashes the pagan idols of Rome, and Félix, as governor of Armenia, cannot commute Polyeucte's death-sentence for fear of what Sévère might report to the Roman emperor, Sévère's presence also tests Pauline's obedience to her father and, by extension, to the State. In overcoming these obstacles, Pauline displays an extraordinary self-mastery. This self-mastery is her glory. It shows her to be worthy of great things. The ultimate recognition of her magnanimity comes not from the public sphere of the State, however, nor the sphere of the family, but from God in the form of irresistible grace that leads to instantaneous conversion.

Pauline displays several character traits of magnanimity. Pauline is magnanimous in the first place because she frankly expresses her friendships and enmities. She admits to her father that she still loves Sévère:

> Il est toujours aimable, et je suis toujours femme;
> Dans le pouvoir sur moi que ses regards ont eu,
> Je n'ose m'assurer de toute ma vertu
> (*Polyeucte* II.i.346–348).

The word "vertu" here certainly means duty, whether it be chastity, obedience, or fidelity, but in proximity to the idea of Sévère's power over her, it also connotes Pauline's microcosmic power, her power of self-mastery. Pauline represents her struggle for self-mastery in striking political and military imagery:

> [Ma vertu] vaincra sans doute;
> Ce n'est pas le succès que mon âme redoute:
> Je crains ce dur combat et ces troubles puissants
> Que fait déjà chez moi la révolte des sens
> (*Polyeucte* II.i.353–356).

The sublime conceit here, in Act II, Scene i, as well as Act II, Scene ii, is the soul as microcosm of the body politic. Hence Pauline's self-mastery is not mere temperance. Her inner turmoil is likened to a civil war; her senses have revolted. As a woman, Pauline seems to say, she is still susceptible to the powers or merits which Sévère possesses. His merits are plain for the eyes to see. Similar imagery recurs in her frank avowal to Sévère himself (*Polyeucte* II.ii). Formerly, in Rome, Pauline was discerning enough to perceive the "illustres marques" which made Sévère preferable "aux plus heureux monarques" (II.ii.469–470). This is still the case. Her senses are in a seditious turmoil (II.ii.504). The sovereignty of her reason can be restored only at the price of tyranny over her senses (II.ii.500–502). It is her frank recognition of Sévère's greatness and, further, her confidence that she will have the strength to master her feelings, which show Pauline to be magnanimous. She has a worthy opponent, "il faut combattre un

ennemi que j'aime" (II.i.357), so this is the right occasion on which to display her own greatness.

The political and military imagery that represents the state of Pauline's soul is all the more striking when one considers that, despite the glory won by fulfilling her duty, Pauline characterizes the victory over her feelings as tyranny. The paradox is that the sublime virtue which makes Pauline so extraordinary, and hence the peer of Sévère, also prevents her from returning his affection. Pauline's superlative virtue, as well as Sévère's, are subordinated to the narrow demands of the patriarchal family and State. Like an unworthy sovereign, Félix is constantly imposing his decisions on his exceptional daughter and yet demands obedience merely out of duty, not because his decisions display any real prudence. The striking imagery of Pauline's speeches shows the body politic mirrored in her soul. We need only complete the analogy. Reason, the father, the sovereign, has unjustly repressed the senses, the daughter, the nobility. This last term of the analogy becomes plausible when one juxtaposes the political turmoil represented in *Polyeucte* with the lingering political turmoil caused by the Protestant reformation in France, not to mention Richelieu's harsh repression of nobles who continued to challenge royal authority.

As an unrecognized and unrewarded great soul, Pauline stands in a paradigmatic relation to all who are unjustly devalued in the body politic. Presumably, like the nobility, Pauline rises to greater and greater heights of self-mastery. Félix keeps raising the bar higher and higher. In Act V, Pauline refuses to lose face either to Polyeucte or to Félix—her threatened suicide would be a way to show herself more magnanimous than Polyeucte, who believes martyrdom to be salvation, and more so than Félix as well, who is putting Polyeucte to death out of narrow self-interest. For Pauline, on the other hand, death would be the ultimate sacrifice to the patriarchy. Were this to happen, Pauline's greatness would in effect outstrip the boundaries imposed on it by the patriarchy. This is why God must intervene at the end. His recognition of her worthiness recuperates her for the patriarchy.

So, while Pauline's actions are quite restricted (it is not so much what she does as what she chooses not to do), she herself represents her loyalty and obedience in vivid imagery that depicts her decision as an active and heroic struggle which, except for God, would have gone unrecognized and unrewarded by her husband and her father. Pauline's magnanimity reveals the patriarchy of the body politic to be tyranny.

Camille, on the other hand, chooses death over subjugation to an unjust patriarchy. One of the more sublime moments in Corneille's *Horace* occurs when Camille decides to revolt against her father in Act IV, Scene iv, and to confront her brother in Act IV, Scene v. Having suffered the cruel dilemma of choosing between brother and fiancé in the first three acts, Camille experiences a devastating reversal of fortune in Act IV, Scene ii. The early reports of Curiace's victory are revealed to be false, and thus Camille's plans for marriage are buried with Curiace. Her father, the elder Horace, shows her no compassion. Camille's anger is aroused when she reflects on what Roman virtue asks of her in these devastating circumstances:

> On demande ma joie en un jour si funeste.
> Il me faut applaudir aux exploits du vainqueur,
> Et baiser une main qui me perce le cœur
> (*Horace* IV.iv.1232–1234).

This expectation is not just unfeeling; it is humiliating. Not only has the most celebrated Alban warrior been taken from Camille, but, adding insult to injury, she is expected to honor her brother Horace for it. How can this be? How can it be an honor for Camille to honor her brother, when his increase in prestige has led to a decrease in her own? Simply, it is an honor for Horace to serve the State, and it is an honor for Camille to be daughter and sister to Roman citizens who in their service to the State have demonstrated their greatness of soul. The patriarchy demands Camille's subordination to father and brother.

Therefore, in truly magnanimous fashion, Camille decides to stake a claim for her own greatness of soul. She frankly declares

her enmity toward a father and a brother who, in her view, have a warped idea of virtue: "la brutalité fait la haute vertu" (*Horace* IV.iv.1242). Camille would rather become "alien" to her father and "unworthy" of her brother:

> Dégénérons, mon coeur, d'un si vertueux père;
> Soyons indigne soeur d'un si généreux frère
> (*Horace* IV.iv.1239–1240).

The epithets "virtuous" and "generous" are delivered with a stinging irony. For Camille, the elder Horace's virtue and the younger Horace's generosity are nothing but over-zealous patriotism. To escape what she considers a perversion of virtue, Camille must escape the patriarchal lineage. Camille therefore "degenerates." She becomes "fatherless" and potentially "state-less." She must degenerate from the patriarchy if she is to demonstrate her superior virtue, her superlative source of power, in other words, her magnanimity.

Camille clearly demonstrates the power of her soul when she thunders a curse down on Rome, her eloquence exhibiting flashes of the sublime:

> Rome, l'unique objet de mon ressentiment!
> Rome, à qui vient ton bras d'immoler mon amant!
> Rome, qui t'a vu naître, et que ton coeur adore!
> Rome enfin que je hais parce qu'elle t'honore!
> Puissent tous ses voisins ensemble conjurés
> Saper ses fondements encor mal assurés!
> Et si ce n'est assez de toute l'Italie,
> Que l'Orient contre elle à l'Occident s'allie;
> Que cent peuples unis des bouts de l'univers
> Passent pour la détruire et les monts et les mers!
> Qu'elle-même sur soi renverse ses murailles,
> Et de ses propres mains déchire ses entrailles
> (*Horace* IV.v.1301–1312).

The emotion is vehement; the tone, majestic and fiery. The curse on Camille's lips reveals a grand and sweeping vision. In the

repetitive apostrophe, Camille reverses the value of Rome, progressively making it an object of hatred for the whole universe. What makes this vision particularly grand is its dramatic irony. Though merely expressing a wish, Camille is foretelling the history of Rome. Even more, she prefigures her own death in the personification of the city, with her guts ripped out by her own hands—a figurative suicide, but a literal fratricide.

The power of Camille's eloquence, and hence her soul, is made all too plain by her brother's murderous reaction. This is when we take the true measure of Horace's soul. As Valère argues, what Roman citizen is safe to criticize Rome if Horace will not brook his own sister's dissent (*Horace* V.1501–1502)? Does Horace's great merit put him above the law? To be sure, Valère is not proposing to cut off the State's right arm. Nor would Tulle allow it. In that case, however, Horace's assassination of Camille is excused by reason of state, not by love for country, as the elder Horace argues (*Horace* V.iii.1655). The elder Horace is trying to defend his son against Valère's charges of "aggression" and "arrogance," qualities which Aristotle sees as typical of mere pretenders to magnanimity (Aristotle, *Ethics* IV.iii.1124a30). There is nothing noble or magnanimous about reason of state.

Camille may very well have succeeded in demonstrating her brother's so-called virtue to be mere brutality. But what about Camille herself? Like Curiace, she is "un coeur abattu" (*Horace* IV.iv.1241). Camille and Curiace represent two kinds of defiance which the State cannot brook. Curiace's defiance consists in his loyalty to another State. But Camille's defiance, while certainly colored by the death of her beloved Curiace, threatens the patriarchal State. Horace recognized that threat. Camille, in expressing her unspeakable wish, had become "un monstre qu'il faut étouffer en naissant" (*Horace* IV.vi.1334). Camille is a female rebel. As Joan DeJean observes, in a period marked by fantasies and fears of female sedition (DeJean 11–17), Camille's rejection of the patriarchy and the State gives her the appearance of an Amazon. The Amazonian heroine belongs to no community, is

anti-hierarchical, solitary, and self-serving, and rebels within the society she seeks to undermine (DeJean 41–42).

This resonates with Bénichou's idea of an "archaic" virtue, marked by power and independence, which deeply appealed to the nobility of the sword. The source of honor is no longer the patriarchal State and family. It is more individualist. It conceals a deeper hubris. It consists of a desire for autonomy and self-sufficiency usually reserved for the State, but now appropriated by the microcosmic source of power, the great soul, that would be a law unto itself. The *megalopsuchos* is self-sufficient; he just accepts what honors the State has to offer since "they have nothing greater to award" (Aristotle, *Ethics* IV.iii.1224a9). Similarly, the Amazon is a great soul, self-sufficient and noble, exiled to the marches of the classical imagination. Camille appears momentarily self-sufficient, proud, in the lineaments of the Amazon only to be immediately snuffed out by a homicidal ambush.

**Corneille's Feminist Revaluation**

Corneille's representation of Pauline and Camille as magnanimous heroines may be considered a feminist[10] revaluation of the classical virtues, provided we take such a representation as a glorification of women in the social and political arenas. Strong reactions to Corneille's magnanimous heroines, such as Scudéry's violent diatribe against Chimène during the *Querelle du 'Cid*,' can be explained by the threat which self-sufficient, seditious women pose to patriarchal values. If women indeed participated in armed rebellion, as Joan DeJean maintains they did before and during the Fronde (DeJean 36), we should not discount the threatening nature of such a revaluation. Armed Protestants, women warriors,

---

[10] I am following Joan DeJean's lead here; cf. *Tender Geographies*, 6: "I will use 'feminist' to describe two related enterprises: governmental and military endeavors by women [...] and creative writing that either glorifies female political daring or attempts to translate political activity into literary terms."

bellicose great nobles—these are all palpable and respectable threats to the most-Christian, patriarchal, monarchal State.

The mere presence of magnanimous women in Corneille's tragic theater, however, constitutes, in my view, a positive revaluation on the social and political level precisely because it entails a revaluation in Aristotelian metaphysics. To grasp just how innovative Corneille is, we need briefly to consider Aristotle's views on women.

Charlotte Witt, in "Form, Normativity, and Gender in Aristotle: A Feminist Perspective," offers a critical perspective on Aristotle's theory of hylomorphism. Rather than approach metaphysics as a paradigm of objectivity, and nature as value-free, Witt argues that "Hylomorphism is an inherently normative theory of reality because, for Aristotle, nature and reality are infused with value" (Witt 121). This perspective allows Witt to reinterpret "the way Aristotle attaches the gender norms of his culture to hylomorphism" (Witt 122). Critics usually look to Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* and his *Politics* to confirm Aristotle's biases: 1) that form is associated with the masculine, and matter with the feminine, and 2) that women are nothing more than "deformed" men. Witt stands the feminist critique of Aristotle on its head by showing how, for Aristotle, women and men must have the same form, since they are the same species (Witt 124). Aristotle lets his own cultural bias infuse his metaphysics in the way he attributes a lesser degree of form to women than to men. The function of a woman is the same function of a man: the soul's activity that expresses reason. But Aristotle does not grant women the same degree of development as he does to men. Women are less because they have developed to a lesser degree the rational parts of the soul responsible for deliberation.

The same cannot be said of Corneille. The playwright gives his heroines ample scope to make life-changing decisions in sublime speeches. Pauline chooses to master the sedition of her senses because she knows the true worth of honor: "il n'est point aux enfers d'horreurs que je n'endure / Plutôt que de souiller une gloire

si pure" (*Polyeucte* IV.v.1343–1344). Such hyperbole is equal to the greatness of her choices. She recognizes Sévère's illustrious merits but bravely chooses to resist him. She is even ready to sacrifice her life to the patriarchy to force Félix to spare Polyeucte and Polyeucte to renounce his faith. Pauline rises to the occasion against worthy adversaries, the magnanimous men around her. The greatness of her choices, coupled with the sublimity of her speeches, points to her greatness of soul. Similarly, the Roman Camille rises up against worthy Roman adversaries. When the Roman State and family no longer offer her a path to honor, she revolts and becomes a stateless and fatherless Amazon. This daring is matched by her elevated and sublime speeches, in which Corneille raises up the soul of Camille: "Pour ce cruel vainqueur n'ayez point de respect; / Loin d'éviter ses yeux, croissez à son aspect" (*Horace* IV.iv.1245–1246). In the curse she pronounces on Rome, we witness a kind of metamorphosis. Her greatness of soul grows before our very eyes.

Corneille has in effect elevated the roles of women in tragedy. His tragic heroines rise to the greatness of the occasion, and they speak like sublime heroines: the greatness of their decisions is matched by the sublimity of their eloquence. To make such decisions, to speak as sublimely as they do, to contend with magnanimous heroes, this very much suggests that Corneille endowed his heroines with great souls. Corneille appears to belong in the ranks of Madeleine de Scudéry and the other pioneers of the *femme forte*.

**Hunter College, CUNY**

## Works Cited

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Terence Irwin. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985.

———. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Trans. George Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

———. *Poetics*. Trans. Stephen Halliwell. Loeb Classical Library, 1995.

Bénichou, Paul. *Morales du grand siècle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1948.

Corneille, Pierre. *Oeuvres complètes*. Ed. André Stegman. Intro. Raymond Lebègue. Paris: Editions du Seuil, coll. "l'Intégrale, 1963.

———. *Trois discours sur le poème dramatique*. Eds. Bénédicte Louvat and Marc Escola. Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1999.

DeJean, Joan. *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Dubrovsky, Serge. *Corneille et la dialectique du héros*. Paris: Editions du Gallimard, 1963.

Frede, Michael. "On Aristotle's Conception of the Soul." *Essays on Aristotle's 'De Anima.'* Eds. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, 93–107.

Fumaroli, Marc. *Héros et Orateurs : Rhétorique et dramaturgie cornéliennes*. Genève: Librairie Droz, 1996.

Hepp, Noémi. "La Notion d'Héroïne." *Onze études sur l'image de la femme dans la littérature française du dix-septième siècle*. Ed. Wolfgang Leiner. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1984, 11–24.

Longinus. *On the Sublime*. Trans. W.H. Fyfe and Donald Russell. Loeb Classical Library, 1995.

Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Ed. Louis Lafuma. Paris: Editions du Seuil, coll. Points, 1962.

Schalk, Ellery. *From Valor to Pedigree: Ideas of Nobility in France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Princeton University Press, 1986.

Witt, Charlotte. "Form, Normativity, and Gender in Aristotle: A Feminist Perspective." *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*. Ed. Cynthia A. Freeland. Penn State University Press, 1998, 118–137.

**Mme de Lafayette et la condition humaine:**
**Lecture pascalienne de *La Princesse de Clèves*.**

**par**
**Francis Mathieu**

C'est le miracle de ce roman qu'il soit à la fois si réservé et si ému, si simple et si complexe, si lumineux et si profond.
(Jean Fabre)

Malgré la profusion de travaux publiés à ce jour sur *La Princesse de Clèves*, la fascination de la critique pour le chef d'œuvre de Mme de Lafayette demeure intacte au vingt-et-unième siècle. Enigmatique et ambigüe, l'œuvre maîtresse de la romancière a fait l'objet de nombreux débats et interprétations idéologiques et philosophiques depuis sa parution en 1678. Comme l'a démontré John Campbell,[1] une telle versatilité a tendance à interdire toute conclusion formelle. A partir de ce constat, pouvons-nous espérer proposer une interprétation convaincante à *La Princesse de Clèves* ? La présente étude propose de relever ce défi en retraçant la source originelle d'une des pistes de lecture philosophique et spirituelle du roman dans un texte oublié de la critique.

Si nous lirons *La Princesse de Clèves* à la lumière des *Pensées* de Pascal, afin de démontrer que Mme de Lafayette a effectué un travail d'insertion romanesque du concept du « divertissement »,

---

[1] Voir le bel article intitulé « Round up the Usual Suspects : the Search for an Ideology in *La Princesse de Clèves* », dans lequel John Campbell énumère les mouvements de pensée et de philosophie les plus souvent avancés afin de donner un sens au roman et à ses protagonistes. Le critique s'avise de les contraster les uns aux autres pour conclure qu'aucune de ces pistes de lecture ne s'avère entièrement convaincante.

notre texte pascalien de référence ne sera pas une de ses éditions modernes. Il ne s'agira donc pas de consulter les éditions Brunschvicg, Lafuma ou Sellier, mais de puiser à la source de l'édition de Port-Royal, celle-là même dont Mme de Lafayette a pu disposer dès 1670.

Nous savons que Mme de Lafayette vouait une grande admiration aux *Pensées* de Pascal.[2] Que l'œuvre posthume du philosophe soit un intertexte du roman, c'est bien ce que certains critiques ont suggéré. Roger Francillon, Jean Mesnard et Philippe Sellier, entre autres érudits, ont souligné l'ascendance pascalienne de *La Princesse de Clèves*.[3] Néanmoins, cette piste de lecture est loin d'avoir révélé tous ses secrets. Malgré la pertinence des remarques de la critique à ce sujet, celles-ci restent assez générales. En outre, elles ne renvoient jamais à l'édition de Port-Royal. Une analyse systématique de *La Princesse de Clèves* comme réécriture romanesque du divertissement, tel qu'on le trouvait dans le texte pascalien auquel les lecteurs du dix-septième siècle avaient accès, fait donc défaut.

Cette démarche intertextuelle exigera de cibler des notions et un champ lexical pascaliens déterminés, dont la présence dans le roman de Mme de Lafayette ne saurait être due au seul hasard.

---

[2] Les travaux des biographes de Mme de Lafayette démontrent qu'elle avait lu et apprécié Pascal. Bernard Pingaud décrit la romancière comme une fervente lectrice de Pascal (43). Selon Roger Duchêne, Mme de Lafayette avait été une enthousiaste lectrice des *Provinciales*, avant d'être une grande admiratrice des *Pensées* (96).

[3] Bernard Pingaud affirme que Pascal est le maître à penser de la romancière (62). Philippe Sellier déclare que Mme de Lafayette admire Pascal (Introduction 7). De même, Roger Francillon (205), Jean Mesnard (*Culture* 555) et Béatrice Didier (83) concluent que la morale de Pascal exerce une influence prépondérante sur l'écrivaine. Enfin, Bernard Laudy affirme que l'univers de *La Princesse de Clèves* est dominé par le divertissement pascalien (126).

Nous serons alors en mesure d'offrir une nouvelle compréhension des protagonistes. Une analyse détaillée de la société de cour ainsi que de son joyau, le duc de Nemours, par le biais du divertissement, mettra en relief l'asservissement de ce personnage à la passion amoureuse. Au de-là de la condamnation des dangers de cette passion, nous verrons que le rôle joué par l'obstacle dans la psychologie amoureuse de ce personnage peut être analysé comme un symptôme du divertissement. La lumière que jette la philosophie pascalienne sur M. de Nemours appelle alors à réévaluer les événements qui ont troublé la critique depuis la parution du roman : le refus final de la princesse de Clèves, ainsi que sa retraite de la cour et du monde. Nous essayerons ainsi de donner un sens éthique et spirituel aux décisions controversées de Mme de Clèves, qui désorientent souvent lecteurs et critiques et continuent d'alimenter la polémique autour de cette œuvre.

**Le défi des Pensées :**

Prendre le divertissement pascalien comme constitutif du personnage de Nemours promet de jeter une nouvelle lumière sur *La Princesse de Clèves*. Néanmoins, la démarche doit se plier à une condition primordiale. Dans la mesure où un gouffre béant sépare l'édition originale des *Pensées* de ses éditions modernes, en matière d'architecture comme de contenu, le texte pascalien qui servira de référence doit être choisi en conséquence. Alors que les critiques qui affirment que *Les Pensées* ont exercé une influence conséquente sur le roman de Mme de Lafayette font référence aux versions modernes du texte de Pascal,[4] une analyse détaillée ne saurait quant à elle s'appuyer sur ces éditions. Il convient au contraire de retourner à la source du premier texte imprimé des

[4] Par exemple, lorsque Jean Mesnard cite un passage des *Pensées* dans l'introduction à son édition de *La Princesse de Clèves* afin de montrer la potentielle influence de Pascal sur Mme de Lafayette, il renvoie aux éditions modernes établies par Lafuma et Brunschvicg (38). Il en va de même pour Roger Francillon, dont les quelques références à Pascal renvoient à l'édition Chevalier des *Pensées*.

*Pensées* : l'édition de Port-Royal parue en 1670, huit ans avant la parution de *La Princesse de Clèves*.

La version des *Pensées* que les lecteurs du dix-septième siècle avaient sous les yeux diffère de manière radicale des éditions modernes du texte. Rappelons que si le projet de Pascal devait constituer au final un grand ouvrage sur la religion, celui-ci est resté inachevé. Après son décès, les proches de l'écrivain se sont donc retrouvés face à une ébauche de livre, dispersée en multiples liasses et fragments, qui présentaient divers degrés de complétude. Les agencer au sein d'un ensemble cohérent relevait du défi. Il fallut donc organiser et ordonner ce matériel de manière à établir un texte publiable. Dans l'introduction de leur reproduction de l'édition de Port-Royal, Georges Couton et Jean Jehasse expliquent que les éditeurs avaient alors donné aux *Pensées* une forme capable d'en faciliter la lecture, et d'en assurer le succès (10). Certains passages furent purement et simplement écartés, alors que la grande majorité des autres fut remaniée. Les éditeurs ne souhaitant pas proposer un texte « en morceaux », décision fut prise de lier les fragments sélectionnés par l'adjonction d'entités textuelles qui n'étaient pas de la main de Pascal. De plus, il fut décidé de terminer certains textes inachevés et d'en développer d'autres, restés au stade embryonnaire, de manière à les rendre présentables. Pour finir, les morceaux du manuscrit pascalien ainsi sélectionnés, tissés, complétés, voire même réécrits, et regroupés selon le jugement de ce premier groupe d'éditeurs furent ensuite soumis à l'approbation d'évêques et de prélats. Or ces derniers censurèrent certains passages et exigèrent de nombreuses modifications et remaniements (Couton-Jehasse 10).

De leur côté, les éditeurs modernes des *Pensées* se sont efforcés de rétablir le texte pascalien originel. Dans le but de fournir un texte aussi proche que possible de ce que Pascal avait laissé, les éditions modernes ont fait l'objet de minutieux travaux de reconstitution. Cette entreprise a nécessité, entre autres choses, un travail de restauration dont l'objectif consistait à éliminer toutes les interventions, les retouches et les ajouts postérieurs au décès de Pascal. Ainsi, les savantes recherches de Léon Brunschvicg, de Louis Lafuma ou de Philippe Sellier ont abouti à la composition

d'un texte respectant l'architecture que Pascal semblait avoir prévue : « Les éditeurs modernes ont donné un texte qui s'est approché du texte pascalien jusqu'à la certitude » (Couton-Jehasse 9). Les éditions modernes présentent donc l'avantage d'avoir restitué un texte des plus authentiques, rassemblant la totalité des fragments qui nous sont parvenus, ordonnés de manière à respecter scrupuleusement le projet de l'auteur. Retrouver l'édition de Port-Royal dans ces éditions relève donc du défi.[5]

Malgré l'évidente supériorité des éditions modernes, l'étude des *Pensées* comme intertexte de *La Princesse de Clèves* requiert d'avoir entre les mains le texte même auquel avaient accès les lecteurs du dix-septième siècle, dont Mme de Lafayette.[6] Si l'édition des *Pensées* de 1670 n'intéresse guère la critique habituellement, elle s'avère en revanche plus pertinente à ce sujet que les éditions modernes. Ainsi, les impressions formées au contact du texte moderne sont confirmées et même renforcées par l'étude de l'édition de Port-Royal.[7] Comme nous le constaterons, certains passages qui ont disparu des éditions modernes sont tout à

---

[5] A en croire Georges Couton et Jean Jehasse, une telle entreprise serait quasiment impossible : « on défie qui que ce soit, même s'il consent à y passer un temps énorme, à retrouver le texte de 1670 dans les éditions modernes, si complètes soient-elles. On le défie aussi de retrouver l'architecture de l'édition de 1670 » (9).

[6] Georges Couton et Jean Jehasse affirment en outre que l'édition de Port-Royal présente l'intérêt d'avoir été préparée par des individus « qui avaient vécu dans l'entourage de Pascal, fréquenté sa famille, recueilli des traditions, ou même l'avaient entendu parler de ses projets » (10).

[7] Les affinités qui lient *La Princesse de Clèves* aux *Pensées* se concentrent au chapitre XXVI de l'édition de Port-Royal, intitulé *Misère de l'homme*. Le défi lancé par Georges Couton et Jean Jehasse (voir notre note 5) s'avère en fait tout à fait relevable, dans la mesure où des pans entiers du chapitre *Misère de l'homme*, applicables à M. de Nemours, sont aisément identifiables dans l'édition Sellier, notamment.

fait éclairants. La référence au texte de 1670 ayant donc écarté l'obstacle de la disparité des éditions, passons maintenant à *La Princesse de Clèves*, dont le prologue peut être interprété comme une mise en forme romanesque du concept pascalien de divertissement.

**Le divertissement et le monde de la cour :**

Le microcosme de la cour tel qu'il est dépeint dans *La Princesse de Clèves* invite à une lecture en filigrane de la profondeur éthique et spirituelle que lui confère le lexique de Pascal. Comme le suggèrent Jean Mesnard, Philippe Sellier et Eric Van Der Schuren,[8] Mme de Lafayette place immédiatement son roman sous le signe du divertissement pascalien. Les premiers paragraphes de *La Princesse de Clèves* peuvent être lus comme une ouverture codée, dans laquelle la romancière met en œuvre d'astucieux procédés métanarratifs, grâce auxquels le texte parle de lui-même. Tout comme la cour est désignée comme le lieu privilégié du divertissement dans l'édition de Port-Royal (*Misère de l'homme* 314),[9] Mme de Lafayette associe cet univers au divertissement dès la première page du roman : « C'était tous les jours des *parties de chasse* et de paume, des ballets, des courses de bagues, ou de semblables *divertissements* » (c'est moi qui souligne 69). Ce n'est pas un hasard si Mme de Lafayette choisit la chasse pour ouvrir le bal des activités du divertissement. Dans les *Pensées*, la chasse est en effet l'allégorie par excellence de cette

---

[8] Jean Mesnard affirme que « Tout ce qui, dans *La Princesse de Clèves*, caractérise la vie de cour, s'ordonne donc à [la] lumière [du divertissement] » (Introduction 38). De même, Philippe Sellier identifie l'ouverture du roman comme un lieu d'expression du divertissement pascalien (Introduction 17). Eric Van Der Schuren précise que « Sous l'hyperbole de la magnificence et de la galanterie, s'insinue, dès le deuxième paragraphe de *La Princesse de Clèves*, le thème obsédant du divertissement » (95).

[9] Toutes les citations de Pascal, sauf indications contraires, renvoient au chapitre XXVI, *Misère de l'homme*, de l'édition de Port-Royal.

conception de la condition humaine : « de là vient que tant de personnes se plaisent au jeu, à la chasse, et aux autres divertissements qui occupent leur âme » (*Misère de l'homme* 319). En outre, chez Pascal, les jeux de balles, comme le jeu de paume, et par extension les autres activités ludiques mentionnées par la narratrice de *La Princesse de Clèves*, renferment, comme la chasse, la connotation du divertissement : « Quel pensez vous que soit l'objet de ces gens qui jouent à la *paûme*, avec tant d'application d'esprit, et d'agitation de corps ? » (c'est moi qui souligne, *Misère de l'homme* 326). Si ce passage a été écarté des éditions modernes des *Pensées*, notons en revanche que ces dernières ont restitué le passage suivant, dont Mme de Lafayette ne disposait pas, dans lequel chasse et jeux de balle sont les modes de représentation figurée du divertissement : « Les hommes s'occupent à suivre une *balle* et un *lièvre*. C'est le plaisir même des *rois* » (c'est moi qui souligne 73)[10].

Avant d'en venir au cas particulier de M. de Nemours, citons encore un passage crucial du roman qui, selon Jean Mesnard, fait allusion au divertissement pascalien « d'une manière quasi nécessaire » (Introduction 37). Il s'agit de la célèbre description de la cour suivante, qui semble peindre ce microcosme tumultueux comme un lieu où règne en maître le divertissement : « Personne n'était tranquille, ni indifférent ; on songeait à s'élever, à plaire, à servir, ou à nuire ; on ne connaissait ni *l'ennui* ni l'oisiveté, et on était *toujours occupé* des plaisirs ou des intrigues » (c'est moi qui souligne 81). Ce passage capital contient notamment le terme « *ennui* », mot-clé du lexique pascalien du divertissement. Il traduit la nécessité à laquelle est réduit l'être humain de remplir son existence de quelque occupation, afin d'éviter d'avoir à penser à lui-même et à la condition humaine. Comparons avec le texte pascalien de 1670 :

---

[10] Il n'est pas impossible que la référence royale ait été jugée trop risquée par les éditeurs du texte de Port-Royal, et donc évincée au profit d'un passage politiquement neutre.

> Ce luy est une peine insupportable d'estre obligée de vivre avec soy, et de penser à soy. Ainsi tout son soin est de s'oublier soy-mesme, et de laisser couler ce temps si court et si précieux sans reflexion, en s'occupant de choses qui l'empéchent d'y penser. C'est l'origine de toutes les occupations tumultuaires des hommes, et de tout ce qu'on appelle divertissement. (Misère de l'homme 312)

Si l'on suit le raisonnement de Pascal, l'*ennui* est insupportable dans la mesure où rien n'empêche plus alors l'individu de se retrouver face à lui-même, à son inhérente misère, bref à la condition humaine, dont la mort est l'élément le plus insoutenable : « Sans cela nous serions dans l'*ennuy*, et cet ennuy nous porteroit à chercher quelque moyen plus solide d'en sortir. *Mais le divertissement nous trompe, nous amuse, et nous fait arriver insensiblement à la mort* » (c'est moi qui souligne *Misère de l'homme* 328). Il n'est donc pas innocent que Mme de Lafayette décrive les courtisans comme des individus constamment occupés, de manière à ne jamais souffrir de cette maladie de l'âme que Pascal nomme l'*ennui*.

**Le Duc de Nemours ou le divertissement incarné :**

Le divertissement marquant l'ensemble de la cour au fer rouge, il est donc logique que ce concept trouve son illustration la plus éloquente dans le personnage qui est l'incarnation de cet univers : M. de Nemours, que Jean Mesnard présente comme « l'abrégé » de la cour (introduction 51). Ce prince a si parfaitement maîtrisé honnêteté, civilité et galanterie, qu'il est le plus beau produit de la civilisation des mœurs. En outre, l'art de connaître les hommes, que M. de Nemours cultive tout en soustrayant sa propre âme à l'inquisition d'autrui, fait de lui un éminent virtuose du « paraître », ce qui permet à Nathalie Grande de remarquer que « le personnage semble ainsi se réduire à sa pure apparence » (91). M. de Nemours se distingue en effet dans le port du masque virtuel, censé neutraliser les signes du corps qui trahissent l'« être » et permettent à autrui d'accéder à l'âme, où résident les passions. La

maîtrise de soi et le raffinement des mœurs aristocratiques servent donc, entre autres, à camoufler les dérèglements des passions.

C'est que derrière cette façade mondaine, M. de Nemours incarne l'âme dévorée par la passion, état affectif assez puissant pour nuire au jugement et empêcher la raison d'exercer son influence salutaire. Or Pascal signale à plusieurs reprises que les passions constituent le plus emblématique divertissement de soi-même : « Il est vray qu'occupant l'esprit, [les divertissements] le détournent du sentiment de ses maux, ce qui est réel. Mais ils ne l'occupent que parce que l'esprit s'y forme un objet imaginaire de *passion* auquel il s'attache » (c'est moi qui souligne, *Misère de l'homme* 325-26). Dans un autre passage, Pascal indique au sujet de l'homme que le plus efficace divertissement consiste à se former « *un objet de passion*, qui excite son desir, sa colere, sa crainte, son esperance » (c'est moi qui souligne, *Misère de l'homme* 327). Pascal précise également qu' « un amusement languissant et *sans passion* l'ennuira » (c'est moi qui souligne, *Misère de l'homme* 327). La passion amoureuse qui s'empare de M. de Nemours, ainsi que les artifices du paraître qui la dissimule, apparaissent donc comme des symptômes du divertissement.

Le paraître de M. de Nemours camoufle si bien son être, que son corps, et en particulier son visage, ne laissent rien filtrer de son âme. De même, soit ses discours ne révèlent que sa mauvaise foi, soit ils n'expriment que la rhétorique lyrique de la passion en émoi. Ses harangues sont en effet saturées de superlatifs, d'hyperboles et de tournures négatives qui ne manifestent que les subjectives hypertrophies d'un « moi » tuméfié d'amour. Il faut donc chercher ailleurs l'expression intime de son être. C'est le comportement de M. de Nemours qu'il faut analyser, parce que les actes parlent et constituent l'ultime expression de l'être qui paraît. En prenant le divertissement pascalien comme motif des actions de ce personnage, on peut alors mieux démanteler son « paraître », pour reconstituer son « être ». Une telle démarche est rendue possible par les multiples indices dont Mme de Lafayette a constellé le récit de *La Princesse de Clèves*.

**L'allégorie pascalienne de la chasse :**

Le plus allégorique de ces indices fournit un point de départ idéal à notre analyse. Il s'agit de la *chasse*, symbole par excellence de la poursuite amoureuse, à laquelle le duc de Nemours est associé à deux reprises dans le roman. Dans les *Pensées*, Pascal confère une nouvelle résonance à ce lieu commun culturel. Comme nous avons eu l'occasion de le voir précédemment, la chasse est en effet une des allégories en titre du divertissement. Or, en plus du symbolisme traditionnel qui a cours dans *La Princesse de Clèves*, le divertissement est présent à chaque fois que Nemours *chasse*. Ainsi, peu de temps après avoir succombé à sa passion pour Mme de Clèves, le duc disparaît de la cour sous le prétexte qu'il feint « une grande passion pour la chasse » (129), alors qu'il est justement question des « *divertissements* où était toute la Cour » (c'est moi qui souligne 129). Notre *chasseur* en profite même pour glisser à l'oreille de sa *proie* qu'il va à la chasse pour rêver à elle, lorsque la princesse ne se trouve pas à la cour (129). De même, quand M. de Nemours feint de se perdre dans la forêt, afin de se rendre en toute discrétion chez Mme de Clèves à Coulommiers, il est en train de chasser : « Comme ils étaient à la chasse à courir le cerf, M. de Nemours s'égara dans la forêt » (169). Juste avant que n'intervienne cette partie de chasse, la narratrice précise justement que Mme de Mercœur reçoit le duc, accompagné du vidame de Chartres, « avec beaucoup de joie et ne pensa qu'à les *divertir* » (c'est moi qui souligne 169). La répétition d'une telle association de termes ne saurait être attribuée au hasard, et semble indiquer que l'allusion est délibérée.

Lire l'allégorie de la chasse à la lumière du divertissement pascalien permet de jeter une nouvelle lumière sur la passion amoureuse de M. de Nemours. A cet égard, les enseignements que nous procure l'édition de Port-Royal sont édifiants : « Ce n'est pas qu'il y ait en effet du bonheur […], ny qu'on s'imagine que la vraye beatitude soit dans […] le lievre qu'on court. On n'en voudroit pas s'il estoit offert » (*Misère de l'homme* 319–20). Ayant restitué la phrase suivante, les éditions modernes des *Pensées* nous

permettent de saisir le raisonnement de Pascal dans son intégralité : « Raison pourquoi on aime mieux la *chasse* que la *prise* » (c'est moi qui souligne 168). La connotation pascalienne de la chasse suggère que ce n'est pas la possession de Mme de Clèves que recherche en fait M. de Nemours, mais plutôt la traque que motive la passion amoureuse. Selon Pascal, si la « chasse » divertit les êtres humains de leur misère, la « prise », quant à elle, ne les garantit pas de « cette misere interieure et naturelle, qui consiste à ne pouvoir souffrir la veue de soy-mesme. Ce liévre qu'ils auroient achetté ne les garantiroit pas de cette veue ; mais la chasse les en garantit » (*Misère de l'homme* 321).

Une lecture pascalienne de *La Princesse de Clèves* suggère donc que les sensations fortes et les obstacles générés par la passion constituent les échappatoires que cultive inconsciemment M. de Nemours afin d'éviter d'être en face à face avec lui-même, confronté à la condition humaine. Comme l'édition des *Pensées* de 1670 nous l'enseigne, la passion amoureuse du duc est un puissant divertissement : « [les hommes] ne cherchent en cela qu'une occupation violente, et impetueuse qui les détourne de la veue d'eux-mesmes, et […] c'est pour cela qu'ils se proposent un objet attirant qui les charme et qui les occupe tous entiers » (*Misère de l'homme* 321).

**L'ivresse de l'obstacle :**

Si la prise ne compte pas, la lecture de Pascal suggère que les obstacles qui diffèrent indéfiniment celle-ci, en perpétuant la chasse, constituent le moteur de la passion amoureuse :

> Ainsi s'écoule toute la vie. On cherche le repos en combattant quelques *obstacles* ; et si on les a surmontez, le repos devient insupportable. Car, ou l'on pense aux miseres qu'on a, ou à celles dont est menacé. Et quand on se verroit mesme assez à l'abry de toutes parts, l'ennuy de son autorité privée ne laisseroit pas de sortir du fonds du cœur, où il a ses racines naturelles, et de remplir l'esprit de son

venin » (c'est moi qui souligne, *Misère de l'homme* 323).

Ingrédient fondamental de cette conception de la condition humaine, les obstacles sont à l'âme ce qu'un stupéfiant est au corps. Ils génèrent donc un état d'euphorie qui mène l'être diverti à l'apogée de l'ivresse du divertissement, tout en entraînant un phénomène de dépendance. L'affaiblissement des obstacles marque en revanche la montée en puissance de l'ennui et des misères qui lui sont inhérentes.

Le paradigme pascalien de l'obstacle est illustré dans plusieurs personnages de *La Princesse de Clèves*, dont le vidame de Chartres et le prince de Clèves, mais c'est chez M. de Nemours qu'il trouve sa représentation la plus éloquente. La narratrice (ainsi que plusieurs personnages) nous informent que Nemours compte la galanterie parmi ses meilleurs talents, qu'il ne laisse aucune femme indifférente (72), et que ses conquêtes ne se comptent plus. En passant constamment d'un projet de séduction à un autre, le duc erre en fait d'obstacles en obstacles. Cette forme continue de divertissement constitue ainsi un remède galant contre l'ennui.

La narration de sa conquête potentielle de la reine d'Angleterre est la première illustration dans le roman de sa dépendance à l'obstacle, probant symptôme du divertissement. Le dernier des passages qui marquent l'intérêt de Nemours pour cette intrigue secondaire ne laisse aucune ambiguïté : « Son esprit s'était insensiblement accoutumé à la grandeur de cette fortune et, au lieu qu'il l'avait rejetée d'abord comme une chose où il ne pouvait parvenir, les difficultés s'étaient effacées de son imagination, et *il ne voyait plus d'obstacles* » (c'est moi qui souligne 90). Ainsi se termine pour le moins subitement le projet de séduire et d'épouser Elizabeth I. Or c'est au moment précis où s'estompent les obstacles que M. de Nemours abandonne ce glorieux dessein. La référence aux *Pensées* permet donc de donner de la perspective à un rebondissement qui stupéfie alors toute la cour[11]. Le duc se met

[11] Les digressions et les récits intercalés disséminés dans le roman ont fait l'objet de virulentes critiques au moment de sa parution.

alors en quête d'autres difficultés apparemment insurmontables, et c'est précisément là que toute son attention se tourne vers Mme de Clèves, parce qu'elle représente la promesse de nouveaux obstacles infranchissables.

L'héroïne incarne en effet l'obstacle par excellence. L'éducation que lui a conférée sa mère l'a dotée d'une vertu inégalée, qui donne l'impression que la jeune femme se trouve hors de portée : « Madame de Chartres joignait à la sagesse de sa fille une conduite si exacte pour toutes les bienséances qu'elle achevait de la faire paraître une personne où l'on ne pouvait atteindre » (89).

L'intrigue de la reine d'Angleterre procure une démonstration du rôle joué par l'obstacle chez l'être diverti, on l'a vu. En outre, elle peut être interprétée comme une annonce de ce qui arriverait à Mme de Clèves si les obstacles qui se dressent en travers de sa conquête venaient à être levés. Si cet avertissement est uniquement destiné au lecteur, les récits intérieurs, et surtout la lettre de Mme de Thémines, illustrent tous d'une manière ou d'une autre la dépendance à l'obstacle, et fonctionnent comme autant d'avertissements destinés à l'héroïne. Mme de Clèves apprend de ces exemples, les médite et identifie le phénomène du divertissement chez son amant. Les symptômes de cette affection de l'âme lui fournissent alors les arguments nécessaires au refus qu'elle lui oppose.

**Le « non » à Nemours, ou le refus du divertissement :**

Ainsi, lors de l'entretien final au cours duquel les deux protagonistes peuvent enfin s'avouer leur passion mutuelle, la princesse soutient que les hommes ne conservent pas de passion dans le mariage, parce que cet ultime attachement marque la fin

---

On s'est notamment interrogé sur la présence et l'utilité de l'intrigue de la reine d'Angleterre, et ce encore récemment. Alain Niderst se plaint par exemple de son insertion dans le roman : « on croirait que le grand problème est de savoir si M. de Nemours va épouser Elisabeth d'Angleterre » (*Les défauts* 55).

des obstacles. L'héroïne affirme que ce sont les obstacles qui ont garanti la constance du duc : « je crois même que les obstacles ont fait votre constance. Vous en avez assez trouvé pour vous animer à vaincre ; et mes actions involontaires […] vous ont donné assez d'espérance pour ne pas vous rebuter » (231). La perspicacité de cette analyse est confirmée par une confidence que la narratrice omnisciente avait auparavant faite au lecteur : « peut-être que des regards et des paroles obligeantes n'eussent pas tant augmenté l'amour de M. de Nemours que faisait [la] conduite austère [de Mme de Clèves] » (178). Les péripéties amoureuses vécues par M. de Nemours formeraient donc le philtre d'amour idéal, en ce que sa passion est portée à son paroxysme par une succession d'obstacles qui empêchent la prise, sans pour autant briser l'espoir de conquête. Le vital équilibre entre l'obstacle et l'espoir mis en relief par Mme de Clèves trouve un écho dans une maxime de La Rochefoucauld : « L'amour aussi bien que le feu ne peut subsister sans mouvement continuel, et il cesse de vivre dès qu'il cesse d'*espérer* ou de *craindre* » (c'est moi qui souligne 75). La passion amoureuse du duc de Nemours expirerait donc si une victoire totale, comme le mariage, abattait tous les obstacles, ou si l'héroïne disparaissait complètement, comme ce sera le cas à la suite de sa retraite.

Mme de Clèves ne cesse de réitérer cette crainte, que ce soit pour réfuter les arguments de Nemours, ou pour subjuguer sa propre passion, qui ne cessera de l'assaillir jusqu'au plus profond de sa retraite. Cet argument perspicace laisse pourtant le duc impassible : « je n'ai rien à répondre, Madame, reprit-il, quand vous me faites voir que vous craignez des malheurs » (230). Cette édifiante réponse ne peut que confirmer Mme de Clèves dans ses soupçons. Le silence du duc sur la question s'avère des plus éloquents, et peut être interprété comme une reconnaissance implicite des arguments de la princesse. Si, comme le remarque John Lyons, on ne peut guère savoir comment agirait M. de Nemours dans le contexte d'une relation amoureuse avec la princesse (399), sa psychologie amoureuse suggère en revanche que le divertissement gouverne sa vie. Or Pascal décrit ce phénomène comme une spirale infernale, dont ne peuvent ni se libérer, ni prendre conscience ceux qui en sont la proie :

> On croit chercher sincerement le repos ; et l'on ne cherche en effet que l'agitation. Les hommes ont un instinct secret qui les porte à chercher le divertissement et l'occupation au dehors, qui vient du ressentiment de leur misere continuelle. Et ils ont un autre instinct secret qui reste de la grandeur de notre premiere nature, qui leur fait connoistre, que le bonheur n'est en effet que dans le repos. Et de ces deux instincts contraires, il se forme en eux un projet confus, qui se cache à leur veue dans le fonds de leur ame, qui les porte à tendre au repos par l'agitation, et à se figurer toûjours, que la satisfaction qu'ils n'ont point leur arrivera, si, en surmontant quelques difficultez qu'ils envisagent, ils peuvent s'ouvrir par là la porte du repos (*Misère de l'homme* 322).

M. de Nemours entretiendrait donc inconsciemment la conviction qu'une union avec Mme de Clèves mettrait fin à son agitation, parce qu'un « instinct secret » lui intime de trouver le repos, et qu'il croit pouvoir l'atteindre après avoir surmonté les obstacles qui se dressent en travers de la princesse. Néanmoins, le divertissement n'étant pas la voie du repos, le mariage (ou bien une liaison) avec l'héroïne aplanirait les obstacles, et ramènerait le duc au point de départ de ce cercle vicieux. Ainsi, après « la prise », l'inévitable misère de l'homme se saisirait de M. de Nemours pour l'accabler de son malheur :

> Qu'on choisisse telle condition qu'on voudra, et qu'on y assemble tous les biens, et toutes les satisfactions qui semblent pouvoir contenter un homme. Si celuy qu'on aura mis en cet estat est sans occupation, et sans divertissement, et qu'on le laisse faire reflexion sur ce qu'il est, cette felicité languissante ne le soûtiendra pas. Il tombera par necessité dans des vues affligeantes de l'avenir : et si on ne l'occupe hors de luy, le voila

> necessairement malheureux » (*Misère de l'homme* 317).

Le duc se sentirait alors contraint de raviver sa quête du repos par le franchissement d'autres obstacles, qu'une nouvelle passion lui prodiguerait. C'est précisément ce que pressent Mme de Clèves. Dès lors, l'héroïne se résout à prendre les mesures de prévention qui s'imposent en disant « non » à M. de Nemours.

D'après la philosophie amoureuse à laquelle adhère manifestement Mme de Lafayette, l'amour tend à dépérir quand les obstacles tombent. Par conséquent, un mariage motivé par la passion serait irrévocablement voué à l'échec. Conformément aux idéaux d'Ancien Régime en matière d'hyménée, le mariage d'amour est une aberration pour la romancière. Le cas du malheureux prince de Clèves le confirme. S'il présente l'exception d'un mari qui conserve une passion intacte dans le mariage, la princesse a raison de l'attribuer à la froideur, génératrice d'obstacles, qu'il rencontrait chez elle : « peut-être aussi que sa passion n'avait subsisté que parce qu'il n'en aurait pas trouvé en moi » (231). La lucidité de cette analyse est d'ailleurs confirmée par une confidence que la narratrice omnisciente avait faite au lecteur au début de l'intrigue : « pour être son mari, il ne laissa pas d'être son amant, *parce qu'il avait toujours quelque chose à souhaiter au-delà de sa possession* » (c'est moi qui souligne 89). L'article « amour » de Furetière confirme que le prince de Clèves s'était marié pour des raisons condamnables : « Il s'est marié par *amour*, c'est-à-dire, desavantageusement, et par l'emportement d'une aveugle passion ». Qui plus est, l'héroïne fait valoir l'argument que, contrairement à M. de Clèves, M. de Nemours serait quant à lui assuré de la passion de Mme de Clèves. L'obstacle qui avait garanti l'amour de M. de Clèves dans le mariage ne s'appliquerait donc pas au duc : « Mais je n'aurais pas le même moyen de conserver [votre passion] » (231).

A la lumière de ses arguments, le mariage d'amour qui unirait Mme de Clèves et le duc de Nemours semble inconcevable. Il convient donc de prendre le contre-pied de Valincour, qui au moment de la parution de l'œuvre avait qualifié le refus de

l'héroïne d'invraisemblable. Au contraire, c'est un mariage qui serait invraisemblable, parce que socialement et éthiquement condamnable. D'une part, on ne se marie pas par amour dans la société aristocratique d'Ancien Régime. D'autre part, une telle union marquerait la victoire de la passion en tant qu'entité divertissant l'individu de lui-même, et le détournant de Dieu. A travers le refus infligé à Nemours, Mme de Clèves dit symboliquement « non » au divertissement.

**La Princesse de Clèves ou le repos incarné :**

Roger Francillon souligne à juste titre que la dualité pascalienne de la nature humaine se retrouve dans l'œuvre de Mme de Lafayette, qui est construite sur l'antithèse entre le monde qui se divertit et l'individu qui aspire au repos, entre la fascination pour la passion et le désir de paix intérieur (201). Alors que le duc de Nemours incarne le divertissement, Mme de Clèves incarne quant à elle la quête du repos. Tout comme nombre d'indices révèlent que M. de Nemours est pris dans l'engrenage du divertissement, le récit contient de subtiles indications qui nous apprennent que l'héroïne suit un parcours inverse. Il est par exemple significatif que M. de Nemours sache à propos de Mme de Clèves « qu'il ne la trouverait dans aucune des assemblée et dans aucun des *divertissements* où était toute la Cour » (c'est moi qui souligne 129).

Bien que le divertissement fasse connaître tout son attrait à l'héroïne, c'est vers son antithèse, le repos, que ne cessent de s'orienter ses décisions. Plusieurs passages dans lesquels figure le champ lexical du divertissement en témoignent implicitement : « le *tumulte* de la Cour est si grand et il y a toujours un si grand monde chez vous qu'il est impossible que le corps et l'esprit ne se lassent, et que l'on ne cherche du *repos* », la princesse déclare-t-elle à son mari (c'est moi qui souligne 170). De même, les multiples projets de fuites et de retraites de l'héroïne traduisent un irrépressible attrait pour le repos, comme le prouve le refus final : « Les raisons qu'elle avait de ne point épouser Monsieur de Nemours lui

paraissaient fortes du côté de son devoir et *insurmontables du côté de son repos* » (c'est moi qui souligne 236).

Depuis les pertinentes recherches de Jean Fabre, qui observe que « L'analyse se voit confier toute la charge du roman », et se focalise sur « la connaissance raisonnable des passions » (26), *La Princesse de Clèves* est souvent décrit comme le premier roman d'analyse. Les épisodes introspectifs, qui voient l'héroïne s'interroger sur elle-même, et l'avant-gardisme de leur substance psychologique, contribuent dans une large mesure à conférer une grande profondeur à l'œuvre. Ainsi, au fur et à mesure des exemples qu'elle contemple, de ses expériences, de ses erreurs et de ses analyses, Mme de Clèves atteint une vraie compréhension d'elle-même, et se trouve en mesure de faire des choix autonomes quant à son futur.

L'héroïne accomplit donc tout le contraire de ce que présente Pascal lorsqu'il explique que l'individu s'investit dans les activités du divertissement, au nombre desquelles il faut compter la passion amoureuse, afin de « s'oublier soy-mesme, et de laisser couler ce temps si court et si précieux sans reflexion, en s'occupant de choses qui l'empéchent d'y penser » (*Misère de l'homme* 312). Au contraire, l'héroïne parvient à vivre avec elle-même, à penser à elle-même. Etant données son attachement pour le repos et son aversion pour le divertissement, Mme de Clèves n'incarnerait-t-elle pas l'idée que se fait Pascal de la sagesse dans le contexte de la condition humaine ? Le comportement, les réflexions et les choix de la princesse signalent en effet qu'elle suit un parcours psychologique qui la conduit vers elle-même, et donc vers Dieu, si l'on s'en tient au raisonnement de Pascal. A l'inverse du chemin emprunté par Nemours, Mme de Clèves penche du côté de cet « instinct secret qui reste de la grandeur de notre première nature », qui lui fait connaître « que le bonheur n'est en effet que dans le repos » (*Misère de l'homme* 322). La princesse a saisi que ce n'est ni par la passion, ni par le franchissement des obstacles qu'elle peut « s'ouvrir par là la porte du repos » (*Misère de l'homme* 322).

Après s'être retirée de la cour, Mme de Clèves souffrira d'une grave maladie « qui ne laissait guère d'espérance de sa vie » (237).

L'héroïne y survivra, mais cette ultime épreuve ne fera que conforter sa vision de la condition humaine, et l'éloignera davantage des instruments du divertissement, au premier rang desquels figure la passion amoureuse : « *Les passions* et les engagements du monde lui parurent tels qu'ils paraissent aux *personnes qui ont des vues plus grandes et plus éloignées* » (c'est moi qui souligne 237–38).

**Une retraite toute pascalienne :**

Ayant dit « non » à Nemours, à la passion, et par extension au divertissement, Mme de Clèves n'a d'autre alternative que de quitter définitivement le monde de la cour, univers par excellence du divertissement, afin de cultiver le repos dans la retraite.[12] Ainsi, lorsque M. de Nemours se présente à la porte du couvent où l'héroïne s'est retirée, elle lui fait savoir que « son devoir et son repos s'opposaient au penchant qu'elle avait d'être avec lui » (238). La critique a démontré que le devoir ne joue qu'un rôle secondaire dans les prises de décisions de la princesse. En fait, il sert de prétexte idéal pour masquer à la cour la véritable raison de son départ. C'est donc le repos, qu'elle invoque à plusieurs reprises, qui est la principale motivation des choix de l'héroïne.

---

[12] Mme de Lafayette a minutieusement préparé le lecteur pour la retraite de son héroïne, et ce dès le début de l'intrigue. Son goût prononcé pour la fuite lui vient des exhortations de Mme de Chartres, qui avait engagé sa fille à quitter la cour afin de se prémunir de sa passion pour Nemours : « retirez-vous de la cour, obligez votre mari de vous emmener ; ne craignez pas de prendre des partis trop rudes et trop difficiles, quelque affreux qu'il vous paraissent d'abord : ils seront plus doux dans les suites que les malheurs d'une galanterie » (108). Cette harangue fait une profonde impression sur la princesse, qui opte pour la fuite dès qu'il s'agit de se sortir d'un mauvais pas. Ainsi, on ne recense pas moins de quinze ébauches de retraites dans le texte, qui fonctionnent comme autant d'annonces. Ces répétitions rythment l'ensemble du récit et permettent à Mme de Lafayette d'inscrire la retraite finale à l'extrémité d'un mouvement continu.

Bien que Mme de Clèves meure jeune, nous savons qu'elle vit encore plusieurs années après sa maladie, et qu' « Elle passait une partie de l'année dans cette maison religieuse et l'autre chez elle » (239). Il faut donc atteindre l'épilogue du roman pour qu'intervienne la religion, dont la présence même, ainsi que le rôle, font toujours l'objet d'une polémique animée.[13] La phrase de

[13] La critique est extrêmement divisée à ce sujet. Pour Raymond Picard, la religion est « tranquillement absente » (192). Bernard Laudy considère que le roman est un univers sans dieu (131). Il en va de même pour Serge Doubrovsky (50). Moins catégorique, John Campbell affirme tout de même que « the Christian God is absent » (441). En revanche, nombreux sont les critiques qui, à l'image de Philippe Sellier, allèguent que le final interdit une interprétation séculaire (*Port-Royal* 204). L'héroïne « tourne son âme vers Dieu », d'après Christian Biet (49). Jean Mesnard observe qu' « une note discrètement religieuse s'étend dans les dernières pages » (introduction 56). De même, selon Roger Francillon, « La dimension religieuse est bien réelle » dans les dites pages. Traiter de l'influence de Pascal dans *La Princesse de Clèves* engage également à aborder l'épineuse question du jansénisme. L'omniprésence du divertissement pascalien, aussi prononcé soit-il, ne signifie pas pour autant que Mme de Lafayette soit janséniste. Si l'on en croit les conclusions de son biographe, Roger Duchêne, la romancière n'était pas une chrétienne de la trempe des jansénistes, même si elle les fréquentait et partageait une partie de leur idéologie. Si certains ont cru voir dans les derniers moments de sa vie une conversion, Roger Duchêne apporte des preuves convaincantes du contraire (455–59). On cherche néanmoins parfois à démontrer que le jansénisme se manifeste dans le texte. Alain Niderst conclut que « ce roman maladroit et pessimiste […] est bien plus janséniste que les tragédies raciniennes » (*Le Roman paradoxal* 137). Pour Louis MacKenzie, il s'agit d'un jansénisme diffus, invisible, mais qui façonne le caractère du roman (38). Béatrice Didier interprète l'acharnement de la princesse à examiner ses moindres pensées et à se condamner, ainsi que le refus final, comme autant de preuves de

clôture du roman ne semble pourtant laisser aucun doute sur l'importance que la piété a prise dans l'existence de l'héroïne, qui vit « dans une retraite et des occupations plus saintes que celles des couvents les plus austères » (239).

L'orientation religieuse que prend la vie de Mme de Clèves est l'aboutissement de sa réconciliation avec elle-même et de sa quête pour le repos. Ainsi, la fin du roman est en complète harmonie avec un passage de l'édition de Port-Royal banni des éditions modernes du texte pascalien :

> Car il est vray que c'est une des merveilles de la Religion chrétienne, de réconcilier l'homme avec soy-mesme, en le réconciliant avec Dieu ; de luy rendre la vue de soy-mesme supportable ; et de faire que la solitude et le repos soient plus agréable à plusieurs, que l'agitation et le commerce des hommes » (*Misère de l'homme* 315–16).

La retraite de l'héroïne dans une maison religieuse, loin du libertinage de la cour, n'aurait sans doute pas déplu à Pascal. La pieuse atmosphère des dernières années de Mme de Clèves nous permet de spéculer que la princesse approfondit la voie qu'elle a choisie, selon les enseignements que nous procure l'édition de Port-Royal : « Ce n'est qu'en le portant jusqu'à Dieu, et en le soûtenant dans le sentiment de ses miseres, par l'esperance d'une autre vie, qui l'en doit entierement délivrer » (*Misère de l'homme* 316).

**Conclusion :**

Retracer la présence du divertissement pascalien dans *La Princesse de Clèves* de Mme de Lafayette permet de proposer une

---

jansénisme (78). Philippe Sellier dresse une liste exhaustive de tous les proches et collaborateurs de Mme de Lafayette adhérant au mouvement janséniste, afin de mieux alléguer l'appartenance potentielle de la romancière à ce mouvement spirituel (*Port-Royal* 201).

nouvelle lecture de M. de Nemours. Les actions de ce personnage constituent un véritable discours, et signalent qu'il peut être lu comme une illustration de la condition humaine selon le divertissement de Pascal. Mme de Lafayette semble donc mettre en pratique et exemplifier le concept du divertissement dans son roman. Une telle interprétation vient confirmer l'héroïne dans ses choix, en dévoilant leur dimension éthique et spirituelle. En outre, elle permet de démontrer qu'ils sont la conclusion rationnelle, voire même inévitable, de sa quête du repos et de son rejet d'un monde perverti par le divertissement.

Notons également qu'à l'époque où Mme de Lafayette écrit, elle se trouve dans une situation de seconde classe au niveau culturel et littéraire. D'abord en tant que femme, parce que la participation de la gente féminine à la République des Lettres est fortement contestée. Ensuite parce que Mme de Lafayette pratique le genre du roman, ce « roturier des lettres », pour reprendre l'heureuse expression de Maurice Lever (23). Malgré de tels obstacles, la romancière s'efforce de doter *La Princesse de Clèves* d'une aura de spiritualité, en joignant au plaisir esthétique et à l'éloquence lyrique des passions une méditation d'ordre éthique sur la condition humaine. A travers le dilemme moral de son héroïne et la référence implicite à la pensée spirituelle de Pascal, Mme de Lafayette affirme la capacité des femmes à exercer la raison et faire des choix moraux. Notre lecture rejoindrait donc ici les interprétations du roman orientées vers l'étude des femmes de Katharine Jensen et Faith Beasley.[14]

**Southwestern University**

---

[14] Voir Faith Beasley: *Revising Memory: Women's Fiction and Memoirs in Seventeenth- Century France*; ainsi que Katharine Jensen: « Making Sense of the Ending: Passion, Virtue, and Female Subjectivity » dans *Approaches to Teaching Lafayette's The Princess of Clèves*.

**Works Cited**

Beasley, Faith. *Revising Memory: Women's Fiction and Memoirs in Seventeenth-Century France*. New Brunswick and London : Rutgers UP, 1990.

Biet, Christian. « Droit et fiction : la représentation du mariage dans La Princesse de Clèves ». *Littératures classiques supplément* (1990) : 33–54.

Campbell, John. « Round up the Usual Suspects : the Search for an Ideology in La Princesse de Clèves ». *French Studies* LX (2006) : 437–52.

Couton, Georges et Jean Jehasse, eds. « Introduction. » *Pensées de M. Pascal sur la religion, et sur quelques autres sujets. Edition de Port-Royal* (1670). Par Blaise Pascal. Saint- Etienne : Editions de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, **1971.**

Didier, Béatrice. *L'Ecriture-Femme*. Paris : PUF, 1981.

Doubrovsky, Serge. « La Princesse de Clèves : une interprétation existentielle ». *La Table ronde* 138 (1959) : 36–51.

Duchêne, Roger. *Madame de Lafayette*. Paris : Fayard, 1988.

Fabre, Jean. *Idées sur le roman*. Paris : Klincksieck, 1979.

Francillon, Roger. *L'Oeuvre romanesque de Madame de Lafayette*. Paris : José Corti, 1973.

Furetière, Antoine. *Dictionnaire universel*. Genève : Slatkine Reprints, 1970. 3 vols.

Grande, Nathalie. *Stratégies de romancières* : *De Clélie à La Princesse de Clèves*. Paris : Champion, 1999.

Jensen, Katharine Ann. « Making Sense of the Ending: Passion, Virtue, and Female Subjectivity ». *Approaches to Teaching*

*Lafayette's* The Princess of Clèves. Ed. Faith Beasley and Katharine Jensen. New York : MLA, 1998. 68–75.

Lafayette, Marie-Madeleine Pioche de. *La Princesse de Clèves*. Ed. Jean Mesnard. Paris : Flammarion, 1996.

La Rochefoucauld, François de. *Maximes et réflexions diverses*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.

Laudy, Bernard. « La vision tragique de Madame de Lafayette, ou un jansénisme athée ». *Sociologie de la littérature*. Bruxelles : Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1973.

Lever, Maurice. *Romanciers du grand siècle*. Paris : Fayard, 1996.

Lyons, John. « Narrative, Interpretation and Paradox : La Princesse de Clèves ». *Romanic Review* 72 (1981) : 383–400.

MacKenzie, Louis. « Jansenist Resonances in La Princesse de Clèves ». *Approaches to Teaching Lafayette's The Princess of Clèves*. Ed. Faith Beaslet and Katharine Jensen. New York : MLA, 1998. 38–46.

Mesnard, Jean, ed. Introduction. *La Princesse de Clèves*. By Marie-Madeleine Pioche de Lafayette. Paris : Flammarion, 1996.

———. *Morale et métaphysique dans La Princesse de Clèves. La Culture du XVIIe siècle*. Paris: PUF, 1992.

Niderst, Alain. *La Princesse de Clèves. Le Roman paradoxal*. Paris : Larousse, 1973.

———. « Les défauts de La Princesse de Clèves ». Littératures classiques supplément (1990) : 55–64.

Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées de M. Pascal sur la religion, et sur quelques autres sujets*. Edition de Port-Royal (1670). Eds. Georges Couton et Jean Jehasse. Saint-Etienne : Editions de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1971.

———. *Pensées*. Ed. Philippe Sellier. Paris: Garnier, 1999.

Picard, Raymond. *Divers aspects de La Princesse de Clèves. De Racine au Parthénon : Essais sur la littérature et l'art à l'âge classique*. Paris : Gallimard, 1977.

Pingaud, Bernard. *Madame de La Fayette*. Paris : Seuil, 1997.

Sellier, Philippe, ed. Introduction. *La Princesse de Clèves*. By Marie-Madeleine Pioche de Lafayette. Paris : Livre de poche, 1999.

———. Port-Royal et la littérature II. Paris : Champion, 2000.

Van Der Schuren, Eric. « Le Portrait dans La Princesse de Clèves. Lectures pascaliennes ». *Littérature* 40 (1999) : 95–134.

# L'amitié et l'amour dans *Eléonor d'Yvrée* de Catherine Bernard

**par**
**Jolene Vos-Camy**

En 1687, à l'âge de 24 ans, Catherine Bernard publie *Eléonor d'Yvrée,* première nouvelle d'une série intitulée *Les Malheurs de l'amour*. Dans cette nouvelle, elle présente une conception fataliste de l'amour qui suit la tradition littéraire des nouvelles galantes et historiques de la période, dans la lignée de *La Princesse de Clèves*. Alors que l'intrigue principale illustre les résultats catastrophiques de l'amour entre deux jeunes personnes, une intrigue secondaire examine l'amitié entre deux jeunes femmes. Si la première intrigue finit mal, la deuxième intrigue est plus optimiste malgré les épreuves difficiles vécues par les deux femmes. Le pessimisme général de la nouvelle, tempéré par une lueur d'espoir, est ancré dans la foi catholique de Bernard. Dans *Eléonor d'Yvrée,* Bernard développe plusieurs idées sur l'amitié que l'on trouve dans l'*Introduction à la vie dévote* de Saint François de Sales. Premièrement, la base de l'amitié est la communication entre les personnes. Deuxièmement, à cause de cette communication, l'amitié peut poser de graves dangers. Et troisièmement, l'amitié reste un soutien important entre personnes vertueuses. C'est ainsi que le thème de l'amitié participe au pessimisme caractéristique de l'oeuvre de Bernard tout en étant une des seules sources d'espoir.

Catherine Bernard est née en 1663 dans une famille protestante de Rouen. Adolescente, elle est partie vivre à Paris, et en octobre 1685, *Le Mercure Galant* a annoncé sa conversion au catholicisme. Même si cette conversion tombait à point nommé et lui évitait d'être persécutée lors de la révocation de l'Edit de Nantes, *Le Mercure Galant* soulignait la sincérité des actions de Bernard : « Comme elle a infiniment de l'esprit, il est aisé de juger qu'elle n'a renoncé aux erreurs où sa naissance l'avoit engagée, qu'après une sérieuse et longue recherche de la vérité » (*Le Mercure Galant* 275). Peu de renseignements subsistent sur la vie de Bernard mais tout semble indiquer l'authenticité de sa nouvelle foi. On sait par exemple que Bernard s'est associée à des dames dévotes de la

capitale et en 1691 elle était en relation avec des personnages importants de la cour et était une protégée de Madame de Pontchartrain et Madame de Maintenon, connues pour leur dévotion[1]. Bernard a continué d'être fidèle à la foi catholique jusqu'à sa mort, comme le démontre le père Claude Buffier en 1723, lorsqu'il écrit que Bernard n'avait pas voulu qu'on « imprimât quelques Poësies qu'elle avoit faites autrefois [...] parce qu'il s'y étoit glissé des expressions qui ne convenoient pas assez à l'exactitude et au sérieux que prescrit la religion qu'elle avoit embrassée » (cité dans Piva, « *Le Commerce Galant*: Essai de définition » 19). De sa conversion à l'âge de vingt-deux ans jusqu'à sa mort vingt-sept ans plus tard en 1712, Bernard était donc réputée pour sa dévotion à la religion catholique.

Même si Bernard ne fait pas de référence à sa foi de manière explicite dans la nouvelle, l'influence catholique y reste primordiale[2]. Pour donner une structure à la pensée catholique présente dans la nouvelle, je prends comme repère l'œuvre de Saint François de Sales, l'*Introduction à la vie dévote*[3]. Cet

---

[1]Voir Franco Piva, «La carrière poétique de Mademoiselle Bernard,» *Catherine Bernard, Oeuvres*, vol. 2, Théâtre et Poésie (Fasano, Paris: Schena editore, Didier Erudition, 1999) 332–33.

[2] L'absence d'une évocation claire de sa foi dans ses œuvres narratives ne devrait pas surprendre. Comme Helen Kaps l'a remarqué pour le cas de *La Princesse de Clèves*, au dix-septième siècle on ne considérait pas le genre du roman comme assez digne pour le sujet de la foi « 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, *Moral perspective in La Princesse de Clèves* (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1968) 25.

[3] Il serait intéressant d'étudier l'influence du roman *Clélie* (1654–1660) de Mlle de Scudéry sur la représentation de l'amitié dans la

ouvrage a eu une forte influence parmi les catholiques dévots du dix-septième siècle et Bernard l'a probablement lu. Comme l'a remarqué Patrick Henry:

> the great originality of this work lies in the fact that, even if not the first devotional manual for laypeople, it was the first effective and successful one. Its author, perhaps above all interested in the direction of souls, firmly believed that laypeople could become conscious of their religious grandeur and lead holy lives in society (Henry 156).

Dans la nouvelle de Bernard il n'est jamais question pour les personnages principaux d'entrer dans les ordres mais l'idée de la vertu reste tout de même centrale, surtout pour Eléonor, le personnage éponyme. Sa volonté de suivre son devoir, d'obéir à son père même s'il faut renoncer à son amour, rappelle les conseils donnés par Saint François de Sales[4]. Examinons certaines des idées sur l'amitié exprimées dans l'*Introduction à la vie dévote* et que Bernard utilise dans sa nouvelle.

Saint François de Sales distingue l'amour de l'amitié ainsi[5] :

---

nouvelle de Catherine Bernard. Même si le concept d' « Amitié Tendre » s'applique surtout à l'amitié entre hommes et femmes, alors que l'analyse de cet article vise plutôt l'amitié entre deux femmes, il existe des parallèles entre les deux notions d'amitié influencées toutes les deux par les œuvres de Saint François de Sales.

[4] Je propose une analyse plus détaillée de la vertu d'Eléonor dans le contexte catholique de Saint François de Sales dans mon article « L'amour et la foi catholique dans *Les Malheurs de l'amour* de Catherine Bernard » (*Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, XXXIV, 67 (2007) : 429–442).

[5] Il faut noter que Saint François de Sales définit l'amitié comme un type d'amour parmi plusieurs. Tout amour n'est pas amitié, mais toute amitié est considérée comme une sorte d'amour.

> Tout amour n'est pas amitié; car, 1. on peut aimer sans être aimé, et lors il y a de l'amour, mais non pas de l'amitié, d'autant que l'amitié est un amour mutuel, et s'il n'est pas mutuel ce n'est pas amitié. 2. Et ne suffit pas qu'il soit mutuel, mais il faut que les parties qui s'entr'aiment sachent leur réciproque affection, car si elles l'ignorent elles auront de l'amour, mais non pas de l'amitié. 3. Il faut avec cela qu'il y ait entre elles quelque sorte de communication qui soit le fondement de l'amitié (Sales 178).

C'est donc la réciprocité et la communication des sentiments amoureux qui constituent la base de l'amitié. Bernard, en présentant les deux jeunes femmes de la nouvelle, souligne la nature vertueuse de leur amitié formée dans l'enfance à un moment où elles habitaient ensemble et étaient comme des soeurs :

> Mathilde, qui était la fille de cette comtesse, était de l'âge d'Eléonor. Elles étaient toutes deux parfaitement aimables et elles s'attachèrent l'une à l'autre de cette amitié de l'enfance qui, ayant plus d'innocence et plus de sincérité que les autres amitiés, a aussi plus de durée (Bernard 183).

Eléonor, accueillie dans la famille de Mathilde, se lie donc d'une amitié étroite avec Mathilde. C'est un amour sororal, qu'elles savent réciproque, et elles sont en constante communication l'une avec l'autre. Si Bernard parle de la durée de cette amitié, cependant, c'est pour préparer le lecteur à la rude épreuve à laquelle cette amitié devra faire face dans la nouvelle. Au milieu de la nouvelle il y a un temps de séparation où toute communication est coupée entre les deux jeunes femmes et c'est alors que leur amitié s'affaiblit. Pourtant, la plus grande épreuve qui met leur amitié en péril, la trahison d'Eléonor par Mathilde avec le duc de Misnie, a ses origines dans un autre aspect de l'amitié.

Dans son guide spirituel, Saint François de Sales fait remarquer à plusieurs reprises que si l'amitié est basée sur la communication entre deux personnes, c'est aussi ce qui la rend la plus dangereuse de tous les types d'amour. Ce danger vient de ce que la communication entre les personnes encourage l'influence d'une personne sur une autre et la participation aux vertus et aux vices de l'ami[6]. Or, dans la nouvelle, Eléonor se lie aussi d'amitié et d'amour avec le jeune duc de Misnie. Le duc de Misnie et Eléonor se sont déclaré leur tendresse mais ce bonheur est de courte durée puisqu'un obstacle survient dans la forme des projets de mariage de leurs parents qui ne tiennent pas compte des souhaits des deux jeunes personnes. Avant que cette crise provoquée par les parents n'arrive, Eléonor et le duc de Misnie associent Mathilde à leur amour. Cette situation où le couple amoureux partage leur bonheur avec une amie commune illustre la communication qui, selon Saint François de Sales, est essentielle à l'amitié. En même temps Bernard souligne le danger que les trois amis courent :

> L'inclination qu'Eléonor sentait dans son coeur [pour le duc] ne diminuait point la tendresse qu'elle avait pour Mathilde. Au contraire, cette amie lui devint en quelque façon nécessaire. Elle lui parlait de son amant quand elle ne le voyait pas, et son amitié n'en devint que plus ardente, parce qu'elle était utile à son amour (Bernard 184).

Bernard souligne la naïveté d'Eléonor qui met son amitié au profit de sa tendresse pour le duc. Le danger, néanmoins, est plus grand pour Mathilde qui demeure l'amie d'Eléonor et du duc et se trouve

[6] « Or l'amitié est le plus dangereux amour de tous, parce que les autres amours peuvent être sans communication, mais l'amitié étant totalement fondée sur icelle, on ne peut presque l'avoir avec une personne sans participer à ses qualités » François de Sales, « Introduction à la Vie Dévote,» *Oeuvres, Saint François de Sales*, ed. André Ravier (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1969) 178.

témoin de leur amour tout en étant exclue de leur expérience d'une réciprocité d'amour tendre :

> Mathilde entrait aussi dans leurs entretiens, du consentement de l'un et de l'autre. Ces conversations étaient assez dangereuses pour une jeune personne. Elle vit la différence de leur état et du sien ; elle conçut le plaisir qu'il y avait d'être aimée ; enfin, elle commença à sentir son indifférence et à la trouver triste et désagréable. Il lui semblait qu'elle n'aurait pas voulu ôter le duc de Misnie à Eléonor, mais elle souhaitait de trouver un amant comme lui, et elle sentait que, s'il ne lui avait pas précisément ressemblé, il ne lui aurait pas plu (Bernard 184).

Alors que les deux autres restent longtemps naïfs et aveuglés par leur amour, Mathilde arrive à comprendre le danger de son inclination secrète pour le duc : « Ce sentiment ne lui donna d'abord qu'une mélancolie qui ne laissait pas d'avoir sa douceur mais, lorsqu'elle vint à en connaître la nature, elle en eut une douleur très vive » (Bernard 184). Mathilde devient victime de l'amitié puisque c'est par la communication et la réciprocité de l'amour d'Eléonor et la participation dans ses sentiments pour le duc que Mathilde a formé un amour coupable pour l'amant de son amie.

Bernard illustre cette même idée du danger de l'amitié d'une autre façon un peu plus tard dans la nouvelle. Comme le père d'Eléonor a l'intention de la marier à un vieil ami à lui, le comte de Rethelois, il envoie son fils chercher Eléonor chez sa protectrice. A cause du passé politique du père, le départ d'Eléonor et son destin sont tenus secrets et les apparences font croire au duc de Misnie qu'il a été trompé par celle-ci. Mathilde, qui n'est pas plus éclairée que lui sur la situation, finit par croire aussi au changement soudain du caractère de son amie. C'est à ce moment que Mathilde et le duc de Misnie se rapprochent. Bernard illustre alors le

glissement trop facile de l'amitié à la passion amoureuse qui peut arriver entre deux amis de sexe différents :

> Mathilde avait des manières tendres et flatteuses. Eléonor et le duc l'avaient comme associée à leur passion, et il n'avait qu'un pas à faire pour l'aimer. D'abord il la cherchait pour se plaindre, ensuite il la chercha pour se consoler. Elle avait beaucoup de complaisance et de douceur ; elle prenait part à ses maux, il en avait de la reconnaissance. Quoiqu'il parlât toujours d'Eléonor, il en parlait avec Mathilde et il se trouva, pour ainsi dire, dans une seconde passion sans être sorti de la première (Bernard 194).

Cette situation démontre le danger de l'amitié dont parle aussi Saint François de Sales :

> L'amitié requiert une grande communication entre les amants, autrement elle ne peut ni naître ni subsister. C'est pourquoi il arrive souvent qu'avec la communication de l'amitié, plusieurs autres communications passent et se glissent insensiblement de cœur en cœur, par une mutuelle infusion et réciproque écoulement d'affections, d'inclinations et d'impressions (Sales 192).

Le résultat de cette communication constante entre Mathilde et le duc après le départ d'Eléonor est donc la formation de cette deuxième passion qui sera à l'origine de toute la tragédie de la nouvelle. Du côté de Mathilde, cette passion représente la réalisation d'un amour secret et coupable qui germait déjà dans son esprit même avant le départ de son amie Eléonor. Par contre, pour le duc de Misnie, cette passion se développe surtout grâce à l'absence d'Eléonor et à la bonne volonté de Mathilde de le consoler. Cette nouvelle passion n'efface pas la première passion—elle n'en est que l'ombre—et dépend d'elle pour son existence. La passion du duc de Misnie pour Mathilde ne peut

remplacer celle pour Eléonor que dans l'absence de celle-ci et leurs retrouvailles éventuelles détruiront cette deuxième passion.

Au moment où les trois personnages se revoient, Eléonor découvre la trahison de son amie la plus proche et de son amant. Le duc pour sa part découvre l'innocence d'Eléonor et abandonne Mathilde sans arrière pensée pour essayer ensuite de convaincre Eléonor de renoncer à son devoir et de le suivre. Mathilde, finalement, se trouve coupable devant son amie et rejetée par celui qu'elle aime. Tant que Mathilde et le duc croyaient Eléonor coupable, Mathilde se sentait justifiée d'avoir pris sa place auprès du duc. Mais la découverte de l'innocence d'Eléonor la met dans une situation intenable. Non seulement est-elle abandonnée et même haïe par le duc mais elle ne réussit pas à avoir bonne conscience auprès de son amie. Elle ne se croit plus digne de participer à cette amitié vertueuse d'autrefois. Le coup est rude à la fois au niveau de son amitié et de sa passion, et elle en meurt avant la fin de la nouvelle.

L'amitié d'Eléonor et de Mathilde est donc fortement menacée par la passion que Mathilde a découverte par le moyen de cette même amitié. Du point de vue de Mathilde, il est maintenant inutile de lutter contre les événements et elle tombe gravement malade suite à son désespoir. Elle exprime clairement à Eléonor ce que sa mort apportera : « Vous allez être délivrée d'une amie importune ; vous allez être vengée d'une rivale ; vous allez avoir votre amant ; et quand je serai morte, vous ne songerez pas que j'aie été au monde » (Bernard 212). Pour Mathilde, cette amitié n'existe plus alors que pour Eléonor, elle constitue la motivation principale qui la pousse à suivre son devoir et à renoncer à son amour pour le duc :

> Ces paroles pénétrèrent vivement Eléonor. Il se fit une révolution subite dans son esprit ; elle se sentit le courage d'exécuter ce qu'elle avait projeté ; enfin, l'amitié et la reconnaissance achevèrent dans ce moment de la déterminer sur une chose à quoi

> elle était longtemps résolue, mais qu'elle aurait peut-être toujours différée (Bernard 212).

Le souvenir de cette amitié reste tout de même un soutien moral pour Eléonor malgré la douleur extrême qui en a résulté. On retrouve l'idée de l'aspect vertueux de l'amitié dans l'*Introduction à la vie dévote* :

> Quant à ceux qui sont entre les mondains et qui embrassent la vraie vertu, il leur est nécessaire de s'allier les uns aux autres par une sainte et sacrée amitié; car par le moyen d'icelle ils s'animent, ils s'aident, ils s'entreportent au bien. (...) ainsi ceux qui sont ès Religions n'ont pas besoin des amitiés particulières, mais ceux qui sont au monde en ont nécessité pour s'assurer et secourir les uns les autres, parmi tant de mauvais passages qu'il leur faut franchir (Sales 185).

Saint François de Sales souligne l'importance d'une sainte et sacrée amitié, c'est-à-dire, une amitié basée sur la vertu et qui aide les personnes à faire face aux épreuves de la vie. Ceux qui rentrent dans les ordres n'ont pas besoin de ces amitiés, mais les personnes comme Eléonor et Mathilde qui vivent dans le monde bénéficient du soutien qu'une amitié vertueuse peut leur apporter. Malheureusement, ce soutien n'est pas suffisant pour que Mathilde puisse surmonter cette épreuve alors qu'Eléonor y trouve tout le soutien qu'il lui faut pour garder sa vertu et suivre son devoir. Même si leur amitié n'est plus réciproque et donc ne suit plus le modèle de l'amitié idéale proposé par Saint François de Sales, elle suffit pour pousser Eléonor à renoncer à toute possibilité de bonheur avec le duc de Misnie et de suivre son devoir en mariage avec le vieux comte de Rethelois.

Dans la dernière phrase de la nouvelle, Bernard insiste sur le fait qu'Eléonor, devenue la comtesse de Rethelois, ne garde pas de rancune contre son amie : « La comtesse de Rethelois pleura autant son amie que si elle n'avait pas été sa rivale, et elle vécut avec le comte comme une personne dont la vertu était parfaite, quoiqu'elle

fût toujours malheureuse par la passion qu'elle avait dans le coeur » (Bernard 217). Si Eléonor réussit à garder une vertu parfaite, c'est grâce au souvenir de cette amitié. L'intrigue principale, celle de la passion d'Eléonor, du duc et de Mathilde, termine mal et fait des ravages dans les trois coeurs, mais l'amitié d'Eléonor pour Mathilde réussit tout de même à surmonter ces épreuves.

Ainsi Bernard tempère le pessimisme qui domine la nouvelle avec une lueur d'espoir, celle de l'amitié féminine. Alors que la passion amoureuse est la source principale de malheur pour les trois jeunes personnes, l'amitié entre deux femmes reste pour le personnage éponyme un soutien de la vertu et assure donc la tranquillité de l'âme face à son devoir. Bernard illustre en effet le concept de l'amitié telle qu'elle est décrite par Saint François de Sales avec cette histoire d'une passion malheureuse liée à une amitié profonde entre deux femmes, l'histoire d'une rivalité destructrice et mais aussi d'une vertu sans faille appuyée sur cette même amitié.

**Calvin College**

## Ouvrages cités

Bernard, Catherine. *Oeuvres, Romans et nouvelles*. Ed. Franco Piva. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Paris: Nizet, 1993.

Henry, Patrick. «*La Princesse de Clèves* and *L'Introduction à la vie dévote*.» *An Inimitable Example, The Case for the Princesse de Clèves*. Ed. Patrick Henry. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1992. 156–80.

Kaps, Helen Karen. *Moral perspective in La Princesse de Clèves*. Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1968.

Piva, Franco. «La carrière poétique de Mademoiselle Bernard.» *Catherine Bernard, Oeuvres*. Vol. 2, Théâtre et Poésie. Fasano, Paris: Schena editore, Didier Erudition, 1999. 321–56.

———. «*Le Commerce Galant*: Essai de définition.» *Le Commerce Galant de Catherine Bernard*. Ed. Franco Piva. Fasano di Brindisi (Italia): Schena editore, 1996. 11–82.

Sales, François de. «Introduction à la vie dévote.» *Oeuvres, Saint François de Sales*. 1619. Ed. André Ravier. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1969.

**Royal Bodies, Royal Bedrooms:**
**The *Lever du Roy* and Louis XIV's Versailles**

**by**
**David M. Gallo**

There is no doubt, as there was none in the minds of his contemporaries, that Louis XIV was exceptionally skilled at using the whole panoply of ceremonial at Versailles, what the Duc de Saint-Simon called the mécanique of the court. Norbert Elias' work, The Court Society, pioneered a detailed study of Louis XIV's carefully calculated strategy "of regulation, consolidation and supervision..." [1] which became, in that king's hands, "a highly flexible instrument of power."[2]

Fundamental to Elias's thesis is the assertion that even Louis XIV, the Roi-Soleil, who is often taken as the supreme example of the omnipotent absolute monarch, proves on closer scrutiny to be an individual whose position as king was enmeshed in a specific network of interdependencies. He could preserve his power only by a carefully calculated strategy which was governed by the peculiar structure of court society in the narrow sense, and more broadly by society at large.[3]

Elias uncharacteristically understood Louis XIV in the light of recent re-thinking about the nature of French absolute monarchy. Far from viewing 1661 as "the dramatic crushing of all opposition by an absolute monarch,"[4] Elias affirmed that the personal rule of

---

[1] Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1983), 130.

[2] *Ibid*., 90.

[3] *Ibid*., 3.

[4] Roger Mettam, "Richelieu, Mazarin and Louis XIV," *History Today*, 33 (August 1983), 42.

Louis XIV began in 1661 at a time of great weakness.[5] At first glance, the simplest strategy would seem to be for Louis to implement the old Roman adage, *divide et impera*. But he did not and could not simply do this. The king knew from the experience of the Fronde that he was "living under the pressure of a possible threat from below;"[6] consequently, he must himself exert pressure to maintain his rule and to "prevent a unification of Court society against him."[7] His genius, according to Elias, was that he succeeded to perfection in an "exact assessment of the power relationships at court and a careful balancing of the tensions within it,"[8] thereby creating "organizations which both maintain the tensions and differences and facilitate their supervision."[9] In his view, it was Louis XIV's carefully calculated strategy, unfalteringly implemented during the course of his nearly fifty-five year long personal reign, which succeeded in maintaining his position and in instilling in the French nobility the need for it.

Maintaining and enhancing power required the king to use any and all means at his disposal. An instrument in his arsenal in the exercise of power, "of regulation, consolidation and supervision — one among others — is the court and its etiquette as understood by the King."[10] Ceremonial and etiquette functioned, for Louis XIV, as an important instrument of rule and the distribution of power. He wielded this weapon in his *métier du roi* with an intensity reflecting his joyful awareness that "he was made for it."[11]

---

[5]Which Louis XIV readily admitted in his *Instructions for the Dauphin*.

[6]Elias (1983) 129.

[7]*Ibid*., 120.

[8]*Ibid*., 120.

[9]*Ibid*., 130.

[10]*Ibid*., 130.

[11] *Ibid*., 127.

Elias perceived that "each act in the ceremony [the King's *lever* or *coucher*, for example] had an exactly graded prestige-value that was imparted to those present, and this prestige-value became to an extent self-evident."[12] Louis's use of these ritual actions "served as an indicator of the position of an individual within the balance of power between the courtiers, a balance controlled by the King and very precarious."[13] Under his watchful eye, "the direct use-value of all these actions," although "more or less incidental,"[14] took on a secondary value of immense importance. "What gave them their gravity was solely the importance they conferred on those present within court society, the power, rank and dignity they expressed."[15] "In effect, etiquette everywhere allowed latitude that he [the King] uses as he thinks fit to determine even in small ways the reputation of people at court. (...) He used the competition for prestige to vary, by the exact degree of favor shown to them, the rank and standing of people at court, to suit his purposes as ruler, shifting the balance of tensions within the society as his need dictated."[16] Elias sums up Louis XIV's deliberate "tactic" in this way:

> He must carefully channel the tensions, cultivate petty jealousies and maintain, within the groups, a fragmentation in their aims and therefore in the pressure they exert. He must allow opposed pressures to interpenetrate each other and hold them in equilibrium; and this requires a high degree of calculation.[17]

Of course, Elias realized that "Louis XIV had certainly not created the mechanism of ceremonial. But thanks to certain opportunities

---

[12]*Ibid*., 85.

[13]*Ibid*., 85.

[14]*Ibid*., 85.

[15]*Ibid*., 85.

[16]*Ibid*., 89.

[17]*Ibid*., 122.

open to his social function he had used, consolidated and extended it (...)"[18]

For all this, Elias' sociological analysis of the functioning of the *lever du roi* as a prime example of Louis XIV's conscious plan did not address the history of the system's evolution.[19] The Duc de Saint Simon, an otherwise valuable eyewitness, provides innumerable examples of the operation of etiquette, but one cannot tell from his work when specific practices actually began. The reader must assume that at some time during Louis XIV's forty-plus years' residence at Versailles the code of manners became so complete that by the 1690's (when Saint-Simon arrived at court), hardly any action by the king in the presence of others, from *lever* to *coucher*, was not regulated by the code of manners.[20]

> The fact remains that the chronology of court ritual has never been clearly established. The question of the intentionality of this development on the part of Louis XIV, that is, ". . . just how it came into being — step by step as must have been the case — has never been elucidated in historical terms."[21]

Peter Burke, in his book on the "fabrication" of Louis XIV, stated that, while valuable, Elias' analysis (as well as Saint-Simon's memoirs), did not address the

> …history of the creation and development of the rituals. We should not assume that they were there

---

[18] *Ibid*., 89.

[19] See especially Ralph Giesey, "The King Imagined," The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture: The Political Culture of the Old Regime, ed. Keith M. Baker (Pergamon Press, 1987).

[20] *Ibid*., 56.

[21] *Ibid*., 45.

> all the time, difficult as it now is to imagine Louis XIV without them. The question of their origin is at once obvious and neglected, easy to ask and difficult to answer. What might be called the "invention" of the Versailles tradition remains obscure. Did the domestic rituals begin when Louis took up permanent residence in the palace in 1682? What happened during earlier visits to Versailles, or later visits to other palaces? Did the king create the rituals himself, or were they the work of his advisers or his masters of ceremonies, or did they really follow tradition? Were they created for political reasons?[22]

Although many of these questions await a definitive response, sources do exist which describe Louis XIV's *lever* as it unfolded at different times during his reign, and in the layout of the king's various apartments, at the Louvre and later at Versailles. The development and transformation of the *lever* indicate an important shift in the public presentation of the French monarchy in the latter part of Louis XIV's reign, with implications for its future.

The day-to-day ceremonial life surrounding the king of France was part of a tradition going back well before the Sun King. As early as 1533, the King's Bedchamber under François I at Fontainebleau was a public room.[23] With ample space at his disposal, this monarch found relatively simple accommodations necessary: a *salle* or Great Chamber in which he ate; a *chambre* in

---

[22] Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 90.

[23] After the rebuilding of Fontainebleau in 1533, the King's Apartments consisted of a *salle*, or room in which the King dined; a *chambre* in which he lived and slept; a *cabinet* into which he could withdraw from the public eye. (See H. M. Baillie, "Etiquette and the Planning of State Apartments in Baroque Palaces," *Archeologia*, 101 [1967], 180–182).

which he lived and slept; behind the *chamber à cabinet* into which he could withdraw from the public eye. As Baillie notes,

> Even if he did not spend a great deal of his time in it, the fact that this Closet was behind and not in front of the Bedchamber inevitably led to the Bedchamber becoming an ante-room to the Closet and so more public than private in character. This is made extremely clear by the fact that the gallery he built to link the old with the new castle and which he used for balls and entertainments leads straight from the entrance vestibule of the new Château into his bedchamber.[24]

It seems clear that by 1533 two trends characteristic of later French royal tradition were in place. First, a multiplication of rooms with a specialized purpose; there were both public rooms for eating and sleeping, and less public, though accessible, rooms for a modicum of privacy. Yet despite this differentiation of rooms, the second trend was the distinctive feature of French royal tradition — the public character of the *chambre*. The king's rooms where the most intimate functions occur were, in effect, wide-open and accessible. François I[er] respected and continued the tradition whereby French monarchs were available and continued to be accessible to all.[25] Louis XIV gave clear witness to this tradition in his *Instructions for the Dauphin*:

> There are nations where the majesty of kings consists, in large part, in never letting themselves be seen, and that could seem reasonable to those minds

---

[24]Baillie, "Etiquette and the Planning of State Apartments," 180.

[25]"Philippe le Bel, the most powerful king in Europe, is described as walking round Paris and talking to any one who wished to approach him. 'Familiarity has never harmed a King of France', was one of the *dicta* of Chancellor de l'Hôpital..." (Baillie, "Etiquette and the Planning of State Apartments," 182).

> accustomed to servitude, governed only by fear and terror; but that is not the genius of our French nation, and, from as far back as our histories can instruct us of it, if there is one particular character of this monarchy, it is the free and easy access of subjects to the prince.[26]

The architecture of most royal châteaux, and of the King's Apartments into the reign of Louis XIV is evidence of this

In the reign of Henri III, a tradition already existed at the Louvre for the king's ceremonial rising. An English eyewitness account of the *lever du roi*[27] provides a glimpse into Henri III's morning ritual as it was in 1584. Upon arising, the king received a dressing gown and slippers from a *valet de chambre*, and then proceeded to another room where he was dressed by other valets in attendance.[28] After a brief breakfast of bouillon, Henri allowed

---

[26] "Il y a des nations où la majesté des rois consiste, pour une grande partie, à ne se point laisser voir, et celà peut avoir ses raisons parmi des esprits accoutumés à la servitude, qu'on ne gouverne que par la crainte et la terreur; mais ce n'est pas la genie de nos Français, et, d'aussi loin que nos histoires nous en peuvent instruire, s'il y a quelque caractère singulier dans cette monarchie, c'est l'accès libre et facile des sujets au prince." Quoted in Yves Bottineau, "Aspects de la Cour d'Espagne au XVII siècle: l'étiquette de la chambre du roi," *Bulletin Hispanique*, 74 (1972), 152 [translation mine].

[27] The material in this section is drawn from an article by David Potter and P. R. Roberts, "An Englishman's View of the Court of Henri III, 1584–1585: Richard Cook's 'Description of the Court of France'," *French History*, II, 3 (1988), 332–340. According to its editors, Cook's account, "The description of the Courte of Fraunce," must have been drafted some time between November 1583 and September 1584.

[28] "When the Kinge is readie to rise which is ordynarilie between sixe and seaven he calleth unto one that lyeth nere unto him to give

entry to those in attendance on him in the morning: first, secretaries reporting to the king, and then the nobility present.[29] Entry to the King's Bedchamber in the morning was limited to his officers, councilors, secretaries, and intimate servants. Only in another room after his rising did he receive members of the nobility. The tradition of two distinct stages — one private, one public — was the pattern of Louis XIV's *lever* in the early part of his reign.

The first complete description of the *lever du roi* of Louis XIV is from June 1655, recounted by Marie du Bois, the 17 year-old king's *valet de chambre* and a participant in the ceremony.[30] This took place in the King's Apartment at the Louvre, which in 1655 comprised, among other rooms, two bedchambers. Henri IV had converted a small room off the main bedchamber into another one replete with an alcove. At the Louvre, both Louis XIII and Louis

---

him his night gowne & a payre of little buskyns lined with verie soft & fyne leather, & when he retireth himselfe into another chamber where divers valets doe attende to make him readye, & beinge there sette downe before the fyer, one of these valets of his chamber bringeth him his dublet, another gartereth his hoase, the thirde whilest he is thus makinge himself readye kennethe [*sic*] & trymmeth his heade & the fourthe plucketh on his shoes." (Potter and Roberts, "An Englishman's View of the Court of Henri III, 1584–1585…," 339).

[29] "When the secretaries have done the usher is commanded to open the dore of the presence, & whilest the nobilitie doe enter…" (Potter and Roberts, "An Englishman's View of the Court of Henri III, 1584–1585…," 339).

[30] *Mémoires de Marie du Bois, Sieur de Lestourmière et du Poirier*, Ed. Louis de Grandmaison, *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique, Scientifique et Littéraire du Vendômois*, Nouvelle Série, Tome I, 1933, 317.

XIV inherited a dual sleeping arrangement[31], one private[32] (*Chambre de l'Alcôve*) and one public [33] (*Chambre de Parade*).[34] The first stage of the young king's rising unfolded first in the smaller bedchamber (*Chambre de l'Alcôve*), the room in which Louis actually slept.[35] As soon as he awoke, Louis began the day with prayer.[36] Religious responsibilities fulfilled, his preceptor then entered the private bedchamber (*Chambre de l'Alcôve*) and began the daily lesson, a study of Scripture or the history of France.[37] His first study session took place while he was still in his bed, for only after this is any mention of getting out of it.[38] As he did so, only the two valets of the bedchamber (*valets de chambre*) on duty for the day and the ordinary usher (*huissier*) entered and

---

[31] Louis de Hautecoeur, *Le Louvre et les Tuileries de Louis XIV*, (Paris, 1927), p. 51. Plans at the Archives Nationales (AN $O^1$ $1667^1$, plan 4) indicate this as well.

[32] And smaller: 5 meters wide, 6 meters high – about 16' by 21'.

[33] And larger: 10 meters wide, 6 meters high — about 34' by 21'.

[34] Louis de Hautecoeur, *Le Louvre et les Tuileries*, 51. See also Robert Berger, *Versailles: The Château of Louis XIV* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 47.

[35] "…Chambre de l'Alcôve, où il couchoit." (Du Bois, *Quartier de Valet de Chambre, avril-juin 1655*, 317).

[36] "Sy tost qu'il s'éveilloit, il récitoit l'office du St.-Esprit et son chapelet…" (Du Bois, *Quartier de Valet de Chambre, avril-juin 1655*, 317).

[37] "…cela faict, son précepteur entroit et le faisoit studier, c'est-à-dire, dans la Ste-Escriture ou dans l'Istoire de Frances." (Du Bois, *Quartier de Valet de Chambre, avril-juin 1655*, 317).

[38] "…cela faict, il sortoit du lit…" (Du Bois, *Quartier de Valet de Chambre, avril-juin 1655*, 317).

took their places.[39] Once out of bed, Louis sat upon his *chaise percée*, which was located in this same chamber; he remained there, readers are informed, for a half an hour, more or less.[40]

The second stage of the *lever* took place in the large bedchamber, the *Grande Chambre*. Leaving his private Bedchamber (*Chambre de l'Alcôve*), the young king encountered various princes and high nobles in attendance upon him for the public *lever*.[41] Still in the relative informality of his dressing gown, he went straight into the waiting crowd, speaking to each one with warmth and familiarity, giving them much pleasure.[42] Once seated in his armchair, the king began his toilette, washing and wiping his hands, mouth and face. He then removed his night bonnet and knelt down beside his bed in the alcove, along with the clerics of his household and everyone else in the room to pray in silence, this

---

[39] "…alors nous entrions, les deux de jour seullement et l'huissier d'ordinaire…" (Du Bois, *Quartier de Valet de Chambre, avril-juin 1655*, 317).

[40] "…sortant du lit, il se mettoit sur sa chère percée, dans sa mesme chambre de l'alcôve, où il couchoit; il y demeuroit une demie heure plus ou moings." (Du Bois, *Quartier de Valet de Chambre, avril-juin 1655*, 317). Primi Visconti relates in the 1670's that Louis XIV, *fort honnête*, put himself in this position at the *coucher du roi* only out of tradition.

[41] "…Après, il entroit dans sa grande chambre, où d'ordinaire il y avoit des princes et grands seigneurs, quy l'attendoient pour ester à son lever." (Du Bois, *Quartier de Valet de Chambre, avril-juin 1655*, 317).

[42] "Il estoit en robe de chambre et alloit droit à eux, leur parloit sy familièrement, les ungs après les autres, qu'il les ravissoit." (Du Bois, *Quartier de Valet de Chambre, avril-juin 1655*, 317).

time in public.[43] Prayer finished, the king went back to his armchair and was combed and dressed.[44]

Some evidence exists concerning the arrangements of the King's Apartments in the early 1660's. A certain Guillet de St.-Georges described it thus:

> Next to the same room [*Chambre à Coucher du Roi*], M. Errard had painted, decorated and gilded a little Oratory for the King, and M. Coypel, following the simple ideas of M. Errard, painted two little pictures after having made himself all the sketches for them.[45]

This "little Oratory" was the small room (*Oratoire du Roi*,) which formed a square to the south-east of the *Chambre d'Alcôve* (the side of which measures about 2.3 meters). Contemporary accounts state that while the King's *Chambre d'Alcôve* was beautiful, it

---

[43] "Après, il se mettoit dans sa chère et se lavoit les mains, la bouche et le visage. Après s'estre essuié, il destachoit son bonnet, quy estoit lié autour de sa teste, à cause de ses cheveux, qui estoit dessoubs. Il prioit Dieu dans sa ruelle de lit, avecque ses aumosniers, tout le monde à genoux et neul sy osé d'estre debout, ny de causer, ny de faire aucung bruit; l'huissier de la Chambre les eût mis dehors." (Du Bois, *Quartier de Valet de Chambre, avril-juin 1655*, 317).

[44] Since it is not specified who combed the King, presented him with his clothing or helped him with it, it can be assumed that the officers of the King's Wardrobe (the *Garderobe*) remained with him for that purpose.

[45]"A côté de la même chambre, M. Errard fit encore peindre, orner et dorer un petit oratoire pour le Roy, et M. Coypel, sur les simples pensées de M. Errard, peignit deux petits tableaux après en avoir fait lui-même toutes les études." (*Vie de Lesueur*, I, 7. Quoted in Hautecoeur*, Le Louvre et les Tuileries*, 56).

always remained rather badly lit, because of its size and lack of windows. A visitor wrote around 1660:

> They have not yet rectified the *Chambre du Roy*, where even in the noonday sun one can only grope one's way in. This darkness is all the more annoying in that it disfigures the most beautiful Bedchamber in the world, and that of the greatest King on earth, no less.[46]

The visit of the Cavaliere Bernini in 1665 provides the only known description of the actual décor of the royal apartments.

> Going on, he [Bernini] entered the King's bedchamber; the King was in bed having just had his foot bled. The bed was covered in amaranth-colored velvet with heavy gold embroidery, like the wall covering of the room and the anterooms. (...) There was no rail around the King's bed, but on the dais there were many silver vases filled with tuberoses.[47]

---

[46]"On n'a pas encore remédié à la chambre du Roy, où en plein midi même on n'entre qu'à tâtons. Obscurité d'autant plus fâcheuse qu'elle défigure la plus belle chambre qui soit au monde et du plus grand Roi de la terre." (Quoted in Hautecoeur, *Le Louvre et les Tuileries*, 56).

[47]Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Diary of the Cavaliere Bernini's Visit to France*, Trans. Margery Corbett, Princeton, 1985, p. 41. Chantelou, one of the *maîtres d'hôtel* of Louis XIV from 1647 on, acted as Bernini's guide on this occasion. Part of the French version, quoted by Hautecoeur: "de velours amarante en broderie d'or fort relevée, comme était la tapisserie de la chambre et des antichambres." Hautecoeur goes on to say that "the King liked strong scents; it was not only in the *parterres* of Versailles or of the Louvre that he wished to breathe heavy and pungent perfumes." (Hautecoeur, *Le Louvre et les Tuileries*, 56–7.)

At the time Chantelou is describing this room, as he mentions above, there was no balustrade surrounding the bed. Apparently it was placed there at a later time, since one is indicated on the plans of 1692[48]. Perhaps the lack of a balustrade here serves to underscore the private nature of this *Chambre d'Alcôve*, in contrast to the larger public bedchamber which did contain the balustrade.

The daily morning ritual of Louis XIV's youth at the Louvre preserved the tradition in the use of the two bedrooms constructed by Henri IV. This is ritually and visibly consonant with Ernst Kantorowicz's theory of the "King's Two Bodies," a formulation that opened a new perspective on the corporative image of a medieval monarch. In short, Kantorowicz theorized that the king possessed two bodies: a "natural body" (private, or real), belonging to one man — François, Henri, Louis — the man who lived and died, bound by space and time; and a "mystical body" (symbolic, or imaginary), which was a kind of eternal spouse of a series of natural bodies, existing beyond time and space. In effect, this mystical body was the continuity, majesty and power of the State, the "king who never died" in France. In the first decades of his reign, Louis XIV ritually and spatially enacted this tradition as he arose each morning using the two bedchambers of the King's Apartments. In the first bedchamber, the king performed the first part of his *lever* in relative solitude and privacy, surrounded by a few familiar servants and away from the pressing crowd for study and attention to physical needs. The second bedroom brought him from the private to the public: from bodily privacy to presence and communication with the court at large; and second, from the bedchamber of Louis' actual physical slumber to another meant for the display of the king to his court.

Louis XIV's assumption of personal rule in 1661 did not at first change this tradition. The *lever du roi* between 1663 and 1682 underwent significant elaboration from a number of points of view, but showed an underlying continuity with this earlier tradition as evidenced in the initial enlargement of Versailles. A modern

[48] Hautecoeur, *Le Louvre et Les Tuileries*, 57.

reconstruction of the 1668 project for the King's Apartments shows a public bedchamber (*Grande Chambre*, or *Chambre de Parade*) as well as a private bedchamber (*Petite Chambre*),[49] following the traditional two-bedchamber arrangement of the *lever*.[50] Yet the ritual during this time did start to change. First, an annual publication called *L'État de la France* clearly named the personnel surrounding the awakened king and who later dressed him. Each article of the king's clothing was also clearly named, and each piece of clothing was received from specifically indicated members of the two major services involved in dressing the King — the Bedchamber (*Chambre*) and the Wardrobe (*Garderobe*). For example, the First Valet of the Wardrobe (*Premier Valet de Garderobe*) gave the king his understockings; one of the Valets of the Bedchamber (*valets de chambre*) gave him his underdrawers, etc.[51] The king even created a new officer in 1669, the Grand Master of the Wardrobe (*Grand Maître de la Garderobe*) to ensure that his service "might be done with all the care, propriety and

---

[49] Jean-Claude Le Guillou, "Le Grand et Le Petit Appartment de Louis XIV au Château de Versailles, 1668–1684: Escalier, Étage, Attique et Mansardes — Évolution Chronologique," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, CVIII, 1411 (1986), 7–8.

[50] The developments of the next decades are documented almost exclusively in this work, published by the same editor, N. Besongne, in 1663, 1665, 1669, 1672, 1674, 1676, 1677, 1678, 1680, 1682, 1683, 1684, 1686, 1687, 1689 and 1694. From its sketchy, early editions in the 1640's, it became, by the 1680's, a multi-volume work, containing chapters on the structure of government and society as well as the ceremonial of the King's *lever* and *coucher*. Edited by a cleric of the King's ecclesiastical household, and thus by a long-term eyewitness of these ceremonies, *L'État de la France* is essential for establishing the chronology of the Sun King's daily ritual.

[51] *L'État de la France*, 1663, p. 74.

greatness appropriate to the dignity of our person."[52] Second, access to the king is also more clearly delineated — lists are given of those household officers permitted entrance to the king's bedchamber.[53] As the numbers in attendance on the king grew to include members of his family, the usher of the king's bedchamber (*huissier de chambre*) took on a new importance as the arbiter of entry, to discern both the relative quality of persons who presented themselves for the ceremony and also to maintain order and decorum.[54] In sum, the *lever du roi* of the 1660's and 1670's changed in the following ways: clear procedures were established and roles of all involved were clearly delineated, that Louis XIV be served with ever-increasing efficiency; in the process, all the necessary personnel were brought closer to hand, their entry and station during the *lever* clearly indicated.[55] As the number of people surrounding the king and seeking to gain access to him

---

[52] AN O[1]13 fº 348r, Minutes et Transcriptions authentiques… éxpédiés par le Secrétaire de la Maison du Roi (…), 1669.

[53] These were extended to those holding office who were not en quartier (on their tour of duty) and who wished to be present. In addition, those who had formerly held an office giving entry could apply to keep their entreés once out of office. (There are brevets giving such permission preserved in the Archives of the Secretary of the Maison du Roi — AN O[1]13).

[54] "…ils demandent, à plusieurs fois, pour les personnes de condition qu'y s'y presentment, jusqu'à ce que le Roy ait prit sa chemise: Ensuite l'Huissier laisse entrer toute la Noblesse à son choix: & selon le discernement qu'il fait des persones plus ou moins qualifiées…" (*L'État de la France*, 1672, p. 82).

[55] The King's doctors, surgeons and *barbiers* were not specified and required as of the 1677 texts. Even the King's tailors were required to be in the wardrobe while the King dressed, should there be need for alteration or repair of his clothing. ("en cas qu'il y eût quelque chose à coudre ou racômoder aux habits." (*L'État de la France*, 1676, 107–108).

increased, so did the necessity of establishing and maintaining order.

The *lever du roi* at Versailles after the king's installation there in 1682 maintained the tradition of two bedchambers, but only for two years. In 1684, Louis XIV abandoned the *Grand Appartement du Roi*[56] where he had lived and slept and installed himself in rooms around the heart of the château, the *Cour de Marbre*.[57] From 1684 to 1701, the king slept and rose in one bedchamber, yet was dressed in the larger adjoining room, the geographical heart of the chateau, called the "King's Salon " or "the Salon where the King dresses" (*Salon du Roi*, or *Salon où le Roi s'habille*). Significantly, this salon was not a bedchamber. The distinction between the two bedchambers for the king (*Chambre de Parade* and *Chambre à coucher*) found in the Louvre and in the earlier constructions at Versailles thus disappeared after 1684. The one official Bedchamber of the State Apartments, the *Salon de Mercure*, took its place as only one of a series of reception rooms where the king mixed with his court. In November 1684, the first ceremonies took place in the new *Chambre du Roi*.[58] After 1684, even though he did not yet sleep there, the king performed the major rising ceremonies in the center of the château. The final movement of the king's bedchamber in 1701 to the site of the King's Salon *(Salon du Roi*), and thus to the very heart of the château, brought this development to its logical conclusion.

---

[56] Which then became what it called today, the *Grands Appartements* or State Apartments.

[57] Reasons for this are not clear. Perhaps the death of Queen Marie-Thérèse on July 30, 1683, rendered the private connection (and the symmetry) between the King's bedroom and her bedroom unnecessary. Perhaps, too, the death of Colbert and the beginning of the *Surintendance des Bâtiments* of Louvois played a part.

[58] Pierre de Nolhac, *Versailles et la Cour de France: Versailles, Résidence de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1925), 106.

The ceremony after the move to one bedroom took on the fixed, "classic" form observed by the Duc de Saint-Simon, who arrived at court in the 1690s. All the conditions were right for this to happen: the king resided in a fixed place for a large part of the year:[59] the Court was large, anchored at Versailles, and included the king's growing immediate family (Sons and Grandsons of France) as well as the collateral branches (Condé, Conti); all the king's servants from the Great Officers of the Crown[60] down to the *gentilshommes* and *valets* of the *Chambre* and *Garderobe*, were concentrated in one place. Not surprisingly, sources show minute regulation began once this "critical mass" had been gathered together in a fixed setting. A conservative estimate of the number of people allowed in the king's bedchamber while he was still in bed (based on published lists of participants in the 1687 text of the *lever*), was upwards of forty, not counting the unnamed officers necessary for the service.[61] Perhaps this partly explains why the decision was taken in 1701 to move the entire Bedchamber down one room to the heart of the château: the king's salon (*Salon où le*

---

[59] The King's movement from place to place would be within a relatively small radius within the Île de France: Trianon, Marly, Fontainebleau.

[60] For example, in 1671, the King offered land in the immediate vicinity of Versailles to whoever would build on it. Many members of his household were among the first to establish a permanent foothold near the King during the first year the offer was made (1670–71): the Maréchal de Bellefonds, Premier Maître d'Hôtel, three of the *Premiers Gentilshommes de la Chambre* (the Duc de Créquy, the Comte du Lude, and the Duc de Saint-Aignan); future *Premiers Gentilshommes de la Chambre* such as the Duc d'Aumont (who would serve in 1674), and the Duc de Gesvres (1675). Thus, even by the 1670's, members of his household had a permanent base of operation at Versailles. (See *L'État de la France*, 1674, 71); J.-F. Solnon, *La Cour de France*, 270).

[61] For a full listing, see *L'État de la France*, I, 1687, 194–197. The description of the whole *lever du roi* in the 1687 edition fills some fifty-nine pages.

*Roi s'habille*) was a larger and better lit room (having three windows opening onto the *Cour de Marbre*). The 1684 Bedchamber was then combined with its former antechamber to form an enlarged room, soon known from its décor as the "Bull's Eye Antechamber" (*Salon de l'Oeuil de Boeuf*).[62] Thus, the tradition of the two bedchambers, each seen to house the slumber of one of the "two bodies" of the earlier, traditional understanding of French royalty, finally gives way at Versailles under the Sun King. The two bedchambers become one by 1684, and finally in 1701 the entire *lever du roi* is performed in the one *Chambre du Roi*, Louis XIV's bedroom as it exists today. The king completed the symbolism inherent in the design of Versailles from the first, performing both private and public functions in the same room — he rose, dressed, received ambassadors, ate and retired in that room facing east and the sunrise. Louis XIV's "one body" was like clockwork, and all time in his presence was ceremonialized time.

The chronological development of Louis XIV's *lever du roi* supports the conclusions suggested by earlier historians of royal ritual in France. Ralph Giesey, a student of Ernst Kantorowicz, stated that at Versailles, Louis XIV

> … literally abandoned his private self in favor of an actual incarnation of sovereign power. Seen in a different way, this process ended in a personalization of this incarnation, formerly a fictional entity (or mystical, ideal and unvarying), to which successive kings had to fit themselves.[63]

---

[62] So called after the large, "bulls-eye" shaped window inserted into the frieze of the room.

[63] "Il a littéralement abandonné son moi privé au profit d'une véritable incarnation du pouvoir souverain. Vu autrement, ce processus aboutit à une personnalisation de cette incarnation, jadis entité fictive, ou mystique, idéale et invariante, à laquelle les rois successifs avaient à s'ajuster." (Ralph E. Giesey, *Cérémonial et*

Stanford professor Jean-Marie Apostolidès wrote that under Louis XIV, the development of court ceremonial witnessed to the "fusion" of the "King's Two Bodies."

> The private body is seen to be taken over by the imaginary body; the two form but one glorious body. This glorious body, which functions like a clock, brings about at the court a ceremonial mechanized in the extreme.[64]

The ritual development and the fusion of the two bedchambers at Sun King's *lever du roi* at Versailles provides visible evidence for the creation of a closed system within which "the King wore neither attributes nor clothing considered exclusively royal, but only the magic of his royal attitude and the force of his personality, operating according to a severely codified comportment."[65] Willy-nilly, the two kings born into this system had to play the essential, starring role. The fact that Louis XV played it grudgingly and Louis XVI ineptly (and, one might add, Marie-Antoinette disastrously) would be fraught with consequences for the monarchy. Entering its final century, it no longer depended on the

---

*puissance souveraine: XVe — XVIIe siècle*. Cahiers des Annales, [Paris: Armand Colin, 1987], 85).

[64]"Chacun de ses gestes est décomposé et donne naissance à des rites, à des hiérarchies. Chacune de ses fonctions biologiques, de la manducation à la défécation, est l'objet d'un nouveau rituel symbolique. Le corps privé se voit annexé par le corps imaginaire; les deux ne forment plus qu'un seul corps glorieux. (...) Ce corps glorieux, qui fonctionne comme une horloge, entraîne un cérémonial mécanisé à l'extrême à la cour." (Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine: Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV* [Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1981] 156).

[65]"Le roi ne portait ni attributs ni vêtements proprement royaux mais la seul magie de son attitude royale, et la force de sa personnalité, opérant selon un comportement sévèrement codifié."(Giesey, *Cérémonial et puissance*, 72).

varied public rituals of its long tradition and history. After Louis XIV, the monarchy was centered on the attributes of the physical body of the king, now publicly and ritually joined to the unique, transcendent and immortal "mystical body" of the kings of France, forming but one glorified body:[66] new, permanently visible, ever on display.

**College of Mount Saint Vincent**

[66] Apostolidès, *Le Roi-Machine*, 156. Ralph Giesey suggests that absolutism constitutes the historical heritage of the "mystical body of the King" in France. See Ralph Giesey, *Cérémonial et puissance*, 85–86.