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## Une forme frondeuse: the function of discontinuity in La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*

In 1663 Mme de Sablé circulated privately a small number of copies of La Rochefoucauld's *Sentences et maximes de morale* (as it was titled at the time); this exercise was intended to sound out opinion about the work in advance of any publication. Among the extant replies to this consultation, one in particular singles out disapprovingly the disjointed nature of the work. Describing the reading process in terms of masonry, the anonymous critic states:

On y remarque de belles pierres, j'en demeure d'accord; mais on ne saurait disconvenir qu'il ne s'y trouve aussi du moellon et beaucoup de plâtras, qui sont si mal joints ensemble qu'il est impossible qu'ils puissent faire corps ni liaison, et par conséquent que l'ouvrage puisse subsister.<sup>1</sup>

The critic goes on to claim that the work is nothing but an anthology of 'sentences' and 'pointes' culled from more coherent works that had the distinct advantage over the *Maximes* of contextualizing their remarks: 'car si l'on voyait ce qui était devant et après, assurément on en serait plus édifié et moins scandalisé'.<sup>2</sup>

So even in their earliest form, La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* disturbed, unsettled, 'scandalized' the reader.<sup>3</sup> More particularly, in this instance, it is their intentionally stylized discontinuity that impacts on the reading experience. Mme de Sablé's correspondent (as today's reader too, perhaps) is disconcerted by being denied 'ce qui était devant et après'. In other words, it is the repeated closure of the maxims, their insistent refusal to elaborate, that affects the way in which they are read and received. Thus the spaces between maxims, the 'spectacular'<sup>4</sup> blanks on the page, disrupt the reading, punctuate it unevenly, and quite literally disarticulate its various statements.

As far as the reader is concerned then, I would argue that these spaces offer instances not of comprehension (taking possession of the text's meaning) but of apprehension (a stalling of meaning and at the same time a coming to awareness of something else). And, as its current usage suggests, this 'apprehension' in reading the *Maximes* is very much tinged with a sense of uneasiness and dread, for what the text does effectively is to deny the very thing that the maxim was traditionally employed to supply: knowledge, specifically the laying down of law. Unlike the maxims of Descartes's 'morale par provision' or even Molière's 'Maximes du mariage' in *L'Ecole des femmes*, La Rochefoucauld's discrete *sententiae* strip the reader of his/her certainties, dispossess the subject of its knowledge and provide blank spaces which both invite the reader into the text and represent perfectly his/her newly realized absence of understanding.<sup>5</sup> Far from accumulating a store of wisdom, the

disjunctive *Maximes* induce what can best be called a ‘non-savoir’ in their reader. This is recognized by Henri de La Chapelle-Bessé in his ‘Discours’ which prefaced the first edition of the *Maximes*. After claiming the work discomfited him, even made him blush at its truths, he writes: ‘mais je sens bien, à force de le lire, que si je n’apprends pas à devenir plus sage, j’apprends au moins à connaître que je ne le suis pas’.<sup>6</sup> In effect, their discontinuities dismantle, by means of form, the same pretensions to knowledge, especially self-knowledge, ridiculed in their text.

This induction of the reader into the text of the *Maximes* via its disjunctions is duly noted by the critic Hélène Cazes. She writes: ‘temps de l’inconstance, du caprice, du mouvement de la pensée, le blanc interdit l’homogénéité et la simplicité – au sens propre – d’une lecture linéaire: il marque la place et la part du lecteur’.<sup>7</sup> This also suggests another reason for the reader’s ‘apprehension’: by allocating the reader a place in the text, more particularly by adequating the reader to the maxim, making him or her the unspoken counterpart to each *sententia*, La Rochefoucauld also ascribes to each reader the formal ambiguity of each maxim, that is, their relation to the rest of the text, what Geoffrey Bennington calls being at once ‘a part of the text and apart from the text’.<sup>8</sup> As with individual maxims, individual readers occupy a place in the text which is both their own, yet which is necessarily occupied by others; they become like each maxim, pre-eminent and superfluous, sharing the partial, liminal existence of statements which stand in a relation of semi-autonomy to the work that they compose, equally susceptible to being cited or disregarded. Hence this partiality of maxim and maxim-reader is not merely formal: it is also ‘partial’ in the sense of ‘partisan’, giving rise to widely divergent readings, judgements and feelings in regard of the text. In short, the disjunctions of the *Maximes* evoke a different state of consciousness in the reader from that produced by more continuous, coherent texts.

In the context of mid- to late seventeenth-century France, this alternative ‘apprehensive’ consciousness brought about by the discontinuous reading of the *Maximes* is particularly opposed to two other states of mind: firstly, the continuously reasoning Cartesian consciousness, explicated in the *Discours de la méthode* and applied in the *Méditations*; and secondly, the equally continuous, but characteristically unconscious, operations of ‘amour-propre’ itself. In fact, if we turn to Descartes’s *Discours de la méthode*, we find in the very title an explicitly discursive – that is, continuous, flowing, accumulative – methodology that opposes it to La Rochefoucauld’s insistent discontinuities.<sup>9</sup> The text itself also makes it apparent that the various objects of Cartesian consciousness suppose, indeed are predicated on, the seamless continuity of the reasoning mind; that just as consciousness develops ‘ces longues chaînes de raisons’, so in the natural world ‘toutes les choses s’entre-suivent en même façon’.<sup>10</sup> This simultaneous and continuous co-existence of thought and its objects culminates in the *Cogito* itself (‘je pense, donc je suis’) with its

necessary synchronicity of thought and being. Stylistically, this reliance on reason and causality in the *Discours* translates into a grammar governed by liaisons of co-ordination and subordination ('donc', 'à cause de', 'au moyen de quoi', 'd'où vient que'), the very opposite of the discrete juxtapositions of La Rochefoucauld's reflections. Similarly, the object of Descartes's thought is only called into question the better to possess it; his doubt or 'apprehension' before the world is a preliminary step toward the certain knowledge of it. If anything, the Stoic quest for self-mastery is aggressively extended by Descartes in an attempted mastery of the natural world; a process in which the aim is to 'rendre sienne' all objects of consciousness.<sup>11</sup> In other words, it is radical comprehension, with all that the term implies of appropriation, that Descartes pursues in the *Discours*; and as such, it represents the antithesis of the apprehension afforded the reader by La Rochefoucauld's disappropriating text.

Yet no less than La Rochefoucauld's disjunctive exposé, Descartes's *Discours* also betrays the workings of a certain 'amour-propre'. For while the subject 'pensant-existant' of the work suspends all knowledge in doubt, the subject telling the tale, sure of its narratorial role and discursive powers, is never called into question. In other words, there is a 'moi' at work in the *Discours* which guarantees, seemingly unconsciously, the success of the Method even as it appears to negate every last comforting certainty. Of course, it is precisely this capacity of 'amour-propre' to 'triomphe[r] dans sa propre défaite', denounced by La Rochefoucauld in his famous 'Maxime supprimée 1', which here characterizes the narratorial strategy of Descartes's *Discours*.<sup>12</sup>

I would argue, it is the continually self-regarding machinations of 'amour-propre' which also provide the second type of consciousness opposed by La Rochefoucauld's formal discontinuities and the 'apprehension' that they generate in the reader. According to established Freudian readings of the *Maximes*, notably those of Doubrovsky and Barthes, 'amour-propre' is particularly associated with the Unconscious.<sup>13</sup> That is, it is associated with the activity of our most basic desires and wishes which derive their energy from primary physical instincts, often sexual or destructive in nature, and which seek only their own immediate satisfaction regardless of any other considerations. Moreover, like 'amour-propre', these unconscious impulses shift and change their objects ceaselessly in a sort of timeless quest for gratification, in which 'one [object] may be replaced by another along a whole chain of associations that have no rational basis'.<sup>14</sup> Yet, La Rochefoucauld's disjunctive reflections are not concerned with defining 'amour-propre' *per se* (as was 'Maxime supprimée 1') but with charting, both in their discontinuous form and their imperious tone, the sporadic and disruptive appearances of 'amour-propre' in contemporary society. In other words, the *Maximes* focus on those specifically discontinuous instances where the unconscious 'amour-propre' is both fulfilled and frustrated in its public expression. Hence, far from identifying with the ceaselessly voracious shifting incarnations of 'amour-propre' itself, La

Rochefoucauld's maxims set out on the page the fleeting, disjunctive eruptions of 'amour-propre' into society – more specifically, into the consciously policed use of language in the society of mid- to late-seventeenth-century France. In Freudian terms, then, the stylized discontinuities of the maxims do not correspond to the Unconscious itself but to its repeated, irregular attempts to enter both consciousness and language. In other words, they correspond psychically to that zone or form of thought which at once releases and blocks unconscious impulses, and which Freud terms the 'preconscious'.

In his important work of 1915 entitled 'The Unconscious', Freud describes the preconscious as those thought processes 'capable of becoming conscious'.<sup>15</sup> Arising more often than not in the Unconscious, these are 'psychical acts' which have not yet attained consciousness. So the preconscious acts as a sort of buffer zone between the unconscious and the conscious mind. In the repression of dangerous unconscious material, it is the space of negating, countering forces mustered in defence of consciousness; yet, in other cases, it readily adopts unconscious thoughts and translates them into consciousness. Its discontinuities are then precisely those set between maxims: they constitute at once a channel of communication and a blocking of communication. Yet Freud makes it clear that this filtering of thought, as the maxim-spaces's filtering of meaning, is neither hierarchical nor one-way: it blocks and releases in both directions from the Unconscious to the Conscious and vice versa (similarly the maxims can be read in reverse order from any given point). More specifically, Freud describes the preconscious as that zone of the mind in which thought processes are 'brought into connection with *word-presentations*': just as the reader's mind connects with the 'word-presentations' of the maxims precisely in their intervening spaces.<sup>16</sup> Finally, in this vein, I would consider the capacity of the Freudian preconscious for standing on the threshold of consciousness while itself remaining alien to it, as very similar, if not identical, to the apprehending-apprehensive spaces of the *Maximes* which stand on the threshold of comprehension (understood here as the full passage of the maxims into consciousness/knowledge) while also remaining alien to it.

Of course, there are other, less arcane readings of the discontinuities of the maxims, at least one of which places them firmly (and consciously) in the social context of their time. According to this reading, the disjunctions of the *Maximes* represent a knowing appeal to the fashionable casualness, the affected negligence, of the worldly salons of 1660s Paris. As Jean Rohou comments, their discontinuities correspond to their critical historical moment, demanding 'brièveté et diversité', at the same time finding favour with a cultivated audience which 'n'est plus dominé par les doctes, mais par les mondains, qu'ennuient longueur et continuité, à moins qu'elles ne soient romanesques'.<sup>17</sup> So, far from inciting apprehension in their readers or appealing to the preconscious mind, the *Maximes* subscribe to the social aesthetic of the 'honnête homme', a figure seemingly at ease with himself and his fellows,

whose comportment is characterized by, if anything, a studied self-consciousness.

Certainly, there are maxims in La Rochefoucauld's text which recognize positively the reflexive and sociable nature of 'honnêteté', specifically maxim 206: 'C'est être véritablement honnête homme que de vouloir être toujours exposé à la vue des honnêtes gens'. Maxim 202 inflects this mutual policing of manners more critically, emphasizing the necessity for personal, moral honesty beneath the public displays of 'honnêteté': 'Les faux honnêtes gens sont ceux qui déguisent leurs défauts aux autres et à eux-mêmes. Les vrais honnêtes gens sont ceux qui les connaissent parfaitement et les confessent'. And here a crucial distinction has been introduced into La Rochefoucauld's conception of 'honnêteté': that of authenticity or sincerity. Elaborating on the implicit 'véritablement honnête' of maxim 206, La Rochefoucauld states that there are essentially two types of 'honnête homme': the true and the false, the morally honest individual and the self-deluding hypocrite who has only the outward show of honesty (here 'honnêteté' is closer in meaning perhaps to Montaigne's 'naïveté'). In other words, 'honnêteté' is often only one more cover for the machinations of 'amour-propre' and self-interest, just another vice masquerading as a virtue. Maxim 170 spells out the moralist's suspicions regarding the deeper motivation behind apparently 'honnête' acts: 'Il est difficile de juger si un procédé net, sincère et honnête est un effet de probité ou d'habileté'. And, of the relatively small number of other maxims concerned with 'honnêteté', the majority identify it as a specifically female form of deception and self-deception. For instance, maxim 368 states cruelly: 'La plupart des honnêtes femmes sont des trésors cachés, qui ne sont en sûreté que parce qu'on ne les cherche pas'.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, as a social norm which, in its most extreme expression, happily equates moral values to aesthetic ones, where being good usually means appearing good, 'honnêteté' sits very uneasily with the critical and denunciatory project of the *Maximes*.<sup>19</sup> As Larry Norman has pointed out: 'La bienséance demande qu'on ne démasque pas les vices d'autrui; les maximes, par contre, proclament ce projet comme leur raison d'être'.<sup>20</sup> The *Maximes* are fundamentally opposed to the double mimesis of the 'honnête homme' which consists of a formal code of 'vraisemblance' in one's speech and writing and a social code of 'bienséance' in one's conduct and manners.<sup>21</sup> This world of seamless appearances, however aesthetically plausible or socially agreeable, is anathema to La Rochefoucauld's disruptive project of revealing the unseemly motives behind one's seemingly consistent words and actions, a project which finds its discursive correlative in his disjunctive prose. In other words, the social mimetism of the 'honnête homme' is denounced as a façade behind which other, violently anti-social forces ('amour-propre', self-interest) operate unseen; equally, his formal mimetism is shattered, disrupted, troubled precisely by the discontinuities of the *Maximes* which reject the order of smooth representation

cultivated by the 'honnête homme' in favour of the fractured, jarring presentation of their unbecoming, but none the less sincere, truths.

It is perhaps significant that the most concerted attempts to rehabilitate the figure of the 'honnête homme' in La Rochefoucauld's prose come, not in his maxims, but in his *Réflexions*. While certain maxims, such as 182, share the *Réflexions* more general acceptance of certain social institutions, however flawed, the latter posthumously published pieces go much further in their reconciliation of 'honnêteté' with moral and social criticism. As such, E.D James draws largely on the *Réflexions* to temper Jean Starobinski's claims that La Rochefoucauld's work is that of a radical moral skeptic challenging all social constructions, including the polite sociability of the 'honnête homme' himself.<sup>22</sup> Stylistically, a correlation is discernible: the more continuous and composed the prose (*Réflexions*), the more conciliatory the attitude towards 'honnêteté'; the more discrete and peremptory the moral judgements (*Maximes*), the more negative and denunciatory the use of the same term.

Hence the discontinuities of the maxims would seem to run counter to La Chapelle-Bessé's use of the trope of the mirror, privileged by the 'honnête homme', to describe La Rochefoucauld's prose as 'le miroir qui nous fait voir nos défauts'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the maxims cannot be equated formally to 'réflexions', insofar as this term has optical connotations, even if it was allegedly favoured by La Rochefoucauld himself.<sup>24</sup> In this instance, it is the readers who impose their title on the work, consistently dubbing the collection, 'les Maximes'. This signifies the primacy of the maxims as a reading experience, one in which, as I have shown, their discontinuities have a major effect. They are not then a mirror held up to society, unless it be a very cracked, fractured, even shattered glass. Although they constitute a striking object of perception to the reader, and occasion a certain self-examination, the maxims are above all a form of expression, that is, they engage in a certain linguistic dynamic with the reader. As Philip E. Lewis writes in an article on the discourse of the maxim: 'the forms of perception and language are fundamentally perceptual and lingual, are to be apprehended in their own terms. [...] The forms of truth in the maxim must be conceived as the forms of language'.<sup>25</sup> The distinction I am attempting to make is perhaps best explained by considering, as Lewis does, another famous reading of the *Maximes*, that of La Fontaine in his fable, 'L'Homme et son image'.

In this fable La Fontaine tells the tale of an ugly yet narcissistic man who flees the many mirrors disabusing him of his self-admiration in worldly society. He arrives in an isolated rural spot where a stream, which La Fontaine calls 'un canal', also reflects his image. Yet the stream is so beautiful that the man cannot tear himself away from its truthful reflection of his ugliness. La Fontaine ends by explicating fully the meaning of his fable:

Notre âme, c'est cet Homme amoureux de lui-même;



Tant de Miroirs, ce sont les sottises d'autrui,  
Miroirs, de nos défauts les Peintres légitimes;  
Et quant au Canal, c'est celui  
Que chacun sait, le Livre des *Maximes*.<sup>26</sup>

As Lewis perceptively notes here, the *Maximes* themselves are not portrayed as a mirror and do not belong to the social order; they belong to the natural order and are presented as a stream ('Canal').<sup>27</sup> Hence La Rochefoucauld's text is water, not glass; an element, not a thing; a medium, not an object: it is formed of language, not perception. Thus, as a medium, it moves, changes and can be entered into; as such, it does not offer reflection, a smooth and plausible representation of oneself, but refraction, a distorted image which La Fontaine suggests is nonetheless more truthful and sincere than that of the polished mirror. And this notion of refraction precisely captures the way in which the maxims are disjunctive, are informed by a fractured, displacing dynamic of reading. The reader dips in and out of maxims which provide him/her with an ugly but truthful insight into the discontinuities of his/her own existence, the contrary of the mirror's smooth reflection of an illusory world.

So both the polite self-consciousness and the trope of the mirror associated with the 'honnête homme' are challenged, upset by the formal discontinuities of the *Maximes*; a claim which also carries an implicit yet significant political edge. It is a fairly common assumption that by the 1660s La Rochefoucauld had turned from the subversive pursuit of individual glory, as in the Fronde, to the conformist codes of 'honnêteté'; that 'the art of war [had been] replaced by the art of conversation', as D.J. Culpin puts it.<sup>28</sup> In other words, he had left behind the reckless heroism, and equally reckless egoism, of the Fronde for the comforts of social integration and submission afforded to the politically accommodating figure of the 'honnête homme'. Yet, as we have seen, the disruptive and disjunctive form of his maxims seems to bely this image of the moralist. Far from acquiescing to the conformism of 'honnêteté', La Rochefoucauld exposes its politely concealed, baser motives and impulses, using a form – the maxim – that classically brooks no reply, that closes out rhetorical argument. His *sententiae* therefore constitute the very opposite of the 'honnête homme's formally and socially accommodating codes of 'vraisemblance-bienséance'. Ironically, born of the 'honnête' conversations and literary games of the salon, the maxim in La Rochefoucauld's hands seeks to deny intercourse, and to have the last word. Its very discontinuity signals a less than polite silencing of the opposition.

But just what is this opposition to the *Maximes*? Socially it is the *doxa*, the voice of received wisdom; politically, it is the centralized and centralizing voices of authority, those concurring to promote the absolutist state in the 1650s and 1660s. Of course, the absolutism challenged by these multiple-voiced, conflicting maxims is not one realized in practice so much as one maintained in

principle. The *Maximes* work against an ideological tendency to absolutism which is to a certain extent divorced from the socio-economic realities of mid-seventeenth-century France, but which is nonetheless propagated there as a political ideal. They also suggest that this new anti-absolutism is to be one of form not content; a suggestion reinforced by La Rochefoucauld's removal from the second edition in 1666 of those few *sententiae* whose barely disguised critique of Louis XIV and his authority might cause offence (see MS 40, 41, 68). This, I would contend, is not so much an act of reconciliation or repentance, but a strategic decision by La Rochefoucauld to suppress any maxim whose content might detract from its form. For the second, and subsequent, editions saw an accompanying honing, a literal sharpening, of the remaining maxims. It is as though the 'pointe' of the maxim becomes increasingly a formal discursive substitute for the discarded sword of the rebel grand seigneur. Consequently, the sense of 'apprehension', even of scandal, inspired in certain readers by the *Maximes* can be interpreted not just as a reaction to an insistent dispossession of knowledge but also to a political disarming, even as their author arms himself with the 'pointes' and 'traits' of the maxims. Even the appeal of the maxims to the preconscious can be read politically as a challenge to the paradigm of the ever-vigilant and all-comprehending consciousness not only of Cartesianism but also of the absolutist monarchy, both sanctioned in the final analysis by a conception of God as the sole perfectly continuous consciousness (Cartesianism), or the only ceaselessly legitimating discourse (absolutism). After the failures and betrayals of the Fronde, La Rochefoucauld is nothing if not a political pragmatist; a point that E.D. James makes well.<sup>29</sup> However, his pragmatism is in no way to be confused with political conformism to the prevailing doctrines of Church and State, and the jarring of his discontinuous maxims is perhaps only a formal reproduction of their discord with other social and political sensibilities of the time, for instance, those of the 'honnête homme' à la Méré.

To conclude, the formal discontinuities of La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* function on many different levels. This essay has focussed specifically on their impact in a phenomenological sense, since it has dealt successively with the relationship of sententious discontinuity, as realized in La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*, with the Cartesian, Freudian and 'honnête' modes of (self-) consciousness. Interestingly, in each instance, the principal effect of these discontinuities is evoke an alternative state of consciousness in the reader; to make him or her apprehensive, questioning his or her existential authenticity or sincerity, so to speak. Yet it is worth noting that such discontinuity is not, however, a synonym for the demolition of any given mode of consciousness; their disjunctive remarks trouble more than they destroy.

(Word-count including footnotes: 4,438)

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in François, duc de La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1991), p. 300. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> Mme de Lafayette claimed to be ‘épouvantée’ by the the sample text of the maxims; and even in those replies to Mme de Sablé which judged the work favourably, it was nonetheless deemed ‘dangerous’ and ‘scandalizing’. See *Maximes*, pp. 307, 293, 299.

<sup>4</sup> R. Barthes, ‘La Rochefoucauld: “Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes”’, in *Le Degré Zéro de l’écriture, suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1972). In contrast to the longer, more discursive *Réflexions diverses*, the maxim is described as ‘le spectacle même de la parole’ and as ‘spectaculaire’ (pp. 70, 71).

<sup>5</sup> For more on La Rochefoucauld and Molière’s ‘Maximes du mariage’, see R. Lockwood, ‘How to read a Maxim’, in *La Rochefoucauld, Mithridate, Frères et sœurs, Les Muses sœurs: Actes du 29e congrès annuel de la North American Society for Seventeenth-Century French Literature*, ed. by C. Carlin (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1998), pp. 31-42.

<sup>6</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, p. 286.

<sup>7</sup> ‘La MS I et les admirables miroirs de l’amour-propre’, in *La Rochefoucauld, Mithridate, Frères et sœurs, Les Muses sœurs*, pp. 65-70 (p. 68).

<sup>8</sup> *Sententiousness and the Novel: Laying down the Law in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 50. Although Bennington is writing about maxims as they function in eighteenth-century French novels, his description of them here is applicable *a fortiori* to individual maxims in La Rochefoucauld’s collection.

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, we also find in Descartes’s *Discours* an extensive use of the house-building or masonic metaphor favoured by the anonymous critic of La Rochefoucauld’s work cited at the start of this essay. See R. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* (Paris: Larousse, 1972), pp. 42-43. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>10</sup> Descartes, *Discours*, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Descartes, *Discours*, p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> S. Doubrovsky, ‘Vingt propositions sur l’amour-propre: de Lacan à La Rochefoucauld’, in *Parcours critique* (Paris: Galilée, 1980), pp. 203-233; R. Barthes, ‘La Rochefoucauld: “Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes”’.

<sup>14</sup> J. Strachey, ‘Sigmund Freud: A Sketch of his Life and Ideas’, in S. Freud, *On Metapsychology*, vol. 11 Penguin Freud Library, (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Freud, *Metapsychology*, p. 175.

<sup>16</sup> Freud, *Metapsychology*, p. 358, his italics.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Introduction’, in La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> See also the scarcely less misogynistic maxim 367: ‘Il y a peu d’honnêtes femmes qui ne soient lasses de leur métier’. Also maxim 205 and MS 33.

<sup>19</sup> See the model and theorist of ‘honnêteté’, le chevalier de Méré, cited by Rohou in La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*: “‘Une marque infaillible pour connaître le bien et le mal”, c’est “la décence et l’indécence; car ce qui sied bien est bon et ce qui sied mal est mauvais”” (p. 36).

<sup>20</sup> ‘La Rochefoucauld et le problème de la reconnaissance de soi’, in *La Rochefoucauld, Mithridate, Frères et sœurs, Les Muses sœurs*, pp. 21-29 (p. 21).

<sup>21</sup> See J-P. Dens, *L’Honnête homme et la critique du goût: Esthétique et société au XVIIe siècle* (Lexington: French Forum, 1981), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> E.D James, ‘Scepticism and Positive Values in La Rochefoucauld’, *French Studies*, XXIII (1969), 349-61.

<sup>23</sup> La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, p. 285.

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<sup>24</sup> Rohou, 'Introduction', in La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>25</sup> 'Work in Progress. The Discourse of the Maxim', *Diacritics*, Ithaca NY, Fall 1972, 41-48 (p. 43).

<sup>26</sup> J. de La Fontaine, *Fables* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1962), p. 45.

<sup>27</sup> 'Discourse of the Maxim', p. 42.

<sup>28</sup> *La Rochefoucauld: Maximes* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1995), p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> 'Scepticism and Positive Values', p. 359.