



1986

The Princess de Clèves: The Euphoric Dysphoric Heroine

Elizabeth Richardson Viti
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/frenchfac>

 Part of the [French and Francophone Literature Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Richardson-Viti, Elizabeth. "The Princess de Clèves: The Euphoric Dysphoric Heroine," *Wascana Review*. 1986, 3-16.

This is the publisher's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/frenchfac/2>

This open access article is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

The Princess de Clèves: The Euphoric Dysphoric Heroine

Abstract

Prefacing *The Heroine's Text*, her study of the French and English novel 1722-1782, with an explanation of its binary structure, Nancy Miller explains that in the first section, "The Euphoric Text," the inscription of female destiny is a positive one, ending with the heroine's integration into society; in the second section, "The Dysphoric Text," this inscription is negative, culminating in the heroine's premature death. Marriage, the law of the father, decides the ladies' lot and to accept the paternally designated husband is to live happily ever after...[Miller] concludes that the eighteenth-century heroine's text is "a masculine representation of female desire produced ultimately for an audience not of women readers, but of men." In short, it appears that men who inscribe feminine desire within and for the patriarchal system necessarily and irreconcilably dichotomize this inscription.

Keywords

Princess of Cleves, Heroine, Feminist Approach, Nancy K. Miller, *The Heroine's Text*

Disciplines

French and Francophone Language and Literature | French and Francophone Literature

THE PRINCESSE DE CLEVES: THE "EUPHORIC" DYSPHORIC HEROINE

ELIZABETH RICHARDSON-VITI

Prefacing *The Heroine's Text*, her study of the French and English novel 1722-1782, with an explanation of its binary structure, Nancy Miller explains that in the first section, "The Euphoric Text," the inscription of female destiny is a positive one, ending with the heroine's integration into society; in the second section, "The Dysphoric Text," this inscription is negative, culminating in the heroine's premature death.¹ Marriage, the law of the father, decides the ladies' lot and to accept the paternally designated husband is to live happily ever after. In her epilogue Miller comments:

. . . despite their titles and their feminine "I," it is not altogether clear to me that these novels are *about* or *for women* at all. At best one might say of their authors that they . . . are indeed aware of the perils of *erotic polarization* in their practice of the sociolect that writes woman as an *identity derived from her status as a daughter, and implicitly, as a wife* (emphasis added).²

And she concludes that the eighteenth-century heroine's text is "a masculine representation of female desire produced ultimately for an audience not of women readers, but of men."³ In short, it appears that men who inscribe feminine desire within and for the patriarchal system necessarily and irreconcilably dichotomize this inscription.

The question arises, then, as to whether when a woman is writing she is clearly doing so about and for a female audience or is she, too, privileging the patriarchal which bifurcates feminine desire. To this question the seventeenth-century heroine's text, *La Princesse de Clèves*,

provides some singular answers. Although — citing the inferior quality of her other novels — critics have accused Mme de Lafayette of collaboration, most notably with La Rochefoucauld, she, a woman, has nonetheless remained synonymous with its authorship. Furthermore, it would be difficult to argue against its being written about and for women if only because Mme de Lafayette, who details court life under Henry II, unquestionably accentuates a subtext of feminine power: The king is a virtual innocent bystander in the political struggle between Catherine de Médicis and Diane de Poitiers.⁴

Ostensibly, however, erotic polarization is firmly in place, for certainly Madame de Lafayette makes use of the Tristan and Isolde myth that, as Denis de Rougemont points out, marks all of Western literature by opposing passion and marriage.⁵ Echoes of the medieval legend are embodied in such details as Henri II calling for the Princesse de Clèves to dance with the gentleman — Nemours — who had just arrived at a royal ball. This gesture makes Henri II, like King Mark who forced a second encounter between Tristan and Isolde, unwittingly responsible for the love between the princess and the duke. And comparable to the medieval couple in their superiority to those around them, Mme de Clèves and Nemours are mutually attracted because they represent what is best at court. But the key to the comparison, of course, is the obstacle that the princess's marriage and her fidelity to its memory present to the pursuit of passion.

In fact, Mme de Chartres' efforts to find a suitable husband for her daughter focus even further the paradigm of passion and marriage as mutually exclusive. They do so because they are seen in the context of the battle between two women whose roles personify the passion/marriage contradiction, the king's mistress Diane de Poitiers (or Mme de Valentinois, as she is primarily known throughout the text) and his wife Catherine de Médicis. When Mme de Chartres finds the Duc de Montpensier a suitable match for her exceptional daughter, Mme de Valentinois, for whom the king's passion — Mme de Lafayette insists — is unshakable, thwarts the marriage by prejudicing the king against it. Mme de Valentinois despises anyone bearing the de Chartres name because the Vidame de Chartres, whom the king's mistress had hoped to win over to her side through the marriage of one of her daughters, chose to align himself with the queen instead. Consequently, all future suitors

turn against Mlle de Chartres for fear of displeasing Henry II. Only the Prince de Clèves, after his father's death, feels at liberty to marry her, establishing their union as singularly independent of political intrigue — as Mme de Chartres had hoped.

Yet the most important promoter of this wife/mistress opposition is apparently Mme de Chartres herself who, educating her daughter in the ways of love, insists on the dichotomization of desire:

Most mothers think that they can best protect young people by never speaking of love in their presence, but Madame de Chartres had different ideas; she often described it to her daughter, minimizing none of its charm, so that the girl should more readily understand what she told her of its dangers. She told her that men were not very sincere, not very faithful, and not above deceit; she spoke of the unhappiness that love affairs can bring to a family, and then, on the other hand, she showed her the life of a good woman, happy, serene, and enjoying the particular glamour that attaches to noble birth when there is also virtue. She impressed upon her that this virtue can only be kept by extreme mistrust of oneself and by following the one line of conduct which can make a woman happy, that is to say, loving her husband and being loved by him.⁶

In short, Mme de Chartres tells her daughter that love is either dangerous or "full of charm"; love produces either unhappiness or serenity. Indeed, these admonitions easily support Marianne Hirsch's view of the mother as the most repressive of agents who traps her daughter "between two opposing forces: the passion of Nemours with all its psychological and social agitation and the world of mother and husband, wife and daughter, with its tranquillity that resembles death, its dependency that keeps her incomplete."⁷

It is curious, then, that feminist readers of *La Princesse de Clèves*, such as Hirsch, make much of the mother as sole arbiter of her daughter's behavior. They posit a maternal rather than paternal axis in Mme de Lafayette's inscription of female desire if only to reveal this potentially liberating medium as simply serving patriarchy. It seems to me that quite

the contrary is true and that a careful examination of both the text itself and certain feminist readings of the novel demonstrate a reversal of the received idea which bifurcates feminine desire. Even Hirsch herself hints at such a reversal when she notes the Princesse de Clèves' attempts to circumvent being "incomplete." Using the paradigm of material/patriarchal discourse, Hirsch establishes a series of corresponding oppositions: country/court, mother and husband/husband and lover, permanence/change, tranquillity/agitation, safety/danger, as well as pre-oedipal/oedipal.⁸ She then goes on to show how the princess's *va-et-vient* between the court and country signals the princess's desperate effort to reconcile the two spaces. Moreover, the two spaces are sometimes collapsed. Certainly such a collapse is evident when the mother is alive, for she brings maternal discourse into the patriarchal space. But even more interesting is the fact that, after her mother's death, the princess allows the maternal space to be invaded. Although Nemours travels to the country to observe the princess surreptitiously, she herself allows him into this maternal space through the metonymical objects of his cane and his portrait.

Moreover, the Princesse de Clèves' observation "... vain are my resolutions, I thought yesterday all that I am thinking today but today my actions are the exact contrary of yesterday's resolutions" (p. 127) seems to be emblematic of an extensive repertoire of hesitations which function as an effort to transcend the dichotomy seemingly prescribed by the mother. And I agree with Hirsch when she points out that these moments of hesitation, of questioning and doubt, appear to be instances of the Princesse de Clèves' development. These moments are, of course, inextricably tied to the maternal discourse, to Mme de Chartres, who "wants to teach her daughter not only to survive but to transcend"⁹ — although this power, seen by Hirsch, is a negative one based primarily on the strength to remain equal by saying "no."

However, the feminist critic unwittingly discloses another means of surpassing this system. Viewing the relationship between Mme de Chartres and the Princesse de Clèves as symbiotic, what Luce Irigaray calls the interpenetration of mother and daughter,¹⁰ Hirsch describes the mother as "the only object, *both* internal *and* external, *both* positive *and* negative, *both* intensely needed *and* intensely feared (emphasis added)."¹¹ Her use of this revealing "both/and" construction suggests that the

mother herself is the model for a different strategy — one which mediates two so-called contradictory roles. Thus, when Mme de Chartres defines woman's happiness as "loving her husband and being loved by him," she is speaking of a reciprocal love. Such reciprocity calls into question the patriarchal view of marriage as the negation of love and an illicit relationship as the imprimatur of passion. Citing a frequently overlooked passage, Hirsch points out that Mme de Chartres had herself apparently attempted to sidestep this formula through reconciliation of the wife/mistress roles. Insisting that the woman remain unnamed, Mme de Chartres leaves the impression that she is speaking about herself when, while explaining Diane de Poitiers' rise to power, she tells the story of a married woman in love with the Duc d'Orléans:

Very soon the Duc d'Orléans died from some sort of contagion at Farmoutier. He had been in love with one of the most beautiful women at the Court and was loved by her in return. I am not going to tell you her name. She has led a good life ever since, and has been at such pains to conceal the love she had for the Prince that she deserves to keep her reputation. It so happened that she received news of her husband's death on the same day as that of the Duke, so that she was not obliged to act a part or conceal her sorrow. (p. 58)

The Princesse de Clèves mirrors her mother's behavior — like the child who, Freud explains, watches an activity and then actively repeats it for mastery.¹² Like Mme de Chartres, she loves a man other than her husband. This man, Nemours, returns her love, and because he cannot marry the princess, she assumes the role of "mistress." What is more, it is also a double death which permits the princess to play both roles forever: The Prince de Clèves dies before he wins his wife's love and Nemours' love dies before he wins the princess's hand in marriage. Of great interest is how the princess actively sustains her wife/mistress status. She "kills" her husband, since what the prince perceives as an infidelity with Nemours leads to an illness and eventual death. She also "kills" Nemours' passion, since his interest wanes when the widowed Mme de Clèves still refuses to marry him. She retains her complete purity.

Another feminist reader, Peggy Kamuf, contributes an observation

which empowers the "both/and" construct of maternal discourse. In contrast to Hirsch, Kamuf substitutes the conceivably tonic Chodorovian oedipal triangle¹³ of mother/daughter/beyond-the mother for the claustrophobic mother/daughter dyad. She explains that, rather than simply disallowing sexual pleasure, Mme de Chartres reinscribes it as "dangerous." "At the same time, the child is given to feel desire for a beyond-the-mother, that which is missing in their isolation from the world, and induced to locate the appeal of that absence in the mother's discourse."¹⁴ What Mme de Chartres has done — and regrettably Kamuf elides this issue — is to reappropriate marriage for herself, changing it from a sign of patriarchal exchange to one of fidelity to the mother. To disclose the triangular dynamics, then, is to allow the Princesse de Clèves truly to transcend, for this displacement of male power frees the princess from the marriage/"happily-ever-after" eighteenth-century model and makes her an enigma — a word Kamuf herself consistently uses to describe the heroine¹⁵ — because she cannot be strictly associated with either of the two characterizations of feminine desire.

Furthermore, neither the Prince de Clèves nor Nemours can ever solely assume the role of husband or lover, for any man who enters the maternal space which surrounds the Princesse de Clèves must necessarily become a surrogate mother and, thus embrace the "both/and" construct. Kamuf, who observes that the "man who would enter this space of an introverted desire can do so only in a familiar guise,"¹⁶ cites an indisputable example which ultimately leads to this maternal construct. The prince, suspecting his wife of loving another, tries to cajole her into candor by repeating his advice to Sancerre with respect to Mme de Tournon. The prince says he values sincerity so highly that were his mistress or wife to admit she was attracted to another, he would "cast off the role of husband or lover in order to advise and sympathize" (pp. 76-77). When, later, Mme de Clèves finally does confess and, thus permits the prince to play surrogate mother, he assumes the "both/and" construct fundamental to the role of mother: "Now that another has succeeded where I have failed I am jealous as a husband and as a lover" (p. 132). So, of course, does the princess: "You are my wife, I love you like a mistress . . ." (p. 163).

Nemours participates in this same puzzling phenomenon. Perceiving himself to be loved as he has been by numerous other mistresses he has

known, he has never “known” the princess and receives few signs of her love. Consequently, after the prince’s death, Nemours wishes to make his “mistress” his wife, to exchange the role of lover for that of husband. His supplications to the princess, however, reveal that he, too, would assume both roles rather than replace one with the other. For he sees in the *Princesse de Clèves* the only woman capable of reconciling two previously contradictory figures of femininity:

I have been able to entertain the hope of spending my life with you, my destiny has led me to love the most estimable person in the world, I have found in her everything that can make a perfect mistress, she loves me and I have found in her behavior everything that can be desired in a perfect wife. Indeed, Madame, you are perhaps the only person who has ever so completely combined the qualities necessary to both.
(p. 188)

Moreover, the princess is wise enough to know that it is only by refusing Nemours’ proposal that she can force his husband/lover status. As Sylvère Lotringer points out, the princess’s refusal is not a refusal of desire but rather a wish “to preserve desire in its pure, integral, imagined form.”¹⁷ Mme de Clèves perspicaciously observes:

. . . but in these eternal relationships does any man preserve his original passion? Can I expect a miracle in my case? And dare I put myself in a position whence I shall be obliged to witness the inevitable death of a love in which lies all my joy? There was perhaps one man and one man only capable of remaining in love with his wife, and that was M. de Clèves . . . possibly this passion of his would not have continued so strong if I had requited it, but I cannot use that means for keeping yours. (pp. 189-191)

Indeed, this wife/mistress balancing act and the corresponding husband/lover roles which the *Princesse de Clèves* imposes on both men is artfully sustained by playing off one man’s passion against another’s. And the highly charged confession scene is the most notable example.

Ostensibly the princess reassures the eavesdropping Nemours that he is loved, but in fact, she does not. Because Mme de Clèves does not reveal her "lover's" identity she is the architect of a double disquietude which simultaneously arouses Nemours' anxiety and her husband's: "M. de Nemours did not miss a word of this conversation and what Madame de Clèves said made him hardly less jealous than her husband" (p. 132). Moreover, the princess behaves with her husband as the reigning sociolect would have her behave with her lover, and behaves with her lover as it would have her behave with her husband. She confesses her love, not to her lover, but to her husband and hides this adulterous passion, not from her husband, but from her lover. Even Nemours is clever enough to understand that by this means Mme de Clèves reverses what would otherwise be a predictable, happily-ever-after outcome: "... I could have wished that instead of telling M. de Clèves what you kept from me, you had kept it from him and allowed me to know it" (p. 186).

This same confession scene demonstrates how, albeit unwittingly, the Princesse de Clèves also plays one man's presence off the other's. Quite obviously the princess would not have been able to affect both men at the same time had not the duke witnessed Mme de Clèves' sincerity with her husband. But there are other textual moments in which a convergence of the prince and the duke plays into the princess's hands. When Nemours, alone with Mme de Clèves for the first time, admits his love, the scene is interrupted by M. de Clèves' arrival. His wife is saved from responding to Nemours who is then suspended in doubt about what that response might have been. And yet it is the curious echo of the earlier confession scene which — because it results dramatically in the prince's death — best underscores the power of one man's presence juxtaposed against the other's. M. de Clèves has the duke followed when he thinks that the duke will attempt to see his wife alone at Coulommiers. The prince's surrogate spies upon Nemours who M. de Clèves falsely believes is seeing his wife in seclusion.

Interestingly, the prince's anguish is based on the unspoken. He refuses his servant's explanation of what he saw and lets suffice the affirmative answer to whether Nemours had followed his wife to Coulommiers. The baseless source of his anguish is similar to the baseless source of the duke's anguish during the confession scene and it focuses on a third means by which M. de Clèves and the Nemours are kept in limbo.

All essential communication between the Princesse de Clèves and the two men takes place *par substitution* — at one remove. I have already mentioned the princess's use of Nemours' "absence" to admit a love she would never admit in his presence and the prince's account of his advice to Sancerre to elicit his wife's confession. In fact, the best screen is someone else's story or, quite literally, someone else. For example, a letter written anonymously to Vidame de Chartres — which the princess mistakes for a letter to Nemours from a mistress — serves as a screen, this time *on which* is instructively projected Nemours' potential infidelity. The princess realizes the distinction between the duke and her husband and believes that she "had allowed not only the object of her love, now shown to have been unworthy, to guess at it, but also somebody else whom she was treating badly on his account" (p. 105). As for Nemours, he shields himself behind his sister, during a visit to Mme de Mercoeur, to reveal that it is he who had spied upon Mme de Clèves from the forest at Coulommiers.

However, the best example of this *par substitution* technique is the theft of the Princesse de Clèves' portrait. The portrait functions as the metonymical sign of this seemingly continual superimposition of one man upon the other which provides the princess with the husband/lover ("both/and" construct) she requires. By remaining silent about the thief's identity she permits Nemours to possess what rightfully belongs to her husband and in each instance counterposes an absence to a presence. In the prince's case, her veritable presence offsets the absence of the portrait and in Nemours' case, the presence of the portrait offsets her absence. Seemingly split between two men, the Princesse de Clèves is, in truth, faithful to both (physically to one and psychologically to the other) and is, thus, once again, able to circumvent the usual bifurcation of feminine desire.¹⁸ She never solely assumes the role of daughter and wife as her mother seems to have hoped. Yet had Mme de Chartres truly wished this, her maternal discourse would simply have served patriarchy, which it seems to me it clearly does not. Instead, Mme de Chartres pays lip-service to a system that would see her daughter safely married, for in advising her daughter to mediate marriage and passion ("to love her husband to be loved by him") she is undermining this system by telling her daughter to follow a desire which contradicts that designed for women by the reigning culture.

Consequently, the Princesse de Clèves has permission to circumscribe her own erotic economy. The development is clear. Her consternation over a possible confession points up her initial vacillation in the face of action: "She considered this for a long time, then was amazed that she could ever have had such a mad idea, after which she fell back into a state of complete indecision" (p. 98). The turning point arrives after the confession when the Princesse de Clèves asks her husband to monitor her behavior. This surrogate mother's response encourages the princess to pursue her delicate balancing act: "... I want to put my trust in you alone; both my heart and my reason approve of this course. In your present state of mind I have you under closer guard by giving you your liberty than in any other way I could imagine" (p. 137). And in her final encounter with Nemours, the Princesse de Clèves sees very clearly that — in what is frequently cited as a conflict between Racinian passion and Cornelian duty — her erotic destiny is unique: "Yes, I am indeed sacrificing much to a duty which only exists in my own imagination..." (p. 192). Indeed, of all literary figures of femininity, she alone deconstructs the patriarchal (mistress)love/(wife)marriage binary. She does so not simply by assuming both roles, as is usually the case, but, as I have shown, by compelling the men in this traditional triangle to be husband and lover. This unbifurcated desire is the perfection that Mme de Chartres had hoped for in her daughter.

Finally, I should like to return to Mme de Lafayette for she is, after all, mother of this text, the author who created this unique figure of femininity. A third feminist reading of *La Princesse de Clèves*, Nancy Miller's in "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," underscores just how important *this* maternal discourse is. Setting out to understand why Mme de Lafayette built a narrative around an ideopathic character, Miller first cites Luce Irigaray's oft-quoted observation about mimeses. Irigaray points out that to play with mimesis is to try to recover woman's place of exploitation by language without being reduced to it. It is to resubmit herself to ideas, particularly those about her, elaborated in and through a masculine logic, while revealing by an effect of playful repetition what was to remain hidden: the recovery of a possible operation of the feminine in language. Finally, it points out, also, that as women mime so well, they are not simply reabsorbed in this function. They remain elsewhere too.¹⁹ Irigaray's observation seems

particularly pertinent in light of the *Princesse de Clèves*' reconciliation of the traditional wife/mistress bifurcation.

Miller's comment on the quotation makes it all the more so. Noting that "elsewhere" for Irigaray is a question of "matter" and "sexual pleasure," she prefers to think of the insistence which Irigaray posits as "a form of emphasis: an italicized version of what passes for the neutral or standard face. Spoken or written, italics are a modality of intensity and stress, a way of marking what has already been said, of making a common text one's own."²⁰ For *La Princesse de Clèves* both comments appear appropriate. There is undeniable sexual pleasure in creating one's own erotic economy, an exercise which unquestionably implies the reappropriation of a common text. Moreover, the quotation has a three-fold relevance when we consider its source, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*. In the title essay, Irigaray follows certain plays on words which she has prepared by this very title. One of them is biologically analogous to the dichotomized female sexuality as imposed by patriarchy:

As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman "touches herself" all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two — but not divisible into one(s) — that caress each other. This autoeroticism is disrupted by a violent break-in: the brutal separation of the two lips by a violating penis, an intrusion that distracts and deflects the woman from this "self-caressing" she needs if she is not to incur the disappearance of her own pleasure in sexual relations.²¹

To further her understanding of Mme de Lafayette's novel, Miller turns to Freud, for she finds the novel written in the language of a dream dreamt by a female author. In her essay, Miller notes Freud's view of women's dreams and particularly his finding that their subjects are chiefly erotic (in contrast to men's, which are egotistic and ambitious as well as erotic). These are the desires, he holds, that shape women's fiction. Miller states, however, that a gynocentric reading reveals a

repressed egoistic/ambitious fantasy in women's writing as well. Citing recurrent melodramatic plots about women unhappy in love because men are men and women are women, she none the less notes that the suffering seemed to have its own rewards in the economy of the female unconscious. The heroine showed herself to be better than her victimizers; "and perhaps this ultimate superiority, which is to be read in the choice to go beyond love, beyond "erotic longings," is the figure that the ambitious wishes of women writers (dreamers) take."²² Miller posits that the ambitious wish of such women writers manifests itself in an economy where egoistic and erotic desires assert themselves paratactically. A fantasy of power results — one which "disdains a sexual exchange in which women can participate only as objects of circulation."²³

Certainly *La Princesse de Clèves* is this fantasy. And I would indeed agree with Miller when she says that the Princesse de Clèves "withdraws . . . and confesses, not merely to resist possession, as her mother would have wished, but to improve on it: to *rescript* possession."²⁴ Moreover, the Princess's nocturnal rêverie at Coulommiers — the moment when she transgresses the maternal space with the beyond-the-mother, Nemours, through metonymical objects — appears to be an attempt to bring "Nemours" into the maternal space where reciprocal love is possible. Miller is correct, then, when she remarks that the Princesse de Clèves "both performs maternal discourse and italicizes it as repossession. Her choice is thereafter not the simple reinscription of the seventeenth-century convention of female renunciation, dependent on the logic of either/or, but the sign of both/and . . ."²⁵ By creating the Princesse de Clèves, this singular woman who creates her own sexual economy, she is giving her female audience a dream come true. She is establishing a *mise en abyme* in which this woman writer dreams the dream that Mme de Chartres dreams for her daughter, and which eventually becomes the Princesse de Clèves' dream as well as women readers'.

Although Mme de Lafayette does not privilege the patriarchal, she must nonetheless mediate between the maternal discourses of her novel and the reigning sociolect. Thus the mother/daughter dyad of female author/female reader must be opened to a triangular dynamics which includes this "beyond-the-mother." For "were she to forget her doubles bind, the 'phallic critics' (as Mary Ellman describes them) would remind her that she is dreaming."²⁶ Unfortunately, this unavoidably leads to the

realization that a non-contradictory space — assuredly the most seductive one — exists only out of this world. That is why the Princesse de Clèves rejects Nemours, this beyond-the-mother figure. The maternal space alone privileges reciprocal love (perhaps Mme de Lafayette is influenced here by her friend Mme de Sévigné) and allows the princess to possess undichotomized desire. That is also why readers themselves give two different interpretations to the text and see the Princesse de Clèves as either wise or foolish in shunning the duke. They forget that it is not a “real world” question of accepting or rejecting desire, but rather, it is a question of keeping it in its “pure, integral, imagined form.” That is, of course, why the Princesse de Clèves is the only fictitious person in the novel. As Miller observes: “Mme de Clèves becomes, thus, both the impossibility of an example for others ‘in life’ and its possibility in fiction.”²⁷

And so the Princesse de Clèves must die, her virtue unblemished and her inaccessibility hermetically sealed. Euphoria, a sense of well-being, of *bien-être*, belongs to the princess and, further, suggests a reversal of these words, *être bien*. The Princesse de Clèves is at peace (in one piece) with herself and, as a literary model, dies the “euphoric” dysphoric heroine. But her death, the death of a dream, is also a silent reproach to patriarchy.

NOTES

¹Nancy Miller, *The Heroine's Text* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), xi.

²Miller, p. 149.

³Miller, p. 150.

⁴I should like to acknowledge here “Order in the Court,” an unpublished work by my colleague Laurence Gregorio, in which he unravels the cabals and rivalries all of which find their origin in the conflict between these two women.

⁵Denis de Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'occident* (Paris: Union générale de l'édition, 1962.)

⁶Madame de Lafayette, *The Princesse de Clèves*, trans. Nancy Mitford, rev. ed. Leonard Tancock (New York: Penguin Classics, 1978), pp. 36-37. All further page references will appear in the text.

⁷Marianne Hirsch, “A Mother's Discourse: Incorporation and Repetition in *La Princesse de Clèves*,” *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), 81-82.

⁸Hirsch explains the formation of the princess's identity in Freudian terms, insisting on the primacy of mother over husband and lover, early childhood (attachment to the mother in the pre-oedipal stage) over maturity.

- ⁹Hirsch, p. 85.
- ¹⁰Luce Irigaray, *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p. 7.
- ¹¹Hirsch, p. 75.
- ¹²Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1950).
- ¹³Nancy Chodorov, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978).
- ¹⁴Peggy Kamuf, "A Mother's Will: *The Princess de Clèves*," in *Fictions of Feminine Desire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 71.
- ¹⁵"where an enigma is first posed about the princess's identity," p. 78; "The enigma of the *Princesse de Clèves* reemerges," p. 85; "The myth may also serve as a key to the princess's enigma," p.88.
- ¹⁶Kamuf, p. 71.
- ¹⁷Sylvère Lotringer, "La Structure Romanesque," *Critique* 26, 177 (1970), 519.
- ¹⁸In this regard, Kamuf's explanation of the etymology of *Clèves* is revealing: "As for *Clèves*, if one hears the verb *cliver*, to split, to sever, then what of its other, intransitive, usage which survives in English: to cleave, that is, to adhere to, to cling, to be faithful to?" (p. 91).
- ¹⁹Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) p. 76.
- ²⁰Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) p. 343.
- ²¹Irigaray, p. 24.
- ²²Miller, p. 347.
- ²³Miller, p. 348.
- ²⁴Miller, p. 349.
- ²⁵Miller, p. 351.
- ²⁶Miller, p. 356.
- ²⁷Miller, p. 351.