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978-0-521-14244-1 - Two French Moralists: La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyere

Odette de Mourgues

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TWO FRENCH MORALISTS

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La Bruyère

ODETTE DE MOURGUES

Fellow of Girton College and Professor of French in
the University of Cambridge

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*To the memory of
my father
who was for me
a living example
of the moralist's lucidity
courage and human sympathy*

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FOREWORD

The scope of this study is limited. It does not attempt to examine with equal thoroughness all the aspects of the two moralists' works, but deals with certain features in their writings; those which for a long time have attracted my curiosity. Nor do I claim to have successfully clarified what, either in the *Maximes* or the *Caractères*, are for me tantalising problems.

Some other critics whose names will appear in the following chapters have during the past ten or twenty years considered the two writers in the same spirit, trying to bring new light to bear on books which have been for too long safely enclosed in well-acknowledged theories about seventeenth-century literature, and thought to be within range of the school curriculum, even if unlikely to provoke much enthusiasm.

I am moved by a similar, if not stronger, urge to question a number of accepted views and to break the respectable but rigid mould which, in its appointed place in the Pantheon of French writers, encases the once living text. My hope is not so much to win the reader over to my own interpretations as to convince him that he should pursue the quest.

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A NOTE ON SOURCES

Unless otherwise stated, the editions of the two moralists' works used in this book are:

La Rochefoucauld: *Maximes suivies des Réflexions diverses, du Portrait de La Rochefoucauld par lui-même et des Remarques de Christine de Suède sur les Maximes*. Texte établi par Jacques Truchet, Paris, Garnier, 1967

La Bruyère: *Les Caractères de Théophraste traduits du grec avec Les Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce siècle*. Texte établi par Robert Garapon, Paris, Garnier, 1962.

Abbreviations:

M.P. refers to Maximes Posthumes

M.S. refers to Maximes Supprimées