

THE CULTURAL CODE
IN
LA PRINCESSE DE CLEVES

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 1976

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of French)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
September, 1978

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Date OCTOBER 10, 1978

This study of Madame de la Fayette's La Princesse de Clèves proceeds from a general overview of the cultural and social mores presented in the novel to examine the stylistic components upon which it is structured--the maxim or generalizing statement. It brings into play the relationship between the author and her audience, the questions of cultural and creative verisimilitude, and the seventeenth and twentieth-century critical reactions to the novel.

Through close textual analysis, a definition of the cultural code, its content and its manifestation in the novel, is revealed. The code's foundation on public opinion and social practice is demonstrated in the numerous maxims and generalizing statements which support or contradict specific actions in the novel. The question of conformity or non-conformity to the code as illustrated by actions leads into a discussion of verisimilitude in the novel as a whole. The seventeenth century's insistence upon cultural vraisemblance is contrasted with the twentieth-century concepts of naturalization and creative vraisemblance. While this study finds that for the twentieth-century reader there may be some lapses of understanding with regard to small details of life in the society which is described in the novel, it nonetheless shows that La Princesse de Clèves observes the prescriptions of its genre, the conventions of vraisemblance as they apply to the novel, and that Mme de la Fayette warrants consideration for her avant garde approach to recording the effects of the social attitudes of her time.

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I wish to thank Dr. H. C. Knutson for his advice and encouragement, my parents for their support, and J. A. Shaw for my freedom.

Introduction

The existence of a social unit--be it a family, a tribe, or a nation--dictates the existence of a set of rules which govern the activity within the group, determining who may join, what members may and may not do, and what punishments will be handed out to transgressors against the rules. These rules form a code of conduct which we call the "cultural code". The cultural code is defined by the society to which it refers, and for this reason it is constantly changing to agree with modifications in the society which inspired it; but at any given moment in history, the prescriptions of a cultural code appear inalterable and inflexible, determining good and bad people, appropriate and inappropriate conduct, reward and punishment. As Peter Brooks points out in the introduction to The Novel of Worldliness, the concept of society in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has two aspects, the first being "the whole of organized human existence" and the second "the self-conscious 'being together' of an élite". These two aspects are virtually one for the novelists whose work is inspired by this social milieu, since they do not consider that there is any group outside the elite which is worthy of thought or mention. In the seventeenth century, it is particularly noticeable that société is more than a simple means of establishing social order under the rules of a cultural code. The concept of society is "an object of conscious cultivation" for the members of the elite whose world revolves around observing appropriate bien-séances and décorum and whose literature is oriented toward protecting and increasing the importance of their cultural code.¹

La Princesse de Clèves is a product of this overdeveloped

and overemphasized sense of société which characterizes the seventeenth century but it is by no means a positive testimonial to the greatness of the society which inspired it. In the novel *Mme de la Fayette* presents a description of her social milieu which includes an account of its cultural code, and she shows the effects of this society and its requirements on the people who live in it. The author refers to many of the prescriptions of the cultural code in her descriptions of the attitudes and the behaviour which characterize the members of the court, and in most cases statements of what is appropriate conduct in society are implicit in the actions and words of her characters. At some times *Mme de la Fayette* reveals rules of conduct in explicit terms, but these maxims are comparatively few in number. The cultural code which governs the lives of the characters in the novel is essentially the same as that which governs both the author's and the seventeenth-century reader's lives; for this reason *Mme de la Fayette* can rely a great deal upon her reader's contribution to insure that the implicit description of the cultural code is understood.

In so far as almost every novel presents an historical record of a particular society, the interdependence of the 'real' world and the 'literary' world is very strong. Whatever may be presented as life in a literary setting must, in order to be intelligible to the reader, be possible (not necessarily probable) in the realm of what this reader views as the real world. This relationship between events in a novel and their corresponding real-life occurrences is described in the complex concept of vraisemblance. Where La Princesse de Clèves is concerned, we call into consideration two broad categories of

vraisemblance--cultural and creative--against which the events of the novel may be measured. The cultural code which operates in the novel is the same as that which applies to the reader, and most of the characters conduct themselves in accordance with the code; there is, therefore, seldom any doubt about cultural verisimilitude in the novel's action. The cultural vraisemblance is only questionable in two scenes--the confession and the Princesse's declaration of love in her last encounter with Nemours--and while the author's apparent lack of consideration for the rules of the cultural code in these instances formed the basis for literary condemnation on the part of her critical contemporaries, they do illustrate Mme de la Fayette's respect for creative vraisemblance in view of the characters that she has created.

By creative vraisemblance we are referring to what Jonathan Culler calls "the text or conventions of a genre, a specifically literary and artificial vraisemblance" which allows an author's specific "imaginative world" to determine the verisimilitude of the events and actions which take place in his works.² Mme de la Fayette has created a woman who does not conform to the cultural stereotype accepted at the time, and she emphasizes this uniqueness in her commentaries. Since Mme de Clèves is defined as abnormal, her actions could not be "normal" and still be vraisemblable with respect to the character as she has been created.

The question of vraisemblance--the believability of the events of a novel in relation to what the reader views as the reality of his own life--is a fertile area of criticism in modern studies of the novel. Jonathan Culler and Gérard Genette

have both recently produced studies of the literary structures and conventions which render the fictional world of the novel meaningful to its "real-world" readers. Both authors refer to the use of the maxim or generalizing statement as an effective, though perhaps artificial, technique through which the fictional may be related to the real, and both use La Princesse de Clèves as an example of a novel which has been criticized for a lack of verisimilitude.³ Bernard Pingaud, too, discusses the critical reaction to the novel's questionable vraisemblance and observes the author's frequent use of maxims.⁴ Genette, on the other hand, notes "l'absence à peu près complète de maximes générales" (p. 78) in La Princesse de Clèves and criticizes Pingaud for his contention that maxims abound in the novel. We shall try to show in the following pages that Pingaud is closer to the mark; indeed, our study takes the maxim or generalizing statements as the basic structure upon which Mme de la Fayette's literary world is constructed, and through which the cultural code of this world is defined. The vraisemblance of the novel can only be determined in relation to the novel's specific world. To this end, our study will examine the nature of the prescriptions of the cultural code, the way in which they are presented, and the effects of the code upon the characters; we hope thus to determine the extent to which the characters' actions are believable in terms of their part in the culture and society of the novel.

Our first chapter will discuss the interdependent relationship between the author and reader where implicit presentation of the code is concerned. The relationship is established through the author's narrative technique which relies heavily on

generalization and allusion. Many details of the code are also contained in descriptions containing value judgements which relate to the actions and qualities of various characters. All of these descriptions present a background, a picture of the social norm, against which the actions of the principal characters may be reflected. Our second chapter will deal with the social repercussions of acceptance of the cultural code and of refusal to comply with its guidelines. The characters find that accepting the prescriptions of the code results in individual frustrations and misunderstandings, but also in social approval; while refusing the guidelines results in a measure of personal freedom, but also in social disfavor. Their attempts to manipulate the code in the interests of achieving their personal goals form an integral part of the novel's action and illustrate the control which the cultural code exerts on their lives. The third chapter defines the restrictive nature of the code itself which is mirrored in the artificiality of the courtly society. The duplicity which is required in everyday life creates psychological conflicts for the characters who find themselves unable or powerless to cope with the essential and constant opposition between reality and artificiality.

Our fourth chapter discusses explicit statements which, for the most part, support the information about the cultural code that is presented implicitly in the author's descriptions. These statements by both the author and the characters contain both openly stated and inferred maxims regarding cultural and role stereotypes, generally accepted truths about rules of conduct and human nature, and suggestions of generally accepted truths which may be inferred from actions which do not exemplify

the cultural norm. The fifth chapter deals with maxims relating to life in the seventeenth-century society which are presented by the characters and which contain an element of underlying strategy. These maxims are stated either in reaction to circumstances dictated by the cultural code, in defense of an individual's actions, or in an attempt to have another character modify his behaviour. These strategies are all essentially dictated by the restrictive nature of the cultural code.

Our concluding chapter deals mainly with the question of verisimilitude as it relates to the cultural code presented in the novel. A brief sketch of the seventeenth-century critical reaction to La Princesse de Clèves leads into a discussion of the modern approach to vraisemblance which deals less with historical and cultural considerations than with those dictated by the novel as a creative entity. The cultural code in the world of the novel contains more than just the general guidelines of appropriate conduct which should apply to all characters as members of a society. It must also consider the psychology of individual characters in deciding what actions are appropriate to them in certain circumstances. It is our intent to show, through a close analysis of the text itself from a structural, though not processional, point of view, that the cultural code which is presented in a given novel, and which governs the actions of the characters, is the sole determining factor of the verisimilitude of the events in such a novel, and that this code is independent, in the final analysis, of any corresponding real-life code of conduct.

Background, Participation, and Judgements

Mme de la Fayette's novel reveals the structure and workings of her society. Her descriptions of the people at the court--their emotions, actions, and physical make-up--contain allusions to an accepted cultural code which governs their lives. La Princesse de Clèves presents a general overview of the social institutions which facilitates the reader's initial comprehension of the heroine's dilemma. But there is a deeper dimension to the novel which becomes evident as one pays closer attention to the author's style. Through generalization and vagueness in description the author calls upon the reader for understanding and participation if specific details of the cultural code are to be discovered. Mme de la Fayette's descriptions also contain value judgements which in turn furnish details of the qualities--both desirable and undesirable--that are found in the people who make up this society. Through an examination of these descriptions the reader who may be unfamiliar with the seventeenth-century society can put together a background against which the actions of the principal characters may be reflected to show their conformity or nonconformity to the prescribed social norms.

The action of La Princesse de Clèves furnishes, in general terms, useful background information about the seventeenth-century social structure. The court itself is the most important institution in this society. It is the centre of all activity--political and social--and the royal family is at its hub. It is a closed circle where only those deemed to be of a certain merit may enter, and only upon invitation. To be favoured at the court is to live a comfortable life; to fall from favour, whether through unfortunate family contacts, a personal misdeed, or a

change in royal personnel, can result in banishment from the court, as illustrated in the description of the events following the King's death.⁵ A great deal of an individual's social standing and power is defined by his relationship with a member of the royal family. Just as being a counsellor, friend, or messenger of the King has its benefits, so those who are favoured by membership in the Queen's circle or that of the King's sister enjoy the pleasures of a certain social distinction, however temporary and unstable the situation may be. Political intrigue (both domestic and international) forms an integral part of courtly life. Relationships between the various heads of state are common knowledge and marriage between the royal families, while being perhaps a private scandal in terms of the society's concept of the participants' relative worths, is recognized to be an assurance of good international relations as well as a step toward achieving some measure of external political control.⁶

Marriage within the courtly society is both a social and a political institution, and depends more upon what external benefits may be gained from a particular union than on the internal feelings between the two people involved. Social rank, family connections, and royal sanction combine to eliminate love as a criterion or even a consideration in marriage.⁷ Although love may not figure in the matrimonial scene, it nevertheless exists in the society in the guise of galanterie, where it assumes a double aspect. It is permitted, or rather tolerated, that a woman may have a lover, as long as the affair is discreet and compromises no one. Men, on the other hand, may discuss their amorous endeavors and are admired for the wide scope of their adventures. Love in itself is recognized by all to be a powerful

and unpredictable emotion which is a driving force at the centre of the society's activity.

Everyday social practices at the court are well-defined and members of this society are expected to observe them. The day is categorized in terms of activities which take place during a specified time period. There is a set hour at which one is expected to be prepared to receive visits from one's friends; there is a specified time during which one is expected to make an appearance at the court; there are appropriate hours set aside for personal necessities--dining, sleeping, writing--and for public functions--banquets, balls, sporting events. Failure to appear at an appointed time or being unprepared or ill-disposed to receive visitors is a subject of public speculation and necessitates an infallible excuse (sickness, duties elsewhere) if social decorum is to be observed.⁸ Residence near the site of the court is required due to the nature of the relationship between the King and his counsellors and representatives. Almost all of these men have land in the country where they and their wives may sojourn for a limited time. To be away from the court for a longer than normal period of time without good reason may be interpreted as indicating a lack of desire for or devotion to duty. Royal festivities such as the King's sister's marriage require everyone's attention and participation especially if international relations are involved, since this allows the King to show off his fine taste and judgement in people.

As for the expectations, responsibilities, and conduct of individuals, these are no less rigidly defined than are the characteristics of social institutions and practices. Men are expected to be duty-bound to the wishes and commands of their

sovereign even at the expense of personal and domestic desires and well-being. They will excel at, enjoy, and understand war, and will appreciate the value of mock combat as a forum for their skills and as a method of gaining the admiration of their women. Men are encouraged to be ambitious in politics, war, games, and love (as long as they do not encroach on the sovereignty of the King himself) for these are the animating forces of seventeenth-century society.⁹ The woman's role is equally clearly defined. To marry well is her main concern, and once married, to show respect, admiration, and devotion to her husband is her duty. She is expected to distinguish herself through attention to her physical attractiveness, through her knowledge of the arts, and through her virtuous and socially appropriate behavior. Her public role includes attending and hosting social meetings (salons) and appearing at the court in such a manner as to bring added admiration to her husband.¹⁰

It is quite proper for people to confide secrets to members of the opposite sex but more common to choose a confidant of the same sex. Honesty is a quality that is valued only when the subject of conversation is pleasing to both parties, and although it is, in theory, a praiseworthy aspect of most relationships, in practice there is little evidence that honesty is at all welcome or valued in love affairs or marriage.¹¹ The rules of appropriate conduct which apply to all members of the society leave little room for personal interpretation. The acceptable length of time for a period of mourning, the amount of secrecy permitted for an individual's private affairs, an individual's style of dress and manner of presentation at public affairs--all is defined and regulated by social pressure and tradition. Any

deviation from the norm is instantly subject to public scrutiny and must be well explained if the individual is to continue to find favour in his social milieu.

While the general rules of conduct in seventeenth-century society may be discerned from the action of the novel, specific actions and attitudes are harder for the twentieth-century reader to make out. Mme de la Fayette relies heavily on her seventeenth-century reader's experience and knowledge to fill in the gaps left by her use of vague and imprecise vocabulary in her descriptions of the court, its members, and social practices. Bernard Pingaud, in Mme de la Fayette par elle-même, presents a representative list of nouns, adjectives, and verbs which are taken from the descriptive passage with which the novel opens, that of the court of Henri II (Pingaud, p. 139). He points out the author's use of indirect discourse to achieve a distancing effect, and suggests that her emphasis on abstraction eliminates the possibility of a close association between the reader and the text--two attributes which are important to the appreciation of the roman d'analyse. We find, however, that there is another dimension to the author's use of imprecise vocabulary, one which relates to our discussion of an implicit cultural code.

When describing individuals at the court, Mme de la Fayette speaks in abstractions. Her subjects possess de bonnes qualités; they enjoy les belles choses; they are bien fait; and they are all d'honnêtes gens. There is much mention of mental attributes which are described in terms of amplitude but which remain, nonetheless, imprecise: ". . . il avait un esprit vaste et profond, une âme noble et élevée . . ." (p. 131). The repetition of and emphasis placed upon the concept of qualité cannot be ignored,

and yet it is defined exclusively in terms of physical attractiveness, mental prowess, and social graces and insight: "Le vidame de Chartres . . . était beau, de bonne mine, vaillant, hardi, libéral; toutes ces bonnes qualités étaient vives et éclatantes;" (p. 132). "'Rien ne me peut empêcher de connaître que vous êtes né avec toutes les dispositions pour la galanterie et toutes les qualités qui sont propres à y donner des succès heureux'" (pp. 306-07).

All of the characters in La Princesse de Clèves are "people of quality". They are educated, socially aware aristocrats (or servants of such people) who instinctively understand the unwritten code of appropriate social conduct and who recognize instantly the physical and mental elements which constitute "quality". Their social environment is rigidly structured, a close circle where, as Pingaud states, "le cérémonial de la passion peut se dérouler dans toute sa rigueur" (p. 144). The concept of passion, its causes and effects, is well comprehended by most of these characters, and the practice of galanterie is accepted as an integral part of their lives--social and political; private and public: "L'ambition et la galanterie étaient l'âme de cette cour, et occupaient également les hommes et les femmes. Il y avait tant d'intérêts et tant de cabales différentes, et les dames y avaient tant de part que l'amour était toujours mêlé aux affaires et les affaires à l'amour" (p. 142).

The seventeenth-century reader, too, was a 'person of quality' since only the privileged aristocracy had the time for and the inclination towards education. Given, then, the close resemblance in physical, mental, and social characteristics between the reader and the people about whom he is reading, it is not

at all surprising that Mme de la Fayette should neglect to define the actions and attributes which make up un honnête homme de bonne qualité. The reader is asked to draw upon his own knowledge of aristocratic society to furnish descriptive details. When he reads that M. de Nemours is un chef d'oeuvre de la nature, he has only to bring together all the pleasing traits of the gentlemen in his social circle to create his own composite ideal of physical attractiveness. And when appropriate social conduct is alluded to, the reader merely consults his personal experience in a similar situation and supplies the missing words, actions, and reactions.

Descriptions of characters' physical traits and actions are not the only area in which the author requires the compliance and participation of the reader to fill in details. Mme de la Fayette also alludes to various ceremonials and practices in the society at the court without giving particulars about or rationales for them. When the author states that Anne de Boulen "avait les manières de France qui plaisent à toutes les nations" (p. 199), she assumes that the reader is familiar enough with these manières that further clarification is unnecessary. The reader would understand, through his own experience, the various honneurs, agréments, and cérémonies which greet privileged visitors to the court, while his concept of the appropriate civilités and his knowledge of the code of bienséance as practised in his own social environment would supply him with a perfect picture of what exactly a certain person would do in a particular situation. When Mme de la Fayette says that Mlle de Chartres, after being caught off guard by an approving glance from M. de Clèves, manages to recover "sans témoigner d'autre attention aux actions

de ce prince que celle que la civilité lui devait donner pour un homme tel qu'il paraissait"(p. 138), the reader has no trouble imagining the tone of voice, the choice of words, and the type of actions which constitute this manifestation of appropriate and required civilité.

Mme de la Fayette's preference of vague abstractions and allusions over concrete description and statement is indicative of a certain cultural bond between author and public in that they possess similar moral viewpoints and social understanding. The author uses other techniques which assume that this bond extends to include social situations. Through the use of the generalizing pronoun on (l'on peut juger, l'on peut s'imaginer) and the use of the adjective tout ("il sentit tout ce que la passion peut faire sentir . . .") she assumes that it is unnecessary to describe the actual physical responses to the emotion since the reader can fill out the picture from his own experience. The same detachment of which Pingaud speaks (p. 139) exists here in that a particular emotion is reduced to the level of a common or generally appreciated response. But more specifically or, perhaps, more importantly, Mme de la Fayette is trying, through her emphasis on reader participation, to eliminate the possibility that the reader might consider the characters' responses extraordinary. For example, when Mme de Chartres's plans to marry her daughter to the prince de Montpensier are thwarted by political manipulation, Mme de la Fayette writes: "L'on peut juger ce que sentit Mme de Chartres par la rupture d'une chose qu'elle avait tant désirée, dont le mauvais succès donnait un si grand avantage à ses ennemis et faisait un si grand tort à sa fille"(p. 146).

And when Mme de Chartres makes it clear that she knows her daughter's penchant for Nemours, the author describes Mme de Clèves's reaction: "L'on ne peut exprimer la douleur qu'elle sentit de connaître par ce que lui venait de dire sa mère, l'intérêt qu'elle prenait à M. de Nemours . . ."(p. 169). The assumption here is that all people who may have encountered situations similar to these would have reacted in a similar manner and that the reader, who would logically be one of these people, would be able to supply the necessary physical responses which go with a seventeenth-century fit of fury or remorse.

Mme de la Fayette makes extensive use of the imprecise and generalizing adjective tout. It is applied at liberty to la politesse, les belles choses, les honnêtes gens, les agréments, les sentiments, les bonnes qualités, les bienséances, la magnificence, and les cérémonies. It is an all-encompassing expression of generality used to convey an idea of extreme magnitude and to avoid long and tedious detailed descriptions, for, after all, her reader would understand and supply all the details anyway. But where emotions such as joy and jealousy are concerned, this adjective is used to ensure that the particular is interpreted as the commonplace. For example, Nemours, when informed by the King that he is to court the Queen of England, receives the news "avec toute la joie que peut avoir un jeune homme ambitieux qui se voit porté au trône par sa seule réputation"(p. 152). The author here assumes that the reader is able to gauge the magnitude of this emotion and to picture the physical and mental responses that would characterize it based on his concept of how such an honour would be received by a politically and socially ambitious man. Not only is the reader familiar with the

characteristics and offshoots of ambition as it appears in his social milieu. He is also experienced in the repercussions and associated states of mind which accompany the other driving force in the seventeenth-century, love. When Mme de Clèves reads the letter said to be from another lady to Nemours, she falls prey to jealousy for the first time in her young life: ". . . ce mal, qu'elle trouvait si insupportable, était la jalousie avec toutes les horreurs dont elle peut être accompagnée"(p. 213). Mme de Clèves does not recognize this emotion herself, but Mme de la Fayette does, and knows that her reader, too, is familiar with all the horreurs inherent therein.

Mme de la Fayette's descriptions of social decorum as well as the physical, mental, and emotional make-up of her seventeenth-century subjects provide a wide margin for personal interpretation through their vagueness and generality. But, at the same time, they present a fairly detailed picture of what is accepted and expected from the society of the time. In many cases, physical details of description are lacking while value judgements abound, a fact not surprising considering that the guidelines of acceptable behavior are clearly delineated and understood by both reader and author. These value judgements are found in three major categories of descriptions: physical beauty, mental and social attributes, and action.

Where physical beauty is concerned, variants of the imprecise adjectives parfait and bien figure prominently. Mary Stuart is described as "une personne parfaite pour l'esprit et pour le corps . . . elle . . . avait pris toute la politesse, et elle était née avec tant de dispositions pour toutes les belles choses que, malgré sa grande jeunesse, elle les aimait et s'y

connaissait mieux que personne"(p. 130); and Mlle de Chartres as "une beauté . . . qui attira les yeux de tout le monde, et l'on doit croire que c'était une beauté parfaite, puisqu'elle donna de l'admiration dans un lieu où l'on était si accoutumé à voir de belles personnes"(p. 136). The value of perfect physical beauty cannot be underestimated in a society where love and amorous intrigues prevail over all social activity and where first impressions and outward appearances constitute the basis for initiating these activities. It is obvious to the reader both from his own experience and from the style of these passages that a woman's value is measured, at least in part, in terms of her physical countenance. Where men are concerned, however, there seems to be some ambiguity. The vidame de Chartres is described approvingly as a strikingly handsome man, yet Nemours is at the same time heralded as a masterpiece of nature's handiwork and "condemned" for being the most handsome man in the world: "Le vidame de Chartres . . . était également distingué dans la guerre et dans la galanterie. Il était beau, de bonne mine, vaillant, hardi, libéral . . . enfin il était seul digne d'être comparé au duc de Nemours, si quelqu'un lui eût pu être comparable. Mais ce prince était un chef-d'oeuvre de la nature; ce qu'il avait de moins admirable, c'était d'être l'homme du monde le mieux fait et le plus beau"(p. 132). It would appear that, for a man, some measure of value may be gained through physical attractiveness, but distinction (in terms of action) on the battlefield or in the sitting-room seems to be a more important criterion.

Where mental and social awareness are concerned, value is measured in terms of wit, charm, and decorum. The introductory

sketch of the court of Henri II (pp. 130-32) contains descriptions of men and women who are admired for their bel esprit, for their appreciation of les belles choses, and for their knowledge of and facility with les manières. The concept of esprit, although imprecisely defined, is interpreted in a positive manner by the author since it appears almost exclusively in the context of favourable description, and it is a major factor in determining the quality of an individual--so important a consideration, in fact, that during this description the word esprit appears seven times in two paragraphs. An appreciation for the arts--poetry, music, painting, la comédie--is an equally valued distinction for both men and women, as are eloquence and verbal alacrity. An inbred facility with and acceptance of appropriate social conduct and an innate knowledge of the behaviour which characterizes a person of quality--in short, a perfect ease and comprehension of bienséance and all that it entails--furnishes the basis for a positive judgement of both sexes. There is, however, one realm of social activity where the value of men and women is judged on different criteria, and that is la galanterie. Whereas Mme de Clèves and women of her rank are valued and respected for their virtue and piety, Nemours and his cohorts gain admiration through their amorous intrigues and conquests.

We have seen that, where men are concerned, actions in the areas of war and love constitute a basis for judging their merit. Physical prowess in jousts and mock combat in the form of tournaments serves as another criterion for measuring a man's quality as seen in the opening descriptive sketch of the court and in the scene of the festivities which accompany the King's sister's marriage to the duc d'Albe. Social actions, too, constitute a

basis for assessing the measure of an individual's quality. Knowing how and when to approach a woman so as not to offend her sense of *décorum* by attracting public attention is one of Nemours's talents: ". . . il se résolut de manquer plutôt à lui donner des marques de sa passion que de hasarder de la faire connaître au public"(p. 163). Mme de la Fayette approves of this "conduite si sage" and later condemns Nemours for departing from this line of action when he comits "une imprudence" by telling his friend, the vidame, about Mme de Clèves's confession (p. 245).

Adroitness in managing affaires de galanterie within the rigid limits of defined socially acceptable behaviour is a positive attribute for men, while adeptness in publicly avoiding or rebuffing amorous advances and in arranging and maintaining clandestine relationships is praised in women. It is indeed a paradox that what is respected and admired in the one sex operates in such a manner as to reduce the respect and admiration of the other. M. de Clèves, on his deathbed, tells his wife that she will regret the loss of his love and respect for her virtue when she comes to realize that all Nemours seeks is to seduce her: "Adieu, Madame, vous regretterez quelque jour un homme qui vous aimait d'une passion véritable et légitime. Vous sentirez le chagrin que trouvent les personnes raisonnables dans ces engagements, et vous connaîtrez la différence d'être aimée, comme je vous aimais, à l'être par des gens qui, en vous témoignant de l'amour, ne cherchent que l'honneur de vous séduire"(p. 291). These statements illustrate a depth of understanding and a measure of innate respect where women are concerned that are not expected of the ideal seventeenth-century gentleman. While M. de Clèves, proud of his "passion véritable" and of his respect

for a woman's virtue, cannot survive in his society, Nemours, who sees a woman's virtue not as a quality to be admired and respected but rather as an obstacle to be surmounted in the pursuit of personal glory, is praised and idolized by his peers.

While open demonstrations of their virility is admired in men, it is the opposite of what is respected in women. Tolerance, submission, deference, masked emotions--self-denial, in most respects--are the meritorious characteristics of the "weaker" sex. Whether Mme de la Fayette agrees with the concept that women should accept, without question, the role defined for them in their society is not clearly discernable from her text. She does, however, show admiration for Henri II's wife who tolerates the existence of the King's mistress without exhibiting any outward signs of jealousy (p. 130). This tolerance is hardly a sign of a weak spirit (the Queen shows much self-assurance in her liaison with the vidame) and should be viewed as a good example of how a well-bred woman handles an uncomfortable situation. The gist of Mme de Chartres's lessons to her daughter is that Mme de Clèves should respect her husband, be cognizant of her duty toward him, and avoid any action which would prove her unworthy of his respect. The concept of virtue (self-denial) is lauded by the mother, accepted (not without reservations) by the daughter, and approved by the author as the most desirable attribute in a woman.

In Mme de la Fayette's descriptions of the people at the court, their actions, intrigues, and emotions, we can discover many details of life in the seventeenth-century society. Through her allusive style, her penchant toward generalization, and her oblique presentation of value judgements, social norms

are implicitly defined where institutions, practices, and conduct are concerned. These norms provide an important background for the action of the novel since the characters' actions may be compared to these norms to show the degree of their conformity to the cultural code.

Acceptance, Refusal, and Manipulation

The guidelines of the seventeenth-century cultural code are clearly defined in terms of appropriate social conduct, but its effects upon the people involved are not so easily discerned since one of the major characteristics of life in this society is duplicity. Acceptance of the cultural code is expected from all those who are members of the court. Through their observance and practice of the rules they gain social approval even though inwardly they may experience frustration at not being able to do what they want to do or at the misunderstandings that grow out of equivocal communication. Should a member of this society contravene the rules of appropriate conduct, the results can be disastrous, giving way to misinterpretation, rumour, and scandal. The value of personal freedom and contentment must be weighed against the possibility of social ostracism. The characters in La Princesse de Clèves are caught up in this conflict. For some (the Queen, Mme de Valentinois), the answer lies in adapting their desires to fit the constraints of social pressure; for others (the vidame de Chartres, Nemours, and, in a rather different manner, Mme de Clèves), it is found in gently adapting the rules to fit their desires, trying to assert their personal freedom discreetly while maintaining a veneer of social respectability.

The constraints of the cultural code under which the characters in the novel live pose few problems for those who are passive enough to accept the limitations and to adapt to them. Neither are they bothersome for those who are able to judge when the rules may be bent and how far their scheming can go without breaking them. But for Mme de Clèves, who has been

raised in a relatively sheltered atmosphere by a mother who believed that passiveness and ignorance of the truth can triumph over social corruption, the exigencies of the cultural code cause confusion when practice does not conform to theory. Taught to suppress any hint of emotion and expression of interest toward a man, and ignorant of the role of love (passion) in marriage, Mlle de Chartres is incapable of comprehending M. de Clèves's complaints regarding her lack of passion for him. She believes that he should be content that her actions conform to the accepted mode of conduct expected of a woman of her rank:

M. de Clèves se trouvait heureux sans être néanmoins entièrement content. Il voyait avec beaucoup de peine que les sentiments de Mlle de Chartres ne passaient pas ceux de l'estime et de la reconnaissance et il ne pouvait se flatter qu'elle en cachât de plus obligeants, puisque l'état où ils étaient lui permettait de les faire paraître sans choquer son extrême modestie. Il ne se passait guère de jours qu'il ne lui en fît ses plaintes. . . .

--Il y a de l'injustice à vous plaindre, lui répondit-elle; je ne sais ce que vous pouvez souhaiter au-delà de ce que je fais, et il me semble que la bienséance ne permet pas que j'en fasse davantage.

--Il est vrai, lui répliqua-t-il, que vous me donnez de certaines apparences dont je serais content s'il y avait quelque chose au-delà; mais, au lieu que la bienséance vous retienne, c'est elle seule qui vous fait faire ce que vous faites. Je ne touche ni votre inclination, ni votre coeur, et ma présence ne vous donne ni de plaisir, ni de trouble. (pp. 149-50)

As a wife she shows respect, a sense of duty, and gratitude toward M. de Clèves, according him all the privileges of a husband while investing none of the emotions of a lover.

The appearance of Nemours creates new problems for the virtuous princesse since this man awakens in her feelings of passion forbidden by her mother. Mme de Clèves finds herself torn between her social duties, which necessitate contact with Nemours, and her desire to avoid temptation, which can be accomplished only by avoiding him: "C'était une entreprise difficile,

dont elle connaissait déjà les peines; elle savait que le seul moyen d'y réussir était d'éviter la présence de ce prince"(p. 194). She recognizes the danger involved in an illicit liaison, not in terms of a threat to her relationship with M. de Clèves, but rather on the basis of her psychological well-being--Nemours evokes in Mme de Clèves sensations and emotions that are unknown to her, and an affair with him necessitates scheming and dishonesty which, while being an integral part of the practice of galanterie, go against Mme de Chartres's teachings.

Frustrations and confusion also grow out of a lack of communication which can be the result of social pressure or of fear. Except for the confession, the conversations between M. de Clèves and his wife are less than fruitful where an exchange of information or an explanation of behavior is concerned. When Mme de Clèves first shows signs of discomfort at being left alone with Nemours, her husband asks for justification for this anti-social behavior:

Il lui en parla, et elle lui répondit qu'elle ne croyait pas que la bienséance voulût qu'elle fût tous les soirs avec ce qu'il y avait de plus jeune à la cour; qu'elle le suppliait de trouver bon qu'elle fît une vie plus retirée qu'elle n'avait accoutumé; que la vertu et la présence de sa mère autorisait beaucoup de choses qu'une femme de son âge ne pouvait soutenir.

M. de Clèves, qui avait naturellement beaucoup de douceur et de complaisance pour sa femme, n'en eut pas en cette occasion, et il lui dit qu'il ne voulait pas absolument qu'elle changeât de conduite. (p. 195)

And later when M. de Clèves wants an explanation as to why his wife prefers to hide in the country rather than return to the court, he is greeted with hollow and evasive answers:

--Mais pourquoi ne voulez-vous point revenir à Paris? Qui vous peut retenir à la campagne? Vous avez depuis quelque temps un goût pour la solitude qui m'étonne et qui m'afflige parce qu'il nous sépare. Je vous trouve même plus triste que de coutume et je crains que vous

n'ayez quelque sujet d'affliction.

--Je n'ai rien de fâcheux dans l'esprit, répondit-elle avec un air embarrassé; mais 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. (p. 239)

The husband's frustration at his inability to communicate effectively with his wife shows in his persistent questioning and results, eventually, in the shocking revelations of the confession.

Nemours, too, is confused by the conflicting reactions he receives from Mme de Clèves. Her candid reactions to his presence indicate amorous interest and pleasure while her social mask is indifference and fear. Ever mindful of the rules governing social conduct, Nemours is constrained to express his interest and emotions toward Mme de Clèves in indirect speeches which ostensibly refer to third parties as indicated in the scene which takes place in Madame la dauphine's chambers following the confession (pp. 255-57). All of Nemours's remarks are addressed to the dauphine, yet they are clearly meant for the understanding and appreciation of Mme de Clèves. Forbidden to use direct speech, he cannot justify or explain himself to her and must adopt an aspect of respectful silence if he is to achieve his goal while maintaining a semblance of respectability:

L'envie de parler à Mme de Clèves lui venait toujours dans l'esprit. Il songea à en trouver les moyens, il pensa à lui écrire; mais enfin il trouva qu'après la faute qu'il avait faite, et de l'humeur dont elle était, le mieux qu'il pût faire était de lui témoigner un profond respect par son affliction et par son silence, de lui faire voir même qu'il n'osait se présenter devant elle et d'attendre ce que le temps, le hasard et l'inclination qu'elle avait pour lui, pourraient faire en sa faveur. (p. 264)

Compliance with the rules of conduct secures social approval at the expense of honesty and personal fulfillment. The dupli-

city which is required is most obvious in the case of the two women who have claims on the King: the Queen and the duchesse de Valentinois. The Queen has what would appear to be the harder role to bear, having married the young duc d'Orléans only to lose him to Mme de Valentinois. However disappointed she may have been where love is concerned, the former Catherine de Médicis enjoys the pleasure of fulfilled ambition, as well as the advantages of her powerful social status. She is bound by the requirements of her role as the King's wife to tolerate the existence of his mistress and to present the outward appearances of contentment and conjugal harmony, which she accomplishes with such success that, if it were not for the account of the vidame de Chartres's relationship with her, no one would know to the contrary:

L'humeur ambitieuse de la reine lui faisait trouver une grande douceur à régner; il semblait qu'elle souffrît sans peine l'attachement du roi pour la duchesse de Valentinois, et elle n'en témoignait aucune jalousie, mais elle avait une si profonde dissimulation qu'il était difficile de juger de ses sentiments, et la politesse l'obligeait d'approcher cette duchesse de sa personne, afin d'en approcher aussi le roi. (p. 130)

The duchesse de Valentinois enjoys the advantages of royal protection and can exercise a right to ostracise people who are not in her favour. She has social distinction by virtue of being the King's mistress and has all the financial and emotional benefits of a royal lover with none of the domestic or political complications. She is, however, a victim of the social duplicity rampant at the time since her acceptance is not based on her personal worth but rather on her relationship with the King. Her position is at best tenuous, as seen in her fall from favour during the King's illness (p. 269) and her banishment from the court after his death (p. 271).

If acceptance of the rules for social conduct creates duplicity which results in frustrations and misunderstandings, it still allows some measure of contentment for the individual in that he can continue to function within the enclosure of his social milieu without fear of ostracism. A refusal to conform to the rules, however, or a deviation from the normally accepted behavior pattern has, on the social scene, effects that often extend beyond the scope of the individual's foresight, as seen in Mme de Clèves's confession and later in her declaration of love for Nemours.

Mme de Chartres took great pains to ensure that her daughter would appreciate the exigencies of the cultural code which governs their society, and to give her a good grounding in the possible pitfalls involved in the practice of galanterie: "Mme de Chartres joignait à la sagesse de sa fille une conduite si exacte pour toutes les bienséances qu'elle achevait de la faire paraître une personne où l'on ne pouvait atteindre"(p. 152). Mme de Clèves's conduct places her out of reach for most of the men who might be tempted to try for a liaison with her and so above suspicion that her husband jokes that the missing portrait might have been given to one of her lovers (p. 204).

Even though Nemours is constantly found wherever Mme de Clèves may be, her conduct never gives rise to the suspicion that she might be "cette maîtresse pour qui il a quitté toutes les autres"(p. 209). Her tenacious grip on the code of bien-séance slips from time to time as she wrestles with the problem of protecting herself from Nemours's advances which are becoming more and more bold. Finally, pressed by her husband to explain her bizarre behaviour, Mme de Clèves steps over the boundaries

of the cultural code and confesses her inclination for Nemours:

--Eh bien, Monsieur, lui répondit-elle en se jetant à ses genoux, je vais vous faire un aveu que l'on n'a jamais fait à son mari; mais l'innocence de ma conduite et de mes intentions m'en donne la force. Il est vrai que j'ai des raisons de m'éloigner de la cour et que je veux éviter les périls où se trouvent quelquefois les personnes de mon âge. Je n'ai jamais donné nulle marque de faiblesse et je ne craindrais pas d'en laisser paraître si vous me laissez la liberté de me retirer de la cour ou si j'avais encore Mme de Chartres pour aider à me conduire. Quelque dangereux que soit le parti que je prends, je le prends avec joie pour me conserver digne d'être à vous. Je vous demande mille pardons, si j'ai des sentiments qui vous déplaisent, du moins je ne vous déplairai jamais par mes actions. Songez que pour faire ce que je fais, il faut avoir plus d'amitié et plus d'estime pour un mari que l'on en a jamais eu; conduisez moi, ayez pitié de moi, et aimez-moi encore, si vous pouvez. (pp. 240-41)

Mme de Clèves's reasons for the confession are clear to her, but she has given little thought to the repercussions of it where M. de Clèves is concerned. She is sure of her innocence in terms of her behaviour, asserting that, although her emotions may be guilty, she has never acted unfaithfully toward her husband. She is attempting to unload her guilt and confusion while asking for the understanding and respect that she feels her unprecedented honesty should merit. Unfortunately, however, the fact of the confession and the nature of its content are so foreign to M. de Clèves's appreciation of appropriate social conduct that he cannot accept it on the terms in which it is presented. Although M. de Clèves has, in a sense, invited the confession by predicting to his wife his reaction in a situation similar to that of Sancerre (p. 181), ~~this~~ actual réaction--jealousy, curiosity, hatred of the lover--is the same as was Mme de Clèves's initial reaction to the letter which told her of Nemours's "infidelity". Since the shocked husband is not accustomed to honesty and open declarations he retains only the

damning information of the confession and none of the emotional investment made by its author. The cultural code provides for conditioned responses to expected stimuli. When the stimulus comes from an action in which the code is contravened, however, the response cannot be foreseen; and although one may hope for a response as honest as the stimulus, the combination of cultural shaping and human nature may override logic and understanding.

Mme de Clèves subsequently regrets this departure from the norm when she realizes that the confession has not improved her position with her husband and that the whole episode has become public knowledge. She recovers her sense of bienséance, but only until she is again pressed for an explanation of her aberrant behaviour--this time by Nemours after M. de Clèves's death. Mme de Clèves's declaration of love for Nemours (pp. 302-09) clearly contravenes the cultural code, but it springs from an innate sense of and respect for honesty. The princesse offers a statement of facts, hoping that Nemours will understand and respect the reasons for her choice of conduct. Mme de Clèves is sure of her innocence in terms of her past conduct and equally certain of her resolutions for the future: "Je vous fais cet aveu avec moins de honte, parce que je le fais dans un temps où je le puis faire sans crime et que vous avez vu que ma conduite n'a pas été réglée par mes sentiments. . . . cet aveu n'aura point de suite et je suivrai les règles austères que mon devoir m'impose"(p. 303). She anticipates that Nemours will accept her decision due to the honesty and objectivity with which her rationale is presented.

But she underestimates the cultural conditioning of the man with whom she is dealing. Nemours does not appreciate the

psychological factors implied in Mme de Clèves's strict resolutions, preferring to combat an illogical rejection of pleasure with statements of galanterie and arguments based on worldly practices. When she speaks of duty as an obstacle to their liaison, Nemours takes this concept in the sense of her social duty to mourn M. de Clèves for a specified time:

--Vous n'y songez pas, Madame, répondit M. de Nemours; il n'y a plus de devoir qui vous lie, vous êtes en liberté; et si j'osais, je vous dirai même qu'il dépend de vous de faire en sorte que votre devoir oblige un jour à conserver les sentiments que vous avez pour moi.

--Mon devoir, répliqua-t-elle, me défend de penser jamais à personne, et moins à vous qu'à qui que ce soit au monde, par des raisons qui vous sont inconnues.

--Elles ne me le sont peut-être pas, Madame, reprit-il; mais ce ne sont point de véritables raisons. (pp. 303-04)

Mme de Clèves cannot convince Nemours that her apprehensions are based on anything but fear of social disfavour, for he is not accustomed to the idea that women are capable of governing their emotional responses and social training with reason and self-discipline. The result of Mme de Clèves's second atypical attempt to reason with a man is as unsatisfactory as the first, since the declaration serves only to encourage Nemours in his pursuits now that he has gained confirmation that mutual sentiments exist. As a result of the unconventional déclaration, Mme de Clèves is forced to adopt an equally unconventional, totally insular, attitude toward the rest of her life.

As we have seen, the guidelines of the cultural code are clearly defined and set out for the people of the seventeenth-century society. Compliance with and deviation from them each has positive and negative attributes, but the choice is not solely one or the other. In some cases slight deviation from the rules may be tolerated, and many of the characters are able

to use the guidelines, slightly modified, to justify their non-conformist actions. They must, however, be mindful of the danger of over-justification which can lead to suspicions just the same. Mme de Clèves's psychological conflict arising from the disparity between what she has been taught and what she is experiencing makes it necessary for her to manipulate the cultural code just as Nemours's frustrated attempts at galanterie with respect to her require him to do the same. There is, however, a difference in intent for the two that can be viewed in terms of the opposition of naiveté and calculation.

A good example of calculation is the malaise diplomatique. Ill health is a readily accepted and widely employed excuse to avoid an unpleasant situation. For Mme de Clèves it provides a credible excuse to avoid going to M. de Saint-André's ball, to remove herself to the country to avoid M. de Nemours, and to get herself out of the uncomfortable situation which Nemours creates in Mme la dauphine's chambers: "Comme il y avait beaucoup de monde, elle s'embarrassa dans sa robe et fit un faux pas; elle se servit de ce prétexte pour sortir d'un lieu où elle n'avait pas la force de demeurer et, feignant de ne se pouvoir soutenir, elle s'en alla chez elle"(pp. 257-58). For Nemours, his own illness allows him to cover up his lack of desire to attend the daily salons which Mme de Clèves has forsaken: "Une légère maladie lui servit longtemps de prétexte pour demeurer chez lui et pour éviter d'aller dans tous les lieux où il savait bien que Mme de Clèves ne serait pas"(p. 194); and, combined with the temporary infirmity of M. de Clèves, it also allows Nemours the opportunity to spend entire days in the presence of Mme de Clèves (pp. 194-95).

Social bienséance is also used and abused by the characters in the pursuit of their goals. Mme de Clèves profits from the necessity to mourn her mother's death to take refuge from Nemours at Coulommiers. Her second flight to the country residence is less well justified and when pressed for an acceptable explanation for her sudden penchant for rest and solitude, Mme de Clèves cites social decorum: "Songez seulement que la prudence ne veut pas qu'une femme de mon âge, et maîtresse de sa conduite, demeure exposée au milieu de la cour"(p. 240). And when, after M. de Clèves's death, Nemours presses her to accept and return his advances she again states the opposition of social practice--she is in mourning--to cover her real reasons: "Je suis dans un état qui me fait des crimes de tout ce qui pourrait être permis dans un autre temps, et la seule bienséance interdit tout commerce entre nous"(p. 308). Nemours, too, manipulates the code of bienséance but not by naively using it as a justification or rationale for his actions: the duke profits from other people's sense of appropriate social conduct in his calculated attempts to gain access to Mme de Clèves. When refused entrance to her chambers to consult Mme de Clèves about the vidame's letter--and, not entirely by the way, to assure himself that she understands that it does not belong to him--Nemours appeals to M. de Clèves's sense of duty to the vidame, thereby succeeding in his double goal: "Il alla à l'appartement de M. de Clèves, et lui dit qu'il venait de celui de madame sa femme, qu'il était bien fâché de ne la pouvoir entretenir, parce qu'il avait à lui parler d'une affaire importante pour le vidame de Chartres. Il fit entendre en peu de mots à M. de Clèves la conséquence de cette affaire; et M. de Clèves le mena à l'heure même dans la

chambre de sa femme"(p. 228). Nemours does respect the code of bienséance in that he is hesitant to demonstrate too openly his inclination for Mme de Clèves, fearing that it might compromise his position with respect to her. But he cannot endure the silence and disappearance of Mme de Clèves after her husband's death, so he again preys on a carefully chosen third party--the vidame--to set up the final meeting between them.

The motivation behind their manipulation of the cultural code is basically the same for both Mme de Clèves and Nemours--each seeks an acceptable way in which to eliminate a disagreeable situation without causing public scandal--but, again, there is a difference in intent. Mme de Clèves, all the way through her adventures, is trying to reach an acceptable state of compromise between her desires and her duties without unduly harming any of the people involved. Since she has been taught by her mother to avoid any hint of galanterie and since she knows that the best way to resist temptation is not to encounter it, her instinctive reaction is to shun all social interaction--an idiosyncratic decision which does not conform to the code of conduct for people of her social rank. Manipulating the code, then, to cover up for her extraordinary behavior is just as instinctive and reflects Mme de Clèves's naiveté in thinking that she can keep secret her involvement in the national pastime. Failing to explain her resolutions to Nemours in terms of reason and logic, she has no other recourse but to invoke bienséance (thereby exemplifying her lack of immunity to the duplicity that plays so great a part in seventeenth-century society) hoping that Nemours will recover with time.

If Mme de Clèves's manipulation of the cultural code is

based on the naive thought that she can avoid temptation by showing displeasure and distaste for the temptor, Nemours's actions show a motivation to the contrary. Every one of his contraventions of the code is calculated. His schemes are all oriented toward the conquest of Mme de Clèves, showing little or no consideration for the effect of his actions on anyone who might be in the way. Mme de Clèves's right to personal contentment and solitude is transgressed throughout the adventure, and even at the end of the novel after being unequivocally dismissed by her, Nemours is still working out ways to intrude upon Mme de Clèves's self-imposed exile by invoking the aid of all the people at the court who might be able to influence her judgement. Whatever the basis for manipulating the code may be, we can see that in each case it functioned with qualified success as a stop-gap measure, but in neither case did it bring about the desired results.

Restrictions, Conflicts, and Resolutions

Through our examination of La Princesse de Clèves we have gained some knowledge about the society in which it takes place. Mme de la Fayette presents a social portrait of the court complete with physical descriptions and an outline of its value structure. We know what physical attributes and actions characterize people of quality; we are aware of the existence of a strict code of conduct which governs every foreseeable event in seventeenth-century life; we have seen the effects of compliance with and deviation from the code, effects which influence the psychological make-up of the members of this society. But the code itself, and not just the attitude of the people governed by it, creates an artificial setting for social interaction by restricting membership and conduct in this society. These restrictions define an atmosphere where psychological conflicts abound, conflicts which can only be resolved by acting within the limits of the code. All of the problems encountered by the characters are related to this essential opposition of artificiality (the code) and reality (emotion, conflict).

The seventeenth-century cultural code defines and, through its definitions, creates a closed society--the court--where membership, actions, and values are prescribed. The practice of galanterie is an integral part of courtly life that is both encouraged and protected by the restrictions of the cultural code. The limited nature of the court as a social milieu determines the number of participants that may be present and available for amorous intrigues. Roles are clearly defined for men and women, married and unmarried, and appropriate conduct is equally clearly prescribed. The ritual of galanterie is also protected

by that aspect of the cultural code which requires that all members of the court come in contact with each other at both private and public functions. The cultural code also prescribes the respective reactions of men and women when engaged in galanterie--a man is praised for his persistence and success while a woman is admired for her tolerance of flattery and her adroit rejection of advances. The complicity of the courtly society in the practice of galanterie is seen at the ball where Mme de Clèves and Nemours meet for the first time (pp. 153-54). Everyone is aware of Nemours's reputation with women and of his physical attractiveness. They are not any less aware of Mme de Clèves's beauty nor of her newly acquired status as a married woman. Yet in spite of this information, which should require that Nemours and Mme de Clèves be kept apart, the King places them together on the dance floor, encouraging the affaire to begin. The appropriate responses of men and women to the beginning of a galanterie are demonstrated by the conversation between Nemours, Mme de Clèves, and Mme la dauphine in which Nemours and Mme de Clèves are formally introduced:

--Pour moi, Madame, dit M. de Nemours, je n'ai pas d'incertitude; mais comme Mme de Clèves n'a pas les mêmes raisons pour deviner qui je suis que celles que j'ai pour la reconnaître, je voudrais bien que Votre Majesté eût la bonté de lui apprendre mon nom.

--Je crois, dit Mme la dauphine, qu'elle le sait aussi bien que vous savez le sien.

--Je vous assure, Madame, reprit Mme de Clèves, qui paraissait un peu embarrassée, que je ne devine pas si bien que vous pensez.

--Vous devinez fort bien, répondit Mme la dauphine; et il y a même quelque chose d'obligeant pour M. de Nemours à ne vouloir pas avouer que vous le connaissez sans l'avoir jamais vu. (p. 154)

Nemours is charming and galant, enjoying the pleasure of the acquaintance. Mme de Clèves is demure, a little embarrassed,

and tries to feign a lack of interest in and prior knowledge of the duke. The dauphine thoroughly enjoys the ritual, recognizing neither her part in preparing Mme de Clèves for her downfall--"Mme la dauphine le lui avait dépeint d'une sorte et lui en avait parlé tant de fois qu'elle lui avait donné de la curiosité, et même de l'impatience de le voir"(p. 153)--nor the extent to which the resulting intrigues would harm Mme de Clèves.

The cultural code also encourages the practice of galanterie by controlling the opportunities for and manner of communication between persons of opposite sexes. It is unusual for a man and a woman who are not related to be left alone, and such interviews very readily give rise to scandal. Public contact between unrelated men and women is expected and required, but does not allow for open conversation or statements of intent since social conversation is governed by social bienséance. Honest and sincere discussions between people are not expected and are certainly not encouraged, thus the ritual of indirect conversation (demonstrations of a talent for wit and rhetoric) becomes a cornerstone of galanterie. The taboo against direct expression also makes it difficult for an individual to put an end to unwelcome advances by appealing to another person's sense of reason, with the result that an attempt at an affair can only be ended by silence.

Since galanterie is so well protected and encouraged by the cultural code it achieves a position of unequivocal importance to the members of seventeenth-century society. It cannot operate and survive without their co-operation, and because the people at the court subscribe to and obey the code, there is little chance that the practice of galanterie will die out. Neither is there much chance for the artificiality of this

society's view of love to be discovered, since the code also encourages dishonesty and illusion in social interaction. A talent for duplicity is necessitated by the prescriptions for social behavior which do not allow the individual to aspire to any self-fulfilling action that may contravene the code. If, for example, a woman marries for all the "proper" reasons (social standing, financial assurance, good family ties) she is bound to find her identity and fulfillment in this role. Should she, like Mme de Clèves, discover, through meeting another man, that her role lacks some measure of excitement which is readily available (although not strictly allowable within the bounds of the cultural code) she must have recourse to secrecy and dishonesty in order to gain contentment. Mme de Clèves, however, cannot bring herself to practice this sort of duplicity (admittedly, she does manage to use white lies to get herself out of some situations) and so she suffers a dual discontent--first, that she cannot have what she wants, and secondly, that she cannot bring herself to do what she can, within the allowances of acceptable social practices, to get it. The obstacles to a knowledge about and an appreciation of love that are created by the arbitrary and artificial nature of the cultural code, while not being totally insurmountable, certainly enhance the value of the results of galanterie. At the same time, however, these obstacles (despite the fact that they are grounded on artificial criteria) have a very real effect on the psychological well-being of the people involved.

The psychological conflicts experienced by some of the characters in La Princesse de Clèves fall into three basic categories, all of which are, in some measure, related to the cultural code.

First, there are those problems which are a direct result of social pressure that is found to be in opposition with personal desires (ought to vs. want to). Secondly, there are those conflicts which arise from a desire for self-knowledge which is opposed by the social code of superficiality (essence vs. role). Thirdly, there are the problems created when actual practices do not exemplify an individual's real thoughts and emotions (theory vs. practice). Mme de Clèves is the one character who experiences all of these conflicts, while her husband and Nemours are directly involved in only the first--they are, however, implicated in the others through their association with Mme de Clèves.

The heroine constantly finds herself in a state of confusion when confronted by Nemours and his indirect (sometimes direct) attestations of admiration and respect, as seen in one exchange that takes place between the two characters shortly after Mme de Chartres's death:

Mme de Clèves entendait aisément la part qu'elle avait à ces paroles. Il lui semblait qu'elle devait y répondre et ne les pas souffrir. Il lui semblait aussi qu'elle ne devait pas les entendre, ni témoigner qu'elle les prit pour elle. Elle croyait devoir parler et croyait ne devoir rien dire. Le discours de M. de Nemours lui plaisait et l'offensait quasi également; elle y voyait la confirmation de tout ce que lui avait fait penser Mme la Dauphine; elle y trouvait quelque chose de galant et de respectueux, mais aussi quelque chose de hardi et de trop intelligible. L'inclination qu'elle avait pour ce prince lui donnait un trouble dont elle n'était pas maîtresse. (p. 193)

The emotional side of Mme de Clèves's make-up encourages her to accept the duke's advances while her rational and socially conscious self demands that she take offense and reject him, thus remaining faithful to her husband. Part of her conflict also comes from the fact that although her status as a wife

requires that she show some degree of love for M. de Clèves, she has no desire to act out this socially defined duty toward her husband. Her desire for solitude as a means of avoiding Nemours is another source of trouble for Mme de Clèves since she is cognizant of her social responsibility to appear at the court with her husband. The cultural code does not tolerate idiosyncracies. It is set up to preserve the whole picture, sometimes at the expense of the constituent parts.

M. de Clèves and the duc de Nemours are also trapped in the conflict between their social requirements and their desires, although the effects of these conflicts are not as serious for them as they are for Mme de Clèves. M. de Clèves's desires appear to be totally in agreement with the requirements of the cultural code--all he wants is that his wife return his emotional investment in their relationship. What he ignores is that their marriage is based on convenience and appropriateness, as social custom encourages, and not on love, as his romantic inclinations desire. The cultural code provides that he should be content with his virtuous, faithful, and socially aware wife, but it does not furnish any rules for soliciting passion from a wife who is not disposed to give it freely. He therefore finds that his desires, while not being outrageous in terms of socially accepted behavior, cannot be satisfied under the circumstances of his marriage and the prescriptions of behavior that apply to it. Nemours's wish to engage Mme de Clèves in an affair of galanterie is basically acceptable under the code, since it is expected of all handsome young men that they should excel in matters of this kind. His conflict arises when he comes up against Mme de Clèves's staunch refusal to compromise her virtuous reputation

for the sake of temporary pleasure. Since Nemours, being a gentleman of quality, understands the requirements of the cultural code where it concerns women, he becomes a victim of the double standard which allows men to have affairs with women while advocating that women avoid intrigues with men. He can and must respect Mme de Clèves's resolutions to observe the rules of the cultural code, even though it is his role and desire to make her change her mind.

Mme de Clèves's penchant for self knowledge and, to a certain extent, self-determination finds opposition in the cultural code which defines an individual's worth for him in terms of his physical traits and social role. Mme de Chartres, in her teachings, prepares her daughter for self-determination and consequent non-conformity to the cultural norm while at the same time emphasizing the importance of maintaining a social role:

. . . elle lui faisait voir, d'un autre côté, quelle tranquillité suivait la vie d'une honnête femme, et combien la vertu donnait d'éclat et d'élévation à une personne qui avait de la beauté et de la naissance; mais elle lui faisait voir aussi combien il était difficile de conserver cette vertu, que par une extrême défiance de soi-même et par un grand soin de s'attacher à ce qui seul peut faire le bonheur d'une femme, qui est d'aimer son mari et d'en être aimée. (p. 137)

The "défiance de soi-même" which is advocated cannot be found through blind acceptance and adherence to a role. In order for an individual to safeguard himself against any threat, he must first gain a knowledge of what constitutes a threat and what his powers are to combat it. All the way through the novel Mme de Clèves is searching for this knowledge, but she never has a chance to test out her hypotheses. The cultural code under which she lives (which is embodied by M. de Clèves and Mme de Chartres) has determined what she should view as a threat

to her virtue and social well-being. It also prescribes what steps, if any, may be taken to combat it.

The limitations of her social role--woman, aristocrat, married--impose upon Mme de Clèves a superficiality which is not compatible with the depth of her self-perception. The conflict which results is clearly shown in her rejection of Nemours at the end of the novel. Mme de Clèves tries to explain to Nemours that the reasons for her decision against him are not based on the superficial criteria of social custom, but rather on her perception of herself and the nature of his love as it pertains to her:

Par vanité ou par goût, toutes les femmes souhaitent de vous attacher. Il y en a peu à qui vous ne plaisiez; mon expérience me ferait croire qu'il n'y en a point à qui vous ne puissiez plaire. Je vous croirais toujours amoureux et aimé et je ne me tromperais pas souvent. Dans cet état néanmoins, je n'aurais d'autre parti à prendre que celui de la souffrance; je ne sais même si j'oserais me plaindre. On fait des reproches à un amant; mais en fait-on à un mari, quand on n'a qu'à lui reprocher de n'avoir plus d'amour? (p. 307)

She realizes that the cultural code which determines appropriate conduct only provides ideal and artificial ground rules governing the relationship between married people. Although their marriage would bear the mark of social approval, Mme de Clèves realizes that adopting the role of husband would not eliminate Nemours's natural penchant for galanterie and that becoming his wife would not end her jealous sufferings. Mme de Clèves cannot go along with society's superficial attitude toward marriage because she knows herself too well--her personal desires would always be in conflict with social practice.

Another source of conflict for Mme de Clèves is the fact that even though the guidelines for appropriate social conduct are clearly defined and obedience of them expected, she often

sees around her examples of conduct which conform neither to the cultural code nor to the real thoughts, emotions, and intentions of the individual. The most obvious example of this contrast between theory and practice is found in the story of Sancerre and Mme de Tournon (pp. 174-86). Mme de Tournon presents an exterior attitude which condemns marriage and advocates retirement from the court as the only possible way of gaining peace of mind: "--Je ne saurais croire, interrompit Mme de Clèves, que Mme de Tournon, après cet éloignement si extraordinaire qu'elle a témoigné pour le mariage depuis qu'elle est veuve, et après les déclarations publiques qu'elle a faites de ne se remarier jamais, ait donné des espérances à Sancerre"(p. 175). So convincing is Mme de Tournon that Mme de Clèves finds it almost impossible to believe that such a lady could dally with even one man, let alone play off one lover against another: "--L'on ne peut être plus surprise que je le suis, dit alors Mme de Clèves, et je croyais Mme de Tournon incapable d'amour et de tromperie"(p. 186). Indeed, the truth would never have been known had she not died, thus having lost control over the imposed restrictions on her two lovers. Two sources of conflict for Mme de Clèves grow out of this tale. First, she is presented with M. de Clèves's hypothetical statement of how he would act if he found out that his wife had a lover: ". . . je crois que si ma maîtresse, et même ma femme, m'avouait que quelqu'un lui plût, j'en serais affligé sans être aigri. Je quitterais le personnage d'amant ou de mari, pour la conseiller et pour la plaindre"(p. 181). Such a statement does not conform with what she knows to be true about jealousy in her social environment, yet she would like to believe and act upon it to relieve herself

of the problem of Nemours. Although the theory is preferable to practice, Mme de Clèves realizes its unreliable nature through seeing the effects of illusion on Sancerre. The second source of conflict for Mme de Clèves is the fact that Mme de Tournon succeeded so well in her duplicity and was not found out until after her death when public opinion could no longer harm her. The possibility for Mme de Clèves to keep her lover and her husband is presented, but she must reject it since she knows that she lacks a basic talent for dishonesty in affairs of this kind.

The resolutions that are made to deal with the conflicts which arise from the restrictive nature of the cultural code are, for the most part, unsatisfactory and condemned to failure since they respond only to the exigencies of the code and not to the needs of the individual. Every time Mme de Clèves resolves to have nothing more to do with Nemours (except, of course, the final resolution) she is reacting to social pressure--fear of public scandal, duty to her husband--and not to her own desires. Since her decisions are based on artificial criteria, it is not surprising that they should be hard for her to observe for any great length of time. Her final resolution is the only one that has any possibility of success because it is based on self-awareness and an honest desire to remain true to herself at any expense. M. de Clèves's resolution, after the confession, not to press his wife to reveal the identity of her lover nor to dwell upon the affair¹² does not last long in the face of his overwhelming curiosity and his desires to the contrary. Nemours, of course, is incapable of keeping any resolution that interferes with his personal goals, but he at least admits to himself that his resolutions are based on artificial reasons and that they

are only stop-gap measures while he waits for Mme de Clèves to come around to his way of perceiving things: ". . . il trouva . . . [que] le mieux qu'il pût faire était de lui témoigner un profond respect par . . . son silence . . . et d'attendre ce que le temps, le hasard et l'inclination qu'elle avait pour lui, pourraient faire en sa faveur"(p. 264).

The conflict between Mme de Clèves's desire for self-determination and the cultural code's prescriptions of behavior fitting a person of her rank cannot be resolved within the guidelines of the code. Since the society has a rule of conduct to govern every foreseeable social action, self-determination is effectively eliminated as is the concept of responsibility for one's own life. By trying to take responsibility for her own existence, and by trying to determine her own personal rules of conduct, Mme de Clèves leaves the jurisdiction of the cultural code, rejecting it both as a criterion on which to base her decision and as a possible answer to her dilemma. The artificial nature of the code is incompatible with her developing sense of honesty, and the exigencies of this code are not relevant to her since she is about to exile herself from the milieu where they are necessary.

Stereotypes, Laws, and Suggestions

We have already seen how the cultural code implicit in the novel has defined and stereotyped people of specific roles by specifying their physical traits and their mode of conduct. Sometimes, however, the narrator and the characters make bald statements about people and their activities in order to justify a certain action which may not be governed by the rules of the cultural code. In some cases, these maxims are stated in the manner characteristic of the Maximes of la Rochefoucauld, while in others they may be inferred from the context of a statement. Such explicit references to human nature and social values provide expressions of role and cultural stereotypes, statements of generally accepted truths about conduct and human nature, and suggestions of other generally accepted truths which may be inferred from actions which do not exemplify the cultural norm.

There are three main areas of stereotyping evident in the novel: first, there is cultural stereotyping which includes praising the French way of life, comparing it to the English, and criticizing the Italian; secondly, there is female role stereotyping where allusions are made to feminine incomprehensibility, vanity, emotions, and dishonesty; thirdly, there is male stereotyping which exposes the difference between a man as a husband and a man as a lover, and which emphasizes the role of glory in a man's social being.

Where cultural stereotyping is concerned, Mme de la Fayette's prejudice in favour of the French is obvious. Both Mary Stuart and Anne de Boulen, although closely linked to England, have been raised at the French court and are admired for their ease with the French culture. The author, in the context of discussing

Anne de Boulen, states that "les manières de France . . . plaisent à toutes les nations"(p. 199). This is the only real maxim that refers to the French culture; the lack of other statements of similar baldness indicates that the superiority of the French was an understood fact. This maxim, appearing in Mme la dauphine's account of the English court at the time of Henry VIII, is used primarily to show Anne de Boulen's quality and to project this image onto her daughter, Elizabeth: ". . . elle n'avait aucune ressemblance avec les autre beautés anglaises" (p. 199). It also serves as grounds for a comparison between the French and English societies, the English coming out on the bottom because of Henry VIII who, after receiving the fulminations of the Pope on the subject of his marriage practices, "se déclara chef de la religion et entraîna toute l'Angleterre dans le malheureux changement . . ."(p. 201). The Italians, too, receive bad notices from the members of the French court. The vidame de Chartres, while recounting to Nemours his adventures with the Queen, states that "la jalousie est naturelle aux personnages de sa nation"(p. 223). Nemours is amazed that the vidame would even attempt to court another lady behind the Queen's back since it is well known that "elle est italienne et reine, et par conséquent pleine de soupçons, de jalousie, et d'orgueil" (p. 225). It is the emotional aspect of the race that is the determining characteristic of Italians according to these two gentlemen. Neither of them considers the general applicability of these qualities to people in certain circumstances, and perhaps this is the reason behind their characteristically inconsistent relationships with women.

We have discussed the stereotyped role that the cultural

code provides for women and how Mme de Chartres tried to instill in her daughter respect for and observance of the role. It is noteworthy, however, that men (M. de Clèves, Nemours) despite the rigid rules imposed by the code, feel it necessary to make explicit generalizations about the nature and actions of women, while women voice no maxims about themselves.¹³ When M. de Clèves, with reference to Mme de Tournon, voices the generally accepted truth, "les femmes sont incompréhensibles" (p. 174) while in the same sentence expressing his pleasure at having a wife who is so different, he is unaware of the full measure of this contradiction. Not only does he stereotype all women, but M. de Clèves also unwittingly puts his wife in a classification where, because of her "different" status, Mme de Clèves can conduct herself differently from them--thereby giving rise to the possibility of the confession. Nemours respects and understands the cultural code in its application to women and to the practice of galanterie but all the same he is the alleged author of a whole series of maxims about women and their social conduct:

--M. de Nemours trouve . . . que le bal est ce qu'il y a de plus insupportable pour les amants, soit qu'ils soient aimés ou qu'ils ne le soient pas. Il dit que, s'ils sont aimés ils ont le chagrin de l'être moins pendant plusieurs jours; qu'il n'y a point de femme que le soin de sa parure n'empêche de songer à son amant; qu'elles en sont entièrement occupées; que ce soin de sa parure est pour tout le monde aussi bien que pour celui qu'elles aiment; que lorsqu'elles sont au bal, elles veulent plaire à tous ceux qui les regardent; que, quand elles sont contentes de leur beauté, elles en ont une joie dont leur amant ne fait pas la plus grande partie. Il dit encore que, quand on n'est point aimé, on souffre encore davantage de voir sa maîtresse dans une assemblée; que, plus elle est admirée du public, plus on se trouve malheureux de n'en être point aimé; que l'on craint toujours que sa beauté ne fasse naître quelque amour plus heureux que le sien. Enfin il trouve qu'il n'y a point de souffrance pareille à celle de voir sa maîtresse au bal, si ce n'est de savoir qu'elle y est et de n'y être pas. (pp. 164-65)

These maxims are ascribed to Nemours by M. de Condé who repeats them to Mme de Clèves and Mme la dauphine. It is not clear whether there is any strategy involved on the part of Nemours to have these opinions made known to Mme de Clèves or whether they are simply theories advanced by the most successful homme galant in the group at the dauphin's bedside. Whatever the rationale, the maxims appear clearly as statements of generally accepted truths about women and about men's dealings with them as based on his own experiences. If there is no strategy involved in the maxims about mistresses and balls, there definitely is when Nemours voices another maxim regarding women: "Les femmes jugent d'ordinaire de la passion qu'on a pour elles . . . par le soin qu'on prend de leur plaire et de les chercher"(p. 192). This statement appears in the first private conversation between Mme de Clèves and Nemours while the duke is indirectly explaining his actions and emotions toward her. This maxim forms the basis for Nemours's usual method of pursuing affairs of galanterie--if the woman wants to be toyed with, he is happy to oblige. But the duke uses this statement to establish a contrast between Mme de Clèves and the rest of the women he has known and to show that he intends to pursue her on her own very different terms. Nemours's inability to follow through on his stated intentions demonstrates, however, that his real opinion of Mme de Clèves is that she, too, is governed by this maxim.

Maxims which stereotype male attitudes and behaviour are not very common in La Princesse de Clèves, and when they do appear they are not clearly stated, but must be inferred from a statement by one of the characters. Mme la dauphine, in reaction to M. de Condé's information about Nemours's opinion of

mistresses and balls, makes a distinction between men who are husbands and men who are lovers: "Comment! reprit Mme la dauphine, M. de Nemours ne veut pas que sa maîtresse aille au bal? J'avais bien cru que les maris pouvaient souhaiter que leurs femmes n'y allassent pas; mais, pour les amants, je n'avais jamais pensé qu'ils pussent être de ce sentiment"(p. 164). The opinion which may be inferred from this is that husbands and lovers have different attitudes toward the reputations of their women, since the husband would feel it his right and duty to protect his wife from amorous advances while the lover gains his satisfaction from publicly showing off his latest conquest. The role of the husband is inconsistent with the socially acceptable pastime of galanterie and it has its own stereotype as presented by M. de Clèves in his reaction to the unconventional confession: "Que ne me laissez-vous dans cet aveuglement tranquille dont jouissent tant de maris?"(p. 291). M. de Clèves bemoans the fact that his wife has performed an act that is abnormal by comparison to those of other women (who would never consider telling their husbands of such a thing), an act that forces him to attempt to abandon the stereotyped role of husband. Mme de Clèves, since she does not fit the stereotype for a woman of her time, is always searching for signs of similar non-conformity in her men. Disillusioned after finding that Nemours is incapable of being content with his suspicions that she loves him and that he can no longer observe the appropriate social mannerisms where she is concerned, Mme de Clèves reflects upon the situation and comes up with perhaps the most obvious and truthful maxim about the men of the seventeenth-century society: "J'ai eu tort de croire qu'il y eût un homme capable de cacher

ce qui flatte sa gloire"(p. 262). It is this inability in men to resist an opportunity to shine in conquest over women that contributes to many of the problems encountered by Mme de Clèves throughout the novel.

Where the presentation of role and cultural stereotypes is concerned, it is the characters of the novel who voice explicit statements of appropriate conduct (maxims), but Mme de la Fayette relies primarily on the reader's implicit knowledge of the cultural code to determine when a certain action agrees with or contravenes the accepted notions of proper social behavior. When, on the other hand, the author does present a maxim, it is usually a statement regarding human nature, a generally accepted truth which applies to all social beings. These maxims explain or, perhaps, justify the actions and reactions of the characters in situations which are not clearly governed by the implicit cultural code.

When Mme de la Fayette states that "[la] plupart des mères s'imaginent qu'il suffit de ne parler jamais de galanterie devant les jeunes personnes pour les en éloigner"(p. 137), she is describing the ignorance which shrouds the lives of women in this society. She establishes the norm in order to show how neither Mme de Chartres nor her daughter conforms to it. The maxim itself contains no value judgement and neither does the description of Mme de Chartres's innovative teachings to Mlle de Chartres, but in their juxtaposition there is an indication that one technique is more acceptable than the other in the eyes of the society. In a sense, this maxim is a statement of general truth about human nature since it may be inferred that most people prefer to avoid touchy issues, hoping that all will turn out well,

rather than to confront and expose possible dangers, gambling that a knowledge of corruption will result in strength to resist and not in a desire to yield.

Most of the conduct of the characters in the novel is ruled by the guidelines set out by the cultural code. Some, however, is not. The confession and the declaration made by Mme de Clèves are two such actions which find their justification solely in the heroine's rationale, which is independent of the cultural code. Other actions in the novel are explained by maxims concerning human nature. When Nemours, after eavesdropping on the confession, tells all to the vidame de Chartres, he strays just a little too far from the cultural code which protects the privacy of the domestic unit as well as that of the individual. Mme de la Fayette explains away this contravention of social decorum with a generalizing statement which contains a maxim relating to human nature: "Ce prince était si rempli de sa passion, et si surpris de ce qu'il avait entendu, qu'il tomba dans une imprudence assez ordinaire, qui est de parler en termes généraux de ses sentiments particulières et de conter ses propres aventures sous des noms empruntés"(p. 245). The vidame de Chartres, too, transgresses the understood code of conduct by making public the contents of a private discussion when he repeats the story to his lover, Mme de Martigues, adding his own suspicions that Nemours is the one involved. This second imprudence is also explained by the author in terms of universal human reactions: "L'envie de s'éclaircir, ou plutôt la disposition naturelle que l'on a de raconter tout de que l'on sait à ce que l'on aime, fit qu'il redit à Mme de Martigues l'action extraordinaire de cette personne"(p. 252). Neither of these

maxims is presented as justification for the action involved, but both provide possible reasons, based on a knowledge of human nature and the effects of passion on human beings in general, for such deviations from the accepted code of appropriate social conduct.

The contribution made by love to the mental imbalance which results in these rash declarations is clearly defined by Mme de la Fayette. Indeed, most of the maxims presented by the narrator concern the effects of love and its accompanying emotions on the people involved. While M. de Clèves is assessing his chances of gaining the hand of Mlle de Chartres, he is held back by "la timidité que donne l'amour" and he finds that his friendship with the chevalier de Guise is becoming increasingly remote since they each realize that the other is also pursuing Mlle de Chartres. Within the realm of human reactions, the author finds this circumstance quite logical, explaining it in terms of "l'éloignement que donnent les mêmes prétentions"(p. 141). These are not, precisely speaking, maxims, but they are nonetheless explicit statements of generally accepted truths about love and human nature. Truth itself is mentioned in two brief maxims. In both cases a character is trying to explain his innocence to another--Nemours to Mme de Clèves, Mme de Clèves to M. de Clèves--and the author comments on the ease with which each second party is convinced: "M. de Nemours lui dit encore tout ce qu'il crut propre à la persuader; et, comme on persuade aisément une vérité agréable, il convainquit Mme de Clèves qu'il n'avait point de part à cette lettre"(p230); "Elle lui parla avec tant d'assurance, et la vérité se persuade si aisément lors même qu'elle n'est pas vraisemblable, que M. de Clèves fut

presque convaincu de son innocence"(p. 293). There is a distinction between une vérité agréable and la vérité invraisemblable which may be expressed in terms of the second party's willingness or hesitation to accept the truth as it is presented, but Mme de la Fayette's maxims stand as similar expressions of the generally accepted notion that, under most circumstances, it is easier to convince people of the truth than it is to make them believe a lie.

The universal applicability of Mme de la Fayette's maxims is indicated in one which refers to the practice of galanterie: "Les personnes galantes sont toujours bien aises qu'un prétexte leur donne lieu de parler à ceux qui les aiment"(p. 245). This is stated, interestingly enough, in relation to Mme la dauphine who is the object of M. d'Anville's admiration, but it could just as easily refer to the Queen and the vidame, to Mme de Martigues and the vidame, or even to Nemours (as the personne galante) and Mme de Clèves. This maxim also points out the fact that Mme de Clèves is not une personne galante or at least that she tries not to be one since she does not enjoy the attention she gets from Nemours nor does she search out excuses to talk to him. Mme de Clèves is constantly encountering difficulties due to her refusal to participate in affairs of galanterie. Her involuntary reaction to Nemours's advances is pleasure, a reaction which she combats with reason based on her mother's teachings. The essential conflict is summed up by another of Mme de la Fayette's maxims: "Les paroles les plus obscures d'un homme qui plaît donnent plus d'agitation que des déclarations ouvertes d'un homme qui ne plaît pas"(p. 193). The affection which Mme de Clèves feels for Nemours makes her particularly

susceptible to his rhetoric and to any allusion that might be made to the existence of some liaison between them. Mme de la Fayette, in giving a universally understood source for the predicament, succeeds in establishing Mme de Clèves's lack of immunity to reactions that are rooted in human nature and points out the futility of trying to go against basic human drives.

It is not surprising that the majority of the author's generalizing statements and actual maxims concern the relationship between men and women and the nature of love as it exists in this society. We have already seen how M. de Clèves and Nemours distinguish Mme de Clèves from the rest of the women of her time by excepting her from inclusion in their own maxims. Some of the generalizing statements that are presented in the narration also indicate that certain other characters do not exemplify the cultural norm. When Mme de la Fayette speaks of the King's jealousy in the light of a suspected amorous affair between Mme de Valentinois and M. de Brissac, maréchal de France, she indicates that this emotion in the King is not demonstrated in the commonly expected manner: "La jalousie du roi augmenta néanmoins d'une telle sorte qu'il ne put souffrir que ce maréchal demeurât à la cour; mais la jalousie, qui est aigre et violente en tous les autres, est douce et modérée en lui par l'extrême respect qu'il a pour sa maîtresse"(p. 161). This statement gives valuable information about the King's personality which supports the original description of him at the beginning of the novel. More importantly, however, the inferred maxim concerning a generally accepted appreciation of jealousy contributes to the reader's knowledge of the reactions he can expect from most members of the courtly society. The same can be said of a

generality expressed in M. de Clèves's reaction to his first view of Mlle de Chartres: "Il s'aperçut que ses regards l'embarrassaient, contre l'ordinaire des jeunes personnes qui voient toujours avec plaisir l'effet de leur beauté"(p. 138). The reader realizes, first, that Mme de Clèves is being distinguished from her contemporaries on the basis of her reaction to M. de Clèves, and secondly, that this statement contains a specific generalization about the reaction which may be expected from all young women who find themselves receiving admiring glances from young men.

The effects of the passion experienced by both Mme de Clèves and Nemours are clearly shown in the events of the novel, but in some circumstances the particular outward manifestations of love and the accompanying emotions felt by the characters are indicated in reference to generalizations about the nature and effects of love in a seventeenth-century context. Nemours's initial reaction to Mme de Clèves is characterized by violent emotion and a slight modification in his social conduct: "Il est vrai aussi que, comme M. de Nemours sentait pour elle une inclination violente, qui lui donnait cette douceur et cet enjouement qu'inspirent les premiers désirs de plaire, il était encore plus aimable qu'il n'avait accoutumé de l'être; de sorte que, se voyant souvent, et se voyant l'un et l'autre ce qu'il y avait de plus parfait à la cour, il était difficile qu'ils ne se plussent infiniment"(p. 155). The effect of passion on Nemours is specific where the magnitude and nature of his emotions, and changes in his behavior are concerned. The actual nature of the force which has caused these reactions is, however, generalized, as is the speculated outcome of the adventure.

Again, the emotion involved is characteristically violent, and it appears to be common knowledge that strong desires to please someone can result in at least superficial changes in personality--Nemours's passion inspires in him gentleness and gaiety. The fatalism inherent in the last statement of the quotation points out another generalization about social interaction in seventeenth-century society: when two people of incomparable quality are exposed to each other constantly, a reaction of mutual pleasure and desire between them is inevitable.

The results of Nemours's passion toward Mme de Clèves are seen in several episodes of the novel (the letter, the imprudence after the confession, the nocturnal visit to Coulommiers) which demonstrate the strength and power of love which tends to override reason. Other characteristics of love are confusion and mixed emotions which, although experienced to some extent by Nemours, are predominantly encountered by Mme de Clèves. The declaration in which Mme de Clèves reveals her love for Nemours and then denies the possibility of a marriage between them ends on a hopeful note for Nemours: "Attendez ce que le temps pourra faire"(p. 309). The always optimistic Nemours is found by the vidame in a confused state of emotion: "Il revint trouver M. de Nemours, qui était si plein de joie, de tristesse, d'étonnement et d'admiration, enfin, de tous les sentiments que peut donner une passion pleine de crainte et d'espérance, qu'il n'avait pas l'usage de la raison"(p. 309). The effects of this both fearful and hopeful emotion are, at the same time, specifically exhibited by Nemours and generally (though imprecisely) defined by the author who presumes that the reader will concur with the universally accepted truth which is implied.

Where Mme de Clèves is concerned, confusion is her usual state of mind when she reflects upon her involvement with Nemours. From the beginning, Mme de Clèves has problems dealing with the conflict between pleasure and duty, and Nemours notices this with ease: ". . . il aimait la plus aimable personne de la cour; il s'en faisait aimer malgré elle, et il voyait dans toutes ses actions cette sorte de trouble et d'embarras que cause l'amour dans l'innocence de la première jeunesse"(p. 203). Nemours recognizes the commonly expected reactions of someone who is not accomplished in the fine art of duplicity and social love-making because it is a generally understood fact that young and inexperienced people would have difficulty coping with the powerful effects of passion. It is also generally accepted that the presence of someone toward whom an individual is kindly disposed is a source of pleasure for that individual. Mme de Clèves is no exception to this rule: "Mme de Clèves demeura seule, et sitôt qu'elle ne fut plus soutenue par cette joie que donne la présence de ce que l'on aime, elle revint comme d'un songe"(p. 235). But, of course, when the source of pleasure is gone and the immediate emotions involved with it fade in the light of a returning sense of duty and social decorum, confusion abounds and motives are questioned: "Veux-je m'engager dans une galanterie? Veux-je manquer à M. de Clèves? Veux-je manquer à moi-même? Et veux-je enfin m'exposer aux cruels repentirs et aux mortelles douleurs que donne l'amour?"(p. 237). So conditioned is Mme de Clèves by her mother's presentation of the nature of love and galanterie in their social aspect that, for her, any participation in either of these practices can only have negative results--only regret and unhappiness can come from unfaithful conduct.

Reactions, Defence, and Strategy

We have seen how the various characters are affected by the implicit cultural code and how they attempt to manipulate certain aspects of it to achieve their personal goals. The maxims which appear in the novel provide support for the prescriptions of the implicit code by furnishing explicit statements about roles, conduct, and human nature in general. Although Mme de la Fayette puts many of these maxims in her narration, the characters also voice generalizations about some aspects of life in the seventeenth century. This second group of maxims is characterized by underlying strategy. They are stated either in reaction to circumstances dictated by the cultural code, in defence of an individual's actions, or in an attempt to have another character modify his behavior. In every case these statements contain a generally accepted truth about human reactions or about the nature of life and love in this society.

One of the most confusing aspects of social life in the seventeenth century is the practice of duplicity which is necessitated by the strict requirements of the code of appropriate social behavior. An individual may do as he pleases as long as he maintains a veneer of social respectability and responsibility. Mme de Chartres's perspicacity where the difference between reality and illusion is concerned is shown in her comments to her daughter: "Si vous juger sur les apparences en ce lieu-ci, répondit Mme de Chartres, vous serez souvent trompée: ce qui paraît n'est presque pas la vérité"(p. 157). Mlle de Chartres, being young and inexperienced in the workings of her social milieu, reacts instinctively to appearances and does not realize the importance of examining the actions of others for possible

motives. Mme de Chartres is trying to open her daughter's eyes to a dangerous characteristic of social life which could trap the younger woman into a bad choice of allies based on faulty appearances. This information does not sit well with Mlle de Chartres since she has been invested with a strong sense of honesty and sincerity which govern her approach to life in this comparatively corrupt society. It is not until she realizes that even her husband advocates and practices duplicity (after the confession) that Mme de Clèves really comes to appreciate the wide scope and inevitability of dishonesty in social interactions, at which point she also realizes that she, as an individual, cannot live under these conditions.

The nature of love in the courtly society is determined by the cultural code, and the effects of this emotion on the people of the court are a direct result of their appreciation of and adherence to the code. Nemours, for whom ambition and galanterie are the animating forces in life, finds himself caught in an uncomfortable situation where his knowledge and techniques have no effect on the object of his amorous interests. Through his training and experience he recognizes the symptoms of love, but the final results of his passion do not follow true to form: "Quoi! je serai aimé de la plus aimable personne du monde et je n'aurai cet excès d'amour que donnent les premières certitudes d'être aimé que pour mieux sentir la douleur d'être maltraité!" (pp. 284-85). Nemours is not conditioned to expect that anything other than pleasure can result from the knowledge that one is loved. His incredulity at discovering that, although his actions fit the role of a man in his social position, the actions of the woman involved do not fit the expected behavior

pattern, is expressed in this generalizing statement which indirectly states the accepted social norm defined by the implicit cultural code.

The nature of relationships between people at the court is based very strictly on the code of appropriate social conduct as indicated by the vidame de Chartres: ". . . la reine m'a toujours traité avec beaucoup de distinction et d'agrément, et j'avais eu lieu de croire qu'elle avait de la bonté pour moi; néanmoins, il n'y avait rien de particulier, et je n'avais jamais songé à avoir d'autres sentiments pour elle que ceux du respect"(p. 217). His sense of social decorum does not permit M. de Chartres to presume that he might aspire to be the Queen's lover. Indeed, the Queen is not looking for a lover, but she does seek a secret and entirely devoted confidant. The need for such people in whom an individual can confide his secret desires and frustrations is an understandable by-product of the restrictive nature of the cultural code. The vidame and the Queen have different opinions regarding this practice, as reported in the conversation between the vidame and Nemours during the episode of the letter: "Je dis qu'il n'y avait personne en qui [j'eusse une confiance] entière; que je trouvais que l'on se repentait toujours d'en avoir La reine me dit . . . que c'était une chose nécessaire dans la vie, que d'avoir quelqu'un à qui on pût parler, et surtout pour les personnes de son rang" (p. 217). M. de Chartres's maxim relating to the pitfalls of relating one's secrets to a confidant contains an element of credibility, especially since he himself betrays the secret that Nemours confides in him about the confession. The Queen is speaking from personal experience about the roles and

requirements that are thrust upon individuals by the cultural code and how these prescriptions define a need for a private means of purging the emotions that build up inside a person who is strictly bound by the code. The Queen's perspicacity where the nature and effects of love are concerned is admirable: "On ne peut se fier à ceux qui [sont amoureux]; on ne peut s'assurer de leur secret. Ils sont trop distraits et trop partagés, et leur maîtresse leur fait une première occupation . . ." (p. 221). The imbalance and lack of reliability that characterize people who are in love is a danger to the Queen whose private confidings must necessarily remain secret for both social and political reasons. The maxim here presented is a statement of general truth about the power that love can exert over normally rational people, and it supports the picture of love that is implicitly presented throughout the novel.

A rational and logical approach to life does not appear to be one of the aims of the cultural code, although it is a desired state of mind for some of the characters. When M. de Clèves is subjected to his wife's confession of outside amorous interests, his reactions are anticipated, if not prescribed by the rules of the cultural code--jealousy, fury, irrationality--but he tries to fight these reactions with reason and calmness. He recognizes his powerless position: ". . . la considération d'un mari n'empêche pas que l'on soit amoureux de sa femme" (p. 242). M. de Clèves's maxim is a statement about the impotence of social classifications and their traditions in the face of basic human drives, and it echoes his early realization that marriage does not necessarily engender the emotions that should, usually, precede it: "La qualité de mari lui donna de

plus grands privilèges; mais elle ne lui donna pas une autre place dans le coeur de sa femme"(p. 151). M. de Clèves is unusually perceptive for what appears to be the normal male of the seventeenth century. When, on his deathbed, he pronounces his parting speech to Mme de Clèves, M. de Clèves makes two statements about human nature that are hidden in admonitions about his wife's conduct: ". . . vous regretterez quelque jour un homme qui vous aimait d'une passion véritable et légitime. Vous sentirez le chagrin que trouvent les personnes raisonnables dans ces engagements, et vous connaîtrez la différence d'être aimée, comme je vous aimais, à l'être par des gens qui, en vous témoignant de l'amour, ne cherchent que l'honneur de vous séduire" (p. 291). M. de Clèves is idealizing when he refers to des personnes raisonnables, for the practice of galanterie and the importance and power accorded to love combine to eliminate the possibility of any rational approach to relationships between men and women. Furthermore, for a man to make such a clear distinction between the two types of love and to openly state his conclusions on the topic in front of a woman demonstrates, if not a breach of social decorum, at least the potential for contravention of the cultural code. M. de Clèves suffers no consequences from this unconventional openness; his death prevents him from dealing with the results of it. His purpose, however, is not just to shock his wife or to declare his feelings toward her. M. de Clèves is simply trying to expose two aspects of basic human nature in the hope that his wife will be able to profit from his observations during the rest of her life.

Some of the maxims which are stated by the characters are more than simple expressions of a general truth about social

conduct and human nature. The characters also use maxims (which, for the most part, support the implicit cultural code) as a justification or a defence of their actions and reactions in a social situation. In some cases a maxim is used to support a claim of innocence or a lack of involvement in an affair. By voicing a generalizing statement about expected conduct, a character may show that his conduct does not fit the pattern and, therefore, that he cannot be the one in question. Mme la dauphine uses this technique effectively when M. d'Anville and Mme de Clèves agree that she must be the object of Nemours's passion that is making him ignore the opportunity to marry into the crown of England. The dauphine can certainly understand this possibility, considering her quality and that of Nemours. But she is not unperceptive where human reactions are concerned: "Ces sortes de paroles n'échappent point à la vue de celles qui les causent; elles s'en aperçoivent les premières"(p. 190). The dauphine knows that were she the object of Nemours's affection, she would be very aware of it. Since she has noticed no significant demonstrations toward her on the part of Nemours, she can be very sure that she is not the one involved. It is ironic that the dauphine, who has made such a perceptive statement, should fail to see the obvious reaction of Mme de Clèves to the talk about Nemours, a reaction which illustrates the applicability of the maxim.

Both Mme de Clèves and her husband use maxims regarding commonly expected social behavior in an attempt to prove their innocence as to who made public the fact and contents of the confession. Mme de Clèves makes a generalizing statement about the characteristics of "extraordinary" women and about the expec-

ted reaction of a man to whom such a confession might be made: "Il n'y a pas d'apparence qu'une femme, capable d'une chose si extraordinaire, eût la faiblesse de la raconter; apparemment son mari ne l'aurait raconté non plus, ou ce serait un mari bien indigne du procédé que l'on aurait eu avec lui"(p. 257). It has not been suspected that Mme de Clèves may be involved in the affair in question, so it is not really a matter of proving her innocence. Nonetheless, Mme de Clèves is trying to establish the fact that it would take a very unusual woman to engage in this type of action and that to make public such a gesture would be a contravention of conventional domestic practices as defined by the cultural code. Since she does not openly conduct herself in any manner which would indicate that she is extraordinary, Mme de Clèves succeeds in covering up any hint of involvement in the actual episode.

Her statement about the husband is expressed in unspecific terms, but it does contain an indication of the awakening suspicion that M. de Clèves might be the culprit.¹⁴ When confronted by this accusation, M. de Clèves defends his innocent position in the same way by appealing to his wife's knowledge of human nature: "A-t-on un ami au monde à qui on voulût faire une telle confidence, reprit M. de Clèves, et voudrait-on éclaircir ses soupçons au prix d'apprendre à quelqu'un ce que l'on souhaiterait de se cacher à soi-même?"(p. 259). The maxim inherent in these questions deals with the concepts of decency and self-esteem. M. de Clèves distinguishes himself from the mari indigne on the basis of wanting to hide the knowledge of his wife's infidelity from the whole world as well as from himself. He knows that not only would the woman be subjected to public censure, but he, too,

would be ridiculed for his inability to control and to satisfy her.

After her husband's death, Mme de Clèves is left to combat Nemours's advances without the protection of a social role which can effectively prohibit communication with him. The cultural code does not allow for an unattached woman to resist the attentions of men as Mme de Clèves resists Nemours at the end of the novel, and therefore Mme de Clèves has to find some means of justifying her actions and decisions. The conversation which takes place between Nemours and Mme de Clèves in the vidame's apartments is a contravention of the cultural code which does not condone private discussions between men and women who are not married or otherwise related. Neither is there any provision for the candor with which Mme de Clèves declares herself to Nemours; of this Mme de Clèves is well aware, as she indicates in her opening statements: "Puisque vous voulez que je vous parle . . . je le ferai avec une sincérité que vous trouverez malaisément dans les personnes de mon sexe"(p. 301). Mme de Clèves invokes her uniqueness in comparison to the other women of her social group as a defence for unconventional actions. The declaration contains Mme de Clèves's resolutions to have no further contact with Nemours--resolutions which are not consistent with her new role as a widowed lady at the court. According to the rules of the cultural code, she is free, after a suitable period of mourning, to engage in amorous endeavors and affairs of galanterie and, indeed, she would be strongly encouraged to entertain the advances of such a man as Nemours. But again Mme de Clèves chooses an unconventional option and justifies her choice with generalizations regarding human nature and love:

Mais les hommes, conservent-ils de la passion dans ces engagements éternels? Dois-je espérer un miracle en ma faveur et puis-je me mettre en état de voir certainement finir cette passion dont je ferais toute ma félicité? M. de Clèves était peut-être l'unique homme du monde capable de conserver de l'amour dans le mariage. Ma destinée n'a pas voulu que j'aie pu profiter de ce bonheur; peut-être aussi que sa passion n'avait subsisté que parce qu'il n'en aurait pas trouvé en moi. Mais je n'aurais pas le même moyen de conserver la vôtre: je crois même que les obstacles ont fait votre constance. (p. 306)

Mme de Clèves does not see that the passions which may lead to marriage can last the duration of the relationship, and she is sure that Nemours's infatuation with her is partly based on the obstacles which separate them, thus giving the final conquest more value for the fact that the hunt was rigorous and demanding. These perceptive observations form the basis for Mme de Clèves to reject the possibility of marrying Nemours. But, at the same time, as she retires from active social life to avoid him, she is creating another obstacle which feeds Nemours's passion, since he really does not think that she can abide by her decision for very long.

Although maxims may be used to substantiate a claim of innocence, there is another aspect to them which can prove the opposite. The danger of defending oneself too strongly is expressed in a generalization proposed by M. de Condé while discussing Nemours's maxims about mistresses and balls: "L'on dispute contre M. de Nemours, Madame . . . et il défend avec tant de chaleur la cause qu'il soutient qu'il faut que ce soit la sienne. Je crois qu'il a quelque maîtresse qui lui donne de l'inquiétude quand elle est au bal, tant il trouve que c'est une chose fâcheuse pour un amant, que d'y voir la personne qu'il aime"(p. 164). And this is not the only time that Nemours's tone and insistence gives away his involvement in a supposedly fictitious adventure,

for when he tells the vidame about the confession, "il la conta avec tant de chaleur et avec tant d'admiration que le vidame soupçonna aisément que cette histoire regardait ce prince" (pp. 245-46). It is well known that loud and insistent denials generally indicate a degree of guilt, and Nemours falls into the trap despite his talent for rhetoric.

Using maxims to illustrate how a character's conduct does not exemplify the social norm is, to a certain extent, indicative of some need for strategy in dealing with common social situations, and we have already seen how important it is for most of the characters to scheme and to plan out their actions so that they can get what they want while still observing the rules of appropriate social conduct as laid down by their society. While most of the scheming has to do with trying to circumvent the rules of the cultural code, some of it is aimed at influencing the conduct of another character. Both Mme de Chartres and M. de Nemours use maxims or generalizing statements in an attempt to influence the behavior of Mme de Clèves, although their intentions differ greatly where the princesse's virtue is concerned.

Mme de Chartres's sole responsibility is to the upbringing and social training of her daughter. Mlle de Chartres is exposed to descriptions of men and women and their actions, of social institutions (marriage, the court), all of which contain morals and advice which should be heeded. The mother has very definite ideas about the nature and conduct of women, and about the dangers involved in living in the close society of the court. When speaking of men to her daughter, Mme de Chartres concentrates on their dishonesty, their scheming, and their unfaithfulness: ". . . elle lui contait le peu de sincérité des hommes, leurs

tromperies et leur infidélité . . ."(p. 137). Mlle de Chartres is cautioned about "les malheurs domestiques où plongent les engagements" and is encouraged to avoid any hint of an "aventure de galanterie". The daughter's virtuous reputation should, according to Mme de Chartres, be her most prized possession, and she is advised against doing anything which might give her a bad one: ". . . je vous conseille d'éviter, autant que vous pourrez, de lui parler, et surtout en particulier, parce que, Mme la dauphine vous traitant comme elle fait, on dirait bientôt que vous êtes leur confidante, et vous savez combien cette réputation est désagréable"(pp. 168-69). The real intent behind this statement is to gently separate Nemours from her daughter, since Mme de Chartres recognizes the beginnings of a galanterie between the two. But this does not diminish the value of the statement about the importance which society places upon a woman's reputation. Mme de Chartres's strategy in all her teachings is to protect her daughter from falling "comme les autres femmes" (p. 172) into unvirtuous conduct and a passion for illicit affairs. Even though she voices few clear-cut maxims, Mme de Chartres's generalizations about human nature are based on her observations of the society in which she lives.

Due to the nature of his role of homme galant, it is not surprising that the majority of Nemours's maxims concern male-female relationships and the nature of love in his social milieu. Nor is it surprising to find that almost all of them contain an underlying strategy which aims at having Mme de Clèves consent to being his lover. Scheming is an integral part of Nemours's make-up which, when combined with his rhetorical prowess and talent for dramatic gestures, allows him to turn

any generally accepted maxim into a statement which is directly applicable to himself or to Mme de Clèves. Nemours, who has been waiting impatiently for Mme de Clèves to return to society after her mother's death, uses a maxim to equate his current state of mind to that of Mme de Clèves and to introduce his first (veiled) declaration of his feelings toward her: "Les grandes afflictions et les passions violentes . . . font de grands changements dans l'esprit"(p. 192). He has contrived to find a time to be alone with Mme de Clèves¹⁵ and with this maxim, followed by a long description where the indefinite pronoun "on" figures prominently, Nemours tries to elicit a reaction which will indicate her feelings for him. He succeeds in his strategy since Mme de Clèves becomes embarrassed and silent, being rescued only by the arrival of her husband.

As Nemours comes to realize the strength of Mme de Clèves's devotion to duty (her husband), he is less and less content to rely upon gentle manipulation of the cultural code to achieve his goal. Toward the end of the novel, he proffers more maxims which are intended to alter Mme de Clèves's way of thinking. The first indication of Nemours's daring takes place during the discussion of the confession between Mme la dauphine and Mme de Clèves. Realizing his guilt in the affair, Nemours is quick to build up Mme de Clèves's suspicions that her husband might have been the one who made the confession public knowledge: "La jalousie . . . et la curiosité d'en savoir davantage que l'on ne lui a dit, peuvent faire faire bien des imprudences à un mari"(p. 257). Since jealousy and curiosity where love is concerned are well understood by all those present, Nemours's maxim contains enough credibility for Mme de Clèves, acting upon this

insinuation, to accuse her husband of treachery. Nemours's purpose is two-fold: first, to shift attention away from himself, and secondly, to drive a wedge between Mme de Clèves and her husband.

In the final meeting between Nemours and Mme de Clèves, the duke voices two maxims in an attempt to show his lady exactly how she is viewed by him and the extent to which her resolutions will be successful. Nemours has many opinions regarding mistresses and few regarding wives--experience in the one area and a lack of it in the other could be the reason--but he does think that in the case of Mme de Clèves the two female roles can be united in the one woman: ". . . vous êtes peut-être la seule personne en qui ces deux choses soient jamais trouvées au degré qu'elles sont en vous. Tous ceux qui épousent des maîtresses dont ils sont aimés, tremblent en les épousant, et regardent avec crainte, par rapport aux autres, la conduite qu'elles ont eue avec eux . . ." (p. 305). Unfortunately, in stating the very credible maxim, "Once a lover, always a lover," and even though he excepts Mme de Clèves from belonging to this category of people, Nemours is trapped by his own words. Instead of convincing Mme de Clèves that their marriage is possible, he only succeeds in voicing the exact fears that the lady has about him--Nemours will always be a womanizer, and once the glamour has worn off, he will continue his amorous career.

Still confident of his powers of seduction, Nemours tries another approach, this time appealing to Mme de Clèves's knowledge of human nature: "Il est plus difficile que vous ne pensez, Madame, de résister à ce qui nous plaît et à ce qui nous aime" (pp. 307-08). He still misjudges Mme de Clèves's inner

strength and hopes that he will be able to persuade her to abandon her resolutions in favour of the easier route of giving in to desires and pleasure. Nemours's intent is clear, as are the rules of his game. The conquest of the lady is the goal, and anything that could possibly flatter her, unbalance her, frighten her, is a permissible weapon, especially devastating if it can be stated in such a way as to suggest a generally accepted truth which should be obeyed or acted out.

Conclusion

The maxims and generalizations which are presented in La Princesse de Clèves, both in the narration and in dialogue between the characters, appear to support the cultural code which is implicit in Mme de la Fayette's descriptions of people and their actions. They do not explain the reasons for certain behaviour, nor do they give a rationale for the seventeenth-century value structure; they merely restate, in explicit terms, the rules and restrictions which are imposed upon the members of the court. The society and its values are reconstructed by the author for the reader who must remember that, while he is only a spectator and basically uninfluenced by the cultural code defined in the novel, the characters must operate within the bounds of their society's rules as they are presented. In other words, there are two worlds presented in the novel, one which may be objectively appreciated by the reader, and one which subjectively influences the conduct of the characters. This is not to say that the two worlds are vastly dissimilar in substance--indeed, they are quite alike. Where they differ is in the extent to which they have an effect on reader or character.

For the reader, the use of maxims or explicit statements of generally accepted truths about love, roles, and human nature was no novelty. One of the popular parlour games of the seventeenth century was the practice of making up maxims which demonstrate the individual's wit and perceptions of the world about him. The popularity of la Rochefoucauld's Maximes attests to the interest shown by most people in social order and in the workings of human minds and emotions. It must be remembered, however, that these maxims were mainly an instrument of amusement and

pleasure, with no serious consideration being given to their value as catalysts of social change. It is for this reason that the reader can read the maxims in the novel and agree with the proposed code of conduct, and then go about his own life governed by only those rules that he feels apply directly to him. For the characters in La Princesse de Clèves, on the other hand, the maxims in the novel present strict rules of conduct and furnish justifications for their actions. There is only one instance where maxims appear in the guise of a parlour game, and that is when Nemours is expounding his theories on mistresses and balls. The rest of the generalizing statements about human conduct and emotion have the underlying intent of justification or strategy, when voiced by a character, and of social judgement, when presented by the narrator. The effects of the prescriptions of appropriate social conduct, whether implicit or explicit, are keenly felt by the characters who find themselves constantly in conflict when their desires cannot be accommodated within the guidelines of the cultural code.

The reader realizes the omnipotence of the author where the events and actions of the novel are concerned. He is required to draw upon his own social experience to arrive at a total understanding of how the fictional society operates, but he is not bound by the prescriptions of this society in the same way that the characters are. But just as the author imposes limitations on the characters in terms of what they may do and say, so the reader puts restrictions on how far the author's imagination and creativity may go in terms of cultural verisimilitude. Almost every subtle writer will slip maxims or morals into his work. This technique was especially prevalent in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when social commentary and criticism was one of the animating forces behind a novelist's art. Balzac was, of course, a master of the maxim which stereotyped human behavior to the finest degree, but he was by no means subtle in his technique. His value judgements were unequivocal, leaving no room for the reader to project his own opinions or to make his own choices as to the relative worth, good or bad, of any particular character. Mme de la Fayette, in contrast, furnishes the rules of the society and leaves the judgement of actions up to the reader. As long as the maxims are not invented purely to justify a seemingly gratuitous sequence of events, the reader is quite agreeable to them. Problems do arise, however, when the generalizing statements do not conform to what is commonly accepted as being true, or when the events of a novel do not correspond to what would be the normally expected actions in real life under similar circumstances. Several of the events in La Princesse de Clèves fall into this last category and have been widely criticized for a lack of verisimilitude since the earliest appearance of the novel. The most fertile area of dispute has been Mme de Clèves's confession, but also subject to discussion is her declaration of love for Nemours and the apparently gratuitous death of M. de Clèves.

Seventeenth-century criticism of Mme de la Fayette's novel concerned itself with two general questions of verisimilitude: the historical and the cultural.¹⁶ Valincour is the primary critic of historical invraisemblance. Upset by the numerous deviations from historical facts, he examines the role of the novel as a genre in relation to history as it has been recorded by historians. Mme de la Fayette stated in a letter to

Lescheraine that her novel would be better called "mémoires" and that she views it as "une parfaite imitation de la Cour et de la manière dont on y vit" (Pingaud, p. 142). Valincour takes this last statement too literally, looking for an "histoire secrète" where none exists. It is not Mme de la Fayette's purpose in La Princesse de Clèves to present historical facts; she wants to describe the effects of this society's system of values, not just the details of the society itself.

The question of cultural vraisemblance in the novel is directly related to the picture of society presented by the author. Since Mme de la Fayette has chosen to situate her story in the court of Henri II, she is restricted as to what sort of people may figure in it and what shape may be given to their moral structure. All of the characters' basic qualities--physical traits, mental adeptness, emotional susceptibility--are determined by the social frame in which they have been placed, and their actions are (or should be) equally well defined. It is precisely this predetermination of actions and attitudes which leads into la querelle de l'aveu which started with Mme de Sévigné and Bussy-Rabutin, and which continues even now. In their criticism of the novel, Mme de Sévigné and Bussy-Rabutin object to the confession on the grounds that it does not conform to commonly expected practices in their social milieu. They are, in one sense, examples of the ideal reader for whom Mme de la Fayette's style of narration is intended, since they would be able to appreciate the subtle references to accepted social practices and appropriate demonstrations of emotion, and would be able to fill in the details that are implied in such statements as "Mme de Clèves sortit de la chambre de sa mère en l'état

que l'on peut s'imaginer . . ."(p. 173) and "Ces paroles . . . lui causèrent une douleur qu'il est aisé de s'imaginer"(p. 253). On the other hand, these two people (and the majority of the readers who wrote their opinions to Le Mercure Galant, April, 1678) are so involved in the study and practice of social bienséance that their criticism does not evolve beyond a condemnation of actions which do not correspond to the cultural code. Indeed, it could be exactly for these people, who are blinded by their restricted view of society, that Mme de la Fayette's novel is intended--as social commentary and criticism. Whatever the author's intent may be, the question of vraisemblance is still the most active area where criticism of La Princesse de Clèves is concerned.

Historical vraisemblance is a consideration in the creation of a novel only in terms of background information which may supply motives for actions and in terms of a sociological backdrop which determines certain descriptive details within the actual story. Methods of travel, modes of dress, and styles of speech must all be chosen with respect for the historical placement of the events. Value structures, too, are an important consideration in a realistic representation of an historical era. But all of these factors are very general in their nature and application to the novel, playing a subordinate role to the novel itself which actually creates its own rules of vraisemblance through the author's choice of characters, action, and setting.

Jonathan Culler, in "Convention and Naturalization", defines five levels of vraisemblance of which three are relevant to a study of La Princesse de Clèves. He speaks first of a "socially given text . . . which is taken as the 'real world'."

His second level deals mainly with cultural vraisemblance which would be supported by maxims, a "shared knowledge which would be recognized by participants as part of culture." The third level concerns "a specifically literary and artificial vraisemblance" which derives from the author's particular imaginative world as well as from the expectations and limitations of a particular genre. The fourth and fifth levels of vraisemblance depend upon a definition of the specific genre to which a work belongs, with the fourth level dealing with works which deny that they belong to a specified genre (Jacques le fataliste) and the fifth with works which employ parody and irony to gain a vraisemblance which derives from the original work (p. 140). Since the genre to which Mme de la Fayette's work belongs was not decided at the time, these last two levels of vraisemblance do not enter into our discussion. The first two levels, however, are directly related to La Princesse de Clèves on the basis of the sociological portrait which is presented therein, and the third level can be related to the psychology of the author herself.

Through her selection of contemporary society for the setting of the novel, Mme de la Fayette's choice of characters is restricted to the type of people who exist in this society and the world that she creates is expected to mirror that from which her observations have been taken. The basic descriptions of people in the novel are drawn from what we know to be natural attributes of human beings. In this sense, Mme de la Fayette is faithfully observing Culler's first level of vraisemblance, that of the 'real', for hers is "a discourse which requires no justification because it seems to derive directly from the struc-

ture of the world. We speak of people having minds and bodies, as thinking, imagining, remembering, feeling pain, loving and hating, etc., and do not have to justify such discourse by adducing philosophical arguments. It is simply the text of the natural attitude . . . and hence vraisemblable"(pp. 140-41). The reader recognizes and can associate himself with the type of character that is featured in the novel and has only to draw upon his own knowledge of people and the possible qualities which may be attributed to them to realize the verisimilitude of these descriptions.

Gerard Genette defines le vraisemblable as "le principe formel de respect de la norme, . . . l'existence d'un rapport d'implication entre la conduite particulière attribuée à tel personnage, et telle maxime générale implicite et reçue"(p.74-75). Here we leave the realm of physical descriptions and enter into that of actions and social conduct. We have seen that Mme de la Fayette leaves out many of the details which pertain to courtly practices and everyday emotions and actions, relying on the reader to draw from his own experiences to supply the total picture. For background information, this technique works because both author and reader are aware of what actions constitute the norm in their social milieu. The maxims of which Genette speaks figure in Culler's second level of vraisemblance, "a range of cultural stereotype or accepted knowledge which a work may use but which do not enjoy the same privileged status as elements of the first type, in that the culture itself recognizes them as generalizations"(Culler, p. 141). Most of the maxims to which the action of La Princesse de Clèves responds are implicit in the descriptions of the court and its members, descriptions

which contain indications of value judgements where the moral structure of the society is concerned; to this extent, the novel may be adjudged "un récit dont les actions répondent . . . à un corps de maximes reçues comme vraies par le public auquel il s'adresse . . ."(Genette, p. 76). But when actions such as Mme de Clèves's confession are described and when there appears to be no maxim, implicit or explicit, which applies to it, the verisimilitude of such an event is open to question.

The culturally accepted norm is clearly defined by Mme de la Fayette in her narration as well as in the dialogue between the characters, and although this is accomplished, for the most part, through implicit means, there are some explicitly stated maxims which relate to appropriate social conduct. There is no apparent problem relating to cultural vraisemblance while the action of the novel deals with people who exemplify the norm. Unfortunately, however, the heroine does not fall into this category. Her confession and her refusal to marry Nemours are signs of aberrant behaviour since neither can be explained by a culturally admissible maxim.¹⁷ But Mme de Clèves's behaviour is never exemplary of the conduct expected from a seventeenth-century lady, as discussed in our second chapter. Thus an important critical question arises: we can understand that the rules contained in the cultural code are applicable to all those characters who live under it, and we can appreciate that those characters who believe in the code will demonstrate behaviour which is consistent with its prescriptions, is it, then, unbelievable that a character who chooses not to or who cannot operate within the rules of the code should opt for a course of action which is not compatible with what is generally expected? In the case

of Mme de Clèves we are no longer concerned with a specific cultural vraisemblance but rather with a verisimilitude which must derive from the text and the character, independent of culturally acceptable interpretation.

This brings us to the third level of vraisemblance cited by Culler, that of "the purely literary vraisemblance of a particular imaginative world"(p. 145). Culler maintains that a text may stand "in a certain relation to its author and that it may therefore be naturalized or made intelligible by relating its elements to a particular psychological vraisemblance"(p. 146). It is precisely through an understanding of Mme de la Fayette's conception of her creation, as well as the psychology of her outlook on society, that we may appreciate the verisimilitude of Mme de Clèves's confession and her refusal to marry Nemours.

La Princesse de Clèves is, above all, a roman d'analyse and, as Pingaud observes, Mme de la Fayette is the first writer to push the analysis to such a point that it becomes more important than the action of the novel (p. 135). The sequence of events in the novel, and even the events themselves, are important only in that they provide the stimulus for Mme de Clèves to reflect upon her emotions and intentions. That Mme de Clèves is the only character whose analyses are constantly indicated and recorded is indicative of her distinction from the rest of the members of the court. Her psychological conflicts are her private concern; she shares them with nobody, not even her mother who is a somewhat similar individual. At the root of Mme de Clèves's conflicts are her respect for honesty in a basically dishonest social environment and her sheltered upbringing which has given her an idealistic impression of the power of the

individual to resist the pressure of his peer group. When she finds that open honesty (the confession) only brings her more conflicts than covert duplicity, and that she, as an individual, has barely the strength to fight her own desires, let alone the exigencies of her social group, Mme de Clèves resolves that the only way she can gain any measure of respect for herself is to isolate herself from the disrupting influence of this society. Mme de la Fayette wrote in a letter to Ménage: "Je suis si persuadée que l'amour est une chose incommode que j'ai de la joie que mes amis et moi en soyons exempts."¹⁸ For Mme de Clèves, too, love is troublesome since it causes problems in her marriage (M. de Clèves demands it; she cannot provide it) and in her social activities (Nemours pursues her amorously; she is not free to respond, and neither does she know how.)

Mme de Clèves's analysis of love and its effects upon her forms the basis for her resolutions at the end of the novel. She recognizes that she is unique in her inability to accept blindly public opinion and social custom, and she also realizes that because of this rejection of the cultural code she cannot live for any great length of time in the society of the court. Her refusal to marry Nemours is not a manifestation of a flagrant denial of social order any more than her confession is a brave attempt to break down the artificially created barriers in communication between men and women in this society. Neither are these two acts bold demonstrations of an individual asserting his freedom and rejection of the social norm. They are simply expressions of Mme de Clèves's knowledge that she cannot survive in such a social environment. Mme de la Fayette's tacit approval of Mme de Clèves's resolutions is reflected in the final sentence

of the novel: "Elle passait une partie de l'année dans cette maison religieuse et l'autre chez elle; mais dans une retraite et dans les occupations plus saintes que celles des couvents les plus austères; et sa vie, qui fut assez courte, laissa des exemples de vertu inimitables"(p. 315). Given the incomparable nature of the heroine's unique views on the society of her time, it would be invraisemblable for her to act in any other fashion. A thinking woman (although an aberration at the time) cannot, without the intervention of some drastic mental incapacity, change into a helpless victim of love, the emotion that Mme de Clèves and Mme de la Fayette understand so well--and fear so rightly.

The picture of seventeenth-century society which is clearly represented in La Princesse de Clèves through both implicit description and explicit statements attests to the author's talent for observation and recreation of what she has seen. Mme de la Fayette's world--the actual society of the seventeenth century--provides her with the raw materials for an analysis of life within the enclosure of strict rules which govern almost every aspect of an individual's existence. According to Peter Brooks, the society of the seventeenth century created an image of itself, became an "object of conscious cultivation". Mme de la Fayette's contemporaries lived "a life dedicated to sociability, to polite social and intellectual intercourse as a total style of existence"(pp. 6-7), but she herself sees through the veneer of artificial emotions and actions--and this is what is reflected in Mme de Clèves's attitude toward society and life at the end of the novel. The implicit cultural code which governs the characters' actions in the novel forms the basis

for what Brooks calls worldliness, "an ethos and personal manner which indicate that one attaches primary or even exclusive importance to ordered social existence, to life within a public system of values and gestures, to the social techniques that further this life and one's position in it, and hence to knowledge about society and its forms of comportment"(p. 4). He regards La Princesse de Clèves as "a novel about an historical way of courtly, public life, and about what happens to love in this way of life. This prototype of the roman d'analyse is also insistently about courtliness, or the worldliness of the court"(p. 68). Mme de Clèves's rejection of Nemours is a rejection of seventeenth-century "worldliness" and, perhaps, a step toward modern individualism.

Footnotes

¹Peter Brooks, The Novel of Worldliness (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 4-5.

²This is described in "Convention and Naturalization" in Structuralist Poetics (London: Routledge & Kegan-Paul, 1975), p. 140.

³Culler, "Convention and Naturalization"; Gérard Genette, "Vraisemblance et motivation" in Figures II (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), pp. 77-99.

⁴Bernard Pingaud, Mme de la Fayette par elle-même (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1959), pp. 142-47.

⁵Madame de la Fayette, La Princesse de Clèves et autres romans (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp. 269-72. All quotations from the text refer to this edition. Page numbers will be indicated in parentheses immediately following the quotation.

⁶The marriage between the King of Spain and Madame Elizabeth described by the dauphine (pp. 190-91) is exemplary of this attitude.

⁷Mlle de Chartres's situation (pp. 143-44, 146-47) illustrates the importance of both family and royal sanction in matters concerning marriage. Only after the death of M. de Clèves's father is the union possible, and love is a consideration only for the prince. Mlle de Chartres admits that she would marry him "avec moins de répugnance qu'un autre, mais qu'elle n'avait aucune inclination particulière pour sa personne" (pp. 148-49).

⁸The need for a good alibi is impressed upon Mme de Clèves by her mother when the princesse does not want to attend M. de Saint-André's ball: "Mme de Chartres . . . lui dit qu'il fallait donc qu'elle fît la malade pour avoir un prétexte de n'y pas aller, parce que les raisons qui l'en empêchaient ne seraient pas approuvées et qu'il fallait même empêcher qu'on ne les soupçonnât"(p. 166).

⁹The description of the various members of the court (pp. 131-32) contains many statements about what is expected of men in this society in terms of actions, responsibilities, and physical traits.

¹⁰Some of the female responsibilities are laid out by Mme de Chartres (pp. 137, 151, 152) while educating her daughter. Others are intelligible through the actions of the various characters and through the implicit value judgements presented by the author.

¹¹The dauphine, while talking to Mme de Clèves about Nemours's letter, makes it clear that honesty has no place in the institution of marriage: ". . . il n'y a que vous de femme au monde qui fasse confidence à son mari de toutes les choses qu'elle sait"(p. 233).

¹²"La confiance et la sincérité que vous avez pour moi sont d'un prix infini: vous m'estimez assez pour croire que je n'abuserai pas de cet aveu. Vous avez raison, Madame, je n'en abuserai pas et je ne vous en aimerai pas moins"(pp. 241-42).

¹³There is one statement made by Mme de Clèves from which a maxim may be inferred: "Puisque vous voulez que je vous parle . . . je le ferai avec une sincérité que vous trouverez malaisément dans les personnages de mon sexe"(p. 301). This is not so much a general statement about the nature of women as it is a particular reference to Mme de Clèves herself, a justification for the non-conformist tactics of the declaration of love for Nemours which follows.

¹⁴Nemours encourages this opinion with a maxim relating to the understandable curiosity and jealousy which a husband might feel in a similar situation. This maxim will be discussed later since it more appropriately belongs to our part dealing with the manipulation of other characters.

¹⁵Mme de la Fayette says that the meeting in the vidame's apartments is the first time that the two find themselves "seuls et en état de parler"(p. 300), but this episode is really the first. It establishes a rationale for Mme de Clèves's subsequent refusals to be alone with Nemours since she understands only too well the meaning and intent of his words.

¹⁶Pingaud gives a brief sketch of the critical responses to the novel in Mme de la Fayette par elle-même, pp. 142-47, and Genette touches upon the subject in "Vraisemblance et motivation" pp. 71-78.

¹⁷This has been discussed by Genette, p. 75.

¹⁸This is given as an epigram to Bernard Pingaud's preface to the Gallimard (Folio) edition used as primary reference.

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