

Lafayette's Subtle Engagement in the Early Modern Debate on Religious Toleration in *La Comtesse de Tende* (1724), *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662), and *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678)

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To my daughter, Anne Winthrop Hargrove Rockefeller

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When Marie Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne de Lafayette wrote her novels *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662), *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), and *La Comtesse de Tende* (published posthumously in 1724), animosity towards the Huguenots living in France was steadily increasing. King Louis XIV was enacting increasingly harsh repression of the Huguenot minority, and public debate was ongoing as to whether Protestants were dangerous heretics who needed to be expelled for the sake of the country's welfare and morality, or whether they were better handled peacefully by tolerating their minority faith. On the surface, Lafayette's historical fictions do not address these issues, instead featuring seemingly apolitical romance plots centering on young noblewomen. But for readers familiar with the era's political discourse, themes of religion and tolerance are never far from the surface.

These works are set in an atmosphere of either brewing or overt intolerance of religious difference within France. They are set in the mid- to late 1500s, during which time France was engaged in a bloody struggle between Catholic and Protestant factions at court, and in which tensions between citizens of different faiths often erupted in violence. Each novel contains explicit references to religious conflict in the time it is set; for instance, in a climactic scene of *La Princesse de Montpensier*, a key character is killed in the anti-Huguenot St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572. And each uses real historical figures as characters in the drama, some of whom, such as the anti-Huguenot, ultra-Catholic Duc de Guise, played a role in the conflicts and political power struggles of the latter half of the 1500s. But amidst the massacres of the Wars of

Religion and the violence of the persecution under Henri II that preceded the conflicts, the *nouvelles* contain short-lived, hospitable spaces—ranging from homes, to garden pavilions, to wombs—where toleration is practiced and fostered. These momentary spaces of toleration in the *nouvelles* accommodate, make room for and, in some cases, allow characters to protect, respect, and appreciate religious difference.

As we shall see below, toleration was frequently discussed in key political and philosophical writings of the day. In Lafayette's works, political and philosophical theories about the benefits of tolerance are tested. Each *nouvelle* uses a romance plot to dramatize attempts to deal with seemingly intolerable situations by employing acceptance, rather than violent intolerance. In each of these three works, a young married woman is tempted by adulterous love. Lafayette's plots often end in the death of characters coded as religious minorities, and in the ultimate destruction of the short-lived spaces of tolerance. In *La Princesse de Montpensier*, Lafayette's first published work, the young princess enlists the help of her husband's friend, the Protestant Comte de Chabanes, in furthering her affair with the Duc de Guise. The prince falsely accuses Chabanes of seducing his wife; Chabanes declines to defend himself, and is ultimately killed in the anti-protestant St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. In the posthumously published *La Comtesse de Tende*, the title character becomes pregnant in an affair with her husband's trusted friend, confesses her sin to her husband and beseeches him to kill her as punishment; when he declines to do so, she starves herself, killing herself and the baby. In the acclaimed work *La Princesse de Cleves*, by contrast, the heroine resists her passion for the dashing duke she is in love with, and requests her husband's help in resisting temptation. Though he agrees to do so, he ultimately dies of an illness brought on by jealousy, and the princess spends the rest of her life in penitence over causing his death. These narratives serve as depictions of the possibilities of

toleration, as well as its shortcomings. In portraying characters who tolerate difference without fully embracing it, Lafayette depicts an alternative to the religious violence and persecution that threatened to recur—even as her plots showcase the difficulty of maintaining a calm, reasoned tolerance in the face of passionate emotion.

Conception

Though Madame de Lafayette was born decades after the Wars of Religion had ended, she witnessed a similar campaign to identify and control differences—cultural, religious, social, sexual, and racial—unfurl in her lifetime under the reign of Louis XIV.¹ Joan DeJean identifies two solutions to difference in use both during and before Louis XIV’s personal reign: “assimilation to Frenchness” and “the often violent exclusion of the threatening other.”² While Louis’s *caisse des conversions*, which essentially financially rewarded recent converts, encouraged assimilation, the *dragonnades*,³ which involved the French government forcing Protestants to house troops within their households, pressured them to convert. Finally, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, officiated by the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685, officially rescinded the policy of granting rights to Calvinist Protestants, ordered the closing of Protestant schools and churches, and rendered Protestants legally non-existent. In stripping key civil rights, it epitomized the exclusion of the “other.”

Louis XIV’s decision took place in a context in which other groups sought rights previously denied them by the power structure. These struggles for rights were a central topic of

¹ Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 12.

² DeJean, 12.

³ For more information on the *dragonnades*, see J. Gratton’s “The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the Role of the Intendants in the Dragonnades,” *French History* 25 (2011), 164-187.

the era's fiction. In *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (1991), Joan DeJean shows how the novel was "a vehicle for feminism" and how feminist ideas contributed to the development of the novel as a genre.⁴ DeJean places Lafayette within a seventeenth-century female literary "*tradition*" (the italics are DeJean's) that she argues generated an *écriture féminine*, one which wrote France's body politic, not as Louis XIV and his administration portrayed it to be, but as it actually existed.⁵ Commenting on the simultaneous rise of the novel and absolutism, DeJean writes: "The official policy of assimilation then being put into place denied women writers the possibility of complacency about their own difference and inspired in them an unparalleled awareness of (the exclusion of) otherness."⁶ DeJean's observation about French women writers' acute sensitivity to otherness led me to question how Lafayette's novellas might engage with religious difference of the Huguenot Other.

Lafayette collaborated with other literati in her circle in an effort to defend the emerging new genre of the *roman*. DeJean remarks that Pierre Daniel Huet's *Traité de l'origine des romans* (1670), which appeared as the preface to Lafayette's *Zayde, histoire espagnole*,⁷ discussed novels' "exposure of enforced conversion to an official (French) system and [their] establishment of an alternative system designed to undermine dominant social codes and demarcations."⁸ While France had recently seen the creation of an official system for "determining difference—cultural, religious, social, sexual, racial," novels chronicle how those divisions can be subverted, for instance through adultery and mingling of bloodlines. Huet, a

⁴ DeJean, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷ In *Tender Geographies* in note 15 on page 225, DeJean notes that Huet presented Lafayette's *Zayde* (1670) as an "allegory of assimilation, a parody of the effortless conversion to sameness."

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

member of the same literary circles and salons as Lafayette, contributed to the composition of *Zayde*, a collaboratively written work to which Segrais also contributed. Lafayette sought out Huet's help with *Zayde* and sent him her work to review as she completed it. Lafayette and Huet decided to pair *Zayde* with a manifesto written by Huet in favor of the *roman* as a genre. It was in need of defense, since many literary critics and moralists of the time were dismissive of the new genre, seeing it as corrupting and a frivolous waste of time. In his *traité*, titled "Lettre à M. de Segrais de l'origine des romans," Huet traced the origins of the *roman* to Antiquity and connected it to epic poetry in an effort to bolster people's opinions of it as a genre worthy of merit and attention.⁹ He also defended the *roman* as a work meant to "please" and "instruct" readers.¹⁰ *Zayde*, which depicts conflicts between Medieval-era Christians and Muslims, was a sort of model or example of the *roman*, meant to support Huet's thesis.¹¹ "For Huet," writes Harth, "the novel's civilizing mission should be to enrich French society by making it receptive to otherness—other discourses, other customs, other classes, even other peoples."¹² In reading Lafayette's novels as (often metaphorical) explanations of contemporary religious conflict, we can see the significance of this idea to her works. Lafayette's novellas participate in the "civilizing mission" DeJean mentions by exposing her readers to the Huguenot Other and by insisting on the presence of the Huguenot Other within the religiously pure body politic France imagined itself as.

Even novels that are not explicitly ideological are deeply engaged with the political and intellectual debates of their time. In *Revising Memory: Women's Fiction and Memoirs in*

⁹ Roger Duchêne, *Madame de Lafayette*, (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 252-253.

¹⁰ Duchêne, 253.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹² DeJean, "The Origin of Novels," 175.

Seventeenth-Century France (1990), Faith Beasley underscores the importance of examining women's memoirs and novels "in light of the social, intellectual, political, and historiographical movements of seventeenth-century France," which they are "products of and responses to."¹³ In that respect, Beasley reads *La Princesse de Clèves* "in light of [Lafayette's] political and social activity" during her lifetime.¹⁴ Beasley's study focuses on Montpensier's *Mémoires*, Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* and *Histoire de Madame Henriette d'Angleterre*, and Villedieu's *Les Désordres de l'amour*, four "history-affiliated works" written by women who participated in the Fronde and the literary salons.¹⁵ Beasley argues that their works contribute to the then-ongoing "crisis of history" and shows how their texts revise and contribute to the French Academy's definition of history as "the narration of action and things worthy of memory."¹⁶ Her chapter on *La Princesse de Clèves* shows how historical narratives included in the work told by Diane de Poitiers, Mary Stuart, and the Vidame de Chartres, stories which critics have characterized as "flaws" and "digressions" that distract from the main story and as mere "background" material, actually function as subtexts for the novel that actively help construct the meaning of the princess's fictional story.

Following Beasley's advice to anchor our understandings of Lafayette's novellas squarely within the historical context in which they were created, this dissertation will argue that religion is a central theme of the texts, albeit one often dealt with through metaphor, analogy and subtle implication. The three novels discussed in this study, all of which are set during or at the onset of the Wars of Religion, not only depict heroines struggling with moral dilemmas in their

¹³ Faith Beasley, *Revising Memory: Women's Fiction and Memoirs in Seventeenth-Century France*, (New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 6.

¹⁴ Beasley, 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

personal lives. They intervene in the early modern intellectual and political debate on religious toleration of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by depicting the challenges and possibilities of trying to create a tolerant space.

Toleration and National Identity in Sixteenth-Century France

These themes were relevant to both the era in which the texts were written, and that in which they were set. In the sixteenth century, the violence of France's Wars of Religion prompted a handful of like-minded men who lived through the violent era to proffer toleration as a much-needed solution to the religious and political violence. Michel de L'Hôpital, for example, encouraged toleration in speeches made in the mid-1550s. Over the course of his service under Catherine de Medici's regency, L'Hôpital gave several speeches in which he addressed France's religious troubles and encouraged the French people to find a way to live together amidst and despite their differences. In *La conscience nationale en France pendant les guerres de religion, 1559-1598* (1971), Myriam Yardeni explains Michel de L'Hôpital's interest in toleration as a solution to the religious and political strife as originating out of his personal understanding of Christianity as a religion in which persecution, violence, and force of any kind played no part.¹⁷ In an opening speech aux Etats d'Orleans, de L'Hôpital said:

deux Français et Anglois qui sont d'une même religion, ont plus d'affection et d'amitié entre eux, que deux citoyens d'une ville, sujets à un même seigneur qui seroient de diverses religions, tellement que la conjoncture de religion passe celle qui est à cause du pays; par contraire, la division de religion est plus grande et lointaine que nulle autre.

¹⁷ Myriam Yardeni, *La conscience nationale en France pendant les guerres de religion, 1559-1598*, (Luvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1971), 79.

C'est ce qui sépare le père du fils, le frère du frère, le mari de la femme: *non veni mittere pacem, sed gladium*. C'est ce qui éloigne le sujet de porter obéissance à son roi, et qui engendre des rebellions . . . La division des langues ne fait la séparation des royaumes; mais celle de la religion et des loix, qui d'un royaume en fait deux.¹⁸

Other voices expanded on this theme. An anonymous pamphlet titled "Exhortation aux princes," published in 1561, which some attribute to Étienne Pasquier, also argued for toleration as a necessary solution to a heresy problem that was dealt with too late. The author's views are informed solely by secular reasons of state rather than religious belief, as he is concerned about the well-being, future, and longevity of France as a nation. The author foresees the ruin of France in the religious struggles of the sixteenth-century:

Les choses sont arrivées à tel point, que nous ne saurions ruiner les Protestants, sans nostre generale ruïne: vu leur grand nombre & quantité. Quand il y ha quelque membre pourry au corps humain, il le faut demembrer de bonne heure avant que son mal croisse, & nuise davantage: mais le vouloir couper quand il ha penetré jusques aux parties nobles, c'est, en bon langage François, en cuidant oster la partie [pourrie], tuer et amortir celle qui n'estoit encore offensée.¹⁹

Attempting to destroy the Protestants would cause too much damage to be worth it. The author continues:

Il n'y ha point de moyen plus prompt & expedient que de permettre deux Eglises: l'une des Romains, & l'autre des Protestants . . . je soutien qu'il se peut faire, puis qu'il ha esté

¹⁸ Yardeni, 81.

¹⁹ Étienne Pasquier, *Exhoratation aux princes et seigneurs du Conseil privé du Roy pour obvier aux seditions qui occultement semblent nous menacer pour le fait de la Religion*, 1561, Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, FC117-01.

fait ailleurs: & ose maintenir que les affaires de France sont disposez en tel estat, qu'il est
necessaire de le faire: & encore soutien je que quand vous le permettrez, vous ne ferez
aucun tort à la couronne de nostre Roy.²⁰

In sum, for the author of "Exhortation au princes," toleration is a necessary and quick, albeit
temporary, fix to the religious divisions tearing France apart.

Sébastien Castellion (1515-1563) also called the French people to toleration in "Conseil à
la France désolée, auquel est montré la cause de la guerre présente et le remède qui y pourroit
estre mis, et principalement est avisé si on doit forcer les consciences" (1562). The author argues
for toleration as a necessary, lesser-evil solution to the religious bloodshed in France. Of the goal
of his text, Castellion writes: "c'est à montrer qu'on peut bien laisser vivre & ne persécuter pas
ceux qui on tient pour hérétiques & qu'en ceci n'y a ni péché ni inconvénient si grand que de
faire autrement & que si des deux maux on doit choisir le moindre, comme certes on doit, on doit
choisir celui-ci."²¹ Summing up his advice to the people of France, Castellion continues: "c'est
que tu cesses de forcer consciences, & de persécuter . . . permettez qu'en ton pays il soit loisible
à ceux qui croient en Christ, & reçoivent le vieux et nouveau testament, de server Dieu selon la
foi non d'autrui, mais la leur."²² He calls on his readers to "appointer & laisser les deux religion
libres"²³ so that "elles fassent paix ensemble par telle condition que aucune tienne sans contrainte
laquelle des religions elle voudra, sans faire fâcherie à l'autre."²⁴ He thus frames tolerance as
something people may not want or be naturally inclined toward, but can choose to enact
nonetheless.

²⁰ Pasquier, 11.

²¹ Ibid., 62.

²² Ibid., 93.

²³ Ibid., 56.

²⁴ Ibid.

In the seventeenth century, the violence of the Revocation and the persecutions that preceded and followed its ratification reignited open discussion of toleration and inspired Pierre Bayle, a French Huguenot who fled France, to pen *Les Commentaires philosophiques* (1686). Writing one year after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, Pierre Bayle argues against a literal interpretation of the Biblical parable in Matthew suggesting that we should “compel [heretics] to enter” the Catholic fold. Pierre Bayle locates the communal, familial, and political divisions that occur in states with multiple religions in the inability of one group to refrain from persecuting the other. Tolerance, according to Bayle, will produce a kind of “concorde” in which everyone supports and helps one another. He thus seems to be advocating for a horizontal type of inter-subjective toleration amongst individuals. The atmosphere of Bayle’s tolerant society is competitive in that everyone wishes to prove himself or herself as the closest to God by performing good works. The ruler’s job is to remain neutral and to keep the religions on an equal playing field, a tactic that Bayle claims will result in healthy competition and economic prosperity for the state. Bayle uses a musical metaphor to describe the ways in which the multiple religions would coalesce to form a greater whole, while at the same time retaining their individuality and remaining distinct from one another.

Il n’y a pas, dit-on, de plus dangereuse peste dans un Etat que la multiplicité de Religions, parce que cela met en dissension les voisins avec les voisins, les pères avec les enfans, les maris avec les femmes, le Prince avec ses sujets . . . c’est une tres forte preuve pour la tolérance, car si la multiplicité de Religions nuit à un Etat, c’est uniquement parce que l’une ne veut pas tolérer l’autre, mais l’engloutir par la voie des persécutions . . . c’est là l’origine du mal. Si chacun avoit la tolérance que je soutiens, il y auroit la même concorde dans un Etat divisé en 10 Religions, que dans une ville où les diverses espèces

d'Artisans s'entresupportent mutuellement. Tout ce qu'il pourrait y avoir ce seroit une honnête emulation à qui plus se signaleroit en piété, en bonnes mœurs, en sience; chacune se piqueroit de prouver qu'elle est la plus amie de Dieu en témoignant un plus fort attachement à la pratique des bonnes œuvres; elles se piqueroient même de plus d'affection pour la patrie si le Souverain les protegeoit toutes, & les tenoit en équilibre par son équité, or il est manifeste qu'une si belle emulation seroit cause d'une infinité de biens, & par consequent la tolérance est la chose du monde la plus-propre à ramener le siècle d'or & à faire un concert & une harmonie de plusieurs voix & instrumens de diferens tons & notes, aussi agréable pour le moins que l'uniformité d'une seule voix. Qu'est-ce donc qui empêche ce beau concert formé de voix & de tons si diferens l'un de l'autre, c'est que l'une des 2 Réligions veut exercer une tyrannie cruelle sur les esprits, & forcer les autres à lui sacrifier leur conscience, c'est que les Rois fomentent cette injuste partialité, & livrent le bras séculier aux desirs furieux & tumultueux d'une populace de moines & de Clercs: en un mot tout le désordre vient non pas de la tolérance, mais de la non-tolérance.²⁵

For Bayle, the monarchy should remain aloof from the religious sphere, serving only as a neutrality enforcer amongst them.

Though the pro-toleration arguments attained a high profile, those making this argument were in the minority. Yardeni is quick to assert that these men did not present a political or intellectual movement, and carefully qualifies them as “quelques rares individus qui ne parlent qu'en leur propre nom.”²⁶ Most thought religious toleration was a risky decision, mainly because the structure of the monarchy and the stability of state depended on the French nation remaining

²⁵ Bayle, 363-365.

²⁶ Ibid.

under one faith. At the time, conceptually, faith was foundational to the monarchy itself, with kings receiving their right to rule directly from God. Thus any different faith—especially those that claimed individual followers could directly communicate with and make petitions to God, as with Protestantism—was a threat to the order of state. Harboring “heretics” was considered to be a sin, dangerous to an individual’s personal salvation, as well as to the community’s well-being as a whole. It was thought that God would punish France, or any country that allowed heretical faiths to co-exist with the “one true faith,” by allowing famines, plagues, natural disasters and wars.

Pushback was especially strong from priests, bishops and those associated with the monarchy. Preachers incited the French populace to anger and encouraged the monarchy to rid France of heretics through elimination and persecution. In some senses the sermons were seditious in that preachers spoke out against the monarchy’s initiatives for toleration. In *Beneath the Cross*, Barbara Diefendorf singles out Simon Vigor as one of the most radical Catholic preachers in Paris during the 1560s.²⁷ According to an English envoy, Vigor was known for “dangerously inflam[ing] popular sentiment against Catherine de Medici,” who pursued an open policy of toleration.²⁸ Heresy, it was believed, threatened not just individual salvation but the entire social order.²⁹ God would punish those who do not following his teachings, or allow others’ rebellion, and his divine punishment was understood to be collective as well as individual.³⁰ Vigor argued that to be restored to right standing with God it was necessary to rid

²⁷ Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in sixteenth-century Paris*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 152.

²⁸ Diefendorf, 153.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

France of the “putrid infection of heresy.”³¹ As a monarch directly ordained by God, the king was expected to perform his duty of purifying the kingdom of France.³² Vigor’s sermons, and those of other like-minded preachers, became polemics against Huguenots and those who tolerated their presence within France.³³

Many during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries recalled an argument made by Augustine of Hippo that legitimized persecution as a form of tough love. Augustine supported his argument for persecution with the parable of the great banquet in the Gospel of Luke 14:15-24. In the story, an unnamed host welcomes the poor and the maimed to his party when his invited guests do not show up. He then asks his servants to “go out to the highways and the hedges, and whomsoever ye shall find, *compel* them to come in.” Augustine compared the banquet to “the unity of the body of Christ” and equated the “highways and hedges” to “heresies and schisms.”³⁴ It is on this very parable that Pierre Bayle offers commentary in his *Commentaire philosophique* (1686).

Religion in the *Nouvelle*

This dissertation fills a void in French literary studies on the French novella. Studies on English theatre of the same period, specifically that of Shakespeare,³⁵ have unearthed how his plays explored religious toleration. However, literary works in France of the era have received

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 154.

³⁴ Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 26.

³⁵ See Joseph Sterret’s *The Unheard Prayer: religious toleration in Shakespeare’s drama*. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), B. J. Sokol’s *Shakespeare and tolerance*, and Elaine Robinson’s *Shakespeare attacks bigotry: a close reading of six plays* (McFarland and Co. Publishers, 2009).

little, if any, attention regarding how they might engage in the then-ongoing conversations about how to handle religious minorities in kingdoms built on specific churches and theological beliefs. This absence of scholarship on French literature relative to toleration is surprising considering that tolerationists in England between 1640 and 1660 looked to France as a good example of a tolerant state. John Coffey writes of how tolerationists in England observed approvingly how Catholics and Protestants interacted in 1640s France. “States lose nothing,” wrote one Independent quoted by Coffey, “by preserving the Liberties of men’s consciences.” “In France,” he continues, “the Protestants are accounted the best Subjects, they are tolerated contrary to the publike Government of the State, yet are not inconsistent with the well being and flourishing condition of it.”³⁶ English writer Henry Robinson corroborates these thoughts; noting the silence surrounding the topic of one’s religion in France, he writes that Catholics “are so temperate and discreet, that it is held an unseemly and uncivill part, for a Papist to aske an other what Religion he is of,” lest the Protestants should feel intimidated or unwelcome.³⁷ The Anglican tolerationist Jeremy Taylor also used France as an example for a multiconfessional state, writing:

The experience which Christendom hath had in this last Age is Argument enough, that Toleration of differing opinions is so farre from disturbing the publick peace, or destroying the interest of Princes and CommonWealths, that it does advantage to the publick, it secures peace . . . When France fought against the Huguenots, the spilling of her own blood was argument enough of the imprudence of that way of promoting

³⁶ *A Moderate Answer to Mr Prins Full Reply* (1645), 40, quoted in Coffey, “European Multiconfessionalism and the English Toleration Controversy, 1640-1660”, *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, 348.

³⁷ *Liberty of Conscience* (1640) 40-1, quoted in Coffey, “European Multiconfessionalism and the English Toleration Controversy, 1640-1660,” *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, 348.

Religion; but since she hath given permission to them, the world is witness how prosperous she hath been ever since.³⁸

In *The Christian Moderator: Or Persecution for Religion Condemned* (1651), the Catholic John Austin noted that in France “the Papists themselves . . . outgo us in their tender and moderate behavior towards the Protestants of their Country, notwithstanding former provocations to jealousy in the last civil wars, nay notwithstanding present provocations by our severity against all of their profession in England.”³⁹ Austin had apparently witnessed conferences in Paris where clergy and tradesmen of different confessions “freely defended” their own beliefs without fear and “with a courteous friendliness and mutuall compassion.”⁴⁰ The notion that tolerance was a key civic virtue and central to preventing problems in France was thus a highly salient aspect of the political discourse in the era.

While some in the era saw a single faith as central to national identity, nationalist arguments could also point the other way. In *La conscience nationale en France pendant les guerres de religion, 1559-1598* (1971), Myriam Yardeni helps us to see an emergent connection between national identity and the capacity for toleration as early as the sixteenth century. According to Yardeni, those who espoused toleration as a solution to civil, religious and political strife during that era still ultimately believed in the unity promoted by Guillaume de Postel’s slogan “une foi, une loi, un roi.” Yardeni writes: “tous ceux qui prêchent la tolérance sont profondément convaincus de la supériorité ‘d’une foi, d’une loi, d’un roi,’ ils savent seulement

³⁸ Jeremy Taylor, *Liberty of Prophesying* (1647; 1650 edition), 21 qtd in Coffey 348.

³⁹ Quoted in Coffey, “European Multiconfessionalism and the English Toleration Controversy, 1640-1660”, *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, 357.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Coffey, “European Multiconfessionalism and the English Toleration Controversy, 1640-1660”, *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, 357.

que dans la vie des Etats, comme dans la vie des individus, il y a des moments où on ne peut pas survivre si on n'accepte pas des compromis."⁴¹ According to Yardeni, attempts to achieve a compromise during the sixteenth century mark the "début d'une tolérance née non pas d'indifférence, mais de sagesse humaine et de souci sincère pour la patrie."⁴² Yardeni calls it "la tolérance 'patriotique.'"⁴³ In this view, other faiths were not necessarily something to be accepted with open arms, but could be tolerated in pursuit of a higher goal, survival of the nation.

Even as these ideas spread, France's policies were moving in the opposite direction. Louis XIV was undertaking multiple key religious and political initiatives when *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662), *La Princesse de Cleves* (1678), and *La Comtesse de Tende* (1724) were written and published. At the time *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662) was published, Louis XIV had just begun his "cold war" against the Huguenots by allowing the Edict of Nantes (1598) to be interpreted more and more restrictively. Eight years later, Louis finalized his clandestine negotiations for The Secret Treaty of Dover (1670), an agreement made with England in which then-King Charles II promised to personally convert to Catholicism himself "as soon as the welfare of his kingdom [England] would permit."⁴⁴ Louis XIV's conflict with the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church over the *régale*, which occurred around the time *La Princesse de Cleves* was published, pressured Louis XIV to prove the strength of the French Gallican Church as a bastion of Catholicism. Finally, only seven years after *La Princesse de Cleves* (1678) was

⁴¹ Yardeni, 78.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁴ Antonia Fraser, *Royal Charles: Charles II and the Restoration*, (New York: Random House, 1979), 275. The agreement involved both a public treaty and a secret one. While the public treaty listed the "Catholic clause," the secret one did not contain it. According to Fraser, Charles was promised money and troops in exchange for his conversion and received half of the money in advance.

published, with the Edict of Fontainebleau (1685) Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes (1598), a political measure that essentially wiped Huguenots from France's legal register.

When read in the context of Louis XIV's religious initiatives in the seventeenth century, Lafayette's novellas take on new meaning. The time period in which three of Lafayette's four novellas⁴⁵ were set—immediately before and during France's Wars of Religion (1558-1563)—suggests that the works can be read in the context of widespread awareness and public debate about the role of Protestants in the French nation. *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662), which features a Huguenot as a main character, ends with the blood wedding of Henri de Navarre and Marguerite de Valois and the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres. *La Princesse de Cleves* (1678) watches Lafayette's fictional princess navigate a court divided by Protestant and Catholic parties. *La Comtesse de Tende* (1724) begins at the onset of the Wars of Religion and metaphorically represents the destruction of the Edict of Fontainebleau (1685), as a space of toleration towards a character explicitly shown as Protestant becomes one of violence and death. Through their depiction of the dangers of the conflicts that arise from difference, these texts can be read as an attempt to move readers to consider France's handling of the religious difference in their midst.

Who Were the Huguenot Others in France?

By the time Lafayette wrote, the Huguenots were long established as a high-profile minority group in France. According to Joseph Bergin, the Huguenots began life in France in the 1520s as “the sect of the Lutherans,” a term that continued to be used to identify them in the

⁴⁵ *Zayde* (1670) is the one exception; it is not set during the Wars of Religion. For these reason, as well as its extreme length in comparison to the other three, it was not considered in this study.

1540s and early 1550s.⁴⁶ “Huguenot” was initially used in the 1560s and quickly became the most commonly used term to identify the Protestant sect, also known as Calvinists, that John Calvin and Theodore Beza planted in France.⁴⁷ Though the specific origin of “Huguenot” remains a mystery, one theory contends that the term originated from Hugues Capet, who seized the elective kingship from the Duc de Lorraine, beginning the hereditary Capetian dynasty.⁴⁸ Brian E. Strayer explores the various meanings of the word “Huguenot”: “Related terms had equally negative, if tenuous, connotations... ‘Hu guénaux!’ (Oh lepers!); ‘Hus-guenons’ (lepers of John Hus); and more fancifully, ‘Huc, Nox!’ (a devil’s incubus).”⁴⁹ The term “the new religion,” a derogatory label in a society suspicious of anything new, was used in royal legislation around and after 1560.⁵⁰ The Huguenots were soon identified officially as the “religion prétendue réformée,” the self-proclaimed or so-called reformed religion, often abbreviated as “RPR,” in official documents.⁵¹ Bergin observes that the phrase, which was first used in the Edict of Roussillon (1564), was made official in the “Peace of Monsieur” (1576) and remained the Huguenots’ primary identifier throughout the rest of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵²

Lafayette’s heroines’ personal dilemmas of the heart serve as allegories for early modern Catholic France’s political problems in regard to the Huguenot Other(s) in their midst. The heroines’ illicit love interests, relationships which hinge around seduction and conquest,

⁴⁶ Joseph Bergin, *The Politics of Religion in Early Modern France*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 27.

⁴⁷ Bergin, 27.

⁴⁸ Brian E. Strayer, *Huguenots and Camisards as Aliens in France, 1598-1789: The Struggle for Religious Toleration*, (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2001), 2.

⁴⁹ Strayer, 2.

⁵⁰ Bergin, 27.

⁵¹ Bergin, 27.

⁵² Bergin, 27-28.

represent one solution, that of assimilation via conversion by force, while the heroine's husbands, whose relationships to their wives are grounded in law, embody the rational and legal solution of toleration. Of the three novellas, only one heroine, Mme de Clèves, resists her penchant for an extramarital lover, Nemours, and remains faithful to her husband; the other two (anti)heroines, the Comtesse de Tende and the Princesse de Montpensier, act on their feelings for Navarre and Guise, decisions that lead to their eventual self-destruction. The lives of Lafayette's heroines and the ends they meet serve as metaphorical warnings for the kingdom of France about the consequences of choosing one solution—coerced conversion and assimilation by force—to the Huguenot minority problem and remind readers of the existence of another possible solution, peaceful toleration.

Theory and Methodology

In this study, I read the novellas as products of and responses to the tense political and religious climate in which they were created and first read. In order to unearth how what seem to be apolitical love stories actually engage in the then-ongoing early modern discourse about tolerance and toleration, I weave together close readings of the texts with excerpts from speeches, anonymous pamphlets, and theoretical and philosophical works of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries that explore toleration as a solution to religious strife and conflict, as well as more recent scholarship on toleration. By filling in this historical and intellectual background of which most contemporary readers would be unaware, I provide information that would have been common knowledge to readers at the time the works were first published. Therefore, although some readings in this study may seem striking, they point to

associations that would likely have naturally occurred to readers who were immersed in these debates on toleration.

While debates over tolerance are familiar to modern readers, the form they took in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century discourse is distinctive. Alexandra Walsham, whose work focuses on early modern toleration in England, has rightly pointed out how difficult it is for us as scholars to look at early modern toleration without allowing our present-day conceptions of the practice to cloud our understanding of what past versions entailed.⁵³ For instance, while we tend to see toleration as an egalitarian ideal today, it was anything but that in the early modern era, as the tolerators often had power and the tolerated did not. To “tolerate” something, as Goethe has observed, can be offensive and condescending. Walsham also acknowledges that academic interest in early modern toleration and tolerance is indissociable from, and likely arises out of, present-day concerns about liberal values being threatened both in foreign lands and at home.⁵⁴ To use a Biblical analogy, our modern-day conception of toleration, then, could be a “speck in our own eye” that we need to remove in order to see early modern toleration for what it actually was (not what we would assume it to be or would like it to be).

Even in the sixteenth century, tolerance of religious minorities was not a new concept, but one that had been evolving for centuries. Research done in the past few decades, spearheaded by John Christian Laursen and Cary Nederman,⁵⁵ has rejected the understanding of toleration as a concept and practice forged primarily in the skeptic environment of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, one which the work of Voltaire best epitomizes. In *Difference and Dissent*:

⁵³ Alexandra Walsham, “Cultures of Coexistence in Early Modern England: History, Literature, and Religious Toleration,” *The Seventeenth Century* 28.2 (2013), 115-137.

⁵⁴ Walsham, 116.

⁵⁵ See Nederman and Laursen, eds. *Difference and Dissent*; Laursen and Nederman, eds. *Beyond the Persecuting Society*, Laursen, ed. *Religious Toleration*, Nederman ed. *Worlds of Difference*.

Theories of Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern Europe (1966) and *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment* (1997), editors John Christian Laursen and Cary Nederman compiled essays that disable myths⁵⁶ about medieval and early modern times and show us that toleration was being practiced and theorized in numerous and varied ways in medieval and early modern Europe.⁵⁷ Their work shows that both the theory and practice of toleration were “more widespread” in medieval and early modern society than has been previously thought, and effectively liberates us from a conception of the medieval and early modern eras as “dark ages” where practices like toleration played no part.⁵⁸

In current scholarship, a traditional approach to toleration sees it as a concept that evolved gradually between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, while a revisionist approach has emerged that insists on understanding toleration within its specific and unique context—local, religious, political, and social. While the first approach gives us a neat, homogenous view of toleration, the latter approach varies significantly. In this study, I will work with the early modern conception of tolerance, a subject explored further below.

Looking Deeper Into Toleration and Tolerance

In order to comprehend how Lafayette’s novellas *La Comtesse de Tende*, *La Princesse de Montpensier* and *La Princesse de Clèves* explore and comment on toleration, it is necessary to

⁵⁶ The myths Laursen and Nederman seek to disable include the following: the myth of the Inquisition cliché or the perception that the early modern era consisted of unending persecution; the myth that toleration coincides with a secular worldview; the myth that early modern tolerationists consisted only of “lonely souls crying in the dark”; and finally, the myth that early modern toleration extended only towards Christians and excluded other faiths, such as Judaism or Islam. For more information, see pages 3-6.

⁵⁷ Laursen and Nederman, “Introduction,” *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration before the Enlightenment*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 2.

⁵⁸ Walsham, 116.

address the similarities and differences in how “toleration” was understood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and how it is understood today. Benjamin J. Kaplan’s definition of “toleration” as “the peaceful co-existence of people of different faiths living together in the same village, town, or city” merely scratches the surface of what proves to be quite a complicated concept.⁵⁹ Unlike our concept of toleration today, which assumes (perhaps wrongly) an open-armed acceptance of and respect for other faiths, the early modern era defined “to tolerate” as “to suffer, to endure, or put up with something objectionable.”⁶⁰ The term tolerance originates from Cicero’s use of the term *tolerantia* in *Paradoxa stoicorum* in 46 BCE to describe an individual’s inner virtue or strength to endure pain and misfortune.⁶¹ The first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* (1694) defines “tolérance” as “souffrance, indulgence qu’on a pour ce qu’on ne peut empêcher,” putting up with something that we have no power to prevent or avoid. It is not until the fourth edition, published in 1762, that a definition of “tolérance” relative to religion appears, and even then it still has a negative connotation: “De la condescendance politique qui fait quelquefois que les souverains souffrent dans leurs états l’exercice d’une autre Religion que celle qui y est établie par les lois de l’État.” Therefore, the practice of toleration in the early modern era was a decidedly unequal dynamic, in which the party in power allowed religious sects to exist, an allowance that they could revoke at any time. Scholars vary between the use of “tolerance” and “toleration.” In this study, I will use “toleration” to refer to the practice of tolerating and “tolerance” to refer to an attitude.

⁵⁹ Kaplan, 8.

⁶⁰ Rainer Forst, *Toleration in conflict: Past and present*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 37.

⁶¹ Forst, 37.

Even in modern-day parlance, the word “tolerance” retains its early-modern associations with suffering, as we talk about our pain threshold or our alcohol tolerance, or our “tolerance” of annoying behaviors (that we disapprove of) from those closest to us. However, in recent decades, tolerance has morphed into something quite different. Nowadays toleration suggests that “individuals should fully welcome and unambiguously endorse alternative ways of feeling, thinking, and acting—though it is not their own or one that is considered for adoption.”⁶² Such a definition often mistakes toleration for affirmation and even veneration, according to Bergen et al.⁶³ They include the pertinent example of the initiative of the United Nations to declare 1995 “The Year of Tolerance,” in which “tolerance” was defined as “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human . . . [and as] the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism.”⁶⁴ The present call of toleration to completely and “unambiguously endorse” beliefs and lifestyles with which we do not agree, while it might initially seem liberating, actually infringes on the freedom of conscience of those who might have reservations about a particular belief or activity, and thus arguably morphs into its opposite, intolerance. The present-day notion of tolerance has also been critiqued as falling short of true acceptance, and as unduly crediting members of the majority group for granting grudging acceptance to members of minorities. But the modern “ideal” of tolerance is an “ideal” because the more negative aspects of it get brushed over or forgotten. By contrast, the early modern concept of tolerance more explicitly suggested suffering through or putting up with something that you judged to be morally and theologically wrong. As a result, it

⁶² C. W. Von Bergen, Beth A. Von Bergen, Claire Stubblefield, Diane Bandow, “Authentic Tolerance: Between Forbearance and Acceptance,” *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 19.4 (2012), 113.

⁶³ Von Bergen et al, 113.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

tended to be a temporary solution because as soon as one group gained power they'd quit "tolerating" whatever minority group was involved.

This uncertainty as to just how much acceptance is included in "tolerance" has long been part of debates over the concept. C. W. Von Bergen, Beth A. Von Bergen, Claire Stubblefield, and Diane Bandow envision three different degrees of tolerance as existing on a continuum, with forbearant "classical tolerance" and accepting neoclassical tolerance at either extreme. Their middle-ground, ideal form of tolerance, which they call "authentic tolerance," is a concept grounded in respect, and is defined as "treating people with whom we differ, not with appreciation, acceptance or endorsement but with civility, dignity, and respect even as we recognize that some conflict and tension is inevitable."⁶⁵ In the context of religious tolerance, where religious beliefs prevent individuals from fully endorsing beliefs of religions different from their own, the concept of "authentic tolerance" from Von Bergen et al. is most practical.

Edward Langerak provides us with a lucid definition of toleration:

Toleration is the enduring of something disagreeable. Thus it is not indifference toward things that do not matter and it is not broad-minded celebration of differences. It involves a decision to forgo using powers of coercion, so it is not merely resignation at the inevitability of the disagreeable, although begrudging toleration can be granted when one believes that coercion, while possible, would come at too high a price. Tolerating another's actions is quite comparable with trying to change another's mind, as long as one relies on rational persuasion—or, perhaps, emotional appeals—rather than blunt threats or subtle brainwashing.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid., 114.

⁶⁶ Edward Langerak, "Theism and Toleration," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 514. Quoted in D.A. Carson

In the most basic of terms, “toleration” equates to what Levine calls “a grudging acceptance”⁶⁷ of something disapproved of. It implies “forbearance from imposing punitive sanctions for dissent from prevailing norms,” writes A. R. Murphy.⁶⁸ Jonathan Harris defines it as “the practice of deliberately not curtailing the freedom of others.”⁶⁹ John Horton and Peter Nicholson see it as “a deliberate choice not to interfere with conduct that is disapproved.”⁷⁰ Charles Parker observes, “In practice, therefore, toleration is better understood as the accommodation of dissent in societies organized around the idea of religious unity.”⁷¹ Kate Langdon Forhan puts it another way: “This is what tolerance indeed means—a willingness to accept otherness *in spite* of itself rather than *because* of difference.”⁷²

Toleration proves to be a slippery practice. If we are not vigilant and do not continually evaluate its content and limits with care, it can quickly devolve into its opposite: intolerance. Thomas Paine hints at the absolutist possibilities concealed in toleration in a reaction to the 1791 French constitution. He writes:

The French constitution hath abolished or renounced toleration, and intolerance also, and hath established universal rights of conscience. Toleration is not the opposite of

“Jottings on the History of Tolerance” *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 48.

⁶⁷ Levine, 6.

⁶⁸ A. R. Murphy, “Tolerance, Toleration, and the Liberal Tradition,” *Polity* 29.S (1997), 596.

⁶⁹ Murphy, 596.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Quoted in Thomas Max Safley, “Introduction,” *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, 18.

⁷² Kate Langdon Forhan, “Respect, Interdependence, Virtue: A Medieval Theory of Toleration in the Works of Christine de Pizan,” *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Toleration in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, (Lanham, Maryland; London, England: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1996), 71.

intoleration, but it is the counterfeit of it. Both are despotism. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding liberty of conscience, and the other of granting it.⁷³

As we will see later in the chapter on *La Princesse de Montpensier*, Louis XIV's handling of the Edict of Nantes during the early years of his personal reign (1660s) exemplifies how toleration can quickly transform into its alter-ego, intolerance. It was in this atmosphere of fragile or nonexistent harmony between religious groups that Mme de Lafayette came of age as a writer.

Madame de Lafayette

Madame de Lafayette, born Marie Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, is a woman perhaps best understood through her connections to those in power in literary and political circles of Paris and her intense interest in political strategy. Her intimate friendship with France's Reine Dauphine Henriette Anne doubtless allowed her to be privy to much of France's dealings with England and its king, Henriette Anne's brother, Charles II, including the Secret Treaty of Dover (1670), an agreement in which Charles II supposedly agreed to personally convert to Catholicism. As a young woman, Madame de Lafayette befriended various male and female literary figures whose circles she frequented during her time in Paris and with whom she kept up correspondence during her several exiles in the country. At one point she left court with Madame de Montpensier, who was a political exile after the Fronde failed. She belonged to a literary circle that Montpensier formed in opposition to Louis's literary circle at court. She spent significant amounts of time living separately from her husband in the country, an arrangement that she preferred but that was considered odd at the time. Her ticket to court was her friendship

⁷³ Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, Part 1 [1791], in *Political Writings*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 94.

with Henriette Anne, without whom she would not have been welcome. Thus, although she was part of some of the court's most exclusive inner circles, she was always in some ways a marginal or outsider figure there.

Without the entertainment of the Parisian social sphere, Lafayette spent her time reading French and Italian works and exchanging letters with Giles Ménage, Mme de Sévigné, Segrais, and others.⁷⁴ What she lacked in Parisian exposure, Lafayette made up for by reading incessantly and writing regularly to friends at court, exercises that no doubt helped her acquire the skills that produced her masterpieces. The Abbé Giles Ménage served as Lafayette's primary link to literary circles in Paris during her time in the provinces, supplying her with a continual stream of books, especially *romans*, and updating her on the latest matters discussed in the Parisian salons.⁷⁵ When she began her literary career in 1659, Lafayette joined Madame de Montpensier, disgraced and notorious after having commandeered troops against the monarchy during the Fronde, along with much of the court, in exile at her country estate during the post-Fronde years.⁷⁶ Lafayette's time there exposed her to many literary talents, including Segrais, with whom she would enjoy a lifelong friendship and whose name she would use to publish *Zaïde* (1670).

The fact that Lafayette did not identify as a particularly devout Christian suggests the possibility that she would have favored religious toleration as a less violent solution to the problem of religious difference. It was those who were staunch believers in the Catholic faith who were the most vocal about ridding France of the Protestant "heretics" to protect themselves

⁷⁴ Duchêne, 103.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 103; Marie-Aline Raynal, *Le Talent de Madame de Lafayette: La Nouvelle française de Segrais à Madame de Lafayette*, (Genève: Slatkine, 1978), 77.

⁷⁶ DeJean, 108.

from God's judgement. Diefendorf observes the importance of "collective behavior" to Catholic believers as the time, noting that "just as one might benefit from the prayers of others, so one might be threatened by their sins, which could bring down the wrath of God upon an entire people . . . Only united in one Christian community could Parisians hope to find favor in the eyes of God."⁷⁷ By contrast, Lafayette likely was not too concerned about the those who held different beliefs than her own. And as a member of a literary circle that was critical of Louis XIV, she would not have unquestioningly supported his intolerant anti-Huguenot policies. Furthermore, Lafayette's friendship with Henriette Anne, who belonged to the Catholic minority in England, might also have influenced her to take interest in the Protestant minority in France. Writers on religious toleration often compared the plight of different religious minorities (Catholics in England vs. Protestants in France) as groups who faced the same type of oppression, so the parallel between the difficulties her friend endured and those of French Huguenots would likely have occurred to her.

In her personal correspondence, Lafayette refers to death, sermons, and God, but rarely discusses these topics in depth, and thus her letters leave us with little insight into her own personal spirituality. In a letter to Ménage dated December 1654, she writes: "L'on m'a dit que vous êtes venu aujourd'hui me chercher et si je n'avais entendu un sermon admirable du père [Le] Boux je serais au désespoir de ne vous avoir point vu mais je vous avoue que la beauté du sermon me console un peu d'avoir perdu le plaisir de vous voir."⁷⁸ In a letter to Madame de Sévigné, Lafayette complains of her ill health and surrenders her death to God's timing: "il faut

⁷⁷ Diefendorf, 37.

⁷⁸ "Correspondance", *Madame de Lafayette: Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2014), 854.

finir, quand il plaît Dieu, et j’y suis soumise.”⁷⁹ Again in a letter to Ménage, she references God while commiserating with Ménage over a trial he is involved in: “votre procès et votre déménagement me fatiguent pour vous, Dieu me garde d’en avoir autant à faire.”⁸⁰ In an undated letter to Ménage, Lafayette writes: “J’irais devant vous dans l’autre monde” and in another undated letter she writes: “je n’ai qu’à les souffrir tant qu’il plaira à Dieu de me laisser en ce monde.”⁸¹ In a portrait presumed to be for Lafayette in *Portraits et Éloges*, published by Claude Barbin and Sercy, she rejects the perception of some that she is “dévote” and instead professes to be simply “une bonne chrétienne”:

Mon repos m’est plus cher que tout le reste, et j’évite avec soin tout ce qui le pourrait troubler. Je ne hais pas la vie et je n’appréhende pas la mort. Il y a peu de choses que je craigne . . . On me croit dévote parce qu’on me voit souvent à l’église, mais je ne veux tromper personne: je ne me pique que d’être bonne chrétienne.⁸²

Situating Lafayette’s *Nouvelles* Within the Seventeenth Century’s Historical Writing

Lafayette’s three works discussed in this study are best classified as *nouvelles historiques*, a fictional genre of historical writing that appeared in the later part of the seventeenth century around the time Louis XIV assumed his personal rule. In order to gain a full understanding of the *nouvelle historique* and its relatives, it is necessary to look back to Louis

⁷⁹ “Correspondance”, *Madame de Lafayette: Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2014), 1082.

⁸⁰ “Correspondance”, *Madame de Lafayette: Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2014), 1083.

⁸¹ “Correspondance”, *Madame de Lafayette: Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2014), 1102.

⁸² Quoted in Camille Esmein-Sarrazin, “Roman et religion au tournant des années 1660: lectures de Mme de Lafayette,” *Littératures classiques* 3.79 (2012), 217-235.

XIII's reign, a time long before Lafayette started writing when Richelieu harnessed the art of historical writing as a propaganda machine for the French state. Richelieu's use of historical writing as a marketing tool for France at home and abroad initiated a literary path that soon led to other historical genres like *mémoires*, the *roman*, and various forms of *nouvellisme*, including the *nouvelles historiques* that we dissect in this study.

The state-sponsored history of the early seventeenth century was a collective endeavor taken on by Richelieu's "corps of writers, engravers, and painters," to use the words of Erica Harth.⁸³ His service to the monarchy entailed publicizing the French king and his government to the nation and to the rest of Europe in the best light possible. Historians appointed and paid by the crown, called either *historiographes du roi* or *conseillers du roi*, worked in tandem with *peintres* and *graveurs du roi* to compose histories, accompanied by illustrations or engravings, that would glorify the current king as a paragon and example worthy of imitation by his successors.⁸⁴ These historiographers often borrowed literary techniques from fiction writers, such as *harangues* (dialogue) and portraits, as a means of making their works more readable and appealing to the public.⁸⁵ Portrait books were especially popular during the early seventeenth century under Richelieu and were often titled "histories," "portraits," "true portraits," "panegyrics," and "famous men [or women]."⁸⁶ Many of the portraits accompanying the texts were allegorical in nature and often represented early modern kings as mythological figures. For an example, *Triumphes de Louis le Juste* (1649) equated Louis XIII to Hercules.⁸⁷ Officially produced histories were exclusive, aristocratic, male-centered, and male-dominated texts meant

⁸³ Harth, 73.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 135.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 92.

to be used as educational material for young princes who learned the art of ruling well from past examples.⁸⁸ The depiction of the king's life and exploits in these narratives became a model for posterity to follow and emulate. That being the case, embellishment (and omission) became essential in the genre. Historiographers' call to write elegies necessitated that positive traits be elaborated, positive events be celebrated, and blights on reigns be trivialized or at times even eliminated from history.

Isaac Newton's third law of motion, which states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, proves true in the literary field as well. An unofficial sector of historical writing orchestrated by those on the periphery at court soon popped up to counter and contend with the historical narratives being produced by beneficiaries of the French state. Courtiers who held a different narrative of events created their own portrait books or took to *mémoires* and *romans héroïques* to explain their version of the "truth." For example, Madame de Lafayette was one of a select group of friends asked to collaborate on disgraced *frondeuse* Madame de Montpensier's *Divers portraits* (1659),⁸⁹ a compilation of fifty-nine literary portraits, or verbal descriptions of prominent people, "a highly exclusive endeavor," according to Harth.⁹⁰ Lafayette's friendship with the Reine Dauphine Henriette Anne allowed her to join other courtiers, like Cardinal de Retz, Madame de Montpensier, and the Prince de Condé, in the composition of personal memoirs as a means of challenging the historical truths being represented in narratives written by *historiographes du roi*. Therefore, even at the beginning of

⁸⁸ Ibid., 131.

⁸⁹ It was during her 10-year exile at St. Fargeau where Montpensier began creating portraits, which Beasley identifies as one of the "most popular salon games" of the century. Montpensier selected the best portraits created within her circle to be published in *Divers Portraits*. Sévigné, La Rochefoucauld, Lafayette, and Villedieu contributed to the work. See Beasley, *Revising Memory*, page 75.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 102-103.

her literary career, Lafayette situated herself within a milieu at court that pushed against the narrative promulgated by the absolutist state. The majority of these memoirs, though written during their author's respective lifetimes, were published and circulated after their authors' deaths so as to escape any censorship surrounding publication instated by Louis XIV. Madame de Lafayette's *Histoire d'Henriette d'Angleterre*, written for the Reine Dauphine, is no exception to this trend. As eyewitness testimonies, *mémoires* were often considered "truer" than the official histories produced by the state.⁹¹ Even today Harth observes that scholars looking for what she calls "credible contemporary accounts of historical events" consult the memoirs of Retz and Saint-Simon before looking into the embellished histories written by court historians, as they prove to be more reliable sources.⁹²

Events of crisis, such as the inter-religious violence seen prior to and during the Wars of Religion, proved to be especially fertile for writers of history on either side of the literary spectrum, official or unofficial, as each had their own particular narrative to promote as "truth." The Fronde, a period of civil unrest during Louis XIV's minority that Madame de Lafayette witnessed herself, inspired Lafayette's contemporaries and friends in the salons to create some of France's most intriguing *romans héroïques*. *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus*, part of a series of *romans héroïques* published during the Fronde, is perhaps the best example of this genre. Similar to the histories produced by the French state that celebrated French kings by equating them to figures in Roman and Greek mythology, the *roman héroïque* lifted material and characters from ancient and medieval history, especially that of Rome, Spain, the Orient, Gaul, and medieval France.⁹³ Readers found themselves immersed in distant time periods populated with ancient

⁹¹ Ibid., 114.

⁹² Ibid, 114.

⁹³ Lever, 106.

characters evocative of their contemporaries.⁹⁴ The novels eventually earned the designation *roman-à-clés* thanks to the correlation between mythical characters and readers' contemporaries.⁹⁵ *Artamène* sought to valorize members of the rebellious nobility involved in the attacks on the crown as the true heroes of the day. A product of the salons, it emerged as a kind of first phase of counter-literature to the histories being produced at court.

Louis XIV's assumption of his personal rule in 1661 brought with it publishing regulations and new forms of censorship. When Louis XIV created the Academy with the historians and playwrights, he overshadowed the then-ongoing work in literary circles, like those of Lafayette and Montpensier. Publishers had to obtain a royal privilege to print any work, so anything that had a message Louis XIV disliked would not get approved to be published. This system instigated a necessary shift from the *roman héroïque* to a new unofficial form of historical writing called *nouvellisme* which promised to unearth the truth being so carefully hidden, obscured, or denied by court historians. Upon assumption of his personal rule, Louis XIV diverted the course of the French state's propaganda system that Richelieu had put in place under his father Louis XIII. Rather than relying on the written word in officially sanctioned histories of state, Louis XIV set out to glorify his reign and his nation via concrete constructions, be they buildings, statues, or gardens, that would impress literate and illiterate, foreigners and subjects alike.⁹⁶ He also maintained control of members of the nobility at court by sequestering them within the walls of Versailles, a palace built just outside of Paris. Without further stipends from the state, *historiographes du roi*, like Donneau de Vizé and Théophraste Renaudot, turned

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ For more information of how Louis XIV presented himself to the public, see Peter Burke's *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

to journalism, an emerging field at the time, as a means of making money and replacing their lost income from the French state.⁹⁷ Renaudot and Vizé founded the *Gazette* in 1631 and *Le Mercure Galant* in 1672, respectively.⁹⁸ Official magazines and periodicals, like *Le Mercure*, which published both Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* and (much later) *La Comtesse de Tende*, featured *nouvelles* in the sense of "news items," then thought of as a "kind of instant history," as well as *nouvelles* in the sense of short fictional stories, like those by Lafayette that I examine in this study.⁹⁹

The *nouvelle* had several genres, most of which overlapped with one another: *histoire secrète* (secret history), *nouvelle historique* (historical novel), *nouvelle galante* (amorous novel). Harth describes the *nouvelle* as both a reaction against and a continuation of its predecessor the *roman héroïque*. The lengthy, cumbrous *roman fleuves* (literally "novel rivers," a play on their seemingly never-ending length) were exchanged for *nouvelles* or *histoires*, shorter, smaller, easily portable pocket-sized publications.¹⁰⁰ In general, the *nouvelle* could be thought of as an extreme simplification of the complicated *roman héroïque* or *épique*. "Le titre d'une Nouvelle, exclut tout ce qui n'est pas nécessaire pour la composer," writes Du Plaisir in treatise *Sentiments sur les lettres et sur l'histoire, avec des scrupules de style* (1683), a work which attempted to identify differences between the *roman* and *nouvelle* and theorization of both prose genres.¹⁰¹ The novelty of the *nouvelle* consisted in both subject matter and form. It tended to be grounded in recent history and feature historical characters, whereas the *roman* was

⁹⁷ Harth, 163.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 163-4.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 164.

¹⁰⁰ Henri Coulet, *Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 209.

¹⁰¹ Du Plaisir, 90-91. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 4, The Eighteenth Century*, 216.

grounded in ancient (Roman and Greek) history. These works typically had less complicated plotlines, in that there were not mini-narratives interwoven within the major narrative, as in the *romans*. (Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* is an exception to this trend). Compared to *romans*, which dramatized public actions and events, *nouvelles* tended to focus on personal predicaments and private motivations of public figures, and aspired to reveal the "secrets" of these public lives. Though some *nouvelles historiques*, like Jean de Préchac's *La Princesse d'Angleterre* (1677), Boisguillebert's *Marie Stuart, Reine d'Escoffe* (1675) and Vaumorière's *Diane de France* (1675), featured solely historical people, Lafayette chose to populate her tales with a mixture of fictional and historical characters.¹⁰²

If modern-day critics still struggle to find a neat definition of what exactly constitutes a novel, seventeenth-century critics, who witnessed its rise firsthand without the benefit of reflection, had even more trouble articulating the genre's limitations. Due to its extreme novelty, the public, literary critics and readers alike, lacked a single decisive term for this new form of prose.¹⁰³ Initially, no distinction was made between *nouvelle* and *roman* and the terms were used interchangeably.¹⁰⁴ The "romans nouveaux" that superseded the "vieux romans" were given various names: *roman*, *nouvelle*, *histoire*, or *petit roman*.¹⁰⁵ Regardless, these works, including Lafayette's, were among the era's most popular and widely read forms of literature.

The rise of the *nouvelle* and of Lafayette's career corresponded with striking developments on the political scene. At the time *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662) was published, Louis XIV had just begun his "cold war" against the Huguenots by allowing the Edict

¹⁰² Harth, 209.

¹⁰³ Claudette Delhez-Sarlet, "La Princesse de Clèves: roman ou nouvelle? I. L'Evolution des formes romanesques à l'époque classique," *Romanische Forschungen* 80.1 (1968), 54.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

of Nantes (1598) to be interpreted more and more restrictively. Eight years later, Louis finalized his clandestine negotiations for The Secret Treaty of Dover (1670), an agreement made with England in which then King Charles II promised to personally convert to Catholicism himself and restore Catholicism to England within a certain period of time. Louis XIV's conflict with the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church over the *régale*, which occurred around the time *La Princesse de Cleves* was published, pressured Louis XIV to prove the strength of the French Gallican Church as a bastion of Catholicism. Finally, only seven years after *La Princesse de Cleves* (1678) was published, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes (1598) with the Edict of Fontainebleau (1685), a political measure that essentially wiped Huguenots from France's legal register.

When read in the context of Louis XIV's religious initiatives in the seventeenth century, Lafayette's novellas take on new meaning. The time period in which Lafayette's novellas were set—years immediately before and during France's Wars of Religion (1558-1563)—suggests that the works were likely meant to move readers to consider France's handling of the religious difference in their midst thanks to the Reformation. *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662), which features a Huguenot as a main character, and ends with the blood wedding of Henri de Navarre and Marguerite de Valois and Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres, undoubtedly has religious and political undertones. *La Princesse de Cleves* (1678) watches Lafayette's fictional princess navigate a court divided by Protestant and Catholic parties. *La Comtesse de Tende* (1724) begins at the onset of the Wars of Religion. Given these text's explicit references to religious conflict, and the *nouvelle* genre's overall tendency toward combining political commentary with fictional plotlines, these works call out for critical reappraisal to bring to light the way they engage with the era's religious debates.

Chapter Breakdown

This dissertation examines three fictional texts with striking parallels to each other. In Chapter 2, I explore how the *La Comtesse de Tende*, an under-read work with a brutal plotline that was published in 1724 after Lafayette's death, metaphorically showcases the horror and destruction of exclusive policies towards religious difference such as the Edict of Fontainebleau (1685), via the comtesse's illegitimate pregnancy and subsequent abortion-like delivery. The tension between the Tende couple, and their differing approaches to the illegitimate pregnancy, represents the rift between the monarchy and the French public over how to deal with the then-growing "illegitimate" Protestant religion in France. While the monarchy, like Tende in the tale, pursued toleration as a temporary solution, the public, like the comtesse in the tale, took matters into their own hands and resorted to destructive violence.

In Chapter 3, I will show how *La Princesse de Montpensier* engaged with current political anxieties by using a love story to depict the tenuous and complex role of religious minorities in France. In the 1660s, the role of the Huguenot minority was deeply ambivalent, with members of this group portrayed variously as potential traitors and as pitiable victims of state repression. The character of Chabanes in this novella seems to encapsulate these anxieties. In the novella, the Montpensier home is constructed as a space of hospitality and tolerance towards the Huguenot religious Other, personified by the Comte de Chabanes. As the tale continues, these constructive attitudes to Chabanes break down, and liberal toleration turns to deadly hatred. Ultimately, I argue that the novella valorizes toleration as an antidote to religious hatred, while simultaneously casting doubt on its effectiveness.

In Chapter 4, I question past critical perspectives that suggest *La Princesse de Clèves* is devoid of religion and attempt to show how the text's love triangle among Madame de Clèves, M. de Clèves, and Nemours mirrors the tension between the Protestant and Catholic political parties at court and metaphorically explores solutions to the dilemma the Huguenot minority posed for France at the time. The princess's unique solution to her predicament, one not seen in any of Lafayette's other novellas, allows the couple to prevent a violent and dramatic end to their predicament. I ultimately try to show that Lafayette's novella offers us a glimpse of a new conception of the French identity as a multi-religious realm rather than a uniformly Catholic one.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I conclude my study and suggest that approaching the novellas through the concept of hospitality rather than toleration, a conceptual transition encouraged by Jacques Derrida, could deepen our understanding of how the works contribute solutions to the accommodation of religious difference within France even today.

CHAPTER 2

LA COMTESSE DE TENDE: A DRAMATIZATION OF INTOLERANCE

Introduction

Published 31 years after Lafayette's death after being discovered among her late son's papers, *La Comtesse de Tende* has been tip-toed around or overtly ignored by critics, seriously addressed in only a handful of scholarly articles. Since appearing in a 1724 edition of *Le Mercure Galant*, the work has attracted negative comments ever since. Stirling Haig calls *La Comtesse de Tende* "the harshest tale Madame de Lafayette ever wrote;"¹⁰⁶ Jaymes Anne Rohrer calls it an "unspeakable story;"¹⁰⁷ Margaret MacRae observes that it is "undoubtedly the most pessimistic of Mme de Lafayette's works;"¹⁰⁸ Micheline Cuénin deems the tale "sans conteste la mal aimée" of Lafayette's works;¹⁰⁹ for Cassandra Moore, the novella "constitutes a bitterly pessimistic distillation of experience."¹¹⁰ As each of these perspectives demonstrate, the tale has overwhelmingly been perceived as a dour, almost repugnant work that seems to rob its readers of hope and optimism for the future. While not inaccurate, these readings miss the significance of the tale's pessimistic and morbid nature. A political tale that implicitly comments on the ongoing religious conflicts in seventeenth-century France, *La Comtesse de Tende* depicts the horror and

¹⁰⁶ Stirling Haig, "La Comtesse de Tende: A Singular Heroine," *Romance Notes* 10 (1969), 311.

¹⁰⁷ Jaymes Anne Rohrer, "Epistolary Intercourse in *La Comtesse de Tende*," 160.

¹⁰⁸ Margaret MacRae, "La Comtesse de Tende: A Disastrous Equality," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 25.2 (1988), 139.

¹⁰⁹ Micheline Cuénin, "La Terreur sans la pitié: *La Comtesse de Tende*," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 77e année, no. 3/4, *Le Roman au XVIIe siècle*, (May-Aug. 1977), 478.

¹¹⁰ Cassandra Chrones Moore, "La Comtesse de Tende: The Final Disenchantment." *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* (1976): 118-128.

brutality of the French state's policy of exclusion of religious difference and reveals it to be self-destructive rather than self-protective for the country as a whole.

A glance at the plot seems to offer an easy explanation as to why *La Comtesse de Tende*, originally published in a 1724 edition of *Le Mercure Galant*, is such an unpalatable story. It details the married life of the Comtesse de Tende, a young bride whose husband's neglect propels her into an extramarital affair with her best friend's husband, the Chevalier de Navarre. The comtesse discovers she is pregnant with Navarre's child days before his death at the Siege of Rouen, which occurred in October of 1562.¹¹¹ Incapable of leading her husband to believe the child is his own amidst her grief, the princess is left with no choice but to admit her fault to her husband in hopes of an immediate honor killing, which would allow her to take his and her secret safely to the grave. Her husband's ambiguous and noncommittal response, which allows the princess her life, at least for the time being, should be a comforting extension of grace, but it proves to be disastrous. Unwilling to live, the princess starves herself to the point of causing a miscarriage, ending her baby's life and then her own—a self-imposed punishment that, according to her husband's response, though merited, did not have to be. Neither the Comte de Tende nor the Princess de Neufchâtel, the only characters left standing at the end of the novella, have any issue to show from their marriages, leaving a bleak outlook for the future. A tale that is hostile to life and infused with death, detailing not only a suicide, but also an infanticide and infertility, *La Comtesse de Tende* is not a tale for the faint of heart.

Since *La Comtesse de Tende* was not discovered until 1724, it remains unclear why Lafayette did not attempt to have it published, as she did with her other known works. Similarly, the tale's actual date of composition remains a mystery. Critics have attempted to date the tale by

¹¹¹ See Esmein-Sarrazin, *Œuvres complètes*, page 1230.

comparing its style to that of Lafayette's other works, but have failed to come to any definite consensus. Stirling Haig lists no fewer than four dates—1664, 1665, 1669, and 1690—as potential markers of its creation. The majority of these would place the tale between *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662) and *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678).¹¹² Cassandra Chrones Moore places the composition of *La Comtesse de Tende* after that of *La Princesse de Clèves*.¹¹³ Camille Esmein-Sarrazin, on the other hand, distinguishes herself from most critics, maintaining that the work seems to be a *premier ébauche* of *La Princesse de Montpensier*, a claim that, if true, necessitates a composition sometime before 1662.¹¹⁴ This dissertation aligns itself with Esmein-Sarrazin in treating *La Comtesse de Tende* as the first in a series. I consider this chronology logical given the tale's relatively harsh treatment of plot and thematic elements that Lafayette would handle with more elegance and finesse in her later, published works; however, it remains only speculation.

Set in the 1560s during the reign of Catherine de Medici, *La Comtesse de Tende* is seemingly focused on a romance plot, but engages deeply with the turbulent political events of France's Wars of Religion. This chapter argues that *La Comtesse de Tende* depicts the religious intolerance demonstrated by the French Catholic church and the French public as they rejected the tolerant stance towards the Protestant minority taken by Catherine de Medici. The text puts on display the tension between the French populace and the French government, demonstrated in the novel through the relationship between the comtesse and her husband. Through her unacceptable pregnancy, the comtesse serves as an embodiment of Catholic writer Nicolas le

¹¹² Haig, 311. Most critics believe the rudimentary style of the novella should place it *before* *La Princesse de Clèves* and *La Princesse de Montpensier*.

¹¹³ Moore, 118-128.

¹¹⁴ Esmein-Sarrazin, *Œuvres complètes*, 1229.

Maire's warning that women "give birth to heresies or allow them to grow."¹¹⁵ The heroine's rejection of her husband's tolerant position is analogous to the French populace's reaction during the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres in Paris and to those that followed in the provinces. In the same way that the comtesse takes her illegitimate pregnancy into her own hands, the French people intended to deal with the Protestant problem as they deemed fit, rather than blindly following government policies of toleration. Portraying her heroine as an intolerant, fear- and violence-driven person does not necessarily confine Lafayette, as the author, to the same viewpoint. Rather, via the comtesse's character, Lafayette lays bare the religious intolerance of the sixteenth century in all its horror. In doing so, she inspires fear in her readers and contemporaries, prompting them to consider a less destructive solution to France's enduring religious discord in the seventeenth century.

Relationships that are short on affection and inherently full of conflict are at the center of this text. Similar to *La Princesse de Montpensier*, the novella opens with a marriage made for political reasons rather than for love: "Mlle de Strossy fille du Maréchal et proche parente de Catherine de Médicis," we read, "épousa la première année de la Régence de cette Reine, le comte de Tende de la Maison de Savoie, riche, bien fait, plus propre à se faire estimer qu'à plaire, et le Seigneur de la Cour qui vivait avec le plus d'éclat" (*Comtesse* 61). Mademoiselle de Strossy, as the subject of the sentence, initially seems to take on all the agency, as if she initiated the match and orchestrated the marriage. The sentence then goes on to emphasize the involvement of prominent members of her family, especially her father. As with Lafayette's other works, many of the characters are real historical figures whom readers would have recognized. Mademoiselle de Strossy's connections to Catherine de Medici and Constable

¹¹⁵ Luria, 199.

Montmorency, a Catholic whom Mack P. Holt qualifies as the “*de facto* head of the French military and a loyal and well-rewarded client of Henry II,”¹¹⁶ far from being superfluous background information, give readers crucial insight into how to read and interpret the tale. In identifying Mademoiselle de Strossy as the daughter of Montmorency and as a close relative of regent Catherine de Medici, Lafayette connects the Strossy-Tende marriage directly to the crown’s military and political initiatives at the time against a quickly strengthening Protestant party. Mademoiselle de Strossy’s marriage, far from being one of personal preference or initiative, as the involvement of her military-commander father and Catherine de Medici quickly reveal, is sought out in service to the French state.

The second half of the sentence provides a description of the comte that, while superficially positive, suggests his personality is dominated by egotism. He is rich and handsome, but more interested in living a glittering lifestyle and making himself esteemed than in pleasing others. By emphasizing his interest in worldly success and admiration, the text foreshadows his eventual neglect of his new wife and household. The opening sentence thus first highlights Mlle de Strossy’s agency, but abruptly shifts to focus on her new husband’s ego and ambition. As the text continues, this shifting of agency will be a central feature, as first one character, then the other, gains the upper hand.

The novel passes through events briskly, stating that the young comtesse loves her husband, but he sees her “comme un enfant” (*Comtesse* 61) and falls in love with another unnamed woman. The comtesse becomes more beautiful and admired in society, consoling herself with the friendships of people like the Princesse de Neufchâtel. The princesse is in turn

¹¹⁶ Holt, 40.

courted by the Chevalier de Navarre, a charming but propertyless man who desires her vast fortune. Concealing his mercenary motivation from nearly everyone, he enlists the comtesse's help as a go-between, but while he is working to win the princesse's heart, he and the comtesse fall in love. The two dramatically declare their passion on the day he is to be wed, but the comtesse insists he should go through with the marriage rather than give up his promising future. The princesse immediately becomes aware that her new husband loves another, but does not know that her best friend is the cause of her jealousy. Her affair with Navarre becomes sexual as "le temps et les occasions avoient triomphé de sa vertu et du respect" (*Comtesse* 70), setting the stage for her pregnancy and the train of tragic events that will follow. The novel depicts love as an emotionally harrowing zero-sum game, in which someone is always being rejected. Love is rarely mutual, and both deceivers and deceived are in danger. Rather than existing as a refuge from a world where outsiders are at risk of exclusion and death, love mirrors the chaos of the political world.

History of Tolerance in La Maison de Tende

A glimpse into historical studies of the Savoy family in France sheds light on the Comte de Tende, a character whose situation Lafayette's text leaves, perhaps deliberately, in a rather ambiguous light. The comte of Lafayette's novel is a fictionalized version of a real political figure, a move that serves to link the text with historical events. Crucially, le Comte de Tende's affiliation with "la Maison de Savoie" (*Comtesse* 61) links him to a family with a relatively prolonged and visible history of defending and advocating for religious minorities in France, especially those adhering to Protestant doctrine. His father, Claude de Savoie, though born Catholic, became an ardent supporter of the Reformation after remarriage to a Protestant wife.

As “gouverneur et grand sénéchal de Provence,” Claude made a name for himself protecting and defending Protestant sects under his jurisdiction from persecution. Significantly, Claude attempted (but failed) to prevent the horrible massacres at Cabrières-d’Avignon, where a Protestant religious minority known as Les Vaudois had found temporary refuge from the crown’s persecution. Henri de Panisse Passis writes about “l’esprit de tolérance qui [animait]” Claude de Savoie, and also tells of his attempt to save Protestants who were using Sisteron as a refuge from religious violence: “Le comte de Tende, sachant ce cruel dessein, lui défendit de l’entreprendre et même avait dépêché auparavant à la Roynne [Catherine de Medici], qui avait écrit à Sommerive de laisser ces misérables en paix à Sisteron.”¹¹⁷ Claude de Savoie used his familial estate, known as the Comté de Tende, as a refuge for religious minorities when persecution was at its peak. In contending that Honorat de Savoie died “par commandement du roi, pour avoir refusé de perpétrer le massacre des protestants dans son gouvernement de Provence,”¹¹⁸ Camille Esmein-Sarrazin confuses Honorat with his father Claude. Therefore, even the Comte de Tende’s name, which, like most noble titles, ties him to his family’s land, evokes memories of safe spaces for the religiously persecuted. While religious tolerance is not depicted explicitly in the text, the comte can be seen as enacting it analogously, in his attempts to show mercy to his wife and allow her illegitimate child to be born.

Illegitimacy

While the purpose of any political marriage is to produce legitimate heirs, in this text that goal is subverted and marriages are ultimately fruitless. The stain of illegitimacy seems to be far-

¹¹⁷ Panisse Passis, 93.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1233.

reaching throughout the text, as if it is a curse from which no one can escape. This theme has precedent in historical fact. René de Savoie, a man otherwise known as “le Grand Bâtard de Savoie,” was the progenitor of the House of Savoy, a family tree which eventually produced our Comte de Tende, “Honorat de Savoie, fils de Claude de Savoie, issu d’une branche bâtarde de la maison régnante.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, the Chevalier de Navarre, though a purely fictional character, has a name that bastards in France often sported, according to Esmein-Sarrazin.¹²⁰ Finally, the comtesse bears an illegitimate child. While the illegitimate origins of the Savoy family make the Comte de Tende’s quest for acceptance and renown at the French court all the more understandable, his effort to distance himself from his past returns to him in his wife’s illegitimate pregnancy. Similarly, the Chevalier de Navarre fulfills his destiny in impregnating the comtesse with an illegitimate child. The events of the text ultimately serve to suggest that what is illegitimate is never fully assimilable; illegitimacy is an infectious disease to which there is no cure. This idea of an uncontainable contagion parallels medical imagery used in the debates of the era around tolerating versus punishing or expelling religious minorities.

Lafayette’s Literary Revision of the Historical Honorat de Savoie

Historically, Honorat de Savoie, the Comte de Tende, made a name for himself at court by breaking away from his father’s precedent of religious tolerance, at one point even leading royal troops against his father’s own mercenaries. Lafayette’s initial description of the comte’s propensity to “se faire estimer” over “plaire” others seems to be a direct reference to his rejection of his father’s precedent in favor of making a name for himself at court. After reading the first

¹¹⁹ Esmein-Sarrazin, note 3 page 1244.

¹²⁰ Ibid., note 5 page 1244.

paragraph of the novella, Lafayette's readers expect a character modeled on the historical life. However, what they find is quite the opposite. Curiously, we never see the comte actively fighting against the Protestant strongholds attacked during the government's Normandy campaign. Not one reference is made to his valor on the battlefield. Furthermore, he returns home, ostensibly to the Comté de Tende, a previous Protestant refuge, to finish "des ouvrages qu'il avait commencé" (*Comtesse* 70) while the siege of Rouen and the larger Normandy campaign are ongoing, a choice that distances him from the militant Catholic agenda to wipe out the Protestant faith and paints him as more of a pacifist, or perhaps even an advocate of toleration.

In addition to the comte's reluctance to participate actively in the war, the company he keeps aligns him with those who supported religious co-existence rather than conflict. He socializes with members of the Navarre family: the Princesse de Neufchatel, a fictionalized character whom Camille Esmein-Sarrazin identifies as Jacqueline de Rohan, a prominent Protestant widow, as well the Princesse de Condé, the wife of Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Condé—all figures who have ties to the Protestant party. Lafayette thus uses an historical personage as the basis for one of her characters, but re-imagines him as more tolerant and accepting of religious minorities than his historical counterpart. The text thus offers tolerance and assimilation as a possibility, only to reject it in its violent final scenes.

The Comtesse's Womb and the Comté de Tende

While the comte responds to his wife's illegitimate pregnancy with an offer of mercy, the comtesse rejects it, deliberately fashioning herself into an unnatural anti-mother too horrific to be forgotten. In retreating to a country house she shares with her husband, one which might well

have been located within the family's Comté de Tende, the comtesse unwittingly associates her womb, the body's protective enclosure, with the property her father-in-law once used as a refuge to harbor southern France's persecuted Huguenot minority. Furthermore, her husband's wish to see the pregnancy through, presumably within the confines of their private country estate, can be read analogously as an intention to create private spaces within France to accommodate the heretical religion of the Huguenot religious minority. This attempt is rejected by the comtesse, who associates such a path with shame and violence. She decides to forge her own ghastly solution or "rémède" to the problem.

Though the text does not explicitly document how the comtesse's physical condition deteriorates, it seems as though she takes on almost anorexic behavior, "paraissant plutôt une personne morte qu'une personne vivante,"¹²¹ as if she is determined to kill herself (and her baby) by starvation. The text's reference to the comtesse as "une personne morte"¹²² paints a picture of a decaying body wasting away before the reader's eyes. The use of the conjunctive adverb "enfin"¹²³ underscores the comtesse's weakened physical state as *a pre-meditated goal* she worked towards, whereas the use of the verb "succomber"¹²⁴ suggests the comtesse went to war with her perfectly healthy body until it succumbed to her will to die. The detail about the comtesse being in the sixth month of her pregnancy at this point, though seemingly inconsequential, is crucial; six months' gestation was the point at which early modern medicine generally considered a fetus a person, instead of simply tissue or potential future life.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Lafayette, *La Comtesse de Tende*, 74.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Therefore, by noting the length of the pregnancy with precision, the text indirectly labels the comtesse a murderess and emphasizes the viability of the child and the new religion it represents. The comtesse's intentional malnutrition of her own body, a vessel meant to provide sustenance and refuge for her unborn child, induces premature labor, a procedure that is eerily close to an abortion or infanticide. And the act of expelling an illegitimate entity from a body that should nurture it has unavoidable resonance to the novella's broader political context. It suggests France's own refusal to allow Protestantism, an unintended and "illegitimate" religion then blossoming in France, to grow and prosper within its realm.

In March of 1562, Catholics, led by the Duc de Guise, reacted to the Edict of January with the massacre of Vassy, an act of violence on the innocent that resonates with the comtesse's self-inflicted suicide and murder of her unborn child.¹²⁶ Rioters killed an innocent group of unarmed Protestants, who, like the comtesse's unborn child, were incapable of defending themselves. The massacre of Vassy, what Penny Roberts calls "the catalyst for the civil wars,"¹²⁷ initiated what would become a three-generations-long battle in every sense of the word over religion. Reacting to the massacre at Vassy, Etienne Pasquier, a Parisian lawyer and historian, remarked that he saw it as "the beginning of a tragedy."¹²⁸ After the massacre of Vassy, Guise ignored orders to present himself at court, then at Fontainebleau, and went instead to Paris, where the people welcomed him as a hero.¹²⁹ Lafayette's tale, by recasting the massacre of

¹²⁶ For a song written on Vassy from the Catholic perspective, see Charles Serfass, "La Chanson catholique du massacre de Vassy," *Société de l'histoire du Protestantisme français: Bulletin historique et littéraire* 51.5 (1902), 255-258.

¹²⁷ Penny Roberts, "Religious Conflict and the Urban Setting: Troyes during the French Wars of Religion," *French History* 6.3 (1992), 262.

¹²⁸ Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 50.

¹²⁹ Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 52.

Vassy as a mother's intentional killing of her own defenseless, unborn child, allows the reader to see the atrocity of the act with new eyes.

The initially secret marriage of the Princesse de Neufchâtel and the Chevalier de Navarre coincides with a public ceremony that, though unspecified by the novella, likely coincides with legislation surrounding the Edict of January (1562), also known as the Edict of Toleration or the Edict of Saint Germain. The text reads: "Le même jour qui fut pris pour ce mariage il y avait une cérémonie publique, son mari y assista, elle y envoya toutes ses femmes et fit dire que l'on ne la voyait pas et s'enferma dans son cabinet" (*Tende* 63-4). "[L]'heure du Mariage pressait . . . il alla comme au supplice à la plus grande et à la plus agréable fortune où un Cadet sans biens ait été jamais élevé" (65). Navarre's change in status may have historical resonance. His marriage to Neufchâtel gives him legitimate money, power, and status he did not have, just as the Edict of January elevated the status of Protestants, constituting the "first public and formal recognition" that the French Crown had ever given the Huguenots to practice their religion with impunity (Holt 47). The edict was "a radical departure from the past" and marked "a watershed" in the Crown's policies towards the Reformed religion (Holt 47). If we take the "cérémonie publique" to suggest the Edict, this day is thus a climactic one both in the fictional events of the narrative and in the historical events they parallel.

Of the Edict of January (1562), Etienne Pasquier wrote the following epitaph: "The edict was no sooner born than it died; thus it was, so to speak, an abortion suffered by France [like a dead child] that will cause many tears in the entrails of the mother who produced it."¹³⁰ The Edict of January placed significant restrictions on Huguenots. They were mandated to restore all church property; barred from interfering with activities of ecclesiastical authorities; forbidden to

¹³⁰ Roelker, 269.

build churches or to hold assemblies by day and night inside any towns limits; forbidden to house criminals or raise money or troops. Iconoclasm, sedition, and a repeated offense of printing or distributing banned books were all punishable by death. Some concessions were also offered, among them that Huguenots could hold services in private homes within the jurisdiction of towns, albeit for the home's inhabitants only. Public assemblies could be held outside private homes by day, but royal officers had to approve them and were likely to attend so as to catch any infraction; both Catholics and Protestants were forbidden to hold armed assemblies, and priests could not preach sermons with the aim of stirring up violence. Amazingly, even with all the restrictions and the scant concessions, Huguenots would cry in later decades of the century "Give us the Edict of January!" proving that even the smallest recognition of their existence meant a great deal to them.¹³¹

Reading the Comtesse's Miscarriage as Henri IV's Erasure from History

In the same way that Lafayette's tale reimagines the life story of Honorat de Savoie, her tale also considers what French history might have looked like had Henri IV, the orchestrator of the Edict of Nantes, which granted toleration to the Huguenots, never been born. To readers familiar with the historical context, the fictional Navarre marriage featured in the novella brings to mind an infamous couple of that time period, Jeanne d'Albret and Antoine de Navarre. They were the parents of Henri de Navarre, who orchestrated the Edict of Nantes, in which Huguenots were granted toleration until Louis revoked it in 1685. Jeanne d'Albret was a prominent Protestant and widow who had considerable territory under her control in France. The Chevalier

¹³¹ Roelker, 264. Roelker notes that the text of the Edict of January can be found in Sutherland, *Huguenot Struggle*, 354-356, as well as interpretations, 133-136. *Mémoires de Condé*, 3:8-96 covers the process of passing the edict from January 17-March 6, 1562; see also 3:256.

de Navarre evokes several aspects of Antoine de Navarre's character. For example, Antoine de Navarre, far from being known as a faithful and resolute defender of the Protestantism, constantly wavered between Catholicism and the new faith. Historian N.M. Sutherland writes that he "oscillated embarrassingly between the two confessions"¹³² and that he displayed "erratic" religious conduct.¹³³ In the same vein, Holt calls him "the vacillating king of Navarre." Ultimately, Guise managed to persuade the him to abandon the Protestant movement in order to support the Catholic triumvirate.¹³⁴ Shortly after solidifying his connection to the Catholic party, Antoine de Navarre, like the Chevalier de Navarre in Lafayette's tale, was fatally wounded in the Siege of Rouen.¹³⁵ While "la Princesse de Neufchatel," as Camille Esmein-Sarrazin observes, most closely correlates with Jacqueline de Rohan, a member of an illustrious Protestant family in France, her association with the Navarre family through marriage makes a direct connection to Jeanne d'Albret, the influential mother of Henry IV.¹³⁶ Therefore, the text seems to draw loose, but obvious parallels to the historical couple.

The Comtesse de Tende's actions throughout the tale do double damage to the Navarre union. In arresting the Chevalier de Navarre's attention, she causes him to neglect his wife, and more specifically, his procreative duties in the marriage. Navarre's lack of interest in his wife deprives their union of children and, more importantly, an heir. In this respect, especially if the Navarre couple in the novel is meant to spark memories of Antoine de Navarre and his wife Jeanne d'Albret, it is as if the comtesse deprives France of Henri IV. The barren womb of the

¹³² Sutherland, 6.

¹³³ Sutherland, 14.

¹³⁴ Holt, 52.

¹³⁵ Holt, 55.

¹³⁶ Esmein-Sarrazin, note 4 page 1244.

Princesse de Neufchatel, though not explicitly mentioned in the tale, contrasts with the comtesse's fertile one. The comtesse's illegitimate pregnancy with Navarre makes it seem as though she usurps a pregnancy that rightfully belonged to the Princesse de Navarre in order to eliminate Henry IV and the Edict of Nantes from history.

The Comtesse's Religion

While the text does not explicitly depict Protestant-Catholic conflicts, it does thematize religious faith. Stirling Haig remarks that "religion is very much present" in the tale, pointing out that the comtesse is "unambiguously Christian" and that she even has her own personal confessor.¹³⁷ However, the comtesse's religious devotion at the end of the novel, which Camille Esmein-Sarrazin calls "suspecte et excessive,"¹³⁸ comes across more like smoke and mirrors than genuine heartfelt repentance. Nowhere in the early parts of the novella is spirituality highlighted as a regular part of the comtesse's life. Furthermore, "la nature"¹³⁹ is named before "le Christianisme"¹⁴⁰ as reasons why the comtesse resists committing suicide initially, suggesting that her faith is more of a second thought than the primary lens through which she makes decisions. Finally, prior to her self-imposed death, the comtesse is described through her husband's perspective as "une personne égarée,"¹⁴¹ a phrase that is often used in spiritual circles to describe prodigals erring like lost sheep on the wrong path or on no religious path at all. The text does not say that she had her child baptized, a practice that a truly religious or spiritual

¹³⁷ Haig, 314.

¹³⁸ Ibid., xxxii.

¹³⁹ Lafayette, *La Comtesse de Tende*, 71.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

person would not have neglected. Interestingly, the text says nothing about the comtesse letting the comte know about the baby's birth, brief life, and death.

Political Background in the Tale

La Comtesse de Tende begins in an era of hope for the future and growth of Protestantism in France. The timing of the comtesse's marriage to the Comte de Tende, which occurred during "la première année de la régence de cette reine," when Charles IX succeeded his late brother Francis II, means that their union coincided with the French government's newly tolerant stance towards the Huguenot community. Mack P. Holt writes that upon Catherine de Medici's ascent to the regency "it immediately became clear that the Queen Mother's policy would be one of moderation."¹⁴² She sought out Michel de l'Hôpital, whom Holt qualifies as "a moderate voice who urged that all sides put down their arms in order to decide the religious question peacefully," as well as Gaspard de Coligny, "a moderate Protestant,"¹⁴³ for political advice. Crucially, Holt observes that "for the first time since the persecution began following the 'Affair des Placards' more than twenty-five years earlier, French Protestants had some reason to believe that the crown itself might at last be wavering in its suppression of the new religion" around this time.¹⁴⁴

The "cérémonie publique" that occurs the same day as the initially secret marriage of the princess de Neufchatel and the Chevalier de Navarre, whom we read as loose representatives of Jeanne d'Albret and Antoine de Navarre, though they are unnamed in the novella, might have

¹⁴² Holt, 45.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 46.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

been the announcement of the Edict of Saint Germain, also known as “the Edict of January” and “the edict of toleration,” enacted in January of 1562 that marked what Holt calls a “watershed in the crown’s position on religion.”¹⁴⁵ The Chevalier de Navarre, though a fictional character, lives up to his namesake and inspiration, Antoine de Navarre. The public announcement of the Navarre marriage coincides with public policy that allowed Protestants to preach openly in the countryside (not in the towns) by daylight. The comtesse chooses not to attend the ceremony—she stays in her own room instead. While her husband and ladies attend, “elle fit dire qu’on ne la voyoit pas, et s’enferma dans son cabinet, couchée sur son lit de repos, et abandonnée à tout ce que les remords, l’amour et la jalousie peuvent faire sentir de plus cruel.” On the surface level, her behavior is the understandable reaction of a jealous lover. But when placed in this political context, her refusal to attend the “cérémonie publique” suggests her displeasure at the newly tolerant stance of the French government towards the Huguenots and positions her as hostile to such policies.

Symbolism of the Comtesse’s Motherhood and Pregnancy

The trope of motherhood was already in use in religious debates at the time Lafayette’s *nouvelle* was written. Pierre Bayle’s remarks about the Catholic Church in his *Commentaire* allow us to see the comtesse as a mother figure representing the Catholic Church in France as a whole. Bayle characterizes the ideal relationship of the Catholic Church with the Protestants as one marked by tenderness and moderation; in other words, one of tolerance: “Car l’Eglise Romaine en suposant ses pretentions doit conserver une tendresse de mère pour les Protestans, &

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 47.

ne doit se server que d'une correction modérée pour les ramener à l'obéissance."¹⁴⁶ The metaphor of a nurturing mother is central to his vision of religious harmony. Intolerance, according to Bayle, causes the Roman Catholic Church to degenerate into a horrific anti-mother figure, much like the one the countess embodies in *La Comtesse de Tende*: "Ainsi les supplices éfroiables que l'Eglise Romaine a fait souffrir aux Héretiques pendant tant de siècles sont une rigueur d'autant plus dénaturée & monstrüeuse que plus on suposera ses prétentions."¹⁴⁷ The unnatural and monstrous qualities of the Roman Catholic Church resonate with the behavior of the comtesse at the end of the tale, as she deliberately brings about her own death and that of her child.

This metaphor was also used equate acts of religious persecutions with those of an unfaithful wife. In the preface to his *Commentaire philosophique*, Bayle compares the intolerant Roman Catholic Church to a harlot, a prostitute, a wayward woman who takes siege of a house not her own, presumably the country of France, and wreaks havoc amongst the populace:

La pretension des Protestans est que l'Eglise Romaine bien loin d'être cette épouse de Jesus-Christ, qui est la mère des vrais Chrétiens, n'est qu'une infame prostituée qui s'est saisie de la maison, assistée d'une troupe de Rufiens, de coupe-jarets, & de gens de sac & de corde, qui en a chassé le père, la mère & les enfans, qui a égorgé de ces enfans le plus qu'elle a pô, qui a force les autres à la reconnoître pour la maîtresse légitime, ou les a contraints de vivre exiliez. Ces enfans exiliez, ces enfans qui ne peuvent plus vivre dans la honte de faire semblant de reconnoître pour leur mère une putain qui a chassé leur mère, & qui a tüé une partie de leurs frères, ce sont les Protestants; ou du moins ils le

¹⁴⁶ Bayle, xxvj.

¹⁴⁷ Bayle, xxvj.

prétendent. Voila donc d'un coté une Eglise qui pretend être la mère de famille, & que ceux qui ne la reconnoissent pas pour telle sont des enfans desobéissans, & voila de l'autre des enfans qui prétendent que ce n'est qu'une abominable paillardie qui s'est saisie par force de la maison & en a chassé la veritable héritiers pour y introduire ses satellites, & les complices de sa débauche.¹⁴⁸

Surprisingly, nearly a century later, Voltaire's *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763) echoes the maternal imagery found in Bayle's *Commentaire* when it invokes the biblical story relating King Solomon's wisdom in determining the true mother of an infant. Voltaire uses a maternal metaphor to oppose tolerance to intolerance, writing: "Enfin cette tolérance n'a jamais excité de guerre civile; l'intolérance a couvert la terre de carnage. Qu'on juge maintenant entre ces deux rivales, entre la mère qui veut qu'on égorge son fils [l'intolérance], et la mère qui le cède [la tolérance] pourvu qu'il vive!"¹⁴⁹ Voltaire's representation of intolerance here as an anti-mother figure who precipitates death rather than bringing forth and preserving life resonates with Lafayette's morbid depiction of her heroine in *La Comtesse de Tende*. Lafayette's Comtesse de Tende becomes the anti-mother figure that Bayle, and later Voltaire, imagine the intolerant Catholic Church to be.

In this context of both conflict and increasing attempts at tolerance, the figure of a pregnant woman is a significant one. As Keith Luria has observed, women had "great symbolic visibility in the conflict between the churches."¹⁵⁰ Proponents of one religion would characterize its opposite as "a religion of women" or as "a religion that 'inappropriately empower[ed]

¹⁴⁸ Bayle, xxvj.

¹⁴⁹ Voltaire, *Traité sur la tolérance*, 52.

¹⁵⁰ Keith Phillip Luria, *Sacred boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early Modern France*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 194.

women” in attempts to discredit the faith.¹⁵¹ Religious polemicists lauded the “virile piety” of their heroines and claimed they possessed “a feminine virtue or quality beyond the norm of their sex.”¹⁵² Nicolas Le Maire wrote that women “give birth to heresies or allow them to grow; it is in the *ruelles* that these great quarrels that trouble the Church have begun.”¹⁵³ Early modern discourse on both real and imagined women became an indirect, yet powerful means of attacking and defending the Protestant and Catholic churches.¹⁵⁴ In this context the comtesse, a Catholic woman who threatens to give birth to an illegitimate new life, but does not allow it to grow, is a deeply ambiguous figure.

Two Letters, Two Approaches to the Protestant Problem

The comtesse’s illegitimate pregnancy looms large in the text as a foreign presence that can be neither accepted fully into the family and society nor purged. The letters written by the Comte and Comtesse de Tende present two alternative scripts to follow in seeking a solution to this pregnancy, and by extension the Protestant problem in France: immediate persecution, in the case of the comtesse, or temporary tolerance, in the case of the comte.

The comtesse’s character, whom the text characterizes as “vive, et de race italienne,” suggests the “swell of emotion” that began to engulf Paris around the time of the Normandy campaign and saw its full expression in the rites of violence enacted during the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre.¹⁵⁵ The comtesse’s letter is characterized by decisive action

¹⁵¹ Luria, 194.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁵⁵ Diefendorf, 65.

prompted by a rash desire for immediate eradication and resolution of the problem. It reads as follows:

Cette Lettre me va coûter la vie, mais je mérite la mort, et je la désire: je suis grosse, celui qui est la cause de mon malheur n'est plus au monde, aussi bien que le seul homme qui savait notre commerce. Le public ne l'a jamais soupçonné: j'avais résolu de finir ma vie par mes mains, mais je l'offre à Dieu et à vous-même pour l'expiation de mon crime: je n'ai pas voulu me déshonorer aux yeux du monde parce que ma réputation vous regarde: conservez-la pour l'amour de vous, je vais faire paraître l'état où je suis, cachez-en la honte, et faites-moi périr quand vous voudrez et comme vous le voudrez. (*Comtesse 72*)

The comtesse refers obsessively to death in the first three opening clauses as if to precondition her husband's response to her confession. A brief reference to the new life growing within her, "je suis grosse," briefly disturbs the comtesse's morose fixation on death; however, she returns to it quickly, without missing a beat: "celui qui est la cause de mon malheur n'est plus au monde, aussi bien que le seul homme qui savait notre commerce" (*Comtesse 72*). Mention of the deaths of Navarre and Lalande seem to justify her own.

We then witness a transfer of power and agency here. The comtesse notes that she deprived herself of the satisfaction of suicide in order to bestow the honor of killing her upon her husband: "j'avais résolu de finir ma vie par mes mains, mais je l'offre à Dieu et à vous-même pour l'expiation de mon crime." It is as if the comtesse provokes her husband to kill her in order to test his allegiance to the true faith of Catholicism. She then appeals to her husband's highest value, his reputation, reminding him that her disgrace is also his own. "[M]a réputation vous regarde," she writes, "conservez-la pour l'amour de vous" (72). Her multiple references to "le public" and "[les] yeux du monde" betray a concern with her reputation in the eyes of the court

rather than God's (*Comtesse* 72). By calling her pregnancy a "crime," the comtesse brings their private and personal situation into the public, religious, and legal sphere (*Comtesse* 72). Finally, the letter ends as it began, with an urgent command to kill: "faites-moi périr," she writes, attenuated by a concession allowing her husband to decide when and how, "quand vous voudrez et comme vous le voudrez."

The guttural, rough-around-the-edges terminology that the comtesse chooses to reveal her pregnancy, "je suis grosse," instead of other smoother, politer expressions, such as "je suis enceinte," or even "je suis pleine," seems to be done with the intention of imbuing her condition with a dirty, almost infectious connotation, like the impressions priests gave of Protestantism as being a heretical sect infecting the body of believers. For example, Simon Vigor, one of the most renowned and outspoken preachers of the era, implored the king to rid France of "the putrid infection of heresy."¹⁵⁶ Similarly, in "Apologie contre certaines calomnies," a work which defends Catherine de Medici's and Charles IX tolerant position towards the Huguenots, Jean Monluc refers to the growth of the Protestant religion in France as an ill-contained contagion, calling them "erreurs" that have become "une commune maladie de peste si contagieuse, qu'elle a infecté & contaminé, en beaucoup de bonnes villes, & autres lieux & endroits de nostre Roiaume, la plus part des habitants, hommes & femmes de toutes qualitez, & jusques aux petits enfans qui sont nourris . . . de ce venin."¹⁵⁷ This commentary resonates with the connotations of *grosse* as unwholesome or repugnant.

¹⁵⁶ Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 153.

¹⁵⁷ Jean Monluc, *Apologie contre certaines calomnies imses sus, à la desfaveur & desavantage de l'estat des affaires de ce roiaume*, (Paris : Pierre Leber, rue des Amandiers, 1562), Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Réserve des livres rares, 8-LB33-42 (A), 12.

After her initial announcement, the comtesse conceals her new reality within the text by using the euphemisms, “l’état où je suis” and “mon malheur,” as well as the pronoun “en,” exemplifying in the medium of the text itself how she would like her pregnancy, or the growing Protestant sect in France, to be progressively suppressed until it exists no more (72). Even immediately after discovering her pregnancy she ruminates on the possibility of allowing her husband to believe the child is his and thus conceal his illegitimacy: “elle conçut quelque légère espérance sur le voyage que son mari devait faire auprès d’elle, et résolut d’en attendre le succès” (70). Her extreme grief over Navarre’s death prevents the comtesse from being able to seduce her husband, and by doing so, dupe him into believing the child is his. Her choice not to follow this route reflects a desire to completely eradicate her illegitimate offspring from memory, which is a safer bet than risking her reputation to an uncertain future with a child who might outgrow his disguise as her husband’s offspring.

The Comte’s Temporary Toleration

The comte’s response to his wife’s letter reveals his approach to the problem to be less extreme than hers: “Le désir d’empêcher l’éclat de ma honte, l’emporte présentement sur ma vengeance. Je verrai dans la suite ce que j’ordonnerai de votre indigne destinée. Conduisez-vous comme si vous aviez toujours été ce que vous deviez être” (74). While the comtesse’s letter is action-oriented, the comte’s is preventative in nature. His desire, contrasted with the comtesse’s yearning for death, is to prevent the crowning moment of his shame. “Éclat,” which translates into eruption in English, the nominal form of the verb “éclater,” which means “to burst,” gives the impression of the comtesse’s swelling belly exploding as an abscess would. It also suggests an explosion of violence: a wronged husband’s murderous rage, which will be inevitably

followed by public scandal. We can read that moment analogously as the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. That event, too, was perceived and publicly depicted as an explosion of long-suppressed violence. A distinction is made between what he feels is appropriate to do "présentement," right now, and how he might proceed in the near future, "dans la suite." The comte's use of the verb "ordonner" associates him with governmental authorities and the various acts and ordinances they were passing at the time regarding the Huguenot minority. Furthermore, the comte's indefinite wait-and-see approach to his wife's dilemma resonates with the various (ineffective) legislative edicts that Catherine de Medici initially passed as a means of dealing with the Huguenot minority in France. None of the legal measures were intended to be permanent, even though the Edict de Nantes professed to be so in writing; but rather were intended as temporary, short-term solutions to what the Catholic majority in France hoped would be a temporary problem. Assimilation into the Catholic church was always the intended long-term goal. In this metaphorical version of that dilemma, both long-term acceptance and integration of the illegitimate figure into the social fabric are seen to be unfeasible, while a violent end comes to seem inevitable.

When integration is not possible, isolation seems to be the only preventative for violence. The comte intentionally isolates himself not once, but twice: First when he opens his letter "seul en carrosse," and second when he retires to a house along his way. "Il s'arrêta dans une maison qui se trouva sur son chemin, où il passa plusieurs jours agité et affligé." While there, he allows his emotions to run their course. He places boundaries around himself intentionally so as not to lose control of himself in front of others and to prevent any potential violence.

il pensa d'abord tout ce qu'il était naturel de penser en cette occasion; il ne songea qu'à faire mourir sa femme, mais la mort du prince de Navarre, et celle de Lalande, qu'il reconnut aisément pour le Confident ralentit un peu sa fureur.

Il ne douta pas que sa femme ne lui eût dit vrai, en lui disant que son commerce n'avait jamais été soupçonné, il jugea que le mariage du prince de Navarre pouvait avoir trompé tout le monde puisqu'il avait été trompé lui-même après une conviction si grande que celle qui s'était présentée à ses yeux.

Cette ignorance entière du Public pour son malheur lui fut un adoucissement; mais les circonstances qui lui faisaient voir à quel point et de quelle manière il avait été trompé lui perçaient le cœur; et il ne respirait que la vengeance.

Il pensa néanmoins, que s'il faisait mourir sa femme, et que l'on s'aperçut qu'elle fût grosse, l'on soupçonnerait aisément la vérité.

Comme il était l'homme du monde le plus glorieux il prit le parti qui convenait le mieux à sa gloire, et résolut de ne rien laisser voir au public. Dans cette pensée il envoya un Gentilhomme à la comtesse de Tende avec ce billet. (74)

Verbs associated with rational thinking and problem-solving, such as “penser,” “songer,” “douter,” “juger,” and “résoudre,” far outnumber the two emotions mentioned in the passage, “fureur” and “vengeance.” The passage reveals a distinct struggle between the comte’s cerebral or rational, and corporeal or emotional, reactions to the letter.

The shame, “la honte,” that both the comte and comtesse express in the novel, as well as their mutual preoccupation with how they are perceived by others, also has political implications. It can be read to represent Louis XIV’s own preoccupation with France appearing as a religiously “pure” nation as a means of boosting its reputation amongst Catholic Europe. France,

unlike England, did not want to be the nation to “birth” Protestantism into a full-fledged religion alongside its treasured and traditional Catholicism.

Even before the comte writes the letter to his wife informing her that he will wait to decide how to proceed with her, the text is peppered with inklings of his affinity for his wife’s yet unborn illegitimate child: “au travers [son étonnement et sa fureur], il sentait encore, malgré lui, une douleur où la tendresse avait quelque part,” the narrator observes. It is his capacity to see the comtesse as both good and bad, in a grey light as opposed to in black or white, that allows him to make a tolerant choice. He does not immediately demonize his wife, but recognizes her worth as an individual even in her errancy. While the text hints at the notion of a loving solution, it does not portray such an outcome as a real possibility. The violent end, one which the comtesse prescribes for herself and ultimately carries out herself, seems inevitable.

Lafayette’s decision to use an unborn, illegitimate child to represent the “heretical,” illegitimate Protestant faith in France centers the female body, the vessel responsible for carrying, protecting, and sustaining the new religion, as the “indigne” recipient of punishment and blame. The rites of violence enacted against the female body, in which the comtesse willingly participates, and to which the comte seems to refer when speaking of his wife’s “indigne destinée,” illustrates the festering resentment towards the female population involved in maintaining and ensuring the survival of the Protestant faith in France.

Comtesse’s Reaction

After having her script rejected by her husband, the comtesse takes her life and the life of her unborn child back into her own hands. Lafayette details the comtesse’s reaction to the receipt and contents of her husband’s letter as follows:

La comtesse de Tende reçut ce Billet avec joie; elle le croyait l'arrêt de sa mort, et, quand elle vit que son mari consentait qu'elle laissât paraître sa grossesse, elle sentit bien que la honte est la plus violente de toutes les passions.

Elle se trouva dans une sorte de calme de se croire assurée de mourir, et de voir sa réputation en sûreté : elle ne songea plus qu'à se préparer à la mort; et comme c'était une personne dont tous les sentiments étaient vifs, elle embrassa la vertu et la pénitence avec la même ardeur qu'elle avait suivi sa passion.

Son âme était, d'ailleurs, détrompée et noyée dans l'affliction : elle ne pouvait arrêter les yeux sur aucune chose de cette vie, qui ne lui fût plus rude que la mort même; de sorte qu'elle ne voyait de remède à ses malheurs que par la fin de sa malheureuse vie.

Elle passa quelque temps en cet état, paraissant plutôt une personne morte qu'une personne vivante.

Enfin vers le sixième mois de sa grossesse son corps succomba, la fièvre continue lui prit et elle accoucha par la violence de son mal. Elle eut la consolation de voir son enfant en vie, et d'être assurée qu'il ne pourrait vivre et qu'elle ne donnait pas un héritier illégitime à son mari.

Elle expira elle-même peu de jours après et reçut la mort avec une joie que personne n'a jamais ressentie.

Elle chargea son Confesseur d'aller porter à son mari la nouvelle de sa mort, de lui demander pardon de sa part, et de le supplier d'oublier sa mémoire qui ne pouvait lui être qu'odieuse. (*Comtesse* 74-75)

“La comtesse reçut ce billet avec joie,” we read; “elle le croyait l'arrêt de sa mort,” fully expecting her husband to follow the script she laid out for him in her note. He defies her script,

however, in refusing to give her the death that she wants. However, true to her minimalist style, Lafayette alerts her reader to the princess's shock, disbelief, and surprise with one, well-punctuated, tiny conjunction. Sandwiched neatly between two commas, an "et" forces the reader to pause and allow his or her own imaginative world to stop momentarily, as the comtesse's own undoubtedly does in that unanticipated moment. Only after placing her reader squarely in the comtesse's shoes does Lafayette fully and clearly explain the reasoning behind the sentence (and our hearts) skipping a beat. Her approach, even then, is slow and methodical. By placing the bulk of meaning at the end of the sentence, Lafayette obliges the reader to decipher the text sequentially, word by word, as the princess must read through her husband's letter in its entirety to fully comprehend and digest its ultimate message: "quand elle vit que" become the four longest words in history precisely because they delay the very revelation of what we all want to know: "son mari consentait qu'elle laissât paraître sa grossesse."

The husband's consent to "laisser paraître [la] grossesse" is parallel to the French government allowing Protestants to worship freely and publicly in designated safe spaces. Furthermore, the Comte de Tende's decision to allow his wife to continue her pregnancy, instead of resorting to a vengeance killing (that she asks for), illustrates an (ahistorical) return to his family's priorities, namely the protection and toleration of religious minorities, such as the Huguenots and les Vaudois.

The comtesse has an emotional and corporeal reaction to her husband's wish to allow her to live, at least throughout her pregnancy—"elle sentit bien que la honte est la plus violente de toutes les passions." Shame is generally an emotion experienced in the public eye, in a "me" versus "them" dynamic, as in the Puritan community who judged and shamed Hester Prynne, another famous illegitimate mother in the literary world. Its use here is puzzling, since the

comtesse, confined to her country house, would never have met the public's gaze. Furthermore, her husband seems to be willing to accept paternity for the child, a course of action that would protect her reputation. No one will see the progression of the comtesse's pregnancy except herself; she and her pride, not the world, seem to be her downfall.

This passage conveys a shift or transition, underlined by the use of a colon, from turbulent chaos, "honte la plus violente de toutes les passions," to a sense of peace and calm, "une sorte de calme de se croire assurée de mourir." The peace seems to be a result of the comtesse taking ownership of her situation and future, as evidenced by the plethora of self-reflexive verbs (se trouver, se croire, se préparer) used here. Death equals tranquility and peace.

The reader should be struck by the extent to which illegitimacy saturates *La Comtesse de Tende*. Camille Esmein-Sarrazin identifies the Comte de Tende as the historical Honorat de Savoie, "fils de Claude de Savoie, issu d'une branche bâtarde de la maison régnante."¹⁵⁸ Claude de Savoie was known for his protection and support of protestants at his Comté de Tende. Claude's father, Honorat de Savoie's grandfather, was known as "le Grand Batard de Savoie."¹⁵⁹ By populating her tale with figures stained by illegitimacy, which seems to be an inescapable sin, Lafayette seems to be emphasizing the impossibility of ever attaining a "pure" religious community or state.

Complicating the Characters of the Comte and Comtesse

The comtesse is not a purely horrific figure. She is tragic too. Her status as a tragic figure becomes clear at the end of the narrative, when she recognizes her own faults and sacrifices

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., note 3 page 1244.

¹⁵⁹ Panisse Passis, *Les Comtes de Tende de la maison de Savoie*, 2.

herself as punishment. Her role in the text is also complicated by her status both as a woman and as a person of foreign ancestry. Her Italian ancestry would have marked her out as different among the French nobility. Henry Heller alerts us to a “contemporaneous hatred for both Huguenot and Italians” among the Parisian crowd.¹⁶⁰ Italians, like Huguenots, were also “focal points of popular hatred” in sixteenth-century France. Catherine de Medici’s patronage attracted many Italians to court.¹⁶¹ Among the most prominent of the Italian who flocked to court was Albert de Gondi, Count of Retz and marshal of France, the “very Maréchal” referenced at the beginning of *La Comtesse de Tende* on page 61.¹⁶² The Florentines at the court were derisively compared to the Jews, a minority that was then equally despised by many. So, when the comte tells the comtesse to “be what she must have always been,” a remark which is ambiguous with a hard-to-pinpoint meaning, we can read a deep-rooted xenophobia directed towards Italians. They, like Huguenots, were viewed as “alien” and as “strangers” and as “cosmopolitans” who were “subversive” to the order of the French court.¹⁶³ Therefore, in some respects the comtesse is doubly (or triply, if you consider her sex) “other.”

The veiled xenophobia, present at the beginning of the text, is easy to miss. The comtesse is identified first as the “fille de Maréchal” and as a “proche parente de Catherine de Médici” (*Comtesse* 61). She is also described as being “de race italienne,” vocabulary that is not often found in Lafayette’s works (*Comtesse* 61). If we focus on the comtesse’s Italian heritage, her eagerness to be liked by her husband, and her success in filling the void he creates in their marriage through her friendship with the Princess de Neufchâtel, can be understood as evidence

¹⁶⁰ Henry Heller, *Anti-Italianism in Sixteenth-Century France*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 112.

¹⁶¹ Heller, 8.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶³ Henry Heller, 8.

of a strong desire on her part to belong in France and to be considered a French subject even though she was born in a foreign country. It is not until the comtesse is accepted by others at court that we learn that her husband “commençait à avoir plus de considération” for her (*Comtesse* 62). Completely driven by appearances, he has no desire to associate himself with anyone who will bring him down in stature or potentially sully his image at court.

The comtesse’s unplanned, illegitimate pregnancy with the Chevalier de Navarre, a character inspired from a historical person with ties to Protestantism, labels her once more as an abject member of society and relegates her to an isolated existence on the fringes of society, assuming her husband plans to sequester her at his country estate for the remainder of her life. In fact, by burdening an Italian-born comtesse with an illegitimate pregnancy, which we read as evocative of the illegitimate Protestant religion then flourishing in France, the text evokes the negative associations the French people held towards both Italians and Huguenots at the time.

The tale’s ending and the comte’s future

Lafayette sums up the rest of the comte’s life in one simple sentence at the end of the novella:

Le comte de Tende reçut cette nouvelle sans inhumanité, et même avec quelques sentiments de pitié, mais néanmoins avec joie. Quoiqu’il fût fort jeune, il ne voulut jamais se remarier et il a vécu jusqu’à un âge fort avancé. (75)

After dramatizing the comtesse’s inhumane killing of her child and subsequent suicide, Lafayette’s text indirectly emphasizes the comte’s humanity. The understated *litote* “sans inhumanité” allows Lafayette to quietly emphasize the comte’s humanity, while also calling out the comtesse’s atrocious and cruel behavior for what it is. Interestingly, of all the emotions that

the comte might have felt in this human moment (anger, despair, relief), Lafayette singles out his pity. Furthermore, the fact that his “joie” over the deaths is mentioned last, instead of first, suggests that his joy is a coerced or forced emotional reaction, preconditioned in the text, to which he ultimately subscribes to with reluctance, rather than genuine gusto. His “joie” is presented as an afterthought, as if to say the comte’s heart is not really invested in it. The comte’s joy, which, as we have seen, has been compelled by the text, seems to discount his initial grief and pity. However, had the comte truly been joyful, he would have enthusiastically moved on with his life. He does just the opposite. The comte, whom the text qualifies as “fort jeune,” with a long life ahead of him, never remarries voluntarily—a huge sacrifice in a society which depended upon the procreative institution of marriage to ensure property and wealth remained within their families (*Comtesse* 75).

The comte’s atypical behavior should cause us as readers to contemplate why he would make such a choice. Grief over his wife’s death is an unlikely explanation. How could he grieve someone who deliberately sidestepped his wishes and slowly killed her child and then herself? His actions are deeply ambivalent. One interpretation is that the comte has lost his faith in women and the institution of marriage. He can no longer feel certain that by marrying, he will be assured of a rightful and legitimate heir. Having trusted his wife and never suspected her infidelity, he now knows that a wife who seems trustworthy may not be. In this reading, the comtesse’s betrayal is so deep, and the violence she enacts so terrifying, that life (for him, and analogously for the nation) can never return to normal.

Yet there is another potential reading to the text’s ending. The comte’s refusal to remarry seems to be a refusal to participate in society as he should, and constitutes a rejection of its values. Readers might expect him to efface the memory of his straying wife and her illegitimate

child by replacing them with a faithful wife who could bear children to carry on his bloodline. His remarriage, and the procreation that would inevitably follow, would suggest that the illegitimate child is replaceable. By choosing to abstain from a practice that most consider his duty, he preserves the memory of the comtesse and the child whose life she snuffed out. The comte's willed aberration from the societal norm of procreative marriage creates a void around his family that insists on the existence of the illegitimate child and the new religion it represents. Even as the comte feels superficial "joie" at the loss of a wife and baby whose existence shamed him, the lack now surrounding his identity serves as an incontestable reminder of their taboo presence.

In dramatizing the Comtesse de Tende's horrific abortion of her viable illegitimate child, Madame de Lafayette's text, the events of the text enact France's persecution, and eventual elimination, of its Huguenot population, a religious community considered illegitimate by most of the Catholic majority in France. If readers find themselves squirming uncomfortably in their seats as they read the tale's troubling ending, it is with good reason. Rather than a pleasant diversionary tale, *La Comtesse de Tende* becomes an intensely personal and intimate story about the complicity of readers (via their ancestors) in the bloodshed of the religious wars, epitomized by the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. A horrific, guilt-inducing tale, *La Comtesse de Tende* forces a kind of introspection that leaves one with the unsettling feeling that what seemed like a solution in the heat of the moment actually proves to be self-destructive behavior that damages the entire nation's future. In whittling down its Huguenot population by persecution, forced conversions and forced emigration, France willingly deprived itself of a vibrant and productive sector of its economy and culture. The religious purification in France, which was meant to ensure and preserve France's glory and prominence on the European stage, ended up detracting

from it, leaving France in a much weaker and less impressive situation at the end of Louis XIV's reign.

The comte's response to the "nouvelle," or news, seems to precondition the reader's response to the "nouvelle," or novella. While the tale directly criticizes political initiatives of persecution and elimination, it does not offer any solutions or alternatives. We, as readers, judge and condemn the comtesse, and feel for and mourn with her husband. The comtesse requests that "sa mémoire," or her life, be forgotten and erased from history. Ironically, however, Lafayette's tale ensures her story would be not only remembered, but retold and reread multiple times. Can what was lost ever be recouped? Lafayette seems to explore the answers to this question in her subsequent compositions, *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662) and *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), both of which seem to explore the feasibility of religious tolerance.

According to Heller, in writing *Discours merveilleux de la vie, actions, et deportements de Catherine de Médicis, Royne-mère* (1574) Henri Estienne sought to unify moderate Catholics and Protestants through their mutual hatred of Catherine de Médici.¹⁶⁴ Within a year, ten editions were published in four different languages, French, German, English, and Latin.¹⁶⁵ The introduction to Henri Estienne's *Discours merveilleux* (1574) echoes the comtesse's instructions to her confessor at the end of the tale to "le [Comte de Tende] supplier d'oublier sa mémoire qui ne lui pouvait être qu'odieuse" (*Comtesse* 75). Estienne writes:

Ainsi pense-je certainement, qu'il seraoit à souhaiter, que les personnes qui n'ont prins leur plaisir, ny employyé leur peine qu'à mal faire, fussent ensevelies en perpetuelle oubliãce, tât pour punitiõ de leurs meschãcetez indignes de memoire, que pour ne laisser

¹⁶⁴ Heller, 121.

¹⁶⁵ Heller, 121.

aux homme trop habiles d'eux mesmes à tout mal, un patron de meschanceté, pour tāt
plustost s'y façonner.¹⁶⁶

The author talks of being frightened of dirtying (“souiller”) his hands in such filthy material. He claims that he is writing the work not out of vengeance, but to prevent Catherine’s final vengeance on France. He also portrays Catherine as an unnatural mother who corrupts her sons so they would be unfit to rule.¹⁶⁷ According to the *Discours*, At Catherine’s birth, astrologers predicted the destruction of the house into which she would marry and the ruin of the place in which she would reside.¹⁶⁸ Thus in some ways, in connecting the Comtesse de Tende to Catherine, the text seems to put on display many of the French people’s worst fears about Catherine de Medici and her policies—that her plan was not to safeguard the kingdom of France, but destroy it.

¹⁶⁶ Estienne, *Discours merveilleux*, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Estienne, 122.

¹⁶⁸ Estienne, 123.

CHAPTER 3

FAILED FORAY IN TOLERATION IN *LA PRINCESSE DE MONTPENSIER* (1662)

La Princesse de Montpensier, like *La Comtesse de Tende*, is a tale that ends in death, destruction, and a sabotaged cross-religious friendship. It details the implosion of the politically motivated Montpensier marriage, as well as the destruction of a seemingly authentic cross-religious friendship between the Prince de Montpensier, a Catholic, and his Huguenot tutor, the Comte de Chabanes. The Princesse de Montpensier's nearly consummated affair with the Duc de Guise, a man whom she loved before she married, is the impetus not only for her demise (as well as that of her marriage), but also for the destruction of her husband's atypical cross-religious friendship with Chabanes.

La Princesse de Clèves overshadows *La Princesse de Montpensier* in scholarly criticism today. During Lafayette's day, however, the situation was quite the reverse. *La Princesse de Montpensier* far surpassed *La Princesse de Clèves* in popularity. In *Histoire de la littérature française*, Antoine Adam writes that the work "obtint un succès considérable."¹⁶⁹ A second and a third edition followed the novella's initial publication within a year, and an additional ten editions were released during Lafayette's lifetime.¹⁷⁰ Another edition overtly identifying Lafayette as the author appeared in 1679, one year after *La Princesse de Clèves* was published.

¹⁶⁹ Antoine Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), 162.

¹⁷⁰ Hendrik Schleiper and Lieselotte Steinbrügge, "The Female Threshold: On Paratext and Gender in Lafayette's *La Princesse de Montpensier*," *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* 39.76 (2012), 144.

So much initial and sustained interest in a work that seems to be a rather typical love story is certainly worthy of further inquiry. There had to have been something deeply fascinating, perhaps even troubling, about the novel for the public's interest in it to have lasted for decades. Furthermore, the choice to publish a new edition of the work a year after the *La Princesse de Clèves* first appeared in print seems to be an attempt to link the two novellas to one another in the public's mind. It is almost as if the 1679 edition of *La Princesse de Montpensier* served as an invitation to read the two novellas together, as a whole.

In this chapter, I will show how this work engaged with current political anxieties by using a love story to depict the tenuous and complex role of religious minorities in France. In the 1660s, the role of the Huguenot minority was deeply ambivalent, with members of this group portrayed variously as potential traitors and as pitiable victims of state repression. In the novella, the Montpensier home is constructed as a space of hospitality and tolerance towards the Huguenot religious Other, personified by the Comte de Chabanes. As the tale continues, these constructive attitudes to Chabanes break down, and liberal toleration turns to deadly hatred. Ultimately, I will argue that the tale valorizes toleration as an antidote to religious hatred, while simultaneously casting doubt on its effectiveness.

The Plot

The book, set during France's Second Wars of Religion in the 1560s, centers on a beautiful young noblewoman Mlle de Mézières. She is betrothed to Guise, whose facial battle scar earned him the nickname "le Balafré," but falls in love with his brother. After the wars break out, her parents decide they need an alliance with a more powerful family and marry her off instead to the Prince de Montpensier. The prince leaves almost immediately to fight in the

wars, leaving his wife for two full years in the care of his best friend the Comte de Chabanes, known for his prominent position in the Protestant party, a party he left out of (supposed) love for his best friend. The comte falls in love with her, but when he confesses his love, she does not reciprocate. Later, she is spotted by the Duc de Guise when he happens to be riding across the estate with his friend the Duc D'Anjou. The two men invite themselves to the castle. The prince, her husband, returns shortly into their stay, to find his home invaded and his wife surrounded by men who desire her.

Though she attempts to restrain herself, the princess falls in love with Guise again and enlists Chabanes to act as a mediator between them. Chabanes ensures that their letters can be exchanged in secrecy and even helps facilitate a late-night *rendezvous* between the two at Champigny. Before sneaking Guise in to the princess, Chabanes warns her that she is exposing herself to dishonor, but still assists with the liaison. In a climactic scene, Chabanes protests to the princess loudly enough that his voice, perceived only as that of a man, awakens the prince, who was home and in bed at the time. Suspicious, the prince breaks down his wife's locked bedroom door to find Chabanes there, a surprise that leaves all three involved temporarily speechless. Chabanes declines to prove his innocence by pinning the blame on Guise, whom he helped escape through the window seconds before Montpensier broke open the door. The prince ultimately believes Chabanes has betrayed him by seducing his wife. Chabanes flees the house and is killed a few days later in the anti-Protestant Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre. The prince, believing his former friend betrayed him, is pleased to learn of his death. Guise marries another woman, and the princess, having never recovered from her fainting spell, dies when she hears the news.

The book inserts a fictional love story in the context of real historical events, during a period when the conflict between Catholics and Protestants was growing more heated and violent. Many characters are based on real historical personages, such as Guise, an ultra-Catholic official who was responsible for some of the country's most extreme anti-protestant policies. Lafayette broke with convention by using historical French names and in explicitly combining a fictional story with real historical details. In doing so, she engages with current anxieties about the possibility of peacefully assimilating religious minorities into the national fabric.

The Significance of the Name Montpensier

From the book's title onward, names of historical personages play a crucial role in the book's meaning. Discussing *La Princesse de Clèves*, Louise Horowitz observes how Lafayette's "deeply encoded" works can be "dependent on the onomastic display, [and] the vertiginous spelling of names."¹⁷¹ The same holds true of *La Princesse de Montpensier*. The preface to *La Princesse de Montpensier* makes a point to disassociate the characters in the novella from the historical Montpensier family. Readers would have recognized the name, as Madame de Montpensier was renowned at court for her public role in the Fronde. Much emphasis is placed on the fact that the story, which features "des aventures inventées à plaisir," is pure fiction. While Lafayette's work is not meant to either bolster or mar the reputation of the Montpensier family in particular, it is most certainly meant to comment upon France's collective identity, as Lafayette thought it most fitting to use "noms connus dans nos histoires [meaning France's]" instead of the Greek and Roman names found in the *romans* of the period (*Montpensier* 49). This

¹⁷¹ Louise K. Horowitz, "Remembrance of Wars Past: Lafayette's Historical Hindsight," *Teaching Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Women's Writers*, 207

shift, from a focus on the Montpensier family in particular to the French community at large, allows us to read the preface written by the publisher in light of French history as a whole, instead of in light of the Montpensier family lineage in particular.

For Schlieper and Steinbrügge, the name “Montpensier” does not refer to the specific woman Mademoiselle de Montpensier, the banished *frondeuse* famous for leading troops in battle against the monarchy and for establishing an alternative court of her own in opposition to that of Louis XIV,¹⁷² so much as it underlines her position as a minority or as a rejected entity in French society. They write: “The name Montpensier clearly stood for a decentralized, anti-court, and women’s emancipatory worldview . . . For contemporary readers, the name Montpensier epitomized the minority position.”¹⁷³ The name, then, identified and, in a way, gives a voice to those oppressed and marginalized, the overlooked, the ignored, the rejected, the unassimilable.

Schlieper and Steinbrügge focus specifically on women as a marginalized group. In this chapter, I will attempt to extend this focus on the marginalized to the religious sphere and show how the novella *La Princesse de Montpensier* (not to be confused with its heroine) speaks to and for “les Morts” and “les Vivants” within the Huguenot minority in France and argues for a policy of toleration towards them. When Lafayette’s heroine is read as a representation of the French nation as a whole, the sense of “le respect qu’on doit à l’illustre nom qui est à la tête de [*la Princesse de Montpensier*]” changes from reverence offered to a powerful family to recognition of the value of the lives of the unpopular religious minority of the Huguenots. Perhaps the most

¹⁷² Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis in *De l’influence des femmes sur la littérature comme protectrices et comme auteurs* (Paris: Maladon, 1811), quoted on page 73 in Beasley’s *Revising Memory*, describes her role as follows: “Elle joua, dans les guerres de la Fronde, un rôle célèbre, qui ne fut celui ni d’une femme ni d’une princesse de sang; on la vit à la fois amazone, et rebelle d’autorité royale.”

¹⁷³ Schlieper and Steinbrügge, 152; 156.

fascinating sentence in the preface, the following quote, which addresses readers who might not agree with the novella's publisher, takes up the same rhetoric of respect again. It reads as follows:

S'il [the reader] n'est pas de ce sentiment, j'y supplée par cet Avertissement : qui sera aussi avantageux à l'Auteur, que respectueux pour moi envers les Morts qui y sont intéressés, et envers les Vivants qui pourraient y prendre part. (*Montpensier* 49)

Our tendency is to think that “les Morts,” the dead, and “les Vivants,” the living, refer to the deceased and surviving members of the Montpensier family tree. As I have attempted to show, however, another interpretation, which takes into consideration a religious sect occupying the minority position the name “Montpensier” calls us to remember, links “les Morts” and “les Vivants” to the Huguenot community that is so dramatically represented in the tale through Chabanes's fate in the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. The ending of the preface encourages readers to pay attention to the role of Chabanes as representative of the Huguenot minority in the novella, and to how the Montpensier family welcomes him into their home hospitably amidst religious violence and intolerance. The name “Montpensier,” which immediately evokes memories of the famous and ostracized *frondeuse*, functions as a signifier for groups in the minority position, specifically those who have been ousted from the political community.

Through the character of Chabanes, Lafayette's *nouvelle La Princesse de Montpensier* explores the world of underrepresented, misrepresented, and unappreciated religious minorities at a time when France's Huguenots and England's Catholics were steadily losing legal rights and being demonized in the process. Lafayette took a deep interest in politics and likely followed the era's religious debates closely. Her intimate friendship with Reine Dauphine Henriette Anne

(begun in 1658, two years before she started writing *La Princesse de Montpensier*)¹⁷⁴ suggests that Lafayette might have harbored some of Madame's progressive opinions relative to English Catholics. Controversial legislation against Catholics in England—of which Henriette Anne would have been aware through her constant communication with her brother, Charles II, King of England—was enacted about the time the work was published, further cementing the parallels between English and French persecution against their countries' respective religious minorities.

The Tale's Political Background

The opening sentence of *La Princesse de Montpensier* transports its readers back to the religious wars of sixteenth-century France: “Pendant que la guerre civile déchirait la France sous le règne de Charles IX, l'amour ne laissait pas de trouver la place parmi tant de désordres, et d'en causer beaucoup dans son empire” (*Montpensier* 21). While the war-torn sixteenth-century France that Lafayette depicts might seem remote to modern-day readers, the atmosphere of civil war would have been all too familiar to the majority of Lafayette's contemporaries reading her novel. Only twenty years before *La Princesse de Montpensier*'s publication in 1662, shocked onlookers in Europe had witnessed monarchies in France and England nearly fall under the close calls of the English Civil Wars and the Fronde. The English Civil Wars, which lasted from 1642 to 1651, consisted of a series of armed conflicts and political *coups* between supporters of King Charles I, known as the Royalists, and various sectors of Parliament, known as the Parliamentarians, as they vied for control of England's government. While a short-lived Republic was established under Cromwell, by 1660 the English people longed for a king again, and to Europe's amazement they miraculously restored Charles II to the throne. Meanwhile, the

¹⁷⁴ Roger Duchêne, *Madame de Lafayette*, (Paris, Fayard: 2000), 168.

Fronde,¹⁷⁵ which lasted from 1648 to 1658, erupted in France. To explain it in the simplest terms, members of the nobility, in favor of a more limited monarchy that would conserve their personal power and influence, challenged the then-encroaching absolutist government being formed by Anne of Austria and Cardinal Mazarin during Louis XIV's minority. While many feared the Protestants would be eager to aid the rebelling nobles' cause, they surprisingly remained loyal to the crown. The conflict derives its name from the word for slingshot in French, as if an attempt to conjure up images of a disgruntled minority challenging an all-powerful administration, as David did Goliath in Biblical narrative.

Proven Loyalties

In both of these conflicts, religious minorities served as important buffers helping each country's monarchies retain their power. Members of what historian Antonia Fraser terms a "Catholic underground" proved integral to keeping Charles II's location and identity a secret during his six-week stint as an escaped fugitive in Cromwellian England after his devastating defeat at Worcester.¹⁷⁶ Antonia Fraser recounts a particularly poignant episode in which Charles II rested in a secret chapel, "little but neat and decent," that belonged to a Catholic priest and former member of the Royalist army, named Father John Huddleston.¹⁷⁷ Huddleston's kindness made a lasting impression on Charles II. After the priest presented his hideaway, Charles II's supposedly remarked, "If it please God, I come to my crown, both you and all of

¹⁷⁵ For more information on the Fronde, see the following works: Orest Ranum's *The Fronde: A French Revolution 1648-1652* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company 1993); A Lloyd Moote's *The Revolt of the Judges: The Parlement of Paris and the Fronde* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971); Paul Rice Doolin's *The Fronde* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; Oxford University Press, 1935).

¹⁷⁶ Antonia Fraser, *Royal Charles: Charles II and the Restoration*, (New York, 1979), 114.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

your persuasion shall have as much liberty as any of my subjects.”¹⁷⁸ Antonia Fraser corroborates Huddleston’s narrative, stating that “Charles’ generous intention to right a wrong was certainly always there once he had encountered the sufferings—and the loyalty—of the English Catholics.”¹⁷⁹ In *Popery and Politics in England 1660-1688*, John Miller states that Charles II spoke frequently of “his goodwill towards Catholics” and mentioned his appreciation for their loyalty and aide during the civil wars and his exile.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, Charles II loved telling courtiers about his marvelous escape from Cromwell. Fraser tells of his courtiers growing “bored” of the well-told tale.¹⁸¹ If Charles did not tell his sister about his escape himself, it is likely that she read about it, as many of the other courtiers and subjects did. Therefore, chances are high that she would have continued to share his tale with courtiers—and especially faithful friends like Lafayette—upon her return to France. Stories like these would have bolstered support for toleration of English Catholics among the elite in France.

Likewise, the Huguenots stood by the French monarchy during the Fronde. According to Joseph Bergin in *The Politics of Religion in Early Modern France*, the civil disturbances of the Fronde offered disaffected minorities a prime opportunity to jump on the bandwagon of revolt; surprisingly, however, the Huguenots remained loyal to the crown.¹⁸² The Huguenot population served as a buffer for the rebellious energies of the Fronde. Had the bulk of the Huguenots allied with the *frondeurs*, many of whose leading nobles were Protestants themselves, the Fronde might

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ John Miller, *Popery and Politics in England 1660-1688*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 93.

¹⁸¹ Fraser, 112; Thomas Blount’s *Boscobel* (1660), which came out the same year Henriette Anne traveled to England before her marriage, provided “the most accurate” narrative of Charles II’s experience.

¹⁸² Joseph Bergin, *The Politics of Religion in Early Modern France*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 229.

have ended very differently. However, the religious aspects of the English Civil Wars prevented the French government from trusting the Huguenots' devotion wholeheartedly. Bergin actually identifies the English Civil Wars as an incentive for the Huguenots' newly adopted loyalty to the French state, arguing that Protestants on French soil desperately wanted to distance themselves from the execution of King Charles I and rightly thought allying with the French king would be a good way to so.¹⁸³

During this period, an ethic arose of pacifying religious conflicts through an attitude of tolerance toward nonviolent religious dissent. Charles II and the powerful French cardinal Jules Mazarin sought out legal rewards for religious minorities in England and France for their loyalty to the crown. In the Declaration of Breda (1660), Charles II "promised, via an Act of Parliament, 'a liberty to tender consciences.' No man was to be in future 'disquieted or called into question' for differences in religion, so long as these differences did not threaten the peace of the kingdom."¹⁸⁴ Similarly, eight years earlier, in May of 1652, Cardinal Mazarin recognized the Huguenot's steadfast devotion to the crown during the Fronde with the Declaration of Saint-Germain, an unprecedented legal gesture.¹⁸⁵ By publicly recognizing their "culture of obedience" amidst the outright rebellion of so many other sectors of society, Mazarin sought to ensure that their identification with and loyalty to the French crown continued.¹⁸⁶ According to Bergin, the declaration "appeared to remove at a stroke the restrictive measures taken against the Huguenots."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Ibid., 229.

¹⁸⁴ Fraser, 173.

¹⁸⁵ Bergin, 230.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. "The political confusion of the Fronde prevented the Declaration from going before *parlement* for official registration, what many suspect to have been an intentional oversight that ultimately left its validity open to interpretation."

The start of the 1660s looked promising for England's and France's controversial religious minorities. In light of Charles II's and Mazarin's recent legal recognitions of not only their loyalty to their monarchies, but the integral roles each group played in toppling each nation's rebels, both religious minorities seemed to be on the brink of achieving a legal status equal to their religious-conformist counterparts. However, governmental procedures, specifically related to the newfound power of Parliament, proved to be deterrents to the rulers' wishes to repay the Catholics and the Huguenots. These actions revealed deep-seated anxieties towards religious minorities harbored by the public, along with an incapacity for religious tolerance.

John Miller describes mounting pressure for toleration for English Catholics between 1660 and 1663, led primarily by a small group at court.¹⁸⁸ Henrietta Maria, widow of the late King Charles I and mother of Henriette Anne, headed the pack; during her three-month stint in England in 1660, securing toleration for the Catholics in England was at the top of her agenda.¹⁸⁹ On a second, longer trip back to England, from 1662 to 1665, Henrietta Maria helped Bristol lobby for the suspension of the Act of Uniformity.¹⁹⁰ By March of 1662, however, the group had lost hope for obtaining toleration for Catholics through legal venues and simply hoped the restrictions against them would not actually be enforced.¹⁹¹

The religious settlement England finally achieved between 1662 and 1665, just as *La Princesse de Montpensier* was coming off the press, named the Clarendon Code, was worlds away from what Charles II intended at Breda in 1660. The Clarendon Code implemented the exact opposite of Charles II's ideal religious settlement and imposed numerous limitations and

¹⁸⁸ Miller, 96.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

penalties on non-conformists to the Church of England. The Corporation Act barred those who did not take the Church of England's sacrament from serving in municipal bodies; the Act of Uniformity penalized those who did not attend Anglican services; the Conventicle Act punished those who worshiped elsewhere; and the Five Mile Act regulated where nonconformist ministers could live.¹⁹² Charles II submitted a Declaration of Indulgence, which would have allowed him, as king, to exempt individuals of his choosing from the Act of Uniformity, but Parliament failed to ratify his attempt to soften the regulations—glaring evidence of the limitations of Charles II's power and of the extreme mistrust of Catholics present in the majority of the English population.¹⁹³

La Princesse de Montpensier engages with a new political landscape in which religious minorities were increasingly seeking official tolerance, while still facing both legal restrictions and public anxieties about their presence. The text begins, as most Lafayette's *nouvelles historiques* do, with an opening that demonstrates how love and politics infiltrate and feed off each other. A broken betrothal fuels a power struggle between the Guise and Bourbon families. The parents of Mlle de Mézières, the only child of the Marquis de Mézières and an "héritière très considérable, et par ses grands biens, et par l'illustre Maison d'Anjou dont elle était descendue," break a promise to marry their daughter to the eldest Guise brother. Meanwhile, over the course of the marriage negotiations, Mlle de Mezieres and her would-be stepbrother fall in love: "le duc de Guise voyant souvent cette prétendue belle sœur . . . en devint amoureux, et en fut aimé" (*Montpensier* 21). The Duc de Guise keeps his intentions to marry Mlle de Mézières secret out of

¹⁹² Fraser, 216.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 216-217. Fraser notes that Charles II was able to implement his promises to the Jews (who were not thought to be politically dangerous), but not to the Catholics (who were thought to be politically dangerous).

fear over how his uncle, the Cardinal de Lorraine, would react to his proposition to marry her instead. Her relatives break their promise of her hand in marriage to the Guise family and instead negotiate a marriage to the Prince de Montpensier, a member of the Bourbon family. The princess, “connaissant par sa vertu qu’il était dangereux d’avoir pour Beau-frère un homme qu’elle souhaitait pour Mari,” decides to obey her parents and implores that Guise cease his active resistance to the marriage (*Montpensier* 22). While the narrator suggests that the princess acts as she does to save her virtue, her action can also be read more ambivalently; having an affair with the younger Guise, as she will ultimately attempt to do, is more socially acceptable if she is not married to his brother.

While Lafayette’s *nouvelles historiques* typically focus on heterosexual relationships or friendships among women, this tale takes a detour from the narrative about the breached marriage contract to briefly focus on a homosocial rapport. This bond is “une amitié *très particulière*” (emphasis added) between two men, the Prince de Montpensier and Chabanes (*Montpensier* 22). Readers are told that the Prince de Montpensier formed a friendship in “sa plus grande jeunesse” with the Comte de Chabanes, a man “d’un âge beaucoup plus avancé” (*Montpensier* 22). If the text’s emphasis on the friendship’s strangeness and the significant age gap between the two men do not make readers pause and question the nature of the men’s friendship, their alliances with separate religious and political parties during a time of outright warfare should. The narrator leads us to believe that Chabanes, “si sensible à l’estime et à la confiance de ce Prince . . . contre tous ses propres intérêts . . . abandonna le Parti des Huguenots, ne pouvant se résoudre à être opposé en quelque chose à un homme qui lui était si cher” (*Montpensier* 22). The narration thus focuses both on the two men’s extraordinary affection and

its power to shape their political decisions, in Chabanes's case at the expense of his political power and prestige.

While Chabanes professes allegiance to the Catholic political majority, his Huguenot faith makes him widely distrusted by most in his party. The narrator acknowledges that “Ce changement de Parti n'ayant point d'autre raison que celle de l'amitié l'on douta qu'il fut véritable” (*Montpensier* 22). Chabanes's transition between political parties even attracts the attention of the Queen Mother, as we learn that “la Reine Mère, Catherine de Médicis” herself, certainly one of the shrewdest politicians of the era, “en eut de si grand soupçons, que la guerre étant déclarée par les Huguenots, elle eut dessein de le faire arrêter” (*Montpensier* 22). The public's mistrust of Chabanes centers on the fact that his friendship with Montpensier is his sole motivator to switch his political affiliation. The public, it seems, would be more apt to take Chabanes's political reversal at face value were there an additional motive for his party transition—like a religious conversion, perhaps—that, at least, would better explain his selflessness and his attachment to Montpensier. But there is no indication in the text that Chabanes converts to Catholicism. He is a Huguenot by faith and a Catholic by party due to his affiliation with Montpensier.

In spite of public suspicion of Chabanes, however, the Prince de Montpensier prevents Catherine de Medici from seizing Chabanes and essentially grants him political asylum on his personal estate, Champigny. On Catherine's intention to arrest Chabanes, we learn that “le prince de Montpensier l'empêcha, en lui répondant de la Personne du comte de Chabanes, qu'il amena à Champigny en s'y en allant avec sa femme” (*Montpensier* 22). Residing on land outside of the monarchy's jurisdiction renders Chabanes essentially untouchable, and therefore free to act as he pleases.

Champigny, then, serves as a little test-kingdom for the practice of religious tolerance, what Michel de l'Hopital framed as *amitié*¹⁹⁴, often suggested at the time as a solution to religious strife. The text from the very outset of the story displays a deep mistrust of friendship as a stable bond. Furthermore, friendship proved a poor explanation for an enduring bond in an age where political and religious division quite literally rent biological families apart. Castellion's introduction to his pamphlet advocating for toleration describes the "maladie" that currently ails France, whom he portrays as a mother carrying infants who fight and kill each other inside her womb, as one that turns the family, normally a space of refuge, into a space of violence. He writes:

Car ce ne sont pas estrangers qui te guerroyent, come bien autrefois à esté faict, lors que par dehors estant affligée, pour le moins tu avois par [dedans] en l'amour & accord de tes enfants quelque soulas. Ains sont tes propres enfants qui te desolent & affligent, & le font non pas en s'entrechamaillant [dedans] ton ventre, come se faisoit en Rebecca: mais en se entremeurtrissant & estranglât sans aucune misericorde les une les autres à belles espées toutes nues & pistoletz & halebardes, dedans ton giron.¹⁹⁵

The mother's womb, symbolic of the nation of France, which is normally characterized as a hospitable and peaceful space that creates the refuge of the family, degenerates into a space of violence and intolerance.

¹⁹⁴ Jean Bodin also discusses toleration in terms of *amitié* in his work *Colloquium* (1588), which circulated in manuscript form until being published in its entirety in 1857 according to Robert Forst. One of the seven men who gather in Venice to discuss their different religious beliefs observes that "Cultiver une amitié et garder la concorde parmy une si grande diversité de sentimens des choses divines et humaines m'a tousjours semblé la chose du monde la plus difficile de toutes." See Bodin, *Colloquium*, IV, lines 227-229, p. 184.

¹⁹⁵ Sebastien Castellion, *Conseil à la France*, 3-4.

If families couldn't remain united under the religious and political tensions of the Wars of Religion, the maintenance of a cross-religious friendship seems that much more unlikely to weather the tenuous political situation.

The text's emphasis on the extreme youth of the Prince de Montpensier, "sa plus grande jeunesse," suggests that he could be too trusting of Chabanes, who as his elder is presumably wiser and more conniving than he (*Montpensier* 22). To believe and trust in an Other-centered, self-effacing friendship in a time of flagrant warfare, as the Prince de Montpensier does, is naïve to a fault. As readers, we are encouraged to heed the clearer-headed perspective of the public and the Queen Mother, proceed with caution, and read with utmost attention as we attempt to make sense of the character of Chabanes and to decipher his motives in this story.

Montpensier's friendship with Chabanes is of interest because Michel de L'Hôpital, who was pushing a policy of toleration at the time of the tale, talks about the practice of toleration in terms of friendship or "amitié." Speaking to those of the Catholic faith in France, l'Hôpital writes: "vous vous devez comporter avec ceux de la nouvelle religion doucement et gracieusement, *ne les mettant au nombre de nos ennemis mais d'amis*, estans baptizes du baptesme et au mesme nom de Jesus Christ" (emphasis added).¹⁹⁶

This discourse suggests that an open-minded and selfless practice of friendly toleration would be enough to overcome seemingly deep-rooted enmities. In depicting an attempt at such a friendship, one which ultimately fails, the novel casts doubt on this idea. How "cher" is the Prince de Montpensier to the Comte de Chabanes? Chabanes molds the princess into the refined woman she becomes and upholds her marriage to his friend, at least at first. But not one time

¹⁹⁶ Michel de L'Hospital, "31 Juillet, Assemblée des prélats, Poissy," *La Plume et la tribune: Michel de L'Hospital et ses discours (1559-1562)*, (Genève: Libraire Droz S.A., 2002), 424.

throughout *the entire novel* does Chabanes refer back to his friendship with Montpensier when debating on his course of action relative to the princess or to her interest in Guise. Instead, the princess herself has to remind Chabanes of his debt to her husband's friendship. Throughout most of the text, readers must question if Chabanes is a wolf in sheep's clothing—a victim or a master manipulator. The text intentionally renders him a perplexing and anxiety-producing figure because we can't label him definitively one or the other. Thus, even as the text seems to advocate tolerance, it also encourages readers to remain suspicious of its representative of the Huguenot minority.

The Prince de Montpensier Has No Control Over His Home

With his choice to shelter Chabanes, the prince designates his home as a safe haven immune to the religious violence occurring outside of its walls. The Montpensiers' hospitality towards Chabanes equates them with a policy of toleration towards the Huguenots. But the policy does not last. The princess usurps her husband's power as host while he is out hunting and invites Guise, representative of intolerance, whose name is synonymous with the violence perpetrated against religious difference.

The princess invites Guise and the Duc d'Anjou to the house at Champigny without her husband's knowledge: "Mme de Montpensier fit les honneurs de chez elle avec le même agrément qu'elle faisait toutes choses. Enfin, elle ne plut que trop à ses hôtes" (*Montpensier* 28). "Il demeura deux jours à Champigny, sans être obligé d'y demeurer que par les charmes de Mme de Montpensier; le Prince son Mari ne faisait point de violence pour l'y retenir" (*Montpensier* 28). And when they arrive, he is displeased. "Le prince de Montpensier était mal content de tout

ce qui était arrivé sans qu'il en pût dire le sujet. . . Il lui semblait qu'elle avait reçu trop agréablement ces Princes" (*Montpensier* 29).

The bonds of friendship, and even the bonds of marriage, cannot keep out the presence of religious bigotry. The princess's attraction to Guise in the novella, like Mme de Clèves's attraction to Nemours, represents France's penchant towards inhospitality, intolerance, and persecution toward the Huguenot religious minority. Pierre Bayle's representation of the Duc de Guise in his 1686 *Commentaire* clarifies what Guise represents for us in *La Princesse de Montpensier*:

Ce Duc de Guise n'étoit-il pas de la même Religion que François I & Henri II? N'avoit-il pas approuvé & conseillé l'Edit de Château Briant, & celui de Romorantin qui soumettoient les Protestans à la mort? N'avoit-il pas travaillé de tout son pouvoir à l'establissement de l'Inquisition en France, ce qui eût été proprement établir boucherie d'hommes, une Chambre ardente toujours siègeante & environnée de bourreaux? . . . N'est-ce pas ce même Duc qui avoit souffert que ses gens massacrasent à Vassi plusieurs Huguenots qui prioient Dieu dans une Grange? En un mot l'obstination qu'il témoigna pour que ces pauvres gens fussent toujours punissables du dernier suplice ne fût-elle pas la cause des guerres civiles de Religion, qu'on n'eût jamais vues en France si on les eût laissé prier Dieu à leur manière?¹⁹⁷

Guise, then, epitomizes the inhospitable position of eradicating France's Huguenot Other rather than welcoming it. The Edict of Romorantin (May 1560) gave cases of heresy exclusively to

¹⁹⁷ Bayle, LXXV-LXXVij.

ecclesiastical courts and thus restricted the power of the civil courts.¹⁹⁸ Sutherland describes the edict as “a relatively unobtrusive way of departing from extreme persecution.”¹⁹⁹ Nancy Roelker sees it as a “*via media* between Protestant demand for a suspension of all persecution and the Guise policy of inquisition.”²⁰⁰ Holt summarizes the Edict of Chateaubriant (June 1551) as “a more comprehensive and legalistic ban on Protestantism with increased efforts to enforce it” and notes that sedition and rebellion, in addition to heterodox opinion, were its main concerns.²⁰¹ Its first article commissioned magistrates to root out those of “the Lutheran heresy” and “to punish them as fomenters of sedition, schismatics, disturbers of public harmony and tranquility, rebels, and disobedient evaders of our ordinances and commandments.”²⁰² Articles 2 through 22, which banned printing, selling, and even the possession of Protestant opinions, delineated the powers of the court to censor print materials. Articles 27-33 consisted of incentives for those who would alert authorities to any illicit assemblies being held by heretics. An informant received one third of the confiscated property of anyone she or he turned in. Sheltering heretics was forbidden. Elsewhere, Protestants were barred from holding public office and from teaching at any education level. Magistrates themselves were to be examined every three months to make sure none of them had succumbed to heretical ideas.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Nancy Lyman Roelker, *One King, One Faith: The Parlement of Paris and the Religious Reformations of the Sixteenth-Century*, Berkley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 241.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Holt, 29.

²⁰² Holt, 29. Holt points out that the edict is printed in Eugène and Emile Haag, *La France protestante*, 10 vols, (Paris, 1846-59), X, 17-19 and that a good summary of the edict is found in N. M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven, 1980), pp. 44-7.

²⁰³ Ibid.

It is these brutal policies that Guise would have suggested to contemporary readers. The Princess's unruly passion for him overwhelms her dutiful respect for her husband. In this narrative, destructive passions (including extramarital desire and hatred of religious minorities) prove more powerful than more restrained motives like duty, friendship and toleration. The final meeting between Guise and the princess arranged at night in her bedroom causes the implosion of the hospitable and tolerant space they had created at Coulommiers.

Refuting the Sedition Narrative: Chabanes's Extreme Loyalty

Irrational fears of the Huguenot minority like those depicted in the novel were stoked by anti-Huguenot narratives circulating in the seventeenth century. In his article "The Huguenot Republic and Anti-Republicanism in Seventeenth-Century France," Arthur Herman offers a brief synopsis of the three main accusations of anti-Huguenot propaganda: that the Protestants formed a "state within a state"; that these institutions were controlled by rebellious nobles; and that they were modeling their republics on the Dutch United Provinces.²⁰⁴ Christie Sample Wilson's research corroborates Herman's findings, as she tells of Protestants being perceived as deterrents to national unity as early as 1650.²⁰⁵ Even Mazarin, who was generally thought to be too lenient and permissive with the Huguenots, was not immune to the suspicion these narratives aroused; only seven years after the Declaration of Saint-Germain (1652), in which he had legally recognized the Huguenots' loyalty to the crown, he asked the Huguenots to avoid actions that could "move the spirits of subjects to sedition and alienate them from the affection" rightly due to the king while at the last national synod held in Loudun in 1659.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Herman, 252.

²⁰⁵ Wilson, 20.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

In an effort to combat the misperception that they represented “a disloyal element in French society,” Protestants reminded government officials of their loyalty to the monarchy during the Fronde and of their continuing devotion to the crown.²⁰⁷ Lafayette’s novella reminds its readers of the same point, harping at length on Chabanes’s devotion. It explicitly mentions Chabanes’s loyalty to the princess (not his “friend” her husband) five times, all in reference to his involvement in her illicit connections with Guise. First, the princess reassures Guise of Chabanes’s loyalty: “Le duc de Guise, qui savait à quel point ce comte était ami du prince de Montpensier, fut épouvanté qu’elle le choisît pour son confident: mais elle lui répondit si bien de sa fidélité qu’elle le rassura” (*Montpensier* 38). According to the narrator, Chabanes’s loyalty to the princess allows him to carry out the otherwise intolerable mission: “Il [Chabanes] porta cette réponse avec fidélité avec laquelle il avait rendu la lettre à la princesse . . . Souvent il prenait résolution de renvoyer le duc de Guise sans le dire à la princesse de Montpensier: mais la fidélité exacte qu’il lui avait promise, changeait aussitôt sa résolution” (*Montpensier* 41). According to Chabanes, his devotion to the princess makes him the best candidate for the job of bringing Guise to her room: “Je ne veux point . . . être cause qu’elle cherche de personnes moins fidèles que moi pour se la procurer,” he says (42). Finally, the narrator references Chabanes’s loyalty one last time at the end of the novella, following his death, when the princess feels “vivement la perte d’un homme dont elle connaissait si bien la fidélité” (47). The emphasis placed on Chabanes’s perfect and unwavering loyalty to the princess rather than her husband throughout the novella clearly designates him as a representative of the religious minorities in France and inserts the tale into seventeenth-century dialogues about the practicality of religious toleration.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 20.

The representation of Chabanes in *La Princesse de Montpensier* initially seems to refute the sedition narratives being propagated about the Huguenot community in France, and even other religious minorities in Europe, like the Catholics in England. Rather than causing division, Chabanes's presence creates an atmosphere of peace and stability. First of all, Chabanes does everything in his power to enrich the prince's and princess's marriage. When Montpensier asks Chabanes to acquaint him with his wife after a two-year absence at war, Chabanes, "avec une sincérité aussi exacte qui s'il n'eût point été amoureux, dit au Prince tout ce qu'il connaissait en cette Princesse capable de la lui faire aimer: et il avertit aussi Madame de Montpensier des choses qu'elle devait faire pour achever de gagner le cœur et l'estime de son Mari" (*Montpensier* 24-25). He even attempts to moderate the couple's quarreling after Guise's unannounced visit to Champigny, which angers Montpensier: "Le comte de Chabannes, selon son coutume, prît soin d'empêcher qu'ils ne se brouillassent tout à fait; afin de persuader par là à la Princesse, combien la passion qu'il avait pour elle était sincère et désintéressée" (*Montpensier* 29). Rather than driving a wedge between the prince and princess, whose marriage might be said to represent France's tenuous national unity, Chabanes works to knit them together. His actions would seem to suggest that the Huguenots constitute a stability-inducing element in France rather than a divisive one. This representation of Chabanes as a promoter of marital and national peace aligns with Pierre Bayle's claim in his *Commentaire* that there would be

par tout ailleurs grand calme, & grande tranquillité, & pourquoi; parce que les uns toléroient les rites des autres. Il est donc vrai comme je le montre dans mon Commentaire que c'est la non-tolérance qui cause tous les désordres qu'on impute faussement à la tolérance . . . C'est donc la tolérance qui est la source de la paix."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Bayle, "Preface," *Commentaire*, LV.

Chabanes also promotes the princess's personal growth in the tale, one more aspect of his character that challenges the myth of the Huguenot as a parasitical guest within the host realm of France. Chabanes recognizes the princess's potential, untapped thus far, and molds her into the refined woman she becomes:

Chabanes de son côté regardait avec admiration tant de beauté, d'esprit, et de vertu qui paraissaient en cette jeune Princesse: et se servant de l'amitié qu'elle lui témoignait, pour lui inspirer des sentiments d'une vertu extraordinaire, et dignes de la grandeur de sa naissance, il la rendit en peu de temps une des personnes du monde la plus achevée.

(*Montpensier* 23)

The narrator makes a concerted effort to identify the princess's friendly demeanor towards Chabanes, "l'amitié qu'elle lui témoignait,"²⁰⁹ as an essential component in the princess's process of refinement (*Montpensier* 23). Chabanes leverages the princess's amiability, her capacity for tolerance—he is described as "se servant de l'amitié qu'elle lui témoignait"—in order to fine-tune her social skills; it is the princess's initial willingness to be friendly towards Chabanes and to accept him as an equal that allows him the agency to influence her, exclusively to her benefit (*Montpensier* 23).²¹⁰ This relational dynamic, especially the fact that Chabanes's influence on the princess rendered her "une des personnes du monde la plus achevée," seems to corroborate the claim Pierre Bayle would make a little over two decades later in his

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ "Il témoigna à la princesse qu'il appréhendait extrêmement que les premières impressions ne revinssent bientôt: et il lui fit comprendre la mortelle douleur qu'il aurait pour leur intérêt commun, s'il la voyait un jour changer de sentiments." The fates of the princess and Chabanes are connected.

Commentaire philosophique that “la tolérance est la chose du monde la plus-propre à ramener le siècle d’or” of France.²¹¹ With Chabanes near her, the princess flourishes.

Crucially, Pierre Bayle locates the failure to achieve the flourishing environment that toleration has the potential to produce in one of the involved parties’ will to control and “exercer une tyrannie cruelle sur les esprits,” something that the princess seems to do to Chabanes once she realizes he loves her.²¹² For Bayle, neutrality of the monarch is key, as it is of utmost importance that “le Souverain les [the different sects] protegeoit toutes, & les tenoit en équilibre par son équité.”²¹³ This, I believe, is where we can locate the downfall in the attempts at toleration portrayed in *La Princesse de Montpensier*. Crucially, the text leaves the authenticity of the princess’s friendship with Chabanes in doubt, as the verb “témoigner” insinuates that her amiability might not be sincere, but rather a performance or a charade. Throughout the novella, we are constantly reminded of what Chabanes owes to Montpensier for his friendship and hospitality. The narrator suggests that even his contributions to the Montpensier marriage and to the princess’s refinement are not enough to erase his debt. This unhealthy dynamic places Chabanes in an inferior position to Montpensier, rather than an equal one.

In this way, the princess’s friendship with Chabanes seems parallel to France’s repressive use of the Edict of Nantes (1598) under Louis XIV’s reign. The edict, when first created, represented an early attempt to grant Protestants some rights. As the 1660s began in France, interpretations of the Edict of Nantes became progressively more rigid and restrictive, initiating what scholars have called a quiet “administrative persecution” against the Huguenots.²¹⁴ Joseph

²¹¹ Bayle, 365.

²¹² Bayle, 365.

²¹³ Bayle, 364.

²¹⁴ Bergin, 231.

Bergin describes the measures as “low-profile initiatives taken further down the chain of political command.”²¹⁵ Bergin describes how a variety of social groups—government commissioners sent to the provinces, the *dévo*t institutions of the Company of the Holy Sacrament and the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, and even advocates of the Catholic Reformation—coalesced in an effort to quietly eradicate Protestantism from France.²¹⁶ Working together, these groups compiled an “arsenal of legal precedents” that Louis XIV would later use against the Protestants still residing in France.²¹⁷ Handbooks filled with legal precedents and decrees allowed interested parties easy access to information regarding the Edict of Nantes. Three of the most well-known publications were Bernard Meynier’s *De l’exécution de l’édit de Nantes et le moyen de terminer dans chaque province le grand différent et ses principales suites* (1662), Pierre Barnard’s *Explication de l’édit de Nantes* (1666), and Jean Filleau’s *Décisions catholiques* (1668).²¹⁸ By 1665, a perceptible change for the worse had occurred in the public’s attitude toward Protestants. The Edict of Nantes, once an edict of toleration, had become an instrument of intolerance and persecution.

The gradual narrowing of the liberties each religious minority enjoyed, a legal phenomenon that occurred in both France and England during the earlier part of the decade, is represented in *La Princesse de Montpensier* via what the novella terms the princess’s “procédé” with Chabanes:

L’amour fit en lui ce qu’il fait en tous les autres: il lui donna l’envie de parler . . . il osa lui dire qu’il l’aimait; s’étant bien préparé à essayer les orages dont la fierté de cette

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 230-235.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 234.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 234.

Princesse le menaçait. Mais il trouva en elle une tranquillité et une froideur pires milles fois que toute les rigueurs à quoi il s'était attendu. Elle ne prit pas la peine de se mettre en colère contre lui. Elle lui représenta en peu de mots la différence de leur qualité et de leur âge, la connaissance particulière qu'il avait de sa vertu, et de l'inclination qu'elle avait eue pour le duc de Guise; et surtout ce qu'il devait à l'amitié et à la confiance du Prince son Mari . . . Elle tâcha de le consoler, en l'assurant qu'elle ne se souviendrait jamais de ce qu'il venait de lui dire; qu'elle ne se persuadait jamais une chose qui lui était si désavantageuse; et qu'elle ne le regarderait jamais que comme son meilleur Ami. Ces assurances consolèrent le Comte comme on se le peut imaginer. Il sentit le mépris des paroles de la princesse dans toute leur étendue. (*Montpensier* 23-24)

Chabanes's declaration of his love for the princess, which gives him "l'envie de parler," represents a Protestant's desire to be recognized as a full-fledged legal subject in France and to have a political voice, presence, and privileges equal to those of its Catholic subjects. Chabanes expects "orages" and "rigueurs," behaviors evocative of persecution, from the princess, but instead finds an eerie calmness, "une tranquillité et une froideur," in her response that resembles the quiet "administrative persecution"²¹⁹ of the Huguenots referenced by Bergin in his study. Like the authors of the legal handbooks dissecting the Edict of Nantes, the princess uses jargon and rational-sounding argument, enumerating "en peu de mots" no fewer than four reasons why Chabanes is not worthy of her love. In attempting to console Chabanes, the princess actually makes clear that the opposite of what she assures him will happen. She promises never to remember *what he just told her*, contradicting herself as she speaks. His declaration of love for the princess, which we can read as his desire to be recognized as a full-fledged subject of France,

²¹⁹ Bergin, 231.

gives the state of France a peculiar and dangerous leverage over Chabanes because it becomes evident that he will go to any length for his love to be reciprocated. He has now set himself up as a peon or puppet for the princess, and by extension the state of France.

Is the “mépris” that Chabanes feels from the princess true in reality? Or is it a product of his imagination? The text leaves the “mépris” of the princess for Chabanes in doubt. First of all, after his admission she reassures him that she will only ever see him as her “meilleur Ami.” Furthermore, when the two interact the following day, the princess’s face is described as being “aussi ouvert que de coutume,” and we learn that she “vécut avec lui avec la même bonté qu’elle avait accoutumé.” The princess thus does not seem to change the way that she interacts with Chabanes based on his admission in the slightest. She continues as if nothing had happened, just as she said she would do. It is this very fact that the princess carries on as normal that irks Chabanes. He is miffed that his presence causes no emotional or physical reaction in the princess whatsoever.

Chabanes won’t venture to admit to the princess that her confessions about Guise to him are “insupportables,” but he does dare to remind the princess of his admission of his love for her: “il osât bien la faire souvenir quelquefois de ce qu’il avait la hardiesse de lui dire” (*Montpensier* 24). Chabanes himself ensures that the princess will fail to fulfill her earlier promise “qu’elle ne se souviendrait jamais de ce qu’il lui venait de dire” (*Montpensier* 24). He recalls his admission to her not once, but “quelquefois,” meaning his reminders of his love for her, though unspecified in number, surely recurred at least a few times (*Montpensier* 24). Even as Chabanes advises the princess after Guise’s visit to Champigny, his warnings against the relationship have to do with his own interest in the princess in addition to his concern for her as a person: “il lui fit

comprendre la mortelle douleur qu'il aurait pour son intérêt d'elle *et le sien propre* de la voir changer de sentiment" (*Montpensier* 30, emphasis added).

Chabanes is able to help facilitate the growth of the Montpensier marriage, not out of any genuine concern for his friend the prince, but out of a desire to "augmenter le bonheur et la gloire" of the princess, a person whom we have already acknowledged as his own creation. Furthermore, Chabanes loses nothing in attempting to nourish their relationship, as it is founded on little to no time spent together. For all intents and purposes, the Montpensiers remain distant strangers throughout most of the novella. Furthermore, even when Chabanes does attempt to quell any disagreements between the couple, he does so to his own benefit: "afin de persuader par là à la Princesse, combien la passion qu'il avait pour elle était sincère et désintéressée" (*Montpensier* 29). But if his love for the princess were not self-serving, statements like this one would not be necessary. A need to convince someone of your other-centered friendship suggests it is actually self-centered.

The princess's decision to commit adultery with Guise unearths conflicts that have been brewing beneath the surface and allows them to reach a point of crisis. The princess's infidelity to her husband represents the very sedition against the state that Mazarin and his administration feared would originate from France's Huguenot minority. Notably, however, the text diverges from the sedition narrative that the French government propagated about the Huguenots in that the novella reveals the princess, rather than Chabanes, to be the perfidious party. Far from encouraging the princess's disloyalty, Chabanes does everything within his power to prevent it.

When Chabanes believes the princess to be somewhat apprehensive about following through on her plans to meet Guise, he takes her hesitancy as an opportunity to convince her to remain faithful to her husband: "Le comte de Chabanes attendait sa réponse comme une chose

qui allait décider de sa vie ou de sa mort, mais, jugeant de son incertitude par son silence, il prit la parole, pour la représenter, tous les périls où elle s'exposerait par cette entrevue" (41).

Lafayette's text does not give us the luxury of hearing Chabanes's attempts to discourage the princess from the error of her ways, but a short excerpt from Pierre Bayle's *Commentaire*, describing the actions of "heretics" that should be tolerated, may prove helpful in filling this textual silence. It reads as follows:

ils ne violentent personne : ils disent bien à leur prochain qu'il est dans l'erreur, ils lui en alléguent les meilleures raisons qu'il peuvent, ils lui font voire une autre créance qu'ils apuient le plus-fortement qu'il leur est possible, ils l'exhortent à changer; ils lui représentent qu'il se damnera s'il ne suit la vérité qu'ils lui présentent; voila tout ce qu'ils font, après cela ils laissent cet homme dans sa pleine liberté.²²⁰

Bayle's description of what tolerable heretics do—persuade to the best of their ability and then leave their mentee free to choose their way—resonates with Chabanes's attempt here to show the princess the error of her ways. Leaving the princess free to direct her own choices in the end is exactly what Chabanes does: "Si après tout ce que je viens de vous représenter, madame, votre passion est la plus forte, et que vous vouliez voir le duc de Guise, que ma considération ne vous en empêche point, si celle de votre intérêt ne le fait pas (*Montpensier* 41-42)."

Chabanes fits Bayle's example of a non-violent "heretic" perfectly; even though he feels the impulse to resort to violence, he does not. While sneaking Guise into the Montpensier home for his rendezvous with the princess, Chabanes, we are told, "s'abandonnait à . . . une rage, qui le poussa mille fois à donner de son épée au travers du corps de son Rival" (*Montpensier* 42).

Later, as the princess beckons Chabanes to remain in the room with her and Guise, Chabanes,

²²⁰ Bayle, *Commentaire*, 375.

whom the text describes as “possédé de rage et de fureur,” answers her so loudly that the Prince de Montpensier hears a man’s voice, though not well enough to distinguish it as that of Chabanes (*Montpensier* 43). This final scene, in which Chabanes has to lead his rival to the women he loves, is not the first time the text has alerted us to the anger simmering within Chabanes. Earlier in the novella, when he loses patience with the princess’s mistreatment of him, Chabanes “s’en alla chez un de ses Amis dans le voisinage, d’où il lui écrivit avec toute la rage que pouvait causer son procédé” (*Montpensier* 40). Chabanes resorts to writing—not physical violence—as a means of cathartically ridding himself of destructive emotions.

Chabanes and Montpensier, the only characters who are wronged and thus justified in acting on their feelings of anger, choose not to do so in destructive ways. This is clear in the scenes in which an unarmed Montpensier lunges at Chabanes and in which Chabanes writes a raving letter to the princess (which he never delivers and she never sees). Meanwhile, as Montpensier and Chabanes simmer with resentment, the monarchy is brewing its own violent initiative. We learn that “pendant ce temps” (that Chabanes was writing the letter and reconciling with the princess), “l’envie qu’on eut à la Cour d’y faire revenir les Chefs du Parti Huguenot, pour cet horrible dessein que l’on exécuta le jour de la Saint-Barthélemy, fit que le Roi, pour les mieux tromper, éloigna de lui tous les Princes de la Maison de Bourbon, et tous ceux de la Maison de Guise” (*Montpensier* 40). The opportunity for personal vengeance, which both Chabanes and Montpensier initially reject, seems to be recompensed with a state-led initiative for violence.

But as in the description of the nonviolent heretic, the narrator’s need to assure the reader of his nonviolence is a continual reminder that it is a possibility, and that his passions and emotions are powerful enough to lead to violence, which he keeps under wraps with difficulty.

The heretic feels so strongly in the rightness of his religion that he believes his neighbor to be damned, and the conclusion that he might “violanter” is a natural one that the narrator must deny. Likewise, there is also something truly frightening and threatening about the amount of pent-up anger and rage Chabanes harbors, to a point that one gets the impression that anyone in his near proximity could be endangered. This narrative is thus one in which the notion that tolerance can defeat long-simmering hatreds, at least in any lasting way, is thrown into doubt.

However, Chabanes’s reluctance to infringe upon the princess’s free will is most striking:

Et voulant lui faire voir qu’il ne lui tenait pas ce discours pour ses intérêts, il lui dit: “Si après tout ce que je viens de vous représenter, madame, votre passion est la plus forte, et que vous vouliez voir le duc de Guise, que ma considération ne vous en empêche point, si celle de votre intérêt ne le fait pas. (*Montpensier* 41)

Chabanes’s begrudging submission to the princess’s desire for a *rendezvous* with Guise, though it initially seems seditious and disreputable, on some level merits the reader’s praise, as it preserves a measure of respect for individual autonomy and freedom of choice. Had Chabanes attempted to control the princess completely, he would be no better than Louis XIV’s domineering, absolutist state or the French Gallican Church that forced people to convert to its doctrine. After all, it is her parents’ usurpation of the princess’s free will to marry whom she pleases (Guise instead of Montpensier) at the beginning of the novella that drives her desire to rebel in the first place. A coerced religious unity in France, forged by forced conversions, like the princess’s dictated and arranged marriage, will ultimately lead to the very rebellion those involved sought to avoid. For Bayle, tolerance does not equal rebellion, but intolerance does: “dans les lieux où on les tolère ils se comportent en bons citoyens & en fidèles sujets, n’ayant

jamais pris les armes pendant qu'on ne les a pas inquiétez dans leur liberté de conscience, ce qui doit assurer leur Maître que pourveu qu'il les laisse prier Dieu à leur maniere, ils ne lui feront jamais d'affaire."²²¹ According to Lafayette's text, the French state's sedition problem, perceived to originate from the Huguenots and the state's toleration of them, actually is a result of its absolutist policies and its desire to control; in short, its intolerance. Ironically, it is Chabanes's obsessive need to prove that he is not looking out solely for his best interests that lands the princess in the predicament everyone initially sought to avoid. Therefore, Chabanes's respect for the princess's freedom of choice also leads to her downfall and to the story's tragic ending. Neither coercion nor liberal tolerance of others' behavior offers a perfect solution here.

The Breakdown of Hospitality

Hospitality is a central concern of the text, with many plot points revolving around who is welcomed into which spaces. This theme has strong resonance with the era's political conflicts, especially the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres, in which it has been documented by Barbara Diefendorf that even members of the ultra-Catholic side of the debate offered Protestants refuge from the violence.²²² Literary critic Judith Still observes that hospitality becomes highly necessary in times of violence, noting the hospitality shown to Jews during the Nazi occupation as one example.²²³ Welcoming members of an oppressed minority into a private home can save them, but also render the home a site of political violence: "External violence, including the

²²¹ Bayle, 350.

²²² Diefendorf writes of how Renée Burlamaqui, along with her two young siblings, was helped by several Catholic Parisians, including the Duc de Guise, who housed them, along with other Huguenots in hiding, for a week in his Paris home until the violence of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres died down. See *Beneath the Cross*, page 104.

²²³ Still, 262.

violence of the hostile host-community, can break in upon the hospitable home, forcing violent choices . . . even the sacrifice of some of the household to save others.”²²⁴ Guise’s entry into the Montpensier home at Champigny equates to the host-community violence entering what had formerly been Chabanes’s safe haven at the Montpensier home. The violent choice is Chabanes’s, to serve as the scapegoat for both the princess and Guise: “il se résolut par une générosité sans exemple, de s’exposer pour sauver une Maîtresse ingrate, et un Rival aimé” (44). Chabanes’s pure selflessness, what the narrator terms his “générosité sans exemple,” and his willingness to risk his life for the princess and Guise, neither of whom are deserving, corresponds to the French Huguenots’ and the English Catholics’ readiness to put their own lives on the line during the Fronde and the English Civil Wars in order to defend monarchies. Those monarchies, meanwhile, legally toyed with them and favored their neighbors who espoused the majority faith, as we have seen through the princess’s “procédés,” just as the princess, “une Maîtresse ingrate,” manipulates Chabanes and prefers Guise (*Montpensier* 44). Guise, the “Rival aimé” whom the princess prefers, represents those who conformed to the faith endorsed by the government—the French Catholics and the English Protestants (*Montpensier* 44).

The trauma of being confronted by the Prince de Montpensier reduces the princess and Chabanes to silence. Chabanes, the first to regain his ability to speak, addresses the prince as follows:

La Princesse n’était pas capable de répondre, et le comte de Chabanes ouvrit plusieurs fois la bouche sans pouvoir parler : « Je suis criminel à votre égard, lui dit-il enfin, et indigne de l’amitié que vous avez eue pour moi : mais ce n’est pas de la manière que vous pouvez vous l’imaginer. Je suis plus malheureux que vous, s’il se peut, et plus

²²⁴ Still, 262.

désespéré. Je ne saurais vous en dire davantage. Ma mort vous vengera, et si vous voulez me la donner toute à l'heure, vous me donnerez la seule chose qui peut m'être agréable. » Ces paroles prononcées avec une douleur mortelle, et avec un air qui marquait son innocence. (*Montpensier* 44-45)

Chabanes's inability to speak, even though the will to speak is there (he physically tries to several times), suggests that his minority or subaltern position provides him no opportunity to share his own subjective version of the truth should it differ from or conflict with the overarching, majority narrative.²²⁵ The only explanation Chabanes is capable of offering is one that fits with France's "one king, one law, one faith" ideology. Interestingly, Chabanes manages to hint at his (unaccepted, silenced) version of the truth, which he specifies is different from the prince's, even though he cannot describe it explicitly in detail. As the use of the colon, a punctuation mark that precedes explanations, indicates, Chabanes's initial statement (that aligns with the majority narrative) is not the only narrative; there is more to the story, another "truth," a different way of perceiving the situation.

In the final stage of his tirade, Chabanes looks to death as a sure means of portraying himself as a faultless, guiltless, entirely innocent victim, even though we as readers see that he should take some degree of responsibility for his role in the princess's intended infidelity. In this way, Chabanes attempts to solidify himself as a martyr-like figure. Chabanes's willingness and eagerness to die, contrasted with his slaughter at the hands of his new hosts, ensure that the text remains ambiguous as to whether Chabanes, if he is a traitor, merited such retribution or whether he is an innocent victim.

²²⁵ One could argue that Chabanes is representative of Gayatri Spivak's voiceless subaltern which she discusses in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Even though Chabanes is unable to tell the prince his “truth,” Montpensier desperately begs him for it:

Ôtez-moi la vie vous-même, lui-dit-il, ou tirez-moi du désespoir où vous me mettez.
C’est la moindre chose que vous devez à l’amitié que j’ai eue pour vous et à la modération qu’elle me fait encore garder, puisque tout autre que moi aurait déjà vengé sur votre vie un affront dont je ne puis quasi douter. (*Montpensier* 45)

The prince would rather die than be kept from knowing the full truth, Chabanes’s truth. The Prince de Montpensier addresses Chabanes “d’un ton qui faisait voir que l’amitié combattait encore pour lui” (44). He urgently begs Chabanes to tell him by making appeals to their friendship, his hospitality towards him, and his “modération,” or tolerant, forbearing attitude towards Chabanes. But while he claims to want the truth, he seems to have made up his mind and claims he can scarcely doubt the “affront” Chabanes committed. The tragedy behind this scene is not the almost-consummated adultery; that is a diversion. The actual tragedy that occurs here is that we as readers get to witness two men of opposing faiths desperately trying to understand each other, yet they are incapable of doing so because of the constraints the dominant, intolerant cultural ideology has put on them.

Caught up in emotion, the prince loses patience and lunges at the comte with the intention of avenging himself:

il s’approcha du comte de Chabannes avec l’action d’un homme emporté de rage et la Princesse, craignant un malheur qui ne pouvait pourtant arriver, le Prince son mari n’ayant point d’arme, se leva pour se mettre entre deux . . . Le Prince fut touché . . . de la tranquillité où le Comte était demeuré lorsqu’il s’était approché de lui (*Montpensier* 45)

The absence of any weapons on the Prince de Montpensier's person characterizes the Montpensier home as a safe haven whose peace cannot be disturbed and testifies to the true hospitality Montpensier had offered, as well as to the endurance of his goodwill towards Chabanes amidst this misunderstanding. Montpensier's lack of a sword also testifies to his lack of power in his home, however. It is Chabanes who runs the show and not Montpensier. The prince notes "la tranquillité où le Comte était demeuré lorsqu'il s'était approché de lui" (*Montpensier* 45). Chabanes's serenity in the midst of such a chaotic scene suggests he is resigned to an outcome he already expects or foresees.

The near-breakdown of the unique atmosphere of hospitality and tolerance that had been cultivated in the Montpensier home is subsequently followed by larger-scale chaos via the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres. The choice to feature the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre near the climax of the love story further suggests the centrality of France's treatment of their religious minorities to *La Princesse de Montpensier*. The narrator appeals to the reader's empathy by using emotionally charged terms, calling the event "cet horrible dessein qu'on exécuta,"²²⁶ "cet horrible massacre, si renommée par toute l'Europe;"²²⁷ and "cette nuit qui fut si funeste à tant de gens."²²⁸ Similar emotional language will recur at the end of the novel. The tragedy serves as a reminder of the insensible mob violence conducted against France's Protestant community. The Prince de Montpensier, who had been in a reclusive stupor after his encounter with Chabanes and his wife, re-energizes when he is called back to Paris:

L'ordre qu'il reçut de s'en retourner à la Cour, où on rappelait tous les Princes catholiques pour exterminer les Huguenots, le tira de l'embarras où il était; et il s'en alla

²²⁶ Lafayette, 40.

²²⁷ Ibid., 46.

²²⁸ Ibid.

à Paris . . . Il n'y fut pas sitôt arrive, qu'on commença d'attaquer les Huguenots en la personne d'un de leurs chefs, l'amiral de Châtillon: et deux jours après on en fit cet horrible massacre, si renommé par toute l'Europe. (*Montpensier* 46)

The text gives no explicit descriptions of Montpensier participating in the killings, but readers can assume he did his duty to the monarchy. By participating in the massacres, the Prince de Montpensier releases the pent-up rage he did not act upon earlier within the protective enclosure of his own household. Instead, Montpensier takes out his rage towards his wife and her unidentified lover on the innocent Huguenots. The text's use of the indefinite pronoun "on" instead of other definitively singular pronouns portrays the killings as communal actions of a faceless mob.

While Chabanes had found temporary refuge at the Montpensier home, his new hosts do not protect him from the violence of the host community towards the Huguenots, whom they consider to be undeserving guests in France:

Le pauvre comte de Chabannes, qui s'était venu cacher dans l'extrémité de l'un des Faubourgs de Paris, pour s'abandonner à sa douleur, fut enveloppé dans la ruine des Huguenots. Les personnes chez qui il s'était retiré l'ayant reconnu, et s'étant souvenues qu'on l'avait soupçonné d'être de ce Parti, le massacrèrent cette même nuit qui fut si funeste à tant de gens. Le matin le prince de Montpensier allant donner quelques ordres hors la Ville, passa dans la même rue où était le corps de Chabannes. Il fut d'abord saisi d'étonnement à ce pitoyable spectacle : ensuite son amitié se réveillant, elle lui donna de la douleur : mais enfin le souvenir de l'offense qu'il croyait en avoir reçue, lui donna de la joie : et il fut bien aise de se voir vengé par la Fortune. (*Montpensier* 46-47)

Emotionally charged vocabulary appear throughout the passage: “douleur,” “funeste,” “étonnement,” “pitoyable,” “joie,” “pauvre,” “pitoyable” again. Many of the terms are indicative of violence and destruction, such as “ruine,” “l’offense,” and “vengé.” Though the reader might empathize with the Prince de Montpensier, his readiness to hold Chabanes responsible for his wife’s unfaithfulness, “l’offense qu’il en *croyait* avoir reçue” (emphasis added) and the joy he ultimately expresses upon his death leave readers with conflicted feelings.

Significantly, mention of Chabanes remains completely absent as far as Guise is concerned:

Le duc de Guise occupé du désir de venger la mort de son Père, et peu après joyeux de l’avoir vengée, laissa peu à peu éloigner de son âme le soin d’apprendre des nouvelles de la princesse de Montpensier; et trouvant la marquise de Noirmoutier, personne de beaucoup d’esprit, de beauté, et qui donnait plus d’espérance que cette Princesse, il s’y attacha entièrement, et l’aima jusques à la mort. (*Montpensier* 47)

Guise is quite simply on to greener pastures with no regard for Chabanes or even the Princesse de Montpensier.

The princess’s behavior throughout the novel, specifically her disregard for Chabanes’s advice and her cruel treatment of him, makes it much harder to feel sorry for her fate. As the princess wakes up from her coma, her first thoughts do not go to Chabanes, the man who saved her from an extremely compromising situation at his own expense, but to Guise: “Son esprit, qui fut travaillé de nouveau, se souvenant de n’avoir eu aucune nouvelle du duc de Guise pendant toute sa maladie. Elle s’enquit de ses Femmes, si elles n’avaient vu personne, si elles n’avaient point de lettres” (*Montpensier* 47).

Her failure to call Chabanes by name—he is reduced to “personne,” literally a nobody—is a testament to how little he meant to her. In fact, the princess never thinks to inquire after Chabanes; she is too distressed that she found “rien de ce qu’elle eût souhaité” (*Montpensier* 47). Her husband tells her of Chabanes’s death, almost as a kind of punishment: “Ce lui fut encore un nouvel accablement d’apprendre la mort du comte de Chabanes, qu’elle sût bientôt par les soins du Prince son Mari” (*Montpensier* 47). Even then, the princess is only able to feel the loss of Chabanes through her attachment to Guise: “L’ingratitude du duc de Guise lui fit sentir plus vivement la perte d’un homme dont elle connaissait si bien la fidélité” (*Montpensier* 47). As far as the cause of the princess’s death, Chabanes comes last, the place of least importance: “Elle ne put résister à la douleur d’avoir perdu l’estime de son Mari, le cœur de son Amant, et le plus parfait Ami qui fut jamais” (*Montpensier* 47). The inability of the princess and her husband, the objects of Chabanes’s utmost devotion, to properly grieve Chabanes’s death represent France’s and England’s refusal to acknowledge contributions made by their religious minorities to the stability and well-being of their nations.

The mention of Chabanes’s new hosts’ suspicion of him at the end of the tale brings the text full circle and recalls the suspicion the public had relative to his friendship with Montpensier at the beginning of the tale. Despite what seemed like trustworthy and friendly actions of Chabanes at the Montpensier home, the text does not allow us as readers to entirely forget our mistrust of him, and he remains a deeply ambiguous, and potentially dangerous, figure.

Conclusion

In a novella named after its heroine, it is curious that Chabanes takes center stage at the end of the work, becoming the focal point for much, if not all, of the pathos the reader is

encouraged to feel at the tale's closing. Surprisingly, we as readers don't feel much sorrow for the princess, whom the narrator scathingly deems "une maîtresse ingrante" a few pages earlier (44). In a way, her death satisfies an urge for justice, after her blatant mistreatment of Chabanes. Her end is tragic too, though, in that her appreciation for Chabanes comes too late. We mourn, not the princess's death, but the missed opportunity for a genuine friendship between her and Chabanes.

The novella's ending calls its readers to mourn the loss of Chabanes, and, more importantly, to reflect upon his value to the kingdom of France. The novella ends with a sense of regret for the mistreatment of the Huguenots, as well as a sense of longing for the irretrievable loss France's population sustained. Readers are left with the clear fact that something of irreplaceable value was lost with the extermination of a large part of the Huguenot population during the Wars of Religion. The novella potentially encourages those readers who belong to their own national faith, whatever it is, to not only empathize with members of religious minorities, but to genuinely befriend them in an attempt to promote a peaceful co-existence. After all, the two religious minorities in England and France are deserving of such treatment, as they were integral to the survival of both monarchies during their respective civil wars.

At the same time, the text casts doubt on the power of friendship and tolerance to overcome religious hatred. The love story told in *La Princesse de Montpensier* enacts the disheartening failure of a genuine attempt at amicable religious co-existence, what we would call today religious toleration. The tale's depressing finale must have resonated with the spirits of those religious minorities in France and England whose hope for legal recognition of their loyalty to those countries, tested and proven in the civil unrest of the 1640s and 1650s, were ultimately left unfulfilled in the early 1660s. As we shall see, Lafayette would return to the

possibility of peaceful co-existence of different religions. Her *nouvelles* tackle the issue again in *La Princesse de Clèves*, a novella written about sixteen years later, in 1678—a work in which a couple, for the first time in Lafayette’s work, successfully preserves their union amidst irremediable differences by cultivating a relationship based on friendship and toleration.

CHAPTER 4

A GLIMPSE AT TOLERATION IN *LA PRINCESSE DE CLÈVES*

The politics of religion are central to *La Princesse de Clèves*' representation of sixteenth-century France. Set on the verge of an era when Protestantism would be brutally repressed and eliminated in France, the novella contains repeated references to characters who "[défendait] la religion catholique," "prit ... les teintures de la religion nouvelle," or engage in political rivalry over religious differences. Yet critics have typically understood *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) as a work in which God, religion, and spirituality are markedly absent.²²⁹ Wolfgang Leiner states that Lafayette "avoids all mention of religious practice" and that "references to a Christian God and the Christian religion and its doctrines are almost nonexistent."²³⁰ In concordance with Leiner, Jean Cordelier sees God as being "absent" from the work;²³¹ Bernard Chédozeau concurs, noting the novella's "caractère areligieux"²³² and claiming that "Dieu n'est pas caché; il est totalement absent."²³³ Similarly, Bernard Laudy claims Lafayette presents us with "un univers sans Dieu" which he believes was inspired by the atheistic Jansenism of the salon.²³⁴ Serge Doubrovsky takes an existentialist approach to the novel and claims that God exists

²²⁹ Camille Esmein-Sarrazin's article "Roman et religion au tournant des années 1660: Lectures de Mme de Lafayette" (2012) offers an excellent and exhaustive survey of studies from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century about the religious or a-religious aspects, depending on the scholar's point of view, of Madame de Lafayette's texts.

²³⁰ Leiner, 139-141.

²³¹ Cordelier, 52.

²³² Bernard Chédozeau, "Morale conventionnelle et éthique du romanesque dans *La Princesse de Clèves*, *Mélanges P. Jourda*, (Paris, Nizet: 1970), 221.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 460.

²³⁴ Bernard Laudy, "La vision tragique de Mme de Lafayette, ou un jansénisme athée," *Revue de l'Institut de Sociologie* 3, 1969, 452 and 459.

outside of it.²³⁵ An anomaly amongst critics, seventeenth-century critic Valincour did not view the work as devoid of religion, as do modern-day critics, but as merely tip-toeing around the topic. He referred to the novella as “un roman où la religion est traitée avec une grande discrétion.”²³⁶

Crucially, Valincour seems to be talking about the politics of religion here rather than spirituality. Even when she depicts political conflicts, Lafayette’s “discretion” means she does not explicitly comment on them. It would make sense for Lafayette to make the religious leaning of her work intentionally vague. Coming down clearly on one side or the other of the religious divide that was then plaguing France would only have made her work a subject of controversy. Furthermore, identifying overtly with Protestantism would have been likely to get her work censured by the monarchy, as Louis XIV had taken significant steps toward suppressing Protestantism at the time the novella was published.

Yet while the novella avoids taking sides in religious power struggles, its depictions of these struggles is not as bland and lacking in content as it may seem. Through its depiction of a tragic love triangle, the text metaphorically explores potential solutions to the ongoing Catholic/Protestant conflict. The titular character in the *nouvelle* is torn between two men, an adoring husband and an extramarital lover whom she loves in return. As will be seen below, the two men, Clèves and Nemours, can be read as representations of the Protestant and Catholic faiths, respectively. And in its seemingly intractable nature and potential for violence, this plot mirrors the political and religious events of France during the sixteenth century.

²³⁵ Serge Doubrovsky, “*La Princesse de Clèves: Interprétation existentielle*,” *La Table ronde* 138, 1959, 50.

²³⁶ Valincour, 9.

But the text depicts a novel solution to this conflict. Rather than deceive her husband, the princess confesses that she loves another man and seeks his help in avoiding temptation to act on her desire for Nemours. And rather than condemning or blaming his wife, the prince attempts to tolerate and accept her feelings as something beyond his and her control. *La Princesse de Cleves* depicts tolerance as a potential solution, one that avoids violence and holds out some hope of equality between people who cannot fully accept or embrace each other's beliefs. The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, in which thousands of French Protestants were killed in Catholic mob violence, is never explicitly mentioned in the text, but hangs over it as the ultimate outcome of religious intolerance. Lafayette's novella hints at the potential for a different outcome. It offers a new conception of the then-nascent French national identity as a tolerant, multi-religious state, instead of a uniformly Catholic one.

The novella presents a multilayered social and political portrait of life at the French court in the late 1550s. The text opens with portraits of King Henry II and his courtiers, all of whom are described as being unparalleled in beauty and bravery on the battlefield. The overall atmosphere at court is characterized as ongoing intense power struggle among various groups or circles at court:

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

The main storyline is set in motion when sixteen-year-old Mlle de Chartres, a beautiful heiress, is brought to court by her mother for the first time with the intention of negotiating her marriage. She immediately catches the attention of the eminent Prince de Clèves and soon attracts many other suitors. Most ultimately reject her because they fear making an alliance with her uncle, the Viscount de Chartres; the Prince de Clèves proposes to her, and on the advice of her mother she accepts. The marriage is amicable, but the prince is continually unsatisfied by his wife's obvious lack of love for him. Upon her meeting the Duc de Nemours at a ball, the two quickly fall in love, although the princess at first refuses to admit the nature of her feelings to herself. Her mother becomes ill; having perceived the nature of her daughter's feelings, she warns her on her deathbed not to ruin her life through an adulterous affair and to do whatever it takes to avoid such a path. The princess begins eluding temptation by isolating herself and avoiding society, but her husband, not understanding her motive, disapproves.

The prince tells her at one point in the text that “la sincérité me touche d’une telle sorte, que je crois que si ma maîtresse, et même ma femme, m’avouait que quelqu’un lui plaît, j’en serais affligé sans en être aigri. Je quitterais le personnage d’amant ou de mari, pour la conseiller et pour la plaindre.” This *modus operandi* will become crucial to the plot. In a pivotal scene set at the couple's country estate, she pleads to be allowed to remain in seclusion, since “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.” The prince claims to accept her confession, but repeatedly presses her to reveal the name of the man she loves. Although she refuses, he guesses that it is Nemours. Consumed by jealousy, he has a servant spy on the princess at their country estate while he remains at court. The servant sees the lovestruck Nemours venture onto the property repeatedly. Although the princess takes care to avoid being alone with Nemours, the prince, hearing the

report, jumps to the conclusion that she has committed adultery, and falls deathly ill. In an emotionally charged deathbed conversation, he finally accepts that his wife is innocent, but his illness has progressed too far for him to be saved. The princess, free to marry after her husband has died, is consumed by guilt at having caused her husband's death. Rather than giving in to her love for Nemours, she resolves to avoid the court via travel, splitting the remainder of her short life between an estate near the Pyrenees, where she lives in seclusion, and an unidentified convent.

The story hinges on the princess's complex response to the two men, both of whom she accepts in some ways while offering painful rejection in others. Even more crucially, it hinges on M. de Clèves' reaction to her confession. This chapter will argue that M. de Clèves, often read as a miserably weak or pitiable character, occupies the most important role in the novel. M. de Clèves's marital experience illustrates the difficulties of living out religious toleration as it was conceived in the early modern era. Through trying to accept the seemingly intolerable reality of his wife's love for another man, he creates the possibility of a peaceful resolution that could not have been imagined otherwise. Their marriage serves as a demonstration, albeit imperfect, of the ways in which the mistrust rampant between Protestants and Catholics in France might be combated, disempowered, and ultimately destroyed.

Personal Predicaments, National Dilemmas

The romance plot of Lafayette's novella has obvious political implications. In "Primary Sources: *La Princesse de Clèves*" (2000), Louise K. Horowitz, one of the few critics who focus on the religious politics of the novel, has aptly shown how the "hallmark schism" of the novel, meaning Clèves's and Nemours's mutual pursuit of Mme de Clèves, mirrors the religious (and

political) schism that occurred in France in the sixteenth century. Horowitz sees the Nemours-Mme de Clèves-M. de Clèves love triangle as what she calls the “‘romanesque’ [fictionalized] twinning” of the deepening divide between the Catholic and Protestant factions at Henri II’s court.²³⁷ The possessive struggle between M. de Clèves and Nemours then can be said to symbolize the tug-of-war between religious and political parties at court as they struggled for control or possession of France (Mme de Clèves). For example, Horowitz highlights M. de Clèves’s deep familial ties to Protestantism, noting that

the prince de Clèves’s mother, Marguerite de Bourbon, was the sister of both Louis de Bourbon, prince de Condé, the Protestant leader during the Wars of Religion, and of the previously mentioned Antoine de Bourbon, duc de Vendôme, king of Navarre in the novel and father of the Protestant monarch Henri IV.²³⁸

It comes as no surprise then that Mme de Clèves herself, though a purely fictional character, is affiliated with Protestantism. Her uncle, Horowitz observes, is the vidame de Chartres, “descendu de cette ancienne maison de Vendôme.”²³⁹ In fact, through her marriage to M. de Clèves, Mme. de Clèves finds herself doubly entrenched in and bound to the Protestant cause. Horowitz’s claim that Clèves and Nemours sit “novelistically” at the helm of the religious (and political) factions—the Clèves-Bourbon-Vendôme triumvirate and the Nemours-Guise clan, respectively—that rent France apart during the Wars of Religion allows us to transpose the princess’s personal amorous predicament to France’s religious and political dilemma, represented by the deepening religious divide at court.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Louis K. Horowitz, “Primary Sources: *La Princesse de Clèves*,” *French Forum* 25.2 (May 2000), 169.

²³⁸ Horowitz, “Primary Sources,” 169.

²³⁹ Horowitz, “Primary Sources,” 169.

²⁴⁰ Horowitz, “Primary Sources,” 169.

Madame de Clèves's extramarital desire for Nemours is synonymous with individual affiliation with a faith outside the official religion of state. While critiquing the idea of enforced conversions, Sebastien Castellion compares a scenario in which a man is forced to profess allegiance to a religion he does not believe in to a marriage that resembles that of the Clèves. He writes: "Ou il est ainsi comme si un mari vouloit avoir une femme qui de bouche luy promist foy de mariage: & de cœur tout au cõtraire. Certainement un tel homme seroit [bien] digne, au lieu d'une loyalle espouse, d'avoir une paillarde secrette."²⁴¹ His comparison works in that both religion and love are affairs of the heart. It also shows how we can read Lafayette's love stories more deeply as commentaries on the religious politics at the time it was being written and first read.

Louise Horowitz sees both Clèves and Nemours as losers in the end, observing that the princess rejects them both. My reading will take a different direction. While the princess does reject both men in different ways, she also accepts both men in different ways. For example, the princess attenuates the finality of her decision to retire from court life and Nemours's presence with the following words: "croyez que les sentiments que j'ai pour vous, seront éternels, et qu'ils subsisteront *également*, quoi que je fasse" (*Clèves* 473; emphasis added). The princess affirms Nemours and her feelings for him in the process of rejecting him in favor of honoring her duty to her husband's memory. The use of the adverb "également" further supports my reading that the princess chooses both men at the end of the novel and suggests that though they possess different parts of her heart, their impacts are of *equal* merit and value. The princess's ultimate decision is not exclusive, *either* M. de Clèves *or* Nemours, *either* Protestantism *or* Catholicism. Her decision is inclusive: *both* M. de Clèves *and* Nemours, *both* Protestantism *and* Catholicism.

²⁴¹ Castellion, 55.

Therefore, seeing both men as losers takes into account only one aspect of the princess's ultimate choice. We can read both men as winners in the end in that the princess actually accepts them both to some degree. The realm of the princess's heart encompasses and accommodates both Nemours and Clèves and their respective faiths, Catholicism and Protestantism, and suggests that the realm of France can be equally inclusive. The equal division of the princess's time between two separate spaces during her final retreat—"elle passait ne partie de l'année dans cette maison religieuse, et l'autre chez elle"—corroborates this view of the princess's decision as one that is inclusive of the differences her husband and lover represent (*Clèves* 478).

Clèves as Protestant, Nemours as Catholic

Numerous clues in the text serve to suggest the religious and political orientations of the male main characters. The very name of the Duc de Nemours recalls the sixteenth-century Edict of Nemours²⁴² (1585), a treaty imposed on Henri III by the Catholic League exactly a century before Louis XIV's Edit of Fontainebleau (1685), which revoked the Edict of Nantes.²⁴³ The Edict of Nemours rendered all preceding policies (Poitiers, Nérac, and Fleix) extending peace towards the Huguenots null and void in much the same way that the later Edict of Fontainebleau nullified the Edict of Nantes.²⁴⁴ In this respect, then, the princess's ultimate rejection of Nemours's proposal of marriage might be read as a refusal of the fast-approaching Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), which was only seven years away at the time the *nouvelle* was published.

²⁴² Agrippa d'Aubigné remarked that the Edict of Nemours made three times as many Huguenots go to mass as had the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres. See Pierre Joxe, 171.

²⁴³ Pierre Joxe, 170.

²⁴⁴ Joxe, 171.

Louise K. Horowitz observes that Protestantism is one of the “innomables” of the novel and notes that it is never directly named: “it enjoys a euphemistic status as “la religion nouvelle.”²⁴⁵ Since no character is ever explicitly designated as Protestant, it is Clèves’ rhetoric and word choice that associate him with the faith. During a conversation with his wife prior to his death, in which he calls himself “un homme qui vous aimait d’une passion véritable et légitime,” M. de Clèves tells Mme de Clèves that “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” (*Clèves* 459). His remark recalls the Protestant texts posted in prominent locations around Paris during the Affair of the Placards, on October 18, 1534. Entitled the “Articles variables sur les horribles, grands & importables abus de la Messe papalle,” the pamphlets called the Catholic Mass a “priestly sham that seduced the people.”²⁴⁶ In contrasting his “legitimate” and “true” love to Nemours’s disguised seduction, Clèves clearly inserts the princess’s personal dilemma of the heart directly into the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The opposition Clèves draws between himself, using the singular pronoun “je,” and the plural noun “des gens,” nameless men who intend to seduce his wife, sets one man against many, introducing an imbalanced “me” versus “them” dynamic that further emphasizes his status as a religious minority amidst a Catholic majority, represented best by Nemours, the man every man (and woman) at court wishes to imitate.

If the love story in the *nouvelle* mirrors the political and religious storyline of France during the sixteenth century, then it becomes possible to insert the tale and its heroine into the

²⁴⁵ Horowitz, “Primary Sources,” 169.

²⁴⁶ Mark Greengrass, *The French Reformation*, (Oxford; New York: Blackwell), 1987, 24.

then-ongoing debate about how best to approach religious difference (Protestantism) under a divine-right monarchy whose stability seemed to depend on the French state's unification under Catholicism. If Nemours and Clèves represent the Catholic and Protestant factions, then the princess's response to both men becomes of utmost importance.

Name of Clèves

Surprisingly, no scholars to date have inquired into the significance of the name Lafayette gives to her heroine, to the husband her heroine is determined to honor, and to the work as a whole. As we have mentioned before, Louise K. Horowitz has commented on how names of people and places used throughout the work, such as Montpensier and Coulommiers, add a depth of meaning and symbolism to the novella that would otherwise be missing. She writes:

La Princesse de Clèves . . . is a deeply encoded piece of fiction, dependent on the onomastic display, the vertiginous spilling of names, evident from its first pages. Romance is textually dominant, but, hidden within the tale of passion denied and censured, is the curious nomenclature that points directly to schism.²⁴⁷

Horowitz is correct in pointing out how characters' names separate them squarely into one of two religious (and political) camps. I argue that the name Clèves, given to Lafayette's main characters and to the novella as a whole, also points us to national unity and cohesion amidst and despite religious differences via the name's association with the duchy of Clèves. Even the name "Clèves," as Peggy Kamuf observes, has links to "the old French verb "cliver," [which] connotes simultaneously rupture and union: "to cleave" is to split and to adhere, to join and to sever."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Louise K. Horowitz, "Remembrance of Wars Past: Lafayette's Historical Hindsight," *Teaching Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Women's Writers*, 207.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

Therefore, even in his name (the name he gives his wife), the character of Clèves illustrates how separate groups (here designated by religious faith) can join together amidst and despite their difference to form a larger cohesive community or national group.

The name Clèves also has significance as a site of coexistence between people of different faiths. Significantly, in 1666, four years after *La Princesse de Montpensier* appeared in print and a decade before *La Princesse de Clèves* hit *Le Mercure Galant*, a trip to the duchy of Clèves convinced a doubtful John Locke that nonviolent coexistence of multiple religions within one nation, what we would call today religious tolerance or *laïcité* in France, was in fact possible. Roger Woolhouse describes Locke as having been profoundly impressed by the numerous sects and denominations that worshiped freely in Clèves.²⁴⁹ Woolhouse explains Locke's reaction to his experience, saying "He wrote to Boyle that there was no more uniformity in the religion of the people of Clèves than there was in their irregular streets and that . . . they quietly permit one another to choose their way to heaven."²⁵⁰ Does Locke's epiphany, sandwiched neatly between the earlier publication of *La Princesse de Montpensier* and the later publication of *La Princesse de Clèves*, explain the differences in their attitudes towards the feasibility of religious toleration?

While I could find no direct connections between Locke and Lafayette, indirect connections in both the literary and political fields abound. Woolhouse names Madeleine de Scudéry's *Le Grand Cyrus*, a work in whose creation Lafayette likely participated if we are to believe Joan DeJean's concept of salon writing, as a work of interest among Locke and his Oxford clique.²⁵¹ Woolhouse also mentions an interest Locke took in Descartes's work, so it

²⁴⁹ Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 63.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

seems as though Locke was familiar with the French intellectual scene.²⁵² Locke held two official positions on the Council of Trade and Plantations; he was both Secretary of Presentations and Treasurer under Shaftesbury during Charles II's reign. Furthermore, Locke spent a short period of time in France from 1675 to 1679, during which time Lafayette would likely have been composing *La Princesse de Clèves*.²⁵³ Always in tune to political thoughts and observations of others, Lafayette seems to have allowed Locke's observation about the Duchy of Clèves to inspire her novella.

Henry II's and Louis XIV's Religious Agendas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Readers would have been familiar with the high stakes of the religious conflict implied in the text. *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) was published shortly before the end of the Dutch War in 1679, which freed Louis XIV from concerns abroad and allowed him to once more concentrate on restoring religious unity within France.²⁵⁴ The signing of the Treaty of Cateau de Cambresis on April 3, 1659 foreshadowed a similar agreement Louis XIV would shortly make with Spain and the Emperor on August 15, 1684 called the Twenty Year Truce.²⁵⁵ According to Joseph Leclerc, Henry II viewed the treaty as “la réconciliation des princes catholiques contre l'hérésie.”²⁵⁶ *La Princesse de Clèves* begins at the time the treaty was signed. The Edict of Ecouen soon followed on June 2, 1559, a “véritable déclaration de guerre à ses sujets protestants.”²⁵⁷ Two days before the signing of the Twenty Year Truce in 1684, Madame de

²⁵² Ibid., 35.

²⁵³ Ibid., 119.

²⁵⁴ L. L. Bernard, “Foucault, Louvois, and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes”, *Church History* 25.1 (1956), 29.

²⁵⁵ L. L. Bernard, 31.

²⁵⁶ Leclerc, 27.

²⁵⁷ Leclerc, 27.

Maintenon wrote that “the King has determined to work for the complete conversion of heretics.”²⁵⁸ Louis XIV, according to Maintenon, was “ready to do anything which could be judged beneficial to religion” and had been in talks with Le Tellier and Chateauneuf.²⁵⁹ The two treaties can each be seen as heralds of hard times for Protestants in France, with the Wars of Religion of the sixteenth century and the impending persecution and Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, in addition to Louis XIV being free of the burden of international wars, his recent conflict with the Pope over *la régale* likely ignited his interest in restoring religious unity within France, as it was a surefire way to bolster the legitimacy of France’s Catholic Church in comparison to that of Rome.

Both Henri II and Louis XIV intended but ultimately failed to restore England to Catholicism. Henry II intended to place Marie Stuart on the throne of England in Elizabeth I’s palace, while Louis XIV negotiated The Secret Treaty of Dover (1670) with Charles II with the help of then Reine Dauphine Henriette Anne, Charles’s sister and wife to Louis XIV’s brother, a political mission Lafayette documents in *Histoire de la mort d’Henriette d’Angleterre*. In the secret treaty, which ultimately never came to fruition, Charles II promised that England would return officially to the Catholic fold.

L. L. Bernard characterizes Louis XIV’s Minister of War and Manufactures Louvois as “an unwilling agent” in the *dragonnades* and other methods of persecution that led up to and followed the Revocation and claims that Louvois emphasized moderation, especially towards the Protestant provincial nobility and manufacturers.²⁶⁰ Adolphe Michel corroborates Bernard’s

²⁵⁸ L. L. Bernard, 31.

²⁵⁹ L. L. Bernard, 31.

²⁶⁰ L. L. Bernard, 37.

perspective, calling Louvois “relativement modéré” before the Revocation.²⁶¹ Louvois apparently wrote to his brother the Archbishop of Reims the night before the Revocation:

One must think in terms of converting the larger part [of the Protestants] and not insist upon converting them all, there being often people of stubborn nature who will not be overcome by violence or excesses in the quartering of soldiers, which are not proper . . . His Majesty recommends that you treat with respect [Protestant] bankers and manufacturers.²⁶²

Lafayette might have known or sensed that Louvois was reluctant to persecute the Protestants on the scale Foucault and Louis XIV were asking for since, she did correspond with him, though mostly on personal matters related to her son’s military service.

Mme de Clèves as an Outsider at Court

The dilemma of outsiders struggling for recognition is reflected metaphorically in the text. In “Beyond Tolerance and Hospitality” Priya Kumar writes:

A stranger is one who may share your space—who may live in proximity to you—but at the same time is perceived as an *unfamiliar, undecidable* person. The unforgivable sin of “late entry”—and the fact that the moment of entry can be determined or pinpointed—enables the production of the stranger as nonnative, non-autochthonous because he did not belong “originally,” from the very beginning, since antiquity. Accordingly, the

²⁶¹ Adolphe Michel, “Louvois et la Revocation de L’Edit de Nantes”, *Bulletin historique et littéraire, Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme français*, 17.7 (1868), 312.

²⁶² L. L. Bernard, 36.

stranger is an interstitial figure who destabilizes the spatial ordering of the world into friends and enemies.²⁶³

In this respect, the Princesse de Clèves is clearly a stranger at court. Madame de Clèves, then Mademoiselle de Chartres, doesn't appear at court until after all the other courtiers have been introduced. She enters the story twelve paragraphs into the novella, and even then she initially remains nameless and unidentified: "Il parut alors une beauté à la Cour, qui attira les yeux de tout le monde" (*Clèves* 337). Furthermore, her atypical education at the hands of her mother as well as her physical appearance set her apart as strikingly different. We learn that "la blancheur de son teint et ses cheveux blonds donnaient un éclat que l'on n'a jamais vu qu'à elle" (*Clèves* 338). Her sincerity in a court full of dishonest intriguers also sets her apart (*Clèves* 348). At first sight of his future wife, Clèves "ne pouvait comprendre qui était cette belle personne qu'il ne connaissait point" and "il fut bien surpris quand il sut qu'on ne la connaissait point" (*Clèves* 338). Clèves's first impression of her is marked by surprise and shock: "Il fut tellement surpris de sa beauté, qu'il ne put cacher sa surprise . . . et il la regardait toujours avec étonnement" (*Clèves* 338-339). When Clèves gathers with those belonging to the king's sister's circle, his inquiries about his future wife initially return nothing: "Madame lui dit, qu'il n'y avait point de personne comme celle qu'il dépeignait, et que, s'il y en avait quelqu'une elle serait connue de tout le monde" (*Clèves* 339). Furthermore, the tangled web of marital alliances at court do not welcome Mlle de Chartres, but shun her instead. We learn that "[la] Maison de Clèves et celle de Guise craignissent son alliance, au lieu de la souhaiter" (*Clèves* 343) and that "personne n'osait plus penser à Mlle de Chartes" (*Clèves* 346). No one except M. de Clèves, that is.

²⁶³ Priya Kumar, "Beyond Tolerance and Hospitality", *Living Together: Jacques Derrida's Communities of Violence and Peace*, 84-85.

So, in the midst of a very inhospitable court, Clèves shows his future wife hospitality and “respect,” even while she is still a complete stranger, a welcome he solidifies by bringing her into his marital home. At their first meeting, coordinated by a friend of Mme de Chartres, Clèves tells Mlle de Chartres to “se souvenir qu’il avait été le premier à l’admirer, et que sans la connaître il avait eu pour elle tous les sentiments de respect et d’estime qui lui étaient dus” (*Clèves* 340).

By contrast, Nemours is portrayed as an aggressor. Nemours stalks Mme de Clèves at court, following her around like a wild animal stalking its prey: “ce Prince trouva le moyen de voir plusieurs fois Mme de Clèves” (*Clèves* 365). Nemours is a nearly omnipresent threatening presence from whom she can’t seem to escape. Priya Kumar writes:

Of course strangeness and the traits associated with the stranger are not natural; the construction of the stranger as stranger is a continuous process that takes place in everyday life through a nexus of social practices and institutional exclusions that must be reiterated continually. In this way, the stranger is positioned as someone other than one’s own, who is outside one’s ensemble, even if she or he does not reside in an outside space or territory.²⁶⁴

Within the realm of *La Princesse de Clèves*, Henri II’s interest in acquiring England through Marie Stuart’s right to the throne and restoring the then nominally Protestant country to Catholicism diverts to Madame de Clèves. Nemour’s “impatience pour le voyage d’Angleterre commença même à se ralentir” at his first sighting of Mme de Clèves (*Clèves* 358). He is no longer concerned with bringing France’s religious Other across the English Channel back into

²⁶⁴ Priya Kumar, “Beyond Tolerance and Hospitality,” *Living Together: Jacques Derrida’s Communities of Violence and Peace*, 85.

the Catholic fold; all energies coalesce on the newest religious Other within France, Mme de Clèves.

Religious Difference as a Disease

In the text, Mme de Cleves's attraction to Nemours is closely associated with sickness. Once Mme de Chartres discovers her daughter's inclination for Nemours she becomes ill and dies (*Clèves* 366). M. de Clèves also dies after believing wrongly that Mme de Clèves acted on her passion for Nemours. Minority religions are also often compared to sickness in writings of the time. In the preface to his *Letter on Toleration*, John Locke calls the religious problems in England a "distemper" in need of "cure" and remedy." Elsewhere, Locke speaks of "the contagion of idolatry, superstition, and heresy."²⁶⁵ Voltaire uses the same image of an illness too far gone to be extracted without causing the death of the nation as a whole. He writes: "n'arrachez pas du corps un ulcère invétéré qui entraînerait avec lui la destruction du corps."²⁶⁶ Elimination of a minority sect, what Voltaire characterizes as an irritating "ulcère," especially once it reaches a certain size, could cause the deterioration of the nation, once again conceived of as an ailing human body, as a whole.

The Prince as Agent and Victim

The character of the prince, whose untimely death forms the climax of the tale, is central to this dynamic. In this chapter, I would like to call attention to the oft-overlooked and, I believe, over-simplified character of M. de Clèves. Most read M. de Clèves as a miserably weak

²⁶⁵ Locke, 25.

²⁶⁶ Voltaire, *Traité de la tolérance*, 81.

character to be pitied at best, or to be mocked at worst. I hope to show that his role is much more important and that his character is much more complex than critics have previously realized. Much more than a necessary stumbling block to his wife's desires or a husband pining after his wife's attention, M. de Clèves arguably occupies the most important role in the novel. Without his presence, influence, and example, Mme. de Clèves's extraordinary legacy would not exist. M. de Clèves functions as a unique character whose memory proves to be vital to the evolution of the princess's character. His contributions to the novel, far from static or inconsequential, determine and direct the ending of the princess's story. While Mme de Clèves might seem to act on her own, or even on behalf of her mother's teachings, she is her husband's creature, an identity that even the title of the work playfully suggests: "la Princesse *de* (M. de) Clèves."

Emile Magne discovered a work entitled *Le Prince de Clèves* listed in a bookstore registry dated December 18, 1671 and postulated that *La Princesse de Clèves* might have initially been given a different title.²⁶⁷ Antoine Adam pushes against Magne's claim, calling it a "hypothèse incertaine" in need of "des preuves plus solides."²⁶⁸ I call Magne's study to mind, not to validate or invalidate it, but to capitalize on the new perspective his claim provides for us when approaching the novella. In the majority of criticism around *La Princesse de Clèves*, Mme de Clèves tends to garner the majority of critic's attention, leaving other lesser characters, like M. de Clèves, with a cursory glance at best. Magne's claim, even if it is far-fetched, as Adam convincingly maintains, encourages readers to approach Lafayette's novella differently. Instead of focusing solely on the princess, we are directed first towards her husband.

²⁶⁷ Antoine Adam, 183.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

Past Critical Perspectives

Critical attention to date has focused on how other female characters school Mme de Clèves in the realm of the court. Faith Beasley, for example, has identified Marie Stuart as a female *historienne* whose stories guide and instruct the princess at court.²⁶⁹ Other critics focus on the mother's early involvement in her daughter's life, particularly the atypical education she provided prior to her daughter's introduction to court life. Marianne Hirsch is perhaps one of the best examples of this view. In her article "A Mother's Discourse: Incorporation and Repetition in *La Princesse de Clèves*," she argues that the princess's story reads as "an apprenticeship to another woman, her mother."²⁷⁰ Few critics, however, give much attention to M. de Clèves, even though his relationship to Mme de Clèves is perhaps the most intimate of the novel.

Those critics who do discuss M. de Clèves, such as Louise K. Horowitz, tend to dehumanize and demonize his character, writing: "M. de Clèves, seen so often as the 'innocent victim of a love triangle, is scarcely that."²⁷¹ Horowitz continues: "The prince speaks, of course, not as an individual, but as the embodiment of a code embedded deeply in the minds of the characters and in the text."²⁷² She finds his discourse to be "accusatory, judgmental, and punishing" and sees him as the very incarnation of patriarchal power structures.²⁷³ According to Horowitz, M. de Clèves, as both "supreme censor" and "prime creator" of his wife's illicit desires, is a bit of a tease.²⁷⁴ Adopting a more forgiving perspective than Horowitz, Peter

²⁶⁹ See Beasley *Revising Memory*, 219-221.

²⁷⁰ Marianne Hirsch, "A Mother's Discourse: Incorporation and Repetition in *La Princesse de Clèves*," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), 68.

²⁷¹ Louise K. Horowitz, "A Tale of Two Henry's, a Saga of Three Jacques's: *La Princesse de Clèves*," *Dalhousie French Studies* 26 (1994), 29.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

William Shoemaker observes that M. de Clèves functions as a flawed confidant and authority figure for Mme de Clèves.²⁷⁵ As a product of patriarchal ideology, M. de Clèves cannot help but to disseminate some of its messages, as Horowitz maintains. However, in claiming M. de Clèves serves as an incarnation of the patriarchal ideology governing life at court, Horowitz forgets to consider the ways in which M. de Clèves pushes against and outright defies customs of that very same ideology in order to pursue his own personal wishes.

M. de Clèves's defiance is well-known and advertised at court. Clèves differs from M. de Guise, a societal rule follower, who "savait bien aussi que ses frères n'approuverait pas qu'il se mariât, par la crainte de l'abaissement que les mariages des cadets apportent d'ordinaire dans les grandes maisons" (*Clèves* 343). Cardinal de Lorraine, the uncle of Guise, "condamna l'attachement [que le duc de Guise] témoignait pour Mlle de Chartres avec une chaleur extraordinaire" because of his "haine pour le Vidame, qui était secrète alors, et qui éclata depuis" (*Clèves* 346). Similarly, M. de Clèves's father, the Duc de Nevers, who "apprit cet attachement avec chagrin; il crut néanmoins qu'il n'avait qu'à parler à son fils pour le faire changer de conduite; mais il fut bien surpris de trouver en lui le dessein formé d'épouser Mlle de Chartres. Il blâma ce dessein, il s'emporta et cacha si peu son emportement que le sujet s'en répandit bientôt à la Cour" (*Clèves* 343). In choosing to marry against the wishes of his father, M. de Clèves violates the long-standing tradition of second sons going into the clergy as a means of ensuring the consolidation of family wealth.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, in choosing to abstain from adultery himself and in professing his love and admiration for his wife amidst his suffering, M. de Clèves

²⁷⁵ Peter William Shoemaker, "Lafayette's Confidence Game: Plausibility and Private Confession in *La Princesse de Clèves* and *Zaïde*," *French Forum* 27.1 (2002), 53.

²⁷⁶ See George Duby's *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

diverges blatantly from societal expectations, as most men in his situation would have sought love outside of their marriage. Clèves, then, far from being a character representative of those adhering to the patriarchal ideology, as Horowitz and others have maintained, actually proves to be one who forges his own unique life path in spite of societal expectations.

Clèves as a Pastoral Figure

Furthermore, as the second oldest in his family, “le second qu’on appelait le prince de Clèves, était digne de soutenir la gloire de son nom; il était brave et magnifique, et il avait une prudence qui ne se trouve guère avec la jeunesse,” M. de Clèves would be expected to carry out a religious role in society. In this context, his marriage to Mlle de Chartres might be conceived of as an initiative²⁷⁷ with religious implications (*Clèves* 333). Even though he does not officially enter the priesthood, Clèves still functions as a pastoral figure, not only for his wife, but also for his friends. He returns to Coulommiers later than expected because “j’étais si nécessaire à la consolation d’un malheureux [his conned and betrayed friend Estouteville] qu’il m’était impossible de le quitter” (*Clèves* 367). Furthermore, Clèves entertains the possibility of his wife loving someone else long before it happens, and even suggests how he would handle the situation, saying: “Je crois que si ma maîtresse, et même ma femme, m’avouait que quelqu’un lui plût, j’en serais affligé sans en être aigri. Je quitterais le personnage d’amant ou de mari, pour la conseiller et pour la plaindre” (*Clèves* 372). Clèves suggests a transition of roles, from lover or husband to counselor and lamenter.

²⁷⁷ The novel refers to Clèves’s marriage to Mlle de Chartres as a “dessein” three times and as a “procédé.” It is M. de Clèves’s own personal mission to marry Mlle de Chartes, even if she does not truly love him.

Clèves's plan to counsel or advise his theoretically straying wife, instead of allowing her to continue in the sin or vice of adultery, aligns with Michel de L'Hôpital's belief about how heretics should be treated: "Nous devons par tous moyens essayer de retirer ceux qui sont en erreur, et ne faire comme celui, qui voyant l'homme ou beste charge dedans la fosse, au lieu de la retirer luy donne du pied: nous la devons aider sans attendre qu'on nous demande secours. Qui fait autrement est sans charité: C'est plus hair les hommes que les vices."²⁷⁸

Clèves' plan to "conseiller" or counsel and advise his wife lines up with the understanding that the word is the primary weapon of the Christian faith on earth, rather than earthly coercion or violence.²⁷⁹ For example, Ephesians 6:17 portrays "the sword of the Spirit" as the "word of God." Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 10:4 reads, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." According to Locke, a church has a right to instruct and to excommunicate. Furthermore, Locke believes the "arms of the church" to be "exhortations, admonitions, and advices," with excommunication or expulsion being the "last and utmost force of ecclesiastical authority."²⁸⁰ For Locke, the church has no place on the literal battlefield, only the spiritual one, which is built on prayer and open discussion with unbelievers.

Christian love becomes a powerful force for toleration as well. 1 Corinthians 14:4-7 defines love as follows: "Love is patient, love is kind; it does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist upon its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." The idea of love "[bearing] all things" and "[enduring] all things" in

²⁷⁸ "13 December 1560," *La Plume et la tribune*, 402.

²⁷⁹ Forst, 42.

²⁸⁰ Locke, 131.

patience aligns with the classical definition of toleration as suffering through or putting up with something objectionable. Furthermore, the fact that it “does not insist upon its own way,” but leaves others space and freedom to live and believe as they like, is yet another aspect included in toleration. Love is an other-centered, rather than a self-centered action. Expounding on the concept of love, 1 Corinthians 4:21 contrasts a “rod,” meaning discipline, to “love in a spirit of gentleness.” Romans 12:10 calls for Christians to “Love one another with brotherly affection.” Similarly, Romans 13:9, as well as Galatians 5:14, summarize all the commandments as “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Matthew 5:44 calls Christians to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Such love is depicted in Lafayette’s works as far from the norm in either relationships or politics. John Campbell writes that the Clèves marriage serves as “a microcosm of the mistrust which in this novel is the norm of human relationships.”²⁸¹ Campbell’s claim extends nicely to the religious situation in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in all but one respect; far from demonstrating the “norm” of human relationships, their marriage provides an exceptional example of the ways in which such mistrust amidst those of different religious groups can be dealt with constructively rather than destructively. Generally, the mistrust between religious communities in France ended in violence, conflict, persecution, and separation; the marriages depicted in Lafayette’s first two tales, *La Comtesse de Tende* and *La Princesse de Montpensier*, illustrate this fact. In *La Princesse de Clèves*, however, the Clèves marriage remains intact (even after M. de Clèves’s death) and the novella ends on a peaceful note of “repos” instead of the violent and dramatic endings seen in the earlier two tales. Their marriage

²⁸¹ John Campbell, “Is There an ‘Aveu’ in *La Princesse de Clèves*?”, *Quinquereme* (1984): 165-171.

serves as a demonstration or example of the ways in which the mistrust rampant between Protestants and Catholics in France might be combatted, disempowered, and ultimately destroyed. The mistrust seen in the Clèves marriage is ultimately overcome in order to enable a very different ending to the religious dilemma plaguing France.

This different ending is made possible by the princess's unprecedented confession, something that "que l'on n'a jamais fait à son mari." Peter William Shoemaker writes that the princess's confession constitutes what he terms a "foundational and exceptional"²⁸² speech act that creates "a newfound sense of self"²⁸³ for the princess. Far from endowing the princess with a spirit of individualism, I would argue that the confession seems to merge the princess's identity with that of her husband. In ultimately acquiescing to her husband's wish for her to confess, she makes it possible for the couple to unite under one common initiative led by M. de Clèves. The confession scene creates a new sense of self for the nation as a whole.

But even as the couple seems to find accord, new conflicts arise. The princess's request that Clèves not corner her into a confession she does not have the courage to make suggests that she is in fact being coerced into an admission: "ne me contraignez point, lui-dit-elle, à vous avouer une chose que je n'ai pas la force de vous avouer" (*Clèves* 419). She emphasizes her weakness here, her inability to follow through with a confession on her own merit, quite a believable situation for a young girl who seems never to have left her mother's side and who was quickly transferred to the supervision of her husband. Clèves, intent on seeing his mission through, ignores her requests and forcefully orders his wife to tell him what she is hiding: "vous avez des raisons pour souhaiter être seule et je vous conjure de me les dire" (*Clèves* 418). He is

²⁸² Shoemaker, 55.

²⁸³ Ibid.

both relentless and patient in his efforts to draw the truth out of his wife, while she is initially stubborn: “Il la pressa longtemps de les lui apprendre sans pouvoir l’y obliger” (*Clèves* 418).

Ultimately, Clèves’s persistent questioning pays off and Mme de Clèves complies with his wishes in all but one respect; she withholds the name of the man she loves. In a state of near exasperation, she throws herself on her knees and offers him the following words: “je vais vous faire un aveu que l’on n’a jamais fait à son mari; mais l’innocence de ma conduite et des intentions m’en donne la force” (*Clèves* 418). The princess’s abrupt transition here, from claiming not to have the strength to make an avowal one moment to maintaining that the very innocence of her behavior and intentions endows her with enough strength to confess at another, should cause us as readers to be wary of her words and question the trustworthiness of her self-presentation in this scene. She twists the truth here, assigning herself agency for the avowal when the idea came from her husband, who both suggested it in an earlier scene and cajoled her into making it. She continues:

Je vous demande mille pardons, si j’ai des sentiments qui vous déplaisent, du moins je ne vous déplaîrai 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 n’en a jamais eu; conduisez-moi, ayez-pitié de moi, et aimez-moi encore, si vous pouvez. (*Clèves* 418)

The princess presents herself as a catalyzer here, using “faire” twice and talking about her “actions,” again a curious self-presentation because she is predominantly a passive character of thought and inaction until the end of the novel. She makes a distinction between how she and her husband feel now, “j’ai des sentiments qui vous déplaisent,” and how her actions will (or won’t) affect him in the future: “je ne vous déplaîrai jamais par mes actions.” Once again, she usurps

credit for the avowal, referencing only herself, “pour faire ce que je fais,” and leaving her husband entirely out of the equation. It is as if the confession was entirely her idea.

Her final entreaties to her husband, a series of commands telling him how to interact with her, amount to acquiescence to the plan Clèves hypothetically proposed for himself much earlier in the novella if ever faced with the situation that now confronts him. Even the princess’s words here echo those used by Clèves earlier in the novella. Her plea for him to lead her—“conduisez-moi”—recalls Clèves’s earlier plan to “conseiller” his wife, just as her entreaty for him to take pity on her recalls his plan made previously to “la plaindre.” She essentially voluntarily makes herself her husband’s subject instead of subscribing to the religious and political ideologies of the time. She implicitly subscribes to his toleration of religious Others. Interestingly, however, she tacks on a third initiative to her husband’s two, entreating him to love her still, if he can.

The “aveu” scene creates some degree of equality between M. de Clèves and his wife. Both Mme de Clèves and M. de Clèves ask for each other’s pity: Mme de Clèves says “ayez pitié de moi” and M. de Clèves mirrors his wife’s request, saying “ayez pitié de moi vous-même, Madame . . . j’en suis digne” (*Clèves* 419). Furthermore, both entreat each other with imperative commands, suggesting that each has the power to grant or withhold requests. Moreover, the fact that M. de Clèves makes his wife stand up and get off her knees, instead of allowing her to stay in such a submissive position, further stresses their equality. The couple are not exactly equals in this ambiguous scene, since Mme de Clèves is following a script suggested by her husband, even as she believes herself to be acting spontaneously. Nevertheless, the Clèves’ interactions in the Coulommiers *aveu* scene give us a glimpse of horizontal toleration at work, a relationship based on mutual respect.

Critics have read Clèves' treatment of his wife in the avowal scene as brutal, unloving, and unkind. But is it really? Doesn't Clèves mediate and attenuate his accusations with assurances of his respect and goodwill towards his wife? Though some of Clèves' discourse is accusatory, judgmental, and punishing during his wife's confession, he voices and exerts a will to refrain from such practices. First of all, he acknowledges his fault and asks the princess to anticipate his weakness and regulate his future behavior: "je suis injuste, refusez-moi toutes les fois que je vous demanderai de pareilles choses" (*Clèves* 422). To be accusatory and judgmental in a scenario such as his is a very human reaction. Lafayette wants to paint a believable, relatable character. This is not an investigation in order to expose his wife's faults in an abusive way, as the concept of an inquisition implies, but rather in a loving, guiding, and ultimately constructive way.

The ability or inability of an individual to tolerate their respective religious "Other" seems to be integrally tied up with their capacity or incapacity to believe the best, to maintain a positive outlook or regard towards their religious "Other." M. and Mme de Clèves are the first couple in Lafayette's succession of novellas to be able to successfully maintain positive regard for one another. M. de Clèves is described as being someone "qui avait naturellement beaucoup de douceur et de complaisance pour sa femme" (*Clèves* 384) and as "un homme qui avait si bonne opinion d'elle" (*Clèves* 384). Likewise, the princess describes her husband as "un mari . . . qui avait tant d'estime et tant d'amitié pour elle, et qui venait de lui en donner encore des marques par la manière dont il avait reçu ce qu'elle lui avait avoué" (*Clèves* 422).²⁸⁴ Even after she divulges her attraction to another man, Clèves "la conjurait de croire que quoiqu'il fût affligé, il avait pour elle une tendresse et une estime dont elle devait être satisfaite." He can still

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

see her value despite her shortcomings. Clèves retains an accepting and welcoming attitude towards his wife, who functions as his religious “Other” in that she prefers Catholic Nemours, who epitomizes the fanatical and intolerant Catholicism of the Catholic League, over her husband. The mutual acquiescence to each other that the Clèves portray in this scene represents the coalescing of both Catholic and Protestant faiths under the same French identity.

The differences in how similar scenarios play out in Lafayette’s other works suggest the relative success of the Clèves’ attempts at tolerance. As we saw in our chapter about *La Princesse de Montpensier*, the Prince de Montpensier assumes (wrongly) that Chabanes not only betrayed him, but expressly meant to cause him ill. He is too quick to demonize Chabanes as his religious “Other,” making it easy for him to ultimately rejoice at his death. Readers, however, thanks to the novella’s narrative, know this not to be true, as Chabanes initially did all he could to preserve and strengthen his friend’s marriage. Though the friends attempt to talk it out, a communicational impasse prevents them from ever coming to an understanding. Similarly, in *La Comtesse de Tende*, the Comte de Tende, whom Waldberg has hailed as “a husband even more tolerant than Clèves,”²⁸⁵ is able to envision a solution of toleration precisely because he continues to see his wife’s value amidst her failure. His wife, however, unlike the Princesse de Clèves, is not a willing participant in his initiative for toleration.

Ultimately, M. de Clèves initially seems to take the same path as the Prince de Montpensier did in Lafayette’s earlier novella. His own *imagined assumption* that his wife committed adultery lands him on his deathbed and ultimately relieves him of his suffering. It is almost as if he forces himself to believe the worst in spite of clear evidence to the contrary. In the

²⁸⁵ J. W. Scott, “Criticism and *La Comtesse de Tende*,” *The Modern Language Review* 50.1, 1955, 17.

same way that the Prince de Montpensier's imagined assumption that Chabanes was an unfaithful friend facilitates an impasse in their friendship—what we have read as a failed attempt at religious toleration—M. de Clèves's assumption that Nemours and his wife had an affair at Coulommiers leads to his death. The dialogue in which Clèves and his wife engage with this question, however, unlike that of Montpensier and Chabanes in the earlier novella, proves to be a turning point in Clèves's outlook on his wife.

Pacts of Friendship

The notion of a pact between mutually consenting parties to negotiate a deep-seated conflict has historical precedent in French history. The first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694) defines "amitié" as an "affection mutuelle, réciproque entre deux personnes à peu près d'égal condition."²⁸⁶ In "'Peace Must Come from Us': Friendship Pacts Between the Confessions During the Wars of Religion" Olivier Christin studies agreements designed to create mutual understanding that were concluded between the religious faiths in numerous localities and provinces during the Wars of Religion in France.²⁸⁷ Christin claims that the parties involved acted on their own initiative without any prompting or cajoling from external parties, to such an extent that he describes their agreements as "pacts of reciprocal friendship" and as "formal agreements . . . in which signatories proclaim their solidarity with regard to a general but well-determined objective."²⁸⁸ Initially, these pacts took the form of "a sort of

²⁸⁶ *Dictionnaire Vivant de la langue française*, artfl.

²⁸⁷ Olivier Christin, "'Peace must come from us': friendship pacts between the confessions during the Wars of Religion," *Toleration and Religious Identity: The Edict of Nantes and its Implications in France, Britain, and Ireland*, (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press,) 92.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 93-4.

collective oath” that underlined the “consensual and unanimous character of the undertaking.”²⁸⁹ Christin describes these unions as “voluntary and egalitarian . . . personal commitments made on their own behalf and on behalf of others.”²⁹⁰ The texts of a pact made in Montélimar, for example, insisted that it was made “with good will, unanimously, and with no dissenting voices.” Similarly, a pact drawn up in Saint-Laurent-des-Arabes proclaimed to have been made “unanimously, with good will, friendship and consent, and with no dissenting voices.”²⁹¹ In Montélimar, the signatories to the pact of October 1567 promised to live “in perpetual peace, friendship and fraternity, as true citizens of a town who support, guard and defend one another.” In Saint-Laurent-des-Arabes, the people made a commitment “to love one another, to please and assist each other, and to ensure justice for all, as good and faithful inhabitants of a town should naturally do for one another.”²⁹² Crucially, Christin observes that “the inhabitants of the same town or village while still members of rival confessions, recognized each other as ‘friends’ and ‘fellow citizens;’ who should have identical guarantees, assurances, and even rights.”²⁹³ Christin goes on to identify “citizenship and friendship” as two concepts that were integral to the entire process of pacification during the Wars of Religion, from 1560 to the Edict of Nantes.²⁹⁴ In Montélimar, those included in the pact agreed to “peace, friendship and perpetual fraternity,” vocabulary that ended up being adopted in royal legislation in the second article of the Edict of Saint Germain (1570). The same article is repeated verbatim in the second article of the Edict of Boulogne (1573), in the second article of the Edict of Beaulieu (1576), and in the second article

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 94.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 95.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 94.

²⁹² Ibid., 96.

²⁹³ Ibid., 97-98.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

of the Peace of Bergerac (1577). The Edict of Nantes even used similar language, inviting members of the two confessions to live “as friends, brothers, and fellow citizens” in article two.²⁹⁵ Relationships of “tolerance” are often unequal, suggesting that a more powerful party abrogates to itself the right to accept or reject the existence of a minority group. These pacts offer a glimpse of a more equal relationship in which each party acts as a free agent.

Suffering Clèves

While the Cleves’ agreement holds out some hope of such an equal relationship, its success is deeply ambiguous. It ultimately results in a closer connection between the two, but also in suffering and conflict. Readers are continually reminded of M. de Clèves’s suffering, giving him an almost martyr-like role in the novella. When he asks the princess to marry him, he lets her know that “[les sentiments] qu’il avait pour elle étaient d’une nature qui le rendrait éternellement malheureux si elle n’obéissent que par devoir aux volontés de Madame sa mère” (*Clèves* 346-347). His love for Mme de Clèves, described as “une passion violente et inquiète qui troublait sa joie” (*Clèves* 349), keeps him in a perpetual state of anxiety and unease; the narrator notes “son affliction” (*Clèves* 446), describes him as being “saisi d’affliction” (*Clèves* 457), as writing “une lettre pleine d’affliction” (*Clèves* 448), and as having a “cœur pénétrait d’une douleur mortelle” (*Clèves* 424), and notes his “accablement” at the end of his life (*Clèves* 457). M. de Clèves’s sadness is compounded by his obsessive and tormenting desire to know and name the man who possesses his wife’s heart. He calls it a “cruelle incertitude” (*Clèves* 450) and says, “vous me cachez un nom qui me donne une curiosité avec laquelle je ne saurais vivre” (*Clèves* 425).

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 98.

He tries to relieve some of his agony by identifying Nemours as his rival, but ultimately it makes him feel not better, but worse. M. de Clèves emphasizes his unhappiness directly, saying: “je suis plus malheureux que je ne l’ai cru et je suis le plus malheureux de tous les hommes . . . je vous demande seulement de vous souvenir que vous m’avez rendu le plus malheureux homme du monde” (*Clèves* 447). M. de Clèves’s overly dramatic reaction to his servant’s report after his espionage at Coulommiers, as an event “qui allait décider du malheur de toute sa vie,” makes it seem as if he deliberately fulfills his own prophecy (*Clèves* 457). It is almost as if M. de Clèves engineers his own suffering, then deliberately casts himself in the ultimately fatal role of a victim in order to win over his wife’s affections. Clèves’ curious insistence on portraying himself as the victim suggests the mixed and ambiguous success of the experiment in toleration portrayed in this tale. While he claims that he can tolerate his wife’s feelings for Nemours, he ultimately cannot do so without forcing a crisis that proves fatal to him. The suffering Clèves endures squarely lines up with early modern understandings of toleration as something disagreeable one must endure or put up with. However, his descent into victim status suggests that there is a threshold or limit to what one can feasibly and healthily tolerate. Therefore, his success and failure expose the delicate balance that must be found for toleration to work, and suggest it to be an imperfect and temporary solution.

After the two suffer through her attraction to Nemours together, Mme de Clèves’ grief over her husband after his death endows her with a sense of duty to his memory. Interestingly, sickness and suffering renew the Clèves’s friendship and connection: “Cette affliction renouvelait l’amitié qu’elle avait pour M. de Clèves” (*Clèves* 458). Nemours recognizes “combien cette amitié faisait une diversion dangereuse à la passion qu’elle avait dans le cœur” (*Clèves* 458). It is now Mme de Clèves who is described as having an “affliction” (*Clèves* 458,

461), as being “affligée” (*Clèves* 458) by her husband’s plight and as having “une douleur violente de l’état où elle le voyait” (*Clèves* 458). The friendship that the Clèves develop amidst their suffering is a “dangerous” diversion, according to the text, precisely because it enables a longer-lasting toleration that can withstand any fanatical penchant for a purely Catholic France.

In the same way that *La Comtesse de Tende* and *La Princesse de Montpensier* call on the reader to reflect on the loss France sustained after the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of thousands of its Huguenots, *La Princesse de Clèves* serves as a kind of commemoration of M. de Clèves. His dying request of his wife, “Je vous prie que je puisse encore avoir la consolation de croire que ma mémoire vous sera chère et que, *s’il eût dépendu de vous*, vous eussiez eu pour moi les sentiments que vous avez pour un autre,” is a plea for acceptance that his wife ultimately honors at the end of the novel at the expense of her own desires (*Clèves* 461; emphasis added). (It is noteworthy that in this line, he literally makes Nemours an Other.) Mme de Clèves portrays attaining a tranquil, peaceful life and preserving M. de Clèves’s memory as interdependent tasks—suggesting that one cannot last without the other. She asserts: “Ce que je crois devoir à la mémoire de M. de Clèves serait faible s’il n’était soutenu par l’intérêt de mon repos, et les raisons de mon repos ont besoin d’être soutenues de celles de mon devoir” (*Clèves* 472).

The memory of M. de Clèves’s death²⁹⁶ haunts the princess incessantly and is reinforced as a traumatic event by the text, which depicts her having repetitive flashbacks that literally re-enact the event because her mind cannot represent it otherwise²⁹⁷:

²⁹⁶ John Campbell corroborates my reading of this scene, calling it a “guilt trip” in his article “The Cloud of Unknowing: Self-discovery in *La Princesse de Clèves*,” *French Studies* (1994), 402-415.

²⁹⁷ Michelle Balaev, “Trends in Literary Trauma Theory,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41.2 (June 2008), 151.

La douleur de cette princesse passait les bornes de la raison. Ce mari mourant, et mourant à cause d'elle et avec tant de tendresse²⁹⁸ pour elle, ne lui sortait point de l'esprit. Elle repassait incessamment toute ce qu'elle lui devait, et elle se faisait un crime de n'avoir pas eu de la passion pour lui, comme si c'eût été une chose qui eût été en son pouvoir. Elle ne trouvait de consolation qu'à penser qu'elle le regrettait autant qu'il méritait d'être regretté et qu'elle ne ferait dans le reste de sa vie que ce qu'il aurait été bien aise qu'elle eût fait s'il avait vécu. (*Clèves* 462)

The narrator's comment that the princess's grief "passait les bornes de la raison" suggests that her sadness allows her to briefly free her mind from the absolutist "one king, one faith, one law" ideology governing France under Louis XIV, one that deemed France an exclusively Catholic nation. Instead of focusing on the (Catholic) French identity constructed by the rejection of the (Protestant) "Other," represented by her husband, the princess ruminates on the very thing that was cast away, what Julia Kristeva has called the abject, and mourns its loss deeply. The repetition of the gerund "mourant," "dying" in English, suspends her husband's death in the present grammatically, enacting textually the scene that is stuck on repeat in her head. She labels herself a criminal: "elle se faisait un crime" for not having loved and accepted him more. This passage clearly delineates the princess as a representative of the collective guilt of the seventeenth-century French populace for their violent eradication of the Huguenot/Protestant "Other." The work turns the criminal discourse surrounding heresy on its head; the princess's preference for Nemours, representative of Catholicism, makes her a criminal, rather than her preference for her husband, representative of "heretical" Protestantism. Furthermore, the

²⁹⁸ The Comte de Tende, our other promoter of tolerance in Lafayette's works, also exhibits "tendresse" for his wife (and presumably her unborn child), too, providing a link between the two men as two examples of tolerance.

comment that the princess “ne ferait dans le reste de sa vie que ce qu’il aurait été bien aise qu’elle eût fait s’il avait vécu” suggests that the remainder of the princess’s life in the novella, specifically her retreat, is a subscription to her husband’s wishes.

The text engages deeply with the question of whether the princess is guilty, without ever providing a clear explanation. The question of which agents were guilty and deserved punishment was also a preoccupation of eighteenth-century discourse on religious tolerance. For Voltaire, the only case in which intolerance would ever be justified is when a state faces a group or individual with fanatical beliefs. Voltaire distinguishes a religious error, a misreading or misapplication of scripture, from a religious crime, a fanatical act that disturbs societal order. A religious group earns toleration from the majority by refraining from destructive and violent acts. “Pour qu’un gouvernement ne soit pas en droit de punir les erreurs des hommes, il est nécessaire que ces erreurs ne soient pas des crimes; elle ne sont des crimes que quand elle troublent la société, dès qu’elles inspirent le fanatisme; il faut donc que les hommes commencent par n’être pas fanatiques pour mériter la tolérance.”²⁹⁹ According to Voltaire, as soon as anyone resorts to violence or disturbs the public order and peace, they are guilty of being intolerant and should be apprehended: “mais enfin si . . . ils [les martyrs] éclatèrent violemment contre le culte reçu, quelque absurde qu’il put être, on est force d’avouer qu’eux-mêmes étaient intolérants.”³⁰⁰

Interestingly, the narrator at one point indicates that the princess’s guilt is misdirected: “elle se faisait un crime de n’avoir pas eu de la passion pour lui, *comme si c’eût été une chose qui eût été en son pouvoir*” (emphasis added). If not Mme de Clèves, then who is to blame? Mme de Clèves tells Nemours that “[i]l n’est que trop véritable que vous êtes la cause de la mort de M.

²⁹⁹ Voltaire, 121.

³⁰⁰ Voltaire, 71.

de Clèves; les soupçons que lui a donnés votre conduite inconsidérée lui ont coûté la vie, comme si vous la lui aviez ôtée de vos propres mains . . . je sais que c'est par vous qu'il est mort et que c'est à cause de moi" (*Clèves* 469). Immediately after M. de Clèves's death, Mme de Clèves's grief is described in terms of violence:

Mme de Clèves demeura dans une affliction si violente, qu'elle perdit quasi l'usage de la raison . . . elle n'était pas encore en état de sentir distinctement sa douleur. Quand elle commença d'avoir la force de l'envisager, et qu'elle vit quel mari elle avait perdu, qu'elle considéra qu'elle était la cause de sa mort, et que c'était par la passion qu'elle avait eue pour un autre, qu'elle en était cause, l'horreur qu'elle eut pour elle-même et pour M. de Nemours ne se peut représenter. (*Clèves* 461)

The violence of the princess's grief in this scene, which causes her to lose her ability to reason, can be read as a traumatic event. The text's use of the verb "envisager" here, which gives the impression of the princess conjuring up a face to represent her grief in her imagination, is realized in the following clause as she "vit quel mari elle avait perdu."

Mme de Clèves ultimately seems to reject Nemours because of fears, expressed by both she and her husband, that are oriented in the future:

Que même en mourant il lui avait témoigné de la crainte qu'elle ne l'*épousât*; son austère vertu était si blessée de cette imagination, qu'elle ne trouvait guère moins de crime à épouser M. de Nemours, qu'elle en avait trouvé à l'aimer pendant la vie de son mari. les maux qu'elle *prévoyait* en épousant ce Prince. (*Clèves* 465)

The intimate way in which the princess describes Nemours's killing of M. de Clèves brings to mind the hands-on approach Parisians (and provincials) took during the Saint Bartholomew's

Day Massacres. Her horror, one which the princess's narrative leaves blank and unexplained, seems to be the massacres.

Clèves' Death Offers Theoretical Perspective

The success of M. de Clèves's initiative to make his wife into an exemplum of religious tolerance becomes evident amidst the seeming failure of his death and the seemingly fast-approaching death of his wife after her separation from court life. "Les pensées de la mort lui avaient rapproché la mémoire de M. de Clèves. Ce souvenir, qui s'accordait à son devoir, s'imprima fortement dans son cœur" (*Clèves* 477). Here, the constructive example of M. de Clèves's tolerant life replaces death, the alternative solution to France's religious problem and the ultimate symbol for the destruction and eradication of the religious "Other." Interestingly, it is when "la mémoire de M. de Clèves . . . ce souvenir . . . s'imprima fortement dans son cœur" that "les passions et les engagements du monde lui [Mme. de Clèves] parurent tels qu'ils paraissent aux personnes qui ont des vues plus grandes et plus éloignées" (*Clèves* 477). By meditating on her husband's life, specifically the way he tolerated her love for Nemours, a man belonging to a religious faction opposing his own, Mme. de Clèves enlarges her perspective on worldly troubles past her immediate present. She acquires a forward-thinking, future-oriented outlook. Crucially, the narrator's use of a comparison between the princess and "personnes qui ont des vues plus éloignées" here, instead of a direct reference to Mme de Clèves's evolving mentality, seems to invoke and include in the novella the seventeenth-century philosophers, such as John Locke and Pierre Bayle, who were contemporaries of Lafayette (*Clèves* 477). Of all the philosophers exploring religious problems in Lafayette's time, England's John Locke

undoubtedly espoused views that would qualify as “[les] plus grandes et [les] plus éloignés” (*Clèves* 477).

The princess’s reasons for not marrying Nemours are shrouded in mystery in the text, as if Mme de Clèves possesses a yet-unearthed secret; she qualifies her motives as “des raisons qui vous sont inconnues” (*Clèves* 469). Nemours, whom we view as representative of France’s ultra-Catholic position, disqualifies her reasons as illusory, saying: “ce ne sont pas de véritables raisons” and describing her duty to her husband in illusory, ghost-like terms. To him, it is nothing but a “fantôme de devoir” and “une pensée vaine et sans fondement” (*Clèves* 469). The princess’s response to Nemours corroborates Nemours’s statements, while simultaneously pushing against them: “Il est vrai . . . que je sacrifie beaucoup à un devoir qui ne subsiste que dans mon imagination; attendez ce que le temps pourra faire” (*Clèves* 473). Her retreat from Nemours should be read as a retreat from the French monarchy’s (and by extension the French state’s) identification with Catholicism.

Mme de Clèves’ Final Retreat Re-envisions What it Means to Be French

The description of the princess’s final retreat reads as follows:

Mme de Clèves vécut d’une sorte qui ne laissa pas d’apparence qu’elle pût jamais revenir [à la cour]; elle passait une partie de l’année dans cette maison religieuse, et l’autre chez elle, mais dans une retraite et dans des occupations plus saintes que celles des couvents les plus austères; et sa vie, qui fut assez courte, laisse des exemples de vert inimitables. (*Clèves* 478)

Her lack of interest in returning to court is repeatedly emphasized: “Elle se retira sur le prétexte de changer d’air dans une maison religieuse, sans faire paraître un dessein arrêté de renoncer à la

Cour” (*Clèves* 477). Traveling allows her a means of leaving court life behind without causing any suspicion or uproar at court over her decision to extract herself from society.

Elle résolut de faire un assez long voyage pour passer tout le temps que la bienséance l’obligeait à vivre dans la retraite. De grandes Terres qu’elle avait vers les Pyrénées lui parurent le lieu le plus propre qu’elle pût choisir : elle partit peu de jours avant que la Cour revînt. (*Clèves* 476)

The word choice here is important. She retires to a “maison religieuse,” not specifically a “couvent.” Furthermore, its location outside of Paris—which had been defined as a Catholic space—also potentially identifies the space with Protestantism, since Protestants frequently worshipped within the confines of country homes of like-minded believers.

Her actions throughout her retreat are meant to honor and conserve her husband’s memory, and therefore should be examined relative to his role and influence in the novel. What exactly does the princess do during her retreat, and what does it symbolize when applied the religious questions France faced at the time Lafayette set her novella and at the time she was writing it? The princess’s retreat begins as a trip, “un assez long voyage, pour passer tout le temps que la bienséance l’obligeait à vivre dans la retraite” (*Clèves* 476). Her husband’s death provides her with an excuse to travel and she capitalizes on it. She goes to “de grandes Terres qu’elle avait vers les Pyrénées” (*Clèves* 476). Horowitz notes that she would be close to the boundary with Spain, but also in “that which is not Spain,” and identifies the area as “a region tied perhaps by geography to Catholic Spain, but by impending history to Huguenot France.”³⁰¹ Horowitz portrays the princess’s behavior during her retreat, what she deems a “solitary limbo,” as stagnant and static: “she pauses, culturally in hiatus, and also biologically, hovering, as the

³⁰¹ Horowitz, “Primary Sources,” 168.

novel ends, between life and death.”³⁰² But isn’t the princess more creative and more proactive than this? Even in her death, doesn’t she leave readers with a hopeful outlook for the future?

The Pyrenees mountains served, then as they do now, as a natural, geographical border between Spain and France, two nations who were then vying to establish themselves as Europe’s Catholic superpower and who unapologetically persecuted those of minority faiths. So, the princess chooses to marginalize herself on a concrete, undeniable boundary line visible to the naked eye. She situates her life within a space that is dual, that incorporates both France and Spain and that, as Horowitz has shown, has associations with both Catholics and Protestants. This all-inclusive (both/and), rather than exclusive (either/or), space is crucial not only to our understanding of the princess’s retreat, but to our understanding of the novel as a whole, specifically in relation to its engagement with the religious dilemma France faced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Her decision is shaped by her experience being torn between her husband and her illicit attraction to Nemours. It is almost as if she is going through symptoms of withdrawal from Nemours: we learn that “une maladie violente sitôt qu’elle fut arrivée chez elle” (*Clèves* 476). After several days fighting her illness, we learn that she is “hors de cet extrême péril où elle avait été, mais elle demeura dans une maladie de langueur qui ne laissait guère d’espérance de sa vie” (*Clèves* 476). She experiences different degrees of sickness and never regains full health, as the narrator ultimately notes that her “santé . . . demeurait considérablement affaiblie” (*Clèves* 476). Interestingly, unlike with the other women featured in Lafayette’s first two novellas, who succumb to death quickly, the princess’s drawn-out illness at the end of the novel allows her to contemplate death and look it in the face. The narrator notes that “cette vue si longue et si

³⁰² Ibid.

prochaine de la mort” helps the princess adapt her perspective, a preliminary element that proves crucial to her ability to take her husband’s memory to heart and to follow his example (*Clèves* 476). The sickness, then, actually proves to be a constructive element to her situation, rather than a destructive one.

The princess fights her passion for Nemours on two levels, first with a physical battle, represented by her intense illness, and second with a mental battle, which the text describes as follows:

Elle appela à son secours, pour se défendre contre [Nemours], toutes les raisons qu’elle croyait avoir pour ne l’épouser jamais. Il se passa un assez grand combat en elle-même. Enfin, elle surmonta les restes de cette passion qui était affaiblie par les sentiments que sa maladie lui avait donnés.

The picture of the ill princess brings to mind the imagery priests would use of France as a sickly nation infected with the “maladie”³⁰³ of heresy. Crucially, the text’s portrayal of her sickness as a remedy to her penchant for Nemours, rather than a totally negative occurrence, seems to suggest that religious multiplicity might actually be beneficial to France. Furthermore, the fact that a physical battle was not enough to completely overcome her passion for Nemours, and her transition to a kind of mental warfare, suggests that France needs to address the religious problem in France not only physically—by killing, banishing, or converting Protestants, or confining their services to private spaces—but also theoretically. It can do so by changing the public’s conception of what it means to belong to the French nation. That is, nationality does not have to be determined by faith; to be considered French one does not have to be Catholic.

³⁰³ *Conseil à la France*, 6.

The narrator never explicitly mentions death in the closing pages of *La Princesse de Clèves*, a striking difference that sets the novella distinctly apart from the earlier two tales, *La Comtesse de Tende* and *La Princesse de Montpensier*. Rather, the text approaches death in terms of its opposite, using the euphemism “l’autre vie,” a phrase that robs death of its finality, as well as its hopelessness (*Clèves* 477). Furthermore, unlike the other novellas, which announce the women’s deaths with some form of the verb “mourir,” Mme de Clèves’s passing is phrased as a “vie, qui fut assez courte” (*Clèves* 478). The evasion of vocabulary associated with mortality at the end of the text, and the use of words associated with life in its place, further aligns the text and its ending with a positive, hopeful outlook on the religious problems plaguing France. Allowing more than one religion within France will not cause the nation’s death, but instead construct for it a different way of living.

While the characterization of the princess’s time and activities as “occupations plus saintes que celles des couvents les plus austères” might certainly be read as merely a means of setting the princess apart as an exceptional person, hidden within that description seems to be a judgement on the religious institutions of the time (*Clèves* 478). Convents were being used as vehicles to convert Protestant children to the mainstream Catholic faith. By qualifying the princess’s actions—specifically, her equal division of her time and attention between spaces associated with Nemours and Clèves and their respective faiths of Catholicism and Protestantism—as more devout, “plus saintes,” than the initiatives of “les couvents les plus austères,” Lafayette quietly valorizes the practice of toleration over that of coerced assimilation, or worse, of religiously justified violence (*Clèves* 478).

Finally, the references to duty, “devoir,” in *La Princesse de Clèves*, which are opposed to the princess’s emotional “penchant” for Nemours, or Catholicism, recall the rational and lawful

promises of protection for Protestants outlined in the Edict of Nantes that ultimately allowed the kingdom of France to rest in a period of peace after decades of civil war. The princess's example and her choices at the end of the novel are rooted squarely in reason and duty, both concepts associated with the law, rather than passion or religious feeling or sentiment.

If we entertain Magne's conjecture hypothetically, *Le Prince de Clèves* does not prove to be a bad a title for the work after all. The princess spends a considerable amount of time ruminating on her husband's memory and her duty to him as his widow; in fact, her reflection on her husband contributes a great deal to her ultimate decision to retreat, instead of marry Nemours, at the end of the novel. Therefore, to some extent, M. de Clèves seems to be due equal credit, if not more than Mme de Clèves, for her extraordinary choices. Clèves is the impetus and inspiration for the princess's atypical and unbelievable behavior. He is a pastoral figure on a mission to render the princess a religiously tolerant person. M. de Clèves's marital experience illustrates the difficulties of living out religious toleration as it was conceived in the early modern era. Throughout the majority of the novel, M. de Clèves more or less successfully tolerates (read: suffers through) his wife's love for another man. His wife ultimately follows in his footsteps when she cultivates space for both Nemours and her husband in her heart.

The fruit of the Clèves marriage is an imagined space of religious toleration characterized by peace, "repos." To call the princess "inimitable," and moreover, to choose "inimitables" as the novella's last word, is to leave readers with a challenge to at least try to emulate the princess's (and Clèves's) example and to be a model or example for the rest of Europe.

In returning to the uneasy calm before the storm of the Wars of Religion in France, *La Princesse de Clèves* imagines how the religious divide could have been handled more constructively via the Clèves marriage. Ultimately, the novella suggests that a horizontal approach to toleration,

that is, one fostered from the ground up, through freely-chosen relationship with respective religious “Others,” works better than a top-down approach that uses governmental legislation to coerce co-existence.

In each of the three novellas studied in this dissertation, there is a king who is either extremely weak and infantile, or is killed. The fact that *La Princesse de Clèves* features the death of King Henri II, who in political thought symbolized the head of the French nation, seems to further corroborate the claim that *La Princesse de Clèves* envisions a new, dual-religious national identity for France. Henry II, the only king represented in Lafayette’s novellas who might arguably be in a position of power, is killed in a joust when a spear gouges his eye. Henry II’s fatal accident at the jousting tournament might be understood as a shattering of France’s national identity, what we might call its communal “I,” that was then rooted in an exclusively Catholic monarchy’s intolerance or inhospitality towards the Protestants in their midst.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), Derek Attridge defines what literature can do for a reader as follows:

Literature is a handling of language whereby something we might call “otherness,” or “alterity,” or “the other,” is made, or allowed, to impact upon the existing configurations of an individual’s mental world—which is to say, upon a particular cultural field as it is embodied in a single subjectivity.³⁰⁴

My dissertation has shown how Lafayette’s novellas *La Comtesse de Tende*, *La Princesse de Montpensier*, and *La Princesse de Clèves* attempt to carve out a space for the Huguenot Other in France by allowing readers to encounter that Other in the non-confrontational sphere of literature. Lafayette’s novellas also present their readers with their capacity for violence and hatred towards a group perceived as a religious Other. Her works expose the violence and bloodshed on which the French (Catholic) national identity was built, and seek to redefine what it means to be French. The Wars of Religion should not be forgotten, nor is it dangerous to remember them; rather, as Ernest Renan observes in “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” (1882), suffering and grief over atrocities, such as the ones committed in the Wars of Religion, often leave us as a people and as a nation with a sense of duty to live differently going forward and a determination to work together, even across religious lines, to ensure that similar atrocities do not recur. Toleration of those who are religiously different is one of the ways that early modern

³⁰⁴ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, (Routledge: New York, New York, 2004), 19.

people attempted to live differently in order to avoid the violence and warfare that came with the Wars of Religion.

Examined in succession, Lafayette's *nouvelles* exhibit an evolving depiction of religious toleration. While a will or a desire for religious toleration is present in all three of Lafayette's works, only her last one, *La Princesse de Clèves*, puts the desire for religious co-existence into practice, albeit in a realm outside of traditional court society. In *La Comtesse de Tende*, the comtesse, whom we view as representative of both France as the Catholic Church and France as a political body, deliberately and intentionally thwarts her husband's decision to integrate her illegitimate child, whom we view as representative of the blossoming "new" Protestant religion, into their lives; in *La Princesse de Montpensier*, the relationship between Chabanes and Montpensier symbolizes what ultimately proves to be an unsuccessful attempt at toleration; finally, in *La Princesse de Clèves*, Lafayette creates a heroine who actually puts religious toleration into practice, thanks to her husband's example, albeit outside of the realm of traditional of society in a space that is all her own.

While many studies have focused on how Lafayette's novellas engage in ongoing women-centered debates about marriage, this dissertation has attempted to show how her novellas engage with the intellectual, religious, and political debate about toleration that France, as well as many other European countries, faced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In order to do this, I show how relevant passages from writings on religious toleration intersect with Lafayette's novellas and add deeper meaning to her stories. The central texts on toleration for this study involved writing across three centuries: pamphlets penned during the Wars of Religion era by Sébastien Castellion, Etienne Pasquier, and Jean de Monluc, speeches given by Michel de L'Hôpital during his time as Chancellor; Pierre Bayle's *Commentaire philosophique* (1686), as

well as a few excerpts from John Locke's Letter on Toleration (1689) from the seventeenth century; and Voltaire's *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763) and *Lettres philosophiques* (1733) from the eighteenth century.

Throughout all of Lafayette's novellas, women's passions for men other than their husbands seem to represent the highly charged religious feelings of France's Catholics during the turbulent sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Lafayette's choice to use extramarital relationships as a symbol for Catholic religious feeling seems to discredit such sentiment and qualify it as destructive behavior harmful to the foundations of the French state. The Princess de Montpensier's nearly consummated affair with Guise coincides with the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in *La Princesse de Montpensier*; in a similar vein, the Comtesse de Tende's murder-suicide seems to symbolize or foreshadow the massacre of Vassy; *La Princesse de Clèves* features the only heroine who remains unscathed by her passion for Nemours, which we read as representing irrational abandon to Catholic religious sentiment. Every affair in the three novellas results in damage and destruction. Mme de Clèves, however, is able to resist it: "les passions peuvent me conduire; mais elles ne sauraient m'aveugler," she tells Nemours (*Clèves* 471). Unlike the other heroines featured in Lafayette's tales, the princess is able to consider the implications of her actions on the future of her life, and by extension, that of France as a country. Mme de Clèves contrasts starkly with Lafayette's previous heroines through her creative avoidance of an affair. The work is marred only by one death, that of M. de Clèves, rather than an entire segment of the population, and ends on a creative note than a destructive one. It is also noteworthy that Mme de Clèves has unusual and insightful advisors: first her mother, then M. de Clèves. By contrast, the Comtesse de Tende lacks any sort of mentor, and while the Princesse de Montpensier has one in Chabanes, she neglects him.

Lessons for Readers Today

French president Nicolas Sarkozy once challenged the relevance of *La Princesse de Clèves*, suggesting it was obsolete and disconnected from the world as we know it today.³⁰⁵ French people came out in defense of the work with overwhelming gusto, what Paula Cohen calls “a firestorm of indignation.”³⁰⁶ Public readings were held of the work; buttons and signs were printed with various slogans, like “Free the Princess of Clèves” and “I am reading The Princess of Clèves.”³⁰⁷ If *La Comtesse de Tende*, *La Princesse de Montpensier*, and *La Princesse de Clèves* function as a trio of works that advocate for toleration of religious minorities, as I have attempted to show, these novellas, which short-sighted readers like Sarkozy might deem outdated, prove to be extremely relevant to current-day religious tensions in France, as well as throughout Europe. Lafayette’s early modern novellas prompt modern-day readers to ask several questions about the world we live in today. *La Princesse de Montpensier* encourages us to consider who the Chabanes of our societies might be today. In other words, who are the undervalued, misrepresented, misunderstood, and unappreciated minorities whose efforts to contribute to society go unnoticed, are undermined, or discounted, as Chabanes’s are in Lafayette’s novella? What groups of people today are targeted and killed in the same brutal fashion as Chabanes is at the end of the novel? Who exist as people under constant public suspicion? Similarly, *La Comtesse de Tende* should cause us to reflect on our society’s current approaches to religious difference, and to compare them to those of the comtesse and her

³⁰⁵ See Paula Marantz Cohen’s “The Princess of Clèves and Nicolas Sarkozy,” *The Yale Review* 101.4 (2013), 67-76.

³⁰⁶ Cohen, 68.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

husband the comte. Which solution do we tend to subscribe to, and which character, the comtesse or the comte, do we resemble the most? If we see more of ourselves in the rash and destructive comtesse, what steps might we take to become more like her reflective and accepting husband? Finally, *La Princesse de Clèves* encourages us to believe that individuals like the princess and her husband can forge new paths amidst and despite the complications of religious difference. The work shows us how toleration is first and foremost an individual work of the heart, and that it works best if initiated at the individual or horizontal level, rather than a top-down, vertical approach initiated through legal measures.

Lafayette's friendships with prominent leaders of France's Catholic church, such as Bossuet, might initially make this study's premise that her works actually contain veiled Protestant messages seem tenuous. However, Lafayette's close affiliation with proponents of Jansenism, an offshoot of France's Catholic church that congregated at Port Royal des Champs, and which Louis XIV's administration sought to eradicate around the same time it made advances on the Protestant sects, makes her literary support of the Huguenot minority seem more tenable. There would have been no better way to justify the Jansenist presence in France than by justifying the presence of an even more "heretical" sect, the Huguenot minority.

Furthermore, after Henriette Anne's early death, Lafayette situated herself away from court life in much the same way her predecessor Madame de Montpensier had done during her year of post-Fronde exile. Lafayette's distance from the court life, as well as her intimate and consistent connections with groups antagonistic to Louis XIV's absolutist administration, made her a sympathetic voice for any group who found themselves under attack from or being overshadowed by Louis XIV's absolutist agenda. Moreover, Lafayette's lack of what we might term a straight-laced faith or devotion suggests she would have had no qualms with people

finding their own ways to God, though they diverged from the predominant path set by the “true” Catholic church.

Lafayette’s position, as a female situated at the very center of power in the Parisian capital, endowed her with a special capacity to see and pay attention to the plight of the Huguenot minority. Lafayette used her privileged seat at the center of power and her unique artistic ability to quietly speak out for the Huguenots, a marginalized Protestant minority in France. Her works give voice to a group of people who did not have the opportunity to speak out for themselves under Louis XIV’s increasingly devout and strictly patrolled Catholic state. Lafayette’s work is without question a timeless exploration of humanity; as such, it can be applied to the complex relations between national identity, security, and religious faiths across centuries and generations.

From Toleration to Hospitality

While Lafayette’s novellas explore toleration as a solution to religious difference within France, they also reveal its shortcomings. Toleration proves to be an imperfect and temporary solution. While it may stave off violence, it does so only for a time. Furthermore, if relied on at length as a method of peace-keeping, it frequently descends into violence that is comparable to, if not worse than, the violence it initially sought to curb.

The limitations of toleration as a long-lasting solution to religious difference within France raise the question of whether there are any other better solutions that make space for religious (and other) differences without the imperfections, judgement, and inequalities that seem to be part and parcel of the toleration dynamic. The French-Jewish philosopher Jacques Derrida

deconstructed the concept of tolerance to reveal its incapacity to remain truly neutral. Derrida's critique of tolerance reads as follows:

Tolerance is first of all a form of charity. A Christian charity therefore even if Jews and Muslims seem to appropriate this language as well. Tolerance is always on "the reason of the strongest," where "might is right"; it is a supplementary mark of sovereignty, which says to the other from its elevated position, I am letting you be, you are not insufferable, I am leaving you a place in my home, but do not forget that this is my home.³⁰⁸

We see those in power grant this allowance of "letting be" in Lafayette's novellas. For example, the comte permits his wife to carry out her pregnancy at his country home, and the Montpensiers allow Chabanes to remain free from prison at their country home.

Jurgen Habermas, too, acknowledges that tolerance tends to be one-sided and writes the following on its "paternalistic spirit":

In this context, the act of toleration retains an element of an act of mercy or of "doing a favor." One party allows the other a certain amount of deviation from "normality" under one condition: that the tolerated minority does not overstep the "threshold of tolerance." Criticism has been aimed and rightly so against this authoritarian "conception of allowance" for its obvious that the threshold of tolerance, which separates what is still "acceptable" from what is not, is arbitrarily established by the existing authority. And the impression then arises that tolerance, since it can only be practiced within a boundary beyond which it would cease, possesses itself a kernel of intolerance.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Yan Mengwei, "Tolerance or hospitality?" *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 7.1, 156.

³⁰⁹ Mengwei, 157-158.

To free ourselves from the intolerance couched within toleration, Derrida suggests looking to hospitality instead, which he defines as follows:

Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality itself, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever arrives an absolutely foreign visitor, as a new arrival, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other.³¹⁰

Judith Still's perception of hospitality as it is practiced in everyday life is less positive than Derrida's, but likely more realistic. She writes, "At best, we offer a *grudging* invitation to the other to enter our house on our terms," and she calls hospitality "(a very limited) openness" to the Other.³¹¹ Still has remarked that "a range of academics within cultural and social studies (including French Studies) have been producing work focused on the representation and reality of State (in)hospitality, or on inter-personal hospitable relations within this context."³¹² I believe Madame de Lafayette's novellas could prove fertile terrain for such a study.

Future Inquiries

This study lays groundwork for other avenues of inquiry that could be taken with Lafayette's works. For example, we know that toleration was an imperfect political solution to the religious difference that both France and England were grappling with in the early modern era, and that they each of the two countries often observed how the other handled the challenge. *La Princesse de Clèves* in particular is a work that shows an inclination towards England. For example, Mme de Clèves displays a fixation on Elizabeth I through the first half of the novella.

³¹⁰ Mengwei, 156.

³¹¹ Still, *Derrida and Hospitality*, 77.

³¹² Judith Still, "Enlightenment Hospitality: The Case of Chardin," *French Studies* 60.3 (2006), 364.

Though these observations were not able to be expounded upon at length in this dissertation, their presence in the text raise interesting questions about how the text's main character's interest in Elizabeth I should be understood.

Michael J. Paulson, who authored *Facets of a Princess: Multiple Readings on Madame de Lafayette's La Princesse de Clèves* (1998) and *A Critical Analysis of de Lafayette's La Princesse de Clèves as a Royal Exemplary Novel: Kings, Queens, and Splendor* (1991), is the only critic thus far who has examined Elizabeth I's function in the novel in any detail to date. Paulson calls Elizabeth "a figure of ambiguous importance in the novel" and observes her similarity to Lafayette's princess, writing: "Like the heroine, she transgresses normal expectations of feminine conduct."³¹³ Paulson continues: "Elizabeth . . . acts alone, a model of what Mary Stuart should be and what Catherine de Medici could be, if she could be fully empowered legally. Ironically, transgressor of tradition or not, the Queen of England is the most successful monarch in the novel, one whom kings and queens alike would be wise to imitate."³¹⁴ Paulson's recognition of Elizabeth's significance to the novel as a whole, as well as his belief that her character offers readers *the* preeminent example of proper queenship amidst religious division, should prompt further investigation into her role in the novel relative to religious toleration.

If Paulson's observations are not enough, other critics who recognize the multivalent messages that Elizabeth I's image holds in general for the English nation make the English Queen's persistent presence in *La Princesse de Clèves* all the more compelling. In "Bones of Contention: Posthumous Images of Elizabethan and Stuart Politics," Julia M. Walker calls

³¹³ Michel J. Paulson, *Facets of a Princess: Multiple Readings of Madame de Lafayette's "La Princesse de Clèves"*, (New York: P. Lang, 1998), 41-42.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

Elizabeth “a potent marker for political commentary.”³¹⁵ In the same vein, in his article “Two Elizabeths? : James I and the Late Queen’s Famous Memory,” D. R. Woolf calls Elizabeth “a propaganda symbol and source of precedents, valued as much by King and Court as by Parliament and Puritanism.”³¹⁶ In *An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy*, Michael Dobson calls Elizabeth “an icon of lost national and theological wholeness over the remainder of the seventeenth century.”³¹⁷ If Elizabeth can function as a unifying symbol for the English nation, might Lafayette’s heroine in *La Princesse de Clèves*, who seems to look to her as a model, function in a similar way for the French nation?

Concluding Remarks

“La chance de la littérature c’est qu’elle va pouvoir dépasser les autres modes de communication et nous permettre de communiquer dans ce qui nous sépare,” writes Simone de Beauvoir.³¹⁸ In eras where French men and women have struggled to communicate and co-exist because of differing religious beliefs, literature, like Lafayette’s novellas, can act as a bridge by allowing readers to be present with their respective “Others” in a way that feels safe and non-confrontational. As Attridge observed, literary exposure to “Others” possesses the potential to change how majority groups perceive and relate to those considered “Other” in everyday life in a positive way because literature and stories can change the way we think about and perceive those considered “Other.”

³¹⁵ *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*. (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1998). “Bones of Contention: Posthumous Images of Elizabeth and Stuart Politics.” 252-276.

³¹⁶ D. R. Woolf, “Two Elizabeth? James I and the Late Queen’s Famous Memory,” *Canadian Journal of History* 20 (1985):167-91.

³¹⁷ Dobson, 44.

³¹⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, “Que peut la littérature?”, 336.

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