



# The Princess of Montpensier

Autumn  
Season  
2011

**Release:** 2010 France

**Cert (UK):** 15

**Runtime:** 139 mins

**Director:** Bertrand Tavernier

**Cast:** Mélanie Thierry, Gaspard Ulliel, Lambert Wilson and Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet



Bertrand Tavernier is in top form with this gripping, superbly mounted drama set against the savage Catholic/Protestant wars that ripped France apart in the 16th century. Based on a 1622 novella by the celebrated Madame de Lafayette, the action centres on the love of Marie de Mezières for her dashing cousin Henri de Guise. This is thwarted when her father's political ambitions force her into marriage with the well-connected Philippe de Montpensier, who she has never met. When Philippe is called away to fight, she is left in the care of Count Chabannes,

an aging nobleman with a disdain for warfare, and she soon becomes exposed to the sexual and political intrigues of court.

Although the backdrop of the film is the religious war, the plot centres on the contradictions between Marie's value as a possession and as an object of desire, between her desires (for both knowledge and passion) and her complete lack of rights to decide for herself; even her mother is unsympathetic.

The two lovers here have both been acting since they were young teenagers. Marie is played by Mélanie Thierry and her mesmeric quality has seen her compared to Brigitte Bardot. Henri is played by Gaspard Ulliel, who has previously played opposite Emmanuelle Béart and Audrey Tatou. Lambert Wilson (Count Chabannes) we saw recently in the excellent *"Of Gods and Men"*

Bertrand Tavernier, now 70 years old, has been directing films since the 1960s, including films about war (*"Coup de Torchon"*), jazz (*"Round Midnight"*), biography (*"Daddy Nostalgia"* with Dirk Bogarde), an old artist (*"Sunday in the Country"*), young cops (*"L. 627"*) and French filmmaking under the Nazis (*"Safe Conduct"*). He is one of the most prolific and generous of directors, and there is no word that summarizes a "Tavernier film" except, usually, masterful.

