HE MAXIMES TOTALLY DEFY critical discourse as we know it; their fragmented structure is at variance with a continuous, organized flow of words. And yet the temptation to order, to structure, to systematize, remains strong, almost as if the fragmentary form provoked some special challenge. Hypotheses explaining why La Rochefoucauld favored the maxim have been amply formulated, perhaps most satisfactorily by Jean Starobinski,¹ for whom the maxim corresponds to the demands of a subject matter imbued with a sense of man's physical and psychic "fragmentation." But even—or perhaps especially—the most perceptive analysis is in radical contradiction with the work as La Rochefoucauld presented it, for a continuous, structured chapter or essay brings to the Maximes the very sense of order that the author clearly sought to avoid.

It is perhaps our ambiguous, uncomfortable relationship to the discontinu in literature that lies at the base of any effort to link what was so deliberately left unjoined. (This discomfort was not experienced, of course, in the classical age, heir to a long tradition in the aesthetics of the discontinu, from the Odyssey up through Montaigne. Rather, our own reactions emanate from the university
criticism of the nineteenth century and its efforts to impose rigor and structure.) As Roland Barthes has shown in his essay "Littérature et discontinu," modern Western thought will accept, at best, only certain specific forms of the discontinuous: "Le livre discontinu n'est toléré que dans ses emplois bien réservés: soit comme recueil de fragments (Héraclite, Pascal), le caractère inachevé de l'oeuvre (mais s'agit-il au fond d'oeuvres inachevées?) corroborant en somme a contrario l'excellence du continu, hors duquel il y a quelquefois ébauche, mais jamais perfection; soit comme recueil d'aphorismes, car l'aphorisme est un petit continu tout plein, l'affirmation théâtrale que le vide est horrible."  

La Rochefoucauld's Maximes, although not exactly proverbial, belong certainly both in forme and fond to a tradition of pithy, moral reflection. Nevertheless, a certain malaise remains; there is a desire, a need, to connect. Because the adage or maxim is its own entity, inevitably any attempt to agglomerate falsifies its basic premise of structural independence. The whole becomes equal to the sum of its parts; but it may well be that any "adding up" process is irreconcilable with intention. Nonetheless, once the critic decides to comment upon the text, he has no other choice than to structure into an intelligible whole the sum total of the Maximes (selecting certain ones as representative of other similar maxims), or, on a more-reduced plane, to study one aspect (theme) of the work, again organizing the individual parts into a new, larger entity—virtue, amour-propre, and so on. The sole alternative possibility is to comment on each individual maxim, with no attempt made to relate it to any others. But this seems to be an unnecessary task, the success of the Maximes being due precisely to their polished form, which gives the "truth" in a more formally perfect fashion than any equivalent expression.

The outcome of this enterprise is necessarily a certain gap between text and critical text. Ultimately, the Maximes taken as a whole are impenetrable. Their fragmentation, their sense of indivisible totality, escape any notion of system. Nevertheless, this section is an attempt at "pene-
trating” the maxims that revolve about the theme of love, although an overly rigid systematization will be carefully shunned.

But once the project is stated and accepted, other problems immediately arise within the bounds of the topic itself. La Rochefoucauld’s pronouncements on love resist almost any categorizing, however fluid. In the Maximes alone, he moves from one “mode” of love to another, runs the gamut between la coquetterie and a nebulous nostalgia for a “pure” love, remote, abstract, unattainable. And only recently an additional important manuscript has been added to the works of La Rochefoucauld, La Justification de l’amour, whose heavy emphasis on lacourtoisie seems to be in contradiction with the basic tenets of the Maximes. Synthesis becomes a near impossibility. But one basic underlying concept does seem to blend the diverse, even sometimes diverging, ideas together—the notion of a passive man, a receptacle for an ever present flow of impulsions, an individual whose very autonomy seems little more than illusory.

Traditionally, l’amour-propre has been seized upon as the fundamental current of the Maximes, the irreducible unit to which all of human thought and deed eventually succumb. The familiar paradigm unfolds as a dialectic between diverse outer manifestations and one basic inner motivation, l’amour-propre. However, in a series of articles begun in 1962 and concluded in 1966, Jean Starobinski reverses this premise, which has long held sway. Relying upon certain maxims that center upon inner division, split, rather than on motivating unity, Starobinski concludes that the so-called external chaos is infinitely more simple than that which reigns “underneath.” Maxim 16 (of the 1678 edition) offers, for example, a multiplicity of motivations to explain clemency: “Cette clémence dont on fait une vertu se pratique tantôt par vanité, quelquefois par paresse, souvent par crainte, et presque toujours par tous les trois ensemble.” Causation reveals itself as both complex and flexible.

Delving further, Starobinski dissociates the “self” from
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l'amour-propre, showing that the two are not equivalent for La Rochefoucauld, and that l'amour-propre is only one impulsion that appropriates the self. The latter emerges as an empty, hollow space, a vacuum, subject to invasion not only by self-love but by all forces. Vice, virtue, passion, all are conceived as “outside” of man, exterior to him, almost as floating energies.  

Starobinski’s theory is substantiated by a careful reading of the Maximes. What strikes immediately is La Rochefoucauld’s frequent use of personification, this literary device being not only a colorful stylistic variation but rather the means by which the maxim-writer expresses the very tension integral to his work. When La Rochefoucauld writes that “l’amour-propre est le plus grand de tous les flateurs” (Max. 2) or that “l’amour-propre est plus habile que le plus habile homme du monde” (Max. 4), he is endowing self-love with qualities of functioning independence and virtual autonomy, rivaling man’s own and therefore a threat to the philosophical beliefs of voluntarism and freedom that he cherishes. Various maxims establish structures parallel to, and competing with, man’s own “systems”: “Les passions ont une injustice et un propre intérêt qui fait qu’il est dangereux de les suivre . . .” (Max. 9). Not only is mankind endowed with an unmitigating self-interest, but so also are the intruding passions, their foundation a twin of the individual’s. Those scholars who seek to determine the precise philosophical bent of the Maximes have justifiably concentrated on their antistoical posture, and the constant use of personification to depict man’s loss of autonomy, his fall from the grace of voluntarism, is the perfect image of the new thinking.

As tempting, then, as it is to view l’amour as an interrupting force into the privileged domain of l’amour-propre, this perspective simply does not hold up. In fact, if a schematization is necessary at all, it would have to be one that depicts love and self-love as two parallel forces, each making its independent set of demands upon the vacuum of the self. That La Rochefoucauld conceived of these forces as operating in similar fashion, is reflected in his
choice of imagery. Both the long digression on *l'amour-propre* and one of the *Réflexions diverses*, “De l'amour et de la mer,” use the metaphor of the sea to translate the sense of movement and flow with which he endows both energies.

There is considerably more to be said on the question of movement and energy, central to La Rochefoucauld’s thinking and most prevalent throughout the *Maximes* and his other works. But this thinking is seemingly at variance, or at least does not obviously correlate, with his views on love as he expressed them in 1660, when *La Justification de l'amour* first appeared, a date that corresponds to the writing of the earliest maxims. The subtleties, nuances, and paradoxes of the *Maximes* and of a few of the *Réflexions diverses* are absent from the *Justification*, which at preliminary reading fails to convince the reader that the work is indeed one of La Rochefoucauld’s. Or at best the text seems to be a *plaidoyer*, urging a woman to quit her modesty and to bestow her favors upon the author. But although this last possibility may not be totally false, ultimately the *Justification* does seem to offer several parallels with the *Maximes* and with a few of the longer pieces.

Since the publication of *La Justification de l'amour* is quite recent (1971), some preliminary background information is necessary:

*La Justification de l'amour* parut au début de 1660—l'achevé d'imprimer date du 13 décembre 1659—dans le troisième volume du *Recueil des pièces en prose les plus agréables de ce temps* chez Charles de Sercy. Ce traité, qui se divise en trois parties, occupe les pages 289 à 334, précédant ainsi un texte bien connu de La Rochefoucauld, *L'Amour-propre à Mademoiselle*, qui va jusqu'à la page 344. Bien sûr, une telle juxtaposition dans un recueil collectif ne prouve rien en lui-même. Mais cet indice prend une certaine importance du fait que Sercy cherchait à grouper les pièces par auteurs. (P. 10)

My analysis, though not able to ascertain positively that the *Justification* is by La Rochefoucauld, does try to involve
it in the larger group of his known works. In any case (as with the "Pascalian" Discours sur les passions de l'amour), even if the work is not by the author of the Maximes, it nevertheless belongs to an analogous group of writings and therefore reflects their concerns and expression. For my purposes, I will here consider the work as one of La Rochefoucauld's, although I am aware of, and accept as potentially valid, the questions concerning the authenticity.

What is significant is that the date of publication of the treatise on love corresponds approximately to the composition of the earliest maxims. Therefore, it would be false to attempt a study of the evolution of La Rochefoucauld's ideas on love when, in fact, many of his most important views seem to have evolved during the same period. In some ways this makes the task more difficult. There is no means to establish any transition in his thought, and the concordance of dates would seem to suggest that very possibly two different forces were in operation at the same moment: "une réhabilitation de l'amour et une contestation de tous les grands sentiments de l'homme" (pp. 16-17).

Basically, both the Maximes and La Justification de l'amour originate in the same metaphysical source: man is subject to "invasion" by exterior forces and energies. The personification so prevalent throughout the Maximes—the stylistic device by which La Rochefoucauld was best able to translate his view of man's place in the world—appears also in the treatise on love, although in a somewhat different vein. In both works man is struggling, at war with (martial metaphors appear throughout the apology of love), outside elements, his autonomy is called into question, and he is drawn as a passive agent in a world of forces over which he has little control. But whereas there is no resolution to this confrontation in the Maximes, only a full acknowledgment of the chaos inherent in love, as well as recognition of its inevitable, sad end, in the Justification the weakness of the male lover becomes the means to establishing a stable situation where love can exist, as a secret.

The deterministic view of man and the passions is as fully expressed in the Justification as in the Maximes, but the
images coincide perfectly with the general courtois, précieux tone: "L'Amour, ce dit Platon, est un puissant Magicien, qui attire soudainement les coeurs, et transforme étrangement les volontés. La beauté que ce Sexe adorable possède par éminence, et avec exclusion du nôtre, est le premier philtre duquel l'Amour se sert pour cet effet" (pp. 38-39). The reference to the philter, to the magic potion with all its ties to legend, is more than simple courtois vocabulary. If love is a magic potion, man is the passive agent who drinks from it, and immediately, all notions of responsibility disappear. Drinking the love philter has long been an ideal way to communicate abnegation of human freedom dependent upon choice, and to enhance a sense of mutual, although involuntary, obligation. The entire concept of a floating love-energy, a "potion" distinct from the self, that the individual absorbs into his system does not at all betray La Rochefoucauld's views on the invasion by annihilating impulsions, but rather reflects the deterministic bent of his thinking.

The personification so evident in the Maximes is given an enhanced status in the treatise on love, where it borders on allegory. The use of capital letters for "Amour" and "Beauté" provides them with a sense of independence, as they seduce and ensnare man. "Beauty" is furnished with supreme power (although in a traditional Epicurean vein, the mind also participates in the all-encompassing attraction), at war with man's so-called indomitable nature:

La Beauté, cette chose admirable dont l'on sent la puissance bien plus facilement que l'on n'en explique la nature; ce rayon de la Divinité; cette Reine victorieuse des Sages les plus modérés, et des Conquérants les plus invincibles; cette qualité dont la domination est si bien établie, qu'encore que toutes les Créatures semblent être armées pour la combattre. . . . Enfin cette Beauté peut-elle trouver un coeur qui lui fasse une opiniâtre résistance? (Pp. 40-41)

The passage is written in the over-refined, over-elegant style of the Précieuses, and adheres to the courtois code. Nevertheless, the personification, the quasi-allegorical note,
follow perfectly La Rochefoucauld's fundamental beliefs. The warlike metaphors additionally support the view of man as being intruded upon, invaded by potent energies, “determined” by them. Everything has become an “actor” on the world’s stage, rivaling for possession of the self. “Le ‘conflit des passions’—dramaturgie figurée, psychomachie allégorique—se fait passer pour la réalité dernière et pour le sens véridique de la vie intérieure.” However, the belief that man is not responsible for his desire is mediated in the Justification, where emotional bondage is viewed as pleasurable. In the essay on love, man is portrayed as the adoring slave to woman; in the Maximes, on the other hand, he is depicted as bound by love, an imperfect, debilitating, and autocratic force.

Personification is not the sole link between the two works. The concept of le vrai amour appears throughout both the treatise and the aphorisms. Although the latter focus on love as an imperfect force, quick to dissipate into coquetry, gallantry, or total stagnation, there is nevertheless room in the Maximes for an ideal love: “S’il y a un amour pur et exempt du mélange de nos autres passions, c’est celui qui est caché au fond du coeur, et que nous ignorons nous-mêmes” (Max. 69). Similarly, in the opening section of the Justification, La Rochefoucauld quickly establishes what love is not: “L’Amour est le nom du monde le plus commun, et la chose la plus rare: tout le monde en parle; beaucoup de personnes croient le ressentir; peu le connaissent; et cette ignorance produit . . . tant de fausses galanteries qui sont si ordinaires, et lesquelles sont plutôt contraires à l’Amour, qu’elles n’en sont les effets” (pp. 27-28). In both works La Rochefoucauld carefully distinguishes between the commonplace reality and the exceptional ideal. “Il semble donc,” concludes Hubert, “qu’il ait vu dans chaque vertu et dans chaque passion avouable de l’homme un cas limite, un état exceptionnel, qu’il faudrait à tout prix atteindre sous peine de s’enliser dans ce monde équivoque où les vertus sont des vices déguisés et où l’amour se confond avec la vanité” (p. 19).
The presentation of *le vrai amour*, however, is not parallel in the two works. In the *Maximes* it is maintained as a remote ideal, a goal that man will never attain. Perfect love in the *Justification*, on the other hand, though still idealistically portrayed, is a real possibility for mankind, if not for all men, then at least for an elite circle of *honnêtes gens*. *L'honnêteté* is not a predominant theme of the *Maximes*, although it does figure in the *Réflexions diverses*. However, in *La Justification de l'amour*, La Rochefoucauld focuses on *l'honnêteté*, establishing a strong tie between that superior moral ideal and love.

In the opening part of the essay, the moralist openly justifies love to its critics—"le vrai Amour est la chose du monde la plus raisonnable" (p. 30)—and in the best Epicurean tradition paints a harmonious picture of attraction based equally on feminine beauty and merit. (The work, it should be made clear, is written exclusively from a male point of view, although La Rochefoucauld does distinguish between male and female reactions in matters of love.) It is, however, at the end of the first section and throughout the second that La Rochefoucauld develops his most original and, for this study, most significant ideas, particularly in his analysis of the secret.

In the introduction to *La Justification de l'amour*, Hubert maintains that the close attention La Rochefoucauld accords secret love is the strongest reason for attributing the essay to the author of the *Maximes*. The latter work does emphasize hidden, secret elements in man's moral life. But if the two works utilize a common principle, they do not pursue the idea along parallel lines. The term *cacher* assumes two very different connotations.

"Qui aime, et ne témoigne pas la Passion à l'objet de son Amour si adroitement, et par des moyens si respectueux, qu'elle ne s'en puisse abstenir, est timide, et manque à l'Amour même. Qui n'a pas assez de conduite pour cacher sa Passion à toutes les autres personnes, en la faisant connaître à la seule qu'il aime, est peu judicieux, et n'aime pas bien" (p. 62). Love, then, is to remain a complete secret
from the world. For transmitting the passion to the "love object," such communication may utilize only the most respectful means. These methods, as the second section will inform, are rarely verbal, or verbal only in the final stages. La Rochefoucauld has developed a theory that first isolates love, removing it from the eyes of the world, then tames it to such a degree that to "talk love" is itself a "sin," violating the rather ascetic criteria of merit and esteem (key principles of *l'honnêteté*) that tolerate only a discreet sign language.

This is not to say that language is not important in the art of wooing. In *La Justification de l'amour*, it is essential, but in a limited context:

> Il nous ordonne de commencer la conduite de notre Passion par une connaissance la plus parfaite que nous puissions tirer de la personne que nous aimons, et particulièrement les sentiments qu'elle a en général touchant l'Amour; d'essayer de lui témoigner en toutes rencontres une extrême curiosité de savoir les pensées qu'elle peut avoir sur ce sujet; de renouveler autant que la licence le permet les discours qui touchent cette matière. (P. 64)

In a note to the above passage, J. D. Hubert remarks that the art of loving expressed here resembles closely the art of conversation as developed in the *Réflexions diverses*: "On ne saurait avoir trop d'application à connaître la pente et la portée de ceux à qui on parle . . ." (p. 192). The point is significant and deserves further analysis. As in the writings of the chevalier de Méré, the *Justification* socializes love. This is not to say that the essay involves the lover in a large context: he is, to the contrary, isolated, refused the pleasure of divulging his feelings. However, in describing love in terms that bear a close resemblance to the art of conversation, La Rochefoucauld stresses not spontaneously experienced emotion but rather the controlled refinement of genteel society.

The second section, however, is less concerned with the couple than with the lover and the world, and the ban
against communication is severe. No third party may share in the knowledge of the passion, which must remain an eternal secret: "Peut-être s'étonnera-t-on que la Loi de l'Amour, que l'on peut appeler la première, puisque c'est elle qui règle ses commandements, soit un commandement de le tenir couvert" (p. 68). The précieux tone of such "commandments" does not detract from an awareness that the interdiction against discussing or sharing the passion is absolute.

The final section of La Justification ("Suite de la seconde partie du traité de l'amour") develops and amplifies the themes of the earlier parts, with the taboo against language assuming greater force. It is no longer a question of maintaining a secret, but of how to communicate with the female. Forthright avowal of love may occur, but only if explicitly permitted by the woman, and only after the acceptance by her of other signs, judged less demeaning to the morale of l'honnêteté. The spoken word itself is seen as a transgression, no less threatening than a physical act. In this context, where gesture and action are never even brought into question, to speak of love is the ultimate violation. Speech must therefore be repressed by l'honnête homme—"Quelquefois il se considère soi-même dans un si grand, et si véritable excès de Passion, que sa grandeur lui donne de l'audace. En ce moment l'impatience de faire connaître ouvertement son Amour, lui porte la parole sur les lèvres; en celui-ci le respect la rejette dessus la langue" (p. 73)—as a means to tempering the passion and to maintaining the standards of esteem and respect.

The final pages of La Justification de l'amour focus almost exclusively on the question of language, as the author searches for more discreet methods of communication. There is an oblique element to these efforts, a desire to remain within the prescribed boundaries of l'honnêteté, even if only partial understanding results:

Je confesse que comme la sujétion entière de notre entendement à la personne que nous aimons est la marque la
plus particulière de la Passion que nous aurons pour elle, puisque nous la refusons même très souvent à nos Rois les plus légitimes, et que c'est l'unique service auquel les plus puissants Monarques de la Terre ne nous peuvent obliger, il est raisonnable que nous soyons extrêmement exacts à ne rendre point nos paroles criminelles, lesquelles sont les plus vives images de cet entendement. Je crois même que nous ne devons laisser jamais sortir de notre bouche ce mot, lequel étant permis nous donne tant de joie, et défendu nous charge de peines et de tourments, je vous aime, que nous n'ayons lu dans les yeux de celle à qui nous parlons, qu'elle a quelque pitié de notre mal; ou bien si nous ne sommes pas assez heureux pour tirer ce sentiment de son coeur, que la violence de nos souffrances ne rompe ce silence parlant. (Pp. 75-76)

Within the confines of l'honnêteté, "ultimate sin" has become the violation of specific language codes—"à ne rendre point nos paroles criminelles"—whose basis is decidedly non-erotic.

La Rochefoucauld does indicate that the woman may see fit to allow the potentially "criminal" words to be pronounced. The précieux tone of this earnestly expressed hope contrasts with the severity directed toward unencouraged love talk, conveying an emotional freedom on the part of the author. Unquestionably, the entire work is colored by elements of la courtoisie and la préciosité; and, in fact, the interdiction against direct avowal of love may be viewed as a conscious attempt by La Rochefoucauld to adhere to those traditions, particularly as regards the question of esteem. Through suppressing direct violations to the précieux tenets, the author may better persuade a woman, if that is his intention.

Nonetheless, the moralist's close, intense attention to language may also be viewed as an effort toward moderating potential disruption to the morale of l'honnêteté, itself antithetical to unbridled, spontaneous emotion. Direct avowal of passion is permissible only when other, less-threatening signs (particularly eye "language") have been received positively. Reliance on such non-verbal signs mod-
erates what is otherwise perceived as a certain violation of social and moral dicta. In this context l'amour honnête coincides with la préciosité, with both attempting to circumvent the realities of passion through non-verbal means. The expression of love becomes then metaphoric.

The Justification is, in the end, an ambiguous work, professing to explain and justify love, yet fixed into an ascetic mold, where love is a secret from the world and, as regards the couple, a discreet, non-assertive sentiment controlled by the woman. There is surely a source of pleasure in the submissive, secretive stance of the lover, but such pleasure, consistently passive, is never the true focus of the essay. The thrust of the work is Epicurean, even Platonic at times, but beyond the philosophical base is the careful attention to regulating language in love matters. To control language is to control the passion itself, first separating it from the outside world into the domain of the secret, then moderating its expression to conform to the ascetic limits of l'amour honnête.

The Justification succeeds in harmonizing l'amour-passion with the behavior of l'honnête homme; le vrai amour remains an ideal throughout the work, but one that is portrayed as viable for an elite group of lovers, if only for them. The mood of the work is subdued, and love never finds expression in the Justification—either in the author's description or recommendations—beyond the levels dictated by social demands. Nevertheless, the effort, however diminished, is a positive one when contrasted with the Maximes, where no such resolution is offered. Love is seized upon, examined from every side, squeezed out, and left limply hanging. The harmonizing activities of the Justification and of certain of the Réflexions diverses are absent, and the sense of total determinism, no longer couched in the elegant phrases of the courtois- précieux mold, appears as a far more bitter pill. Moreover, the vrai amour is placed so far away from us that we are tantalized without receiving any hope of realization. As for the love we are allowed in our life, when it manages to exceed the boundaries of
coquetry and gallantry (a rare enough occurrence), it still, inevitably, ends and dies, and we are left with a sense of shame and an exhausted heart.

The deterministic view of life that ruled over *La Jus­ti­fication de l'amour* is, as I showed earlier, present throughout the maxims. But the aphorisms present a more complex view. "Reading through the *Maximes* consecutively, one may be struck by two evidently divergent principles of causal explanation. On the one hand, persistent attention to egotism and passion points to a far-reaching psychological determinism; on the other hand, emphasis upon fortune and the bodily humors as indomitable influences suggests an equally powerful physical determinism."\(^{10}\) This dialectic is not really ever resolved in the *Maximes*, although, as Philip Lewis has shown, the maxim on *l'amour-propre*, which was number one in the first edition of the work but which La Rochefoucauld later rejected, is able to link the ego's demands with forces from the outside: "Il [*l'amour-propre*] est inconstant, et outre les changements qui viennent des causes étrangères, il y en a une infinité qui naissent de lui, et de son propre fonds."\(^{11}\) Nevertheless, the problem remains when individual maxims confront others of a different persuasion.

Maxim 262 of the 1678 edition, for example, states, "Il n'y a point de passion où l'amour de soi-même règne si puissamment que dans l'amour"; and Maxim 374 concludes, "Si on croit aimer sa maitresse pour l'amour d'elle, on est bien trompé," the implication being, of course, that it is "pour l'amour de soi." Maxims such as these do indeed indicate a psychological base where *l'amour-propre* is seen as the major determining force behind man's love. In these cases, actually, "love" as we traditionally formulate it—as a reaching out to another—is stripped of that very implication. The "other" is present, but it is self-love that is ultimately at stake. This view is most nearly consistent with certain modern psychoanalytical ideas that center upon the theory of narcissism, holding that "love of self is of the same nature as love of another person, or of ex-
terior objects. Both are classified as sexual instincts and considered to originate in the libido."\textsuperscript{12}

But in establishing priority, primary consideration should be given to external physical causes,\textsuperscript{13} although La Rochefoucauld, fearing perhaps the consequence of stressing this attack on man's autonomy and will, omitted several maxims to that effect from the 1678 edition. (Most, in fact, were taken out after the publication of the first edition.) Frequently they are also the strongest thrusts against the prerogatives of the self, although a few significant maxims do remain in the established edition: "La durée de nos passions ne dépend pas plus de nous que la durée de notre vie" (\textit{Max. 5}); "La fortune et l'humeur gouvernent le monde" (\textit{Max. 435}).

It is, however, in the \textit{maximes supprimées} that La Rochefoucauld develops the greatest indictment against freedom and will; and although the basic belief of causation is not very different from that expressed in the \textit{Justification}, the language is far more acerbic. It is no longer a question of magicians and potions; the entire précieux tone has vanished, replaced by the metaphor of illness: "La plus juste comparaison qu'on puisse faire de l'amour, c'est celle de la fièvre; nous n'avons non plus de pouvoir sur l'un que sur l'autre, soit pour sa violence ou pour sa durée" (\textit{Max. supp. 59}).\textsuperscript{14} The conclusion is inevitable: "Comme on n'est jamais en liberté d'aimer, ou de cesser d'aimer, l'amant ne peut se plaindre avec justice de l'inconstance de sa maîtresse, ni elle de la légèreté de son amant" (\textit{Max. supp. 62}). Love is not willed, nor will. And as Starobinski concludes: "L'homme est ainsi dépossédé. Il ne désire pas en personne, il n'est plus responsable de son désir. C'est le désir qui, venu on ne sait d'où, s'installe en l'homme et réclame satisfaction."\textsuperscript{15}

Beyond the level of determinism, of erosion of autonomy, the \textit{Maximes} take a quite different bent from the \textit{Justification}. The greatest concentration of thought on the theme of love in the maxims is directed toward the dynamics of Eros, both the internal movement necessary to maintain
its force as well as the cyclical flow of passion. Prone to a certain amount of concrete imagery, La Rochefoucauld alludes to the sea and to the life force as metaphors of his outlook. Both images occur in the Réflexions diverses, and although that work is not at the center of this study, it does highlight the maxim-writer's views. “De l’amour et de la mer” is short and may therefore be quoted in its entirety:

Ceux qui ont voulu nous représenter l’amour et ses caprices l’ont comparé en tant de sortes à la mer qu’il est malaisé de rien ajouter à ce qu’ils en ont dit. Il nous ont fait voir que l’un et l’autre ont une inconstance et une infidélité égales, que leurs biens et leurs maux sont sans nombre, que les navigations les plus heureuses sont exposées à mille dangers, que les tempêtes et les écueils sont toujours à craindre, et que souvent même on fait naufrage dans le port. Mais en nous exprimant tant d’espérances et tant de craintes, ils ne nous ont pas assez montré, ce me semble, le rapport qu’il y a d’un amour usé, languissant et sur sa fin, à ces longues bonaces, à ces calmes ennuyeux, que l’on rencontre sous la ligne: on est fatigué d’un grand voyage, on souhaite de l’achever; on voit la terre, mais on manque de vent pour y arriver; on se voit exposé aux injures des saisons; les maladies et les langueurs empêchent d’agir; l’eau et les vivres manquent ou changent de goût; on a recours inutilement aux secours étrangers; on essaye de pêcher, et on prend quelques poissons, sans en tirer de soulagement ni de nourriture; on est las de tout ce qu’on voit, on est toujours avec ses mêmes pensées, et on est toujours ennuyé; on vit encore, et on a regret à vivre; on attend des désirs pour sortir d’un état pénible et languissant, mais on n’en forme que de faibles et d’inutiles. (Pp. 197-97)

This reflection contains many of La Rochefoucauld’s ideas on love. In the first part he describes the internal chaos of love, its storms and reefs, and the second half is more concerned with the cycle of love, particularly with its end. Comparing love to the life rhythm in another of the Réflexions diverses, “De l’amour et de la vie,” he picks up again the theme of cycle, of rhythm:
L'amour est une image de notre vie: l'un et l'autre sont sujets aux mêmes révolutions et aux mêmes changements. Leur jeunesse est pleine de joie et d'espérance: on se trouve heureux d'être jeune, comme on se trouve heureux d'aimer.

Cette félicité néanmoins est rarement de longue durée, et elle ne peut conserver longtemps la grâce de la nouveauté... Nous nous accoutumons à tout ce qui est à nous; les mêmes biens ne conservent pas leur même prix,... Cette inconstance involontaire est un effet du temps, qui prend malgré nous sur l'amour comme sur notre vie; il en efface insensiblement chaque jour un certain air de jeunesse et de gaieté, et en détruit les plus véritables charmes. (Pp. 200-201)

In these passages La Rochefoucauld demonstrates a decided proclivity for all that is associated with movement, time, and change. The Maximes also are filled with allusions to passage and to transformation. Love is conceived as a force totally dependent upon constant energy. Varying his elements, La Rochefoucauld adopts the metaphor of fire: "L'amour aussi bien que le feu ne peut subsister sans un mouvement continu; et il cesse de vivre dès qu'il cesse d'espérer ou de craindre" (Max. 75). Not only, then, is love in a state of constant change and movement, rushing to an unfulfilling end, but it is conceived also as a projection, a forward-seeking shove, dependent upon either fear or hope, both future-directed emotions. La Rochefoucauld is thereby calling into question the very nature of love, perhaps its existence even; for if the dynamic element, the projection, is removed, there remains nothing. Love emerges as a non-force, dependent for sustenance upon our desires and anxieties, and it is these forces that sweep over us, demanding satisfaction.¹⁶

La Rochefoucauld, as seen in the Réflexions diverses, is equally aware of love as a cycle, hence the comparison to the life flow; and although there are a few images of the early stages of love—"La grâce de la nouveauté est à l'amour ce que la fleur est sur les fruits; elle y donne un lustre qui s'efface aisément, et qui ne revient jamais"
most of the adages are concerned with the end of love, with its eventual erosion and subsequent staleness. In the terminal stages, no pleasure remains, and the frequent reference to illness suggests a feeling of corporal decrepitude, of a worn-out, worn-down mass of tissue. Stagnation sets in, and all that is left is a hopeless feeling of shame: "Il n'y a guère de gens qui ne soient honteux de s'être aimés quand ils ne s'aiment plus" (Max. 71). But worse than anything else is the inability to remove oneself from the labyrinth, from the web: "On a bien de la peine à rompre, quand on ne s'aime plus" (Max. 351), and the individual stagnates in the morass of his own dilemma.

The image of stagnated, dying love pervades both the Maximes and the Réflexions diverses, and once in a while, La Rochefoucauld makes allusion to the graceful, happy stages of a developing passion. There are, however, almost no references to love as a potent, positive force. That love may be a powerfully upsetting feeling, with negative effects, La Rochefoucauld does acknowledge: "Si on juge de l'amour par la plupart de ses effets, il ressemble plus à la haine qu'à l'amitié" (Max. 72). But most frequently, it is associated with weakness, debilitation, sickness, and death; once in a while with delicate, promising hopes; almost never with vitality and vigor. There is one important exception, however, indicating that La Rochefoucauld at the very least did glimpse the possibilities of something more powerful, more forceful: "La même fermeté qui sert à résister à l'amour sert aussi à le rendre violent et durable, et les personnes faibles qui sont toujours agitées des passions n'en sont presque jamais véritablement remplis" (Max. 477). Here love is linked to notions of energy and force; it is stationary ("durable") but not stagnant. Nevertheless, it seems fair to conclude that such possibilities are limited in La Rochefoucauld's moral universe—the note of disintegration prevails.

The final question revolves around le vrai amour, a concept that La Rochefoucauld developed at length in La Justification de l'amour, and that also occupies an im-
important place in the *Maximes*. Nevertheless, the latter work fails to establish a working plan for this superior ethic, whereas the *Justification*, in an elaborate display of *mondanité*, offers the *honnête homme* a code for achieving harmonious interaction between his personal and social needs. The concept of true love in the *Maximes* is no longer a perfectioning of the Epicurean mode, combined with the excellence of *mondain* principles; it is instead an intangible, even quixotic, vision, an ideal value, that La Rochefoucauld periodically injects into his writing as a tantalizing standard. Moreover, it is truly indefinable, and the sole method of explanation is through defining what it is not.

Several maxims allude to the difficulty of defining this ideal, and almost all of these center upon the basic theme of concealment:

S'il y a un amour pur et exempt du mélange de nos autres passions, c'est celui qui est caché au fond du cœur, et que nous ignorons nous-mêmes. (*Max.* 69)

Il n'y a que d'une sorte d'amour, mais il y en a mille différentes copies. (*Max.* 74)

Il est du véritable amour comme de l'apparition des esprits: tout le monde en parle, mais peu de gens en ont vu. (*Max.* 76)

The allusions to the hidden depths of the heart, if interpreted within the context of all of La Rochefoucauld's writings, would point to his doubt regarding the possibility of ever reaching such a pure form of love, for *le fond du coeur* is really a never ending abyss, and man can never hope to come to grips with its depths. Similarly, maxim 76, by comparing "real love" to apparitions, thereby contests its reality for mankind and places the whole question in the realm of the superstitious. In the aphorisms that which is secret and hidden is no longer the conscious effort of *l'honnête homme* to maintain the restraints of his moral system. Rather, if *le vrai amour* is hidden, it is because the ideal is far removed from any hope of realization.
And yet the ideal remains strong, appears almost viable sometimes, but ultimately remains elusive. Of course, were one to achieve such purity, all coquetry, gallantry, envy, and jealousy would disappear. But the final reality is an imperfect state of love, an inauthentic copy.

Evidently, as Jean Starobinski has concluded, La Rochefoucauld never succumbed to the Nietzschean type of nihilism he flirted with; for he maintained at least a facade of belief in absolute moral values, unattainable perhaps, but existing as images in man's mind. Certain religious, ethical, and moral standards—in this case, love—retain their sense of purity, if only in the abstract. There is still a metaphysical and psychological "out," and fundamental, humanistic notions—freedom, will, self-perfection—are given a new lift, after having been negated.

It is, however, difficult to return to the Justification after the Maximes; for even if the latter fail to take the ultimate step into a form of nihilism, they offer nonetheless some rather conclusive statements on the "way things are," statements that seem to destroy the hope that was put forth in the apology on love. There is an element of finality to the maxims, whereas the apology of love proposes an "open end," an aperture onto the world.


3. La Rochefoucauld, La Justification de l'amour, ed. J. D. Hubert (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1971). Subsequent references are to this edition, and will be found in the text.


5. La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, ed. Jacques Truchet (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1967), p. 10. Subsequently, the maxim number will be cited in the text. (References are to the 1678 edition of the Maximes unless otherwise noted.) The same method will be used for quotations from the Réflexions diverses, which have been published in the same edition (Garnier) as the Maximes; the page number, however, will be given.

Other passages in La Rochefoucauld's works support the theory of multiple motivation, notably the head maxim of the 1678 edition: "Ce que nous prenons pour des vertus n'est souvent qu'un assemblage de diverses actions et de divers
intérêt, que la fortune ou notre industrie savent arranger; et ce n'est pas toujours par valeur et par chasteté que les hommes sont vaillants, et que les femmes sont chastes." A section from the long maxim on l'amour-propre, which was expunged after the first edition, states that it is "inconstant d'inconstance, de légèreté, d'amour, de nouveauté, de lassitude et de dégoût."

7. Hubert admits to this possibility in his introduction.
8. Perhaps seeking to modify his position on the topic, La Rochefoucauld removed several important maxims in the later editions. In the Truchet edition they are grouped together as maximes supprimées, following a long tradition of La Rochefoucauld's editors.
11. Ibid.
14. I am following the order established by Jacques Truchet in his edition of the Maximes, that is, by the date of their removal after the first edition.
16. This is not the first time that La Rochefoucauld questions the existence of a separate, independent force called "love." Maxim 68 proceeds in a similar fashion: "Il est difficile de définir l'amour. Ce qu'on en peut dire est que dans l'amour c'est une passion de régner, dans les esprits c'est une sympathie, et dans le corps ce n'est qu'une envie cachée et délicate de posséder ce que l'on aime après beaucoup de mystères." The "ce qu'on en peut dire" successfully challenges any certainty of what love is and replaces precision ("définir") with vagueness. It is not, subsequently, only the language that is vague, but perhaps our entire concept of love. In any case, according to the maxim, all three of the components are at once love and not love, but each has a separate, independent name and, hence, existence.