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# THE PRINCESS OF MONTPENSIER

A FILM BY  
BERTRAND TAVERNIER





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THE PRINCESS OF  
**MONTPENSIER**

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A FILM BY **BERTRAND TAVERNIER**

MÉLANIE THIERRY LAMBERT WILSON GASPARD ULLIEL GRÉGOIRE LEPRINCE-RINGUET RAPHAËL PERSONNAZ  
MICHEL VUILLERMOZ PHILIPPE MAGNAN FLORENCE THOMASSIN

2H19

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# SYNOPSIS

1562. In France, during the reign of Charles IX, the wars of religion are raging...

Marie de Mézières, heiress to one of the kingdom's greatest fortunes, loves the young Duc de Guise, known in the annals of history as Le Balafre, "Scarface". She believes he loves her back.

To increase his family's prestige, her father, the Marquis de Mézières forces Marie to marry the Prince de Montpensier, whom she has never met.

The Prince is summoned by Charles IX to join the war against the Protestants. With the whole country turned into a bloody battlefield, he sends his young wife to Champigny, one of his most secluded castles, in the company of the Comte de Chabannes, his friend and former tutor. The Prince asks Chabannes to complete the Princess's education so that she can take her place at court one day.

In unhappy isolation at Champigny, Marie tries to forget the passionate longing she still feels for Guise.

Fate and the changing course of the war lead Guise and the Duc d'Anjou, the future Henri III, to stay at Champigny shortly after Montpensier has joined Marie there. In turn, Anjou falls in love with the Princess, to whose charms Chabannes has also succumbed.

A violent, passionate rivalry develops with Marie as the prize.





## INTERVIEW WITH BERTRAND TAVERNIER

### What appealed to you and co-writer Jean Cosmos in Madame de La Fayette's novel?

It was the chance to tell a love story that would be both lyrical and expansive. When we started the adaptation, our major concern was to bring out, in the context of the period, the depth of feeling and passion in the book, in all its naked violence. After *Life And Nothing But*, *Captain Conan* and *Safe Conduct*, Jean amazed me once more with the inventiveness, humor and sheer beauty of his language. His dialogue brings the period to life. It stirs the imagination—mine and that of the actors, who made it their own in a very modern style.

### You worked with a cast of mostly young actors...

That was another important reason for wanting to make this movie—it gave me the opportunity to work for the first time with many of the actors. During the eight weeks of shooting, every day I felt what Michael Powell expresses so well about some actors : Words are no longer a screen behind which the writer hides. They have become a musical instrument on which the actor plays an entrancing tune.

We are given a glimpse of joy and human suffering of which we were completely unaware. The director stops worrying about costumes and the shooting schedule. He gives free rein to his imagination. For a brief moment, he is simply happy. I was happy. Very happy. I never felt like I was directing the actors. I watched them. They inspired me, carried me, and thrilled me.

It was dazzling.

### Your princess is a rebel who questions the world she lives in...

Marie de Montpensier is a very young woman who must learn about life at her own expense, learn to tame and channel her feelings, and make difficult and painful choices even though she is still a mere wisp of a girl. Throughout the shoot, Mélanie Thierry delighted and overwhelmed me with her performance, her beauty, of course, and above all the intensity of the emotion she brought to the character. After acting in a production of *Baby Doll* with Mélanie, Monique Chaumette said to me, She's a Stradivarius. She'll go way beyond anything you ask of her. She was absolutely right.







**Just like the Princess, Chabannes refuses to accept preordained ideas...**

Chabannes is the spine of the film. He's the catalyst of the emotion and allows us to glimpse the different aspects of Marie. He reminds me of the great heroes of some of the literature of the time—teacher and warrior, mathematician and philosopher, fighting intolerance in all its forms. To understand his humanism and commitment to peace, we need to see him confronted with the brutality of war. Lambert Wilson possesses every facet of the character and it is through his eyes that we understand the heartrending decisions facing Marie.

**You offer a radically new representation of the Duc d'Anjou, the future King Henri III...**

I wanted to break with the caricature handed down by history. Anjou was a brilliant general with an inquiring, intelligent mind. Somebody once said he would have been a great king if he had lived in a better period. Raphaël Personnaz played him with a lot of presence, elegance and charm, perfectly capturing the character's intelligence, ambiguity and caustic wit.

**Whereas Guise and Montpensier are soldiers...**

Guise is an out-and-out warrior. A hunter. He represents brute force, courage and religious intransigence, with touching moments of sincerity and doubt. Gaspard Ulliel expresses all his strength, violence, sensuality and occasionally sincere love. Compared to Guise, Philippe de Montpensier is profoundly honest and less ambitious politically. He falls in love with his wife after they are married and is swept along by this passion whereas Guise is subverted by his ambition.

Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet brings a lot of inner strength to Montpensier, with spectacular and surprising explosions of violence. On the very first day, I could see that he transcended every conventional aspect of his character.

**Overall, your point of view is quite feminist.**

I clearly take Marie's side. She is torn between her education and what is expected of her, on the one hand, and her passion and desire on the other. She refuses to be the submissive wife. She wants to educate herself and embrace the world. Her desire to learn empowers her and allows her to resist.

**You never give the impression it's a period movie.**

I wanted to be as modern and natural in the story I'm telling as I was in *Safe Conduct* and *In The Electric Mist*. I didn't want to reconstitute a period, just capture its soul. For example, I didn't want any pseudo-16th century music.

Although Philippe Sarde drew his inspiration from composers of the time, such as Roland de Lassus, we ensured the arrangements and harmonies were very modern by using a lot of percussion.

In fact, we ended up with a completely original formation made up of three baroque musicians, four trombones, seven double basses and cellos, and five percussionists.

And no violins!





**INTERVIEW WITH**  
**MÉLANIE THIERRY**  
(MARIE  
DE MONTPENSIER)

**What was your first impression when you read the script?**

My immediate reaction was that it was a wonderful portrait of a woman and magnificent love story in various forms—passion between Marie and Guise, tender affection with her husband, the Prince, a philosophical and intellectual bond with Chabannes, and a certain ambiguity with Anjou. The script was very faithful to the original text, although Madame de La Fayette's novel is remarkably chaste. There isn't the passion and the newlyweds' discovery of sexuality, which are present in the film.

**The Princess is caught between conflicting forces...**

Absolutely. The Queen, Catherine de Medici, sums it up perfectly when she tells Marie that she is torn between her integrity, which makes her want to be a good wife, and her desire and sensuality, which she experiences with her lover. It's a contradiction that constantly preys on her. For example, she never received a formal education, but she's a bright young woman who needs to make sense of the world in which she lives. In order to exist, she needs to be able to express her ideas and opinions.

**Would you say she's manipulative?**

I thought so at the beginning. I pictured her as a seductress who knew exactly how to get what she wanted. So when she decides to learn to write, I thought it was to send love letters to Guise. Then I realized I was on the wrong track. In fact, she's totally unaware of her beauty and powers of seduction. She's never calculating.

**What was the atmosphere on set?**

What I found very positive was that there were two generations rubbing shoulders—big names and young actors. It could have led to different approaches to the dialogue, for example, but on the contrary, there was genuine harmony. Personally, I adored the rhythm and musicality of the dialogue. Everything that seemed old-fashioned on the page became perfectly clear and self-evident on set.



## FILMOGRAPHY

**DUMAS** by Safy Nebbou (2010)

**ONE FOR THE ROAD** by Philippe Godeau (2009)  
César Award 2010 for Most Promising Actress

**BABYLON A.D.** by Mathieu Kassovitz (2008)

**LARGO WINCH** by Jérôme Salle (2008)

**PU-239** by Scott Z. Burns (2006)









## FILMOGRAPHY

**FLAWLESS** by Michael Radford (2007)

**PRIVATE FEARS IN PUBLIC PLACES** by Alain Resnais (2006)

**PALAIS ROYAL!** by Valerie Lemerrier (2005)

**MATRIX REVOLUTIONS** by Andy & Larry Wachowski (2003)

**SAME OLD SONG** by Alain Resnais (1997)

**JEFFERSON IN PARIS** by James Ivory (1995)

### How would you describe the Comte de Chabannes?

Chabannes is a man of action, an old warrior who sees the horror and barbarity of war at close quarters and withdraws from all that. He's not in an ivory tower reflecting on the state of the world, but he's a very wise human being. The great thing about Bertrand's approach to the film was that we began by shooting the combat and riding scenes. That gave me a hook to hang the character on without even thinking about his psychology, which is often a trap for actors. I was able to find who he was simply in the way I fought and held a sword.

### What's it like working with Bertrand Tavernier?

He tells you exactly what he expects. I have never before seen a director on set close his eyes to "listen" to a scene. He is inflexible on the dialogue and the way he wants it spoken—with precision and humility. At the same time, he clearly loves being with the whole crew. I really admire the way he feeds off everybody's energy and channels it back.

### What is his relationship with his actors?

Bertrand has a passionate, almost physical relationship to the actors. They are the focus point of the way he directs, but he insists on keeping it simple, without affectation. He notices immediately when an actor veers toward grandiloquence. We actors tend to overact to ease our conscience when we get the impression we're not doing enough, but the richness of the story works for us. Bertrand is always there to remind us of that.



## INTERVIEW WITH LAMBERT WILSON (COMTE DE CHABANNES)







# INTERVIEW WITH GASPARD ULLIEL (DUC DE GUISE)



**How would you compare your character, the Duc de Guise, to his rivals for the Princess' affections?**

The Duc de Guise was one of the main protagonists in the wars of religion, craving power and ready to do anything to open up a path to the throne, which was not available to him by birth. He is a natural, charismatic leader, who constantly asserts his independence and liberty of action while rejecting any superior authority. In my mind, I had the image of a lion—the king of the jungle who does exactly what he wants. Compared to his rivals, I guess you could say that Montpensier embodies virtue, Anjou brains and Guise brawn. Marie is torn between the three points in the triangle.

**How did you prepare for the shoot?**

I trained for the fight scenes for two months with Alain Figlarz, a martial arts expert who mostly works on contemporary thrillers and action movies. Bertrand wanted the film to stand out from traditional cloak-and-dagger movies, so the action scenes were choreographed in a very modern style.

**How does Bertrand Tavernier work with his actors?**

On set, he's the happiest man in the world. It's very touching to see the sparkle in his eye. He's tireless and generates the same bubbly enthusiasm in the whole crew. At the same time, you sense his experience and complete control over everything. He's precise and stubborn when he needs to be, while giving his actors plenty of freedom. He cuts to the chase because he knows what he wants, how to get it and when he's got it.

As a result, he works fast, doesn't break scenes down into tiny segments and doesn't hesitate to move on to the next shot after a single take.



## FILMOGRAPHY

**HANNIBAL RISING** by Peter Weber (2007)

**PARIS, JE T'AIME** by Gus Van Sant (2006)

**A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT** by Jean-Pierre Jeunet (2004)

**SUMMER THINGS** by Michel Blanc (2002)

**THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF** by Christophe Gans (2001)





## FILMOGRAPHY

**THE ARMY OF CRIME** by Robert Guediguian (2009)

**THE BEAUTIFUL PERSON** by Christophe Honoré (2008)

**IN THE ARMS OF MY ENEMY** by Micha Wald (2007)

**LOVE SONGS** by Christophe Honoré (2007)

**Can you introduce Philippe, the Princess de Montpensier's husband and legitimate love?**

Philippe de Montpensier is a warrior of royal blood with a rank and reputation to maintain. So, he's a fighter, but paradoxically it's his marriage that makes a man of him. His relationship with Marie enables him to blossom and grow. I played him as a man battling with his unrequited love, and that allows the character to take on an extra dimension in the story. Obviously, his marital situation hurts him but the anger he feels is never mean-spirited.

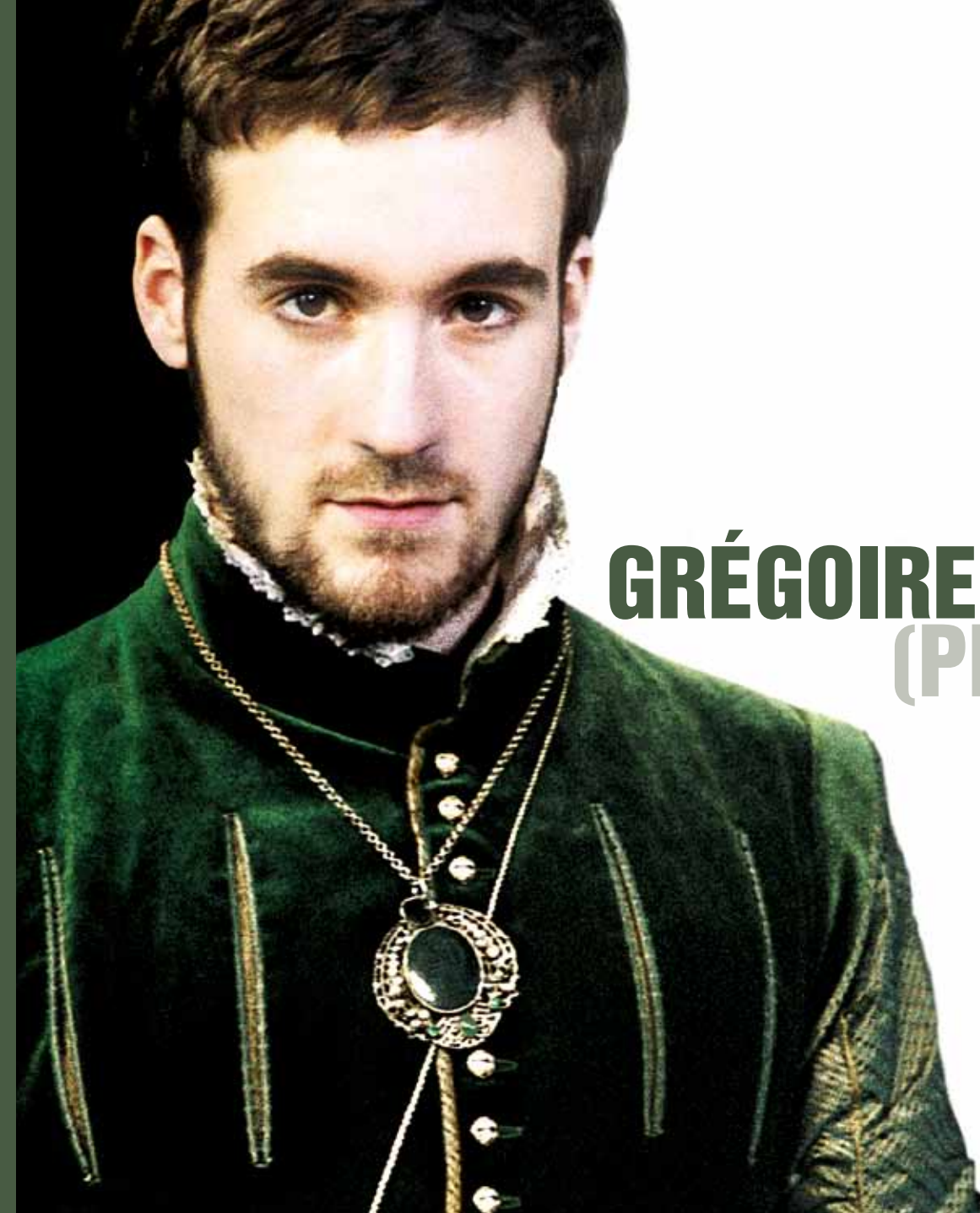
**Chabannes is a kind of mentor for him and there is a lot of affection between them...**

When I read the script, I was fascinated by the way the authority in their relationship is constantly changing hands. When the Prince issues an order the Comte de Chabannes obeys, but he remains Philippe's closest adviser, a kindly father figure. Lambert Wilson and I had a great time playing the confidence scene, in which their dialogue weaves a path between authority, suspicion and affection. It's a rare pleasure to play a scene with so many facets and nuances.

**What was it like working with Bertrand Tavernier?**

Bertrand is extremely affectionate with his actors and his overall gentleness drives people to give the best of themselves. Let your muscles do the talking is one of the most simple, perspicacious and incredibly effective things any director has said to me. Bertrand's other great talent is in developing genuine team spirit while creating healthy competition.

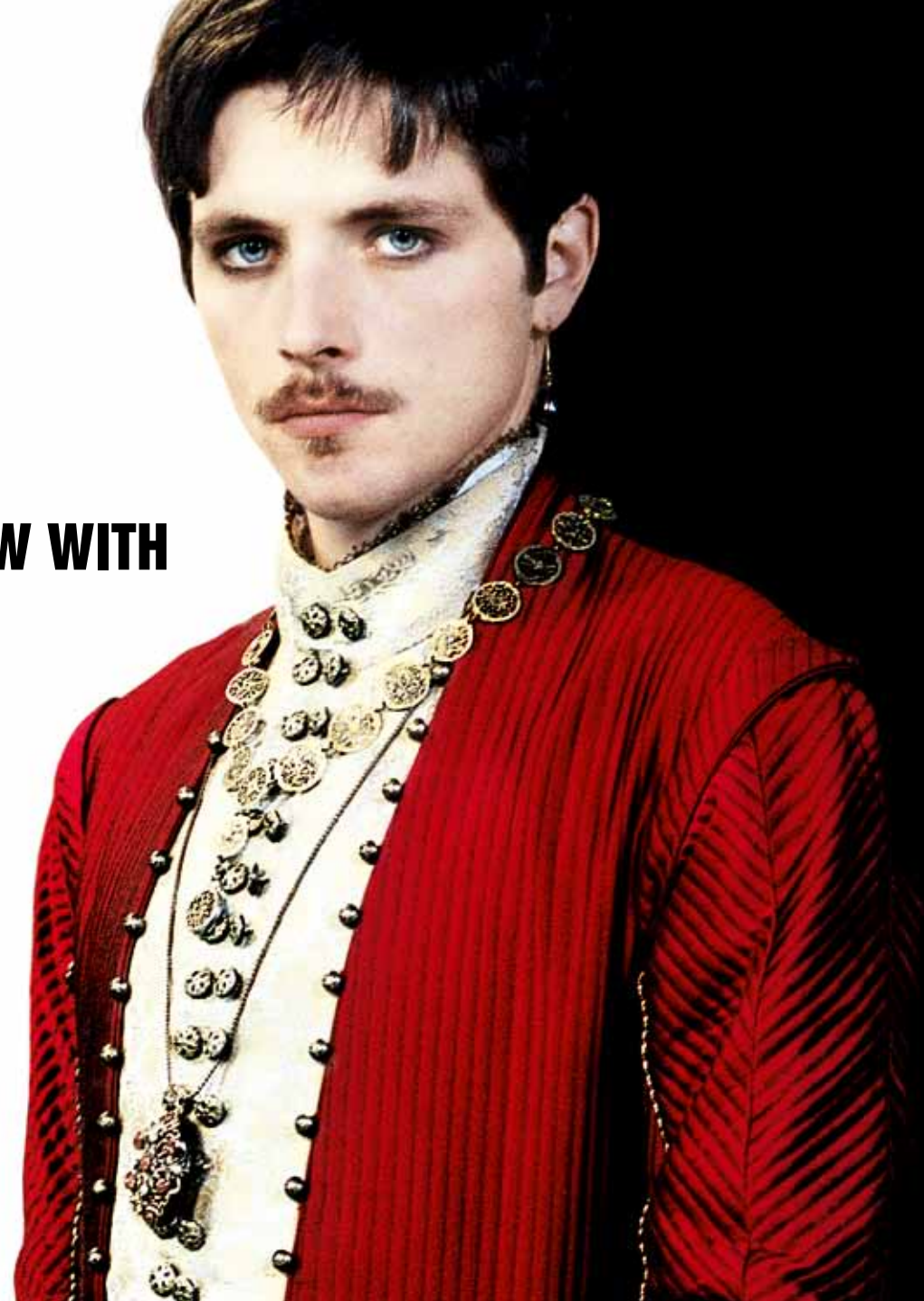
I really like sensing that I'm not alone in front of a camera. Bertrand listens to everyone and acknowledges people's different skills and talents.



## INTERVIEW WITH GRÉGOIRE LE PRINCE-RINGUET (PRINCE DE MONTPENSIER)



# INTERVIEW WITH RAPHAËL PERSONNAZ (DUC D'ANJOU)



**When you read the script, what image did you have of the Duc d'Anjou?**

For a long time, he was considered precious, or even homosexual, because he liked to wash, eat at a table with a knife and fork and didn't like to fight—even though he won two important battles by directing operations from his tent! At the time, that kind of behavior from a noble of his rank was considered highly suspicious, but Bertrand Tavernier wanted to avoid caricature while retaining the sophistication of a man who went on to become King Henri III. By basing the character on historical fact, we made the Duc into a man of enormous restraint, but prone to occasional, spectacular rages that totally unnerve everyone around him.

**Is it difficult for a young actor to get into the skin of a character living in the year 1560?**

Bertrand keeps his actors on their toes because we know from the start that we'll only get three or four takes tops. That forces you to be extremely natural and solid, while avoiding any kind of affectation. With Bertrand, the actors are never static, spouting lines, but constantly caught up in the action. As a result, the dialogue becomes fluid and you never get the feeling you're in a costume drama.

**Do you think the Duc d'Anjou is sincere in his feelings for the Princess?**

I think so, yes, but he's a reserved man, who conceals his feelings and sensitivity behind his wit and humor. He also has to shoulder crushing responsibilities at a very young age, which toughens him up. With Anjou, everything is wrapped up in the art of conversation, which he fully mastered by the time he became King of France. In that respect, he's the complete opposite of the bestial violence embodied by the Duc de Guise.



## FILMOGRAPHY

**MY FATHER'S GUEST** by Anne Le Ny (2010)

**FASHION VICTIM** by Gérard Jugnot (2009)

**BLAME IT ON FIDEL!** by Julie Gavras (2006)

**NEVER SAY... NEVER!** by Eric Civanyan (2005)

**THE FIRST TIME I TURNED TWENTY** by Lorraine Levy (2004)



# JEAN COSMOS

For anybody who stays a while (and writing a film is a relatively protracted affair), the 16th century is boggy, bloody terrain, of which I personally only had hazy schoolboy recollections—the wars of religion, the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, Catherine de Medici, widow of one king and mother of three others.

That was pretty much it until I read **Madame de La Fayette’s short novel**, in which I found the passions of the great names of France, Henri de Guise, Philippe de Montpensier and Henri d’Anjou, converging on Marie, a beautiful vibrant and secretive young woman.

These are not circles I usually frequent. How would I convey the delicate fluctuations of soulful tensions to audiences in the thrall of special effects? Especially as the protagonists are adolescents—a 20-year-old King, rivals of the same age—and, except for Anjou, all uneducated but quick to draw their swords to avenge a sidelong smile, while Catholics and Protestants are so essentially similar that only the color of their scarves tells them apart.

My only ally, an intermediary between the periods, theirs and ours, was François de Chabannes, twice the age of the others, more enlightened in the modern sense since he betrayed both fundamentalisms, and, in terms of reading and thought, on a higher plane although of lower rank.

It was through him that Bertrand and I, following on from François Rousseau, who blazed the trail, found the linguistic and behavioral equivalences. It was through him that we adapted ourselves to the story, especially as his hopeless love brought us unerringly back to Marie, a prisoner of her caste, education and codes of respectability, and of her appetite for light and liberty.





## LA PRINCESSE DE MONTPENSIER BY DIDIER LE FUR

La Princesse de Montpensier was originally published anonymously, in 1662, probably because informed observers recognized in this tale of passion the story of another liaison, between Henrietta of England, wife of Louis XIV's brother and the Comte de Guiche. Nonetheless, in her first novel, Madame de La Fayette, took care to cover her tracks. She set the story not at the court of the Sun King but a century earlier in the reign of Charles IX, against the backdrop of a country torn apart by the wars of religion. All the characters had truly existed even if the author changed some of their names. All that she made up was the love story: a very young woman Marie de Mézières, who has only respect for her husband Philippe de Montpensier, secretly loves another man, Henri, Duc de Guise. For a time, she believes that the distance between them and the company of the loyal Comte de Chabannes will remove temptation. But fate brings Guise to her door and her virtue is powerless to resist.

Betrayal by the man she loves and the disaffection of her husband are her punishments. As for Chabannes, the discreet confidant and perfect friend, he eventually sacrifices himself for the woman with whom he too has fallen passionately in love. Although Madame de La Fayette's La Princesse Clèves has often been adapted for the screen, the same is not true of La Princesse de Montpensier. It straggled in the wake of La Princesse de Clèves in terms of book sales and impact on the collective imagination. When 19th century readers rediscovered a period, which under Bourbon rule had been renowned for its moral depravation, the court of Henri II, the focal point of the action in La Princesse de Clèves, seemed more glorious and more representative of the image they had of the 16th century than that of his second son, Charles IX, which recalled recent wounds that had not yet healed. By capturing the splendor and prosperity of a country at the peak of its glory, illuminated by Renaissance talents, Clèves represented the objective to aim for. Set in a time of division, intolerance and massacres, Montpensier depicted a past to be forgotten and a future to be avoided. In the 19th century, La Princesse de Clèves was reprinted 28 times, La Princesse de Montpensier not at all.







Although the 20th century went some way to repairing this injustice, it did so very late. Even so, Bertrand Tavernier and Jean Cosmos's decision to adapt this short novel did not stem from the desire to restore a forgotten minor masterpiece to its rightful place, and even less from the idea of using a historical setting to deal with contemporary issues, as Madame de La Fayette undoubtedly had to avoid censure. By choosing this text, they sought first and foremost to tell a story of passion and love in both its most personal and universal forms.

To make things easy, or artificially modern, they could have set the story in the present day. They chose not to adulterate it, but this choice implied depicting a relatively unknown period without the film becoming a history lesson. *La Princesse de Montpensier* is anything but a history lesson. Bertrand Tavernier and Jean Cosmos deliberately shied away from dates and political events that contributed little or nothing to the story. Charles IX never appears and Catherine de Medici, his mother, has only one scene.

The film does not set out with the wild and self-defeating ambition of retelling the wars of religion. Although there are skirmishes and battles, they are there to illustrate the characters' personalities and reflect on their passions. Nor is *La Princesse de Montpensier* a costume drama, with all the negative images associated with that genre—lavish sets and

ornate costumes failing to hide the weaknesses of the script. The strength of Madame de La Fayette's story, to which Bertrand Tavernier and Jean Cosmos remain very faithful, speaks for itself. Nonetheless, the period had to be reconstituted and made visible. They achieved this by writing several scenes, which discreetly, without interfering with the story, provoke the impression of making contact with a way of life, a daily reality. Scenes like Marie de Mézières' wedding banquet and wedding night, the death of the wild boar, the Duc d'Anjou's bedtime ceremony at Champigny, the hawker passing through, and Marie learning to write, efficiently underpin the portrayal of a society with its habits, pleasures, constraints, curiosities and violence. The weight of the sets never obstructs our view, the hose and farthingales don't handicap the characters, but they offer us the spectacle of a world that the history books often hesitate to reconstitute and that Madame de La Fayette does not extensively describe either. A color here, a hint of a scent there, a noise farther away, a gesture or a posture somewhere else—a swathe of subtle, multi-faceted messages which, beyond the strength of the characters, story and production, strangely and satisfyingly convince us that it's possible to capture on film the essence of a period dating back over four centuries.



# CAST

Marie de Montpensier Mélanie Thierry  
Comte de Chabannes Lambert Wilson  
Prince de Montpensier Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet  
Henri de Guise Gaspard Ulliel  
Duc d'Anjou Raphaël Personnaz  
Joyeuse Anatole de Bodinat  
Quelus Eric Rulliat  
La Valette Samuel Theis  
Duc de Montpensier Michel Vuillermoz  
Catherine de Guise Judith Chemla  
Marquis de Mézières Philippe Magnan  
Mayenne César Domboy  
Cardinal de Lorraine Jean-Pol Dubois  
Marquise de Mézières Florence Thomassin

# CREW

Director Bertrand Tavernier  
Producer Eric Heumann  
Executive Producer Frédéric Bourboulon  
Screenplay Jean Cosmos  
François-Olivier Rousseau  
Bertrand Tavernier  
Dialogue Dialogue Jean Cosmos  
Original Score Philippe Sarde  
Director of Photography Bruno de Keyzer  
Camera Operator Chris Squires  
Sound Olivier Schwob  
Elisabeth Paquette  
Olivier Do Huu  
Set Designer Guy-Claude François  
Costume Designer Caroline de Vivaise  
Editing Sophie Brunet  
Production Manager François Hamel  
Casting Casting Gérard Moulévrier  
First assistant Director Valérie Othnin-Girard  
Unit Manager Sylvain Bouladoux

A Paradis Films, StudioCanal, France 2 Cinéma, France 3 Cinéma, Pandora Filmproduktion coproduction  
Associate producers Laurent Brochand (Outsider Productions) and Marc Sillam  
With the participation of Canal+, CinéCinéma, France Télévisions  
In association with Cinéma 4, La Banque Postale Image 3, Centre National de la Cinématographie et de l'Image Animée, FFA (Filmförderungsanstalt)  
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