

The Princess, Dido, Diana: Lunar Glimpses in *La Princesse de Clèves*

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“Je n’ai rien à vous apprendre [...] sur quoi on puisse faire de jugement assuré” (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 289). Those words, from the fourth part of Madame de Lafayette’s novel, were spoken by the Prince de Clèves’s manservant, sent to Coulommiers in order to spy on the Princess. This article will take for its own those words and their sense of uncertainty, indicating from the outset that it has nothing sure to offer, even as it snoops after something to report about the consternating and variously explained puzzle that concludes the novel, namely why the Princess rejected ostensibly perfect love and marriage. Like the shifting, shadowy light from the ever waxing and waning moon – the astral body that will become the focus in the closing pages of what follows – whatever wavering intellectual light to be shed below will not have anything like the clear and decisive light of the sun. But since in studies of seventeenth-century France and often of its literature the sun is symbolically associated with the absolutist, repressive, and sexist Louis XIV, lunar light might not be an entirely bad thing. Moreover, John Campbell’s book of 1996, *Questions of Interpretation in La Princesse de Clèves*, has reviewed the major critical work done on Lafayette’s novel, in order to make the sound and unavoidable observation that, by any light, in its major concerns this novel stands as a text singularly and confoundingly resistant to unequivocal “sun-lit” interpretations: “[...] *La Princesse de Clèves* is an unstinting source of paradoxes, contradictions and ambiguities. Working one’s way up the long winding river of criticism, one has only to pitch camp at a place where pattern and meaning are found, to see another impressive site loom up, but on the opposite bank” (Campbell 224).

On then to a moon-lit argument, one centered on a greatly “tangled” question (the concept of entanglement will come into play below): why does the Princess take to a life alternating between a *maison religieuse* and *chez elle*, instead of marrying the Duke of Nemours, a man whom she loves

sincerely and deeply, a man viewed by the narrator and the other characters as the most handsome, the most dashing, the most accomplished, the most desirable Frenchman alive; he is also the best dressed, a vestimentary emphasis to which we will soon return (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 132). This is a man whom she has every right to marry, were it not for what she famously describes as “*un devoir qui ne subsiste que dans mon imagination*” (309). The first point in the argument can be made by applying to the text the spirit of an aspect of Michael Riffaterre’s structuralist *cum* reader-response theory, to wit, that in literature textual problems resistant to mimetic understanding have several weighty consequences, among which is the fact that such problems are “at one and the same time the locus of obscurity and the index to the solution” (Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* 161). More specifically, the problems themselves point to an intertext that offers the best solution to the problems, a solution not of mimetic sense but of semiotic significance. No attempt will be made here to apply Riffaterre’s theory strictly to Mme de Lafayette’s novel, although happily enough it is true that one of Riffaterre’s designation for mimesis-resistant problems in literature is “faults or rents in the fabric of verisimilitude” (Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* 102). The French term for “verisimilitude” being of course “*vraisemblance*,” justification for turning to the spirit of Riffaterre’s theory can be found in this novel’s early readers’ raising vociferous and notorious objections to “faults or rents in the fabric of” *vraisemblance* (Montalbet 16). For more recent readers, while they probably find this novel’s fabric of verisimilitude less rendered than had many of the novel’s contemporaries (or at least they find it differently rendered), if one is to judge from the range of conflicting attempts to explain the Princess’s conduct at the end of the novel – *vertu*, *devoir*, *repos*, religiosity, emotional immaturity, etc. (surveyed in Campbell, Chapter V) – her decision does retain even today something of the *invraisemblable*.

Regarding problems of understanding at the level of mimesis, they of course abound in *La Princesse de Clèves*. One encounters them for example at the novel’s very opening, that long, complicated introduction to the court of Henri II, an opening that not only bedevils most of today’s readers, but that also bothered the novel’s contemporaries (Adam 190, Valincour 35). In addition and echoing the problems of historical sense posed by the opening pages, scattered throughout the rest of the text there are the famous and famously complicated intercalated stories that in both intrinsic sense and plot placement challenge any easy notion of the novel as mimesis.

Bridging the spirit of Riffaterrean theory to critical practice regarding *La Princesse de Clèves*, one may call all these problems “entanglements,” the term that Rae Beth Gordon used to describe and unify thematically first the

confusing cast of historical and fictional characters that sets the decor at the beginning of the novel, then the text's prominent woven objects (the Princess's ribbons and Nemours's scarf caught in a window jamb), and finally and most notably, the intricate, narratively disruptive internal narratives. In support of Gordon's contention of the role of "entanglement" in *La Princesse de Clèves*, one should consider the novel's extensive use of words such as *embarras*, *attachement*, and *liaison*. The "entanglement" connoted by the latter two words is clear enough. Regarding *embarras*, the etymological root of *embarras* has been traced to a sixteenth-century borrowing based on the Galician-Portuguese *baraço*, 'strap,' 'cord' (Rey). Numerous instances of *embarras* and its derivatives are to be found in the novel, illustrating how its "strap, cord" etymon remained lively across the range of Mme de Lafayette's seventeenth-century usage, designating physical and even political entanglements; but more importantly for the current argument, emotional entanglement is designated as well (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* e.g. 154, 157, 179, 235, 257-58, 283).

Moreover, remaining true to Riffaterre's essential insight, I propose that the entanglements not only bring attention to themselves, they also point to their own solution, a solution to be found à *la Riffaterre* in yet another literary text, an intertext, a solution that will bring us back to bodily appearance, the vestimentary specificity of which was curiously emphasized in the novel's opening and atypical description of Nemours. As a first step in getting at that solution we turn to one of the much commented scenes from the book, the second pavilion scene, the sexually charged one involving voyeurism on the Duke's part, the scene in which the Princess, having fled the court by herself and believing that she has complete privacy in her country pavilion, is surreptitiously observed by the Duke as she engages in curious, perhaps autoerotic behavior, while noteworthy in her clothing (more precisely, in the scantiness thereof) she gazes intently at a picture of her beloved: "Il faisait chaud, et elle n'avait rien, sur sa tête et sur sa gorge, que *ses cheveux confusément rattachés*" (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 281 ; emphasis added). Recall that the scene takes place on the edge of a forest, often the scene of fairy-tale, of myth, of dream, that is, the frequent scene of significant if indirect and often "lunar-lit" symbolic revelation. I propose that in this visually entangled, inverted scene (Nemours looks at the Princess who looks at the painting that closes the inverted circle by "looking at" Nemours) the hair of the slightly uncovered Princess is a noteworthy example of thematic overdetermination inviting special attention to itself, in that its confused reattachment to itself (not to mention the erotic charge derived from its strip-tease role on the Princess's exposed chest) replicates the inverted voyeuristic entanglement and charge. Then the

following two sentences further echo the two sorts of tangles by recounting how around Nemours's stolen (and phallic) cane the Princess had been tying ribbons into knots of black and yellow (the colors that, known only to her and to him, he had worn in her honor at the earlier joust). And as Gordon points out, the text at this point compulsively if subtly insists on entanglements in other ways, one of which arises when the Duke turns to leave, only to have his scarf get tangled in a window jamb.

How then does this focusing of all the literal and metaphorical entanglement-problems on the mention of the Princess's tangled hair point the way to a solution to the puzzle at the end of the novel? To answer that question à la *Riffaterre*, one needs to identify the intertext whereby the problems, the entanglements, would be ... resolved. Let me prepare here part of my subsequent argument by pointing out that the words "resolve" and "*résoudre*" come from the Latin *resolvere*, meaning "to untie a knot or tangle." In order to get at the "resolving" intertext, the reading must first address the following: because of this novel's obstacles to understanding and its memorable and explicit emphasis on the role of deceptive appearances, one should distrust the narrator's and the characters' repeated hyperbolic assertions that the latter's feelings, passions, and story were the most moving, the most extraordinary, the most novel, etc. ever told (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 241-42, 246, 256, 259, 276, 282, 284, etc.) For instance, it is not at all the case, as the Princess, her husband, and the narrator would have us believe, that she is the first princess to tell her loving and deserving husband, out of noble motives, that she loves another (240-41), Corneille's Polyeucte having done the same in 1642 (Adam 191, n. 2). So two questions arise: is this love story in not just one but in all its major lineaments actually not unique? And if, as will be argued, it is in fact profoundly derivative from a prestigious intertext ("profoundly" both in the sense of having transcending significance and of being found only well beneath its "surface"), why was the author so inclined – consciously or unconsciously – to deflect attention away from that?

To address the first question while, as Mme de Chartres notably advised (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 157), remaining skeptical of appearances, we should ask in a contrarian spirit what at the time was in fact one of the oldest, best known European love stories, one long considered most moving? There was indeed such a story, about a widow like the Princess, with blond hair like the Princess (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 138), textually associated in other ways with the color yellow like the Princess (266), in love with a man of imperial destiny, as was the Princess with Nemours who was both of marital interest to Queen Elizabeth of England (135-36, 187) and of reported adulterous interest to no less a queenly figure

than the Dauphiness, Mary Stuart (132-33); and like the Princess this earlier widow finally did *not* marry her new love. In both cases the heroine finds herself in an “entanglement” because, while keenly attached to her status as a devoted widow, she is on the other hand desperately in love, has external authorization to marry, but in the end she comes to a pass whereby the love affair does *not* lead to marriage. Moreover and what is central to the ultimate point of these pages, in both texts the overriding issue is whether the woman’s goals and power will take precedence over the man’s.

Medieval, renaissance, and modern Europe knew that story well, coming as it did from Virgil, Virgil who as a presumed *anima naturaliter Christiana* had exercised extraordinary influence in the Christian West because his fourth eclogue had been read to be a pagan prediction of the coming of Christ (Comparetti 99-103),¹ Virgil who had told the ultimately futile love story of the widowed Dido and the imperial Aeneas in the poet’s *Aeneid*, which Lafayette, in learning Latin, had read.² The European imagination had for centuries been gripped by precisely that love affair, to such an extent that it figured in texts major and minor, starting most famously with

¹ So singular and monumental had been Virgil’s contribution to Latin language and letters that already for post-Augustan Romans as well as for his contemporaries, Virgil had enjoyed sweeping and lofty veneration. This veneration reached such heights that his texts came to be considered a source of prophecy. The practice of the *sortes Vergilianae*, whereby one had only to open his works at random to find guidance on the future, continued even throughout the Christian middle ages (Comparetti 48).

² “[S]elon les dires des contemporains, [...] après trois mois de leçons de latin l’élève fut aussi forte que le maître [Gilles Ménage]: ‘Trois mois après que Madame de LaFayette eut commencé d’apprendre le latin,’ lit-on dans *Segraisiana* [Segrais, *Segraisiana*, Paris, 1722], ‘elle en savait déjà plus que Monsieur Ménage et que le Père Rapin, ses maîtres: en la faisant expliquer, ils eurent dispute ensemble touchant l’explication d’un passage et ni l’un ni l’autre ne vouloit se rendre au sentiment de son compagnon: Madame de LaFayette leur dit, vous n’y entendez rien ni l’un ni l’autre ; en effet elle leur dit la véritable explication de ce passage, ils tombèrent d’accord qu’elle avait raison. C’était un poète qu’elle expliquait, car elle n’aimoit pas la prose, et elle n’a pas lu Cicéron: mais comme elle se plaisoit fort à la poésie, elle lisoit particulièrement Virgile et Horace [...]’” (Ashton 29-30, see also Haig 22). In addition she had commented on Segrais’s French translation of Virgil’s text (Rea 222). Although one should readily discount the accuracy of Segrais’s flattering description of Madame de Lafayette’s knowledge of Latin (see for example Lafayette’s own description of her Latin, *Correspondance* 196-97, 201, 218), Ménage and another of her intellectual and literary mentors, Pierre-Daniel Huet, could nonetheless communicate with her in Latin (for example, Lafayette, *Correspondance* 160-61, 162, 211), so there can be no discounting her acquaintance with Virgil.

the passage in Augustine's *Confessions* (regretting his emotional response as a youth to the fictional Dido, Book 1, Chapter 13) and including Montfleury's comedy entitled *L'ambigu comique ou les Amours de Didon et d'Ænée* (produced in 1673, five years before the publication of Lafayette's text).³

Granted then that Lafayette and her world were quite familiar with the Carthaginian queen's story in the *Aeneid*, and granted then that in its outline the allegedly unique story of the Princess's love affair is not in fact unique, the question arises of the extent to which Lafayette's novel can be shown to parallel Virgil's epic. As was indicated above, in its plot outline Lafayette's text shows arresting parallels with Virgil's: Dido had of course been a queen, that is, an aristocrat, like the Princess, who too had vowed not to marry after the death of her husband (Sichaeus), but who subsequently had found herself deeply in love with a renowned warrior, Aeneas in her case, one of the most attractive men of her times, as Nemours would be in the Princess's times. In fact Aeneas was the literal son of the goddess of love as the irresistible Nemours would be her metaphorical son (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 132). However, neither woman would ultimately marry her "son of Venus," Dido being refused by Aeneas, and in a highly significant reversal of roles, the Princess refusing Nemours's hand. One soon realizes that the parallels extend even to less obvious details as well, for example that the color marking Dido is yellow, as noted above for Lafayette's Princess: Dido's hair is blond (Virgil 4.698 – as indeed is that of the presumed forebears of the Princess, the Gauls, whose blond hair figures on the wondrous shield made for Aeneas by Vulcan, 8.659), her hair is knotted in gold (4.138), Aeneas gives her a veil edged in yellow (1.711), and his sword that she uses to kill herself was starred with yellow jasper (4.261, 4.646-647).

The focus of this study being the puzzle that concludes the Princess's story, a careful comparison of the two texts' endings should now be undertaken. But the effort, like that of the Prince's manservant, can only glimpse uncertainly what it is looking for. We start with the climax of Virgil's episode, in which Dido kills herself in order to escape the anguish and humiliation of spurned love. In rereading the climax, one notes that, as was religiously appropriate for Dido's approach to the altar in order to beseech the gods, she first must untie/untangle her sandal and girdle, because the Romans considered knots dangerous in all religious rites (Burriss 157): "She herself, with holy meal and holy hands, stood beside the altars, one foot

³ For sources offering comprehensive lists of appearances of Dido in English, French, Italian, Latin, and Spanish literatures, see Desmond 237-38, note 93.

unsandalled and girdle loosened; soon to die she calls on the gods and on the stars, witnesses of her doom [...]" (Virgil 4.517-520).

Moreover, initially unsuccessful in her attempt at suicide and suffering dreadfully, she is granted mercy by Juno, who sends Iris to cut her hair (substituting for Proserpine, who was supposed to cut hair from those entering the underworld), Iris who thereby (in Virgil's words) "*luctantem animam [...] resolveret*" ["her struggling soul [...] might {she} untie" 4.695].

With these passages in mind, we can now view the Princess, the proposed French Dido, as imitating her Carthaginian intertextual sister, but she admittedly does so only indirectly and subtly – that is, under a far from decisive, lunar light. The Princess, at the end of her story, enters a convent, thereby making possible a tenuous link between herself and Dido at the end of her story, that link being the cutting of hair at a religious site: the convent, like Dido's sacrificial altar, was both a sacred site and the site par excellence of women with shorn hair. Furthermore, the convent, like Dido's pagan altar, was a site of death, at least symbolically, insofar as the cutting of hair indicated that the nuns would, if not literally and immediately then spiritually and eventually, die to the world. (One of the more memorable examples of that in French literature occurs at the end of Chateaubriand's *René*, when the eponymous narrator observes his sister Amélie take her convent vows.) In those symbolic terms, then, the new Dido, like her predecessor experiencing a sense of impending death ("*Cette vue si longue et si prochaine de la mort*," Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 313), in presumably cutting her hair or in at least associating herself with women shorn of their hair, "resolves" her problems, she "untangles" herself from all entanglements: in the abstract she "untangles" herself from the entanglement of the real with the only apparent, but more concretely she does so from the entanglement of the French court's erotic/political "*intrigues*" (e.g. Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 5, the word *intrigue* coming from *intricare*, 'to entangle'), and most importantly for her she "untangles" herself from the *attachements* "binding" the three protagonists to each other in conflicting ways (e.g., 305, 307, 313) that for her and on her idiosyncratic terms threaten her duty (308-9).

That duty, it must be remembered, is one that the conclusion's two male authority figures, Nemours her would-be husband and the Vidame de Chartres the remaining patriarch of her family, unsuccessfully insist that she reject. Especially when viewed against male insistence that the Princess reject her sense of duty to herself, her turning to a convent for "resolution" had special resonance for seventeenth-century France, where the number of convents had recently proliferated (Walker 9), imprinting a feminine spiri-

tuality on France's Catholic Reformation (Rapley 5), and effectively resisting – indeed violating – the sexist strictures of post-Tridentine Catholicism. It would be hard to exaggerate the difficulty of – and need for – resistance:

Nowhere has the metaphor of war between the sexes been more liberally employed than in describing French society in the seventeenth century. Almost every indicator of social relationships which historians have examined – religion, politics, the law, medical practice, literature, business, and marital and family relationships – has supported their thesis of a growing male-female dichotomy, an aggressive antifeminism, an irresistible trend towards patriarchy. The picture emerges of a society like an armed camp, with men in control of all strategic points. Yet it also appears that the men lived in a constant state of anxious vigilance, always alert to the other sex's efforts at usurpation. The image that haunted their thoughts was that of the 'world turned upside-down': the mule riding the muleteer, the woman commanding the man, a thing against all nature and reason. (Rapley 3)

Unsurprisingly, in such a world the usually compliant Princess's decision to resist patriarchal authority, to flee that world and an apparently ideal marriage by associating with a convent, would appear even to her all the more surprising, all the more "against all nature and reason": "Elle fut étonnée de ce qu'elle avait fait; elle s'en repentit; elle en eut de la joie [...]" (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 310).

Equally unsurprisingly, scholars of seventeenth-century French convents have demonstrated that convents became a center of womanist resistance to authoritarian, gynophobic patriarchy. In many cases this occurred precisely as a result of women's making the convent what Elizabeth Rapley designates an "intermediate state" part religious, part secular" (Rapley 7), and as Linda Lierheimer has written, a site straddling "the boundary between lay and monastic" (211; see also Walker 5). That intermediate state cannot help but bring to mind the puzzle within the puzzle found on the very last page of *La Princesse de Clèves*, namely, why Lafayette's heroine, after refusing apparently ideal love and marriage, not only turns to the convent, but does so in a highly unusual way, spending the rest of her life creating "des exemples de vertu inimitables" by regularly straddling the "intermediate state" between a "maison religieuse" and "chez elle" (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 315; for a different reading of the "puzzle within the puzzle," see Racevskis).

In short, then, *La Princesse de Clèves* can be read to make of its convent, on the one hand an ever so "lunar-lit" reversal of one of the West's originary literary struggles pitting a woman's rule, that of Queen Dido, against a man's rule, that of Rome-bound Aeneas, patriarch par excellence, and on the other hand a highly resonant reminder for its seventeenth-century

readers of the seismic confrontation with power between the sexes, a confrontation underscored by womanist resistance in the convents.

With this answer to the first of the two questions posed above (no, the Princess's love story is decidedly *not* unique, but it does reverse the patriarchal submission characterizing its prestigious intertext), there remains the second question: why was Lafayette so inclined – consciously or unconsciously – to deflect attention away from her novel's Virgilian intertext?; or, to rephrase, why does her novel reflect its intertext only under a less than decisive, lunar light? To be sure, in the sort of moon-lit reading argued for in these pages, speculation could lead to any number of insubstantial, unproductive answers. For instance, it is the case that many texts deflect attention away from their intertextual tracks, especially if, as was the case for *La Princesse de Clèves*, they are presented as *nouvelles*, that is, as examples of a new kind of literature. But a less speculative and a more interesting answer, one more in harmony with the political and ideological issues in play at the time of the novel's production, would take as its starting point the observation of the great success with which Lafayette's love story did in fact deflect attention away from its intertext. Even in Lafayette's time, a time far more attuned to classical studies than our own, her text's claim to being a new, unique love story managed to go unchallenged, even by its first substantial critic Valincour who, in his book's disparaging attack on *La Princesse de Clèves*, happened to refer to Virgil's epic no fewer than three times (Valincour 63, 71, 72), on the third occasion even explicitly naming Dido and Aeneas. But not once did he give any sign of seeing any parallels between Virgil's and Lafayette's love stories.

The success at deflection harmonizes quite nicely with the visibly suppressive character of this text by Lafayette, an intimate of Louis XIV's intimidating court for ten years (Adam 186), a suppressive character not at all surprising given the pressures attending questions about women's status, their rights, and their potential under the Sun King. Consequently, I propose that important aspects of the text allow themselves to be glimpsed only in an uncertain, moon-lit reading consistent with the text's omnipresent suppressiveness. To begin with, an article of Joan DeJean's has argued well for what she terms Lafayette's novel's "poetics of suppression" that in its impact ranges from the author's suppression of her own name, on through pronoun usage and wide-spread, varied use of ellipsis, extending even to the Princess's identity and story (DeJean, "Poetics of Suppression"). Also, we should acknowledge that Lafayette's novel is after all an emphatically litotic text, that is, one that affirms strong emotion, particularly the love that interests it so strongly, by showing it through not showing it, by focusing on it even as it suppresses its expression both in word and in action. We should recall as

well that the text opens with a brazen example of suppression when it denies the glory of the Sun King by maintaining that *never* has a French court matched Henri II's in *la magnificence et la galanterie* (a denial that clearly registered with contemporaries, e.g. Valincour 34-35). The brazenness yet indirection of this incipit suggests that Lafayette's novel works an attack on Louis's reign in an indirect mode made necessary not only by the threat of serious social and regal reprisals for overt assaults, but also by a "novel" way of seeing women's plight in late seventeenth-century France. Within that suppressive context we should consider this: just as the text suppresses that one astral symbol, the sun, so too it suppresses that other, competing astral symbol, the moon, insofar as Henri II's notorious and notoriously powerful mistress, Mme de Valentinois, in spite of her domination of the novel's politics, is only rarely in the novel referred to under the name by which she has been best known to history, the name by which her Antiquity-smitten world so often referred to her, and by which her passion and monument, the chateau and garden of Anet, so richly glorified her (Cloulas 236 ff.), namely, Diane de Poitiers. Let us recall that Diana the lunar goddess, hunter, and slayer, evoked unruly nature so incompatible with the Sun King's will to order in architecture and gardens as in politics and literature.⁴ (There is of course nothing suppressed about the role of the Duchess of Valentinois in Lafayette's novel, or for that matter about the fact that "Mme de Lafayette ensures that the reader will perceive points of comparison" between the Duchess and the Princess [MacRae 565] – a point important for my conclusion. But as we will soon see, the lunar side of the Duchess and of the link between the two figures is indeed open only to indirect glimpses.) The barely glimpsed quality both of this sun-moon opposition and of the novel's intertextual links discussed above, seems of a piece with so many of the text's more striking moments that insist that simple sight destroys, that the eye seeing directly has an affinity for death, literally as in the death of Madame de Chartres after seeing in her married daughter's comportment the presumed certainty that the latter is entertaining a potentially adulterous love, metaphorically as in the death to Nemours's erotic aspirations that is eventually brought about by his voyeurism, and symbolically as in Henri's joust that brings him death through the eye. Even the mere assumption of seeing with simple clarity can bring doom, witness the Prince's dying after insisting on reading certainty into his servant's uncertain message, the message that opened this article.

⁴ I would like to thank Ms. Elise Albrecht, Denison '05, for her help with the research on this aspect of my argument.

The potential value of this consciously lunar glimpse at a text, a glimpse that offers something other than solar clarity and decisiveness, takes on an added dimension when we realize that Dido herself has been shown by classical scholars to be a Phoenician incarnation of none other than the lunar goddess (Seyffert 185), an incarnation acknowledged in Virgil's text by comparing Dido to the moon-goddess Diana when the Carthaginian queen first appears (1.494-504) and later by linking her to the moon when she appears to Aeneas in the underground land of the dead (6.450-54). If that lunar connection is made, is it appropriate to conclude that the new French Dido too has a lunar side, and can anything be found in Lafayette's novel to warrant that? Perhaps. Consider the novel's last sentence, the one that has caused no small amount of critical ink to be spilt, the one described above as "the puzzle within the puzzle," the expression that uses the iterative imperfect to tell us that, after giving up her love, the Princess for the rest of her life would withdraw to a convent part of the year only to leave it: "Elle passait une partie de l'année dans cette maison religieuse et l'autre chez elle [...]" (Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves* 315). The expression gives pause, because, to my knowledge, although a widow's leaving the world to enter a convent is banal enough in seventeenth-century French life as in its fiction, in fiction at least this regular, rhythmic – lunar? – moving in and out is unparalleled, and thus would, like so much in this novel, tease at the threshold of awareness for informed readers. Moreover, if we turn from a consideration of literary parallels to a consideration of those to be found in history, we may recall the singular life of the Duchesse de Longueville, one of the *frondeuses* appropriately called "Amazons" in their time (DeJean, *Tender Geographies* 9-10, 36-45), literally a woman warrior who dared to take up arms and seriously (and almost with success) threaten Louis's power and indeed reign, an historical incarnation of, in Rapley's expression, "the 'world turned upside-down': the mule riding the muleteer, the woman commanding the man, a thing against all nature and reason." It turns out that Longueville spent the end of her life vacillating between the world and the call of Jansenist retreat from the world: "In the years after the Fronde, the greatest *frondeuse*, the Duchesse de Longueville, chose a not unrelated form of retreat – to the Carmel convent in the faubourg Saint-Jacques – and divided her life between this female community and a house she had built for herself at the Jansenist monastery, Port-Royal" (DeJean, *Tender Geographies* 233 note 40; see also Erlanger 226 ff.). That singular, powerful, resistant woman's story would have been quite familiar to Lafayette, because her close friend La Rochefoucauld had been Longueville's lover and father to her son Paris. So the Princess's alternately appearing in, and then disappearing from, *une maison religieuse* and *chez elle* is yet

another interpretive tease, a glimpse of a role harmonizing with both the moon's and a towering woman rebel's rhythm of presence and absence to the world.

I would like to start to close by offering an answer to the question hanging over this article's entire argument: what is the point of a reading that is merely glimpsing, merely "lunar-lit"? The major contentions of Joan DeJean's book *Tender Geographies* set the context for an answer. DeJean shows that the modern French novel is a feminist creation (5), that in seventeenth-century France "female authorship was a political act," that novels such as Lafayette's "are never solely about love, but always stress the political and social implication of affective choices and female writing" (11), that such novels provide "at least a *subtle* contestation" (8; my emphasis) of the political structures of the time. Those points, together with DeJean's recalling that "the Augustan age [deliberately glorified in the *Aeneid*] was already being promoted as the model for France's self-designated Golden Age" (91), would set the context for the proposed lunar reading, to wit: at a time of increasingly intolerant political, literary, and sexist absolutism, the suppressive, elliptical, litotic *La Princesse de Clèves* can only hint at its Virgilian intertext but do no more, because in the context of late seventeenth-century France's concerted and largely successful repression of women, of their history, their power, their potential, this novel's vision of womanist *devenir*, like the Princess's vision of *devoir*, "*ne subsiste que dans l'imagination.*"

On the other hand, a *nouvelle* that can be read to challenge, however subtly, patriarchal intolerance of women does well to challenge it through the *Aeneid*, because as Marilyn Desmond shows in *Reading Dido*, her postcolonial, feminist study of Virgil's epic, from the Middle Ages up until the nineteenth century:

the reading of the *Aeneid* has been associated with the study of Latin, thereby placing Virgil at the heart of institutionalized education; consequently, the history of education in the West has – until very recently – paralleled the history of Virgil readership. And groups historically excluded from institutional education have also been excluded from Virgil readership: women of any class [...].” (Desmond 4).

Small wonder then that for T. S. Eliot Virgil "acquires the centrality of the unique classic; he is at the centre of European civilization, in a position which no other poet can share or usurp" (Eliot 70). But in spite of the *Aeneid's* service in the cause of patriarchal ideology that has historically replicated itself in the West's institutionalized and until recent times sexist education of exclusion, Desmond shows the story of Dido, in its various forms throughout the post-Augustan Roman empire and medieval Europe,

to have questioned and challenged Virgil's turning the original Dido tale on its head when he proposed a flawed, failed, and submissive woman to replace the resourceful and commanding leader who had with great success defied male dominance. In its own lunar-lit way *La Princesse de Clèves*, a novel written by a woman who *had* read Virgil in Latin, restores the main power-dynamics of the original tale, reasserting what Desmond, after Trinh Minh-ha, terms the second-hand memory of an earlier, heroic Dido (Desmond 3).

So “*je n’ai rien à vous apprendre sur quoi on puisse faire de jugement assuré,*” but I do propose that this text, read in this intertextual way, lets us glimpse – but no more – the Princess as French Dido who in turn hints – but no more – at Diana, both the lunar goddess of mythology and the political giant of the reign of Henri II. The French Dido-Princess/Diane would challenge Aeneas-Nemours who in turn would hint at Augustus-Louis, the brilliant but blinding solar Apollo of seventeenth-century French political and literary power. Moreover, a recent study of the figure of Dido across centuries, cultures, and continents shows her to be “not only [...] a liminal figure who defies all boundaries but also [...] an aesthetic tool to both resist and endorse the hegemonic discourse of the state regarding national, racial, and gender identity” (Zayzafoon 72). That characterization of Dido-figures like the characterization proposed in this article harmonizes well both with the contradictory state of the literary criticism surveyed by Campbell in the opening paragraph above, and with the glimpsing nature of the current argument. But the very glimpsing itself recalls another reason for the enduring appeal of *La Princesse de Clèves*: “The ‘*merit*’ of Lafayette’s novel, the fascination it exercises over readers, comes from her understanding of the power of language and of the spell cast by what is outside of language, the unsayable – *la Princesse de Clèves* is a true Barthesian *texte de jouissance*, a text that glorifies the *in-dicible*, the *coupure*, the *faillie*” (DeJean, “Poetics of Suppression” 94). Nor was this the first time in the history of French letters that the revolutionary text of a woman writer echoed classical precedent in a way that hinted at the need for its discretion in a man’s literary world, while inviting the reader to engage its obscurities in order to generate hermeneutically *le surplus*:

Custume fu as anciëns
 Ceo testimoine Preciens
 Es livres ke jadis feseient
 Assez oscurement diseient
 Pur ceus ki a venir esteient
 E ki aprendre les deveient,
 K’i peüssent gloser la lettre

E de lur sen le surplus mettre. (Marie de France, "Prologue" 9-16)

And *le surplus*, like *la faille* endlessly rich in subversive potential, *ne subsistent que dans l'imagination*, of course and necessarily.

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â€œThe Princess, Dido, Diana: Glimpses of the Lunar in La Princesse de Clèvesâ€ (paper read at the 59th Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, April 20-22, 2006). - â€œUntangling the Tangle in La Princesse de Clèves: Mme de Lafayetteâ€™s Heroine as Interrogating Didoâ€ (read at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Cincinnati Conference on Romance Languages and Literatures, May 2005). - â€œPatrick Modianoâ€™s Villa Triste: Bordering on Not So Sadâ€ (read at the 2005 Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, April 2005). - Or: The Orthodox/Unorthodox in Lit Crit, the University, La Princesse de Clèves, andâ€œWho Knows?â€ Maybe Even Lifeâ€ (read at Denisonâ€™s Faculty Luncheon, November 2003). - â€œWhatâ€™s a Lit Class? The Peopleâ€™s Princess was the most loved member of the British Royal family and probably the most loved royalty in the world. She was often nicknamed â€œThe Queen of Heartsâ€ for her hands-on & loving approach in dealing with the causes she cared about. She took every opportunity to bring awareness to different issues around the world, to promote love and family values. On the day of her tragic death, here are 20 of the most inspiring Princess Diana quotes that will inspire you to open your heart and care for others. Top 20 Most Inspiring Princess Diana Quotes. â€œI wear my heart on my sleeve.â€ La Princesse de Clèves is a French novel which was published anonymously in March 1678. It is regarded by many as the beginning of the modern tradition of the psychological novel and a great classic work. Its author is generally held to be Madame de La Fayette. The action takes place between October 1558 and November 1559 primarily at the royal court of Henry II of France, as well as in a few other locations in France. The novel recreates that era with remarkable precision. Nearly every character La Princesse de Clèves written by Madame de Lafayette, Special Edition illustrated by Christian Lacroix, 2010â€™, â€™, ~â€™; Ophelia Ryan â€™, ~â€™. Historical Art Portraiture Photoshop Woman Painting Nostalgic Art Portrait Art Great Artists Art History Portrait. Madame de Lafayette. - Lettres Delacroix Maisons Alfort -> Blog Archive -> 1 -> S: Scènes de bal: La Princesse de Clèves. R -> visez gratuitement le BAC, le brevet gr -> ce. Profs, ouvrez gratuitement un blog p -> dagogique.